

Thiersch, H. (1996) 'Sozialarbeitswissenschaft: Neue Herausforderung oder Altbekanntes?' In R. Merten, P. Sommerfeld and T. Koditek (Eds.), *Sozialarbeitswissenschaft – Kontroversen und Perspektiven*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.

Wendt, W.R. (2008) *Geschichte der Sozialen Arbeit 2*. Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.

## Special Feature Peer Assisted Learning

### PAL Leader Training at Bournemouth University: 12 years on and still evolving

Steve Parton and Victoria Noad, The Sir Michael Cobham Library, Bournemouth University

#### Abstract

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) at Bournemouth University (BU) is a peer mentoring scheme that fosters cross-year support between students on the same course.

Coordination of PAL, including leader training, is run centrally within Student and Academic Services by the PAL Coordination Team. Successful applicants attend two days of compulsory training in June or September with optional follow up training sessions offered throughout the autumn term.

As with other training programmes for peer learning schemes, including Supplemental Instruction (SI), upon which PAL is based (Arendale 1994; Jacobs *et al.* 2008), the concept of modelling is integral to the training. Trainers employ small group learning techniques and frequently re-direct questions. Leaders can then use these approaches in their own sessions. Crucially, all attendees lead a simulated PAL session.

Weekly follow up training is delivered in collaboration with other support staff, providing information on various academic skills, support services and ideas for related PAL sessions.

Like PAL itself, leader training has evolved gradually since it began in 2001. Changes include:

- training on new online community areas on the University's Virtual Learning Environment;
- streamlining of initial training in response to trainee feedback.

However, the overarching principles of the training, established by the founders of the scheme, remain (Capstick *et al.* 2004). Qualitative feedback from 2011-2012 trainees after completing training, and from a later survey delivered to them towards the end of their role, has further confirmed the continued power of this training while revealing potential ways to strengthen it.

**Keywords:** Peer Assisted Learning; training PAL leaders; Bournemouth University; mentoring; undergraduate students.

#### PAL at Bournemouth University

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is a peer mentoring scheme run centrally from the department of Student and Academic Services for five of the University's six academic schools. PAL has been running successfully at Bournemouth University (BU) since 2001.

PAL leaders are generally second year students recruited to facilitate regular sessions for 1<sup>st</sup> year students from the same course. In PAL sessions leaders encourage discussion, collaborative learning, and share experiences of the first year of their course from the student perspective (Fleming 2009a). The content of sessions is largely student driven, but leaders also meet with PAL course contacts (usually first year programme leaders from their academic school) who are able to steer them in the right direction and contextualise the sessions they run. Leaders are paid for each hour long session they run, along with 30 minutes of preparation time. Leaders may also gain points and develop transferable skills towards earning the BU Student Development Award (Bournemouth University 2012A). Leaders are not paid for any training they receive.

In its first pilot year, 2001-2, five students studying Hospitality Management within what is now the School of Tourism '...were recruited and trained for the role of Student Leader' (Capstick & Fleming 2001 p. 72). By 2011/12, PAL supported virtually all courses or frameworks at full-time undergraduate level at BU, with 151 trained leaders supporting 2,435 first year students. For 2012/13, 180 leaders have already been recruited. PAL has been embraced across the university, is highlighted in the University's Strategic Plan (Bournemouth University 2012b) and is a strong selling point to potential students applying to BU. PAL continues to perform an important role for students, not just in supporting academic development for 1st years but also in easing their transition to university life. The timeline below shows how PAL at BU has developed over the past decade and will continue to expand into 2012-13 supporting the University's commitment to providing coaching and mentoring support for all students.

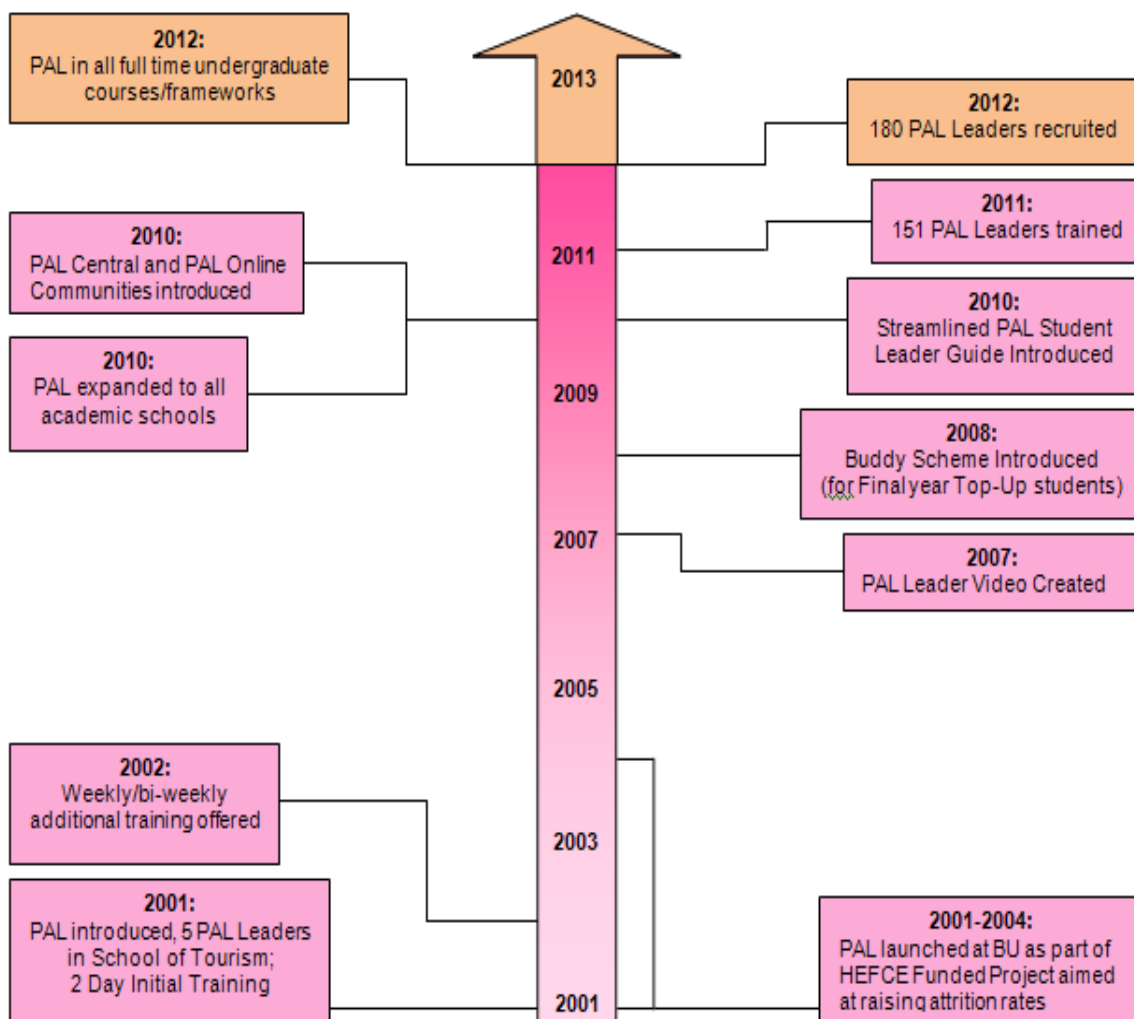


Figure 1: Development of PAL Leader Training since 2001

#### PAL leader training at BU

As with the PAL scheme itself, the roots of the training lie within the original Supplemental Instruction (SI) Model, pioneered at the University of Kansas-Missouri City in the 1970s (Arendale 1994; Jacobs *et al.* 2008). Approaches used in the centre for SI training programme including modelling of group and active learning activities by the trainer, encouraging listening skills, and specific facilitation skills such as the redirection of questions, have featured in PAL Leader training since it first began (Capstick & Fleming 2001). However, BU and other UK institutions have adapted training to suit the PAL model of peer mentoring, which tailors SI more to the UK Higher Education system (Wallace 1992; Fleming 2009b).

Embedding PAL into first year timetables has proven to be successful because it is not viewed by students as a 'deficit model' of student support (Andrews & Clark 2011). So, Leaders at BU for example are not expected to be particularly academically strong in their subject, and the scheme does not target historically difficult subjects, struggling students, or specific units/modules.

Therefore the focus of the training reflects this. Leaders support all students in a particular seminar group with every module of that course and in adapting to university life. As the PAL scheme has expanded to courses university-wide, incoming first year students view attending PAL sessions as part of the BU first year experience.

Leaders must therefore develop group facilitation skills, encouraging the group to formulate the answers through collaborative discussion and if this is not possible, know which department or staff member of the University to refer students to.

As the content of the training is moulded to fit BU, it can be argued that there is no 'one size fits all' model for training of PAL leaders. Some of the training content will inevitably be shaped to suit the needs of the institution that it fits within. A number of universities, including the University of Manchester, University of West England and the University of Birmingham, take a staggered approach to delivery. For example, Manchester's Peer Assisted Study Support (PASS) leaders complete four

half-day training components which become increasingly subject specific (University of Manchester 2012). A number of universities have also developed accredited PAL or SI courses with leaders being assessed and achieving credits for undertaking their training (University of West England 2012).

At BU, the initial training is delivered over two consecutive days. Several two-day slots are offered in June or September prior to the start of their role. This is compulsory for all recruited leaders to attend. The progress of the trainees is monitored by the trainers to ensure all are suitable for the role. Additional training is offered throughout the autumn term. Leaders are also observed running at least one of their sessions by a member of the PAL Coordination Team during the autumn term. Feedback is discussed with the leader(s) after the session and a typed copy of the feedback is sent to them.

#### Aims of PAL training at BU

The founder of the scheme, Hugh Fleming (2007), set out the aims of the initial training and to a large extent these remain unchanged:

'The aim of our initial training programme is to provide new PAL Leaders with:

- an overview of the main ideas upon which PAL is based;
- an introduction to a range of activities and techniques Leaders should use to help them run their PAL sessions effectively and structure group discussions;
- opportunities to discuss these ideas with the trainers and with each other;
- opportunities to put these skills and techniques into practice;
- opportunities to meet with experienced PAL Leaders' (Fleming 2007).

#### Content of Initial PAL Leader Training

Tables 1 and 2 outline activities of the initial training. The content closely follows the natural arc given in the aims listed above. Initially, the focus is on the nature of the scheme itself and the facilitation skills students will need to use as Leaders, as well as the resources and support available to them including PAL Central, a community area developed for Leaders on myBU, the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). A video, *How to run PAL Sessions*, developed by the former PAL Coordinator and Television Production students and presented by former leaders, stresses the importance of structuring and planning PAL sessions is also played.

8.45	Coffee/Tea available
9.00	Welcome and introductions
9.30	Activity: What Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is all about
10.00	Activity: Experiences of PAL
10.45	Coffee/Tea Break
11.00	Short film: 'How to run your PAL sessions' followed by discussion
11.45	Introduction to where resources are in myBU; use of sign up lists; using groups; blogs; wikis; discussion boards; Academic Skills Community; linking to facebook from menu; posting announcements; how to use a data projector; check that students can see correct PAL groups; how to use the GradeCentre as a register
13.15	Lunch
2.00	Activity: What are the similarities and differences between PAL and teaching? Small group discussion and report back.
2.25	Simulated PAL session 1: Content video Leaders prepare review activities
2.55	Simulated PAL session 1: activity
3.25	Debriefing on Simulated PAL session
3.40	Coffee/Tea Break
3.45	Simulated PAL session 2: Content video Leaders prepare review activities.
4.15	Simulated PAL session 2: activity
4.45	Debriefing on Simulated PAL session Groupings for tomorrow's discussion on 'How to run PAL sessions'
5.00	End

**Table 1:** PAL Leader Initial Training Programme 2011: Day 1

8.45	Coffee/Tea available
9.00	How to Run PAL sessions Aim to give a 4 minute report and then lead discussion on each of the items you have read. Your report should cover the following:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three most important things you have learned.</li> <li>• How you would use these suggestions in your PAL sessions.</li> <li>• The extent to which your PAL Leader(s) last year used these suggestions.</li> <li>• Which ideas you would find easiest/most difficult to use, and why?</li> <li>• Which ideas, if any, you think students in your group might find difficult, and why?</li> </ul>
9.45	Simulated PAL session 3: Content video. Leaders prepare review activities
10.15	Simulated PAL session 3: activity
10.45	Debriefing on Simulated PAL session
11.00	Coffee/Tea Break
11.15	Working with students with a disability
12.15	Cultural awareness
1.15	Q & A session with PAL Leader(s) from last year
1.30	Lunch with PAL Leader(s) from previous years
2.00	Boundary setting
2.30	Meet with staff from School, including administrator who will collect in PAL paperwork and discuss payment. This will be a chance to discuss school-related issues, including how to book rooms.
3.00	Planning your first PAL session.
3.30	End

**Table 2:** PAL Leader Initial Training Programme 2011: Day 2

The focus then shifts to the experience of running PAL, including the opportunity for all trainees to lead a simulated PAL session. Visiting speakers come in to talk about Additional Learning Support and Cultural Awareness, which performs the function of sign-posting important support services to Leaders so they can direct their student to them in the future (Boyle 1998). Leaders are also given the opportunity to meet former Leaders and talk with them more informally over lunch. There is emphasis on the specific nature of PAL in their discipline with the opportunity to meet with their academic course contacts; as well as plan their first PAL session with leaders from similar disciplines. Once Leaders have all had a chance to run a mock session, the training seeks to address the realistic challenges leaders may face with their groups, including the need to set boundaries with peers. Finally, their employment paperwork is issued to them and guidance on how to complete the forms provided.

A key component of the training at BU, as with many peer mentoring training programmes, is the simulated PAL session. This is where trainees get the chance to prepare and deliver a pretend PAL session to a small group. Leaders are selected for each simulated session, normally in pairs, and watch the opening minutes of a documentary/lecture before being sent away to plan a 20 minute PAL session. They then lead a PAL session to their group, who have watched and made notes on the

entire video, thus replicating a real life lecture. Afterwards, the leaders, their groups, and finally the trainers give feedback on how the sessions went in order to provide the leaders with a 360 degree perspective. This helps them to further reflect on their facilitation skills, and to develop and gain confidence.

#### **Recent Modifications to the Training Content**

In recent years, additional elements have been incorporated as the scheme has evolved. Given the increasingly blended approach taken to the delivery of PAL, guidance and the use of online support materials has been incorporated into the initial training. Advice on using the online community areas of the University VLE (developed in 2010 by a BU Learning Technologist, Tamsyn Smith) have been added for example. Leaders are given an overview of PAL Central, a community which includes guidance information for leaders such as session ideas, resources for different learning techniques, and other material previously distributed in a large printed manual. Leaders also get the chance to explore the programme communities accessible by first year students and leaders, and post an introductory announcement for their new group. This part of the training is important so that leaders are comfortable working with technology and once they are in their new role they can take advantage of these communication channels. It also ensures they can answer basic IT enquiries.



Figure 2: Image of PAL Central Community on VLE

A perennial criticism of the training from attendees is that it is too long. In response to this we have endeavoured to streamline initial training as much as possible, without compromising the quality of their experience by shortening the second day and moving more extended training activities into the additional training programme.

### Approaches used

Throughout the initial training, the trainer aims to create an active student centred learning environment which models the approach Leaders should use in their PAL sessions (Boyle 1998; Fleming 2007). Trainers frequently re-direct questions, encouraging Leaders to reflect on particular ideas and situations and come up with their own answers. The trainees in turn begin to recognise how this technique can be employed in their own future PAL sessions and appreciate its power (Jacobs *et al.* 2008). Trainees are also encouraged to use wait time when obtaining feedback from questions. Students attending PAL sessions will, as a result, be encouraged to think for themselves rather than become reliant on leaders for answers which they may not be able to give.

During the course of the two days, trainees are frequently moved around so they can benefit from hearing new perspectives and ideas and do not congregate with people they already know. Again, the trainees recognise this is good practice for their own future PAL sessions.

A variety of small group learning techniques, including 'think, pair, share,' 'pyramid,' and 'jigsaw', are modelled

throughout to raise leaders' awareness of various group learning techniques and demonstrate how effective they can be when used in their own sessions.

To prepare them for gathering feedback in their own sessions, leaders are encouraged to write responses to discussions on a whiteboard (or flipchart) so they can refer back to earlier ideas, develop these further at a later stage, and compare their responses to other groups' responses. Feedback is also recorded by the trainer on a discussion board in PAL Central so at any time later in the year, leaders can refer back to the responses from their training and also access responses from other training days. This also models how leaders can utilise their PAL Programme Community to record discussions during sessions and post them in the community so that their group may refer back to these notes at any time.

### Logistics

From our experience the optimum number of leaders for initial training is 24, ideally facilitated by 2 trainers. This makes it easy to work in pairs or 4 groups of 6, and gives everyone the opportunity to be a leader in simulated session with a partner. This also means a reasonable amount of students are left to participate in the simulated session. However, we have worked with larger and smaller groups than this in the past. Depending on the activity, grouping students on tables of 4-6 tends to work best. This way it is easy to focus on a discussion and share ideas. Trainers are able to move around the room monitoring progress and manage

group activities effectively, whilst allowing for sufficient discussion.

In 2011/12 six training slots were run during June and September and two additional condensed one-day sessions for a number of late leader recruits were also offered. Timetabling training slots can be challenging and it is important a suitable room is found in good time. Seminar rooms with several whiteboards or enough space for four or five flipcharts are essential, as is a data projector and facilities to play video content such as the documentaries for the simulated session. It is also useful to have a smaller separate room booked for the simulated session where leaders can sit and plan their session with their paired leader.

A PAL Student Leader Guide is also used considerably throughout the two days. It has been specially produced for leader training and includes information about the training activities. This is distributed to attendees in advance of their training. This guide is structured in chronological order by training activity and students are encouraged to annotate it, as it can also be referred to after the training has been completed. Additional information and support are also available via PAL Central and this is signposted during the training.

### Additional training

The diagram shows a rectangular box divided into two equal halves by a vertical line. Each half contains a thought bubble. The left bubble contains the text: 'Which aspects of the PAL training do you think will be useful?'. The right bubble contains the text: 'How do you think the PAL training could be improved?'. Both bubbles have three small circles leading down to the main bubble.

Figure 3: Initial Feedback Form

### Initial Feedback

The initial feedback we received was generally very positive. Many trainee leaders remarked that the simulated PAL sessions had been particularly useful in preparing them for their role.

‘The simulated PAL sessions were good because it involved everyone and gives you an understanding of what’s expected and how it feels.’

They also valued:

- advice on planning and structuring PAL sessions;
- opportunities to develop facilitation skills e.g. redirecting questions, gathering feedback, employing wait time;
- group management skills and techniques modelled during the training;
- additional learning support, cultural awareness and boundary setting sessions.

The most suggested improvement for training was for it to be condensed as they felt it was too long. The second

Early into the scheme, the previous PAL Coordinator introduced additional training sessions in the autumn term as a way of enhancing skills and keeping a connection with existing PAL leaders (Fleming *et al.* 2004).

Additional training continues to be offered weekly throughout the autumn term on topics such as learning styles, referencing activities, and employability skills. These sessions model group based activities as in the initial training. Sessions are run by the PAL Coordination Team, various guest speakers from across Student and Academic Services, and the Students’ Union. These are not compulsory or well attended, but informal feedback from leaders attests to them being useful.

### Evaluation of the 2011/12 training

For this year, a number of evaluative measures were put in place. There was a light touch initial feedback form (Figure 3) in which trainees were asked to complete at the end of initial training. Leaders were also surveyed at the end of the year and were asked to feedback on how useful they found the initial training, having now spent a year in the role. This was part of a more extensive evaluation of the scheme for 2011/12 which was written up as a final report. This surveyed both first year students receiving PAL and leaders, and this year was triangulated with several focus groups.

most suggested improvement was of the catering provided. Some trainees also would have liked:

- more former PAL leaders to have come along to the training and have heard more input from them;
- more course specific content in the training.

### PAL 2011/12 Evaluation feedback: PAL leaders

Leaders were asked to complete an evaluative survey, which included a question on the training. They were asked: ‘Thinking back, how useful was the 2-day initial training in preparing you for your role?’

An overwhelming majority of PAL leader respondents found the two day initial training to be useful with a slight majority of 53.3% finding it very useful, which is very encouraging.

From additional qualitative comments found in the survey responses which relate to training, the most popular request was to make training more course-specific. Suggestions included:

- having simulated PAL sessions in training that related directly to their course (planning sessions around videos/programmes of course related content);
- having a separate day or part day of training that deals specifically with the course/framework itself with attendees only interacting with Leaders from their course/programme;
- academic staff to lead and shape some of the content of training.

The last two suggestions mirror the way the University of Manchester (2011) run their PASS leader training with inclusion of a 'discipline-specific session' all leaders must complete.

There were also a number of respondents who felt that the initial training could include more role play activities.

#### **PAL 2011/12 Evaluation Feedback: PAL recipients**

From the surveys and focus groups of first years receiving PAL, certain criticisms of the scheme emerged that could be addressed through the training. These included:

- poor timetabling of sessions;
- lack of structure or planning for some PAL sessions;
- certain PAL Leaders who were unable to deal effectively with disruptive students.

#### **Responding to Evaluation Feedback**

The PAL Coordination Team must continue to look at ways to make the initial training more concise without diluting its content. For 2012/13 the second day has been shortened by reducing the time allocated for lunch and tea/coffee breaks.

Introducing more course specific content to initial training is also something that needs further exploration. Making radical changes would be challenging at this stage. With the small team of staff in the PAL Coordination Team (who have other work commitments), it would be difficult to introduce the four half-day training options with course specific components Manchester provide for their PASS Leaders for example. The inevitable administrative and staffing implications of coordinating four separate half-day training sessions would be too great. It would also be difficult if academics had to contribute further to the training. Indeed, we already include some course specific elements in the second day and it has so far proved difficult and rather impractical to get all of our PAL Course Contacts to attend the training slots. This is understandable given the high workloads of academic staff.

Despite this, some changes have been made for the next academic year (2012-13). Various course specific previous Leader Observation Forms (anonymised) have been distributed to each trainee towards the end of their second day of training. Trainees are therefore able to read a summary of a previous PAL Session from their discipline area, see how PAL Leaders used particular facilitation/group learning techniques, and check

constructive feedback the Leader received. After reading through the observation form, trainees engage in group discussion and share their thoughts with other trainees from their course/school.

The PAL Coordination Team have also responded to leaders' comments by adding more role-play activities. Instead of having a group discussion about boundary setting as in previous years, trainees are encouraged to act out scenarios as Leaders to a pretend PAL group (made up of other trainees) and respond in an appropriate way (Appendix 1). So far groups have found this activity to be engaging and useful. By acting out a 'disruptive students' scenario for example, trainees are able to explore ways of dealing effectively with this kind of behaviour in their own PAL sessions. We are also planning to include an additional training session on assertiveness in order to help Leaders to manage disruptive students.

An activity related to critical incidents leaders are likely to face has also been introduced, including changing a timetabled PAL session if it is inconvenient for their group (Appendix 2). This attempts to address some of the general criticisms of PAL from first year students, including poor timetabling of sessions.

Another critical incident scenario encourages students to explore their options for planning sessions when no assignments are due, or when their PAL group is unable to suggest ideas for the next session. This responds to first year students' feedback relating to poor structure and planning of some PAL sessions. More emphasis is also being given on allowing trainees to reflect to the whole group as to why they feel planning and structure is important, especially after they have experienced running their simulated PAL session.

#### **Further modifications to training for 2012/13**

The initial training has also been modified for 2012/13 to complement the University's changing culture. The University's commitment to instilling a coaching and mentoring ethos across the University is reflected with an additional session focusing on coaching skills incorporated into day one. The Student Union has been invited to the second day of training as visiting speakers in recognition of their value and importance.

#### **Conclusion**

One of the great strengths of PAL lies in its flexibility. It can be adapted to various learning environments and academic disciplines. Any training provided has to be equally flexible. PAL retains its principles established by its founders over a decade ago but the scheme has expanded and developed in response to student feedback, changing learning technology and the evolving ethos of the University. PAL Leader training has also gradually evolved but its core aims remain unchanged (Fleming 2007). In order to support PAL in a blended environment, guidance on using the VLE to support PAL has been incorporated for example. In response to feedback, initial training incorporates more course

specific elements and has been streamlined where possible.

The concept of modelling continues to be fundamental to the training. Trainers employ small group learning techniques and frequently re-direct questions encouraging Leaders to reflect and formulate their own answers first. Leaders will in turn, always be able to apply these approaches in their own sessions.

The principles set out by Boyle (1998) for developing peer mentoring training programmes remain relevant today. There is no one size fits all training programme for peer mentors. The training offered needs to complement the way the scheme runs at a particular institution and meet its specific aims.

In order to keep the training practical and operating effectively, evaluating the training and responding to feedback from trainees is recommended.

**References**

Andrews, J. & Clark, R. (2011) *Peer Mentoring Works! How Peer Mentoring Enhances Student Success in Higher Education*. Birmingham: Aston University.

Arendale, D. (1994) 'Understanding the Supplemental Instruction model'. In Martin, D. & Arendale, D. (eds.) *Supplemental Instruction: increasing achievement and retention*, Chichester: Jossey-Bass, p. 11-21.

Bournemouth University (2012a) *The Student Development Award*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [www.bournemouth.ac.uk/student/award](http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/student/award) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012].

Bournemouth University (2012b) *Strategic Plan 2012-18*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [strategicplan.bournemouth.ac.uk/](http://strategicplan.bournemouth.ac.uk/) [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012].

Boyle, M. (1998) 'Designing training and reward for peer support schemes'. In Dolan, A. and Castley, A.J. (eds.) *Students Supporting Students*. Birmingham: SEDA, p. 33-48.

Capstick, S., & Fleming, H. (2001) 'Peer Assisted Learning in an Undergraduate Hospitality Course: Second Year Students Supporting First Year Students in Group Learning'. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, 1 (1): p. 69-75.

Capstick, S., Fleming, H. & Hurne, J. (2004) *Implementing Peer Assisted Learning in Higher Education: The Experience of a new university and a model for the achievement of a mainstream programme*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/documents/implmntng%20pal%20article61.pdf](http://pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/documents/implmntng%20pal%20article61.pdf) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> October 2011].

Fleming, H. (2007) *Training PAL Leaders*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/training.html](http://pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/training.html) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> October 2011].

Fleming, H. (2009a) *Peer Assisted Learning (PAL): an overview*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/#aims](http://pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/#aims). [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010].

Fleming, H. (2009b) *PAL and its links to Supplemental Instruction*. Poole: Bournemouth University. Available from: [pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/supplemental\\_instruction.html](http://pal.bournemouth.ac.uk/supplemental_instruction.html) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010].

Jacobs, G., Hurley, M. & Unite, C. (2008) 'How learning theory creates a foundation for SI leader training'. *The Australasian Journal of Peer Learning*, 1 (1): p. 6-12.

University of Kansas-Missouri City (2012) *The International Center for Supplemental Instruction*. Kansas City: University of Kansas-Missouri City. Available from: [www.umkc.edu/cad/si/](http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

University of Manchester (2012) *PASS Training*. Manchester: University of Manchester. Available from: [www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/students-as-partners/peersupport/pass/training/](http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/students-as-partners/peersupport/pass/training/) [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> April 2012].

University of West England (2012) *Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)*. Bristol: University of West England. Available from: [www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studysupport/peerassistedlearning.aspx](http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/studysupport/peerassistedlearning.aspx) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012].

Wallace, J. (1992) 'Students Helping Students to Learn'. *The New Academic*, 1(2): p. 8-9.

This article builds on a presentation given by the authors at the National HE STEM Programme's South West Spoke's *Second Seminar on the Transition and Induction of Students, and Peer Assisted Learning within STEM programmes*, 23 November 2011, UWE, Bristol. Available from: [www.hestem.ac.uk/event/he-stem-event/second-seminar-transition-and-induction](http://www.hestem.ac.uk/event/he-stem-event/second-seminar-transition-and-induction)

**List of Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Boundary Setting Role Play Activity
- Appendix 2: Critical Incidents Activity

**Appendix 1: Boundary Setting Role Play Activity**

Incident	How could you best deal with this?
1. You are running your first PAL session and your students ask you whether or not PAL is compulsory.	
2. Only a couple of students are participating in group discussions.	
3. Your students don't see the point of identifying and discussing the key issues that have been presented in their lectures during the past week.	
4. Your students have received their first assignment and want you to tell them what to put in it.	



5. Two of your students are aware that you did a similar assignment last year. They want to have a look at your assignment to get some ideas on how to structure theirs.	
6. One of your students is uncertain whether her completed assignment is of an appropriate academic standard. She asks you to read it and make suggestions.	
7. A student wants to borrow the list of references from one of your essays. She says that it will help her understand how to reference properly.	
8. The group is reluctant to suggest topics for discussion in PAL sessions and want you to decide what should be covered.	
9. Although you agree topics for discussion in advance with your group each week, very few of the students turn up with the relevant notes or resources to enable useful discussions to take place.	
10. Some students are being disruptive and ruining the session for others.	
11. A student comes to you at the end of the PAL session and asks if they can talk something through with you.	
12. An attractive member of your PAL group asks you out for a drink.	
13. Students rarely share ideas or participate in discussions and persist in wanting to hear answers from you.	
14. Members of your group rarely come to PAL with news items of their own and are overly dependent on you for this information.	

### Appendix 2: Critical Incidents Activity

Incident	How could you best deal with this?
1. The timetabled PAL Session is not at a convenient time for your group (i.e. scheduled on their day off).	
2. Subgroups start forming and there are clear divides in the group.	
3. There is an assignment set that is different to what you were assigned last year and a student asks you to explain it	
4. You think your co-PAL Leader is giving wrong information to the group.	
5. You are feeling unwell and are unable to run your next PAL Session.	
6. One student isn't engaging/participating.	
7. Your PAL Session is timetabled in a Lecture Theatre.	
8. Your PAL Group was unable to suggest ideas for the next session and you can't think of anything relevant to cover.	
9. Attendance at your sessions is very low.	
10. Your students don't have any assignments due and say that, as a consequence, they don't think there is any point in meeting for their PAL Sessions until their next assignment is set.	

11. A student in your PAL group tells you about an online reference generator and says it's much easier than referring to the BU Harvard Referencing Guide.	
12. Other PAL Leaders from your course are struggling to come up with ideas for their PAL Sessions and ask you for help	
13. The discussion you are leading goes off topic.	
14. A student asks you a question and you don't know the answer or are not entirely sure of the answer.	
15. There is a noticeable age difference between you and some members of your PAL Group, which is creating some awkwardness.	

## Facilitators and Barriers to the Development of PASS at the University of Brighton

Lucy Chilvers, Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Brighton

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) is a peer learning scheme involving student volunteers, typically from the second and third years, trained in leadership and facilitation skills to run weekly small group study sessions for 1<sup>st</sup> year students (Wallace 1995). Student attendees benefit from revisiting course material in a safe and supportive environment where they can ask questions and clarify understanding (Fostier & Carey 2007). Students who attend regularly have been shown to improve their course knowledge, confidence, independent learning skills and develop friendships on their course (Coe *et al.* 1999; Arendale 1994). Likewise, leaders also benefit by developing a wide range of leadership, communication and facilitation skills, boosting their confidence and developing into high calibre, employable graduates (Chilvers *et al.* 2012; Donelan 1999).

At this time of significant change in Higher Education (HE) (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2011), the increased provision for student support, with minimal demand on staff time, is hugely beneficial; PASS

is proving to enhance the quality of the student experience whilst also promoting a deeper engagement with the university, and independent study (Chilvers *et al.* 2012).

This paper focuses on facilitators and barriers to the development of PASS from the experience gained at the University of Brighton. PASS is coordinated centrally by the PASS team based in the Centre for Learning and Teaching, who work with a dedicated team of School and Course based PASS supervisors and administrators, and student PASS leaders.

PASS was first implemented at the University of Brighton in the academic year 2009/10, initially piloted in the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences, and the School of Sport and Service Management, with a total of 22 PASS leaders. Through gradual and steady growth over the following years, 2012/13 saw approximately 139 PASS leaders trained to facilitate PASS sessions across 9 departments, making PASS available to approximately 1200 students. Table 1 gives a summary of the PASS schemes at Brighton in more detail:

Table 1: Details of PASS schemes at Brighton in 2012/13

Department/ School	Undergraduate Courses/ Modules PASS is embedded in	Number of Leaders	Number of Groups	Approx. number of students PASS is available to
Applied Social Sciences	Contemporary Social Inequalities core module	24	12	250
Business	Accountancy and Finance	10	5	85
	Finance and Investment	4	2	30
Computing, Engineering and Mathematics	Mathematics	9	4	65
Education	Education	12	4	30
	Primary Education	3	1	18