LTC16D048

Title:	**Update on the development of an evaluation framework for UEA's Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme**
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Issue

Oversight of UEA's Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme moved to the Learning Enhancement Team from 01 August 2016. This report provides an update on the development of a framework to evaluate the scheme and follows Dr Jeremy Schildt's update to the LTC on 10.6.16. The author of the report is the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning (Pablo Dalby). This new role within the LET incorporates the following three main responsibilities which this report will also briefly report progress on:

- Coordinating the delivery of the PAL scheme (including recruitment, promotion, training and monitoring);
- Evaluating the PAL scheme;
- Conducting a mapping exercise of other peer learning initiatives across the UEA.

Recommendation

Recipients are invited to:

- Consider the proposed evaluation framework (i.e. criteria and methods);
- Advise on the author's approach to the evaluation of PAL;
- Respond to the key questions at the end of the report.

Resource Implications

The type of evaluation framework proposed is dependent on the resourcing of the PAL scheme and the type of results (e.g. level of rigour) it can produce correspond to that resourcing. This includes:

- The extent to which, and confidence with which, the evaluation is able to make claims, with regard to the impact of the PAL scheme on participants, that go beyond correlation and begin to build up a case for a level of causal connection to be made;
- Whether it is feasible, within current resourcing levels and timeframe (i.e. 2016-2018), to conduct an evaluation of other (non-PAL affiliated) peer learning initiatives across the University, as per the LTC's recommendation in January 2016 that the PAL evaluation metrics 'should also be applied when reviewing School based schemes'. This would largely depend on the quantity and size of school-based schemes at UEA, which is yet to be determined by an initial mapping exercise by the author.

Risk Implications

The proposed evaluation framework indirectly impacts the overall level of risk facing the University only to the extent that decisions regarding the future of the PAL scheme are based on the results of the evaluation. There is a level of risk involved here with regard to:

- How effectively the University provides different forms of support services for its diverse student body;
- How the quality of the University's support services is perceived by those inside and outside the UEA community (i.e. the University's reputation).

Equality and Diversity
The proposed evaluation framework includes attention to how the PAL scheme relates to UEA's:

- Widening Participation Strategy 2016-20;
- Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreement 2016-2017.

It therefore attends to how the scheme impacts on students with protected characteristics. Although PAL is not specifically aimed at groups with protected characteristics, the evaluation aims to generate insights into whether or not diverse groups are being catered to, and benefiting from, PAL provision in its current form.

Timing of decisions
As stated in the minutes of the LTC meeting on 27.1.16, the LET will 'report to LTC in January 2018' on the results of the evaluation up to that point. This will, necessarily, only include the evaluation results for the first year (2016-2017) of the two-year extension to the pilot phase as the second year would still be in process. Alternatively, if required by the LTC:

- The report could be provided at an earlier date (e.g. October 2017); this would allow for any alterations to the evaluation framework for the second year of the pilot phase to incorporate any comments the LTC might want to make on the first year report;
- Intermittent updates on the progress of the PAL scheme could also be made to the LTC by the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning.

Further Information
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Background
Following discussion of the future of UEA's PAL scheme at LTC in January 2016 it was determined that "a set of metrics for evaluating whether the scheme offered value for money should be devised and these metrics should also be applied when reviewing School based schemes…". Two potentially useful resources for developing an evaluation framework at UEA were identified in Dr Schildt's previous report to the LTC:

- Primary data gathered through the *Mapping peer-led academic learning UK* survey published by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2014;
- 'Academic Peer Learning Network' – the network's Research and Impact group has developed an evaluation toolkit which is ready for piloting.

The first resource here identified a number of social and academic benefits of peer-led learning for students and institutions, as does much of the literature, though it should be noted that this can depend on how effectively peer-learning schemes are structured and delivered. Moreover, as the then Chief Executive of the HEA - Professor Stephanie Marshall – notes, there is much work to do in developing peer-led learning, "especially in the field of pedagogic research" (Keenan, 2014: 4). The Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning hopes for UEA to become a leading contributor to this research beginning with the proposed evaluation framework which draws from the second resource listed above (an evaluation toolkit he obtained during a recent training course for evaluating PAL). The framework is outlined in the next section ('Discussion') after the following brief update on the progress of the PAL scheme since the author began in post on 01 August 2016.

- Delivery has gone smoothly and successfully, at least in terms of outputs (outcomes will not be known until the completion of the evaluation). 86 Mentors and 11 Officers have been recruited, trained, and supported by the PAL team (Pablo Dalby and Administrators Vicky Hawkes and Julie Penton[1]) and Mentors delivered regular PAL sessions in five schools – CHE, CMP, DEV, HSC, and MED;
- Evaluation is inevitably in its early stages with the evaluation framework currently being proposed by the author in this report. Nonetheless, ethical approval has been obtained from the UEA Ethics Committee and some methods of data collection such as attendance-taking have, necessarily, already begun. A new online attendance-taking system introduced by the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning has been a major success and eliminated past problems with poor quality attendance data;
- The mapping exercise of other peer learning initiatives across the UEA is currently in a preliminary stage, with the author in discussion with other members of the LET and PAL Team about how best to approach it.

Discussion
To evaluate PAL between 2016-2018, the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning proposes a framework that builds on previous evaluations focusing on the impact of PAL on mentees', Mentors' and Officers':

- Retention (mainly regarding mentees);
- Academic performance (mainly regarding mentees and Mentors);
- Employability (mainly regarding Mentors and Officers);
- Overall student experience (regarding all participants);

The author proposes immediate changes to the evaluation framework which:

1) Strengthen processes of data collection and analysis:

The problems of selection bias identified in Caroline Sauverin's January 2016 review of the UEA PAL scheme will be reduced by gathering better quality attendance data using an improved data collection system (already in place and working successfully). As in previous evaluations, these attendance data will be shared with the UEA Business Intelligence Unit (BIU), who will provide quantitative analysis that will enable comparison, for instance, of the academic performance (e.g. grades) of students who attended different amounts of PAL sessions, or none at all. The type and level of quantitative analysis conducted will be strengthened further by enlisting the assistance of Dr. Georgios Papadopolous – a UEA Lecturer in Econometrics and the author of a previous study into the 'impact of PAL on student performance' at UEA - to help with the econometric analysis of data pertaining to retention and academic performance in particular;

2) Connect the evaluation more closely to the research of national and international academic peer learning networks – in particular the evaluation toolkit created by the 'Academic Peer Learning Network's' Research and Impact group:

Using selected sections of the toolkit – for example Likert scale survey questions relating to retention, employability, academic performance and overall experience (see Appendix 1 for an example)[2] – will provide quantitative self-reported data from students. To this, the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning proposes to add questions generating qualitative self-reported data, which will contribute insights into students' subjective experiences, a selection of which will be used as case studies.

Unlike previous evaluations of PAL at UEA, these online surveys will now ask respondents to (anonymously) provide their student number, as they do when registering their attendance at a PAL session. This will enable an analysis that more thoroughly accounts for important student

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[1] Julie Penton's contract of employment with PAL ended in December 2016.

[2] Appendix 1 is an example of the survey to be used with PAL Mentors. The survey will also be adapted for use with mentees, Officers, and Module Conveners.

characteristics (e.g. gender, fee status etc.) by linking attendance data with survey data and the analyses conducted by the BIU and Georgios Papadopoulos (see above). This level of analysis will paint a clearer picture of what kinds of students are accessing PAL and what kinds of experiences they are having, therefore enabling a better understanding of, for instance, whether PAL is catering effectively to students with protected characteristics.

Finally, unlike previous PAL surveys the proposed online surveys will be distributed to all first year undergraduates who were invited to participate in PAL sessions and feature a section of questions for those who chose not to attend, or dropped out. Although the response rate from students who did not participate in PAL is likely to be low, this is a first attempt to understand non-participation in the scheme;

3) Link the evaluation to wider-reaching, current higher education (HE) policy at UEA and beyond. This will involve aligning the PAL evaluation framework criteria to relevant criteria outlined in various key sources, including the:

- UEA Strategic Plan 2016-20, and Learning and Teaching Strategy 2014-19;
- UEA Graduate and Postgraduate Attributes, and the UEA Award;
- Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF);
- UK Engagement Survey (UKES).

A particularly relevant theme within current HE policy trends is the notion of 'Students as Partners' in the learning process. Key sources such as the UKES are concerned with 'student voice' and so linking the PAL evaluation to such sources would, for instance, involve gathering data on whether or not PAL participants feel that their ideas and opinions are being listened to and acted upon during their PAL experience. Doing this will help ascertain to what extent the PAL scheme really is peer led and how it might become more so.

On this note, the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning also proposes to gradually introduce, in the short to medium term (towards the second year of the pilot phase extension), a peer led, participatory approach to the implementation of the evaluation framework. This would involve PAL Mentors and Officers being 'research partners' in the evaluation process by, for instance, conducting focus groups and interviews with mentees and helping to map other peer learning activities around the University. As well as potentially spotlighting the UEA PAL scheme as a leading innovator in the field of peer learning and evaluation, this would:

- promote the development of valuable transferable skills (gathering, transcribing, and analysing data) enhancing Mentors/Officers academic credentials and employability;
- enable a more comprehensive, thorough evaluation to be conducted within current resourcing levels by delegating responsibilities for some research activities;
- align the PAL evaluation framework more congruently with the peer-led pedagogic ethos at the heart of PAL;
- align the UEA PAL scheme with UEA's strategic objective to engage 'students as partners' in the learning process, thus complementing wider shifts in UK higher education policy and practice.

Key Questions for the Committee
Can the LTC please advise on the following questions:

1) In light of the committee's resolution that 'a set of metrics for evaluating whether the [PAL] scheme offered value for money should be devised…' (LTC Minutes 27.1.16):

(i) What definition of 'value for money' should be adopted? Should, for instance, the definition refer to:

- the quantity of students that participate in the scheme, and the cost per student?
- the correlation between participation in PAL and quantitative criteria such as student retention rates and academic grades?
- the qualitative experiences of PAL participants?

(ii) What benchmarks/indicators should be used to indicate 'value for money' within the metrics that are to be devised? For instance:

- what cost per student would indicate good value for money?
- what percentage of students describing their PAL experience as 'beneficial' would indicate good value?
- are there established benchmarks/indicators that have been used in relation to other learning activities at UEA?

2) Regarding the committee's recommendation to review other 'School based [peer learning] schemes' (LTC Minutes 27.1.16):

(i) Should this include either or both of the following:

- schemes 'formally' organised by Schools/staff?
- schemes 'informally' organised by students?

(ii) What is the end goal of reviewing other School based peer learning schemes? Is it, for instance, to:

- understand what conditions are conducive to localised (School-based) peer learning schemes?
- understand the pros and cons of schemes that are locally rather than centrally organised?
- identify anomalies between schemes (e.g. do some pay Mentors and others not)?
- learn 'good practice' lessons in relation to peer learning?

(iii) How best can the reviewing/mapping of peer learning initiatives across UEA be approached within PAL's current resourcing levels and timeframe? Which, for instance, of the following approaches is recommended?

- circulating emails requesting information through Heads of School/Teaching Directors;
- the Learning Enhancement Tutor for Peer Led Learning visiting Learning and Teaching Quality Committees and/or Student Staff Liason Committees;
- enlisting the help of PAL Mentors/Officers and delegating each one a manageable number of schools to approach;
- employing a PAL graduate intern to assist with the reviewing/mapping task.

Attachments
Appendix 1: Example of end of semester PAL evaluation survey (for PAL Mentors).

References
Keenan, C. (2014). *Mapping student-led peer learning in the UK* [Internet]. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/peer_led_learning_keenan_nov_14-final.pdf [Accessed 7 August 2016].

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) EVALUATION SURVEY
(for PAL Mentors)
Phase 5 Autumn 2016

It would be much appreciated if you complete this survey – which is for PAL Mentors who worked during the Autumn 2016 semester – as it will help us (the PAL Team) to evaluate PAL and develop the scheme for the future.

Your responses will remain anonymous, so you should NOT provide your name, although you are requested to (optionally) provide your student registration number **or** background information about yourself, which will enable a useful analysis of the impacts of PAL on different groups of students. This helps us to understand if PAL is effectively catering to the needs of diverse UEA students, and if not, how this could be improved. **If you provide your student registration number, it will never be used to identify you by name at any point during the evaluation process.**

Thank you very much for your time and thoughts!

The PAL Team

SECTION 1

*Please complete **ONLY ONE** of the parts in this section **(Part A, Part B, or Part C)** whether you attended any PAL sessions in the autumn 2016 semester or not. Our first preference is that you complete Part A, our second preference is Part B, and our third preference is Part C, but each is optional.*

SECTION 1 - Part A: (optional but the first preference)

Please enter your student registration number _____

If you completed Part A, please go straight to SECTION 2. If not, please go to PART B.

SECTION 1 - Part B: (optional but the second preference)

Please answer the following questions:

1. Age (in years):

2. What is your gender identiyy?

Male ☐

Female ☐

Male to female transgender ☐

Female to male transgender ☐

| Prefer not to say | ☐ |

| Other (please specify) | ☐ |

| |

3. What is your marital status?

| Married/civil partner | ☐ |

| Separated (but still legally married) | ☐ |

| Divorced | ☐ |

| Widowed | ☐ |

| In a relationship | ☐ |

| Single | ☐ |

4. Programme of study?

| |

5. Have you attended any peer mentoring sessions this semester?

Yes   ☐

No   ☐

6. How many peer mentoring sessions have you attended?

0   ☐

1-4   ☐

5-8   ☐

8+   ☐

7. Mode of Study:

| Full-Time | ☐ |

| Part-Time | ☐ |

8. Year of Study:

| First | ☐ |

| Second | ☐ |

| Third | ☐ |

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Fourth	☐
Fifth	☐
Sixth	☐
Placement year	☐

9. Are you the first person in your immediate family to enter higher education? (Immediate family includes those directly related to you, such as parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins)

Unsure	☐
Yes	☐
No	☐

10. If you are not the first person in your immediate family to enter higher education, what was their relationship to you?

Mother	☐
Aunt	☐
Father	☐
Uncle	☐
Sister	☐
Cousin	☐
Brother	☐

11. Where were you living when you applied for a place at this university?

In the UK	☐
In the European Union but outside the UK	☐
Outside Europe	☐

12. How often does your travel to and from the university take more than 45 minutes one-way?

Never	☐
Occasionally	☐
Frequently	☐
Always	☐

13. Will you have a part-time job whilst undertaking your programme of study?

Yes	☐
No	☐
Unsure	☐

14. If you will have a part-time job whilst undertaking your programme of study, on average how many hours will you work each week? (Please state)

15. What did you do before coming to university?

At school or college full time	☐
Working full time	☐
Working part time	☐
At school or college and working part time	☐
On a training scheme	☐
Unemployed	☐
Other (please write in)	☐

16. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes	☐
No	☐
Prefer not to answer	☐

17. If you consider yourself to have a disability, please tell us the type/name of the disability you have:

18. Will you be in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) whilst in higher education?

Yes	☐
No	☐
Unsure	☐

19. Do you have caring responsibilities for: (place an x in all that apply)

A child ☐

A dependent older person ☐

A person with a disability ☐

None of the above ☐

20. If you have caring responsibilities, please indicate on average how many hours you spend caring for people in a week.

21. Do you have caring responsibilities for dependants that rely on you financially?

Yes ☐ No ☐

22. If you have caring responsibilities for dependants, how many rely on you financially?

23. If you have caring responsibilities for dependants that rely on you financially, how long have you been helping like this?

Up to 6 months ☐

6-12 months ☐

Over 1 year but less than 3 years ☐

3-5 years ☐

Over 5 years ☐

I don't know ☐

Next, we would like you to answer a series of questions about your living arrangements during term time and also out of term time. Please provide an answer for each question even if your term time accommodation type is the same as your accommodation type outside of term time.

24. During term time, which of the following types of accommodation do you live in?

University Halls ☐

Private rented ☐

Home/parents ☐

Own residence ☐

Not Known	☐
Not in attendance at the university (e.g. placement)	☐
Private-sector halls	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

25. Out of term time, who of the following, if any, do you live with?
(Place an X in all boxes that apply)

Parent/guardian	☐	Step parent	☐
Foster parent	☐	Parent-in-law	☐
Spouse	☐	Civil Partner	☐
Cohabiting partner	☐	Son/daughter	☐
Step-son/daughter	☐	Foster child	☐
Son-in-law/daughter-in-law	☐	Brother/sister	☐
Step-brother/sister	☐	Foster brother/sister	☐
Brother/sister-in-law	☐	Grandchild	☐
Grandparent	☐	I live alone	☐
Other relative (please state)	☐	Other non-relative (please state)	☐

26. Out of term postcode:

27. Thinking about where you live out of term time, is this accommodation owned or rented?

Own (with a mortgage)	☐	Own (without a mortgage)	☐
Rent	☐	Don't know	☐

28. Thinking about where you live out of term time, how many cars or vans (include company cars if available for private use) are owned or available to the household?

0	☐
1	☐
2	☐
3	☐

4+ ☐

29. Do you regard yourself as belonging to any of the following religions? (Place an x in one box only)

No religion	☐	Presbyterian	☐
Roman Catholic	☐	Free Presbyterian	☐
Church of Ireland	☐	Baptist	☐
Methodist	☐	Muslim	☐
Jewish	☐	Hindu	☐
Sikh	☐	Buddhist	☐
Other (please specify)	☐		

30. Nationality:

British	☐	Scottish	☐
English	☐	Welsh	☐
Irish	☐	Unknown	☐
Other	☐	Prefer not to answer	☐

EU International (please specify below)   Non EU International (please specify below)

31. Which of the following best represents your ethnicity (please tick):

White	☐	Black or Black British-Caribbean	☐	Chinese	☐

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Irish Traveller	☐	Black or Black British – African	☐	Other Asian background	☐
Gypsy or traveller	☐	Other Black background	☐	Mixed – white and Black Caribbean	☐
Other white background	☐	Asian or Asian British – Indian	☐	Mixed – White and Black African	☐
Prefer not to answer	☐	Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	☐	Mixed – white and Asian	☐
Not known	☐	Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	☐	Other mixed background	☐
Other ethnic background	☐	Arab	☐		

If you completed Part B, please go straight to SECTION 2. If not, please go to Part C.

SECTION 1 - Part C: (optional but the third preference)

Please enter the following information:

The Name of your UEA School:

Your Level/Year of Study:

The name of your PAL Mentor(s):

Now please go to SECTION 2

SECTION 2

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Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the statements below. It would be very useful for us if you could also then write about your response by explaining why you chose it and, if possible, giving some examples in your explanation.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the (PAL) sessions useful.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions enjoyable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions interesting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions relevant to my area of study.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions helped to build my confidence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions increased my knowledge.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions important.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I got to know other students through PAL.					
I think that participating in PAL has enhanced my overall University experience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would recommend PAL to students starting next year	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please explain your responses:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the sessions helped me feel more prepared to complete my assignments and exams.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions helped me to see how to transfer my skills from one situation to another.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions helped me to improve my grades.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions helped me succeed academically.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found the sessions helped me to approach learning in a more positive way.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Please explain your responses:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
During my time at University, I have sometimes thought about leaving?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If/when I have thought about leaving, peer mentoring has influenced my decision to stay.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would have left University if it wasn't for the peer mentoring programme.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being part of the peer mentoring programme has allayed any fears I may have had about coming to university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I feel I belong to the University community

Please explain your responses:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
During my time at University, I have sometimes thought about leaving?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If/when I have thought about leaving, peer mentoring has influenced my decision to stay.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would have left University if it wasn't for the peer mentoring programme.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Being part of the peer mentoring programme has allayed any fears I may have had about coming to university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I belong to the University community					
I stopped going to PAL during the semester					
Please explain your responses:					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think that participating in PAL					
… has enhanced my communication skills					
… Has enhanced my critical thinking skills					
… Has enhanced my problem-solving skills					
… Has enhanced my ability to work in a team					
….has enhanced my learning and personal development					
….has enhanced my active leadership and citizenship skills					
….has enhanced my digital literacy					
… helped me to get a part-time job while studying at University					
…will help me get a job or go on to further study in future					
…has enhanced my ability to articulate my knowledge, experience, and skills					
….has helped to enhance my overall employability					
…helped me to take part in the UEA award					

Please explain your responses:

What you think the main strengths of the PAL scheme are, and what have been the highlights of your PAL experience?

What you think the main weaknesses of the PAL scheme are, and are there any improvements you would suggest for the next phase of PAL?

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Would you be interested in applying to be a PAL officer in the future?   Yes ☐   No ☐ If 'yes', please complete an *Expression of Interest Form* at www.uea.ac.uk/hr/pal-interest.
Finally, please use this space to say any thing else you would like to say about PAL:

<div align="center">

Thank you! Please return to PAL@uea.ac.uk or deliver to EFB Hub

</div>