



Peer Assisted Learning at UEA

A 3-year implementation project
(January 2013 – December 2015)

Report on Phase 1

January – June 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and introduction:

Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) is being introduced into UEA over a 3-year period, with the aim of including the majority of schools by the end of December 2015. Five schools took part in the first pilot which ran from January to June, 2013. This report summarises evaluations by those who have participated in PAL during this period.

Phase 1: Participating schools

Chemistry (CHE)

Computing Science (CMP)

Language and Communication Sciences (LCS)

Norwich Business School (NBS)

Nursing Sciences (NSC)

Aims of PAL

PAL aims to ease the transition of new students into university. Mentors provide pastoral and academic support by sharing their experiences and skills they have gained. HEIs with experience of PAL have found that it enhances retention, engagement and performance through shared learning, engendering stronger links between faculty and students as well as providing an additional form of feedback.

Organisation of PAL

PAL sessions are run by students for students. Mentees attend weekly PAL sessions in small groups led by mentors working in pairs. The aim is to facilitate learning and mentors are not expected to teach.

Mentees attend on a voluntary basis and contribute to the content of PAL sessions. Mentors have access to the same materials as mentees and provide a range of activities to promote group learning. They submit a record of attendance and activities to the PAL officer on a weekly basis. Officers support and supervise the mentors, sign off time sheets and submit a monthly summary report to the PAL team. Mentors and officers are trained and paid for their roles. They are contracted for a maximum of 50 hours per semester.

The PAL team consists of the PAL champion, Anne Guyon, and the PAL administrator, Vicky Hawkes. Their roles are to promote, develop and oversee the implementation of PAL. The complexity of PAL requires liaison at each level of the university structure. PAL is overseen by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic and Academic Director for Taught Programmes.

Evaluation of Phase 1:

The core objectives for PAL at UEA are to:

1. Enhance the student experience through

- supporting 1st year students through the transition into higher education
- aiding integration into university life and orientation to UEA
- opportunities to learn from more experienced students
- provision of additional social and learning opportunities for mentors

Evaluation indicated that mentees gained increased understanding of course requirements. They gained confidence through sharing worries and concerns. Mentors were supportive and reassuring, giving insight into what future years may hold. Mentors benefitted from a wider social and cultural mix than they had previously experienced. Officers described developing positive working relationships with fellow officers, mentors, academic and administrative staff.

2. Improve performance through

- attaching PAL to core modules / 'tricky' areas
- interactions between levels – opportunity to share experiences
- opportunities for mentors to revisit core learning

Both mentees and mentors indicated they gained knowledge and understanding through the scheme. Mentees described acquiring study skills through carrying out academic exercises. In NSC practicing clinical skills was particularly useful. Mentors gained a deeper understanding of core concepts.

3. Promote employability for mentors / officers through

- consolidation of academic studies
- Development of skills, e.g. job applications; facilitation; leadership

Mentors and officers reported acquiring skills and attributes such as leadership; time-management; communication; organisation and planning. They demonstrated the ability to be flexible and responsive to others' needs.

Key learning points from Phase 1

The majority of schools which took part in Phase 1 had a September intake of students. Attendance at PAL sessions in these schools was lower than expected. Timing of the introduction of PAL sessions, poor promotion and timetabling were the key issues identified as having a significant effect on attendance. In the School of Nursing Sciences, which had a January intake and sessions were timetabled, attendance was much improved, achieving 80% in some sessions.

Phase 1 provided an opportunity to evaluate the practicalities of PAL, such as timing and processes for recruitment and employment of officers and mentors; promoting PAL; timetabling; booking rooms; collecting attendance data; monitoring the content

of PAL sessions; managing time sheets and payment for mentors and officers and ensuring effective communication systems.

Timetabling is proving to be the greatest challenge to the implementation of PAL. Many schools are supporting this process, but more support is needed to ensure that PAL sessions are included on timetables where possible.

Phase 2 and Phase 3: Additional schools

The five schools from Phase 1 are continuing with the implementation of PAL. Additional schools to implement PAL in the Autumn Semester are:

- Environmental Sciences (ENV)
- Film, Television and Media Studies (FTM)
- Norwich Medical School (MED)
- Political, Social and International Studies (PSI)
- Rehabilitation Sciences (RSC, formerly AHP)

International Development (DEV) plans to start the scheme in the Spring Semester.

Future considerations

The introduction of PAL into UEA is still in the early stages. The evidence gained from Phase 1 is largely anecdotal and although it indicates that PAL has been received positively, more robust measures of success are needed. This might include enhanced retention, improved performance, stronger engagement with the module, improved social interaction within and between years and employability. Measures could include comparisons of attrition before and after implementing PAL; comparing marks / grade profiles; monitoring attendance; student satisfaction surveys; reports to SSLCs; tracking student performance; gathering exit data on mentors' and officers' first employment destinations.

SECTION 1: PAL at UEA

Background and introduction:

Peer-Assisted Learning (also known as Supplemental Instruction and Peer Assisted Study Sessions) was first developed at the University of Kansas in 1973. Since then it has been adopted by approximately 1500 universities worldwide. PAL is a structured mentoring system based on the principles of social learning (Bandura, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). First year undergraduate students / mentees are mentored by students in higher years, with the aim of supporting them through the transition into higher education. Mentors provide academic and pastoral support by sharing the experience and skills they have gained. PAL is being introduced into UEA over a 3-year period, with the aim of including more than 50% of schools by the end of that time.

The key to PAL is that it is run by students for students. PAL is linked to specific modules, usually core or 'tricky' ones, and supplements rather than replaces teaching. Mentees are invited to attend PAL sessions in small groups led by mentors who work in pairs. Groups meet for about one hour per week, or equivalent, over the course of a Semester. Sessions should be structured, but relaxed, creative and fun. Mentors receive training to emphasise their role as facilitators, not teachers, and provide them with the skills to create a safe, confidential learning environment. This gives mentees the opportunity to share their knowledge and ask questions they may have shied away from in lectures.

Benefits of PAL

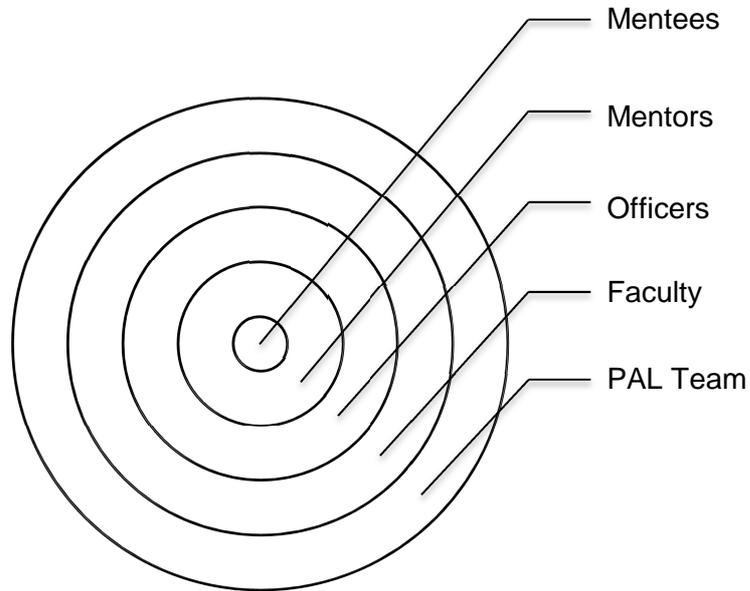
PAL gives mentees an opportunity to expand their knowledge and deepen understanding as a foundation for future learning. Interacting with students in higher years gives an insight into what the future might hold. Orientation and integration into higher education should occur more easily.

Mentors have the opportunity to revisit and consolidate their learning from earlier years. They gain skills in communication, time-management, organisation, facilitation and others which will help in building a CV for their future careers.

PAL officers, usually drawn from PG student cohorts in each school, liaise with module conveners to ensure PAL links with current teaching. The officer role includes providing leadership and support for the mentors. This in turn enables them to develop skills they can transfer into the workplace.

Other HEIs have found that PAL enhances retention, engagement and performance. It engenders stronger links between faculty and students as well as providing an additional form of feedback.

Structure of PAL within UEA



Roles and responsibilities

Mentees attend PAL sessions on a voluntary basis. They are given guidance about the purpose and principles of PAL and the role of the mentors. They are encouraged to help determine the content of PAL sessions, by bringing learning materials and questions to the sessions. The group ensures continuity of learning by creating an action plan from week to week.

Mentors are made aware of current curriculum content and have access to the same materials as mentees. Mentors are expected to work collaboratively with their mentor partner and are encouraged to use a range of activities to promote effective group learning. Recording PAL attendance and activities is a requirement of the role. This data is submitted to the PAL officer and forms the basis of PAL evaluation.

Officers are mainly recruited from PGR/PGT student cohorts with a few exceptions, outlined below. They liaise with teaching faculty within the school and with the PAL team as well as supervising and supporting mentors. Their administrative role is to gather attendance and activity data as well as signing off time sheets and submitting a summary report.

Mentors and officers are paid for their roles and are contracted to a maximum of 50 hours for the semester. This includes payment for training days, PAL sessions, administration and evaluation activities.

The PAL team consists of the PAL champion and PAL administrator, whose roles are to promote, develop and oversee the implementation of PAL. The complexity of PAL requires liaison at each level of the university structure.

PAL is overseen by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Academic and Academic Director for Taught Programmes.

UEA Objectives

Phase 2 of PAL implementation will coincide with the introduction of the New Academic Model, with the aim of supporting students to meet the threshold criteria for achievement and encourage increased retention. The core objectives for PAL are to:

1. Enhance the student experience through

- supporting 1st year students through the transition into higher education
- aiding integration into university life and orientation to UEA
- opportunities to learn from more experienced students
- provision of additional social and learning opportunities for mentors

2. Improve performance through

- attaching PAL to core modules / 'tricky' areas
- interactions between levels – opportunity to share experiences
- opportunities for mentors to revisit core learning

3. Promote employability for mentors / officers through

- consolidation of academic studies
- Development of skills, e.g. job applications; facilitation; leadership

SECTION 2: PAL TRAINING

Mentors and officers received two days of training in December 2012. This covered a definition of PAL and its potential benefits to students, mentors, officers and UEA faculty. It also included sessions on communication skills, group dynamics, team roles and the difference between facilitation and teaching. Colleagues from Dean of Students, Library services and the Students Union provided information about support services and experienced mentors from UCL shared their experience and facilitated practice PAL sessions.

Mentors and officers were invited to evaluate the training and feedback indicated that mentors found the practical sessions and hearing from the UCL mentors more beneficial than presentations on the theory behind PAL. They expressed the need for opportunities for practice sessions and school-specific training. Officers felt they needed additional training so support their leadership role.

SECTION 3: REVIEW OF PHASE 1

Phase 1 started in January 2013 with five schools, the majority of which had a September intake of students. Although this presented issues of attendance, as reported below, it provided an opportunity to evaluate the practicalities of PAL, such as recruitment of officers and mentors; issuing contracts; attracting students; timetabling; booking rooms; collecting attendance data; monitoring the content of PAL sessions; managing time sheets and payment for mentors and officers and ensuring effective communication systems. All have been under scrutiny with the aim of developing efficient and effective delivery of PAL in the future.

Participating schools

Chemistry (CHE)
Computing Science (CMP)
Language and Communication Sciences (LCS)
Norwich Business School (NBS)
Nursing Sciences (NSC)

Weekly 1-hour PAL sessions ran throughout the Spring semester.

Attendance

School	Cohort	Number of groups	Attendance per group
CHE	72	6	1-5
CMP	49 (2 modules)	6	5-10
LCS	65 (2 modules)	5	2 (overall)
NBS	374	19	1-3 (data from 6 groups)
NSC	66	3	4-21

These data indicate that 1 – 10 students attended at least one PAL session in the 4 schools with a September intake. In NSC, where mentees started their course in January, attendance ranged from 36-80% of the cohort.

Reasons for poor attendance are difficult to determine, however data gathered from CMP and LCS indicate a number of reasons why students did not attend.

Lack of awareness of PAL 'I wasn't told about them. I would have gone if I'd known'

'If there was more information of what was in the

	meetings’
<i>Peer support</i>	‘...only one there’
<i>Timetabling:</i>	‘Not Wednesday p.m. – sports’
	Times and locations of meetings changed from week to week and a lack of regularity may have discouraged some students
<i>Other potential factors put forward by mentors and officers</i>	Students in some schools felt that PAL was not attached to an appropriate module
	Students, mentors and officers felt that introduction of PAL in the Autumn semester would encourage attendance as the majority of students arrive at UEA
	Students may feel ‘settled in’ by the Spring semester, with study and social routines well-established
	Students were preparing for exams and may not have understood how PAL could assist with revision techniques and consolidating learning

Some of this is borne out by the positive experience in NSC. PAL was in place as students arrived at UEA and they were introduced to it during induction. Sessions were timetabled at a regular time and mentors were provided with guidance as to the content of the module. The module lead helped with room bookings and notifying students of the location of PAL sessions.

Evaluation

Evaluation of Phase 1 was sought through individual feedback forms from students, mentors and officers who had attended PAL sessions. Questionnaires were circulated to all students on the PAL modules in some schools to determine why students had or had not attended PAL sessions and what would have attracted them. Group meetings were held at the end of the semester to capture collective reflections on successful and less successful aspects of PAL and suggestions for future planning.

Evaluation is largely anecdotal and based on students’, mentors’ and officers’ experience and perceptions of PAL. An overview of evaluation is provided below with each section supported by illustrative quotes. A summary of evaluation data from each school is available on request from the PAL Champion.

Mentees' evaluation

PAL worked particularly well when information about timetabling and location was provided well in advance. Evaluation indicates that in general mentees found PAL sessions beneficial. Mentees and mentors planned the content of sessions and developed a plan for future sessions. They particularly valued the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues with experienced students from the same course of study. This gave mentees greater clarity about current and future expectations and options, a deeper knowledge base and increased confidence.

A few mentees felt they did not benefit from PAL, either because in their view it was not attached to the appropriate module or did not cover subjects they felt would help them. Some mentees expected mentors to provide answers rather than facilitate their learning. Poor communication, organisation and planning were given as reasons for less successful PAL sessions.

Suggested improvements included providing clear information about the purpose of PAL and potential benefits to mentees. Timetabling and room-booking well in advance was seen as a potential improvement.

Illustrative comments:

Reasons for attending PAL sessions:

<i>Orientation to course / placements – academic and professional requirements</i>	'To gain information on certain aspects of the course including placements and theory' '... we have discussed relevant issues that help us progress on the course'
<i>Learning from others' experience</i>	'General advice from people who have experienced what you are going through, to make sure you are on track with work etc.' 'To enquire about experiences, take advice on how to handle situations and give feedback on the course'
<i>Allaying fears / reassurance</i>	'It's a very good opportunity to talk through any fears or worries we have with people who have experienced the same thing'

Benefits of PAL:

<i>Gaining confidence</i>	'... put my mind at rest about completing the degree' 'The mentors were very good at ...giving us support through the first 'scary' 10 weeks of the course' 'I feel more confident in being able to approach the
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	relevant people when problems arise and who would be the best person to help'
<i>Understanding academic and professional expectations</i>	<p>'Knowledge of what is expected for assignments and placement. How the course progresses'</p> <p>'Very useful re enhancing understanding of the module. Great to speak to 2nd years about the course and any tips they had'</p> <p>'Feeling there is always someone you can turn to for advice and guidance and who isn't necessarily a lecturer'</p>
<i>Subject / module choices</i>	'Helped with ... choice for 2 nd year modules'
<i>Increased subject knowledge</i>	'Explained things in a different way to the lecturers. Helped go through things we were confused about'
<i>Support with technical aspects of learning</i>	'Learnt how to use Blackboard properly and how to access folders'
<i>Assignment preparation</i>	'Very useful to go through past exam questions and complete them with help available'
<i>Good organisation</i>	<p>'... mentors always replied promptly to emails and were happy for us to make suggestions'</p> <p>'The session before we brainstormed what we wanted to talk about in the next session and if there were any queries that arose during the week ... we were able to email them'</p>
<i>Group working / dynamics</i>	<p>'Able to voice my own problems and concerns about my own worries but also problems I have had with other members of the group'</p> <p>'... brought our group closer together and we got to know each other'</p>
<i>No / limited benefit</i>	<p>'I attended 4 weeks of PAL then stopped as it was stressing me out more than I was already'</p> <p>'Not particularly focussed / prepared people and as they aren't allowed to teach I didn't gain much'</p> <p>'It is useful but isn't much info in the sessions that I find really useful'</p>
<i>Poor / improvements to</i>	'A problem was the different opinions raised amongst

organisation

the peer group'

'Some people didn't attend because they didn't realise mentors were students not lecturers'

'More support for the mentors from the start. It took a few weeks to get going but was really good when it did'

Students were asked to rate their skills development and the results are presented in the table below

Skills Development					
Benefit	Definitely benefitted	Benefitted	Not sure	No benefit yet	No benefit
Confidence in starting university	9	13	3		1
Understanding requirements of university	16	10			
Getting to know other students	6	11	9		
Increased knowledge, understanding and skills	11	13	1	1	
Academic writing	8	11	5	2	
Confidence in getting good grades	5	14	5	2	
Confidence in completing your degree	8	16	1	1	

Mentors' evaluation

Students who applied for the mentor role recognised the potential and actual benefits of PAL such as supporting mentees, enhancing their own knowledge and CV building. They recognised the challenges associated with the transition into higher education for first year students and expressed a sense of satisfaction in supporting mentees. They also reported instances of interactive learning as they learned from mentees. Social and financial benefits were seen as an additional bonus.

Some mentors found the experience challenging, but felt rising to it had played a part in their personal and professional development. Several described increased confidence as the result of developing skills and knowledge through PAL. They felt PAL offered opportunities to improve communication skills, especially for those with English as a second language, gain a deeper understanding of the HEI environment and build a CV as well as providing financial benefits. Some mentors felt that PAL experience had has a direct effect on being offered employment.

Mentee attendance was critical to a sense of benefitting from the experience. Although poor attendance was disappointing several mentors from those schools have reapplied, indicating they still have confidence in the scheme.

Pairing of mentors is set by the PAL team and based on variations such as gender, UK / international mentors and different years of study. On the whole the pairings worked well, providing peer support and a shared workload. Timetabling could be difficult for pairs of mentors in different years or because of placements and a few mentors indicated they would prefer to work alone.

Mentors are supported by officers within their school. In most schools there is a single officer; however in large schools, such as NBS, an additional officer was needed. Officers met regularly and were able to pass others' experience on to their mentors, which was valued. Mentors particularly appreciated the support of officers when attendance for low or at zero level.

Suggested improvements echoed those of mentees. Timetabling was seen as a major issue. Although one of the key elements of PAL is voluntary attendance, mentors were keen to make some or all sessions compulsory or at least give strong encouragement to attend. Introducing PAL in the Autumn semester would improve take-up of PAL. They felt that PAL needs to be promoted before arrival at UEA as well as throughout the semester to encourage and maintain attendance. Suggestions included promotion by module conveners, academic advisors and year leads, who need to be fully informed as to the structure and purpose of PAL.

Illustrative quotes:

Reasons for applying to be a mentor:

Development of skills, experience and confidence '... a new experience to improve my communication skills and teamwork skills, meet new people and

	strengthen my knowledge.'
	'To enrich my CV and improve my English.'
	'... increase my confidence when working with people in small groups ... share my experience and knowledge.'
<i>Revising knowledge</i>	'Motivation to revise an area of my course which I enjoyed but found difficult.'
	'Gain some experience and enhance my knowledge of related subjects.'
<i>Benefits to first year students</i>	'I would have benefitted from this scheme had it been in place.'
	'I wanted to help fellow students who were starting their courses as I knew how lost and unorganised everything seemed'
<i>Future study / employment</i>	'I am considering teaching English as a second language during the gap year between BA and MA therefore PAL mentoring seemed a good opportunity to test myself and gain some of the skills required'
	'An interest in a career in teaching and so wanted to explore the opportunity.'
<i>Social</i>	'I can make friends.'
<i>Payment</i>	'Wanted to earn some money.'
<u>PAL meeting expectations:</u>	
<i>Yes</i>	'Yes – students had similar queries to mine in 1 st year.'
	'Definitely because it helps me revise my knowledge and improve communication skills and time management.'
	'Aside from the low attendance it was a lot of fun mentoring new students about their university experience to come.'
	'I was out of my comfort zone, but think I have grown because of this.'
<i>No</i>	'I expected better structure and organisation in the first few weeks'

	‘Fewer students attended than I had expected most weeks so I don’t feel that the experience met my expectations.’
<i>Don’t know / reservations</i>	‘I feel that the students would benefit more if the groups were smaller and we were given a larger range of [school-specific] materials with which to help our mentees’
	‘... as the weeks progressed I felt that their interest waned and this had an effect on my enjoyment of the process as I didn’t feel I was getting the response from students that matched my level of input.’
<u>Benefits to mentees</u>	
<i>Deciding on modules / topics</i>	‘Directing students on the choices they should make to get the most out of their time here.’
<i>Preparation for assignments</i>	‘Adapting to university examinations.’
	‘Sharing useful resources for essays and helped brainstorm ideas for exam revision.’
<i>Placement / fieldwork preparation</i>	‘Helped to relieve worries and myths about placements.’
<i>Pastoral aspects / alleviating anxiety and building confidence</i>	‘Helps them settle into Uni more. Tells them where to get help.’
	‘It helped ‘air out’ course frustrations and seek clarification on many pastoral aspects of the course.’
	‘Acting as intermediaries and passing concerns on to appropriate people ... signposting.’
<i>Clarifying / enhancing knowledge</i>	‘I feel that the students who attended had a better understanding of the material that was covered.’
	‘Helped them with some of the basic stuff they were assumed to know.’
<i>Study skills</i>	‘Helps them focus on their work. Stresses the importance of doing well even in 1 st year.’
	‘... helped students get to know one another quicker and helped their EBL sessions.’
<i>Social benefits</i>	‘Got to know more students on their course.’

<i>Orientation to course / school / UEA</i>	‘Explaining the less known aspects of university and approaching study/social life.’
<u>Benefits to mentors:</u>	
<i>Development on skills, experience and confidence</i>	‘Team- leading and responsibility. Providing guidance and help’ ‘Organisation and planning for the sessions – time management’ ‘... realised that I have actually developed and come a long way’ ‘It has helped me to manage working alongside others more effectively in preparing for the sessions.’ ‘It was also our role to act as advocates on the mentee’s behalves ... this can be transferred to my practice in future.’
<i>Revising / clarifying knowledge / interactive learning</i>	‘I have gained a much deeper and more analytical understanding of my discipline. I now see that it is not all black and white.’ ‘When I express the problems to mentee I strengthen my personal knowledge as well.’ ‘I have also learnt things from the students.’
<i>Communication and social benefits</i>	‘Practice my spoken English and communication skills.’ ‘Nice to have an opportunity to mix with other students in a different cohort and gain knowledge and experiences from them as well.’ ‘At least I feel better in UK environment.’
<i>Financial benefits</i>	‘Money, saving for a rainy day so not as stressed if I have issues with bills. Also having driving lessons which will be a benefit for my future employment.’
<i>Understanding UEA / academic environment</i>	‘Better understanding of how the University works’ ‘Gained more sympathetic understanding of teaching and administration staff, the difficulties of organising and delivering a degree course.’

<i>Employability</i>	‘Spent a little while talking about this ...at an assessment centre for a graduate job. Not sure to what extent this may have helped in me being offered the job but it may have as they run a similar scheme there for first year graduates. I think it also helped come across as somebody who is active and gets involved.’
<u>Improvements to PAL:</u>	
<i>Timetabling / structure</i>	‘Attendance by students to the first session should be compulsory or at least less emphasis put on the ‘voluntary’ element’ ‘Having PAL timetabled during the working day has helped a great deal as no special effort was required to attend.’
<i>Timing of introduction of PAL</i>	‘Biggest problem with PAL ... that it was semester B not A.’
<i>Promotion / prior information / preparation</i>	‘... I would combine it with the offer/welcome letter sent to new intakes prior to arrival. This should explain PAL, what happens in sessions and the benefits.’ ‘Support from lecturers and seminar leaders, announcements and updates through email’
<u>Mentor peer support:</u>	
<i>Self / peer support – positive</i>	‘It was useful having a 3 rd year who had a different perspective to all of us.’ ‘A great way to fill any gaps in knowledge and provide a firm footing and back-up’ ‘... if the mentees had not suggested any topics for the session it was useful to share ideas.’ ‘We had different viewpoints on issues and bring different experiences to facilitate sessions.’
<i>Peer support – reservations / for improvement</i>	‘Placement shifts meant that it was not always possible for all of us to be there at the same time.’ ‘...you need to find a time that is suitable for you both. Working alone would offer far more flexibility.’
<i>Liaison with officer</i>	‘Our PAL Officer organised meetings at which we could discuss the scheme and how each of the groups were

approaching the mentoring.'

'As explained by our PAL Officer, we ensured that we were present for all the assigned sessions. When no students attended the time was used for personal study.'

Skills development:

Mentors were asked to rate their skills development in a number of domains. The table below shows that most rated their skills as 'improved' or 'definitely improved'. Reasons for this have not been explored. One hypothesis is that much depends on mentee attendance, although this has not been tested.

Skills Development					
Skill	Definitely improved	Improved	No effect yet	Reduced	Definitely reduced
Leading/chairing a group	8	22	10		
Management skills	6	20	13		
Confidence building	9	18	10	1	
Communication skills	6	24	7		1
Critical thinking skills	4	12	24		
Problem solving skills	7	17	16		
Presentation skills	8	11	21		
Ability to adapt to a particular audience	7	17	14	1	
Interpersonal skills	8	23	6		1

Officers' evaluation:

Officers gave a number of reasons for applying for their roles within the PAL scheme. They cited CV building and employability; a wish to support mentees at the beginning of their academic careers and an interest in learning about different approaches to learning and teaching. For some previous experience of similar schemes at other universities was an incentive for becoming involved in PAL at UEA.

Some officers felt PAL provided an opportunity to explore a particular approach to learning and teaching. Others gave philosophical reasons, i.e. a belief that PAL had potential benefits for all concerned. They took their role seriously in terms of supporting mentors and also valued the support they gave each other, especially when low attendance was an issue. They described leadership, team-building and administrative aspects as important to the development of PAL and themselves.

Officers did not feel that PAL had enhanced subject-specific knowledge. This indicates that they are further removed from the undergraduate experience than mentors and employability is a stronger outcome for the officers.

Some reported that peer-working had been a valuable and supportive experience and valued on-going support from the PAL team. Others described individual variations of implementation of PAL in different schools as a reason for not having a sense of a united purpose.

Improvements included similar suggestions to mentees and mentors. Officers indicated that greater involvement from academic staff was needed in some cases. For Phase 1 officers received the same training as mentors. Several expressed the need for separate officer training.

Illustrative quotes:

Reasons for applying to be an officer:

<i>CV development and employability</i>	'I saw it as a good opportunity to do something new, earn money and have experience as a team leader.'
	'I am keen to develop my professional skills within HE and PAL offers challenges and possibilities to help me do this.'
<i>Supporting mentees</i>	'I liked the idea of the PAL scheme and wanted to be part of setting it up to help students.'
<i>Belief in the ethos of PAL</i>	'... a fantastic addition to the modern HE environment. I believe in peer-supported education and PAL has great potential to help both students and staff.'
<i>Previous experience of similar schemes</i>	'Wanting to help a scheme I've already been involved in.'

PAL meeting expectations:

Rewarding experience

'PAL has been a rewarding task, but I feel that I would have had more enthusiasm towards the end if we had fuller attendance from students.'

'I knew it would be a challenge, but also rewarding. Understanding that it is a pilot scheme has been vital, but I hope our work can help guide future sessions.'

Reservations / not meeting expectations

'Phase 1 ... being organised quite late definitely had a negative effect on my PAL experience. However ... positive feedback from PAL sessions helped a lot.'

'Unfortunately attendance was very poor so my role ended up being more administrative and marketing (booked rooms each week, promoting PAL) rather than evaluation and supervising.'

Support for mentors:

Support and building relationships

'Acting as a support to the mentors ... as I build open relationships with mentors and they knew they could come to me if they needed help.'

'Encouraging mentors to continue with mentoring despite low attendance, because the role of PAL is to help students – even if that is only a few students.'

Organisation and administration

'I organised and motivated the mentors under my supervision, scheduling sessions, booking rooms and liaising with staff.'

'Providing information and seeking answers to administrative questions.'

Benefits of PAL:

CV building + development of employability skills

'... leadership, communication and organisational experience I can take with me in the future.'

'The scheme is great to talk about in job interviews and cover letters.'

'Understanding mentor strengths and weaknesses. Understanding my own strengths and weaknesses.'

Understanding of PAL approach

'A good chance to see how these sorts of schemes are run, and what responsibilities people have.'

‘This experience has taught me the complexity of pilot schemes and large HE projects which could be very useful if my future is in HE’

‘Liaison with academics – it was useful to see how a programme needs to be presented very differently to students vs. academics as ... the needs are very different.’

Organisation and promotion:

Timetabling

‘...sessions to be placed formally on the timetables of first year students – this would without doubt completely change the potential success of PAL.’

Promotion and timing of introduction

‘... having the scheme ready for when students arrive will make a much larger difference.’

‘Run the scheme in the first semester; perhaps attach to different modules; put first session on student timetables.’

Involve academic staff

‘Have all academic staff trained and enthusiastic about PAL, communicating this to students so awareness and authenticity increase.’

Peer working with other officers:

Sharing experiences

‘...it was good to hear how other officers communicated with mentors ... differences in how the programme needs to be run in different schools.’

‘Officers were professional and friendly, a reflection of a strong recruitment process. Benefits of working with co-officers is sharing the work load ... bouncing ideas and enthusiasm with other Officers, and knowing that there are other people experiencing the same problems I was.’

Different experiences

‘I believe it is important as they are the ones to lead the mentors and adapt to their specific school’

‘Finding out about other Officer’s experiences was not that useful, as the PAL experience in different departments was much different – varying attendance. Student demographics and numbers’

Skills Development					
Skill	Definitely improved	Improved	No effect yet	Reduced	Definitely reduced
Leading/chairing a group	4	1			
Management skills	4	1			
Confidence building	4		1		
Communication skills	4		1		
Critical thinking skills	1	3	1		
Problem solving skills	3	1	1		
Presentation skills	3	1	1		
Ability to adapt to a particular audience	3		1		
Interpersonal skills	4		1		

Reflective meetings:

Group reflective meetings were held at the end of Phase 1 to allow mentors and officers to discuss their experiences together. The meetings took the form of a 'world café' in which students moved from station to station to discuss what went well, what did not go so well and what could be improved. In general findings reflected individual evaluations, additional reflections are outlined below.

Illustrative quotes

Enhancing student experience

'voluntary nature of PAL meant students were willing to engage.'

'people brought friends which made them more likely to attend.'

'Increased level of trust.'

Improved academic performance

'Listening and interpretation skills.'

'Critical thinking.'

'Greater knowledge of Uni support services – DOS – increase in mentor's grades.'

<i>Promote employability for mentors / officers</i>	<p>‘Coping with responsibility.’</p> <p>‘Leave comfort zone – be more brave, gain confidence.’</p> <p>‘Marketing and promotion skills.’</p> <p>‘...understanding cultures. Learning how to interact. Dealing with different situations.’</p> <p>‘Diplomacy – managing conflict; managing expectations’</p>
<i>Additional benefits</i>	<p>‘Meetings more improvised rather than scripted like presentations.’</p> <p>‘Noticed errors in assessment.’</p> <p>‘Improve English skills.’</p>
<i>Suggested improvements</i>	<p>‘Better communication between students and mentors.’</p> <p>‘Better communication between PAL mentors and module organisers.’</p> <p>‘Forward planning. Send PAL pack to all stakeholders.’</p> <p>‘Using spaces outside of typical school environment.’</p> <p>‘Next training involve a Q & A session with past mentors.’</p> <p>‘Find out from PAL mentors who get people, what they were doing for promotion/meet with them.’</p> <p>‘Improved Blackboard system to access module BB site.’</p> <p>‘Explaining how paperwork (pay sheets/evaluation forms) will work.’</p> <p>‘PAL social events e.g. Pizza night.’</p>
<i>Promotion</i>	<p>‘Promote on Open Days & Post-offer visit days; in different societies events; University wide programmes.’</p> <p>‘Current students to advertise to future mentees.’</p> <p>‘Put it in Concrete.’</p>

'Promote on Facebook and Twitter'

'Posters in labs, bar, Library, each school.'

'Put it on student handbook.'

'PAL mentor t-shirts to further make people aware.'

'Presentation from PAL Officer to Year Group as a whole.'

SECTION 4: The PAL team perspective

The PAL team consists of the PAL champion, Anne Guyon, and the PAL administrator, Vicky Hawkes. Both were appointed in December 2012 in readiness for the initial implementation of PAL. Phase 1 had been set up in the five schools. Modules and module leads had been identified and officers and mentors had been recruited and trained.

In Phase 1 there were particular difficulties recruiting a PAL officer in NSC. Most of their PGR/PGT students are in full-time employment and are therefore not available for this post. As a result the PAL champion took on the role which gave a valuable insight into the implementation of PAL at ground level. In Phase 2 two experienced mentors have been recruited as officers. This arrangement will be evaluated at the end of the next phase.

Promoting PAL was a major priority during early implementation. Despite information being disseminated, potential mentees and some members of faculty appeared to have little understanding of the purpose of PAL. Promotion was carried out by module conveners and mentors attending relevant lectures. Advertising was via student and faculty news emails and the digital screens. The PAL champion attended meetings with Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning and Faculty Learning and Teaching Quality Committees to outline the purpose and structure of PAL and report on progress. The champion has yet to attend a meeting with the Faculty of Science LTQC.

Other promotion activities included presentations at the AHP Employability Symposium and the UEA Learning and Teaching Day. Mentors and officers were invited to contribute to both events which received positive feedback from delegates. The reflective meeting provided an opportunity for a promotional video to be made. Sections can be viewed on the PAL webpage: <http://www.uea.ac.uk/pal>

Much was learned from Phase 1 about the implementation of PAL. Processes for issuing contracts to mentors and officers, establishing channels of communication, timetabling and room bookings and submission of timesheets were developed as implementation of PAL proceeded. Regular meetings were held between the PAL team and the officers, who provided updates on attendance, topics covered and general progress of PAL

Key areas to address are:

Further promotion activities

Meetings have been held with Admissions, Recruitment and Marketing in order to develop an 'image' for PAL and develop materials which clearly indicate the PAL identity, structure and purpose.

Schools implementing PAL will have links to the PAL website for students to access prior to arrival at UEA. PAL will be introduced at induction, giving officers and mentors the opportunity to introduce themselves and invite mentees to attend PAL sessions.

Timing of recruitment and training of mentors and officers

In future it would be helpful to appoint school officers early in the academic year to help with liaison with faculty, recruitment of mentors and promotion of PAL to potential mentees. The team needs to be mindful that officers' and mentors' contracts allow them to devote 50 hours maximum to PAL, so efficient use of time is critical

Officers will receive separate training, including leadership training. This will be provided prior to mentor training so that officers can attend and contribute constructively to the training programme.

Ratio of mentors to mentees / officers to mentors

The current ratio of 10 mentees per mentor is based on 100% attendance. Although this would mean mentors potentially supporting groups of 20 mentees it is unlikely that there would be full attendance and the ratio will be reviewed as the project progresses. In schools such as NBS and MED where high numbers of mentors are employed additional officers will be recruited.

Evidence for the benefits of PAL

Schools are invited to identify their own aims for PAL. This may be enhanced retention, improved performance, stronger engagement with the module, improved social interaction within and between years and employability. Methods of gathering data are yet to be developed. These could include comparisons of attrition before and after implementing PAL; comparing marks / grade profiles; monitoring attendance; student satisfaction surveys; reports to SSLCs; tracking student performance; gathering exit data on mentors' and officers' first employment destinations.

Improved monitoring of attendance and recording of PAL activities

Mentors and officers will be charged with ensuring data is collected and collated on a regular basis and submitted to the PAL champion reliably. Attendance sheets and databases; session records and action plans have been developed for the purpose of collecting this data.

Enhanced communication systems

Currently Blackboard and email are the primary methods of communication. However as Facebook and Twitter become increasingly popular, guidelines for using these professionally and safely are to be developed.

Timing of evaluation data gathering

In order to ensure effective evaluation, distributing evaluation forms to ensure data is gathered from as many PAL participants as possible is necessary. As PAL is voluntary other HEIs have found attendance varies and there tends to be a drop-off towards the end of a semester. Gaining feedback from students who attend different numbers of sessions or who have not attended is critical to the development of PAL. Mechanisms to support this are needed, such as making forms available from Blackboard from the beginning of the semester or distributing during taught sessions.

Formalising CPD opportunities for mentors and officers

Mentors will be encouraged to include PAL activities in their Higher Education Achievement Records (HEAR) when these are introduced into UEA. Discussions have taken place with PGR training coordinators in some Faculties to ensure that PAL activities can contribute to PGR/PGT officers' Personal and Professional Development (PPD) credits

SECTION 5: Overall summary in relation to UEA objectives

Even though Phase 1 of PAL has been a mixed experience the evaluations outlined above indicate that for mentees, mentors and officers who engaged with PAL, it has been a positive experience on the whole. Several officers and mentors have reapplied for Phase 2 which indicates their confidence in the scheme.

Enhancing student experience

Mentees reported increased understanding of the expectations and requirements of their course of study. Positive outcomes were increased confidence, meeting like-minded students and having a forum to share worries and concerns. They found the mentors to be supportive and reassuring and hearing about mentors' experience meant they understood what future years may hold and could discuss options from the student perspective. The informal, though structured, nature of PAL allowed mentees to develop a social learning network. Mentors in some schools arranged social events for their groups which helped cement those networks.

Mentors also benefitted, describing the interaction with their fellow mentors and with the mentees as a positive experience. They reported increased social interaction, particularly for international students. PAL provided a forum for a greater social and cultural mix which helped them improve their English language skills.

Officers too described experiencing improvements in their experience at UEA. They developed close working relationships with their fellow officers and mentors in their school. They also developed positive relationships with academic and administrative staff.

Improved academic performance

Although there is little concrete evidence for improved performance from Phase 1, there are strong indications that both mentees and mentors have developed study skills and enhanced knowledge and understanding through the scheme. One mentor reported attending a session at the Dean of Students, having recommended DoS to mentees and felt her marks had improved as a result. A mentee contacted the PAL team by email after receiving her exam results to say that she attributed her high mark to her experience in PAL sessions.

Promoting employability

Mentors and officers reported a number of skills and attributes they had developed through the scheme. They all go through a formal application and recruitment process which provides relevant experience from the outset. Mentors are recruited via completion of application and endorsement from their personal advisors. Officers are recruited via completion of application, interview and reference from their personal advisors. This may be their first experience of going through the discipline of such a process.

Several people mentioned developing skills such as leadership; time-management; communication; organisation and planning. They demonstrated the ability to be flexible and responsive to others' needs and adapt their communication to different circumstances.

SECTION 6: Phase 2 and Phase 3

Additional schools

The five schools from Phase 1 are continuing with the implementation of PAL, although some have chosen to attach PAL to a different module. Additional schools to implement PAL in the Autumn Semester are:

- Allied Health Professions (AHP)
- Environmental Sciences (ENV)
- Film, Television and Media Studies (FTM)
- Norwich Medical School (MED)
- Political, Social and International Studies (PSI)

International Development (DEV) has elected to start the scheme in the Spring Semester:

Recruitment

Fifteen officers and 126 mentors have been recruited and trained across the 10 schools with the aim of attracting approximately 1300 first year students to the scheme. One of the key learning points from Phase 1 is that recruitment needs to begin much earlier in the academic year. Expressions of interest will be sought during the Autumn semester.

Training

Training is obligatory for all officers and mentors. Half-day leadership training has been put in place for officers and a one-day programme has been developed for mentors. Courses have taken place in June and September. Further dates will be offered for those unable to attend any previous training

Timetabling

Participating schools will include an introduction to PAL in their induction programmes and have been asked to facilitate timetabling of the early PAL sessions. This could be via the LTS Hubs or by authorising officers to book rooms.

Phase 2 and 3

The PAL team have learned a considerable amount from Phase 1 and recognise that there is still much to be learned. Implementation will continue to be monitored and reviewed over the next Phase. Plans are in place for development of Phase 3 and a timeline of activities has been developed with the aim of ensuring overcoming some of the pressures experienced so far.

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We are very grateful to our colleagues in the Centre for Staff and Educational Development, Dean of Students and the Students' Union for contributing to the training of officers and mentors.

Within the schools module conveners, officers and mentors have worked extremely hard to make PAL work for them. In particular the enormous enthusiasm of the officers and mentors in sometimes difficult circumstances has helped to motivate the whole team and drive PAL forward.

We also thank the mentees who attended the sessions and helped to demonstrate that PAL can and will work.