UEA

University of East Anglia

LTC14D229

Title:	***Peer Assisted Learning: Report on Phase 3 of the extended 3-year implementation project***
Author:	PAL Champion, Anne Guyon
Date:	12.06.15
Circulation:	Learning and Teaching Committee – 24 June 2015
Agenda:	LTC14A006
Version:	Final
Status:	Open

Issue

The Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) project was launched in January 2013 on a three year trial basis. A commitment to run the project for the full academic year 2015/16 has been made to give sufficient time to consider and evaluate its success and make recommendations for the future. This report considers PAL progress in 2014-15 and summarises an evaluation of the project based on available data.

Recommendation

The recipients are invited:
1) to note:
   a) the contents of the report;
   b) the plans for developing the project during 2015/16;
   c) that an option appraisal of this, and other PAL schemes, and a business case for the future shape and scale of activity for 2016/17 and beyond, will be brought forward to a future LTC meeting.

2) to consider offering guidance to the Project Team on future actions to evaluate the project.

Resource Implications

Current resources include: PAL champion and administrator's salaries; payment for mentors and officers; supporting materials for training and resources for ongoing PAL sessions; travel and accommodation for the PAL champion and mentor/officer representatives to attend meetings and conferences.
There are no resource implications arising from this report in relation to 2015/16 budgets.

Risk Implications

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity

PAL is open to all students in the schools involved in the project. The PAL team actively encourage applications from students from a wide range of backgrounds as mentors and officers. All first year students are actively encouraged to attend sessions. Mentors are paired to represent cultural diversity where possible.

Timing of decisions

The future of PAL at UEA and the shape, range and scale of activity need to be agreed no later than December 2015 in order to implement plans for 2016/17 and beyond.

Further Information

Anne Guyon, PAL champion: anne.guyon@uea.ac.uk. 01603 591683. Enquiries can also be directed to PAL@uea.ac.uk

Background

This is the annual report on the progress of the PAL project which began in January 2013.

Discussion

Recipients are invited to consider the success of the scheme to date, in particular the data collected from student and module organiser evaluations, and the evidence they would wish to see in the follow up report when considering the future shape, range and scale of PAL activity at UEA.

Attachments

Report only

Peer Assisted Learning at UEA

Extended 3-year implementation project
(January 2013 – July 2016)

Report on Phase 3

September 2014 – June 2015

Author: Anne Guyon, PAL Champion. PAL@uea.ac.uk

CONTENTS	Page

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SECTION 1: PAL at UEA: Background and introduction:

This report looks back over Phase 3 (2014-15) of the extended 3-year Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) project pilot and forward to Phase 4 (2015-16), which is the final year for which funding is assured. Recommendations for the future of PAL will be made with the aspiration for PAL to be adopted as part of the learning and teaching strategy for UEA.

Further information about PAL, including reports on Phases 1 and 2 of the pilot can be found at http://www.uea.ac.uk/pal

Structure of PAL within UEA

The PAL project is overseen and supported by the UEA Learning & Teaching Committee and Learning & Teaching Service.

PAL roles & responsibilities:
  PAL champion: responsible for the promotion and development of PAL
  PAL administrator: responsible for the development of systems and processes which provide a framework for PAL.
  PAL officers: supervise and support the mentors.
  PAL mentors: provide regular mentoring sessions to groups of first year students.
  PAL mentees: attendance at PAL sessions is voluntary and confidential.

UEA Objectives

In line with QAA Quality Code for Higher Education; the New Academic Model and UEA Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2014-2019. The core objectives for PAL are to:

1. *Enhance the student experience*
2. *Improve performance*
3. *Promote employability for mentors / officers*

SECTION 2: Review of Phase 3

Thirteen programmes across 9 schools took part in Phase 3, 2014-15. The majority of schools implemented PAL across both semesters. 149 mentors and 21 officers were appointed. 631 out of 1,400 first year students attended at least one PAL session.

PAL Evaluation

Mentees, mentors and officers reported benefiting from PAL in terms of student interactions between years, confidence-building, demystifying university processes, learning development and the development of skills and experience for future learning and employability. Module conveners reported that PAL eased the transition into university and enhanced learning on their modules.

Additional data for evaluation was supplied by the Business Intelligence Unit provided a profile of students who engage with PAL. Responses to UEA Student Experience Survey indicate that PAL may contribute to overall student satisfaction and engagement.

Two research projects have been carried out during Phase 3. Dr George Papadopoulos (ECO), is leading a project titled 'Evaluating the Impact of Peer-Assisted Learning on Students' Performance and Attrition' funded as a UEA Teaching Fellowship. Anne Guyon, PAL champion and lecturer in Speech & Language Therapy (HSC) supervised a final year undergraduate research project titled 'SLT students' experience of Peer Assisted Learning'.

Data sources and more detail from evaluations in individual schools are available from the PAL champion. Please email PAL@uea.ac.uk.

SECTION 3: Overall summary in relation to UEA's objectives

Enhance the student experience: Evidence from PAL evaluations combined with data from the UEA Student Experience Survey indicates that PAL has a positive impact in the student experience for the majority of students who take part in PAL.

Improve performance: Although the impact of PAL on performance is yet to be demonstrated, there are indications that attending PAL sessions regularly can have a positive effect. Both mentees and mentors report that they develop confidence, learning strategies and study skills through participating in PAL.

Promote employability for mentors / officers: During Phase 3 the PAL team have supplied 45 references for employment / further study from PAL mentors and officers. References have been for internal UEA posts as well as external employment; internships and a PhD.

Additional opportunities

Skills Award: Seven mentors have taken part in the pilot of the UEA Skills Award. Two students have achieved bronze in the pilot with another two aiming to achieve bronze before completion of the pilot. The remaining 3 mentors are working towards achieving bronze.

PPD credits: PAL activities can contribute to PGR/PGT officers' Personal and Professional Development (PPD) credits.

SECTION 4: The PAL team perspective

Both the PAL champion and administrator are currently employed on 0.5 contracts until December 2015. Currently the team is supporting 8-9 schools which is maximum capacity.

SECTION 5: Phase 4

Participating schools / programmes

Most of the schools are continuing into Phase 4, except the School of Political, Philosophy, Language & Communication Studies where the decision was taken not to continue with PAL as take-up by first year students was very low in Phase 3.

Recruitment: 132 mentors have been appointed of whom 15 returning and 61 have been mentees. Sixteen officers have been appointed including 4 returning, 3 who have been mentors and 3 who have been both mentor and officer.

Training: Part 1 training, the introduction to PAL, has been completed by most officers and mentors. Part 2, the practicalities of implementation, will take place in Week 0. Part 3, school-specific training will take place in Week 0 or Week 1 and is run by the officers for the particular school.

Timing and timetabling: PAL sessions have already been timetabled in some schools. Over the summer further discussion will take place.

Key recommendations for PAL Phase 4 and beyond.

A strong foundation has been created for PAL based on:

- A strong working relationship between the academic and administrative leaders of the project
- Robust systems for recording employment, attendance and evaluation data
- Clearly structured meetings to introduce, plan and review PAL within schools
- A cycle of events from recruitment of mentors and officers through to implementation, review and evaluation of PAL sessions
- A robust training programme for mentors and officers based on academic principles with supporting resources
- The potential for career progression for students from mentee to mentor to officer
- Enthusiasm and commitment from module conveners in the majority of schools participating in PAL
- Strong links to other student support services and UEA departments

It is recommended that the above should continue with further development beyond the end of the project. Areas for future development

- At present PAL is seen as an 'add-on' to learning and teaching within some schools and that PAL is led and administered centrally. Greater promotion and engagement within schools would help with student engagement and embedding PAL into the learning and teaching strategy.
- More consistent support from administrative team leaders in timetabling PAL sessions
- Provision to support more schools who would like to implement PAL beyond the pilot period
- A scoping exercise to determine the level of interest in and understanding of PAL among students and faculty
- Funded evaluation, similar to evaluation of the Values Project in HSC, to demonstrate the impact of PAL in relation to objectives set by UEA.

SECTION 1: PAL at UEA

Background and introduction:

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), has been implemented in a number of schools across UEA since January 2013. This report looks back over Phase 3 and forward to Phase 4 (2015-16), which is the final year for which funding for the extended 3-year pilot project is assured. Recommendations for the future of PAL will be made with the aspiration for PAL to be adopted as part of the learning and teaching strategy for UEA.

PAL is a structured group mentoring system. Experienced undergraduate students from second year and above are trained as mentors to support first year students through the transition into higher education. Primarily mentors offer academic support in liaison with module conveners. They share their own experience, such as the development of study skills, and help first year students navigate UEA resources and processes. Mentors also offer pastoral support such as assistance with practical matters and providing social opportunities. Mentors are given clear guidelines regarding their remit as facilitators and guides. They are made aware of appropriate routes of referral to personal advisors and student support services.

PAL follows the principles of Supplemental Instruction, first developed in 1973 at the University of Kansas, which is now the international centre for Supplemental Instruction. Since its inception this type of student support has been adopted by approximately 800 universities worldwide. At least 42 UK universities offer PAL or Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) and a national network has been established, currently based at Manchester University.

The key to PAL is that it is run by students for students. PAL is usually linked to specific modules and aims to facilitate complementary learning rather than replace formal teaching. Mentees attend PAL sessions on a voluntary basis in small groups and learning is facilitated by mentors working in pairs. Groups meet for the equivalent of one hour per week for a maximum of 12 sessions with the aim of creating a community of learning with mutual benefits for mentees and mentors.

Further information about PAL, including reports on Phases 1 and 2 of the pilot can be found at
http://www.uea.ac.uk/pal

Structure of PAL at UEA
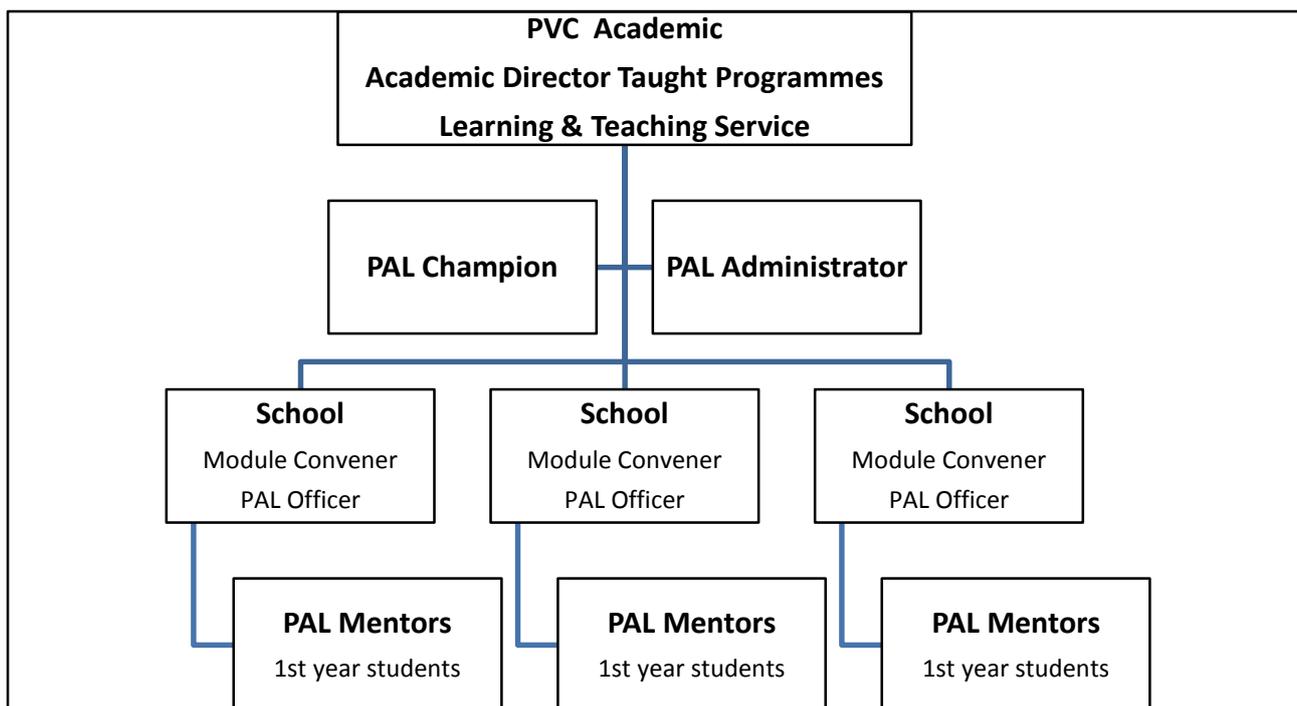
The PAL project is overseen and supported by the UEA Learning & Teaching Committee and Learning & Teaching Service.

The PAL champion is responsible for the promotion and development of PAL and to ensure the academic integrity of the programme based on 21 core principles which are common to all such schemes (Appendix 1).

Key duties:
- liaise with module conveners and other members of faculty in the promotion and delivery of PAL within schools
- liaise with the PAL administrator in the recruitment of mentors and officers
- develop and deliver training for mentors and officers
- monitor the progress of PAL sessions
- provide ongoing supervision and support for officers
- analyse attendance, evaluation and other relevant data for the annual report
- represent UEA at national and international meetings and conferences regarding PAL

The PAL administrator is responsible for the development of systems and processes which provide a framework for PAL.

Key duties:
- keep records of all PAL activity
- set up systems for collating and recording recruitment, attendance and evaluation data
- organise meetings and contribute to discussions with module conveners
- liaise with appropriate administrative staff to find appropriate times and locations for PAL sessions
- contribute to the recruitment and training of mentors and officers

- liaise with Human Resources and Payroll in matters relating to employment and payment of mentors and officers
- provide resources and ongoing support for mentors

PAL officers are recruited from post-graduate student cohorts or experienced mentors to supervise and support the mentors. Officers are interviewed for the role and must receive a supporting reference from their supervisor of personal advisor. They receive leadership training, attend the same generic training as the mentors and provide school-specific training for mentors.

Key duties:
- liaison with module conveners to ensure PAL is based on current teaching
- regular contact with mentors to monitor progress of PAL sessions
- attendance monitoring
- contribute to quality monitoring by observing PAL sessions and holding regular debrief meetings with mentors
- regular contact with the PAL champion and administrator to report back of PAL progress
- assist with the evaluation of PAL

PAL mentors are recruited on the basis of the quality of their application and endorsement from their personal advisors. They work in pairs or trios to provide regular mentoring sessions to groups of first year students. They receive training in the purpose and principles of PAL, their role as facilitators not teachers and the practicalities of promoting PAL and running the sessions

Key duties
- provide well-prepared PAL sessions based on mentees' learning needs
- foster mutual trust and respect between students to encourage a productive learning environment
- develop an effective communication system with mentees for contact outside PAL sessions
- facilitate learning based on module content, their own experience and university guidelines
- refer students to relevant university support services as needed
- provide opportunities for mentees to socialise and get to know the university
- maintain regular contact with the PAL officer and submit attendance and other relevant data while maintaining mentees' anonymity and confidentiality

PAL mentees are encouraged to contribute to sessions. Attendance at PAL sessions is voluntary and confidential. In order to maximise benefits mentees are encouraged to
- attend PAL sessions regularly on a voluntary basis
- contribute to discussions, reflecting on their own experience and be honest about worries & concerns
- share knowledge, understanding & skills
- contribute to the content of sessions, e.g. suggesting topics, sharing resources etc.
- provide constructive feedback where appropriate

UEA Objectives

Peer Assisted Learning reflects the guidance in QAA Quality Code for Higher Education in that it encourages student engagement in learning and has the aims of enhancing academic quality and the student experience. The code can be found at:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code

Phase 2 of PAL coincided 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. PAL also fits with the enhancement of UG / PG attributes and 10 Strategic Aims set out in the UEA Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2014-2019. Please refer to:

http://www.uea.ac.uk/learningandteaching/documents/learningteaching/UEA+Learning+Teaching+Strategy+2014-19

The core objectives for PAL are to:

4. *Enhance the student experience by:*
   supporting transition into higher education
   promoting integration into university life and orientation to UEA
   learning from more experienced students
   providing additional social and learning opportunities for both mentees and mentors

5. *Improve performance by:*
   attaching PAL to core modules / 'tricky' areas
   encouraging interactions between levels
   providing opportunities for mentors to revisit core learning

6. *Promote employability for mentors / officers by:*
   consolidating academic studies
   developing skills, e.g. writing CVs and job applications; facilitation; leadership; team-working

SECTION 2: Review of Phase 3

Participating schools

Thirteen programmes across 9 schools took part in Phase 3, 2014-15 (Table 1). The majority of schools implemented PAL across both semesters.

Table 1: Phase 3 Schools

Faculty	School	Semester 1	Semester 2
SCI	Chemistry (CHE)	Energetics of Spectroscopy	
	Computing Science (CMP)	Programming 1	
	Environmental Sciences (ENV)	Global Environmental Challenges	
SSF	International Development (DEV)	Introduction to Development Studies	Introduction to Economics of Development Introduction to Natural Resources and Development Social Anthropology and International Development 1
	Norwich Business School (NBS)	Introduction to Management & Financial Accounting	
HUM	Art, Media & American Studies – Media students (AMA)	What is Film History?	Studies in Film History
	Political, Philosophy, Language & Communication Studies (PPL)	Introducing PPL: PSI-4030Y	
FMH	Norwich Medical School (MED)	Module 1, The Human Life Cycle	Module 2, Locomotion
	Health Sciences (HSC)	The Foundations of Nursing	
		Foundations of Paramedic Practice	
		Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy: Human Sciences 1	
		Speech & Language Therapy: Foundations	

Recruitment of mentors and officers

Recruitment of PAL mentors and officers begins in January in order to ensure students have received initial training and were confirmed in their role before Easter and the revision / examination periods.

Mentors are paid c£8 per hour and contracted for a maximum of 50 hours from September to April. Officers are paid c£9 per hour and contracted for 60 hours from April to April. Table 2 shows the average number of hours claimed by mentors and officers

Table 2: Mentors & Officers Hours

	Average hours	Calculation	Range of hours claimed	Comments
PAL Mentors	25.14	3746.25 hours (hours) divided by 149 (number of mentors)	3.50 – 64.50 hours	Includes mentors who withdrew after training and DEV mentors who continued into Spring semester
PAL Officers	39.18	587.75 (hours) divided by 15 (number of officers)	6.25 – 67 hours	Includes officer who withdrew after training and additional hours for officers providing data for Teaching Fellowship

228 undergraduate students applied to be mentors of whom 149 were appointed. 21 post-graduate or experienced UG mentors applied to be officers of whom 15 were appointed. One officer withdrew before taking up the role, one withdrew from UEA and one withdrew for family reasons during Semester 1. Cover was provided by reconfiguring the officers and the PAL champion took on the role in AMA for Semester 2. Unfortunately arrangements in CMP and CHE were not successful meaning that these two schools were left without an officer for Semester 2.

Reasons for applying to be a PAL mentor or officer have been extracted from application forms:

- Empathy for the first year experience / desire to help students make the transition into HE / promoting a positive student experience
- Benefited from / would have benefited from PAL sessions
- Own experience of anxiety / struggling / performing less well than expected in 1st year / difficulty finding a learning style / own initial lack of discipline and reluctance to ask for help
- Supporting students in a minority on their course settle in, e.g. gender / international students
- Mutual benefits of learning together / reinforcing own learning / sharing study skills and learning strategies
- Gaining and providing insights into course / sharing a passion for their subject
- Developing skills and experience, e.g. organisation, time-management, communication skills, team-working
- Wanting to pursue a career in (higher) education
- Developing inter-year student relationships
- Developing social networks / providing a 'social safety net'

Attendance

Over 1,400 first year students were offered PAL sessions in Phase 3. Where attendance data is available 631 or approximately 45% of those students attended at least one PAL session. Table 3 provides an overview of attendance. Please email PAL@uea.ac.uk for further detail for individual schools.

Table 3: Overview of attendance

School	Cohort number	Number attending at least 1 session	Number of groups	Number of sessions offered per group	Number of sessions attended	% cohort
AMA Semester 1 + Semester 2	54	16	1	12	1-5	29.6%
CHE Semester 1	56	51	2	11	1-10	91%
CMP Semester 1	91	No data	2	No data	No data	
DEV Semester 1	109	99	3	15	1-9	90.8%
ENV Semester 1 + Semester 2	127	90	2	12	1-6	70%
HSC Nursing Semester 1 + Semester 2	199	165	12	6	1-6	83%
HSC OT, PT, SLT Semester 1 + Semester 2	81	50	3	12	1-7	61.7%
HSC Paramedic Semester 1	36	6	2	7	3-7	16.6%
MED Semester 1	171	86	12	12	1-12	50%
NBS Semester 1	330	61	9	12	1-7	18.5%
PPL Semester 1	224	7	5	12	1-5	3%

Topics covered in PAL sessions:

Officers submit a monthly report to the PAL champion outlining attendance and topics covered in PAL sessions. Some examples are outlined below:

Settling in: living in university accommodation; managing domestic issues, e.g. using the washing machine; finding the way around; initial worries; concerns re anatomy lab; jobs; nightlife

Academic: maximising readings; revision of week's learning; note-taking styles; feedback from formative assignments; managing deadlines; academic writing; referencing; reflective models; assignment preparation; research skills; presentation skills

University resources: navigating Blackboard; library; LET

Practical issues: placement requirements; learning contracts; coping with stress and workload

Planning ahead: modules; year abroad; choosing houses for second year; applying to be a mentor; career planning and CVs

Some of the concerns outlined in the officer reports included
- lack of wider understanding of PAL within schools
- timetabling and room-booking concerns
- finding topics to suit all group members
- dealing with dropping attendance

PAL Evaluation

As in previous years mentees, mentors and officers are requested to complete an evaluation of their PAL experience. Evaluation forms consist of questions requiring responses using a likert scales + comments and questions requiring comments only. Forms were made available as paper copies distributed at PAL sessions or via email. For the first time the questions were distributed via Survey Monkey. All those involved in PAL are invited to attend reflective meetings at the end of each semester.

A summary of the findings from PAL evaluations is presented below:
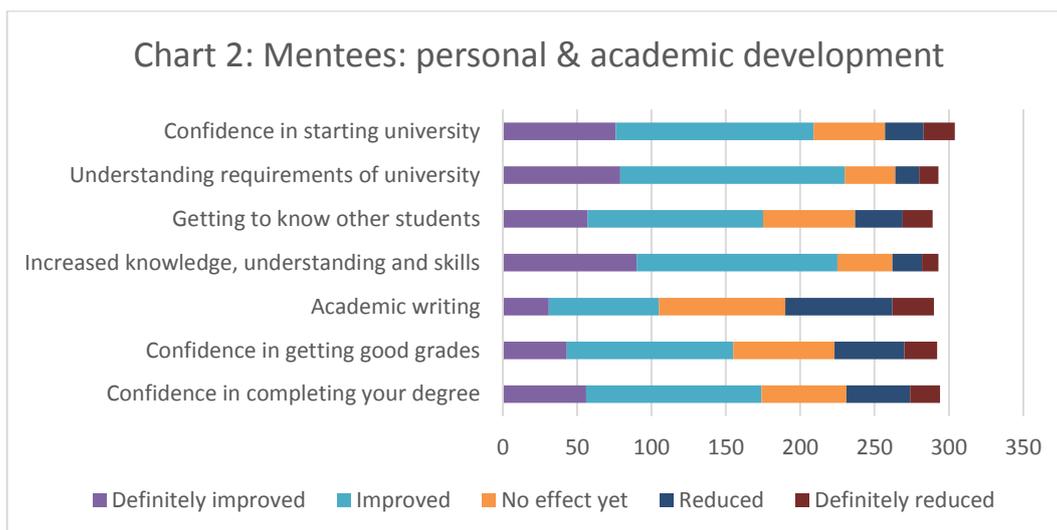
Mentees' evaluation

289 mentees completed evaluation forms. This constitutes 46% of those who attended PAL sessions. The use of Survey Monkey allowed the capture of data from mentees who had only attended early PAL sessions and gave insights into why students had not continued to attend.

Quantitative data

Chart 1 shows that approximately 60% of mentees responded that PAL had improved their experience at UEA, benefited their learning and would help them in the future. Responses from the remaining 40% were neutral, not sure or definitely not. Despite these less positive responses to earlier questions, 76% of mentees would recommend PAL to students starting university next year.

Chart 1: Mentee evaluations: Qs 1-4
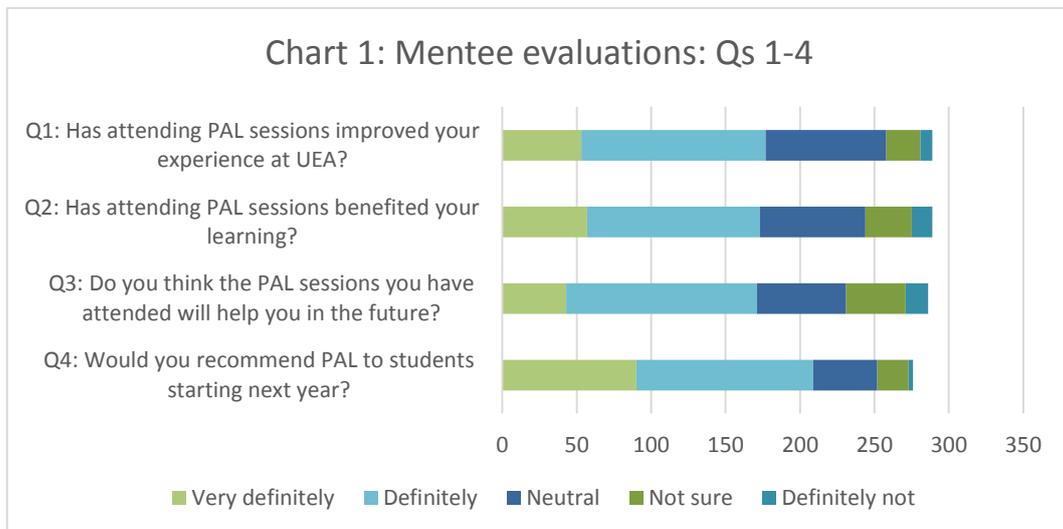
In terms of personal and academic development (Chart 2) 79% of respondents reported improved understanding of the requirements of university and 77% reported increased knowledge, understanding and skills. Mentees also reported increased confidence in starting university (69%); getting good grades (53%) and completing their degree (59%). 61% of respondents reported that PAL had helped them get to know other students. 35% of students felt that PAL had helped them with academic writing. This lower percentage is likely to be due to the largely discussion based or practical nature of PAL.

Chart 2: Mentees: personal & academic development

Legend: ■ Definitely improved ■ Improved ■ No effect yet ■ Reduced ■ Definitely reduced

Qualitative data

Benefits

Comments from each question were analysed to identify recurring themes. The strongest theme to come out of the data was the benefit of interacting with experienced students. Mentees particularly valued gaining the student's eye view of the university and their particular course as well as the mentors' recent experience of being in the same position as themselves. Social aspects and building a sense of community were also mentioned.

> *… nobody knows what you're going to experience better than the people who have just done it*

> *The PAL mentors are exceptional. The energy and commitment that they have put into the PAL sessions … is really impressive*

> *… coming up with imaginative ways … to revise that we may not necessarily have thought of.*

> *[PAL provides] a sense of community within the school.*

Reassurance was another recurring theme in the mentees' evaluation. Mentees felt more comfortable raising queries or concerns with mentors in the first instance. Mentees felt reassured about expectations and surviving the course in some cases.

> *Being able to hear first-hand what placement was like and have reassurance that I would survive the course was invaluable to me.*

> *I found it very useful, especially as a mature student who was very concerned about going back to studying and having a change of career.*

Various aspects of learning, assignment preparation and revision were also high on the list of mentees' priorities. Mentees referred to opportunities to reinforce learning through collaboration. Mentors helped to clarify assignment criteria and provided guidance which would help them with future assignments. Mentors also guided mentees to other sources of support.

> *helped me in: - writing assignments - assignment submission - where to find academic help - experience of new modules - how to pick modules*

14

… helps me to improve my understanding of anatomy & physiology as they explained things in a different more relaxed way.

We have solved several problems together. We learn how to prepare for exams.

[Mentors] explained and went through assessment and assignment criteria and what was needed from us. They gave some cues and tips for essays and where to seek for help.

… learning steps for specific OSCE Stations will stick with me for the rest of my career.

Demystifying and clarifying university procedures and aspects of course and module were also commented on frequently. Some mentees talked about their initial confusion while others described preferring to refer minor queries to mentors rather than their personal advisor. Others felt that information is not always clear and mentors acted as interpreters.

I found it a good way to get over any initial confusions about the beginning of the course. … helped with my understanding of what was expected of us on this course

They were able to clarify small details we were unsure about but not worth asking PA.

Helped to have tips on how to get through the ambiguous instructions UEA gives us.

Several mentees made specific reference to PAL easing the transition into higher education, referring to practical, social and educational transition

Ideal for younger students living away from home for the first time.

… helped me understand the way the university works, as I found the transition into university difficult.

… without I don't think that I would have settled in and enjoyed the first year at UEA as I did.

Other benefits described by mentees included: a forum for asking questions they would not ask in more formal settings; the development of clinical / practical skills in preparation for placement; insight into their future on the course and help with choosing modules. Mentees also valued hearing different perspectives from students at the same level and above them. They reported gaining skills in time-management and prioritisation, accessing resources and improved study skills.

Areas for improvement

The majority of mentee evaluations came from nursing students in HSC, 187/289 responses. There are particular issues with fitting PAL sessions into the timetable at times when the nursing mentors are also available. This resulted in the main criticism that too few sessions were available. Mentees could see the benefits of PAL, but felt they had had too few sessions to really benefit.

… we didn't get enough out of the small amount of time we actually spent with our 'PALs'. I feel that they were willing to help, however we didn't really get much opportunity to ask / go through as much as we needed to.

I think it is a very good idea … however we only saw our PAL mentors twice, at the very start of the course. When it got to the time in the course when support would be useful, we didn't see them again.

Lack of structure and organisation within the sessions was another area for improvement. Although PAL is based on first year students' needs, the need for early sessions to be structured was clear. It

is apparent that some first years' initially found it uncomfortable to be expected to set the agenda. Others had specific suggestions of areas to be covered.

> *Make sure they are a little more organised as felt that there were a great deal of lack of attendance after the first couple of sessions*

> *… set activities would be useful. Most sessions revolved around discussion based student needs.*

> *… keep informal but have some definite things that can be discussed. Perhaps a workshop in helping people gain confidence.*

As in previous years timing of sessions, timetabling and rooms were a cause for concern for mentees.

> *PALs need to ensure that sessions are timetabled to complement our timetable. Was unable to attend some sessions due to not being about to get there on time.*

> *Often sessions were on days that we had nothing else on so it was more time would be spent traveling into uni for the session than was actually spent in the session.*

> *Attendance is always good when it is later in the day / after a lecture*

Other suggested areas for improvement included: mentors making sure that information is accurate and up to date; linking sessions more closely to teaching; improve communication outside PAL sessions. Reasons for not attending PAL sessions were that it did not fit with students' learning style; some students preferred to seek advice from other sources such as their personal advisors and in some cases that PAL sessions put additional pressure on students who already felt over-committed.

Mentors evaluations

Sixty-five mentors completed evaluation forms constituting a response rate of 46%.
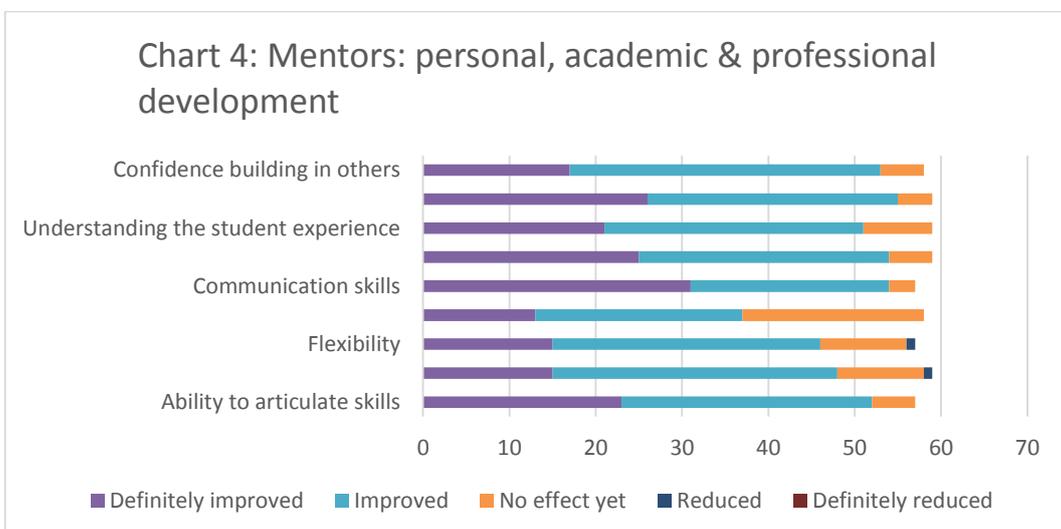
Quantitative data

Chart 3 shows that 94% responded that they had benefitted from being a PAL mentor. 78% responded that mentoring had benefitted their learning. 90% responded that PAL experience would be beneficial to them in the future with 56% specifying that their PAL experience had helped with applications for jobs or further study.

Mentors who responded 'neutral', 'not sure', or 'definitely not' tended to come from schools where attendance had been low, e.g. PPL; few PAL sessions had been held (HSC Nursing) or there had been a lack of continuity for mentors (HSC OTPT).
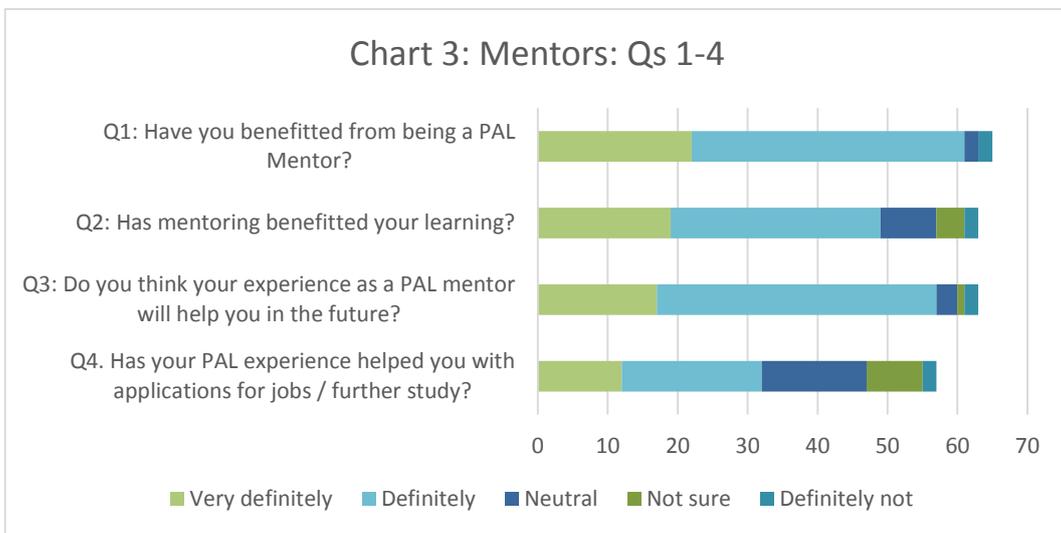
In terms of personal, academic and professional development (Chart 4), 90+% reported increased confidence-building in others; increased confidence in their own abilities; improved leadership and team-working and communication skills as well as improved ability to articulate their skills. 80+% felt their understanding of the student experience had improved as had flexibility and problem-solving. 64% described an increase in cultural awareness.

Qualitative data

Benefits

The strongest benefit to come out of the evaluation data was the development of skills which mentors could apply to their future careers, such as teamwork, communication, leadership, organisation and planning. Even those who had a less positive experience described gaining from it.

> *… benefitted my public speaking skills, my ability to handle responsibility of mentees, my organisational skills, my lesson planning skills, my team work skills*

> *I explained [in a job interview] how I balanced duties of PAL including planning and writing up sessions with other responsibilities such as part time work and exams and coursework.*

> *PAL proved to be challenging at times with lack of attendance however coming up with action plans as mentors has been a useful exercise for enhancing problem solving skills, and translates to the 'real world of work'*

> *I feel that it taught me that not everything in life is going to work out and how to deal with it.*

Mentors also described the benefits to their own learning, such as revisiting core concepts, revising weaker areas in order to support first years and hearing different perspectives. Working with other mentors also helped with their own course decisions

> *… revisit some of the core skills and reflect on why certain things are important.*

> *… chance to share and reflect on my own experiences, revise curriculum from the first year, get to know other students… the benefits are endless!*

> *As I spent more time reviewing my past assignments and feedback … I grew as a writer.*

> *Talking to other mentors definitely helps me on my module choices.*

> *I frequently learn and develop understanding of concepts in PAL sessions from other mentors as well as mentees.*

Increased confidence was frequently referred to by mentors both in terms of their knowledge and understanding and skills they would take into future careers.

> *Being a PAL mentor has built up my confidence in the knowledge that I have and in sharing it with others (the mentees). I have learnt the importance of the process of learning.*

> *My experience will help me in the future as it boosted my confidence and will give me another important role and work to be able to talk about in the future.*

Mentors appreciated the opportunity PAL gave to interact with other students and particularly to support first years.

> *… listen to their concerns in a big group or more on an individual level. I even had the opportunity to encourage someone who was having mental health issues to receive help from the dean of students*

> *… it aided in my knowledge as I have revised before each session but I have loved being able to aid others to learn*

> *It is great to be able to offer support and advice to people that are in a similar position to what I was in my first year. It gives me chance to reflect on what I have learnt in my time at UEA.*

Other benefits included an increased interest in education, social benefits and the opportunity for career progression within PAL. PAL also afforded the opportunity for greater interaction with faculty and to keep up with current UEA developments.

Areas for improvement

As with the mentees, and as in previous years, the greatest area for improvement is timetabling and rooms.

> *Make sure that the sessions are in students timetables from the beginning of the year as that was something that made our first sessions have very few students.*

> *Some of my timetables are just rush in time, e.g. one lecture in the morning (11am), one seminar at 12-1pm, another PAL sessions at 1-2pm. They may feel tired if sessions are connected.*

Greater support within schools was also seen as an area for improvement

> *… a welcoming session for mentees and plenty of advertising during lectures in the first term.*

> *… beneficial if all teaching staff were aware of PAL and knew who the mentors were to discuss what areas students were finding more difficult as well as promote PAL to students*

Other improvements suggested were better promotion and communication and improved PAL session planning, which echoes mentees' evaluation.

Officers' evaluations

Nine out of the 15 officers completed evaluations constituting a 60% return rate

Quantitative data

Chart 5 shows officers reported 100% agreement that their PAL experience had benefitted them and that the experience would help them in the future. 89% agreed that PAL had benefitted their understanding of academic structures and university processes. 78% responded that it had helped with job applications or further study.
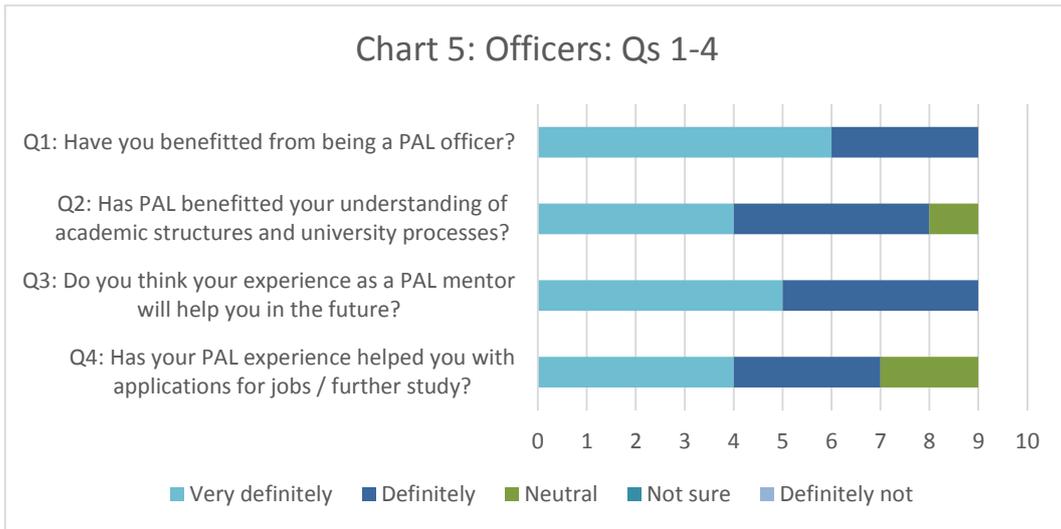

Chart 6 shows that all officers felt that their ability to build confidence in others; leadership and team-working skills; communication skills and ability to articulate skills had improved. 89% felt confidence in their own abilities; understanding the student experience; cultural awareness and flexibility had improved and 78% that their problem-solving abilities had improved.
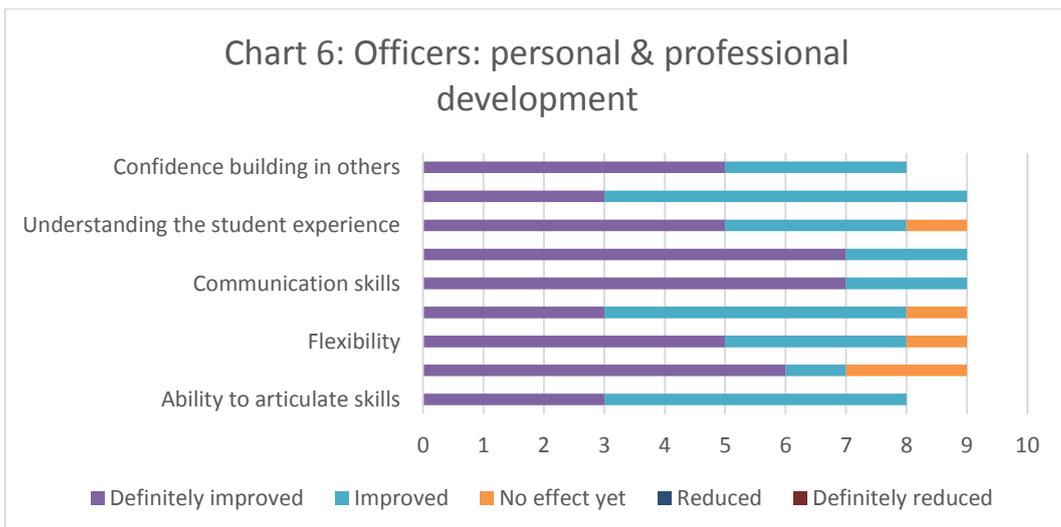
Qualitative data

Benefits

As with the mentors officers felt they gained the most from PAL in terms of developing skills and experience they could take into their future careers, such as workload management, leadership, team-working and communication skills.

> *I have learnt how to be organised and to balance my work and responsibilities effectively. Also it has given me confidence in managing people.*

> *I [have] worked for PAL in two different schools with two different set of challenges. PAL enriched my team management skill [and] leadership abilities*

> *I used PAL when applying for a job recently to demonstrate leadership and organisation. The people were very interested in PAL and it may have contributed to me securing the opportunity,*

> *I included the skills I have developed in my application to my masters programme which I have been accepted on.*

Confidence-building also ranked highly with the officers as it had with the mentors. This appears to be associated with the development of skills and experience

> *… confidence and the skills that I have gained will be hugely helpful in the future.*

Several officers referred to gaining insight into higher education as another benefit of their PAL experience

> *I am looking forward to pursue a career in University Lecturing. PAL gave insights to problems that as a lecturer I might not deal with directly.*

> *… chance to participate in the operations of a university programme, in addition I observed some processes of launching a new project in the university.*

> *… I understood the differences between the academic structures of difference schools. It has widened my awareness of the diversity of workloads and the academic structure of the courses.*

Areas for improvement

Timetabling and communication were both seen as areas for improvement. One officer commented that PAL may need help to be integrated into UEA.

> *Make sure the mentors understand that communication is a crucial factor in the success of PAL. While, it seems like boring bureaucracy, it is much needed. Without weekly communication with the PAL officer, it is difficult to keep PAL intact.*

> *I feel that PAL is developing every year. It benefits the students both academically and the student experience. It may need help to be integrated into the culture of UEA.*
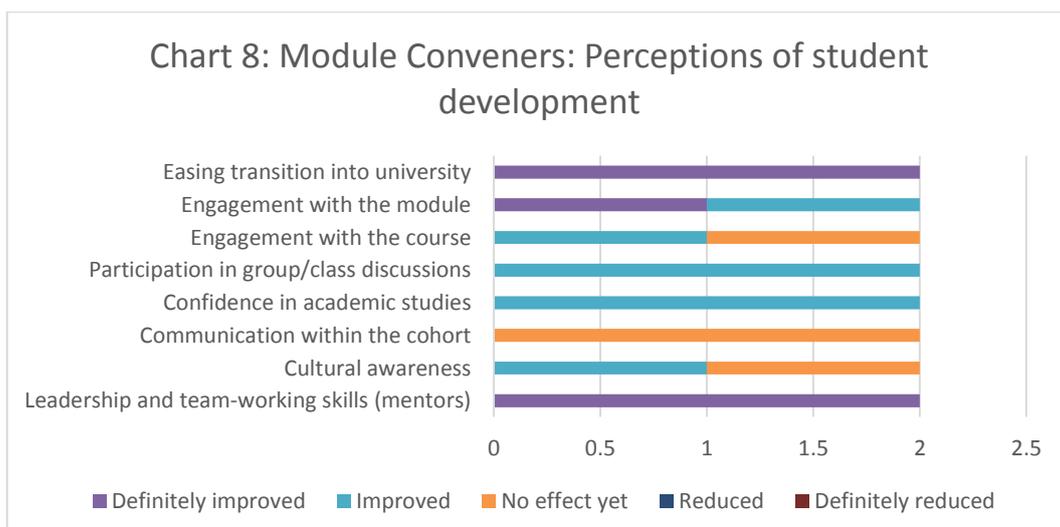
Module conveners' evaluations

The 14 module conveners involved in PAL were asked to provide feedback on their experience of PAL. Four responses were received.

Quantitative data

Chart 7 shows that all module conveners agreed that students who attended PAL had benefitted on their module, that the experience would help in future studies and would help mentors with employability. Three of the four agreed that PAL was beneficial to the school.

Chart 7: Module Conveners: Qs1-4
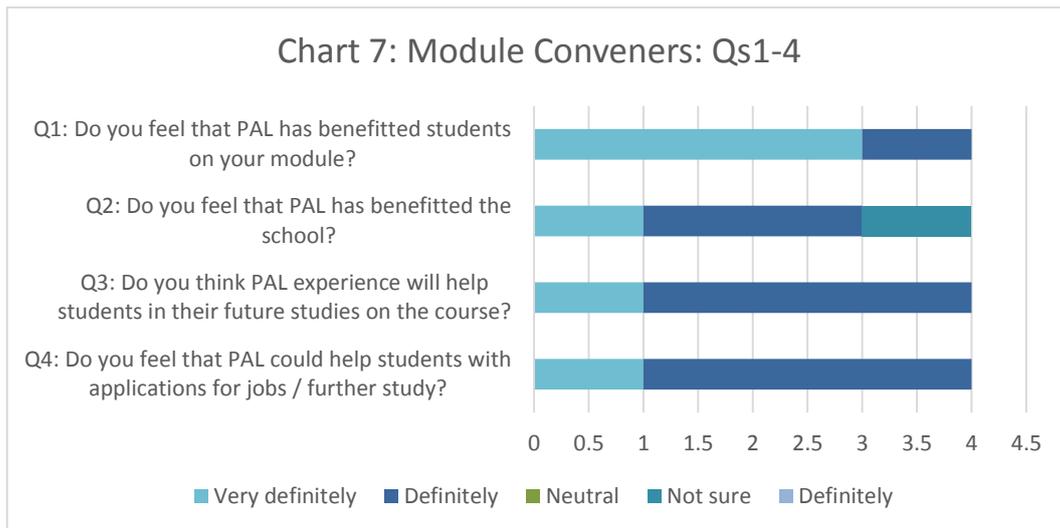
Only two conveners completed the question, relating to student development (Chart 8). Both agreed that PAL eases transition into university; promotes engagement with the module, participation in group discussions and confidence in academic studies. There was less agreement about overall engagement with the course, communication within the cohort or cultural awareness.

Chart 8: Module Conveners: Perceptions of student development

Qualitative data

Module conveners provided the following comments on providing a foundation for and reinforcing learning

> *I think PAL has helped re-inforce the scholarly attitude and skills we attempted to embed on the module … Collegial experience will also help them prepare for group tasks/work*

> *It gives some grounding on concepts of the UEA and promotes supporting each other. It also offers different techniques on how to study effectively by interacting with those with more experience.*

Additional evaluation and research

Planning office data

The Business Intelligence Unit (Planning Office) has supplied data based on PAL attendance data which has assisted in gaining a profile of students who engage with PAL. Attendance data on 493 students was available at the time of submitting data to the BIU. This included students from other schools who take part in modules to which PAL is attached.

Table 4: Profile of students attending PAL sessions

Student profile			
Gender	Female: 344	Male: 149.	May reflect the makeup of the courses, e.g. HSC courses have a high proportion of female students
Fee status	Home/EU: 430	International: 63	
Highest qualification	A/AS: 261	Others of note: Dip Level 3: 32 / Foundation: 8 / HE Access QAA: 54	Indicates that PAL may appeal to students entering UEA via a non-traditional as well as a traditional route
Widening participation	393		Constitutes 80% of PAL participants, of which a high proportion are students in HSC.
Disability	54		PAL mentors and officers need to be aware of this when planning sessions
Retention	Continue: 42	Dropout: 0	Data at this stage is incomplete

Responses to UEA Student Experience Survey

Respondents from every school which participates in PAL took part in the survey. Some students from schools not involved in this particular model of PAL identified themselves as PAL participants.

This may be because they take part in similar schemes or are registered on modules to which PAL is attached.

Results of particular note, where those who identified themselves as being involved in PAL include positive responses to:

Arrivals:
I found the post-registration events helpful in familiarising me with university life
My induction prepared me adequately for what to expect from my course and University in general.

Academic Support:
Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.
I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.

Personal & Professional Development:
I feel that this course is preparing me for future employment.
My communication skills have improved.
The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
It is important to me that my course prepares me for future employment.
The course has helped me to develop team-working skills

Support Services (higher access):
Careers Central
University Counselling Service
Specific Learning Disabilities Team
Accommodation Office (HSC)

Student Engagement:
I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run
I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience

Activity Patterns:
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before submitting it.
Worked with other students on projects or assignments.
Explained course material to one or more students.
Asked another student to help you understand coursework/materials.
Given a presentation.

Although a causal link between participation in PAL and increased student satisfaction and engagement cannot be proven from this evidence, there are clear indications of a positive trend.

UEA Teaching Fellowship

The PAL champion has been working with Dr George Papadopoulos (ECO) who is lead investigator on a research project titled 'Evaluating the Impact of Peer-Assisted Learning on Students' Performance and Attrition' funded as a UEA Teaching Fellowship. The schools of International Development (DEV), Medicine (MED) and Business Studies (NBS) have been taking part in the study.

Although findings will not be complete until confirmation of marks at the summer examination boards, preliminary data from NBS indicate a positive impact on performance for students who attend most

PAL sessions offered. Preliminary findings from MED do not currently indicate an impact of PAL on performance, however data was drawn from formative assignments. Summative assignments may show different results. No data is available from DEV at the time of writing.

SLT UG research project

The PAL champion, Anne Guyon, who is also a lecturer in Speech & Language Therapy (SLT) in the School of Health Sciences, supervised a final year undergraduate research project titled 'SLT students' experience of Peer Assisted Learning'. Four students undertook the research and each explored a different focus: learning opportunities within PAL, collaborative learning, PAL as preparation for collaborative working and the development of professional skills.

Key findings included:

- PAL provides the opportunity to deepen learning, increase motivation and increase confidence
- PAL encourages students to recognise the importance of and participate in collaborative learning
- First year learning is assignment driven and although students engage in collaborative learning through PAL it is with the aim of individual success
- PAL mentors develop valuable skills such as planning, developing resources, flexibility, time-management and interpersonal skills which are relevant to the profession of SLT.

A paper is to be submitted to the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education. Anne Guyon and the students who conducted the research will be co-authors. The paper will also be presented to the UK National Centre for Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Meeting in July 2015.

A similar research project is planned for 2015-16 investigating the impact of PAL from the student perspective in all 3 years of the course.

Data sources and more detail from evaluations in individual schools are available from the PAL champion. Please email PAL@uea.ac.uk.

SECTION 3: Overall summary in relation to UEA's objectives

Enhance the student experience

Evidence from PAL evaluations combined with data from the UEA Student Experience Survey indicates that PAL has a positive impact in the student experience for the majority of students who take part in PAL. Mentees particularly appreciate the opportunity to interact with more experienced students and gain the student's eye view of UEA. PAL acts as a means of demystifying some of UEA's structures and processes. Participants feel more confident and engaged in their studies.

Mentors benefit from a sense of engagement and fulfilment in their role. PAL provides an opportunity to consolidate their learning as well as develop social networks.

One mentor provided the following quote in an email (with permission):

> *Attending PAL sessions during my first year is one of the key reasons I stayed at UEA. I was having a really hard time adjusting to both academic and social university life. PAL was a place I could be myself and ask stupid questions I felt I couldn't ask anywhere else which gave me much needed confidence in my abilities. In chatting with my mentors, they also showed me other opportunities that I could do while being at the university, such as becoming a PAL mentor and getting involved with student representation, which made my university social life more interesting. I am very grateful that PAL exists and I'm not sure what I would have done without my amazing mentors.*

Improve performance

Although we have yet to demonstrate the impact of PAL on performance, there are indications that attending PAL sessions regularly can have a positive effect (Dixon & Gudan, 2000; Fostier & Carey, 2007; Parkinson, 2009).

Mentees and mentors report that they develop confidence, learning strategies and study skills through participating in PAL which may well have a positive impact on the process of learning and learning outcomes. Mentees see PAL sessions as a place where they can learn together, ask questions they might not ask in lectures, gain an understanding of university processes and gain deeper knowledge and understanding. Mentors value the opportunity to revisit their first year learning, see the connections to their current studies and explore a variety of perspectives thereby gaining as well as giving through the PAL process. Mentors also encourage accessing the library and other learning resources and support services. Regular attendance is likely to engender a community of learning.

Promote employability for mentors / officers

During Phase 3 the PAL team have supplied 45 references for employment / further study for PAL mentors and officers. References have been for internal UEA posts as well as external employment, internships and a PhD.

Students are requested to feedback on how they feel PAL has contributed to successful applications. The following quotes indicate the contribution made by PAL:

> *I received a letter of recommendation from the PAL champion, and her belief in me along with the experience I gained through the PAL programme bolstered my application*

Undergoing PAL training and mentoring fellow students gave me an insight into what it would be like to be a teaching assistant, which is part of earning a stipend during the PhD.

PAL mentoring enabled me to become confident in sharing my experiences at UEA and to talk about what I'm passionate … all these things helped me apply for the post

… I had to prepare a presentation for the interviewers pretending that they were a group of prospective students and parents at an open day … I mentioned that PAL mentoring is one of the things I'm involved in at UEA

… the panel seemed extremely interested and impressed by my experience mentoring students. I referenced the range of approaches and variety of areas the students needed help with … it seems too often is the role of the mentor seen as a 'burden' and the panel seemed to be refreshed by someone talking about the role of the mentor being something positive and exciting.

I was asked specifically about PAL during the interview, and peer-assisted learning techniques are definitely going to be in use in my teaching

… the interviewer specifically brought up a question about PAL and asked me to explain what it was and how it worked - it allowed me expand on my "customer" facing role and how I deal with finding solutions to problems etc.

Additional opportunities

Skills Award

Seven mentors have taken part in the pilot of the UEA Skills Award. Two students have achieved bronze in the pilot with another two aiming to achieve bronze before completion of the pilot. The remaining 3 mentors are working towards achieving bronze. This is an excellent achievement for the mentors and information about the award will be provided for mentors starting in September 2015 to encourage them to take part.

PPD credits

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 4: The PAL team perspective

Both the PAL champion and administrator are currently employed on 0.5 contracts until December 2015. An administrative assistant is also employed for one day per week until December. Currently the team is supporting 8-9 schools which is maximum capacity. The PAL administrator frequently works over her allotted hours. A table of key activities are set out below (Table 5)

Table 5: PAL Team Activities

	September – December	January – April	April – September
Promotion	o Promotion of PAL at all levels of the university o Build networks with UEA services and departments o Update information on PAL Website & Blackboard site o Update promotional materials o Attend careers events and key lectures to address potential officers & mentors directly		
Development & review	o Planning meetings with new schools o Monthly officer meetings	o Monthly officer meetings o School review meetings	o School review meetings
Recruitment & training	o Recruitment of mentors and officers (Jan start)	o Recruitment of mentors and officers (Sept start) o Officer training o Part 1 training	o Officer briefing for Part 3 training o Parts 2 and 3 training
Administration	o Ongoing administration of all aspects of PAL o Develop and review systems and processes o Address any issues arising from PAL implementation and work to find solutions		
PAL sessions	o Semester 1 PAL sessions	o Semester 2 PAL sessions	
Evaluation	o Semester 1 Reflective meeting	o Semester 2 Reflective meeting o Student evaluations	o PAL report
National activities	o PASS National Student conference	o PASS National Meeting	o PASS National Meeting

Each aspect of PAL is complex from communicating and setting up meetings with schools, recruiting and training mentors and officers, timetabling PAL sessions at suitable times in suitable locations, promoting PAL to first year students, collecting and recording attendance and evaluation data. Each school has different systems, processes and curriculum configurations which need to be taken into consideration when planning and implementing PAL. Timetabling is particularly challenging and considerable effort had been made by the PAL administrator to ensure that PAL sessions are put on students' timetables. Progress had been made, although this is still an area which could be improved with greater understanding at all administrative levels.

Another complex and valuable aspect of the team's function is to support individual mentors and officers in their role. This close involvement with students is the most rewarding and at times challenging aspect of managing the PAL project.

The success of PAL is dependent on a strong relationship between the academic and administrative strands of PAL as well as the links to schools, other services and departments in the university (Chart 9). The key members of the team are fully committed to PAL, however if it is to expand to other schools in the future additional resources will be needed, especially in terms of administrative support.

Chart 9: PAL links to related committees, departments and services
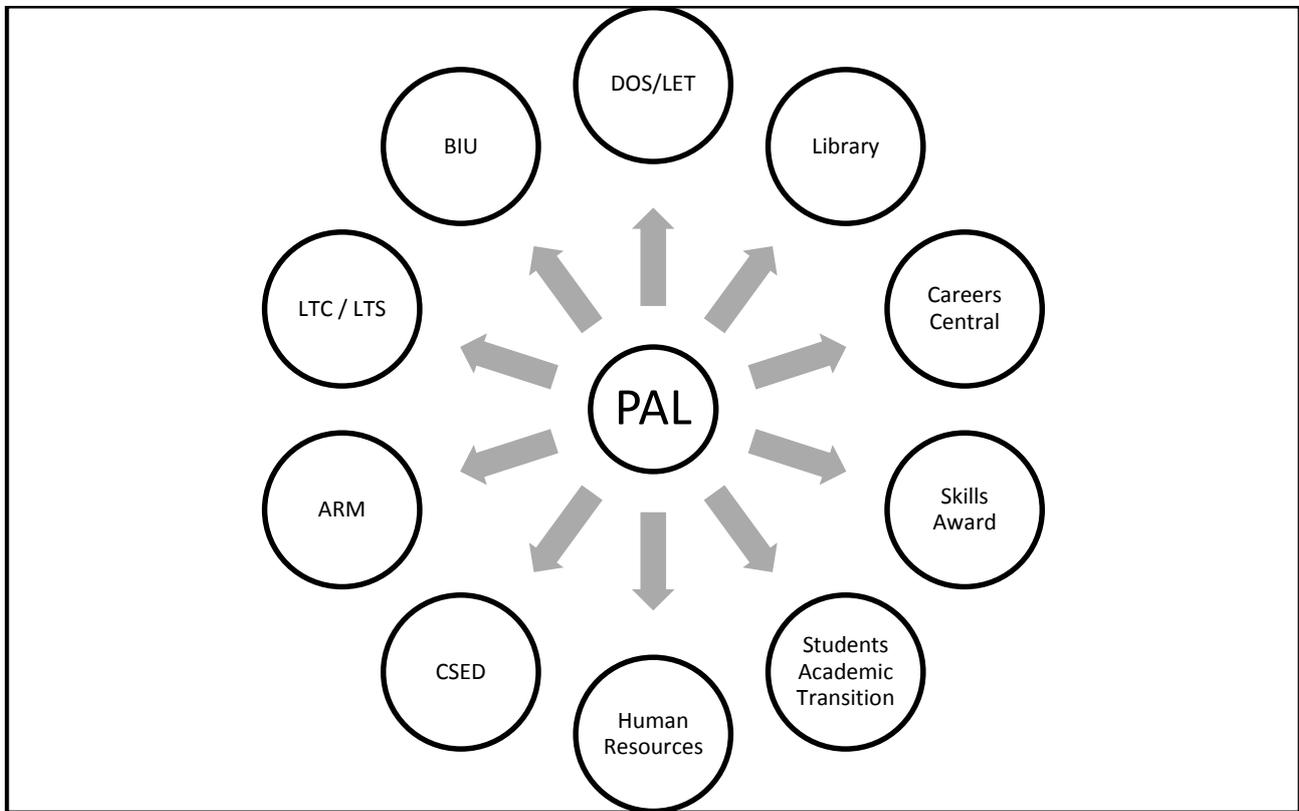
SECTION 5: Phase 4

The PAL project was originally funded to complete in December 2015. Funding has now been extended for the full academic year 2015-16. This will include many final year students who took part in PAL in their first year which will give the opportunity to evaluate the longer term impact of PAL.

Participating schools / programmes

Most of the schools who took part in Phase 3 of the pilot are continuing into Phase 4. After consideration and discussion with the School of Political, Philosophy, Language & Communication Studies the decision was taken not to continue with PAL in Phase 4 as take-up by first year students was very low in Phase 3. Further discussion will take place regarding reintroduction once the school has settled into the new configuration.

In HSC the Operating Department Practitioners programme will be implementing PAL for the first time.

Faculty	School	Autumn semester	Spring semester
SCI	Chemistry (CHE)	✔	✔
	Computing Science (CMP)	✔	✔
	Environmental Sciences (ENV)	✔	✔
SSF	International Development (DEV)	✔	✔
	Norwich Business School (NBS)	✔	✔
HUM	Art, Media & American Studies (AMA): Film, Television and Media students	✔	✔
FMH	Norwich Medical School (MED)	✔	✔
	HSC: Nursing; Paramedic Sciences; OT, PT, SLT; Operating Department Practitioners	✔	✔

Recruitment

Recruitment for PAL mentors and officers is almost complete at the time of writing. 132 mentors have been appointed of whom 15 are returning mentors and 61 have been mentees. Sixteen officers have been appointed with 4 returning, 3 who have been mentors and 3 who have been both mentor and officer. This demonstrates positive student engagement with the project and the opportunity for career progression within PAL.

Training

Part 1 training, the introduction to PAL, has been completed by most officers and mentors. An additional session will be provided in Week 0 for those students who still need to complete it. Part 2, the practicalities of implementation, will take place in Week 0. Part 3, school-specific training will take

place in Week 0 or Week 1 and is run by the officers for the particular school. Officers have been briefed on the content of the session, which will be driven by module content and school considerations.

Timing and timetabling

PAL sessions have already been timetabled in some schools. Over the summer further discussion will take place.

Key recommendations for PAL Phase 4 and beyond.

Over the two and a half years the PAL project has been running a strong foundation has been created for PAL. This is based on:

- A strong working relationship between the academic and administrative leaders of the project
- Robust systems for recording employment, attendance and evaluation data
- Clearly structured meetings to introduce, plan and review PAL within schools
- A cycle of events from recruitment of mentors and officers through to implementation, review and evaluation of PAL sessions
- A robust training programme for mentors and officers based on academic principles with supporting resources
- The potential for career progression for students from mentee to mentor to officer
- Enthusiasm and commitment from module conveners in the majority of schools participating in PAL
- Strong links to other student support services and UEA departments

It is recommended that the above should continue with further development beyond the end of the project. Areas for future development

- At present PAL is seen as an 'add-on' to learning and teaching within some schools and that PAL is led and administered centrally. Greater promotion and engagement within schools would help with student engagement and embedding PAL into the learning and teaching strategy.
- More consistent support from administrative team leaders in timetabling PAL sessions
- Provision to support more schools who would like to implement PAL beyond the pilot period
- A scoping exercise to determine the level of interest in and understanding of PAL among students and faculty
- Funded evaluation, similar to evaluation of the Values Project in HSC, to demonstrate the impact of PAL in relation to objectives set by UEA.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the majority of students who have participated in PAL in 2014-15 and who have completed evaluation forms feel that they have benefited from it in terms of the student experience, their own learning and the skills and experience they gain. Module conveners are also seeing the benefit of PAL to their students. PAL has the potential to be a truly positive force within UEA with the encouragement of faculty and administrative services

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Fostier, M., and Carey, W. (2007). Exploration, experience and evaluation: Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS), sharing the experience of The University of Manchester: 480 1st year bioscience students. Paper presented at the Science, Learning and Teaching Conference, Keele University, UK.

Parksinson, M., (2009) 'The effect of peer assisted learning support (PALS) on performance in mathematics and chemistry', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International,* Volume 46, Issue 4, 2009, pp.381-392.

Dixon, S & Gudan, S., (2000) 'The Impact of Peer Assisted Learning on Student Performance and Retention'. *Michigan Community College Journal: Research & Practice*, vol 6 no.2 pp.95-99.

APPENDIX 1

PAL Core Principles

1. a methodology of student support
2. small group learning
3. facilitated by other students acting as mentors
4. confidential
5. voluntary
6. non-remedial
7. participative
8. content-based and process-orientated
9. encourages collaborative rather than competitive learning
10. benefits all students regardless of current academic competency
11. gives privacy to practice the subject, make mistakes and build up confidence
12. gives opportunity to increase academic performance
13. is pro-active, not reactive
14. targets high 'risk' courses, not high 'risk' students
15. decreased drop-out rates and aids retention
16. encourages learner autonomy
17. does not create dependency
18. integrates effective learning strategies within the course content
19. enables a clear view of course expectations
20. works in the language of the discipline
21. challenges the barrier between year groups

University of Manchester, 2010

CONTACT DETAILS + PAL INFORMATION

Email: PAL@uea.ac.uk

Website: http://www.uea.ac.uk/pal

Anne Guyon, PAL Champion: anne.guyon@uea.ac.uk