

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health Professions	Podiatry	4	2	35
Humanities	Available to all courses - sign up	10	5	100
Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences	All courses including: Biomedical Science Biological Sciences Master of Pharmacy Chemistry Ecology Pharmaceutical and Chemical Sciences	40	20	350
Sport and Service Management	Sport Coaching and Development (top-up)	2 (paid post graduates)	1	25
	Sport and Exercise Science	6	3	100
Hastings Campus	Joint Honours programme subject strands:			
	Biology	6	3	30
	Computing	5	2	45
	Education	2	1	25
	Mathematics	2	1	12
TOTAL		139	66	1200

Facilitators of the development of PASS

Strategic focus, impact and evaluation

In the early stages of working alongside course teams to establish a new PASS scheme, having strategic goals such as seeking to improve the student experience, retention, attainment or class attendance are identified. This has been helpful in providing a focus for PASS evaluation which has proved important for securing funding. Since recently receiving Access Agreement retention and widening participation funding in 2012, the PASS team at the University of Brighton are currently conducting research into the impact of PASS on the retention, success and engagement of students who participate regularly.

Raising the profile of PASS

In order to generate interest about PASS across the institution, the PASS team work with students involved with PASS to co-present evaluation findings at a variety of internal committee meetings, staff workshops and the annual Learning and Teaching, and Pedagogic Research conferences. The PASS team's recent collaboration with the Student Union's Teaching Excellence Awards, in which PASS leaders and supervisors received nominations by their respective attendees and leaders, has been an exciting development which will no doubt continue to raise the profile of PASS.

Student consultation

PASS is primarily a student-owned and student-led initiative; therefore it is essential that students are involved in the implementation process. At the University of Brighton, students are consulted via meetings with course representatives or at the staff-

student liaison committees in order to establish the most appropriate modules or courses into which PASS can be embedded. Whilst retention and achievement data can be helpful in guiding implementation, it is the student interest and challenging course material that have proved most influential to the success of PASS pilots at Brighton.

Academic staff endorsement

PASS is a voluntary, opt-out model (Wallace 1995; Fostier & Carey 2007) and is included in first year students' timetables in order to encourage participation. If students perceive that their tutors consider PASS to be beneficial to their studies then this can have a positive influence on students' attendance at sessions. Whilst an academic staff champion leads the promotion of the scheme, it is important that the whole course teaching team are aware of and endorse PASS to students. This can be challenging to get everyone on board but information and discussion sessions that demystify PASS, and demonstrate to course teams the support from Heads of School and Course Leaders have been helpful for this purpose.

Barriers to the development of PASS

Perceptions of PASS

PASS intends to project a positive, proactive, developmental image in which students of all abilities can gain something from engaging with PASS. The PASS model aims to target high risk course material, as opposed to high risk students (Wallace 1995). However some students can still misunderstand this and perceive PASS to be a remedial intervention and thus avoid sessions (Blunt 2008). We are careful in how PASS is introduced to students and have found that PASS

leaders explaining their own experiences of PASS from their first year is much more persuasive for enticing students to sessions. We have also found putting PASS on students' timetables subtly communicates to students that PASS is part of the course culture and all students are expected to benefit from engaging with it.

Misunderstanding the leaders' role

In PASS leader training at Brighton, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the role of the leaders as facilitators of the learning process as opposed to re-teaching subject material. However this is a fine line to tread, especially when the leaders have experienced the course material themselves, so regular supervision is in place to help leaders to reflect on whether they are getting the right balance. Whilst the role of leaders is explained to first year students in PASS Induction sessions, this still proves to be a stumbling block for some students who struggle with the concept of the leaders not answering all their questions. We have found it most effective when leaders explain what their role and the purpose of PASS is at the start of PASS sessions for the first month, or whenever someone new attends, in order to manage expectations.

Similarly, we have found some academic staff have concerns about leaders teaching course material and potentially being wrong. The regular debriefs and observations that leaders have with PASS Supervisors has provided reassurance to academic staff with this.

Resourcing

The earlier stages of running PASS rely heavily on the good will and enthusiasm of staff championing the programme; but as PASS develops from the periphery to becoming mainstream in an institution, a more sustainable model is needed to support the expansion of the schemes. A variety of academic staff, student support tutors and administrators make up the School based staff PASS teams, and careful consideration needs to be given to the time and resources required for PASS to succeed. We have found it most effective to establish this resourcing structure right from the beginning of a PASS pilot in order to ensure a sustainable approach for the future.

Organisation and logistics

One of the most fundamental and challenging aspects of implementing PASS is the availability and booking of rooms for students to use. Despite PASS supervisors working closely with timetabling staff, finding enough rooms can often be a challenge. A creative approach at Brighton has helped in this situation with some students meeting in social spaces, booking library rooms or meeting outside when the weather permits.

Summary

A strong team of students and staff working in partnership within and across Schools and Central Departments is vital to the development and expansion of PASS across an institution. A variety of approaches are needed in order to address the range of factors that can facilitate and inhibit the development of PASS. Whilst the success of PASS hinges on a bottom-up approach, demonstrating and reinforcing the student-led ethos of the scheme, it seems that an influence from the top is also required for the structuring, funding and sustainable expansion of PASS. Ideally, as PASS becomes more embedded into an institution's culture, with the benefits to students evidenced by impact-evaluation research, it will become a valued priority for resourcing.

For more information please visit
<http://www.brighton.ac.uk/ask/pass>.

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