Welcome

Welcome to the fourteenth PASS Newsletter. Please send contributions or comments for future issues to: d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk. The next newsletter will be in the summer. Back copies can be found on the PASS webpage: http://www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/wp/pass/index.html

All contributors receive a PASS mug...

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PASS National Conference

Lauren Blackburne-Tinker (joint student organiser for English PASS) represented PASS at Queen Mary at this year’s conference, run jointly by the University of Manchester and this year’s hosts, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology. Any English (or other) mentor who can spot Lauren in the picture, will join her in earning a mug:

On the first weekend of November 2012, I was privileged enough to be part of the PASS Leader (mentor) Conference, in Galway, the Republic of Ireland. It was a two-day intense conference, filled with a truly eclectic mix of people. If there was one stand-out thing I learnt, it was the incredible global consciousness that is PASS or PAL (Peer Assisted Learning). At this particular conference, not only was it situated in the Republic of Ireland, it also saw leaders come from: Manchester to Plymouth, Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland, and Sweden to Portugal. I also became aware of a large PASS community across the sea in the United States. It put into perspective the scale of PASS, and the sense of community that it looks to harbour. Queen Mary can learn a great deal from these older schemes. They were more than willing to pass on advice and even more notably were genuinely interested in the way we do things here at Queen Mary.

Throughout the two days there was a variety of workshops tailoring you towards improving your schemes in many different ways. Policies and initiatives other leaders deemed to be successful and unsuccessful: shared goals, flexibility, good communication, rapport, continuity and a variety of purposes; versus, spoon feeding, lack of focus, tense atmospheres, restraints, no variety and disruptions. There was a poster competition, we had to make a shield, and make a video, there were quizzes and prizes and treasure hunts and copious amounts of food. It was what I hope all conferences to be like in the future – an even split between food and fun. I hope this convinces you to go next year if the opportunity arises!

In the eclectic mix of universities there, more commonly than not, it was the support of their departments that they deemed is what really made their scheme progress. There must be an awareness of PASS to lecturers, feedback from seminar leaders and the understanding and commitment of the department as a whole. I strongly believe that it is the improvement of communication between staff and students in our departments that will see our own PASS schemes take flight.

Overall, my time in Galway was definitely a trip worth making. I have met and kept in contact with many of the mentors there. I learned on my free tour around Galway that James Joyce’s works are all set around the 16th of June because that was his first ever date with his wife. I got to go to the Republic of Ireland. I was able to make a fool of myself and sing in a video... I ate very, very well. I came back genuinely enthused. I will even get an ever-coveted PASS mug.
A new mentor writes...

Anna Varone, new mentor in SEMS PASS, is glad she took up the challenge:

I am enjoying being a mentor very much and have attended many sessions. For me it has just become a very enjoyable routine. I just love talking to the first-year students and trying to help them out. It is just so great when you meet them again and they greet you in such a friendly way that your stressful day turns upside down.

All I am doing is out of passion. I had a very difficult time during the first year and I would like to ease the way through for other students.

Speed mentoring

Speed mentoring has become an annual feature of PASS at Queen Mary. This year, the formula was updated, rejigged and run by student organisers Tanjina Ali and Khadija Khanom (both Maths) and Marie Cruz (EECS, who also took photographs) the session was attended by mentors across subject areas (see the picture below).

In the warm-up session, fascinating facts about PASS mentors were discovered. One, for example, has many, many teeth and another can – and did - do the splits. The mentoring was of a high standard throughout but the prizes for top scores went to Meena Kumar and Nikki Georgiadou (Dentistry) and Juned Uddin (SEMS). Juned commented: This event reminded me about the amazing people there are at QMUL; all the mentors were really pleasant to speak to, very friendly and they gave some great advice.

SBCS produce son of PASS newsletter

Enterprising SBCS mentor and second-year Biomed student, Ismail Uddin, experienced and interested in graphic design, decided to produce an SBCS PASS newsletter to advertise SBCS PASS to all first-years. He received enthusiastic backing from the academic and student organising team and the result is below.
Team evaluation in Maths PASS

Student organisers Khadhija Khanom and Tanjina Ali describe their communication with the Maths mentor team

In the Maths PASS team, this is the first year we have had evaluations every four weeks to catch up with mentors. Each evaluation is led by a different mentor, putting their own spin on it. It can be as informal or formal as they wish and they can be as creative as they want. Any resources they require can be given in advance, for example, a mentor thought it would be nice to have team-bonding activities during the evaluation. This allows all our mentors to have experience in a leadership role which is definitely beneficial for their CV and confidence. It also helps in developing a better relationship with fellow mentors. They are also able to share mentoring skills they have gained.

The structure depends on the chair of the evaluation; however the general idea is to discuss high points, low points and mentors’ thoughts and ideas on aspects of PASS in Maths, such as logistics and improvements on negatives. There is a team affirmation in each evaluation where all mentors present take an anonymous vote. The mentor with most votes is awarded a prize for their contribution and enthusiasm in the past few sessions. We’re hoping this will encourage mentors to shine and by the end of the year all mentors should have had a chance to win a prize! In concluding the session, all mentors discuss how the sessions have been going and agree on a grade for the last four weeks.

For our first evaluation, we focused on getting to know the team and expressing personal opinions on mentoring and how it would be best to improve. For example, one of our mentors mentioned an issue with the room and the board. As student organisers, we could take action and raise this with our academic coordinator, Dr Valiente-Kroon.

We have found this activity very useful and can recommend it to other teams.

Dentistry PASS at conference

Meenakshi Kumar and Nikki Georgiadou, student organisers for Dentistry PASS (and champion speed mentors), contributed to the annual Student Staff conference at the Royal College of Physicians on 11 January. Meena writes:

We gave a little introduction about ourselves and PASS Dentistry. We were invited by the student president of the Dental Society (as honorary members of the Dent. Soc. because of our roles in PASS) to talk for a couple of minutes each. It was a very nerve-racking experience as the entire Dental School was there (two conference halls full of people) but it was really good publicity for PASS and Nikki and I are glad that we did it.

Date for your diary

The PASS Mentoring Celebration and Awards event for 2012/13 will be held on Tuesday 19 March (4pm) at Mile End. Invitations will be sent via email.
Anyone reading this newsletter is likely already to be involved in PASS at Queen Mary. However, if there is anything about which you would like to know more (or if you would like to contribute to the next edition of this newsletter), please contact:

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Below is a list of the key PASS people in schools and departments. These are the academic coordinators and the undergraduate student organisers, each of whom is a PASS mentor leading a team of mentors.

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