Welcome

Welcome to the sixteenth 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: www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/wp/pass
All contributors receive a PASS mug...

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PASS training 2013

There were six PASS mentor training sessions around the start of this academic year and, as usual, experienced mentors played a key part. Maths PASS organisers Tanjina Ali and Khadhija Khanom were part of the training team this year and other organisers gave presentations on PASS from the Inside. Feedback on these from the new mentors included:

‘I liked the comments from experienced PASS mentors (Fatima Abukar – Computer Science PASS – and Khadhija Khanom) as now I feel confident in how I will be approaching my role as a mentor’

‘PASS from the Inside (by Anel Kudebayeva – Electronic Engineering PASS – and Zeeshan Arshed – SEF PASS) was very useful as it gave answers to all the questions that I had before the session!’

‘My top session was the talk by Josh (Underwood – Physics PASS) and Tanjina (Ali) – purely because it was so encouraging!’

Sessions run by QM Careers Consultants, Maya Mendiratta, Vinnie Potter, Jeff Riley and Abi Sharma on How to use PASS to boost your employability were also seen as very useful by many of the new mentors. Comments included: ‘helpful and insightful’ and ‘showing how doing this can boost employability is useful because even if we volunteer and are not paid, we still get rewards.’

Maya Mendiratta presenting to new mentors (in foreground, Gilman Ahmed, SEF PASS)
Working with Advice and Counselling

Training for new student organisers

Terry Patterson, Senior Counsellor in the Advice and Counselling Service and Lizzy Pollard, Senior Welfare Adviser and Deputy Head of Advice and Counselling service, run by their team for us PASS student organisers, it was a fitting opportunity to return the favour by giving them a talk. Additionally, after having attended a brilliant session run by their team for PASS student organisers, it was a fitting opportunity to give a presentation about PASS to the Advice and Counselling team based at Queen Mary’s Mile End campus. As an enthusiastic PASS mentor in my second year, and somebody who really enjoys scaffolding others’ learning, I naturally was very excited at the prospect of giving this talk. Additionaly, after having recently attended a brilliant session run by their team for PASS student organisers, it was a fitting opportunity to return the favour by giving them a talk about how PASS operates.

The talk itself was a rather simple outline about the structure of our scheme and the sort of help that we offer first years. However, giving this talk about PASS served as a great reminder to me about some of the really great things PASS mentors get to be part of, something that is easily forgotten during our hectic lives as students. Sometimes we get students coming to us for help with something that may seem really trivial to us, but it may seem really challenging to another student. Being able to help students with such problems, and thus help them offload much un-needed stress is a great boon, for me at least. These are just some of the great aspects that were brought up during the insightful impromptu discussions we had with the team after our presentation. Furthermore, this opportunity offered me the chance to develop my public speaking skills, an important graduate attribute. Most importantly, however, the opportunity to engage in impromptu discussions with professionals was an invaluable experience in helping develop one’s ability to articulate one’s thoughts and think off the cuff.

In short, if you’re a student organiser or mentor looking to gain some experience or simply become a bit more involved with PASS, I would definitely recommend you to look out for and take up such opportunities. They may not seem as impressive at first, but it’s always great to get involved in different activities and plus it’ll look great on your CV!

Care leavers at Queen Mary

As a result we have implemented a dedicated package of support for current and prospective students who are or have been in care. Coordinated by the Advice and Counselling Service, students can request an appointment to seek specific advice about one or more of the following areas: welfare, finance, accommodation, and careers. Students will be provided with opportunities for additional support in these areas, if and as appropriate, our aim being to offer a tailored and flexible package that best meets individuals’ needs.

The most important thing we want to do is raise awareness about this support, and that students can choose to access this, in confidence, throughout the academic year. If you would like to find out more see the widening participation webpages (www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/wp) or contact the Advice and Counselling Service (welfare@qmul.ac.uk).

As part of our commitment we are also building relationships with local authorities and other colleagues to focus on delivering outreach activities to support students currently in care, and with QMSU to look at peer-support opportunities such as informal meetings for students here. We would be very interested to hear PASS mentors’ views about any areas of this work, so please feel free to contact me if you wish to.

Explaining PASS

Ismail Uddin, PASS organiser for SBCS (with Nasira Ahmed), took up the invitation from Laura Sequeira, Head of Advice and Counselling, to tell all Advice and Counselling staff more about PASS so that they knew when it may be useful to flag it up to students coming to them for help. Ismail writes about this below:

During November, I took the opportunity to give a presentation about PASS to the Advice and Counselling team based at Queen Mary’s Mile End campus. As an enthusiastic PASS mentor in my second year, and somebody who really enjoys scaffolding others’ learning, I naturally was very excited at the prospect of giving this talk. Additionally, after having recently attended a brilliant session run by their team for PASS student organisers, it was a fitting opportunity to return the favour by giving them a talk about how PASS operates.

The talk itself was a rather simple outline about the structure of our scheme and the sort of help that we offer first years. However, giving this talk about PASS served as a great reminder for the second year running, a very useful session for new PASS student organisers in October, giving them more information and insight on when and where to recommend students to seek professional help and guidance over personal and welfare issues. New organisers from English, Drama, Computer Science, Electronic Engineering, History, SLIF, SBCS, Geography and SBM attended. They said they found it both interesting and useful and their engagement and participation was noted and appreciated by Terry and Lizzy. (This session is mentioned in Ismail’s piece below.)

Dentistry gets down to the bones

Dentists often feel that most of us don’t realise that their work can involve the whole body, not just the space between the chin and the nose. Ahmed Al-Bayyaz (Dentistry PASS student organiser with Noor Sharif and Poornima Sakthithasan) writes:

We had a session in December that was entirely dedicated to Anatomy which most of us usually find hard in first year. We always have too many nerves to fit into one room but we managed to run it in small groups by having the mentees go into different rooms, with the mentors rotating around at intervals of ten minutes. That way, everyone had a chance to learn about everything we had prepared. We used props such as skulls to help them visualise things too.
Piloting PASS

Two pilot PASS student organisers reflect on the highs and lows of their first semester:

Wilf Mountfield, School of Politics and International Relations, and three mentors are building foundations.

Wilf writes:

PASS started this academic year in the School of Politics and International Relations. It was a bitty beginning, the first-years were overwhelmed by information in the first few weeks of term and adding another scheme to the already daunting list of opportunities certainly didn’t help. Despite this setback, students still arrived at sessions.

The first session was by far the most successful, although only ten students attended, we answered more questions in that one day than in all the other sessions combined. This was obviously the result of anxiety over a new course, and numbers soon dropped for consecutive sessions. Eventually, we were running sessions for 3-4 people every week. Not amazing numbers, but consistent.

While there are certainly no words of wisdom that this scheme has yet produced, it has provided interesting information about what can go wrong. Firstly, it appears that sessions on a Monday are never well attended, if at all. This may be a departmental problem or university wide, but it certainly appears as if the large majority of students don’t want to engage on a Monday.

Secondly is scheduling, this is perhaps the hardest thing to coordinate. Given the multitude of modules that students are taking both within and without the department, it proves difficult to provide sessions at appropriate times. Students have approached me by email or otherwise saying that they were unable to make the session. Due to numbers at the time, it didn’t appear logical to run a second session during the week, but in the second half of the year, we will certainly experiment with this and see if we can reach a wider audience.

Lastly, and perhaps most dauntingly, is the effort of getting the message out. Students have been emailed, there have been lecture shout-outs and students have been approached individually yet still there are first years who do not know who we are. Because our students are never congregated in one place, posters become impractical, emails don’t get read and lecture shout-outs are ignored because people want to leave. Having said that, the people who do pay attention are benefiting from it, and hopefully if through nothing other than word of mouth, we will eventually bring numbers solidly upwards.

Despite the apparent negativity this article would suggest, it has been a great experience. It has been interesting to see how students interact not only with themselves but with the department and the resources that the department provides. Hopefully, the second half of the year will be better and set a piece of the platform for those to come in the following years.

Basma Tahir and a large team of mentors are also working together for first-years in the School of Business and Management. Basma explains:

This academic year, PASS has been introduced in the School of Business and Management (SBM). With the support of Dr Elena Doldor (PASS Academic Coordinator within SBM) and the central PASS team in Widening Participation, we launched PASS in September 2013.

Collectively, we are a group of 17 mentors, both second- and third-year students, who are all passionate about giving first-years an opportunity which the mentors never experienced themselves. We are constantly sharing new ideas about how we can make a

Basma Tahir and a large team of mentors are also working together for first-years in the School of Business and Management.
Piloting PASS continued

As reflected in the pieces on two new PASS schemes in this newsletter, getting the word out to first-years is an abiding challenge. On a cold day in November, shivering PASS mentors and organisers set up a table in Library Square to talk to passing first-years about the scheme and distribute leaflets and sweets. Among those who came to help (even without knowing they were going to be given PASS mugs so huge thanks to them…) were Lois Ovie (SEMS), Thomas Ganly (Geography), Becky Hipkiss, Rachel Nelms and Heather McDonald (English); Jake Voiler, Tom Reid, Marta Zakrzewska and Tony Cunningham (History) and Ambika Kumar and Leyla Noury (SBCS). The event ended with a real-time result as Leyla netted a passing first-year student and took him off to a PASS session right there and then.

Overcoming the challenges in catering for everyone in Geography

Moreover, despite both being on the scientific end of the spectrum, Physical Geography and Environmental Science have significant differences in their modular structure. This has created a challenge as each PASS session has had to deal with three subjects that do not have much in common.

There are only two mentors who are studying Environmental Science and neither of them could attend the weekly sessions. This was quite problematic during the first few weeks when Environmental Science students came in for some advice, and most of the time we could not help them with specific queries relating to their course.

Thankfully, both mentors offered their time to help organise some sessions, specifically aimed at Environmental Science students. After a bit of emailing and working around each other’s timetables, we managed to put in place the first session. This proved to be a great success, as it was the most popular PASS session of the term! We were also pleased to hear that the student rep for first year Environmental Science found the session extremely useful and asked if we could organise a session every fortnight. Since then, we have taken up this idea and look forward to carry on implementing it throughout this academic year.

When PASS schemes work well, it is often down to the flexibility of the student organiser and ability to overcome obstacles. Thomas Ganly, student organiser in Geography PASS, writes about squaring his particular circle:

The School of Geography is quite unique in the sense that it offers degrees in both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science. As a result, a Human Geographer could share more in common with a History student, than someone studying Environmental Science in the same department.

PASS student organisers meet together regularly to share ideas and I would like to give a special thanks to Tanjinna Ali and Khadhija Khanom, SO’s from the School of Mathematics who played a big part in redesigning our SBM PASS Poster. Above all, many thanks to our dedicated SBM PASS mentors for all the work done so far.

Reflecting on last semester, we experienced fluctuating numbers of mentees attending the weekly drop-in sessions, as expected of any pilot scheme. However, numbers increased steadily each session and we received positive feedback from students who attended, with mentee feedback such as: Really helpful for my presentation that I have in my next seminar. The main challenge has been to raise awareness of the scheme and its benefits among first-year students. The number of mentees who turned up increased after we put up posters in the SBM building and after the first-year course reps posted announcements and reminders on the year’s collective Facebook page. As a result, this semester, one of our main objectives is to continue raising awareness of the scheme and we plan to do so by setting up a PASS Facebook page, which will be used to communicate when and where sessions will be held along with insights into previous sessions. Furtherm more, we are trying to schedule the weekly sessions in a way that might be more suited to the schedule of first year students. Our very actively supportive Academic Coordinator will also continue to reach out to other academics in the SBM, and ask them to recommend the PASS scheme to students.

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better team, and through this we have created a great support system. The mentors have all been trained by the central PASS team in order for them to be a useful aid to the mentees. Additionally, we work closely with our Academic Coordinator, Dr Elena Doldor, to ensure that our mentoring sessions address the specific needs of first-year students within SBM. Thereby, the PASS mentoring team tries to support some of the School’s strategic teaching and learning objectives. For instance, Dr Doldor organised a training session focused on study skills by our teaching and learning objectives. For support some of the School’s strategic the PASS mentoring team tries to address the specific needs of first-year students. Our very actively supportive Academic Coordinator will also continue to reach out to other academics in the SBM, and ask them to recommend the PASS scheme to students.

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**PASS mentor certificate event**

The event this year (student committee currently working on format) will be on the afternoon of Wednesday 19 March, at 2.30. As usual, PASS alumni are always very welcome indeed – just let us know if you are coming.

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**Passion for Learning**

My duties involve project planning and tracking, and presenting weekly progress reports including some PMO activities such as resource management and project portfolio management. All in all, I am extremely happy with the exposure I am gaining.

I am building strong technical knowledge, too, which I am proactively converting into practical skills, i.e. producing data visualisations in Tableau to present to management, or designing a database to manage Microsoft licenses and produce a baseline report. I feel not only developers should be able to write scripts (UNIX, run queries (SQL), analyse data (Excel) or even program (Python, Java, etc.) As a project manager or management consultant the technical knowledge can only aid your interaction with developers, as you’ll be able to speak their language. Furthermore, when approaching deadlines maybe you’ll be able to roll your sleeves up and get into some coding yourself. It’s this flexibility that I am aiming for.

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**Student organisations**

**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:

Dr Debbie Andrews, Peer-mentoring and Transition Coordinator ( Widening Participation Team, Directorate of Marketing and Communications): d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk

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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**Finding out more**

Anyone reading this newsletter is likely already to be involved in some way 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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Finding out more continued

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