Welcome

Welcome to the eighteenth 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 (due to be updated any time now so watch out for that). All contributors receive a PASS mug...

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• Alumni news (focus on postgraduate study)
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New mentor training

It is useful for PASS mentors and organisers to have staff in their academic schools and Widening Participation to scaffold their work but it is undoubtedly a student-led scheme which is why a new injection of mentors each year is interesting as well as necessary as they bring with them new ideas for the scheme. This year, 125 new mentors were trained, across seven sessions. As usual, advisors from QMUL Careers participated to encourage students to use their time as PASS mentors as part of their skills development for future study or careers. The Careers team was coordinated by Dr Maya Mendiratta and she, Vicki Tipton and Jeff Riley delivered well-received sessions. Experienced mentors worked alongside staff as trainers as their recent ‘front-line’ experience makes PASS real to the trainees; as one student commented, they give relatable, practical advice. This year, the following organisers were involved with core training: Becky Hipkiss (English), Lois Ovie (SEMS), Leyla Noury (SBCS), Michael Khoshdel (SMS), Ryan Howells (Dentistry) and Kateryna Hrynchak (SEF). They were joined, for the PASS from the Inside sessions, by Giulia Campolo (SMS), Sneha Gopee (EECS), Jade Ng Chieng Hin (SEMS) and Catalina Romila (SBCS). Some of the mentor-trainers chose to wear the PASS tee-shirts being piloted this year.

Everyone involved in training was grateful for the generous participation of the trainee mentors, especially those who volunteered to take part in the mentoring role-play for which they were, of course, awarded PASS mugs: Carl Stanley, Liam Hartley, James Cook, Jessie Danquah, Stephen Rayner and Sean Cooper (all Physics); Conall Borowski and Jasmine Ayer (Drama); Mira Vladimirina (English); Asad Ahmed and Runa Rahman (Dentistry); Rachel Bashabe (SBM); Kinjal Dave (SEMS) and Milica Ilicic (SLLF).
PASS at Queen Mary has always relished making links with other university mentoring and peer support schemes, in Britain and internationally (look out for a national conference report from two PASS student organisers in the next newsletter). This July, four of us from QMUL, led by student organisers Ryan Hill (Physics) and Said El-Chamaa (SBCS) met up with two colleagues from Middlesex University, Simbo Ajayi, Peer Assisted Learning Manager and Aleksandra Podsiadlik, Peer Assisted Learning Scheme Assistant and – from a bit further away - Jessica Elam, Supplemental Instruction program assistant at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton and Kimberly Quinn, who also works in the Center for Learning and Student Success at Florida Atlantic University, primarily assisting with the peer tutoring program.

As well as the pleasure all of us felt at talking to fellow mentoring enthusiasts, we exchanged ideas and materials very usefully, covering the following areas: how our different schemes are structured; how our different contexts affect our schemes; mentor training and publicity/reaching students.

Remarks from participants reflected the feeling that we had all learnt from each other. Jessica commented, It was incredibly informative and wonderful to meet with you all and Simbo Ajayi added: We have been able to learn so much from you all and we are considering incorporating some of the ideas into our scheme. Ryan and Said, who ended the visit by showing everyone around the campus, also found it helpful for us at QMUL, as well as interesting. Ryan commented, Meeting our nearer neighbours and those from across the pond gave the groups the chance to share some ideas and it has really helped improve some things I have been doing in PASS since. Said felt: The meeting was very productive, plenty of ideas were exchanged about their and our schemes and useful information noted by us. Our visitors certainly felt welcome and gave some positive feedback about our way of delivering the PASS scheme.
Former mentors often opt to take part in the ‘PASS It On’ scheme, where they give informal email advice to current mentors in their own subject exploring their career options. Here, three former mentors-of-the-year in 2014, now pursuing postgraduate study, share their experiences to help current mentors with similar ambitions:

Dinitha Bulathsinghala (SEMS) writes from Bath:

I came to the UK in September 2011 to study Aerospace Engineering at QMUL. When I started the course, I had not decided exactly what area of specialisation I wanted within the field of aerospace, but I discovered in my second year that I had a special affinity towards the subject of Aerodynamics, so much so that I wanted to do a PhD in the subject straight after graduation. This was what I worked towards while I was at QMUL, in the end achieving first-class honours and a graduation prize from the Royal Aeronautical Society. Having only had a three-year Bachelor’s degree (BEng) it was always going to be difficult to be accepted onto a fully-funded PhD programme, but I got there in the end, being accepted into a competitive funding scheme with the Aerospace Engineering Research Centre (AERC) at the University of Bath, doing exactly the kind of PhD I was looking for.

I was a PASS mentor for two years and I would say being a PASS mentor was one of the best things I did at QMUL, since it meant that I was given questions by my younger peers which I may have overlooked while I was doing the same module in my previous years. It was an ideal platform for me to test myself by explaining difficult concepts to my peers and I believe that this introduction to teaching at peer level will help me during my PhD studies.

Ambika Kumar (SBCS) has stayed with us so you may still spot her across campus – see her talking about mentoring at http://youtu.be/aDBpAsmAxD8?list=PLA6of3BJ9kc6H5B10Txm9A92P9989:

After completing my Biomedical Sciences degree, I am now doing a PhD in Queen Mary on DNA repair proteins in trypanosomatid parasites. I chose to stay at Queen Mary mainly because I got so much out of the university during my undergraduate degree, that I felt there were many more opportunities I had yet to be involved in.

For those who are thinking of doing a PhD after their degree, I would definitely advise you to first determine what you are most passionate about. Not only will you be more enthusiastic when making changes in your field but it will also help you stay motivated when things are going askew. Secondly, make sure a PhD is really for you. It’s a long-term commitment so make sure you are doing it for all the right reasons. For me, I love organising my own timetable and being in charge of my own work and I love coming into the lab every day.

Leigh Whitlie (senior mentor, English) sends advice from the North:

I decided to go on to study for an MA in Renaissance Literature because I felt that there was still so much more to learn from the period. I wasn’t ready to stop studying and this route meant I could be a lot more specialised. I was very fortunate to get an offer from the University of York, the only place I wanted to go, and where I am now. And I was even luckier to be offered a fully-funded scholarship. I did decide to apply quite late on, though, in the Springtime. So my advice would be not to rush the application process, and to really think about if the University you’re thinking of applying to is best suited for you. For example, do they offer modules based around a specific subject you’re interested in? Could you spend a year (or two, if part-time) living in that city? And make good use of your academic referees at QMUL! Both of mine were fantastic and really helped me with putting my application together and giving me advice on funding etc. Good luck to anyone applying/thinking of applying!
Advice and counsel for student organisers

PASS mentors are not counsellors, nor trained to be so, so it is very important that they should know where and when to direct any student they may come across who has needs or problems beyond their remit. The annual session run for student organisers by Advice and Counselling staff, Lizzy Pollard, Senior Welfare Adviser and Terry Patterson, Senior Counsellor, is therefore invaluable and provides a useful opportunity for student organisers to come together to share ideas. One of the students attending this year said that as well as finding the session useful for work in PASS, it also sparked an interest into the world of counselling and the general concern of people’s mental well-being. Terry and Lizzy say they enjoy meeting the student organisers each year, too.
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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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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**Mathematical Sciences**

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