Welcome

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

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PASS publicity

One of the hallmarks of PASS is that while the central coordination is done through Widening Participation (Corporate Affairs), each scheme is run by and for students in individual schools, supported by a key academic.

The diversity within schemes is reflected in a new series of posters designed by Kelly Burrows in Creative Services where, within an overall series style, the PASS student organisers tailor the text to appeal to their own peers. Examples from Mathematics and SLLF are shown here.

Some academic coordinators have found the pdf version useful to email to colleagues to make them aware of PASS and recommend sessions to their first-year students.

Mentor events – dates to note

Please make a note of the following dates. (By the time mentors get this newsletter, you will also have received more information and invitations to participate via email but please contact your student organiser if still in doubt.)

Wednesday 9 February, 2pm, Francis Bancroft Conference-style ‘First-year experience summit’. Current and former mentors will take the lead on a range of topics relating to the first-year experience, then explored in group discussion. The ideas generated at this session will be developed into a PASS resource.

Wednesday 30 March, 2.30pm, People’s Palace PASS Mentor Certificate Ceremony.
Mentoring beyond PASS

It is always interesting to hear from PASS mentors about the experience they may bring with them of mentoring or mentoring-related activities in other settings. In the second of an occasional series for the PASS Newsletter, we have contributions from Sweta Mehta (Dentistry) and Sally Faulkner (SBCS).

Sweta reflects on her experience in her first year as a dental student of both the ‘Mummies and Daddies’ scheme and PASS. Her story has a particularly happy ending as Sweta is now a mentor for Dentistry in the PASS team co-led by her former ‘mummy’, third-year student Margaret Dinh (see pictured below).

As a first year dental student, I was quite scared and nervous about starting university, making friends and most importantly passing exams. One of the first events for freshers was Mummies and Daddies where I met Margaret – my ‘Bart’s mum’ - and she warmly welcomed me to the university. We got talking and she told me that she was a PASS mentor. I had absolutely no idea what PASS was but she described the aims and objectives of PASS and I decided to pop in to some of the sessions. From time to time, I attended PASS sessions and found them very useful as the mentors gave me great tips about tackling lectures, revision and dentistry as a degree.

Sweta reflects on her experience in her first year as a dental student of both the ‘Mummies and Daddies’ scheme and PASS. Her story has a particularly happy ending as Sweta is now a mentor for Dentistry in the PASS team co-led by her former ‘mummy’, third-year student Margaret Dinh (see pictured below).

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PASS schemes are always enriched by the contributions of mature students, both as mentors and mentees. Here, Sally, now a second-year student in SBCS, compares being a PASS mentor with her work supporting veterinary nurses.

Entering university as a mature student and coming from a background of full-time employment was always going to be a daunting prospect. I hoped that what I lacked in scientific education as it is currently being taught in schools, I would gain from having the benefit of skills that I had learned from my career as a veterinary nurse. I was right to be daunted: the first year was hard for me, everyone seemed so smart and every sentence uttered seemed to say, ‘Oh well, we learned that in A-levels’. I had to draw on my experience from working in often high-pressure situations to remain calm and focused, get my head down and commit!

Delighted to have done well in my exams and to make it to my second year, I felt that what I had missed in my first year was an insight from peers. I would have benefited so much from just ‘having a chat’ with a second- or third-year student about exams, lectures and coursework. So, I decided to become a PASS mentor, hoping that I would be able to pass on not only my experience of what first year was for me but also to try and pass on what I had learned from my job, especially the skills that managed to get me through that first year.

Being a veterinary nurse involves daily episodes of pressurised situations, dealing with emergencies from road-traffic accidents to anaesthesia difficulties. We are professionals trained to deal with these particular situations, we know the protocols of first aid and it is a natural environment for us to be in. Not only are we there to treat the animals but also it seems a large part of my job is supporting the worried owners, or just offering routine advice. Communication skills are of paramount importance and useful, too, as a student and mentor, although thankfully not in the exact scenarios!

Usually my job involves teaching students, basically to communicate not only my knowledge but also my adaptability to given situations, to student veterinary nurses. Student nurses, although they spend some of their education in the classroom environment, do most of their learning, I feel, when they are being mentored and supervised by a qualified nurse in practice. Similarly to PASS mentees, it is important that the student nurses are not just told what to do in any given situation but given the information and asked to work it out for themselves under guidance. Every situation is different in a veterinary practice, every mentee problem is a different one also, and working through a problem together, rather than just giving an answer, will hopefully help also with other problems not obviously related.

Sally Faulkner, facing, right, at mentor training.

Sally Faulkner, facing, right, at mentor training.
Alumni news

Noor Alam (Computer Science mentor 2009-10) writes:
I completed my time at Queen Mary with a first class in Computer Science and am now at King’s doing an MSc in Advanced Software Engineering. I am grateful for the opportunity I had with the PASS sessions, and it looks great on the CV.

Mark Bradley (SBCS mentor 2008-09), now a secondary-school teacher, writes:
Continuing to use mentoring skills in helping this year’s crop of PGCE students, and definitely interested in becoming a mentor for PGCE students myself in the future! PASS was definitely worthwhile for me.

Samia Faruq (Computer Science mentor and organiser, 2006-08)
In December, it was to good to read comments from Samia featured in press reports of FReD – the Floral Reflectance Database – which holds data on what colours flowers appear to be, to bees. FReD was developed by researchers at Queen Mary and Imperial and Samia is involved as she has an EPSRC-funded PhD studentship. She is supervised by Professor Lars Chittka in SBCS and Professor Peter McOwan in SEECS.

Caught on camera

PASS student organisers for SBCS, Serap Gonen and Martin Rosillo-Lopez were inadvertently caught on camera crossing Library Square when BBC 2’s Newsnight came to film at Queen Mary in December. They were on their way back from a PASS session and are available for autographs at future PASS sessions, twice weekly. You can see them by visiting: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/9277595.stm

Festive drop-in

Mentors dropping in to a festive end-of-semester gathering made good use of the PASS kettle on a cold December day. As well as giving feedback on PASS to develop and improve it (and eating quite a lot of cake), the group tried out a range of revision and other exercises to use with mentees. ‘Human spelling’ provided an opportunity for the uninhibited to warm themselves up. ‘Specialist vocabulary’ was particularly brain-stretching in a mixed-discipline group and challenges for definition ranged from ‘gendered discourse’ to ‘biomaterials’…
Finding out more

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:

Dr Debbie Andrews, Peer-mentoring Coordinator (Widening Participation Team, Corporate Affairs): 
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.

Biological and Chemical Sciences

**Student organisers**
Serap Gonen  
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Computer Science

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Dentistry

**Student organisers**
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Electronic Engineering

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Engineering and Materials Science

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History (pilot)

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Languages, Linguistics and Film

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Mathematical Sciences

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Physics (pilot)

**Student organiser**
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**Academic coordinator**
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Mentee comments

When mentees added comments to the sign-in sheets in Semester 1, they ranged from the casual:

**Glad I showed up**

**It helped**

to the effusive…

**Really, really helpful**

**VERY enjoyable and helpful**

**Brilliant!**

**Excellent**

**5 stars!**