Welcome

Welcome to the seventh PASS Newsletter. Please send contributions or comments for future issues to: d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk. The next newsletter will be in the Spring. Back copies can be found on the PASS webpage: http://www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/wp/pass/index.html. From this issue onwards, anyone who has contributed will be eligible to receive a PASS mug and these are, as you may know, rare and much-sought-after objects.

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PASS mentor training 2010/11

Well over 80 new mentors have already been trained this year, with another training session scheduled. These new mentors join those continuing from last year or even, in the case of some MEng students, in their third year as PASS mentors. They must enjoy it…

The ‘news from the front-line’ sessions at training given by current mentors are always popular; one student commented that this ‘allowed me to discuss freely and sort the queries I had.’ Another agreed: ‘You get a good insight from people who have actually taken part and had experience.’ Thanks to this year’s mentor-trainers: Thiaga Edirisinghe (SEMS), Melissa Gabriel (SEMS), Serap Gonen (SBCS), Sinan Halilbeyoglu (Comp Sci) and, pictured below, Nana Botwe (Comp Sci) and Rituparna Mallick (Elec Eng).

With many concerns about the job market, the sessions at training on showcasing mentoring skills on a CV are also appreciated. These were run this year by Sabrina Wedderburn and Dr Tracy Bussoli from QM Careers. One student commented, ‘I was pleased with the careers session as improving my CV originally motivated me to join this programme.’ Another felt, ‘It gave me a good insight into what employers are looking for.’

Nana and Rituparna, pleased that their session went well
New PASS schools

Joining PASS this year to run pilot schemes are the School of Physics, the School of History and the School of Economics and Finance (see pieces below). Their teams are working hard to spread the word to first-years that they are ready, willing and able to welcome them to sessions. All the PASS schemes have very distinctive flavours and it is always interesting to see the new ideas each team brings and to disseminate them in this newsletter and elsewhere.

Physics

Student organiser for PASS in Physics, second-year Emma Bedford, reflects below on a really pleasing start:

As this year is the first that Physics has joined PASS at Queen Mary, I was unsure how it would be accepted and if it would be successful at all. But it seems PASS is just what the first-years needed. All our sessions so far have had over 12 students turn up, with one session occupying over double that. The mentors have all been fantastic and have gone well past their duties by revising first-year modules themselves and looking up homeworks in advance so they know what they will be tackling in future sessions. I hope that throughout the year the sessions maintain this level of volume and quality.

History

Student organiser for PASS in History, second-year Henrik Mathiesen, hopes first-years will take advantage of an opportunity he would have liked himself:

It was my own need for such a scheme as PASS that made me volunteer as mentor. Last year, being a sometimes confused first-year History student, I did not find any arena in which I could ask second- or third-year students about my concerns about my studies. I was therefore delighted to discover that PASS would be set up in the School of History. 'This is brilliant, exactly what I needed last year,' I thought. The personal motivation of joining PASS as a student organiser was therefore strong, and it was with vigour and excitement I embarked upon training and organising sessions. Although difficulties always emerge when such a scheme is establishing itself, the History PASS mentor team has excellent mentors who are full of initiative and are all very helpful. So, please encourage any first-year History students you meet to come along! The support from the School has been invaluable, and I believe that in no time this scheme will be highly successful.

Economics and Finance

Student organiser for PASS in Economics and Finance, second-year Shrenik Parekh, reflects on why he wanted to take on the challenge

I am delighted to be the first student organiser for PASS in the School of Economics and Finance. One of the main reasons I wanted to take on the challenges of this role was because I felt passionate about ensuring that the first-year students felt that they were an integral part of the university and could cope with their new-found independence. Whilst balancing the academic and social side of university, I wanted to give these students a platform not just to assist them with their academic difficulties but also to instil confidence in them to use their strengths to their advantage and make the maximum of their time here at Queen Mary. Our plans for the coming year are to publicise and raise awareness of this pilot scheme in our School and reach higher turnouts to the weekly PASS Sessions. Along with the central PASS coordinator, the supportive academic advisers in my department and my fantastic team of second- and third-year mentors, I am sure PASS will be a great success in this school!

Dr Guglielmo Volpe, academic coordinator for PASS in Economics and Finance and Sarah Riley, the School’s student support officer, add their perspective on piloting the scheme:

PASS was newly introduced to the School of Economics and Finance this academic year. The scheme forms part of the School’s Student Support Strategy and since its launch during induction week, has proven to be a great success. We know we can speak for George Kapetanios (Head of School) and indeed the whole of the School when we say that we are delighted to be part of the scheme and are very proud of the hard work our students have put in so far. Shrenik, our PASS student organiser, in particular, has worked incredibly hard to ensure that the scheme got off to a good start. We were delighted to see the number of students who volunteered their time to become mentors. They are a dedicated team and a real asset to the School. We expect PASS to become a permanent feature and we are confident that the number of first-year students attending sessions will progressively increase and that they will find them both a useful and enjoyable part of their time at Queen Mary.
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 first of an occasional series for the PASS Newsletter, Haaris Lakhani, PASS mentor in Computer Science, reflects on supporting new staff in his part-time job at Homebase and compares it to his PASS mentoring:

The fun and laughter when training someone or helping a mentee is always present. Sharing an experience of when I was in their shoes, and stuck on the same problem, is a great moment as, when they see someone who has made it after finding things hard, they get a confidence boost and are motivated to do well.

Working as a PASS mentor has its similarities and differences to training staff in my part-time job. Firstly, training staff at work, which is a formal environment, entails a lot of responsibility. As we are providing service to the public, we must ensure that our service is the best it can be. A good foundation for customer service and logic for using tills is vital. So when training staff, I don’t just teach them what is needed, but why it’s needed. I have seen that when trainees understand the reason behind the concept, they adapt to the task much more quickly, as they use the logic they already have to support their new skill.

PASS sessions are similar as here, I do not actually give the answer but encourage and promote the understanding to derive an answer. The skill of understanding the work as well as getting the right answer is essential. I feel that trying to learn ‘parrot-fashion’ makes us think about work more as a chore than a skill. We all know how to learn things off by heart, but actually to learn the meaning behind it, and understand the concept in depth is completely different and vital.

The similarity between training staff at Homebase and mentoring in PASS, is in passing on understanding and promoting its growth. At the end of the day, we can only do so much, so rather than just passing on facts, I believe we pass on skills, to enable the mentees continually to expand their knowledge.

There are times where a PASS mentee, or a trainee at work, will ask how you do a certain task. For the trainee, as they are new, I would show them how to do the task and help them come up with a way to remember this technique. For a mentee, I would firstly try to get their knowledge out and expand it by, again, showing them a similar problem but in a different context. Once they understand it, they are always able to solve the problem. I love my job both as a PASS mentor and training staff, as I enjoy seeing the happiness on their faces when they truly understand things on their own behalf, rather than being spoon-fed them. It’s like seeing someone ride their bike without training wheels for the first time. It’s rocky, but they get better with experience and encouragement.

Alumni news

New mentors may not know about the PASS It On scheme, where former mentors offer advice to current mentors in their subject, particularly about their own experiences in applying for jobs or further study. Already this semester, advice has been given on applying for graduate-entry medicine and for an MSc. For further information on this scheme, ask your student organiser or Debbie Andrews.

Mark Bradley (SBCS mentor 2008-09) contacted us in response to the last newsletter, in June:

Good to see PASS still going from strength to strength. I’m just about to finish my PGCE, working in a school near Lewisham for the foreseeable future.

By now, term will be well underway and we hope Mark is still going from strength to strength, too!

Kosta Stoenchev (SBCS mentor 2008-10 and student organiser 2009-10) let us know he is now a medic and the happy recipient of a PASS bag and pen. He writes:

Thank you for the goodies! I am now at King’s College so they certainly bring back memories from Queen Mary.

It is good to think of that PASS bag stalking the corridors of Guy’s…
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.

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**PASS mentoring and the Drapers’ Skills Certificate**

Being a PASS mentor is (among other things) a way of building up credits for the Drapers’ Skills Certificate, described by the Learning Institute at QM, who run it, as ‘a way of helping students to become aware of the many opportunities available to them at Queen Mary that can assist them in developing transferable skills.’ To find out more about what you have to do to get the certificate, go to:

www.learninginstitute.qmul.ac.uk/ee/dsc/