PASS mentor training, 2008

New mentors (chosen by their departments) were able to opt for one of three training days this year, on the first three days of induction week. Over 90 new mentors were trained.

Planning for this year’s training took into account feedback on training from continuing mentors. This suggested that experience from the front line of mentoring and advice on how mentoring can enhance personal development and career prospects would be appreciated. We were delighted therefore that David Winter and Fiona Thurley from the Careers Service were able to join us to work with the mentors and that doctoral student Samia Faruq, former PASS mentor and PASS student organiser in Computer Science, devised and presented PASS from the inside. Both these sessions were very well received. One student said of the work with Careers, for example:

“...The advice was really useful because I was unsure how I was going to explain to employers how the scheme was ‘relevant.’”

Many comments on Samia Faruq’s talk echoed this one:

“Knowing that Samia has been through it and believes so strongly in PASS gave me more confidence.”

Of the feedback on the core training, it was good to see how many students commented on enjoying working with, and meeting, other new mentors, finding the new handbook useful and noting the clear distinctions between mentoring and tutoring. In summing up, one commented:

“It was a good mixture of past experience and practical advice and it was clear the role we needed to have.”

There was the usual contradictory feedback on some points. For example, one mentor thought there were too many breaks and another commented that there definitely weren’t enough! Perhaps we should try an evening session next year? Special thanks are due to the dentists who journeyed to Mile End and offered no complaints about it in their feedback. Thanks, too, to my colleague in Widening Participation, Michael Bennett, for all his help with training and other PASS activities.

Why produce a PASS Newsletter?

The heart of PASS at Queen Mary is to be found in the peer-mentoring sessions run by the volunteer student mentors for first-year students. This newsletter is for them but also for the wider network of people who help run or contribute to PASS. This includes academic and administrative colleagues in the departments who work in partnership with Widening Participation to run the scheme and the recent PASS alumni, who have said they will be interested to hear how we are managing without them... Has any of you been doing any mentoring since you graduated in the summer?

The aim of this newsletter is to keep everyone in touch with what is going on and to share ideas, comments and suggestions.

In this issue:

• Why produce a PASS Newsletter?
• PASS mentor training, 2008
• Sharing ideas
• Conference and research news
• Finding out more
PASS
Peer Assisted Study Support

Sharing ideas

Good ideas from mentors this semester

Some departments have set up Facebook groups to keep the student organiser in contact with mentors and encourage new first-years to get involved.

One pair of mentors found rewarding responses with sweets really got enthusiasm going among first years at their introductory session!

Good ideas from departments

Increasingly, departments find that PASS mentors are very good people to call on to be involved in induction and other departmental activities.

Agony column

Please send in your replies to this mentor:

Two students turned up just as the session had ended and asked for help. What do other people do in this situation?

and to this student organiser:

Some of my mentors do not let me know if they cannot come to a session (I was on my own this week). What should I do?

(NB please note my restraint in not rushing my own this week). What should I do?

Ongoing feedback

Thanks to Sid, PASS mentor in Computer Science, for his suggestion last year for revamping the session feedback sheets. The new model is now in practice and seems to be working a lot better. Keep them up, please, mentors: they are vital. You might even get a comment like this one from a happy mentee this semester:

“Brilliant! You guys are an inspiration to us.”

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 (central coordinator for PASS).

We have a new set of posters, produced for us by Publications and Web. If anyone would like more for display in their department, please don’t hesitate to ask. Many thanks to Jason Lizarraga and Inna Polichtchouk for their help with these.

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.

Established PASS schools and departments

PASSEvaluation focus, 08/09

The focus for our own evaluation this academic year (observing of PASS sessions, data from training and interviews) is on the development of mentors’ perceptions of the difference between mentoring and teaching.

Liaison with other HEIs

We are building links, through conferences, meetings and workshops with other universities running PASS (or equivalent) schemes. We have been cooperating usefully with Manchester and UCL in particular. From a workshop at Manchester in the Spring, we have permission to share powerpoint presentations from the academic coordinators for the Faculty of Life Sciences (Evaluation of PASS in FLS after two years - 2005-2007: Dr Maggie Foster); Computer Science (Benefits of PASS: Dr Suzanne Embury) and the School of Chemical Engineering and Mechanical Science (PASS in the CEAS Curriculum: Dr Arthur Garforth). Please email d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk if you would like to see any of these.

Mathematics project

In October, researchers from Manchester University School of Education Department of Mathematics talked to some PASS mentors in Mathematical Sciences and observed one of their PASS sessions. In liaison with Dr Francis Wright and Dr Robert Johnson (PASS academic coordinator), they were observing induction activities and became interested in PASS when hearing the introductory talk to first-years by a PASS mentor.