Welcome

Welcome to the fourth PASS Newsletter. Please send contributions for future issues to: d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk. The deadline for contributions or comments for Issue 5 is 1 February 2010.

New face for PASS

Fathea Khanum, who joined the Widening Participation team in March, is becoming a familiar face for PASS mentors. Fathea writes: “It is great to be involved in PASS. I’d have loved to participate when I was a student at Queen Mary myself (Biochemistry, 2008). I would have been very interested in the Civil Service Fast Stream scheme, too!”

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PASS mentors in pioneering scheme with Civil Service Fast Stream

Four BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) PASS mentors have been selected, via application, to be the first students benefiting from a pioneering partnership between Queen Mary and the Civil Service Fast Stream. This all began when Emily Huns, Head of Careers at Queen Mary, went to a showing of the film, PASS at Queen Mary, in the summer. She was impressed by the students on the film and those introducing it and put the central PASS coordinator in touch with Shareena Butt, Fast Stream Project Lead Manager. The selected PASS mentors are being paired with current Civil Service ‘Fast-streamers’ who will become their mentors, exploring hopes and ambitions for the future and informing them about the Civil Service Summer Diversity Internship Programme and the Fast Stream.

On 4 November, a team from the Fast Stream came to Queen Mary to meet the four PASS mentors chosen to take part: Melissa Gabriel (Medical Engineering), Juliet Omotayo (Biology with Psychology), Tanzil Mazid (Computer Science with Mathematics) and Kanar Soor (Biomedical Sciences). Kanar’s mentor could not be there so had met up with her separately but Mel, Tanzil and Juliet were delighted to be introduced to theirs and to hear about their varied – and surprisingly exciting - work as young Fast Stream Civil Servants. The advice given, including tips on tackling the tests and application procedures for the Summer Diversity Internship Programme and the Fast Stream was, as described by one of the chosen mentees, ‘absolutely brilliant’ but, as Rhonda Calder, Head of Marketing and Diversity for the Fast Stream, reminded them, ‘You are the person who can make or break your experience.’

There will be more news about this scheme in the next edition of the newsletter. For more about PASS and Careers working together, see ‘Working with Careers’ below.

Fathea consults with a new mentee during an icebreaker exercise at training

Mel, Kanar, Juliet and Tanzil with three of their Civil Service mentors (two of whom, Charlene Woolley and Ramesh Deonarine, are Queen Mary alumni)
Mentor training 2009

Three PASS mentor training sessions were held in September to accommodate the growing numbers on the scheme.

The trainers were impressed with the energy and commitment of the trainees, who all give up their own time to prepare themselves in this way. This year we were able to show the DVD, PASS at Queen Mary (funded by a small grant from Educational and Staff Development) to give the trainees an overview of the scheme. Sessions with former and current PASS mentors were, as usual, an important part of the training; as one of the trainee mentors said, in the true spirit of PASS, ‘it’s always good to hear from people who have been there.’ Former PASS mentors Samia Faruq and Chris Gungaloo offered well-honed advice and current mentors Thiaga Edirisinghe, Merott Movahedi and Mel Gabriel offered insights from the mentoring front-line.

In the picture below, Silas Mellor (SB CS) is the ‘mentor’ and Farrell Healion (Electronic Engineering), the blindfolded ‘mentee’. Silas comments: ‘This blindfolding exercise gave us a taste of what mentoring involves, and also presented a few pitfalls for us to try and avoid. This was further explored by feedback evaluation with the other mentors afterwards.’

Farrell recalls: ‘As the blindfolded mentee I felt vulnerable to what was ahead of me and then with Silas’ help I managed to overcome all the obstacles in front of me and achieve my goals.’

For most of the year, PASS is rooted in academic departments but the chance to meet people from across the university at training is always appreciated. As one trainee mentor commented: ‘I liked the fact that there were people from different departments, as all PASS sessions are run differently and it was good to see what everybody thought about their departmental PASS sessions.’

Experienced mentors would say that the trickiest, yet most important, PASS mentoring skill is to help mentees arrive at solutions and answers for themselves. To demonstrate this, trainees at this year’s session took part in an exercise where blindfolded ‘mentees’ called on the help of ‘mentors’ for guidance and confidence in working out how to reach their ‘learning goal’. The difficulties in their way were represented by objects to hand and the moment of achievement by a chocolate bar!

PASS IT ON – PASS alumni help current mentors

One of last year’s PASS central team brought back an idea from a student mentoring conference we are now adapting for PASS at Queen Mary, under the name PASS IT ON.

This involves setting up a bank of recently graduated mentors willing to give informal email advice to current mentors in their final year about how to cope with final projects and exams and entering the world of further study and work. Some are also willing to offer ideas and advice on running sessions.

So far, alumni have said they are willing to be contacted over the following areas and current mentors wanting to be put in touch should contact Debbie Andrews (d.m.andrews@qmul.ac.uk) or their student organiser(s):

- General advice on mentoring sessions and specific advice for student organisers
- Final year work in SB CS
- Final year work in Maths
- Final year work in Electronic Engineering
- Final year work in Computer Science
- Applying for a PGCE
- Applying for medical school
- Applying for Dentistry

PASS alumni reading this who are willing to join in and have not yet let us know, please get in touch.
When PASS mentors graduate from Queen Mary, they are invited to stay on the mailing list for the newsletter and to keep in touch. Their continued interest is greatly valued by staff and current mentors.

Some of them have emailed to catch us up on what they are doing now. We hope those who have PASS-ed on will continue to send in news and thoughts for this newsletter.

Shahid Ahmed (Maths) is at the start of a teaching career: ‘At the moment I am doing my PGCE course in Mathematics at the University of East London. I have just received information about my first placement; the school is located in Essex.’

Mark Bradley (SB CS) is another teacher in the making. He emails: ‘I’ve begun my Secondary Science PGCE at Goldsmiths and begin my first school placement tomorrow! I’m somewhat apprehensive... But never mind! PASS mentoring actually helped me for my future career... And gave me something relevant and worthwhile to discuss in my interview.’

Adam Deshpande (SB CS) is currently studying for an MRes (Molecular/Medical Biosciences) at Newcastle University.

Aadila Lallo (SB CS), is still at Queen Mary but has shifted campuses to study medicine at Whitechapel.

Jason Lizarraga (Electronic Engineering) has been working on the staff at Queen Mary to save up for travelling and reports that his tickets are now bought! He says, ‘I’m off mainly to Asia: India, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and China.’

Nuzhah Gooda Sahib (Computer Science) has begun a doctorate in her old department and is the Professional Skills Programme Coordinator there, a role she takes over from Samia Faruq who was also her predecessor as PASS student organiser in DCS.

Ivy Tong (Maths) emails: I have recently returned to the country after participating in a volunteering programme in Taiwan. It was definitely a great experience where I had a chance to teach people English as well as Mandarin. It was a training course as well as a volunteering programme, so I got to study further about my religion and do all sorts of volunteering work, from cooking for 500 people (and washing dishes afterwards!) to getting my hands dirty (digging grounds and throwing out industrial waste for the new temple they are building).

I believe the PASS scheme has equipped me with the skills that I need when teaching people, whom I am not familiar with. Some of them don’t even understand anything that comes out of my mouth (and I speak three languages) but at the end you see them start picking up the language and really being able to communicate with others. That is quite amazing! So yeah, PASS made me understand the importance of understanding the needs of the mentee, and how to adapt different ways of teaching when facing different students. Definitely.

Ivy Tong (with members of her old mentor team, Jennifer Gregory and Nicholas Ilman) at the PASS certificate ceremony in 2008
Working with Careers

As will be clear from some of the comments in the ‘Alumni news’ section, PASS mentors often find their experience a very useful addition to their own skill set and to their CVs when they come to make their next move after graduation.

Advisers from the Careers Service at Queen Mary (this year, Fiona Thurley and Abi Sharma) run a session to increase awareness of this at PASS training and always find the mentors a rewarding group to work with. PASS also had a stand at ‘Experience Works!’, the Careers Service’s event held on 7 October for first-year students looking for volunteering and employment opportunities on campus. PASS student organisers Rishi Shah (Maths) and Stephanie Murray (SLLF) had a steady stream of enquiries and felt it was a very useful and enjoyable evening.

What is the PASS central team?

The PASS central team is made up of the student organisers, who head up the mentor teams in their Schools or departments and scaffolded by the central PASS coordinator. They meet together a few times a year to exchange ideas, mentor each other and generate ideas for central PASS activities. They are also all volunteer mentors themselves, within their own subject teams. Ideas such as the PASS alumni advice scheme mentioned above are generated at their meetings.

Ongoing feedback

As well as Facebook groups and noticeboards set up by PASS mentor teams, are the all-important sign-in sheets, providing essential records of each session. Early comments from mentees on these sheets are promising and suggest a good year ahead. They include: ‘It was great. I’ll come again’ and ‘Nice students, very willing to help’ (perhaps that should be a new PASS slogan….?) Many thanks to mentors and organisers from academic and central coordinators for ensuring these sheets are filled in and returned.

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.

Established PASS schools and departments

Biological and Chemical Sciences
Academic coordinator: Dr Caroline Brennan; student organisers: Serap Gonen, Silas Mellor, Kostadin Stoenchev

Computer Science
Academic coordinator: Dr Tassos Tombras; student organiser: James Snee

Dentistry
Academic coordinator: Dr Sahar Mohsin; student organiser: Prina Patel

Electronic Engineering
Academic coordinator: Dr Janine Lajudie; student organisers: Helena du Toit, Merott Movahedi

Engineering and Materials Science
Academic coordinator: Professor Julia Shelton; student organisers: Mel Gabriel, Mohamed Kadir

Mathematical Sciences
Academic coordinator: Dr Robert Johnson; student organiser: Rishi Shah

Schools and departments running PASS as a pilot this academic year

Languages, Linguistics and Film
Academic coordinator: Dr Kirsteen Anderson; student organisers: Steph Murray, Jo Piddock

Plea to (a few) mentors from (some) student organisers

PLEASE stick to the mentoring sessions you have put yourself down for and don’t think a last-minute text to say you can’t come is much (or any) use!