

# Creating and Sustaining Peer Supported Learning (PSL) Groups

*Jeff Waldock and Claire Cornock, Dept of Engineering and Mathematics*

**Introduction:** Students naturally form a small circle of friends on their course. When in difficulty - academic or otherwise - this network represents their first source of support; academic staff will come second.

On the BSc Mathematics programme, first year students are gathered in tutor groups of 7-8, and work on an activity throughout semester 1. Anecdotally, we observe that strong relationships form quickly, and these groups remain close together throughout the programme, and often beyond. How can we help develop, support and sustain such **Peer Supported Learning** groups further?

## Peer Assisted Learning : BSc Mathematics

The scheme was first set up in 2007 with the support of a CPLA project and helps develop a cross-level supportive learning community.

- **First year students** work in small groups on a project through semester 1, leading to a poster, report and group presentation
  - This work gains them academic credit for a core module
  - Students gain skills in communication, team working and presentation.
  - The scheme helps new students' transition into HE
  - It begins the creation of the Peer Supported Learning group, building an active staff-student cross-level learning community
- Each group is facilitated by a **final year student** (the PAL leader)
  - A training day is held during induction week to provide guidance for PAL leaders on facilitation skills
  - The PAL leader's role is not to teach, but to guide the group
  - Weekly meetings of the group are advised, in booked rooms
  - The PAL leader gains no academic credit for their work, but does develop leadership, management and inter-personal skills
  - Most PAL leaders have been on industrial placement
- A member of **academic staff** is allocated to each group

**PAL Leaders:** *"It's certainly made me more confident speaking up in front of a group of people I don't know. It gave me a good idea of how people work together in a group too, something that you don't notice as much if you're actually working within the group"*

*"PGCE interviewers were very interested, felt it helped me gain a place. Good practice for becoming a teacher"*

*"Great for leadership questions at interview; also learning to work with different younger people. Great on CV. Not much time out of schedule but looks v good"*

*"It's a great opportunity to be able to help first year students settle into the course and uni environment"*

**First year:** *"I learnt that to meet new people isn't as hard as I thought and that we having a group of friends to bounce ideas from one another is a good thing"*

**Staff tutor:** *"final year students approached the job in a professional and responsible way and related well to the 1st years. The 1st years seemed to get quite a lot out of being able to chat to some final year students, quite apart from their project"*



PAL Leader training, induction week

Case study:



Full PAL Leader comments:

