

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL): BSc Mathematics

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Acting Mathematics Subject Group Leader and PAL coordinator



Transition into university

- PAL aims to help in the difficult phase of starting university by creating peer support groups.
(Hill and Reddy, 2007)
- Benefits including raising retention rates, helping the transition into university and improving skills.
(Hammond et al., 2010)
- This initial time at university is of particular interest as it has an effect on the rest of their programme.
(Lawson, 2015)

Higher Education

- Course level differences include the contrast between mathematics in A level and higher education, particularly regarding rote learning.
(Hoyles et al., 2010)
- Students are expected to have less dependence on staff and be more responsible for their own learning, whilst getting used to new teaching and learning styles, with fewer opportunities for support, especially from family and friends.
(Hill and Reddy, 2007)

Community of learners

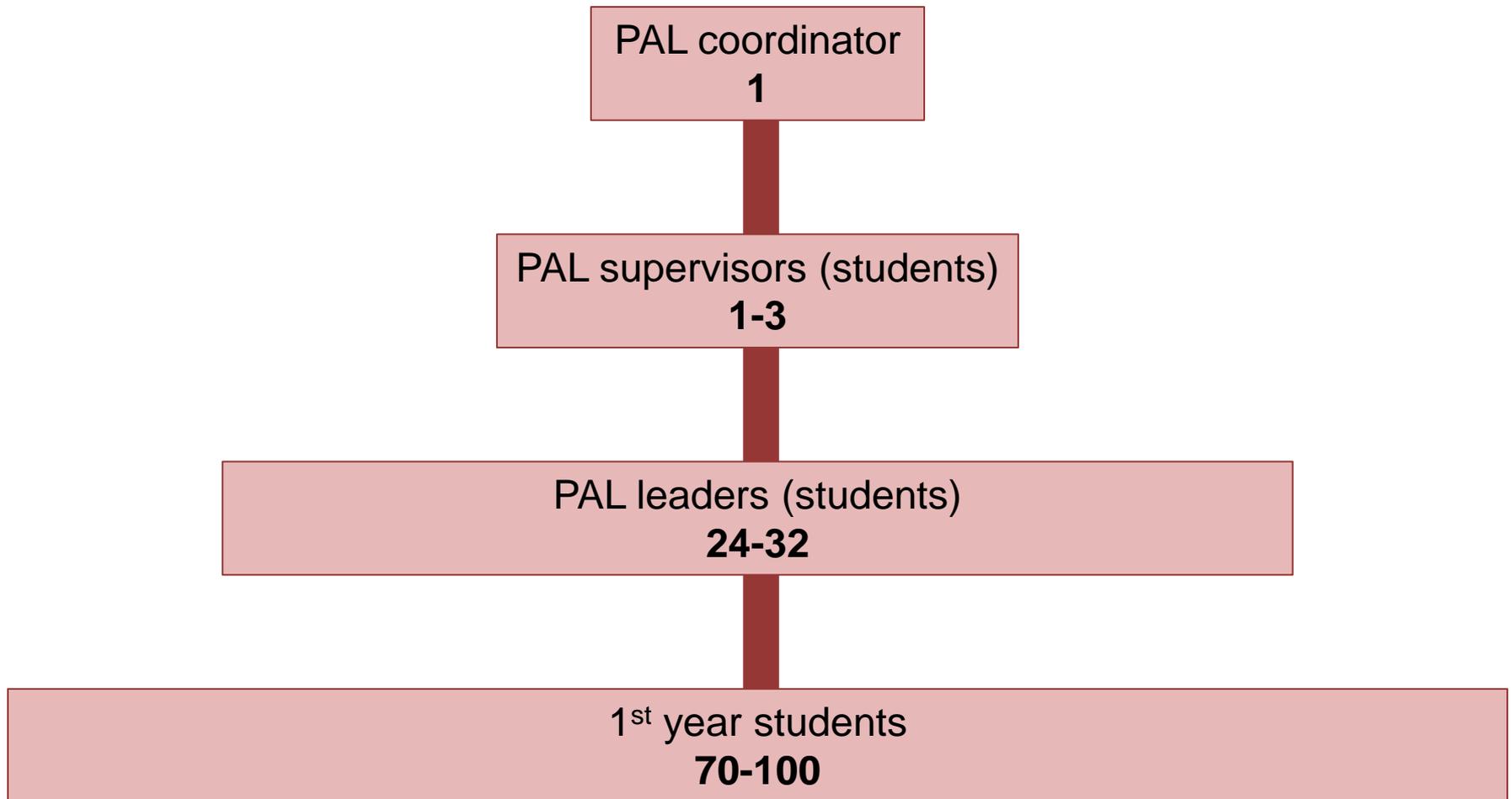
- Encouraging discussions amongst students makes a course more 'worthwhile and enjoyable'
Luk (2007)
- Group work fosters 'feelings of belonging to a community of learners of mathematics' in general
Challis (2015)
- A learning community is an 'effective educational practice', with benefits including improving students' success and increasing satisfaction
Zhao and Kuh (2004)

The PAL scheme on BSc Mathematics

- Group of approximately 5-8 students
- Slot on timetable: Tuesdays 2-3pm (semester 1 only)
- Introduced to group on day 1
- Compulsory - counts towards the mark of a module



Structure



Role of a PAL leader

- Support 1st years to work together as a team
- Encourage students to recognise what needs to be done to make progress
- Ask questions
- Guide discussions
- Note non involvement – support more contribution
- Share experiences
- Facilitate
- Be a role model

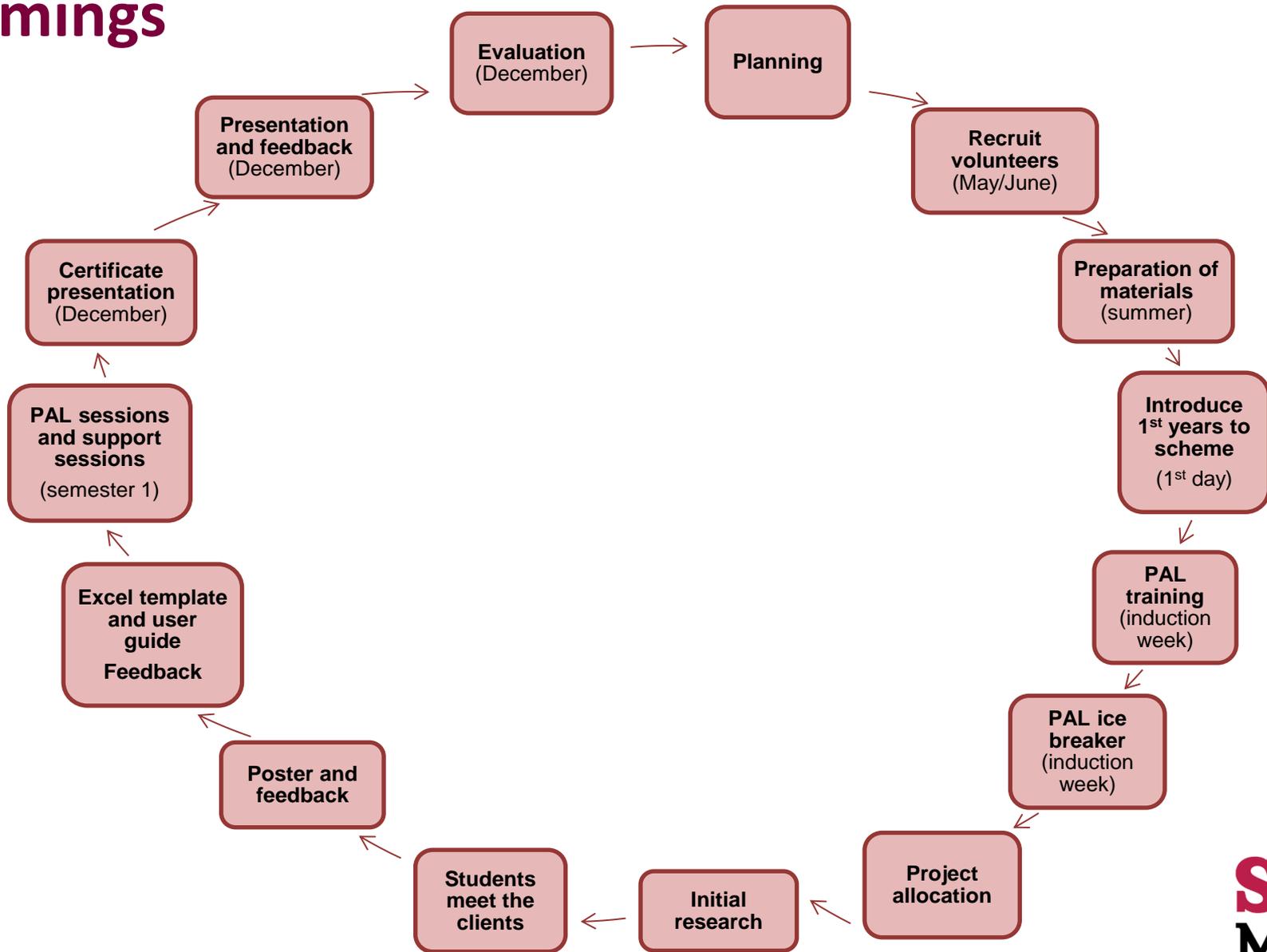
Role of a PAL supervisor

- Ensure all groups are working effectively
- Help PAL leaders deal with problems
- Suggest activities
- Discuss issues with PAL coordinator
- Lead PAL support sessions
- Collect attendance records
- Peer observe PAL sessions

Task for 1st year students in 2018/19

- Groups were allocated a work-related learning project
- The projects were from local companies, e.g:
 - Using postcode data to investigate user demographics
 - Stocktake calculations and financial reporting for a shop
 - Break-even analysis and customer analysis for new bars
- They met the client early on to discuss requirements
- Poster on background of company and requirements
- Excel template and user guide
- Presentation to client and staff

Timings



Support available for PAL leaders / supervisors

- Training
- PAL supervisors
- PAL coordinator
- Log books
- Lunch support sessions

Support available for 1st year students

- PAL leaders and supervisors
- PAL coordinator
- Log books

PAL training

- The background to the PAL programme
- Benefits to all involved
- The role of a PAL Leader and PAL supervisor
- Limitations of the roles
- 1st year assignment task
- Introducing yourself to your PAL group
- Effective group management
- Facilitation skills
- Referring students
- Qualities of a PAL leader
- Support available
- Questioning
- Preparation
- Agendas
- Closing a session
- Dealing with difficult situations
- Activities

Recognition for PAL leaders and supervisors



Recommendations

- PAL numbers to be different to academic tutorial numbers
- Think about the space they can use
- Ice breakers
- Applications: hoop to jump through
- Timetable
- Groups
- Contribution sheets

Feedback - 1st year students

*“A good way to **get to know people** on the course”*

*“Chance to settle into a **friendship group**”*

*“It made it easier to **make friends**”.*

*“Got me **talking** with other members of the class”.*

*“Very useful way to **get to know people** on the course.”*

*“I've made some **good friends** in my PAL group”*

Feedback - 1st year students

*"It allowed me to make **instant friends**"*

*"The PAL group scheme really **helped to break the ice** and **make friends early** on in the year"*

*"It especially helped people who might have been too shy to initiate conversation and I feel the whole year has benefited from it as people are **able to talk to each other easily**".*

Feedback - 1st year students

*"It helped us get to know people when we **first got here.**"*

*"I liked how we were able to work in a group straight away, allowing us to **feel comfortable** together and **help each other.**"*

*"It was good because it brought people together as we were all new and **did not know anyone.**"*

*"I enjoyed the PAL scheme and found that having a group of **people to talk to** when you first start uni as you don't know anyone."*

Feedback - 1st year students

*“Was easy to get to know people **for help** on the course”.*

*“Good to get a group of people who I know **for seminar classes** at the start of the year when I don't know anybody”.*

“The whole idea of a PAL group has been brilliant as I wouldn't have had a clue who I'd be sitting next to in any lecture if I hadn't of made those friends”.

*“It gave me chance to meet some people in a small group which is **easier than meeting them in a class.**”*

*“PAL is a great way to **meet people who are in my tutorial group**”*

Feedback - 1st year students

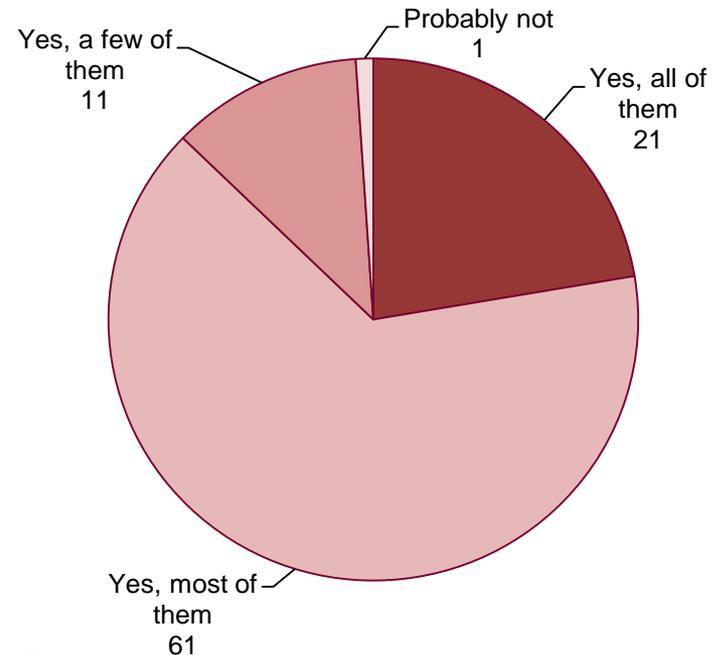
“Allowed me to make new friends whom **I hope to remain friends with**”.

“We **spend time as a group** in and out of the university”

“We **hang out** almost all the time”.

“We **socialise** in lessons and outside”

Do you think you will continue to work with your PAL group?



Feedback - 1st year students

*"I found it useful and helped me **settle** into uni."*

*"Good at times because it **makes the transition easier**"*

*"I think it's an **important part** of entering university"*

*"It helped me **settle into uni life** and has given me a good group of friends."*

*"**Eased** the transition"*

Feedback - 1st year students

*“**Very helpful** for understanding the experiences that the 3rd year students have been through”.*

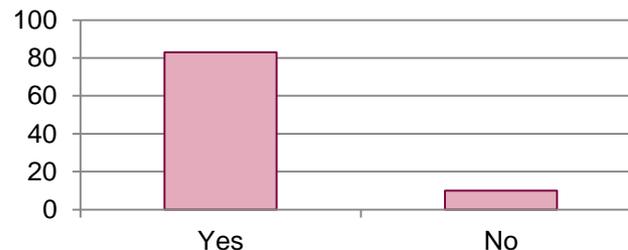
*“I liked the fact the leaders would **help you** about uni life.”*

*“I liked that we had help from a third year (PAL leader) and a teacher because they gave us **good advice**.”*

*“It was organised well and it was **nice to work with the PAL leaders**.”*

*“Final years assigned to give **advice**.”*

Did you ask your PAL leader questions about other parts of the course?



Feedback– 1st year comments

*"Improved my **team work**."*

*"It **encouraged collaboration** in a way I had not really studied at A-level, etc."*

*"Improving skills which **haven't really been covered before**"*

"Taught us poster, presentation and report writing skills."

*"Important skills being **improved**, at least for the presentation side of things."*

*"**Confidence** gained from presentation."*

Feedback - PAL leaders

*“Good opportunity to **interact with students earlier on the course**”*

*“Liked the **chance to inform the students** on placements and their final two years of study”.*

*“Got to **meet students from other years**”.*

*"Chance to help first year students in the **same way** final years helped us in first year."*

Feedback - PAL leaders

*"Found it very useful and **rewarding** to see them develop."*

"It's a good way for students to meet and integrate into university life."

*"It was good to pass on information to the first years and see if they had the **same problems** that I had in first year."*

*"It's a **good opportunity for first years** to boost their group work skills and presentation skills."*

*"I found it very **rewarding** as my help is benefitting their degree."*

Feedback - PAL leaders

*"It gave me good experience of chairing a team and felt **I learnt from them.**"*

*"I found it to be a great opportunity to share my knowledge and **develop my leadership skills.**"*

*"Found it useful and will **help me** later on with future group work."*

*"A good experience for myself. Helped to **develop** my own **leadership skills / organisational skills.**"*

*"I feel it increased **interpersonal skills**"*

Feedback - PAL leaders

*"Enlightening. Very enjoyable, much use as I have gained **experience in a teaching sense**, which is valuable to me. Very tough sometimes, but very enjoyable."*

*"The experience of **being a leader**. I can use this as an **example in applications and interviews**."*

*"I enjoyed the experience as a whole and I felt it helped want to be teachers **gain experience**."*

References

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