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# Transitioning to Higher Education: The impact of Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) for students with non-traditional qualifications

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# What is PASS?

## Peer Assisted Study Sessions

Voluntary programme of  
regular study sessions

Not remedial

Run by higher year  
students

**Key  
features**

Small-group learning

Leaders facilitate  
sessions to consolidate  
learning

Community of learning



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# Development of PASS at The University of Sheffield

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2 Pilot PASS  
schemes in the  
Faculty of  
Engineering:  
**44 Leaders**  
**320 Students**

**2014**

5 PASS schemes:  
**65 Leaders**  
**730 Students**

**2015**

7 PASS  
schemes:  
**76 Leaders**  
**945 Students**

**2016**

10 PASS  
schemes:  
**90 Leaders**  
**1145 Students**

**2017**

9 PASS  
schemes:  
**52 Leaders**  
**700 Students**

**2018**

8 PASS  
schemes:  
**52 Leaders**  
**630 Students**

**2019**

11 PASS Leaders with Associate  
Fellowship of the HEA,  
5 PASS Leaders awaiting outcome.



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# Structure of PASS at The University of Sheffield



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Foundation year,  
first or second year  
undergraduates, or  
first year PhD  
students

**Students**

Second or third year  
undergraduates,  
second or third year  
PhD students

**Leaders**

Third year  
undergraduates on  
5 schemes

**Coordinators**

Module Leader:  
Makes a  
commitment to  
facilitate PASS  
debriefs and  
manage timetabling  
of sessions

**Academic  
Lead**

301 Peer Learning  
Team:  
Three PASS  
Supervisors trained  
by Lund University

**Supervisors**



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# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Benefits to Leaders and Coordinators

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Initial training from PASS Supervisors at 301:

- Covers how to facilitate a session, not teach
- Setting agenda and Interactive activities to engage participants

Requires revision of first year topics – enhances knowledge

Eligible for HEAR recognition

Employability skills:

- Learn to discuss complex concepts in a simple way
- Manage time when arranging and running sessions
- Collaborative working with another Leader and the PASS team
- Responsibility for designing sessions and recording attendance
- Insight into academia via the Academic Lead

Supported in application for AFHEA recognition, bespoke careers events focussing on how skills learned through PASS can be applied after graduation.





# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Benefits to Leaders and Coordinators

### Feedback from Leaders on the benefits:

*“Meeting new people and developing communication skills”*

*“leadership, problem solving and having to think on your feet, staying positive: sometimes students are really unprepared or unmotivated, so trying to get them feel less anxious about the course and uni life”*

*“I've improved my communication skills as you actually have to learn to listen to what the participants are asking and then deliver a reply that helps guide them to the answer rather than just saying the answer”*

*"I have really enjoyed getting to know students in Level 1, and being able to pass on things that I have learnt from my own experience.”*





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# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Benefits to Academic Lead

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- Formative feedback on lecture content students are finding challenging, which can be addressed quickly
- Increase in confidence for Level 1 participants – fewer anxious students
- PASS creates a social community for new students which can help when a module involves collaboration and group work
- Provides a network through which Module Leaders can transfer key information with help of Leaders and Coordinators





# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Benefits to Participants

- Supported in the transition into HE - a friendly face
- Can work with peers to revise lecture content and clarify knowledge through sharing with each other
- Gain insight from higher-level students about how Level 1 basics will be applied in more advanced modules later
- Ask questions to a fellow student that they may not feel confident enough to ask a lecturer, hear from someone who has completed the module
- Can get tips on a wide range of topics, from where to go in Sheffield and social activities, to applying for summer placements or considering a year in industry/abroad, to what to expect on the day of an exam





# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Benefits to Participants

### Feedback from Participants on the benefits:

*“makes me more confident in my ability to be able to consolidate information from lectures I'd otherwise be doing on my own ”*

*“The ability to work with 2nd and 3rd years students on a module they have already done”*

*“Being able to see how to work through problems correctly”*

*"The help it gave me into learning more about the material and the structure of the course in a relaxed social atmosphere.”*

*“I loved my Pass leaders and that we've become friends.”*



# PASS at The University of Sheffield

## Considerations when Running PASS

Timetabling PASS sessions – finding one hour where both Level 1 and Level 2/3 students are free can be a challenge!

Room scheduling is also difficult on an ad hoc basis, and reduces attendance if there isn't a fixed location each week.

The support of an engaged Academic Lead is vital

Weekly sessions are not always required, and we also run similar peer-learning training and support for more targeted sessions with Leaders, eg:

- When module content becomes more applied
- Prior to Year Abroad
- Support in writing the Literature Review for PhD students



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# Transitions into HE

## Students with non-traditional qualifications

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**School of Nursing –**  
BMedSci in Health and Human  
Sciences, ~70% of students with non-  
traditional qualifications.

Cohort: 60 students, 6 PASS Leaders

Weekly sessions, content requested by  
participants from any part of the current  
curriculum.

**Department for Lifelong Learning –**  
Foundation years for mature students  
without required entry qualifications.  
Pathway for Biomedical Sciences.

Cohort: 12 students, 3 PASS Leaders,  
2 PASS Coordinators

Three sessions per semester, topics  
agreed in advance, focus on transition  
and study skills, not subject knowledge.

**Both courses have a higher proportion of BAME, mature  
and/or widening participation students**



# Transitions into HE

## Students with non-traditional qualifications

### **School of Nursing –**

Student feedback on transitions:

*“They asked if I had any questions regarding accommodation, different type of lectures to look out for, different places to live and socialise.”*

*“Bringing me out of my shell and becoming more confident”*

*“Asking any questions that I was too scared to ask from lecturers.”*

### **Department for Lifelong Learning –**

Student feedback on transitions:

*“They are willing to answer any questions I throw at them, especially about biomed years 1, 2 and 3!”*

*“We had a tour with the leaders which makes us more familiar with the department.”*

*“I was able to speak to other people from different courses and ages and I could apply this whilst I’m socialising.”*



# Transitions into HE

## Students with non-traditional qualifications

### Benefits of the 3-session model:

- More scalable
- Less administration
- More realistic for students with a busy timetable
- Focussing on study skills and transitions, not subject.
- Brings together an academic lead from UG and Foundation

### Challenges of the 3-session model:

- Small cohort, difficult to reach critical mass
- New model – yet to build a reputation
- Difficulty recruiting foundation pathway students to PASS in following year
- PASS Leaders may not have a similar background
- Difficult to get the whole team together for debriefs



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# Any Questions?

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<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/301/peerlearning>