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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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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>