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**Ask the Experts Toolkit**



Devised and written by Nick Russell

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# Introduction

## What is Ask the Experts?

Ask the Experts involves training pairs of student leaders who have been through a particular experience or transition (i.e. starting university or going on placement), to deliver a one-off workshop to students going through, or preparing for, the same experience or transition.

**All resources are contained in this document apart from the training presentation itself and facilitators script which are in separate documents.**

## Why is it helpful?

It creates a developmental opportunity for students (Procter, 2012) to deliver a one-off workshop and provides an additional, lived, perspective to more junior students that as staff we cannot (O'Brien, 2014).

This model facilitates learning for both student leaders and participants. The former receive training to allow them to design and deliver their workshops and the latter benefit from the experiences and reflections of their more experienced peers.

Planning for the sessions is supported by staff but all the content is generated and delivered by students. The model draws on best practice from mentoring and PASS/PALs to deliver similar benefits in a condensed format.

## What have been the common features in workshops?

Although the subject matter and delivery techniques vary greatly between workshops there are often common themes:

* Introductions and warm-up activities.
* Myth busting and top tips.
* Providing a safe space for students to ask questions.
* Leaders talking about their experiences.
* Exploring possible options/approaches to a situation.

## Feedback from students who have attended sessions

"It was students talking about their achieved experiences not just a lecturer telling you about how good it is to do a placement. We covered a lot and it was very useful hearing about the students' experience"

"Very informative, good to have advice from students…makes it feel less daunting"

O'Brien V, (2014, September). To what extent does peer to peer support encourage second year students to actively seek placements? Paper presented at Aset Annual Conference; Placement and Employability Professionals' Conference, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne

Procter, C. (2012). Peer mentoring to secure student placements, 2(2), 121–131. https://doi.org/10.1108/20423891211224603

# Logistics

## Targeting support

As with the introduction of any new support, it is important to identify a point in students' university journeys where they would particularly benefit from additional guidance and, in this case, the lived experience of other students. You may already be aware of times where students find the course particularly stressful or challenging but you may still want to consider polling final year students about when they would have most appreciated hearing from students who had already been through an aspect of the course.

**Stress points for students will naturally vary but common times include:**

• Starting university

• Moving up a level in the course

• Choosing modules

• Placements (deciding/applying/succeeding/returning from)

• Dissertations/research

## Practical considerations

Once you have identified the point in the course you wish to support it is important to think about some of the practicalities before investing any more time:

### Is there appropriate staff time/resource to facilitate this additional support?

It is advised that there is at least one academic member of staff involved and one administrator to assist with scheduling and communication.

### Do you have students on the course who could act as leaders?

These are students who have been through the experience/transition in question. It is important to communicate with potential leaders early on in the planning process to ensure there is an enough interest from students to make workshops viable.

### How are the workshops going to fit into student's timetables?

Are there sessions or events that already take place where workshops could be added? (inductions/careers' days etc). It is important to consider timetabling from the perspective of leaders and participants as both must be free at the same time.

### When are you going to train the student leaders?

It is important to identify a date and time for training early on so when communicating with prospective leaders you can ensure they are able to attend both the training and the workshops.

### Are you able to book rooms for the date and time identified?

Multiple workshops can take place in the same room depending on size/layout and the likely number of participants. It is important for both training and workshops to have cabaret styled rooms (group tables) or where furniture can be pushed to the side to set the correct tone and help with facilitation.

# Training and Session Planning

A lot must come together in this session, so it is important that it is carefully planned and delivered. Student leaders should generate the content, but staff should facilitate the discussion around this as well as drawing out and providing examples of workshop facilitation tools and techniques. The key elements of the session should be:

## Organising leaders into pairs

Leaders deliver workshops in pairs to increase the breadth of experience they can offer participants and to make the prospect of facilitating a workshop to a group of other students feel less daunting. If leaders have a range of different experiences (i.e. different types of placement or provider), it is important to group similar experiences together as student participants will be keen to attend a workshop where the focus is on the area they are interested in.

## Exploring what their experiences were like

Exploring with leaders what their thoughts and feelings were at each stage (pre/during/post) of the transition/experience in question and what they would advise others to do/not do in similar situations.

## Brainstorming facilitation tools and techniques

Discussing with leaders what they feel the features are of an engaging workshop and the types of activity they feel participants would respond well to. Staff facilitating the training should endeavour for as much of this content to be generated by leaders but be prepared to develop their responses.

## Allowing time and providing support to leaders in planning their workshops.

This will involve leaders deciding on the content they want to cover, and which activities are best to facilitate this. They will also need to consider what stationary and printing they will need. Leaders may require some time after the training session to develop resources so ensure to inform them of who to contact regarding printing. Any stationary or printing required should be provided by the course.

## Asking leaders to either input and/or assist with promotion and evaluation

At the session it is helpful to discuss with leaders the best way to advertise/inform participants of the sessions. You may also wish to discuss what methods you plan to use to evaluate the sessions and if you want any input from the student leaders in terms of ideas or assisting with the gathering of this information.

# Supporting Delivery on the day

Leaders will be responsible for the delivery of the workshops, but staff have the important role of creating the right conditions for success.

## Ensure rooms are laid out correctly

Room layout plays a vital part in setting the correct atmosphere for workshops. The room should be laid out in group tables or as a semi-circle of chairs depending on the activities the leaders have planned. It is also important to check that AV equipment is working properly, and leaders know how to operate it if they are planning to use it.

## Check that leaders have everything they need

Student leaders should have identified the stationary and printing they require before the day, but it is still important to check in with each pair on the day to ensure they feel ready and have everything they need. If you are asking leaders to take a register or gather feedback you need to ensure they have the materials to do so.

## Greet and organise participants

It is important for staff to be on hand on the day to greet participants and signpost them into the correct sessions if you are running multiple sessions in tandem.

* If participants have pre-selected or have been pre-assigned to a workshop staff should have copies of these lists on the day to aid with signposting.
* If you have asked participants to sign up to the event but not a specific workshop it is important to collect all of them together and organise them.
	+ If all workshops are on the same subject, then simply do this by numbering students 1,2,3 etc up to the number of workshops.
	+ If the workshops are different (i.e. different placement providers / locations etc) briefly describe each session and ask students to select the session most relevant to them.

## Leave the room

Once workshops are underway it is time for you to leave the room. (Do inform leaders where you, or another member of staff, can be found should they need anything). This can feel like a daunting step and there is a temptation to linger at the back to see what happens in the session. It is crucial however that you do leave as it avoids leaders feeling observed and allows participants to ask questions and make comments, they might be unprepared to voice in the presence of staff.

## Debrief

After the workshops it is important to meet with the leaders to see how the sessions went and if they have any immediate feedback on the experience. It is also helpful to ask the leaders if any specific topics/concerns were common in the sessions. If there were common concerns these should be fed back to the course team to see if there is anything staff can do to clarify information or support students differently.

# FAQs

## Can Ask the Experts be delivered online?

There is no reason Ask the Experts couldn’t be delivered online, but this guide writes from the perspective of delivering in person. It is also our view that in person sessions are likely to generate greater engagement and rapid rapport building than is possible online, especially due to the one-off nature of the intervention.

## Is there any support available to help introduce Ask the Experts?

This toolkit should provide you with all the information and resources you need but the Skills Team are always happy to meet to answer any questions and provide further guidance.

## Do I have to call the session "Ask the Experts”?

Absolutely not! This is purely a name we use to describe the model. We would actively encourage you to refer to the sessions by something related to your course and the nature of the transition.

## Who will run the training?

Depending on availability, training sessions can be delivered by members of the Skills Team but could also be delivered by staff locally. If the Skills Team are not available to deliver the training, we are always happy to meet with you to help you prepare appropriately.

## Will I need to be present at training?

We strongly advise that at least one member of department staff is present at the training session. This is to allow leaders to ask logistical questions about the workshop sessions/event and agree the resources they will need. It is also an incredibly valuable opportunity to hear first-hand about the experiences of the student leaders as you will not be present at the workshops themselves.

## How much time does training take?

As leaders are preparing to deliver a one off, one hour workshop the level of training required is relatively limited. The Skills Team deliver this training as a 2–3-hour session. It is important to reserve a minimum of half an hour within this to allow leaders to plan their sessions, ask questions and identify what resources they need.

## How big should workshop groups be?

Leaders have successfully worked with group sizes varying from six to twenty. This will mainly be determined by cohort size divided by number of workshops. Ideal numbers are between ten and twenty as this is large enough to generate healthy discussion but not become unmanageable.

## What's next after the workshops?

This model was designed to be a one-off activity to minimise the time commitment for staff, leaders and participants whilst offering a genuinely worthwhile experience for all involved. You may want to discuss with leaders if they would be willing to share their email addresses with participants or set up a collective social media group to answer any follow up questions.

## Are there further ways of increasing the impact of this support?

Most workshops will produce resources; whether this is handouts that the leaders have prepared in advance or artefacts (flipcharts/ post-its) created in sessions. If you feel it is appropriate you can look to capture these and display them. We strongly advise against recording sessions themselves as students are less likely to be open with their questioning if they think tutors may watch the recording back.



# Ask the Experts Checklist

| Actions | Completed?  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Identify a point in the university journey where students would particularly benefit from the lived experience of other students. |  |
| 2. Discuss and agree which staff will be involved in supporting the workshops and what they will be responsible for |  |
| 3. Poll prospective leaders to confirm there are students willing to run the workshops. |  |
| 4. Determine a time/date where workshops would fit into potential participants and leaders timetables (existing/new event). |  |
| 5. Agree who is going to deliver the training and set a time/date. |  |
| 6. Book appropriate rooms for the training and workshops. |  |
| 7. Deliver training to leaders - ensure to discuss promotion, evaluation and the resources leaders require to facilitate their workshops.  |  |
| 8. Determine if participants will need to book onto the event or not, what system will be used and if bookings will be general or for specific workshops. |  |
| 9. Develop and distribute promotional information to participants.  |  |
| 10. Prepare evaluation materials and workshop materials for student leaders. |  |
| 11. On the day of the workshops ensure rooms are laid out correctly, leaders have everything they need and participants are directed/ assigned to workshops. |  |
| 12. Immediately after the workshops debrief with the leaders to see how the workshops have gone and if any immediate feedback/themes emerged. |  |
| 13. Conduct post session evaluation if this was not conducted at the end of the workshops.  |  |
| 14. Inform other course staff of any trends/key findings from the workshops and evaluations and follow up as appropriate. |  |
| 15. Communicate with leaders and participants to see if they would be interested in a more informal follow-up session to the workshops. |  |



# Information for Prospective Leaders

## Ask the Experts Leaders

### Summary of the role:

Hearing about the experiences of, and being able to ask questions to, students who have “been there and done that” can be transformational for students. As a workshop leader you will be paired with another leader to plan and deliver an interactive workshop for students preparing for (insert transition /session focus here).

Supporting other students is an extremely rewarding process and allows you to develop your own skills whilst supporting others:

* Improved communication and facilitation skills.
* Increased confidence.
* Chance to support other students.
* Opportunity to attend facilitation training.
* Evidence of skills that employers want.
* Ideal experience for Hallam Award applications.

\*\*\*\*\* insert specific expectations for your area \*\*\*\*\*

### Skills/Experience Required

No prior experience required. Leaders should be approachable, reliable and be willing to share their experiences.

### Benefits to leaders

Leaders will receive training and \*\*\*insert other incentives here\*\*\*. The experience you will gain from supporting others will help improve your interpersonal skills, confidence and can be used as one of your skills when applying for the Hallam Award.

Graduate attributes developed as part of the role include: motivation and engagement, social responsibility, integrity and professionalism, communication.

### Training

Leaders will receive training which includes:

* Icebreakers and facilitation techniques.
* Audience expectations.
* Reflection on own experience and what you wish you had known.
* What the features of an effective workshop are.
* Session planning.

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# Audience Personas

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| Context/ background |  |



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Motivation for attending the session  |  |
| Their ideal experience of the session  |  |
| Possible frustrations with the session  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What would their quote be of an ideal experience? |  |

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# Icebreakers

When icebreakers work well they have a profoundly positive impact on the rapport of a group and help to create an engaged and active learning environment. This success can never be guaranteed but through proper planning, consideration and genuine enthusiasm from the person facilitating the activity the odds are greatly increased.

## Things to think about when choosing an icebreaker:

### Does the activity you have in mind suit your group?

Think about your group size, the size/layout of the room and how well the group already know each other. If you already know each other’s names you might want to try and learn a little bit more about each other.

### Is there a way of making the activity relevant to your subject area/session focus?

Changing what question, you ask allows you to change the focus of the activity. The most common questions are focused on getting to know each other but you might want to use your icebreaker to find out people’s opinions or existing knowledge on a subject.

### Sometimes the word "icebreakers" is enough to put people off!

Alternative synonyms include: introductions, networking or warm up activity.

## Example icebreakers for small groups (3-9 people).

All the examples for small groups can be done in person or online.

### Getting to know

Requires: a list of questions and a bag of Starburst sweets. You could use coloured or numbered cards instead of sweets and if you want to make the activity even more relaxed just let people chose the question they would like to answer.

1. Display a list of questions on a projector, flipchart/whiteboard or sheet of paper
2. Each person takes a sweet or a card and answers the matching question.
3. If you want to play for longer skip introductions and just answer another question.

Green – Hi my name is X and my favourite TV/streaming series is…

Orange – Hi my name is X and my favourite thing to eat for breakfast is…

Red – Hi my name is X and my favourite animal is…

Purple – Hi my name is X and the country I would most like to visit is…

You can play this icebreaker online by sharing the questions and getting people to chose what question they want to answer or by using a random number generator.

### Introducing each other

1. Pair people up in twos in person or in separate break out rooms online.
2. Give them a short list of questions to ask each other such as where they are from and things like to do/watch/eat, do they have any hobbies/skills etc.
3. Ask each pair to briefly interview each other. If doing this online, you could do this using breakout rooms.
4. When the whole group is together either in person or in the same virtual room each person introduces the group member they interviewed.

### Alliterative name game

1. Take it in turns to introduce yourselves and add an alliterative adjective to your name i.e. Hi I am Methodical Mick / Delightful Deeba etc.
2. Each person must say everyone else's name and adjective that has gone before them before introducing themselves.

This is an icebreaker with long lasting effects as it helps you remember each other's names and provides positive nicknames and associations. No changes needed to play online.

### If I were a . . . (works with any sized group)

1. Each person takes it in turns to introduce themselves to the group and say what they would be and why if they were, for example: an animal, a tv/film/computer game character, a historical figure, a household object, chemical element etc
2. If you want the activity to go on longer than one round provide a number of potential subjects or ask groups to generate their own.

This activity is most effective when tailored to the course/situation i.e. sports students

might be asked which famous athlete they would be and why. No changes needed to play online.

## Example icebreakers for larger groups (10+ people)

All of these examples can only be completed in person.

### Group web

Requires: a ball of string

Arrange the group so they are stood in a circle.

The first person introduces themselves and give their answer to the agreed question (favourite film, holiday, band etc), a response to the discussion topic or something they know about the topic the group is discussing.

Keeping hold of the end of the string they throw the ball to someone across the circle from them and the activity continues until everyone has had a go.

It is important to keep reminding people that they need to keep hold of part of the string before throwing it on to create a web.

Once everyone has had a go and the web is fully formed you can explain to people that the web they have created is a visual representation of the way groups network/work together and how it would look totally different if someone was missing/not included.

You can play this online by writing peoples answers on a virtual whiteboard and asking people to nominate the person who will go next to give their answers.

### Group map

1. Stand in the centre of the room and explain that the room is a map of the world, with Sheffield in the centre. You will need to indicate which way is North.
2. Instruct people to arrange themselves in the room relative to Sheffield as to where they are from.
3. Once everyone is in position go around the map asking people to introduce themselves, saying where they are from and provide one interesting detail about their hometown or city.

To play this icebreaker online share a blank virtual whiteboard, mark where the UK is and then ask each person to put their initials on the whiteboard to show where they are from and then go round and ask people to introduce themselves.

### People Bingo

Requires: printed grids and pens.

1. Give each person a question grid and a pen
2. Instruct people to find someone in the room who identify with the statements on the grid. They must find a different person for each statement.
3. Either provide a time limit or turn it into a competition to see who can complete their grid the fastest.

This is a fast paced activity which allows people to rapidly exchange information with each other. Because the information people exchange is already provided it does not require them to come up with topics themselves which some people find difficult. This activity cannot be done online.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Likes cats better than dogs | Doesn't know what sort of job they want | Wants to work abroad | Has watched one or more Star Wars films |
|  |  |  |  |
| Listens to podcasts | Plays a sport | Watches the news everyday | Likes computer games |
|  |  |  |  |
| Can name three marsupials | Watches Eurovision | Can juggle | Doesn't drink coffee |
|  |  |  |  |
| Was born in another country | Has met someone famous  | Plays an instrument | Can speak more than two languages |
|  |  |  |  |

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# Workshop Planner

Names of Leaders:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Timing** | **Activity** | **Description** | **Stationary required** |
| **0 mins** |  |  |  |
| **10 mins** |  |  |  |
| **20 mins** |  |  |  |
| **30 mins** |  |  |  |
| **40 mins** |  |  |  |
| **50 mins** |  |  |  |

**Notes:**

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# Example Workshop Planner

Names of Leaders: Student A and Student B

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Timing** | **Activity** | **Description** | **Stationary required** |
| **0 mins** | Post-it note questions.Introduction to us. | On entry write down one worry/what they want from the session.What we did, issues we had | Post-it notes and pens. |
| **10 mins** | Icebreaker. | String game - students say name, course, type of placement/area(s) or interest. | Ball of string. |
| **20 mins** | Respond to post-its. | Group responses together by theme, read aloud and respond to questions/worries. |  |
| **30 mins** | Types of placement brainstorm. | Break students up into two groups, one leader work with each group and then feedback. | Marker pens and flipchart paper. |
| **40 mins** |  Finish brainstormTop Tips | Present top tips |  |
| **50 mins** | Q&A and signposting to support available | Take questions from students and show where to find support online on pc |  |

**Notes:**

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# Facilitation Techniques

When brainstorming facilitation techniques with the leaders it is helpful to draw their attention back to the concerns captured earlier in the session. To generate discussion and ideas you may need to ask supplementary questions such as:

* How do you think we could get students talking about this topic?
* Is this something you want to explain to students, or do you want them to construct their own ideas/solutions?
* Could you split the students up into smaller groups, pairs, or individual reflection?
* Are there any of the techniques we used in this session so far that you think would be helpful? (Prompt students to think about how each section has been facilitated)

Leaders will often come up with their own ideas and this is very much what we want to encourage. If leaders struggle to think of anything or only come up with a handful of ideas, then you may want to remind them of / suggest some of the following:

Icebreakers

It is important to ask leaders what they think of the example icebreakers and if they can think of any icebreakers they have done which they particularly liked. Rapport building is important and the most common use of icebreakers, but they can also be used to generate questions or explore the expectations of participants by simply changing the questions asked.

## Anonymous questions

It is hard at the start of a session to have the confidence to ask questions in front of others, especially if it is on a subject you are feeling anxious about. Asking students to write down questions on post-it notes or submitting them via an anonymous survey app/link, collecting them in and then going through the responses can be a great way of addressing what students really want to know.

## Pairs/group generated responses

Have students break into smaller groups for discussion and then feedback their thoughts to the whole group. Another effective technique is called Think, Pair, Share. Students are instructed to initially think on their own, after a brief time they should turn to the person next to them and discuss their thoughts and lastly they are asked to share their thoughts (as a pair) with the group.

## Sub-group flipcharts

This technique helps to maximise the impact of discussion. If there’s time groups can feedback and if not sheets can be photographed and circulated after the session. This technique developed by:

* Asking each group to tackle a different situation/question and then feeding back to the whole group so more ground can be covered.
* Swapping sheets with another group half-way through the activity in order to either add to what has already been written or to try and answer the questions posed by the first group.

## Sharing experience/top tips

There are questions students want the answers to, but they also don't know what they don't know. Leaders sharing their lived experience and/or providing top tips can be invaluable and are often the aspects of session's student find most helpful.

## Opportunity for Q+A

A very simple technique but often very effective. Two things that help with this are giving student's time to think on their own/in pairs before taking any questions and waiting to near the end of the session as students have had time to build up confidence.