Developing Independent learning in Biomedical Science Students Through Peer-Assisted Learning

Summary

The Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme has been running since September 2014 with enthusiastic involvement of 21 final year PAL Leaders and Common Year One (CYO) student interaction. PAL Leaders have been involved in several CYO sessions over the past two semesters. Preliminary evaluation of the programme has suggested the CYO students who participated have benefitted by improving skills and settling into University life. It is also clear the CYO students are keen to have more involvement of PAL Leaders in their learning around study skills and how to navigate University life. The PAL Leaders also feel they have benefitted by improving key transferable skills.

PAL sessions

Since our last report the PAL leaders have contributed to a Writing Skills workshop run by the English Language Centre on 17th-19th November 2014, and have led Research Lab Tours for 134 CYO students on Research Day on 2nd December 2014.

In addition the PAL Leaders organized and ran a Research Symposium on 3rd December 2014, attended by approximately 40 CYO students, where 3rd/4th year students talked about the research they had done during extra mural years, summer projects or third year research projects (see attached flyer). At the end of the session many students stayed behind to ask questions of the individual presenters. An organizer tells us that since the event he has ‘bumped into’ several of the CYO students who attended and they have expressed their thanks for running the session, and as a direct result of the advice given one of these students has secured a summer placement in a lab (Jake Stoddart, pers. comm.).

In semester 2 the PAL Leaders have designed and delivered four 1.5 hour workshops for CYO students on 2-6th February 2015, attended by ~75 students in total. The PAL Leaders report that the sessions were well received and CYO students who attended were very interested to have input from the PAL Leaders. The CYO students have also specifically asked for a PAL Leader session on module choices. As a result the PAL Leaders will present a stall at the Biomedical Sciences module advising social on 4th March 2015.

Programme evaluation

Mr Hamung Patel has used questionnaires and focus groups to evaluate the programme.

For Common Year One (CYO) a Survey Monkey questionnaire was distributed by email to all CYO students at the end of Semester 1. This produced 6 responses. Despite the low response rate, it is clear that the students feel taking part in sessions involving PAL Leaders has improved their communication skills, and their interaction with the PAL Leaders has helped them understand the pressures of balancing work and personal time at University. The CYO students who responded are also keen that there should be more involvement of PAL Leaders with study skills learning, potentially in the form of additional workshops. However not all students felt the scheme had been explained sufficiently to them; they also felt some sessions would benefit from having more PAL Leaders involved.

Another questionnaire will be circulated at the end of Semester 2 to gather more data from the CYO students.
Mr Patel also ran a focus for PAL Leaders at the end of Semester 1 to gather information on how the scheme had impacted them and ideas on how the scheme might change or improve in the future. Four PAL Leaders attended and gave useful insight into the programme and how it had impacted them. The PAL Leaders commented on how being involved in the scheme had improved their communication skills, time management skills and team-working skills. They all enjoyed interacting with the first years and felt they had helped the students settle into University life. In the future the PAL Leaders felt the scheme could be extended to target second years too.

A further focus group will be held with the PAL Leaders at the end of Semester 2.