Quality Assurance in PAL
Boundary setting, observations & feedback

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Overview

- Overview of PAL at Bournemouth
- Boundary setting
- Observations of PAL sessions
- Questions and discussion
Overview of PAL at Bournemouth University

- We have trained 700+ students to be PAL Leaders
- This year 150 Leaders support c.1,650 first years students who have access to PAL
- PAL runs on almost all FT undergraduate programmes in 5/6 academic Schools
- Quality Assurance Agency’s Institutional Audit in December 2008, PAL identified as one of 4 instances of good practice providing additional support for 1st year students and developmental opportunities for leaders
- PAL forms a key part of the University’s Educational Enhancement Strategy 2007/8-2011/12: which commits the University to ensuring that by 2012 “Peer assisted learning is provided for all first year undergraduates” (p3).
5 intended outcomes for PAL

PAL is intended to help students:

- integrate quickly to university life;
- improve their learning and study skills to meet the demands of their programme;
- enhance their understanding of the subject matter of their course through collaborative group discussion;
- prepare better for assessed work and examinations;
- gain insight into the requirements of their programme, programme direction and their lecturers’ expectations from the perspective of a more experienced student from the year above.
Initial Training for PAL Leaders

Small group discussions with focus on:

- What PAL is all about
- How to run planned, structured and purposeful PAL sessions
- Activities and techniques PAL Leaders can use to encourage small group interaction in their PAL sessions
- Practising the above in simulated sessions
- Meeting with experienced leaders from previous years
- Issues relating to the boundaries of their role
- Planning time for their first PAL session
- Assertiveness/working with international students
Boundary setting activity 1

- Idea taken from mentor training
- Essential for Leaders to recognise the various points at which their responsibilities end and their students’ responsibilities begin
- 14 incidents, based on real problems, which address:
  - Assignments: content, structure, referencing, quality, etc
  - Handling discussions on course content
  - Who decides what is discussed in PAL?
  - Leader’s behaviour towards the group and its members
Boundary setting activity 2

Some typical questions we as PAL Leaders were asked:

- Is PAL compulsory?
- Can we look at the assignments you did last year?
- Can you check our assignment for quality?
- These “assessment criteria”, what is that all about?
- Can you explain this lecturer’s handout to me?
- Do you fancy having a drink with me?
Model of PAL session types

- Meaning-oriented (understanding)
  - PAL Leader re-explaining course subject matter
  - Class discussion of course subject matter

- Strategic-oriented (assessment)
  - PAL Leader advising students how to achieve
  - Class discussion on how to achieve

- Didactic
- Discursive
## Interaction in PAL sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Idealised</td>
<td>S-S-S[L]-S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discursive</td>
<td>SL-S-S-S-L</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>SL-S-S-L</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
<td>S-SL-S</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Instructive</td>
<td>SL-S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>SL ... S</td>
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</tbody>
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Observing PAL sessions

Why? To ensure that Leaders are running sessions effectively by:

- Planning and structuring the session
- Engaging their students in small group/pair work
- Monitoring each group’s progress & discussions
- Keeping discussions on track
- Gathering feedback effectively
- Asking questions, redirecting questions, clarifying, etc.
- Summarising the session
- Requesting ideas for next session
- In general being supportive, encouraging, passing on their experience
- For me to provide formative feedback
What we felt were the benefits of being observed

- Provided us with a quality checklist
- Ensured we were aware of session structure
- Gave guidance on key traits and leader behaviours
- Ensured that we facilitated and didn’t try to teach
- Feedback highlighted both what we were doing well and things we needed to consider doing in future
Contact

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- Peer Assisted Learning website: www.peerlearning.ac.uk