

PAL Leader Training Programme

Biochem/Mol Biol/Bio Eng

Welcome & Introductions

- What do you already know about PAL?
- Benefits for 1st years
- Benefits for you - what do you hope to gain from being a PAL leader
- How do you think PAL differs from teaching?
- What do you want from this training session? - Concerns & worries

The Questionnaire

- Comments and feedback from last term's questionnaire

The First Year Experience (discuss in small groups)

- Hopes, fears, challenges and expectations you felt a year ago.
- Differences between school / college and HE (specifically UCL).
- Identifying the needs of first years.
- The big picture a year on (academically and socially).

Running PAL sessions

- Common weaknesses with PAL sessions
- Running effective PAL sessions.
- Structuring your PAL sessions (beginning, middle, and end).

Your first PAL session (discuss in small groups)

- How you will structure your first session.
- What needs to be done beforehand?
- How are you going to introduce the whole idea of PAL?
- How will you learn their names?
- What ground rules are you going to set for future sessions?
- Departmental strategies - posters etc.
- Shadowing the 1st year courses, keeping in contact with lecturers.

Formalities

- Groups / dates & times / rooms / e-mail addresses

Benefits of Peer Assisted Learning

Benefits for 1st years who attend regularly:

- Opportunity to practice language of discipline with peer group
- Social interaction, relaxed surroundings, reduces stress
- Increased confidence in subject content and language
- Develops independent learners and study skills in context
- Many 1st year questions/queries can be dealt with easily

Benefits to the PAL Leaders:

- Opportunity for practical revision
- Confidence in speaking about their subject
- Facilitation, mentoring and tutoring skills
- Good practice for teaching assistants and/or future teaching jobs
- Opportunity to develop and practice transferable skills:
 - communication,
 - leadership,
 - team work,
 - responsibility,
 - time and self management - evidence of which is keenly sought by employers
- Provides useful evidence for CV/job interviews

Common weaknesses with PAL sessions

Goals and structure

- The goals of the session are unclear
- The structure of the session is unclear

Preparation

- Lack of preparation by the leaders
- Lack of preparation by the attendees

Domination

- Leaders dominate the discussion
- One or two attendees dominate the discussion

Starting and ending PAL sessions

It helps to organize your sessions so that the students feel it is worth arriving on time and staying until the end.

For the first 5 mins of a session:

- ***Find out*** what the students want to work on – this may have to be negotiated as you only have 1 hour to cover the weeks work!
- If necessary get them working in ***small groups*** on different problems so that all difficulties are addressed

For the last 5 mins of a session:

- ***Review*** what you have done – highlight what has been achieved but acknowledge where you all got stuck (encourage them to take these problems to the relevant lecturers or their personal tutor)
- Encourage the students to ***come prepared*** for the next session – even if this means just reading through the coursework questions!

Running Effective PAL sessions

- Learn and use the students' names
- Check the students understand the requirements of the reading lists, assignments, practical write-ups and tests
- Ensure the students know to bring their lecture notes to the sessions – encourage them to keep them up to date and fill in any missing sections
- If you pose a question to the group, allow them “thinking time”
- Encourage the students to discuss problems in small groups – this economises your time by not repeating things to individual students
- During term two, encourage them to start looking at past papers

PAL Questionnaire

Total responses 2005: 48 2006: 38 2007: 23 2008: 28

How did you find out about PAL?

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
• Email	20 (42%)	19 (50%)	13 (57%)	18 (64%)
• Friends	16 (33%)	6 (15%)	7 (30%)	7 (25%)
• Didn't	3 (6%)	0	0	0
• Timetable	N/A	N/A	10 (43%)	6 (21%)

Everyone found out about PAL.

I sent out regular emails before each session and each session was timetabled.

How many did you attend?

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
• None	25 (52%)	5 (13%)	3 (13%)	5 (18%)
• Few	14 (29%)	28 (74%)	15 (65%)	12 (43%)
• About half	2 (4%)	3 (8%)	1 (4%)	9 (32%)
• Most/all	6 (13%)	2 (5%)	4 (17%)	2 (7%)

Attendance at PAL sessions improved from last year (39% attended >half), but still most only attended a few sessions BUT...

How useful did you find them?

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
• 0 (Useless)	0	1 (3%)	0	0
• 1	0	0	3 (13%)	0
• 2	3 (14%)	7 (23%)	0	2 (7%)
• 3	6 (27%)	15 (48%)	5 (22%)	8 (29%)
• 4	7 (32%)	4 (13%)	8 (35%)	7 (25%)
• 5 (Extremely useful)	6 (27%)	4 (13%)	3 (13%)	3 (11%)
Average scores:	3.72	3.06	3.42	3.55

People clearly found PAL useful! It has got better over the last 3 years. However, there is room for improvement.

PAL Questionnaire

Why didn't you go to more?

	2005	2006	2007	2008
• Not compulsory	10 (21%)	4 (11%)	4 (17%)	3 (11%)
• D.K. where or when	12 (25%)	5 (13%)	2 (9%)	5 (18%)
• D.K. anyone else going	3 (6%)	3 (8%)	0	3 (11%)
• Lectures enough	11 (23%)	7 (18%)	8 (35%)	11 (39%)
• Tried but not useful	2 (4%)	9 (24%)	3 (13%)	4 (14%)
• Clashed	16 (33%)	15 (39%)	11 (48%)	7 (25%)
• Workload	17 (35%)	10 (26%)	4 (17%)	4 (14%)
• Specific problems only	4 (8%)	15 (39%)	10 (43%)	12 (43%)

- People were selective about going to sessions - most only went when there was a specific problem with which they needed help.
- Clashes were the greatest problem!
Clashes should be rare as the sessions are now timetabled
PAL sessions are supposed to reduce the workload!
- Presumably those who thought they weren't necessary all got Firsts
- Not knowing where or when sessions were being held was a problem for some
Sessions were timetabled.
Emails were sent with reminders of the rooms.
All the information about rooms and times was on WebCT/Moodle!

How could PAL be improved?

	2005	2006	2007	2008
• Better publicity	29 (60%)	15 (39%)	5 (22%)	9 (32%)
• Have a social event	22 (46%)	15 (39%)	14 (61%)	16 (57%)
• Make it compulsory	8 (17%)	8 (21%)	1 (4%)	4 (14%)
• Have staff attend	6 (13%)	10 (26%)	1 (4%)	10 (36%)

Lots thought a social event would help.

You organize it!

Other Feedback

Positive comments

- They helped me well
- They were generally very helpful
- They were very helpful and useful and very friendly
- I found them useful every time I went

Publicity, etc

- Improving publicity about them as I never knew when they were on and had to find out from others

Preparation

- In many cases 2nd year students could not help us because they didn't know how to!
- [Leaders] could have brought old notes with them to refresh their memories
- They could have brought some of their notes from the previous year, or prepared themselves a bit more
- [Leaders could] be more prepared
- [Leaders should] seem interested in helping, come prepared to sessions – would be more encouraged to attend if felt people wanted to be there to help
- Not much preparation for some questions and sometimes not much explanation given to fully understand the problem
- Preparation of specific questions before going

Organization

- PAL leaders need to turn up!
- More PAL leaders at sessions
- More PAL leaders so we would not have to wait to get help
- Sometimes only 1 or 2 PAL leaders attended a session where quite a few students attended and have different problems which caused a waste of time waiting for help
- More PAL leaders come to each PAL session (not just 2-3)
- Make sure that the PAL leaders attend regularly, sometimes there was no one there and sometimes only a few or two came
- Let us know if a session is going to be cancelled
- Let us know about room changes or cancellations

Practical issues

- Reply to emails (because sometimes too busy to come but have problems to ask)
- Ask questions by email
- Greater interaction early on
- Date and time were a problem

Other comments

- Moodle forum was sufficient
- Maybe have sessions for specific topic / tutorial
- Maybe have a question forum online
- PAL leaders can be more friendly to us when we are asking questions
- Staff members to join or randomly check sessions

Previous years comments...

- PAL leaders were amazing (2007)
- they solved all the things I came to them with (2007)
- The few I attended gave all the help I needed (2007)

- PAL leaders need to turn up!!!!!!! (2006)

- PAL leaders need to be better prepared (2006)
- leaders need to be more up to date with 1st year material (2007)
- leaders need to be more organized about what will be discussed (2007)
- leaders need to prepare material beforehand (2007)
- Some leaders need to be better prepared (2007)
- Make sure the leaders are familiar with the course work and have a first-quality answer of their own (2006)
- Need to cover lecture material as well as practicals (2006)

- Email in questions beforehand (2006)
- 1st years should submit topics beforehand (2007)
- PAL leaders were sometimes disorganized because 1st years hadn't contacted them first (2007)

- Be more understanding when asked stupid questions (2006)
- 'At the beginning it was awkward – we were all shy. First years are scared; new start. PAL leaders should step out.' (2005)

- Link PAL to WebCT/online message board (2007)

- Amount of discussion didn't yield many answers (2007)
- Give each session a real agenda (2007)
- Sessions should be better organized (2007)

- have a specific leader to which you address your questions (2007)

Ideas Generated in Training Sessions

Things to help the first years

- Help students on how to organize themselves
- Tell them to read the course book for deadlines
- Tell them where things are and about shortcuts between lecture theatres
- Tell them about the staff
- Help with workload and time-management
- Immediate social activity
- Booklists – which are the really useful books (sell them old books)

Ideas about how to run sessions

- Introduce yourselves
- General introduction to what you have found out about Biochemistry at UCL
- PAL leaders need to know deadlines and organize appropriate sessions
- Pathway charts
- Split session into general and specific
- Organize the group – find out what they think would be helpful

Differences from teaching

- Knowledge / familiarity with course / exams / problems
- Non-experts – speak at the same level
- Real experience of using the text books
- Have more time available?
- Different relationships – more personal
- May have different (maybe wrong) answers

Hopes and Fears as a 1st Year

Hopes	Fears
Will pass / do well	Failure
Make friends / meet like-minded people	Not fit in
Coalesce as a group	Fall behind / time management
Survival!	Forget stuff from A-level
Lecturer and teaching will be good	Right course?
	Will everyone else be more clever?

Differences from School

- More freedom. Requires: Self-motivation; Self-organization
- Less feedback
- Large classes and small tutorial groups
- Different teaching style
- Less structured
- Overall curriculum may not be so obvious
- Difficult to ask questions in lectures and don't want to in tutorials

Needs of 1st Years

- Advice from peers
- Knowing where things are and how to get there
 - nearest toilets, places to eat, etc.
- Know what the staff are like
- Know the **essential** lectures
- Need to ask 'dumb' questions
- Impression of how much work people do
- Revision techniques, etc.
- Social advise – places to go
- Calm fears about specific subjects (e.g. Physical chemistry)
- Revisit the large amount of information from the first week

PAL Session Timetable

All PAL sessions which are timetabled:

Autumn and spring terms

- Wednesday at 1pm (Biochemistry Common Room)
- Thursday at 2pm (Biochemistry Common Room)

<http://www.bioinf.org.uk/teaching/pal/>

Linked to via WebCT/Moodle