Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)

Co-ordinators Pack

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This pack is intended to be an information resource for anyone wishing to set up a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme. The pack aims to provide would-be co-ordinators with practical advice from others who have been involved with similar schemes, offer tips and provide training and other resources that can be tailored and adapted to a variety of settings.

Because every PAL co-ordinator will have different experiences of PAL, different aims for their scheme and different ways of running things, this pack is intended to offer a selection of opinions, resources and training ideas rather than hard and fast rules for implementing PAL. This approach should enable co-ordinators to select the things they regard as most helpful and appropriate for their needs.

The pack is arranged into 4 main sections:

- *Introduction to Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)* – this section provides background information on what Peer Assisted Learning is and gives an overview of PAL schemes that have run at The University of Glasgow and the experiences of those involved in them.
- *Tailoring PAL to Your Needs* – this section will help co-ordinators explore and define their intended aims and outcomes for any proposed scheme and provide a reality and practicality check!
- *Setting Up PAL* – After reading the sections above, this part of the pack is designed for those who decide to set up a scheme and gives advice and resources to aid with the organisational practicalities.
- *PAL Facilitator Training – Information, activities & handouts* – this section of the pack provides a selection of resources and activities previously used by PAL co-ordinators at Glasgow to organise their schemes and train their student Facilitators. These resources can be photocopied and adapted and a full description of how to use them is provided. Don't worry – you don't have to use them all!

We hope that this pack is informative and helpful to you. It may not answer all of your questions on PAL as some things only become clear during the learning process of embarking on a scheme. However, we hope that it provides a useful starting point. If you decide to run a PAL scheme good luck and enjoy the experience! We would be delighted to hear how your scheme proceeds.

If you find that you have a question that this pack doesn't answer, some useful contacts are listed below:

Fiona Black
Widening Participation Service
f.m.black@admin.gla.ac.uk

Maria Fletcher
School of Law
m.fletcher@law.gla.ac.uk

Debra Macfarlane-Dick
Careers Service
d.macfarlane-dick@educ.gla.ac.uk

Introduction to Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)

What is PAL?

The following description of PAL is adapted from Bournemouth University and provides a good general description of what PAL entails.

> 'Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is a student-to-student support scheme for academic and personal development.
>
> Trained student 'Facilitators' meet regularly with small groups of students (sometimes called 'clients') from lower years/levels to help them better integrate into higher education, develop their study and learning strategies, and improve their understanding of the subject matter of their course.
>
> The character of a PAL session is one of cooperative and collaborative learning. PAL sessions centre around discussion and interaction – Facilitators are not there to teach.
>
> PAL is largely student-driven though may work best where the particular course on which it runs is supportive of PAL, both in terms of moral support and resourcing, such as by enabling timetabling or provision of activities for PAL sessions.
>
> The PAL system of support offers the opportunity to lower drop-out rates and increase grades.
>
> Of as much importance are the `intangible´ benefits of PAL, such as increased cohesion of the student group, reassurance about study concerns and increased confidence. PAL is intended to offer benefits to all levels: to the School, the course, Facilitators as well as first year students.
>
> There are a number of variants and synonyms of PAL, but all utilise students from higher years who facilitate understanding and learning among a group of first years.
>
> PAL derives originally from the American model of Supplemental Instruction, developed in the 1970´s at the University of Missouri - Kansas City'.[1]

The handout on the following page, from the same source, is also useful.

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[1] See http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/all_about_pal.html

Peer Assisted Learning
(Adapted from www.peerlearning.ac.uk)

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is:

➢ A formal system, similar to mentoring, which enables students of proven competence to help others develop understanding.
➢ After receiving training, students act as PAL Facilitators, organising and facilitating weekly study support sessions for groups of first year client students (this can be adapted to students in any year of study).
➢ Sessions are voluntary and are intended to offer a safe, friendly place to help students:
    o *Adjust quickly to university life,*
    o *Improve their study habits and*
    o *Enhance understanding of the subject matter of their course, or a course unit, through group discussion.*
➢ Content for PAL sessions is based on course materials (handouts, notes, textbooks).

Peer Assisted Learning is NOT:

➢ Targeted at weak or problem students – all participants should benefit.
➢ Teaching by students.
➢ A means of reducing existing lecturer-student contact.

Peer Assisted Learning requires:

➢ Agreement, co-operation and support from the teaching team.
➢ Students' recognition of its value.

Benefits to your course:

➢ Reduces student wastage rates. (i.e. improves student retention)
➢ Improves student grades and performance for those who attend regularly.
➢ PAL can be targeted at courses or units which are seen as difficult or high risk.
➢ PAL can also be targeted at courses or units which have high drop out or failure rates.
➢ Increases student support, involvement and ownership of learning.
➢ Provides staff with an additional channel for feedback.
➢ Provides the course with altruistic and committed students who can help promote the course and meet with internal or external reviewers.

Benefits to individual students:

➤ Helps new students adjust to higher education.
➤ Improves ability to master course concepts by providing students with an opportunity to discuss or practice their subject in a safe, unthreatening place.
➤ Helps build confidence and self-esteem.
➤ Develops enhanced study habits.
➤ Gives discreet support to those who need help.
➤ Facilitators provide a clear view of course direction and expectations.

Benefits to student Facilitators:

➤ Develops personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal communication, facilitation and coaching skills.
➤ Enables Facilitators to gain confidence especially in situations where teamwork is required to attain a goal.
➤ Provides valuable experience to enhance CVs.
➤ Enables Facilitators to revise and practice their subject, and gain a deeper understanding of it.
➤ Opportunity to attend PAL conferences and share experiences with Facilitators in other institutions.
➤ Certification and payment (in some instances).

Benefits to academic staff:

➤ Cuts down number of 'minor' requests from students.
➤ Helps students to be better prepared for classes and to keep up with course material.
➤ Trains students in basics of group work.
➤ Helps create more independent learners.
➤ Facilitators give regular feedback on how course content is being received by first year students.

Benefits to your faculty:

➤ Provides cost effective support for expanding student numbers.
➤ Targets support at difficult courses and/or courses with high wastage rates.
➤ Reduces staff time spent recruiting students to fill gaps caused by high wastage.
➤ Breaks down barriers between year groups – helps develop a more cohesive course culture.
➤ Provides evidence of quality student support for subject review or institutional audit.

PAL at the University of Glasgow

The following departments have set up PAL schemes so far:

- Computing Science, 2002 onwards
- Psychology, 2003 onwards
- School of Law, 2003 onwards

Each scheme runs differently depending on the particular needs of the area.

In *Computing Science,* PAL sessions were structured to give Level 1 students the opportunity to work through their course study pack and to gain insight and experience from Level 2 & 3 students.

In *Psychology*, PAL sessions ran for students at all levels. These sessions covered various topics and discussion areas related to that particular level of study.

In the *School of Law*, a PAL scheme was integrated into the Level 2 European Union (EU) Law course. From 2004 onwards, PAL will also run for all Level 1 Law students.

Some of the benefits listed in the 'What is PAL section?' above have already been seen at Glasgow in the schemes that have run and this can be seen in the comments made by some of those involved.

From an academic perspective, I think I gained a lot from facilitating last year. Not only is it bound to look good on a CV to prospective employers, but I liked how I could use my experiences of first year to help others. I was able to go over first year work again, which meant when learning stuff for second year I had a better basic knowledge. From a social and personal perspective it allowed me to meet other students and staff in the department. Most of all it was fun!!!

Lauren Dempster, 2nd year, Computing Science Facilitator

From a Facilitator's point of view, being a Facilitator for PAL is an immense confidence boost. The training gained throughout the year will prove invaluable throughout life and from a career viewpoint looks great on the CV. Also, throughout the year, the Facilitator gets to know the other Facilitators, staff, and the first years better and this extra social boost is very desirable for the new Facilitators who are still quite young in the whole 'University Scene'.

Colin Riley, 2nd year, Computing Science Facilitator

I am interested in providing students with the opportunity to help themselves, both in terms of personal and academic development. Having piloted an EU Law-related PAL scheme for the first time in session 2003-2004 I am convinced that the real winners of the PAL scheme are the student Facilitators. The positive feedback from Facilitators and attendees alike has convinced me of the value of PAL and in session 2004-2005 the scheme will be extended in the School of Law.

Setting up and managing a PAL scheme was particularly time-consuming in the early stages, when recruiting and training of Facilitators needed organising, rooms needed booking and PAL needed to be promoted within the department. However, once the sessions were up and running things definitely settled down. I would receive and file session feedback forms from the Facilitators and use them to form the basis of discussions at a fortnightly 'feedback session' with the Facilitators and I would print off materials and posters prepared by Facilitators to save them from using their precious printing credits! With one PAL scheme set-up and completed I feel more confident about continuing it this year and setting up another one. I'm sure I could delegate more responsibilities to the Facilitators if I wanted, but I want to learn the ropes first and allow PAL to become established in the department. The fact that I really *want* to set-up PAL schemes rather than *have* to obviously helps immensely…of course the downside to that is that you can't complain when the burden becomes quite heavy!

Maria Fletcher, Lecturer in European Law, PAL co-ordinator

HE class sizes, especially in the early years, are increasingly large and there tends to be few opportunities for students to discuss and learn with other students in small groups. Small group learning is not only an effective way to learn but also important in terms of student motivation. Such opportunities have a social element allowing students to meet in a non-threatening environment which is known to be a major factor in student retention. The sooner we can facilitate students discussing the subject(s) they have chosen to study, the better. I therefore believe that PAL programmes, supported and administered appropriately by departments, can have a major impact on the way we support our students and can effectively facilitate their learning and retention.

Dr Jane MacKenzie, University Teacher, Teaching and Learning Service

There is no doubt that PAL enhances employability for clients and student Facilitators. It allows Facilitators to develop a host of skills in a discipline specific setting including teamwork, organisation and communication – much more than any two-hour skills course could. It can also build confidence amongst both groups of students in their ability to adapt and progress at University, in their academic work and in the social context of their department and Faculty. Of course, with the added potential benefits of increased retention and improved exam performance, staff benefit too.

Debra Macfarlane-Dick, Employability Development Adviser, Careers Service

The Student Network operates on the premise that student peer-support initiatives such as PAL are an excellent means of providing support to all students in their crucial first year at the University. The benefits accrued by those students acting as peer mentors (for example, PAL Facilitators) is immense.

According to Vincent Tinto, the U.S. retention 'guru' there are five main factors affecting student retention and success: expectations; support; feedback; involvement and learning. PAL actively demonstrates all of these factors.

Student *expectations* about a course are important to whether a student will be successful and happy in their first year. Unrealistic expectations can and do lead to withdrawal from University. Expectations can be refined by involvement with students from the same year and different years of study. In addition, Level 1 students can better understand departmental expectations of them when working with Level 2 and/or Level 3 students.

The peer-*support* provided by PAL itself is valuable. PAL Facilitators can also play an active role in ensuring that new students are aware of the various types of support available to them – Facilitator training is important in this regard.

PAL sessions encourage students to be reflective and to engage with their departmental peers. This provides a means by which they can assess how well they are getting on in a safe and supported atmosphere. PAL can also be an effective means for a department to provide *feedback* to Level 1 students as a cohort.

Meaningful *involvement* with a department is vital in engendering in students a sense of belonging to the department and the institution. PAL allows students to see themselves and student groups as valued members of a department.

Finally, PAL is about *learning*. Tinto states that all students come to university with the primary aim of learning. As the experience of PAL at Glasgow has so far proved, PAL is most successful when students see it as a forum for learning. PAL offers students a kind of learning community where they have the space to reflect, explore, explain and discuss in a collaborative setting.

Some preliminary work on how PAL is perceived by non-traditional entrants to the University of Glasgow (i.e. those from low-participation rate schools involved in the GOALS, Greater Opportunities of Access and Learning with Schools, project; students entering from Further Education Colleges; students from SHEFC designated postcode areas of low participation; students from an access course) show that these students value PAL and will attend and benefit from it when it is on offer.

The figures below are from PAL 2003-2004 (October to December) in Computing Science and draw upon the evaluation work carried out by Margaret Brown and attendance data collated by the Student Network. They show that the group designated as 'non-traditional entrants' not only proved more likely to try out PAL but also to attend a number of sessions. There was no special provision in place to attract these students.

Attendance at PAL in Computing Science

% of L1 CS (for whom there is data) attending PAL	Total group	Non-traditional entrants
0 PAL sessions	27%	8.5%
1 or more PAL sessions	73%	91.5%
3 or more PAL sessions	44%	71%
5 or more PAL sessions	24%	43%

Fiona Black, Student Network, Widening Participation Service

What can you expect?

Although formally 'student-centred' there is no doubt that PAL schemes need academic support, particularly in the early stages of introducing them into a department. Academic support is important for two main reasons:

1) If departmental staff are seen to be supporting PAL it will enhance its credibility in the eyes of the students (both clients and Facilitators) and consequently be more effectively adopted as a mainstream presence in departmental life.

2) PAL schemes do not simply appear and run by themselves. It takes willingness and commitment on the part of (at least) one member of academic staff to 'invest' in a PAL scheme.

Unsurprisingly, the level of 'investment' on the part of the PAL academic co-ordinator is higher when a scheme is first being introduced. However, beyond this initial investment of time and effort, the intensity lessens. Once student Facilitators are running the PAL sessions, the role of the academic co-ordinator can become much less 'hands-on'. Similarly, ensuring the continuation of PAL schemes in subsequent academic sessions should become less and less onerous from an organisational perspective.

> For example, in the PAL scheme in Computing Science, now in its 3rd academic session, the Facilitators have set up a board of PAL Directors, drawn up a business plan for the continuation of the scheme and intend to self-manage the forthcoming scheme. However, support for the scheme will be available from the academic co-ordinator and the Student Network.

(Further advice and tips relating to 'on-going management and support' can be found later in this pack in the section on 'Setting up PAL').

Tailoring PAL to Your Needs

PAL is not, nor is it intended to be, a fixed model. Indeed one of its strengths lies in its flexibility to be adopted by and adapted to various learning environments. Although all PAL schemes offer student-to-student support, the aims, structure and content of the scheme will differ according to the specific situation. From the outset then, academic co-ordinators should give consideration to how to adapt PAL to their specific identified purposes and needs.

PAL schemes can either be offered to a whole year group (for example first year psychology students or third year computing science students) or to a specific group of students (for example all students studying a particular course or module.) The former 'generic' schemes tend to be most popular, although the latter 'course specific' schemes have also been adopted in the University of Glasgow (an EU Law related PAL scheme runs in the School of Law). The relevant target audience will depend upon what you wish the PAL scheme to do: for instance, if you would like to offer a scheme to ensure a smoother integration of students into university life you would obviously target first year students in their first weeks of university. If you want the scheme to offer broader academic as well as personal support to students you might consider offering separate, generic PAL schemes to all year groups (at strategic times in the academic year). Similarly, if you would particularly like a scheme to offer a forum in which students can discuss issues surrounding your own particular subject you may consider 'attaching' or 'integrating' a PAL scheme into your course. Please note in this regard, however, that it has been the experience of a number of institutions, at least in the UK, that PAL has been successfully implemented onto a course (or courses), and then gradually faded away. This is largely due to the fact that course specific schemes rely heavily upon the involvement of the academic course co-ordinator who may periodically be absent due to study leave or other work commitments.

Ask yourself:

- Why is PAL a good idea? Compile a list of aims and objectives specific to you.
- Based upon the aims and objectives who would be the target student audience?
- When is the best time in the academic session for the PAL scheme to run?
- How many sessions will be offered and how regularly? (Be realistic!)

Setting up PAL

Setting up a PAL scheme and getting it off the ground does involve time and careful planning. PAL requires some basics without which it couldn't run. The table below shows the organisation of PAL at Bournemouth University over three years and is a good indicator of the types of considerations needed to get a PAL scheme off the ground. There is also a blank proforma on the next page that could be useful to you in the planning stages of a new PAL scheme.

Example of PAL organisation (at Bournemouth University) and how it progressed.
(Adapted from Capstick, Fleming and Hurne 2004)

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	Pilot: 2001-02	*2002-03*	*2003-04*
No. of PAL Facilitators	15	34	c.80
No. of 1st year students PAL available to	320	600	c.1300
PAL Facilitators' pay	Paid through Project funds (c. £2000)	Paid through Project funds (c.£6000)	Paid by Schools (c.£20,000)
Recruitment and selection criteria; acceptance/rejection procedure	Unspecified	Person specification developed	As 2003; recommendation that unsuccessful applicants be counselled by course staff
Attendance by first year students	Low overall	Satisfactory to high	Aim: high attendance though fluctuations likely
Course involvement	Variable; limited to ad hoc meetings with staff contact	Variable; more regular meetings and some course team involvement	Aim: regular meetings between PAL Facilitators and staff contact with input from and feedback to course team
Course PAL contact	In place, though responsibilities and activities unclear	In place with clearer role; more regular meetings with PAL Facilitators	Aim: role clearly defined; regular plan and review meetings with PAL Facilitators
Promotion	Formally, in perhaps dogmatic terms	Room for innovation and sensitivity to different groups' needs	As 2003; refinement of process
Balance of responsibility for content of PAL sessions (students/staff)	Entirely student-centred	Mostly student-centred but with important input by staff	Aim: healthy balance permitting structure but also flexibility
Use of directed activities (course)	Minimal	Some unsystematic provision by central and course staff	Aim: more systematic and widespread provision
Use of directed activities (generic)	Implied	Activities pertaining to study skills and ways of encouraging participation offered - not widely taken up	Aim: more clarity and practical stock of generic PAL activities available to PAL Facilitators
Training	Two-day course	Two-day course with weekly/fortnightly follow-up training	As 2003 but with more flexible delivery for follow-up training and refined programme

PAL Facilitators; student matching	Any PAL Facilitator available to any student within a course	PAL Facilitators allocated to a particular seminar group (though may negotiate cover)	As 2002-03
Timetabling	Open sessions – interested first years can attend which and when they choose; did not appear on printed timetables	Timetabled PAL sessions by seminar group; variability in 'convenience' of slots; did appear on printed timetables; responsibility for timetabling unclear; some revisions early in the year	Aim: 'convenient' slots for PAL sessions the responsibility of individual courses with central support and guidance

PAL checklist

No. of students in target PAL audience/No. expected to attend	
No. PAL Facilitators; how many PAL sessions each Facilitator expected to lead	
PAL Facilitators' pay	
Recruitment and selection criteria; acceptance/rejection procedure	
Course/departmental staff involvement	
Course PAL contact	
Promotion	
Balance of responsibility for content of PAL sessions (students/staff)	
Use of directed activities (course)	
Use of directed activities (generic)	
Training	
Timetabling	
Feedback and evaluation	

Getting Started

Costs of Setting up PAL

The financial cost of the PAL scheme will depend on whether you intend or are able to pay the PAL Facilitators. Typical hourly payment for PAL Facilitators has been approximately £5 per hour.

For a scheme that does not pay Facilitators, costs will be low and will vary according to the types of materials the Facilitators will use in PAL sessions e.g. photocopying, post-it notes, flip charts, OHTs etc.

Non-financial costs of setting up PAL include the time and personnel needed to organise and conduct training, to recruit and select Facilitators and to get the scheme up and running.

Aims of your PAL scheme

There are several potential aims for any PAL scheme and many ways that these aims could be prioritised.

Do you want your PAL scheme to improve Level 1 exam results? Reduce the number of students who do not progress to Level 2? Provide Level 1 students with greater engagement with the department? Improve the retention of Level 1 students? Boost students' understanding of a course or module? Improve Level 1 students' study skills? Setting out clear aims is important.

Ask yourself:

- Which students are you targeting? Is your PAL scheme going to focus on the support and retention of certain target groups?
- How will it be incorporated into the curriculum? How will students recognise the importance of PAL to their studies? How will the course handbook set out the benefits of PAL? Will it be advertised as a normal part of the curriculum alongside lectures and tutorials or as a voluntary add-on?

Rooms and Timetabling

Rooms and timetabling can be an administrative nightmare – be prepared! The room or rooms for PAL sessions should, where possible, be within the department or near to the department. Computing Science PAL sessions run in a room next to the Level 1 laboratory and PAL sessions in Psychology and Law run in rooms that are easy for both Facilitators and client students to access.

The timetabling of PAL sessions is also important. Experience shows that PAL sessions that run at 4pm on a Friday will not be well attended. Sessions do, however, need to be timetabled to fit both the target PAL students' timetables and that of the Facilitators so some flexibility will be required. These considerations are important when you are working out how to structure PAL, i.e. whether a lab or seminar group will be allocated a specific PAL session and time or whether you will follow the model that Psychology run of allowing client students to sign up to a session that matches up to their individual timetable.

In terms of room bookings and timetabling it would also be helpful to consider whether your PAL scheme will run for one semester or two or for a shorter length of time as dictated by, for example, a specific module that you want to run PAL sessions for.

Ask yourself:

- What rooms are available for sessions? Can you block book them?
- Will you hold sessions only in the department? Can you do this?
- Will PAL be run in both semesters?
- Where will PAL fit in the timetable?
- Are 9am or 4pm sessions going to work?
- Are there other subject timetables that you need to consider e.g. popular courses in other departments that your students take?
- Do you want students to always to attend the same timetabled slot or is it more flexible?
- Will you have bi-weekly/weekly/fortnightly sessions?
- When do you want the first PAL sessions to take place (week one, week two...)?

Recruiting Facilitators

The question of when you want your PAL scheme to start is central to all of the pre-planning for PAL. If you want your PAL scheme to start in week one, or even week two, you will need to begin planning as early as possible in order to have trained Facilitators who are ready to get started at the beginning of the academic year. Facilitators are integral to the success of any PAL scheme.

The recruitment and selection of Facilitators will have to take place either at the end of the preceding semester or over the summer months.

PAL attendance in Computing Science, University of Glasgow (semester one 2003-04)
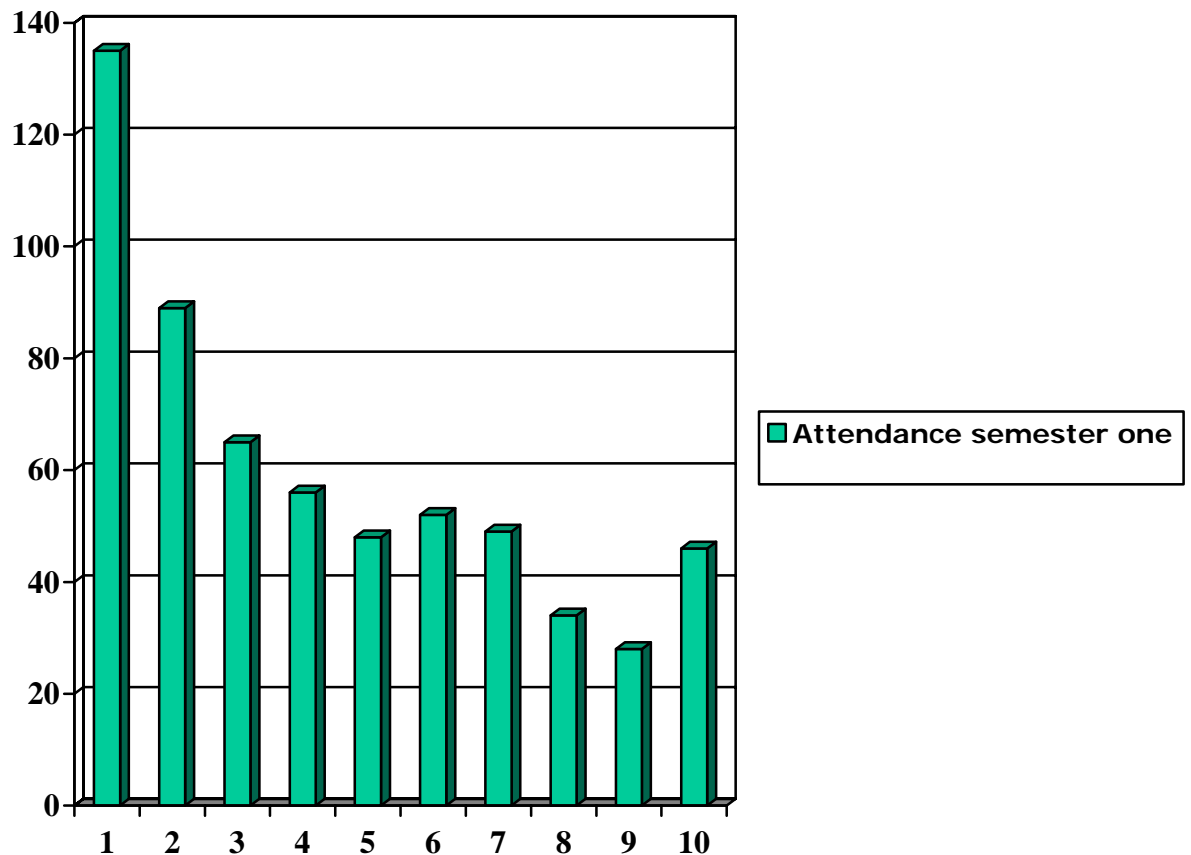
You will need to know how many Facilitators you will need to run the PAL scheme. The attendance graph for PAL in Computing Science in 2003-04, above, shows that attendance at PAL started off at a high point and fell as the semester progressed. In Psychology in 2003-04 attendance fluctuated from week to week. PAL is not a compulsory part of a student's curriculum and experience at other institutions also suggests not to expect high attendance every week.

Experience in Computing Science suggests that it might be better to have fewer Facilitators who can run two PAL sessions each at the start and cut back to one session rather than take on too many Facilitators who end up with poorly attended sessions. In 2001-02 and 2002-03 in Computing Science PAL ran over both semesters and in both academic sessions the number of PAL sessions was halved in the second semester, meaning that only half the number of Facilitators were really required. It is difficult to 'reject' students as Facilitators at the point of selection but it is more difficult, impossible even, to tell some Facilitators that they are no longer required after a certain length of time.

In terms of recruitment the experience at Glasgow has shown that students are very interested in the idea of PAL and in applying for the post of PAL Facilitator. You shouldn't expect to find it difficult to attract applicants. It is a good idea to introduce your ideas about PAL to potential applicants well in advance of formal recruitment (perhaps by way of email, drop-in Q & A session, or notice at the end of a lecture) as it allows interested students to ask questions. Inviting students already involved in other PAL schemes might also be useful 'marketing'.

Ask yourself:

- How will you recruit Facilitators? (e.g. person spec/application form/interview etc).
- Which year do you want your Facilitators to come from?
- Is academic ability an important factor in your choice of Facilitator?
- What skills and aptitudes are you looking for?
- How many Facilitators will you need overall and per PAL session?
- How many students do you think might attend?

Below is a sample recruitment letter for Facilitators. This is detailed and includes a person specification.

Dear Student

PAL 2003 –04: Invitation to apply to become a Facilitator

Last year the Department of Computing Science, in conjunction with the Student Network, piloted a Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) project, called A-PASS, which provided a series of weekly review sessions for L1 students who wanted to improve their understanding of Computing Science. You may have attended or seen the information around the lab.

PAL will be running again during the next academic year, with some changes, and we are currently looking to recruit a limited number of students, progressing into L2, who might be interested in becoming PAL Facilitators. If you will be entering into L2 in Computing Science in October, have the skills described below, and would be interested in being involved with PAL, we would very much welcome your application.

What is a PAL Facilitator?

As a PAL Facilitator, you will be expected to support regular study sessions for small groups of first year students. Study sessions run weekly during term time and last for an hour. Each group will have at least two PAL Facilitators - a second year student and a third year student (in most cases). All Facilitators may be asked to work with 2 groups, for the first few weeks of term, as we are expecting attendance to be high at this time.

Ideally, the attending Level 1 students set the agenda for each session. All successful applicants will be provided with training and ideas as to how to facilitate such group sessions. As a PAL Facilitator you will not be expected to be a tutor, but to support the first years in their search for their own solutions.

You will be paid £4.90 p/hr. After each session you will be expected to provide a summary log of what happened during the session. You will also be asked to keep a record of which first year students attend your PAL sessions. This information will be confidential, and will be used for monitoring purposes only. A more detailed job description is provided on the next page.

What's in it for me?

Although the primary aim of PAL is to support students in lower years, working as a PAL Facilitator can also be very rewarding. The experience you'll gain will be a very valuable addition to you C.V. It can also consolidate your knowledge of your coursework by developing your own critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Some of the comments made by student leaders last year, on how they benefited from the experience include:

- *Learning communication and presentation skills*
- *Has improved the way I plan, structure, and explain my programming*
- *Gained socially*
- *Learnt a lot more about what's in store in 3rd year*

What qualities/attributes do I need?

An importantly quality for the job is the ability to have a good understanding of what it's like to be a first year Computing Science student and to be able to relate to students currently in their first year. You should also be interested in helping others to learn Computing.

You will need to have achieved 2C's or above in your Computing Science exams and be able to demonstrate the following skills:

- *Ability to model or demonstrate good study habits*
- *Ability to work as part of a team or independently*
- *Good communication and interpersonal skills*
- *Good listening skills*
- *Good organisational/time management skills*
- *Ability to work with individuals as well as groups of students*
- *Ability to support the learning of others*
- *Enthusiasm and a commitment to education*

Main Responsibilities

The list below is a summary of what you'll be expected to do as a PAL Facilitator;

- Offer weekly PAL sessions, throughout the entire academic year, with suitable support from the staff co-ordinators and fellow student Facilitators.
- Complete weekly feedback forms on PAL sessions and maintain regular contact with PAL co-ordinators and course staff.
- Attend scheduled PAL feedback sessions with the staff co-ordinators and fellow student Facilitators.
- Attend all training sessions provided.

Training and support

Full training will be provided to help you develop and practice the necessary skills before your first PAL session.   Training will begin on the 30th September and the 1st October 2003 from 5pm 'til 8pm.

In the session, you will receive training in group-work methods, such as facilitation skills, and will have the opportunity to practice these skills before you make use of them for real. You will also be able to discuss your role as a PAL leader and how this differs from the teaching role of academics.

These initial workshops will be supplemented by regular training sessions throughout the academic year.

Application

If you are interested in becoming a Facilitator then please complete the enclosed form and send it, by post or via e-mail, along with an up-to-date C.V., to the address given below. The closing date for applications is the 5th September 2003. All applicants should expect to hear from us by no later than the 19th September 2003 as to whether they have been selected to go forward for training. Please note that there will be a limited number of places available.

Please contact me if you require any further information about PAL.

The application form for potential PAL Facilitators given below was used by PAL in Computing Science.

Forename

Surname

Term-Time Address

Address for August – September 2003

Phone:	*Phone:*
Mobile:	

E-mail addresses (Please give the address you use most frequently FIRST)

What do you think are the major benefits that PAL could provide for L1 Computing Science Students?

Why would you make a good Facilitator in the coming year, considering the skills and responsibilities outlined in the letter?

Signature

Date

Facilitators – responsibilities and rewards

PAL Facilitators will need to commit not only to facilitating PAL sessions but also to related activities. Training is of great importance (training can be used as part of the selection process) and on-going training might be something your PAL scheme utilises. Regular contact between PAL Facilitators and contact staff is also important, as is session planning. Registers are a good idea to help monitor and evaluate how the scheme is progressing and some type of reporting back structure for Facilitators after each session is also valuable. PAL does take a level of commitment from student Facilitators and it is important that this is recognised and rewarded in some way.

Former PAL Facilitators at the University of Glasgow have gained both financially and academically from their experience. In 2003-04 all PAL Facilitators were paid (approximately £5/hour) – this money was made available through various sources including Faculty Widening Participation funds and the Chancellor's Fund. Facilitators all received a certificate signed by the Principal (see below).
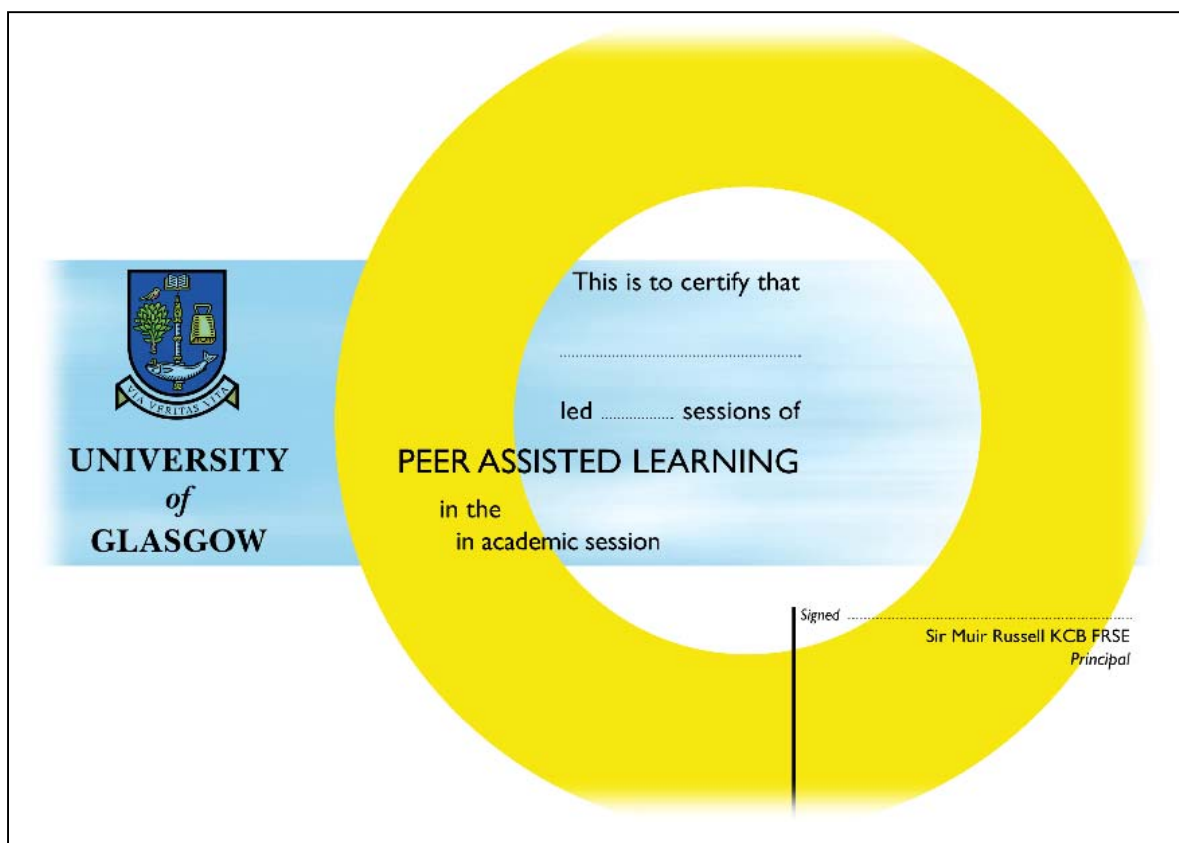
Ask yourself:

- What are Facilitators expected to do? i.e. only PAL sessions, or do they have to attend feedback sessions, promote PAL etc?
- Will they get a contract?
- Will you/can you pay your Facilitators?
- Will they get paid for all of these duties or just the sessions?
- How and when will you organise payment if applicable?
- What other rewards will they receive (e.g. departmental acknowledgement, certificate)?

Session content

Each individual PAL scheme will have its own focus and the types of activities covered will vary from department to department and also, possibly, within a department from week to week.

PAL sessions in Computing Science in 2003-04 followed the themes of the student study pack whereas in Psychology the sessions are more general. In Law, Facilitators and clients are focussing on the study requirements for L1 Law students. What will suit your aims and objectives best?

Ask yourself:

- What is the balance of responsibility going to be for PAL session content? i.e. will you prescribe topics or let Facilitators and/or students choose?
- If you prescribe topics what resources, if any, will you provide Facilitators with?
- Will other teaching staff be involved in providing materials or ideas?

Administration

Effective administration is essential to any PAL scheme. Keeping full records will also help you when you try to evaluate the success of the scheme. Attendance registers help with monitoring and evaluation and good feedback from the Facilitators about each session is also valuable material. A sample attendance sheet is given below. If Facilitators are being paid then there will also be some related admin.

Ask yourself:

- Will you require a register of attendance for each session?
- What administrative support do you have?

SESSION ATTENDANCE SHEET

25

FACILITATORS _____

DATE OF SESSION _____

TIME OF SESSION _____

ROOM _____

NAME	MATRIC NUMBER

TOTAL NUMBER OF ATTENDEES

Training PAL Facilitators

Advice and ideas for designing Facilitator training are included in the section at the end of this pack. However, there are some practicalities surrounding training that you need to consider and these are included in this section.

Ask yourself:

- Where will you train? How much space will you need?
- What facilities?
- Who will do the training? Who could help you?
- Who will organise the training?
- When will this take place?
- How long will the training last?
- What will you cover?
- What resources will you need?
- Will you pay Facilitators for attendance at training?
- Will training be part of the selection process?
- How will you evaluate the training?
- Will you provide ongoing training?

On the next page, these questions are answered by departments that have set up PAL schemes.

PAL Training 2003-4

Session 03-04	Computing Science	Psychology	EU Law
Where?	Department meeting room	L1 Psychology lab	Department meeting room
What facilities?	OHP, flipcharts, board	OHP & Board	OHP, flipcharts, post-its
Who trained?	Academic co-ordinator, departmental staff and Student Network	Academic co-ordinator, departmental staff and Student Network	Academic co-ordinator & TLS
When?	week 0 (PAL started wk 1)	week 1 (PAL started wk 2)	End of Jan exam period (PAL started semester 2)
How long?	3 x 3 hours	1 x 3 hours	3 x 3 hours
What was covered?	See Section on 'Ideas, Resources and Further Information for Training' at end of pack		
What resources were used?			
Were fac's paid?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was training part of selection?	Yes	No	No
How was it evaluated?	Questionnaire	Questionnaire	Questionnaire
Was ongoing training provided?	Not formally but used weekly feedback sessions	Not formally but used weekly feedback sessions	Not formally but used weekly feedback sessions

Promoting PAL

PAL is not a compulsory part of the academic curriculum. Its 'voluntary' status can easily devalue and taint how it is viewed by both students and other academic staff. Effective and continuous promotion of PAL is therefore essential. It is important that PAL be promoted to various audiences and in various ways within an institution.

Promoting PAL to target student audience ('the clients')

Ask yourself:

- Will you put details of PAL in course handbooks?
- Will you promote PAL to students before the start of the academic year e.g. e-mails, posters, flyers sent to home addresses, internet site, during induction?
- Will you use students already involved in PAL to promote it to others e.g. in course lectures, induction lectures etc?
- Who will take responsibility for promotion – you, the student Facilitators, the departmental PAL administrator, course staff etc.?
- What will you do to promote PAL in the longer-term e.g. individual sessions?
- Will you have a PAL website or web-board?
- Will you use posters (see below for examples)?

Ideally, over time, PAL should become part of the expectations of different year groups so that it is an accepted and integrated part of departmental academic life. However, even once this stage is reached it remains important to advertise and promote PAL in various ways and at effective times.

Promoting PAL- some ideas:

- Student client groups can be mailed with information about a PAL programme during the summer before the academic session begins.
- Student client groups can be e-mailed with PAL details prior to the start of a new PAL scheme and at strategic intervals throughout the PAL scheme. This task could be devolved to student Facilitators.
- Devise a rota for PAL promotion (i.e. each pair of Facilitators takes it in turn to promote weekly PAL sessions).
- Ideally, information about PAL could be included in general student documentation such as the Student Handbook.

- Student Facilitators might promote PAL during first year orientation/induction by way of talks, handing out brochures, emails.
- Student Facilitators might design an eye-catching brochure to promote PAL in advance of the PAL sessions.
- Student Facilitators might design posters advertising PAL sessions. These can be placed around the department on notice boards and will be seen by staff and students alike. Posters should be eye-catching yet simple, perhaps including an agreed topic for discussion in the PAL session and, crucially, dates, times and venues of sessions.
- PAL could be promoted on the Departmental website.
- Student Facilitators could promote PAL at the end of lectures attended by the target client group.

In promoting a PAL programme, the benefits of PAL can be espoused, for example- PAL can increase grades, PAL is informal and confidential, PAL can help better understanding of the subject and better prepare students for exams and assignments. Below are a couple of examples of promotional emails for L1 Law students.

PAL FOR FIRST YEAR LAW STUDENTS

PAL is a support scheme run by second year law students to help you settle into uni life. Sessions are informal and cover topics such as study skills and exam technique. All students are welcome, whether you have already come or not.

Next week (week 2) (4/10/04 - 8/10/04) sessions will cover **study skills** but if you have anything else you want to ask feel free to come along at one of the following times:

- **Tuesday**   **11-12**
- **Wednesday**   **11-12**
- **Wednesday**   **12-1**
- **Thursday**   **12-1**
- **Friday**   **11-12**
- **Friday**   **1-2**

All sessions take place in the Halliday Room (first floor of the Stair Building).

Hope to see you there!

ATTENTION FIRST YEARS:

PROPERTY EXAM NOV 8TH- PREPARED YET?

Are you stressed, scared or nervous about your first exam at university?

Do you need some friendly advice about what to expect in it or some hints and tips on exam technique?

If so, PAL can help you!

PAL sessions are run by law students for law students and all first years are welcome to attend at a time that suits you!

- **Tues**   **11-12**
- **Wed**   **11-12**
- **Wed**   **12-1**
- **Thurs**   **12-1**
- **Fri**   **11-12**
- **Fri**   **1-2**

All sessions take place in the Halliday Room in the Law building.

Look forward to seeing you there!

Promoting PAL to potential Student Facilitators

There are various ways of making initial contact with potential Facilitators e.g. through recommendation by academic staff and/or by offering the opportunity to apply to all students.

PAL can be marketed in a number of ways, as:

- an opportunity to help others
- an opportunity to gain new, transferable skills
- an opportunity to review and revise academic material
- an opportunity to gain formal departmental/institutional acknowledgement (if available, e.g. by way of certificate)
- an opportunity to gain valuable experience to enhance CV
- an opportunity to meet and share experiences with fellow peers (co-Facilitators)

If you have secured monies to pay Facilitators you should consider whether you want to mention payment in your recruitment drive.

Promoting PAL to departmental staff

Ask yourself:

- How will you justify the introduction of PAL in your department?
- How will you persuade people of the benefits?
- How will you provide information on PAL to other staff?
- How will you keep other staff up-to-date with your progress?
- To what extent will you involve other staff?

PAL can be promoted to staff through departmental meetings, e-mails seminars, and presentations and by word of mouth. Point out that:

- PAL is not teaching
- PAL can reduce drop-out and increase grades
- PAL demands little in terms of staff resources
- PAL helps create more independent and effective learners
- PAL may cut down on the number of 'minor' student requests

PAL will have more credibility if staff are knowledgeable about its existence and potential benefits. This will also make them more likely to mention PAL in tutorials and refer students to PAL sessions.

The following pages give examples of some PAL posters. Ostensibly these posters are used to attract L1 students to attend PAL sessions but they also make PAL visible to all members of a department. N.B. the Computing Science posters refer to A-PASS, this was the name given to that PAL scheme in its pilot year by the Facilitators.

First Exam – November 8th !!!!!

Scared? Nervous? Stressed?
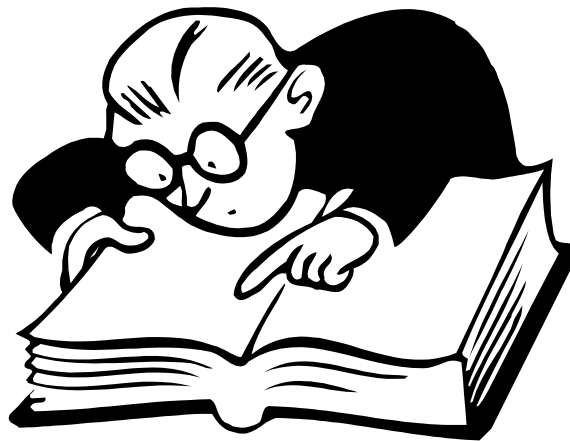
PAL Sessions

2/11 Tuesday	**11-12**
3/11 Wednesday	**11-12**
3/11 Wednesday	**12-1**
4/11 Thursday	**12-1**
5/11 Friday	**11-12**
5/11 Friday	**1-2**

No need to book. Venue: Halliday Room

Open to all first years looking for hints, tips and advice!

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

A-PASS is all about sharing your ideas and insights with your classmates so that you can all attain a greater understanding and get those A's you dream of. A-PASS facilitators are there to help you achieve that goal, through organised group discussion.

Come along to the next A-PASS session. Check lecture notes for details.

A-PASS

WORKING TOGETHER IS THE BEST WAY TO SURVIVE

A-PASS is there for you, helping you to help yourselves. All the A-PASS facilitators have been where you are now, and through experience have learned that cooperation and group discussion are key to survival.

A-PASS

On-going Management and Support

A PAL scheme doesn't run itself. Facilitators need *continued* support, the chance to reflect on their own learning and ongoing administrative back up. While PAL can be largely student led and you have flexibility in your level of involvement with Facilitators, it is important to provide a support framework that both you and your Facilitators can work within.

Ask yourself:

- How hands on do you want to be? Will you simply administer the scheme or will you provide pastoral support, development and ideas for Facilitators?
- How regularly will you meet PAL Facilitators?
- How will you structure these meetings?
- How formal or informal will these meetings be?
- What support will you provide Facilitators (will you have an open door policy or office hours to deal with issues)?
- How regularly do PAL Facilitators meet or have the chance to share experiences?
- How will you ensure that Facilitators' development needs are met?
- How will you monitor attendance at PAL sessions?
- How will you set up an effective process for monitoring and feedback?

Continued staff involvement is crucial to maintaining the presence of PAL, but once a scheme is up and running academic support is really needed only in a managerial and co-ordinating capacity. It is up to you, as academic co-ordinator, to decide the extent and means of this support. You may wish to distance yourself from PAL as much as possible and simply let the students get on with things or you may wish to retain some controlling interest by maintaining regular contact with the Facilitators and by making yourself available to Facilitators should they have any queries or difficulties. Most likely you will wish for the former (a hands-off approach) but find, in fact that you are spending more time than you had anticipated dealing with PAL issues! (…from experience, this mostly arises due to an enthusiasm and genuine interest in PAL and how it is going!)

Student ownership of PAL can be fostered in a variety of ways:
- Student Facilitators could be involved in recruiting (and training) the next years student Facilitators
- Student Facilitators could have regularly scheduled meetings with School staff
- Student Facilitators could take responsibility for promoting PAL

Evaluating PAL

There are several potential aims for any PAL scheme. Do you want your PAL scheme to improve exam results? Reduce the number of students who do not progress to the next level? Provide students with greater engagement with the department? Improve student retention? Boost students' understanding of a course or module? Improve students' study skills? Setting out clear aims is important for the planning and implementation of a PAL scheme but also in terms of working out how to, and why you should want to, evaluate the scheme.

Monitoring and evaluation are also necessary to shape future developments and improvements.

Methodologies

Below are some examples of possible methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of PAL in different areas.

- Questionnaires for Facilitators – all of the PAL schemes at Glasgow have benefited from questionnaires asking Facilitators to reflect on their PAL experiences from their experience of training through to facilitating sessions and the general running of the PAL scheme (see examples below).

- Focus groups and discussion – in some senses the ongoing feedback meetings for a PAL scheme allow for some informal evaluation. Feedback meetings are vital for monitoring progress.

- Questionnaires for client/potential client students – whole class questionnaires provide information from those students who have attended PAL sessions and those students who have not attended PAL sessions (see example below).

- Exam/assessment marks – these can be used to measure whether students who attend PAL have benefited in terms of their understanding of a subject.

- Student records can show whether retention and/or progression rates can be seen to have improved after the introduction of PAL.

Ask yourself:

- What do you want to find out?
- What questions will you ask?
- How will you use the information gained?

Sample questionnaire - Feedback on PAL Facilitator Training

Please take about 5 minutes to respond to each of the questions below about last week's training. Don't put your name on the form – your responses are anonymous. What you write will help me to develop future training sessions. Thanks.

1. At what moment in the training last week did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

2. At what moment in the training did you feel most distanced from what was happening?

3. What action that anyone (trainers or other students) took in the training week did you find most affirming and helpful?

4. What action that anyone took in the training did you find most puzzling or confusing?

5. What about the training surprised you most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you).

6. Are there things that you would like to receive further training on, that did or did not appear in last week's training session?

Sample questionnaire – Facilitators in Computing Science

Please help us evaluate the current PAL scheme by completing the following questionnaire. Qualitative and quantitative feedback from Facilitators and Level 1 students will enable us to gain some insight into the use and usefulness PAL to those involved, and how its implementation could be improved for next year.
Information from the completed questionnaires will be not be attributed to specific individuals. Your name is only requested to allow your answers to be linked to those in any future questionnaires. Answers will be collated and fed back to the Student Network and Computing Science. Thank you for your co-operation. Dr Margaret I. Brown, Dept of Computing Science. e-mail mbrown@dcs.gla.ac.uk

Name: .... Level .... Date ....

Q.1.   Explain why you volunteered to be a Facilitator.

        a) Main reason: b) Other reasons:

Q.2.   Will you volunteer to be a Facilitator next year?

        Yes   No   I'm in Level 4   Not sure   Please explain:

Q.3.   Does your experience of PAL meet your expectations? Please explain.

Q.4.   This year the PAL sessions have focused on the 1P Study Packs, but are now also addressing the 1Q module and past papers.

        a) Should PAL focus on topics other than Study Packs?   Yes   No

        b) Has focusing on 1Q and past papers been successful?   Yes   No

        c) What other topics did you address?

        d) What other topics could be addressed?

Q.5.   List the ways in which you feel your PAL sessions helped those students who attended.

        a) Main way they helped: b) Other ways they helped:

Q.6.   Did you use e-mail or any other way of communicating with your group?

        Yes   No   Please explain:

        How did your group respond?

Q.7.   Apart from the fact that your group may have merged, have you noticed any differences in the sessions in Term 2 compared to Term 1? (Student attitude etc.)

        Yes   No   Please explain:

Q.8.   Leaving aside any monetary benefit, how do you rate the benefit to you of being a PAL Facilitator so far?   (Please circle)

        Definitely have not benefited   Have not benefited   Neutral Have benefited

        Definitely have benefited

Q.9.   How have you benefited?

a) Greatest benefit:

b) Other ways you benefited (*actual benefits*):

c) What other benefits could there be for Facilitators? (*potential benefits*):

Q.10.   Has facilitating affected your own knowledge of computing science in any way?

Yes   No   Please explain:

Q.11.   Do you think that your experience as a Facilitator will help you in the future?

Yes   No   Not sure   Please explain:

Q.12. How would you organise / improve the PAL scheme next year?

Q.13.   Three Training Sessions were organised for Facilitators in October.

a) Did you attend?   Yes   No

b) How useful was the training?   *(please circle)*
Not at all useful   Not very useful Useful Very useful   Extremely useful

c) Did you get enough training?Yes   No

d) Please comment on the training you received:

e) What other training would have been useful / would you like to have been given?

Q.14. How useful was it to find out how other Facilitators ran their groups and the problems, successes etc. they experienced?

a)   via feedback sessions in the Boyd Orr

Not at all useful   Not very useful Useful Very useful   Extremely useful

b)   via feedback sessions in the Research Club

Not at all useful   Not very useful Useful Very useful   Extremely useful

c)   via email reports

Not at all useful   Not very useful Useful Very useful   Extremely useful

d)   via observation of other Facilitators

Not at all useful   Not very useful Useful Very useful   Extremely useful

Comments:

Q.15. If no students turn up at your PAL Session, how do you and your fellow Facilitators spend your time?

What benefits and problems did you encounter working with your co-Facilitator/s?

Q.16. It has been suggested that being a Facilitator may improve certain of your skills. Please indicate (tick) if you consider that facilitating has already improved any of the following of your skills.

Skill	Definitely improved	Improved	No effect Yet	Reduced	Definitely reduced
Leading/chairing a group					
Management skills					
Confidence building					
Communication skills					
Critical thinking skills					
Problem solving skills					
Presentation skills					
Ability to adapt to a particular audience					
Interpersonal skills					
Other skills, please specify.					

Q.17. Comment on the formation of the Advertising Group, the Web Design Group and the Staff Contact Group.

Q.18. Did you facilitate last year?   Yes   No

If "YES", please comment on PAL this year versus A-PASS last year

Q.19.   Did you attend PAL when you were in Level 1?

Yes   No   Wasn't available (I am in level 3/4)

a)   If you did attend in L1, please comment on PAL this year versus A-PASS last year

b)   If "NO"
        Please list the reasons you did not attend PAL

c)   If "Wasn't available",
        Please list the reasons why you would have attended PAL

        Please list the reasons you might not have attended PAL

Q.20.   Please comment on any aspect of PAL

Sample questionnaire – client/potential client students: EU Law

Matric no. …………….. Level ….

Please help us to evaluate PAL by answering:

SECTION A (ALL STUDENTS)
+
SECTION B (if you attended one or more PAL sessions)
or **SECTION C** (if you NEVER attended any PAL sessions)

SECTION A   ALL STUDENTS

Q.1. How comfortable / "at home" do you feel studying Law here?

Not at all comfortable   -3   -2   –1   0   +1   +2   +3 Very comfortable

Please comment:

Q.2. How often do you typically spend time outwith the formal teaching in workshops do you discuss aspects of the EU law course?
Never
Ahead of every workshop
Only when unsure
When interested in a specific topic

On average how many hours did you spend preparing for each workshop?

(Go to Section B if you did attend a PAL session)
(Go to Section C if you did not attend a PAL session)

SECTION B   Students who DID attend PAL on one or more occasion

Q.3.   How many PAL sessions did you attend?

Q.4.   Did you always go to the same group (same day and time)? YES   NO
         Please explain why:

Q.5.   How important were the following factors in your decision to go to PAL the first time?

	Not at all important	*Not important*	*Neutral*	*Important*	*Very important*
To find out what PAL was all about					
To increase my knowledge of the course work					
To increase my marks for exams, essays etc.					
To talk to students who had already completed my year					
To meet and socialise with other students in my year					
The advertising					
Other factor, please specify					

Q.6.   If you attended a second PAL session, explain why you went back.

Q.7.   If you did not attend a second PAL session, please explain why.

Q.8.   How much did you benefit from attending PAL? (Please tick or otherwise indicate)
Definitely have not benefited   Have not benefited   Neutral   Have benefited

Definitely have benefited

Please explain how you benefited/did not benefit.

Q.9.   How important was PAL for each of the following? Which other resources helped you?

	Not at all important	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
Finding out facts about aspects of EU Law covered on the course					
Really understanding a subject as against just learning to regurgitate facts					
Learning about the course itself and succeeding courses					
Good Study Skills					

Q.10.   Is there a single exercise or activity you remember from a PAL session as being particularly useful? Please explain.

Q.11.   How important were the following factors to make you MORE LIKELY to attend a specific PAL session? *(Please tick or otherwise indicate)*

	Not at all important	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
The time of the session					
The Facilitators for that session					
The other students who were going					
The specific topic for that session					
The amount of work you HAD prepared for the forthcoming workshop					
The amount of work you HAD NOT prepared for the forthcoming workshop					
Other factor, please specify					

Q.12.   Would you have preferred a PAL session to help prepare for a forthcoming workshop or to revise a workshop already attended?

Q.13.   Having attended PAL session this year would you be interested in becoming a PAL Facilitator next session? Yes   No   Any comments?

Q. 14.   Please suggest any activities/topics you would have liked included in the PAL sessions.

Q. 15   Please comment on any aspect of PAL.

SECTION C   Students who did not attend any PAL sessions

Q.14.   If you did not attend PAL, how important were the following factors in deciding that you would not go?

	Not at all important	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
Sessions were not at convenient times					
Didn't really know what PAL was about.					
Felt it might be embarrassing if I couldn't answer questions / had not done work beforehand					
Prefer to work on my own					
Couldn't be bothered					
Coping well, didn't feel I needed to go.					
No-one else I knew was going					
No evidence that PAL would be useful to me					
Other reason, (please specify)					

Comments:

Q.15. How important would the following factors be to make you MORE LIKELY to attend PAL?
         (Please tick or otherwise indicate)

	Not at all important	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very important
More convenient times					
More interesting topics					
Different activities in the session					
More information about sessions					
Seeing evidence that PAL would be useful to me					
Other factor, please specify					

Q.16.   Please suggest any activities/topics you would have liked included in the PAL sessions

Q.17.   Please comment on any aspect of PAL (e.g. in hindsight do you wish you had given it a try? In principle do you think it is a good idea?).

PAL Facilitator Training
Information, Activities & Handouts

The materials and suggested activities in this section come from the experiences in 2003-2004 of training for Computing Science, Psychology and EU Law Facilitators. Evaluation of the various training events for PAL Facilitators (see Evaluation section for an example proforma) shows that students found the training useful.

Training times varied across the departments from one three-hour session to 3 x three-hour sessions.

Initial training

- Feedback from Facilitators shows that the most powerful training activities are those which allow students to practice the skills they will require in PAL sessions. Role-play exercises, facilitation exercises and group work are key. The smaller the group undergoing training the easier it is to effectively use these techniques. Appropriate physical space is also important.
- The second most important consideration for the 2004 Facilitators was that the training should focus from the start on the specifics of the department or course context. The materials provided in this section are generic but could easily be adapted to tailor them to your Facilitators' needs.
- An extremely valuable resource that can be used in training are current Facilitators who can share their experiences (and learn from new perspectives).

On-going training

Whether in the form of specific training sessions, or as part of regular feedback sessions, ongoing training is very important. The materials in this section should provide a good base for any training that takes place before the PAL sessions start. Some of the handouts, especially those relating to facilitation skills, can also be used at strategic points after PAL sessions have begun. On-going training should very much be based on feedback and experience from the PAL sessions and the PAL Facilitators should be able to specify any areas in which they would like to receive further training.

How to use this section

Training should be designed to meet the needs of your particular PAL scheme. The materials included in this section are collected from examples of PAL Facilitator training previously used in the University. You don't need to use all of the activities and handouts and you can add your own materials and ideas. Some will suit your needs more than others and this section is designed to help you to pick what would suit your scheme and give you ideas on how to structure your training.

Training Topics

Activities and handouts are arranged into the training topics listed below. These were chosen as they were the topics that existing co-ordinators most commonly used in Facilitator training:

1. What is PAL?
2. Using reflective practice
3. Approaches to learning
4. Teaching v. facilitating
5. Effective communication
6. Supporting student clients
7. Planning PAL sessions
8. Promoting PAL

Each training topic is broken down as follows:

- ***Why might you want to include this topic in your training?***
  General information and reasons why the topic might be useful.
- ***What training activities could you use?***
  Activities are suggested along with guidelines on how long the activity will take and what resources you need to use it.
- ***What handouts could you use?***
  The handouts included can be adapted and photocopied for your own use. Just remember to acknowledge the source where this is stated. Use them to generate discussion and to feed into the suggested activities. Wherever possible, they should be used as discussion documents and Facilitators should be encouraged to feel confident enough to 'own' them and adapt them where appropriate. These could be provided before training to cut back on time spent 'passively' reading during the session.
- ***Where can you get more information on this topic?***
  If you feel that you need more information or would like to research this topic more for yourself, some links to further information are included.

Session Planning

At the end of this section you will find a proforma to help you schedule the topics and activities you choose into a timed training plan.

Training Topic 1 – What is PAL?

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

Facilitators will have a general idea of what PAL is before they attend training. However, training should aim to provide Facilitators with a better understanding of what PAL is and what it is not and to allow them to understand the aims and objectives of the scheme in their context.

What training activities could you use?

There are three suggested activities here. You may want to use one of these or even use one you create yourself using a similar idea.

Activity – Personalising PAL principles

Use the handout 'Some principles of PAL' (below). Ask Facilitators to work in pairs and go through the principles to personalise them to their PAL scheme's needs. For example, which of the principles are most important to them? Are any principles missing? Are there any listed that don't seem to fit in their context? Could they be re-worded to make more sense to them?
After c.20 minutes ask the pairs to feedback their ideas to the larger group. Lead a discussion to agree on what personalised principles are key to their scheme.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Flip chart

Activity – Ranking principles

Get the Facilitators to consider the principles in pairs and to rank their top 5 most important principles. Each pair then joins with another pair to make a four and to compare their choice of 5 most important principles. Fours then join to make groups of 8 and so on until the whole group comes together to discuss the principles and what they mean to their PAL scheme.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Flip chart

Activity – Sharing experience

If you have experienced PAL Facilitators available, a question and answer structure could be used to allow them share their understanding and experience of PAL with new Facilitators. One way to do this is to set up a 'speed-date' for 'What is PAL?'

Arrange chairs into 2 horseshoes with chairs facing each other. New Facilitators sit in one row and experienced Facilitators face them. Each new Facilitator has a number of questions that they have drawn from a bag of appropriate questions that you have prepared earlier. They ask the Facilitator facing them the questions. This activity is timed and after a set time (no more than one minute per question) a buzzer goes and the experienced Facilitators stand and move to the next seat in the row. The new Facilitators stay seated in the same position throughout. Depending on numbers the new and experienced Facilitators might all get a chance to meet – this activity can also be used to introduce people to one another. Examples of questions could be: "What is the difference between PAL facilitating and teaching?"; "What's the most important skill a PAL Facilitator needs?"; "Why do you think PAL is useful for students?"; "What's the best thing about PAL?"

This activity allows new Facilitators to gain some insight from experienced Facilitators into what to expect from PAL. It also makes the experienced Facilitators think about PAL and verbalise their understanding.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: None

What handouts could you use?

The handout 'Some principles of PAL' is on the next page.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

For more handouts, try,
http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/what_is_pal_.html

Some Principles of PAL – proforma

PAL is a methodology for learner support.	
PAL is small group learning.	
PAL is facilitated by other students acting as mentors.	
PAL is confidential	
PAL is voluntary.	
PAL is non-remedial.	
PAL is participative.	
PAL encourages collaborative learning, rather than competitive learning.	
PAL is content based and process orientated.	
PAL integrates effective learning strategies within the course content.	
PAL works in the language of the discipline.	
PAL does not create dependency.	
PAL is pro-active, not reactive.	
PAL encourages learner autonomy.	
PAL decreases drop out rates and aids retention.	
PAL gives opportunity to increase academic performance.	
PAL challenges the barriers between year groups.	
PAL benefits all students regardless of current academic competency.	
PAL gives privacy to practice the subject and make mistakes and build up confidence.	
PAL enables a clear view of course expectations.	

Training Topic 2 – Using Reflective Practice

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

Right from the start of training, if you encourage Facilitators to employ reflective practice, this should benefit them while session planning, running PAL sessions and in all of their feedback about PAL.

Reflective practice involves thinking about and learning from practice and from the practices of others so as to gain new perspectives on the ways in which you can tackle any given task or situation. The activities below can help Facilitators to understand this process.

ACTION

PLANNING   **REFLECTION**
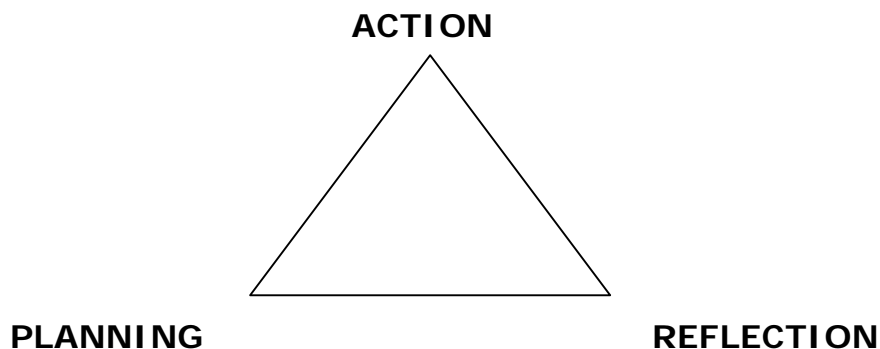
What training activities could you use?

Activity – Reflective practice

Ask Facilitators to recollect a learning experience they have had and use the diagram above or handout below to see how reflective practice is something that is part of their day-to-day experience.

For example, to take lecture notes students will ACT/DO by taking notes during a lecture. They might then REFLECT/REVIEW on this action when they read over notes and see how their note-taking technique could be improved. They might PLAN, for example, to use a more structured system of note taking. The cycle then comes full circle when they ACT by taking notes in an improved way in the next lecture.

By using reflective practice the Facilitators should recognise that their skills as PAL Facilitators will increase with practice and reflection and that this is a continual process.

Ask some Facilitators to share their experience with the larger group and discuss how this process can be useful to them.

Point out that their clients will go through the same cycles in their learning and that recognising and helping clients to do this can also be beneficial.

Time needed: 15 mins
Resources needed: Handout

Activity – Past learning experiences

It may be useful for Facilitators to reflect upon their own learning experiences in the previous year. This empathy with their student clients is an important aspect of running successful PAL sessions.

Ask Facilitators to reflect back to their previous year at University and in their department. Provide them with cut out images from old university prospectuses. These images should show such things as: lectures, seminars, labs, students working in the library, sport facilities, student accommodation etc.

Allow the Facilitators to spend time in small groups looking through these images and categorising them. This should help them to remember how they felt as new students to the department and what kinds of information or advice they felt they would have benefited from. This will then help them to work through some of the issues that they might like to cover in PAL sessions with new first year students.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Cut out images from old prospectuses

What handouts could you use?

The handout 'Do, Review, Plan' handout is on the next page.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

ATHERTON J S (2003) *Learning and Teaching: Reflective Practice* [On-line] UK: Available:
http://www.dmu.ac.uk/~jamesa/learning/reflecti.htm Accessed: 10 December 2004

Reflective Practice
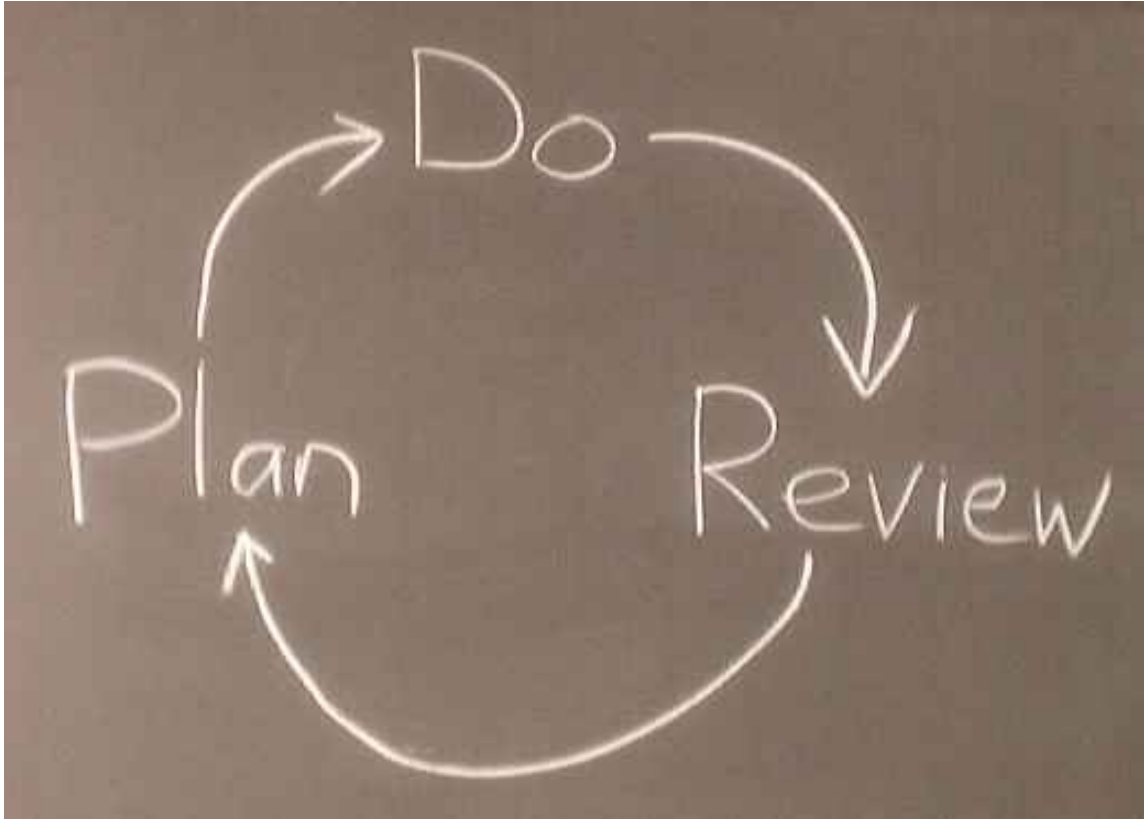
A learning experience:

Do: Take notes during a lecture

Review: Read notes over and think about how you could make your note taking better

Plan: To use a more systematic approach/get advice from friends/use the Student Learning Service for help

PAL facilitation:

Do:

Review:

Plan:

Topic 3 - Approaches to Learning

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

PAL is a methodology for supporting learning and encouraging students to learn together in peer groups. It is useful to give Facilitators some understanding of the different learning strategies that students can apply to their work in order for the Facilitators to successfully facilitate effective PAL sessions.

Three main approaches to learning have been identified in the academic literature. These are **Surface**, **Deep** and **Strategic**.

Characteristics of students in the three approaches to learning

SURFACE APPROACH

- Intention to complete task requirements
- Memorize information needed for assessments
- Failure to distinguish principles from examples
- Treat task as an external imposition
- Focus on discrete elements without integration
- Unreflectiveness about purpose or strategies

DEEP APPROACH

- Intention to understand
- Vigorous interaction with content
- Relate new ideas to previous knowledge
- Relate concepts to everyday experience
- Relate evidence to conclusions
- Examine the logic of the argument

STRATEGIC APPROACH

- Intention to obtain highest possible grades
- Organise time and distribute effort to greatest possible effect
- Ensure conditions and materials for studying are appropriate
- Use previous exam papers to predict questions
- Be alert to cues about marking schemes

What training activities could you use?

> ### *Activity – Approaches to learning*
>
> The Approaches to Studying Questionnaire (below) gives Facilitators the opportunity to explore their approach to learning.
>
> Ask Facilitators to complete the questionnaire and score their responses. Use the results in the larger group to discuss how best to use PAL to cater for different learning approaches and how, where appropriate, to encourage students to adopt a deep approach to the course content.
>
> Time needed: 30 mins
> Resources needed: Handout

What handouts could you use?

The 'Approaches to Studying Questionnaire' is on the next page.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

For more information on Surface, Deep and Strategic Learning see:

Atherton, J. S. (2003) *Learning and Teaching: Deep and Surface Learning* [On-line] UK: Available: http://www.dmu.ac.uk/~jamesa/learning/deepsurf.htm Accessed: 10 December 2004

There are also links to various effective study sites from the Effective Learning Service, see http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/tls/sls/effectivelinksindex.html These gives ideas about how best to cater for students with different approaches to learning.

Faculty Effective Learning Advisers are also a prospective source.

Approaches to Studying Questionnaire
(adapted from questionnaire created by Entwistle et al)

Please answer every item quickly by giving your immediate response. Circle the appropriate code number to show your general approach to studying.

4	means definitely agree
3	means agree with reservations
2	if the item doesn't apply to you, or if it is impossible to give a definite answer
1	means Disagree with reservations
0	means Definitely Disagree

1	I find it easy to organise my study time effectively	4	3	2	1	0	A
2	I like to be told precisely what to do in essays or other set work	4	3	2	1	0	B
3	It's important for me to do really well in the courses I take	4	3	2	1	0	A
4	I usually set out to understand thoroughly the meaning of what I am asked to study	4	3	2	1	0	C
5	When I'm studying I try to memorise important facts which may come in useful later	4	3	2	1	0	B
6	When I'm doing a piece of work, I try to bear in mind exactly what that particular tutor/lecturer seems to want	4	3	2	1	0	A
7	My main reason for studying these subjects is that they really interest me and I want to find out more	4	3	2	1	0	C
8	I suppose I'm more interested in the qualifications I'll get than in the subjects I'm taking	4	3	2	1	0	B
9	I'm usually prompt at starting assignments when they are set for me	4	3	2	1	0	A
10	I generally put a lot of effort into trying to understand things which initially seem difficult to grasp	4	3	2	1	0	C
11	Often I find I have read or heard things without having a chance to really understand them	4	3	2	1	0	B
12	If conditions aren't right for me to study, I generally manage to do something to change them	4	3	2	1	0	A
13	I often find myself questioning things that I hear in lectures/tutorials or read in books	4	3	2	1	0	C
14	I tend to read very little beyond what is required for completing assignments	4	3	2	1	0	B
15	It is important for me to do better than my friends, if I possibly can	4	3	2	1	0	A
16	I spend a good deal of my spare time in finding out more about interesting topics which have been discussed in class	4	3	2	1	0	C
17	I find my subjects so interesting that I would like to continue with them after I finish the course	4	3	2	1	0	C
18	I find I have to concentrate on memorising a good deal of what we have to learn in order to pass the course	4	3	2	1	0	B

Score your questionnaire by writing down the numbers circled for questions marked A, B or C. There should be six numbers for each column below:

	A	B	C
Totals			

'A' scale score

This is a score out of 24 on **'Achieving'** orientation. This indicates a *strategic approach* to leaning. This indicates competitiveness, well-organised study methods, and hope for success. Students who score highly on this scale are orientated towards doing well, whatever this involves. They tend to do well in their studies.

'B' scale score

This is a score out of 24 on **'Reproducing'** orientation. This indicates a *surface approach* to learning. A surface approach is when students focus their attention on the details and information in a lesson or text. They try to memorise individual details in the form they appear in a lesson or text or to list the features of the situation. Students who score highly on this scale may not be interested in the subject and only keep narrowly to the syllabus as laid down and do not follow up any interests of their own. Despite their concerns to pass, they may do badly in their studies (especially at university level).

'C' scale score

This is a score out of 24 on **'Meaning'** orientation. This indicates a *deep approach* to learning. A deep approach is when students focus their attention on the overall meaning or message in a lesson, text or situation. They attempt to relate ideas together and construct their own meaning, possibly, if appropriate, in relation to their own experiences. Students who score highly on this scale follow up their own interests even if these are outside those of the course which is assessed. They tend to do well in their studies.

Norms are available from large-scale national studies of how students learn. What is interesting from these results is that the subject taken by a student seems to influence the way they learn. Or is it the other way round?

Compare your results with the following national averages:

	Arts	Social Sciences	Science	Overall	SD
(A) Achieving	12.50	12.73	13.08	12.82	4.26
(B) Reproducing	11.98	13.65	14.26	13.51	4.40
(C) Meaning	15.17	14.21	13.93	14.31	4.51

(Adapted from material by Professor Graham Gibbs, Oxford Brookes University).

Topic 4 – Teaching v. facilitating

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

PAL is intended as study support **not** 'teaching by students'. Discussion of the difference between teaching and facilitation can be useful in training to help Facilitators understand their role.

What training activities could you use?

Activity – Teaching v. facilitating

Ask the Facilitators, in groups, what they think the differences are between facilitating PAL sessions and teaching. To do this, they could use the template provided on the next page.

Once they have had time to think about this and list some differences and similarities on the template discuss and share each group's ideas.

Time needed: 20 mins
Resources needed: 'Teaching v. facilitating' Template Handout

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Activity – Strategies for Facilitation

Ask Facilitators in pairs to think about what reasons there might be for students to view PAL as a means of 'getting the right answer' or as another form of teaching to complement lectures, tutorials, labs etc. Ask them to list these reasons in the left-hand column of the handout 'Strategies to ensure that PAL does not become, or is not viewed as 'teaching by students''.

Then, taking each reason in turn, ask Facilitators to think about what strategies they could use to combat this. When they have finished, share reasons and strategies with the whole group.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Strategies to ensure that PAL does not become, or is not viewed as 'teaching by students'' template handout.

What handouts could you use?

The handouts 'Teaching v. facilitating' and 'Strategies to ensure that PAL does not become, or is not viewed as 'teaching by students'' can be found on the following pages.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/teaching_vs._facilitating.html has lots of examples of the differences between teaching and facilitating that you could use as a prompt during these activities.

Teaching v. Facilitating

DIFFERENCES	SIMILARITIES

Strategies to ensure that PAL does not become, or is not viewed as, 'teaching by students'

Potential reason why PAL might become/be seen as 'teaching by students'	Strategy to combat this

Topic 5 – Effective Communication

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

PAL Facilitators need to be able to communicate effectively with student clients and the activities below on active listening, two-way communication and questioning skills can help to give them strategies for use in their PAL sessions. It can be beneficial to use all of these activities in your training or to use activities that cover all of these areas.

What training activities could you use?

Activity – Active listening

One of the most essential skills a Facilitator needs if they are going to lead successful PAL sessions, no matter what size the group, is the ability to LISTEN.

The Active Listening checklist (see handouts section) can be used as a template to allow Facilitators to assess their own and others' listening skills. It can be used during a role-play exercise of a PAL session.

Ask the Facilitators to choose a topic or lecture which they all have come across in their studies. You could provide some material if necessary, perhaps even play a video of part of a lecture.

Divide the Facilitators into pairs and have one play the role of the PAL Facilitator and the other the student who has just come across the material for the first time. They should then proceed to role-play a PAL session based on this material. Alternatively, ask a pair to volunteer to role play in front of the rest of the group.

This exercise demonstrates the importance of active listening and effective questioning skills and can be adapted to be part of group role-play rather than pairs.

After 15 minutes of role-play, lead a group discussion on the outcomes, or, if one pair role-played for the whole group, ask the larger group to give them feedback based upon the checklist.

You may want to use the handout 'Active Listening' to round off your discussion (see handouts section).

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Active Listening Checklist' Handout
                      'Active Listening' Handout

Activity – Two-way communication

This exercise is designed to allow students to explore the advantages of active communication and group work.

You will need a variety of cut-out shapes of different colours (e.g. large blue circle, small blue circle, pink triangle etc – 8 shapes per 'team' is a good number).

Divide the Facilitators into pairs and have them sit back-to-back. Give one partner a set of shapes and ask them to design a pattern with them.

Then give the other partner a set of shapes. The 'designer' then has to instruct the 'novice' and get them to produce a copy of the design. The 'novice' is **not** allowed to ask questions. Keep a strict time limit to this activity – three minutes maximum. Then allow the pairs to compare the designs. It is probable that they do not look very similar.

Discussion should focus on the difficulty of understanding how to complete a task when two-way communication is not possible. This might have similarities to a lecture situation when student numbers make it difficult to ask questions. PAL allows students to work through tasks together and encourages active communication.

Allow each pair to swap roles and repeat the exercise.

Each pair can then repeat the exercise but this time allow the 'novice' to question the 'designer'. Hopefully, this time, the designs should be reasonably similar and, therefore, show the benefits of two-way communication. This second attempt also allows Facilitators to think about the benefits of questioning and can be a good lead in to the activities on questioning below.

Time needed: 15 mins
Resources needed: Cut-out shapes

Activity – Effective questions: using closed & open questioning

Ask groups or pairs of Facilitators to devise a set of closed questions around a particular topic, while another group devises a set of open questions on the same topic. Topics could be related to the course or could be chose more generally by Facilitators. Get each group to ask the other group their questions.

The purpose of this exercise is to look at the different answers that can be generated simply by using different question types.

Cement the learning in this exercise and discuss other types of questions by using the handout 'Effective Questioning' (see handouts section).

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Effective Questioning' handout

Activity – Effective questions: redirecting questions

Start by giving Facilitators the handout 'Effective Questioning' (see handouts section) and discussing it if you have not done so already in a previous exercise.

In small groups (c.5), ask PAL facilitators to role-play a scenario where 'students' come to a PAL session and try to get the PAL Facilitators to provide answers to specific course-related questions (rather than finding them out for themselves!). PAL Facilitators need to role-play how they would redirect questions back to the rest of the group who are acting the students.

This is a useful method of allowing Facilitators to practice using some of the suggestions given in the handout. It is also a good way into a discussion on what a PAL Facilitator should and should not be expected to do.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Effective Questioning' handout

What handouts could you use?

The handouts: 'Active Listening Checklist', 'Active Listening' and 'Effective Questioning' are on the next few pages.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

See http://www.petervenn.co.uk/adquest/adquest.html for more on effective questioning.

Active listening checklist

ACTION/SKILL	EXAMPLE
Appropriate eye contact	
Body language	
Voice	
Verbal encouragement	
Reflecting feelings	
Non-interruption of student answers	
Encouraging student questions	
Positive reinforcement	
Other ways demonstrated	
Other	
Other	

Active listening

(The following has been adapted from Group Facilitation Skills for Student Leaders (1998) by J.E. Brooks-Harris & K.G. Shollenberger. University of Hawaii website, http://www2.hawaii.edu/~jharris/facilitation.html and from materials at www.peerlearning.ac.uk)

Active listening requires concentration and demonstrates that you are interested in what others have to say. This has the effect of encouraging people to speak more freely. Three key components to active listening are; be patient; be friendly; be reinforcing.

Non-verbal elements

Non-verbal elements include using appropriate eye contact, attentive body language (leaning forward, nodding and reacting facially to things being said). Your voice, and what you say, should indicate interest.

Encouraging and paraphrasing

The use of minimal verbal encouragements e.g. 'uh-huh', 'really?', 'tell me more' are much more likely to elicit continued conversation than stony silence. Similarly, non-verbal encouragement such as nods and appropriate smiles to demonstrate you understand what someone is saying will have a similar effect. You can also clarify by paraphrasing what someone says in order to let them know that you have understood them. For example, "Mandy, you found the last problem we worked through frustrating, is that right?"

Reflecting feelings

It is often helpful to identify emotions that are expressed indirectly. This involves focusing more on the feeling than the content. For example, "It seems like you're relieved that the class test has been postponed."

Encourage student questions

Student questions form the raw material for PAL sessions. Always ask if students have questions and ensure plenty of time to answer.

Place the emphasis on student ideas

Always encourage students to share their thoughts, because students build new concepts upon their own ideas and new course material.

Encourage them to find the answers in their lecture notes and to summarise the major concepts of lectures and let other students fine-tune the responses. You should also wait for other students to comment after a member of the class has said something. Don't immediately label an answer right or wrong – wait to see if other students have anything to add, and encourage them to do so.

PAL should be a safe and comfortable environment for students to try things out, attempt answers and make mistakes. Remember it is often from making mistakes that our best learning comes about.

Use positive reinforcement

Examples of positive reinforcement include offering praise for an answer (even if not correct e.g. good idea but not quite there yet, or thanks for that answer but it's not quite what we're looking for), using a posture of interest and concern, maintaining eye contact, smiling and nodding and making positive comments.

Repeat student responses - This can act as positive reinforcement, to summarise or clarify comments and enable others to hear comments.

Protect students from interruptions, laughter or those with louder voices. Let them see that their contribution is valuable.

Effective Questioning

? Knowing which types of questions to use in different situations will help to facilitate effective group discussion. Some question types and their uses are outlined below.

Open questions, an invitation to talk

Facilitators should usually use open questions. Open questions allow the other person to elaborate on information of their choice. A closed question, on the other hand, emphasises content and can often be answered in a few words or with a yes or no. Open questions are preferred to stimulate conversation as they allow the person to whom you are listening to 'lead' the conversation. For instance, 'Did you understand the main points of the first lecture on EU law?' is a closed question. An open equivalent might be 'Could you explain to me what you thought the most important features of the lecture were?' How, where, why, what, who, which, can you etc. can all be useful ways of starting an open question.

Socratic questioning
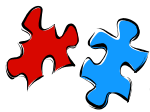
This type of questioning can be a useful tool to lead students to correct answers. This is where the PAL facilitator uses open questions to break down difficult concepts into small chunks of information that students can answer more easily. Instead of asking "How do we address this whole problem?", ask first "What is the first thing we need to do to understand this?" It is much more effective to spend a session closely dissecting a lecture or exercise bit by bit than trying to answer the big question at the start.

Intervention questions

Students may ask for help or Facilitators may become aware that there is a problem from the behaviour of the group. To make it easy for students to admit they are having difficulty the Facilitator should think about open questions that could be used to promote discussion. The closed question, 'Is *everything OK?*' prompts the answer *'Yes.'* Try the open question, '*What can I do to help?*'

Clarifying questions

Clarifying questions can be used when a student's answer is vague or unclear. The Facilitator asks the student for meaning or more information. Use a mixture of open questions, **reflective questions** (questions which encourage the student to develop a line of thought further) and **closed questions** (questions used to check facts). Often the simple process of telling you about the problem will make it clear to the group where they went wrong. It's important to listen carefully and check your own understanding

- Are you saying that…?
- Could you explain that in a little more detail?
- Can you be a bit clearer about that? Can you be more specific?
- How would you explain that in an essay or exam?
- Anything else you would like to add?
- In what way?

Refocusing questions

Another way to clarify student ideas is to use refocusing questions. These encourage the student to see a concept from another perspective by focusing on relationships.

- How is that related to…?
- How does that tie into…?
- How does that compare with…?
- If that is true, then what would happen if…?

Encouraging/probing questions

The PAL Facilitator can help students to begin to process information beyond the superficial level of delivering the 'right' answer. This will happen when students begin to genuinely interact with the material by clarifying it, thinking critically about it, putting it in their own words and relating it to other knowledge. Ask questions which encourage students to find the next steps for themselves using **open** and **hypothetical** questions:

- What had you planned to do next?
- What do you think would happen if…?
- Do you think that will work?
- How did you arrive at that answer?
- Can you suggest another way to think about this?
- When have you done something like this before?

Redirecting questions (or how not to give answers...)

If the level of direct questioning from students becomes a problem, it may be worth reminding the group that the purpose of a PAL session is for students to discuss course materials or study strategies, and that your job is to help them do this.

- Can anybody help X answer that question?
- What was said in the lecture about this?
- Does anyone know the answer to that question?
- What do *you* think about that?
- What information would you need to answer that?
- Does anyone have any hints about this in their notes?
- Let's try and work that out together.

Note

In response to your questions you may be faced with a wall of silence. Don't panic! Remember it is important to *wait* for student responses (within reason!). Don't be afraid of short periods of silence as students may need time to think and gain confidence when asked a question.

(The above has been adapted from Group Facilitation Skills for Student Leaders (1998) by J.E. Brooks-Harris & K.G. Shollenberger. University of Hawaii website, http://www2.hawaii.edu/~jharris/facilitation.html and from materials at www.peerlearning.ac.uk)

Topic 6 – Critical Incidents & Student Support

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

Facilitators may encounter difficult situations in sessions and training can help them deal effectively with these.

Facilitators should be encouraged to take time to be aware of what support for students is available at departmental level and university-wide so they can encourage students to access this where appropriate.

It is worth spending some time during training brainstorming which support services Facilitators are aware of. The University website is a good resource and student support leaflets are available from the Student Information Desk (SID) based in the Macmillan Reading Room.

What training activities could you use?

Activity - Dealing with challenging incidents

This exercise should be used to give Facilitators the confidence to realise that they *can* facilitate effective PAL sessions.

Divide the Facilitators into pairs and provide each pair with the 'Critical Incident' proforma handout (see handout section which follows).

Ask them to consider each of the incidents and think about how they could deal with them. They may wish to add challenging incidents to the proforma list. Then ask the pairs to identify four or five incidents that they consider to be most problematic. Each pair then feedback to the whole group their key incidents and as a group the possible solutions to the incidents can be discussed.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Critical Incident' proforma handout

Activity - Boundaries

Ask the group to brainstorm the Support Services that they have used or are aware of. Discuss with them how they might use/refer to these services in their PAL sessions. Add your knowledge of other support services that the group does not identify. Lead a discussion on where their boundaries lie as PAL Facilitators and what they can deal with and what limitations they have. You may also want to include a discussion about confidentiality in this session.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Relevant handouts from Support Services or
                       University Services website
                       http://www.gla.ac.uk/student/support.html

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What handouts could you use?

The handout proforma: 'Critical Incidents' can be found on the following page.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

See the Student Support Services web page at http://www.gla.ac.uk/student/support.html for more information and handout material for your sessions.

Critical Incidents

Incident	How you could deal with it
Only one student turns up	
More students than expected turn up	
The whole group is silent and unresponsive	
A student is silent and unresponsive	
Subgroups start forming and private conversations start	
The group becomes dependant on the Facilitators	
Discussion goes off the point	
Two students arrive late and distract others	
Two students are very dominant	
Students reject the facilitation process and demand to be told answers	
A student is aggressive and racist	

Students are not listening to each other. Discussion is not building on previous contributions	
Students start arguing with each other	
The exercise fails or goes wrong	
The group give inaccurate responses	
The discussion starts going round in circles	
No creativity	
Lack of support for ideas	
Information only flows from one member of the group	
Students ask for answers to course work problems	

Topic 7 - Session-Planning

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

Planning sessions is essential for the smooth running of PAL sessions and for Facilitators' confidence. Facilitators often want to know what to do in the first session and how they can plan and prepare. Including this in your training plans allows you to support them in this process.

What training activities could you use?

Activity – Session planning

Get the facilitators to work in pairs, ideally with their partner Facilitator. Using the 'Session Planning Starter Questions' handout (see handouts in the next section) ask them to prepare their own PAL session based on all of the information they have been given during training.

This is designed to get students to imagine taking a PAL session and in their pairs devise a plan for either the first PAL session or a later session. Ask them to feed back their plans to the larger group.

Using the handout, 'Working in small groups' can be a good way to round off this session and cement and re-cap on ideas.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: 'Session planning starter questions' handout
                      'Working in small groups' handout

Activity – Techniques to engage clients with session content

A PAL session may work as a general discussion forum. However, to ensure that students engage with PAL and the content of PAL sessions Facilitators must be able to use a variety of active learning techniques. Session planning therefore involves the consideration of both content and form (the what and the how).

Lead a brainstorming session on techniques to engage student clients and generate active learning. Examples might include quizzes, lecture-note review, mind-mapping, brainstorming exercises, small group discussion, plenary discussion, pair-work, use of the whiteboard for summary, asking a student client to summarise on the whiteboard, problem solving using past exam papers, mini presentations, poster presentations etc.

Once you have a list from the brainstorming session, allocate all Facilitators a subject or topic relevant to your discipline. Ask them to think of ways to best present the topic to engage the client students using techniques identified in the brainstorming. Ask facilitators to explain and justify their approach to the whole group.

You may want to cement this learning and add more ideas by using the handout 'Techniques that support group facilitation'.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Flip Chart, pens & handout 'Techniques that support group facilitation'.

Activity - Role-play the first PAL session

As a whole group brainstorm ideas for the content and structure of the first session and devise a session-plan. This could include for example, an icebreaker, introduction to PAL, an activity about getting started as a student in the x department, student skills, rounding up the session.

Once the session plan is agreed divide into groups and allocate each group one of the items in the session plan. The groups then have 10 minutes to prepare their section after which the groups role-play their sections with other groups playing the role of student clients.

Ask the Facilitators to treat this exercise as if it is the real thing i.e. consider seat-planning, use of whiteboard etc. This allows the Facilitators to get a feel for how their first PAL session might be.

Encourage all participants to provide constructive feedback. It is important to allow the 'role-players' to feedback first on how they felt their performance had been. Feedback can then be offered all.

Time needed: 1 hour
Resources needed: Flip Chart and pens

What handouts could you use?

The handouts 'PAL session planning starter questions', 'Working in small groups' and 'Techniques that support group facilitation' can be found on the following pages.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

For more advice on planning sessions, chat to experienced PAL facilitators or invite one or two along to talk to the group about their experiences at the end of the session (i.e. after the new Facilitators have had the chance to think about how they would plan the session for themselves).

PAL Session Planning Starter Questions

- ➢ How will you arrange the room?

- ➢ Where will you sit?

- ➢ How will you welcome people into the session?

- ➢ How will you introduce PAL to the group?

- ➢ How will you get the group members to introduce themselves to each other?

- ➢ How can you make the sessions feel relaxed, enjoyable and friendly?

- ➢ Will you negotiate ground-rules for PAL sessions with the clients?

- ➢ Will you use an 'ice-breaker'?

- ➢ Will you refer to/use any materials? If so, how?

- ➢ What will you do if students expect you to teach them?

- ➢ How will you ensure that individual members communicate with one another?

- ➢ How will you ensure you keep to time?

- ➢ How will you close the session?

- ➢ Is there anything else you need to consider?

Working in small groups

Being an effective group Facilitator involves using skills that allow you to influence the way a group interacts and learns. Four types of group facilitation skills have been identified: Engaging, Informing, Involving and Planning.

(These skills were originally identified and described in the book, *Workshops: Designing and facilitating experiential learning* by J. E. Brooks-Harris & S. R. Stock-Ward (1999): Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

1. ENGAGING

Engaging facilitation skills invite members to be a part of a group. They encourage a member to feel included and valued and help group members reflect on what they already know and prepare them for interactive learning. Engaging skills are used to create curiosity, interest and energy. Given that you may encounter new faces in each PAL session it is important to put these skills into practice at the start of every single session.

Scene Setting

This skill enables you to clarify expectations of your role as a Facilitator to the group e.g.

"Hello everyone, I'd like your attention! I'm Diane and I'm one of the Facilitators for the PAL sessions."

Creating an Open Environment

There are things you can do as a Facilitator to welcome members to the group and make them feel included e.g.

"I'm really glad that each of you decided to come along to this session. I hope we all have a useful and enjoyable time."

Encouraging Connections

In order to feel connected to a group, members need to get to know one another and see what they have in common e.g.

"It might be useful to start with everyone introducing themselves and saying what they hope to get out of the PAL sessions."

Building Group Rapport

A challenge of group facilitating is creating camaraderie and goodwill within the group. It is important to encourage positive interactions that make members feel good about being part of the group.

"Thanks for coming to this session. It might be useful if each of us starts by saying what they have found to be the most challenging thing about 2nd year law and in what ways they've found it different to 1st year."

Defining Group Identity

Every group has an identity and an atmosphere. As a Facilitator, you will set the tone for defining what the group is all about and what it will feel like to be a member e.g.

"Let me start by defining what the PAL scheme is about and what we hope to achieve in running these sessions."

2. INFORMING

Informing facilitation skills are used to provide a group with information from outside the group and to help the group learn. These skills include helping the group consolidate factual information and allowing group members to gain new knowledge. Two types of information are relevant to a group-learning format: first, content information from outside the group; and, second, process information from within the group itself.

Providing Information

Facilitation sometimes involves providing the group with information that they don't already have. In the case of the PAL scheme, your job is not to provide information about the subject being studied but more about the administration of the scheme itself or perhaps about resources within the university that the group might not be aware of e.g.

"There are several books in the workshop/library that can help support this group's activities. Let me tell you about some of them..."

Soliciting Information

A Facilitator often needs to collect information from the group. This can be done by asking open questions and surveying ideas e.g.

"What kinds of things have you done to effectively cope with exams in the past? Can I have two or three people share what has and hasn't worked for them?"

Clarifying Ideas or Concepts

This skill involves making sure everyone understands what is being said or agreed upon. One way to clarify is to summarise the concept or idea and see if there are any misunderstandings e.g.

"Let me make sure that I am clear on this. As a group we think that the most important point in lecture 1 of EU law is……….. and we'd like to spend a few moments now concentrating on that"

Conceptualising

Being a Facilitator sometimes involves using new or outside knowledge to help the group better understand itself. Looking at the group using a particular theory, model, or concept is one example of conceptualising e.g.

"I think that in this group there are some of you who would prefer the Facilitators to take the lead more, others prefer a more informal style."

Learning from Within the Group

In addition to providing information from outside the group, you can survey group members or gather information about the group itself.

You might also use your observation skills to identify group characteristics, themes, or process e.g.

"I'd like for us to identify our own best habits about how we study. Let's go around the group and have each person identify one good study habit and one bad study habit they need to change."

3. INVOLVING

Involving facilitation skills encourage positive interaction and learning between group members. These skills create an opportunity for active experimentation and encourage learning by practice and allow group members to put new knowledge to practical use. Because involvement occurs when group members themselves practice and gain hands-on experience, these facilitation skills require a shift in focus away from the Facilitator and toward the group and the members within the group

Inviting Participation and Interaction

Facilitation often involves prompting group members to take action or to interact with one another e.g.

"Perhaps someone might like to be a scribe for this task and jot down on the board the key points of our discussion."

Bouncing Back to the Group

The group's attention may naturally gravitate toward you as the Facilitator. However, it is often helpful for you to deflect this attention and "bounce" the focus or energy back to the group itself to keep interaction and involvement high e.g.

"That's a really good question. What have other people's experiences been in this situation?"

Recognising Commonalities and Promoting Consensus

Promoting involvement often involves helping group members find similarities in ideas, interests, values, and plans. Conflicts often arise when the group focuses on differences rather than common ground. Identifying similarities can be used to support common goals e.g.

"It sounds like you have different ideas about how to tackle the upcoming assignment. After hearing from both of you, let's agree a compromise with the help of the rest of the group."

Supporting Cooperation and Group Cohesion

As the identity of the group continues to form and strengthen, a key facilitating skill is to encourage supportive interactions and nurture the ongoing interdependence of the members so that they feel like they can accomplish more as a group than individually e.g.

"You worked really well together on the last problem we tackled. This time I'm going to take a back seat and just let you get on with it. I think you go about things in a similar way and if you need any help just give me a shout. I'll be over there."

Experimenting with New Behaviour

Group learning often involves encouraging members to try new things. Experimenting can include role-plays, work sheets, or other exercises as well as simply suggesting alternate behaviours for members to try e.g.

"Now that we've had a brief chat about the relevant legislation and case law it might be worth trying to use our knowledge to solve a hypothetical problem "

4. PLANNING

Planning skills focus on the future and applying learning from the group to other contexts. These skills get members to work together to make specific plans to accomplish group or individual goals. This prepares group members to move from active experimentation within the group to concrete experience beyond the group

Brainstorming

One of the best ways for a group to start the planning process is by generating lots of ideas in a non-threatening manner. Brainstorming allows a group to think of a diverse and large number of ideas in a short period of time without rejecting ideas too quickly e.g.

"We need to think of as many ideas as possible to come up with ways to solve the problem we're discussing. Let's shout out as many different ideas as possible without criticising each other's ideas. We can go back and work out how realistic each idea is later."

Generalising

Using a successful behaviour from one area and trying it in a new area e.g.

"Now that we've all identified strategies that we used to achieve our session goals last time, let's see which strategies will help this time."

Strategising

After analysing a problem and brainstorming possible solutions, it is important to make a decision about the best way to solve a problem or approach a challenge e.g.

"Right we've established what we want to concentrate on and we've decided what makes this area a challenging one, we now need to decide how to go about tackling it. I suggest we look back at what has worked in previous meetings before making that decision."

Applying

Once knowledge has been shared in a group, it should be put into action in a way that directly relates to the experience of the group. In this way, group members can take new learning home with them e.g.

"OK, we all seem to have a good understanding of the need for an EC competition policy. I suggest we now sketch out, in writing, how we would explain it to another student who is having difficulty with it."

Making Specific Plans

Creating an action plan with specific steps, a time-line, and designation of who is going to take the lead on each section is a crucial skill in helping a group realise its goals e.g.

"For the next twenty minutes of our session we are going to concentrate on the role of the European Court of Justice in developing EU policy on the free movement of goods. Shout out some key cases in this field and I will write them on the board. In small groups you will discuss one of the key cases identified and report back to the entire group on its relevance."

Techniques that support group facilitation

Checking-In / Round Robin - To ensure complete participation, it may be helpful to go around the group and have each member take a turn sharing. *(Supports all four facilitation skills)*

Writing - Writing can be used as a way for members to privately organise their thoughts before sharing with the larger group. One way to do this is by handing out index cards and having members record their thoughts. *(Supports all four facilitation skills)*

Using Humour - To build group rapport, you may want to use some moderate and appropriate humour. Humour should be used to create safety and not alienate or offend people in the group. *(Engaging)*

Self-Disclosing - At times, it is appropriate to share your own experience as an example or model. Self-disclosure can also be used to build rapport with the group by highlighting your similarity to group members. *(Engaging / Informing)*

Surveying / Voting - One way to gather information about a group is to survey all the members or to have them vote on a particular issue or idea. *(Informing)*

Modelling - Demonstrating skills and/or behaviour is an active way of providing information to a group that prepares them for practice or other forms of involvement. *(Informing / Involving)*

Sharing in Pairs / Small Groups - Breaking the group into pairs or small groups allows all members to share their ideas in a less-threatening environment. After sharing in a small group, some members may find it more comfortable to share their ideas with the large group. Common themes can then be identified in an open discussion. You could try using leaderless groups – i.e. divide group into two sub-groups; alternate between the two (this temporarily removes the Facilitator from the situation and is, therefore, useful if you have identified that your group is being inhibited by the Facilitator). *(Involving)*

Giving Feedback - One way to involve group members is to ask them to give feedback or to critique what you or others have said or done. It is important to encourage the group to start with strengths or positive feedback before suggesting areas for improvement. *(Involving)*

Role Playing - A great way to encourage new behaviour is to ask group members to actually act out what they would do or say in a particular situation. Other group members can play other roles to flesh out the situation. *(Involving / Planning)*

Negotiating layout of room with students – this might not always be practical but it can help to involve the group right at the start of PAL (*Engaging / Involving*)

Brainstorming – A way to encourage everyone in the group to generate ideas about where the topic under discussion should go. It is useful in this instance to assign a chairperson so that the discussion remains manageable. It is also useful to assign someone to the process of scribing the ideas on a whiteboard or flipchart. (*Informing / Involving / Planning*)

Topic 8 - Promoting PAL

Why might you want to include this topic in your training?

Attracting students to attend PAL sessions is critical to the success of any PAL scheme.

What training activities could you use?

Activity – promoting student attendance

Ask the Facilitators to brainstorm the benefits of PAL for students. This will also help them to recap on some of the previous information and activities covered in training.

Then have them brainstorm reasons why students might NOT attend PAL sessions. Ask them to record these reasons on the handout proforma 'Understanding and promoting PAL attendance' (see the handout section below) and then spend time in groups working through how to combat these potential difficulties. This is a useful exercise for the PAL co-ordinator too, and could be useful in ensuring that Facilitator expectations about how PAL will progress are realistic.

Time needed: 15 mins
Resources needed: Handout, 'Understanding and promoting PAL attendance'

Activity - Designing a PAL poster

This is a good way to round off a training session as it allows the Facilitators to reflect on everything they have covered during training to make the poster as effective as possible. It is also a very practical exercise as the poster can then be used almost straight away to attract clients.

Time needed: 30 mins
Resources needed: Flip Chart, pens etc.

What handouts could you use?

The handout 'Understanding and promoting PAL attendance' can be found on the following page. For examples of PAL posters used here and at other Universities, see the 'Promoting PAL' section of the Co-ordinators pack on p. 28.

Where can you get more information on this topic?

For more handouts on promoting PAL see
http://www.peerlearning.ac.uk/documents/promoting_PALx.pdf

Understanding and promoting PAL attendance

Reason why a student might not attend	How to troubleshoot
The PAL session I'm meant to go to is not at a good time for me	

Session Planning Proforma

Below is a form that will help you plan activities for your training session. Remember to allow time for comfort breaks and at least one tea break in a 3 hour session!

PAL Training Session Planner

Activity	Time	Resources Needed	Notes