Evaluation of the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Scheme at Bournemouth University 2013/14

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1 Executive Summary

This report evaluates Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) at BU during 2013-14 and outlines recommendations and an action plan for improvements for 2014-15. The evaluation is based on the annual survey of PAL Leaders and first year students who experienced PAL during 2013-14, as well as supplementary data from: a focus group exploring PAL for the purposes of a film project; communication with course contacts; specific course feedback; training evaluation and observations.

For the purposes of consistency we have followed the School structure in place at the start of the 2013-4 academic year.

1.1 Key Developments and Achievements during 2013-14

1.1.1 Increased numbers

During 2013-14, the number of PAL Leaders increased to 260 PAL Leaders (from 170 in 2012-13). We attribute this to three causes:

a) Media School integration: The Media School formerly operated a separate PAL scheme. In July 2013, non-academic support for 53 Media School PAL Leaders was accommodated by Academic Services. PAL now operates as a single scheme across the whole of BU.

b) Over-recruitment on BSc (Hons) Psychology: turnover of academic staff responsible for this course resulted in over-recruitment for 2013-4. This accounted for an additional 14 PAL Leaders. This situation has been rectified for 2014-5.

c) Sustained growth: excluding the above, there was an increase of 27 PAL Leaders which can be explained by increased activity. During 2013-4 PAL ran across all full time undergraduate programmes, placing BU as one of the top UK HEI's for Peer Assisted Learning.

1.1.2 Single support scheme

The integration of non-academic support for Media School PAL Leaders occurred from July 2013 and has been beneficial in the following respects:

a) All PAL Leaders now receive the same training in facilitating PAL.

b) All PAL Leaders receive the same benefits (e.g. hoodies, certificates and attendance at PAL celebration event).

c) Best practice from Media School has improved central support (e.g. efficient handling of employment documents).

d) Single communication channel for non-academic support (e.g. PAL Leader Facebook page, PAL Central myBU community etc).

There is further work to be done to clearly identify support for Media School academics involved with PAL, which will be taken forwards through broader efforts to develop communities of practice at BU. Support for PAL has been strengthened by the establishment of the Peer Learning Officer role as a permanent position.

1.1.3 Improved engagement from PAL Leaders

There is evidence of increased engagement from PAL Leaders:

a) Participation in annual surveys and celebration event more than doubled;

b) Student involvement in co-creating knowledge about PAL (focus group and student-produced videos).

We attribute this to continuity in the Peer Learning Officer role and there is evidence that this has helped to achieve good relations with PAL Leaders.

1.1.4 Improved perception of support from PAL Leaders
PAL Leaders felt better supported by BU in 2013-4 (96% felt that BU was "Supportive" or "Very Supportive" of their roles. 69% felt "Very Supported", increased from 42% the previous year).

1.1.5 Academic liaison
During 2013-4 we have established improved communications between central support, academic course contacts and strategic leads within the Schools (PAL co-ordinators, Student Experience Champions, or Framework Leads). This has taken the form of:

- Twice-annual Course Contact Meetings to provide support & guidance and share BU-wide developments;
- Established regular meetings with School leads to identify resource and evaluate at School level.

There is still an expressed need for more inter-school collaboration and we will seek to address this through the CEL with the development of a PAL community of practice.

1.1.6 Fusion project
In November we were successful in securing Fusion funding to employ students to co-produce short films exploring different aspects of PAL. The films were completed by September 2014 and are being used to promote PAL within BU and externally.

1.1.7 External engagement
During 2013-4 we have continued to promote PAL beyond BU through:

a) Engagement with the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) National Centre through attendance at national meetings.
b) Participation in HEA "Mapping Peer Led Learning UK" survey and case study (Keenan 2014).
c) Hosted 9 external visitors (including 3 international visits).

1.2 Summary of findings from evaluation
- PAL Leaders continue to value: supporting first year students; reinforcing their learning; and, developing transferable skills.
- There is an increase in the importance of pay as a motivation for PAL Leaders.
- There is an overall improvement in the level to which PAL Leaders feel supported by BU.
- Some PAL Leaders expressed a need for more contact with academics.
- PAL Leaders recognise that they have developed a range of attributes (such as: organisational skills; communication and confidence) that relate to employability.
- There is an expressed need for training to be more active and experiential.
- Confidence and preparation are thought to be the most important attributes for success as a PAL Leader.

- PAL Leaders are successfully using social media (Facebook) to communicate with their groups.

Responses from 2013-14 Level C Students reveal the following themes:
- PAL is valued for supporting learning specific to their course and helping them to understand assignments.
- Students benefitted from the experience of PAL Leaders who had recently been through the same units of study and adjustment to Higher Education.
- Some would like sessions to be more structured and relevant to the material that they are studying at the time.
- Some feel that the benefits of PAL should be promoted more to fully engage their group.

1.3 Recommendations and key priorities for 2014-5

We recommend that PAL continues to develop under the current operating model where:
1. Schools/ Faculty are responsible for:
    a. recruiting and employing PAL leaders;
    b. identifying academics as "course contacts" who provide academic support and direction;
    c. timetabling and room bookings.
2. The PAL Central team in Academic Services are responsible for:
    a. training and on-going support for PAL Leaders;
    b. observation and feedback of PAL sessions;
    c. central resources (e.g. hoodies, celebration event, online materials);
    d. co-ordinating the development and promotion of PAL through the CEL steering group.

The following are key areas for development during 2014-5 emerging from needs identified in the evaluation:
- Pilot the use of ex-PAL Leaders to support current PAL Leaders.
- Develop online collection of attendance statistics to accurately measure engagement with PAL and enable enhanced support.
- Pilot the use of debrief sessions to foster increased opportunities for academic engagement and feedback from PAL Leaders.
- Develop a community of practice that engages course contacts; the CEL; professional services and students in co-creating knowledge and research about PAL.

2   Evaluation

2.1   Evaluation methods

Two anonymous questionnaires using Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) were sent to current PAL Leaders and Level C students via email and were publicised on the PAL Leader Facebook Group. The surveys were open between 10/03/2014 and 08/04/2014. The PAL Leader survey received 74 responses (response rate=28%). The Level C survey received 179 responses (response rate=c.3.6%).

Responses have been analysed using a variety of methods. Responses to qualitative questions have been coded to identify significant themes and priorities for action.

Response rates to both surveys have shown significant improvement on the previous year which we attribute to improved communications with PAL Leaders promoting the survey. We aim to continuously improve engagement and efforts for 2014-5 will focus on identifying cross-school differences in engagement to identify and share best practice.

In addition to the survey, we have included relevant supporting data from: a focus group exploring PAL for the purposes of a film project; communication with course contacts; specific course feedback; and training evaluation and observations.

2.2   Survey Results

2.2.1   PAL Leaders
The PAL Leaders were sent a link to a 13 question survey consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions (See Appendix A). The link to the survey was posted on the 'BU PAL Leaders 2013-14' Facebook page, on the PAL Central announcements page and via email. PAL Leaders were sent email reminders and were given verbal reminders during observations by the Peer Learning Officer.

2.2.1.1   Response by School/ programme
Response rates are broadly representative of the level of activity in each school. HSC and ST were underrepresented in the survey (they make up 16% and 12% respectively of PAL Leaders) Activity to improve engagement with the survey next year will focus on these groups. It should be noted that a separate survey was delivered to HSC students. Improved collaboration over surveying students is listed on the action plan for next year to achieve consistent evaluation across BU and avoid survey fatigue.

Number of Respondants

Pie chart showing: ApSci 11%, BS 27%, DEC 18%, HSC 8%, MS 28%, ST 8%
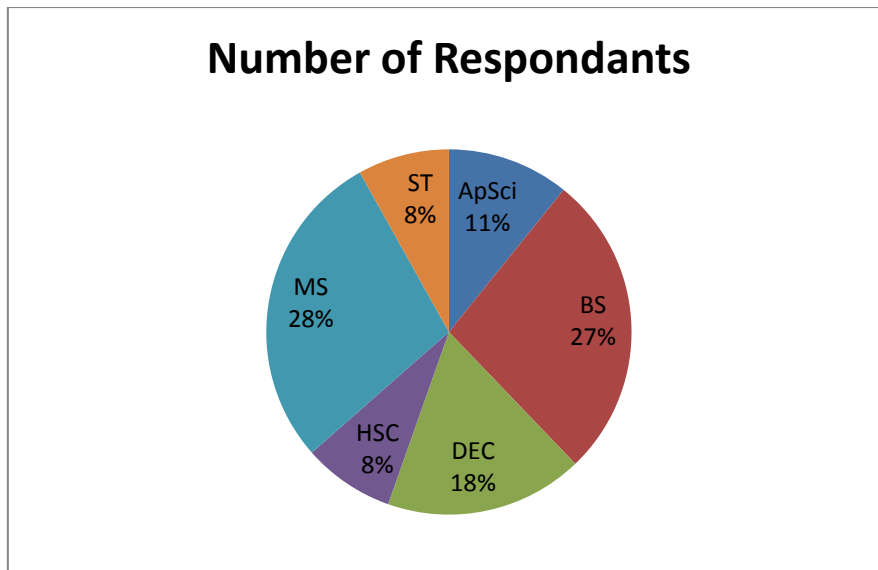
2.2.1.2   Which of these skill(s) did you develop during your experience being a PAL Leader?

These results are consistent with previous years. It is encouraging that PAL Leaders continue to recognise the benefits of PAL in their skills development, in particular valuing opportunities to develop communication/ presentation, confidence and leadership skills.

Those that responded "other" added the following responses: Teaching skills; Dealing with conflict; Coaching and mentoring; Creativity, How to evaluate myself after every single session, Coaching and teaching skills, Making more friends.

Although this is a small number of responses, it is interesting to note that skills aligned to helping others to learn (such as teaching, coaching and mentoring) are mentioned here. This is consistent with information that helping others to learn is a key motivator for PAL Leaders (See Question 3).

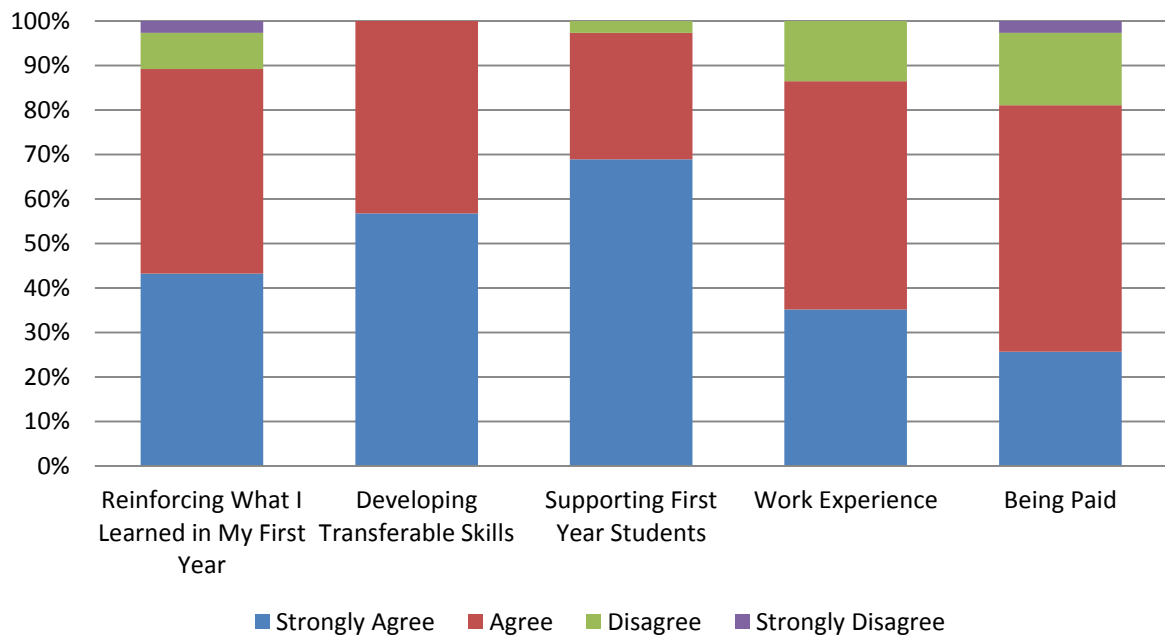## Which of These Skill(s) Did you Develop During Your Experience Being a PAL Leader?

2.2.1.3   The following are important benefits that I gained by being a PAL Leader:
Responses to this question are broadly consistent with previous years. There is potential to explore the learning and employability benefits for PAL Leaders further and this is listed on the action plan for 2014-5.

Interestingly, there is a marked increase in the number of PAL Leaders identifying pay as a benefit. There is potential to further investigate the drivers for this change and this is also listed on the 2014-5 action plan.

The Following are Important Benefits That I Gained by Being a PAL Leader:

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Categories: Reinforcing What I Learned in My First Year, Developing Transferable Skills, Supporting First Year Students, Work Experience, Being Paid

2.2.1.4 An unexpected benefit I gained through my role as a PAL Leader was . . .
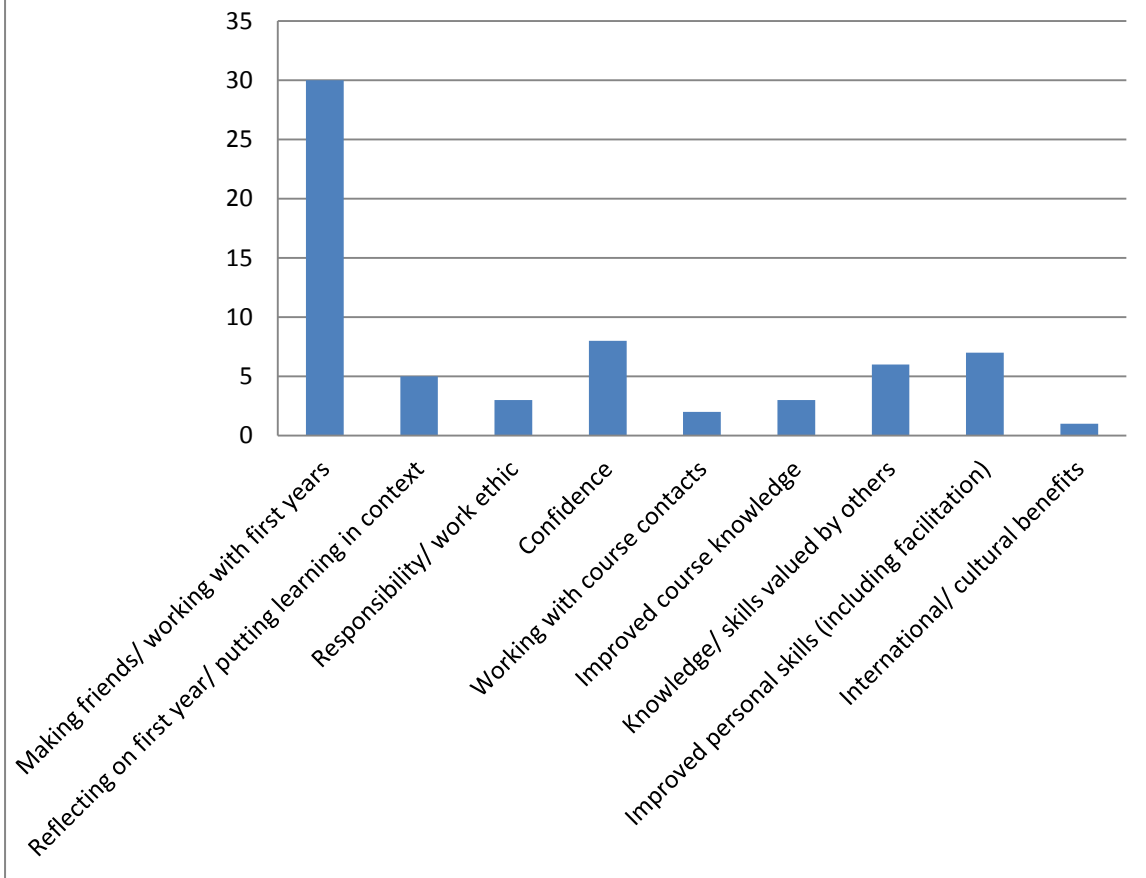
The majority of respondents identify making friends as an unexpected benefit. There is more work to be done on understanding the benefits of PAL for socialisation, cohort identity and cohesion. The strength of this response suggests that the phenomenon is worthy of further research.

Reflecting on the first year to place it into context, confidence and improving personal skills (like facilitating a group) were also identified as was the benefit gained from feeling that their experience and knowledge was valued.

One respondent highlighted "Understanding British students more" as a benefit. Although this was only a single response it does highlight the potential for PAL to support international students, both as PAL Leaders and first years.

4. An unexpected benefit I gained through my role as a PAL Leader was . . .

This year, PAL Leaders feel better supported in their role. There has been a significant increase in the number of PAL Leader feeling that the university was "Very Supportive" (69% compared to 42% in the previous year). We attribute this to consistent, high levels of support from the Peer Learning Officer role and this helps to validate the establishment of this role as a permanent post.

Throughout My Role As a PAL Leader, the University Was…

Not Supportive At All — 4%
Somewhat Supportive — 27%
Very Supportive — 69%
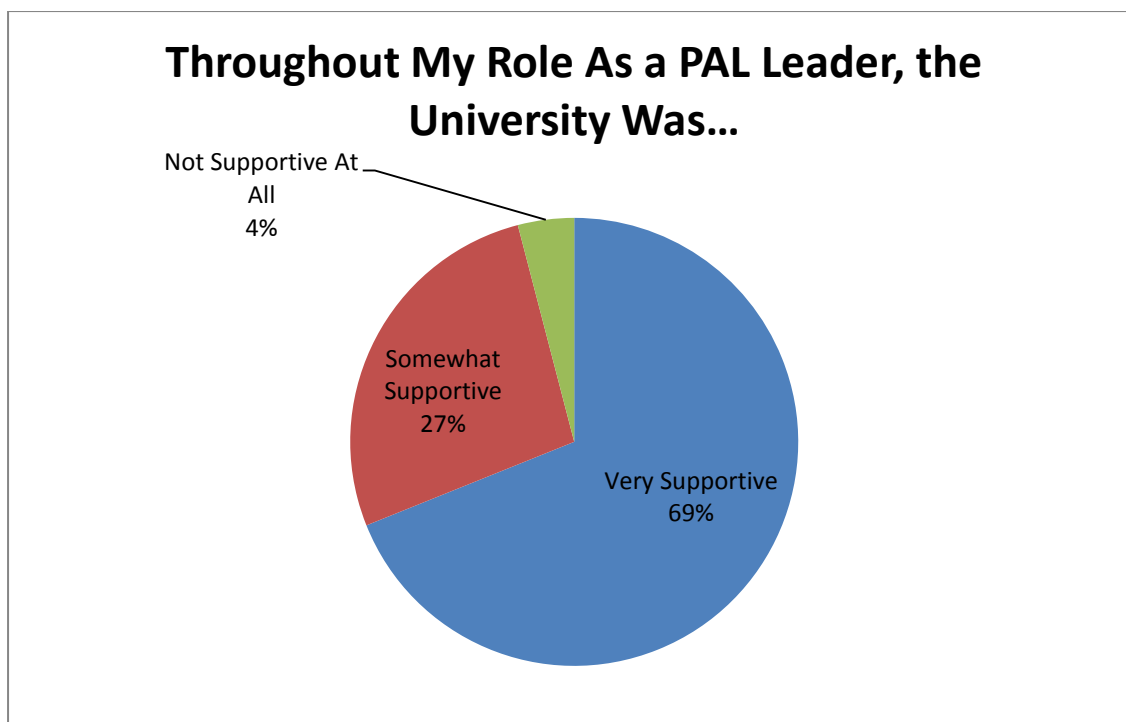
2.2.1.6 How could the university better support PAL Leaders?

The majority of comments for this section related to course specific information and guidance. A number of PAL Leaders highlighted that they would have appreciated regular meetings with their course contacts, especially in the context of curriculum change and semesters. Opportunities to meet and network with other PAL Leaders were also highlighted, as were continuation training – especially around low attendance.

BU is unusual in that we do not formally employ "debriefs" for groups of PAL Leaders to meet with course contacts and central support. Other institutions employ these meetings to reflect on challenges, provide updates on course direction and needs and on-going training. There is potential for debriefs to address a number of the issues identified by this question and piloting the use of these is identified on the 2014-5 action plan.

There is also continued feedback about BU promoting the benefits of PAL to level C students. Film's being created during this year will help to address this and working with course contacts to promote attendance at PAL is also listed on the 2014-5 action plan.

There has been a significant reduction in the proportion of comments regarding administration of pay and timetabling. This supports efforts made to improve administrative support for PAL. Continued improvements around employment documents should feed into 2014-5 delivery and will be evaluated on next year's survey.

## 6. How do you feel the university could better support PAL Leaders?
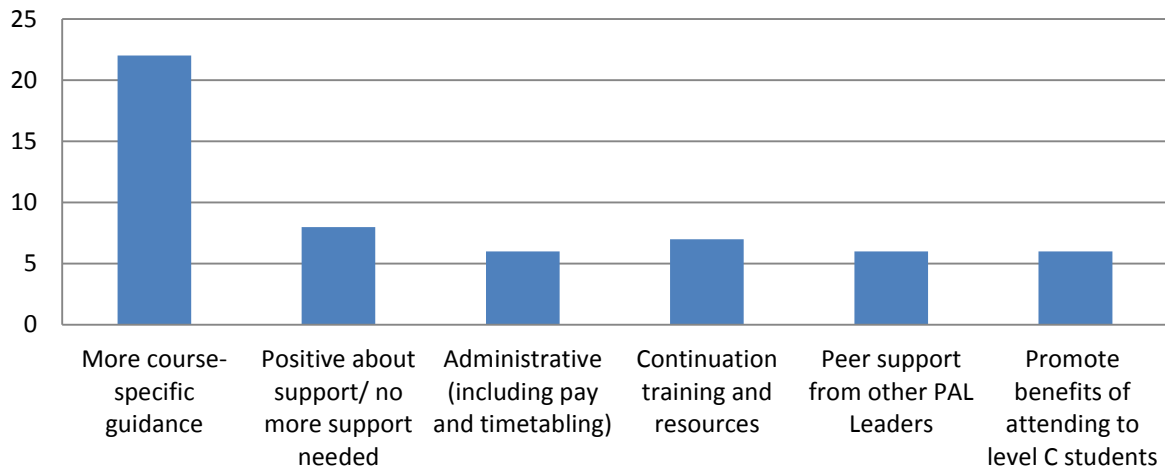
2.2.1.7 Thinking back, how useful was the 2-day initial training in preparing you for your role?

The responses to this question are consistent with recent years and offer encouraging feedback on PAL Leaders recognising the benefits of training after spending some time in the role.

Continued improvement of the training programme has now been built into the annual PAL planning cycle and we will continue to evaluate training against the development needs of PAL Leaders (see also PAL training report).

Thinking Back, How Useful was the 2 Day Intial Training In Preparation For Your Role?
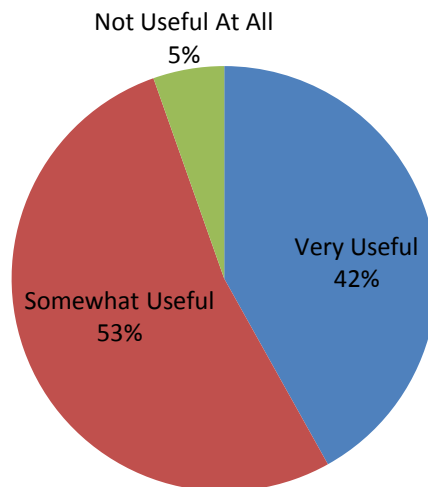
2.2.1.8 How do you think the training could be improved to better prepare PAL Leaders?

There are marked differences in the comments received for this question to the previous year. This is to be expected following significant changes to the training implemented by the training working group. It is encouraging to see that one of the strongest responses was that the training was good and needed no action.

The proportion of comments relating to training being too long has reduced and again further work has been carried out to ensure that the training is as focused as possible.

Timing was mentioned mostly with regard to wanting the training closer to delivering PAL or wanting top-up training after the summer vacation. Work to address on-going training and support with debriefs is identified in the action plan.

This year, a new theme "Experience PAL sessions" emerged relating to comments asking for more experiential/ active or practical training. Comments relate to students wanting more of the simulated session type activities, to meet existing PAL leaders or know in some way what PAL is "like". It validates work to streamline training to content directly relating to PAL and further work has been carried out this year to make the training more participative. Comments from 2014-5 training evaluation suggest that changes implemented this year have made the training more experiential, for example: 'the perfect balance between information and actual practise as well as 'doing the activities rather than just being told about them.'

Overall, the initial responses from 2014-5 training evaluations are positive and next year's survey will provide detail on the impact of these changes.


8. How do you think the training could be improved to better prepare PAL Leaders?

2.2.1.9 PAL Central underwent a bit of a makeover this year. Was there anything that was not on PAL Central that you would have found useful for your role?

The overwhelming majority of responses to this question were positive about the support available on PAL Central, which validates work undertaken to improve the content and organisation. Most did not express a need for any additional materials (n=59). A small minority (n=5) stated that they did not use PAL Central. There were also small responses in favour of: more activities (n=3), course related information (n=3), ways to contact other PAL Leaders (n=2), and better organisation (n=2).

2.2.1.10 I would . . . (Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

Responses to this question are consistent with previous surveys. Responses are positive in that PAL Leaders would recommend the opportunity to a friend and that they found it worth their time.

Responses to the question of PAL in the 2nd/ final year are more varied and while some agree, others are clearly opposed to the idea. Further investigation of PAL beyond level C is discussed in the action plan with regards to placement support, support for direct entry students and Postgraduate PAL.
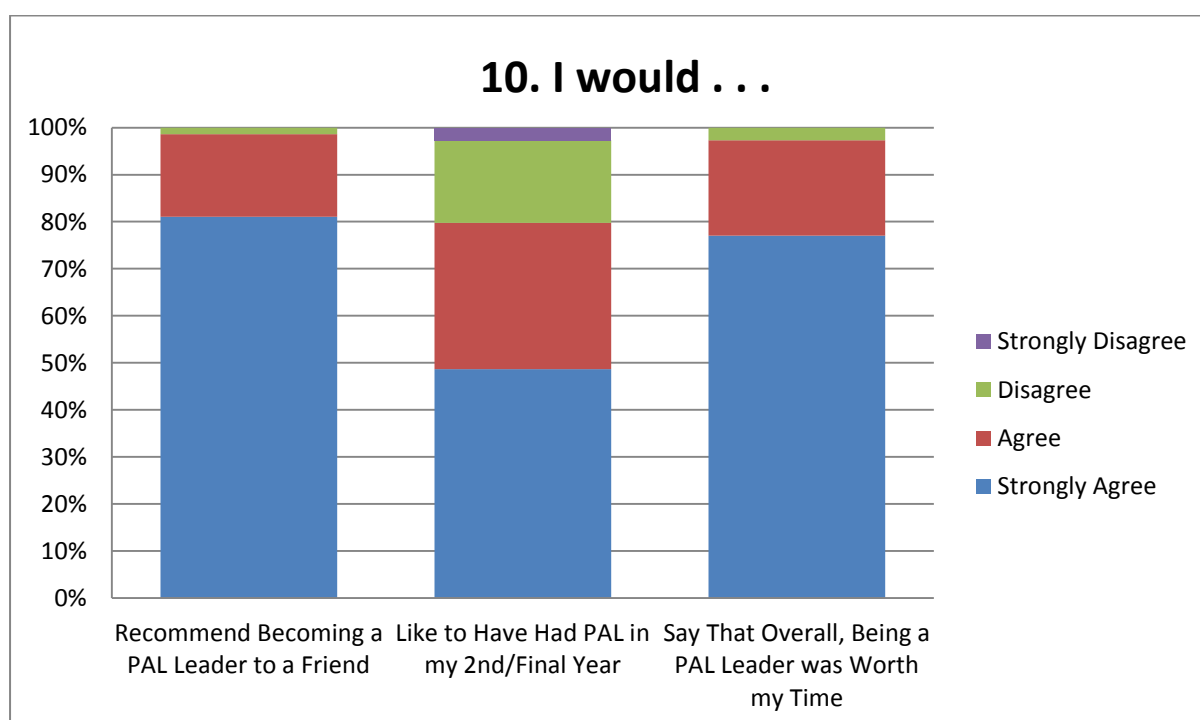

2.2.1.11 What was the main way you and your PAL group communicated outside of PAL (e.g. email; university email; myBU course communities, Facebook, phone/text)?

All PAL Leaders responding to this question stated that they used Facebook to communicate with their groups. A minority also used phone/ text or email to supplement their communications.

This validates removing training on using myBU communities and the admin involved in setting them up. It also suggests that the Facebook / Netiquette training that has been introduced is worthwhile and should continue to be developed.

11. What was the main way you and your PAL group communicated outside of PAL (e.g. email; university email; myBU course communities, Facebook, phone/text)?

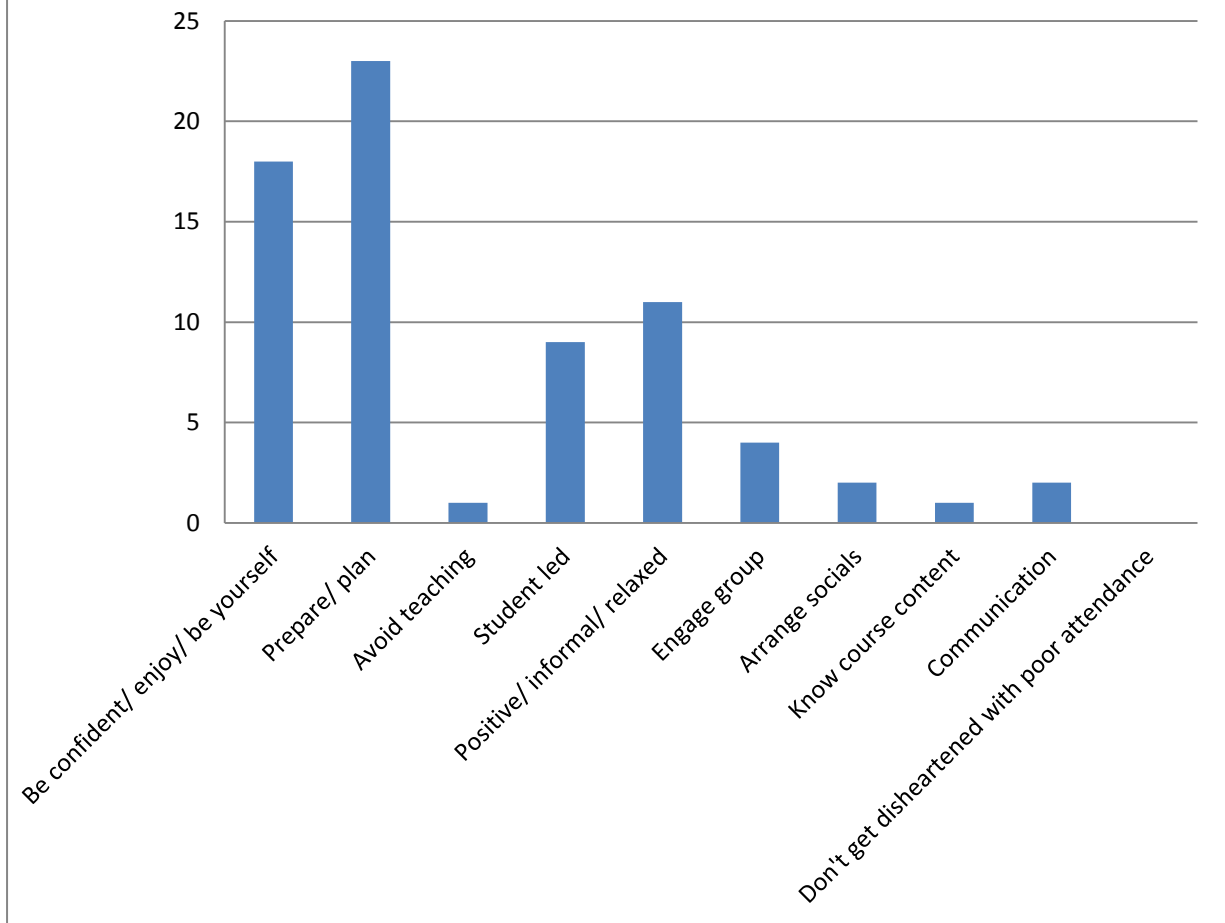■ Facebook   ■ Facebook and Email   ■ Facebook and Phone

- 7%
- 19%
- 74%
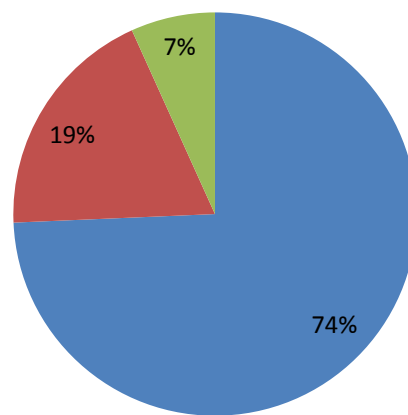
2.2.1.12 What advice would you offer to potential PAL Leaders?

Planning and preparing for sessions remains the strongest response to this question, which validates paid preparation time as a motivator. There were also strong themes relating to being "confident" or "being yourself" and creating a positive informal atmosphere with the students. There are also similar themes around engaging the group (especially quieter students) and ensuring that the sessions are student-led as a way of achieving engagement.

It is encouraging that these themes are consistent with our aims for the type of learning that PAL aims to achieve. Some students phrased this in a different way – advising future PAL leaders to "avoid teaching". The responses received to this question are consistent with responses from a focus group who were asked "How is it [PAL] different to other types of learning". There is potential for further exploration of these themes through focus group feedback and observations.

There is also potential to use student feedback of this nature to support PAL Leaders in observed sessions with guidance on what facilitating learning, rather than teaching means.

12. What advice would you offer to potential PAL Leaders?

Chart showing responses:
- Be confident/ enjoy/ be yourself: 18
- Prepare/ plan: 23
- Avoid teaching: 1
- Student led: 9
- Positive/ informal/ relaxed: 11
- Engage group: 4
- Arrange socials: 2
- Know course content: 1
- Communication: 2
- Don't get disheartened with poor attendance: 0

2.2.1.13 Do you have any other comments about PAL at BU?

There were 27 responses to this question. The majority (n=14) were overall positive comments highlighting that PAL Leaders had valued the experience and felt that they had developed as a result. There were also a number of comments recognising the support received from the Peer Learning Officer. There were a small number of comments highlighting difficulties experienced with academic support. These will be addressed in the action plan through improving support for course contacts and working with groups where specific issues have been identified.

A small number of comments expressed a desire to extend PAL (either through more sessions or extending PAL into the second year). Extending PAL beyond level C is discussed in the action plan.

2.2.2 Level C Students

The survey for the level C students included 12 questions in a similar format to the Leader survey. It was, however, hard to publicise due to considerations over potential survey fatigue and was mainly publicised to students by their PAL Leaders. Emails were sent to course contacts to ask if they could also promote the survey and some academics replied that they

would do this. Response rates by school are broadly aligned to the PAL Leader survey and may suggest that PAL Leader encouragement to take the survey is the most effective motivation. Although response rates have improved since last year, the action plan recommends closer working with Marketing and Communications to promote the 2014-15 survey. It should be recognised that a separate survey was delivered in HSC and this may explain under-representation for this school in this survey. Consolidating the level C survey for next year is identified in the action plan.

2.2.2.1 Course Stats and age

Survey responses by School
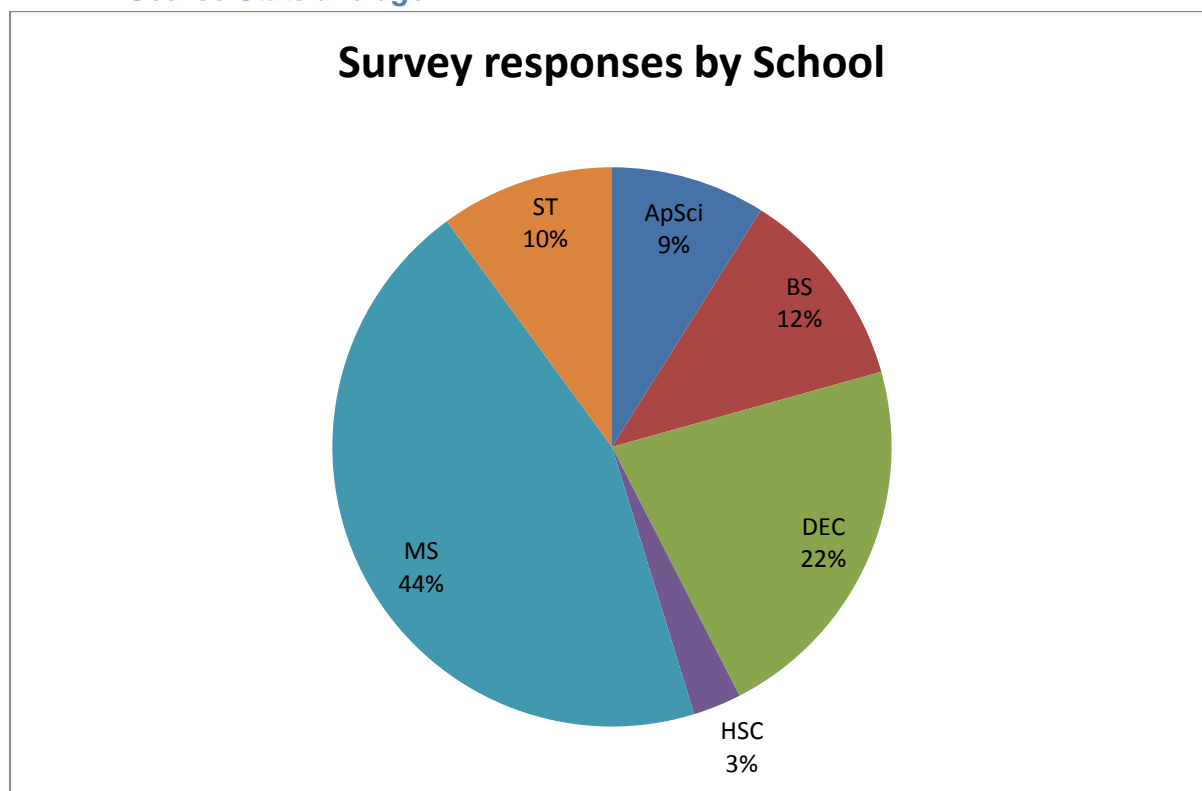
2.2.2.2 The following are possible benefits of PAL. How beneficial were each of these to you? (Very beneficial, Somewhat beneficial, Not beneficial)
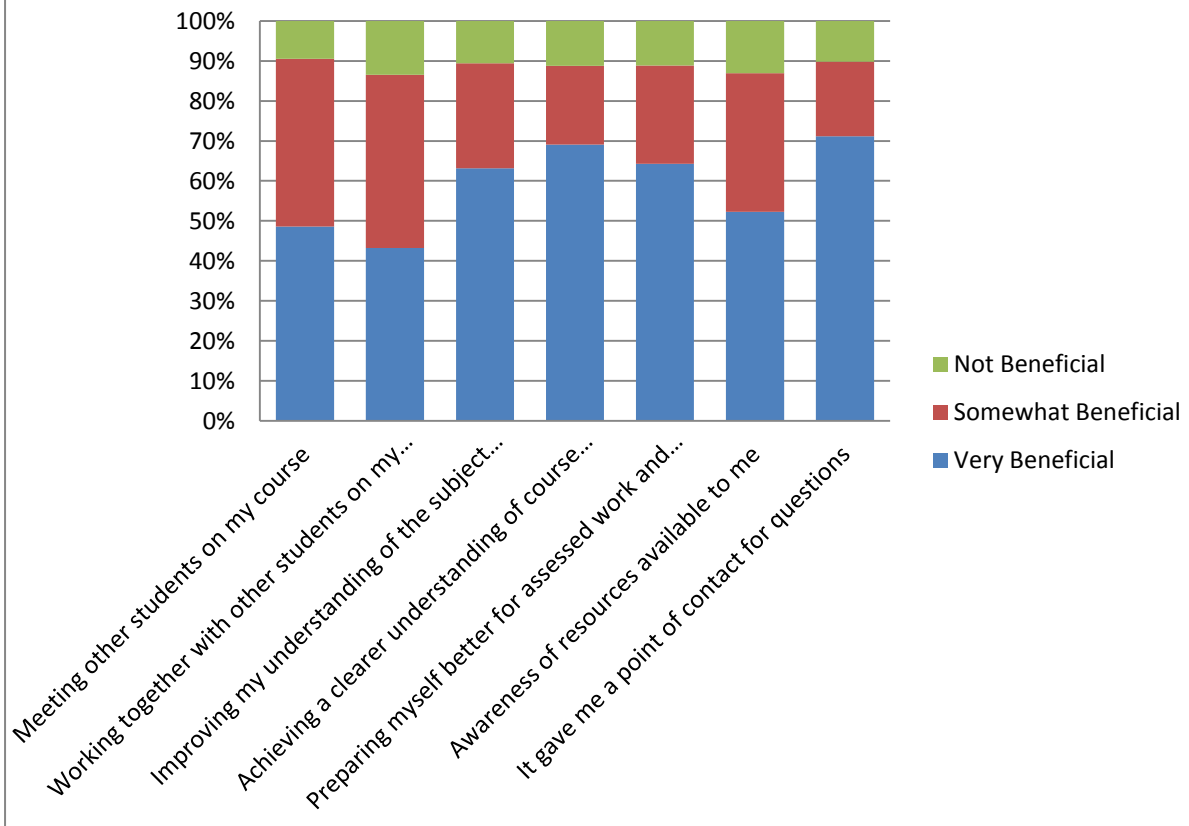
It is encouraging that students continue to recognise the benefits of PAL. The strongest responses are for: Achieving a clearer understanding of the course and preparing for assessed work – highlighting that PAL's primary benefit is to support learning. This finding is also supported by responses to question 5 (see below).

PAL is also valued as an informal point of contact for questions. There is some evidence from focus group data that the informal atmosphere provides an environment in which students are comfortable asking questions relating to their studies.

This question does not enable students to identify additional benefits of attending PAL. Given feedback from PAL Leaders requesting support with engaging level C students, future surveys should seek to identify the benefits for level C students more fully.

3. The following are possible benefits of PAL. How beneficial were each of these to you?

Categories (x-axis):
- Meeting other students on my course
- Working together with other students on my...
- Improving my understanding of the subject...
- Achieving a clearer understanding of course...
- Preparing myself better for assessed work and...
- Awareness of resources available to me
- It gave me a point of contact for questions

Legend:
- Not Beneficial
- Somewhat Beneficial
- Very Beneficial

2.2.2.3 How often did you attend PAL Sessions?

There is an increase in the number of students stating that they attended few sessions. This suggests that this year's survey has been more successful in reaching students who did not engage with PAL and may explain variation in other questions relating to benefits and engagement.

Attendance is not compulsory and is currently recorded locally (with paper registers). In order to more fully understand engagement with PAL, we recommend recording attendance figures in an online spreadsheet. This is identified in the action plan for 2014-5.

How often did you attend PAL Sessions?

- 3 Sessions or Less — 6%
- About Every Other Session — 13%
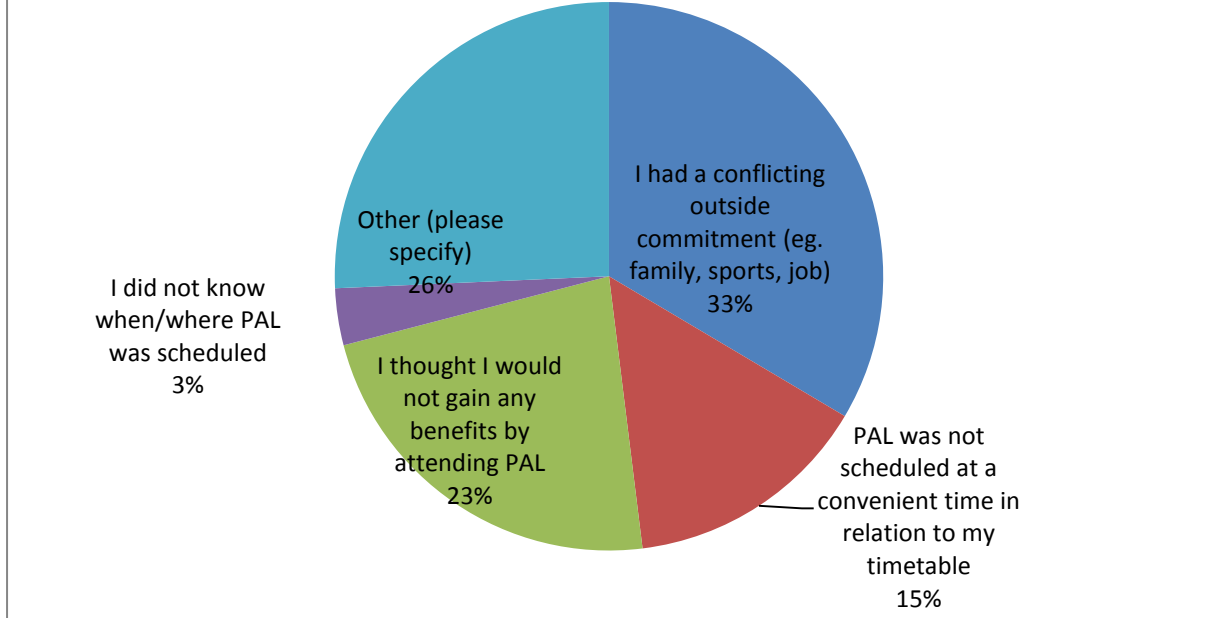- Every Session — 34%
- Most Sessions — 47%
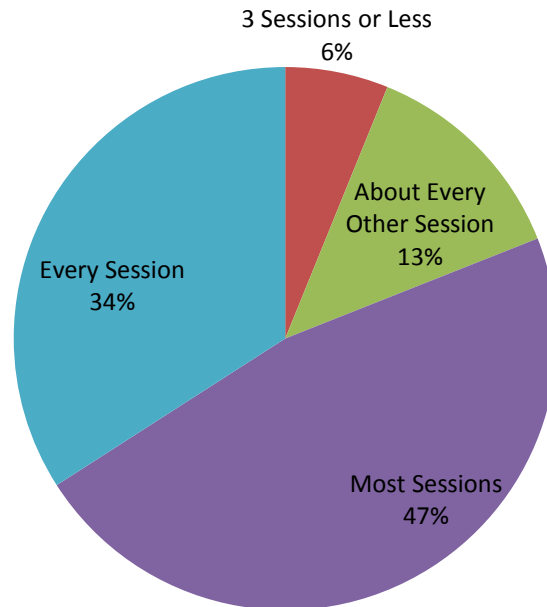
2.2.2.4 If you did not attend PAL, the main reason was...

Interestingly, a greater proportion of students indicated that they did not attend sessions because of not seeing benefits. This validates feedback from PAL Leaders requesting more support for encouraging level C students to attend. Materials from the Fusion film project are aimed at encouraging level C students to attend and further work with course contacts to encourage PAL activity during induction are planned (see action plan).

It is encouraging to see a reduction in the number of students citing timetable issues as a reason for non-attendance. We attribute this to better guidance for PAL Leaders to go directly to school timetablers (rather than Course Contacts) to request changes to timetabling.

The proportion of students citing other reasons has reduced from 32% in the previous year to 26%. Other reasons given were mostly that students had attended all sessions, the structure of the question should be changed in future surveys to avoid this (see action plan). Other reasons given were that students prioritised assignment work or were ill for sessions. None of the responses was strong enough to consider adding as a response for future surveys.

5. If you did not attend PAL, the main reason was...

- I had a conflicting outside commitment (eg. family, sports, job) 33%
- PAL was not scheduled at a convenient time in relation to my timetable 15%
- I thought I would not gain any benefits by attending PAL 23%
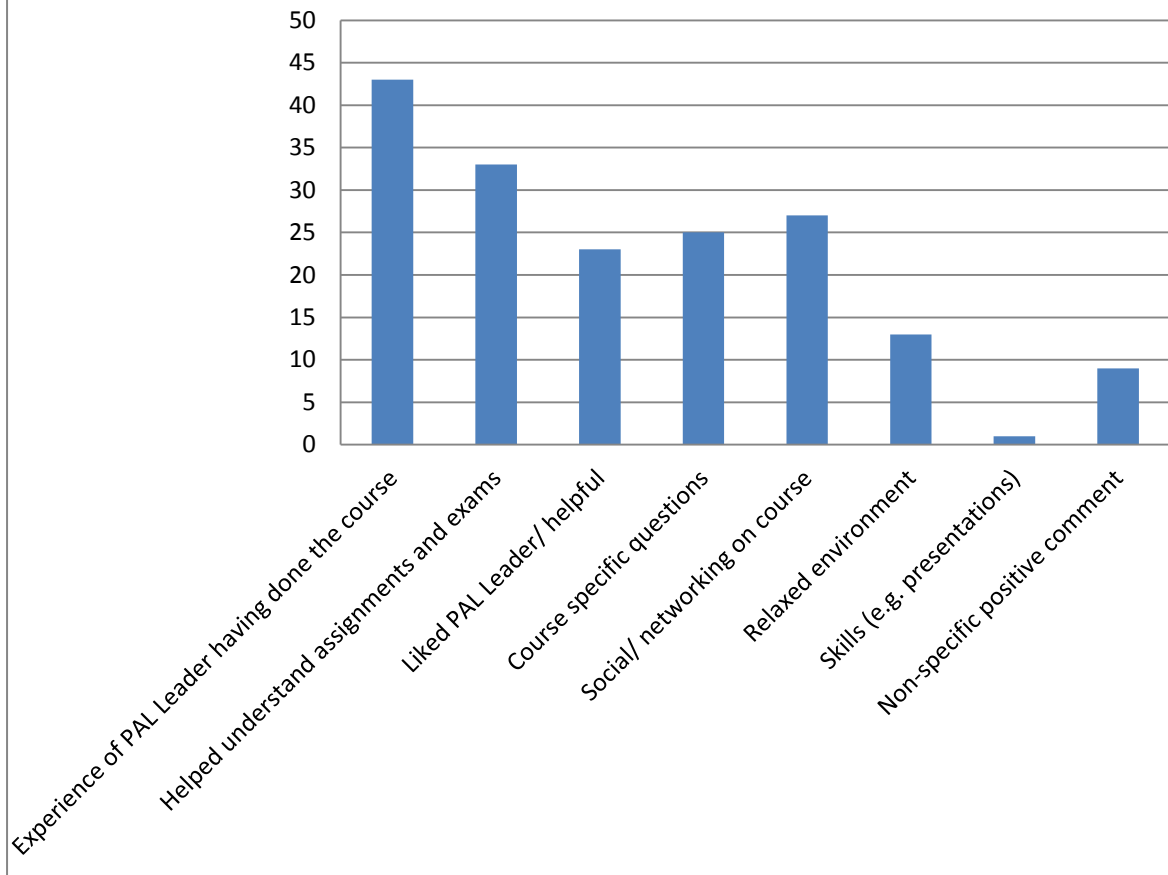- I did not know when/where PAL was scheduled 3%
- Other (please specify) 26%

2.2.2.5 The best thing about PAL was...

Gaining from the experience of PAL Leaders relating to the course was the strongest response to this question, followed by help with understanding coursework and assignments.

A secondary number of responses related to social aspects such as networking on the course and "liking" the PAL Leader, highlighting that as well as supporting learning, PAL has additional benefits such as socialisation at University.

There is potential to communicate these benefits more to level C students to help them to understand why they should attend PAL sessions. Priorities for communicating benefits should be in early in the programme (e.g. pre-arrival and during induction) and outside of PAL sessions (to reach those students who are not attending).

6. The best thing about PAL was...

Bar chart showing responses. Y-axis from 0 to 50 in increments of 5.

- Experience of PAL Leader having done the course: 43
- Helped understand assignments and exams: 33
- Liked PAL Leader/ helpful: 23
- Course specific questions: 25
- Social/ networking on course: 27
- Relaxed environment: 13
- Skills (e.g. presentations): 1
- Non-specific positive comment: 9

2.2.2.6 The worst thing about PAL was...

After "No response" the most common answers to this question related to themes of "Irrelevant/ nothing to do" and "Too informal". To address this we will continue to encourage closer liaison between PAL Leaders and course contacts (to help to ensure that PAL is academically relevant) and will review training and provide support for managing sessions. Achieving balance between the "relaxed" learning environment valued by students and being "too informal" presents a challenge for PAL Leaders.

Whilst it is encouraging that most respondents did not identify "worst" things about PAL, we should consider that this question may be self-selecting (i.e. if the survey is more likely to be completed by students who value PAL). We will consider rewording this question in a more positive frame in future surveys to enable students to provide constructive criticism (e.g. by asking them to identify one improvement).

7. The worst thing about PAL was...
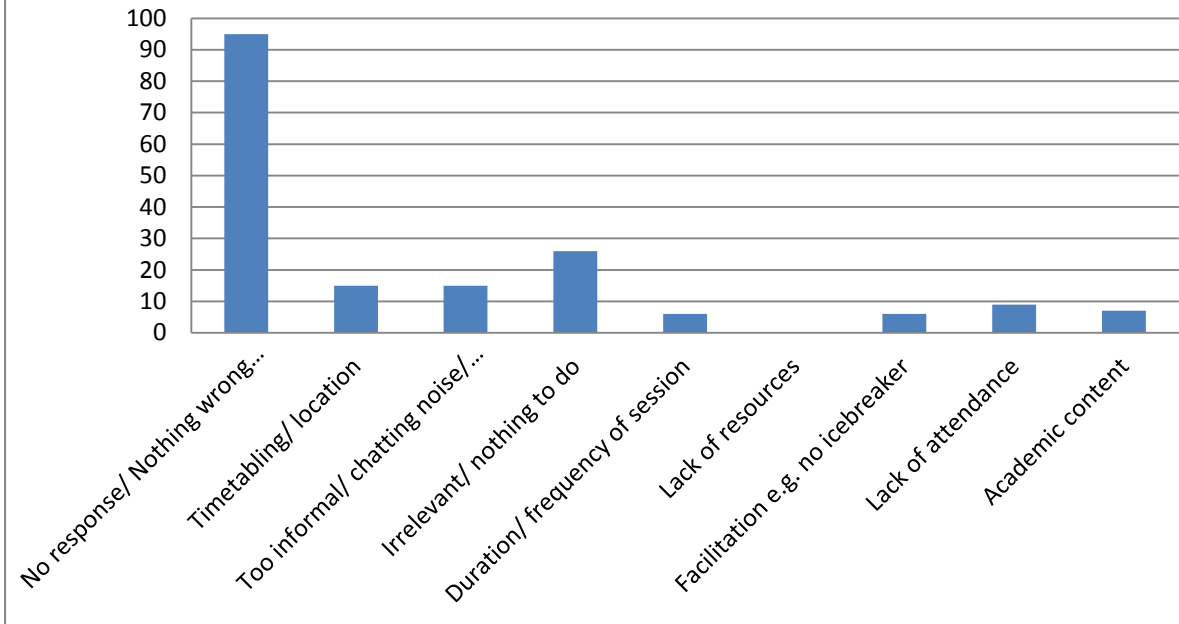
### 2.2.2.7 I would... (Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)

The response to this question is broadly consistent with previous years with the majority of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing that PAL was positive and worthwhile. There is some debate about the value of PAL beyond the first year and further work is required to identify where this occurs and potential value in extending PAL.

8. I would...
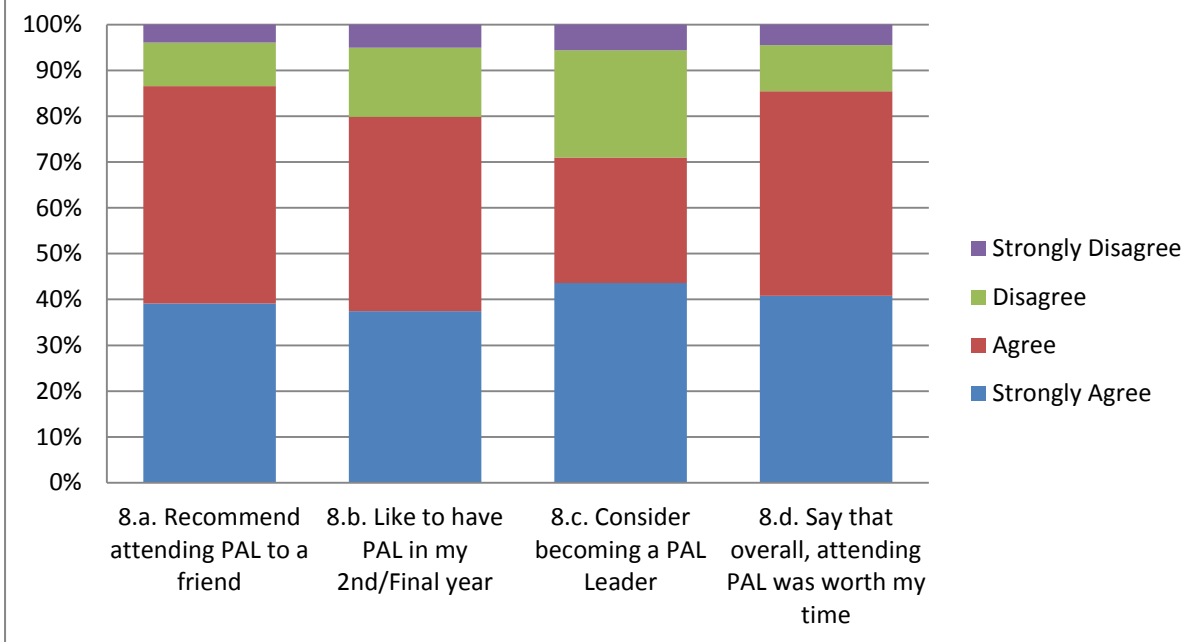
### 2.2.2.8 Did many students from your seminar group attend PAL? (Yes/No)

Whilst it is positive that 60% of students responded that attendance was good, it should be recognised that this is a subjective, proxy measure of engagement with PAL. It is subject to variation depending on the respondent's definition of "many". Efforts to find a more objective measure of attendance through online attendance figures are identified in this year's action plan.

9. Did many students from your seminar group attend PAL? (Yes/No)

No
40%

Yes
60%
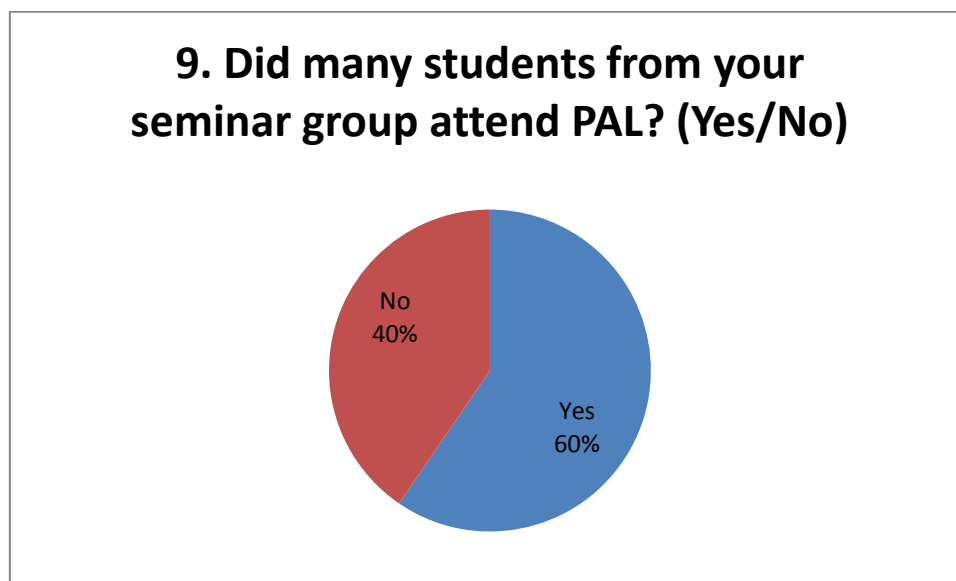
2.2.2.9 If you answered 'No'. Why do you think this was?

Comments relating to the theme of non-attender's not seeing the value are the strongest theme and this is consistent with previous surveys. Interestingly, issues around location and timing are less prevalent, which supports work to enable PAL Leaders to liaise with timetablers to find appropriate times. Comments relating to a general lack of engagement with the course are more frequent this year and there is potential for further investigation of this phenomenon. It should be pointed out that this question relies on students' subjective notion of why other students did not attend and is therefore limited. Focus groups or interviews with students who did not attend PAL would be a more reliable measure of motivation.

9.a. If you answered 'No'. Why do you think this was?
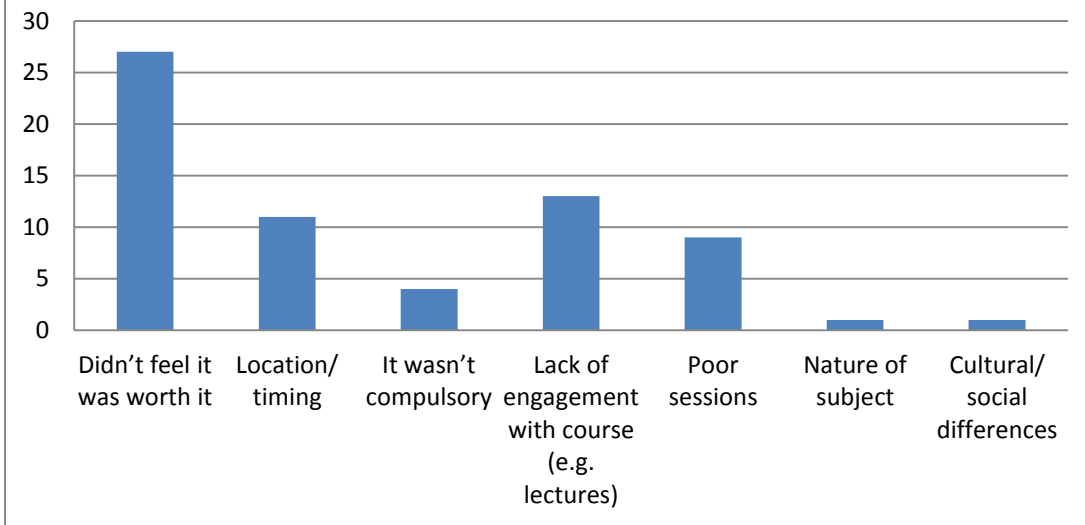
2.2.2.10 What was the main way you and your PAL Leader communicated outside of PAL Sessions? (eg. university email; myBU community announcements; Facebook; phone/text)

The response to this question is consistent with PAL Leaders responses in that Facebook is the predominant method of communication and is sometimes supplemented with email and phone.

Feedback from the focus group validates the concept that PAL Leaders are using Facebook effectively with examples of surveying students' needs to plan sessions; providing support between sessions; and sharing materials after the session.

PAL Leader's use of social media to enhance learning is interesting and has implications on the digital literacy agenda. HE staff can sometimes find using social media to communicate with students challenging yet there is evidence that students themselves are adept at using technology in this way. There is great potential for further research into the use of social media in PAL.

10. What was the main way you and your PAL Leader communicated outside of PAL Sessions? (eg. university email; myBU community anouncements; Facebook; phone/text)
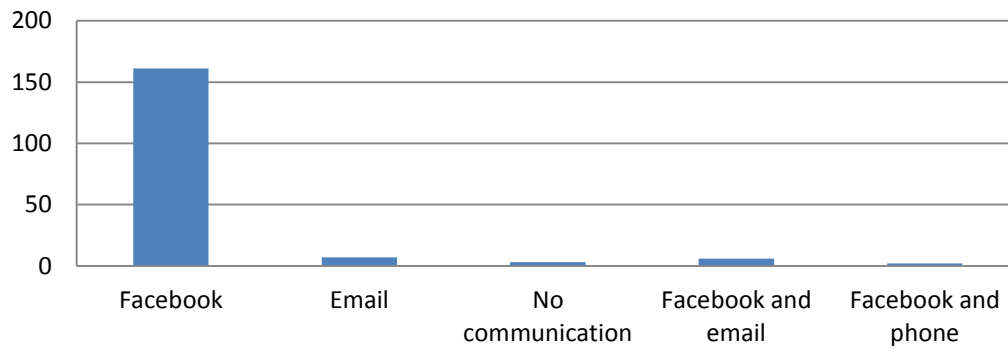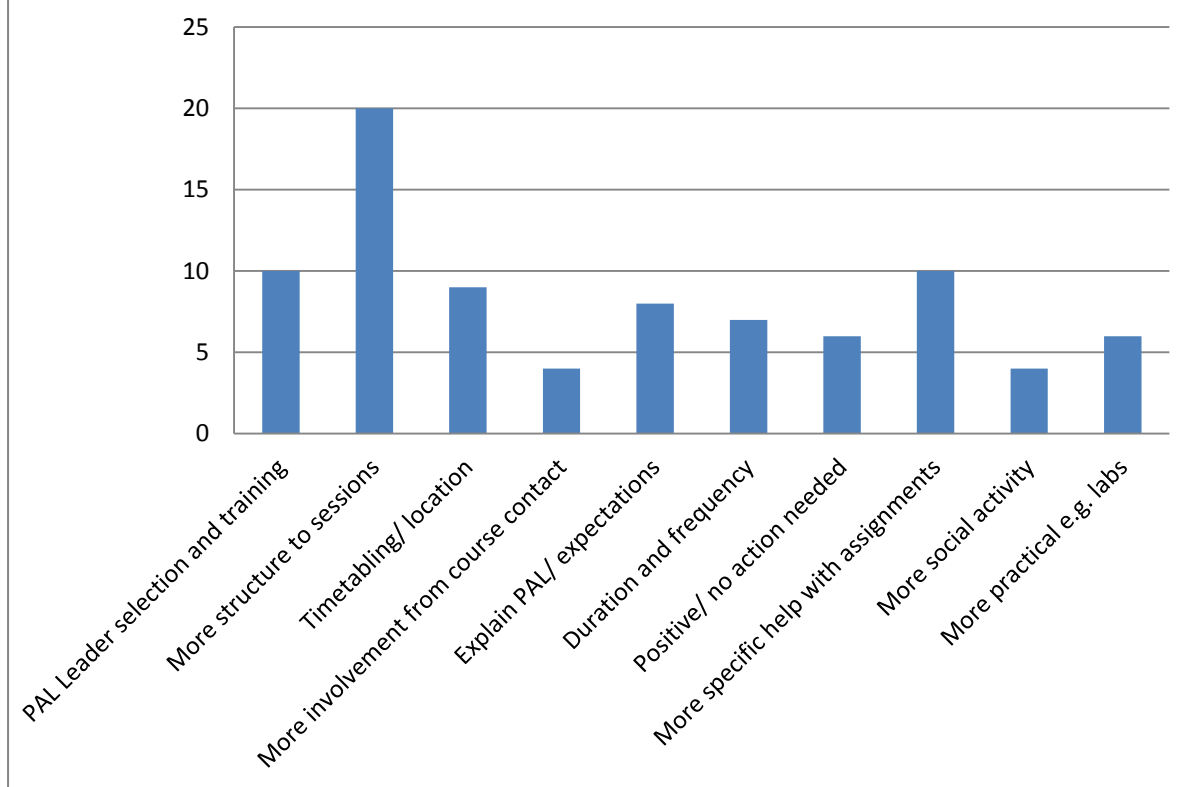

2.2.2.11 How do you think the PAL programme could be improved for next year's First years?

It is encouraging that strongest theme in response to this question has changed from "PAL Leader Selection and Training" to "More Structure to Sessions". This validates work over the past year to improve the PAL Leader training, focussing on giving PAL Leaders experience of running the sessions.

There is an expressed need for more structure to the sessions and this is consistent with question 6. As above, achieving balance between achieving academically focussed, structure sessions and creating a relaxed learning environment. The action plan identifies a priority for training to give PAL Leaders a framework or scaffolding for their sessions whilst still enabling creativity and informality.

11. How do you think the PAL programme could be improved for next year's First years?

Bar chart showing responses for how the PAL programme could be improved. Y-axis ranges from 0 to 25.

- PAL Leader selection and training: 10
- More structure to sessions: 20
- Timetabling/ location: 9
- More involvement from course contact: 4
- Explain PAL/ expectations: 8
- Duration and frequency: 7
- Positive/ no action needed: 6
- More specific help with assignments: 10
- More social activity: 4
- More practical e.g. labs: 6

2.2.2.12 Do you have any other comments about PAL at BU?
There were a range of responses to this question.

Suggestions for improvement focussed around wanting more structure and academic focus to the sessions and also expressed disappointment when group engagement was poor.

Positive responses included general expressions of having found PAL helpful and many respondents took the opportunity to praise their PAL Leader. For some the support that PAL offered had clearly been significant, for example: "I don't think I would've gone through my first year as well without PAL. So many things were simplified and made easier to understand for me, especially when it came to assignments and essays. The university life was a HUGE change, PAL really eased it up for me."

3 Recommendations and action plan

3.1 Action Plan

The table below outlines the main aims and recommendations to be carried out this year from this evaluation, other observations from the year and from the summer training report.

Activity can be grouped in three main themes:
- Enhancing support for PAL Leaders and Course Contacts;
- Enhancing evaluation of PAL;
- Developing pilot studies for improving support and research potential.

Theme	Actions	Who
Support for PAL Leaders and Course contacts	Pilot debrief sessions that incorporate on-going training, course contact and review	Peer Learning Officer
	Use videos/ induction/ course contacts to promote attending PAL	PAL central team/ PAL Leaders
	Continue to develop training with emphasis on structure of sessions (framework without making too formal)	Training team
	Develop course contact meetings into PAL community of practice through the CEL	PAL Central Team/ CEL
Enhancing Evaluation of PAL	Consolidate approaches to annual survey across BU	PAL Central team/ Schools
	Develop online collection of attendance stats to evaluate student engagement with PAL	Peer Learning Officer
	Specific improvements to survey: • Improve identification of programme/ school on survey. • Revise question on why students did not attend so that students who did attend sessions do not have to answer this question. • Revise level C survey to identify additional benefits for attending PAL. • Reword question about "What is the worst thing about PAL" to more positive frame (such as "suggest one improvement for PAL").	Peer Learning Officer
Research potential/ pilot studies	Support ST employability project. Potential to research Mahara portfolios to identify employability benefits of being a PAL Leader	PAL Central team/ CEL Employability lead
	Investigate potential of PAL for supporting digital literacy (encouraging use of Mahara as part of ST employability project)	PAL central team
	Pilot use of former PAL Leaders as Peer Support Leaders to develop sustainable support and observations for growing numbers of PAL Leaders	PAL central team
	Investigate changes to pay as a motivation in 2014-5 survey	PAL central

		team
	Investigate the benefits of PAL in supporting internationalisation	PAL Central/ Schools
	Investigate postgraduate PAL	PAL coordinator/ Grad School
	Investigate case studies of PAL beyond level C	PAL Central Team/ Schools
	Investigate the role of PAL in developing socialisation, friendship and cohort identity	CEL
	Engage with National and International discussion on evaluation and impact assessment	PAL central team/ CEL

4   References

Keenan, C., 2014, *Mapping student-led peer learning in the UK* [online].
York: Higher Education Academy.

5   Appendices

5.1.1   Appendix A

Survey Questions for 2013-14

Level C Student PAL Evaluation Questions

1. Which course are you enrolled on?
2. Please select which range represents your age
   - 17-19
   - 20-25
   - 26-35
   - 36 & older
3. The following are possible benefits of PAL. How beneficial were each of these to you?
   3a. Meeting other students on my course
     - Very beneficial
     - Somewhat beneficial
     - Not beneficial
   3b. Working together with other students on my course
     - Very beneficial
     - Somewhat beneficial
     - Not beneficial
   3c. Improving my understanding of the subject matter of the course
     - Very beneficial
     - Somewhat beneficial
     - Not beneficial
   3d. Achieving a clearer understanding of course direction and expectations

- o Very beneficial
- o Somewhat beneficial
- o Not beneficial

3e. Preparing myself better for assessed work and exams
- o Very beneficial
- o Somewhat beneficial
- o Not beneficial

3f. Awareness of resources available to me
- o Very beneficial
- o Somewhat beneficial
- o Not beneficial

3g. It gave me a point of contact for questions
- o Very beneficial
- o Somewhat beneficial
- o Not beneficial

4. How often did you attend PAL Sessions?
- Every session
- Most sessions
- About every other session
- 3 sessions or less

5. If you didn't attend PAL, the main reason was. . .
- I had a conflicting outside commitment (e.g. family, sports, job)
- PAL was not scheduled at a convenient time in relation to my timetable
- I thought I would not gain any benefits by attending PAL
- I did not know when/where PAL was scheduled
- Other (please specify)

6. The best thing about PAL was. . .
7. The worst thing about PAL was. . .
8. I would. . .

8a. Recommend attending PAL to a friend
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

8b. Like to have PAL in my 2nd/Final year
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

8c. Consider becoming a PAL Leader
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

8d. Say that overall, attending PAL was worth my time
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

9a. Did many students from your seminar group attend PAL? Yes/No

9b. If you answered 'No'. Why do you think this was?...

9c. What was the main way you and your PAL Leader communicated outside of PAL sessions?,,, (e.g. university email; myBU community announcements, Facebook, phone/text)?

10. How do you think the PAL programme could be improved for next year's First years?...

11. Do you have any other comments about PAL at BU?...

PAL Leader Experience Evaluation Questions

1. Which course are you enrolled on?
2. Which of these skills(s) did you develop during your experience being a PAL Leader?
- Organisation/presentation skills
- Listening/communication skills
- Leadership/teamwork skills
- Confidence
- Problem solving/'thinking on my feet'
- Other (please specify)
3. The following are important benefits that I gained as a PAL Leader:
    3a. Reinforcing what I learned in my first year
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
    3b. developing transferable skills
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
    3c. Supporting first year students
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
    3d. Work experience
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
    3e. Being paid
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
4. An unexpected benefit I gained through my role as a PAL Leader was. . .
5. *Do you have any ideas as to how the university should better support PAL Leaders?*
6. Thinking back, how useful was the 2-day initial training in preparing you for your role?
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful

- Not useful at all
7. How do you think the training can be improved to better prepare PAL Leaders?...
8. PAL Central underwent a bit of a makeover this year. Was there anything that was not on PAL Central that you would have found useful for your role?
9. I would. . .

10a. Recommend being a PAL Leader to a friend
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10b. Like to have had PAL in my 2nd/final year
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10c. Say that overall, being a PAL Leader was worth my time
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. What was the main way you and your PAL group communicated outside of PAL (e.g. email; university email; myBU course communities, Facebook, phone/text)?
11. What advice would you offer to potential PAL Leaders?
12. Do you have any other comments about PAL at BU?