**TSEB/14-39**

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Leeds for Life Working Group on Induction & Transition

***The Taught Student Education Board endorsed the introduction of a Leeds for Life Model for Peer Mentoring on 18 February 2015***

## Student-led Peer Support Mechanisms at the University of Leeds

*This paper invites TSEB to consider the role and benefits of student-led peer support schemes and encourages FTSECs to consider introducing such schemes at School-level to support students’ induction and transition through various stages and levels of their studies.*

### Context

Student-led Peer support mechanisms can engage students in a spectrum of peer-support activities that span welfare and academic-related issues:

Academic-related Peer Support

Welfare-related Peer Support

A recent set of focus groups has been conducted by the Induction & Transition Working Group to explore students’ experiences at various transition points through their studies. The outcomes of this work have highlighted the role and importance of peer support schemes in smoothing such transitions, with students in several of the focus groups identifying where peer support was either beneficial or desirable, for example:

* Targeted support for transition, e.g. of mature, P/T, ODL and/or international students, on entry to either UG or PGT
* Level 2/3 students supporting transition from School to Level 1 UG
* Getting PhD students or previous years’ students to support transition into PGT

LUU Advice Centre has also observed many more students coming to them with ‘settling-in’ anxieties and difficult personal circumstances. LUU is considering offering a central one-to-one peer support mechanism to assist those transitioning into HE and who would value talking to another student. This would build on existing issue-based student-led peer-support groups and help signpost students to professional support services as appropriate.

A recent report[[1]](#footnote-1) published by the Higher Education Academy, although focusing on peer-led *academic* support such as Peer-Assisted Study Support (PASS) or Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) schemes, has identified peer support mechanisms to be beneficial to institutions. The reported benefits include contributing to improvements in retention and progression, satisfaction and employability and through being a cost-effective means for reputational enhancement. They suggest that such schemes signal the commitment of institutions to student engagement and help to build partnerships between students and staff to create more integrated learning communities. These are bold, eye-catching claims and having both student and sector interest in peer-support mechanisms makes this an aspect of provision worthy of further, high-level discussion.

### Peer Support and Leeds for Life

Potter & Hampton (2009) define peer learning / mentoring as:

“… [involving] students helping other students to fulfil their academic potential, and to aid their educational attainment and personal development. It can assist students in their learning of both the formal and informal agenda, helping them to settle into their course, faculty/department and university cultures, with consequent implications for engagement and success”.

Research by Andrews (2010) showed that, even when primarily pastoral in focus, peer mentoring had a favourable impact on the commitment of peer mentees and builds their confidence in terms of skills and learning. It was found to be useful in promoting a positive transition into university. The research also showed that through peer mentoring both student volunteer mentors and their mentees are encouraged to make the most of their university experiences.

Peer mentoring therefore fits well with the ethos of Leeds for Life which is about:

“… inspiring students to get the most out of their academic and co-curricular experiences and build on their time studying at the University of Leeds”;

and with one of the key aims of the University’s Strategic Plan:

“To provide students with outstanding education, opportunities for all-round personal growth and a life-changing experience; to graduate global citizens who are prepared for the future and ready to make a difference.”

The findings of Keenan (2014) further support these goals by reporting that benefits for students who act as peer-learning group leaders / facilitators include:

* developing higher-level personal and professional skills
* deepening subject learning, thereby enhancing grades
* enhancing relationships and inter-cultural awareness;
* improving their employability prospects.

Similarly Keenan reports that those students who participate in peer-learning schemes have a greater sense of belonging through social integration and derive enhanced academic engagement, confidence and ability.

### Background to Peer Support at the University of Leeds

Peer *mentoring* was first piloted at the University of Leeds with international students in 2005/6, as part of a strategic project to develop an institutional peer support mechanism to assist in the induction and transition of incoming first year students. On the basis of this preliminary work a University scheme for peer mentoring was approved and gradually rolled out to ~ 20 Schools over the following four years, with support being provided via a central co-ordinating role.

Peer Mentoring at the University of Leeds was introduced as a group based support system offered to new students to provide extra help and information during their transition into University life. The approach adopted by the University places particular emphasis on social and cultural orientation plus welfare-related issues and aims to enhance the experience of incoming students during their first semester and potentially beyond. It provides a 'light touch' approach and informal networking opportunities with existing students, and complements the more academic student support provision provided by personal tutors.

The scheme was developed as one of “two to many” with two year 2 or 3 undergraduate students offering support to a group of up to 10 incoming year 1 students and with most contact and support needed for first 6 – 12 weeks.

From 2010 onwards, peer mentoring has been devolved to Schools to run on a ‘business as usual’ basis, with support provided only via the Help@Leeds web site[[2]](#footnote-2) and through training provided by SDDU for School-based peer mentor co-ordinators on a request only basis. The University’s peer mentoring scheme has not been further developed or revised since 2010.

During this time, many Schools have migrated such schemes to peer support mechanisms for academic learning, for example Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) or Peer Assisted Study Support (PASS). Others have maintained or become interested in the pastoral Peer Mentoring scheme, the latter largely as a result of student requests.

Expectations for the design and operation of Academic Orientated Peer Support Schemes were proposed (FTSEC/12-08, September 2012) but this set of principles has not been well-adopted and schemes are, in the main, divergent.

Since introduction of the HEAR, several schools have gained recognition for their PASS/PAL schemes for recording the engagement of student mentors. However, the recognition process for peer mentoring schemes has not been straightforward.

To this end, a Leeds for Life Model is proposed that makes revisions to the existing Peer Mentoring scheme to ensure that the selection and training of peer mentors, the monitoring of their engagement with the scheme and the graduate level skills they derive through their engagement are robust and consistent enough to enable recognition for Peer Mentoring on the HEAR.

The proposed Model is provided as an Appendix to this paper. There does remain the option to introduce less formal schemes for peer support but it would not be expected that these would be recognised via the HEAR.

### Recommendations

In the first instance, this paper requests that Taught Student EducationBoard toconsider:

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| 1. the role and benefits of student-led peer support schemes; 2. the approval and introduction of a Leeds for Life Model for Peer Mentoring. 3. that FTSECs encourage Schools to consider introducing such schemes to support student induction and transition through various stages and levels of studies; |

It is anticipated that the model proposed for Peer Mentoring will become the first of several frameworks / sets of principles to address different aspects of student-led peer-support mechanisms to ensure the ability of such schemes to be recognised via the HEAR. One other such proposal will be that for revised programme, or ‘Course’ representation which is due for completion by LUU in April 2015.

### References

* Andrews, J., 2010. “Pathways to Success through Peer Mentoring” published in What Works: Retention & Success – Briefing No. 5, Research at Aston University funded by Retention Grants programme
* Keenan, C., 2014. Mapping student-led peer learning in the UK. Report of an HEA funded student engagement project
* Potter, J. & Hampton, D., 2009. Students Supporting Students. SEDA Special No. 26. London: SEDA

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On behalf of the Leeds for Life Induction and Transition Working Group

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## Leeds for Life Model for Peer Mentoring

*This Appendix proposes an institutional model for Peer Mentoring that is underpinned by the ethos of Leeds for Life. The model provides a set of principles to establish the minimum requirements to enable student mentors to have their engagement with the scheme formally recognised by the University on their Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).*

### Introduction

The proposed model is designed to assist those schools who have, or who wish to set up, a scheme for the peer mentoring of incoming or transitioning students by students at higher levels of study. This proposed Leeds for Life Model for Peer Mentoring does not seek to prescribe how Schools should set up such a scheme but serves to act as a framework within which Schools have flexibility to design a scheme relevant for their context, whilst ensuring that students’ participation in the scheme is capable of being recognised via the HEAR*.*

### Leeds for Life Model for Peer Mentoring

### Aims

* To assist a smooth transition to different stages of University study by giving students the opportunity to meet with current students who have previously transitioned through the relevant stage;
* To enable peer mentors to develop a range of Leeds for Life skills and knowledge to help fellow students transition to or through University life.
* To help new students feel an early sense of belonging to their peer group, school and the University.
* To articulate with personal tutoring by providing an additional source of support for students to go for information and assistance.

And in the spirit of the University Partnership:

* To recognise the value of those who have recently transitioned into Higher Education in contributing to developing an excellent supportive environment.

### Principles

The following set of principles establishes the minimum requirements for the design of a school-based peer mentoring scheme to enable student mentors to have their engagement with the scheme formally recognised by the University on their Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR). The principles set baseline expectations but allow for school variations in the design and implementation of such schemes. The principles approach ensures that the selection and training of peer mentors, the monitoring of their engagement with the scheme and the graduate level skills they derive through their engagement are robust and consistent.

1. There should be School-level commitment and approval for the scheme with named administrative support identified to co-ordinate the scheme at a School level;
2. Peer Mentor Co-ordinators should undertake appropriate induction for setting up such a scheme, such as attendance at a Train the Trainer event;
3. Peer Mentors should be provided with a role description that includes clear boundaries;
4. Students should signal their interest in becoming a Peer Mentor via a selective application process;
5. All applications should be independently scrutinised and there must be clear and transparent selection criteria to determine the suitability of those wishing to become Peer Mentors;
6. All Peer Mentors must receive appropriate training[[3]](#footnote-3) for their role, to include guidance on signposting and reporting in relation to duty of care, and attendance at the training must be recorded;
7. Evidence of Peer Mentors engagement with the scheme must be gained e.g. through monitoring and/or timetabling;
8. Peer Mentors engagement with the scheme must be maintained for a period of 6 – 12 weeks over the first semester of the academic year with a minimum number of substantive contacts or encounters with tutees being defined;
9. That supervision be provided to Peer Mentors in order to respond to complex or affecting pastoral issues.
10. Through their engagement with the scheme Peer Mentors should have opportunity to develop the following graduate level skills:
    * **Use of Knowledge** – demonstrated through using knowledge of the programme of study to answer questions and provide advice / insight into being a student on the programme ;
    * **Professionalism** - demonstrated through acting as a role model to incoming students and being selected on the basis of having a good attitude towards their own studies;
    * **Time management** - demonstrated through the planning and organisation of meetings and events;
    * **Team working** - demonstrated through working effectively in partnership with a fellow mentor and together with their mentees;
    * **Social / cultural sensitivity** - demonstrated through being aware of student diversity and in organising events that are inclusive;
    * **Communication skills** - demonstrated through listening, signposting, passing on information and knowledge, offering different perspectives plus being supportive and encouraging;
    * **Confidence** - peer mentors need to build the confidence and self-reliance of incoming students and therefore would need to demonstrate these qualities themselves through leading discussions with peers;
    * **Ethical awareness -** demonstrated through acting in an open and honest way and with integrity in relation to academic regulations;
    * **Flexibility -** able to respond to issues as they arise and to be resourceful in organising events and discussions with incoming students;
    * **Leadership -** demonstrated through leading events, activities and discussion with a group of up to 10 incoming students;
11. Peer Mentors should not receive direct payment for their involvement in the scheme, although the design of the scheme should enable their contribution to be recognised via the HEAR.
12. Certificates[[4]](#footnote-4) for those Peer Mentors who have engaged successfully with the scheme should be provided.

### Recommendations

Schools are also recommended to consider:

* whether the logistics of their context enable them to offer an opt out or opt in scheme (with the former being the preferred option);
* how systems such as the University’s VLE, CRM or Flying Start website can be used to enable peer mentors to contact incoming students in advance of arriving at the University;
* how contact between peer mentors and their mentees will be co-ordinated and maintained;
* how the effectiveness of peer mentoring can be evaluated and further developed;
* whether it is appropriate for peer mentors’ contribution to be recognised through a celebration event

### Case-Study Examples

Case studies will be collected to showcase the variety of ways in which Schools have implemented student-led peer mentoring schemes. These are to follow.

1. Keenan, C., 2014. Mapping student-led peer learning in the UK. Report of an HEA funded students as partners project [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://help.leeds.ac.uk/peer_mentoring/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A standard training pack is available for this purpose [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These can be ordered online via from the Print & Copy Bureau who have a template [↑](#footnote-ref-4)