

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University of Manchester

20  
YEARS  
OF PEER SUPPORT

**PEER**  
SUPPORT

# Peer Support

- Encouraging the development of independence and resilience
- Helping students make the most of the university experience
- Building a community that benefits from everyone's experiences

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## Why Peer Support?



Professor Matthew Jefferies

I began working at Manchester in the 1990s, coincidentally at around the same time as the first Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) and Peer Mentor schemes were being established at the University, but I must admit that until a few years ago I was only vaguely aware of their existence. There was no PASS scheme in my discipline, and my only experience of Peer Mentors came at departmental social events or on visit days. I was perhaps not an obvious choice, therefore, to lead the University's Review of Peer Support in 2012.

I was hugely impressed by the Sabbatical Interns, the PASS leaders, the Peer Mentors and the Staff Coordinators that I met in the course of the Review. They were articulate, enthusiastic, sometimes critical but always engaged, with a genuine interest in helping their peers and contributing to the life of the University. In short they were everything that we would hope to see from Manchester graduates, with all the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in today's competitive jobs market, but with the generosity and public spiritedness to make a contribution to their communities and society at large too.

One direct result of the Review was the establishment of the Peer Support Strategy Group, which I have had the pleasure of chairing for the past couple of years.

The fundamental principle that schemes should be 'discipline owned, student led and centrally coordinated' remains unchanged, but the group has sought to provide strategic direction, not least in how best to expand Peer Support across the institution. I am delighted that from this coming year we can say that every first-year student at The University of Manchester has access to some form of Peer Support.

Peer Support is invaluable to our institution: It can help the transitions through higher education, support socialisation and aid retention, enhance the student experience, and improve employability. I am confident that the status of Peer Support within The University of Manchester has never been more secure, but the real strength of any Peer Support scheme lies in the people who make it work on a daily basis. I hope that this brochure might inspire you to become involved with a PASS or Peer Mentoring scheme in your own discipline area – I know you won't regret it!

**Professor Matthew Jefferies**  
Assistant Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students, Faculty of Humanities and Chair of the Peer Support Strategy Group

**1995**

1 PASS scheme with 10 leaders

**2005**

11 PASS schemes with 250 leaders

16 Peer Mentoring schemes with 350 leaders

**2015**

30 PASS schemes with 900 leaders

35 Peer Mentoring schemes with 850 leaders

**48 graduate interns have worked on Peer Support programmes since 2004.**

**Regular attendance at PASS has been shown by some studies to improve average grades and reduce failure rates.**

Source: Fostier, M. and Carey, W. (2007) *Exploration, experience and evaluation: Peer Assisted Study Scheme Science Learning and Teaching Conference*, Keele UK, Bioscience, Materials and Physical Sciences Subject Centre

**Benefits students in their learning, wellbeing, and their future.**

“PASS is something I can physically see, talk about and be proud of, knowing that I was part of it.”

## PASS

In Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), students taking a particular programme work together to improve their own understanding of a topic. PASS Leaders (higher-year students who have previously taken the programme) facilitate discussions and lead activities using skills learned through extensive training.

PASS undoubtedly supports students in their learning, but there are also benefits for the retention and wellbeing of participants. PASS Leaders develop useful – and demonstrable – skills that will help them in both their ongoing studies and their future career.

### Why run a PASS scheme?

*“It is of obvious benefit to the School to operate a scheme in which students from higher years help to mentor students from lower years. However, PASS combines this with an academic side. Not only does it provide support for coping with a new environment, but also in coping with the change in learning from school to university by people who have gone through it. It also creates a level of responsibility as they develop as individuals. This development is palpable and often noticed within the School. The feeling of community between the School and students is invaluable and helps us to work together. An example of this is the school quizzes which are run by PASS Leaders and attended by large numbers of staff and students.”*

**Dr Iain Dupere, Director of Undergraduate Studies, School of Mechanical, Aerospace, and Civil Engineering.**

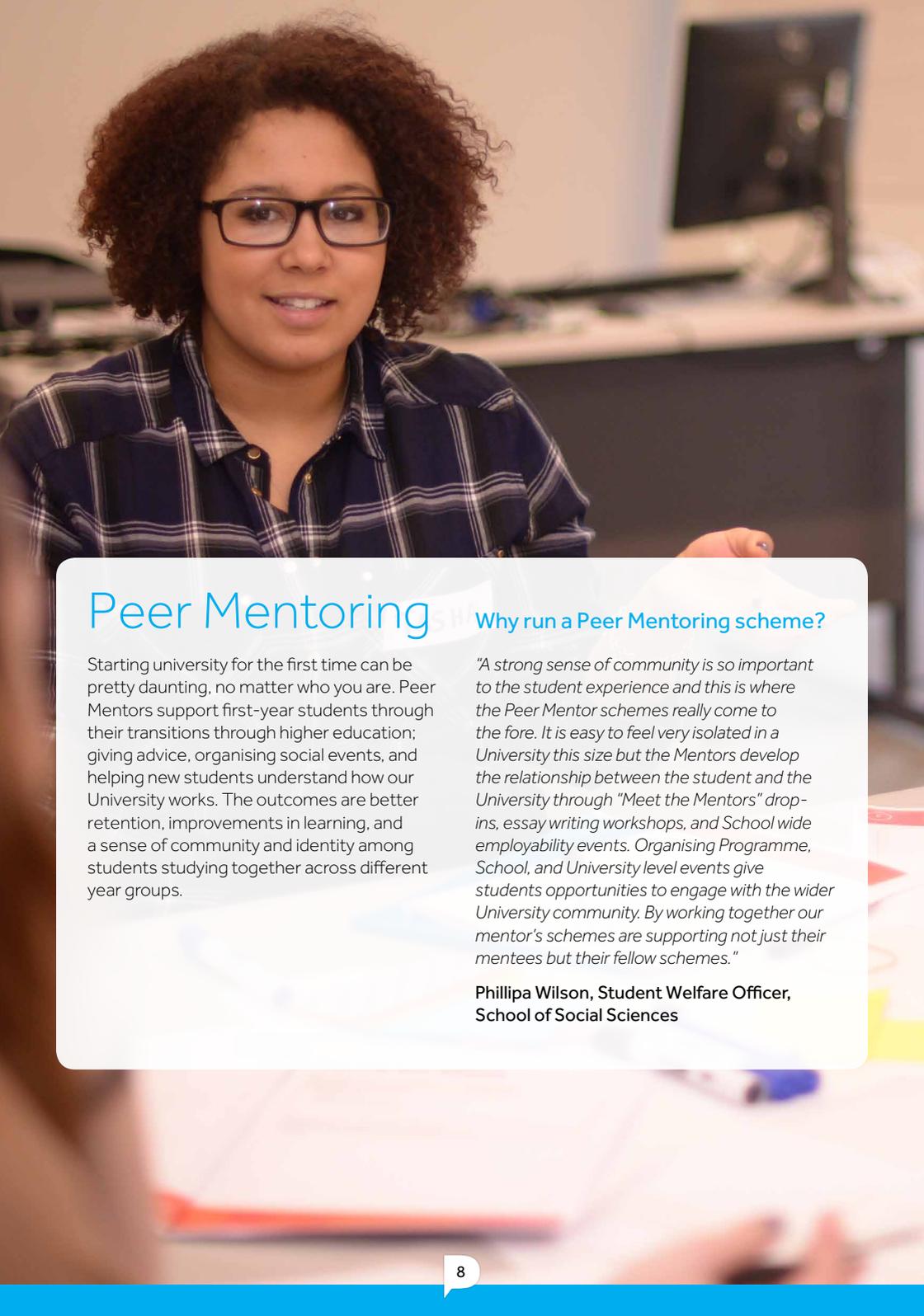
**Andrew Aldridge, a final-year student in the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, shares what he’s gained from being a PASS scheme student coordinator:**

*“I’ve been involved with PASS throughout my time at Manchester. I believe the secret behind Aerospace Engineering PASS success comes from the enthusiasm and determination from all involved to reach a certain standard of achievement. Engineers are hard-working individuals, and as coordinators we get to nurture students into PASS leaders who are at the top of their game and really understand the purpose and value of Peer Support.*

*I always had the intention of making the most of university, and it’s easy to say I have gained leadership and communication skills through PASS. But what I also feel I can take away from this is firstly the sense of being part of something, and secondly having something I have directly influenced. In Aerospace Engineering PASS we have our own little organisation that replicates the real world in a great way. We have goals to work towards and standards to adhere to, and we have lines of reporting that we feed back to. Personally, I have*

*taken it as a challenge to step up to the mark and produce results that are reflective of my work ethic and determination. At the end of my fourth year, with a solid degree and a scheme I spent three years to help shape and develop, I’ll have the right experiences to go into the business world. More importantly, PASS is something I can physically see, talk about and be proud of, knowing that I was part of this.*

*Through PASS, I’ve been lucky enough to make some of the best working relationships I’ve ever had with staff and students alike. Over the year I’ve spent time speaking to external visitors about what Aerospace does and how we work to deliver what we feel are the best PASS sessions that we can. In fact, I think if people could see the relationship between staff, interns and students, they would know instantly why peer support schemes at Manchester are so successful. The enthusiasm of each person who works for Peer Support’s success is so clear, and it’s great to know that I have been part of it.”*



“I met someone who had gone through what I was going through as a first-year student.”

## Peer Mentoring

### Why run a Peer Mentoring scheme?

Starting university for the first time can be pretty daunting, no matter who you are. Peer Mentors support first-year students through their transitions through higher education; giving advice, organising social events, and helping new students understand how our University works. The outcomes are better retention, improvements in learning, and a sense of community and identity among students studying together across different year groups.

*“A strong sense of community is so important to the student experience and this is where the Peer Mentor schemes really come to the fore. It is easy to feel very isolated in a University this size but the Mentors develop the relationship between the student and the University through “Meet the Mentors” drop-ins, essay writing workshops, and School wide employability events. Organising Programme, School, and University level events give students opportunities to engage with the wider University community. By working together our mentor’s schemes are supporting not just their mentees but their fellow schemes.”*

**Phillipa Wilson, Student Welfare Officer,  
School of Social Sciences**

### Tinotenda Mapata, a first-year undergraduate in the School of Social Sciences, explains what having a Mentor meant to him:

*“Coming to Manchester, I was drowned in fear, attributed by the fact that I had not been away from my parents and I was moving to a whole new country on the other side of the world. I kept asking myself a whole bunch of questions. Am I going to cope? What if I don’t like the university itself? I was terrified.*

*During the welcome week, we were told that we would be having peer mentors who will be helping us find our way through the first year of university. I didn’t really pay much attention to this and when the School scheduled our first meeting with the mentors I was a bit sceptical about going but something kept on pushing me to go then I finally decided, hey why not?*

*My first encounter with my mentor was amazing because I met someone who had recently gone through what I was going through as a first year and was very eager to help me*

*in any way she could. It kind of put me at ease because I knew in my heart that if I had problems in whatever area I had someone I could turn to.*

*My peer mentor has been of great help in my academic, social, and mental wellbeing. I got to relate with her not only as my mentor but also as my friend, as someone I could talk to when things got difficult. The socials the BA Econ peer mentor scheme organised also gave an opportunity to make new friends and meet more people who were doing the same course as me.*

*All this actually inspired me to want to become a peer mentor myself in the next academic year. I have already applied and gone through the training. I want to become a mentor because I admire what my mentor did for me and will be greatly satisfied if I can do it for another person as well.”*



## Student led

All of our schemes are discipline owned, student led, and centrally supported. Our Partnerships are one of the things we're most proud of about Peer Support.

At a local level, each PASS and Peer Mentoring scheme is managed by a partnership between staff and student coordinators; each benefitting from the experiences of the other.

This direct connection to our students doesn't end with the Schools. Centrally, all schemes are supported by a team of eight graduate interns. Having only just graduated themselves, they bring a unique perspective to the work of the Teaching and Learning Support Office based on years of experience of both student life and Peer Support.

Since 2004, we've had the privilege of working alongside 48 University of Manchester graduates. Half of them have gone on to find permanent jobs in Higher Education, continuing to support students in Manchester and elsewhere.

“I am still drawing on the skills I learnt with Peer Support to make a difference.”



Liz Evans

### Liz Evans was one of our first graduate interns, back in 2004:

*“After graduating with a First, I knew that I wanted to work in education but I didn't have great confidence or nearly enough experience to do so. The opportunity for an internship came up offering the chance to coordinate peer mentor and PASS schemes in the arts and humanities and I knew this would be the perfect stepping-stone for taking me from university to a career in education. I was elated when I got the job!*

*During this year I supported students in setting up new Peer Mentoring and PASS schemes as well as helping those already in place to develop and grow further. I had the opportunity to liaise with lecturing staff and students about their needs and from this gained a crucial insight into the workings of education and the support that needs to be in place in order for students to succeed. I delivered training sessions to students that enabled me to become confident in public speaking and in facilitating training sessions, and I learned about the needs of students and how to support them – both on a day-to-day basis when completing my role and in conference opportunities that I was able to take part in both at the university and across Europe. The most memorable opportunity during the internship was when I had the chance to travel to Lund University in Sweden to discover how Supplemental Instruction and Peer Mentoring work in a higher education system different from our own as well as in schools – and it was seeing this that convinced me to train as a teacher and apply for a PGCE.*

*I left my internship with great confidence and it led me on a path to become a teacher. The internship gave me an edge when applying for highly competitive PGCE courses and the experience I gained helped to set me apart from other graduates. The skills I learned to help students become independent learners is something I still use every single day – both when teaching students, training staff or delivering conferences. I gained invaluable experience during my internship in writing at length about education and peer support and this triggered a love of writing about education – something that resulted in me writing for the Guardian. I have drawn upon the peer support systems I came across at the University to implement similar systems in schools – such as in training literacy mentors to help develop the reading and writing skills of students below the base line when they enter secondary education or in access mentoring where students mentor students from under-privileged backgrounds through their UCAS applications. It even stretches further to teacher CPD where I have set up mentoring schemes to coach and develop staff. Such schemes have resulted in increased retention on courses, increased applications to higher education from pupil premium students, higher examination results and above all, happy and supported students and staff.*

*It's great to think that even though I left my internship a while ago, I am still drawing on the skills I learnt there to make a difference – both to the education of young people and to teachers themselves.”*

## The future of Peer Support

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Peer Support is already an important part of the experience of being an undergraduate student at The University of Manchester. In the 20 years of Peer Support, we've grown from just two schemes in 1995, to 65 today, with more than 1750 higher-year students supporting 12,500 of their peers.

From September 2015 we'll provide Peer Support to every single first year undergraduate through Peer Mentoring and PASS schemes – a first for UK universities.

But we're not stopping there. There is an exciting time ahead of us as we further develop our programmes, with the aim that peer-led activity will be fundamental and pervasive across the entire experience for all of our students – both undergraduate and postgraduate.

The University of Manchester will be known nationally and internationally for its Peer Support – it will be something that makes us distinctive.

This vision of Peer Support is bigger than just mentoring and PASS schemes, and there is already widespread peer-led activity taking place through academic disciplines and student services. Our vision for Peer Support recognises all peer led activity, while bringing consistency and cohesion towards achieving the University's goal for an outstanding learning and student experience.



## How can you get involved in Peer Support?

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- Get involved with the Peer Mentoring or PASS scheme within your discipline. Find out who the Staff Coordinator is and work with them to develop the provision for your students. Most importantly, promote Peer Support opportunities among your first-year students.
- Do you know of any other structured, peer-led activity taking place in your area? Have you heard about different types of peer-led activity elsewhere in your networks? Share it with us so we can offer support and promotion through the Peer Support networks.
- Consider how peer-led activity might enhance the work that you do for students. Not convinced yet? Come and talk to us.
- Share your ideas for what the future of Peer Support might look like.

## Get in touch

To talk with someone about Peer Support, contact **Marcia Ody**:

tel: **0161 275 3254**

email: [marcia.ody@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:marcia.ody@manchester.ac.uk)





Peer Support fosters partnerships between staff and students to enable higher-year students to support lower-year students at The University of Manchester.

Peer-led activities support students in all aspects of their University experience: Learning, wellbeing and future.