

Title: **Identifying opportunities to engage in scholarly activities through peer tutoring**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Consider some factors required to support postgraduate student scholarship and development in learning and teaching
- Gain an appreciation of how students can develop essential academic skills, e.g. facilitation, organisation, group working, through engagement in peer tutoring
- Identify opportunities in their subject domains where mentoring can facilitate integration of scholarship in practice
- Discuss similar training and support for tutors in their subject domains

Session Outline

At the R(D)SVS we have piloted a number of peer tutoring projects. As part of this, online taught MSc students volunteered to act as peer tutors for courses delivered as part of a distance education programme - their primary role being to facilitate sessions around key academic skills. These peer tutors were trained following the same basic structure as our current on-campus undergraduate peer project following the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) method (University of Manchester, 2014). Taking into account research in this area (Beaumont et al., 2012), the training materials included support specifically aimed at new online teaching staff. To encourage the key components of academic leadership and scholarship development, as reported in McKiggan-Fee et al. (2013) and Zaccagnini & Verenikina (2013), the peer tutors were given the opportunity and support to apply for Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Regular debrief sessions were carried out with the peer tutor team comprising staff and fellow peer tutors, ensuring the tutors had the opportunity to share and discuss their experiences.

We are in agreement with Ross (2012) that there is little difference between teachers who study and students who teach. The process of supporting and working with the peer tutors provided us with opportunities to learn, reflect and develop our own skills. By mentoring the peer tutors as junior academics, a community of practice was developed focussed on guiding and supporting students in distance-learning study. This session will provide an overview of the project. We will also reflect on our experience, and encourage participants to share their own experiences or consider opportunities to develop similar projects in their institutions.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

5 minutes – setting the scene by introducing the online MSc peer-tutor training project. This will include details of the training course designed for the tutor group.

10 minutes – questions and discussion

Do you (delegates) have experience teaching/supporting online?

What are the differences between teaching online tutors versus face-to-face?

10 minutes – preparation, mentoring and support for students applying for Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. This will include details of how this provides opportunities for staff to develop their own scholarship and understanding as well as the importance of reflection for both staff and students.

15 minutes – discussion in small groups with key points shared back to the main group. Presenters will move between groups engaging in discussion and facilitating feedback to the main group

Are there similar training opportunities in your subject discipline? If so, how could these guide our future developments?

What opportunities would there be to organise a similar project for your students?

How can the discussion and debate between teaching staff and student colleagues challenge current practice and drive change?

5 minutes – close and reflection prompt

Brief outline of future developmental activities

Reflection – do we make effective use of the inspiration and ideas raised through discussion with our students on teaching and learning in our discipline? How can we do better?

References

Beaumont, T. J., Mannion, A. P., & Shen, B. O. (2012). From the Campus to the Cloud: The Online Peer Assisted Learning Scheme. *Journal of Peer Learning*, 5(1), 1-15.

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University of Manchester (2014). About PASS. Available at: <http://www.pass.manchester.ac.uk/about-pass/> (accessed 8 May 2015)

Zaccagnini, M., & Verenikina, I. (2013). Peer Assisted Study Sessions for postgraduate international students in Australia. *Journal of Peer Learning*, 6(1), 8.