Enhancing Student Support
Benchmarking Event
19 February 2013

Postgraduate Support Workshops
BioPALS

Presenters
- Brian Chondo

Notes
- Student led programme of peer support sessions, aligned to academic curriculum but not confined to academic topics.

BioPALS
- Course Organisers are engaged and course structures or needs are discussed.
- Publicity has been developed. Have met with students to promote the service. Facebook is used.
- Feedback is gathered at the end of a session.
- Recruitment was challenging at first but it is hoped it will increase.
- The implementation has been an organic process with facilitators learning as the initiative progresses.
- Guidelines for sessions have been developed.
- The benefits for facilitators have been linked to their learning, e.g. presentation skills
- Participants experienced a demonstration and worked through materials from a mock session.

BioPALS
Student led programme of peer support sessions, aligned to academic curriculum but not confined to academic topics.

During Innovative Learning Week, BTO staff invited students to participate in 2 training sessions with a view to establishing a peer support system. 7 Students opted to participate. Biological science has very large first year classes. First year students sometimes miss opportunities simply because they are unaware of them, and they have little or no interaction with students from other years. Introducing peer support was intended as a step towards addressing that.

The student facilitators planned a programme of peer support sessions, roughly fortnightly from the start of semester 1. Through conversations with course organiser, topics were deliberately selected to align to what was happening in the course eg material being taught; pitfalls and deadlines. Each session had a couple of lead facilitators who planned it in detail, but the other facilitators were also present. All the facilitators meet on Sunday evenings, before the next peer support session, to go through in detail what is planned and to ensure everyone is fully briefed.
Initial attendance was vast, too many to be manageable (70+) but has dropped to around 20. Its not the same core of people all the time, its mostly different people coming along. Sessions were initially advertised heavily – posters; shout outs; email – but these were dropped when the response was so overwhelming! If it seems there are fewer participants for the number of facilitators, then a couple of facilitators just merge in and assume the role of participant, it can help seed the discussion. Aim for a ratio of about 1:4 facilitators:participants. No register or record made of who attends.

Finding the right time to hold sessions is important – best seems to be middle of day, when students are at KB but (obviously) not in lectures.

Facilitators eligible for Edinburgh award, but they would do it anyway. It’s a big time commitment, but very much viewed as a worthwhile thing to do.

Students shared some of the example activities that they have used in peer support sessions, and showed feedback from those who had participated. Suggests very much valued by those who have engaged.

- Organic process, learning as the system evolves
- Instilling confidence in themselves and others
- Support for students.
- Feedback and evaluation.
- Engagement slow, then grows (momentum when students move on?).
- School link is important - publicity and engagement with staff