

## Project Team



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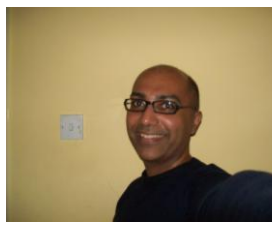
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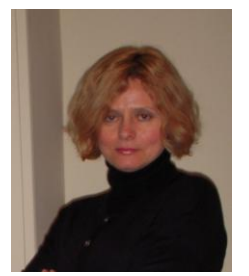
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## Next Steps

We recommend that you join networks of like-minded people who are also interested in the transition and retention of students.

You are encouraged to become a member of the Retention network. This will enable you to keep in touch with the Support and Co-ordination team to share your knowledge across the sector and for them to support the work you are doing. Send your name and email address to [retention@actiononaccess.org](mailto:retention@actiononaccess.org) with 'Retention Network' in the subject line to register.

You are also encouraged to join the network for learning developers [www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ldhen](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ldhen)

Also, find out more about the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education [www.aldinhe.ac.uk](http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk).

## Useful reading

The project website provides a comprehensive bibliography of related first year literature.

A useful source of information is the Higher Education Academy <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/retention-and-success>

For any further information contact the Project Lead

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Creative Learning Journeys  
SW Spoke of the National HE STEM programme  
commissioned Dovetail, a creative social enterprise to capture some of the learning outcomes of a number of STEM SW projects as they progress. These are available to view at <http://www.creativestem.co.uk/>

# Stepping Stones 2STEM



Exploration and enhancement of transition and induction experiences of students starting on HE STEM programmes in the SW region

Peer Assisted Learning: in and beyond the classroom

April 2011 – June 2012

# News about the third regional seminar held on 31 January 2012



This seminar was held at the University of Plymouth in order to learn more about their experiences of recently introducing 'Peer Assisted Learning' in four programmes: Psychology; Chemistry; Law; Computing fast track. Evaluation indicates that both students and staff have been very enthusiastic about the scheme.

*"PALS ...is not a tool for fixing study skills but an integral part of developing an academic community where informal sharing of ideas and enthusiasm for the subject is a valuable part of the student experience"*

*"I found the group interaction was great – lots of laughter and very positive atmosphere"*

More than 35 delegates attended this seminar. The focus of this seminar was the role of Peer Assisted Learning in supporting first year STEM students as its key focus.

**Marcia Ody** provided some national context in her opening talk. Marcia has built a national and international profile of Peer Assisted Study Support and Supplemental Instruction and now leads the UK National Centre of PASS from the University of Manchester. Marcia described the work of the national centre in supporting the ongoing developments of PAL/PASS in the UK., for example supervisor training and PAL leader conferences. [Marcia.j.ody@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Marcia.j.ody@manchester.ac.uk)

**Carolyn Gentle**, PALS co-ordinator at Plymouth University then gave a presentation entitled: PAL leaders and mentees: What are we learning from our PALS@Plymouth pilot, during which she discussed the extent to which the newly implemented scheme was meeting the needs of leaders and students. For more information contact [carolyn.gentle@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:carolyn.gentle@plymouth.ac.uk).

**Ismini Vasileiou and Dr Hywel Evans** then discussed their own expectations and experiences as PAL academic co-ordinators in Computing fast track and Chemistry at Plymouth. Their presentation was concluded by chemistry PAL leaders who gave us a student's eye view of PALS@Plymouth and offered us authentic insights into what they perceive to be the benefits for both PAL leaders and mentees. The leaders also contributed to small group discussions during the afternoon which was warmly appreciated by the delegates.

**Jane Rowe**, a Learning and Teaching Adviser in Education Enhancement at the University of Exeter then gave us a change of topic. Jane gave a brief overview of video resources that are being developed as part of the Becoming a STEM Enthusiast! Project she is leading on for the HE STEM SW programme. The resources are designed to be used in outreach activities. For further information about these exciting resources contact [j.l.rowe@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:j.l.rowe@exeter.ac.uk)

## Further news of the role of PAL in supporting new first year students project

The project comes to a close on 30 June 2012. There have been a number of outcomes which are available in more detail on the website. The project aimed to explore the role of Peer Assisted Learning in supporting first year students studying on SW Spoke of the National HE STEM programme, and, began an exploration of on-line PAL.

The work included:

- A review of models of PAL in the south west region
- A brief overview of the PAL literature
- An in-depth focus group interview with PAL leaders
- Two regional seminars taking PAL as its key focus
- A literature review of on-line PAL
- A case study of setting up and implementing PAL
- A discourse analysis of PAL leader discussion
- Guidelines on implementing PAL

Full details of the projects are available at [www.hestem-sw.org.uk](http://www.hestem-sw.org.uk). However, the key learning relating to the role of PAL in supporting students in first year programmes includes:

- The importance of providing social learning opportunities with peers
- The importance of creating smaller social spaces within large cohorts where students can explore their learning
- The importance of providing opportunities for students to learn from others who are "similar to them" about the academic practices that help develop independent learning
- The importance of sympathetic timetabling of PAL
- The importance of knowing that you are not on your own and that more experienced students have survived!
- The importance of PAL in developing a sense of community
- The importance of social integration opportunities with higher level students

# News about the fourth and final regional seminar held on 22 May 2012

The final Seminar in the SW Spoke of the National HE STEM programme held at Bournemouth University took the theme of applying research findings into policy and practice. This seminar addressed questions relating to enhancing the 'Transition and early experiences of students starting on HE STEM programmes'. There was also a presentation about PAL leader discourse and, an overview of the Making PALS project - a national HE STEM practice transfer adopters scheme- an opportunity for other universities to adopt best practices.

This seminar very much focussed on how to move research findings into policy, beginning with an exploration of the findings of the three year HERE! project one of seven HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Trust funded research projects in the What Works: Student Retention and Success programme.

**Ed Foster**, of Nottingham Trent University opened the day with a talk on using research evidence to drive retention policy. Ed discussed the two key themes of the HERE! project which were: an exploration of factors that influenced students who may have had doubts about being at university to stay, and secondly, what can be learned from the practices of programmes with good rates of retention. For more information see <http://www.hereproject.org.uk/> or contact either [ed.foster@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:ed.foster@ntu.ac.uk) or [ckeenan@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:ckeenan@bournemouth.ac.uk).

**Chris Brill** of the Equality Challenge Unit then provided a comprehensive overview of the strategic imperatives around equality and diversity in transition and retention policy development. His talk covered admission processes, continuation rates, progression and transition with reference to the Equality Act and public sector equality duty. More information about this can be found at <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/> or contact [chris.brill@ecu.ac.uk](mailto:chris.brill@ecu.ac.uk).

**Sally Alsford** then gave a detailed account of the Enhanced Induction Project, a TQEF funded four year development at the University of Greenwich. The project has resulted in a University of Greenwich policy on New Arrivals and Transition which highlights the importance of moving to a more integrated and extended approach to transition. The policy includes a statement of new students' entitlement reflecting best practice and students' feedback. There is more detail on the SW Spoke regional website [www.hestem-sw.org.uk](http://www.hestem-sw.org.uk), alternatively, contact [s.e.alsford@greenwich.ac.uk](mailto:s.e.alsford@greenwich.ac.uk).

**Helen Watts**, of the University of the West of England provided an intriguing exploration of the construction of a PAL leader role with special emphasis on the negotiation of a peer identity between participants through a discourse analysis. The central tenet was that presenting 'self' as an expert and as a peer can be challenging – and this raises some important issues for the support and training of PAL leaders. A more detailed paper is available on the HE STEM project website.

Finally, **Chris Keenan** of Bournemouth University provided an overview of the experiences of practice adopters setting up Peer Assisted Learning Schemes through the Making PALS! Project.



## More news about the enhanced transition and induction to HE programmes project

This project also comes to a close on 30 June 2012. The outcomes and outputs of this project are also available on the SW Spoke regional website website.

The work included:

- An exploration of the perceptions of young people about science and about going to university from the perspectives of science ambassadors working with young people in schools
- A case study about setting up a maths café
- Insight into the transition experience of students with aspergers syndrome
- Two regional seminars taking Transition as the key focus
- Drawing on work taking place in the wider sector in order to promote models of good practice
- Setting up a discussion network

Key learning points relating to transition of students to HE STEM programmes include:

- The importance of dispelling stereotypical myths about science
- The importance of raising awareness of career opportunities and the variety of university courses available
- The importance of peer support
- The importance of tapping into students' goals and demonstrating how the first year curriculum fits together and helps them to achieve these goals
- The importance of discipline-specific transition learning resources