

# Final implementation and process evaluation report: University of East Anglia – Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)

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## 1. Executive summary

### 1.1. Project team

UEA research team includes the primary evaluator Dr Reda Nausedaite and Prof. Fabio Aricò, Prof. Helena Gillespie acting as supervisors. TASO appointed a Project Evaluation Team: Dr Sally Andrews, Dr Vanessa Dodd, and Dr Kate Cuthbert, Staffordshire University.

### 1.2. Project description

#### *Intervention being evaluated*

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) is designed to support Foundation Year students, first-year and second year as well as and Postgraduate Researchers get off to a successful start at university by bringing them together with student mentors in their degree programme. However, the initiative is open to students from participating UEA schools and supports both academic transition and pastoral support through a trained mentor with specific module/course knowledge and the ability to refer students to additional support services if required.

PAL recruits mentors annually and each academic year there have been around 100 active mentors. As for mentees, PAL manages to attract over 600 participating students (657 during 2021/2022 academic year and 618 during the 2022/2023 academic year).

PAL was first introduced at UEA in 2013-2015 as a pilot scheme. Since 2016, PAL has been managed by the Learning Enhancement Team (LET) in Student Services (STS) and is currently co-funded by UEA's Access and Participation Plan (APP) and STS. The intervention is managed by two PAL tutors (1FTE broken down into one tutor position at 0.7 FTE and the other at 0.3 FTE) who oversee the running of PAL.

#### *Brief description of IPE*

The purpose of the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) is to analyse how the activities carried out under PAL have contributed to the achievement of the programme objectives. The IPE of the UEA PAL programme is conducted as an effectiveness study to analyse how the implementation of PAL has worked and to determine whether or not it is consistent with the context of PAL implementation and the relationships outlined in the PAL Theory of Change (ToC).

#### *Key findings*

During its implementation phase, PAL became progressively embedded in the UEA infrastructure. Under the leadership of the Learning Enhancement Team, PAL has expanded its mentoring activities and now offers one-to-one mentoring in addition to group sessions, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Networking between PAL tutors and UEA teaching staff is crucial to the quality of PAL mentoring activities. Collaboration in the development of training materials is an important factor in the success of PAL.

PAL is not seen as an alternative to taught events, but as a way of consolidating what has been learnt in taught events in an alternative learning environment. It is important to note that the greater the interest and commitment of the teaching staff, the better the mentoring activities within the PAL programme as the teaching staff become co-creators of the PAL training materials. Through this cooperation mentors are introduced to the curriculum their mentees will undergo; thus, mentors have a stronger foundation from which to answer emerging questions by the mentees.

From the mentors' point of view, their training is a (re)familiarisation with the first-year courses, which improves their skills and strengthens their continuing education. For the mentees, it is an additional opportunity to understand their new academic environment both during and outside taught events. The introduction of one-to-one mentoring was in part a response to interest in more flexible opportunities, and interest in participating in PAL has increased since the early pilot phase.

#### *Key conclusions*

- Although the programme in its current form is an official part of the approach to student support at UEA, there is still room for improvement to create a closer link to the formal structures.
- Formalised or a more structured cooperation between UEA school staff and PAL tutors and the PAL programme itself could also improve the quality of the programme, as collaboration between PAL tutors and UEA staff is at the heart of producing high quality content.
- There are opportunities to set long-term goals for the programme, including supporting wider UEA objectives. Whilst PAL has benefited from the iterative process of its implementation, the Learning Enhancement team continues to strive for improvements and additions. As the programme is now an integral part of UEA's inclusive education provision, it is worth considering more ambitious development goals and objectives that would encompass 5- or 10-year development for the programme. Furthermore, with PAL's inclusion in UEA's Access and Participation Plan and Inclusive Education Policy there are opportunities to continue utilising PAL towards achieving wider UEA objectives.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Background and rationale for intervention, including existing evidence and the challenge

PAL was first introduced at UEA in 2013-2015 as a university-wide pilot project. Since 2016, PAL has been managed by the Learning Enhancement Team and is currently co-funded by UEA's Access and Participation Plan (APP) and Student Services (STS): the PAL tutor FTE is co-funded between STS and APP, the PAL intern is funded through APP, and administrative support is provided by STS Professional Services Team.

PAL supports Foundation Year students, first-year and second year as well as Postgraduate Researchers students through student-led, active learning mentoring to promote first year transition and longer-term student outcomes such as continuation, completion and progression. PAL is designed to enrich the curriculum, reinforce learning and personalise the academic experience, either through timetabled group mentoring or 1:1 mentoring, depending on the student's needs.

### 2.2. Intervention aims and objectives

PAL aims to support students in processing the large amount of curricular and non-curricular information they receive in the introductory phase and in the first year of study.

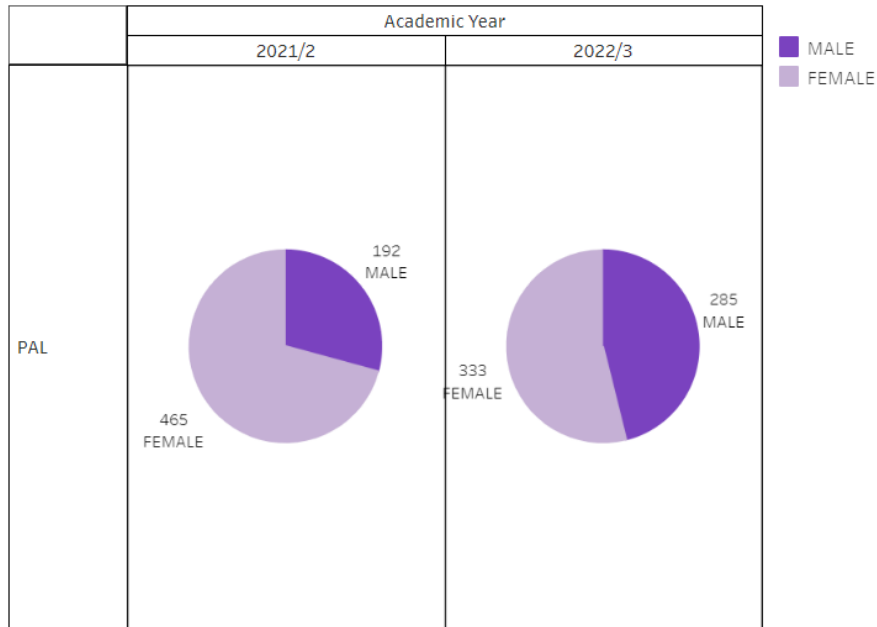
PAL provides students with access to peers who have gone through similar experiences and can offer informal guidance on navigating the university, both from the academic and social perspectives. PAL is a complementary intervention to taught events such as lectures and other teaching events that provide one facet of transition support.

### 2.3. Detailed description of the intervention

PAL was initially designed with first-year students in mind to support students transition into university by matching them with student mentors on their course. The scheme is led by PAL tutors who oversees the work of PAL.

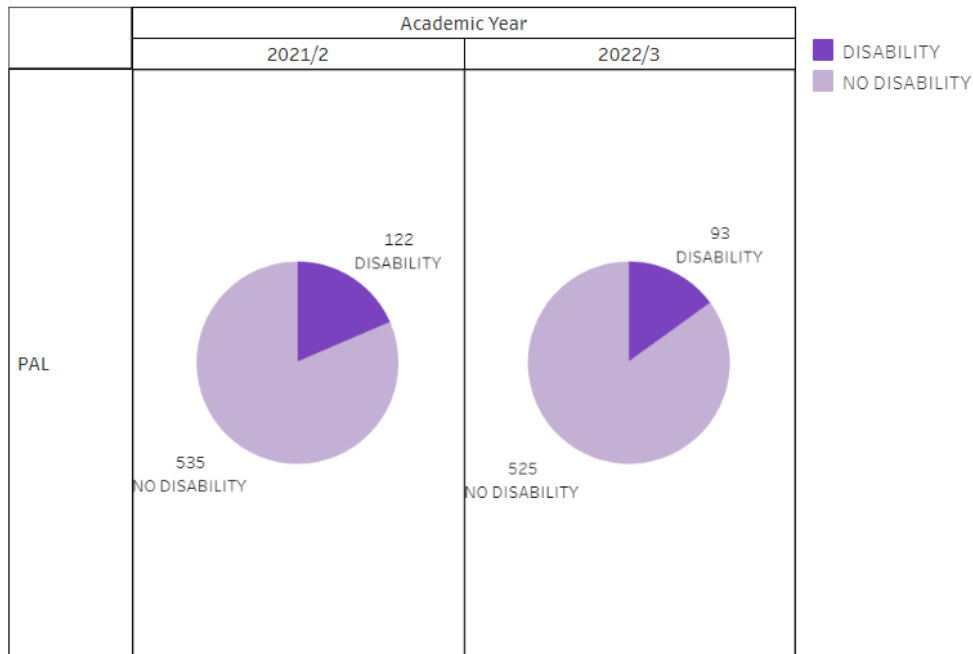
- As of 2023/2024 academic year there are two PAL tutors sharing 1 FTE position (one at 0.7 FTE and one at 0.3 FTE) employed within the Learning Enhancement Team.
- According to the conducted interviews, each academic year there are around 100 mentors working across the UEA schools where PAL is active (see below for a list of currently participating schools).
- During the 2021/2022 academic year there were 657 mentees participating in PAL. During 2022/2023 the number was 618 mentees in total. Their demographic breakdown can be seen in the figures below.

Figure 1 PAL mentee demographic: gender



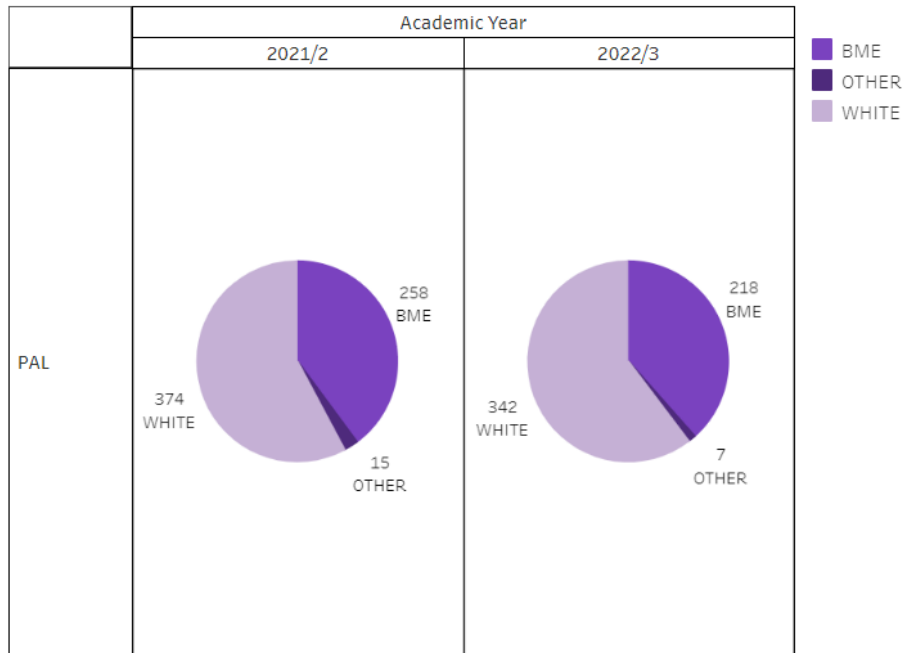
Source: UEA (2023) PAL Student Demographics

Figure 2 PAL mentee demographic: disability



Source: UEA (2023) PAL Student Demographics

Figure 3 PAL mentee demographic: ethnic group



Source: UEA (2023) PAL Student Demographics

The initiative is open to all first-year students, and it has been reported that Foundation Year, second year students and Postgraduate Researchers have also participated in the programme. This demonstrates that PAL can be a flexible part of UEA’s inclusive education provision. The initiative supports both academic transition and pastoral care through a trained mentor who has specific module/course knowledge and is able to refer students to additional support services as required.

Mentors receive bespoke training to support students and enhance their soft skills. They participate in mentoring activities throughout the academic year that deepen their subject-specific knowledge and build their confidence. The mentors are second- and third-year students who participate as volunteers. They attend a six-hour training course before becoming mentors. Mentors learn a variety of topics about effective mentoring, including the importance of EDI and effective signposting. Course teams in Schools also support PAL through signposting and awareness raising.

There are two modes of delivery:

- Group mentoring which is reportedly scheduled around once every two weeks and is timetabled as part of course curriculum. A single mentor can have a group ranging in size of 2 to 20 mentees at a time. Each group sessions is expected to last up to an hour.
- One-to-one mentoring which is typically scheduled once every three weeks over the academic year; however, it is up to mentors and mentees to schedule these meetings and their actual frequency may differ from mentor to mentor. A single



mentor can work with 1-3 mentees for one-to-one mentoring sessions. Each one-to-one session is expected to last up to an hour.

Course teams also benefit from PAL as a co-curricular enrichment programme. Schools and courses decide for themselves how to use PAL in their course context. Most degree programmes at UEA offer PAL with the following UEA schools participating: AMA, BIO, DEV, ECO, EDU, HIS, IIH FY, LAW, LDC, MED, MTH, OT/PT, PARAMED, PPL, PSY, SCI FY, SLT, and SWK. The PAL tutor and academic course team support the recruitment of PAL mentors both through general communication and by identifying specific students as part of a development opportunity.

PAL is introduced as part of the course induction. The PAL tutors and student mentors attend a scheduled session in the first week to raise awareness of the opportunity. The PAL tutors are responsible for facilitating PALs introduction and uptake across UEA schools, development of PAL, mentor training, matching mentor and mentee, scheduling PAL and monitoring PAL engagement during the academic year.

#### 2.4. Brief description of the evaluation and what this report covers

The aim of this evaluation is to analyse how the activities carried out under the UEA's PAL programme have contributed to achieving the programme's objectives. The focus is on examining the programme activities to improve our understanding of the activities aimed at students participating in PAL, the success factors as well as the challenges and obstacles in the implementation of PAL.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Statement of research questions

The research questions (RQs) are based on the IPE design and examine the factors of how the PAL programme is implemented. The research questions guide the evaluation to examine why certain elements of the programme are (or are not) achieving the intended effects. The following table provides a breakdown of the research questions, which in turn are divided into sub-questions.

Table 1 Specific research questions related to IPE

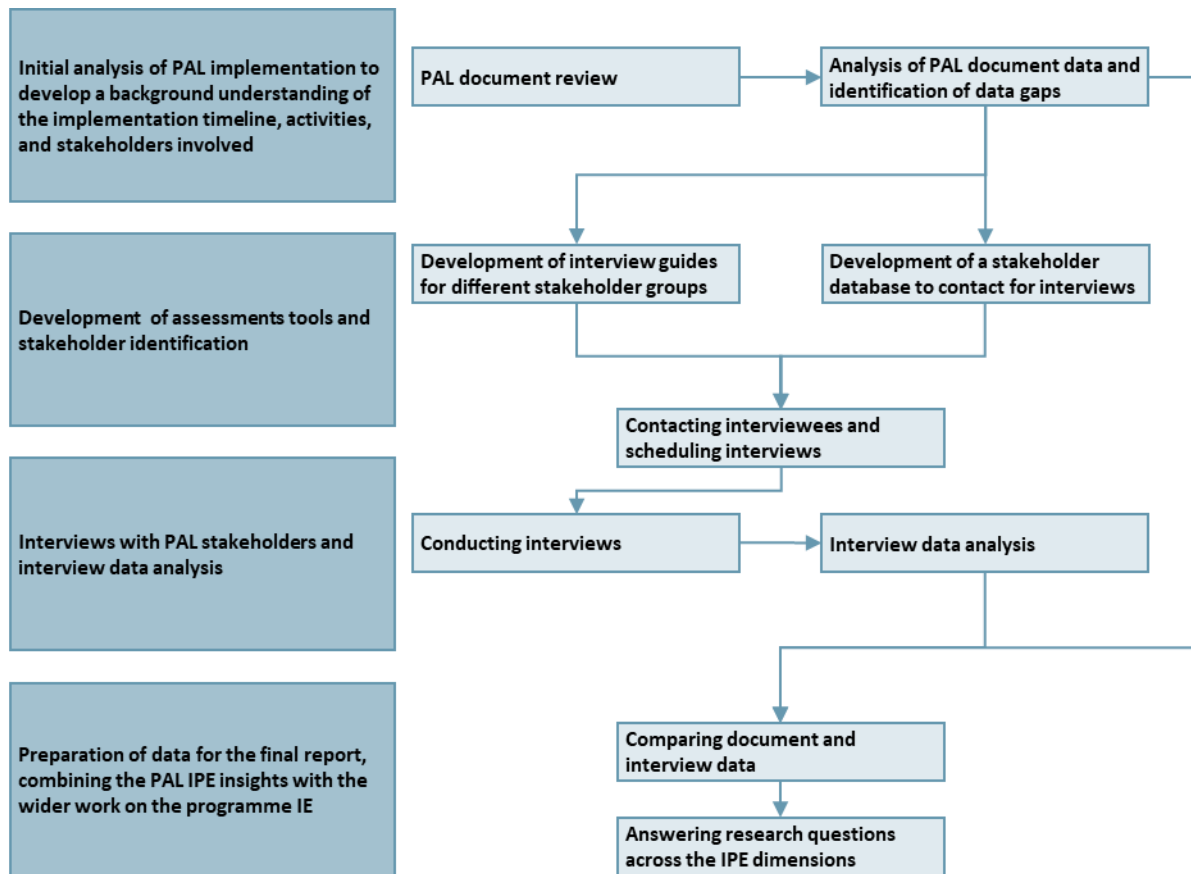
Research question	Sub-questions
Q1. How is the PAL being implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are the different activities of PAL?</li> <li>● Who are the target (staff) of PAL activities?</li> <li>● What are the causes for the success of activities?</li> <li>● Who (staff) are involved in the implementation of PAL activities?</li> <li>● How do implementers contribute towards achieving the PAL outcomes?</li> <li>● What are the barriers for implementation of PAL?</li> <li>● How the barriers (if any) affect the implementation of PAL activities?</li> </ul>
Q2. How has the implementation of PAL evolved over time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why (or why not) have changes to the PAL activities been made?</li> <li>● Have there been changes and/or expansion to the groups of students that PAL activities target?</li> <li>● Have changes been made in response to specific barriers for PAL implementation?</li> <li>● Have the changes been proactive or reactive in the course of implementation?</li> <li>● How have these changes been rationalised in terms of supporting PAL implementation?</li> <li>● How successful have these changes been in terms of supporting more effective implementation of the PAL programme?</li> </ul>

The research questions are linked to specific IPE dimensions and serve as a guideline for the development of interview guidelines and the presentation of the results for the final report.

#### 3.2. Overview of IPE design and methods

The IPE of the UEA PAL programme is conducted as an effectiveness study to analyse how the implementation of PAL has worked. The purpose of the IPE is therefore to analyse how the activities carried out under PAL have contributed to the achievement of the programme objectives.

Figure 4 PAL IPE design



### 3.3. Sample, data sources

The involvement of stakeholders provided the best conditions for a comprehensive analysis of the individual RQ and IPE dimensions, where statements could be compared and contrasted to either substantiate how and why PAL was implemented the way it was, or to challenge assumptions about implementation. The analysis includes interviews with PAL implementers to ensure that the evaluation can reconstruct a full timeline of implementation, challenges encountered, changes made and reasons for PAL design decisions. The interviews were conducted with UEA personnel involved in PAL implementation. Interviewees were identified following consultations and recommendations from UEA staff knowledgeable about services available to students. Interviewee selection was based on their level of knowledge about the programme. Each interviewee signed a “Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form” which ensures any individualised data will only be accessed by staff members working on the research project and the confidentiality of each interviewee will be ensured so that they cannot be identified within the report. Due to the signing of the “Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form” no further information about the interviewees will be disclosed.

The interviews took place after the initial desk research during which the available documentation of PAL was used to produce preliminary findings. The interview data expanded upon this work where interviewee input was analysed against the research questions filling in the data gaps (particularly in regards to PAL implementation timeline, current implementation structure) and expanded with added details (particularly regarding the activities). The analysis of interview data was facilitated by the design of the interview guide which was grounded in the research questions.

During the interviews, the following broad topics were covered (see Annex 2 for the full interview guide):

- Working with PAL – the management structure of PAL, including changes over time.
- PAL activities – discussing the different mentoring activities under PAL, including mentor training, reasons behind the activity design.
- Changes to PAL design – since its initial pilot phase PAL has undergone changes in how the programme is managed and the activities that are carried out as part of PAL. Here it was important to understand the timeline of these changes, reasons behind them.
- Success of PAL activities – discussing the success factors of PAL activities and how these impact students and UEA.
- Challenges of PAL activities - challenges and barriers for implementation of PAL and potential for further development and expansion of PAL.

#### 3.4. Details of dosage, compliance, fidelity, and usual practice

The following table presents the IPE dimensions that are relevant for the assessment of PAL, as well as the reasons why each dimension is important for this work.

Table 3 PAL IPE dimensions

IPE dimension	Relevance to the PAL evaluation	Research Question (RQ)
Fidelity/adherence	<p>Analysis of the extent to which the implementation activities match the processes and relationships presented in the ToC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on the staff assigned towards PAL implementation and management of the programme activities.</li> <li>● Identify extent to which the implementers and the actions they take under PAL adhere to the assumptions outlined in PAL ToC.</li> <li>● High fidelity would indicate that implementers are working within the expected framework of PAL.</li> <li>● Low fidelity finds mismatches between assumption of implementation (under the ToC) and actual implementation activities. It can likewise indicate that not all PAL activities are taking</li> </ul>	Q1

	place or are implemented in a reduced capacity.	
Adaptation	<p>Analysis of the changes that were made to the PAL programme during its lifetime. Examines the rationale behind the changes and the intended and actual effects on the implementation. The analysis considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rationale behind the changes and how they fit within the ToC (i.e., whether changes are designed to affect the method or the content of PAL activities).</li> <li>• The timing of the changes, whether these were pro-active or reactive to emerging challenges, needs, etc. and how data was used to justify the timing of changes.</li> <li>• The valence of the changes made, whether these were positive, neutral or negative in the context of implementation and achieving outcomes.</li> </ul>	Q2

The selection of IPE dimensions represents the focus of this study in order to perform an analysis of PAL within a limited time frame. It was decided that the most efficient use of the available resources would be to focus on the implementation expectations and actual experiences outlined in the ToC.

### 3.5. Analytical approach

The evaluation is based on qualitative research methods, document review and interviews following a linear scheme, with the document review supporting the identification of gaps and the development of interview guidelines.

The document review includes available PAL documentation, data on the PAL design decision, changes to the design and implementation.

Semi-structured interviews are the primary qualitative research method used to collect data on PAL implementation and stakeholder statements. The interview guides were based on the data collected during the document review and relied on the RQs.

### 3.6. Ethics (very brief outline of the components that required ethical approval, who granted this, e.g., the specific Research Ethics Committee, and ethical approval reference).

This is an additional element of the TASO-funded Institutional Data Use project which centres around an evaluation of UEA's PAL scheme. This part of the project is a process and implementation evaluation which aims at investigating ways to use primary and secondary data collected at UEA to inform the PAL intervention and improve the student experience. The project is funded by TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education) and overseen by them.

Evaluator Dr Reda Nausedaite (UEA) is in charge of PAL IPE including the collection and analysis of the data. She is suitably trained and experienced in collecting and managing datasets containing sensitive information.

This process and implementation evaluation project involves analysing primary and secondary data aimed at improving the student experience. The data sets in which information on this programme was collected included both quantitative dimensions (i.e. data on participation in PAL activities, changes to the design of PAL activities) and qualitative dimensions (interview data on the implementation of PAL activities).

Mitigating factors regarding data protection were the following: (i) data gathering took place at UEA (ii) data was handled using UEA approved channels and facilities to record and store information safely; (iii) data was handled and available only to the researchers at UEA, as well as the Project Evaluators.

The UEA Research Team has access to the data held on UEA digital storage facilities on a secure OneDrive with limited access. Files were encrypted and password protected. TASO have confirmed they will not receive or have sight of any raw data at any stage, the data will not be archived and only summary data will be shared with TASO.

Any ethical breaches were to be reported to the researcher's supervisor (Fabio Aricò) and any adverse events which affect the research would also be reported to TASO. The research supervisor would evaluate the adverse event and report to UREC.

This research has been assessed by UEA's University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), identifier ETH2324-0598.

#### 4. Analysis

##### 4.1. Summary of analysis of the implementation and process evaluation – how is PAL being implemented

###### *PAL implementation activities*

For the purposes of PAL's IPE, the analysis examines the activities identified by the PAL ToC.<sup>1</sup> These activities can be categorised into those that support the implementation of PAL and consist of dissemination and networking within the UEA, the implementation of PAL recruitment activities and the development of PAL materials. These activities form the basis for PAL and are of great importance for the IPE as they show the underlying measures that characterise PAL. The other side is the actual PAL activities, which consist of group mentoring or one-to-one mentoring and delivering PAL to UEA students.

The following table provides an overview of these activities and their significance for the implementation of PAL. Note that the PAL tutors are supported by colleagues from the STS Professional Services Team which handles administrative support for PAL.

Table 5 PAL implementation activities

Type of activity	Name of activity	Relevance to PAL implementation
Promotion	PAL promotion	<p>PAL promotion includes activities that raise the profile of PAL and establish and maintain strong links between PAL and UEA schools (as will be explained, this is an essential part of PAL's success).</p> <p>Communicating with UEA school faculty members about the implementation of PAL supports the uptake of PAL by academic staff. Building links with UEA schools ensures ongoing communication. This leads to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faculty staff awareness of PAL. Beyond the direct contribution of faculties (see below), maintaining a high profile already supports PAL implementation as faculty staff and lecturers can signpost students to this additional learning opportunity.</li> <li>- Knowledge transfer between UEA schools and PAL. One of the critical elements to the success of PAL is the training of mentors. The more this training is based on the current module design, the better prepared the mentors will be. Aligning mentor training with the training pathways of the modules ensures that PAL mentees benefit from an up-to-date understanding of their learning environment.</li> </ul> <p>Marketing also targets potential mentors and mentees, keeping the PAL website and other social media updated with current information about the programme.</p>

<sup>1</sup> UEA (2023) *Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC): Peer Assisted Learning*

		Finally, PAL tutors (or representatives from the Learning Enhancement Team) attend careers events where the benefits of PAL for mentors' skills development and future careers can be promoted.
<b>Development and review</b>	Liaisons with UEA schools	As mentioned earlier, PAL tutors work with faculties to ensure that module-specific information is included in PAL, particularly in mentor training, which involves familiarising themselves with the current curriculum.  Up-to-date knowledge of module content was identified by both mentees and mentors as a strength of PAL mentoring when it is sufficient, or a weakness when it is lacking.
	Expansion of PAL	As a programme, PAL has undergone a development process characterised by a period of renewal – it began as a pilot programme before moving to the Learning Enhancement Team. Here PAL went through 2 separate 2-year implementation periods - after the first it was renewed and after the second it finally became a permanent programme.  The changes that the programme underwent are discussed in more detail in other chapters. However, it is important to note that PAL has evolved as it has become increasingly embedded in the UEA infrastructure. This is due to the efforts of the Learning Enhancement Team and PAL tutors who continue to network with UEA schools to understand their needs and develop PAL accordingly.
<b>Recruitment training &amp;</b>	PAL tutor recruitment	PAL tutor is a full-time position within the Learning Enhancement Team, which currently is divided into two posts: one with 0.7 FTE and the other with 0.3 FTE. The PAL tutor is co-funded by STS and APP budget. PAL tutors work mainly on the development and implementation of PAL. At the same time, they also contribute to the wider work of the Learning Enhancement Team in supporting students with academic writing and effective learning.
	PAL mentor recruitment	The support of the faculty is expected for the annual recruitment of mentors. PAL mentors are recruited from second- and third-year students. The application deadlines are usually set before Easter (15 March for the 2024/2025 semester). Mentors are therefore recruited in the spring semester in order to start their mentoring activities at the beginning of the autumn semester. As part of the Learning Enhancement team, PAL has retained approximately 100 mentors for each academic year, with the hope that the current round of applications will attract approximately 175 students interested in becoming mentors.



		<p>The PAL intern, a new position within the Learning Enhancement team, was created to facilitate mentor onboarding and subsequent support during the programme. The PAL intern position is held by a former mentor, so the PAL Intern has insight into the challenges mentors might face and how to deal with them.</p>
	PAL mentor training	<p>PAL mentors take part in a six-hour training course before becoming mentors. The mentor training covers several topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information on the content and delivery of the current year's modules to familiarise mentors with the learning pathway that mentees will follow.</li> <li>- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and effective signposting.</li> <li>- Working either with groups (group mentoring) or individually (one-to-one mentoring).</li> </ul> <p>Training activities are an important part of ensuring that mentors are prepared to work with mentees and understand their role (and its limitations) in terms of what they can offer to UEA students.</p>
<b>Administration</b>	PAL administration	<p>Ongoing process of maintaining the programme. Includes review of PAL implementation and development of new systems and processes to improve the programme. Managing the relationship between PAL and the UEA and resolving any programme implementation issues that arise during the semester.</p> <p>Currently the administrative activities are under the STS Professional Services Team.</p>
<b>PAL mentoring</b>	Group sessions	<p>Group sessions are group learning experiences in which several mentees and mentors work together. Prior to the move to the Learning Enhancement Team, this was the only mentoring option available to students.</p> <p>Reportedly, group sessions are organised about once every two weeks throughout the academic year and range in size from 2 to 20 mentees. Group sessions are expected to last up to an hour.</p> <p>Currently, group sessions and one-to-one mentoring are balanced, depending on the needs and input of individual UEA schools.</p>
	One-to-one mentoring	<p>The one-to-one sessions introduced by the Learning Enhancement Team are tailored to the needs of students and</p>

		<p>UEA schools who indicate that one-to-one mentoring would be more beneficial.</p> <p>This is a better opportunity for students to work closely with mentors at their own pace. This option allows a larger group of students to benefit from mentoring and is better suited to online mentoring – which has been particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>One-to-one sessions are typically organised once every three weeks’ though, the mentors and mentees are ultimately responsible for setting the schedule and frequency. Each mentor may have 1-3 mentees assigned for these individual sessions which last around an hour.</p> <p>UEA schools benefit from one-to-one mentoring when it is more difficult to schedule group sessions for students. This was a response from the Learning Enhancement team when it became clear that some UEA schools were dropping out of the PAL programme because students were not attending group sessions. The need for one-to-one mentoring was further emphasised during the pandemic when PAL had to shift towards online mentoring and one-to-one sessions proved to be more conducive to the online environment when compared to group sessions. One-to-one mentoring offers more UEA schools the opportunity to participate in the programme.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	Weekly mentor catch ups	PAL mentors are expected to attend at least one weekly meeting with PAL tutors to report on their activities and progress.
	PAL participant monitoring	The Learning Enhancement Team monitors PAL participants to gain an overview of the number of participants in all UEA schools.

Source: UEA (2023) *Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC): Peer Assisted Learning*

### *UEA staff involvement in the implementation of PAL activities*

In terms of personnel, two broad categories can be defined that have to do with PAL: staff involved in implementation and staff addressed by PAL. In the first category, the implementers are part of the Learning Enhancement Team. Although this will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, the posts of PAL tutors are indicative of the greater integration of PAL within UEA as it demonstrates the formalisation of PAL’s role within the University.

Currently, the position of PAL tutor is held by two people who share the tasks associated with the implementation of PAL. The PAL tutor is responsible for:

- Communicating with UEA module leaders and other members of the Faculty in relation to expanding and implementing of PAL, including the promotion of PAL.

This will include efforts to ensure that module specific information is included in PAL mentor training.

- Promote PAL mentorship and recruit mentors.
- Develop and deliver training to mentors before they start working with PAL.
- During the academic year, tutors supervise and support mentors. Tutors also monitor the progress of PAL.

The STS Professional Services Team supports the implementation by managing the administrative work associated with PAL.

The other group of UEA staff are those to whom the PAL activities are directed. This is a network between the PAL tutors (and the Learning Enhancement Team) and members of the UEA teaching staff. PAL tutors work with UEA staff for two main reasons:

- To promote PAL as a programme that supports the student learning experience and can support first year students transition into the academic environment (the programme has been extended to allow first and second year students and postgraduates to benefit from mentoring support). It was noted that UEA faculty have a role in promoting PAL to students, provided they understand PAL themselves. Even before the move to the Learning Enhancement Team, it was noted that lecturers who recognised the benefits of PAL were passing on information about the programme.
- Aligning module content with PAL mentor training. The importance of mentor training to the success of PAL is emphasised in this evaluation. An important part of this success is the relationship that is built between the PAL tutors and the UEA school faculty members. When faculty members work with PAL tutors, they can in turn ensure that mentors have an up-to-date understanding of the curriculum content that their mentees will be going through and are better prepared to answer questions. In this way, comprehensive training and support for mentors can be developed, leading to greater confidence for mentors and a better experience for mentees. Therefore, although the collaboration with UEA faculty members is not a formalised process, it is a very important factor leading to a high-quality programme.

#### *How implementers contribute towards achieving the PAL outcomes*

The role of implementers is critical to the PAL outcomes. As highlighted in the review of PAL success factors, the strength of PAL lies in the work of the PAL team in ensuring that PAL is linked to and up to date with actual module content and that mentors have the necessary knowledge to provide peer assisted learning.

The ToC of PAL recognises the differences between mentee and mentor outcomes. Therefore, the following table also shows the contributions broken down by mentee and mentor outcomes.

*Table 6 Implementer contribution towards achieving PAL outcomes*

Mentee outcomes		How implementers contribute towards achieving the outcomes
<b>Course related outcomes</b>	<p>Mentees are more confident about course content.</p> <p>Mentees have increased engagement with course.</p> <p>Mentees are more likely to complete course.</p>	<p>PAL is intended to complement the educational experience at UEA. This is only possible through collaboration between PAL tutors and course teams who ensure that PAL educational material is based on up-to-date course content.</p> <p>The PAL pilot showed that mentees (and mentors) noticed when group sessions did not include up-to-date curriculum information. In such cases, mentors were unable to properly address the educational needs of their mentees. This impression continues at PAL under the Learning Enhancement Team, who have recognised that a higher level of involvement from UEA faculty leads to better prepared mentors.</p> <p>Therefore, the promotional and liaison activities within PAL are a key component in ensuring PAL educational outcomes for mentees. As course provision and content changes, PAL tutors must endeavour to keep pace with the development of educational paths in UEA. The relationships that are built between PAL and the course teams are responsible for ensuring that mentees receive complementary training, understand their courses and modules and are able to engage more effectively in taught events.</p> <p>The current version of PAL owes its success to the networking between the PAL tutors and the teaching staff at the UEA schools. This is not just about promoting PAL and aligning PAL with modules, but also recognising the different needs of UEA schools, which has supported the introduction of one-to-one teaching and the expansion of participating UEA schools.</p>
<b>Education related outcomes</b>	<p>Mentees are more likely to be future-self oriented.</p> <p>Mentees are more likely to receive a good degree.</p>	<p>As mentoring is undertaken by second or third year students, PAL acts both as an intervention to help mentees navigate their immediate educational needs and as a presentation of examples of where their educational journey can lead.</p> <p>The role of mentors in delivering PAL mentoring content is therefore not just to provide additional learning opportunities. They are also role models,</p>

		examples of where the mentee's UEA studies can lead and how best to prepare for future challenges.
<b>Personal outcomes</b>	<p>Mentees are less isolated.</p> <p>Mentees have increased self-belief.</p> <p>Mentees experience greater belonging.</p>	<p>Finally, mentors are also facilitators of the social experience of studying at UEA. This should not be underestimated as PAL eases the transition into student life not only academically but also socially.</p> <p>PAL provides students with access to like-minded peers and helps address different learning barriers, PAL is another way for UEA students to get advice.</p>
<b>Mentor outcomes</b>		<b>How implementers contribute towards achieving the outcomes</b>
<b>Mentorship</b>	<p>Mentors have increased knowledge of EDI principles.</p> <p>Mentors have increased knowledge of Skills to carry out mentoring sessions.</p> <p>Mentors have increased confidence to carry out role.</p>	<p>The Learning Enhancement Team attaches great importance to the training of mentors to ensure the quality of PAL. For mentors, this means that their training is constantly reviewed and updated.</p> <p>It is noted that the more work that goes into the preparation of the training material and the actual training, the more confident the mentors are in working with their mentees.</p> <p>This is important because since the introduction of one-to-one mentoring and the increased use of online mentoring, mentors need to have a different skill set. Working in a group is different to working with an individual.</p> <p>The Learning Enhancement team is aware of these needs and as PAL continues to grow, training will be updated to reflect the changes to PAL.</p>
<b>Education</b>	<p>Mentors have increased module attainment.</p> <p>Mentors are more likely to complete their course.</p> <p>Mentors are more likely to complete their course.</p>	<p>Due to the training they receive, mentors not only see the teaching side of content, but also experience what it is like to work with students.</p> <p>Whilst it is recognised that mentors do not provide formal teaching, the experience of working with PAL helps to improve academic performance as mentors refresh previous learning.</p>
<b>Employment</b>	<p>Mentors have increased employability</p>	<p>During the pilot phase, it was reported that active participation in PAL enhances the employability of mentors. Both the skills development training and its practical application during mentoring represent further added value that the mentors provide for their (potential) employers.</p>

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Source: UEA (2023) *Enhanced Theory of Change (eToC): Peer Assisted Learning*

### *Causes for the success of PAL activities*

According to the mentees from Phase 1-3, the PAL mentors were an important factor in the mentees' positive experience, both in terms of gaining knowledge about their first year at UEA and building a network of students with similar experiences. Mentees recognise the value of learning from students who can pass on their knowledge of processes and courses:

- Processes are the activities of university life that are universal and not course specific. This includes issues of navigating the university infrastructure as well as understanding academic processes such as tests, exams and how to approach them. Mentees cite 'demystification' as a particular strength when it comes to understanding processes, and here the mentors' personal experiences are an important part of the support they offer mentees.
- In terms of course information, it is important that the mentor knows the mentee's subjects in detail. This emphasises the role of PAL tutors who collect course-related information for each academic year and pass this on during mentor training. The responses from mentees therefore demonstrate the value of PAL as an additional learning resource based on subject specific material.

PAL evaluations indicate that mentees are more comfortable approaching mentors with some questions rather than their lecturers.

Some mentors note that they are able to develop (or reinforce) the learning process by repeating material from the past. Mentor training is often cited as one of the strengths of PAL. The ability to draw on previous studies enhances their understanding of the subject and allows mentors to view the course from a different perspective. This is made possible by the collaboration between PAL tutors and UEA faculty members in promoting PAL and, at its best, in co-creating PAL training materials. It should be noted that the level of engagement between PAL tutors and faculty staff varies from case to case and the level of engagement of faculty staff varies.

### *Barriers and challenges for implementation of PAL*

As far as implementation challenges are concerned, there are several problems that hinder the realisation of PAL. They are particularly related to the position of PAL within the infrastructure of the UEA and represent challenges that can be seen at institutional and not only at programme level.

- Close relationships between PAL and academic staff in schools of study support implementation and result in a higher quality mentoring experience for students,

whether through group sessions or one-to-one mentoring. As mentioned above, PAL tutors (and the Learning Enhancement team in general) work in partnership with academic staff in schools of study (course leads, module organisers, faculty members, etc.) in the delivery of PAL. At a basic level, this relationship generates awareness about PAL among faculty members and enables UEA academics to promote PAL to their students, provided they understand the programme and see its benefits. More importantly, at its best, collaboration can lead to PAL material being aligned with the content of the module and mentors being more responsive to the needs of mentees. The challenges arise from the unequal relationships between the PAL implementers and the schools of study. PAL tutors (and the Learning Enhancement Team) need to build individual relationships with UEA teaching staff, leading to differences between the level of support available to PAL and the level of support PAL can provide to mentors in relation to specific module content.

- An infrastructural challenge is UEA's timetabling system, which should facilitate the sharing of information with students. In the case of PAL, it is used to schedule mentoring activities. However, the system often causes delays and additional administrative burden in the implementation of the programme.

While the pilot phase produced several evaluation reports, after the transition to the Learning Enhancement Team, monitoring activities (tracking data on students entering PAL) are used to support decisions regarding PAL. The current IPE addresses, at least in part, the need for more comprehensive programme evaluation within UEA.

#### 4.2. Summary of analysis of the implementation and process evaluation – how has the implementation of PAL evolved over time

##### *Changes to PAL – implementation structure and position within UEA*

The implementation of PAL at UEA began as a pilot project and was carried out in several phases. However, during the pilot phase, PAL existed outside of other formal UEA student support structures. Following the completion of Phase 3 of the pilot, it was decided that PAL should be better integrated into the UEA administrative framework.

When PAL was introduced into the Learning Enhancement Team in Student Services, a successful case was made for the establishment of a formal position within the Learning Enhancement Team dedicated to PAL activities. Thus, the position of PAL champion (as it was called during the pilot phase) was changed to 'Learning Enhancement Tutor (Peer-led learning)', initially as a fixed-term, part-time post before eventually becoming a permanent, full-time position now divided between two posts (0.7 FTE and 0.3 FTE). The

change of title (champion to tutor) was made to reflect the overall structure of the Learning and Enhancement Team (which included a number of tutor posts).

The PAL administrative staff who worked on the programme during its pilot phase were initially transferred to the Learning and Enhancement Team during the fixed-term extensions of the pilot phase. As PAL became more integrated into the Learning and Enhancement Team and following the expansion of the programme and its embedding within UEA, it became possible for PAL to utilise the existing administrative capacity of the Student Services for supporting Learning Enhancement Team activities.

For the 2023/2024 academic year PAL has introduced a new position – the PAL intern. Essentially a student (former mentor) who is involved in PAL administrative activities and has worked with mentor recruitment and onboarding. Having former experience with participating as a mentor, the PAL intern is positioned to introduce new mentors to the programme and present expectations for what being a PAL mentor will likely be. PAL interns are recruited annually for a 15-hour work week with the internship lasting 12 months.

#### *Changes to PAL – mentoring*

After PAL transitioned into the Learning and Enhancement Team, one of the changes for the PAL Mentor position was that it was no longer a paid role, but a volunteer role. Prior to 2017, PAL mentors were paid on a monthly basis.

Arguably the most significant change for mentors was the introduction of the one-to-one mentoring option. Responses to PAL group sessions often highlighted difficulties in scheduling and organising sessions to meet the needs of multiple students at once. The PAL mentors organised the sessions themselves, including the selection of topics that should theoretically be discussed with the mentees in advance.

PAL evaluations conducted during the pilot phase indicated that the number of mentees was decreasing over the semesters and some UEA schools did not see sufficient (sustained) student interest in participating in PAL. In response, the Learning Enhancement team has worked with Schools of Study to introduce new options for mentoring activities. This resulted in the introduction of one-to-one mentoring and its inclusion was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to shift to an online environment to deliver mentoring services. Within this context, one-to-one mentoring proved to be a more suitable solution to maintain availability of mentoring to participating UEA students. One-to-one mentoring has since remained part of PAL alongside group mentoring.



*Rationale behind the changes to PAL implementation and their success*

The changes that have been made to the implementation of PAL are related to the better integration of PAL within the UEA and increasing the sustainability of the programme – both aspects that are mutually supportive.

The transfer of PAL to the Learning Enhancement Team marked a clear aim to establish clear links between PAL and the UEA – something that was lacking prior to 2016 when PAL operated almost outside the formal organisational structures of the UEA. Whilst PAL was increasingly integrated into the Learning Enhancement Team (establishing the role of PAL tutor, on the administrative tasks for PAL, UEA itself was going through a period of review of its inclusive practices, culminating with the implementation of a new Inclusive Education Policy. By 2019, as one of the 4 interlinked elements of the policy - Inclusive Environment – peer mentoring was introduced as an expected part of inclusive support for UEA students.<sup>2</sup>

*Box 1 Features of an inclusive university environment - mentoring*

*“A commitment to developing and promoting a range of peer-led learning initiatives, including opportunities for students to benefit from and provide mentoring for their*

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*Source: UEA (2024) Inclusive Education Policy 2023/24. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/university-information/governance/policies-and-regulations/general-regulations/inclusive-education-policy> [Accessed 19th February 2024]*

In this way, UEA incorporated mentoring into standard provision for students. PAL became an important and integral part of the University’s educational policy, eventually leading to PAL becoming an integral part of UEA’s teaching provision. This position has been further strengthened in the Access and Participation Plan (updated 2022) which discusses the UEA’s commitment to widening participation opportunities for students. In this context, the plan indicates that UEA will continue: “to invest in the capacity of our Learning Enhancement team to address issues of academic skills development for specific in-need groups of underrepresented students through embedded and dedicated support and peer assisted learning”.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the role of PAL mentor was transformed into a purely voluntary role (moving away from a paid role in previous iterations of PAL). By becoming an entirely

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<sup>2</sup> UEA (2024) *Inclusive Education Policy 2023/24*. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/university-information/governance/policies-and-regulations/general-regulations/inclusive-education-policy> [Accessed 19th February 2024]

<sup>3</sup> UEA (2022) *University of East Anglia Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25*. [https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/20142/8213853/theuniversityofeastanglia\\_app\\_2020-21\\_v1\\_10007789.pdf/e3ef319b-1056-d245-e639-f0321be7976a?t=1669973825493](https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/20142/8213853/theuniversityofeastanglia_app_2020-21_v1_10007789.pdf/e3ef319b-1056-d245-e639-f0321be7976a?t=1669973825493)

voluntary experience, mentoring has benefited from greater sustainability by attracting students whose primary motivation is to support others through their knowledge.

The inclusion of one-to-one mentoring has been seen as a success for PAL. By offering more inclusive opportunities for students, the Learning Enhancement team managed to stabilise the pre-2016 student drop-off and increase student participation. One-to-one mentoring allows a smaller number of students to benefit from mentoring as there is no need to form groups and mentoring can be more flexible to meet individual needs. This has led to UEA schools re-evaluating their desire to participate in PAL. Due to ongoing communication between PAL tutors and UEA faculty staff, more UEA schools are now participating in PAL. Specific examples of PAL tutors working with UEA faculty members include the module organisers (i.e., teaching directors) who have a broad overview of the programme content. In general, however, the PAL team seeks to work with all UEA academic staff who are interested in supporting and promoting the programme and helping to develop the content of the mentoring training.

In addition to the increase in interest and participation, one-to-one mentoring also proved resilient to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic as online mentoring sessions for one-to-one activities were easier to organise.

## 5. Results

The transition of PAL from the pilot phase to its current position PAL has become increasingly embedded within the UEA infrastructure. This was achieved through various phases of implementation – a 3-year pilot, followed by two two-year fixed-term extensions under the Learning Enhancement Team before the programme became formally permanent. The Learning Enhancement Team has improved PAL by taking a bottom-up approach to the design and expansion of PAL, which has led in particular to the introduction of one-to-one mentoring opportunities. The bottom-up approach has made PAL a more flexible programme that can adapt to new challenges and respond to the needs of the UEA. This indicates the ability to expand the programme further.

In its current form, the programme is an official part of the UEA teaching provision, but there are still opportunities for closer links to formal structures. The networking between the PAL tutors and UEA teaching staff is an example of how PAL, while being an official programme and fulfilling part of the UEA policy on inclusive education, depends on the interest and willingness of UEA staff to engage with the PAL tutors (activities). Unequal levels of interest, workload pressures lead to varying levels of engagement, which in turn leads to varying levels of ability of PAL mentors to deliver mentoring in different UEA schools.

The lack of PAL evaluation within the University also indicates that the programme could be better aligned with UEA. It suggests that PAL has not been analysed for its impact and value at an institutional level.

The involvement of UEA faculty working with PAL to co-design PAL is one of the reasons for PAL's success. From the mentors' perspective, their training involves (re)familiarisation with first year courses, which enhances their skills development and strengthens their further education.

UEA school staff, who liaise with PAL in terms of matching courses and PAL materials, also recognise the value of the programme as a supportive learning experience. PAL is not seen as an alternative to more formal taught events, but to reinforce what is learnt in in taught events in an alternative learning environment.

## 6. Conclusion

The IPE conducted shows that PAL is increasingly gaining recognition among UEA staff, as evidenced by how the programme has changed and expanded over time. The programme has benefited from UEA staff at every stage of this journey, initially from those who worked on the pilot and later from the Learning Enhancement Team who have taken responsibility for maintaining and improving PAL.

The barriers to implementation should be seen as further opportunities for PAL, especially as the programme is now an integral part of the UEA teaching provision. These opportunities could be used to review PAL's objectives and introduce long-term goals (i.e. 5- or 10-year development goals) for the programme, including support for wider UEA objectives.

Formalised involvement of UEA schools in PAL could also improve the quality of the programme as collaboration between PAL tutors and UEA staff is at the heart of producing high quality content which is then passed on to mentors and ultimately to mentees. PAL is one tool in UEA's portfolio to create inclusive opportunities for its students. It is important to ensure that the building blocks of PAL success are stable so that the programme can provide high quality peer mentoring opportunities. Further work to improve the elements that support the delivery of mentoring training can strengthen the programme and ensure its sustainability in the long-term and facilitate further scaling-up, including the development of new delivery methods for peer learning in UEA.

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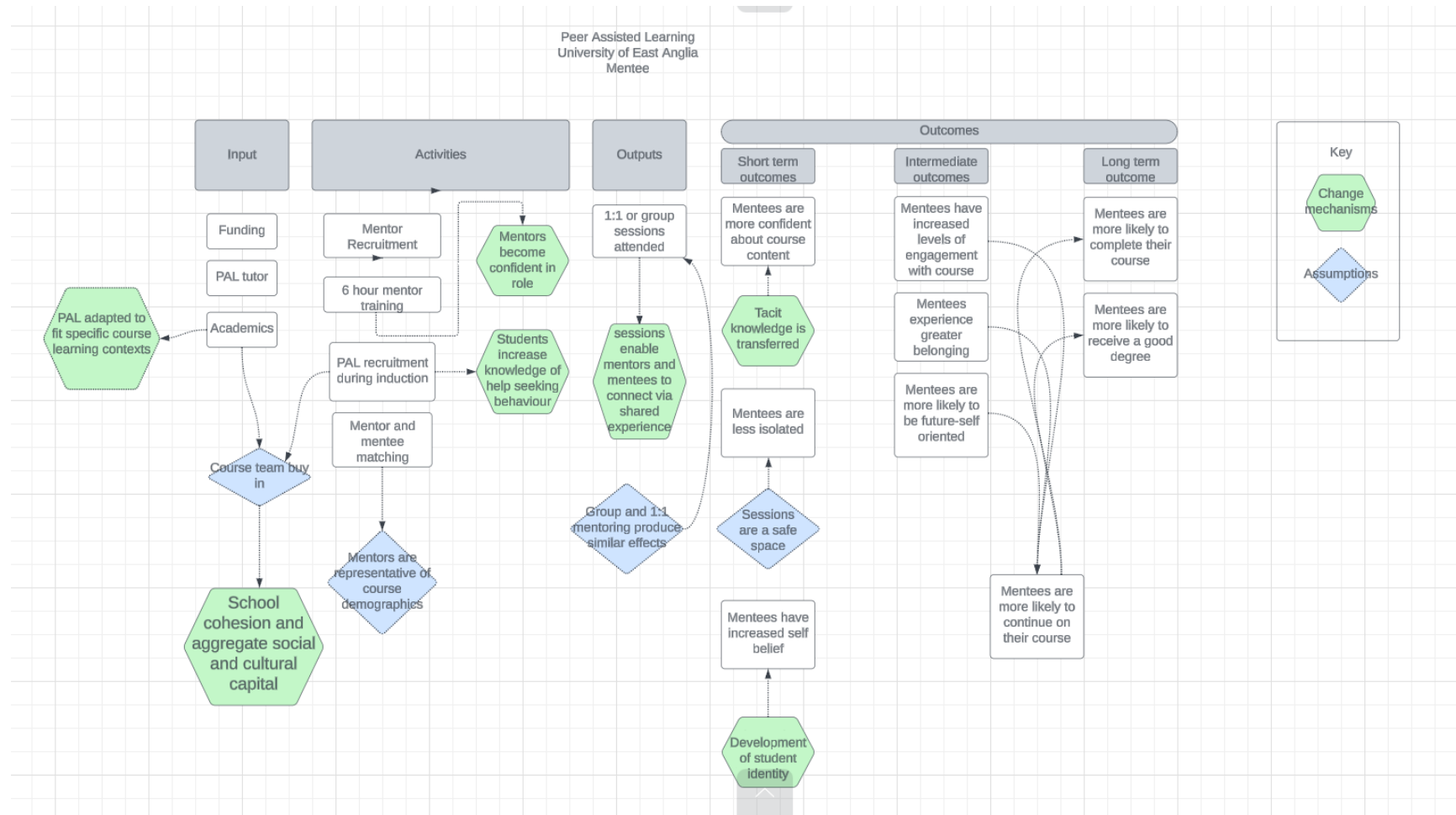
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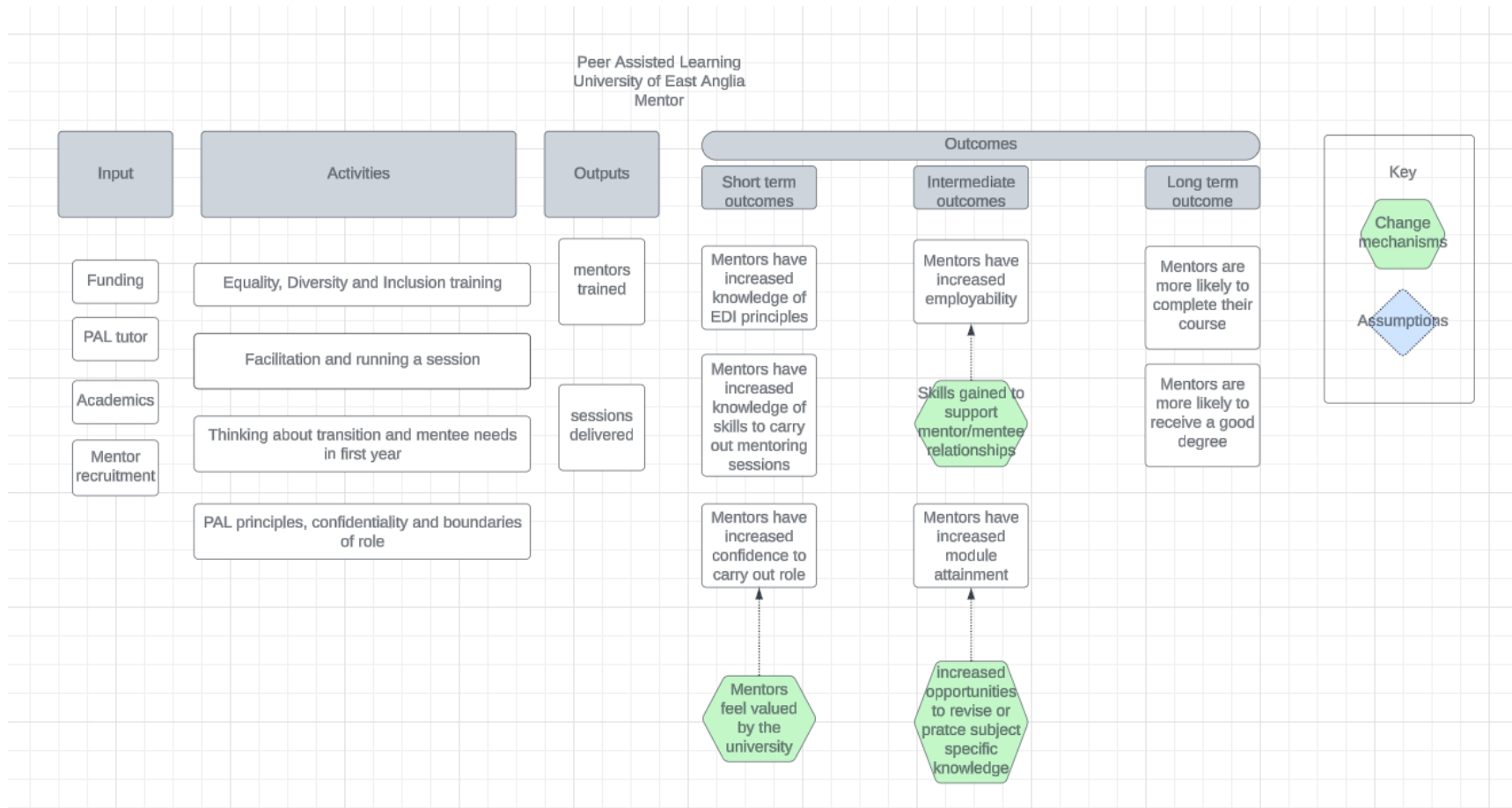
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### Annex 1 – PAL Theory of Change (ToC)





Annex 2 – PAL interview guide

<p>Working with PAL</p>	<p>What are your roles and responsibilities in PAL programme design and implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are recruited into the different roles? For how long is a person recruited to the role?</li> </ul> <p>Who are the staff involved in PAL design, PAL activities and implementation? Their roles and responsibilities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the PAL roles change over time? For example, during the pilot of PAL there were several roles – PAL champion, officer, administrator – that seem to have been replaced by the singular role of PAL tutor. Why did these changes take place (i.e. consolidating responsibilities)? What was the intended effect on PAL implementation (i.e. greater efficiency through consolidated roles)?</li> </ul> <p>How do the staff contribute towards achieving the PAL outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do PAL staff work with UEA schools, faculty members to support PAL implementation? How important are relationships with UEA schools for PAL’s success?</li> </ul>
<p>PAL activities</p>	<p>What are the different activities of PAL programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the general topics included in PAL mentoring?</li> <li>• How do you compare PAL one-to-one mentoring with group activities? Are they both equally important? Can mentees have both one-to-one and group mentoring?</li> <li>• How is the pairing of mentors and mentees handled? Can mentees switch mentors?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What support is available to PAL mentors/mentees once the programme starts?</li> </ul> <p>Who are the target groups of PAL activities? How do the activities differ between target groups and why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are mentors recruited for PAL? How do you promote PAL to attract mentors? Do you get support from UEA faculty members in recruiting mentors? How many mentors return for a second, third year?</li> <li>• How are mentees recruited to PAL? What kind of promotional activities do you engage in to attract mentees? How would you compare these promotional activities, how successful are these?</li> </ul> <p>What preparatory activities are in place to support different target groups when they begin their engagement with PAL?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How important is PAL mentor training? How is PAL mentor training material prepared? What is included in the training material? Who is responsible for preparing the training material?</li> </ul> <p>What are the monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities used in PAL programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the target groups of these activities? What kind of data is collected and how is it used?</li> </ul>
Changes to PAL design	<p>Have there been changes and/or expansion to PAL activities – their design, the activities included in the programme, etc? What was the reasoning for these changes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example, during the pilot it seems there were only PAL group activities and one-to-one mentoring was added later. Why were these</li> </ul>

	<p>one-to-one sessions included (for example, increase in the number of mentors, mentees, better fit for the programme)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have there been changes to the monitoring activities of PAL? Why did these take place? Was monitoring expanded, reduced, consolidated, etc.?</li> </ul> <p>Have there been changes and/or expansion to who PAL activities target? What was the reasoning for these changes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has PAL expanded across UEA schools? What is the reason for different UEA schools introducing or dropping PAL from services available to their students?</li> </ul> <p>How successful have the changes to PAL been?</p>
<p>Success of PAL activities</p>	<p>What are the success factors of PAL activities? How important are these to support achieving PAL outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For example, from promoting PAL, maintaining relationships with UEA school faculties, preparing PAL material, monitoring PAL?</li> <li>• How important are the different staff involved in PAL for its success? What staff activities in particular stand out?</li> </ul>
<p>Challenges of PAL activities</p>	<p>What challenges and barriers for implementation of PAL can you identify?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the causes for these challenges? Are these challenges new or ongoing?</li> </ul> <p>Have the challenges and barriers for implementation changed over time? How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What challenges has PAL encountered in the past? How were these challenges addressed?</li> </ul>

	<p>How are monitoring, feedback actions used to identify challenges and barriers to PAL?</p> <p>How the challenges and barriers affect the implementation of PAL activities?</p> <p>What action have been taken to address these challenges and barriers?</p>
Overall thoughts	<p>Overall, how would you evaluation PAL and its implementation?</p> <p>How well are the activities aligned with the programme objectives and expected outcomes?</p>