

Students and staff in Mathematics, together with colleagues from the Teaching Centre, are working to enhance significantly the experience of second-year undergraduate mathematics students. This newsletter is intended to raise awareness of the project objectives, what has been achieved so far, and our plans for the coming months.

In this second issue of the SYMBOL newsletter we highlight an important aspect of the project - the *Student Leader* scheme. The project was introduced in the previous issue - available from <http://sym.lboro.ac.uk>.

### SYMBOL: Student Leaders

From the start of the SYMBOL project, plans were laid to recruit and train a number of incoming third year students to work with, advise and encourage new second year students undertaking the two key modules: *Vector Spaces* and *Complex Variables* in 2011/2012. This is consistent with the project's primary aim of enhancing the experience of the second year students.

Thirteen mathematics students, referred to as *Student Leaders*, were recruited in semester 2 of 2010/2011 when they were themselves second year students. Each of the prospective *Student Leaders* had taken one or both of the modules that academic year.



*The Student Leaders with Carol Newbold and Maurice Fitzgerald (Teaching Centre), and Tony Croft and Francis Duah (MEC)*

### Student Leader Training

Student Leader training has been led by the University's Teaching Centre and has drawn on additional support from colleagues in Mathematics. In addition, every effort was made to involve the student interns who worked on the project over the summer of 2011, two of whom have volunteered as Student Leaders.



*Eugenie Hunsicker and Martin Hallnas discuss strategies for approaching mathematics problems during a Student Leader training session*

Two training sessions – a half-day in June and a full-day in September - have helped to prepare the Student Leaders by promoting a way of students working together in small groups known as peer assisted learning (PAL). PAL sessions are additional to core teaching provision and involve Student Leaders facilitating in pairs (or threes) the learning of a small group of second year students. Solutions or queries arising from the PAL sessions can be passed on to the module leader to post a response that all students can see on the Learn module page.

Contacts: Tony Croft ([a.c.croft@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:a.c.croft@lboro.ac.uk)) or Steven Kenny ([s.d.kenny@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:s.d.kenny@lboro.ac.uk))

**Further details on the items in this newsletter can be found on**  
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## Demonstrating PAL

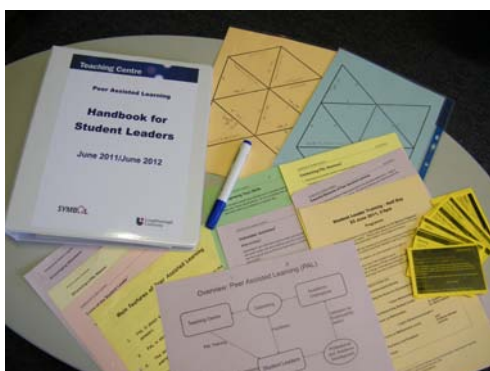
One element of the training involved a mini-lecture given by Steven Kenny following which Barbara Jaworski and Tony Croft played the role of Student Leaders, whilst the new Leaders themselves were the students they would be supporting. In this way the Leaders were able to observe strategies for drawing out issues from the students and getting the group as a whole to address them.



*Barbara Jaworski and Tony Croft modelling a PAL session for the Student Leader training, following a mini-lecture by Steven Kenny.*



*Student Leaders 2011/12*



*A folder and materials for Student Leaders used in the training sessions*

## Benefits for the Student Leaders

The Student Leaders have the opportunity to develop and enhance a wide range of skills important for their own academic studies as well as future employment. They have been encouraged to sign up for the Loughborough Employability Award (LEA) and a points tariff has been developed to map to the various responsibilities of the role.



*Student Leaders enjoy 'speed speaking' to practice oral communication skills during a training session*

## Putting the theory into practice

The Student Leaders, now in their third year, are meeting once a week with the current second years, starting with the *Vector Spaces* module in semester 1. 61 students signed up to join a PAL session in the first *Vector Spaces* lecture, and were allocated to one of 5 PAL groups; the progress of each of these groups is now being monitored and we will report upon what has worked well and anything that hasn't in the coming months.

## Sustainability

In line with the aim of sustainability for all HE STEM funded projects, the Teaching Centre plans to propose and disseminate a model of PAL that can be implemented more widely across all Schools in the University. The Student Leader role is integral to the ongoing development of PAL, and the SYMBOL project is providing essential feedback.

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