# Policy Briefing – Peer-Led Initiatives at UCL

Date: 26/11/2024

Audience: Education Zone

## What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

UCL currently provides some peer-led support through the Transition Mentor Programme[[1]](#footnote-1) for first-year undergraduate students. This initiative focuses on easing the transition into university life by assigning mentors (more experienced students from the same course), to provide weekly sessions in Term One. These sessions cover academic and non-academic support, ranging from study tips to wellbeing advice.

However, this programme is limited in duration (Term One only) and scope (first-year students only), leaving a gap for other year groups, academic challenges, and continued social and academic support.

The Cibyl Student Mental Health Report 2024[[2]](#footnote-2) revealed that 17% of university students nationally reported having no friends at university, highlighting a need for initiatives that foster connections and a sense of belonging. Additionally, the AdvanceHE Student-led Peer Learning and Support Report indicated that peer-led schemes align well with institutional priorities like the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and National Student Survey (NSS).[[3]](#footnote-3)

## What would change if the policy was successful?

Structured and expanded peer-led initiatives at UCL would create a culture of academic collaboration and social inclusion, benefiting students across all years and disciplines.

Examples include:

1. Buddy Schemes: New students are matched with current students who provide informal support. Also, establish a dedicated website,’ buddyscheme.com’, that lists all events including a monthly meet up.
2. Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL): Higher-year students lead study sessions for lower-year students to help them with their academic work.
3. Wellbeing Buddies: Providing informal support to improve mental health and combat loneliness.

These initiatives could complement existing programs like the Transition Mentor Programme by extending their duration and audience, thereby creating a more effective support network.

## What is the relevant national/international context to this situation?

Peer-led initiatives are well-established in UK universities and globally. For example:

* University of Sussex: A Buddy Scheme pairs new and existing students for informal support, featuring monthly meet-ups and a dedicated website.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* University of Birmingham: Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) pair higher-year students with newer students for academic guidance.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* University of Leeds: Offers a mix of academic peer mentoring, wellbeing support, and partnerships with industry professionals like PwC.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* University of Glasgow:Has a Peer Wellbeing Support scheme, where trained student volunteers offer a listening ear and signpost to other services as needed.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* University of Edinburgh:Offers three scheme types: Peer Support, PALS, and Peer Mentoring. These programmes arrange social and wellbeing events, course-specific support and confidential 1 to 1 support respectively[[8]](#footnote-8)

These initiatives are proven to enhance academic outcomes, student satisfaction, and retention rates.

## Are there any legal implications to this policy proposal?

No significant legal implications. However, the initiatives must comply with data protection laws, especially when matching students and managing personal information.

## Does this relate to any existing SU policy?

Yes, it aligns with UCL’s goals of improving the student experience and the Students’ Union’s commitment to wellbeing and academic support initiatives.

## Are there any financial, resource, or stakeholder/public relations issues with this policy proposal?

* Financial: Funding would be required for training peer leaders, promotional materials, and logistical support.
* Stakeholders: Collaboration with UCL departments, the Students’ Union, and external bodies like AdvanceHE may be needed.
* PR: Positive attention from implementing inclusive and supportive initiatives could improve UCL’s reputation and NSS scores. If not well managed peer support can make risk difficult to manage and students may not feel well supported by the peer supporter.

## Are there any sustainability implications to this item for discussion?

No.

## Are there any equity and inclusion implications to this item for discussion?

Yes, these programmes can be effecgively used to support under-represented or vulnerable groups, such as international students, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those with disabilities.

## What would the next steps be if the proposal passed?

1. Conduct a feasibility study to assess demand and structure for peer-led supports / initiatives at UCL.
2. Pilot a scheme in 2025/26 academic year.
3. Develop a training framework for peer leaders to ensure quality support.
4. Regularly evaluate the impact of these initiatives using student feedback and NSS scores.

Expanding peer-led initiatives at UCL would address current gaps in academic and social support, improve student outcomes, and create a stronger, more inclusive university community.

1. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/new-students/transition-mentor-programme/mentee-information> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.cibyl.com/cibyl-insights/student-mental-health-research-uk-2024> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-led-peer-learning-and-support>? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Buddy Scheme and Peer Support Groups - University of Sussex](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/internal/sussex-researcher-school/new-doctoral-researchers/wellbeing/buddy-scheme) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [PASS - University of Birmingham](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/libraries/asc/about/pass.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [PASS - University of Leeds](https://students.business.leeds.ac.uk/student-community/peer-assisted-study-sessions-pass/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Student Listener - University of Glasgow](https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/studentlisteners/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Peer Learning and Support – University of Edinburgh](https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/peerlearningsupport/becomealeader#:~:text=Peer%20Mentoring%20offers%20confidential%201,students'%20Edinburgh%20and%20university%20experiences.) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)