# Experiences of undergraduate Diagnostic Imaging students undertaking Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) in the clinical environment, in Scotland

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Peer-assisted learning (PAL)

'...a learning concept that involves students, from the same, or different, academic levels, learning from each other by acting as 'teachers' and 'learners' [1]
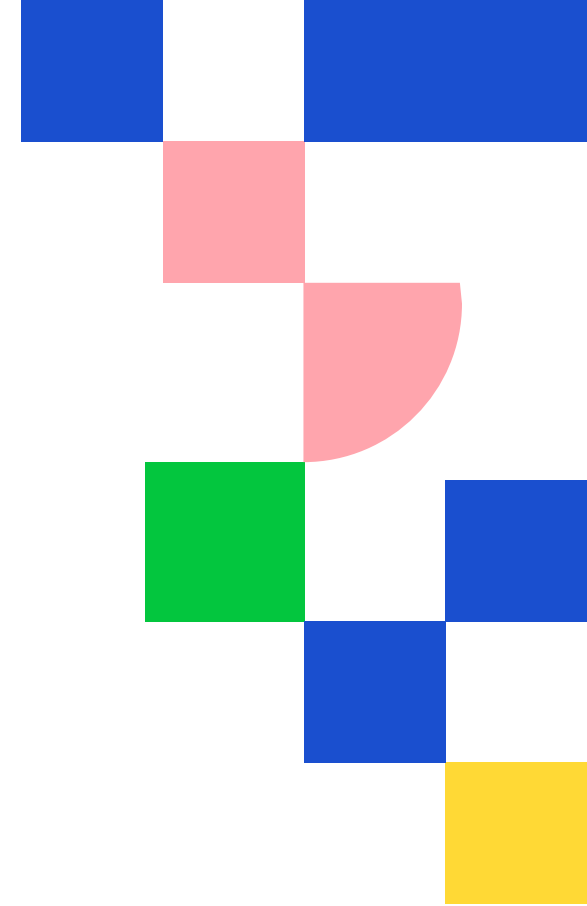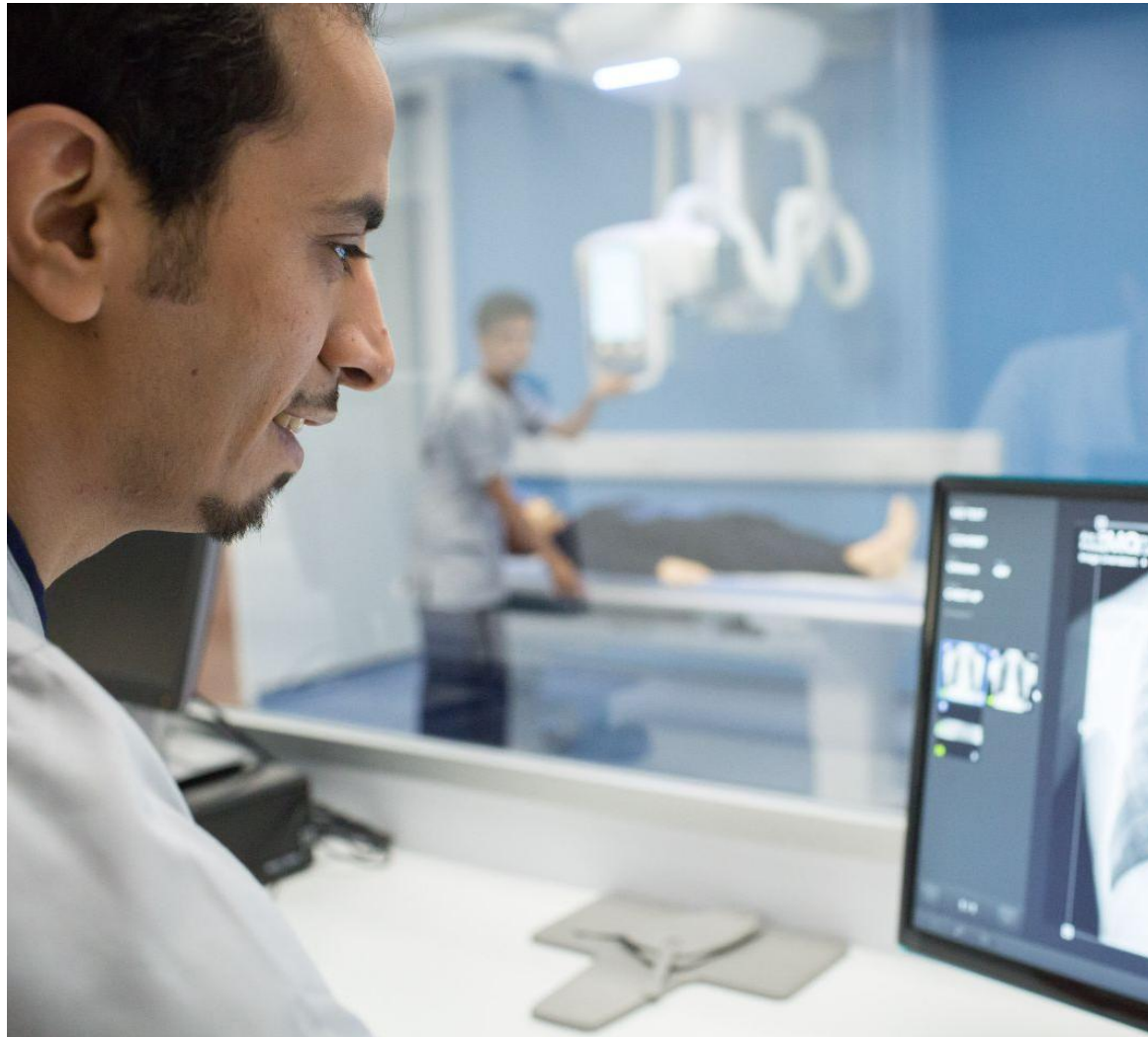
Current picture of PAL at GCU

- Now formalised activity in the simulated learning environment[2]

- PAL in the clinical environment: utilised by other AHP professional groups at GCU
  - PAL advocated by NHS Education for Scotland (2023)[3] for radiography education with the aim of improving the student experience on placement

Preparation

- Drew from experiences documented in previous research
  - Students recruited on a voluntary basis[4,5]
  - Pre-session training[6]
  - Timings to avoid clinical assessments[4, 5, 7]

- GCU Ethics approval obtained

- 2 x clinical cluster sites recruited

- Students selected based on alignment of shifts on clinical roster
  - Approached via email to either be 'student tutors' (level 3 and 4) or 'student tutees' (level 1 and 2)
  - Provided with synopsis of PAL and potential dates of intervention
  - Emphasised participation voluntary, should not impact clinical assessments
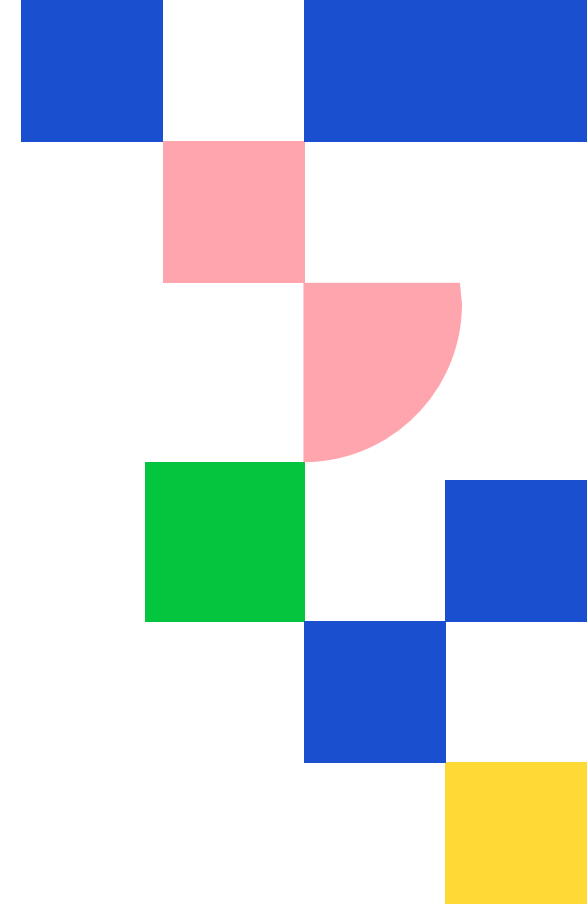
PAL interactions

- 14 students recruited
  - 3 x Level 4 students tutors, paired with a Level 2 student tutee
  - 4 x Level 3 students tutors, paired with a Level 1 student tutee

- Pre-session training provided on campus and online (recorded)
  - Aims of PAL; outline of PAL interaction: 1 hour, 2-3 times; student-led (suggested activities provided)
  - Expectations of both student tutors and tutees[5,7]
  - Giving and receiving feedback[7]; Difficult scenarios

- Initial introductions of the student tutor and tutee arranged

- Evaluated initially by anonymous online questionnaire and then with two focus groups (1 x student tutors: 1 x student tutees)
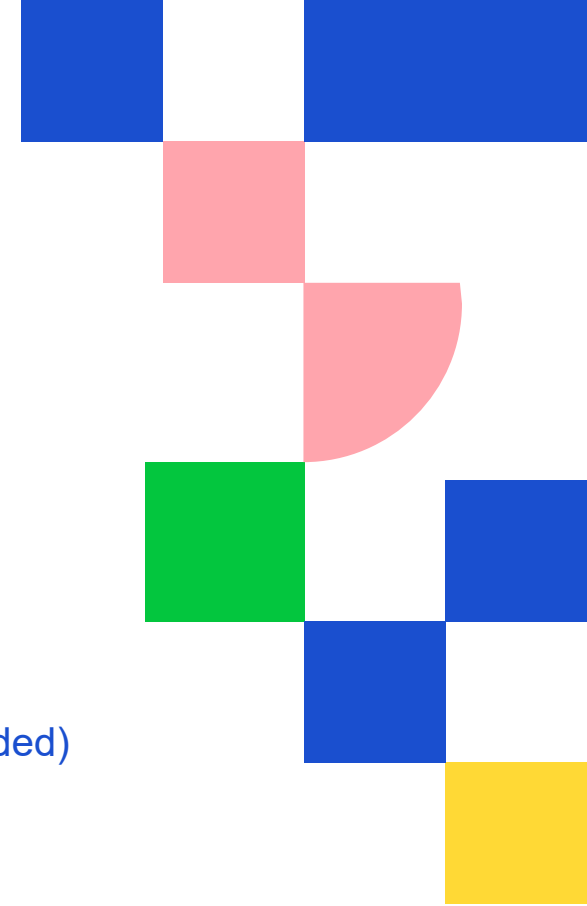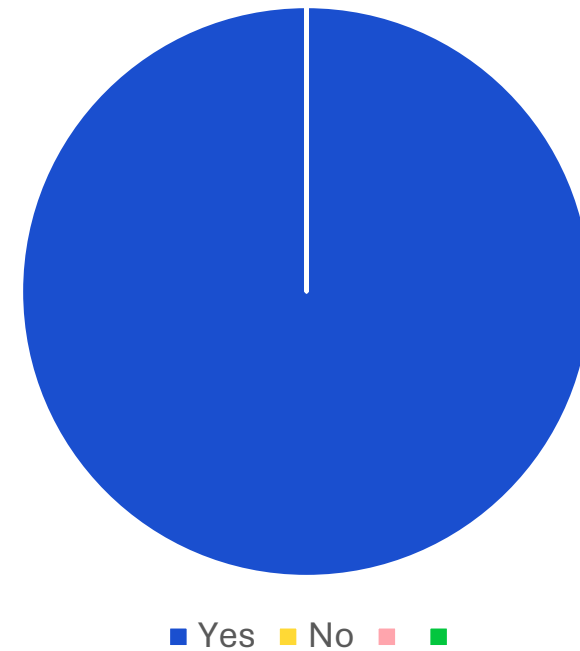
Findings

Overall experience (n=11)

Excellent · Very good · Okay · Negative
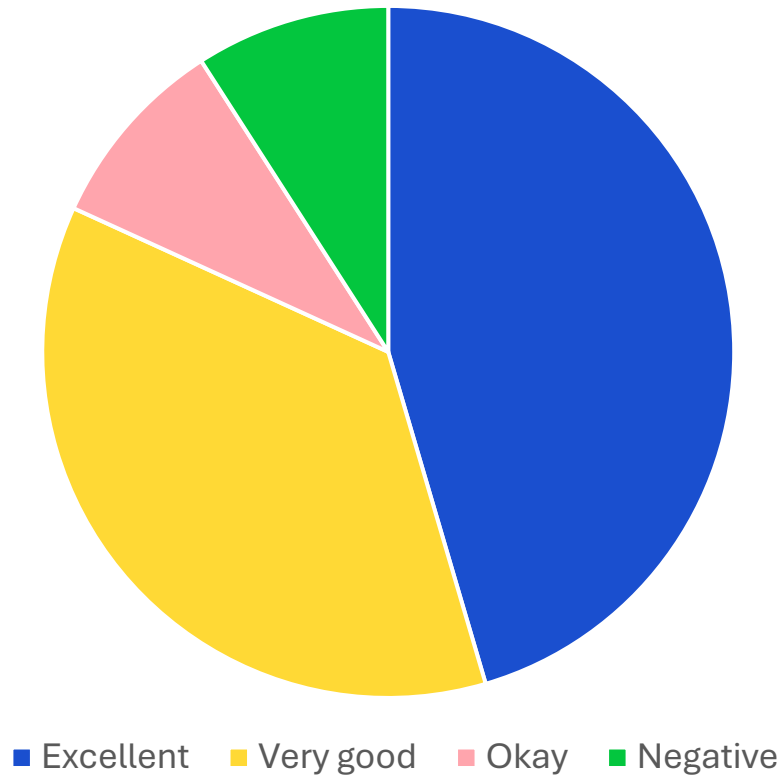
Should PAL be integrated into the radiography clinical syllabus? (n=11)

Yes · No

Positives: Development of the learning community

Speaking to someone who understands

'It's good to have someone to ask questions to that you might feel a bit embarrassed or shy to ask…someone else that has been there and knows what it's like'

Sharing knowledge

'My PAL…asked me what I wanted to go over… It's [PAL] quite personal as well…she simplified it down…I felt I learnt a lot'

'I found it useful for revision… I had to look over topics again to help my PAL'

'Getting advice for how staff expect students to take charge of tickets really help as I was unaware my site viewed this as positive'

'I'm dyslexic, like my PAL. She gave me good tips on how to remember things'

Student tutors: confidence in teaching others

'I've always been one for imposter syndrome. It helped me realise that I do actually know what I'm doing'

'Learnt how to be a mentor…it's not something you've ever thought of before…you kind of do it in passing…but it's not something you've actively thought of until you actively do it'

'It was a rewarding experience seeing them [tutees] slowly getting more confident'

Challenges

- **Student engagement/communication varied**
  - Difficulty recruiting Level 2 students
  - Lack of engagement from some student tutees disappointed student tutors

'Originally, I thought it was a good idea…I thought it was, like, something I would have benefitted from in 1st year…but it went…nothing went bad…I don't know if it was a mismatch with my PAL. She didn't need me so much. She was a very secure student. She knew her stuff. Maybe she didn't have the time to experience certain things I experienced.'

''I was looking forward to it…but my PAL was sick a lot so we didn't get to meet'

'I [didn't] know [in advance] how much time it would take out of my placement…but then it didn't…it was actually helpful having the 4th year going through the staged assessment…it wasn't wasting time because you're getting educated on your assessments'

- **Students found it difficult to fit PAL in around clinical assessments**

'It would be good to have more time to discuss 'cause I feel there's only certain times you could meet up sometimes, depending on what shift you've been given.'

- **Some found it intimidating to undertake PAL in the presence of radiographers**

'…the setting wasn't good…it [took place] in the student area, but all the staff use it…I could feel them listening…thinking 'what is she talking about?'

Going forward...

PAL integrated into the MSc (pre reg) Diagnostic Radiography programme in first instance with introduction into BSc programme thereafter. With the following adjustments:

PAL will be kept as voluntary

Training will remain, but will be enhanced
Include tutor/tutee agreement regarding communication methods/times

Post-intervention feedback introduced
Between student tutor/tutee

Link with PAL in academic environment
Increase frequency of interactions

Thank you for listening

References

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5. Foulkes, D. and Naylor, S. (2022) 'Exploring peer tutoring from the peer-tutor's perspective'. *Radiography*, 28, pg 793-797

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7. Goldsmith, M., Stewart, L., and Ferguson, L. (2006) 'Peer learning partnership: an innovative strategy to enhance skill acquisition in nursing students'. *Nursing Education Today*, 26, pg 123-130