

“AdvanceHE

+ The Peer-to-Peer Framework: Embedding Peer Learning and Support in Higher Education

Lucy Chilvers and Dr Catherine McConnell



Contents

Contents	2
1 Introduction	3
1.1 What is peer learning and support in higher education?	3
1.2 Why is peer learning and support important and to whom?	3
1.3 Who is this framework for and how can it be used?	4
2 Areas of Focus: Contexts and Approaches	6
2.1 Contexts for Peer-to-Peer Activities	6
2.2 Peer-to-Peer Approaches	6
3 Applying the Framework in Practice	7
3.1 Stages of Development	7
4 Underpinning Values	8
4.1 Building Strong Foundations	8
4.2 How does this Framework align with the Professional Standards Framework (PSF)?	9
5 Acknowledgements	9
6 References	10

1 Introduction

1.1 What is peer learning and support in higher education?

Student-led peer learning and support is an approach advocating for students to collaborate and learn from, and with, each other towards their educational goals and personal growth. Peers can provide a vital sense of community and belonging to students, and working together offers the potential to improve students' academic confidence and contribute to improved attainment, retention, progression and completion. Peer learning and support is commonly situated across a variety of institutional contexts, featuring a diverse range of approaches, models and terminology. Ranging from students tutoring or mentoring one-another in a supervised environment, to co-creating societies and participating in group work. Peer support occurs when students share their knowledge, experience, skills or practical know-how to help one another in a mutually beneficial space. The terms 'peer learning' and 'peer support' are being used broadly to encompass formal activities whereby students interact with one another, either vertically or horizontally across levels of study, for the purpose of enhancing their learning, development or pastoral support either within the curriculum or as co- and extra-curricular activities.

1.2 Why is peer learning and support important?

Peer learning and support are vital across the educational ecosystem, enriching student experiences, enhancing staff practices, strengthening institutional culture and fostering collaboration with external partners. The following outlines how different stakeholders contribute to and benefit from this shared commitment.

- + **Students:** to enable and empower students to engage with one another in order to foster deep connections and a learning community, while developing essential professional skills and attributes.
- + **Staff** (academics and professional services): to transform thinking about learning, teaching and service design placing active and engaged learning at the heart of curricular and provision.
- + **Institution:** to provide all students and those involved in their experience with a sense of community, collegiality and collective endeavor towards shared goals.
- + **Students' Unions:** to promote student-to-student learning through academic societies, collaborative projects, educational campaigns and events.
- + **Employers:** to nurture essential skills and attributes which benefit employment and lifelong learning, contributing to the development of future leaders, including constructive social and interpersonal communication.

1.3 Who is this framework for and how can it be used?

This framework is relevant for both strategic leaders such as those planning institutional approaches to student success, as well as academics and practitioners planning and delivering student-facing activities such as in-class learning, professional services and students' unions facilitating student-to-student engagement. This framework is designed with versatility in mind so that it could be used as a strategic planning tool as well as a practical guide for peer learning and support implementation.

The peer-to-peer framework offers a holistic overview, to help readers reflect on current peer learning and support practices at institutional, faculty, department and programme or service level. It is helpful to work through stages one to five as introduced in section 3.1, when designing and planning for peer activities which may be as part of the curriculum, learning and teaching strategies, or an element of student-facing central services.

This framework is intended as a practical guide to the essential stages of developing peer-to-peer activities. It can be used by a range of stakeholders, including managers, practitioners and students, providing a structure to shape and evaluate policy and practice at an institutional, faculty, department, course and project level.

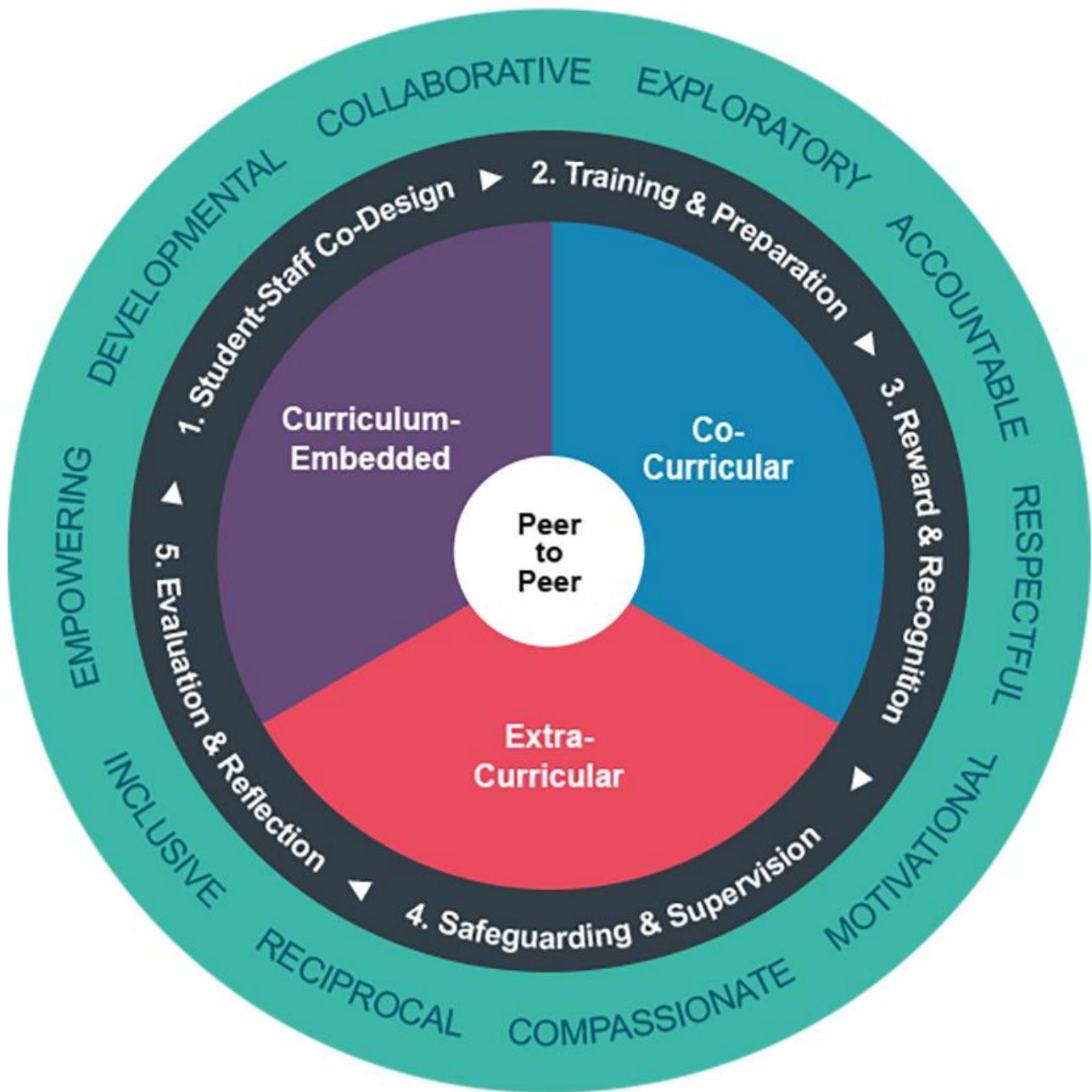


Figure 1: The Peer-to-Peer Framework

2 Areas of focus: Contexts and approaches

2.1 Contexts for peer-to-peer activities

This framework is intended to equip institutions to broaden and embed peer learning and support provision both within the curriculum as well as providing co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. This approach provides a more inclusive and accessible offer to students, ensuring all students have multiple opportunities throughout their course experience to benefit from peer-to-peer interactions. This, in addition to having co- and extra-curricular opportunities to opt in to, adds value and enhancement to the student experience. Partnership working between practitioners, departments and students is required across all contexts for optimal development of peer-to-peer approaches.

2.2 Peer-to-peer approaches

Curriculum-embedded approaches provide a spectrum of active and collaborative learning experiences and maximise existing workload and timetabling logistics. Co-curricular activities provide additional opportunities that complement the curriculum and engage students in their subject and academic studies. Extra-curricular peer learning fosters collaboration, enhances academic confidence and builds a supportive community.

In the inner ring of the framework are the three contexts of the student experience that peer activities can take place. Table 1 summarises examples of peer activities that suit these different contexts. This framework aims to provide clarity and a shared language for the HE sector for describing the variety of practices being used across institutions.

Curriculum-Embedded	Co-Curricular	Extra-Curricular
Group work	Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)	Student Union societies
Problem-based learning	Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)	Specialist peer communities
Peer-led team-based learning (PLTL)	Peer mentoring	Student Ambassadors
Action Learning Sets	Peer coaching	Student Champions
Peer Review/Crits	Buddying	Student Advisors
Peer Feedback and Assessment	Academic Societies	Student Partners
Online/ asynchronous peer interaction		Course Reps
		Residential/ Hall Reps

Table 1. Examples of peer-to-peer activities in different contexts of the student experience

3 Applying the framework in practice

3.1 Stages of development

The areas of focus (contexts and approaches) are surrounded by five stages suggested for effectively embedding peer learning and support. These are designed to be used iteratively to ensure continual quality and consistency of practice.

Stage 1: Student-Staff Co-Design

It is essential that peer-to-peer activities are co-designed in partnership with students. This means students being actively involved in curriculum or provision design from the outset; staff contributing expertise in the course, discipline and institutional processes and students contributing expertise in their own learning and student experience.

Stage 2: Training & Preparation

Recruitment of students for peer roles must be done inclusively to enable diverse participation. Peers require training to equip, develop and motivate fellow students in their roles. Staff need to prepare students for peer learning and support by explaining the purpose and benefits of activities, and the process of how activities will be undertaken.

Stage 3: Reward & Recognition

Students' participation in peer learning and support can make a significant impact on their personal and professional development. Their engagement can be rewarded and recognised in a variety of ways, from the achievement of learning outcomes or credit-bearing reflective portfolios, to financial payment, digital badges/ micro credentials, certificates and award ceremonies.

Stage 4: Safeguarding & Supervision

Creating a safe space for students to engage in peer-to-peer activities is important for safeguarding their mental health and wellbeing. This involves establishing ground rules, roles and responsibilities for group work, and identifying boundaries for managing expectations such as defining the purpose of activities, technologies to use, topics for discussion and further support networks.

Stage 5: Evaluation & Reflection

Identifying the rationale for implementing peer learning will inform the focus for evaluation and methods for collecting data. This could be exploring the impact on students' engagement with their studies, their professional development or future employability. From a course or institutional perspective this might be the use of strategic investment, the impact on student voice and satisfaction, achievement and retention. Students' and staff reflections on their experiences of peer-to-peer activities enriches their development and progression.

4 Underpinning values

4.1 Building strong foundations

Values which provide the foundation for effective peer learning and support experiences build upon those found in the Student-Led Peer Learning and Support Compendium (Lochtie and McConnell, 2024) and Student Engagement Through Partnership (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014). Specifically, peer learning and support should be:

- Empowering** Increasing students' personal sense of agency to influence their own or their peers' learning and development
- Developmental** Participation leads to enhancements in students' academic skills, course knowledge, personal development, and/or professional attributes and skills
- Collaborative** Encourages non-competitive and supportive learning partnership working
- Exploratory** Offers a safe space for students to experiment, explore and make mistakes
- Accountable** Students taking responsibility for their participation, honoring confidentiality and accountability to peers
- Respectful** All peer-to-peer interactions to be mutually respectful, valuing the contributions and mutual exchange of experiences
- Inclusive** All students of any background, demographic or perspective are all equally valued and encouraged to engage with peer learning and support activities
- Reciprocal** All parties have an interest in, and stand to benefit from, working and/or learning together
- Compassionate** Showing kindness and empathy, being considerate of each other's personal contexts, such as their backgrounds, responsibilities, home life, challenges or resources available
- Motivational** Encouraging of students' autonomy, engagement, independent study and drive to remain focused on their studies

4.2 How does this Framework align with the Professional Standards Framework (PSF)?

Staff may want to consider how their engagement with student access, retention, attainment and progression in HE can offer an effective approach to areas of activity, enable deeper understanding of core knowledge, and demonstrate alignment with professional values. It is particularly relevant to the following dimensions:

- + ACTIVITY: A1, A2, A4, A5
- + KNOWLEDGE: K1, K2, K4
- + VALUES: V1, V2, V3

Advance HE invites lecturers, teachers and learning support staff to evidence their use of this or other Advance HE frameworks in applying for Fellowship in recognition of their commitment to professional practice.

To find out more about Fellowship visit: www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship.

5 Acknowledgements

This framework, originally developed by Lucy Chilvers (2024) and Dr Catherine McConnell at the University of Brighton, accompanies the 2024 Advance HE publication Mapping Student-Led Peer Learning and Support. Additional thanks goes to colleagues across the sector who contributed to a Mapping Peer Learning Advisory Group, and peer reviewers for the Journal of Peer Learning who gave feedback on early drafts of the framework. Advance HE acknowledges the complementary work on active learning and student engagement by other sector bodies and agencies.

Reference this document: Chilvers, L. and McConnell, C. (2025) The Peer-to-Peer Framework: Embedding Peer Learning and Support in Higher Education. Advance HE

6 References

Lochtie, D.& McConnell, C. (2024) Student-led Peer Learning and Support: Executive Summary. Eds. D. Lochtie and C. McConnell. Advance HE Accessible at:
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-led-peer-learning-and-support>

Healey, M., Flint, A. & Harrington, K. (2014) Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education, York: Higher Education Academy.
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher>

Chilvers, L. (2025). The Peer-to-Peer Model: A UK Institution's Approach to Broadening and Embedding the Provision of Peer Learning and Support. *Journal of Peer Learning*. 16(1), p2. DOI: 10.21061/jopl.113. Accessible at:
<https://journalofpeerlearning.org/articles/10.21061/jopl.113>

Contact us

All enquiries

Email: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

Advance HE helps HE institutions be the best they can be, by unlocking the potential of their people.

We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Company limited by guarantee registered in Ireland no. 703150. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Registered Office: Advance HE, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.

© 2024 Advance HE. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advance HE. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the copyright owner. Such permission will normally be granted for non-commercial, educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given. The Advance HE logo should not be used without our permission.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the Marketing and Communications Team at Advance HE: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

advance-he.ac.uk

[in](#) [X](#) [f](#) [@AdvanceHE](#)