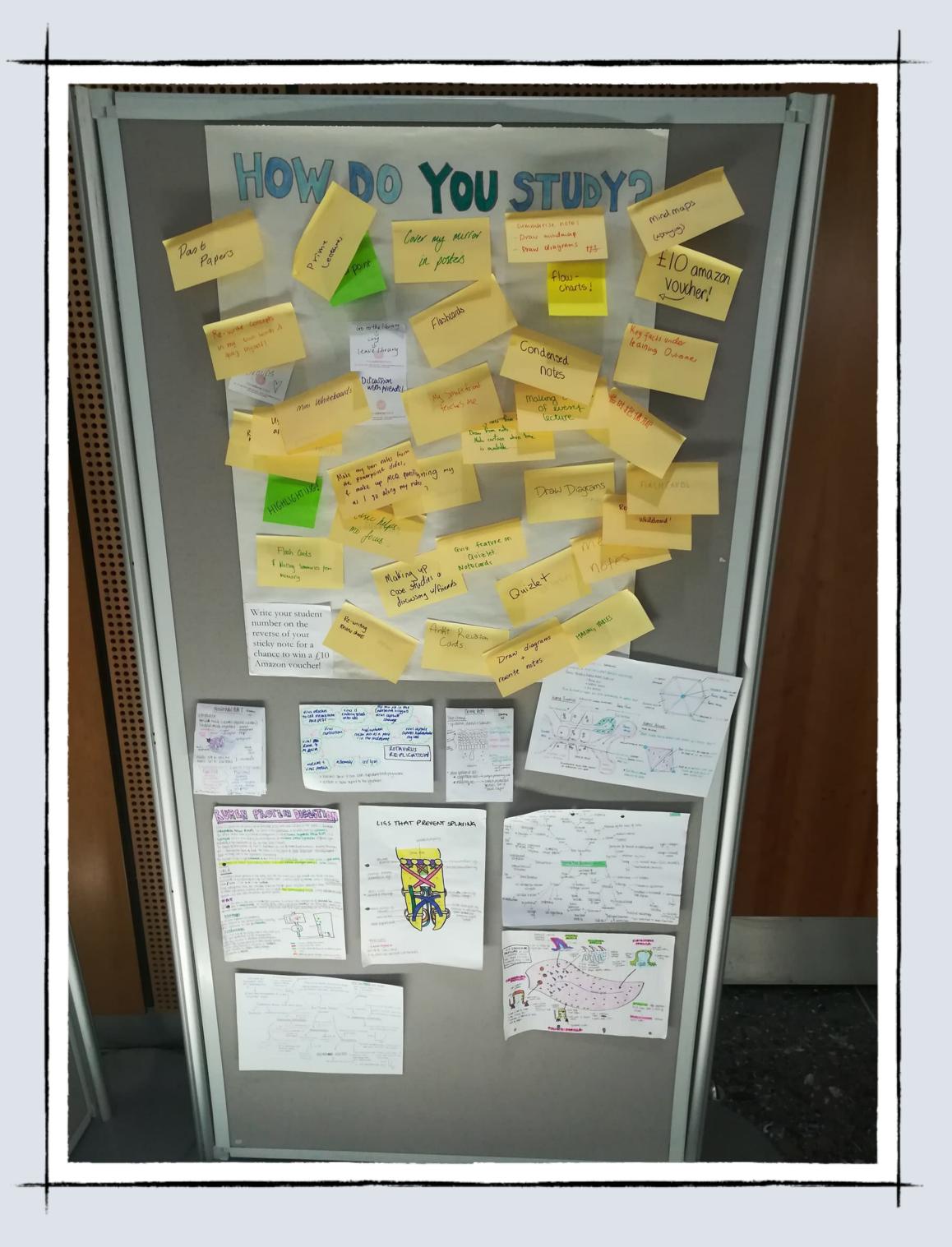THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

VetPALs – a journey to success
Dr Jessie Paterson & the VetPAL Leaders – contact Jessie.Paterson@ed.ac.uk

VetPALs - what is it?
- Peer assisted learning Scheme - Vet students in later years support earlier year students
- Student-led sessions for other students
- Not teaching but facilitating discussion
- Not about course content but about academic skills
- Leaders trained (2 day course at R(D)SVS)
- Leaders not paid but can work towards Edinburgh Award

Baby steps
- Started 2013-14
- 8 Leaders from 3rd and 4th year
- Aimed at First Year students to help with transition into University
- To start with sessions at R(D)SVS on Wed lunchtime but attendance low but feedback positive:-

    "They were very helpful and friendly"
- Students said would like to attend but conflict with sports so moved to Pollock Halls @ 7pm and attendance increased.

Journey
- **2014-15** recruited new leaders (2 of existing Leaders stayed on); new Leaders had attended sessions as 1st years and wanted to give something back.
- Sessions at Pollock Halls & numbers attending growing
- **2015-16** more new Leaders to give Leaders from all of the later years
- Moved back to R(D)SVS but times chosen to suit the 1st year timetable and the Leaders timetable.
- **2016-17** introduced similar scheme but aimed at graduate entry programme (GEP) students run by later year GEPs
- Started with 3 GEP leaders, all sessions at R(D)SVS
- Large numbers attending from the start

Where we are now
- Core part of the Schools' student support
- 6 new Leaders recruited annually and 4 for GEP VetPALs
- Additional activities now included beyond initial remit:
    - Making of Better You week event in Jan aimed at all years
    - Sessions run for later years at key transition points (pre-clinical/clinical, move to final year)
- Set of student engaged in education and used for ad-hoc representation/views

Lessons Learned
- Be patient as takes time to get established and embedded.
- Trust the Leaders, support but don't micro-manage
- Have regular meetings with the whole team (monthly) and have a few senior students that meet with more frequently and act as main liaison with the Team
- Needs local academic support and small amount of funding (for catering & occasional stationary