

NATURAL.PALS – BUDDY-PROGRAMME

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I. About the Programme

What is a Buddy(-Programme)?

- "Buddy" means pal or friend. A Buddy-Programme usually denotes a guided partnership between two persons at an equal level which includes dialogue, mutual support, and joint activities. In the subject-specific Buddy-Programme Natural.PALS, advanced students support new international students at their faculty as peer-tutors during the introductory phase of studies.
- The core idea is that both partners benefit: As an international student, you can familiarise yourself with the particularities of your degree programme and subject-specific study skills and establish first contacts. As a local student, you can expand your specialised / methodical knowledge and meet fellow students from all over the world. Through professional and personal dialogue, all participants can train and improve their intercultural competence.

Do I get to improve my foreign language skills in the Buddy-Programme?

- The Buddy-Programme is not a language tandem. It does not aim at learning or practising a foreign language. However, as an international student, you may improve your German language skills in interaction with your Buddy, particularly in an academic / subject-specific context.
- If you would like to practise a foreign language (or German) in interaction with a native speaker, you can participate in one of the general [tandem programmes of the University Language Centre \(ZFA\)](#) or in the subject-specific [tandem programme Tandem.MINT](#).

II. Prerequisites, Registration & Preparation

Who is eligible?

- The Buddy-Programme addresses new international students (1st/2nd semester, Bachelor's or Master's) and local Bachelor's (3rd semester at least) and Master's students. The degree programmes involved and further details are available on the [website](#).

I am an international student in an advanced semester. Can I participate?

- If you are studying in an advanced semester and have the impression that you would profit from the Buddy-Programme nonetheless, you are welcome to apply – however, international students in their first semester are considered with priority.
- Of course, you are welcome to apply as a peer-tutor for new international students if you are an international student yourself in an advanced phase of your studies.

Do I have to meet specific prerequisites?

- You are eligible to participate if you meet the prerequisites indicated on the website. We expect all participants to be open-minded, interested in other cultures, and reliable.
- Proficiency in foreign languages is not required, English skills are of advantage. In the application, we ask you to indicate your language proficiency to consider it in the matching.

When do I get to know if I can participate?

- After your application, you will receive a confirmation including information on the next steps. A final admission cannot be given before the end of the application period and subsequent matching procedure. We make an effort to place all applicants, but cannot guarantee it. If we receive more applications from international than from local students, we will consider assigning more than one international student to a peer-tutor.

Which criteria is the matching based on?

- The primary matching criterion is the degree programme. In addition, we consider further aspects such as interests, language skills, and age, if possible. If you indicate in your application that you prefer a Buddy of the same gender, we will consider this as well.

Do I need to prepare?

- As a local student, you attend an **initial training** as preparation for the Buddy-Programme. It usually takes place shortly before the lecture period or in the first lecture week. We will announce the date well in advance and send you an invitation by email. Additionally, you are required to participate in a one-day **intercultural training** (optional in the certificate-variant).
- We recommend all new international students to attend preparatory courses, orientation weeks, or tutorials and other preparatory services offered for your degree programme: www.rub.de/zsb/einf.htm | studium.rub.de/en/start-your-studies.
- As an international student in the BSc-programme Biology, please take a **counselling session** at your [faculty's student advisory service](#) before the programme starts. Please make use of the regular consultation hours or make an appointment.
- We recommend all participants to attend the [Orientation Days of the International Office](#) for new international students. Here, you meet other international and local students, get help-ful information on studying at RUB, and explore the campus and surroundings. The schedule is available [here](#). Please register with the International Office!
For local students, we recommend to participate in the Orientation Days as [Campus Guides](#). Please sign up in advance for one of the information sessions.

International students find useful information to prepare for studying in Bochum on the [websites of the International Office](#). Especially for new international students, the International Office offers the course [STARTsmart](#).

I will also be a Campus Guide – do I need to attend both training sessions?

- No, one of the training sessions – the one for peer-tutors in the Buddy-Programme or the one for Campus Guides – is sufficient for both activities. Please contact the coordinator in advance if you will attend the Campus Guide-training only.

III. Start & First Contact

When does the programme start?

- For the local students, the programme starts with the **initial training** (see [Preparation](#)). Attending the initial training is a condition for participation in the programme.
- The first joint event for all participants is the **Kick-Off Meeting**. We will announce the date well in advance (usually in the 2nd or 3rd lecture week).
- All dates are compiled in the **Programme-Guide** for the respective semester which you can find on the website ([Downloads](#)) as well as in the Natural.PALS-Network (Moodle course) – you will receive a printed copy at the Kick-Off Meeting.

When do I get to know who my Buddy is?

- After the application deadline, we will try to assign a matching Buddy to each applicant. We will notify you about the results as soon as possible.

How do I get in contact with my Buddy?

- Having completed the matching, we will send you an email with the contact details of your Buddy. Please contact him/her soon and arrange a first meeting at the university or a "neutral" place.

What is to do, if my Buddy does not reply?

- Please be patient for a while – in case your Buddy has not replied for a week, you can send another email to check back with him/her (politely). If you still do not get an answer, please contact the coordinators via international-at-home@rub.de.

Should I pick my Buddy up at the station / airport? / Will my Buddy pick me up?

- If you are in touch early enough you may pick your Buddy up at the airport / station and escort him/her to his/her housing (or, as an international student, you may be picked up by your Buddy). However, this is voluntary and subject to individual agreement. We recommend international students to plan their arrival in Bochum for a weekday (Mon – Fri) and during daytime.

IV. Peer-Tutoring / Meetings with the Buddy

What does Peer-Tutoring mean?

- The central idea in Peer-Tutoring is that (advanced) students support their fellow students with their „inside knowledge“ in gaining orientation and in acquiring subject-specific study skills and specialised knowledge. The assignment of one particular peer-tutor shall facilitate trustful cooperation and allow you to bring up questions or problems without fear of disadvantage.

Do we have to work exclusively on subject-specific topics and tasks?

- At least half of the overall time of your meetings, you should work on study-related or subject-specific topics; you can decide for yourselves what you want to do in the remaining time.
- You can find some suggestions for joint activities in the **Programme-Guide** for the respective semester in which we have compiled a selection of the various events and options offered at RUB. The Guide will be available on the website and in Moodle at the beginning of the semester. An overview of extracurricular activities can also be found on the RUB-websites „[Extracurricular Activities](#)“ and on the [website of the city of Bochum](#).

How do we decide which topics / tasks to work on during our meetings?

- In the Kick-Off Meeting at the beginning of the semester, you will have the opportunity to plan your meetings and talk through what you want to work on together with your Buddy. You can still amend this plan later, depending on current questions and study requirements. Possible tasks are to prepare or recapitulate the subjects of your lectures together, prepare for exams, and discuss assignments or texts (e.g. lab reports, papers). You decide – primarily according to the needs of the international Buddy – which topics and subjects to work on.
- By means of the **Buddy-Agreement**, you can mutually agree on some key terms for working together. The **Buddy-Planner** facilitates to compare your timetables and find suitable time slots.

How often should we meet?

- It is up to you if you would like to meet weekly or less often. The amount of time of the Buddy-meetings should add up to at least twelve hours overall; in MSc Biology only, it is eight hours, but mandatory sessions of the Study Skills Coaching (“Master-Coaches”) are added.

Should we agree on a regular date?

- It is up to you if you would like to agree on a regular weekly meeting or arrange each meeting individually. According to experience, it is easier for most people to stick to a regular meeting.

Where can we meet?

- You are also free to choose the location of your meetings. You can meet in the workspaces of your faculty or in the library, or in the student workspace of the [OASE](#).

What is to do if my Buddy does not keep the appointments or is never available?

- As a first step, you should talk to your Buddy in this case – you can frankly, but still friendly, tell him/her, how this affects you, ask for the reasons, and ask for reliability. If the problem remains, please contact the coordinators.

V. Programme Components

Do I have to complete all components included in the Buddy-Pass?

- Yes. The components listed in the **module description** and in the respective **Buddy-Pass** are mandatory. Optional components are marked as such. Some components differ for local and international students and the schedule also depends on whether you pursue recognition or a participation certificate. To some extent, you can choose between several options – for details, please check the [website](#) or the Programme-Guide (issued at beginning of semester).

VI. Activity Record / Recognition

Can I have the programme recognised?

- Students of the BSc and MSc programme **Biology** can have their participation recognised for elective modules ([BioPlus/Optionalbereich](#)) by 4 Credit Points (CP). Within the MSc programme **Chemistry**, the Buddy-Programme can be recognised as a part of the module [Practical Science and Communication](#). For detailed requirements in each case, please refer to the respective module description or module handbook. With questions on recognition, please consult the student advisors and/or module coordinator at your faculty.
- As an alternative, you can choose the less extensive **certificate-variant** of the programme – in this case, you will receive a participation certificate after completion.

Is there an exam?

- The programme does not include an exam, but a presentation and a concluding report (both not graded).

How do I prove that I have accomplished the requirements?

- On your **Buddy-Pass**, you need to have your participation confirmed by the signature of the respective instructor. In addition, you keep record of the meetings with your Buddy using the **session list** which you both need to sign. The forms are available for download on the [website](#). As a final step, please submit these documents along with the concluding report until the due date.

VII. Events / Contact to Other Participants

How do I get in touch with other participants?

- At the group events (Kick-Off, Reflection, Final), you meet other participants and have the opportunity to exchange views. Moreover, you can get in touch via the Natural.PALS-Network (Moodle). In addition, the Supporters usually organise at least one group meeting during the semester.

Kick-Off Meeting

- In the Kick-Off Meeting, all participants get to know each other. We provide you with an overview of the programme structure and you get to plan the meetings with your Buddy.

Reflection Meeting

- The Reflection Meeting facilitates exchanging your experience with other participants and reflecting upon the first half of the semester. Moreover, the bachelor's students (Biology) will give short presentations on a topic of their choice.

Final Meeting

- In the Final Meeting, all participants look back on their experience in the programme and are asked for their feedback. Ensuing this joint event, a Feedback Panel for peer-tutors takes place.

Feedback Panel

- The Feedback Panel facilitates dialogue between peer-tutors and coordinators. The focus here is to reflect upon the role as a peer-tutor in retrospect, discuss challenges, and identify best practice. The feedback is also valuable for the coordinators to further improve the programme.

Cultural / Extracurricular Activities

- In the Programme-Guide, you can find an overview of the wide range of leisure activities and events at RUB and in Bochum, many with a focus on culture. The [RUBiss-semester programme](#) of the International Office organises interesting trips and events each semester, many of which are open to local students as well. BOSKOP, AKAFÖ's culture department, offers a diverse [cultural programme](#) ([facebook/boskop](#)), i.a. an intercultural [cooking event](#). At the [Centre of the Arts \(Musisches Zentrum\)](#), various activities about music, theatre and dancing take place, e.g. [Open Stage](#).

VIII. Problems

What's to do if problems arise between me and my Buddy?

- You can ask your Buddy to talk and describe which impression you got – without being judgemental or reproachful. You can ask if your interpretation is correct and try to find out the reasons. If the conflict cannot be solved, you can turn to the [coordinators](#), e.g. in the consultation hours.

What is to do if my Buddy has (personal) problems?

- At RUB, there are various advisory services and contact persons for different matters, also psychological and social counselling. Seeking advice can be the first step towards solving a problem – in case the advisors are unable to help directly, they can usually refer you to other services or suggest alternatives. International students can also turn to the International Office for support. For subject-specific or study-related problems, the student advisory services are approachable. Below, you find a [list of contacts / advisory services](#).

I would like to quit the programme...

- Before you quit the programme, please contact the coordinators first – many issues can be sorted out in a personal conversation. Also, please take into consideration that also your Buddy cannot continue the programme if you quit.

What happens if my Buddy quits the programme?

- In the first place, we will seek dialogue with your Buddy. If quitting is inevitable, we will seek an individual solution together.

IX. Completion of the Programme

When is the programme finished?

- The official programme ends with the Final Meeting at the end of the lecture period. You complete the programme by submitting all required documents and the concluding report until the due date. If you have met all requirements, you will receive a participation certificate and possibly – depending on your degree programme – credit points to have them [recognised](#).

Can I participate in the programme again?

- You are welcome to participate a second time if we have vacancies – please indicate this in your application. However, new applicants are given priority. Recognition is only possible once, but you will receive a participation certificate again.
As an alternative, you are welcome to volunteer as a Natural.PALS-Supporter.

I have participated as an international student – can I participate as a peer-tutor now?

- Yes, you are welcome to participate as a peer-tutor if you are then in the third semester (at least) of your bachelor's or in your master's studies.

Contacts / Advisory Services

Buddy-Programme Natural.PALS

- **Coordination** (Project inSTUDIESplus): Melina Wachtling (Ms.)
international-at-home@rub.de | <http://internatural.blogs.rub.de>
 - Coordination at the Faculty of Biology:
Dr. Elisabeth Kühnel (Ms.); elisabeth.kuehnel@rub.de
- Consultation hours: announced via Moodle

Advisory Services at the Faculties

Faculty of Biology & Biotechnology

- Student advisory service: www.biologie.rub.de/studium | studienberatung-bio@rub.de
- Student representatives: www.rub.de/frbio | frbio@rub.de
- Master-Coaches: bio-master-coaches@rub.de

Faculty of Chemistry & Biochemistry

- Student advisory service: chemie.rub.de/studium/berater
- Student representatives: dbs-lin.rub.de/frchemie | frchemie@rub.de

Faculty of Geosciences / Dept. of Geography

- Student advisory service: www.geographie.rub.de/studium/beratung
- Student representatives: www.geographie.rub.de/fachschaftsrat | fsgeo@rub.de

Student Advisory Service, Social Counselling etc.

- **Central Student Advisory Service** (ZSB): www.rub.de/zsb
Student counselling, psychological counselling | advice on social issues & funding | coaching
→ seminars, workshops and support groups (OASE): www.rub.de/oase
- **Students' Union** (AStA): asta-bochum.de/beratung
i.a. social counselling, counselling for students with children, legal consultation etc.

Advice for International Students

- **International Office**: international.rub.de
RUBiss (international student services): rubiss@rub.de | Facebook: [rubiss.rub](https://www.facebook.com/rubiss.rub)
- **University without Borders** - Dr. Anja Zorob
studium.rub.de/en/project-university-without-borders
counselling for refugee students, e.g. on funding and scholarships
- **AKAFÖ** (Student Services Bochum) <https://www.akafoe.de/en/international/>
counselling for international students: auslaenderberatung@akafoe.de

Counselling on (Academic) Writing

- **Writing Centre** (Schreibzentrum): www.sz.rub.de

Career Counselling

- **Career Service**: www.rub.de/careerservice

An **overview** of all **advisory services** at Ruhr-Universität Bochum can be found here:

studium.rub.de/en/counselling | studium.rub.de/en/service-facilities
