

# WIN

WESSEX  
INSPIRATION  
NETWORK



## EVALUATION REPORT: ONLINE MENTORING OF 'A' LEVEL STUDENTS AT WESTON COLLEGE

Jo Lilley, Ben Anderson, and Natalie Blight

### ABSTRACT

Findings and recommendations from the pilot mentoring scheme held at Weston College.

WIN



# CONTENTS

---

Acknowledgements.....	2
1 Executive Summary.....	3
2 Introduction .....	5
2.1 Purpose of evaluation .....	5
2.2 Description – Rationale, Context, Plan for Delivery.....	5
2.2.1 Description & Rationale .....	5
2.2.2 Context & Hypothesis .....	5
2.2.3 Plan for Delivery.....	6
3 Methodology.....	7
3.1 Data to inform the evaluation .....	7
3.2 Data collection methods.....	8
4 Data Analysis and Results .....	10
4.1 Learner Participation Survey (Pre-post).....	10
4.2 Learner focus groups .....	13
4.3 On-line environment for learners .....	15
4.4 Subject Tutor Feedback .....	16
4.5 Mentors Focus group.....	17
4.6 On-line environment for mentors.....	17
4.7 Grade Analysis.....	18
4.8 HE Progression .....	19
4.9 Points of Value .....	21
5 Conclusions & Recommendations .....	22
5.1 Conclusions .....	22
5.2 Recommendations .....	23
6 Bibliography .....	24
7 Appendix 1: Intervention / Activity Stream .....	25
8 Appendix 2: Focus group at Weston – Script.....	26
9 Appendix 3: Box and whisper plot of change in knowledge and confidence before and after mentoring .....	28

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

This project was a collaborative effort involving multiple organisations. The completion of this pilot would not have been possible without the support of the following Higher Education Institutions:

- Bournemouth University – Beth Matthews (Schools Liaison Officer)
- Falmouth University – Andrew Wallis (Head of School and College Partnerships)
- University of Gloucestershire - Sarah White (Marketing and Partnerships Schools and Colleges Manager) and Chantal Goldsworthy (Student Ambassador Manager)
- We would like to acknowledge the capability and versatility of the mentors taking part in the scheme.

We would also like to thank Weston College and University Centre Weston for supporting the scheme as the host institution, in particular:

- Mark Hilton– Head of Sixth Form and safeguarding lead.
- All the sixth form tutors who took part.
- Fiona Walters – College Registrar and Lead Designated Safeguarding Officer
- Eleanor Webber - Learning Technologist

# Evaluation Report for the WIN Mentoring of 'A' level students at Weston College

## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Weston College introduced an A-Level mentoring scheme in January 2021 to offer A-Level learners the opportunity to engage with university ambassadors. This was delivered remotely, via Microsoft Teams, with feedback gathered from participants, mentors, and tutors at Weston College at multiple stages throughout the process.

The following are a summary of the key findings and recommendations from the evaluation of this pilot scheme.

➤ **Learners felt more confident about progression to HE because of mentoring.**

This programme was created to increase the confidence and awareness of HE progression for A-Level learners at Weston College. Learners were asked to rate their confidence about HE progression out of 5 in pre- and post-mentoring participant surveys. An average increase of 0.14 (out of 5) was identified after comparing learner responses collected at the beginning and end of the scheme.

Recommendation:

Expand delivery to wider range of schools and colleges with substantial student populations of OfS underrepresented groups.

➤ **Learners felt that mentoring had improved the quality of their work. This was validated by their improved grades.**

A recurring theme identified in the mentoring feedback suggested that learners felt there had been a noticeable improvement in the quality of their work after participating in the mentoring scheme. Participant grade analysis was also conducted. 154 learner grades were analysed, with 47 receiving subject-specific mentoring and support. The results found that, on average, 64% of learners that received subject specific mentoring saw an increase in their end grade, in comparison to 54% of the total 154 learners.

Recommendation:

Ensure mentors and mentees are matched based on degree and A-Level subjects. Expand the network of HE Institutions involved in the mentoring scheme to cover a wider range of subject specialisms. Facilitate more effective communication between tutors and mentors. For example, fortnightly 1-2-1s to check progress and learner engagement.

➤ **Compared with traditional methods on-line mentoring provided more accessible mentoring, enabling learners to meet with ambassadors from a variety of HE Institutions.**

Delivering online removed geographical barriers that may have limited which HE Institutions could participate in this mentoring scheme. Microsoft Teams was the venue for these sessions, with both mentors and mentees commenting on the convenience and accessibility of online mentoring.

Recommendation:

Continue to deliver mentoring online through Microsoft Teams or equivalent. Encourage learners to use their cameras and microphones as they become more confident and familiar with their mentor(s). Opportunities for mentors and mentees to meet face-to-face at a HEI campus should also be explored where appropriate.

➤ **Participants learnt about the social aspects of university life.**

Engaging with current university students gave A-Level learners a glimpse into the social elements of university life. Mentors were able to talk candidly about their lives at university, which many learners would not typically learn about until moving to university themselves. Most university open and visit days were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore this provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of life as a university student.

Recommendation:

Review and adapt the induction process for mentors to clarify expectations and encourage conversations around HE decision making and information relating to university life.

➤ **Delivery of the mentoring scheme offered a learner-led and versatile approach to addressing GATSBY Benchmarks 3, 4, and 7.**

The GATSBY Benchmarks are now an embedded component of career delivery in schools and colleges. The mentoring scheme offers a creative and accessible method of providing information, advice, and guidance that addresses GATSBY Benchmarks 3 (Addressing the Individual Needs of the Pupil), 4 (Linking Curriculum Learning to Careers), and elements of 7 (Encounters with Further and Higher Education.)<sup>1</sup>

Recommendation:

Rolling out the mentoring scheme to a wider network of schools and colleges will allow Career Leaders to address elements of GATSBY Benchmark 1 (A Stable Careers Programme). Incorporating opportunities for face-to-face interaction between mentors and mentees – such as a campus visit – would address all aspects of GATSBY Benchmark 7.

➤ **Benefits of the mentoring scheme extended beyond the learners.**

Organisation of the mentoring scheme has improved working relationships with HE Institutions beyond the WIN partnership. Participation in the scheme has increased the outreach opportunities for the HE Institutions involved. Mentors felt an increased level of confidence over their intended destinations, whilst also engaging with elements of their subject that they had previously enjoyed. Weston College was able to introduce a variety of voices and experiences to enhance the colleges' ability to help the learners make informed decisions.

Recommendation:

Expand the mentoring scheme to include a more diverse range of HE Institutions based on tariff, location, and course offerings. This should be expanded to more schools in the WIN network to enhance future interventions of the WIN's sustained and progressive programme.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Good Career Guidance', *Gatsby.org.uk*, 2021, <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance> [Accessed 20 July 2021].

## 2 INTRODUCTION

---

### 2.1 PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

In January 2021, an A-Level mentoring pilot scheme was launched by the HE advisers at Weston College. This programme offered an opportunity for A-Level learners to engage with university ambassadors from a variety of universities. Due to COVID-19 restrictions it was not possible for the ambassadors to meet with the students face-to-face. This was an opportunity to see if Microsoft TEAMS could be used as a platform to facilitate an effective and cost-effective university mentoring scheme within a 6<sup>th</sup> form.

The purpose of this evaluation is to look at the impact of the mentoring on the A-Level learners, identify what they learnt, and whether the experience changed their attitudes and/or intentions towards HE progression. The evaluation will also inform the planning of future schemes by identifying how the programme could be improved and the typical characteristics of on-line mentoring.

### 2.2 DESCRIPTION – RATIONALE, CONTEXT, PLAN FOR DELIVERY

#### 2.2.1 Description & Rationale

The intervention was designed to address the following issues which have been identified through anecdotal conversations with A-Level tutors, other supporting staff, and learners in addition to the learned experiences of HE advisers.

- Lack of opportunity for students to meet undergraduates, made worse by COVID-19 restrictions.
- Learners' concerns about getting the required grades.
- Lack of knowledge about university life.
- Learners unprepared for study at HE Level.
- Learners unsure about what to do next.
- Drop in UCAS applications from A-Level students at Weston College.

The 6<sup>th</sup> form student or group of students are matched with the university ambassador for online mentoring and coursework support. It is anticipated that matching based on subject, with the mentors being close in age, will help increase the mentees motivation and subject interest.

The universities that contributed mentors to this scheme were Falmouth University, Bournemouth University and University of Gloucestershire.

#### 2.2.2 Context & Hypothesis

CFE Research's Evidence Meta-Review (October 2020) found that 'Learners relate to and are influenced by people like them'.<sup>2</sup> One recommendation was to 'Consider ways to integrate student

---

<sup>2</sup> *An Independent review of evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships* (CFE Research, 2020) <<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/e3989a60-1314-43f5-ae0-7e94ae3946da/cfe-review-of-uni-connect-evaluation-evidence.pdf>> p.2.

ambassadors into the delivery of activities such as mentoring and campus visits, where the evidence suggests they can add value and enhance impact'.<sup>3</sup>

We believe that facilitating these mentoring sessions will provide role models for young people during a very important time with regards to decision making and assessments. It will provide an additional layer of support for the young people to access during these unprecedented times, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating a digital environment will allow for communication and sharing of knowledge and experience relevant to the mentees' progression to university. Learners will gain academic support and an insight of HE experiences via the mentors.

There is also potential for this pilot scheme to contribute to a sustained careers programme by addressing GATSBY Benchmarks 3 (Addressing the Individual Needs of the Pupil), 4 (Linking Curriculum Learning to Careers), and 7 (Encounters with HE).<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2.3 Plan for Delivery

The mentoring sessions ran for 18 weeks, commencing 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021 until 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

Tutors at Weston College identified suitable learners for the programme. Gap students and those from Polar 4 Q1 and Q2 were prioritised, although other learners were also included.

Weston Colleges Safeguarding, Learning Technologists, IT and HR personnel were involved in setting up and training of the mentors prior to the launch of the programme.

Weston College's Microsoft TEAMS platform is used to host all sessions. Each session is arranged by a member of Weston College staff, recorded, and created in a way that allows a member of staff to access the session at any time (for safeguarding purposes).

Mentors were expected to meet with their mentees at least once a week for a virtual conversation. Dates and times were negotiated based on the mentees needs. Some sessions were 1:1 and some were held with a group of learners. The length of the sessions varied from 0.5 hours to 1.5 hours.

The subject tutor worked with the mentors ensuring that the content of the sessions aligned with the curriculum.

All sessions were logged and added to the HEAT database.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Good Career Guidance Report* (Gatsby, 2014)

<<https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>> p. 7.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

---

The WIN programme has been designed using the NERUPI framework<sup>5</sup>. The intention of this intervention is to prepare post-16 learners for progression to HE. It is likely to impact on the learners in a variety of ways but particularly these objectives:

KNOW – develop students’ knowledge and awareness of the benefits of HE

*Enable learners to explore academic, social, economic, and personal benefits of progressing to HE*

CHOOSE – develop students’ capacity to make informed choices.

*Enable learners to explore differences between HE institutions and study opportunities.*

BECOME – develop students’ confidence and resilience to negotiate the challenges of university life.

*Enable learners to increase confidence in their capacity to progress to HE*

PRACTISE – Develop students’ study skills.

*Enable learners to develop study skills and enhance their academic skills.*

UNDERSTAND – develop students understanding and subject knowledge and supporting attainment raising.

*Enable learners to broaden their understanding of subject knowledge.*

A mixed method approach has been taken to evaluate this intervention using a variety of tools including surveys, focus groups and analysis of grades.

See Appendix 1 for a summary of the theory of change and evaluation methods identified during the planning of the intervention.

#### 3.1 DATA TO INFORM THE EVALUATION

Prior to commencement of the mentoring sessions:

1. Learners completed the on-line Participation Survey. This is an extensive survey which is based on a national Uni Connect Participant survey, designed by CFE. It aims to capture learners’ aspirations, knowledge of HE, and intentions to progress to HE. On completion of the programme learners complete a modified version of the survey to identify changes in their knowledge of HE and intentions to progress.
2. Mentors completed a survey designed to gauge their confidence around the mentoring role.
3. Tutors were also asked to complete a survey and provide predicted A level grades for the mentees and find out more about the student groups.

---

<sup>5</sup> "NERUPI Framework Overview", *Nerupi.co.uk*, 2021 <<http://www.nerupi.co.uk/about/nerupi-framework-overview>> [Accessed 19 July 2021].

After the sessions

1. Focus groups were conducted with Learners.
2. Learners completed a follow up survey.
3. Tutors completed a follow up survey.
4. Mentors focus group.
5. Comparison of start grades and end grades.

A total of 527.75 contact hours were delivered over 312 sessions, involving 87 mentees and 14 mentors.

### 3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

1. 'Online surveys' (<https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/>) was used to develop and distribute the Baseline Learner Participation survey, a link to the survey was sent to all participating learners.
2. Microsoft Forms was used to design and distribute surveys at the start of the project to gather feedback from the mentors and tutors.
3. A total of fourteen learners participated in seven focus groups. These were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. A common script (appendix 2) was used for each session. Some students chose to have their cameras and microphones switched on whilst others did not. Those who did not have cameras on responded to questions in 'the chat'. Where students did have their microphones on, conversation flowed, and learners were able to explain and give context to their responses more easily than those who only responded via the chat function. All focus group discussions were recorded and analysed to identify common themes.

At the start of each focus group, the following clarifications were made:

- The purpose of the session.
- Participation in the focus group was voluntary.
- Participants could withdraw from the focus group at any time.
- All data would be reported anonymously.
- Data would be kept in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Those taking part in the focus groups represented a relatively small sample (20%). Those taking part may have been the more motivated and/or those that had had a more positive experience.

5. A Participant Follow Up Survey, consisting of a subset of the initial baseline survey was distributed and completed by 43% of those who completed the baseline survey. The follow up responses were compared to the initial responses to identify changes in learners' ability to make informed choices, knowledge of HE and its benefits, and learners' overall confidence to progress.
6. Microsoft Forms was also used to gather feedback on the programme from tutors, 10 tutors completed this.

7. A focus group was conducted on Microsoft Teams with two of the mentors. Those taking part had their cameras and microphones turned on and the session was recorded for analysis.
8. The head of 6<sup>th</sup> form provided details of each students' predicted grades, start grades and final grades. This was only possible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students who had been awarded their final grades; it was not possible to gauge any improvement in the quality of the work of the 1<sup>st</sup> year learners using this method.

The evaluation being undertaken is type 2 OfS classification, empirical enquiry.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *Access And Participation Standards of Evidence* (Office for Students, 2019)  
<<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/6971cf8f-985b-4c67-8ee2-4c99e53c4ea2/access-and-participation-standards-of-evidence.pdf>> [Accessed 19 July 2021], p.2.

## 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 LEARNER PARTICIPATION SURVEY (PRE-POST)

Of the 89 invited to take part, 87 learners attended at least one mentoring session. 65 (75%) of those that attended at least one session were from POLAR (Participation by Local Area) 4, Quintile 1 and 2 postcodes, as classified under the Uni Connect programme.<sup>7</sup> 11 (12%) were identified as WIN students.

84% of participants identified as English/Welsh/Scottish/N.Irish/British, with 6% identifying as White Other, 3% as being from Any other Asian Background, 2% as Bangladeshi, 1% as Arab, 1% as African and 1% as being from Any other Black/African/Caribbean Background.

37 of the students taking part in the mentoring completed the baseline survey (43%). Of these 37, 21 (57%) were in the Follow Up group, they completed both the baseline and the follow up survey.

Survey responses were exported in coded format, scaled responses were given numeric values, as shown in Table 1. Responses to a selection of the questions were analysed to see if there was a difference in responses before and after mentoring.

Category	Question	Sub questions	Possible responses with numeric value
1. Ability to make informed choices and knowledge of how to apply (CHOOSE)	16. How much do you know about the following aspects of applying to higher education...	The courses that are available	Nothing – 1 Little -2 A lot – 3
		Different routes such as: higher/degree apprenticeships, distance learning, and higher education in a further education setting	
		How to apply through UCAS	
		Where to find information about applying	
2. Knowledge of HE (KNOW)	17. How much do you know about ...	What student life would be like.	Nothing – 1 A Little – 2 A Lot – 3
		How it leads to careers that you would be interested in	
		The costs of study	
		The financial support available	
		The options about where to live whilst studying	
		The support available	
3. Confidence and resilience (BECOME)	23. How much do you agree with the following statements about HE ...	It is for people like me	Don't Know – (N/A) Strongly Agree – 5 Agree – 4 Neither Agree/Disagree -3
		I would fit in well with others	
		I have the academic ability to succeed.	

<sup>7</sup> 'Young Participation by Area', *officeforstudents.org.uk*, 2021, <<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/>> [Accessed 20 July 2021].

			Disagree – 2 Strongly Disagree - 1
4. Knowledge of the benefits of HE (KNOW)	24. How much do you agree with the following...	It will broaden my horizons	Don't Know –(N/A) Strongly Agree – 5 Agree – 4 Neither Agree/Disagree -3 Disagree – 2 Strongly Disagree - 1
		It will challenge me intellectually	
		It will give me valuable life skills	
		It will improve my social life	
		It will enable me to earn more	
		It will enable me to get a better job	

Table 1- Participation Survey Questions

An average of the numeric responses from each student was calculated for each question, as shown below. ('Don't know' responses were excluded from the calculations).

In this way a measure of each student, and each group of students was calculated for various aspects of the students' knowledge and confidence.

Category	Source data	Whole group before mentoring A	Follow up group before mentoring B	Follow up group after mentoring C	Difference C-B
Ability to make informed Choices and knowledge about how to apply	Average of Q16_1- Q16_5 (1 to 3)	Average 2.2	Average 2.18	Average 2.38	+0.2
Knowledge of HE	Average of Q17_1 – Q17_6 (1 to 3)	Average 2.02	Average 2.02	Average 2.21	+0.19
Confidence about progression to HE	Average of Q23_1- Q23_4 (1 to 5)	Average 3.42	Average 3.52	Average 3.66	+0.14
Knowledge of the benefits of HE	Average of Q24_1 – Q24_6 (1 to 5)	Average 3.98	Average 3.99	Average 4.16	+0.17

Table 2- Analysis of Participant Survey Responses

Comparison of the responses from the students who completed both the baseline and follow up survey showed a positive increase in all the aspects measured. Responses measured on a scale from 1 to 3 the mean increased by 0.2 for those measured on a scale from 1 to 5 the mean increased by 0.16. A comparator group was not available, so it is not possible to establish a causal effect of the mentoring and attribute this change to the mentoring.

The results presented in Table 2 and Figure 1 demonstrate a consistent increase in confidence and awareness for the following categories during the mentoring programme:

1. Ability to make informed choices and knowledge about how to apply.
2. Knowledge of HE
3. Confidence about progression to HE.
4. Knowledge of the benefits of HE.

As a result, it can be confidently concluded that the mentoring had contribute to this change in a positive way.

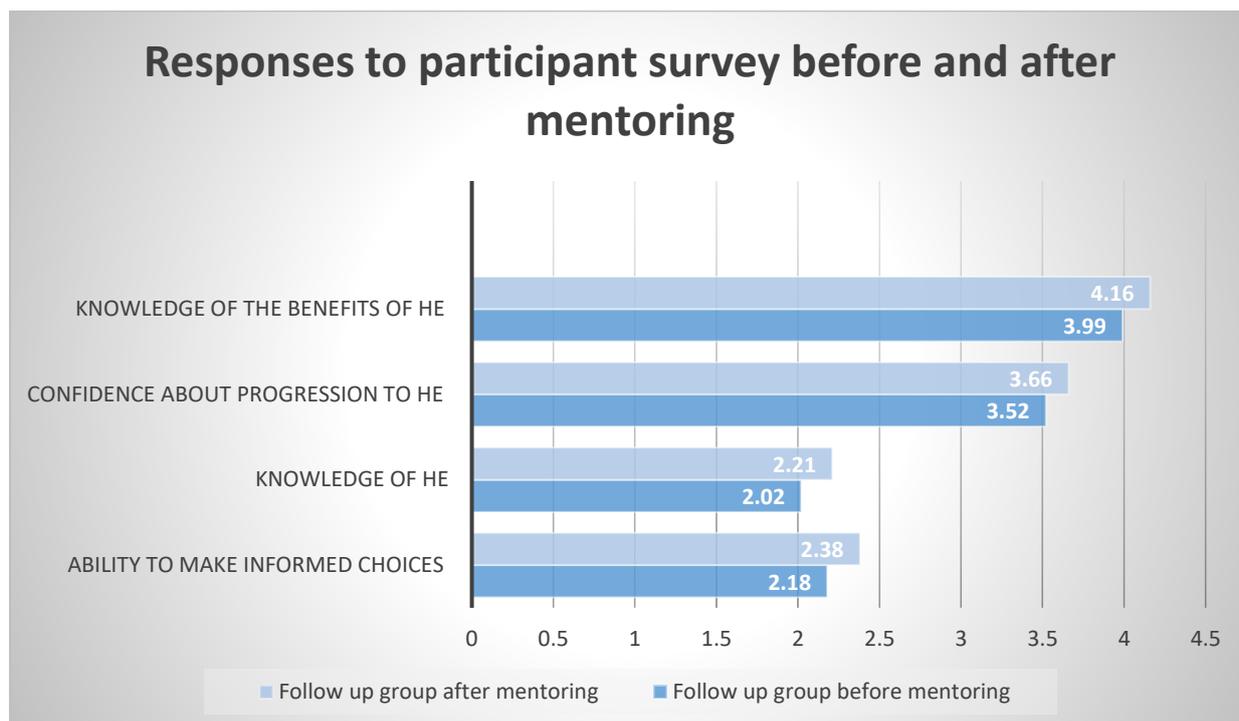


Figure 1 - Responses to participant survey before and after mentoring.

Another element of the follow up survey which provided further qualitative evidence of the impact of the programme was this question:

*'Please complete the following: 'For me being part of the WIN mentoring programme ....*

Using thematic analysis, the following themes were identified:

Theme	Number of respondents
Improved course work/ grades (UNDERSTAND)	11
Developed my skills (PRACTISE)	7
Find out about university life (KNOW)	6
Increased knowledge and understanding of subject (UNDERSTAND)	4
More confidence in future options (CHOOSE)	2
Broadened horizons (BECOME)	2
Helped with application to uni (CHOOSE)	2
Helped motivation (BECOME)	1

Table 3 - Analysis of themes

Feedback included the following comments:

*'Enabled me to get a higher grade in my coursework and has improved my general writing skill.'*

*'Has helped me develop my understanding of higher education in things such as life at uni, the costs, finding the right course and enabled me to create new strategies for revising to help me succeed'*

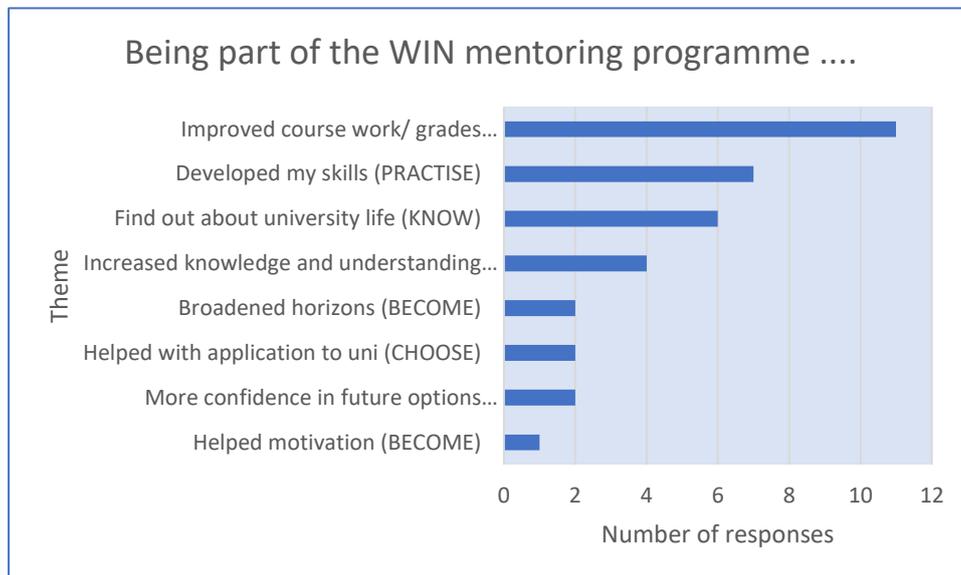


Figure 2 - Being part of the WIN Mentoring programme ...

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, the primary theme to arise from the learner post-participation survey was an improvement to coursework and overall grades, followed by developing skills and finding out more about university life.

## 4.2 LEARNER FOCUS GROUPS

Fourteen learners participated in seven on-line focus groups. The size of the groups varied from one to three. It was difficult, in an on-line environment, to engage learners in discussion with each other. Mentimeter, a voting software, was used to provide an interactive method of collecting, anonymous data, from all involved. This captured their immediate views at the start of the focus group session.

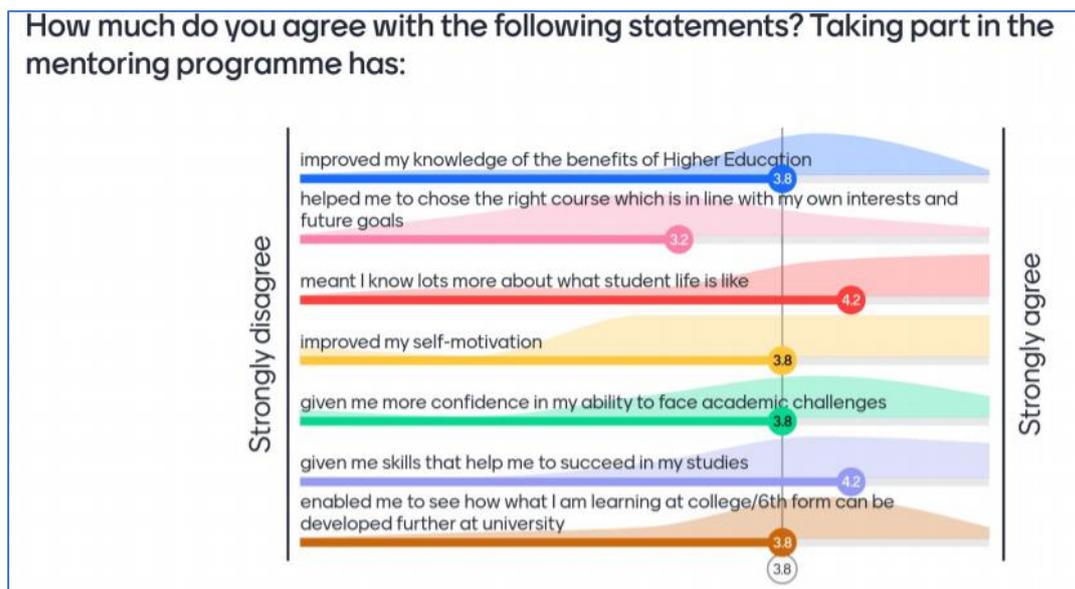


Figure 3 - Voting responses during focus groups

From this initial voting we can see that learners felt that the areas where the mentoring sessions had the most impact were:

- Giving the students the skills that will help them succeed in their studies (Practise)
- Improved knowledge of what student life is like (Know)

In some sessions learners did not use their microphones or cameras and limited feedback to 'chat', which tended to make their answers brief. A common script (appendix 2) was used for all the focus groups and the recordings were analysed to identify common themes. These themes are summarised in Figure 4.

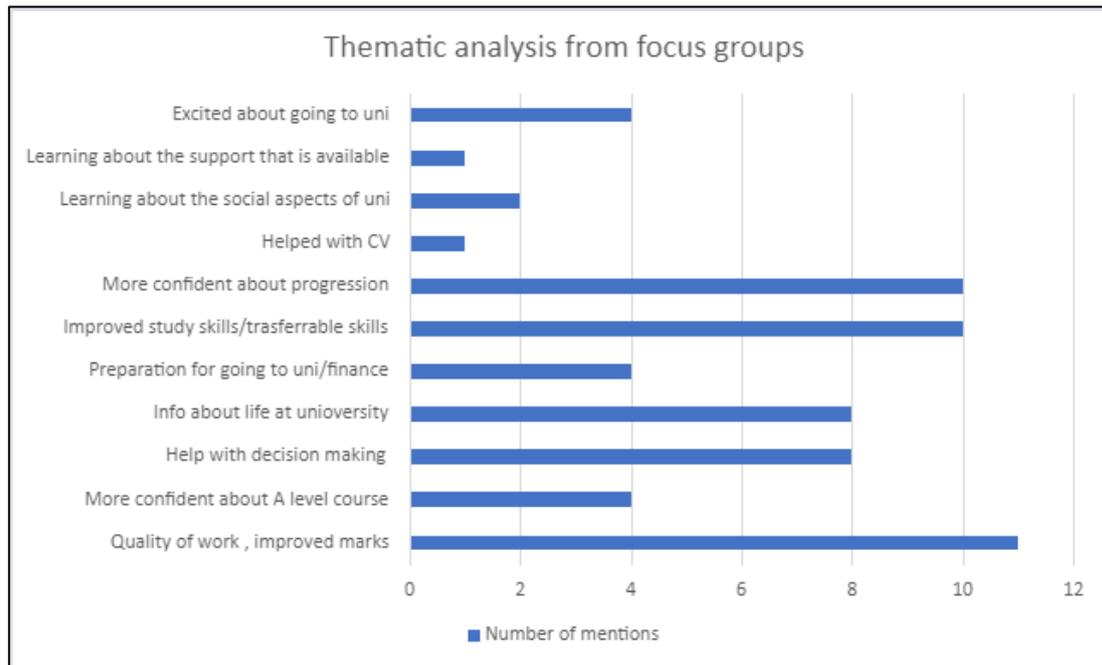


Figure 4 - Thematic analysis from focus group discussions

From these responses it is clear that learners felt that having mentoring from a current university student ambassador **improved the quality of their coursework and improved their marks**. They valued the individual feedback that they were given and the tips on how to write and or present their work. Comments included:

*'I don't think I would have done as well in my coursework and the way I write without the mentoring from xx, like it's made a huge difference'*

*'I think it really helped like me learn different ways of structuring things and different like vocab and things which was really helpful'*

*'I've honestly loved it so much and my grade is so much better than it would have been if I done it by myself'*

*'Because we do like the one-on-one sessions you can go so much more in depth whereas like for real teacher because they have so many students to mark stuff you get more general feedback which is helpful but when you go through it and really nit-pick what you've written in makes a difference.'*

*'Mentoring was less confusing and able to go at my pace.'*

**Improved study skills/transferrable skills** were also cited very often in the focus group discussions.

*'Gave me tips on how to answer longer questions.'*

*'The way I structure sentence is completely changed and been developed massively to the point that I feel really confident now. If I was asked to write about literally anything I feel like I'd know how to structure and make the sentences sound good.'*

*'Enables you to be kind of critical of your own work.'*

*'It has helped with communication about my work.'*

Learners also voiced that they felt **more confident about progression to HE** as a result of conversations with their mentor.

*'Before I didn't want to go to university at all but now I know much more about it and gaining confidence in the course through the sessions, I am now considering it.'*

*'I definitely feel confident about going and knowing that there's going to be support there and I just felt more happy about my decision now that we can talk through it.'*

Learners valued being able to find out from someone who is at university, **what life at university is really like**. They found it helped to look at halls of residence, the social aspects of university, and to find out about the support available with the mentor. This in turn helped with their choices and decisions about which course or university to choose. Several learners said they were excited about going to Uni.

### 4.3 ON-LINE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNERS

Feedback from learners during the focus groups, made it clear that the use of TEAMS to host mentoring sessions was a positive experience. They liked being online as it was very accessible, available anywhere, and made sharing work easy. They felt it was easier to meet people they did not know online than face-to-face. One student, who has a disability which makes them feel uncomfortable in a classroom setting, said that he felt more relaxed knowing that he could just turn off his camera or microphone which would not disturb the session as much as leaving the room.

The online environment was particularly suited to courses like English, History and Psychology where essays and coursework could be easily shared and worked through together. Learners studying creative subjects like photography and art benefitted from new ideas that shaped their final projects and inspired them to do further research.

Some year 13 learners would have liked some input in the first term to help them make their university course choices and write their personal statements. Most learners, however, felt that the timing of the mentoring had come at a good time for valuable help with their coursework.

#### 4.4 SUBJECT TUTOR FEEDBACK

The majority of tutors felt that the programme had a positive impact on the mentees, increasing their knowledge and confidence about progression to university (70%); greater engagement with learning (60%); developed their study skills (90%); Improved quality of their work (60%); increased knowledge of subject (70%); Know more about life at university (60%).

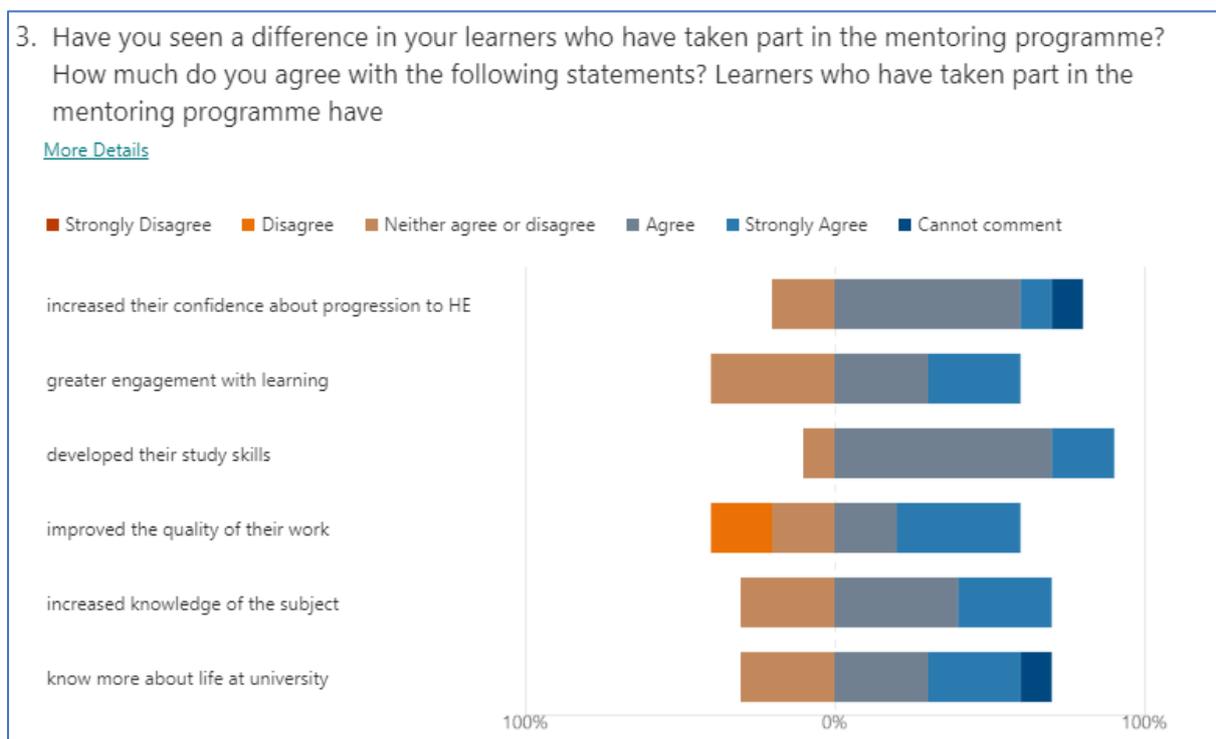


Figure 5 - Feedback from tutors about the impact of the mentoring programme on learners

Notable comments from the tutor feedback gathered include:

*'It does seem to have been a positive experience for the students involved and it is good to have another point of view/way of describing content to students'*

*'Having a mentor at HE level promotes a sense of equality between students and staff as the mentor is a stepping stone and can model appropriate student engagement'*



Figure 6 - What has been important to the success of the programme?

Good communication and flexibility were cited as important characteristics of the mentors for a successful programme along with subject knowledge and ability to engage the mentees. Tutors would have liked more time to engage with the mentors.

#### 4.5 MENTORS FOCUS GROUP

Two mentors took part in the focus group. It was clear from their responses that they had put in a considerable amount of time into planning and preparing their sessions. The first couple of sessions were spent getting to know the individual needs of their mentees.

Feedback included:

*'The more confident needed less support and I was there just to give them hints and tips. Others needed more time and I began to extend my sessions with them. I was only able to identify this after 2 sessions.'*

*'Some, but not all mentees turned their cameras on, with those that did it was a lot easier to build a rapport and a relationship.'*

Mentors also benefitted from the role of 'mentor'. They reported that it had given them a refreshing opportunity to revisit some of the subjects that they had done at A-level. One is planning a career as a teacher and the experience of mentoring has confirmed for her that this is the right path for them. Another has followed a creative path, but mentoring maths reminded her how much she liked maths and technology and acted as good revision prior to her masters.

#### 4.6 ON-LINE ENVIRONMENT FOR MENTORS

Mentors felt that mentoring online using teams, had many advantages. It was more flexible as no travelling was involved. It was much easier to fit it around other things, to reschedule if required and provided less distractions. For mentees it provided someone who was neutral, who could understand the pressures and the deadlines that students experienced.

If the mentoring had been face-to-face, it would not have been logistically possible to get the range of mentors from a variety of university partners to the college campus in Weston Super Mare.

Mentors did not feel it would add to the existing programme to have a physical meeting although it might be beneficial for the mentees to visit them at their university to learn about the university aspects such as accommodation, support, and finance.

From the mentor's perspective it was very helpful to have met the subject tutor to find out about the mentees and the topics they were studying.

To enhance the information that they had about mentees expectations, they suggested that the mentees complete a short questionnaire before the programme begins highlighting what they want to get out of it. Another suggestion was to have an online group session, with break out rooms, where the mentors met the mentees and did some ice breaking and ‘get to know you’ activities.

They gave these final messages for mentees:

*‘If you are feeling a bit unmotivated, definitely sign up for it. It gets you into the mind frame of just getting on with it.’*

*‘Just show up. You get the revision time, you will get something out of it.’*

And for mentors:

*‘Even if you have no teaching experience, if you are a student ambassador you will be able to do this. I would encourage any ambassador to do this. It has been a huge benefit to me and I am sure it would be for them.’*

*‘Just do it, very rewarding, it’s helpful and it makes you feel more confident with your own skills and then you can help someone which is a really fun thing to do.’*

#### 4.7 GRADE ANALYSIS

The head of 6<sup>th</sup> form provided grades for all the mentees for each subject that they studied. The difference between the start grade and end grade for each student/subject combination was analysed. There was a total of 154 combinations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year learners. Of these 47 were for learners who had been mentored in the subject; 131 included all the subjects for mentored students. The number of times the end grade exceeded the start grade, equalled the end grade, and fell short of the end grade was counted for each group and is shown in Table 4.

	total student grade combinations	Improved grade		No Change in grade		lower grade	
		end grade better than start grade	end grade better than start grade (%)	end grade same as start grade	end grade same as start grade (%)	end grade worse than start grade	end grade worse than start grade (%)
All	154	83	54%	42	27%	28	18%
just mentored subjects	47	30	64%	11	23%	6	13%
mentored students only	131	71	54%	36	27%	24	18%

Table 4 - Analysis of final A level grades

In the mentored subjects 64% of the final grades exceeded the start grade in comparison to only 54% in the overall group and 54% in the mentored group when all subjects were included. This demonstrates that the **mentoring had contributed to improved grades** as the learners had thought.

#### 4.8 HE PROGRESSION

21 of the 51 second year mentees have confirmed places to study at a variety of HE Institutions, the most popular destination being University of Plymouth. Figure 7 represents the range of HE destinations for the mentees that had confirmed places, in addition to their confirmed courses. Others have not yet confirmed their places.

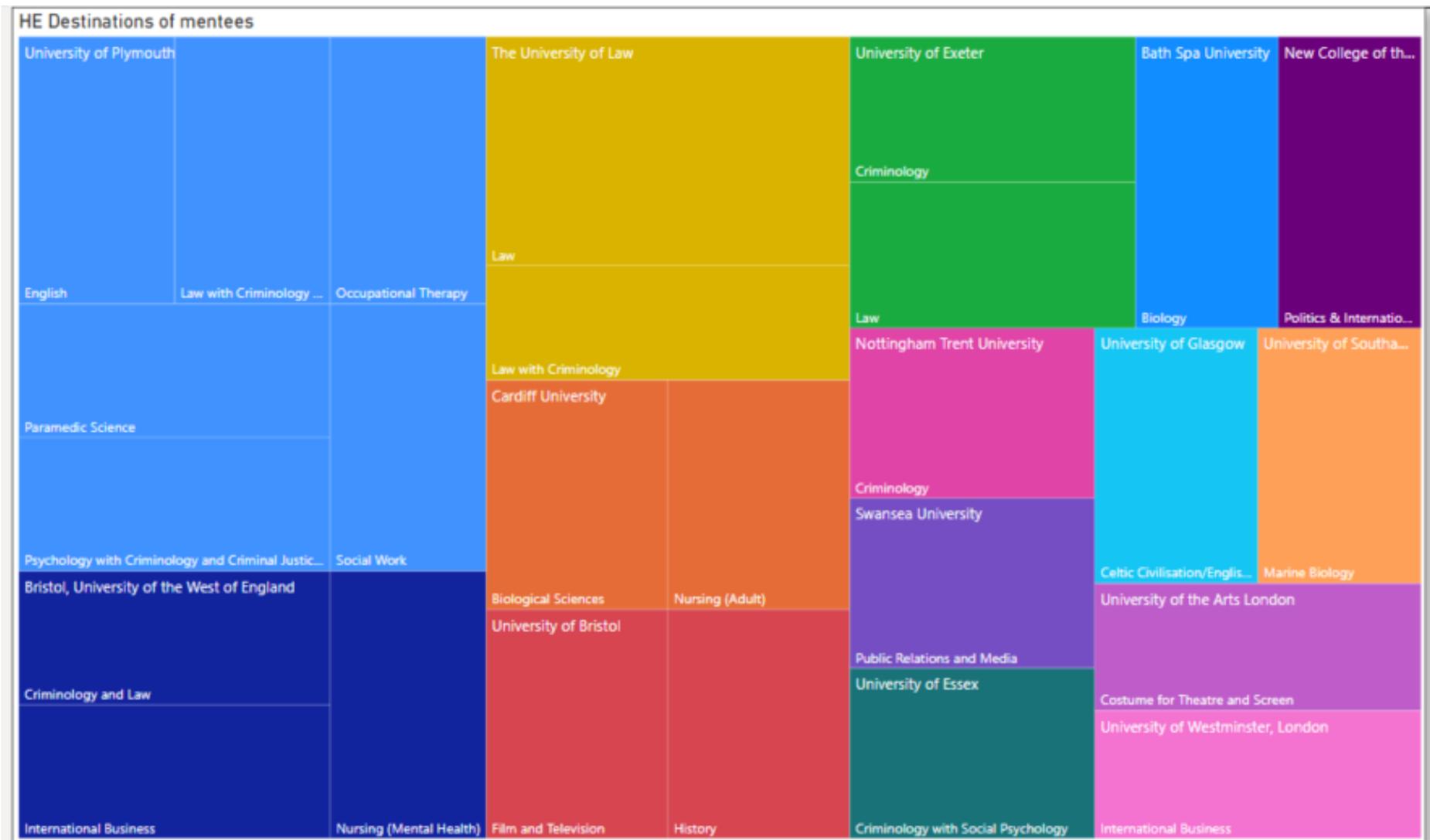


Figure 7 - HE Destinations of mentees

## 4.9 POINTS OF VALUE

Feedback received from learners, mentors and staff has identified significant value in the A-Level mentoring scheme beyond the benefit to learners. We have subsequently identified 5 key points of value through this pilot scheme: to the learners, the mentors, the college, the HE Institutions that participated, and the wider WIN programme. This is detailed further in Figure 7:



Figure 8 - Points of Value from the A-Level mentoring scheme.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

---

### 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the A-Level mentoring scheme provided an opportunity to deliver academic mentoring, based on subject interest, in a WP environment. Overall, everyone involved in the pilot project has been very positive about the programme. They have seen a positive impact on a broad range of outcomes that enable young people to make informed choices about their future progression choices.

Feedback suggests that learners have enjoyed the sessions, with their primary motivation being the academic mentoring. This has helped to improve their coursework, grades, and study skills. A by-product of the sessions has been finding out more about university life, the support available, and what to expect, which has led to increased confidence in their ability to progress. We can therefore conclude that higher education ambassadors have provided these learners with a role model from which to develop more accurate perceptions of higher education.

Mentors have also gained valuable teaching and communication skills which will help them in their future careers, based on the feedback received. With some highlighting it has re-engaged them with areas of the subject they had forgotten they were interested in.

The relationship with student ambassadors and mentees was key to increasing knowledge and awareness of higher education, confidence, motivation, and attitudes towards education. Mentoring was most beneficial where the mentors and the mentees academic backgrounds and aspirations aligned.

Online mentoring using teams had many advantages over traditional face-to-face mentoring. No travelling is required, it is more accessible, easier to reschedule, and easier to share documents and coursework. Learners were also more comfortable online and found it an easier environment to meet people they did not know. Mentoring worked best when mentees had their cameras and microphones on.

In addition, this pilot scheme offered an innovative approach to the delivery of GATSBY Benchmarks 3, 4, and 7 during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were devised for future delivery of the A-Level mentoring scheme. Feedback from learners, mentors and tutors informed these recommendations, in addition to overall feedback and experiences from the Weston College HEAs.

1. Investigate how the programme could be extended to other schools and colleges.
2. Offer two waves of intervention to best suit the timetable of year 12 and year 13 students.
  - a. October to December – Open to year 13 in preparation for HE applications.
  - b. February to May – Open to year 12 and year 13 in preparation for progression decisions.
3. It is important to ensure that mentors and tutors have a clearer definition of the mentoring programme, identifying the academic nature of the intervention and its wider impact. Improvement to guidance and documentation i.e., Mentoring Expectations (pre-agreed working hours per week) and Mentoring Good Practice document would also be beneficial.
4. College tutors and HEI mentor should meet on a regular basis, with tutors and mentors meeting fortnightly (minimum of 20 mins virtual 1:1).
5. All Teams pages to be set up by learning technologist to ensure consistency and allow better use of Microsoft Insights to reduce the admin burden.
6. It is suggested that mentees work towards having their cameras and microphones on for better engagement.
7. Recruiting from a wider range of universities would mean that this provision could be offered to learners from a variety of subject areas.
8. Where appropriate include a university campus visit for students. This will allow them to meet their mentors at their university and gain first-hand experience of campus life.
9. Building in review checkpoints to programme delivery will improve overall communication and monitor the process.
10. For better academic outcomes, match mentees academic subject with the mentor's degree subject.

## 6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

CFE Research. (2020). *An Independent Review of Evaluation Evidence Submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships*. Leicester: CFE Research. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/e3989a60-1314-43f5-ae0-7e94ae3946da/cfe-review-of-uni-connect-evaluation-evidence.pdf>.

Gatsby (2021) 'Good Career Guidance', Webpage, Retrieved 20 July 2021, from <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance>.

Gatsby. (2014). *Good Career Guidance Report*. Gatsby. Retrieved from <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf>.

NERUPI. (2021). 'NERUPI Framework Overview'. Webpage, Retrieved 19 July 2021 from <http://www.nerupi.co.uk/>.

Office for Students. (2019). *Access and Participation Standards of Evidence* [PDF]. Office for Students. Retrieved from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/6971cf8f-985b-4c67-8ee2-4c99e53c4ea2/access-and-participation-standards-of-evidence.pdf>

Office for Students (2021) 'Young Participation by Area', Webpage, Retrieved 20 July 2021, from <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/>.

## 7 APPENDIX 1: INTERVENTION / ACTIVITY STREAM

What is the issue or problem our activity is designed to solve?	How does our activity solve the issue or problem?	What are the 'active ingredients' that make this happen?	What do we need to measure to prove this is happening?	How do we measure this?
Concerns about getting the required grades.	If learners receive more help and feedback on their work the quality of their work will improve, and they will get better grades.	Opportunity to learn subject knowledge from mentees. Greater engagement with learning.	Improvement in quality of academic work – assessments/course work. Greater engagement with learning.	Predicted/actual grades. Tutor feedback. Attendance/ learning analytics.
Lack of knowledge about life at university.	If learners can talk to current undergraduates, they will learn more about life at university and feel more confident about this as an option for them.	Discussions between mentor and mentee. Giving the learners insight of HE experiences via the mentors. Relationship between mentor and mentee.	Increased knowledge of university life.	Ask mentee before and after. Participant survey. Focus group.
Not prepared for study at HE Level.	If learners get feedback on their work from undergraduates, they will be more prepared for study at HE level.	Feedback from mentors. Mentees understand the importance of these skills for success at HE level.	More prepared for HE study. Improved study skills – problem solving/ group work/ research and referencing.	Tutor feedback. Student feedback.
Drop in UCAS applications from A level students at Weston College.	If learners are aware of the benefits of university degree and university experience, then they are more likely to apply.	Removal of barriers to progression. Feeling that HE is the right option for them.	Applications.	Application statistics.
Some learners are unsure about what to do next.	If learners have the opportunity to discuss their options with someone of similar age and background, then they will be able to make a decision about the future career path.	More informed about HE. Help with decision making.	Change in intentions. Reduction in 'Don't knows'.	Participant survey. Student feedback. Destination data.
What constraints or limitations that we need to consider?	Commitment of mentors and mentees, relationship between mentors and mentees.			

## 8 APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP AT WESTON – SCRIPT

---

### **Research question:**

How has taking part in the A level mentoring programme changed learners:

- knowledge of life at university
- confidence about their futures
- study skills
- knowledge of subject
- quality of work

### **Introduction**

My name is \*\*\* and I am interested to hear about your experience of the mentoring program.

I am interested to understand your views about this. What you feel has been the impact of the programme on you. How it can be enhanced for future learners.

Everything you say will be confidential, in that I won't use your name when I write up the study at the end, and no-one outside the research team will see your individual answers. You do not have to answer every question, and you can choose to withdraw your answers if you change your mind. It will last about 40 minutes, and I would like to record our conversation so that I have an accurate record of your responses. Do you have any questions?

Ground rules – put up hand to speak – one at a time. Use chat.

Would you like to go ahead?

### **Opening:**

Tell me a bit about yourself. What are you studying? What do you like to do in your spare time?

Then we will do the voting using Mentimeter.

### **Mentimeter Questions**

How much do you agree with the following statements?

Taking part in the A level mentoring programme has:

- improved my knowledge of the benefits of Higher Education
- helped me to choose the right course which is in line with my own interests and future goals
- meant I know lots more about what student life is like
- improved my self-motivation

- given me more confidence in my ability to face academic challenges
- given me skills that help me to succeed in my studies.
- enabled me to see how what I am learning at college/6th form can be developed further at university

**Main: descriptive** – give an account of something

Could you describe a particular mentoring session?

What extra knowledge did you gain through this experience? How have you used it?

**Evaluative:** - how do you feel towards something

How did being part of the mentoring programme change your attitude towards higher education and university?

Do you feel confident about going to university? If not, why not?

**Structural** - what has influenced you

In what ways, if any, did taking part in the mentoring affect your views on the future?

How has being part of the mentoring program helped you feel more prepared for university?

What skills do you think you have developed?

**Compare** – on-line/face to face

What do you feel are the advantages of mentoring on-line?

What would be better if it were face-to-face?

**Future improvements**

How can we improve the programme?

What else would you like to help you plan and succeed in your future careers?

What would you say to other students about the programme?

**Ending** – thank you any questions?

Summary

## 9 APPENDIX 3: BOX AND WHISPER PLOT OF CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE BEFORE AND AFTER MENTORING

Derived from responses to the baseline and follow up surveys.

