Evaluation of the University of Warwick's outreach programme, UniTracks: The Warwick Young Achievers' Programme:

Report 7:

E-mentoring, 2016-2017

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Executive summary

Overall findings

The first offering of the E-Mentoring programme to Year 12 members of UniTracks was a success. The launch event ('Meet the Mentors and Mentees'), the Brightside e-mentoring platform, and the process of mentoring were all successful elements of the programme. In addition, there was evidence from the mentee interviews that the process of mentoring had strengthen mentees' attitudes in respect of their academic work, understanding of university, and ability to make informed choices about degree and university choices.

Evidence from mentors and mentees stressed the following strengths of the e-mentoring programme:

- It was a relaxed, mentee-friendly system that enabled mentees to ask a very wide range of questions that were relevant to their school lives, university and course choices, university life, and possible post-school pathways.

- The Brightside e-platform was easy to use and effective.

- The mentors and mentees who attended the 'Meet the Mentors and Mentees' event thought that it was important, helping them to build quickly a good online working relationship.

- The matching of mentee and mentor academic interests was a successful element of the programme, enabling mentees to access help and advice around their own work and in relation to degree choice.

- It was a valued programme in the eyes of mentees, and mentors.

Evidence from the mentees and mentors suggested that the e-mentoring programme impacted on important areas of mentee thinking:

- Mentees benefited from study skills, and extension reading advice provided by their mentors.

- Mentors provided advice and information about degree courses that changed the way in which mentees thought about course options after school.

- Mentees were introduced to subject disciplines they were unaware of, and subject combinations that they did not know about.

- Much of the information that mentors provided for mentees had an important reassurance element, making mentees less apprehensive about university life and study.

- Mentees said that the information and advice that they received was additional to that which their schools provided.

- Mentees were enthused about university life and study by their interactions with the undergraduate mentors.

Recommendations

There are a small number of recommendations, relating to the programme itself, and to the evaluation of the programme.

- The 'Meet the Mentors and Mentees' event is an important element of the programme, enabling the school students and the undergraduates to establish a good, opening relationship on which to build the e-mentoring process. Some schools were reluctant to release pupils to attend the event, and several of the interviewees were not able to attend. Given that the event is the only school release required for Year 12 UniTracks members, schools should be strongly recommended to release these pupils. Similarly, the mentors should be required to attend.

- Some thought might be given to organizing a mid-way point face-to-face meeting between mentors and mentees. This was requested by three of the mentees, and would be a good, optional, element of the programme.

- One of the mentees wondered if a genera message board could be added to the e-platform, to enable the swapping of questions and answers between those involved in the programme. Some version of this might be considered.

- In relation to the evaluation, although good data was collected through interviews with mentors and mentees, it is hoped that a larger sampling will be possible in 2017-2018. In particular, it is hoped that the mentors will be directed to ask the mentees to log on to a CEDAR site in order to complete anonymous surveys at two points in the e-mentoring programme. In addition, mentors and mentees should be alerted at the outset that the evaluation will take place and that they are encouraged to take part.

1. Background

1.1 UniTracks, and Year 12 members

UniTracks forms part of the University of Warwick's widening participation programme. It engages between 440-520 school students from Years 10 – 13 (ages 14 – 18 years) in a programme of outreach and widening participation events aimed at talented/highly able school students (top 10-5% nationally) from 23 partner schools. The participating school students all meet strict eligibility requirements relating, for example, to no parental history of higher education, residents of low participation neighbourhoods, and residents of areas of significant socio-economic deprivation. The overriding aim of UniTracks is to support school student members to successfully apply to the UK's most competitive, research intensive universities.

Each of the UniTracks' cohorts are offered differing interventions, events and support for each year of their membership. For the Year 12 members, who are in school or college sixth forms, the UniTracks' focus is on preparing for As and A levels, and for the process of choosing and applying for university. UniTracks' own statement regarding membership in Year 12 is:

> 'Now that you are I Year 12, in sixth form or college, we want to start helping you make the most of your AS and A levels and help you translate the thinking you've been doing about university in successful applications. We are going to do this by offering as much in the way of exam revision as we can as well as giving you practical avice about how to write personal statements, navigate UCAS, and make sure you are getting what you need to make the right decisions for you.'[1]

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[1] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach/programmes/unitracks/year12, accessed 29 August, 2017.

There were two 'events' for Year 12 UniTracks' members, 2016-2017. First, was the 'E Scholar Programme Graduation', which was held on Saturday, 24 September, 2016; also the University of Warwick's Open Day. The second 'event' was the 'E-Mentoring' programme, which is the subject of this evaluation report.

1.2 E-Mentoring

The academic year, 2016-2017, saw the introduction of a new programme for Year 12 members, announced as 'New for 2016 – working I partnership with the Brightside Trust, all Year 12 UniTracks Participants will have the opportunity to be mentored by a current Warwick student during this critical academic year'[2]. This programme started with an induction meeting, held at the University of Warwick, on Wednesday, 16th November, for the mentees and their undergraduate mentors. This brought together the five undergraduate mentors, and 23 UniTracks' mentees. A researcher from the evaluation attended the event, and provided an overall observational note on it:

'UniTracks

Mentee Induction: UniTracks Online Mentoring - Wednesday 16th November 2016

Observations and engagement

Started 30 minutes late as some students missed their train. Meant some students had been there well over half an hour before it started, but they seemed happy to be talking to friends they had made previously.

Lot of talking by the facilitator to get the session started, got some head nodding regarding a question about A Levels, no questions were asked at the end.

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[2] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach/programmes/unitracks/year12, accessed 29 August, 2017.

Not all mentors or mentees were present so two mentees had to go with another mentor for the activities. Had an ice breaker activity where I could hear the mentors talking more at the beginning but the mentees eventually warmed up. All participants seemed to be listening to their groups, lots of laughing from each group (there were 5), conversation was reasonably equal especially after a few minutes.

Small group discussion on what is a mentor. Everyone said something within group. Feedback was trickier, even from the mentors but someone answered eventually.

The mentees enjoyed discussing the messages regarding whether they were appropriate, very eager to talk after the first one, could also hear them discussing further things and ideas for what they could put for their first message. Good discussion during this activity and safeguarding was also discussed.

They had a short break in the same room, they all seemed to enjoy mingling and congregated round the food and drink. Could hear some conversation and no one was by themselves.

The final activity was a spider diagram on flip chart with ideas of what to ask your mentor. There was discussion and wiring from all groups. The facilitator was going round helping students to access the messaging system on their phones.'

Following this event, the mentors and mentees were able to access an electronic platform provided by the Brightside Trust. The Brightside Trust's saw the programme as providing:

'young people [with] the opportunity to talk to student mentors and learn more about what it's like to be a university student. Conversation topics included, how students had made their university choices and the kinds of things to consider when

making a decision about university, what student life is like and what it's like to study at university'.[3]

2. The evaluation

As part of its continuing evaluation of the UniTracks programme the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) carried out an evaluation of the E-Mentoring programme, 2016-2017. This report of the evaluation is the seventh report in the ongoing evaluation of UniTracks, 2016-18. Evaluation reports on each aspect of the UniTracks' offer during the period will build into a three year picture of the UniTracks' programme. The evaluation of the UniTracks programme has three key aims:

- To track attitudinal change among UniTracks members in relation to higher education and post-higher education choices.

- To assess the quality of UniTracks design at pupil, parent and teacher level.

- To provide case studies of attainment at GCSE and A level.

The evaluation of the E-Mentoring programme, 2016-2017, focused on the first and second of the key evaluation aims, drawing upon the views of the mentees and mentors.

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[3] E-mail from Brightside Trust to evaluation, 25 September, 2017.

2.1 This evaluation

This report provides an account of the E-Mentoring programme, 2016-2017. The intention of the evaluation was to gather data from mentors and mentees in January, 2017, after there had been time for both groups to experience the mentoring, and, again, in May/June 2017, in order to gather data on how the first academic year of mentoring was seen by mentors and mentees. The data was all gathered through recorded, fully transcribed, telephone interviews. In addition, very limited engagement data was provided by The Brightside Trust.

The five undergraduate mentors were all contacted in December, 2016, and all five were interviewed in December or January. They were contacted again in May, and two were subsequently interviewed in June. Similarly, once the list of active mentees was available, in the first week of January, the 20 active mentees were invited to take part in the evaluation, with data being collected in January, and June. There were difficulties in recruiting the mentees to the evaluation that are covered in 4.1 below.

3. E-Mentoring – the mentors' perspective

The five Warwick undergraduate mentors were interviewed in January, and two of the five were interviewed again in June. The interviews were carried out by telephone. Each interview was recorded (with informed consent) and fully transcribed for analysis. The interviews were based on semi-structured interview schedules (see interview schedules, Appendices 1 and 2), and the analysis was carried out using the topics of the interview schedule in addition to emergent topics from each interview. The topics presented here are:

- Background and becoming a mentor.
- Induction and support.
- The mentor-mentee meet-up, 16th November.

- The process of e-mentoring.

- Benefits accruing to the mentees.

- Benefits accruing to mentors.

- Developing the mentor role.

In addition, data from the follow-up interviews with the two mentors who were interviewed in June, 2017, is also presented.

3.1 Background and becoming a mentor

All the undergraduate mentors were experienced in relevant areas, such as, outreach, mentoring, and widening participation work. They had done work as Warwick Ambassadors, with the Sutton Trust, and as mentors. They came from a range of academic disciplines, for example, history, biochemistry, biomedical sciences, and physics. One of the mentors had themselves been a school student member of the precursor to the UniTracks programme - Goal. This student gave an interesting account of the impact that being a member of Goal had on university choice:

'I think it did have an influence. I had never been to a university before, so it was good to have that exposure [to Warwick] at quite an early stage, and Warwick always stuck in my mind because of the [Goal] programme, so when I came to apply, because I'd visited the university and I liked the camps, it was the first university that came int my mind.' (UG5)

The other mentors also made links between their own school days and choosing universities and courses. For example, one said:

'I saw the advertisement for the peer mentoring, and I thought it would be a good idea, because when I was in Year 11, or sixth for, I really didn't know what was going on with this whole uni stuff, s I would have liked a mentor, so I thought I might as well; become one so I can help people and give them advice [and…] I think the kids that are on the [UniTracks] programme, they come from a certain kind of background, from certain schools that are at a disadvantage – that's what they said to us, and I went to a secondary school which is in the same … […] so I can relate to where they are coming from, and tell them what I did, so, hopefully, it would help them in their decisions.'   (UG3).

3.2 Induction and support

All the mentors were happy with the training and support the received for their role. They received training from the Brightside Trust on using the e-mentoring platform, child protection, the role of a student mentor, and, in addition, they were given support during the mentoring by a member of UniTracks. The induction and support was outlined by one of the mentors as being:

'really good; we had a training session and they spoke a bit about how we would define a mentor, what we would expect from a mentor relationship and then also what kind of thing is appropriate to talk about, what's not appropriate to talk about. And then they've also been good since we started and keeping us on track, they'll message the mentees if they haven't spoken to us for a while and they also sent out a timetable – you don't have to stick to it – but of rough things they think you should cover at various points throughout the year, so the first chance then you just try and build a bit of rapport, get to know what they're interested in, say a bit about yourself

and then it's more about their setting goals and what they would like to achieve over the next couple of months. (UG1)

3.3 Meet the Mentees day, 16th November

The mentors all thought that the 'Meet the Mentees' day went well. They liked the opportunity to meet some of the UniTracks' members they were mentoring, and thought that the ice-breaker sessions worked well, and that both mentors and mentees got on well. For example, 'I thought it went well. Everyone was talking. They [the mentees] were split into small groups with a mentor with a few mentees doing different activities, and everyone was talkative, and I think it went well,' (UG5). The mentors said that the meeting enhanced the effectiveness of the mentoring process, helping to overcome the anonymity of e-mentoring. One of the mentors explained:

'It [the meeting] was, like, icebreaker activities s that you got to know them, which I think is good, because if I just had to e-mail someone that I hadn't met before it would be different to if I had met them. So it made it a lot easier for me to e-mail her, because we talked about stuff we like, and it turns out we like a lot of the same things, so it was easy to start a conversation with her then online.' (UG3)

This development of a personal relationship is important to the process of e-mentoring, and one of the mentors made the point that only one of her three mentees had been able to attend.

According to the mentors, their mentees asked them plenty of questions about university. One of the mentors also explained that her mentee was interested in adding to her reading at the moment, and not just in future concerns regarding university life:

'She [the mentee] was interested a lot in the extra-curricular side at university, how to do a work life balance and get involved in things, but, also, because I mentioned one of my focuses at university is gender history, said she was quite interested in knowing more about that, so anything interesting in the way of articles, or anything that I read...' (UG1).

3.4 The process of e-mentoring

The mentors reported that in terms of the frequency of messaging from their mentees, there was a range, with some mentees being very proactive and often messaging, while others were far less so. All of the mentors felt that, overall, the messaging worked well, and they were quite happy with variations in frequency and detail of messages. For example, one of the mentors explained:

'You are supposed to email them once a week but it depends on how much they contact you. So, for example, I had one that I had quite a few email exchanges back and for the last week but then I haven't had anything for about 2 or 3 days now but then I did send them off a bit of a list of stuff to go and look into and to help them make their decision. I shouldn't say list – a few options to have a discussion and think about. Some days it can come in more but, as we've always been told in our group, extremely busy. We're more than likely to give them one email each week but for me personally if I'm free, if I'm on the bus or something and I get an email through it's quite nice to be able to give a response, a reply, and get the

conversation going as quickly as possible. Sometimes these things are a bit urgent in their mind because they know they've only got a bit of free time right now before they get bombarded with exams.' (UG4)

This mentor also went on to give a good account of the type of topic that a mentee asked the mentor about, and the response she gave:

'She was mainly talking about she wanted to study Medicine so she was asking me first of all about the A2B Project at Birmingham and then Realising Opportunities. And so there was a discussion about that and she wasn't sure which one to take and I advised her towards Realising Opportunities because it included Birmingham as well and other universities; even though she wants to go to Birmingham she can still have her back up option or potentially other options if they are part of RO she'll have that reduced offer.' (UG4)

Two of the mentors noted that they found it easier to develop an ongoing dialogue with mentees who were thinking about studying similar disciplines at university, than with mentees were not interested in the subjects studied by the undergraduates. However, from the whole group of mentors, it was clear that it was more likely that mentees and mentors were, in fact, matched in terms of their particular subject interests.

3.5 Benefits accruing to the mentees.

The mentors provided similar responses to questions about the benefits that they thought the mentees were acquiring from being part of the mentoring programme. Four of the five interviewees said that the mentees were receiving 'reassurance' about choosing, applying

for, and attending university. All of the mentors said that they thought the mentees were benefiting from having a source of trusted, up-to-date, reliable information about university and university life:

'I think the first one [benefit] is that they are making an informed decision, because I think a lot of young people, particularly myself at that age, because none of my family went to university or anything like that. I was completely making the decision on a whim, scraping information together, not knowing if the information was right or anything like that, but just happy to trust it. It's quite good for them [the mentees] to make an informed decision, and they're going to university knowing "I want to go to campus or non-campus, I want to go to this university and study this course".' (UG4)

Another mentor put the point as 'it's nice for them to have an extra resource, someone there you know that has legitimate answers and not just someone random on a forum' UG2). There was also benefit from knowing someone who was at university, as one mentor said of one of her mentees, 'she told me when I met her that I'm the only person she knows that goes to university' (UG1). In addition, one of the mentors made the point that being part of a mentoring scheme focused on university gave the mentees a competitive edge when it came to applying for university. The same mentor (UG4) also noted that she was providing information about non-university options, enabling informed post-school choice.

In addition to the benefits associated with finding out about courses and universities, one of the mentors also made an important observation regarding the opportunity having a mentor gave a mentee when it came to expressing enthusiasm for academic interests:

'In particular, I think she seems to know that I'm taking a interest in her as well, and I think she's slowly opening up even more because for once in her life maybe it's not geeky to talk about the fact that she loves English and that there is someone who can share the passion for it, who is also passionate about their subject. I think she's slowly getting more confident in the fact that it's obviously a different world going from secondary school to university, and the fact that you're no longer judged for being academic and liking academia.' (UG1).

This discovery, on the part of the mentee, of a like-minded person who was interested and engaged by academic study, and who was at university, was an important benefit for the mentee.

3.6 Benefits accruing to the mentors

The mentors all expressed strong support for the value of this programme, and said that the main benefit that they got from being part of it was the sense that they were helping younger people to make better choices about their post-school, and university lives. In addition, the interviewees said that being part of the schemer had boosted self-confidence, was good experience, was useful for future job and training applications, and was a good personal development opportunity. A typical response to a question regarding benefits enjoyed by the mentors was:

'It's nice to realise, in terms of my own personal development, how far I have come since I was at that age. Because I do see a lot of similarities in the way that you're quite nervous, you don't know much about the world, an yet it's kind of reaffirmed for me how much I've developed at university, because I ca tel at the beginning that [name] in particular must be quite shy, but I realise how much I don't now have a

problem talking with new people. [...] I just recently got accepted onto the Frontline graduate scheme for social work with children and families, so I obviously spoke about the widening participation work I've done a lot. It's been amazing for the amount of opportunities I've had through that scheme to get to work with young people and especially this one [e-mentoring] it's like building a relationship over time, and I think it realy did help in my interview to talk about that.' (UG1)

3.7 Developing the mentor role

The mentors were asked if they had suggestions about how the e-mentoring pr0hrammne, and the mentor role, might be developed for future offerings. Overall, the mentors were positive about all the programme's aspects – the organisation, the face-to-face meeting, the Brightside site, and the concept. As one mentor said when asked if they could think of any improvements: 'I'm not sure. I think the basic concept is sound really. The website is great an easy to use. The training was good. From my side anyway everything seems good. I'm honestly not sure how I would improve it', (UG5). Nonetheless, suggestion were made in respect of the e-platform, the numbers of young people mentored, and face-to-face meetings.

One of the mentors (UG2) wondered if there was scope to extend he programme to a greater number of school students, with the specific aim of reaching young people from less proactive schools. Another mentor suggested changes to the Brightside e-platform: 'The website is very functional but it is quite plain. I feel like there could be some more interactive features, like something like personality quizzes, and stuff like that. When you look at it, it does seem very black and white, just question, question, question, with words', (UG1). A clearer suggestion came from mentor UG3 regarding the possibility of another face-to-face meeting:

'You know when we had the Meet the Mentor day? I think half way through the whole year maybe you should have another day so you can actually discuss the things you've been talking about online if the mentees are able to come to Warwick again and they could even like … So mine's into like looking at Science subjects and Biology and stuff – I could give her a tour of like the Biology Department and show her the Labs and stuff so you can personalise it and it will be easier and give them an advantage of when they're going to apply for uni because they know what it will be like exactly.' (UG3)

The importance placed on face-to-face meeting as a supporting element to the process of e-mentoring by UG3 also reinforces the importance of having all the mentees attend the initial face-to-face event.

3.8 The follow-up interviews

Although all the mentors agreed to be interviewed a second time (during the summer), in the event only two of the interviewees were, in fact, interviewed in June. These were UG1 and UG5. It may well be that the timing of the interviews, in the run-up to, and during, the university examination period, was not conducive to giving time. However, it was necessary to allow the longest possible period for the e-mentoring to have run before a second interview.

The purpose of the second, follow-up, interview was to get the reflections of the mentors on the e-mentoring programme after seven months of its operation. The interview schedule is presented in Appendix 2, and the main questions, 1 – 6, form the structure of the data presented here. Although only two of the mentors were interviewed, the data presented

here is of interest, with the interviewees providing clear, reflective commentary on their experience of mentoring over two and a half terms.

3.8.1 Overall assessment of the mentoring programme

Both mentors were very positive in their overall assessment of the mentoring programme. They praised the programme for enabling good, effective working relationships to be built, for being flexible, and for allowing the mentees to have the space to ask any sort of question about university life. The mentors also said that they enjoyed being part of the programme too. Mentor UG1 explained:

'It is a good scheme. I'm getting a lot out of it, and I think the mentees are as well, but, then, obviously, it does all depend on their engagement, and I think some are more engaged than others. And I think it's good because it is quite casual, and not really a strict structure. There's so many things that are able to ask and I've always told my students [mentees] that if it's a personal question I might answer it, but I have ones like, "I dunno if this is a stupid question, but how many weeks off do you get at Christmas?", or, "What's the library like?" – it's the kind of things they'd never ask an academic, but, especially like about societies and clubs, so I think it is really good for them to get talk to someone on a more casual basis'. (UG1 (ii))

The only negative point that either of the mentees could think of was that sometimes work commitments, on the part of mentors and mentees, interrupted messaging, but this was seen to be a minor issue.

3.8.2 The process of messaging

The mentors said that they had found the e-platform easy to use and effective: 'the layout's very intuitive, very simple. Navigating to your different mentees is very easy, and also you've got the extra section for pages of information relevant to exams or different academic topics […] it's very easy to navigate to as well from the chat section', (UG5 (ii)).

The mentors both made the point that, as would be expected, mentees were engaged to different extents, and messaged at different rates. Nonetheless, the typical level of mentee messaging was high, with once a fortnight being seen as usual.

Both mentors gave a number of examples of the type of questions they fielded from their mentees. These included questions about tackling school work, choosing degree subjects, the differences between campus and non-campus universities, societies and clubs at university, lectures, seminars, libraries, and making friends. An example was given by UG5:

> 'One of them [the mentees] was in a very similar situation to me when I was going to university, because I was struggling to decide between maths and physics, I was very torn, and one of my mentees was going through the exact same thing, so it was really good for me to be able to offer them advice […] I suggested looking into joint degrees, and I think she found that really helpful because it was something she hadn't considered.' (UG5 (ii)).

The other mentor provided a range of questions that mentees had asked:

'I get quite a lot about campus versus city unis; that was coming up quite a lot. So obviously I can mainly talk of campus universities because obviously I go to one but I would say if you come from a big city you might like the city and the vibrant night life and things like that. I got asked about joint degrees because they were a bit confused about how that really operated between two departments and things like that. I sometimes get random questions about the library or the transport and the difference between lectures and seminars; that came up. So then I get a lot on the social side, like societies and how that works and I said about societies' fair and how you can go round at the beginning of the year. They're all a bit shocked when I say how many different societies there are. So one of mine, for example, she does a lot of ballroom dancing so she was asking what dance societies they have here.' (UG1 (ii))

3.8.3 Building a mentor-mentee relationship

The mentors argued that the key to building a mentor-mentee relationship was the degree to which the mentees were engaged with the process. However, most of the mentees were engaged, with both mentors believing that they had built up good working relationships with their mentees. One of the mentors explained: 'I think they're very curious and very eager to ask questions when they do think of something. It's easy to send messages to each other. If they do want to find out something, they're not hesitant or worried to ask,' (UG5 (ii)). The mentors' evidence suggests that the flexible, unstructured nature of the process, along with the functionality of the e-platform, enabled good, working relationships to be built. In addition, one of the mentors also stressed the importance of the face-to-face meeting.

3.8.4 Being in a position to help mentees

The mentors were asked to give specific examples of where they felt they had 'really helped your mentee'. Both said that they had been able to give specific advice related to 'A' levels,

and university subject choices, and both gave examples of provided reassurance as well as information about university study and life. For example, one of the mentors said that the two areas they had helped their mentees most were, 'probably course choice, deciding what you might want to consider doing at uni […] and because they match up students studying A levels to what you're doing at uni, I could offer specific advice for their A level modules', (UG5 (ii)). The other mentor gave examples that included information that reassured mentees:

'A lot of them have asked about lectures and seminars and how that's different, and I think the lectures sound quite scary as a concept. I think they were worried a bit that they were going to be picked on in a room of like 300 people, so I said, actually it's very rare that you ever get picked on; it's more like that they'll ask a question, and if you want to answer you can. And they're saying they quite like the fact that seminars are a little bit more like a classroom.' (UG1 (ii)).

3.8.5 Having an impact

Both mentors thought that they had been able to make a real difference for their mentees. One of the mentors thought that the most important element of the mentoring experience for the mentees was that they had the freedom to ask whatever questions they wanted, even if it they feared it was a 'silly' question: 'Questions you wouldn't even ask at an open day, just little things, just to kind of calm their nerves a little bit about it. Like one of them was asking me the other day about getting to know people because she was worried about making friends,' (UG1 (ii)). The other mentor responded:

'I guess it's the personal experience which is something they don't have which is the most important part for them. So I think the best example is the one I gave before,

which is the girl who was struggling to decide about what course she wanted to do. From her responses it felt like my advice had really resonated with her and it had really helped her to think about her options and make a decision. I feel like if she hadn't had me to talk to it might not have been as easy for her or it may not even have developed at all.' (UG5 (ii))

3.8.6 Future development

Three ideas were put forward as ways in which the e-mentoring programme might be added to for future offerings: 1) an app that mentees and mentors 'could get notifications directly from the app to your phone – that would be handy because you've always got it with you' (UG5 (ii)). 2) additional, background information about the mentees to be provided to the mentors, 'I don't even know what area of the country some of them are from, or whether they go to a mixed school, just little things like that', (UG1 (ii)). 3) ensuring that the mentees attended the 'Meet the Mentors' session, and, perhaps, having a second face-to-face meeting part of the way through the school year:

'I don't know why I didn't get to meet the other two [mentees] at the beginning of the year, they just couldn't make it, but it would be nice to be able to put a face to it all, especially at the beginning. A few of them were a bit tentative at first just because they had no idea who I was; or even if you had a mid-way meet up,' (UG1 (ii)).

4. E-Mentoring – the mentees' perspective

4.1 Collecting mentee data

Once the list of active mentees was available, in the first week of January, the 23 active mentees were invited to take part in the evaluation, with data being collected in January,

and June. The evaluation was provided with the names and contact details of 23 mentees, 20 of whom were, at the 4 January, 'active', in that they had messaged their mentor in the previous week, or at least three weeks prior, or, in one case, had just logged on and been matched to a mentor. All 20 were contacted, at least twice, and 12 mentees responded, agreeing to provide data to the evaluation. Of those 12, two said they wished to do so by e-mail, and ten agreed to being interviewed by telephone (with informed consent). In the end, four were interviewed by telephone, one provided e-mailed answers. The remaining seven were unavailable for interview, typically not answering booked telephone appointments, or subsequent e-mails. The latter problem was even more apparent for the follow-up interviews, when only one interview and one e-mail response was possible.

The data presented here represents a snapshot of the views of the mentees, and provides some interesting material about the experience and impact of being part of the e-mentoring programme. The larger part of the material comes from the first interview period in January, and the small amount of data from June (one interview and one e-mail response) is briefly presented in summary form. The first part presents data under the headings drawn from the interview schedules (see Appendices 3 and 4); these are: the process of the e-mentoring programme; Meet the Mentors day; the mentees' reflections on e-mentoring; suggestions for changes.

4.1.1 Process of the e-mentoring

All the mentees provided clear accounts of the process of e-mentoring, showing that was a range of degrees of e-mail contact. A good account of the process of e-mentoring was provided by the mentee who answered by e-mail:

'To start off we (me and mentor) just got to know each other in general, what courses we were taking and a bit about our lifestyle, what our day to day life is like, and interests. Then I started asking her questions about university … was it best to stay on/off campus? Ho to choose between universities? What course I should take etc. We contacted around 2-3 times a week depending on how fast she could reply which was 2 to 4 days. She was able to give good advice and answers to my questions, and was able to reassure me. Some of the advice I was given was to get a good amount of work experience as well as interests in Year 12, as Year 13 can get a bit crammed.' (M1)

While this mentee e-mailed their mentor twice a week, the rest did so once a week or fortnight. All of the mentees said that the mentors provided good responses that contained plenty of information: 'my mentor is in-depth with me. When I've asked open-ended questions she's provided me with a lot of information,' (M2); 'he gives me lots of information', (M3); 'she's given a lot of information about the university societies […] I'm always interested in the teams at all the different universities and what she thinks of the different ones,' (M4).

The mentees described the process of e-mentoring as being characterised by free-flowing interchanges, with the mentees leading the online conversation by asking specific questions and follow-up questions. The process was flexible and, being a long-term one enabled the mentees to ask questions about issues that as they thought of them, or became aware of them. Responses from mentors were reflected upon by mentees, and led to further questions and self-directed investigation of ideas and pointers given by the mentors. The accounts given by the mentees suggested that the process is engaging, effective, and positive in its outcomes. Box 1 provides an example of the process from a mentee's point of view.

Box 1: The process of e-mentoring, Mentee M5

M5: 'For the e-mentoring my mentor is a Biochemistry student in her third year at Warwick and because I'm interested in those kind of subjects at university and I don't know much about them, I just ask her like every … I try to do it at least every two weeks. During Christmas period it was a bit longer. I ask her about her degree and why she picked her degree; that's mainly one of the things I want to find out most about and about other degrees within her field.'

Question: 'And so what sort of things has she said? Why did she pick her degree and why did she pick Warwick?'

M5: 'She said she picked Warwick because she was choosing between Warwick and another university in Coventry. She picked Warwick in the end and she picked Biochemistry because she just found it very interesting. She found it meshed with her interests and it was everything she wanted.'

Question: 'When you do send her an email, what gives you the idea that you want to talk about or is it whatever comes into your head?'

M5: 'It's really whatever comes into my head that I'm wondering about at that time.'

Question: 'Has she told you anything that you thought that's something I really didn't know or that's something that's really interesting?'

M5: 'Oh yeah she has actually. Like recently she mentioned about something called Virology. I didn't even know that was a degree. So then I asked her a bit more and she said I should research it myself as a little project because that would help me more with it myself.'

4.1.2 'Meet the Mentors' day

Of the five mentees, one was unable because of health issues to attend the 'Meet the Mentors' event, two did attend, while the other two were not permitted to attend by their schools. The latter is interesting, as the schools were operating strict policies regarding attendance at co-curricular events: 'my school believes that … they're very strict about missing school days. The UniTracks leaders got in touch with my school about the mentoring and [unclear] it would entail, but my school thought it would be more useful and better for my attendance if I listened to the webinar instead' (M3). The other mentee whose school refused permission to attend also watched the substitute webinar. The two attendees did, however, think that the Meet the Mentor was worthwhile, with, for example, one saying: 'she [the mentor' is really nice, but I think it was good to meet before [i.e. at the Meet the Mentors event], because I think if I'd just been messaging a name without a face I'd be less comfortable' (M2). This also reflects the opinion of the mentors, who regarded face-to-face meetings as an important part of the process of building effective e-mentoring relationships.

4.1.3 The mentees' reflections on e-mentoring

The mentees' accounts showed that the interactions with their mentors had given them new insights into university and what it means to be an undergraduate. The mentoring also had an impact on key questions such as which course and what type of university. An example came from mentee M5, who said that 'talking' to her mentor had made her think about university in a different way:

> 'I think it has [made a difference] because I always thought that university was, like, you go there and you study hard. [But] it's not going to be that bad, and it will be more fun if you really enjoy your degree. It's helping me decide so I actually want to do pharmacy, or do I want to do something, not cooler, but different.' (M5).

The mentees also reported that the mentors had altered them to steps they might take to make more informed choices about university:

'She [the mentor] was asking whether I'd gone to any open days and she was saying, especially if I want to do medicine, because the deadline is earlier, I should look into starting to go to some before the summer. That was really helpful because I've started looking at when some of the open days are that I'd like to go to.' (M4).

Two of the mentees also said that 'talking' to their mentors had made them particularly interested in applying to Warwick because they were interested in particular degrees, and they liked other aspects of the university, such as it being a campus university.

4.1.4 Suggestions for changes

The mentees were very happy with the e-mentoring programme, with, for example, one concluding, 'I just think it's a really good scheme overall. I think definitely continue to run it where possible', (M2). Three of the mentees made suggestions about improving the e-platform. Two suggested a message alert system being added, particularly if it could be sent to their phones: 'I think sometimes being able to get an e-mail saying you've got a message …like a notification would be a lot better because sometimes you don't check it for a few days, and you're, like, oh, wait, I've got a message,' (M4). A further possible change was suggested by mentee M1, who said: 'I think there should be an open chat room on the same system where you can see what questions other students are asking and the answers they are getting back, as you may not think of that particular question, but now, after reading it, it has become fairly useful,' (M1).

4.2 Follow-up interview - summary

The follow-up interviews, carried out during the latter half of the summer produced only one telephone interview (M6), presented here as a summary.

Reviewing the e-mentoring programme, the mentee was very positive about all aspects of it, saying that, 'it's definitely helped me massively with stuff that you don't get from school, and my parents didn't go to uni, so…' (M6). The mentee said that she liked the fact that the process was 'quite casual, quite relaxed', and that she had received valuable advice that was of immediate help at school and for the future:

> 'I would say that [the mentor's advice] on how to revise would be one of my top ones. Then one that was realy helpful was when I asked her – I can't remember exactly how I phrased it – but we were taking about uni courses, because I wasn't sure what uni course I want to do, because I was interested in history, which is what she is doing, I asked her what you do on that course, what subjects you're going to choose, and what she thought about doing a combined course. So really about choosing your course. She helped with that quite a lot.' (M6)

The mentee was also pleased that she had been matched to a mentor who had similar academic interests, and gave examples how this had not only enabled here to take good advice about study skills in her subjects, but had also meant that the mentor had been able to give her suggestions for extension reading, suggestions that she had followed up. The mentee could think of nothing that she disliked about the e-mentoring programme, and was strongly positive about the experience and its value.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The first offering of the E-Mentoring programme to Year 12 members of UniTracks was a success. The launch event ('Meet the Mentors and Mentees'), the Brightside e-mentoring platform, and the process of mentoring were all successful elements of the programme. In addition, there was evidence from the mentee interviews that the process of mentoring had strengthen mentees' attitudes in respect of their academic work, understanding of university, and ability to make informed choices about degree and university choices.

Evidence from mentors and mentees stressed the following strengths of the e-mentoring programme:

- It was a relaxed, mentee-friendly system that enabled mentees to ask a very wide range of questions that were relevant to their school lives, university and course choices, university life, and possible post-school pathways.
- The Brightside e-platform was easy to use and effective.
- The mentors and mentees who attended the 'Meet the Mentors and Mentees' event thought that it was important, helping them to build quickly a good online working relationship.
- The matching of mentee and mentor academic interests was a successful element of the programme, enabling mentees to access help and advice around their own work and in relation to degree choice.
- It was a valued programme in the eyes of mentees, and mentors.

Evidence from the mentees and mentors suggested that the e-mentoring programme impacted on important areas of mentee thinking:

- Mentees benefited from study skills, and extension reading advice provided by their mentors.

- Mentors provided advice and information about degree courses that changed the way in which mentees thought about course options after school.

- Mentees were introduced to subject disciplines they were unaware of, and subject combinations that they did not know about.

- Much of the information that mentors provided for mentees had an important reassurance element, making mentees less apprehensive about university life and study.

- Mentees said that the information and advice that they received was additional to that which their schools provided.

- Mentees were enthused about university life and study by their interactions with the undergraduate mentors.

4.2 Recommendations

There are a small number of recommendations, relating to the programme itself, and to the evaluation of the programme.

- The 'Meet the Mentors and Mentees' event is an important element of the programme, enabling the school students and the undergraduates to establish a good, opening relationship on which to build the e-mentoring process. Some schools were reluctant to release pupils to attend the event, and several of the interviewees were not able to attend. Given that the event is the only school release required for Year 12 UniTracks members, schools should be strongly recommended to release these pupils. Similarly, the mentors should be required to attend.

- Some thought might be given to organizing a mid-way point face-to-face meeting between mentors and mentees. This was requested by three of the mentees, and would be a good, optional, element of the programme.

- One of the mentees wondered if a genera message board could be added to the e-platform, to enable the swapping of questions and answers between those involved in the programme. Some version of this might be considered.

- In relation to the evaluation, although good data was collected through interviews with mentors and mentees, it is hoped that a larger sampling will be possible in 2017-2018. In particular, it is hoped that the mentors will be directed to ask the mentees to log on to a CEDAR site in order to complete anonymous surveys at two points in the e-mentoring programme. In addition, mentors and mentees should be alerted at the outset that the evaluation will take place and that they are encouraged to take part.

Appendix 1:

UniTracks mentor scheme, 2016-17
Mentor interview schedule

• Talk through Information Sheet and Consent Form (to be signed & collected in). Assure confidentiality. Explain what the evaluation is.
• Ask permission to record. Explain you will be taking notes too (if you want to).

1. **Just to start, could you tell me a little about your background, and how you became involved as a mentor?**
   Prompts:
   - Warwick student/post-grad, or Warwick graduate?
   - How did they hear?
   - Why do they think it is something worthwhile being involved in?
   - What is the object of the UniTracks' scheme, as they see it?

2. **What sort of induction and support did you receive to carry out the role of mentor?**
   Prompts:
   - Did you feel it was sufficient preparation, or were there other things you think should have been included?

3. **What have you committed to do as a UniTracks mentor?**
   - Time commitment?
   - Online – how often, what are the expectations?
   - Does this seem to be both reasonable, and useful?

4. **Could you tell me about the initial contacts with the young people (and their teachers) at the launch on 16th November, how did it go, what were your impressions of the young people?**
   Prompts:
   - Could you outline the day – what happened, what exercises did you do, how did you get on with the young people.

5. **Could you tell me about the e-mentoring – how has that been going, is it useful, what do you think are the strong and less strong elements of the e-mentoring?**
   Prompts:
   - How often do you have contact online?
   - What type of advice does they ask for – can you give me some examples?

6. **What do you think have been the benefits so far for the young people?**

7. **Do you have any suggestions for the future development of the role of UniTracks mentor?**
   Prompts:

- Enhanced induction?

8. **What benefits do you feel that you gain from being involved with UniTracks ?**
   Prompts:
   - In terms of your CV?
   - Personal development?
   - Would you undertake the role again? If not, why ?

9. **Is there anything you would like to add about being a mentor, or about UniTracks?**

Thanks for taking part!

Appendix 2

UniTracks mentor scheme, 2016-17

Second Mentor interview schedule (May-June 2017)

- Talk through Information Sheet and Consent Form (to be signed & collected in). Assure confidentiality. Explain what the evaluation is.

- Ask permission to record. Explain you will be taking notes too (if you want to).

1. **You've now been involved in the e-mentoring scheme for a term and a half, could you give an overall assessment of the scheme now?**

   Prompts:

   - Good aspects

   - Less good aspects

2. **Could you tell me how often you have been exchanging e-mails with your mentee, has it been on a regular basis, or only when they had a particular issue or question they wanted to talk about?**

   Prompts:

   - How effective has the Brightside blog platform been? Is it easy, and quick, to use?

- What particular issues has the mentee asked about, could you give me an example?

- Has the e-correspondence lagged at any time, if so, why do you think that was?

3. **Do you feel that you've built up a good, working relationship with your mentee?**

    Prompts:

    - Does your mentee respond quickly?

    - Do you feel that your mentee is interested in what you are doing at university?

4. **If you had to pick one or two issues or questions that you think you have really helped your mentee with, what would they be?**

    Prompts:

    - Were they related to school work, or advice about future education or university issues?

5. **Do you think that having a mentor this year has made a real difference to the mentee, or not? Why do you think this?**

6. **Do you think changes could be made in the e-mentoring scheme that might improve it? What sport of changes do you think they might be?**

    Prompts:

    - In relation to the e-platform?

    - In relation to the mentors?

7. **Is there anything else you think we should know about the mentoring scheme?**

THANKS for taking part.

Appendix 3

UniTracks mentor scheme, 2016-17

Mentee interview schedule (first, January)

- Talk through Information Sheet and Consent Form (to be signed & collected in). Assure confidentiality. Explain what the evaluation is.

- Ask permission to record. Explain you will be taking notes too (if you want to).

1. **Just to start, could you tell me a little bit about yourself – your school, family, interests, subjects you are studying, and any plans you have for your future at school and beyond.**

Prompts:

- *Check year group (Year 12) and age.*

- *Bit about parents and siblings.*

- *Interests – member of any groups, clubs?*

- *GCSE, A levels and if any idea about university.*

2. **Could you tell me how you came to be part of Warwick University's UniTracks programme?**

Prompts:

- *Did a teacher or parent tell you about it?*

- *What were you told about UniTracks?*

- *Why did you think it was a good idea to join UniTracks?*

- *What did your teacher/s think it was a good idea to join UniTracks?*

- *What did you parents and (if applicable) siblings think?*

- *What did your school friends think of your joining UniTracks?*

3. Could you tell me about the e-mentoring project – what does it entail, why did you decide to join it?

Prompts:

- *Why did you think it might be a good idea to join?*

- *What information did you get about the project before you joined?*

- *What did your teacher/s and parents think?*

4. Could you tell me about the 'meet the mentors and mentees' day that was held at the University on 16th November

Prompts:

- *Did you enjoy it, what did you enjoy most?*

- *Did the day mean that you understood fully what was expected, and how the e-mentoring would work? If not, what was missing?*

- *Did you think it was well organised, or were there things that could have improved it?*

- *How do you think you got on with your mentor, and the other mentees?*

5. Since you started using the e-mentoring system, how do you feel that it has worked for you?

Prompts:

- *How many times a week do you contact your mentor?*

- *Does your mentor reply quickly?*

- *Do you feel that you've built up a good working relationship with your mentor?*

- *Could you tell me the sort of things that you ask your mentor?*

- *Can you give me an example of any advice, or information that you've got from your mentor that you think was valuable.*

6. **Do you think changes could be made in the mentoring system that might improve it? What sort of changes do you think they might be?**

Prompts:

- *In relation to the e-platform?*

- *Meeting the mentors at the beginning?*

7. **Is there anything else you think we should know about the mentoring project?**

8.

THANKS for taking part!

Appendix 4

UniTracks mentor scheme, 2016-17

E-Mentee interview schedule (second, June)

- Assure confidentiality. Explain what the evaluation is.

- Ask permission to record. Explain you will be taking notes too (if you want to).

8. **You've now been involved in the e-mentoring scheme for a term and a half, could you give an overall assessment of the scheme now?**

Prompts:

- Good aspects

- Less good aspects

- In what ways has it been useful?

9. **Could you tell me how often you have been exchanging e-mails with your mentor, has it been on a regular basis, or only when you had a particular issue or question you wanted to talk about?**

Prompts:

- How effective has the Brightside blog platform been? Is it easy, and quick, to use?

- What particular issues have you asked about, could you give me an example?

- Has the e-correspondence lagged at any time, if so, why do you think that was?

10. **Do you feel that you've built up a good, working relationship with your mentor?**

Prompts:

- Does your mentor respond quickly?

- Does your mentor ask how your school work is going, do they ask how useful their advice was for you?

- Do you feel that your mentor is interested in what you are doing?

11. **If you had to pick one or two issues or questions that you think the mentor really helped with, what would they be?**

Prompts:

- Were they related to school work, or advice about future education or university issues?

12. **Do you think that having a mentor this year has made a real difference, or not? Why do you think this?**

13. **Do you think changes could be made in the e-mentoring scheme that might improve it? What sport of changes do you think they might be?**

Prompts:

- In relation to the e-platform?

- In relation to the mentors?

14. **Is there anything else you think we should know about the mentoring scheme?**

THANKS for taking part.

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