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

Report 2:

The Big Deal Enterprise Challenge, 2016

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19th July, 2016

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Executive Summary

- The Big Deal competition is a core part of the University of Warwick's UniTracks programme, offering a ten week, supported, business and enterprise competition to UniTracks members in their first year of membership (Year 10 at school).
- For 2016, 14 schools put forward teams, each of which had a maximum of five UniTracks members. The competition was launched on 15/16th January, and was followed by nine weeks of weekly tasks, mentored via an online resource, before the Big Deal heats, held at the University of Warwick. The successful teams from the heats went through to the final, held on 18 April at the Shard in London.
- The main elements of the competition were: the Launch event; the Brightside Blogs focusing on a weekly schedule supported by the business and student mentors; the heats; the final.
- The evaluation collected data from business mentors, student mentors, participating young people, school staff, and the Brightside Trust. Findings are presented relating to each data source, with ten recommendations being made.
- The recommendations relate to:
 - The role of schools and school staff: the need for full commitment to support their young people.
 - The role of schools and school staff: the choice of which staff, from which department, to support young people in a business and enterprise competition.
 - The workload commitment required from school students.
 - The role and engagement of student mentors.
 - The Big Deal blogs.
 - The Big Deal launch event: communication between the Warwick Business School and UniTracks' teams and the business mentors, particularly prior to the event.
 - The Big Deal launch event: a review of the timing and content of the budgeting and finance presentation.

- The Big Deal launch event: school teams should come prepared with short presentations covering their initial ideas of an entrepreneurial project.
- The Big Deal launch event: it was suggested by some of the mentors that it would be helpful if pre-launch contact between business and student mentor pairs could be arranged.
- The student mentor role: more rigorous recruiting to this important role, and more opportunities for the student mentors to spend time with the teams.

1. Background

1.1 UniTracks and the Big Deal Enterprise Challenge competition

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 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. The University has a background of being part of, and offering, widening participation programmes stretching back over a decade, and including the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY), and the International Gateway for Gifted Youth (IGGY)¹.

Each of the UniTracks' cohorts are offered differing interventions, events and support for each year of their membership. For the Year 10 members, 2015-2016, the three events offered in their first year of UniTracks membership were, the Launch Day at the University of Warwick (14th November, 2015), the Big Deal Enterprise Challenge (Big Deal) Competition, and the 'Shooting the Past' Competition. In the event, although Shooting the Past was launched (23rd January, 2016), the competition was not run. Details of the small amount of evaluation data gathered, and the reasons behind the abandonment of Shooting the Past are contained in another, short, evaluation report.

¹ For further details, and the evaluation role of the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) see: Stephen Cullen, and Geoff Lindsay, 'Evaluation of the University of Warwick's outreach programme, UniTracks: The Warwick Young Achievers' Programme: Report 1, UniTracks Launch Day, Saturday, 14th November 2015', CEDAR, Coventry, 2 February, 2016.

The Big Deal competition was the main offer for the Year 10 UniTracks members in 2015-2016. It was described by the University's 'Widening Participation and Outreach Team' as:

An enterprise challenge that forms a core part of Warwick's UniTracks programme in the first year. It is a 10-week programme where school teams create and develop either a business or social enterprise idea with the assistance of a dedicated Business Mentor and Student Mentor. The Big Deal is organised by Warwick Business School (WBS), in conjunction with the educational charity the Brightside Trust².

Fourteen schools put forward teams, each of which had a maximum of five UniTracks members. The competition was a ten week programme, with the launch on 15/16th January being followed by nine weeks of weekly tasks, mentored via an online resource, before the Big Deal heats, held at the University of Warwick. The successful teams from the heats went through to the final, held on 18 April at the Shard in London. The Big Deal was a combined UniTracks and Warwick Business School programme that also involved the Brightside Trust³, which provided the bespoke online mentoring system, 'The Brightside Blogs'. The Big Deal competitors were supported by their schools, business mentors, and student mentors from the University of Warwick. Both business and student mentors had face-to-face contact with the school students over the two day launch event, in a single school-based meeting, and during the heats and, for the finalists, at the final.

1.1.1. Details of the ten weeks of The Big Deal

The main elements of the ten week competition were:

- The Launch event.

² 'Outreach @ Warwick', Issue 2 Winter/Spring 2016, p.1.

³ <http://www.thebrightsidetrust.org/>, accessed, 25 May 2016.

- The Brightside Blogs focusing on a weekly schedule supported by the business and student mentors.
- The heats.
- The grand final.

Each is outlined here.

1.1.1.1 The Launch Event

The Launch Event was held at the University over two days, Friday, 15th- Saturday, 16th January, 2016. The event started at 11:00 for the school teams. Friday was taken up with a series of presentations covering the competition: 'Welcome to the Big Deal 2016'; 'The Big Deal blogs'; 'Top tips for becoming a successful team'; 'Budgets'; 'Presentation Skills'. The teams then went to their accommodation on the University campus, had dinner, and took part in evening events. During this period the teams were introduced to their undergraduate student mentors, drawn from the University's widening participation team, and their business mentors. The following day, Saturday, was taken up by an extended planning session, with each team beginning the process of developing a Big Deal business idea, led by their business mentor, supported by the student mentor.

1.1.1.2 The Brightside Blogs

The Brightside Trust's 'Brightside Blogs' is an online platform which enables the UniTracks students to receive individually tailored support from the Big Deal business and student mentors. The platform is a moderated one, designed to ensure safeguarding. Using the Brightside Blogs, the Big Deal teams were given a series of weekly tasks designed to enable them to develop their business or social enterprise idea through to completion. The tasks were designed by the Warwick Business School and are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Weekly Big Deal tasks

Week	Student tasks
Week 2 (18 Jan)	<p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis • Unique Selling Points <p><i>Task</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task A: SWOT analysis for each idea (submission) • Task B: Competitor analysis (submission)
Week 3 (25 Jan)	<p><i>Reading</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market research <p><i>Task</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task A: Target audience and information gathering (submission) • Task B: Market research techniques and questions (submission) <p><i>Actions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out competitor research, customer analysis, and customer focused market research and review findings to choose your final idea
Week 4 (1 Feb)	<p><i>Task</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task A: Research findings (submission) • Task B: Submit final suggested idea (submission)
Your Final Idea	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Submit your final idea (this is the one on which your business/social enterprise plan will be based and which you will 'pitch' to the judges).</p>
Week 5 (8 Feb)	<p><i>Task</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Task A: Operations & resourcing questions (submission)</p>
Week 6 (15 Feb)	<p><i>Reading</i></p> <p>Marketing materials and prototypes</p> <p><i>Task</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task A: Submit ideas for marketing and promotion materials (submission) <p><i>Actions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider applying for funding for prototype or materials
Week 7 (22 Feb)	<p><i>Task</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Task A: Submit budget (submission)</p>

Week 8 (29 Feb)	<i>Actions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare 1st draft of business or social enterprise plan • Possible visit from mentors <i>Task</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st draft of business or social enterprise plan (submission)
Week 9 (7 Mar)	<i>Task</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update plan using feedback from mentor (submission) <i>Actions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about presentation format
Week 10 (14 Mar)	<i>Tasks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit final plan using template (15 Mar - submission) • Prepare, practice presentation and submit final version (18 Mar - submission) □ Submit feedback to mentors (18 Mar - submission)
Heat 1 (21/22 Mar)	<i>Actions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round one of presentations <i>Tasks</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit learning outcomes (23 Mar - submission)
Grand Final (18 Apr)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel to London • Present presentation to judges • Find out winners and all celebrate!
Afterwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete online feedback form □ Thank your mentors • What will you do next?

1.1.1.3 The Heats

The Big Deal heats were held at the University on Monday, 21st and Tuesday, 22nd March, with seven teams presenting on each day, following the same sequence of events. Each day started with teams having 50 minutes pre-event preparation with their business and student mentors. The teams subsequently made their presentations, and, after lunch, the top two winning teams were announced with feedback from the judges.

1.1.1.4 The grand final

Four teams went forward to the competition final, held at The Shard in London. The winners were chosen on a combination of competition factors – weekly tasks completed, business strategy development, business idea, and presentation. Details of the final were reported by the Warwick Business School: <http://www.wbs.ac.uk/news/big-red-hub-triumphs-at-the-big-deal-2016/> (accessed, 26 May, 2016).

2. The evaluation

As part of its ongoing independent evaluation of the UniTracks programme, The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) carried out an evaluation of the Big Deal competition, 2016. 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 Big Deal competition focused on the second of the key evaluation aims, drawing upon the views of the Big Deal business mentors, the student mentors, and the student competitors.

2.1 This evaluation report

This report provides an account of the Big Deal competition over its ten week cycle. Data was collected using researcher observations of day 1 of the launch event and the heats, semi-structured interviews with business mentors, student mentors, teachers, and a representative of the Brightside Trust, and a questionnaire survey of the Big Deal student finalists. The details of the data collection are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Collection, Big Deal evaluation.

Data source	Numbers interviewed or questionnaire respondents, and total numbers for each data source
School teachers	3 teachers out of a total of 14
Business mentors	9 business mentors out of a total of 14
Student mentors	3 student mentors out of a total of 14
Brightside Trust representative	1 of 1
Big Deal Final student questionnaire	20 out of a total of 20
Brightside Blogs site engagement data, received, 3 May 2016	n/a

This report examines the Big Deal Competition 2016 from the perspective of mentors, teachers and school students. It also provides a summary of aspects of the operation of the Big Deal competition which may require additional attention in the future.

2.1.1 Shooting the Past

The UniTracks team decided prior to the start of the Big Deal competition that an additional offer would be made in 2016, for UniTracks members who wished to take part in a scheme that was not focused on business and entrepreneurship. Working with staff from the University's Modern Records Centre (MRC) and the Department of Film and Television Studies, 'Shooting the Past' was developed. UniTracks members were told that Shooting the Past involved:

'working with the MRC (Modern Records Centre), and the department of Film & TV Studies and History, you will have the chance to develop skills relevant in all these

subject areas and related disciplines such as sociology and law! This is a great opportunity for you to get hands-on experience in an internationally-renowned archive, experience a lecture and seminar by academics at the top of their field, and undertake an independent research project.’⁴

The theme of Shooting the Past was related to political protest in the UK in the late 20TH Century. Teams from five schools were recruited to Shooting the Past, and a launch day was held at the University on Saturday, 23rd January, which was to be followed by ten weeks of activities and a competition day on 8th April, 2016, when teams were expected to present a pitch for a film idea. CEDAR began to evaluate the programme, with 13 school students completing Shooting the Past Launch Day questionnaires, and two teachers being interviewed in February. However, lack of interest resulted in the abandonment of Shooting the Past that month. Findings from the evaluation data that was collected are presented in a separate, short, evaluation report.

⁴ E-mail from UniTracks to UniTracks’ members, January, 2016.

3. The operation and impact of the Big Deal competition 2016

3.1 Introduction

Part 3 of this report examines the data gathered from the business mentors, student mentors, teachers, the Brightside Trust, and the Big Deal competitors. The focus is on, firstly, the operation of the Big Deal competition, including features that were seen to have worked well, and those that were seen to have worked less well. Secondly, the views of those involved regarding the impact on the school students of participation in the competition are presented.

3.2 Business mentors' views

3.2.1 Data collection

The 14 business mentors were all invited to take part in the evaluation. Twelve of the business mentors agreed to be interviewed, with nine eventually being interviewed – eight by telephone and one face to face. Only one business mentor failed to respond to the requests for interview; the remaining business mentors were unable to arrange suitable times and dates for interview. The interviews were all recorded, with informed consent, fully transcribed and analysed. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The interviewees were asked about their background and experience, how they came to take on the role of Big Deal mentor, induction and support for that role, their experience of contacts with their school team and teacher, the experience of e-mentoring, the benefits accruing to the UniTracks' members resulting from being part of the Big Deal competition, and suggestions for future developments of the role of Big Deal business mentor.

3.2.2 Business mentors – backgrounds and motivations

The business mentors had a range of educational and employment backgrounds, but all were relevant to the role. There was a mix of business backgrounds, with business mentors

having experience of work with large, global businesses, start-up companies, entrepreneurial initiatives, graduate recruitment, higher education, banking and finance, the healthcare sector and the European Commission. The majority of the business mentors were graduates of the University of Warwick, and some were current MBA students at WBS. There was, then, a very good fit between the experience and education backgrounds of the interviewees and the role of business mentor for the Big Deal competition.

The business mentors were recruited to the Big Deal through LinkedIn contacts, direct contact from WBS, Warwick alumni information, and personal contacts through workplaces. They all gave very positive explanations regarding their decision to volunteer for the role (see Box 1).

Box 1: Illustrative explanations from business mentors of their motivations for the role.

I'm just really passionate about working with young people, and I just think it's a great initiative to bring the practical application of business thinking and theory to life – so that's what was driving my desire to be involved. (BM5)

I just really liked the idea of it, because I was the first person in my family to go to university, so to me it was a good fit, something that I could help with. (BM4)

I've always believed that education is the key to unlocking potential and achieving things [...] so when I heard about this Big Deal initiative it seemed interesting to me, and having worked last year with a group of students who were obviously coming from a disadvantaged background and challenging environment, I found it fulfilling to work with them, and hence I volunteered this year as well. (BM3)

Explanations included, for example, having fulfilled the role before, and thought it worthwhile; valuing university educational opportunities and wishing to support young people into university; wanting to put something back into society; and seeing the role as a useful and interesting break from work.

3.2.3 Induction and support

The business mentors were asked about the induction and support that was in place for their role. The interviewees discussed communications prior to the start of the Big Deal competition, the training available via the webinars, and general support from WBS for their role. The overall picture was positive, with the business mentors being satisfied with the pre-competition support and induction they received. A strongly positive account was, for example, given by one of the interviewees:

‘I’ve found the [Warwick] Business School people have been very efficient actually. They respond very quickly to anything, and they do keep you in touch very well. I e-mailed and said, “I’m interested” [in being a mentor], and then got a response saying, “this is what it is all about. Can we talk to you?”. And then I had a phone conversation with them and the next thing there was an online training session, which have been some time in November, which was pretty well organized.’ (BM1)

This account represents the majority experience among the interviewees. Related to this success, one of the interviewees who had previously been a business mentor for Big Deal, noted that they thought that the induction had improved - ‘there has been more induction and information provided this year’ (BM3).

The webinars were well received, with some of the interviewees being strongly positive about them. For example, one business mentor commented: 'it was really useful in the sense of understanding the online mentoring aspect, which was new to me, and I thought that Brightside did a brilliant job at bringing that to life,' (BM5).

Despite the overall picture of good induction, a number of issues were raised in relation to communications, and the webinar sessions, by a minority of the business mentors. One interviewee was surprised by the length of time between expressing an interest in becoming a business mentor and being contacted; the interviewee remarked, 'I think it was noticeable that the way it was handled was different from what I'd expect in a corporate environment' (BM7). The same interviewee raised issues with the webinar induction:

'There were some technical challenges, so they gave two different webinars, one which was an introduction, and then the second, which was more specifically about the [Brightside] blog. On the second one they had technical problems which meant you couldn't continue, so in the end I just listened to a recording [later], and, actually, it would have been much easier to have just done that in your own time. Of course, it wouldn't have allowed for questions, but it was fairly clear, so I think that would have been a more practical way to do it really.' (BM7)

The ability to watch the webinar on demand was a feature that was welcomed by the interviewees, who noted the difficulties of finding space in their calendars.

3.2.4 The business mentors' perceptions of the Big Deal Launch Days

The Big Deal competition was launched over two days, Friday, 15th- Saturday, 16th January, 2016, and was the first interaction between the business mentors, the student mentors and the Big Deal teams. The evaluation asked the business mentor interviewees about the preparation for the Launch Days, their role during the event, their experience of working with the young people, school staff, and the student mentors.

3.2.4.1 *Preparing for the Launch Days*

A number of issues were raised by the business mentor interviewees in relation to the preparatory information they received, and the roles of the school teachers and the student mentors. Of these three areas, the issue that was raised by the majority of the interviewees related to pre-event information and planning. The interviewees reported that they had not received sufficient information prior to the event, and that, as a result, last minute, on-site, preparation was needed on the Friday evening. A good, representative, account of this issue is presented in Box 2:

Box 2: Issues with information and preparation for the Launch Days

If I were to give a critique [of the Launch Days from the business mentors' perspective] it would be around the [preparation], and, depending on how many of the mentors you are speaking to you might hear this again. A fair amount of us did discuss it. . It went fine, however, it was a bit of a surprise to a number of us that all day Saturday we were effectively in a room with our team, and we had a pretty high-level to-do list, and the show was ours. That could have been better explained to us, the expectations of us during the event. It ended up going fine, but myself and a couple of other people were a little bit scrabbling about on Friday night to put together some content [...] It would improve the programme if, upfront, someone had said "you're going to turn up, you're going to get some face time with these guys in the evening, which is a getting to know you, but, then, on the Saturday, you're going to be crashed in a room together and you

need to achieve the following things, and we are expecting you to make sure that happens”, would have helped us to be better prepared. (BM2).

The need for good pre-event information was emphasized by another interviewee who noted that although the business mentors had wide experience relating to business, they did not, necessarily, have teaching experience, and planning was particularly important for a day’s contact with the young people.

3.2.4.2 Working with school staff on the Launch Days

A minority of the interviewees raised issues in relation to the role of the school staff who attended the Launch Days with the young people. The role of school staff was a wider issue, for some of the business mentors, beyond Launch Day, which is addressed below. The interviewees gave varying accounts of the contributions of different school staff at the Launch Days, with some being very pleased at the teacher contribution to making the Saturday contact successful, and other interviewees being less pleased. One business mentor described the input of a school teacher during the Saturday sessions:

‘They had a teacher with them when they were at Warwick who participated in the session we had. I thought that might be awkward, frankly, if you’ve got a professional teacher there. But, actually they were great. I deliberately, every now and then, would include the teacher, but at no stage did I feel they were contributing too much or trying to take over. The teacher was just there, engaged, interested but fairly low profile.’ (BM7).

This positive experience can be contrasted with that of another business mentor who found that the team's accompanying teacher found it difficult to give the young people full freedom of interaction with the business mentor. The business mentor commented: 'the teacher was often trying to come in and say what they should do, when I was trying to get them to say what they wanted to do,' (BM1). Perhaps even more problematic was the case raised by another business mentor, who said, 'I have an issue with the teacher because the teacher is not available at all' (BM3). The varying experience that the business mentors had of working with school staff on the Launch Days suggests that schools might be encouraged to consider carefully which staff they allocate to their school's Big Deal teams. This issue was wider than school staff support for mentors on the Launch Days, and other aspects of school support for Big Deal teams are discussed later.

3.2.4.3 Working with student mentors on the Launch Days

The business mentor interviewees provided a range of accounts of working with the student mentors during the Launch Days. A third of the interviewees had no particular views on the role of their student mentors, with a third being positive, and a third, negative about the role and performance of the student mentor. The majority of the business mentors were, however, agreed that the student mentor role was an important one. One business mentor, for example, said:

'I think the student mentor really is the key role in this project. In term of age and experience, there's a step for the [school] students. They don't have to directly feel that there's a huge age gap between a [business] mentor who is well established in their career, as opposed to a student mentor who is still in university. They can relate to the student mentor as the student is just a few years ahead of them, and has been a school student not that long back,' (BM3).

The business mentors valued good communications, and an independent and pro-active approach to their role by student mentors. It was also seen to be important that the student mentors could quickly establish, and maintain, a good working relationship with the school students. One of the business mentors who was very pleased with their student mentor – ‘she’s been very proactive’ – talked about the good relationship that the student mentor had built with the Big Deal school students, and the importance of the good communications she had with both the students and the business mentor (Box 3).

Box 3: Good communications between student mentor, business mentor, and a Big Deal team.

She [the student mentor] does interact quite well with the student team, and then I interact with her. Sometimes they will feed things to her, and I know she’s a little bit older than them (because they’re 15 and she’s 20, or something), and then she’ll come to me, and I say, “I’m talking to them about this and that – what do you think about it?”, and that actually seem to work quite well. And if I have to discuss things with them, there have been times when I’ve talked about management models and stuff like that, I always make sure that she knows what I am doing, and I try and run it past her, and that sort of triangular thing seems to work quite well. (BM1).

The business mentor interviewees valued co-working with proactive, independent, student mentors who had good communication skills, and an ability to quickly establish, and maintain, good links with the school students.

The business mentor interviews also provided examples of less successful student mentor involvement in the Big Deal competition. In relation to the Launch Days, a third of the

business mentor interviewees thought that their student mentors were not engaged enough with the event, with the school students or the business mentor. The business mentors who raised these issue had expectations that student mentors would be active, engaged and able to contribute. One of the mentors described what they had hoped for, and expected, from their student mentor:

‘I would have thought the role of the student mentor was to be a little bit closer to the students [Big Deal competitors], to have obviously participated in the event the day before [Friday], so just perhaps bridge that process a little bit more from the Friday to the Saturday, and maybe they’d have a bit more of a rapport being that much younger [...]. My expectation was that they would be involved on an equal level to me, but it seemed as if it was more like 90:10 [business mentor: student mentor], if that’ (BM6)

The less positive experiences of working with the student mentors started at the Launch Day, with some of the student mentors not being as engaged as the might have been; and example being, ‘the student was kind of just like them [the school students] – looking at me to tell them what to do. The student kind of piped up here and there, but we weren’t running it together as colleagues’ (BM4). There were also issues relating to subsequent involvement, via the Brightside Blogs, when the interviewees noted that some of their student mentors rarely contributed, contacted, or engaged with the teams on the blog. This issue may have been exacerbated by the lack of automatic access to each other’s postings on the part of the business and the student mentors, but there was, nevertheless, lack of online engagement by some of the student mentors. An example was provided by a business mentor: ‘the student mentor has had one email interaction with the on the platform that I’ve seen, and it was about two lines, so that’s somewhat disappointing. I’m not sure the student mentor wanted to do it, how well qualified the student mentors are when they are coming into it...’ (BM2). Another business mentor noted that ‘the feedback

I've had from the students is that the student mentor hasn't been that actively involved' (BM6). There was, therefore, a suggestion that student mentors might need more support and training prior to the start of the Big Deal competition to ensure that they had a clearer idea of the importance of their role and were more equipped to fulfil that role.

3.2.4.4 Working with the UniTracks' members on the Launch Days

All the business mentor interviewees enjoyed working with the UniTracks' members on the Launch Days, while noting that the Saturday, in particular, represented a good deal of hard work – building a rapport with the young people, re-capping on the work that the teams had undertaken on the first day, working on the ideas that were generated, and beginning the process of getting the young people to think in business and entrepreneurial terms. Some parts of this process could, the business mentors found, be hard going. For example, one interviewee explained:

'I'd kind of structured it around the agenda they'd been given and handled it with the materials (they'd given us some of the slides they'd used with the kids during the day [Friday]) and part of the brief was that they wanted us to re-cap on that. So, I did that first thing in the morning – that was a bit like pulling teeth, because you didn't have the slides, because we only had the slides on paper...' (BM7).

However, the accounts of the process of developing a business idea were much more positive. There was a divide between those Big Deal teams who had previously developed the beginnings of a business idea, and those who had not. The business mentors worked successfully with both these situations. For example, one interviewee explained, 'my group really, really hadn't come with any ideas at all, and it was a big effort to get them even to come up with one idea; and they have come up with an idea, and since then they've come up with a few ideas,' (BM5). By contrast, another, business mentor had a group which came

prepared with a number of initial business ideas – ‘they had lots of ideas, they were good on that. We did help them, but it was kind of a team effort, they were good on ideas and came up with a lot, which was positive’, (BM4). This, however, was the exception, and the lack of preparation, or thought, on the part of the Big Deal teams did impact upon the experience of the Saturday work: ‘My group really, really hadn’t come with any ideas at all, and it was a big effort to get them even to come up with one idea, and they have come up with an idea, and since then they’ve had to come up with a few ideas’. (BM5). This evidence suggests that teams might be encouraged to undertake preparatory brain-storming around developing ideas they could take to the Launch Day work with their mentors.

3.2.5 Using the Brightside Blogs

The larger part of the Big Deal competition work was supported, and given structure, by the Brightside Big Deal blogs. This online platform provided a safe, moderated, forum for the school students to discuss their progress with the business and student mentors, and for the mentors to provide support for their teams as they carried out the weekly tasks (see Table 1 above). Overall, the business mentors’ experience of using the blogs was positive, and, with a few minor technical issues, the interviewees were pleased with the day-to-day use of the blogs by the teams, and the functionality of the platform. An example was given by one of the interviewees:

‘So, they [the team members] are formally required to log on each week and complete the tasks. So, the tasks are a series of questions which they have to basically fill in on the blog as a response. They’ve been very good. They’ve done it each week, and sometimes during the week we will have some correspondence back and forth about what they are doing. It just depends on who it is who’s doing it that week, and their style, and I think, by necessity, how comfortable they are with the question. So, I’d probably say more weeks than not we have some chat before they complete the task.’ (BM7)

Some of the business mentors came to an agreed weekly timing for discussion and preparation related to the tasks, with mentors being given input on fixed days, and, in turn, guaranteeing responses within a certain time frame. With an enthusiastic team, the blogs worked well, and, further, good interaction between the mentors and the teams could help offset limited school support for teams. For example, one mentor said, ‘we contact each other almost every day [...] I don’t want them to be disadvantaged because there’s not another adult [at the school] helping them’, (BM3). With the exception of one of the business mentor interviewees, they were very impressed by the levels of online engagement shown by the Big Deal teams; and a representative example is given in Box 4.

Box 4: Working with a Big Deal team using the Brightside Blogs platform.

We agreed right at the beginning a timetable that if they let me have their stuff on a Thursday evening, I will get back to them on the Friday with my responses, and I’ve tried to stick to that. At the same time, I’ve said that if you need to raise something at other times, don’t feel you’ve got to be stuck to the Thursday schedule. I’ve actually been incredibly impressed, not only by their enthusiasm, but also with the ideas they’ve come up with, and also they’re taking on board that, when youOK, they’re 15 years old, they don’t understand all this business stuff, and what I’ve had to do (it’s quite hard for me) , so when I’m producing stuff for them I don’t use management speak [...] but they’ve got ideas, and they’ve got concepts, and it seems to work quite well.

BM1

Seven of the nine business mentor interviewees were positive about their experience of working online with their Big Deal teams. The two whose experience was less positive put

the weaknesses down in one case to the team's lack of commitment, and, in the other case, to a lack of support from the school for their Big Deal students.

3.2.6 Benefits for the Big Deal competitors

The Big Deal competition aims to ensure that young people taking part in the competition benefit in a number of ways. These include benefits relating, firstly, to the business and entrepreneurial focus of the competition; for example, creating a business or social enterprise, and learning about business and enterprise. In addition, it is intended that the young people will also benefit in relation to building their team skills, their confidence and thinking about their futures. The business mentor interviewees were asked what they thought had been the benefits, if any, that the young people had already, before the completion of the competition, enjoyed.

The interviewees identified a range of areas in which they felt that the Big Deal competitors were acquiring and enhancing their skill. These areas were: working to deadlines, delegating tasks, team working, organisation, planning and timing, and self-confidence. A good, illustrative, account of the benefits accruing to one team is presented in Box 5.

Box 5: Learning and the Big Deal experience.

The team working is definitely developing. They uncovered hidden strengths that they didn't know existed. They're definitely better at creative thinking if you see the results that they're putting in. I'm surprised in some ways with the quality of what they're managing to do, definitely developing their financial skills and definitely developing their presentation and analysis. My biggest surprise during this process was on one occasion they had to go and do market research to speak to their target audience and understand

that this idea they'd got how it would be met, and I set them the task to go out and speak to as many people as possible and they came back having surveyed 75 people which surprised the hell out of me, I was expecting about 10, so really engaged and working as a team seems to be good considering they came into it not really knowing each other and they seem to be leveraging each other's strengths as well; they've got one person who's good at finance; one person who's good at presentation; one person's who's more analytical.

(BM2)

The business mentors were also aware of the longer-term goal of UniTracks membership, that of increasing the number of gifted and talented school students, with non-university family backgrounds, applying for leading universities. The interviewees gave accounts of how they thought the Big Deal competition was contributing to the overall goal of the UniTracks programme. An example was:

'The ten weeks is great but at the end of the day there is a wider aim to get them interested and engaged and wanting to go to these top universities so I was conscious of that and I did chat to them about it. I don't think they specifically asked me outright but I just blathered on to them. I talked to them about university and when they apply and what to think about and just really shared my experiences of what it was like for me applying and saying just try and pick a university that works best for you and again I was talking to them last week we were talking about A levels with their teacher as well and saying that they were tricky and a lot more work maybe than GCSEs which involves a lot of study because they are very hard. Also I grew up where their school is, so even though I don't live there now, I grew up there and my family still live there and so it was quite good because I feel like I had a bit more in common with them, and maybe they related to me a bit more. So it was quite nice to have that.' (BM4)

In a similar vein, another interviewee stressed the importance of the student mentor role in this respect, with student mentors being, perhaps, more suited by age and recent experience to talk to the school students about university choices, subject choices, and the transition from school to university.

3.2.7 Business mentor suggestions for future Big Deal Competitions

The business mentors provided a number of suggestions relating to future running of the Big Deal competition. These related to: preparation for the Launch Days, additional functions on the Brightside blogs platform, the role of student mentor, and the commitment required from participating schools and school staff.

The need for more information and time to prepare for the business mentors' input into the Launch Days was covered above (3.2.4.1 Preparing for the Launch Days). This was a majority view on the part of the business mentor interviewees, who would have liked clearer instructions regarding their role over the Launch Days, particularly the second day, which would then enable them to prepare more fully for their contact time with the Big Deal teams.

There was a small range of issues relating to the Big Deals blogs that were raised by four of the interviewees. Suggestions were made in relation to extending the functionality of the blogs. The interviewees said that they found it problematic that there was no capacity to forward messages or documents, copy in other recipients, and that the postings of student and business mentors were not immediately available to both mentors. For example, one business mentor explained:

‘I do think the blog is quite frustrating, in that you can’t forward, you can’t copy in, which means that ... you can send a group message but you have to start it from scratch. So if, for example, the task has come to me from one of the students if I want to answer him and the others, or him and copy in the student mentor, I can’t do that. So what I’ve ended up doing is if I do an individual response to one of the students then I copy it and send it to the student mentor because otherwise he doesn’t know what I’ve said and then I’ve been trying to encourage him to send me what’s he’s communicating to them because otherwise there’s a danger that we are saying different things and giving guidance that is not aligned, which then becomes very complicated when a student is trying to work out okay I’ve got two completely different points of view – what on earth do I do next? So that’s challenging and that would be easy for them to fix I’m sure. In moderation I understand why it’s necessary but that then becomes kind of challenging in terms of flow.’

(BM7)

In addition, one interviewee made a specific request for a dedicated document storage area of the blogs, where all relevant documents relating to the running of the Big Deal competition might be found.

Those business mentor interviewees who had been co-working with the less pro-active student mentors (see: 3.2.4.3 Working with student mentors on the Launch Days) stressed the importance of the student mentor role. The business mentors argued that the student mentors were important in supporting and co-working with the business mentors, both on the Launch Days and throughout the rest of the competition. They also argued that the student mentors had a unique role in bringing a young person’s perspective and experience relating to university, and that the student mentors should be prepared to fulfil that role.

That not all student mentors were pro-active, engaged, and willing to contribute throughout the competition was, the business mentors felt, an issue that needed some consideration.

There was a particular stress by some of the interviewees on the need to ensure more commitment from schools to support the young people. The importance of reliable contacts with a named member of school staff who was fully committed to supporting the school Big Deal team was stressed, with one interviewee encapsulating the view (Box 6).

Box 6: The importance of school buy-in to Big Deal.

I think the school direction thing, I think that could be tighter in terms of perhaps in getting the schools from the very beginning to appoint someone to be the co-ordinator-type person would be good, and actually perhaps having one on the blog as well because one of the things is the blog's got the student group on and it's got the student mentor on and it's got me on but I don't know whether the person in the school sees any of that. They don't necessarily need to get involved but it might be useful if they see what's going on and I think that adds a connective link with the school, there being someone who is the key point of contact. There wouldn't appear to me to be a hugely difficult thing at the beginning when the school decides to go in for this to say 'right, this person is going to be the person who's going to deal with it and they're going to go to the launch, they're going to go to the heats, they're going to go to the final' so they've got a commitment to be part of that process where at the moment it's just something that's going on, on the side lines. I've got the feeling that the student team is very committed, very active, running forward with this idea. I'm not totally convinced that there's somebody in the school giving them the backing they need.

(BM1)

This view was also stressed by other interviewees, including, for example, one who noted that 'I do think that it's crucial having a teacher as an active stakeholder in this' (BM5).

3.3 Student mentors' views

All 14 student mentors were invited to be interviewed about their participation in the Big Deal competition. However, only three agreed to be interviewed. The three student mentor interviewees provided interesting commentary on their experience of taking part in the Big Deal, covering their personal backgrounds and motivations for volunteering to take part in the Big Deal, the preparation they received to act as student mentors, the Launch Days and their work with the young people, the Brightside blogs, the benefits that they felt the young people were getting from the competition, and suggestions for future Big Deals. Although the data presented here represents the views of only three of the 14 student mentors, it does present a snapshot of the student mentor experience, and some interesting points were made by the interviewees.

3.3.1 Student mentors – backgrounds and motivations

The three student mentors all had relevant experience and backgrounds, having been mentored, or having been a mentor previously. They also had an interest in the widening participation agenda of the University of Warwick, and the UniTracks and Big Deal offer. A good, illustrative, statement on this came from one of the student mentors, who, in answer to a question about their motivation said: 'Mainly the widening participation aspect because my school was quite poor, and I'm all behind the university trying to get people from less privileged backgrounds to not be too scared to come to uni basically,' (SM1). The student who had themselves benefited from mentoring also explained:

‘I’ve had the experience of benefiting from mentoring, so that’s why I was, like, OK, I had a good experience, and I recognized the importance, and how useful I found it, so I thought it seems like a good way I can help somebody else in a sphere where maybe I could use the good knowledge that I gained in my first year [of university].’ (SM2).

3.3.2 Induction and support

The interviewees all expressed satisfaction with the induction and preparation they were given prior to the start of the Big Deal competition. The only point that was raised was in relation to the Brightside blogs. The student mentors had no problems using the blogs site, - ‘the system was really easy to use’ (SM1) - but it was suggested that it might be useful if student mentors could have access to the platform prior to the training – ‘I think if I’d been able to log onto the site before that webinar [on the blogs] it would have made a lot more sense’ (SM3). The other interviewee said that they thought that the blogs ‘needed an update’ (SM2), as it looked dated.

3.3.3 Student mentors’ perceptions of the Big Deal Launch Days

The three student mentors had slightly different experiences of the Launch Days. They all felt that the role was an important one, especially in their work with the young people. It was this aspect of the Launch Days that they enjoyed most, and where they felt that they were making a difference to the experience of the young people. Working with the business mentors was a more varied experience; although it was expected that the student mentor role was subsidiary to the business mentor, there was a sense that the student mentors wanted greater clarity about the roles.

3.3.3.1 Student mentors and their Big Deal teams at the Launch Days

The student mentor interviewees all saw a high level of value in the time that they spent with their Big Deal teams when they were showing them around the campus, talking to them about university, and eating lunch with them. It was during these interactions that the student mentors felt that they were helping to create a positive image of university life, and, particularly, the University of Warwick, for the young people. The student mentor interviewees were ready to be pro-active with the young people, appreciating that they needed to take a lead in order to help the teams get the most out of the experience. For example, one student mentor explained:

‘They were quite quiet, but I prompted them, and asked them if they had any questions. It [looking around the campus] gave them more of a sense of what it is like, less of a mythical situation, and it makes it more of a reality, they can see themselves potentially being in a place like this, so I think it was a good experience for them.’ (SM2).

3.3.3.2 Student mentors working with business mentors

The three interviewees each had a different experience of working with their business mentor. Two of them felt that they had very good working relationships with their business mentors, and that they formed a good team to support the Big Deal teams. The third was not sure about the experience of the second day of the event, when the business mentor was leading on the day-long session with the team. Nonetheless, this student mentor still felt that they had a valuable role to play.

The second day of the launch was given over to extended work with the mentors to help the teams develop an initial business idea and begin their ten week project. One of the

interviewees argued that they had a valuable role in this process, acting in an important supporting role for the business mentor:

‘They [the team] seemed to be a little uncomfortable with the business mentor when they first met, because he came from a more academic background maybe, probably felt more like a teacher. They didn’t freely talk, they spoke to me, and I kind of fed back at times [...] it was that they felt more comfortable speaking to the student mentor than the business mentor.’ (SM2)

There was a sense that the student mentors and the business mentors were having to develop their relationship, and their co-working in an ad-hoc fashion. This was, perhaps, inevitable, given the lack of time they had together prior to the start of the Launch events, and did not, in itself, lead to issues relating to the effectiveness of co-working to support the Big Deal teams. The effectiveness of that relationship was dependent on the approach of student and business mentors. For example, one student mentor commented: ‘the contact between us was quite easy to be honest, [the business mentor] and I got on really well, so we’d e-mail and communicate on the blog easily,’ (SM1).

3.3.4 Using the Brightside Blogs

Overall, the student mentors were positive about the Brightside Blogs, the weekly tasks structure, and the functionality of the platform. There were, nonetheless, some issues, in particular, they felt that there was a need for a smoother running feedback process that enabled the student and the business mentors to see each other’s feedback as a matter of course. In addition, there was some concern that the timings might be too tight, given the other commitments that the school teams had, and that there might be room for more flexibility in relation to timings, or that the competition could be a little longer.

A typical comment on the Brightside Blogs and the weekly tasks was:

‘I think it was good, it gave them small tasks, small deadlines, because they’ve never had ... if you tell them to submit a business plan, that’s quite daunting, so I think it was very good. It’s just that maybe some tasks should have been a bit longer, and others shorter. For example, my team needed an extension on their research, their market research, because they’d contacted a local business, and were going to meet them the following week, so the business mentor gave them a weekend and a day. Maybe that added a bit of flexibility, so someone could adjust it, but then still be on schedule for the end. Maybe that’s something that could be built in.’ (SM2).

The student mentor interviewees all said that they thought the weekly structure was ‘good in that it kept them working on it throughout’ (SM2), but some flexibility was necessary.

3.3.5 Benefits for the Big Deal competitors

All the student mentor interviewees were able to identify benefits accruing to the Big Deal teams from their participation in the competition. These identified benefits matched those mentioned by the business mentors. The student mentors talked about their school teams gaining in terms of confidence, team working, knowledge about business and planning, deadline keeping, public speaking, and enjoyment. One student mentor, for example, explained that despite the fact that their team did not get through to the finals, they still gained a great deal from participation; Box 7.

Box 7: A student mentor's view of benefits gained by a Big Deal team.

I know they really enjoyed it, being in the competition. I tried to make it a fun experience, and they all improved their confidence immediately from the moment I met them to the end of the project. The quietest member wouldn't even talk to me at the start unless I asked him a direct question and by the end he was making jokes, just speaking up, so that definitely improved and they particularly were two members down right at the end, they were so determined to get it in, sort it out and re-distribute the work, so that aspect was so beneficial even though it was quite stressful for them, but I know they definitely enjoyed it and I know they found it a good experience.

(SM2)

3.3.6 Student mentor suggestions for future Big Deal Competitions

Each of the student mentor interviewees made suggestions for future offerings of the Big Deal competition. These suggestions related to school support, contact time between the teams and the student and business mentors, and the budgeting session during the Launch Day event. Two of the student mentor interviewees questioned whether the schools provided sufficient support for the young people. One team was only able to attend the Launch Days because of the support of parents, not the school. In this case, the school failed to send a teacher, or organize transport. Another school teacher merely dropped the young people off at the Launch Days, then picked up at the end of the event – 'I'm pretty sure the teacher just dropped them off on the Friday night. I met him just to say "hi", and then he left them in my hands' (SM1). The third student mentor did, however, think that their team's school was very supportive at all stages of the competition.

One of the student mentor interviewees wondered whether there was scope for greater engagement between mentors and young people. In particular, at the Launch Days events, where student mentors could be assigned a stronger contact role with more time and

opportunity to show the young people around the campus, and answer their questions about the university. The same interviewee also wondered whether the heats event could be an overnight event, so that the teams would have longer to prepare their presentations with the help of business and student mentors.

Finally, all three of the student mentors raised the business planning session of the Launch Days event as being problematic. They reported that the young people found the presentation difficult to follow, primarily because they had no prior understanding of the topic. As one student mentor explained:

‘I don’t think the budgeting session on the Launch was great, just because it was quite technical, and it was a lot of information, and they all looked a bit dazed (it kind of went over their heads). I think it needed to be simplified, especially at that point maybe that could have been a session that happened later on, maybe there could have been a recording that they released that they [the young people] could watch for more detail. But it was too complicated at that point, so they switched off, and didn’t really listen at all, because it was too complicated for them’ (SM2).

This was the view of the other interviewees, and suggests that some modifications might need to take place.

3.4 Teachers’ views

Teachers from all 14 schools were invited to be interviewed about their school’s participation in the Big Deal competition. Teachers from ten Big Deal schools agreed to be

interviewed, but seven of these failed to keep telephone interview appointments, including additional appointments. In the end, only three teachers were interviewed. Although it is usually difficult to arrange telephone interviews with school staff, the fact that only three of 14 were eventually interviewed may have been a reflection of an issue that business mentors and student mentors raised - that is a lack of commitment by some schools to the Big Deal offer.

The three teacher interviews that were carried out provided data on the running and the impact of the Big Deal competition. Although the data is drawn from only three interviews, some interesting points were made by the teaching staff.

3.4.1 School staff views on the operation of the Big Deal competition

The three interviewees were very positive about the operation of the Big Deal competition. They expressed satisfaction about the Launch Days, the blogs, and the input of the business and student mentors. The only issues raised were in relation to time allowed for completing the weekly tasks, and concern over the budgeting session during the Launch Days.

3.4.1.1 School staff views on the Launch Days

The interviewees were pleased by the experience of the Launch Days, welcoming the chance that it gave the young people to see the university, stay for a night on the campus, meet the student mentors, and benefit from the Saturday workshops. The school staff put a high value on their young people being able to see, and stay at, the university. Typically, the young people were the first in their families to have a chance of attending university, and this lack of cultural capital was being offset by the residential nature of the Launch Days. One of the school staff interviewees explained: 'I think that it's a good idea that the kids stop over and do that in terms of their sense of what a university feels like in terms of halls of residence and things, I think that is just a really good idea,' (ST1). The residential nature

of the Launch Days gave the opportunity for the young people to have time with the student mentors, who were valued by the school staff. One of the school staff, who had previous experience of the Big Deal competition when it did not have a residential element said: 'This time I think it was much better in my opinion because it was spread over two days [...] and there was a lot more opportunity for the students to meet their student mentors,' (ST3). The only issue raised in connection with the Launch Days related to the budgeting session. One school staff interviewee said: 'The weakest point was the budgeting. The lecturer, I think because he's used to speaking to adults and university students, it was a little bit over their heads, it didn't reach them particularly well, and they did switch off a bit,' (ST1). This issue was also raised by some of the student mentors.

4.4.1.2 School staff views on the Brightside blogs, and the weekly tasks

The school staff interviewees were positive in their views of the Brightside blogs, although there was some concern that the young people struggled to complete some tasks in the short time available, and a suggestion that there should be some increase in the time allowed.

The school staff interviewees all reported that they were happy with the functionality of the blogs platform – 'we haven't had any issues with it' (ST1). One of the interviewees gave a good account of how they used a short weekly review session of the blog tasks to keep in touch with the young people's progress:

'I think the blog is a really good idea, the weekly blogs, and we give the opportunity for the students at our school, we meet every Wednesday at break time for half an hour, they sit in, and we've got a few computers in my department's office, and they all discuss their ideas, what they've done the previous week, the task that they have to do on that blog, and then the submit it within that time. If they needed more

time, they can come at lunchtime, after school – they just let me know when they need that extra time really.’

(ST2)

This is also a useful account of the way in which one school team was supported by school staff. The issue of time was a prominent one, and while acknowledging that carrying out the weekly task successfully and to time was an important learning experience for the young people, there was still a sense that there could be a bit more flexibility in this area. One school staff member noted:

‘That is the only negative that we’ve found, the feedback I would like to give Big Deal is if it could be over a longer period of time, the weekly tasks. Some of them are massive, and to get them done in a week alongside their schoolwork is a tall order for them, because all of the team are doing extra GCSE work after school anyway, so it’s been a bit overwhelming in that respect.’ (ST1).

This issue was also raised by some of the student and business mentors, and the young people themselves.

3.4.2 School staff view of the impact on school teams of taking part in the Big Deal

The school staff interviewees gave good accounts of the impact on their school students from taking part in the Big Deal competition. These were: social skills, organisational and planning skills, communication skills, and a clearer idea of university life. The school staff interviewees were very positive about what they saw as the gains that their students were

making as part of the Big Deal competition. One of the interviewees said that ‘the skills these kids pick up during these challenges are absolutely priceless I think, not just the social aspect, but also the organisation, the communication between each other,’ (ST3). This was also the view of the other interviewees, while one of the school staff made a very clear link between their school teams’ aim of getting to university to the acquisition, as part of the Big Deal, of university appropriate learning skills, and the experience of seeing and staying at a university; Box 8.

Box 8: The Big Deal experience and university – a school teacher’s view of the impact on school students.

It [Big Deal] gives them the opportunity of figuring out what university might be like. My point of view is that they’ve decided to go to university, where they’ll be left to their own devices, whereas at school we support them hugely – it’s just that learning curve isn’t it, to build up, and I think that the Big Deal helps them to realise what life would be like at university. [...] I think the first thing is that they actually went to the university itself, and they could see what a lecture theatre looks like, and just the people milling about, the students themselves, and I think they got a little bit of a taster in the first place for that. (ST1)

3.5 The Brightside Trust

A Brightside Trust staff member with responsibility for the Big Deal blogs was interviewed by telephone. The interview was recorded, with informed consent, and fully transcribed for analysis. In addition, the Brightside Trust provided details of blogs site engagement figures, both overall, and by team, along with skills tracker data. Findings from both this data and the interview are presented here. The interview focused on the recent background regarding the Brightside Trust’s role in the Big Deal competition, the aims and purposes,

from the Brightside Trust's viewpoint, of involvement with the Big Deal, and the organisation and daily operation of the Big Deal blogs.

3.5.1 The Brightside Trust's mission and the Big Deal competition

There was, of course, a notable commonality in the aims and goals of the Brightside Trust with that of UniTracks. As the interviewee put it:

'In terms of helping young people make informed decision; helping them make confident decisions; giving them skills and networks to do that, that's kind of the crux of our mission and vision, and I think that fits really well with this project [Big Deal]. Obviously a lot of this is about developing those skills, those team work skills, and being creative, but I think that being in contact with the business mentor, with the student mentor, is also giving them more information about university, giving them connections, and just more information to make those sort of decisions in the future.' (BT1).

The interviewee further stressed the importance that Brightside attaches to the role of both business and student mentors in the competition, but also in the trust's work in general (it runs 25-28 mentoring schemes aimed at school-age young people). The interviewee provided an account of the operation of the Big Deal blogs that stressed the willingness of both Brightside and Warwick Business School to develop the blogs as a platform to support the competition. It was this stress that provided the impetus to changes in the blogs platform between 2014 and 2016. It is also the reason why the Brightside Trust wants mentors to be aware of the importance, but also the particular nature of, online mentoring. The interviewee gave an example of the difference between face-to-face and online mentoring: 'we want the mentors to understand the groups they are working with, the

importance of being reliable, the difference between that communication online and if they were, for example, mentoring face-to-face, so the importance of active listening, and frequent replies to e-mails,' (BT1).

3.5.2 Developing the Big Deal blogs

The Big Deal blogs have undergone change over the last two years, and further change is planned for 2017. The interviewee explained that in previous years, the function of the blogs had been limited, largely acting as a platform from which the Big Deal teams could download weekly worksheets. However, it was recognized that this approach minimized the role of mentors, and failed to exploit the potential of an online mentoring programme. As a result, the Brightside Trust and WBS worked together to remove the barriers to the full use of the blogs platform:

'The site wasn't fully integrated into the project so teams could use the site to download worksheets but they didn't have to interact with their mentor so not only is interacting with their mentor now part of their project, they have to do it in terms of winning the prize, but also they're using the site right from the very beginning so they start using the site on that launch day and they use it throughout and I think they talk to their mentors a lot more. The mentors are a lot more involved in the idea generation now so that feels more natural for them to continue those conversations and I think also now that we've kind of moved along to activities, that's helped.' (BT1)

The interactions between the young people and the mentors are also tracked, and site engagement is one of the metrics that contribute to a team's final score. The outcome of these changes led to a notable increase in the young people's engagement with the blogs in

2016, which, in the opinion of the interviewee was a 'real testament to adding that [new] structure, and the young people knowing what is expected of them,' (BT1).

The process of review and improvement has been built into the Big Deal blogs, and further change is being planned for 2017:

'We're currently going through a whole technology overhaul at Brightside which is exciting for us and we're getting a completely new site next year so if we're running the Big Deal blogs again the site is going to look very different because it's going to be amazing and the Big Deal will have been considered within that site planning so it means that things are going to work much better, messaging within a group is going to be a lot smoother.' (BT1)

The aim is to continually seek ways of adding value to the Big Deal competition by integrating the blogs as completely as possible with the daily operation of the competition, and ensuring that mentor-mentee contact is fully enabled.

3.5.3 Big Deal blogs site engagement and skills tracker

Data regarding site engagement by the young people was collected by individual team and in aggregate. In addition, the young people were able to track their own, self-assessed, skills development using a skills tracker tool; this data was also collected through the Brightside blogs.

The teams were set 11 weekly activities to complete. Of the 14 teams, one team completed 10 activities, eight teams completed nine activities, three completed eight activities, one, seven activities, and one team completed only five activities, giving an average number of eight out of 11 activities completed by the teams. The Big Deal 2016 site engagement figures are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Big Deal Blogs 2016 Site Engagement

Average number of log ins per mentee	31
Average number of log ins per team	129
Average number of messages per mentee	14
Average number of messages per team	58
Average number of log ins per mentor	34
Average number of messages per mentor	51
Average number of activities completed per team	8

This level of engagement represented a notable increase in engagement with previous years, and was seen to reflect the changes introduced by the Brightside Trust⁵.

The young people who took part in the competition were also able to self-assess their perceptions of how participation in the Big Deal helped build key skills, relating to confidence, communication skills, creativity, motivation and presentation skills. The data available to the evaluation related to the early period of the competition, prior to the heats, when all teams were still taking part. The data is presented in Table 4.

⁵ At the time of writing, data for previous years' engagement levels was still awaited.

Table 4: Skills Tracker data. Self-assessed skills tracking by participating young people.

Skill	Average Initial value	Average Target value	Average Latest value (prior to heats)
Confidence	6.4	8.6	8
Communication Skills	6.3	8.7	7.6
Creativity	6.2	8.3	7.6
Motivation	7.2	9	7.8
Presentation Skills	5.9	8.1	7.1

Data was also gathered in respect of the percentages of mentees who felt that they had improved their skills in key areas as a result of participating in the Big Deal competition. This data is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Skills Tracker data relating to percentage of mentees (prior to the heats) who improved key skills.

	% mentees who improved skill
Confidence	88%
Communication Skills	74%
Creativity	73%
Motivation	54%
Presentation Skills	54%

Without further information it is difficult to interpret the skill tracker data, but it is reasonable to assume that the comparatively low percentages of mentees who felt that they had improved their presentation skills, and boosted their confidence reflected their already high levels of confidence and presentation skills at the outset.

3.6 UniTracks' school students' views

Data gathering relating to the participant school students was limited to an end of competition questionnaire completed by the 20 Big Deal competitors at the competition final on 18th April, 2016. The questionnaire consisted of five point Likert scale response questions relating to: 'Working in a Big Deal team'; 'Working with the business mentor and the Bog Deal blog'; 'Support from your school for your Big Deal team'; 'The Big Deal experience'; and 'The Big Deal and your future'. In addition, there was an open question which invited respondents to add any additional comments. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 1. The findings presented here are an overview of the data, presenting basic demographic details of the finalists, and a review of the key areas covered by the questionnaire. Respondents' additional comments made in the open question section of the questionnaire (eight of the respondents completed that section) are also presented.

3.6.1 The responses to the end of competition questionnaire

3.6.1.1 *Demographics*

Of the 20 finalists, three were male and all three described their ethnicity as 'White British'; while 16 were female. All the young people were in Year 10 of their schools. Just over half of the finalists who responded to the ethnicity question (19 of the 20 did) described their ethnicity as 'White British'. The remaining respondents described themselves in a variety of ways: Black African, White (Other), Asian, Asian (Other), British Pakistani, British Indian, and Bangladeshi. The details are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Self-described ethnicity of Big Deal finalists.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid:				
White British	10	50.0	52.6	52.6
Black African	1	5.0	5.3	57.9
White (Other)	2	10.0	10.5	68.4
Asian	2	10.0	10.5	78.9
Asian (Other)	1	5.0	5.3	84.2
British Pakistani	1	5.0	5.3	89.5
British Indian	1	5.0	5.3	94.7
Bangladeshi	1	5.0	5.3	100.0
Total	19	95.0	100.0	
Missing -99	1	5.0		
Total	20	100.0		

3.6.1.2 Working in a Big Deal team

Team working skills represented one of the core skills that the Big Deal competition aims to build in participants. Seven discrete questions were asked in relation to team working with other young people. The questions related to: enjoyment from working together, the amount of effort respondents thought they had put into working with their team mates, whether they thought they had learnt new team working skills, new planning skills, new communications skills, new budgeting skills and new presentation skills from working together as a team. All the finalists responded to all questions.

The responses were, overall, strongly positive, and ranged from 75% 'agree' or 'totally agree' with the statement regarding new budgeting skills, to 100% 'agree' or 'totally agree'

with the statement regarding learning new presentation skills, and 100% 'agree' or 'totally agree' regarding 'plenty of effort' being put into the competition. Only two respondents returned a 'disagree' response, both for question 2f – 'new budgeting skills'. Three of the respondents made open comment remarks relating to skills acquisition:

'I have become a lot more confident in all aspects and have seen myself become a lot more professional.'

'I feel that it has helped me to develop my skills and enhance my knowledge on how a business is run and how they work.'

'This has been a great opportunity to try something new and learn new skills.'

These comments reflect the fact that there was overall response of 89% 'agree' or 'totally agree' with the key skills areas, indicating that the respondents were strongly positive in their perceptions of how much they had gained from team working in the Big Deal competition.

3.6.1.3 Working with the business mentor and the Big Deal blog.

The questionnaire asked five discrete questions relating to working with the teams' business mentors, and using the Big Deal blogs facility. The questions related to: whether having an online mentor was a good idea, how easy it was to interact with the mentor online; how easy it was to keep in contact once a week at least, how good the advice was from the mentor, and whether the team had enough time to complete the tasks.

The responses to one question, 3e ‘your team had enough time to complete the weekly tasks’, stood out in that it had the lowest positive response, with only 50% of respondents agreeing or totally agreeing that there was enough time to complete the weekly tasks. This contrasted with the 85%-95% positive response rate to the other questions. The complete response rate is given in Table 7.

Table 7: Did your team have enough time to complete the weekly tasks?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid:				
Totally disagree	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
Disagree	4	20.0	20.0	30.0
Neither agree nor disagree	4	20.0	20.0	50.0
Agree	5	25.0	25.0	75.0
Totally agree	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Interestingly, of the eight respondents who made comments in response to the open question of the questionnaire, four of the finalists mentioned problems with timing. The comments were:

‘Need more time generally. Ten weeks is too short. A task to do every week is too hard for Y10 students.’

‘Need more weekly time for tasks [and] at the Launch more details about tasks to come.’

‘One thing which I think they should be aware of is exams, as they clashed [with tasks].’

‘Timings of the events were wrong, which was not good especially if we have real or mock exams.’

Apart from the issue of time, the respondents were strongly positive about the value, responsiveness and advice of the business mentor using the Big Deal blog.

3.6.1.4 Support from school for Big Deal teams

The questionnaire asked four questions relating to school support for the Big Deal teams. These related to: good overall support, good individual teacher support, the interest of school peers in the competition, and how proud the school was of Big Deal team achievements. The responses to all the questions were positive, ranging from 60% ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ in relation to the questions of overall school support (which, nevertheless also saw a 15% ‘disagree’, and 25% ‘neither agree nor disagree’ response), and peer interest, to 80% ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ in relation to school pride in the team achievement, and 70% for teacher support (which also saw a 20% ‘disagree’ response). The overall picture, then, was of satisfaction with school support.

3.6.1.5 The Big Deal experience

The questionnaire contained five questions relating to the Big Deal experience, skills development and future career choices. The responses suggest that taking part in the competition had a strongly positive effect on the in terms of skills development and confidence. All the respondents ‘agreed’ (n=10), or ‘totally agreed’ (n=10) that the Big Deal experience had made them more confident about their abilities. In terms of the Big Deal experience helping to develop new skills that the respondents thought would help them in

school, 95% 'agreed' or 'totally agreed', and only one respondent neither agreed nor disagreed. Eighty-five percent of the respondents also 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' that the Big Deal had helped them develop skills that would be helpful in their post-school career. Interestingly, taking part in the competition had less of an effect on the young people's ideas about their future (only 55% 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' with the statement), or on being more interested in a business career, although 65% 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' with that statement.

3.6.1.6 The Big Deal and the young people's perceptions of their future

As one might expect, the young people appear to have already had a good idea of which 'A' levels they want to study, and the experience of taking part in the Big Deal had a small impact, with only 4 of the respondents (n=19 for the question) 'agreeing' that taking part had 'affected your views about what subjects you want to study at A level'. However, taking part in the competition did appear to have a strongly positive impact on the young people's desire 'to attend a top university', with 90% (n=18, of 19) 'agreeing' or 'totally agreeing' with the statement. In terms of possible university degree choices, and, beyond university, career choices, the impact of taking part in the Big Deal was less pronounced. Only 35% (n=7, out of 19) thought that the competition had affected their views about degree choice, and 45% (n=9, of 19) 'agreed' or 'totally agreed' in relation to future career choices.

4. Summary and Recommendations

4.1 Overview

The Big Deal competition 2016 was a successful, highly-valued offer, and Big Deal continues to represent a highlight of UniTracks' membership. Participating young people, business mentors, student mentors and school staff all reported positively about the experience of the Big Deal. There was also evidence that participating in the competition boosted skills and confidence in key areas relating to learning, school and post-school careers. Similarly, being involved with the University of Warwick, visiting the campus, and taking part in the

heats and the final enhanced the desire, on the part of most young people, to attend a well-regarded university.

4.2 Recommendations

There were a number of issues relating to the operation of the Big Deal competition that may require additional attention in the future. These are:

4.2.1 The role of schools and school staff

The level of engagement with the competition on the part of schools and their staff varied. Some schools seem to have had a limited conception of the support that was needed for their UniTracks' Big Deal students, and for the competition in general. Only a small minority of schools appear to have assigned a gifted and talented co-ordinator (or similar) to support the students in the Big Deal competition. In some cases, the students do not appear to have been supported by the same member of staff throughout the 10 weeks. In one case, the assigned member of staff was absent from early on, and was not replaced by the school. In another case, a Big Deal team travelled to, and from the Launch Event by themselves, in a private taxi which had been paid for by parents (the not insubstantial cost was, apparently, refunded by WBS).

Staff took different attitudes to their role, and support varied. There was very little communication between school staff and business or student mentors. Schools have the benefit of a UniTracks' 'Schools and Teachers Guide', but it may be that an additional 'Big Deal' guide is needed, and, a formal 'contract' might be considered between the Big Deal and schools, whereby schools agree to a number of support and engagement standards. Schools might also be encouraged to consider which of their staff should help support their Big Deal teams. Most schools offer business studies and/or economics, and it might be that staff from those departments would be able to support most effectively the school students

involved in the competition. Finally, it should be stressed to schools that members for the Big Deal competition teams should have volunteered for the competition. In one case, it was reported that the team members had, from the outset, been unwilling participants. This had, of course, negative consequences for the team's engagement with Big Deal and the business and student mentor.

4.2.3 The workload commitment required from school students.

Data from both business and student mentors, and teachers, suggested that, at times, the additional workload imposed on the school students by Big Deal might be excessive. It was suggested by some mentors that the competition might be a few weeks longer (but with the same requirements), or that there might be some reduction in the weekly tasks. The Big Deal final questionnaire also indicated that workload and time issues were, for some young people, a concern.

4.2.4 The role and engagement of student mentors

There appears to have been a range of levels of engagement shown by student mentors. Some student mentors were proactive and exhibited high levels of engagement with the school students and the business mentors; others were less proactive. Student mentors noted that they were unsure as to the full extent of their role, and how far, and in what ways, they were to be involved alongside the business mentors in face-to-face, and blog, contacts with the school students. It may be that the student mentors could receive additional information and/or training related to their role in the Big Deal.

4.2.5 The Big Deal blogs

In general, this platform worked well. The main issue that arose was that the student mentors could not directly access business mentor feedback to school students. Instead, the

student mentors had to access this information separately. This issue was also raised by the business mentors. It might be that, in future, the student mentors could be integrated more fully into the blog conversations between business mentors and school students.

4.2.6 The Big Deal launch event (1)

A number of the business mentors raised the issue of prior notice relating to their involvement in the launch event. There were concerns that they had not been given adequate prior notice of the event, and that had not been fully informed as to their role over the two days. Timings and information could be improved in relation to these points.

4.2.7 The Big Deal launch event (2)

Some of the business and student mentors felt that the school students struggled to understand fully some of the elements of the event. In particular, the presentation relating to budgeting and finance was believed to have presented problems for some of the school students. It was suggested that some of the information presented might be more suitable once the school students had been involved with their project for a couple of weeks.

4.2.8 The Big Deal launch event (3)

It was suggested that in order to ease day two of the event, the school teams should come prepared with short presentations covering their initial ideas of an entrepreneurial project. This would not have to be detailed, but it would enable the day two session to have a starting point produced by the school students. In this respect, point 1 above, concerning the background of the responsible member of school staff, might be relevant, with business studies or economics teachers being able to provide school students with some initial guidance.

4.2.9 The Big Deal launch event (4)

It was suggested by some of the mentors that it would be helpful if pre-launch event contact between business and student mentor pairs could be arranged, in order that they could work out their respective roles and expectations.

4.2.10 The student mentor role

School staff, business mentors and student mentors agreed that the student mentor role was potentially very important in supporting the young people in the competition, acting as a link between the young people and business mentors, and in providing an insight into university life. There were suggestions that student mentors might be allocated more time with the young people, for example, during the launch event when student mentors typically took teams on tours of the campus. The varied experience of the business mentors in relation to the student mentors they were paired with also suggests that a more rigorous recruitment process might be adopted for the student mentor role.

Appendix 1

The end of competition questionnaire, Monday, 18th April

UniTracks. *Big Deal*.

End of competition questionnaire, Monday, 18th April, 2016.

- To help the University of Warwick develop and improve The Big Deal, the *Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal & Research* (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick is evaluating all aspects of the competition.
- It would be very helpful if you could complete this end of competition evaluation questionnaire. You don't have to complete the questionnaire, but by doing so you will be contributing to continuing improvements to the UniTracks programme.
- All the information collected will be held securely, and is confidential. You are not asked to give your name, nor the name of your school, so this questionnaire is anonymous.

1. Demographic details

Gender:

Year Group:

How would you describe your ethnicity:

2. Working in a Big Deal team.

(Tick one box in response to each statement).

Thinking about the last ten weeks, and working with other students in your Big Deal team, do you think that:

	Totally disagree.	Disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree.	Totally agree.
2a. you had an enjoyable time?					
2b. you put plenty of effort into the competition?					
2c. you learnt new team working skills?					
2d. you learnt new planning skills?					
2e. you learnt new communications skills?					
2f. you learnt new budgeting skills?					
2g. you learnt new presentation skills?					

3. Working with the business mentor and the Big Deal blog.

(Tick one box in response to each statement).

Thinking about your team's work with the business mentor, using the Big Deal blog, do you think that:

	Totally disagree.	Disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree.	Totally agree.
3a. having an online business mentor was a good idea?					
3b. your business mentor was friendly and easy to 'talk' to online?					
3c. your team found it easy to keep in contact with the business mentor; at least once a week?					
3d. your business mentor gave your team a lot of good advice about the Big Deal?					
3e. your team had enough time to complete the weekly tasks?					

4. Support from your school for your Big Deal team.

(Tick one box in response to each statement).

Thinking about your team's work with the business mentor, using the Big Deal blog, do you think that:

	Totally disagree.	Disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree.	Totally agree.
4a. your team had good overall support from your school?					
4b. the teacher who supported your team was helpful throughout the competition?					
4c. your school friends were interested in what your team was doing?					
4d. your school is proud of what your team has achieved in the Big Deal competition?					

5. The Big Deal experience.

(Tick one box in response to each statement).

Thinking about the entire Big Deal experience, do you think that being involved in the competition:

	Totally disagree.	Disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree.	Totally agree.
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5a. made you more interested in a business career?					
5b. helped you develop new skills that will help you in school?					
5c. helped you develop new skills that will help you in your post-school career?					
5d. made you more confident about your abilities?					
5e. changed your ideas about your future?					

<p>6. The Big Deal and your future.</p> <p>(Tick one box in response to each statement).</p> <p><i>Thinking about your future, would you say that being involved in the Big Deal competition has:</i></p>					
	Totally disagree.	Disagree.	Neither agree nor disagree.	Agree.	Totally agree.
6a. affected your views about what subjects you want to study at A level?					

6b. increased your desire to attend a top university?					
6c. affected your views about what subject/s you want to study at university?					
6d. affected your idea about what career you would like to follow?					

7. What else would you like to tell us?

Use this space to add anything else that you think we should know about. You can comment on any aspect of Big Deal, good or bad.

Thanks for helping with this evaluation!



PLEASE HAND THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN

For further information about this evaluation, please contact: Dr Stephen Cullen, Senior Research Fellow, CEDAR, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL.

