

Mentoring Case Study for STAMINA

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Thrive Career Mentoring: a strategy embedded scheme at the University of Reading

Executive Summary

Thrive Career Mentoring is a scheme run by the Career Mentoring team, within Careers, at the University of Reading. The scheme is ambitious and, having started from two pilot schemes with 65 mentoring partnerships, currently has around 275 partnerships with the aim of some 1,000 partnerships a year by 2021 across both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses. Integration of the purpose of the scheme into the University strategy has led to long term commitment, funding and stability.

What are your goals?

The scheme, although open to all part two undergraduates, was designed with the needs of widening participation students in mind with the aim of enhancing social, economic and cultural capital for those involved where needed. The broad aim was focused on student employability: “to enable students to make a confident transition into graduate level work.”

Alongside this we designed a range of key performance indicators for which we measure positive shifts for each mentee and the cohort as a whole:

- career clarity;
- sector, organisational and job knowledge;
- confidence in interacting with professionals;
- strength and breadth of professional networks;
- self-belief in the ability to secure graduate level employment, and
- exposure to the workplace via discussions, visits, shadowing, work experience, placements, and potentially, permanent job offers.

Alongside these more immediate measures the scheme aimed to look for any correlation between scheme engagement and graduate level employment. We wanted a positive, altruistic experience for our mentors and mentees so strong engagement and a win-win situation was the team aim.

Who was involved?

The original project was initiated by Dr Orla Kennedy, Teaching and Learning Dean at the University of Reading, who made Tania Lyden, University Career Mentoring Manager project manager. Since then scheme expansion has led to a team of three and soon four (2.7FTE) with a Career Mentoring Officer, Assistant and a new Assistant planned for 2018.

Beyond this immediate team, there is a wider collaboration across the university that enables the scheme to function. Our central alumni team have been fundamental to the mentor recruitment process. We have an academic partner in every school who acts as a conduit to market to students and also to help us identify alumni mentors. Personal Tutors are also kept in the loop and consulted

if mentees stop engaging. We also have a team of Thrive Ambassadors to help with promotion and mentee training.

In 2014/15 the Career Mentoring Manager put forward successful proposals that mapped the scheme onto the University and the Careers and Employability strategy. This convinced the Head of Student and Applicant Services to invest in the scheme longer term (a further five years). The access committee also endorsed the scheme with funding at this stage.

Describe the policies, procedures and processes you used

Recruitment and marketing: involves a detailed case study led marketing campaign for both mentors and mentees. The academic network is also used as is LinkedIn for searching for particular occupations to be represented. Recruitment is open to all part two undergraduates at present up to a maximum of 400 in 2017/18 and shortly 75 postgraduate taught students across specific Schools from January 2018. We particularly encourage students with disabilities and mental health conditions who need extra support with the transition into work by encouraging tutors to refer students to the scheme and also provide extra marketing to widening participation students. We also have a range of marketing materials (stands, leaflets, stickers, coasters, pens, lollies etc.) to help us promote the scheme. We have extensive application forms for both mentors and mentees to ensure they are committed. If they won't fill in a 15 minute form, then will they meet their mentee/mentor? Mentors are normally alumni but we will aim for about 25% non-alumni to broaden our labour market reach. A third of our mentors are overseas, spread across 53 countries.

Training and support: mentees receive two hours of face to face training using a flipped classroom technique. We support them in making the first move to engage with mentors and monitor their relationships to ensure they have the support they need. Mentors receive 2-3 hours of face to face or online training and have specialist training around disability and mental health conditions if they are supporting a student where this is relevant. We support mentors with ad hoc training during the year, offer 'drop-in' clinics to discuss issues with the team and have a LinkedIn discussion page.

Matching: research suggests that formal mentoring schemes who give the mentee control in their choice of mentor are more likely to have higher mentor/mentee engagement levels. Matching is also the most time consuming part of organising a scheme. As a result we ask our mentors to create profiles and provide these on a private web page for students to review and select their own mentors. We review the choice and either confirm this or suggest a better alternative. Applications are on a first come, first served basis only. Effectively students apply to be mentored by a specific person. We have found this is highly effective and seems to have increased engagement levels.

Engagement and events: engagement is monitored, particularly at the start of the process where bonding is crucial. We expect all partnerships to meet face to face once or twice (or skype) to help build this connection. We measure engagement at the end of the scheme and regularly check in for news from our pairs throughout the year. We have a LinkedIn page for mentors, a quarterly newsletter for all and meet and greet, networking and closure events to help maintain engagement.

Evaluation: we evaluate the scheme in line with the goals listed above using a before and after survey of both parties, looking for KPI shift. The first is incorporated into the application form. We are measuring other opportunities that can be harvested from the scheme such as work shadowing

and work experience or placements. Finally, from this year we will be able to look for correlations between scheme engagement and graduate level employment.

Describe the system you used and created

To date we have functioned by using a combination of excel spreadsheets, online survey packages and word documents on webpages. With ambitious goals for growing the scheme, and having reviewed the alternative IT systems available, we are now designing our own internal database which will also have a web based user interface to facilitate students selecting mentors. The scheme will also enable us to safely store and manage mentor and mentee information and undertake routine processes such as checking training completion, checking who is matched/not matched, monitoring the diversity of mentors and mentees and also facilitating event management.

Challenges

The main challenges are resource related. Running a large scheme with only 2.7 FTE is difficult and requires innovative approaches that will not compromise standards such as training, engagement monitoring and reporting. In addition, with larger schemes comes more expense in terms of IT systems and also basics like food and drink for events.

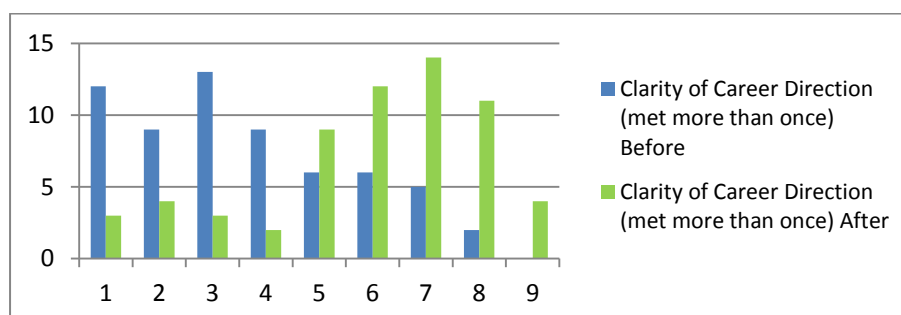
Other challenges have been around trying to secure academic commitment consistently across the University, although on the whole this has been good and continues to improve as the scheme's credibility and solid reputation become more widespread. Finally, when a mentor or a mentee decides not to engage it can be damaging to the reputation of the University, so time must be allowed for managing the fall out of these situations to preserve alumni and employer relationships.

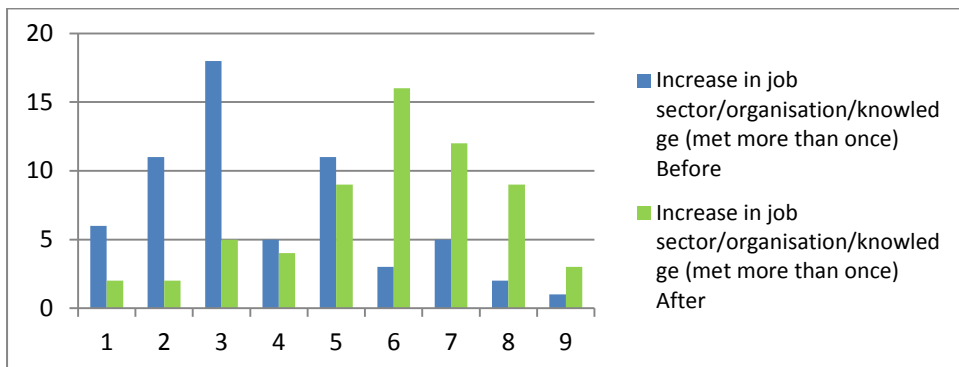
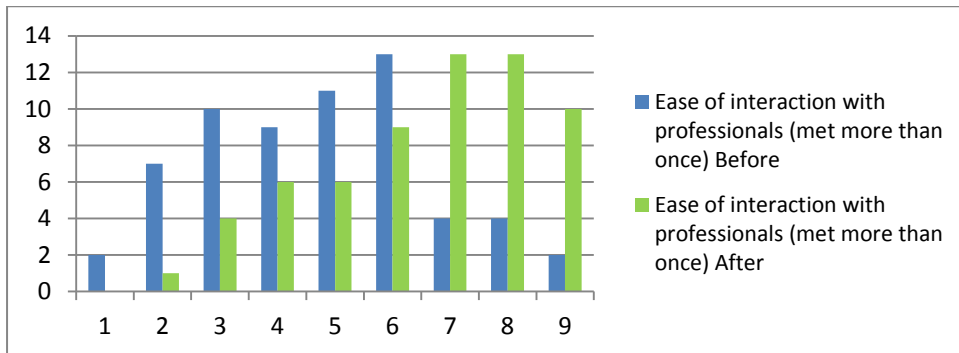
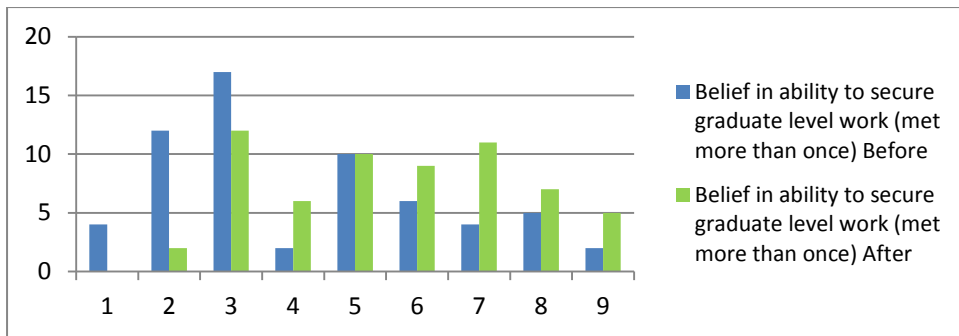
Outcomes

Our results have been excellent and we have listed these for 2015/16 below:

- 100% of mentors and mentees who met each other felt comfortable with their partner.
- 98% of mentors rated the training as good or excellent.
- 96% of mentors stated they would recommend becoming a mentor to a colleague.
- 97% of mentors felt the scheme was well or very well organised.
- 92% of mentees had at least one significant meeting/contact with their mentor with 86% meeting at least 3 times.

Learning gain





Over the next few years we will continue to enhance the quality of our mentoring, but much of our changes are being pushed through necessity due to the expansion of the scheme. We are considering moving to two six-month schemes a year for instance. We are also introducing the IT system so the administrative burden is reduced.

Supporting visuals, quotes

Mentee quotes:

“You never know what you’ll discover and how that may actually change your preconceived ideas of what you actually want from life.”

“The most important thing I have gained from my mentor is self-confidence and self-belief. Now I feel like I can walk into a room full of professionals and believe that I fit in, can have conversations and make people remember me.”

“Thrive mentoring has not only helped guide me but also empowered me.”

"I hope we keep in touch after the mentoring scheme is over, but I know now that I have what it takes to make it on my own."

"I can't believe how helpful my mentor has been at putting me in contact with different people in the food industry. I am so glad I did thrive mentoring it has been so helpful."

"I found Thrive mentoring the most useful part of careers so far. Having a mentor who is in the sector I would like to work in has been very useful and so helpful in securing an industrial placement."

"The Thrive mentoring scheme has been one of the most useful services I have received whilst being at university - I would 100% recommend it to any student at Reading."

"The biggest thing so far has been developing my first professional relationship- seeing how easy it is/ how competent I am at building a relationship with someone in the field of work I am looking to go into. "

"My mentor instigated my interview and thus my internship with "XYZ" media (name changed). This was a fantastic opportunity for me, to learn as much as I can about PR and network with people within the industry, hopefully after university to give me a head start!"

"I have really benefitted from the advice that my mentor has given me throughout my placement application. Without this I wouldn't have felt as confident and probably wouldn't have secured my placement."

"It is great to have the support of a mentor and someone to speak to, as well as having access to a network so someone such as myself (who doesn't have many family contacts in a professional work environment), can begin to expand his own network."

