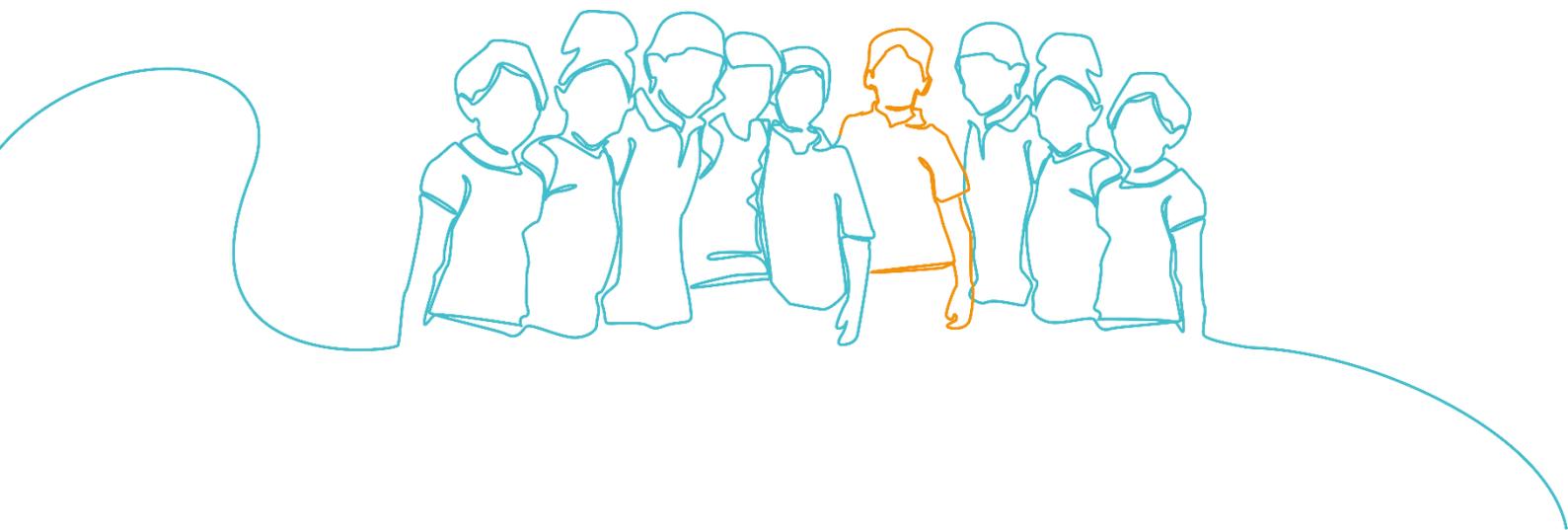


# HE Explore Online Mentoring Evaluation Report May - July 2021



*“A supportive platform in which a prospective student can find out more about their higher education options and receive advise on their next steps.”*

Mentee

*“Brilliant and informative mentoring programme. It's very necessary for students planning to continue their higher education.”*

Mentee

*“More than an app, it's given me the opportunity to meet amazing people and get some amazing advice.”*

Mentee

*“It was a very rewarding experience for me, knowing that I helped someone.”*

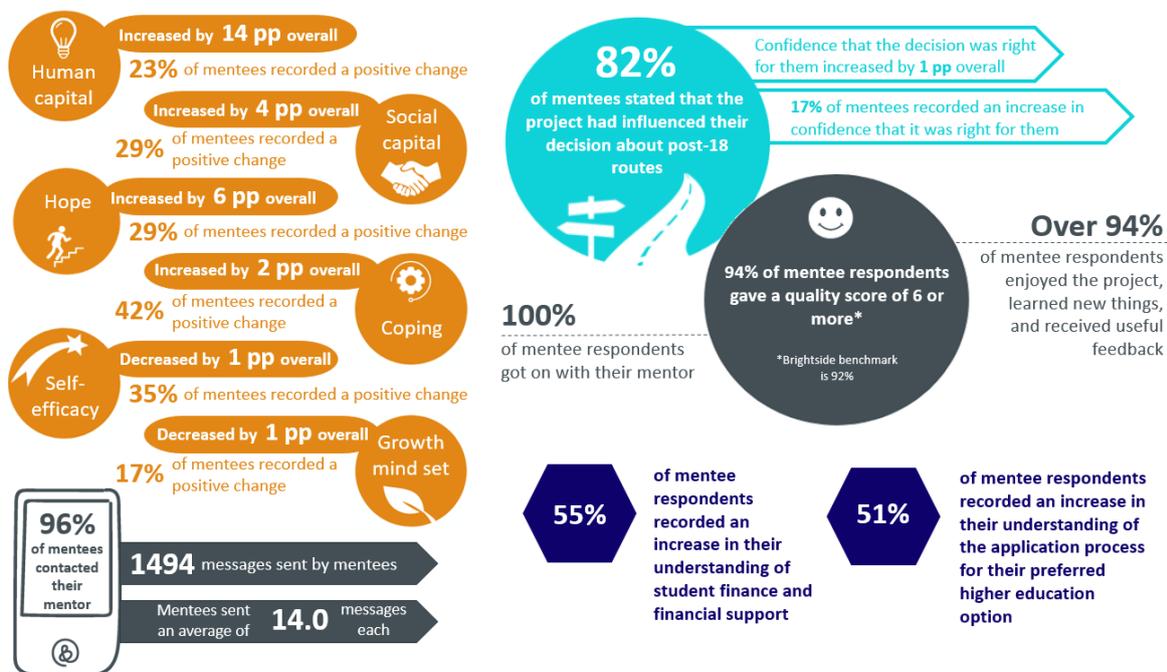
Mentor

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## 1. Executive summary

### 1.1 Key data



### 1.2 Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation shows that HE Explore online mentoring project continues to be an appropriate and effective intervention for year 12 students exploring their higher education options. The project was well-engaged, with 89% of mentees sending at least three messages and 79% sending at least six messages.

Both mentees and mentors reported high-quality mentoring experiences. 100% of mentee respondents agreeing or strongly agreed that they got on with their mentor, 97% agreed that mentoring had helped them think more clearly about the future, and 95% agreed that it had made them feel more optimistic about their future. Brightside aims for 92% of mentees to give a quality score of 6+ out of 7. 94% of mentee respondents for this project gave a quality score of 6 or more. 90% of mentor respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had a positive impact on the mentees that engaged, that they were able to build positive relationships, and that they knew how to help all of their mentees. 94% of mentor respondents agreed that they can use their experience with Brightside on their CV or job applications, a particularly positive result in the context of the pandemic and limited work experience opportunities for student ambassadors.

The majority of the impact outcomes measured saw an overall increase between the start and end of the project. Change was particularly positive in relation to mentees' knowledge and understanding of HE; 55% of mentees respondents recorded an increased understanding of financial support, 51% an increase in their understanding of higher education application processes, 41% an increased understanding of university study and 43% an increase in their knowledge of student life.

We observed the same patterns as in 2020 for behavioural and capital outcomes, with overall positive change in Human Capital, Social Capital and Hope. This year, Coping scores had particularly improved – at the overall level there was an increase of 2 percentage points compared to a decrease of 2 percentage points last year. At the individual level, Coping increased for 42% of the respondents – a 15 percentage point increase compared to last year.

Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset saw a lower proportion of mentees reporting a negative change compared to last year. The former had 31% of mentees record a decrease compared to 47% in 2020, and the latter had 26% record a decrease compared to 22% in 2021. These small decreases in the proportion of mentees reporting a negative change in these outcomes may be linked to the introduction of a mentee guide, and the redesign of the mentor mentoring guide and training materials.

Full recommendations for future projects can be found in the final section of this report but the summary is as follows.

- Continue use of the mentor matching tool.
- Continue to use automated engagement reminders on the Brightside platform to ensure timely replies by mentees and mentors.
- Continue to use Brightside’s gamification feature.
- Consider prioritising returning to live inductions (in person where possible), as this resulted in high recruitment numbers and much better conversion rates before the pandemic. It is also likely to positively impact engagement (and therefore impact).
- GAs should continue to employ a variety of recruitment methods employing the method which works best for their particular school and college contacts.
- Continue to train mentors by webinar.
- Continue to run a text and email campaign to convert Insight mentees on to HE Explore.
- Ensure to respond to mentor queries within 48 hours.
- Continue to ask HEIs to distribute the mentor survey.
- Continue to articulate and refer to project outcomes in mentee and mentor training, mentoring guides and project communications.
- Support more mentees to convert to HE Apply, ensuring mentees are receiving continued support for a further 16 weeks and providing more time for applying their newfound knowledge to their own situation which should help to improve the project specific aims.
- Ensure mentors who have not completed an apprenticeship are asking Brightside for support if they are unsure of how to explain apprenticeship qualifications or answering their mentees

questions, to ensure mentees are receiving accurate information and sign posting from their mentors on a range of post-18 routes.

## 2. Introduction

This report examines the engagement, quality and impact of the HE Explore online mentoring programme, delivered by Brightside in partnership with the Greater Manchester Higher team. The project took place between May and July 2021 and was the fourth cohort of this project model run in the region through this partnership. Working with 21 schools and colleges across Greater Manchester, 107 students from Year 12 (including 57 from Uni Connect or POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 target postcodes) were matched online to a trained higher education mentor.

This report draws together data and feedback to evaluate three key areas:

1. Mentees' engagement with the online mentoring
2. The impact on behavioural and capital outcomes, and project-specific outcomes
3. The quality of the mentoring relationships reported by mentors and mentees

### Background

GM Higher and Brightside have been working together since 2016. Online mentoring for Year 12 learners is one of GM Higher's core activities, offered to students across all five hubs. In 2021, three projects were delivered: Insight Mentoring, HE Explore and HE Apply. HE Explore aims to give Year 12 students an insight into studying at HE level, exploring post-18 options and introducing students to the application process.

This 2021 HE Explore programme ran for eight weeks between May and July, and followed the same structure as in previous years:

- Year 12 students from sixth forms and colleges in Greater Manchester were matched with a student mentor currently in higher education.
- Mentors were recruited from nine higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Greater Manchester area, and from one University of Cambridge college.
- Over the course of the project, mentees communicated with their mentor via the Brightside mentoring platform. They were supported and encouraged to cover topics related to post-18 options, including university and degree apprenticeships, application processes, and how to make decisions about higher education.
- Brightside delivered a communications plan, involving tailored emails and texts to mentors and mentees to keep them on track, offer support and sent reminders to those who were not messaging regularly.

The project also continued elements introduced in previous cohorts which have been correlated with higher engagement; there was a 'soft launch' period of two weeks ahead of the official launch, during which time mentees created their Brightside accounts and were able to choose their own mentor using Brightside's matching tool and start messaging straight away.

For the 2021 cohort, Brightside redesigned the mentor mentoring guide. Each of the 8 project weeks covered a specific topic linked to a project outcome, containing discussion topics ideas and higher education specific resources. For example, discussions on exploring university and apprenticeship routes in weeks 2 and 3 linked to developing human capital. Week 6 focused on student finance and budgeting research and linked to developing coping skills. Further resources were included covering the UK higher education system, pandemic support and developing confidence. Brightside also introduced mentoring guides for mentees. The mentee guide simplified the content covered in the mentor guide to make it accessible to a Year 12 audience.

The table below shows the number of mentees that took part in 2021, broken down by school/ college:

School/ College	Mentees
Aquinas College	9
Ashton Sixth Form College	1
Canon Slade C of E School	1
Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College	2
Connell Sixth Form College	6
Holy Cross College	10
Loreto College	10
Oldham Sixth Form College	1
Salford City College - Eccles	2
Salford City College - FutureSkills	2
Salford City College - Pendleton	14
St John Rigby RC Sixth Form College	10
St Mary's Catholic High School	1
The Trafford College Group Trafford	6
TMC Harperhey	1
TMC Nicholls	2
TMC Northenden	2
TMC Northenden Openshaw	4
TMC Shena Simon	3
Winstanley College	5
Xaverian College	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>

### Evaluation methods

The evaluation framework is made up of entry and exit surveys. The surveys have been developed to assess the quality of mentoring relationships within a project, as well as the impact that mentoring

may have had on behavioural and capital outcomes for students. The mentee entry and exit surveys therefore included a number of scales used to measure distance travelled against key outcomes that Brightside aims to achieve through online mentoring, helping young people make confident and informed decisions: Hope, Coping, Growth Mindset, Self-efficacy, Social Capital and Human Capital. A series of project specific questions were also asked to assess mentees' understanding of university and apprenticeship study, student life, student finance and application processes. All surveys contained a combination of open text questions to provide qualitative data, and closed questions to collect quantitative data.

The entry survey is compulsory for all mentees to complete at the start of the project before they can send their first message, which explains the 100% response rate. The exit survey relies on mentees and mentors completing it at the end of a project, therefore responses to the exit surveys vary.

The response rates for the surveys analysed in this report are as follows:

1. Mentee baseline survey: 107 responses / 100% response rate
2. Mentee exit survey: 69 responses / 65% response rate
3. Mentor exit survey: 30 responses / 51% response rate

This year's mentee response rate was slightly lower than last year (65% in 2021 compared to 71% in 2020). Positively, the mentor response rate has increased by 25 percentage points since last year. This suggests that HEIs sending out the mentor survey had a positive impact. Future projects should continue to ask HEIs to distribute the mentor survey.

### **Impact analysis**

When survey responses are collected via the online platform, a unique identifier is attached to each response. For the impact section of this evaluation, we have compared the results of the mentees who completed the exit survey to their individual responses in the entry survey to ensure an accurate analysis of distance travelled. It should be noted throughout the impact analysis in this report that 69 matched responses have been analysed, representing 65% of the cohort.

## **3. Project Delivery**

### **3.1 Recruitment and induction**

#### **Mentees**

Between March and May, students were recruited to sign up to HE Explore by GM Higher's Graduate Advisors (GAs) based at partner institutions, supported by their Hub Managers and the Central Team. During March and April, students who had participated in the Insight mentoring project earlier in the year were recruited directly by Brightside.

For the 2020 programme, the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying school closures caused all recruitment methods to be moved online. In 2021, although schools were open to most students, the ongoing uncertainties and challenges in the external environment meant that face-to-face activities were still extremely limited and therefore recruitment for mentoring remained online only. GAs used email, text, teacher shout outs during online lessons or assemblies and social media. Brightside recruited target learners at the end of the Insight project via email and text.

Interested students completed an online expression of interest form, and Brightside sent them information on next steps, including a welcome video and instructions for creating their online account. In previous years, this information has been delivered through a live induction (face-to-face or via webinar). However, in 2021 we saw low attendance rates at webinars for the Insight project, and GAs did not have sufficient capacity to deliver these to the same extent as in previous years.

As in 2020, GM Higher's post 16 targeting criteria for 2021 aimed for 50% of learners to be from Uni Connect or POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 postcodes. Brightside continued to prioritise these learners by sending them the registration information before non-target students, and in 2021 53% of the cohort met the targeting criteria. 25% were from other target groups such as care leavers, learners with a disability or first generation in their family to consider higher education (58% of the UniConnect, POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 mentees also met a second target group). The proportion of learners from Uni Connect postcodes (29%) remained similar to 2020 (31%), 2019 (30%) and 2018 (29%).

## Mentors

As with previous cohorts, mentors were recruited from nine of GM Higher's partner HEIs. Each institution followed their own recruitment process, with the majority recruiting mentors through their Student Ambassador programmes. Manchester Metropolitan University recruited nine volunteer degree apprentices (up from four in 2020). St John's College at the University of Cambridge continued to provide mentors for HE Explore, giving mentees the option to speak to a mentor studying at an Oxbridge university. Nine Cambridge mentors mentored on HE Explore, supporting 19 mentees.

All mentor training continued to run as online webinar sessions following success on HE Explore and HE Apply in 2020. The high engagement of mentors and quality of conversations seen across the project suggest that webinar training for mentors is a viable alternative option for future projects instead of the usual face-to-face mentor training.

The table below shows the breakdown of the number of mentors per HEI:

HEI	Number of mentors
Manchester Metropolitan University (including nine degree apprentice volunteers)	22
Salford City College	4
Stockport College	1
The Manchester College	1
University Campus Oldham	2
University of Cambridge St John's College	9

University of Bolton	1
University of Salford	8
University of Manchester	6
Wigan and Leigh College	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

### 3.2 Mentee conversion

This year's recruitment target of 150 matched mentees was not met, with 107 mentees being matched. 214 students completed the initial expression of interest form, meaning that the overall conversion rate (expression of interest form to match) was the same as last year at 50%. The table below shows the conversion rate compared to previous programmes:

	Number of students who completed initial expression of interest	Number of students matched	Conversion rate
HE Explore 2021	214	107	50%
HE Explore 2020	323	160	50%
HE Explore 2019	227	161	71%

Initially it is surprising that the conversion rate was the same as last year, as for the 2021 programme the majority of learners were back in school and college. However, it does show how the ongoing impacts of the pandemic continue to affect mentee recruitment and matching. During the summer term, schools and colleges were focusing on examinations and academic catch up and many students were attending online lessons at home due to self-isolating. It is likely that for some sign ups, HE Explore was one too many things to participate in at the time or they were not encouraged to fully participate by their teachers as much as they might have been before the pandemic. As the effects of the pandemic on school capacity and priorities will be long-lasting, future projects should prioritise relationship building with staff in schools and colleges so that they are bought into the programme and can encourage learners to convert. We should also consider returning to live induction sessions for the majority of sign-ups (including in-person where possible as part of the school or college timetable) as this resulted in much higher conversion rates before the pandemic.

Of the 107 mentees participating in HE Explore this year, 77 mentees had already taken part in the Insight Mentoring project which ended in March 2021. HE Explore was offered to all target mentees who sent three or more messages on the Insight project through email and text communications sent at the end of the Insight project. 77 mentees converting from Insight to HE Explore represents 55% of the 141 target mentees who engaged in the Insight project. Importantly, this is an increase of 47 percentage points compared to last year's projects when the same offer was sent to Insight mentees (30 of the 380 target mentees from Insight took part in HE Explore in 2020).

Insight mentees converted on to HE Explore at a higher rate than non-Insight mentees; 55% of Insight mentees converted on to HE Explore compared to 41% of the new expressions of interest. Future projects should continue to offer all target mentees who sent three or more messages on the Insight project the opportunity to take part in HE Explore through email and text communications sent at the end of the Insight project as this is an effective method to recruit engaged mentees onto the HE Explore programme.

As mentioned in the introduction, we gathered demographic information about mentees to support targeting of the programme. This is shown in the table below, and it should be noted that some mentees met more than one of the target criteria, so the totals add up to more than the 107 total number of matched mentees.

	Number of students who completed initial expression of interest	Number of students matched	Conversion rate
Uni Connect postcode	60	31	52%
POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 postcode	81	42	52%
In care	3	1	33%
Learners with a disability	18	9	50%
Young carer	7	2	29%
First generation HE	94	50	53%
Asylum seeker/ refugee status	4	3	75%
Military family/service children	1	1	100%
Non-target criteria	53	23	43%

Young carers and looked after children had lower conversion rates compared to last year where 83% of these target groups converted to match. The sample size continues to be too small to draw overarching conclusions about mentees from these groups but it may be that the external landscape of the pandemic affects learners in these groups more than others. Mentees who were first generation learners, from a Uni Connect postcode or from POLAR4 Q1 and Q2 postcodes had slightly higher conversion rates than the project average. The data is consistent with previous years in that it suggests that HE Explore is appropriately targeted and a range of target learners can see the benefits of taking part.

### 3.3 Mentee engagement

The table below shows the overall figures for how far mentees engaged with their mentors over the course of the project, compared to the last two years of the HE Explore programme:

	Number of matched mentees	Total number of messages sent	% of mentees who sent 1+ messages	% of mentees who sent 3+ messages	% of mentees who sent 6+ messages	% of mentees who sent 10+ messages	Average number of messages sent by mentees
HE Explore 2021	107	1494	96%	89%	79%	58%	14.0
HE Explore 2020	162	4284	100%	97%	90%	82%	26.4
HE Explore 2019	161	912	74%	59%	44%	22%	5.7

In 2021 we continued to see good engagement, with 96% of mentees sending at least 1 message and 89% meeting Brightside’s base metric for an engaged interaction of 3+ messages. Although still a positive picture – and notably better than 2019 – we should note the lower engagement figures when compared with the 2020 programme. The proportion sending 10 or more messages to their mentor this year is 24 percentage points lower than the 2020 cohort, and last year’s mentees sent almost double the average number of messages.

As suggested in last year’s evaluation, the mentees on HE Explore in 2020 may have had more time to focus on HE Explore than mentees in 2021 and in previous years, due to home schooling and the cancellation of summer schools and work experience weeks. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic may have meant 2020 mentees turned to their mentor with more questions that they may have previously had answered at university open days or summer schools. This year, some university open days occurred in person and mentees were back in school so multiple sources of support were available. This year’s mentees may have also been prioritising school catch up learning resulting in their slightly lower engagement levels with mentoring.

The evaluation report for the 2020 programme indicated that the introduction of the mentor matching tool and roll-out of the Brightside mentoring app is likely to have contributed to the significant improvement in engagement between 2019 and 2020. We continued to use these features in 2021 which is likely to have played a key part in maintaining a high level of engagement, even if lower than 2020. Reintroducing mentee live inductions especially when face to face activity is allowed at school and colleges should help increase engagement on future HE Explore projects.

### **Insight Mentoring and HE Explore**

As in previous years, mentees participating in in both Insight and HE Explore had higher engagement levels compared to the mentees who participated only in HE Explore. The average number of messages sent by Insight mentees on HE Explore was 2.4 more than their HE Explore-only counterparts, and 62% sent 10 or more messages (a difference of fifteen percentage points when compared to the HE Explore-only mentees). This suggests that participating in the HE Explore project after taking part in a six-week Insight project will positively impact engagement levels and is further

evidence of the importance of continuing to encourage Insight mentees to take part in both programmes.

## 4. Impact

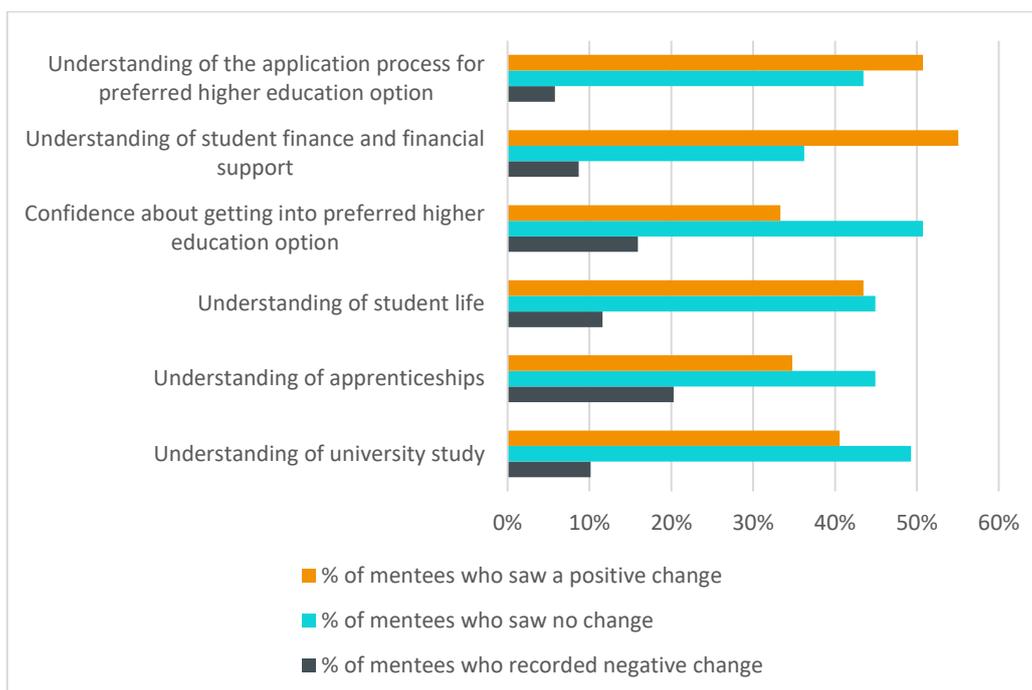
### 4.1 Impact on project-specific outcomes

The mentee surveys contained questions to assess distance travelled against the project-specific aims of supporting mentees to explore their post-18 options. Mentees were asked how strongly they agreed with a set of statements at the start and end of the project, and the table below shows the results at the overall level (in percentage points):

Understanding of university study	+11pp
Understanding of apprenticeships	+5pp
Understanding of student life	+11pp
Confidence about getting into preferred higher education option	+4pp
Understanding of student finance and financial support	+17pp
Understanding of the application process for preferred higher education option	+17pp

There was significant overall change for all project-specific outcomes which is very positive. The same pattern of overall group change was seen in the 2020 results, with the highest positive change occurring in mentees' understanding of student finance and application processes.

The graph below shows the individual mentee experience; the proportion of the cohort who recorded positive, negative and no change for these outcomes:



The results around mentees' understanding of post-18 options are very positive and echo the findings from the overall data in the table above. Over 50% of respondents recorded positive change for understanding of student finance and application processes, and over 40% positive change in their understanding of university study and student life.

We should note that the overall change data and the individual progress on these outcomes is slightly lower than the 2020 programme, although still very positive. When compared to the results from HE Explore 2020, the overall change for most of the project-specific outcomes is slightly lower (between 1 and 13pp lower). The proportion of mentees experiencing negative change remained similar and the proportion of mentees experiencing no change was higher for some outcomes on HE Explore 2021. 61% of the mentee responses analysed here came from mentees who had participated in Insight prior to HE Explore. Mentees who had already received six weeks of mentoring support are likely to have started from a higher baseline point as they began HE Explore. They may have experienced increase in outcomes that is not captured through the data reported. This year's project saw slightly lower engagement than last year's, it is likely that this lower engagement has impacted the above core project outcomes as the better the engagement of mentees the more likely these outcomes are to increase.

The qualitative feedback collected in the mentee exit survey supports the view that these outcomes have been well addressed for high numbers of mentees through online mentoring:

### Understanding of university study

*"[I learnt about] What is university life like e.g., in some semesters you are required to do exams for some courses work. What type of courses are available e.g., university, apprenticeships and etc."*

(Mentee, Bolton Bury and Rochdale hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee)

*"I asked about her route into medicine which was through a different degree, this was my first time hearing about this kind of way into medicine so it was really interesting and new. I also asked about her experiences and accomplishments during her four years in medical school as well as advice for UCAT prep." (Mentee, Manchester hub, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

*"Amazing and useful. It helps students like me to get better understanding of what to expect from university and how to cope with it." (Mentee, Manchester hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Uni Connect postcode, In Care, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

*"We discussed University life in general and how to deal with difficulties at uni. We discussed the different pathways that are available to me and what how to pick the university that suits me most. My mentor also gave me tips on work experience, personal statements and finances." (Mentee, Manchester hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee)*

#### **Understanding of student life**

*"Helpful for providing clear, real life experiences of university from actual students." (Mentee, Wigan hub)*

*"Helping you see all your options after college and help you understand student life." (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Insight mentee)*

*"It was really helpful and reassuring to be able to talk about any questions or worries about University that you don't fully understand through college." (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

*"Brightside has been a great experience and I'm glad I took part! I learnt a lot of new things and I understand more about university and student life." (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

#### **Understanding of student finance and financial support**

*"We discussed the financial support available to students, university life, the psychology curriculum and modules, and who you would be able to contact for support within a university setting." (Mentee, Manchester hub, Uni Connect postcode, Insight mentee)*

*"She also helped me to understand the financial support I can get in case I need and how the application process on general looks like." (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

#### **Understanding of application processes:**

*"I've really enjoyed learning about how my mentor got into university and hearing advice on writing personal statements." (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Insight mentee, Learner with a disability)*

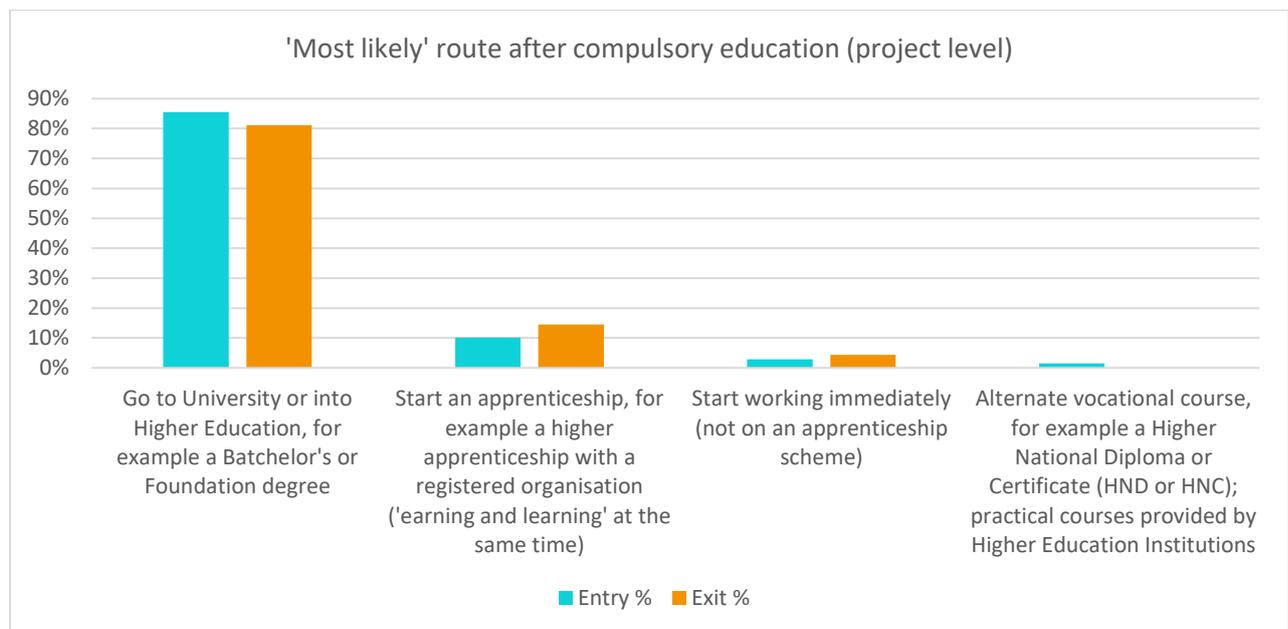
*“An amazing opportunity to learn more about university life and the application process.” (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)*

Recommendations from these project-specific results are outlined below in section 4.4.

## 4.2 Impact on decision-making

### Decision-making

Brightside’s mission is to support young people to make confident and informed decisions about their future. The impact framework measures how confident mentees feel about their pathways after finishing compulsory education. The graph below shows the post-18 routes mentees ranked as ‘most likely’ at the start and end of the project:



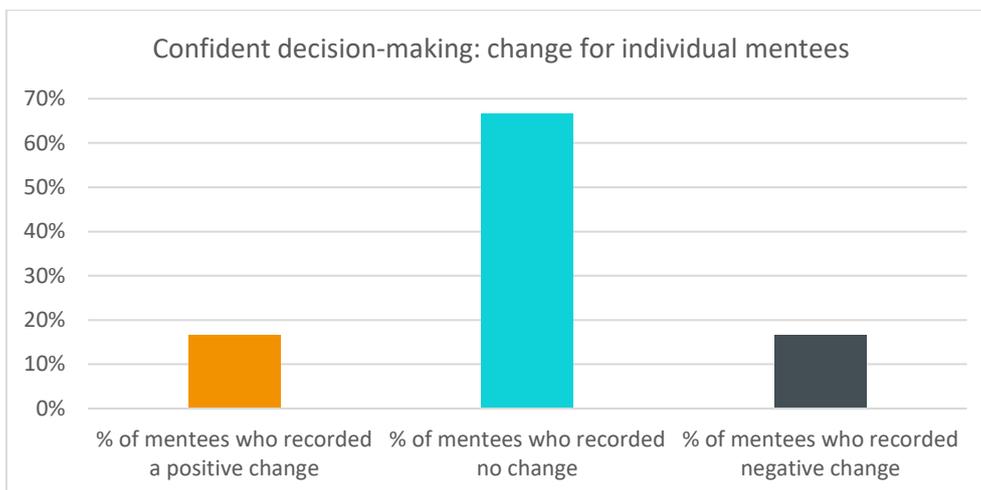
There was minimal shift in the group overall, with mentees going to University or Higher Education remaining the most common response. Five mentees changed their most likely pathway from going to university to starting an apprenticeship or work immediately and two mentees changed from starting an apprenticeship to going to university. Students opted in to this project, therefore it is not surprising that mentees taking part in online mentoring already had an interest in higher education before the project began.

As well as asking mentees about their most likely route, we also asked them how confident they felt that this decision was right for them.

**The overall change in confidence at group level was an increase of 1 percentage point.**

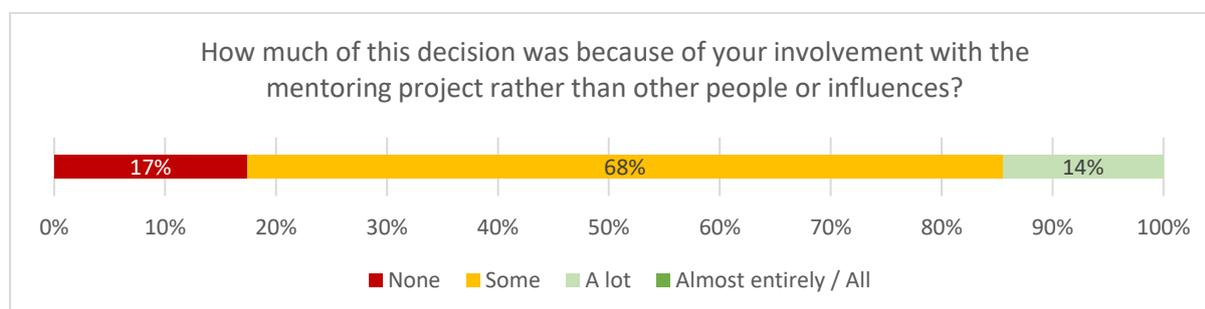
This is a 10 percentage point decrease compared to last year where the overall change in confidence at group level was an increase of 11 percentage points.

The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who recorded a change in confidence around their decision:



At the individual level, 17% of respondents felt more confident in their decision at the end than at the beginning. 67% showed no change in confidence that the decision was right for them, but 29% said ‘extremely confident’ at the start and the end, meaning that they may have gained confidence which was not recorded. Compared to last year, the proportion of mentees reporting a negative change increased by 11 percentage points.

Although the majority of mentees did not change their most likely post-18 option (87%), and many were already confident in their decision, the majority (82%) still stated that their decision was influenced by the mentoring project. The proportion of mentees stating that mentoring influenced their decision remained similar to last year where 81% said Brightside contributed to their decision, at least in part.



The below quotes highlight how mentee’s confidence in their decision-making increased during the project:

*“A very insightful program which provides clarity regarding further education.”* (Mentee, Manchester hub)

*“Very helpful and helped me think of my future.”* (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Uni Connect postcode, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)

*“Really helpful in preparing you for further higher education.”* (Mentee, Bolton Bury and Rochdale hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee)

*“Helpful because it made me more prepared for higher education.”* (Mentee, Bolton Bury and Rochdale hub, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)

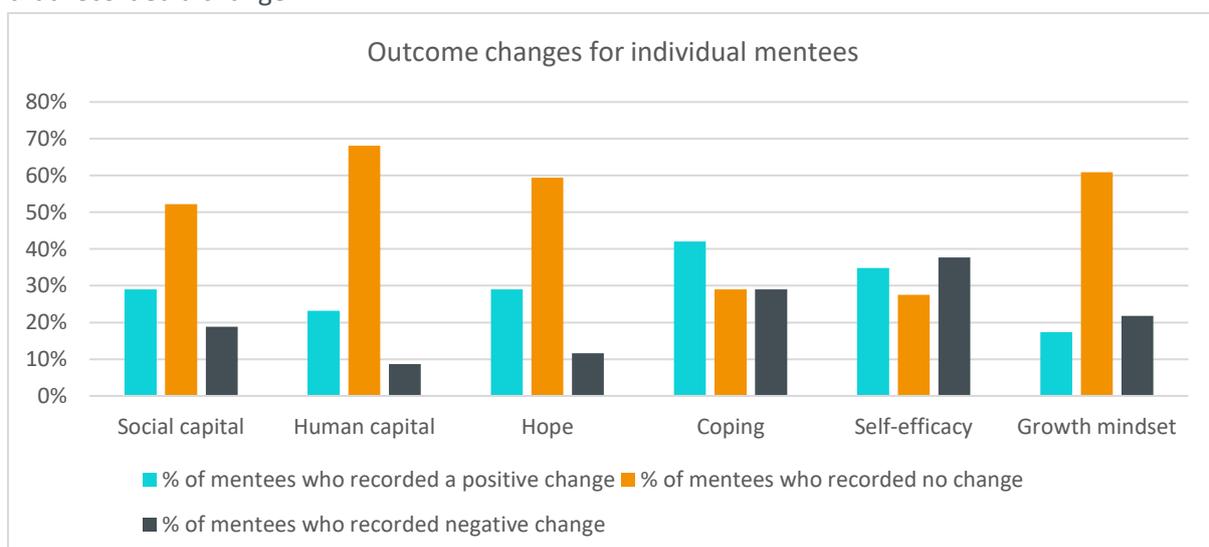
### 4.3 Impact on behavioural and capital outcomes

The table below shows the overall change, at the project level, for capital and behavioural outcomes from Brightside’s quality and impact framework.

<b>Social capital</b>	4%
<b>Human capital</b>	14%
<b>Hope</b>	6%
<b>Coping</b>	2%
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	-1%
<b>Growth mindset</b>	-1%

The same pattern of overall change was seen on HE Explore 2021 and 2020, with slight decreases in the overall levels of Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset and the highest positive overall change in Human Capital. This year, there was a positive overall change in Coping (+2 percentage points) compared to a decrease of 2 percentage points last year.

The graph below shows these outcomes again, this time with the proportion of individual mentees that recorded a change:



Looking at the two sets of data, we can make the following observations:

- Mentoring is correlated with some increase in Human Capital (which asks mentees if they knowing the qualifications/training they need to get the job they want). The data shows an increase at the overall level of 14 percentage points. This is driven by 23% of individual mentees recording an increase in this outcome, and less than 10% recording negative change. When we investigate further, we find that 54% of respondents gave the maximum response to this question at the start and the end, meaning that they may have gained Human Capital but this is not recorded. So, although 23% recorded an increase in Human Capital, the proportion is likely to be higher.
- There are positive results for Hope (feeling positive about the future) and Social Capital (knowing people to call on for support and advice). These outcomes increased by 4 and 6 percentage points respectively at the overall level, and for 29% of individual mentees.
- Even more mentees recorded an increase in Coping – 42% of 2021 mentees recorded positive change in how easy they find it to deal with problems between the start and end of mentoring. The extent of change at the overall level was +2 percentage points, due to a notable proportion (29%) recording negative change.
- For Self-efficacy, the group level shows a decrease by 1 percentage point. 73% of the respondents recorded a change of some kind, with 38% recording negative change and 35% positive change.
- Growth Mindset shows a similar change overall (decrease of 1 percentage point) but had 61% record no change. The baseline scores indicate that some mentees started with a high level of Growth Mindset, with 35% giving the max response at the start and end. So although 17% of individual respondents recorded an actual increase, the proportion may be higher but missed in the data.

This is a complex set of outcomes to affect in young people, and mentees' feelings – particularly in relation to the behavioural outcomes – are affected by many factors external to the mentoring. There are some important changes to note when comparing this data to the 2020 report:

- Coping results show significant improvement; the proportion of mentees recording positive change increased by 25 percentage points compared to 2020 (from 27% to 42%).
- The proportion of individuals recording positive change for Human Capital is lower than last year (23% compared to 42% in 2020). Similarly, the proportion increasing in Social Capital was lower (29% compared to 59% last year). However, we should note that 61% of the mentee responses analysed for 2021 came from mentees who had participated in Insight prior to HE Explore. Mentees who had already received six weeks of mentoring support are likely to have started from a higher baseline point as they began HE Explore. They may have experienced increases in Human and Social Capital that is not captured through the data reported, and

may have found it more useful to focus on project-specific and behavioural outcomes together.

- Patterns for Hope, Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset are similar across the 2020 and 2021 results, with a notable decrease in proportion of mentees recording negative change for Self-efficacy (from 47% in 2020 to 38% in 2021).

#### **4.4 Impact: summary and recommendations**

The impact analysis in this report shows some encouraging key findings around the impact outcomes:

- The project-specific outcomes around HE knowledge and understanding showed significant improvements for mentees between the start and end of the mentoring project. All outcomes measured recorded an increase at the overall level, and there was particular progress in mentees' understanding of financial support and higher education application processes; 55% and 51% respectively recorded an increase. 41% of mentees respondents recorded an increased understanding of university study and 43% of student life. These are key aims for the project so this is encouraging.
- Although most mentee respondents did not change their 'most likely' post-18 pathway, a large majority (82%) said that their mentor had influenced their decision-making, indicating that they helped consolidate decisions, build mentees' confidence and help those decisions be more informed. 17% of mentees recorded an increase in confidence that this decision was right for them, and the proportion may have been higher due to another 29% giving the maximum score at the start and end.
- Four of the six capital and behavioural outcomes (Human Capital, Social Capital, Hope and Coping) showed overall increases between the start and end of the project, and for each of these outcomes at least 23% of the cohort recorded a positive change at the individual level.
- Coping was particularly well-addressed; it increased for 42% of the respondents. (15 percentage points higher than last year's project).
- Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset still recorded notable proportions recording negative change (38% and 22% respectively), but the proportion of mentees reporting a negative change for Self-efficacy decreased by 9 percentage points compared to last year (47% of mentees in 2020) and for Growth Mindset by 4 percentage points (26% of mentees in 2020).

The same patterns of overall change can be seen on HE Explore 2021 and 2020. For the project-specific questions, the highest overall change occurred in mentees' understanding of student finance and application processes. The behavioural and capital outcomes saw slight decreases in the overall levels of Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset and the highest positive overall change in Human Capital. For the majority of outcomes, change at the overall and individual level this year was slightly lower than in 2020. There are two likely reasons for this. Firstly, 61% of the mentee responses analysed here came from mentees who had participated in Insight prior to HE Explore. Mentees who had already received

six weeks of mentoring support are likely to have started from a higher baseline point as they began HE Explore. They may have experienced increase in outcomes that is not captured through the data reported, especially those who gave the maximum response in the baseline survey. Secondly, this year's project saw slightly lower engagement than last year's. It is likely that this lower engagement has impacted the project outcomes as the better the engagement of mentees (the more messages they send), the more content they cover and the more in-depth discussions are, therefore it's more likely these outcomes will increase.

Recommendations (in addition to encouraging engagement through Insight conversions, platform functionality and live inductions):

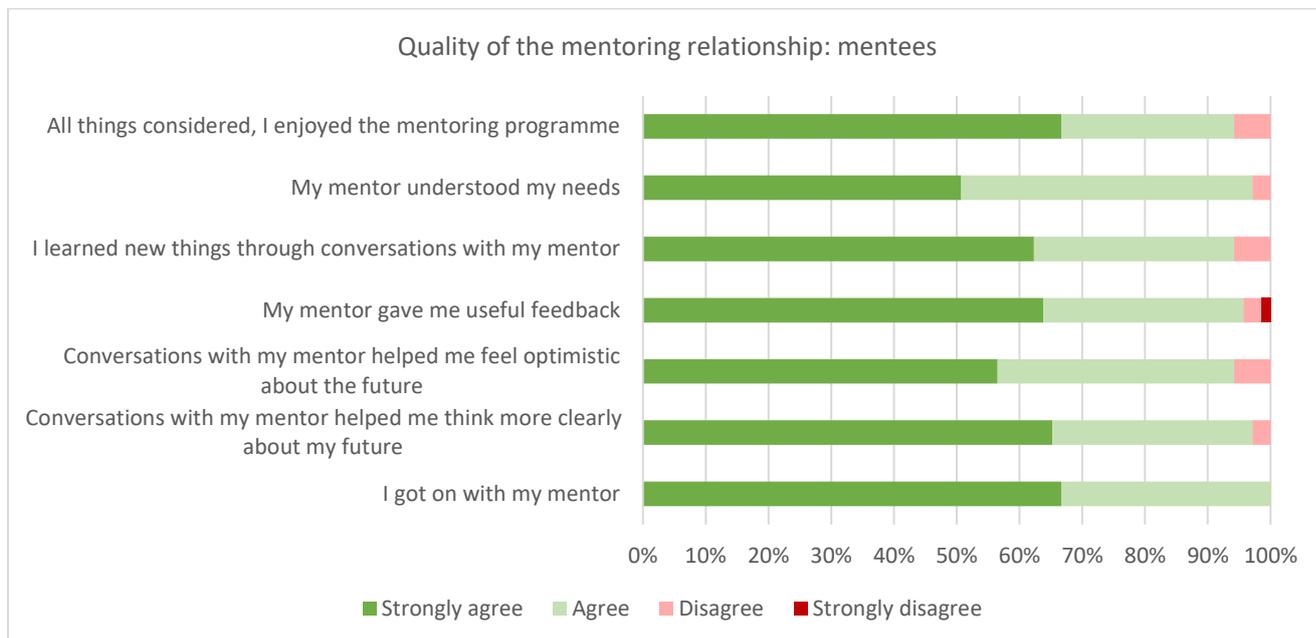
- Continue to articulate and refer to project outcomes in mentee and mentor training, mentoring guides and project communications.
- Support more mentees to convert to HE Apply, ensuring mentees are receiving continued support for a further 16 weeks and providing more time for applying their newfound knowledge to their own situation.
- Ensure mentors who have not completed an apprenticeship are asking Brightside for support if they are unsure of how to explain apprenticeship qualifications or answering their mentees questions, to ensure mentees are receiving accurate information and signposting from their mentors on a range of post-18 routes.

## **5. Quality of the mentoring experience**

### **5.1 Mentees**

Mentee feedback on the quality of the programme is consistent with the 2020 HE Explore project.

The graph below shows how mentees responded to questions around the quality of the mentoring relationship:



100% of respondents to the exit survey agreed or strongly agreed that they got on with their mentor. For all other statements, agreement or strong agreement exceeded 94%. The data suggests that the project helped mentees feel more confident about their next steps, with 97% agreeing that mentoring had helped them think more clearly about the future, and 95% agreeing that it had made them feel more optimistic about their future. This supports the earlier observation that those recording no change in their confidence likely did experience a change and mentoring did have a positive impact on them.

Brightside aims for 92% of mentees to give a quality score of 6+ out of 7. This represents agreement with at least 6 out of the 7 statements in the graph above. 94% of mentee respondents for this project gave a quality score of 6 or more which is positive to see.

The conclusion that mentees experienced quality mentoring is reinforced by some of the qualitative feedback from mentees on the exit survey:

*“A safe place where you can talk about your future wants and needs.”* (Mentee, Wigan hub)

*“Good and fun especially if you don’t know what to do after college it helps you find the right path for you and encourages you.”* (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, Uni Connect postcode, Insight mentee)

*“Useful. My mentor was very helpful and great at retrieving lots of websites and information on the questions I asked.”* (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)

*“I enjoyed that I could talk to someone who doesn’t know me personally so they could give a thorough and professional opinion and answer to my question.”* (Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee)

*“A great experience and an extra helping hand when you can’t reach teachers or family members.”*  
(Mentee, Salford and Trafford hub, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode, Insight mentee)

*“I feel like it really provides a person with the right amount of support.”* (Mentee, Manchester hub,  
Insight mentee, First generation in their family to consider higher education)

## 5.2 Mentors

While the purpose of HE Explore was to support mentees, it’s important that mentors have a quality experience so that they develop their own skills and are more likely to continue mentoring in future. Mentors were asked about the quality of their mentoring relationship, support that they received from Brightside and their experience as a mentor.

### Relationship with mentees

Overall, mentors had a positive experience while on the project, with 90% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they had a positive impact on the mentees that engaged in conversation, they were able to build a positive relationship and that they knew how to help all of their mentees. 83% of mentors strongly agreed or agreed that they were the right match for their mentees.

*“I enjoy the chance to help someone into their journey of higher education as it's something that I really struggled with at school.”* (Mentor, University of Salford)

*“I enjoyed inspiring young pupils and watching their confidence and excitement about HE grow.”*  
(Mentor, Cambridge St John’s College)

*“Really enjoyed the experience, would love to do it again next year.”* (Mentor, MMU)

*“The whole platform was very easy to use and it was very helpful to receive messages every week with information about the upcoming week. I liked the fact the project was done remotely and through messages so that we could answer in times suitable for us.”* (Mentor, MMU)

70% of mentor respondents agreed that their mentees were well engaged and responded consistently to messages.

*“Some were highly engaged, asked lots, sent lengthy replies and seemed genuinely interested in it. Others I felt had one question and then didn’t know what to say afterwards, answered in single words and updated me but in ways that closed the conversation.”* (Mentor, Cambridge St John’s College)

*“The biggest challenge was accepting that my mentee simply did not want to engage and that is something that I can't change. Although I desperately wanted to help them and get to know them, I can't force them to interact.”* (Mentor, University of Salford)

### Support from Brightside

Overall, mentors felt satisfied with their support from Brightside. 93% of respondents found the platform easy to use. 93% of mentor respondents agreed that their training prepared them for the project and they knew where to go if they had questions or needed additional support. Some comments also referenced this support:

*“The weekly prompts were helpful as it allowed us to initiate a conversation with the mentees.”*  
(Mentor, MMU)

*“They did their best and when I contacted them to highlight my concerns about poor engagement they explained some of the challenges on the part of mentees.”* (Mentor, MMU)

77% of mentor respondents agreed that the Brightside team answered their questions promptly when they have them. While the majority of mentors agreed that Brightside offered prompt and helpful advice this question saw lower agreement from mentors. Brightside should ensure to respond to mentors within 48 hours in future.

### **Skills development**

94% of mentor respondents agreed that they can use their experience with Brightside on their CV or job applications. 90% of mentor respondents felt their experience had helped them to develop professionally and increase their confidence in working with young people.

This feedback is especially positive this year when university student ambassadors had limited opportunities to generate income and gain work experience.

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Recruitment and conversion**

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to present multiple and significant challenges for the traditional recruitment and induction methods for HE Explore, resulting in the overall conversion rate remaining at 50% as in 2020 and the match target of 150 mentees not being met. Positively, this year saw the highest proportion of Insight mentees convert on to HE Explore on a GM Higher and Brightside project, 55% of invited Insight mentees took part in 2021 compared to 8% of invited Insight mentees in 2020 – a 47 percentage point increase. There were also positive results on targeting, with 53% meeting the principle targeting criteria of a Uni Connect or POLAR4 Q1 or Q2 postcode, and many more meeting additional targeting criteria.

Future projects should:

- GAs should continue to employ a variety of recruitment methods employing the method which works best for their particular school and college contacts.

- Consider prioritising returning to live inductions (in person where possible), as this resulted in high recruitment numbers and much better conversion rates before the pandemic.

### **Engagement**

Engagement levels were high, although lower than the 2020 programme. 89% of matched mentees sent at least three or messages and 79% sent at least six messages. As with previous years, mentees participating in both Insight and HE Explore had higher engagement levels compared to the mentees who participated only in HE Explore.

Future projects should:

- Continue use of the mentor matching tool.
- Continue to use automated engagement reminders on the Brightside platform to ensure timely replies by mentees and mentors.
- Continue to use gamification feature on Brightside platform.
- Continue to train mentors by webinar.
- Reintroduce live mentee live inductions especially when face to face activity is allowed at school and colleges.
- Continue to run a text and email campaign to convert Insight mentees on to HE Explore.

### **Quality of the mentoring experience**

Mentees had a high-quality mentoring experience on this year's HE Explore programme, with 100% of mentee respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they got on with their mentor. 97% agreed that mentoring had helped them think more clearly about the future, and 95% that it had made them feel more optimistic about their future. Brightside aims for 92% of mentees to give a quality score of 6+ out of 7. 94% of mentee respondents for this project gave a quality score of 6 or more which is positive to see. Mentors also reported positive experiences, with 90% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they had a positive impact on the mentees that engaged in conversation, that they were able to build a positive relationship, and that they knew how to help all of their mentees. 94% of mentor respondents agreed that they can use their experience with Brightside on their CV or job applications, and 90% of mentor respondents felt their experience had helped them to develop professionally and increase their confidence in working with young people. These are particularly positive results as university student ambassadors continue to have limited opportunities to generate income and gain work experience.

On future projects:

- Brightside should ensure to respond to mentor queries within 48 hours.

- HEIs should continue to distribute the mentor survey, which resulted in an increased response rate this year.

### **Impact outcomes**

Outcomes around knowledge and understanding of HE were well addressed, with all questions recording positive change at the overall level. 55% of mentees respondents recorded an increased understanding of financial support and 51% an increase in their understanding of higher education application processes. Mentoring clearly supported more informed decision-making, with 82% of respondents agreeing that mentoring had influenced their most likely post-18 pathway. There is more the programme could do here nevertheless, as the lowest amount of change for the project-specific outcomes was in mentees' understanding of apprenticeships.

For capital and behavioural outcomes, the same patterns of overall change were observed in 2021 as in 2020. There was a slight overall decrease in Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset, but increases in Human Capital, Social Capital, Hope and Coping. Coping was particularly well-addressed; at the individual level, 42% of mentee respondents reported an increase in this outcome – a 15 percentage point increase compared to last year. Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset saw a lower proportion of mentees reporting a negative change compared to last year.

While positive, the impact data at overall and individual level showed slightly lower positive change scores than the 2022 programme. This is likely linked to slightly lower engagement and also the increase in mentees who had already received online mentoring, thus started with higher baseline scores. As well as the aforementioned strategies to increase engagement (and therefore impact), future projects should:

- Continue to articulate and refer to project outcomes in mentee and mentor training, mentoring guides and project communications.
- Support more mentees to convert to HE Apply, ensuring mentees are receiving continued support for a further 16 weeks and providing more time for applying their newfound knowledge to their own situation.
- Ensure mentors who have not completed an apprenticeship are asking Brightside for support if they are unsure of how to explain apprenticeship qualifications or answering their mentees questions, to ensure mentees are receiving accurate information and signposting from their mentors on a range of post-18 routes.