

Insight Online Mentoring (Y12) February-April 2020



“It has given me an opportunity to weigh my options through the advice of my mentor on what I want to do later in life. It has also improved my confidence in knowing what I need to do to achieve my goals.”

Mentee

“Really useful in helping you decide what direction to go in after college.”

Mentee

“An experience that really makes you understand which paths you can take to get to your career and talking to someone in the similar field as you helps understand your chosen occupation better.”

Mentee

“It was good to learn to mentor students outside of my field. It gave me confidence in being able to signpost and I will take this back to my own workplace.”

Mentor

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Key data



1.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

This evaluation shows that Insight online mentoring project continues to be an appropriate and effective intervention for year 12 students exploring the world of work and their career goals. The project was well engaged, with 71% of mentees sending their mentor at least three messages. The introduction of the mentor matching tool, Brightside app and adjustments to the content of mentee inductions resulted in the proportion of mentees converting fully from match to messaging improving by 25 percentage points since last year; this year, 97% of the cohort contacted their mentor. Following recommendations from the previous Insight evaluations, only one cohort of Insight ran this year in contrast to two cohorts in previous years. Concentrating recruitment efforts on one cohort proved successful with the match target of 350 mentees being surpassed, the first time the match target has been exceeded on an Insight project.

The majority of mentee respondents reported positive mentoring relationships, and most of the impact outcomes measured saw an overall increase between the start and end of the project, with all outcomes recording a positive change for at least 18% of mentees for whom we can measure distance travelled. Social Capital and Human Capital were particularly well-addressed, with just over 40% of mentee respondents recording a positive change in these outcomes. On an individual level, 26% of

mentee respondents felt more confident in their decision about their most likely post-18 pathway at the end than at the beginning, and 76% said that Brightside mentoring contributed to their decision, at least in part. The proportion of mentees agreeing that they learnt new things, received useful feedback, felt more optimistic, and thought more clearly about the future as a result of mentoring all increased by at least 3 percentage points (and some by up to 9 percentage points) compared to the quality statements on the 2018-19 Insight projects.

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

- Brightside and GA staff in schools and colleges should emphasise the optional nature of the project when students attend a recruitment or induction session.
- The introduction of automated engagement reminders on the Brightside platform alongside Brightside's usual communications plan will help to encourage mentees and mentors to reply in a timely manner of 3-4 days.
- Recruiting sufficient mentor numbers to support a large cohort of 500 mentees should help to provide mentees with more mentor choice in their chosen sector and ensure mentors have enough time to check in with their quieter mentees and ensure they are responding to messages within 3-4 days.
- To better-set mentees' expectations, and help them understand the benefits of the programme and their commitment when taking part, mentee guides should be introduced. These will help to show mentees the content being covered each week and key milestones to achieve throughout the project.
- Mentor recruitment and training should continue to manage mentor expectations that they might be mentoring a mentee interested in their wider sector, not their specific job role, and upskill them to provide support through training, mentoring guides and project communications.
- Consider an optional extension to 8 weeks to provide support to the mentees still active in March.
- Brightside should send all mentor communications via the Brightside platform Announcement functionality to ensure project support messages can be easily found in one place.
- An optional mentor group chat could be introduced for peer support, providing a space to share challenges and for more experience mentors to share their advice and tips.
- To improve Hope, mentors should spend more time helping mentees apply what they are learning to their own situation, identifying next steps in a reassuring and supportive way.

- To support mentees with their Coping skills, future projects should ensure conversations discussing challenges and barriers are also focusing on solutions, strategies and skills development to overcome these challenges to ensure mentees are not feeling daunted by the challenges they face.
- To increase Growth Mindset, both mentee and mentor training could contain an activity on SMART goals. This would help mentors understand the process of breaking an ideal or aspiration into smaller steps and why that can help develop Growth Mindset in mentees. Mentoring guides and in-project communications should also encourage mentors to share examples of their own goals to help mentees understand these processes and skills.
- To better affect Self-efficacy, mentoring guides and in-project communications could include more advice on helping mentees to identify, understand and develop their skills and strengths.
- To ensure mentees are not feeling daunted by the new information learnt during Sector Insight, future project communications and mentoring guides should be reviewed to ensure that as well as gaining insight into a sector of interest, mentees are benefitting from advice and signposting that they can apply to their own situation.
- Future projects should do more to promote the HE Explore mentoring programme by text, email and a phone campaign at the end of the Sector Insight project to ensure interested mentees take advantage of future – and longer – mentoring opportunities.

2. Introduction

This report examines the engagement, quality and impact of the Insight online mentoring programme, delivered by Brightside in partnership with the Greater Manchester Higher team. The project took place between February and April 2020. Working with 26 schools and colleges across Greater Manchester, 521 students from year 12 (including 153 from NCOP target postcodes) were matched online to a trained industry 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
3. The quality of the mentoring relationships reported by mentors and mentees

2.1 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 2020, three projects were delivered: Insight Mentoring, HE Explore and HE Apply.

The 2020 project was the fifth cohort of Year 12 learners to take part in the Insight mentoring project with GM Higher. Students from sixth forms and colleges in Greater Manchester were matched with a working professional or current student mentor from Brightside’s volunteer network. Over the course of the project, mentees communicated with their mentor via the Brightside mentoring platform, providing an opportunity for them to get tailored 1:1 advice and support on their next steps, developing their knowledge of the professional working world and different careers so they are more able to make confident and informed decisions about their next steps. Mentees were encouraged to complete a series of optional online activities to help them explore and understand their chosen sector, and were provided with feedback on these activities by their mentor.

Insight included a ‘soft launch’ of two weeks ahead of the official launch, during which time mentee inductions were conducted. During inductions mentees were able to choose their own mentor using Brightside’s new matching tool, taking into consideration their sector preferences and hobbies and interests. To prevent a drop off in engagement between match and week one mentees and mentors could begin messaging straight away once matched, and the below engagement summaries include the soft launch period.

The table below shows the number of participating students broken down by school/college:

College/School	No. Mentees
Aquinas College	40
Ashton Sixth Form College	5
Bolton College	15
Bolton Sixth Form College	7
Cardinal Langley	18
Deanery	13
Glossopdale Community College	13
Holy Cross College	37
Hopwood Hall College	7
Loreto College	27
Manchester Enterprise Academy	1
Oldham Sixth Form College	13
Parrs Wood High School	1
Salford City College	21
Salford City College Pendleton	15
The Manchester College	62
Thornleigh Salesian College	34
Trafford College Stockport	1
TMC-Harperhey	3

TMC-Northenden	3
TMC-Northenden Openshaw	66
TMC-Shena Simon	31
Trinity C of E High School	22
Winstanley College	34
Wigan and Leigh college	23
Xaverian College	9
Total	521

As with previous cohorts, Brightside supported mentors with sector specific mentoring guides. The guides included resources and suggested questions, designed to support mentoring pairs with their mentoring conversations and relationships. Brightside also delivered a communications plan, involving tailored emails and texts to mentors and mentees to keep them on track, offer support and send reminders to those who were not messaging regularly. Mentoring guides and project communications included topics on goal setting, exploring pathways to and job roles in various sectors, skills development, commercial awareness and the differences between the world of work and school.

2.1 Aims and outcomes

This project aims to give Year 12 students an insight into a sector of their interest, exploring their post-18 and career options.

The specific project aims are:

- To help mentees explore the range of career or higher education options related to a specific subject or sector
- To develop their understanding of routes into the sector or area
- To begin to build the soft skills required for success in the field
- To help them understand their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to the sector/subject
- To increase their human capital through the online activities
- To increase their social capital through working with a relevant mentor

3. Evaluation methods

This evaluation draws together findings from Brightside's Quality and Impact (Q&I) framework, alongside engagement data from Brightside's online mentoring platform.

The evaluation framework is made up of entry and exit surveys. The entry survey is compulsory for all mentees to complete at the start of 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. The mentee baseline survey 522 responses / 100% response rate
2. The mentee exit survey 178 responses / 34% response rate
3. The mentor exit survey 46 responses / 35% response rate

Similar to previous years, the mentee exit survey response rate represented around a third of the cohort. Brightside should review the timing and communications around the exit surveys in order to maintain a good response rate for mentors and increase the rate for mentees.

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. These outcomes are:

Behavioural outcomes

- **Hope:** a combination of optimism and agency, which emphasises the importance of setting specific goals based on flexibility and motivation.
- **Coping:** skills that people use when faced with specific difficulties.
- **Growth Mindset:** the belief that abilities are not fixed but can be developed through hard work.
- **Self-efficacy:** an awareness of one's own strengths and confidence in one's abilities to achieve specific goals.

Capital outcomes

- **Social Capital:** networks and connections who can provide informal advice and support.
- **Human Capital:** specific knowledge and skills related to education and careers.

In order to analyse a broad range of topics, all surveys contain a combination of open text questions to provide qualitative data, and closed questions to collect quantitative data. Unless otherwise stated, the closed questions asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed strongly, agreed, were neutral, disagreed or disagreed strongly with a statement.

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 only 178 matched responses have been analysed, representing 34% of the cohort.

In 2020, Brightside launched a new method of impact analysis, based on learning from an external audit of our impact data and the development of internal systems. We are now able to score and standardise responses, giving us an overall change (in percentage points) for each outcome, which can be compared to each other. We can also report on the proportion of mentees that showed positive, negative or no progress against each outcome. This new analysis method has been used for this evaluation, meaning the impact results are not directly comparable with previous year's Insight projects where the analysis reported progress at an overall level (e.g. the proportion of mentees that agreed with a statement at the start compared to the end) without standardising the responses.

4. Project Delivery

4.1 Set up, recruitment and training

Students were recruited to sign up to Insight Mentoring by GM Higher's Graduate Advisors (GAs) based at partner institutions, supported by their Hub Managers and the Central Team. GAs focused on recruitment from December to January, with the aim of having all students recruited and inducted by early-February.

Following recommendations from the previous Insight evaluations, only one cohort of Insight ran this year in contrast to two cohorts in previous years. Concentrating recruitment efforts on one cohort proved successful with the match target of 350 mentees being surpassed, the first time the match target has been exceeded on an Insight project. The hubs setting recruitment targets based on the expected conversion rate helped to ensure sufficient students were recruited, to account for a drop off between sign up and match. This approach also means that hubs did not have to recruit students to HE Apply and Insight simultaneously in the autumn term, which may well have contributed to the success of the Insight recruitment in January.

As usual, mentee recruitment methods varied between hubs and sixth forms/colleges. These included presentations to small groups through in-school sessions or assemblies delivered by Brightside or the GAs, and mass communications via email or text.

Students completed an online sign-up form and were then invited to an induction session delivered by Brightside or the GAs. During inductions, mentees were informed of the benefits of the programme, created their accounts, completed their baseline survey, chose their mentor using the matching tool quiz and were supported to send their first messages to their mentor. Where there were more than 10 mentees per sixth form/college, face-to-face induction sessions were delivered. 63 mentees attended webinars in their own time or during school hours.

Although NCOP encourages consortia to focus activities on learners from NCOP target postcodes (specific geographical wards where there are lower than expected levels of participation considering Key Stage 4 attainment), GM Higher continued to be flexible and include non-target students. This approach made it easier for sixth forms and colleges to participate, and enabled GAs to use recruitment strategies that would access higher numbers of students rather than singling out NCOP learners only. They were encouraged to consider targeting during recruitment, and try, where possible, to specifically target NCOP students. Similarly to the 2017-18 and 2018-19 cohorts, targeting remained at the 30% mark with 29% of mentees being from NCOP wards. This is much lower than the GM Higher target of 66%, illustrating how targeting continues to be an ongoing challenge. Future projects and training for GAs should focus on how this targeting could be improved.

Mentors were recruited through Brightside's network of university and industry volunteers, and they were trained via webinar. The professional make-up of the volunteer network informed which sectors were offered to students, and therefore the following strands were set up:

- Insight into Business and Management
- Insight into Education and Social Care
- Insight into STEM
- Insight into Medicine and Healthcare
- Insight into University Study
- Insight into Creative and Digital Industries
- Insight into IT and Computing
- Insight into Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
- Insight into Law and Criminology
- Insight into Sport

4.2 Training and conversion

901 students completed the initial sign up form, which is significantly higher than the 404 students in Insight cohort 3 and 161 in cohort 4. With space for about 500 mentees, this meant that not every student could be accepted on to the project and NCOP learners were particularly targeted and prioritised. While the overall conversion rate (sign up to match) was slightly lower than the previous year – due to the exceptionally high number of learners recruited – NCOP learners converted at a higher rate (68%), suggesting conversion strategies aimed at target learners were successful. The introduction of one cohort of Insight in February running separately from HE Apply recruitment proved highly successful and the GAs recruitment efforts were excellent.

The table below shows the conversion rate of mentees for the 2020 project:

Insight 2020	Number of students matched	Number of students who completed initial sign-up	Conversion rate
Total	521	901	58%
Total NCOP	153	226	68%

And the table below shows the conversion rate compared to previous years, indicating that a conversion rate of around 60% is realistic and factoring this into setting recruitment targets works well.

	Number of students matched	Number of students who completed initial sign-up	Conversion rate
Insight 2020	521	901	58%
Insight Cohort 4 (Feb-Apr 2019)	105	161	65%
Insight Cohort 3 (Oct-Dec 2018)	209	404	52%
Insight Cohort 2 (Mar-May 2018)	171	76	44%
Insight Cohort 1 (Jan-Mar 2018)	310	219	71%
Insight Pilot (May-July 2017)	221	53	24%

5 Engagement

5.1 Overall engagement

Overall, Insight had good engagement with 97% of mentees sending at least 1 message. Of these, 71% of mentees sending at least 3 messages and 46% sending at least 6 messages. In total, mentees sent 4120 messages to their mentors; an average of 7.9 over the course of the project. 28% of mentees sent 10 or more messages to their mentor.

The table below shows the overall figures for how far mentees engaged with their mentors over the course of the project, alongside the equivalent figures for previous cohorts:

	Number matched mentees	Proportion of active mentees (1+ messages)	Active mentees sending 3+	Active mentees sending 6+	Average number of messages sent by active mentees
Insight (February-April 2020)	521	97%	73%	48%	8.1

Insight Cohort 4 (Feb-Apr 2019)	105	72%	73%	50%	7.3
Insight Cohort 3 (Oct-Dec 2018)	209	75%	86%	59%	7
Insight Cohort 2 (Mar-May 2018)	76	87%	83%	64%	9
Insight Cohort 1 (Jan-Mar 2018)	219	84%	84%	61%	8
Insight Pilot (May-July 2017)	53	85%	93%	71%	11

Positively, the proportion of mentees converting fully from match to messaging has improved by 25 percentage points since last year. 97% of the cohort made contact with their mentor, which is a significant improvement and the highest for any Insight cohort to date. The average number of messages sent by mentees was also higher than last year at 8.1 compared to 7.3. One of the factors which may have contributed to this increase in engagement is the introduction of the new matching tool. In previous years, inductions have covered the benefits of the project and supported mentees to create their accounts on the Brightside platform, then complete a survey to share their subject interests and hobbies. Brightside then matched them after the induction, using their survey responses to choose an appropriate mentor. This could sometimes take a few days. The introduction of the matching tool enabled mentees to choose their mentor match during their induction, and therefore there is time to also write and send their first message. The matching tool also helps to give mentees agency in their mentor choice and helps with rapport building as includes tips on what to include in first messages. The mentor matching tool was developed following a research project with Brightside and Bain & Co., with the aim of helping to build rapport and improve engagement. It is very encouraging to see the tool having a positive impact on engagement on this Insight project.

Another contributing factor may have been the roll out and active encouragement of mentees and mentors to use the Brightside mentoring app. At Brightside, we have seen portfolio-level statistics showing significant increase in engagement from users using the app: across our entire project portfolio, between April-June 2020 there were 3610 live app users, 70% of which were mentees. There is a positive shift in user experience for our app users, with app users sending twice as many messages than website users and a higher proportion of app users sending 3+ and 10+ messages compared to website users. Although we do not have these statistics for the specific GM Higher cohort, this is likely to also have contributed to 97% of the cohort sending at least one message to their mentor.

Despite this higher proportion of mentees sending a first message, the proportion of mentees converting on to send 3+ and 6+ messages to their mentor has remained similar to last year's February-April cohort.

Mentors were originally recruited for a match ratio of 3-6 mentees each, to support an overall matching target of 350 mentees. In response to the much higher number of mentees recruited than expected, several mentors were chosen by 6 or more mentees (18% of mentor cohort). This may have

resulted in mentors finding it harder to check in with their quieter mentees and focusing their time on supporting their more responsive mentees.

Following the recruitment and conversion success of this year’s programme, when planning for future Insight projects working with higher mentee numbers, mentor recruitment targets should be set from the outset to ensure mentors are not supporting more than 3 mentees. This will help ensure they have sufficient time to check in with their quieter mentees and ensure they are responding to messages within 3-4 days. Hub expectations should continue to be managed that mentee match numbers cannot be surpassed by a significant extent to ensure every mentee is receiving a quality mentoring experience. Also, during the recruitment phase, Brightside and GAs should ensure students are opting in to this opportunity and understand their commitment to the programme, not just recruiting students to fill spaces. This will ensure mentees are engaged and responsive to their mentors’ support, as well as helping to ensure numbers are not exceeded to the same extent without prior planning and the necessary mentor recruitment.

Another factor which may help to improve the proportion of mentees sending 3 or more messages to their mentor is the introduction of automated engagement reminders on the Brightside platform. This is another new feature, which involves the platform automatically sending any mentee or mentor a notification if they have not replied to a message for four days. Users receive a notification depending on how they signed up to their platform – either via email, text, or a push notification from the app. These extra engagement reminders alongside Brightside’s usual communications plan will help to encourage mentees and mentors to reply in a timely manner.

These recommendations should help to improve the proportion of mentees sending 3 or more or 6 or more messages to their mentor on future Insight projects.

Overall, the engagement for NCOP and non-NCOP learners was very similar and both were high (differences were between 1 and 3 percentage points for the main engagement metrics). This is consistent with previous evaluation findings, showing the intervention is appropriate for target students. The table below shows the engagement figures for broken down by NCOP and non-NCOP alongside the equivalent data for previous cohorts:

		Number of active mentees (1+ messages)	Active mentees sending 3+	Active mentees sending 6+	Average number of messages sent by active mentees
Insight (February-April 2020)	NCOP	98%	72%	48%	8.1
	Non-NCOP	97%	70%	45%	8.2
Insight Cohort 4 (Feb-Apr 2019)	NCOP	73%	86%	58%	7.9
	Non-NCOP	77%	63%	44%	6.9
Insight Cohort 3 (Oct-Dec 2018)	NCOP	77%	93%	67%	8.5
	Non-NCOP	75%	83%	56%	7
Insight Cohort 2 (Mar-May 2018)	NCOP	87%	88%	81%	12

	Non-NCOP	87%	80%	53%	7
Insight Cohort 1 (Jan-Mar 2018)	NCOP	88%	86%	66%	9
	Non-NCOP	83%	83%	58%	8
Insight Pilot (May-July 2017)	NCOP	82%	83%	44%	6
	Non-NCOP	87%	100%	89%	14

Positively, the proportion of NCOP mentees converting fully from match to messaging has improved by 25 percentage points since 2018-19; this year 98% of the NCOP cohort messaged. However, we should note that the proportion of mentees going on to send 3 or more messages and 6 or more messages to their mentor is lower when compared to last year's February-April cohort (by 14 and 10 percentage points respectively). While this year's figures were still high, the recommendations suggested above will also be relevant for improving NCOP learners' messaging rates.

132 mentors were matched to an average of 4 mentees each, and their engagement figures are also impressive. Mentors sent 5546 messages to their mentees in total (higher than the total sent by mentees and an average of 42 messages each). 100% of the mentor cohort sent 3+ messages and the vast majority sent 10+. While this mainly reflects the high engagement from mentees and the fact that they had multiple mentees each, it is positive to see mentors meeting engagement expectations and sending a high number of messages.

5.2 Recruitment and mentee engagement

A more detailed analysis of engagement sheds light on the different recruitment and training methods that were used and can suggest which methods are most effective at preparing mentees to engage with a project.

The table shows mentee engagement levels broken down by recruitment method:

	% of all participants	% of all mentees who sent 1+ messages ('active')	% of all mentees who sent 3+ messages	% of all mentees who sent 6+ messages	% of all mentees who sent 10+ messages	Average messages sent by active mentees
Assembly (9)	2%	100%	89%	67%	44%	11
Email from my school/college/teacher (24)	5%	100%	100%	71%	42%	10
Flyer/postcard (4)	1%	75%	75%	75%	25%	9
From a friend (8)	2%	100%	88%	75%	50%	14
Posters (3)	1%	100%	67%	67%	67%	10

Presentation in class (64)	12%	95%	64%	42%	27%	7.6
Recruitment/induction combo (364)	70%	97%	66%	40%	23%	7.4
School staff (4)	1%	100%	100%	100%	50%	14
Screens around sixth form/college (30)	6%	97%	93%	77%	57%	12.4
Social Media (3)	1%	100%	100%	67%	67%	14.3
Stand in college (2)	0.4%	100%	100%	100%	100%	12
Text message on my phone (4)	1%	100%	100%	75%	50%	10.3
Website (1)	0.2%	100%	100%	0%	0%	3
Unknown (1)	0.2%	100%	100%	100%	0%	88

Engagement is slightly better for mentees recruited via mass communications and posters however it is likely that the students who signed up to the programme via these methods were more engaged in the first place and likely to put themselves forward for a programme. The majority of mentees were recruited via face-to-face sign up sessions which proved effective at producing good engagement.

5.3 Induction and mentee engagement

The table shows mentee engagement levels broken down by induction method:

Training method	% of all participants	% of all mentees who sent 1+ messages ('active')	% of all mentees who sent 3+ messages	% of all mentees who sent 6+ messages	% of all mentees who sent 10+ messages	Average messages sent by active mentees
Brightside Face-to-face (249)	48%	97%	73%	51%	32%	8.2
GA Face-to-face (209)	40%	96%	61%	39%	21%	7.4
In-school webinar (55)	11%	100%	93%	49%	29%	9
Webinar outside school time (8)	2%	100%	100%	88%	63%	19

All of the induction methods used for this project were successful, resulting in over 61% of mentees sending three or more messages to their mentors. The mentees trained by a webinar in their own time had high engagement levels, however these results are unsurprising as mentees willing to give up their free time to attend a webinar are likely to be motivated and engaged participants. Mentees trained by this method only represent 2% of the cohort. The majority of mentees were trained by face-to-face sessions led by Brightside staff or GAs, and mentees trained in this way still engaged well. In future, face-to-face inductions should continue to be prioritised where possible as the highest number of students attend these sessions whereas webinars are more likely to attract only engaged students.

6. Impact: behavioural and capital outcomes

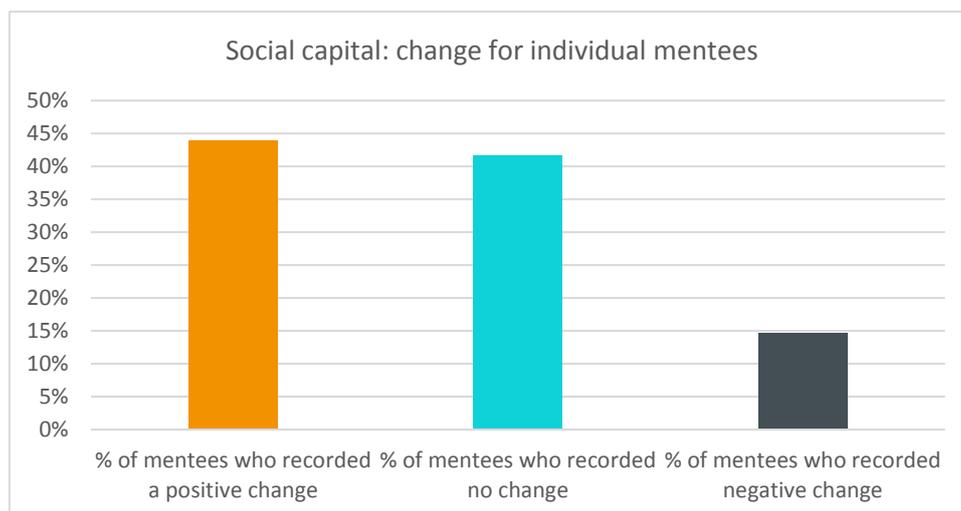
6.1 Results

Social capital

Mentees were asked how far they agreed that they had people to call on for education or employment advice. Brightside aims to provide this by giving mentees access to a mentor outside their usual network who can provide information as well as signposting them to other sources of information.

When responses were scored and standardised, **the overall change at the group level was an increase of 12 percentage points (pp)**. This is positive and shows significant overall change in Social Capital between the start and the end of the project.

The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who experienced a change in Social Capital:



44% of mentees experienced an increase in Social Capital, supporting the overall finding that this is a strength of the project. .

“It helped me know the importance of networking.” (Mentee, TMC-Northenden Openshaw, Uni Connect and POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

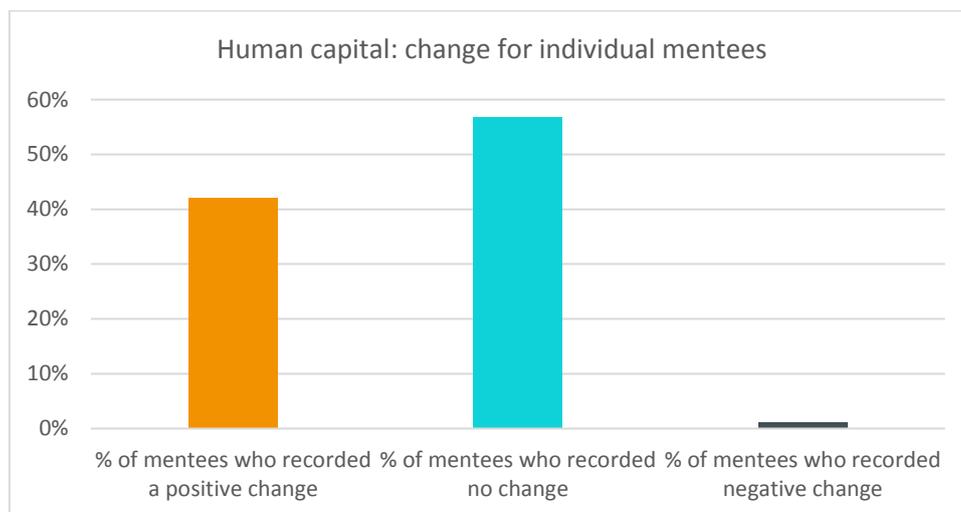
It is not reasonable to expect that a mentoring project lasting 6 weeks will positively affect every student on every outcome, so we should see an overall increase of 12 pp (and 44% of mentees showing an increase) as successful. The area for attention is on the 15% who experienced a negative change. Support materials for mentors (including communications) for future projects should be reviewed to ensure that as well as gaining insight into a sector of interest, mentees are benefitting from advice and signposting, especially if they are learning new information which can be daunting.

Human capital

The project aims to increase mentees’ Human Capital by providing access to relevant people with experience, online resources and e-learning activities where they can explore higher education in detail. Mentees are asked how far they agree that they know how to get the qualifications or training they need to get the job they want.

This is another strength of the project, with the **overall change at group level showing an increase of 41 percentage points.**

The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who recorded a positive change in this outcome:



42% of mentees experienced an increase in Human Capital with only 1% recording negative change. Interestingly, the proportion who recorded no change in this outcome is higher than those recording positive change. When we investigate further, we can see that 35% 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 42% recorded an increase in human capital, the proportion is likely to be higher.

The qualitative feedback collected from the mentee exit survey supports the finding that gaining human capital is a strength of this project, with many mentees feeling more informed about university and their career options including for specific careers. Several mentees described how speaking to their mentor gave them an insight into potential career options and post-school options:

“It was interesting and enjoyable and helped me learn more about my career options.” (Mentee, Deanery, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

“We discussed what working as a software engineer is like. He said that with front-end development and user interfaces, psychology plays an important role, which I found interesting.” (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

“Helped me understand university life.” (Mentee, Thornleigh Salesian College)

“A really useful and insightful programme into better understanding the steps you should take to get the future you want.” (Mentee, Salford City College Pendleton)

“An experience that really makes you understand which paths you can take to get to your career and talking to someone in the similar field as you helps understand your chosen occupation better.” (Mentee, Oldham Sixth Form College)

“I think it was very useful - I gained a lot of insight about my next steps in the future (going to university and then into the world of work). My mentor was really friendly and helped me a lot.” (Mentee, Winstanley College, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

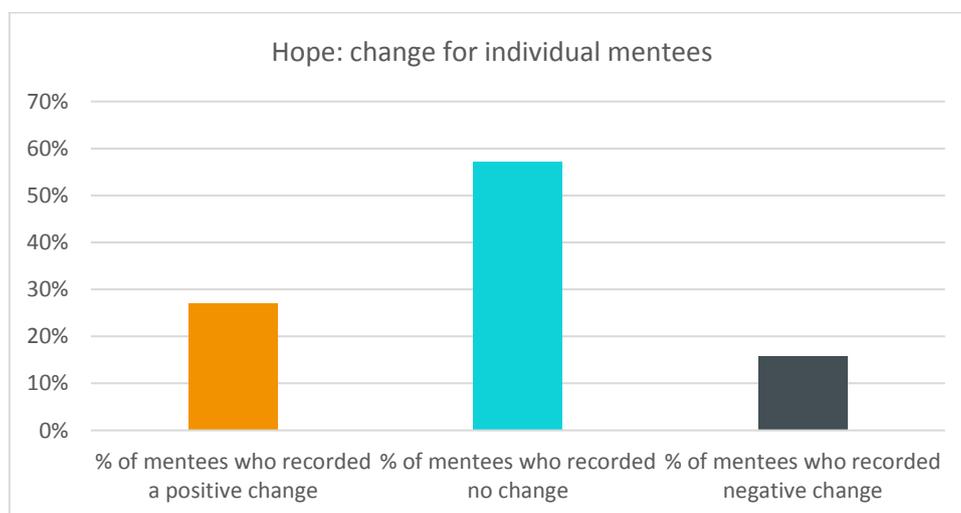
“A great programme which gave me more insight on university life.” (Mentee, Wigan and Leigh College, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

Hope

Mentees were asked how far they agreed with the statement ‘I feel positive about my future’.

The overall change at group level was an increase of 3 percentage points.

The graph below shows the proportion of respondents that recorded a positive change:



27% of mentees experienced an increase in Hope and 16% reported a negative change. A possible explanation for this negative change in Hope for some mentees could be that some mentees started the project feeling positive about their futures but then as they learnt new information about careers from their mentors they felt more daunted about their options after the 6-week project. In future, as well as sharing information on careers, mentors should spend more time helping them apply what they are learning to their own situation, identifying next steps in a reassuring and supportive way.

In their exit survey, 92% of mentees agreed that mentoring had helped them think more clearly and optimistically about the future and the qualitative feedback collected in the mentee exit survey suggests that for some mentees speaking to their mentor did make them feel more positive about their futures, for example the below mentee from Holy Cross College commented on how talking to their mentor made them feel relieved.

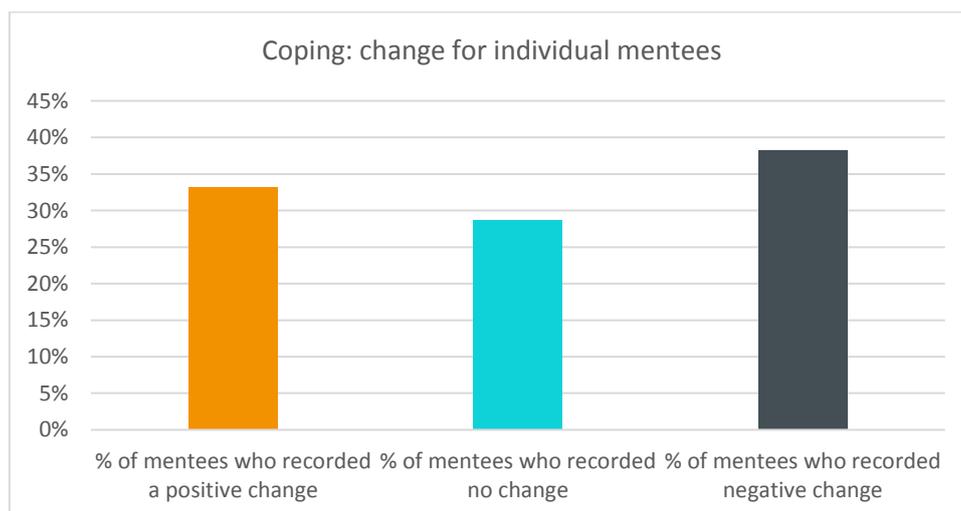
“Having your questions that have been bothering you answered and finding some direction to your life takes a weight off of your shoulders.” (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

Coping

Mentees were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 0-10 for how easily they feel they can deal with problems that come up in their life.

The overall change at group level shows a decrease of 1 percentage points.

The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who recorded a positive change for this outcome:



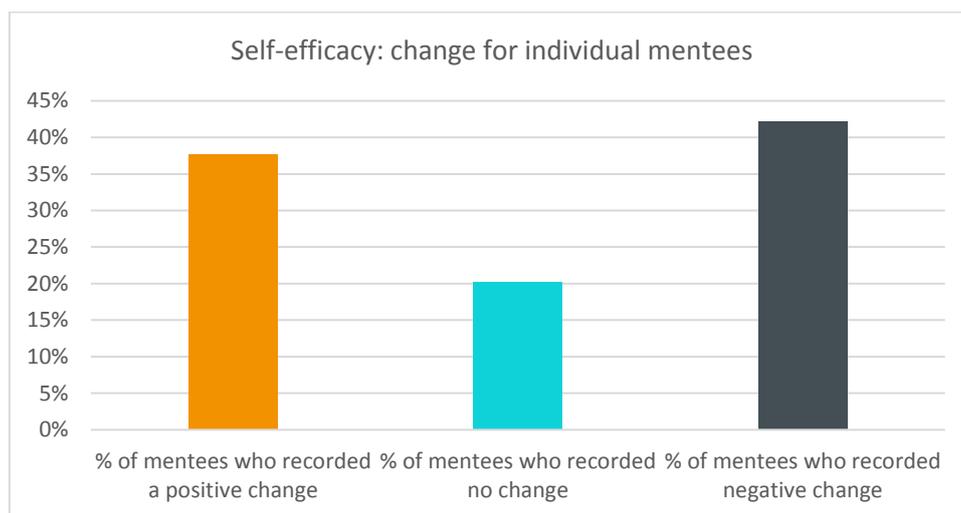
On an individual level 33% of mentees recorded a positive change and 38% a negative change. This is interesting, and suggests that the project and/or other factors significantly impact mentees’ feelings about their coping ability at this point in their education journey.

To further address this outcome, Brightside could consider including more advice in mentoring guides and communications about discussing coping with change and dealing with setbacks. This would help mentees to understand how developing strategies and moving on from change can have a positive effect on their coping skills. Mentees and mentors could also be encouraged to discuss current barriers or challenges and/or those that could get in the way of achieving goals. It may be that, for some, the conversations focused on the challenges themselves rather than solutions or skills development, and this could explain some of the negative change. At any rate, the data suggests that this project can and does affect Coping, so future cohorts of mentors should ensure that relevant conversations focus on strategies and confidence building, to reduce the number recording a decrease.

Self-efficacy

The overall change at group level shows a decrease of 1 percentage points.

The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who recorded a positive change:



38% of mentees experienced an increase in Self-efficacy and 42% reported a negative change.

The qualitative feedback collected in the mentee exit survey suggests that for some mentees speaking to their mentor did help to increase their confident in their ability to achieve specific goals which is a key element of Self-efficacy.

“A great resource for people my age to better understand their goals for higher education and employment.” (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

“Very helpful, helps you understand more about what is going to happen and how to achieve your goal.” (Mentee, The Manchester College, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

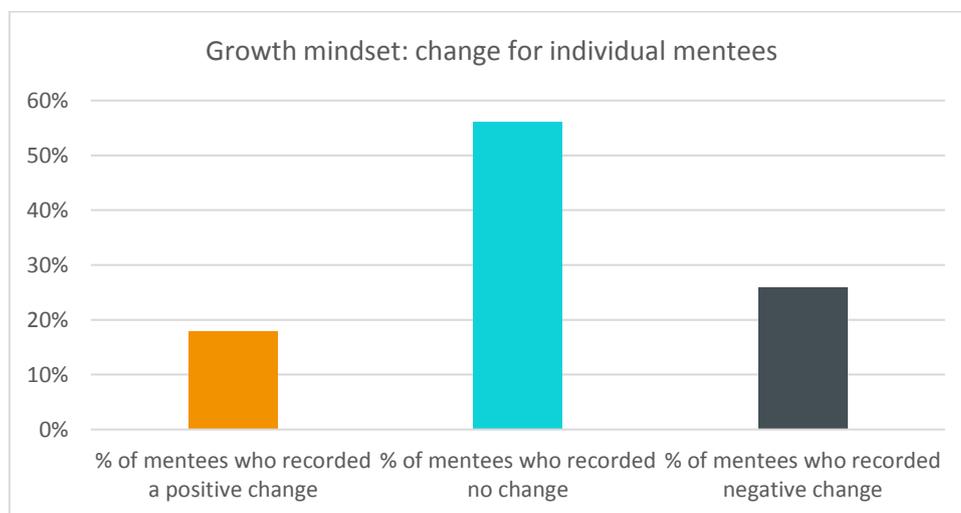
“Being able to find out more on how to achieve your goals in terms of life after college/a career.” (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

This being said, as with Coping, this outcome is clearly affected for a high number of mentees at this point in their journey and we should explore how we can support mentees more with this through mentoring, to bring down the proportion experiencing a negative change. To better affect Self-efficacy Brightside could include more advice in mentoring guides and in-project communications on helping mentees to identify, understand and develop their skills and strengths.

Growth Mindset

Overall change at group level shows a decrease of 2 percentage points.

The graph shows the proportion of mentees recording positive, negative or no change.



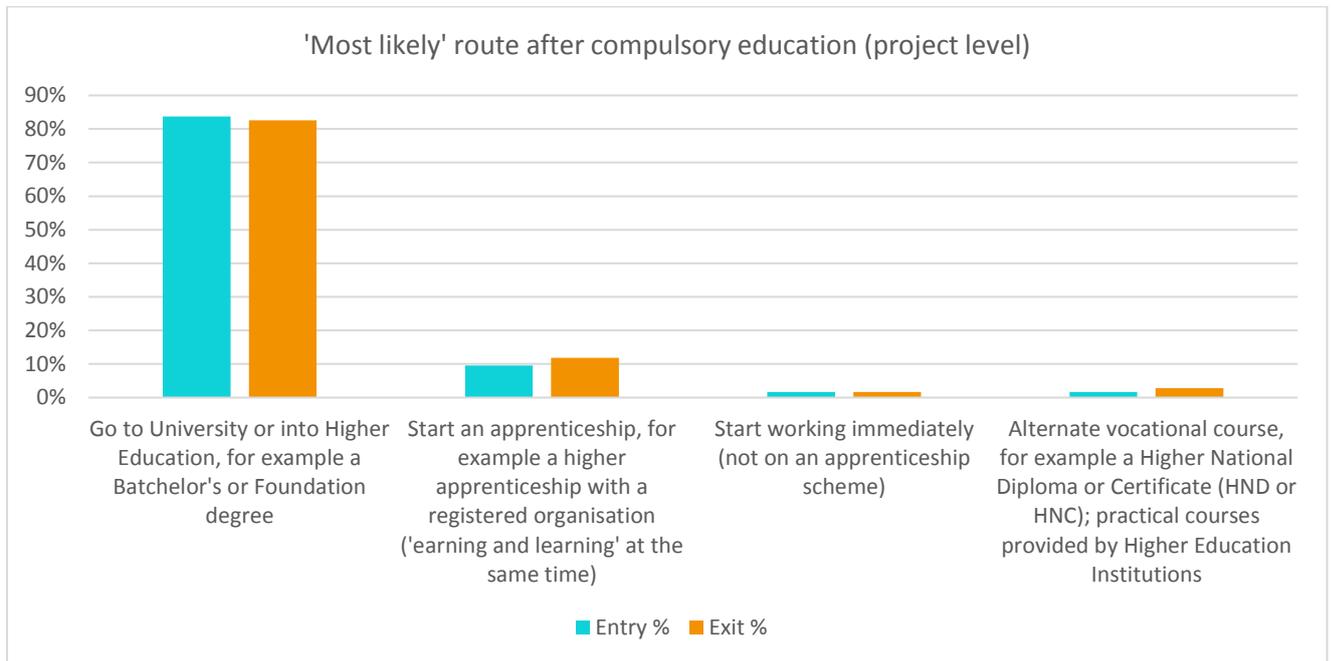
25% of respondents gave the maximum response to this question at the start and the end, meaning that they may have gained Growth Mindset but this is not recorded. So, although 18% recorded an increase in Growth Mindset, the proportion is likely to be higher. 26% reported a negative change.

To increase Growth Mindset Brightside could ensure both mentee and mentor training sessions contain an activity on SMART goals. This would help mentors understand the process of process of breaking an ideal or aspiration into smaller steps and why that can help develop Growth Mindset in mentees. Mentoring guides and in-project communications should also encourage mentors to share examples of their own goals to help mentees understand these processes and skills.

A summary of impact against the behavioural and capital outcomes, and accompanying recommendations, are outlined below.

Decision-making

The final outcome measured at baseline and exit is 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:

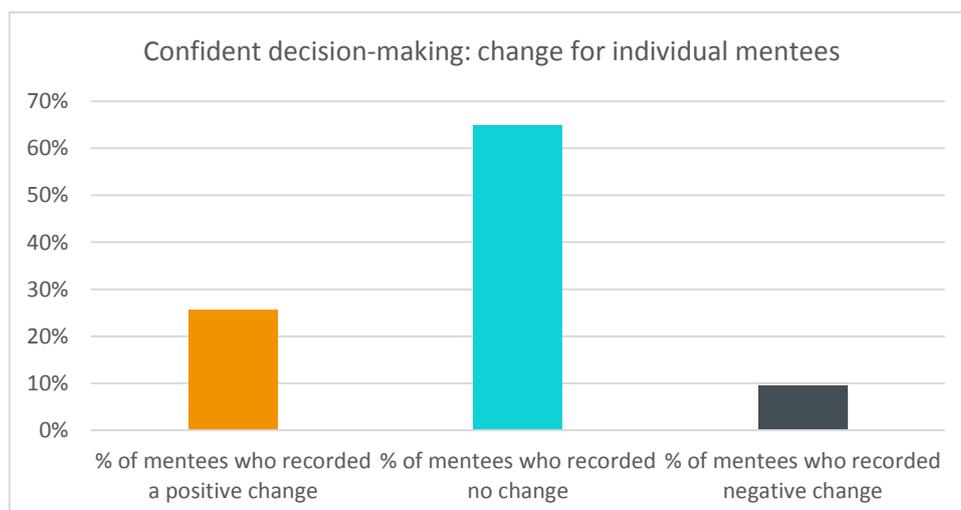


There was minimal shift in the group, with going to University or Higher Education remaining the most common response.

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 6 percentage points.

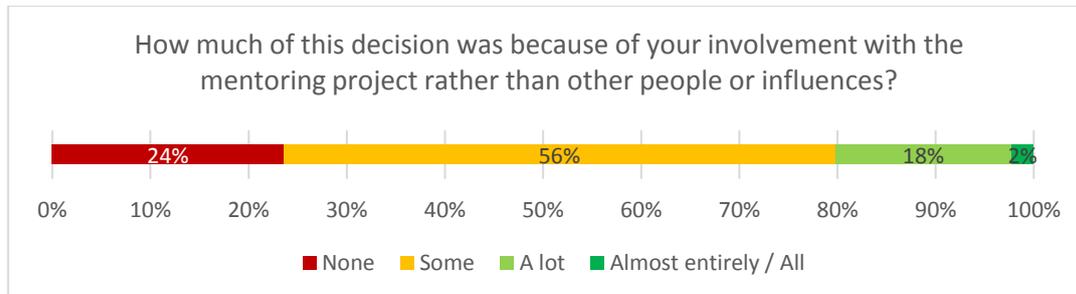
The graph below shows the proportion of mentees who recorded a change in confidence around their decision:



On an individual level, 26% of respondents felt more confident in their decision at the end than at the beginning, and 10% felt less confident. Although 65% showed no change in confidence that the

decision was right for them, 24% said ‘extremely confident’ at the start and the end, meaning that they may have gained confidence which was not recorded.

Although 26% registered a positive change in confidence, a much higher proportion agreed that the mentoring project had influenced their decision about their most likely route:



Although the majority of mentees (94%) did not change their most likely post-18 option, 76% said Brightside contributed to their decision, at least in part. This is a significant increase compared to last year’s cohorts where 64% stated that mentoring had contributed to their decision in some way. The introduction of the matching tool, providing mentees with agency in their mentor match, may have helped them to choose a more relevant mentor and therefore contributed to this outcome.

The following quotes highlight how some mentees confidence in their decision-making increased during the project:

“My Brightside mentor was incredibly helpful in helping me pick the best route for my future.”
(Mentee, Holy Cross College)

“It was a positive and helpful experience. I was able to find out what I wanted to do with my life.”
(Mentee, Holy Cross College, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

“Something that helped me open my eyes to see decisions in a better light.” (Mentee, Oldham Sixth Form College)

“I have a clearer view about my future in university.” (Mentee, Loreto College, Uni Connect postcode)

“Help to make the route to your career and future seem a little less daunting and showing that there are multiple ways of getting there.” (Mentee, Winstanley College)

“A way to reach other experienced students who are able to help you with your decision and have a huge impact on your decision when it comes to university because they are experiencing the university lifestyle so, you will have an insight of what uni is like.” (Mentee, TMC-Northenden, Uni Connect and POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

“Really useful in helping you decide what direction to go in after college.” (Mentee, TMC-Shena Simon)

“It has given me an opportunity to weigh my options through the advice of my mentor on what I want to do later in life. It has also improved my confidence in knowing what I need to do to achieve my goals.” (Mentee, Salford City College Pendleton, Uni Connect and POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

“It was very informative and helped me think more about what I can do after college.” (Mentee, Loreto College Uni Connect postcode)

6.2 Impact summary and recommendations

The impact analysis above shows some key findings around the behavioural and capital outcomes:

- Three of the six outcomes (Human Capital, Social Capital and Hope) showed overall increases between the start and end of the project, and for each outcome at least 27% of the cohort recorded a positive change at the individual level.
- The capital outcomes were particularly well-addressed, with Human Capital and Social Capital increasing for 42% and 44% of the respondents (this increase could be significantly higher due to the high proportion who have the maximum response at baseline).
- There were less positive figures around Coping and Self-efficacy, with 38% and 42% (respectively) of the mentee respondents showing a negative change.
- The proportion showing negative change for Growth Mindset was 26%.
- The majority of mentees (76% of respondents) felt that mentoring influenced their decision about their most likely post-18 pathway, and 26% of mentees recorded an increase in confidence that this decision was right for them.

These figures suggest that one of the primary aims— giving mentees knowledge and insight into their sector of interest (human capital) – has been met and this is a key success for the project. However, it is reasonable to suggest that when they learn a lot of information in a number of weeks, mentees may be daunted or concerned about how to succeed in that area. This could explain some of the negative change for other outcomes. To better improve Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset future projects should focus more on self-reflection and goal setting through training and project materials for mentors.

It is important to recognise that a projects will not positively affect every outcome for every mentee. However, we should take steps in the future to reduce the proportion recording a decrease in outcomes, particularly Self-Efficacy and Coping. It is possible that through the project, mentees become more aware of their knowledge and the complexities of the choices in front of them, and are therefore more realistic at the end, when completing the exit survey. But the data could also suggest a need for mentoring conversations to go beyond the sharing of information, to help mentees apply what they are learning to their own situation, as opposed to learning about their options and separately talking about goal-setting, for example.

At Brightside, we will be conducting some qualitative research with students who have shown positive or negative progression against outcomes, to understand more about how their mentoring experience may have led to these changes. Brightside will also be conducting cognitive testing on our surveys to better understand how learners interpret and respond to survey questions. For example we often see mentees say mentoring helped them feel more optimistic in their exit survey but this is not always reflected in the distance travelled for the Hope outcome. Through this cognitive testing, we will better understand how mentees are understanding the survey questions assessing Hope. This will give us more information that can be applied to project design in the future. In the meantime, future projects through GM Higher should encourage mentors to focus on reflecting conversations back to mentees' own situations, and taking a positive, solution-focused approach to discussing setbacks and challenges.

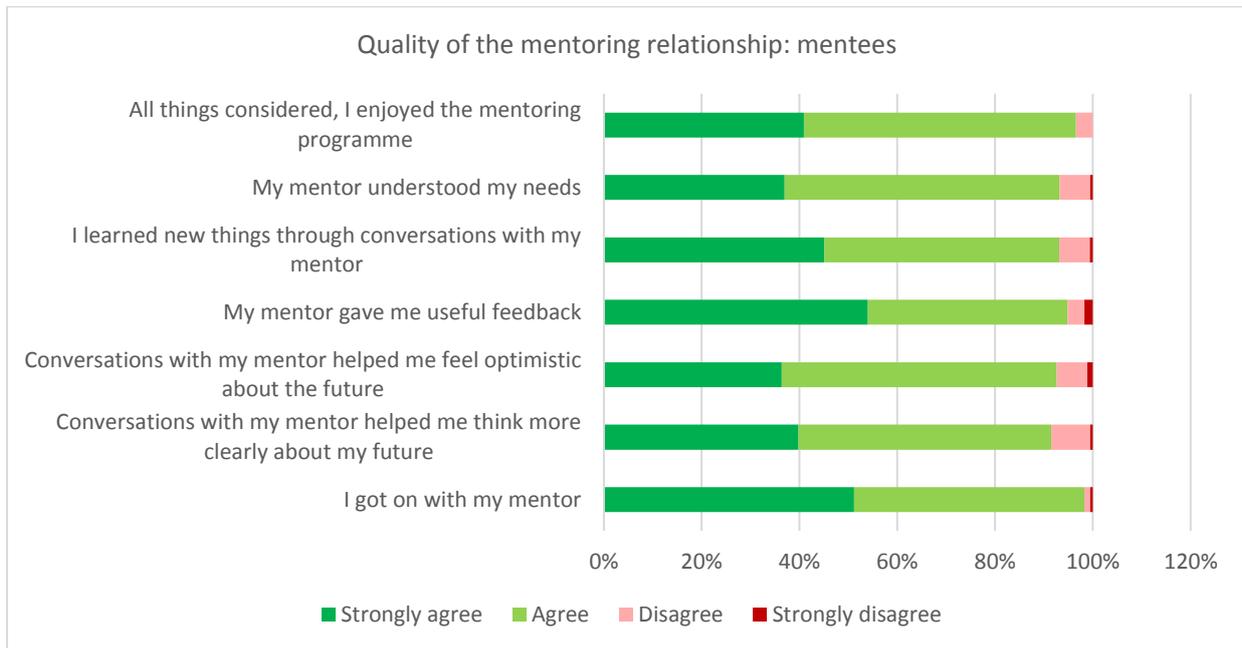
Finally, there are some intended benefits for mentees in the Insight project which are not currently captured through the evaluation framework, for example, their understanding of various higher education routes such as apprenticeships or the employability skills required for a specific sector. In the future, we should develop some additional, project-specific questions to track distance travelled against these other outcomes.

7. Quality of the mentoring experience

6.1 Mentees

The exit survey contains a number of questions to assess the quality of mentee's experience. To get a quality score, the responses are scored and averaged. For this project, 89% gave a quality score of 3 or more, and the average quality score for the mentee group was 3.37. Considering Brightside's quality benchmark is 3, these are very positive results.

The statements that make up this quality score are shown in the graph below. As in previous projects, the feedback highlights very strong mentoring relationships, with 98% of respondents to the exit survey agreeing or strongly agreeing that they got on with their mentor.



This graph suggests that the project helped mentees feel more confident about their next steps, with 92% agreeing that mentoring had helped them think more clearly and optimistically about the future. The latter figure is particularly interesting in light of the impact figures noted earlier, where 26% recorded an increase in confidence around whether their most likely post-18 was right for them, and 27% recorded an increase in hope. The fact that so many mentees felt mentoring had helped them feel more optimistic suggests that this optimism may apply to more areas than simply their post-18 options, and/or that they became more self-aware through their conversations and that their entry responses may have overstated their confidence in their decision or positivity about the future. Although we cannot know for sure the reasons behind these differences, the quality responses add a further, encouraging dimension to our understanding of mentoring’s impact on mentees’ hope and optimism about the future.

A number of these quality statements saw improvement since the 2018-19 projects. The proportion agreeing that they learnt new things, received useful feedback, felt more optimistic, and thought more clearly about the future all increased by at least 3 percentage points (and some by up to 9 percentage points). This is positive, and suggests that the introduction of the matching tool and updates to the mentoring guides and in project communications to improve the relevance and specificity of mentoring conversations has had an impact.

Mentees were receptive to the feedback they received from their mentor, were open to learning new things and enjoyed the project. The fact that over 92% of respondents agreed with all the above statements is positive. It shows that mentors successfully built rapport with their mentees and provided encouragement, motivation and enjoyment in addition to information and advice. This is reinforced by the qualitative feedback from mentees on the exit survey:

“Helpful as it made me look at alternate options.” (Mentee, Cardinal Langley, POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

“Fantastic especially if you are very indecisive like me.” (Mentee, Loreto College, Uni Connect
postcode)

“A comfortable space to learn from people with experience.” (Mentee, Xaverian College, Uni Connect
postcode)

*“Very useful and effective for those that aren’t very clear or struggling with decisions on what to do
in the future.”* (Mentee, Oldham Sixth Form College)

*“Matching to a mentor in the same field as me and getting all that guidance was no less than a
blessing. Thanks to this great mentoring app.”* (Mentee, Trafford College Stockport, Uni Connect
postcode)

*“An excellent opportunity for students to talk to someone that has experience in the field you are
trying to go into in order to gain some valuable information that you probably wouldn’t get
elsewhere.”* (Mentee, Salford City College)

“She was really friendly and welcoming and motivating.” (Mentee, Winstanley College)

“I really enjoyed the experience and my mentor was extremely helpful and knowledgeable.” (Mentee,
Salford City College Pendleton)

*“Overall really good opportunity and helped me get to grips with my career opportunities and future
prospects, also really friendly and approachable mentor.”* (Mentee, Aquinas College, POLAR Q1 or Q2
postcode)

*“An opportunity to reflect on yourself and really think about what you really want to achieve in a
place where you are not judged and are encouraged.”* (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

*“I really enjoyed this project as my mentor was quick to reply to my needs and I didn't have to wait
long. Also, my mentor was always positive which kept me going.”* (Mentee, Oldham Sixth Form
College)

“The mentors are very understanding.” (Mentee, Salford City College Pendleton, POLAR Q1 or Q2
postcode)

*“I found it really nice how you could literally text from a phone and get information from someone
very qualified.”* (Mentee, Aquinas College)

“Help for people who have no one to guide them In applying to university.” (Mentee, Aquinas
College)

The qualitative feedback from the exit survey also highlighted a few areas for improvement, which would help increase the quality scores above even more in the future.

A handful of mentees mentioned the response rate of their mentor affecting their mentoring experience:

"I didn't really learn much since she only replied the first time and not after that." (Loreto College, Uni Connect postcode)

"I felt that I was more excited and motivated to message my mentor then they were to respond." (Mentee, Deanery)

"My mentor stopped messaging me a couple of weeks into the program, I last messaged him in late February but haven't heard from him since. I feel I've missed out on a few weeks of useful advice because of this." (Mentee, Salford City College, Uni Connect and POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

"My mentor didn't really respond back to me or even check in after the 1st/2nd week." (Mentee, Winstanley College, Uni Connect postcode)

"My mentor wasn't very active and I didn't know what to do. I didn't learn much from this project because of that." (Mentee, Oldham Sixth Form College)

Interestingly, out of the five mentees who mentioned their mentor's response rate affecting their experience of the project three were matched to mentors who had 6 mentee matches and two had the same mentor. As suggested in the mentee engagement section of this report, mentors with 6 matches may have struggled to respond to messages within 3-4 days and support their various matches equally. Although only 6 mentees out of 178 exit survey responses mentioned feeling their mentor's replies to their messages were too slow, this is still an area for improvement. The introduction of automated engagement reminders and matching mentors to a maximum of 3 mentees should help to avoid mentee's having this experience on future projects. In future Brightside should also continue to set engagement expectations with mentors and endeavour to create a support culture where mentors feel comfortable telling Brightside if they are struggling with mentoring or if their commitment to the programme has changed.

Two mentees mentioned wanting a mentor in a different sector:

"Not enough law mentors." (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

"Would have liked a mentor from a medical background." (Mentee, Winstanley College)

As with the above feedback, the higher mentee recruitment numbers than expected resulted in mentors from popular strands such as law and healthcare reaching their match capacity early on during the soft launch. This meant that mentees signing up during later induction sessions had less choice when completing the matching quiz. Adapting the matching target numbers for 2021 and recruiting sufficient mentors for supporting 500 mentees will ensure more law and medicine mentors are available and hopefully see more mentees matching to their first choice of sector. It is also important for Brightside and GAs when delivering recruitment and induction sessions to continue to manage mentees expectations that a perfect subject match is not always possible, and that every mentor can support with researching their chosen field, with CV preparation and the development of employment skills. For example, the below quote from a mentee interested in being a vet illustrates how a productive mentoring relationship can still be had with a mentor from outside this sector as their mentor worked for the NHS in a pathology lab and not as a vet.

“Even though my mentor wasn't an exact match in terms of careers, she was still able to give me useful advice and did some research on anything she wasn't sure about to help me out.” (Mentee, Winstanley College)

Two mentees mentioned wanting the project to run longer than 6 weeks.

“Can I please continue with my current mentor as it is a tough time for me at the moment and I find it quite helpful.” (Mentee, Holy Cross College)

“I just wish we had more time with our mentors.” (Mentee, TMC-Northenden, Uni Connect and POLAR Q1 or Q2 postcode)

As 6 weeks is a short project future projects could consider offering an optional extension into 8 weeks for mentoring pairs keen on talking for longer. For continued mentoring support mentees should continue to be encouraged to take part in HE Explore mentoring by Brightside delivering a text, email and phone campaign to convert mentees at the end of Insight.

6.2 Mentors

Overall, mentors had a positive experience while on the project. 93% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt they had a positive impact on the mentees that engaged in conversation. 87% strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to build a positive relationship.

There was some positive qualitative feedback from mentors, which alludes to the mentor experience being strongly linked with the level of engagement from mentees – feedback we often receive from mentors at Brightside:

“I found that an engaged mentee was one that asked questions back and wanted to really learn from our exchange. By this we were able to form a sort of relationship because they got to know me on a personal level as much as I got to know them. This aided in avoiding a power dynamic, and instead encouraged them to see me as a helpful peer.”

“[Mentee] was highly engaged - very responsive and asked insightful and curious questions about higher education.”

“I've enjoyed the experience and the app really works.”

“1 of my mentees really engaged which was amazing and I actually feel a little sad that it's over.”

“I felt they were engaged, had lots of questions, answered my questions, had an idea of what they wanted to gain from the experience.”

Other survey responses and comments highlight the need to address engagement of mentees, which will in turn improve the mentor experience. 59% agreed that they felt their mentees were well engaged with the project and 52% agreed that their mentees responded consistently to messages.

“Not all of my mentee contacted me, even when I attempted to contact them. I also found the ones who did, had no real questions or wanted to engage in conversations or discussions about the future which made it difficult to guide any ideas.”

“One of my mentees only sent 1 message (at the start of the project) and did not engage at all after this.”

“...I felt it was hard to keep on topic each week, I wasn't sure if they knew what each week was focused on.”

“I understand that some children are not as engaged in these sorts of things than others but judging by the first messages sent by them it did not seem that they were quite aware of the purpose of the programme. There may have been other children more interested in the scheme who could have benefitted.”

“My Mentees were not so committed, however it has been a difficult time and I understand.”

As mentioned, to improve mentee engagement on future Insight projects a mentee guide could be introduced to show mentees the content being covered each week and key milestones to achieve throughout the project. This works well for mentors and may help to set mentee's expectations around the benefits of the programme and their commitment when taking part. During mentee recruitment, Brightside and GAs should ensure students are opting in to take part and want to speak to a mentor even when trying to reach large recruitment targets. It is also important for Brightside to continue to manage mentor expectations during training to explain some of the reasons why a young person may struggle to manage mentoring alongside their studies.

77% of mentor respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were the right match for their mentees with some related comments:

“I was uncomfortable about being matched with a mentee who wanted to pursue a career in law, which is not my area of expertise. I think she would have benefitted more from an alternative mentor with experience in law.”

“I feel that I was encouraged to put about my hobbies in my mentor profile, which led to many of the mentees choosing me on that basis. This meant I wasn't best placed to answer questions - for example I was being asked about studying hospitality because I said I like baking. I feel this has a negative effect on my relationship.”

“It was good to learn to mentor students outside of my field. It gave me confidence in being able to signpost and I will take this back to my own workplace.”

As mentioned, the larger match numbers than expected may have resulted in mentors being matched to a mentee not interested in their specific sector which may have made it harder for them to answer their mentee's questions. As with the mentee comments above, some mentors found being matched to a mentee interested in a sector outside of their own rewarding and beneficial whilst others found

this a challenge. Recruiting sufficient mentor numbers to support a large cohort of 500 mentees should help to provide mentees with more mentor choice in their chosen sector, but mentor recruitment and training should continue to manage mentor expectations that they might be mentoring a mentee interested in their wider sector not their specific job role and upskill them to provide support through training, mentoring guides and project communications.

A few mentor comments mentioned ways to improve project communications and training.

“I felt the emails from Brightside where too long during the process. More emails which were shorter would have worked for me.”

“Useful guidance throughout. The weekly emails were helpful to keep on track, especially the reminders about what stage/time period we had reached in the programme.”

“I was on the Education and social care strand. The mentoring guide was good, but maybe too focused on teaching. It would have been good to have some more guidance about non school/teaching careers. I would say the same for the activities, they were mostly to do with teaching it would have been good to have more variety.”

“For further improvements, I would say the comms could be overwhelming in quantity, and I had to fish them out from my emails. Would be good to have them in one place somewhere else.”

“I think the pre training was held too early. I would really benefit from being to engage with other mentors.”

“The initial training was good. I felt well prepared for the first week or so. The training could be improved by also focusing on the latter weeks, once you have introduced yourself.”

A few mentors commented on the length and the method of sending project communications. To address these feedback points, Brightside should send all mentor communications via the Brightside platform Announcement functionality to ensure project support messages can be easily found in one place. Engagement communications and check ins should continue to be sent via email and text. Alongside the creation of mentee guides, mentor guides and project resources should be reviewed to ensure they are providing a diverse look at each sector. Although mentor training needs to be held ahead of the project launch to provide sufficient time for mentor recruitment and on boarding, to address mentor’s desire for continued support and training an optional mentor group chat could be introduced for peer support, providing a space to share challenges and for more experience mentors to share their advice and tips.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Conversion and Engagement

Concentrating recruitment efforts on one cohort proved successful, with the match target of 350 mentees being surpassed for the first time on an Insight project. Full conversion of students (from being matched to a mentor to sending their first message) improved by 25 percentage points compared to last year. 97% of students who created accounts and were matched sent at least one message to their mentor. The proportion of mentees sending 3 or more or 6 or more messages to their mentor remained similar to previous years. Engagement was also highlighted as an area for improvement from mentors with some mentors stating that messaging could be intermittent from mentees. Both mentors and mentees had a high quality mentoring experience.

Recommendations:

- Brightside and GA staff in schools and colleges should emphasise the optional nature of the project when students attend a recruitment or induction session.
- The introduction of automated engagement reminders on the Brightside platform alongside Brightside's usual communications plan will help to encourage mentees and mentors to reply in a timely manner of 3-4 days.
- Mentor recruitment targets should be adjusted in line with mentee recruitment targets and expectations, and mentee numbers should not be significantly surpassed unless there is mentor capacity. This will ensure that mentors are not supporting more than 3 mentees and therefore have sufficient time to check in with their quieter mentees and respond to messages within 3-4 days.
- Brightside should continue to set engagement expectations with mentors and endeavour to create a support culture where mentors feel comfortable telling Brightside if they are struggling with mentoring or if their commitment to the programme has changed.
- Brightside should continue to manage mentor expectations during training to explain some of the reasons why a young person may struggle to manage mentoring alongside their studies.
- To better set mentee's expectations of the benefits of the programme and their commitment when taking part, mentee guides should be introduced to show mentees the content being covered each week and key milestones to achieve throughout the project.
- During the recruitment phase, Brightside and GAs should ensure students are opting in to this opportunity and understand their commitment to the programme, not just recruiting students to fill spaces. This will ensure mentees are engaged and responsive to their mentors support as well as help to ensure numbers are not exceeded to the same extent without prior planning and the necessary mentor recruitment.

Matching

The higher mentee recruitment numbers than expected resulted in mentors from popular strands such as law and healthcare reaching their match capacity early on during the soft launch, meaning mentees signing up during later induction sessions had less choice when completing the matching quiz. 18% of mentors were matched to 6 or more mentees.

Recommendations:

- Brightside and GA staff in schools and colleges should manage mentees' expectations when delivering recruitment and induction sessions, emphasising how every mentor can support with researching their chosen field, with CV preparation and the development of employment skills.
- As above, when expecting to work with larger mentee cohorts, mentee recruitment and matching targets should be adapted and have mentor recruitment targets linked to mentee recruitment targets to ensure mentors are not supporting more than 3 mentees. This should help to provide mentees with more mentor choice in their chosen sector and increase engagement.
- Mentor recruitment and training should continue to manage mentor expectations that they might be mentoring a mentee interested in their wider sector, not their specific job role, and upskill them to provide support through training, mentoring guides and project communications.

Project length

Two mentees mentioned wanting the project to run longer than 6 weeks.

Recommendation:

- Signpost to HE Explore by delivering a text, email and phone campaign to convert mentees.

Supporting mentors

A few mentors commented on the length and the method of sending project communications and a desire for continued training throughout the project.

Recommendations:

- Brightside should send all mentor communications via the Brightside platform Announcement functionality to ensure project support messages can be easily found in one place.
- Engagement communications and check ins should continue to be sent via email and text.

- Mentor guides and project resources should be reviewed to ensure they are providing a diverse look at each sector.
- An optional mentor group chat could be introduced for peer support, providing a space to share challenges and for more experienced mentors to share their advice and tips.

Quality and Impact

Mentees experienced a positive change in Human Capital and Social Capital with at least 40% of the cohort recording a positive change at the individual level. Hope was also well-addressed, increasing for over 27% of the respondents. For every outcome at least 18% of the cohort recorded a positive change at the individual level. The majority of mentees (76% of respondents) felt that mentoring influenced their decision about their most likely post-18 pathway, and 26% of mentees recorded an increase in confidence that this decision was right for them. However, some behavioural outcomes – Coping, Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset – saw a lot of movement, with notable proportions of mentees experiencing positive, negative and no change even though qualitative feedback and the quality scores were overwhelmingly positive.

Recommendations:

- To continue to increase the proportion of mentees experiencing a positive change in Social Capital, support materials for mentors (including communications) for future projects should be reviewed to ensure that as well as gaining insight into higher education pathways of interest, mentees are benefitting from advice and signposting, especially if they are learning new information which can be daunting.
- To improve Hope, mentors should spend more time helping them apply what they are learning to their own situation, identifying next steps in a reassuring and supportive way.
- To better understand the range of responses and distance travelled for the other behavioural outcomes (Coping, Self-efficacy and Growth Mindset), Brightside will be conducting research on conversation data and cognitive testing on the survey questions. Learning will inform project and evaluation design for future Insight cohorts. In the meantime, Insight cohorts should encourage mentors to focus on reflecting conversations back to mentees' own situations, role modelling goal setting behaviours, and taking a positive, solution-focused approach to discussing setbacks and challenges.
- Future projects should do more to promote the HE Apply mentoring programme at the end of the Explore project to ensure interested mentees take advantage of future mentoring opportunities.
- Brightside should review the timing and communications around the exit surveys in order to maintain a good response rate for mentors and increase the rate for mentees.

- To capture how Insight mentoring is impacting mentees' understanding of various higher education routes such as apprenticeships or the employability skills required for a specific sector, additional project-specific questions should be developed to track distance travelled against these outcomes.