UNIVERSITY
of DERBY

Building Motivation, Achievement and Progression Online: Evaluating Brightside's Approach to Online Mentoring

August 2014

TRISTRAM HOOLEY

JO HUTCHINSON

SIOBHAN NEARY

International Centre for Guidance Studies

www.derby.ac.uk/icegs

Authors

Tristram Hooley
Jo Hutchinson
Siobhan Neary

International Centre for Guidance Studies
University of Derby, Derby, DE22 1GB
www.derby.ac.uk/icegs

August 2014

International Centre for Guidance Studies

The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) is a research centre with expertise in career and career development. The Centre conducts research, provides consultancy to the career sector, offers a range of training and delivers a number of accredited learning programmes up to and including doctoral level. For further information see www.derby.ac.uk/icegs

Related research papers

This research is one of a series of publications by iCeGS. Recent examples include:

Dent, P., Garton, E., Hooley, T., Leonard, C., Marriott, J. and Moore, N. (2012). *Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation: Toolkits for Practitioners*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Hooley, T. (2012). How the internet changed career: framing the relationship between career development and online technologies. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC)*, 29: 3-12.

Hooley, T., Mellors-Bourne, R. and Sutton, M. (2013). *Early Evaluation of Unistats: User Experiences*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Longridge, D., Hooley, T. & Staunton, T. (2013). *Building Online Employability: A Guide for Academic Departments*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

A complete list of iCeGS papers is available from http://www.derby.ac.uk/icegs/publications.

Contents

Executive summary

This report sets out the findings of an independent evaluation of Brightside conducted by the International Centre for Guidance Studies. Brightside is a charity that seeks to raise young people's aspirations and awareness about education and career pathways and enhance their capability to achieve those aspirations. Brightside supports young people through a mixture of information provision and online mentoring. The organisation has existed for over a decade and has proved its relevance across a number of different policy environments. However, the current report represents the first systematic evaluation of its effectiveness.

A mixed methods approach to evaluation was taken which combined interviews with Brightside staff and partners (representatives of organisations that used Brightside) with analysis of existing web statistics collected by Brightside, an online survey of mentees (n=555) and a detailed content analysis of a sample of online mentoring conversations (n=366). Both the survey and the content analysis were undertaken with mentees who had sent at least two messages as part of their online mentoring experience. A literature review was also conducted which demonstrated that Brightside's approach was innovative, but in tune with other online mentoring practice.

Overall the evaluation found that Brightside is well regarded by its partners, and provides a tool which delivers high quality mentoring and clear impacts for participants (mentees).

- 91% said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the experience of online mentoring;

- 56% said that the online mentoring experience had helped them to make decisions; and

- 49% said that the online mentoring had helped them to do things differently.

It is particularly effective in helping young people to transition to higher education by helping them to think about which university they want to apply to, and supporting them through the application process.

Engaging and sustaining participation in online mentoring

The evaluation looked at how partners, mentors and mentees are engaged in Brightside mentoring. It found that Brightside is a well-known and popular tool with its partners who report that the site is easy to use and that there is good support available from Brightside's central team. Partners felt that they were able to recruit appropriate mentors for their projects. Although they felt that the support available from Brightside for mentors was good, their feedback suggests that it could be developed further.

Brightside is highly successful in engaging mentees. However, less than half of those initially engaged successfully establish a mentoring relationship. Many of those who do not engage in mentoring may nevertheless benefit from Brightside's information resources, but there is room to explore how the journey from initial engagement to full mentoring relationship can be improved.

Models of delivery

The evaluation found that there were four main ways in which Brightside was used by its partners.

1. As a repository of reliable online information, with little or no use of the mentoring functionality.
2. As a communication tool to support face-to-face projects, again with little or no mentoring actually taking place.
3. As an e-mentoring system in which mentoring takes place entirely online.
4. As a b-mentoring system in which mentoring is delivered through a mix of online and onsite activity.

All four uses were found to have some benefits, but e-mentoring and b-mentoring form the focus of this evaluation.

Quality of provision

The evaluation team developed ten identifiers of quality which were used to evaluate the quality of mentoring delivered through Brightside. These were as follows.

The mentor would:

1. establish an appropriate relationship with the mentee;
2. establish the purpose of the mentoring conversation;
3. provide the mentee with information and/or links to useful resources;
4. refer the mentee to appropriate services;
5. provide prompt and relevant responses;
6. encourage the mentee to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses;
7. encourage the mentee to explore their career goals;
8. identify opportunities and explore ways to overcome barriers;
9. move the mentee progressively towards their goals; and
10. bring the process to a mutually satisfactory close.

In general the quality of mentoring was high with quality identifiers observable in 84% of the conversations reviewed. However, there were a number of areas in which quality might be improved particularly in relation to the structuring of mentoring relationships and the provision of information and referral. It was suggested that existing quality standards such as the matrix standard, and the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's APS (Approved Provider Standard) would provide a good starting point.

The content of online mentoring conversations

The mentoring conversations covered a wide range of topics including personal and social issues, health issues, work, employment and employability skills, school and college, higher education and further education and work-related learning. The most common areas discussed focused on the process of choosing to go to higher education and to a lesser extent the subsequent transition into work. Mentoring conversations were less likely to address personal issues or to explore alternatives to higher education.

Measuring impact

The evaluation found that the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (mentees) were satisfied with their experience of Brightside and would recommend it to a friend. Mentees were able to report a range of benefits from participating in online mentoring including helping them to make decisions and changing their behaviour. Mentees also reported an increase in a range of skills and knowledge during the period that they were undertaking online mentoring. In particular they felt that they understood more about their careers options and were more able to actively manage their careers.

Actions for Brightside

Throughout the report a number of actions are identified for Brightside to consider or implement. They are all drawn together here to support Brightside in developing its strategy following this evaluation.

Engagement

- The core Brightside product (a technical solution for online mentoring with associated advice and support about how to use this and a high quality career and educational information site) is popular and effective. If any change is sought by partners it is to extend the level and range of support available. It is therefore suggested that Brightside should explore a range of additional areas in which support might be offered in the light of this evaluation.
- A key area where additional support would be welcome would be in the provision of further training and resources to help mentors to deliver a high quality mentoring experience. There are some concerns about how the initial engagement of mentees is sustained into full mentoring relationships. It is suggested that Brightside explore ways to improve this initial stage of the relationships perhaps by reviewing practices at a project level, attending more closely to engagement data during the early stages of projects and offering more support to those projects which are under-performing in this area.

Models of delivery

- The identification of four different types of usage of Brightside suggests that further thought needs to be given to how the product is marketed and supported.
- A starting point for this review would be an audit of all existing partners to identify which models they are currently using and which they might use in the future.
- On the basis of this baseline information, Brightside could then consider developing four (or more) distinct Brightside products which would be tailored to provide the type of support that different delivery partners need to help them to facilitate most effectively their mentor – mentee relationships and help them to achieve their broader objectives.

Quality

- Although the findings suggest that mentoring quality is high, Brightside currently lacks a formal quality assessment approach. It is suggested that it might adopt the ten quality identifiers as a key component of a quality approach.
- The areas where quality seemed weakest related to the successful closure of the mentoring relationship and also to quality identifiers which require an understanding of the broader support context that mentees can access (providing information, identifying opportunity and referral). It is suggested that these areas should be addressed as a priority through new training and support materials.
- The quality of mentoring appears to be dependent to some extent on the project within which the mentor is operating. It is suggested that Brightside explore the quality procedures that are utilised by its partners and consider strategies to enhance these where necessary.
- There may also be value in Brightside exploring an external quality standard (possibly the matrix standard) to provide a recognisable quality assurance for Bright Knowledge and other direct delivery by the organisation.
- It is important to recognise that evaluation is a key element of continuous quality improvement. It is therefore suggested that Brightside develop an evaluation plan setting out how the organisation will build on the current evaluation to create regular and formative evaluation feedback loops to support organisational strategy.

Content and focus of mentoring

- The mentoring conversations were generally highly focused on the key questions that they were designed to address. However, it may be that the current approach is constraining the mentoring relationships to consideration of more technical issues for example about the mechanics of UCAS applications. There may also be value in supporting mentors to be able to open up broader personal issues relating to individual skills, aptitudes and values as well as the challenge of transition. Brightside may wish to pilot and evaluate some new training and support materials in this area.
- The mentoring is currently highly focused on higher education. This reflects Brightside's core market and its historic association with the widening participation to higher education agenda. However, there is potential to adapt the online mentoring approach and many of the resources developed by Brightside to benefit other groups. The organisation may wish to consider how it could repurpose Brightside mentoring to serve the needs of other groups. The mentoring opportunities could be expanded to include other transitions such as those considering apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships or professional adults, women returners or others seeking a career change.

Impact

- Brightside's impact story is strong. It is important that this story is well communicated to current and future partners and to key policy makers and influencers. It is suggested that Brightside produce a summary document for distribution based on this evaluation and also host appropriate events to disseminate the findings.

- This study takes the impact story as far as it can go at the present time. However, there would be a strong case for commissioning future studies to look at Brightside both through a randomised control trial methodology and through longitudinal approaches.

1. Introduction

My mentor has been a source of constant support. Being the first member of my family to attend university, I was not entirely sure what to expect with the application process. She has helped to keep me motivated and has given me invaluable advice and insight into my future career. My confidence has certainly grown as a result of this.
Mentee (Survey)

Without this scheme, I doubt I would be as capable as I am now in achieving the goals I set, and the goals set would be much more vague.
Mentee (Survey)

Brightside is a charity that seeks to raise young people's aspirations and awareness about education and career pathways and their capability to achieve those aspirations.

We want to make sure that it's talent, not background, that determines the education opportunities and careers that are available to young people.
Brightside website

Brightside provides an online mentoring system and a suite of online education and career information and learning resources. In this online environment trained volunteer mentors can connect with disadvantaged young people in order to inform them about their options, inspire them, provide a sounding board for their career thinking and propel them towards purposeful action. Ultimately Brightside seeks to support young people to achieve their potential.

Understanding the context for Brightside

Brightside has a flexible approach which could be used with a wide range of different clients. However, Brightside's core users, at whom the majority of its resources are targeted, are young people who are engaged in educational and career transitions. Brightside has its roots in the widening participation to higher education agenda and the majority of the mentoring that takes place on the system is still focused on this area. However, Brightside is not solely focused on higher education and also includes mentoring programmes that support a wider range of educational and career choices.

Brightside has been providing online mentoring services for over a decade within the context of a number of different policy environments. Nonetheless, it is useful to briefly review recent policy in the area of career education and guidance, work-related learning and widening participation and outreach to help to clarify the current environment within which Brightside operates.

The election of the Coalition Government has resulted in a number of substantial shifts in the widening participation and careers landscape. The Government's key messages and policy discourse shares a considerable degree of continuity with its Labour predecessor. Both governments have emphasised social mobility, the importance of reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and of raising the level of participation in education and training notably through higher education and

Apprenticeships. However, the ways in which these themes have been enacted under the Coalition have been very different.

Whereas the Labour Government favoured delivery of services in this area through identifiable national brands, the current Government has sought to simplify the number of publically funded players in this area and to reduce the level of public spending. As a consequence the last two years have seen the effective closure of most Aimhigher, Connexions and Education Business Partnerships. The responsibilities which were previously held by these organisations have been variously passed to schools, higher education providers and, to a lesser extent, to local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The current Government has also renamed and re-launched the adult careers service (formerly Next Step) as the National Careers Service. However, despite calls from the Education Select Committee (2013) and the National Careers Council (2013) the National Careers Service currently has a very limited remit with young people. However, within the new contracts a more focused role brokering relationships between schools and employers is envisaged.

The major changes in funding and organisational structure have also been backed up with some legislative actions. The duty to provide career guidance has been moved from local authorities to schools and the duties for schools to provide career education and work-related learning (including work experience) have been removed, although the Government has stressed that these activities are important and that schools should continue to offer them in ways they consider to be most appropriate. The recent Ofsted review (2013) acknowledges that careers work in school is now working as well as it should do and that few schools provide an effective service or have the skills or expertise required. They recommend that the government should provide more explicit guidance on what constitutes a careers guidance strategy and how to secure independent external provision.

In the area of widening participation to higher education there has been a transition of responsibility from a government funded programme (Aimhigher) to higher education providers themselves. Alongside this transition the higher education sector has experienced a major shift in the way it is funded with the full costs being shifted to the student. As part of this marketisation of higher education the role of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has been strengthened and higher education providers have been required to produce an annual access agreement setting out how they will support the widening of participation in higher education.

Within this landscape of change Brightside has been remarkably resilient. The fact that it is a third sector initiative has meant that it has not been too seriously affected despite the end of large scale government programmes such as Aimhigher and Connexions which the organisation had been involved in supporting. Furthermore Brightside's mission speaks directly to enduring policy themes around retention in education, social mobility and skills. Brightside has continued to develop partnerships and establish and develop programmes with universities and other partners. New initiatives have seen Brightside working more

closely with corporate partners, and providing mentoring and support for entrepreneurship as part of the government's start-up loans programme.[1]

Online mentoring

Brightside is, at its core, an online mentoring programme. The key intervention that is offered through Brightside is the connection of an individual to someone who has experience that they can learn from. Most commonly this takes the form of a current university student mentoring a current school student to support them to make good decisions and a successful transition to higher education. The evaluators have found that in practice a Brightside mentoring relationship can take many forms with variable objectives and amounts of time allocated to the mentoring. In some cases Brightside mentoring stands as an intervention on its own, while in other cases it is embedded within broader programmes of education and guidance. Some Brightside mentors and mentees only interact online, while for others the online interactions are part of a relationship that included face-to-face meetings. Despite this diversity of implementation, it is the mentoring that forms the central intervention around which Brightside's other interventions (self-directed study activities, information, group work etc.) are organised. This online mentoring is the focus of this evaluation research and it is therefore useful to briefly review the literature that looks at mentoring and online mentoring in particular.

Mentoring is a voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their life (Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2011). Mentoring can take place for a wide variety of reasons but is commonly used for aspiration raising and to support transition and the negotiation of the education system (Thompson, 2001; Rose & Jones, 2007; Bartlett, 2009). The form and nature of the mentoring is likely to be influenced by the model used, the purpose of the mentoring, the availability of time and resources, and the mentors and mentees involved in the process. However, there are likely to be a number of features that are found in all mentoring relationships. These include:

- building relationship and trust;
- clarifying purpose and intended outcomes;
- communicating and reviewing progress with individuals; and
- bringing the relationship to a close.

This evaluation report will argue that there is a need to develop this framework for online mentoring relationships and utilise it to underpin quality in the delivery of online mentoring. This will be discussed in section four addressing the quality of provision.

There is a strong evidence base for the value of mentoring for young people particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds and those at risk. A study by Younger and Warrington (2009) found that mentoring young people impacted positively on their grades, helped them develop

---

[1] For further information on this programme see https://www.brightsidestartuploans.org/.

more confidence and raised their aspirations to higher education. An evaluation of the National Mentoring Scheme developed under the previous government was found to improve the self-esteem, motivation, confidence, persistence, application and time management of young people (Evans, 2005). A recent study by Moore *et al.*, (2011) of a graduate officer mentoring scheme within Aimhigher Greater Manchester found that young people had responded very positively to the support offered by the graduate officers and many reported having been inspired or motivated to study at university as a result of their contact. Another recent study by Bartlett, (2012) of the Mosaic Mentoring Programme found that 12 months after the scheme the young people were more confident and happier and the programme increased the likelihood of mentees wanting to go university.

Online technologies provide an important delivery mechanism for mentoring programmes. Online mentoring is a well-established practice (Bierema & Merriam, 2002) that has been used in a wide variety of different contexts including workforce development (Bierema & Hill, 2005), entrepreneurial education (Perren, 2003), career development (Headlam-Wells *et al.*, 2005), and learning development (Thompson *et al.*, 2010). Particularly relevant to an evaluation of Brightside, the literature also shows that online mentoring has been extensively used for supporting social equity and educational advancement. Single & Single (2005) reviewed the literature relating to a decade of online mentoring programmes around social equity and educational advancement. They concluded that in addition to the informational, psychosocial, and instrumental benefits associated with face-to-face mentoring, online mentoring was more effective at facilitating mentoring across organisations and that it enhanced impartiality.

Online mentoring is the core of Brightside's work, but the system actually constitutes a comprehensive online career learning system. While early online mentoring approaches were based around email exchange (Stone, 2010), increasingly online mentoring has taken place within a purpose built learning environment within which human-to-human interactions are combined with human-to-computer interactions (Headlam-Wells *et al.*, 2006). Brightside actually offers learners a comprehensive mix of all of the main approaches to providing online career learning: providing information resources; enabling automated interaction with online tools and providing a channel for online communication (Hooley *et al.*, 2010).

About the study

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of Brightside's online mentoring approach. The evaluation adopted a multi layered approach to explore the effectiveness of Brightside's work. The report represents the analysis of three data sets consisting of stakeholder interviews, an on-line survey with users, and an analysis of mentoring conversations. The data gathering took place between January and May 2013 although it relates to interactions that took place in the previous academic year (2011-2012). Unless otherwise stated all data presented in this report relates to the academic year 2011-2012, Brightside report that the levels of engagement and usage have continued to grow since then.

The evaluation was designed to be non-intrusive and was conducted in a way that did not interfere with the core operation of Brightside. As will be seen this approach has been able to provide a strong indication of both the extent and the nature of Brightside's impacts. However, it is also important to recognise that the current report does not offer the last word on the impact of Brightside or online mentoring. There would be value in Brightside continuing to develop a research and evaluation agenda alongside its other activities. This research and evaluation could explore issues that are raised by this study but which are not definitively answered (for example why do some people drop out of online mentoring) as well as deepening the evidence base through methodologies such as randomised control trials and longitudinal impact studies.

The current report synthesises the findings from the three data sets that were gathered to provide an in-depth review of the process from a range of perspectives.

- A series of four partner interviews provided the views from individuals and organisations that were utilising Brightside to deliver online mentoring
- An online survey gathered feedback from 555 mentees who had participated in a Brightside online mentoring programme
- An analysis of 366 online mentoring conversations offers a direct insight into the conversations that were taking place between the mentor and mentee.

These were supplemented with some further analysis of the user data collected by Brightside's data management and information systems.

Partner interviews

Four interviews were conducted with Brightside's partners. The partners were selected by Brightside to offer examples of different types of projects and to help explore the various approaches adopted for using Brightside's online mentoring platform. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals or small groups of colleagues at their premises to explore how Brightside was operationalised and how partners related to Brightside tools and the central Brightside team. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews and summaries were written up following the interview.

Online survey

An online survey was conducted to draw out reflections from those young people who had participated in online mentoring. The survey tool asked respondents to complete questions about themselves (demographics and life experience), to make a self-evaluative assessment of their skills across several dimensions before the mentoring intervention and then again after it, and to provide their overall assessment of the experience.

The survey population comprised users from the 2011-2012 cohort who met the following criteria:

- Were over the age of 16 when the survey was first sent out

- Had made at least two posts to their mentors, and

- Had an email address.

This generated a sample that comprised 2211 individuals of whom 65% were female and 35% were male. Links to the online survey were emailed to everyone on this list. All participants received two invitations to participate in the survey with early invitations being accompanied by an incentive to secure Amazon vouchers. Following the second invitation initial analysis suggested that responses were under-representing males, therefore a third invitation to participate was sent out to males only.

The research team topped up the responses to ensure a representative sample by calling a quota of participants. The survey returns were cleaned (for example, to remove individuals who answered just the first couple of questions, or who did not complete the survey). Further information on survey responses is concentrated in section six of this report.

Analysis of online mentoring conversations

The final key element of the methodology was to look in detail at what goes on in the mentoring conversations. A framework was developed to support the analysis of the mentoring conversations. The availability of online text-based mentoring conversations meant that it was possible to review complete sets of interactions between mentors and mentees. The analysis focussed on two key elements; the topics covered during the course of a mentoring conversation and secondly the quality of the intervention.

The process of developing the quality assessment framework is described in more detail in section four of this report. The framework draws on pre-existing quality assessment tools developed by iCeGS for assessing web based careers advice sessions, on guidelines for mentoring good practice and on relevant literature. The framework seeks to describe a quality mentoring process through ten identifiers which can be observed by researchers.

In order to explore the quality of mentoring a representative sample was drawn from the database of mentees to ensure that the analysis of conversations reflected all mentees' experiences. The base population for this sample was a cleaned database of 3450 mentees. These included younger mentees (from the age of 12 years) and those for whom no date of birth was available. The database included only those mentoring interactions where the mentee had made at least two posts.

The sampling frame is summarised in the Table 1 below. Names were drawn from the database which was put in user identification number order with names then drawn from the list at intervals of 10 to correspond with the sample frame below. The framework below identifies 345 names although the eventual total number of conversations analysed was 366 as additional names were drawn by the team to compensate for some records which had missing conversations or where individuals were difficult to identify.

Table 1: Sampling quota

Quota sample: females

		Ages (years)					
		12-15	16-17	18-19	20-25	unknown	Total
No. of messages	2-5	9	36	26	2	39	111
	6-10	5	19	17	1	17	58
	11-15	1	10	9	0	8	28
	16-20	1	6	5	0	3	14
	Total	**16**	**69**	**57**	**4**	**65**	**211**

Quota sample: males

		Ages (years)					
		12-15	16-17	18-19	20-25	unknown	Total
No. of messages	2-5	8	21	18	1	33	80
	6-10	3	10	8	1	13	35
	11-15	1	5	4	0	4	14
	16-20	0	2	1	0	2	6
	Total	**12**	**37**	**32**	**3**	**51**	**134**

Researchers then reviewed each of these conversations and coded them in relation to each of the quality identifiers. Where researchers felt that this quality identifier was not directly evident as the conversation indicated that this aspect of the mentoring relationship had happened face-to-face it was coded as "Probably done face-to-face". Where it was seen that this quality identifier was not appropriate to this mentoring conversation it was coded as "No but wouldn't be appropriate". These categories have been excluded from most of the analysis of quality found in section four of this report.

In addition to the exploration of mentoring quality the analysis of the online mentoring conversation also explored the range of topics covered in the interactions. To explore this, a selection of messages were sampled and used to inform a typology of areas that might be addressed during mentoring conversations. Table 4 sets out the typology that was identified. This framework was then used by researchers as a basic coding framework for the analysis of mentoring conversations. Where conversations were identified that did not fit into these

codes the conversations were described and then coded. Further information about the range of codes that were identified is set out in section five of this report (see Table 4).

2. Engaging and sustaining participation in online mentoring

Summary findings

This chapter looks at how partners, mentors and mentees are engaged in Brightside mentoring.

It finds that Brightside is a well-known and popular tool with its partners. They report that the site is easy to use and that there is good support available from Brightside's central team. In general they were enthusiastic about the site and keen for it to continue to develop into the future.

Partners felt that they were able to recruit appropriate mentors for their projects. They felt that the support available from Brightside for mentors was good, but could be developed further.

Brightside is highly successful in engaging mentees. However, less than half of those initially engaged successfully establish a mentoring relationship. Many of those who do not engage in mentoring may benefit from Brightside's information resources, but there is room to explore how the journey from initial engagement to full mentoring relationship can be improved.

Brightside is a national charity which works with a wide range of different partner organisations to deliver mentoring to a range of individuals. This section of the report will explore the process of engagement, by looking first at the process of engaging partners and then at how mentors and mentees themselves are engaged.

Brightside works with partners. These partner organisations are typically universities, businesses or third sector organisations which wish to connect with young people. The evaluators interviewed representatives of four organisations that were working with Brightside. These ranged from organisations who had worked with Brightside over a number of years, to those which have only recently developed an online mentoring programme. Interviewees revealed that they frequently use Brightside to support a range of activities such as programmes focusing on:

- access to specific professions such as medicine, law, and teaching;
- subject specific programmes such as languages and humanities;
- specific target groups including Black Ethnic Minorities, disabled, looked after children and mature students; and
- providing an introduction to the world of work.

In some cases online mentoring is offered as a self-contained intervention, while in others it is used to underpin or extend other activities that are classroom based and face to face. Some projects integrate mentoring, activities and resources to offer careers education programmes. The use of these materials and resources may be utilised within a structured curriculum or as tools which are used individually with mentees.

Many of the programmes operating in universities are located within widening participation activities and target young people from year 9 upwards. The projects can last from a year to up to five at some institutions, although maintaining engagement for that length of time can be a challenge. Brightside mentoring is often used by a number of departments within a university but there may be little liaison across projects and little knowledge of who else in the institution may be using Brightside mentoring.

Engaging and supporting partners

Brightside is well known and well regarded in the sector. It has a particularly strong reputation within the area of widening participation to higher education and has engaged a wide number of partners in the delivery of online mentoring in this area.

Brightside is currently working with around 70 partners. These include a number of schools (e.g. Lilian Bayliss Sixth Form and Christ the King Sixth Form College), universities (e.g. Birmingham University, Liverpool John Moores, Reading University and the Royal Veterinary College), and companies (e.g. Bank of America, Rothschild and BP). The organisation also works with a range of other third sector and specialist organisations to deliver its programmes (Future Foundation, the Financial Skills Partnership and the Sutton Trust). Each partner is allocated a Brightside coordinator who will support them in using the system, provide training materials and resources, and offer advice on working with mentors or any other help required. The coordinator will usually upload all the mentor and mentee details and provide technical assistance in terms of running reports from the system. They provide the key contact point between the partner and Brightside.

Brightside tends to recruit partners through referrals by existing projects. This means that the organisations that partner with Brightside tend to be networked with each other and to be similar kinds of organisations (most notably higher education widening participation departments). However, Brightside is also proactive in developing new relationships with a wide range of different kinds of partners. Brightside staff are keen to stress that they are not "selling software", but working with partners to achieve mutual objectives in line with the aims of the charity. Brightside therefore needs to be understood as both a tool for delivering online mentoring and an approach to delivering online mentoring informed by the organisation's expertise.

Partners who participated in the evaluation revealed that they had identified Brightside's platform as a tool to extend and enrich the delivery of their programmes. They had selected Brightside for a range for reasons with the factors most commonly cited being safeguarding and security issues. When compared with more general tools such as Skype and Facebook, Brightside was seen as providing a safe and secure environment, and the opportunity for moderation of the conversations was seen as particularly attractive. However, Brightside

was also popular with stakeholders because the organisation was perceived to be in tune with the aims of their programmes. One stakeholder commented.

> *We liked Brightside because of their passion for what they do and because of the online content for mentors and mentees.*
> **Partner (Interview)**

The experience of working with Brightside was described as very positive, both in terms of technical support and in helping the various partners to develop their understanding of online mentoring. Respondents described accessing the mentoring and mentee training tools available including the presentations and the handbooks. These were described as easy to use, helpful and well written.

> *The training and support is very clear and robust.*
> **Partner (Interview)**

> *When new people come to work on the mentoring projects that we run I am very confident that they will be able to pick up how to use Bright Links.[2]*
> **Partner (Interview)**

Stakeholders reported that requests for help and support were responded to quickly and all projects felt they had a good relationship with their Brightside coordinator.

> *At the end of last year's programme I visited Brightside who were able to provide examples of other practices and case studies and to provide a sample mentor plan which we are now using.*
> **Partner (Interview)**

Project stakeholders explained that they often required help from Brightside coordinators at the start of the year to aid them with technical tasks as well as to provide advice on how to engage participants in the mentoring. Support was generally accessed by phone and email and stakeholders felt that the team were very responsive and helpful.

> *I know if I pick up the phone they will sort out any problems. They are also always really quick to flag any issues with the system.*
> **Partner (Interview)**

However, despite the overall positive picture, stakeholders did express some uncertainty about exactly what support was available to them. They also felt that there was a high turnover of Brightside coordinators, which raised some concerns over developing long term working relationships.

In general Brightside's platform was seen to be relatively easy to use and those partners who had a long history with Brightside were able to reflect on its on going improvement. Nonetheless there were some concerns about the technical aspects of the site. One partner reported that this was the most common area in which support was needed.

---

[2] Bright Links is a brand used by one of Brightside's mentoring programmes.

> *The most support we need is technical, usually to do with the website.*
> **Partner (Interview)**

Some partners felt that managing an online mentoring programme through Brightside was quite labour intensive. They were interested in any developments that Brightside could come up with which could help to automate the management of the activity for example by sending out automatic email reminders to inactive mentors. They also highlighted some technical improvements that could be made to the process of moderating messages and raised some concerns about the ease by which monitoring data could be access by partners. None of these concerns were critical to maintaining partner engagement with Brightside, but all point to the importance of ongoing investment in technical development.

Engaging and supporting mentors

Partners described how they recruited mentors for their projects. In general they felt that it was possible to find suitable and enthusiastic mentors. They described how mentors were selected to meet the needs of each project and also explained that for some projects in universities the mentoring would be on a volunteer basis whilst for others mentors were paid. The recruitment within some projects was formal involving job descriptions and person specifications, while for others the process of identifying mentors was more informal. In universities mentors were often selected as a role model due to having a similar background to the institution's target mentee group. Partners particularly liked to select mentors who have previously experienced and benefited from a mentoring relationship. Matching between mentors and mentees was predominantly based on interests and hobbies, but personal circumstances were also taken in to consideration where possible within the universities.

The approach to the mentoring projects that were run by employers or which utilised working people had many similarities to university based mentoring. Again, partners generally reported that it was possible to find mentors and explained that they usually sought to use employees who would be seen as 'people like me' by the mentees that they were working with. Within this type of project the matching of mentor and mentee tended to be on a random basis.

Partners reported that the resources provided by Brightside to aid in the training and support of mentors were very useful. However, there was an agreement that these materials could be developed to help partners to support their mentors more effectively. In particular it was felt by some partners that the provision of clear guidance on how mentors should make use of support materials and other resources provided by Brightside might be helpful both in supporting the core mentoring relationship and in providing a more structured approach to managing and monitoring online mentoring sessions. One partner suggested that it might also be useful to develop some further resources and gave the example of a key milestones and deadline calendar for applications to higher education.

Engaging mentees and sustaining their participation

Partners reported using a wide range of approaches to engage mentees. In the case of universities this process was usually organised as part of their widening participation

targeting strategy or in a way that was linked to the broader marketing of the institution. In businesses the mentoring was usually conceived as part of corporate social responsibility and the actual process of engaging mentees varied. A typical strategy used to engage mentees and to sustain their engagement was to recruit 'link teachers' in schools whose role it was to remind learners and encourage them to talk to their mentor.

Those who used mentoring as part of a series of activities suggested that online mentoring worked best when it was underpinned by initial face- to -face activities as an initial meeting supported the development of a mentor relationship. The different approaches taken in online mentoring will be discussed in more detail in section three of this report dealing with models of delivery.

Brightside's system collects a lot of data that can be useful in exploring the issue of mentee engagement. This engagement moves through a number of stages. In the first instance participants are enrolled on the system. Brightside and its partners were very successful in the initial engagement of mentees and recruited over 10,000 in 2011-2012. Enrolment entitles mentees to access a range of information and learning resources on the mentoring site. Bright Knowledge is a comprehensive career and educational information resource provided by the organisation which includes information on educational choices, career pathways, study support, financial support and a wide range of other topics relevant to Brightside's core client group.

Bright Knowledge is well used by both mentees being referred from the mentoring system (around 20% of total users) and by users accessing it directly (around 80% of total users). This second group of users may include Brightside mentors but predominantly constitutes an additional group of unregistered users of Brightside. Figure 1 shows the growth of usage of Bright Knowledge since Jan 2011.
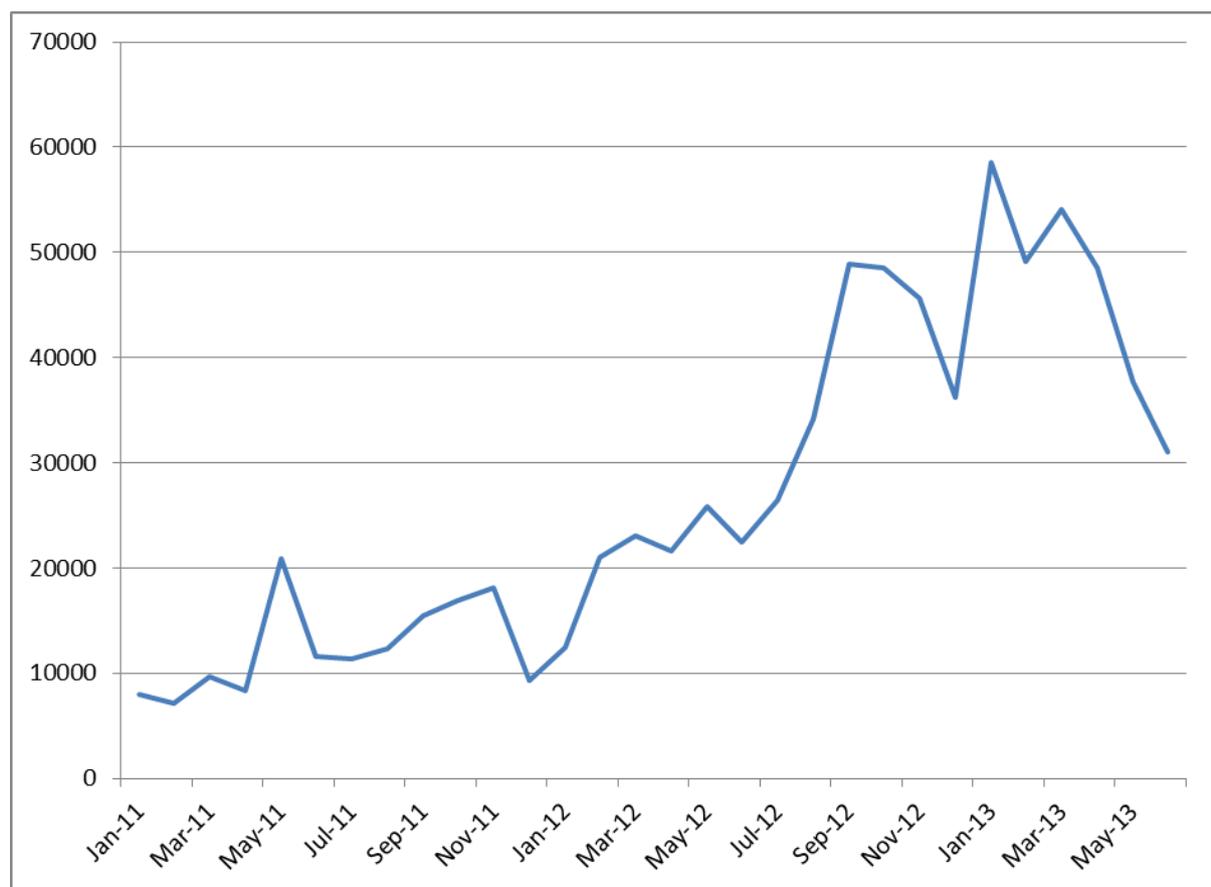
It is clear from this that Bright Knowledge is a popular site with a substantial audience gaining tens of thousands of unique visits a month. The fact that many of these do not come directly from the mentoring site demonstrates either that the site is being used more widely or that those involved directly in Brightside mentoring continue to use the site as a resource outside of the immediate context of the mentoring conversations (in all likelihood a mix of both of these). Both of these possibilities point to the fact that Brightside's impact is likely to be greater than can be identified from an evaluation such as this one that is focused on the mentoring relationships facilitated by the organisation.

Following enrolment mentees should be matched to a mentor. However, it was clear from the usage data that some projects were enrolling learners to use Bright Knowledge and were not attempting to match them to a mentor. Furthermore there may be a range of particular local and personal reasons why enrolled mentees might not be matched to a mentor in any particular project. For example, mentors might not be available, mentees might withdraw or there may be glitches in project organisation that delay or prevent the matching of mentor pairs. It is not possible to identify the reasons why this matching did not take place, but

---

[3] The sharp decline in unique visits to Bright Knowledge from January 2013 is the result of a problem with search engine indexing. This has since been fixed and Brightside are confident that the growth in usage levels will return to the previous trend.

Brightside usage data reveal that more than 2000 of those who were enrolled were not matched to a mentor. This is not necessarily a problem as these learners may be using Brightside's resources, however there may be a case for Brightside beginning to distinguish more clearly at a project level between the different reasons why partners choose to use the mentoring system or otherwise. So in this case it is possible that some partners are buying the Brightside package purely for its information content with no intention of using it for mentoring. If this is the case recognising this might support both the marketing of Brightside and achieving more clarity in future reporting and evaluation.

Figure 2 sets out the levels of engagement in Brightside mentoring and shows how the level of engagement drops as we look at user behaviours (logging in once, sending one message, sending two or more messages). This study sets the threshold for online mentoring having taken place at two mentee messages. So if the mentee has not been matched to a mentor, logged in and sent at least two messages it was assumed that online mentoring had not taken place. Consequently it was only these mentees who were surveyed and whose mentoring conversations were analysed.

Figure 2: Levels of engagement in Brightside mentoring
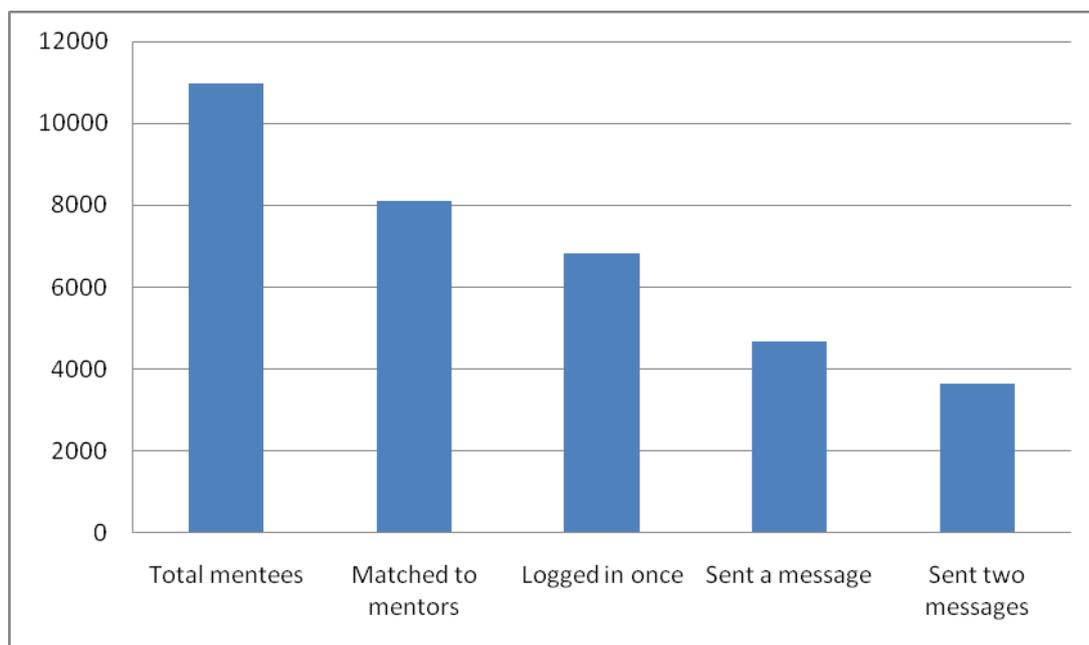
The way in which engagement declines as mentees are asked to undertake more tasks is not unusual for any kind of online engagement. For example there is an extensive literature devoted to understanding, detecting and preventing learner disengagement during online learning programmes (Street, 2010; Cocea & Weibelzahl, 2011; Lee & Choi, 2011). Similarly web usability consultants are frequently highly concerned with bounce rates (how many people disengage with a website once they have read a particular page). In general however it is important to exercise some caution about drawing straightforwardly negative conclusions from bounce rates or disengagement rates. A statistic that indicates disengagement may

equally be understood to signify that a user has got all they need from the site or that they have been unable to find what they need and have left disappointed.

In the case of Brightside the progressive level of disengagement in the early stages of enrolment although not unusual for an online activity (Clow, 2013) may, therefore, be worthy of further investigation to establish why some people are disengaging. Is it due to mentees being enrolled en masse with little intrinsic motivation or a lack of clear explanation and understanding of online mentoring and its purpose? Alternatively is it that mentees who disengage have resolved their initial reason for engaging in mentoring either through the use of Brightside resources or some other form of career support? Further investigation may throw a light on these issues; however this should not prevent some initiatives being taken to try and bolster engagement and to support the effective movement of learners from enrolment to full mentoring.

Within the group of learners who have sent more than one message and so are seen as having actually taken part in online mentoring there are also considerable differences in the levels of engagement. Figure 3 sets out the spread of engagement based on the number of messages sent by mentees.

Figure 3: Mentee interactions of those mentees sending between 2 and 137 messages[4]

---
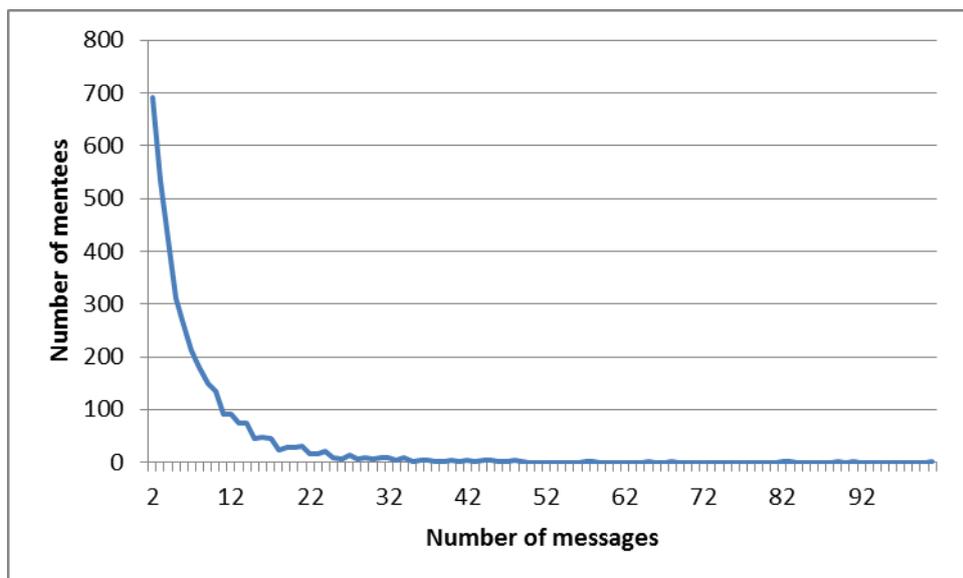
[4] n.b. The highest numbers of interactions were 124 & 137 these have been represented on the graph as two instances of >100.

This is a very typical distribution of online activity in which a lot of people are each responsible for relatively little activity while a small number are responsible for a large amount of activity. It demonstrates that some mentoring relationships are very extensive while others are relatively brief. This is to be expected and is likely to represent different mentee needs, mentor styles and the focus and length of different projects.

Some partners felt that the appearance and usability of Brightside's mentoring interface may have been a negative aspect in relation to engaging and sustaining the engagement of mentees. Some partners had received feedback from mentors and mentees which suggested that they would like something which looked more like Facebook and where they could load up their own photograph rather than using an avatar. Others suggested that the fact that they had to log on to the system every time they needed to pick up a message was a hindrance to the flow of communication.[5]

Some participants also raised these kinds of technical issues as factors which may have negatively impacted on their experience of using Brightside.

> *Sometimes the message system was a little inefficient and took a very long time for my message to reach my mentor.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

> *A slightly more streamlined way of messaging i.e. IM, [instant messaging] could have helped at times, though on the whole e-mentoring has been a fluid and rewarding experience.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

> *It could be made easier to log on through the use of an app, it was sometimes a long process just to reach the message.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

While it is unrealistic to expect that the interface of a product like Brightside mentoring will be able to keep pace with the latest social media tools that users are familiar with there is clearly a strong case for sustained investment in the technical development and usability of the system. In particular there was some enthusiasm in the survey for the development of an app to enable more peripatetic use.

It is important to recognise that technical issues were only raised by a small minority of participants and to note that there is no evidence to suggest that these contributed to lower engagement or impacts. One area where problems with engagement are common in online products is the need for participants to create and remember a username and password. The issue of remembering usernames and passwords was raised by some mentees and may be an area where alternative approaches might usefully be investigated.

---

[5] Since the evaluation Brightside have added an email gateway to the site to allow mentors and mentees to respond to message direct from their email inbox.

Suggested actions for Brightside

It is possible to draw out a number of key actions that Brightside might want to consider in relation to the findings set out in this chapter.

- The core Brightside product (a technical solution for online mentoring with associated advice and support about how to use this and a high quality career and educational information site) is popular and effective. If any change is sought by partners it is to develop the level of support that is available. It is therefore suggested that Brightside should explore a range of additional areas in which support might be offered in the light of this evaluation.
- A key area where additional support would be welcome would be in the provision of further training and resources to help mentors to deliver a high quality mentoring service.
- There are some concerns about how the initial engagement of mentees is sustained into full mentoring relationships. It is suggested that Brightside explore ways to improve this initial stage of the relationships perhaps by reviewing practices at a project level, attending more closely to engagement data during the early stages of projects and offering more support to those projects which are under-performing in this area.

3. Models of delivery

Summary findings

This chapter looks at how Brightside programmes are delivered in practice.

It found that there were four main ways in which Brightside was used by its partners.

- As a repository of reliable online information, with little or no use of the mentoring functionality.

- As a communication tool to support face-to-face projects, again with little or no mentoring actually taking place.

- As an e-mentoring system in which mentoring takes place entirely online.

- As a b-mentoring system in which mentoring is delivered through a mix of online and onsite activity.

All four uses were found to have some benefits, but e-mentoring and b-mentoring form the focus of this evaluation.

The evaluation revealed that Brightside's tool was being used in a variety of different ways. Broadly the different approaches to its use can be modelled as follows.

Utilising the knowledge bank

Some projects clearly utilised Brightside primarily as a repository of reliable online information and resources. As discussed in section two of this report it was clear from the usage data that some projects did not match mentees to mentors. Brightside staff reported that they are aware that some of their partners see access to the online information as the key reason for building a partnership with Brightside and that they do not utilise the opportunity for mentoring.

Communication support

Some projects used Brightside's mentoring tools as a way of providing a safeguarded message board for participants. In these cases mentors were usually matched with many mentees and took the role of the facilitator of group discussions rather than that of a genuine mentor. From the analysis of mentoring conversations it was possible to identify a small minority of conversations which were not strictly mentoring interactions. Much of the communication of this type appeared to accompany face- to -face projects or activities and often comprised largely of the provision of updates and logistical discussions.

E-mentoring

Most projects used Brightside's platform in the way that it was conceived to be used as a wholly online mentoring tool. From the analysis of mentoring conversations it was possible to identify around 55% of conversations that seemed to be conducted wholly online. Clearly this conclusion should be treated with caution as it was inferred from analysis of conversations rather than directly observed or reported.

Pure e-mentoring raises a number of issues for the mentoring relationship many of which are related to the need to establish a social presence as part of building up relationships. Some mentees' fed back that they would have liked the opportunity to actually meet their mentor face-to-face and argued that this would have strengthened the relationship.

> *I think if we actually got to meet our mentor, we would be able to communicate more, and find out more about the person and their jobs, rather just knowing their job title and what their qualifications are.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

> *More face to face sessions. One was worth 1000 emails in the information you received.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

However, despite this viewpoint being articulated in a minority of cases there were also many mentees who reported very positive experiences of e-mentoring. There are also other important advantages to a wholly e-mentoring approach in relation to safeguarding, flexibility and efficiency.

B-mentoring

Finally it was possible to identify a large minority of mentoring interactions that utilised a blend of online and face-to-face mentoring. The analysis of mentoring conversations suggests that this blended mentoring (b-mentoring) approach accounted for around 34% of the conversations on Brightside. There are some clear advantages to this approach where it is logistically feasible. The following extract from an online mentoring conversation provides a good example of how mentors were able to connect face-to-face to online mentoring to create an effective blended mentoring experience.

> *It was really nice meeting you this week and I hope you had a really good time at the summer school and also a safe journey home. Just want to give you a quick reminder about the e-mentoring system. I will be emailing a few times a month with information regarding various aspects of the university application process and useful information for your last year at sixth form/college. However feel free to email me with any questions you may have at anytime as I am more than happy to respond and give you as much information I can. I will aim to reply as soon as possible and not leave you waiting ages for a response.*
> **Mentor (Analysis of online conversation)**

In this example the online mentoring is used to extend and sustain a relationship that was established in a summer school environment as a way of carrying on the learning and supporting its translation into action.

Reviewing the four models of Brightside use

It is important to recognise the four models of Brightside use without establishing a hierarchy. Each of them may serve a need in a particular context. However, Brightside may find it useful to consider how these four models are identified, communicated to potential partners and then supported. At the present time these models have emerged in an ad hoc way and it is not clear which project is using each of these approaches. The collection of more monitoring data about how Brightside is being used by each of its partners will enable Brightside's team to support partners more effectively, but would also enable a future evaluation to be clearer about the relative benefits and outcomes of each of these approaches.

Suggested actions for Brightside

It is possible to draw out three key actions that Brightside might want to consider in relation to the findings set out in this chapter.

- The identification of four different types of usage of Brightside suggests that further thought needs to be given to how the product is marketed and supported.
- Audit all existing partners to identify which models partners are currently using and might use in the future.
- Consider developing four (or more) distinct Brightside products which provide more tailored support to groups of partners to achieve their broader objectives

4. The quality of provision

Summary findings

This chapter looks at the quality of provision that is delivered using Brightside mentoring.

It sets out ten identifiers of quality which are used to evaluate the quality of mentoring delivered through Brightside.

In general the quality of mentoring was high with quality identifiers observable 84% of the time.

However, there were a number of areas in which quality might be improved particularly in relation to the structuring of mentoring relationships and the provision of information and referral.

This chapter concludes by looking at a number of approaches through which Brightside and its partners can assure quality. It is suggested that the organisation may wish to explore the matrix standard, the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Status, as well as considering the viability of developing its own quality standard for partners.

One of the key aims of the evaluation was to make an assessment of the quality of the mentoring that is available through Brightside. The availability of online text-based mentoring conversations meant that it was possible to review complete sets of interactions between mentors and mentees – at least amongst the majority that use the e-mentoring model.

Initial reviews of the mentoring conversations revealed that there was a wealth of good mentoring practice in evidence. The following quotes provide a series of examples of mentoring interactions delivered using Brightside. These examples respectively demonstrate the four key elements of effective mentoring that the review of literature revealed earlier; effectively establishing the purpose of the mentoring conversation; setting out the process by which the mentoring will be managed; providing resources to stimulate learning; and effectively closing down a relationship at the end of a programme.

> *I hope to be able to be an effective mentor for you while you apply to university, offering advice and someone to talk to when, where and if you need it. Hopefully you will find the process helpful, and benefit from it as much (or more) than I hope I will. More details about the e-mentoring will be (or will have been) discussed at the e-mentoring introductory session.*
> **Mentor (Analysis of online conversation)**

> *Now for some more mentoring specific stuff. The first thing that would be great to do is to establish a weekly contact schedule so we know when to write to each other etc. Can I suggest that I'll write to you by Tuesday evening, and you by Friday? Also, I will try and answer the questions you have, and will ask you questions about things so we can get the most out of this.*
> **Mentor (Analysis of online conversation)**

Thank you for the article about moving up to A level. It was really good to know that perhaps it isn't too scary moving up to A level! I also hadn't really thought about how I'd use my free time. It hadn't really occurred to me I'd need to sort out whether I was doing an enrichment activity one free period or studying English in another.
Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)

As you may or may not know the programme will be ending shortly which means you've only got me to use for a limited period of time. But don't worry; you are an extremely confident, intelligent and capable individual. I'm sure you will have great success in whatever path you head down.
Mentor (Analysis of online conversation)

There were many more examples of quality mentoring, as well as examples of poorer quality mentoring in which opportunities to develop the mentee were missed or mishandled. Where quality mentoring was not in evidence mentees were often aware of its limitations and felt that it adversely impacted on their experience. For example, where the purpose of the mentoring conversation was not set out clearly some mentees were unsure about what to talk to their mentor about.

I just didn't understand what I was doing there half the time.
Mentee (Survey)

Perhaps most clearly the regularity (or irregularity) of communication was seen as an issue by mentees. Some participants in the survey complained that the poor responsiveness from mentors had created problems for their engagement with the programmes.

If the mentor was more easily available to respond. I understand that they may have other important things to do however it may have been useful to set a day when the mentor would have to log on, say once a week.
Mentee (Survey)

Unlike my tutor who helped me with my essay, I felt that my online mentor lacked a desire to communicate with the group on a regular basis and ended up providing too much information all at once, rather than distributing it over the course of a month etc.
Mentee (Survey)

Mentors should give faster response so students who have important questions get their answers as quick as possible.
Mentee (Survey)

For some participants the relationship with their e-mentor was generally weak and they received limited or poor responses, 12% of those responding to this question in the survey specifically identified their mentor as being a cause of their poor experience. Often relationships started well but then faded away. In such instances it was observable that the sessions often lacked structure, with some mentors not agreeing timescales with their mentees who were then unsure when they could expect a response. Response times and e-mentor engagement with mentees caused some to query the benefit of the process.

Given the importance of quality to the mentee experience a key purpose of this element of the evaluation was to provide a summative judgement on the quality of the mentoring delivered using Brightside mentoring. In order to make a judgement about the quality of the mentoring a framework was developed to describe what a good quality mentoring interaction should include. The framework drew on the guidelines provided by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2011), on relevant literature which explores the delivery of effective mentoring or the issue of mentoring quality (e.g. DuBois *et al.*, 2002; Arnold, 2006; and Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). These were then used to inform and develop a pre-existing quality assessment tool which had been developed by iCeGS for assessing web based careers advice sessions. The framework seeks to describe a quality mentoring process through ten identifiers which can be observed by researchers.

Quality identifiers for online mentoring

The mentor will:

1. establish an appropriate relationship with the mentee;
2. establish the purpose of the mentoring conversation;
3. provide the mentee with information and/or links to useful resources;
4. refer the mentee to appropriate services;
5. provide prompt and relevant responses;
6. encourage the mentee to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses;
7. encourage the mentee to explore their career goals;
8. identify opportunities and explore ways to overcome barriers;
9. move the mentee progressively towards their goals; and
10. bring the process to a mutually satisfactory close.

Taken together it is argued that these ten identifiers describe a quality mentoring experience. However, it is important to recognise that there will be occasions when all ten are not necessary. For example in some mentoring conversations it will not be appropriate to refer the mentee to appropriate services, or to spend time developing their career thinking. Conversations in which some of these identifiers are not present do not necessarily represent bad mentoring in all cases and should be referred to as appropriate to the conversation. However, the framework does provide a clear set of criteria against which the quality of mentoring can be considered.

The sampling of conversations has already been discussed in section one of this report. To recap a sample of 366 mentees were identified from a base population of 3450 mentees.

Researchers then reviewed each of these conversations and coded them in relation to each of the quality identifiers. Table 2 sets out the findings on the evidence of quality identifiers. Relevant responses were judged to be those in which an assessment of quality was possible (excluding those that were coded as either "Probably done face-to-face" or "No but wouldn't be appropriate"). Those that were relevant were coded as either "Yes" (the quality identifier was clearly present in this conversation), "Partially Yes" (some elements of the quality

identifier were in evidence, but there was room for improvement) or "No" (the quality identifier was not evident).

Table 2: Evidence of quality identifiers

Quality identifier	Total relevant	Yes (%)	Partially Yes (%)	No (%)
establish an appropriate relationship	281	85	11	4
establish the purpose of the conversation	295	82	13	4
provide information or links to resources	287	67	14	20
encourage the mentee to explore their career goals	272	66	19	15
prompt and relevant responses	348	63	28	9
identify opportunities or explore ways to overcome barriers	256	63	18	20
refer to appropriate services	237	62	11	27
move the mentee progressively towards their goals	288	60	22	18
encourage the mentee to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses	272	60	23	17
bring the process to a mutually satisfactory close	241	41	24	34
Average (Mean)		**65**	**19**	**16**

Table 2 suggests that a generally high quality of mentoring is being delivered using Brightside mentoring. On average quality identifiers were observable 84% of the time (either through a yes or partially yes response) and were only clearly absent 16% of the time. Given that the quality identifiers have been developed retrospectively and have not currently informed the training or management of mentors this suggests that the blend of training, support and mentor selection employed by most of Brightside's partners is working effectively to deliver quality mentoring.

Despite the generally high quality of online mentoring through Brightside it is possible to argue that there is still some room to drive up quality further. This is particularly the case if we look at which quality identifiers were most clearly in evidence. The following list ranks the quality identifiers by the likelihood of the quality identifiers being present.

1. establish an appropriate relationship **(4% of conversations did not have this quality identifier in evidence)**

2. establish the purpose of the conversation **(4% not in evidence)**

3. prompt and relevant responses **(9% not in evidence)**

4. encourage the mentee to explore their career goals **(15% not in evidence)**

5. encourage the mentee to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses **(17% not in evidence)**

6. move the mentee progressively towards their goals **(18% not in evidence)**

7. provide information or links to resources **(20% not in evidence)**

8. identify opportunities or explore ways to overcome barriers **(20% not in evidence)**

9. refer to appropriate services **(27% not in evidence)**

10. bring the process to a mutually satisfactory close **(34% not in evidence)**

This shows there was a considerable diversity in relation to the level of engagement with each of the quality identifiers. The weakest areas relate to the successful closure of the mentoring relationship and also to quality identifiers which require an understanding of the broader support context that mentees can access (providing information, identifying opportunity and referral). When asked "What one thing would have improved your e-mentoring experience?", one respondent expressed how frustrating it can be when a mentor does not prove to be a good source of information and referral.

> *Mentors putting more effort into the reply. For example finding a weblink or any other reliable information regarding the topic/discussion.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

It is not fully clear what accounts for the diversity in quality. However, the data suggest two issues that may be important. Firstly it is clear that some of the difference in quality is

accounted for by the project that mentors were participating in. The researchers analysed the quality measures by project to see whether the average level of quality differed across the projects. In the project with the highest quality researchers were able to identify almost all of the quality identifiers (average number of identifiers not in evidence = 0.17). However, in the project with the lowest quality on average only seven of the ten identifiers were in evidence (average number of identifiers not in evidence = 2.82). This reveals that there is considerable range in the average quality of mentoring in each project. These figures can only be indicative as the number of conversations relating to any one project was relatively low. However, there would clearly be value in investigating how quality is assured at a project level.

The second issue which appears to account for some of the diversity in quality is the gender of the mentor/mentee pairing. The data were analysed to identify whether there were any differences with respect to the gender of the mentor pairing. The results of this are set out in Table 3. The table suggests that 64 of the mentoring conversations that were analysed had both a male mentor and a male mentee, on average across these 64 conversations 2.19 of the quality identifiers were not in evidence. This contrasts with the 169 conversations that were analysed which had both female mentor and mentee where the average number of absent quality identifiers was a lower 1.14.

Table 3: Gender and mentoring quality

	N=	No. of quality identifiers not in evidence
female mentor - male mentee	68	0.54
both female	169	1.14
male mentor - female mentee	48	1.54
both male	64	2.19

Table 3 suggests that in general mixed gender pairings produce better quality mentoring than single gender pairings. It also suggests that female mentors generally provide higher quality mentoring than male mentors. Other research has also found that gender is an important dynamic in mentoring relationships (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Rhodes *et al.*, 2008). However, this is clearly an area that would merit further research.

In general the quality of Brightside mentoring is high although there would clearly be value in developing training and quality assurance strategies that might address the areas where

there are weaknesses. Interviews with Brightside's partners revealed that there was an appetite amongst them for more support in relation to the monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance of mentoring. There was also enthusiasm for more guidance on how to effectively structure and manage mentoring and for a clear steer on what comprises good quality mentoring. It is suggested that the quality framework developed for this evaluation, or an iteration of it, might be a useful tool in underpinning the development of quality by clarifying what Brightside considers to be a quality experience and providing a resource for training, mentoring practice and quality assurance.

Developing Brightside's approach to quality

The development of the 10 quality identifiers provides a useful tool to support quality enhancement with respect to the conduct of mentoring conversations themselves. However, stakeholders within Brightside and its partners also expressed interest in receiving some external recognition for the quality of support delivered through Brightside. This section will briefly consider some options that exist to support broader quality enhancement.

There are two clear areas to the provision of Brightside, Bright Knowledge and the online mentoring platform. From a quality assurance perspective, Bright Knowledge is produced and delivered by Brightside, whereas the delivery of the e-mentoring support is delivered through a network approach utilising partner organisations. There are a range of quality standards which have been developed or are in development within this sector. Quality frameworks such as the matrix standard for information advice and guidance services[6], careers education standards validated to the Quality in Careers Standard[7] and the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard (APS)[8] may be useful frameworks for Brightside to consider adopting.

The support provided online though Bright Knowledge can be described generically as career information and advice. Given this it would be appropriate to consider quality assuring it against a quality framework which supports these areas, such as the matrix standard. There are 27 indicators within the matrix standard, however the key aspects require services to be clear about what they want to achieve through their delivery, establish key success measures and engage in continuous quality improvement – using the Plan, Do, Review approach. A framework such as the matrix standard would also require Brightside to be able to articulate the difference that the service has made on the individuals accessing the information. This will require the development of an ongoing evaluation strategy as part of a broader quality approach. Formal accreditation to the matrix standard would only enable the assessment of Brightside direct activity (including Bright Knowledge) and not delivery undertaken by partners, although the information and advice provided by Brightside to its

---

[6] Further information about the matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services is available at http://matrixstandard.com/.
[7] Further information about the Quality in Careers Standard is available at http://www.careersengland.org.uk/quality.php. However it is important to note that currently this is targeted at schools and is unlikely to be a viable option for Brightside.
[8] For further information about APS see http://www.mandbf.org/quality-standard.

partners could be included and these partners could also be encouraged to consider the matrix standard where appropriate.

Given the importance of partners to the Brightside approach, ongoing quality improvement will require partners to be engaged. In relation to the delivery of mentoring through partners, it may be the APS may be worth further consideration as this is directly addressed to the issue of mentoring. However, this would require each partner to be assessed/benchmarked against the framework and would look at a range of indicators including the organisation, recruitment of mentors and mentees and support arrangements. Furthermore there are existing examples where Brightside partners have been assessed against this standard. An alternative to this might be for Brightside to develop its own quality standard as part of its offer to its partners. This approach would require some investment in the development of the standard and it may be sensible to commission a feasibility study in the first instance.

Quality standards such as the matrix Standard and APS require that organisations (both Brightside and its partners) are clear about what they are trying to achieve. The commitment to quality is usually expressed in terms of measurable objectives, monitoring and observable commitments to continuous development. Typically quality standards do not prescribe 'how' delivery should be planned or undertaken, but rather indicate 'what' should be in place, therefore providing flexibility. These are values which interviews with Brightside and partners suggest would align well with existing practice and organisational values. The adoption of formal quality standards could therefore provide a clear structure for quality enhancement and help relevant organisations to prioritise quality.

Suggested actions for Brightside

It is possible to draw out a number of key actions that Brightside might want to consider in relation to the findings set out in this chapter.

- Although the findings suggest that mentoring quality is high, Brightside currently lacks a formal quality assessment approach. It is suggested that it might adopt the ten quality identifiers as a key component of a quality approach.
- The areas where quality seemed weakest related to the successful closure of the mentoring relationship and also to quality identifiers which require an understanding of the broader support context that mentees can access (providing information, identifying opportunity and referral). It is suggested that these areas should be addressed as a priority through new training and support materials.
- The quality of mentoring appears to be dependent to some extent on the project within which the mentor is operating. It is suggested that Brightside explore the quality procedures that are utilised by its partners and consider strategies to enhance these where necessary. This might be addressed either by encouraging partners to adopt a quality standard (possibly APS) or through the development of a new and bespoke Brightside quality award.
- There may also be value in Brightside exploring an external quality standard (possibly the matrix standard) to provide a recognisable quality assurance for Bright Knowledge and other direct delivery by the organisation.

- It is important to recognise that evaluation is a key element of continuous quality improvement. It is therefore suggested that Brightside develop an evaluation plan setting out how the organisation will build on the current evaluation.

5. The content of online mentoring conversations

Summary findings

This chapter looks at the content of the online mentoring conversations.

It identifies a wide range of topics that the mentoring conversations covered including personal and social issues, health issues, work, employment and employability skills, school and college, higher education and further education and work-related learning.

The most common areas discussed focused on the process of choosing to go to higher education and to a lesser extent the subsequent transition into work.

Mentoring conversations were less likely to address personal issues or to explore alternatives to higher education.

There is a danger that mentoring conversations can be seen as something of a "black box". Mentor and mentee are paired, but beyond this it is frequently unclear what is talked about. An important area of investigation for this project was to explore and quantify the areas which mentoring conversations addressed.

To explore this, a selection of messages were sampled and used to inform a typology of areas that might be addressed during mentoring conversations. Table 4 sets out the typology that was identified. This framework was then used by researchers as a basic coding framework for the analysis of mentoring conversations. Where conversations were identified that did not fit into these codes the conversations were described and then coded. This resulted in the identification of additional codes (shown in bold in Table 4).

Table 4: Typology of mentoring conversation topics

Personal and social	Health	Work, employment and employability skills
Caring responsibilities	Dealing with existing health issues	Assessment centres
Finding student accommodation	Dealing with new health issues	**Career choice**
Freshers' week		Interview skills
Hobbies and interests		
Making new friends		**Job search and CV**

School and college	Higher education	FE and work-related learning
Moving away from home		Placements while at university
Relationships with family		**Volunteering**
Student life		**Work experience at university**
Gap year		Work experience while at school
School and college	**Higher education**	**FE and work-related learning**
Entry requirements for courses	Changing course	Changing course
Examination grades	Choosing a university	Choosing a college
Revision/Exam preparation	Choosing a university course	Choosing a college course
Subject choice	**International exchange**	Whether to go to college
Subject support	**Interviews and open days**	
	Module choice	
	Personal statement	
	Student finance	
	Whether to apply to university	
Other		
Logistics/arrangements (often relating to face-to-face meetings)		
Project (generally related to support for a current project related to the mentoring relationship)		
Uncategorised write in responses		

Each conversation was coded against each of these factors and recorded on a standard framework. This was then analysed to identify the frequency of each of these codes across

the 366 mentoring conversations analysed. Conversations would often address a number of these items simultaneously such as work experience and personal statements.

Table 5 sets out the number of conversations that addressed each of these areas (ranked from most common to least common).

Table 5: Areas covered during mentoring conversations (ranked)

Topic	Total	Topic	Total
Choosing a university course	180	Caring responsibilities	19
Choosing a university	164	Whether to go to college	15
Subject choice	112	Changing course	15
Work experience while at school	82	Hobbies and interests	13
Entry requirements for courses	74	Assessment centres	10
Whether to apply to university	58	Student finance	10
Module choice	47	Work experience at university	9
Placements while at university	46	Relationships with family	8
Moving away from home	40	Choosing a college	8
Personal statement	40	Student life	8
Interview skills	36	Grades	7
Choosing a college course	36	Freshers' week	6
Finding student accommodation	33	Changing course	5
Revision/Exam preparation	32	Gap year	4
Project	30	Dealing with existing health	3
Uncategorised	29	Volunteering	3
Job search and CV	25	Interviews and open days	3
Logistics/Arrangements	24	Subject support	3
Making new friends	21	Dealing with new health issues	2
Career choice	20		

To summarise the range of conversations it is possible to analyse the coding at the category level as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Areas covered in mentoring conversation by category
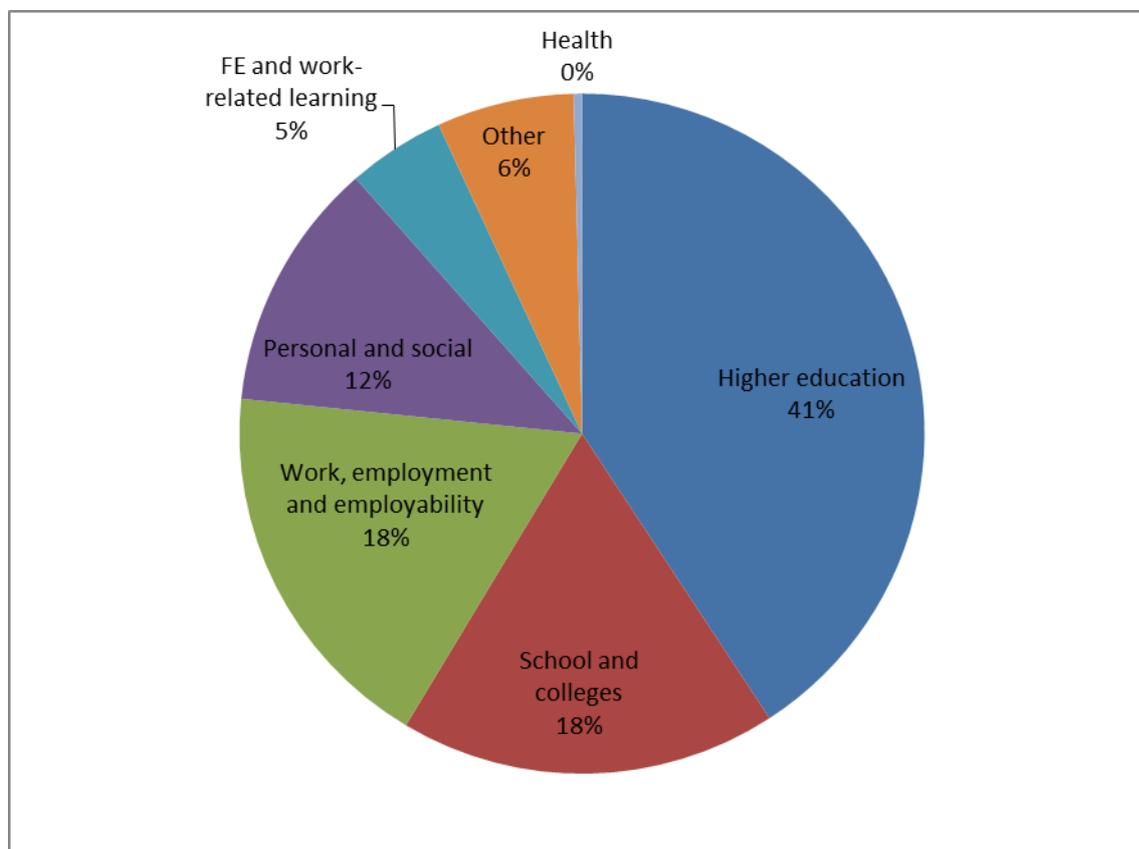
As Table 5 and Figure 4 demonstrate the mentoring conversations are generally highly focused around the core purpose of the mentoring relationship. Most commonly they are strongly centred on the process of transitioning to higher education. This was the same for all students in the study regardless of age.

> *Hi K__, your course sounds quite interesting and it seems like a big change from college life. How do they help students to deal with the transition? I have applied for Chemistry with a possibility of a year in either industry or abroad at Sussex, Loughborough, Southampton, York and Liverpool.*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**

Often this takes the form of students seeking help to make a decision or to gain a greater understanding of what universities are looking for.

> *I would like to work in the law profession in the future but I am not entirely sure which university I want to go to. I was thinking about applying for Oxford University but at the moment I am still unsure.*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**

Mentors are frequently able to provide useful insights and advice based on their own experience and knowledge.

> *When it comes closer to your interviews, start to research on a few more topics that are coming up in the news around that time, anything that takes your interest. The student BMJ is a good website to look at too, and they have a magazine you can subscribe to too. http://student.bmj.com/student/student-bmj.html*
> ***Mentor (Analysis of online conversation)***

The focus on transition to higher education is often underpinned by mentoring that supports the mentee's current engagement in their subject and in their school work.

> *Thanks C___ that's helped a lot. I understand the difference between thermodynamic stability and kinetic stability now...:D.*
> ***Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)***

> *My mentor was there whenever I had Law related questions. She always answered them very clearly, so I could count on her support when it came to understanding a Legal concept.*
> ***Mentee (Survey)***

> *I feel like the e-mentoring experience is very well thought out and believe that it shouldn't be changed in any way!*
> ***Mentee (Survey)***

While the mentoring conversations are most commonly focused on transition from school to university this is not always the case. Some focus on other transitions notably transitions to work.

> *Well I'm currently planning to apply for LPC [Legal Practice Course] and go onto becoming a solicitor. Haven't really decided what I want to specialise in just yet though. I would like to discuss about the LPC expectations and get to know more about what it is really like to work in the legal profession before making a solid decision about it.*
> ***Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)***

However, there were far fewer conversations which were concerned with the process of applying to Apprenticeships or further education although that is largely a reflection of the sort of partners Brightside works with and there is no reason why Brightside's approach could not be adapted to support this kind of transition.

Most mentoring conversations were focused on the more technical issues underpinning transition.

> *Thanks for clearing up what happens during the application process.*
> ***Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)***

Some mentoring relationships addressed issues of personal and social relationships and anxieties about transitions. However, in general the mentoring relationships did not address these kinds of more personal and emotional issues. It may be that there is room for further training for mentors to help them to consider how to handle these kinds of issues without overstepping their boundaries and recognising the limits of their role.

Suggested actions for Brightside

It is possible to draw out a number of key actions that Brightside might want to consider in relation to the findings set out in this chapter.

- The mentoring conversations were generally highly focused on the key questions that they were designed to address. However, it may be that the current approach is constraining the mentoring relationships to consideration of more technical issues for example about the mechanics of UCAS applications. There may also be value in supporting mentors to be able to open up broader personal issues relating to the challenge of transition. Brightside may wish to pilot and evaluate some new training and support materials in this area.
- The mentoring is currently highly focused on higher education. This reflects Brightside's core market and its historic association with the widening participation to higher education agenda. However, there is potential to adapt the online mentoring approach and many of the resources developed by Brightside to benefit other groups. The organisation may wish to consider how it could repurpose Brightside mentoring to serve the needs of other groups. Most obviously this might include young people who are taking alternative routes than higher education and those currently in higher education. It could also be expanded to include other transitions such as those considering apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships or professional adults, women returners or others seeking a career change.

6. Measuring impact

Summary findings

This chapter looks at the impact of Brightside.

It finds that the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (mentees) are satisfied with their experience of Brightside and would recommend it to a friend.

Mentees are also able to report a range of benefits from participating in online mentoring including helping them to make decisions and to change their behaviour.

Mentees also report an increase in a range of skills and knowledge during the period that they were undertaking online mentoring. In particular they felt that they understood more about their careers options and were more able to actively manage their careers.

In order to explore the impacts of Brightside's approach, reflections were sought from mentees via an online survey. The survey tool (see Appendix One) asked questions about the characteristics of the survey respondent, a self-evaluative reflection of their skills across several dimensions before the mentoring intervention and then again after it, and their overall assessment of the experience.

The aim of the online survey component of the research was to identify whether mentees had enjoyed the experience of mentoring and judged it to be useful as well as exploring how their skills had developed through the experience of being mentored.

Survey Respondents

The survey population has already been discussed in the introduction. In summary it comprised users from the 2011-2012 cohort who: were over the age of 16 when the survey was first sent out; had made at least two posts to their mentors; and had an email address. This generated a sample that comprised 2211 individuals of whom 65% were female and 35% were male.

Table 6: Characteristics of survey respondents

	Survey population		Respondents	
Age profile				
16	341	15%	71	13%

17	809	37%		208	38%
18	827	37%		219	40%
19	136	6%		29	5%
20	27	1%		7	1%
21 +	64	3%		12	2%
Male	778	35%		184	33%
Female	1433	65%		362	65%
No response				9	2%
Total	2211	100%		555	25%

N.b: Totals may not always tally due to missing data.

Most of the survey respondents were either studying at sixth form (63%), or studying at college (29%) with 11% still at school. Nearly one in five of the respondents (19%) were working part time, while 15% said that they were involved in volunteering activities.

The survey respondents therefore closely match the characteristics of the sub-set of Brightside users that we chose to survey.   The findings also only represent those mentees who had sent at least two messages and therefore were judged to have actually experienced a mentoring relationship rather than simply using some of Brightside's information and resources. There will be some bias in that those who respond to satisfaction surveys often feature the very satisfied or the very un-satisfied although the use of an incentive can help to ameliorate this effect. Nevertheless the survey provides robust and statistically valid perspectives of the cohort of users who engage with Brightside.

Mentee satisfaction with online mentoring

Participants generally reported that they enjoy and value the online mentoring experience. Participants were generally very positive about the impact of e-mentoring.

- 91% said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the experience of online mentoring.

- 56% said that the online mentoring experience had helped them to make decisions.

- 49% said that the online mentoring had helped them to do things differently.

I feel very fortunate to have had this experience. Having someone who is older and has gone through the stress of A-level and university application can make a huge difference to the way you view the same process.
Mentee (Survey)

Figure 5 identifies those aspects of e-mentoring that participants thought they benefitted from most; namely having someone who they liked to talk to about their future.

Figure 5: General feedback on what participants liked about e-mentoring
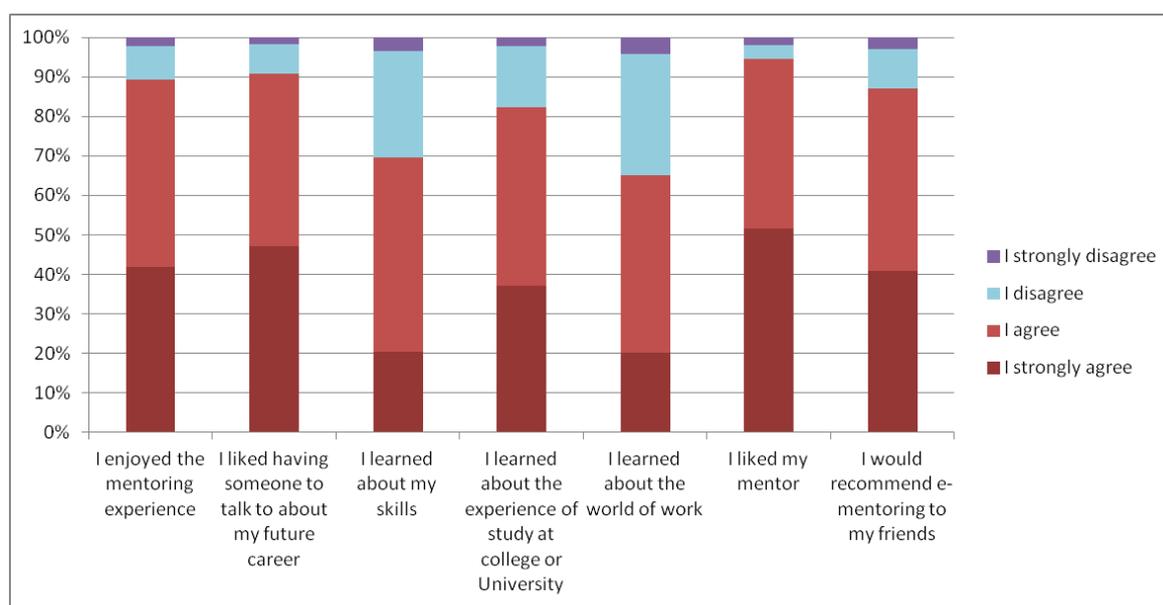
However, it is important to recognise that for most participants, engaging in online mentoring was part of a broader range of career exploration activities that they were engaging in. Table 7 sets out the other key sources of career support that mentees had accessed during their experience of online mentoring.

Table 7: Additional sources of support

While you were engaged in the e-mentoring programme did you seek help and support in any other ways? Tick all that apply		
I searched for information on the internet	481	94%
I talked to my family about my future	423	82%
I visited universities, colleges and/or employers	409	80%
I talked to friends about my future	403	78%
I talked to my teachers about my future	389	76%
I talked to a careers professional about my future	203	39%

The mentoring participants were actively exploring their futures through information searching, talking to family, friends and teachers as well as visiting opportunities (Table 7). In addition 39% talked to a careers professional during this time. For some then, the experience of mentoring represented the most formal career support that they accessed during the period that they were engaged in mentoring. However, for others the mentoring relationship was combined with accessing professional support.

General impacts

Around half of the participants who expressed an opinion revealed that they did not have a clear objective when they first engaged with online mentoring (see Table 8).

Table 8: Initial expectations of mentees

Before you started e-mentoring did you have a clear idea about what you wanted to achieve from the programme?		
Yes	257	46%
No	246	44%
I don't know	52	10%

More than half of mentees said that e-mentoring had helped them to make decisions (Table 9). A third responded that they had not been helped by e-mentoring to make decisions.

Did e-mentoring help you to make any decisions?		
Yes	311	56%
No	185	33%
I don't know	59	11%

The types of examples of decision making varied from university, course and career choice to work experience, and choices related to course or project work. Some examples are provided below:

> *It helped me decide university was an option and helped me rule out some careers which was just as useful.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *It helped me further develop my understanding of the area of work I wanted to go into in the future.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *I explored my ambitions for the future and my e-mentor advised me and gave me information. My e-mentor helped me to write up and re-draft my personal statement for my university application.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *Realised I didn't want to go to university.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

It was also possible to pick up these kinds of impacts through the analysis of the mentoring conversations. These examples can be useful as they show how the mentoring conversations actually lead to impacts through the provision of information, advice and challenges to pre-existing thinking.

> *The programme that you suggested was really interesting. It has really had me thinking and considering all my options.*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**
>
> *I just wanted to say the message about Durham was really helpful! I am going to go along to some open days, I guess then I can really judge the distance from home and whether or not I will like that!*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**
>
> *I didn't even consider some of those things about choosing universities!*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**

A similar proportion of respondents said that online mentoring had helped them to do things differently (Table 10).

Did e-mentoring help you to do things differently?		
Yes	252	46%
No	201	36%
I don't know	100	18%

The comments provided by respondents to explain their answers tended either to refer to practical activities, such as study or work skills, CV and personal statement preparation, or they referred to emotional and attitudinal changes such as confidence, motivation and greater pro-activity. Further examples are provided below:

> *My mentor encouraged me to change my studying habits to be better prepared for my exams.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *I became more aware of the work I needed to put in at Sixth Form to achieve and progress to University. I was motivated to work harder by having contact with someone who had been through A levels already.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *My e-mentor was good at helping identify my own skills and the skills I needed to develop and how they could help me in later life and my career.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**
>
> *It made me believe in myself more and gave me the confidence.*
> **Mentee (Survey)**

Of those 311 who said that e-mentoring had helped them to make decisions (see Table 9), 62% said that it had helped them to do things differently, while 68% said that it had an impact on what they were currently doing in terms of their studies or engagement with the labour market.

Again it is possible to shed further light on how these impacts were achieved by looking at data drawn from the analysis of mentoring conversations. The following roles demonstrate the range of ways in which mentors stimulated change through the provision of practical support, advice and inspiration.

> *Thanks for all the tips + support on Personal statement- I think the points you raised were very true and I made the appropriate changes.*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**
>
> *I have certainly taken your advice and I have been reading a lot more than I used to and I find that it is really beneficial to me.*
> **Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)**

I'd just like to say thank you for this help you are giving me M___. You are seriously impacting my life. I feel like a much more driven determined individual.
Mentee (Analysis of online conversation)

Participants identified a wide range of impacts and reported increases in motivation, confidence, decision making, career planning and engaging in extracurricular activities as a result of engaging in the programme. Figure 5 below presents a tag cloud of how participants perceived that online mentoring had impacted on what they were currently doing. It suggests that impacts are focused on both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and support the participants to work hard, gain other experiences, and produce good applications. They indicated that their engagement allowed them to think more freely about their options and helped them to achieve their ultimate goals.

Figure 6: "Why do you think that e-mentoring has had an impact on what you are currently doing?" Tag cloud of the most important impacts identified by mentees

Showing 28 Most Important Words and Phrases

A-Levels Activities Outside Advice and Guidance Allowed Books Career Course Education Encouraged Essays Exams Extra Curricular Far Future Head Jobs Medicine Mentor Motivated Potential Questions Set Skills Study Successful Uni University Work Harder

Participants were able to provide examples of how online mentoring had helped them to develop.

I have been more ambitious in having a variety of different experiences and skills. It has made me want to be a more well-rounded individual so I was not solely about my chosen subject.
Mentee (Survey)

Being able to talk to someone who has been through the process you are going through is an enlightening experience and is much more helpful than talking to careers guidance or family/friends. I feel that it enabled me to make more informed decisions and hence I changed my approach to my application.
Mentee (Survey)

Because I know that I have someone to talk to and get advice from so I am more confident with what I am doing. E-mentoring has also motivated me to do what I feel I want to do and has thus given me the confidence.
Mentee (Survey)

It was clear from the survey that most respondents had enjoyed the experience of mentoring and that they were able to articulate clear impacts that the experience had had on their decision making, aspirations and confidence.

Impact on skills and knowledge

The survey included a set of statements which reflected the key aims of Brightside's online mentoring, namely more effective decision making, greater career focus and the development of employability skills. Survey participants were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with these statements as they related to themselves before the e-mentoring and then again, after it.

Figure 7: Proportions who 'strongly agree' before and after online mentoring with statements about skills and knowledge..
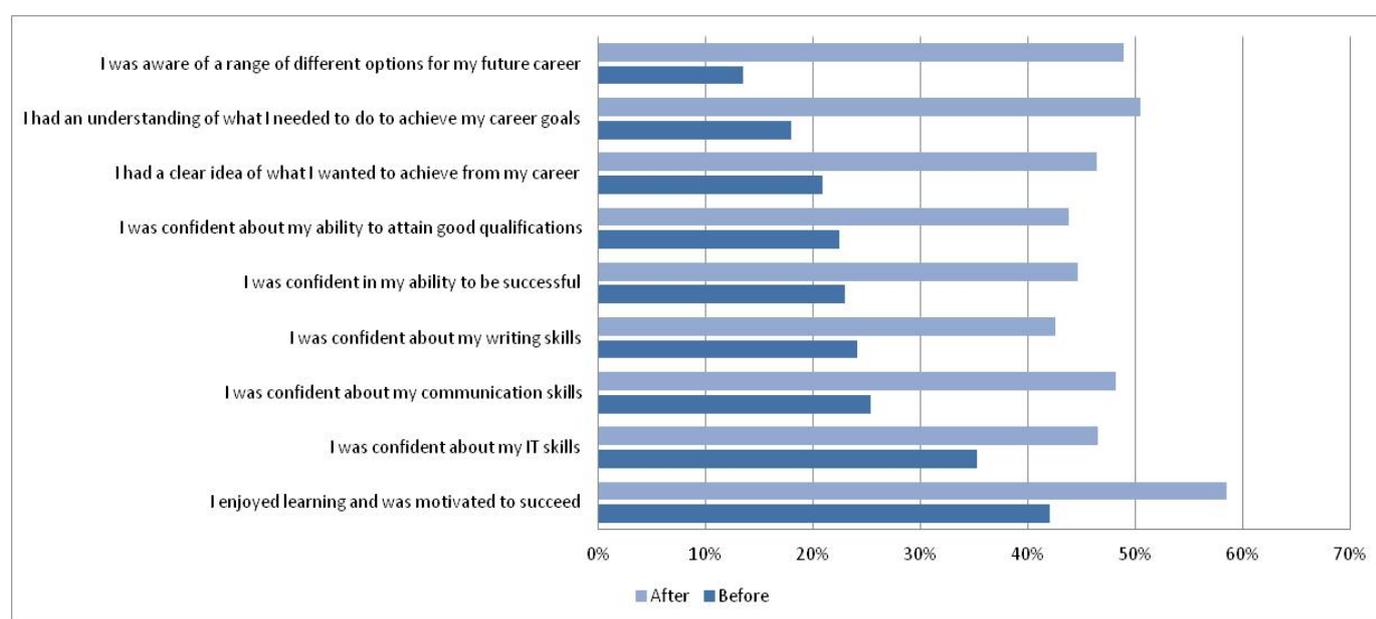

Figure 7 demonstrates that across all the dimensions, the proportions of respondents who strongly agreed with the set of statements increased significantly after online mentoring. The effects were particularly strong for those statements that relate to career planning;

- o I was aware of a range of different options for my future career

- o I had an understanding of what I needed to do to achieve my career goals

- o I had a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve from my career.

This was not least because young people come to mentoring with rather low levels of career awareness.

There was little difference in the responses from girls compared with those for boys – their levels of confidence across all the dimensions both before and after online mentoring were broadly similar.

The analysis above is based on overall proportions who expressed their agreement with the statements. In aggregating results in this way however it is possible to hide changes within overall responses. Consequently, the data was analysed to assess the numbers of individuals whose responses across the statements stayed the same, improved (i.e. their level of agreement moved from agree to strongly agree for example) or declined (i.e. responses moved in the opposite direction).

In total, 79 (14%) of the respondents to the survey reported no change across any of the dimensions. Only 43 (8%) reported a negative change in that they expressed less strong agreement with the statements as they related to themselves after online mentoring compared with before.

The majority of participants (77%) gave responses that indicated that their IT skills had not changed as a consequence of e-mentoring. Similarly, well over half of all respondents gave responses that indicated that they did not think that their writing (64%) or communication skills (59%) had changed.

However, more than half of respondents gave responses to indicate that they were more aware of a different range of options (51%) or had an understanding of what they needed to do to achieve their career goals (49%).

Table 11: Numbers of mentees who report changes in skill areas before and after.

	Mentees whose responses do not change		Mentees whose responses indicate a positive change	
I am aware of a range of different options for my future	258	46%	285	51%
I have an understanding of what I need to do to achieve my career goals	261	47%	276	49%
I have a clear idea of what I want to achieve from my career	275	49%	257	46%
I am confident in my ability to be successful	319	57%	217	39%
I am confident about my communication skills	333	59%	215	38%
I am confident about my ability to attain good qualifications	335	60%	200	36%
I am confident about my writing skills	361	64%	182	33%
I enjoy learning and am motivated to succeed	372	66%	150	27%
I am confident about my IT skills	432	77%	105	19%

n.b. Percentages will not add to 100 as some respondents indicated negative change.

Suggested actions for Brightside

It is possible to draw out a number of key actions that Brightside might want to consider in relation to the findings set out in this chapter.

- Brightside's impact story is strong. It is important that this story is well communicated to current and future partners and to key policy makers and influencers. It is suggested that Brightside produce a summary document for distribution based on this evaluation and also host appropriate events to disseminate the findings.
- This study takes the impact story as far as it can go at the present time. However, there would be a strong case for commissioning future studies to look at Brightside

both through a randomised control trial methodology and through longitudinal approaches.

7. Conclusions

This evaluation has set out the evidence in relation to Brightside's approach to online mentoring. It has found that Brightside is well regarded by its partners, and provides a tool which delivers high quality mentoring and clear impacts for participants. In particular Brightside provides its partners with a tool which they can embed in a range of different ways to support young people to think about their futures. It is particularly effective in helping young people to transition to higher education by encouraging them to think about which university they want to apply to, and supporting them through the application process.

Of course there are areas for improvement, but these should not diminish the value that has been identified in online mentoring. The evaluation suggests that there are three key areas for improvement.

- Firstly, users have suggested that there could be ways to make accessing messages more user-friendly, and there are likely to be areas of the website that could be better used and better integrated into the mentoring conversations.

- Secondly, Brightside mentoring is used as a platform in a number of different ways by partners, which is a reflection of its versatility. If these different approaches were better understood, conceptualised and then developed as a range of complementary products then again Brightside could make technical improvements to the website and further improve its offer of support to partners.

- Thirdly, the focus of Brightside activity is on access to higher education – its reach could be extended by applying its approach to other groups of young people who are interested in transitions to a wider range of opportunities, or to particular groups of adults.

Much has been made in the policy discourse about the importance of face-to-face advice and guidance to support the educational and career choices of young people. Recent work by Howieson & Semple (2013) suggests that on their own, websites have a limited impact on young people's career management skills. However, this evaluation suggests that perhaps it is not the format of communication (online or face-to-face) that makes the difference, but rather whether a real relationship with another human being forms a core part of the support offered.

Brightside mentoring places human relationships at the heart of the provision of career and transition support for young people. They also support the delivery of this career and transition support in an efficient and effective fashion. This is not to suggest that online mentoring can replace either professional career support or face-to-face interactions. Indeed it is a recommendation of this report that Brightside develops the way it conceives its blended provision and ensures that appropriate referral is taking place in all mentoring conversations. Nonetheless, online mentoring of this kind clearly has a role to play in helping young people to make informed, considered and supported choices about their futures.

Brightside has weathered the current storm in public finances at least in part because it is a third sector body which can work with public and private sectors alike. This is to be encouraged, but it should not be seen as letting government off of the hook. There are clear benefits associated with online mentoring. Despite the good work of Brightside and its partners these are currently only available to a small fraction of young people. There would clearly be value in government considering how the benefits identified here can be rolled out to a wider section of the population.

8. Bibliography

Arnold, E. (2006). Assessing the quality of mentoring: sinking or learning to swim? *ELT Journal*, *60* (2), 117-124.

Bartlett, (2012). *A Model Role Evaluation of Mosaic Mentoring Programmes.* London: Demos.

Bierema, L. L., & Hill, J. R. (2005). Virtual mentoring and HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 7(4): 556-568.

Bierema, L.L., & Merriam, S.B. (2002). E-mentoring: Using computer mediated communication to enhance the mentoring process. *Innovative Higher Education*, 26 (3): 211-227.

Bogat, G. A., & Liang, B. (2005). Gender in mentoring relationships. In DuBois, D.L. & Karcher, M.J*., Handbook of Youth Mentoring.* London: Sage.

Clow, D. (2013). Moocs and the funnel of participation. In Third Conference on Learning Analytics and Knowledge (LAK 2013), 8-12 April 2013; Leuven, Belgium.

Cocea, M., & Weibelzahl, S. (2011). Disengagement detection in online learning: Validation studies and perspectives. *Learning Technologies, IEEE Transactions on*, *4* (2), 114-124.

Deutsch, N. L., & Spencer, R. (2009). Capturing the magic: Assessing the quality of youth mentoring relationships. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2009* (121), 47-70.

DuBois, D., Holloway, B., Valentine, J., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A Meta-Analytic review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *30* (2), 157-197.

Evans, A. (2005). How Mentoring Can Raise Achievement. Paper presented at the first Aimhigher National Mentoring Scheme Conference: Mentoring and Higher Education, Stratford-on-Avon, June 2005.

Headlam-Wells, J., Gosland, J., & Craig, J. (2006). Beyond the organisation: The design and management of e-mentoring systems. *International Journal of Information Management*, 26(5): 372-385.

Hooley, T., Hutchinson, J., & Watts, A. G. (2010). *Careering Through the Web: The potential of Web 2.0 and 3.0 Technologies for Career Development and Career Support Services.* London: UKCES.

House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools.* London: House of Commons.

Howieson, C., & Semple, S. (2013). *What's the evidence? Comparing the impact of career websites and other career support. No 63.* Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh.

Lee, Y., & Choi, J. (2011). A review of online course dropout research: implications for practice and future research. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 59 (5), 593-618.

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2011). *What is mentoring and befriending?* Manchester: Mentoring and Befriending Foundation.

Moore, N., Christopoulos, M., Dimitriou, K. & Hutchinson, J. (2011). *Researching the Aimhigher Greater Manchester Graduate Officer Programme.* Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies.

National Careers Council (2013). *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a culture change in careers provision.* London. Perren, L. (2003). The role of e-mentoring in entrepreneurial education and support: a meta-review of academic literature. *Education + Training* 45(8/9): 517-525.

Ofsted (2013). *Going in the Right Direction? Careers Guidance in schools from September 2012.* Manchester: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) .Available from: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/going-right-direction-careers-guidance-schools-september-2012 [Accessed 12 September 2013].

Rhodes, J., Lowe, S. R., Litchfield, L., & Walsh-Samp, K. (2008). The role of gender in youth mentoring relationship formation and duration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *72* (2), 183-192.

Rose, R., & Jones, K. (2007). The efficacy of a volunteer mentoring scheme in supporting young people at risk. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12(1): 3-14.

Single, P.B., & Single, R.M. (2005). E-mentoring for social equity: review of research to inform program development. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 13(2): 301-320.

Stone, T. (2010) *The Brightside Trust.* In Clutterbuck, D., & Hussain, Z. *Virtual Coach, Virtual Mentor.* Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Street, H. (2010). Factors influencing a learner's decision to Drop-Out or persist in higher education distance learning. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *13* (4).

Thompson, L. (2001). The impact of mentoring on academic achievement of at-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 23(3): 227-242.

Thompson, L., Jeffries, M., & Topping, K. (2010). E-mentoring for e-learning development. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 47(3): 305-315.

Younger, M., & Warrington, M. (2009). Mentoring and target setting in a secondary school in England: an evaluation of aims and benefits. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(2): 169-18

9. Appendix 1 On-line Survey