



making physics matter



Mentoring programme

2020

Year 13 mentoring

The Year 13 mentoring programme was launched in May 2020 as lockdown took hold, exams were cancelled, and schooling was disrupted. It ran for 10 weeks over the summer. The programme was designed to give Year 13 students additional support as they prepared for a physics degree at university.

With many of the traditional support mechanisms not immediately available in 2020, and increased uncertainty about what studying at university might involve, the mentoring programme enlisted current physics undergraduates to mentor prospective students, providing guidance on physics learning in higher education, as well as first-hand insights into university life.



174

**Year 13
student
mentees**



95

**undergraduate
mentors**



26

universities

One hundred and seventy-four Year 13 students were matched with 95 undergraduate mentors around the UK. Thirty per cent of the mentees were the first in their family to go into higher education. Over 50 per cent of the A-level students were matched with an undergraduate currently studying at the student's first choice university.

The programme

The programme was developed and facilitated centrally by the Trust, with support and input from Ogden outreach officers based at universities across the UK. The mentoring was delivered through the Brightside mentoring platform which provided the infrastructure and safeguarding. The mentors were given a mentoring framework to follow, online training, and guidance to help them in their interactions with their mentees.



I thought it was an amazing opportunity and I am so glad I applied. It has helped me worry less about university and given me some great ideas and pointers.



Mentoring framework

Each week of the programme was themed around an important element of studying physics or being at university and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. As well as using their own first-hand experience of being an undergraduate, mentors were given a crib sheet to inform their interactions and had access to additional supporting materials relevant to the theme.

1 - Transition to university

2 - A day in the life of an undergraduate

3 - Your first physics lecture

4 - Journal club I

5 - Revision/learning skills

6 - Success 101 including live webinars

7 - Physics labs

8 - General

9 - Journal club II

10 - What next?

Interactions

All interactions were text-based and channelled through the Brightside mentoring platform, which ensured communications were moderated for safeguarding purposes. Mentors were advised to spend an hour a week interacting with each of their mentees. However, throughout the programme, most mentors engaged more fully; the conversations were detailed, in depth and meaningful.



3,466

messages sent
by mentees



4,930

messages sent
by mentors



My mentor was very thoughtful and informative. I looked forward to his responses every other day. Having a mentor who goes to your university of choice was very beneficial as he could provide specifics on support opportunities and the department. Overall, my experience was very useful and well worth my time.





83%

of participants sent

5 + 

65%

of participants sent

10 + 

30%

of participants sent

20 + 



The programme was helpful and gave me insight into university that I would have been unlikely to get otherwise. I think that it made me feel more ready to move into university life in all aspects, from socially to how lectures are carried out.



As expected, despite a new theme for each week, the communications were significantly higher at the start of the programme. Although overall, interactions across the programme were very good; 65 per cent of the mentees (112 people) sent more than 10 messages during the programme which Brightside considers to be a high value invention; 83 per cent (144 people) sent more than five messages; and 30 per cent (53 people) sent more than 20 messages.

Two live webinars in Week 6 provided useful conversations, generated ideas and reinvigorated communications at a time when mentees may have thought the programme had already delivered the information they needed. There were seven mentors on the webinar panel for each session and almost 30 mentees attended each webinar, which provided a space for some live discussion and Q&A.



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Evaluation

Anonymous pre- and post-programme surveys were carried out. Almost all of the A-level students who completed the survey at the end of the mentoring reported an increase in their confidence with regards to starting university and studying physics. At the end of the programme, the majority of students felt better prepared for university, with 78 percent feeling this was a combination of the mentoring programme and additional factors (such as having time to do their own research, talking to family and friends, university websites, etc); 16 per cent attributed their increased confidence solely to the programme.

Before the programme, the Year 13 students were predominantly already feeling positive about going to university, however the programme confirmed and enhanced their confidence. Nearly half of the students taking part in the mentoring programme reported an overall increase in positivity towards all aspects of university life.



78% of students felt better prepared for university; this included feeling more confident about:

starting university

dealing with potential struggles at university

meeting new people

what a typical term at university might involve

74%

81%

68%

90%

The programme had a positive impact on how much students were looking forward to:



living away from home

seeing a new city

being independent

making new friends

42%

47%

40%

40%

“

Thank you so much for organising such an amazing mentoring programme with Brightside. I have thoroughly enjoyed being a mentor and feel that this experience has been beneficial to both my mentees and myself.

”

The mentors were also overwhelmingly positive about the programme and reported an increase in their confidence in areas including employability, communication and social skills. Supporting future undergraduates was a key factor for mentors when they applied to the programme; at the end of the 10 weeks, it was the thing that the vast majority had most enjoyed. More than 85 per cent of the mentors indicated that they would recommend this programme to their friends; a similar percentage said they would volunteer as a mentor again.

Going forward

Making physics accessible, particularly to those from under-represented groups, requires work to remove systemic barriers for students and to give students the tools and support they need to continue their physics education. Mentoring and coaching programmes are vital tools that can give students the confidence and skills to proceed to higher education.