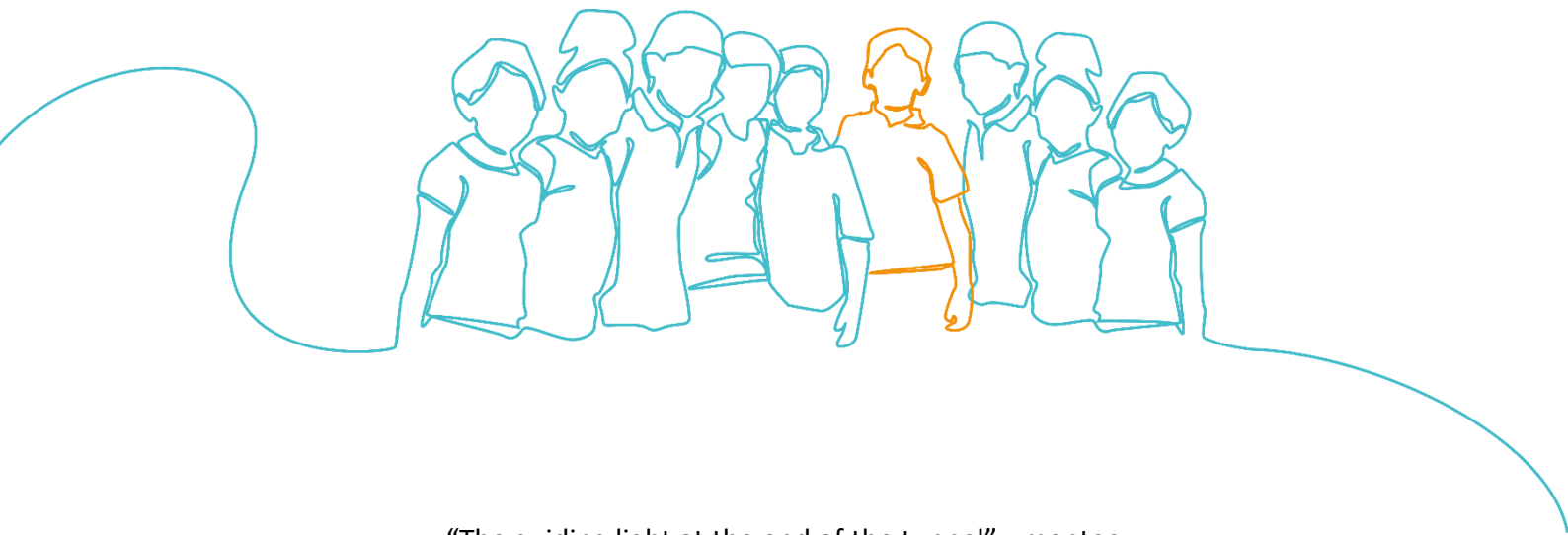


# STEM Learning Life After School Mentoring (2022 - 2023)

## Evaluation Report



"The guiding light at the end of the tunnel" - mentee

"I really felt satisfied that my knowledge could be of use to someone" mentor

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## Glossary

**Autumn cohort** – relating to the October to December 2022 project

**Spring cohort** – relating to the February to May 2023 project

**Ask the expert** – a function on the Brightside platform that allows for a guest to be asked questions by mentees

**Conversion** – how many mentees signed up to join the platform and then went on to choose a mentor

## Executive summary

### The project

Life After School mentoring supported 407 mentees from October 2022 to May 2023 to enable them to gain a greater understanding of how to prepare for life after school and the alternative career pathways available to them. Brightside and STEM Learning delivered the project in partnership, and this was the second iteration of the project. Mentees were supported by the information, advice and guidance provided by 222 STEM Ambassador mentors, who generously gave their time to help achieve the project's desired outcomes for young people. Mentees also engaged with over 20 resources through Brightside's 'Bright Knowledge' platform, a learning hub embedded directly into the mentoring app.

### Engagement

Mentoring pairs exchanged 7,704 messages between October 2022 and May 2023, with mentees sending 3,481 messages and mentors sending 4,223. On average, mentees sent more than eight messages each across the 12 week project and mentoring pairs continued to engage throughout the whole project. 71% of mentees sent three or more messages on the project, slightly below Brightside's target of at least 75% of mentees sending this number of messages. However, 54% of mentees sent five or more messages, and 31% sent ten or more messages across the project. While engagement was slightly lower than anticipated overall, over half of the mentees on the project engaged with their mentors well beyond our minimum expectation.

### Impact

We assessed six core outcomes in evaluating the project, as well as some project specific questions. 34% of mentees reported an increase in human capital, which measures the mentees' learning about the knowledge, skills and qualifications required for the jobs they want in the future. 43% of mentees reported an increase in social capital, which measures mentees' knowledge of who to turn to for advice and support. Furthermore, 47% of mentees reported an increase in their coping skills, their ability to deal with challenges in a positive way. It's clear that the mentoring conversations have had a clear impact on the mentees who took part, with significant numbers of mentees reporting increases across these critical outcomes:

"I got useful advice on where to go to find help and what steps I need to take to apply. I also got a better insight into the career"

"My mentor helped me explore different options within careers and who to talk to if i need help"

"Thank you very much for your help, I am way more confident in my future now!"

Mentees were able to increase their knowledge around post-18 options, particularly around apprenticeships and alternate vocational courses like Higher National Diplomas. While project-level knowledge of every post-18 route increased for mentee respondents, knowledge of vocational courses increased the most (17pp). Many were set on attending

university but were still able to learn about the practical elements of higher education, with the term 'university' appearing 1,822 number of times in conversations.

Over 70% of mentee respondents attributed at least 'some' of their decision about their next steps due to their involvement with mentoring rather than other influences, with 27% attributing 'a lot'.

### Quality

Feedback about the mentoring experience was generally positive across the programme. In the autumn term, 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they got on with their mentor. 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the mentoring, and 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that conversations with their mentor helped them feel positive about the future.

*"It was amazing - my mentor helped me feel comfortable by speaking about things that we also unrelated to future plans, like what they did over the weekend. I would've really liked it to have been longer, possibly starting at the beginning of year 12. Even if the mentorship scheme continued from February up until June it would've been very beneficial, but it was still a wonderful experience nonetheless"*

### Recommendations

- Include a topic in the mentor guide that focuses on myth-busting about apprenticeships
- Consider adding the 'ask the expert' functionality to the project, to bring in additional volunteers and boost engagement
- Ensuring projects are accessible for all STEM Learning mentees, including assessing if there are any additional needs to consider in the mentor matching tool or initial survey

## Introduction

This report evaluates the engagement, quality, and impact of Life After School Mentoring, the second iteration of this project model delivered by Brightside and STEM Learning. This project supported 407 mentees from October 2022 to May 2023 to enable them to gain a greater understanding of how to prepare for life after school and the alternative career pathways available to them.

STEM Learning and Brightside have been working together since 2021. STEM Learning is dedicated to improving young people's lives through the power of STEM, and believes great STEM education builds knowledge and skills that are vital for everyone. Their collaboration with Brightside allows their high impact STEM Ambassador and Student Engagement mentoring programmes to reach high numbers of students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds.

In October to December 2022 and February to May 2023, STEM Learning and Brightside partnered to deliver Life After School Mentoring. This programme is focused on supporting young people in Years 12 and 13 to think about pathways available to them after finishing school or college, as well as careers in a STEM context. 301 mentees were matched with a STEM Ambassador in the autumn cohort and a further 104 matched in the spring cohort.

This report sets out the context of the project (its aims and activities) before outlining the evaluation methods used to measure whether it met its outcomes. It analyses the engagement with the project, the impact of the mentoring on participants, and the quality of the mentor and mentee experience. Recommendations have been included throughout and summarised in the conclusions and recommendations sections.

## Aims

STEM Learning are committed to STEM education in everything that they do. Their aim is always the same: to provide a world-leading STEM education for all young people across the UK. STEM Learning work in collaboration with the UK Government, employers large and small, organisations and educational establishments to deliver positive STEM interactions for teachers, young people and beyond.

Brightside is a social mobility charity that connects young people with inspiring mentors to help them make confident and informed decisions about their future. They are pioneers in online mentoring, with 20 years' experience of using technology to engage young people. They design and deliver programmes, recruit and train volunteers, and facilitate meaningful conversations between mentors and mentees. They collaborate with partners (including schools and employers) to deliver mentoring programmes through a safeguarded online platform.

The overall aim of Life After School Mentoring is to support Year 12 and 13 students to gain a greater understanding of how to prepare for life after school and to understand alternative career pathways through conversations with a STEM Ambassador. To achieve this, the programme aims to:

- Develop mentees' confidence about their next steps

- Help mentees feel more prepared about their next steps
- Support mentees to have clear goals for their future
- Develop mentees' understanding of their education journey, with a focus on higher education

Brightside's Theory of Change outcomes support their mission to help young people to make confident and informed decisions about their future. They developed these outcomes with external evaluation consultants, and they're measured using rigorously and robustly tested scales and questions. Life After School aligns with Brightside's mission, and they measured the following Theory of Change outcomes for this project:

- Human capital: learning knowledge and skills about qualifications needed for the job you want
- Social capital: knowing people to turn to for advice and support
- Hope: setting specific goals, and having the flexibility and motivation to achieve them
- Coping: dealing with difficulties in a positive way
- Self-efficacy: having confidence and knowing your strengths
- Growth mindset: believing your abilities can be developed through hard work

For a young person to reach their potential, guidance is crucial. A 2021 UCAS report found that two in five students believed that more information would have led to making better choices.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of Life After School Mentoring, mentees were asked their reason for participating in mentoring. The quotes below show mentees' reasons for seeking guidance from a STEM Ambassador mentor about preparing for life after school and alternative career pathways:

"I don't know many people in the industry I would like to go into (Technology, Computer Science) and having more knowledge about how to stand out would be ideal, especially as I am a WOC<sup>1</sup>. It is important that I also learn about how I can improve my prospects during university and the preparation into getting a job, which I do not know much about."

"I want to talk to people that are doing the things I'm thinking of doing and just because I'm nervous for the whole process [of] uni and possible [sic] not being good enough."

The quotes demonstrate that Life After School Mentoring is a valuable project for Year 12 and 13 students who are feeling unsure about their next steps after finishing school or college.

## Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and identify areas of potential improvement or replication, the following data sources and collection tools were used:

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<sup>1</sup> WOC means Woman of colour

- Measuring engagement through quantitative data pulled from the online mentoring platform, which shows number of messages sent and received by participants, engagement trends, and average message and word count
- Measuring the impact of the project through baseline and exit surveys, completed by mentees, that address project-specific and Theory of Change outcomes
- Using conversational data and open-text responses from surveys throughout the evaluation to better understand how and why certain outcomes were achieved for mentees
- Measuring the quality of the mentoring experience for mentors and mentees through questions on the exit surveys and include qualitative responses

The impact of the project was measured through baseline and exit surveys and analysed at both a project and individual level. Project-level change indicates the overall percentage point (pp) change of a cohort for an outcome, whereas individual-level change portrays the number of mentees that experienced a positive, negative, or nil change on an outcome. In addition to project-specific and Theory of Change outcomes, mentees were asked to what extent they attribute their decision making about next steps, at least in part, to their mentoring experience.

Brightside are currently working to develop benchmarks across all the data they collect to better understand if and how trends occur for certain mentees, projects, or project models. Currently, there are existing benchmarks for engagement and quality data. A mentee is considered engaged if they have sent three or more messages during the programme. A well-engaged project is one where 75% of mentees meet the 3+ message milestone. A high-quality project is where 92% of mentees give a quality score of at least six out of seven, which represents agreement or strong agreement with at least six out of seven questions in Brightside's quality framework.

Appendix A provides additional information about the questions asked, the scales used to measure outcomes, and any sources used to develop them.

## Findings

This section provides an overview of all engagement, impact, and quality findings from the data sources outlined in the methodology section above.

### Conversion

The below tables show the conversion for both the autumn cohort and the spring cohort. 721 mentees were invited in total to join the autumn cohort, and 183 mentees were invited to join the spring cohort via email.

#### Autumn cohort

<b>Total number signed up</b> (created accounts on the mentoring platform)	407	<b>Total matched</b>	301	74%
		<b>Total unmatched</b>	106	26%

### Spring cohort

<b>Total number signed up</b> (created accounts on the mentoring platform)	128	<b>Total matched</b>	106	83%
		<b>Total unmatched</b>	22	17%

Conversion from joining the platform and choosing a mentor on both cohorts of the project this year were high. 74% of mentees who joined the platform chose a mentor in the autumn cohort, and 83% of mentees who joined the project chose a mentor in the spring cohort, both of which exceed Brightside's aim of around 50%.

Last year's cohorts ran from January to April and March to June. For the first cohort of last year, conversion stayed the same for this year, with both projects reaching 74% of mentees choosing a mentor. Conversion increased for this year's second cohort, as 83% of those who joined the platform chose a mentor, compared to last year's cohort where 53% of mentees chose a mentor. This may be because the dates for the spring project were changed from March to June last year to February to May for this year's cohort, meaning the majority of the project occurred before mentees' exam periods. Brightside recommends continuing to run one autumn cohort and one spring cohort from February to May.

There were issues with school firewalls in both cohorts, meaning that mentees could not receive emails from Brightside. In future, STEM Learning should communicate with schools ahead of the project launch to ensure that Brightside is not blocked by their firewall.

### Engagement

The below tables show the number of messages sent by mentees for both cohorts.

#### Autumn cohort

Number of messages sent by mentees					
	1+ messages	2+ messages	3+ messages	5+ messages	10+ messages
No. of mentees	274	244	209	160	93
% of mentees	91%	81%	69%	53%	30%

#### Spring cohort

Number of messages sent by mentees					
	1+ messages	2+ messages	3+ messages	5+ messages	10+ messages
No. of mentees	94	85	79	61	34
% of mentees	88%	80%	74%	57%	32%



It is positive to see that over 90% of mentees in the autumn cohort sent at least one message to their mentor, and the majority logged back in to send a second and third message. The autumn project fell 5pp short of reaching Brightside's benchmark of an engaged project, with only 69% of mentees sending 3+ messages.

Mentees in the autumn cohort who sent three messages continued on to send five and ten messages; 53% of matched mentees sent 5+ messages, and 30% went on to send 10+ messages.

Although the spring cohort had fewer mentees who sent one and two messages than the autumn cohort, more mentees sent 3+, 5+, and 10+ messages, meaning those who engaged were more likely to remain engaged until the end of the project. 74% of mentees in the spring cohort sent 3+ messages, just one mentee short of Brightside's benchmark for an engaged project. It was also positive that over half of these mentees then went on to send 5+ messages, and a third sent 10+ messages.

In addition, many mentees on both projects went well above sending 10+ messages, with 12% of mentees in the autumn cohort sending 20+ messages, and 16% of mentees in the spring cohort sending 20+ messages. Looking more deeply at mentees that only sent one or two messages provides some explanations for why mentees did not engage further. Several cited being busy as a reason, all of which came from mentees in the autumn cohort:

"sorry I've been really busy with exams and the application process! Thank you for your help"

"Sorry I haven't replied I've been busy working on personal statements at school atm" <sup>2</sup>

"Sorry for not replying sooner, I have had lots of tests these past few weeks"

Many of these messages show mentees engaging with what their mentors had previously sent and sending follow up questions, which were then answered by their mentors. This demonstrates that although mentees may not have reached Brightside's benchmark of engagement, this does not mean they did not get useful information and resources out of the project.

Other reasons for not replying came up as well, including one mentee who took several weeks to send their second message as they were unsure what to include:

"Sorry for the late response, i wasn't quite sure what to write. I have a couple of questions if you don't mind answering. What university did you go to? What grades did you get in your A levels? Is the writing papers stuff boring?"

Although it is positive that the mentee logged back in and sent this message, it was also most likely the reason they did not send more messages. Brightside already send topic suggestions to mentees on the project and include these in the mentee guide, so another way in which

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<sup>2</sup> atm means at the moment

Brightside can combat mentees being unsure on the purpose of mentoring or having an idea of what to discuss in future projects is to add some additional ideas or conversation starters to training.

Brightside could also include ideas for what to include in a second message in the mentee training, which will hopefully support mentees to engage earlier in the project. In addition, our newest training includes some guidance for mentors on how to respond to mentees who aren't sure what the project entails and those who send closed off messages.

Accessibility was also highlighted as a barrier to engagement, with one mentee who sent two messages writing this to their mentor:

"please accept my apologies that I didn't reply back sooner and on the last day of the mentoring program. since I am blind I am still learning how to use mobile phones and make most out of it. I thought I would be able to talk through zoom in this program but it was not so. I still need someone to type for me to reply. but really thanks for all your support I really appreciate it. Hopefully I will be able to do higher studies like you one day. Many thanks."

It is very important for Brightside and STEM Learning to assess how accessible and user-friendly the projects are for all mentees. Future projects will be able to use video and/or audio calling on the Brightside platform, which is a feature currently being tested and will be rolled out in 2024 to offer a more accessible experience.

75% of mentees in last year's first spring cohort, and 76% of mentees in last year's second spring cohort met the 3+ messages benchmark. This year's cohorts had similar but slightly lower number of mentees reaching the 3+ benchmark, with 69% of mentees in autumn and 74% of mentees in spring sending 3+ messages.

This year's cohorts also had a similar average number of messages sent by mentees. When looking at average number of messages sent per mentee these reached 10 in last year's first cohort and 8 in last year's second cohort, compared to 8 messages on average sent by mentees in this year's autumn cohort and 9 messages on average sent by mentees in this year's spring cohort.

### Bright Knowledge resources

We encouraged mentors on this project to share Bright Knowledge articles and resources with their mentees. Bright Knowledge is Brightside's online resource with hundreds of useful articles and information helpful for all students from ages 14 to 18. Mentees and mentors can search for and send resources on higher education, career planning and more.

For this project Brightside have investigated which articles mentees were most interested in by using a 'key word' search for Bright Knowledge throughout all messages sent by mentees. This gives an idea of which articles mentees were reading and discussing with their mentors, which can be used going forward to improve our mentor training and resources for future projects.

Mentees on both cohorts viewed a variety of articles, ranging from emotional health and wellbeing, applying to university, and different careers in STEM. A full list of articles is in Appendix B.

Mentees discussed these articles with their mentors, as can be seen in the below conversation excerpts from mentees:

“These articles were super helpful and interesting! Honestly, as someone who struggles with mental health, I am happy that I am not the only one out there!”

- <https://brightknowledge.org/health-wellbeing/the-importance-of-optimism-during-challenging-times>
- <https://brightknowledge.org/health-wellbeing/mental-and-emotional-health>

“And this article: <https://brightknowledge.org/careers/jobhunting-with-social-networking> Which is helping a lot when trying to find work experience”

“<https://brightknowledge.org/health-wellbeing/the-importance-of-optimism-during-challenging-times> I found this article very helpful, when I was finalising my university choices”

“I found this link on the Brightside knowledge panel, which I found helpful. However, how can incorporate that I enjoy reading and good at listening into my personal statement/ CV? Would it be very relevant? <https://brightknowledge.org/careers/what-are-my-skills>”

Many of these articles looked into applying to university, careers in STEM, and employability advice and skills. All of these areas relate to the key aim of the project to provide mentoring opportunities that help young people to consider and pursue careers in STEM. Additionally, final messages sent by mentees also demonstrate that mentees have been able to gain an insight into their future career or education pathways.

“Overall, I really want to thank you for all the help you gave me during these few weeks, I can’t express enough how much I appreciate it! Especially with my personal statement and seeing you so enthusiastic about engineering made me much more excited and sure about my future career” - mentee

“Thank you very much for your help. I'm grateful for this opportunity. Thank you for giving me some of your time to explain and give advice as well as finding some resources I benefited from” - mentee

“Last day of mentoring programme so wanted to say thank you so much for help. Your advice has been really useful in helping me decide my future/academic and etc I literally have an album full of screenshots of your advice. I’m really glad I took up this mentorship opportunity” - mentee

“Thank you so much for you time this mentoring scheme has been amazing, and really helped me build my confidence in university choices and student life. Your suggestions about revision

for chemistry and revision generally have defiantly helped me improve my grade and confidence in the subject I do at a level, which was a goal of mine. I also feel I'm now ready to apply for university and get good grades in my AS exams, which are next week. This mentoring scheme, and by extension, you, have improved my confidence in knowing what I want to do and the articles on the site and the information you gave me about your work cleared up any questions I had about what I might end up doing in the future, and I know who I can talk to about my future steps. I wish you all the best, it's been lovely to get to know you over the past couple of months!" - mentee

"hello! thanks for all the cv templates, I'll be updating my cv fairly soon most likely after exams when I have more time so I'll be sure to use those templates to help :)" - mentee

"Been getting emails that mentorships almost up so I just wanted to thank you for all the links and advice you've given me it's really helped me make a plan for my future so just wanted to say thank you :)" - mentee

### Impact

Baseline and exit surveys contain questions to assess progress mentees made against Theory of Change and project-specific aims. 108 mentees completed both the baseline and exit surveys in the autumn cohort, and 21 mentees completed these for the spring cohort. This represents 24% of matched mentees across the projects. The impact of this project will be assessed for both these projects combined.

### Project-specific

Mentees were asked questions relating to the specific aims of Life After School mentoring at the beginning and end of the project. These related to knowledge gain on post-18 options available to them. These questions have been adjusted since the last Life After School programme to allow mentees to record their knowledge gain in four specific post-18 routes. The graph below shows the overall change for this year's project when asked how much they know about the following pathways:

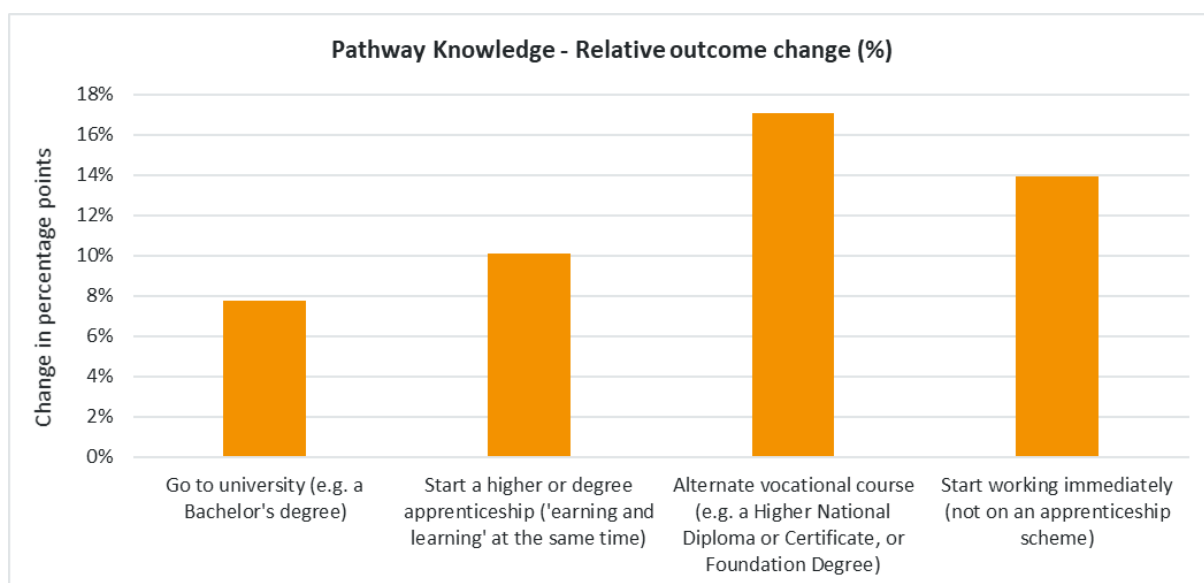


Figure 1

Knowledge gain about university increased by 8pp at the overall level, which is the smallest increase out of the four post-18 options. The word 'university' appeared 1,822 times in conversations and was covered extensively between mentees and mentors. It isn't surprising that knowledge gain for university didn't increase as much as other routes, as mentees who took part in this programme were in Year 12 and 13, and those interested in attending may have already started the process of looking into or applying to universities through their school. This is evident in a quote from the mentee exit survey:

*"I have already made the decision and applied to university before meeting my mentor"*

This is not to say that mentees did not learn about university through this programme, as seen here:

*"My mentor had been to university and so was able to tell me the pros and cons of applying and whether going to university was the right option for me"*

One mentee noted that their faith prevented them from receiving a student loan: *"In my religion, the student loan used to pay the £9,250 per year for university is not allowed since it has interest"*

The mentor was able to ease the worries of the mentee, who responded: *"I want to thank you so much for that message because now that has cleared my mind!"* This mentee had a meaningful conversation with their mentor, discussing revision and techniques to relieve stress, such as meditation. In their parting messages, the mentee said: *"I can't express in words how much I have benefited from this program."* This is testament to the impact of the programme and demonstrates how it met its aims of increasing mentee knowledge around their next steps. For future programmes, it may be worth addressing concerns such as religion and student loans in mentor training and project guide to ensure that mentors have the relevant information should this come up. To ease mentee worries around the difficulty of

apprenticeships, it is recommended to include a topic in the mentor guide that focuses on myth-busting regarding apprenticeships.

Interestingly, knowledge gain about apprenticeships increased by 10pp while alternate vocational courses rose by 17pp (seen in Figure 1). The word ‘apprenticeship’ appeared 340 times in conversations, and one mentee made it clear that they did not want to attend university: “I definitely do not want to go to university, but I would like to do a degree apprenticeship.” Their mentor also went down a non-university route, completing a degree apprenticeship, and together they discussed how to stand out in applications and work experience. Their mentor was able to validate their desire to complete a degree apprenticeship, which impacted the mentee positively: “wow that sounds amazing.” While the mentor was clearly an ambassador for degree apprenticeships, they could have been more expansive in their responses to their mentee. More time in the mentor training could be dedicated to the section on responding and signposting to mentees. Additionally, some mentees expressed interest in apprenticeships, but were perhaps put off by their competitive nature:

“I am quite interested in doing a degree apprenticeship, but I understand they can be very difficult to get”

Knowledge of alternative vocational courses increased the most by 17pp. Across both cohorts at the individual level, 49% of mentees who answered the exit survey recorded an increase of knowledge about vocational courses (seen in Figure 1). Some mentees already had ideas of vocational courses, like foundation years, and discussed their next steps with their mentor:

“I will do a foundation year then go on for a diploma”

“I applied to numerous foundation courses because I want to do a foundation year in order to get into medicine”

However, other mentees were able to use conversations with their mentor to learn more about options like foundation years. One mentoring pair were able to have a thorough discussion, and a snippet of their conversation is here:

**Mentee A**

I was actually thinking of choosing a foundation year chemistry course as a back up option. If I apply through ucas will I have to put an option as 'chemistry with foundation year'? Meaning I'll only have 4 other options left. Also, in the uk I think student loans cover 4 years. Does this mean a foundation year will count as a 4th year?

Because I wanted to do a placement year and maybe a masters.

**Mentor A**

I checked with the admissions officer here about the Student Loan thing. He told me that if you apply for a course with a Foundation year and then transfer on to a Masters course later you will get a Student Loan for the full duration of the course, i.e., a total of 5 years.

The other thing I checked with him is that if you applied for Chemistry with a Foundation year and got good enough A level grades to get onto the Chemistry course you could then skip the foundation year and start in the first year. Likewise, if you applied for Chemistry and didn't make the A level grades, they would offer you a place on the course with the Foundation year.

This mentor was able to provide informed advice to their mentee, which had a positive impact on them. The mentee regularly expressed their gratitude to their mentor – “**I just wanted to thank you for all your help**” - and was able to send off their UCAS application by the end of the mentoring programme.

In both the baseline and the exit survey, mentees were asked about their most likely next step after sixth form or college, and how confident they felt that this decision was right for them. The results are here:

	Baseline survey	Exit survey
<b>Go to university</b>	91%	90%
<b>Start a higher or degree apprenticeship</b>	8%	9%
<b>Alternate vocational course</b>	1%	0%
<b>Start working immediately</b>	0%	1%
<b>Other</b>	0%	0%

In total across the two cohorts, 91% of mentees chose university as their most likely next step in the baseline survey, and this changed very slightly to 90% in the exit survey. 8% opted for a higher or degree apprenticeship in the baseline, which increased to 9% at the point of answering the exit survey. This supports earlier analysis of knowledge gain about university and apprenticeships, with some mentees joining the project with existing knowledge and others gaining it. Overall, only 8% of students deviated from their original choice in the

baseline survey. Looking at the data, they are likely to have moved away from university to an apprenticeship or to working immediately.

One mentee appears to have changed their decision from an apprenticeship to university. In the exit survey, the one mentee who changed their next step to university noted that they had attended an open day which made them believe university was for them. They also credited their mentor:

“They supported me in knowing how I can get into that next step which allowed me to feel more confident about getting there”

At the overall level, confidence that their decision was the right one increased by 3pp. At the individual level, 24% of respondents to the exit survey recorded an increase in confidence, while 68% recorded no change. 25% of those who recorded no change gave the maximum score at baseline, so again may have seen progression in their confidence that we are unable to record. 20% recorded a decrease in confidence but increases in knowledge on post-18 options suggest that mentees were able to learn about routes available to them.

Some students may have been overly confident at the start of the project due to a lack of knowledge of alternative routes. Increasing their knowledge of the available options may have led to a decrease in confidence that their chosen path was correct, but information is necessary in making informed decisions.

In the exit survey, mentees are asked how much of their decision is due to their participation in the mentoring. The below graph shows the results:

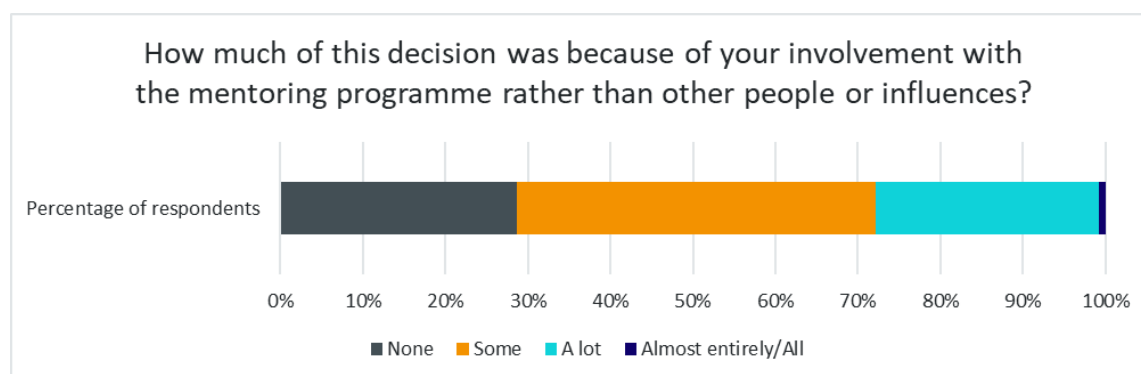


Figure 2

29% of respondents to the exit survey said ‘none’, and looking at exit survey data this is likely due to their pre-existing interests:

“I have thought about it for a while and it seems the best option”

“None, because I've been determined for my next steps”



“I made this decision purely with my own research although i did get more info about it from the mentoring sessions”

“I'm academic and enjoy learning in that environment, as well as the fact that my chosen career requires further education”

Eight said ‘some’ of their decision was due to their participation, while nine mentees overall said that ‘a lot’ of their decision was thanks to mentoring. Mentees were also asked to provide a qualitative response as to how their mentor supported them, and the below quotes evidence the impact of the project on their confidence and decision making:

“I've done a lot of research and the mentor scheme has helped me understand what I want to do and how to get there”

“The more I have delved into specific areas the more confident I am”

43% responded ‘some’ and 27% said ‘a lot’, while 1% credited ‘almost entirely/all’ of their decision making to their mentor (seen in Figure 2). This clearly demonstrates the impact of the project, and the below quotes support this:

“My mentor helped quite a lot with providing different options I could take, they told me how university works and what I can really get out of it which helped me decide”

“At first I was leaning towards university but he told me about apprenticeships and helped me to feel more confident that this would be a good choice for my career”

“I've done a lot of research and the mentor scheme has helped me understand what I want to do and how to get there”

“The more I have delved into specific areas the more confident I am”

### Theory of Change

The table below shows the project-level change for Brightside’s capital and behavioural outcomes<sup>3</sup>:

Outcome	Overall change
Social capital	14%
Human capital	32%
Hope	3%
Coping	4%
Self-efficacy	1%
Growth mindset	1%

All outcomes recorded a positive overall change. Human and social capital saw the greatest change, with an increase of 21pp and 14pp. This is typical within Brightside programmes, and

<sup>3</sup> More details on our measurement tools can be found in Appendix A

Brightside will be adjusting the evaluation outcomes in the near future to better reflect the mentee learning journey in mentoring. In last year's Life After School evaluation, human capital saw a change of 19pp and social capital 15pp. Hope and coping decreased by 2pp in the previous projects, so it is good to see an increase this time of 2pp and 5pp respectively.

When looking at the individual level, 38% of mentees recorded an increase in human capital. 56% recorded no change, but 39% gave the maximum score in the baseline survey and therefore may still have progressed despite being unable to record it. Human capital showed the greatest change at the overall level, and the below quotes evidence this:

"Helped me know about different courses and pathways to different courses"

"I got useful advice on where to go to find help and what steps I need to take to apply. I also got a better insight into the career"

Social capital also recorded a 43% increase at the individual level, and the following quotes illustrate the development for some mentees:

"My mentor was very helpful and was there when I needed him. He always gave a right solution which took me forward and helped every single time"

"I truly do see you as an inspiration and you've left a great impression on me, I can only hope that our paths do indeed cross someday"

"My mentor helped me explore different options within careers and who to talk to if i need help"

Coping saw the largest individual increase, with 47% of exit survey respondents recording a positive change in their coping skills. This can be supported by messages that mentees sent to their mentors at the end of the programme, suggesting the impact of the project on their preparedness for their next steps:

"Thank you for your support and guidance! It has helped me in my UCAS application and prepared me for uni life"

"Seeing you so enthusiastic about engineering made me much more excited and sure about my future career"

"Thank you very much for your help, I am way more confident in my future now!"

## Quality

### Mentee feedback on programme quality

The graphs below show the mentee responses to questions related to the quality of the projects.

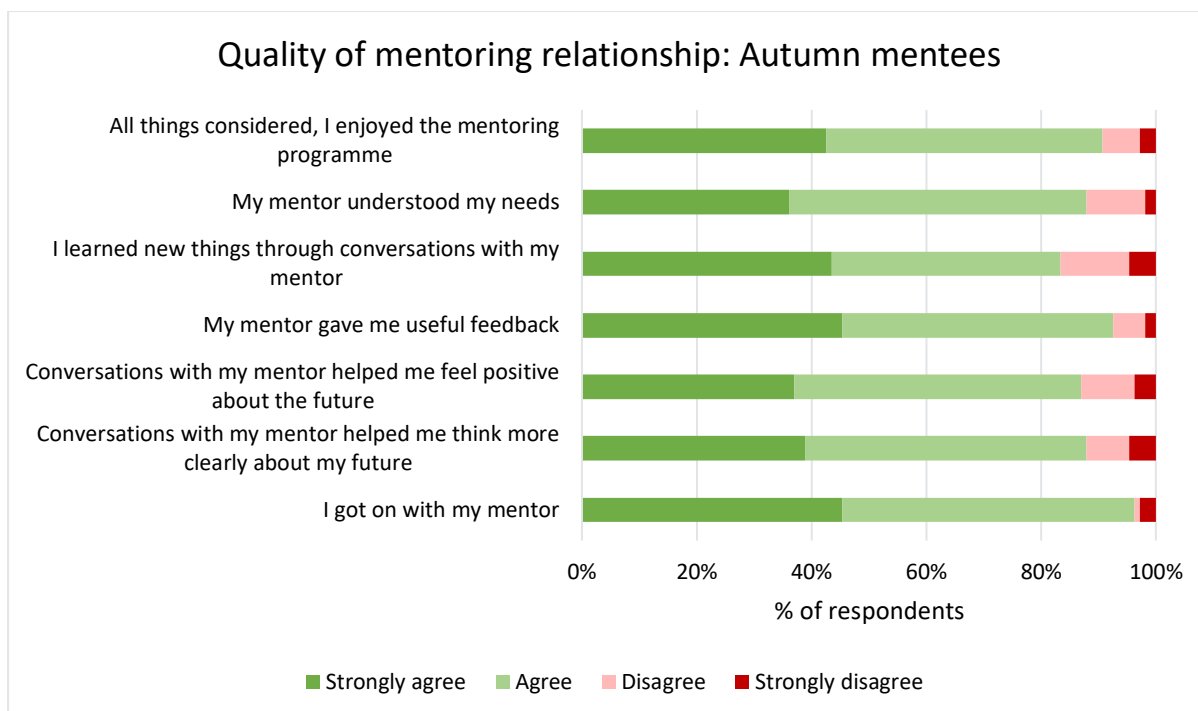


Figure 3

Overall, responses in the autumn cohort were positive, but there was some disagreement. 81% of respondents gave the project a score of six or more out of seven, which falls short of Brightside's benchmark of 92%. However, the dataset consists of 36% of matched mentees and therefore does not represent the entire cohort.

However, 96% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they got on with their mentor, 91% strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed the mentoring, and 87% strongly agreed or agreed that conversations with their mentor helped them feel positive about the future (as shown in Figure 3).

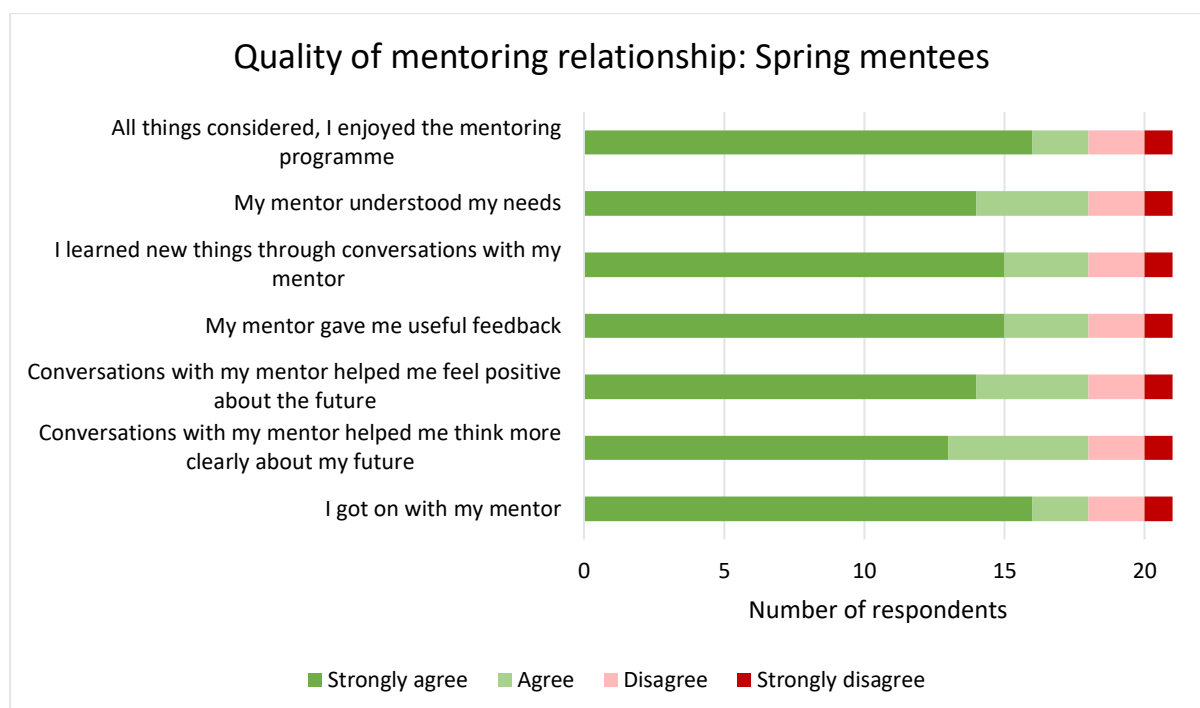


Figure 4

Results for the spring cohort were also largely positive, with 18 mentees strongly agreeing or agreeing that they got on with their mentor, enjoyed the mentoring project, and learned new things through conversations with their mentor. 86% of respondents gave the project a score of six or more out of seven, which is closer to the benchmark of 92%. Since the spring dataset only represents 20% of matched mentees, more exit survey responses are needed for a more holistic view (seen in Figure 4). It may be worthwhile for STEM Learning to think about how they can call on teachers to encourage students to complete the exit survey, or consider incentivisation.

Although all questions received more strongly agree answers than any other option, all questions also recorded the same number of disagree or strongly disagree answers. Looking at the data, these are from the same three mentees. Two did not indicate why they may have disagreed with the questions, but one commented that their mentor did not respond to them. Brightside should continue to chase up mentors who are not responding, especially at the beginning of the project. Mentees should then be re-matched if their mentor is unable to continue with mentoring. This was done in the autumn cohort and a re-matched mentee expressed their thanks: *"I was grateful how the support team matched me up with a mentor of the subject I am interested in."*

The autumn cohort also disagreed or strongly disagreed with some questions. Looking at the reasoning for some of these answers, one mentee said: *"Mentoring is a closed off, very tightly monitored programme with excellent mentors who share similar interests and careers that you'd like to go in, but mentoring is also restrictive solely due to the programme and the way it's structured, with no access to calls, face-to-face meetings or outside platform discussions."* Brightside is currently working on providing video-based mentoring, and feedback such as this suggests that this is the right step to take. Although text-based mentoring provides flexibility and ease, another mentee described it as 'disconnected.' Therefore, Brightside's

enhancements should further support the mentee experience in the near future. However, some expectation setting could be done by STEM Learning when advertising the opportunity to students to ensure that they know exactly what the mentoring entails.

Another autumn cohort mentee suggested that they would like to see a mentor from a certain background available: “i would have liked if i would have found a clinical psychologist as my mentor to discuss the challenges i will have to face to be one.” There are hundreds of mentors from various backgrounds that take part in the projects, and it is often recommended that mentees don’t think too deeply about the exact person they would like to speak to, as all mentors can offer support. However, it could be worth considering how the ask the expert feature could play a role in allowing mentees to connect with someone that may not be available in the mentor pool.

Some mentees across both cohorts expressed that they would like the mentoring to continue for longer:

“It was amazing - my mentor helped me feel comfortable by speaking about things that we also unrelated to future plans, like what they did over the weekend. I would've really liked it to have been longer, possibly starting at the beginning of year 12. Even if the mentorship scheme continued from February up until June it would've been very beneficial, but it was still a wonderful experience nonetheless” - mentee

Since there are two projects that run in both autumn and spring, STEM Learning could consider whether they would like mentees to enrol on both projects and how this could work. This has benefits in providing more mentoring to those interested, but also could limit the reach if similar mentees partake each time. Brightside should continue to ensure that the week of mentoring (e.g., week three out of 10) is noted in the weekly communications so that users are aware of how long is left.

The following quotes support the positive experience of mentees across both cohorts:

“I also feel I'm now ready to apply for university and get good grades in my AS exams, which are next week. This mentoring scheme, and by extension, you, have improved my confidence”

“Being able to talk to an actual person that is in a similar field I want to go into has helped me decide on my next step in life”

“The extra invaluable support that help visualise your future from the current moment, raising confidence and becoming more determined”

The progress seen in the project-specific outcomes and capital outcomes, as well as the positive response to the quality questions, indicate that both cohorts were able to meet the project aims and provide mentees with a good experience.

### Mentor feedback on programme quality

On 28 June 2023, Brightside recognised that mentors from the Life After School mentoring spring cohort had responded to the Sector Insight exit survey, meaning that there may have

been an error when the exit surveys had been sent out via email. This was done by both Brightside and STEM Learning, and it is difficult to know when this error may have occurred. Brightside made the decision to combine the data for the Sector Insight and Life After School mentoring projects from the spring projects, and the autumn data will also be combined for continuity of analysis. Mentor quality will be analysed in cohorts, looking at responses from both projects.

### Autumn cohort

The graph below shows the mentor responses to questions related to the quality of the projects. The graph combines survey answers from mentors on both Sector Insight and Life After School autumn cohorts. Overall, 81 mentors responded to the exit survey across both projects (34 for Sector Insight and 47 for Life After School):

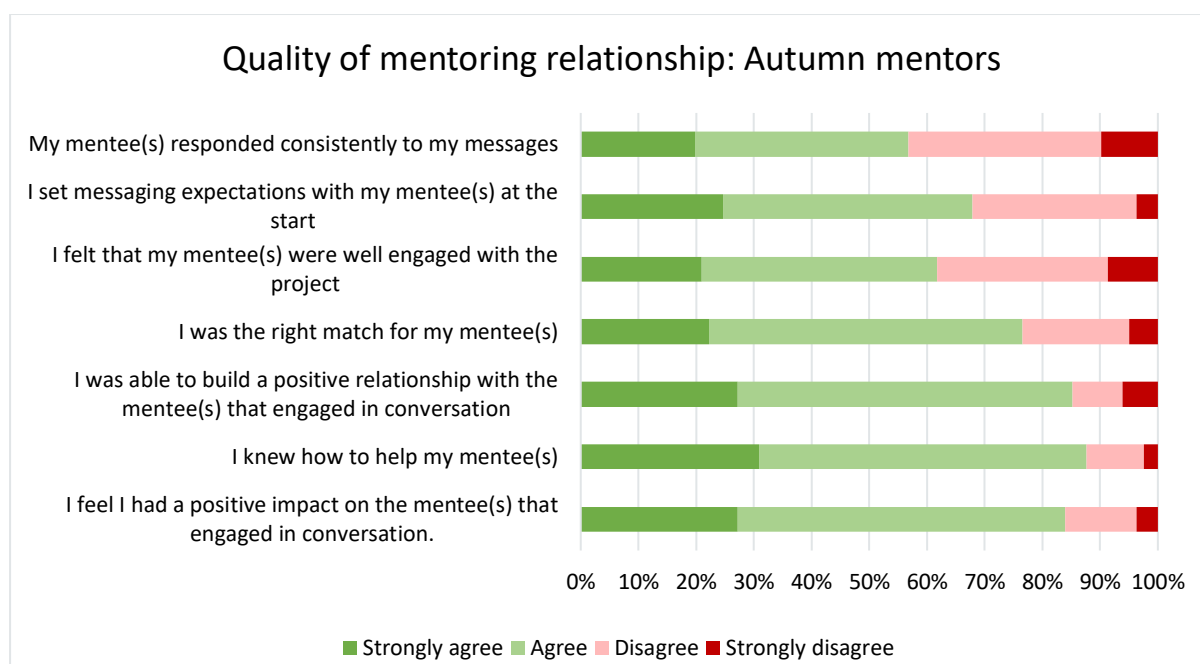


Figure 5

Responses to the quality questions were overall positive in the autumn cohort, with the majority of mentors strongly agreeing or agreeing to each question. Brightside were able to use the Net Promoter score to measure quality of service provided. Net Promoter Score (NPS) is an indicator which allows mentors to rate the service they used and the likelihood of them forwarding the service to their family and friends. Mentors gave the project a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 32, which translates to a 'great' score<sup>4</sup>.

88% of mentors who responded to the exit survey strongly agreed or agreed that they knew how to help their mentees, 85% said they were able to build a positive relationship with their mentees, and 84% felt they had a positive impact on their mentees (seen in Figure 5).

<sup>4</sup> The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has four scores. A score of -100 to 0 is 'needs improvement'; 0-30 is 'good'; 30-70 is 'great' and 70-100 is 'excellent'. More information about NPS and how to calculate it is provided here: <https://delighted.com/nps-calculator>. A score of 32 is therefore 'great'.

### Spring cohort

The graph below combines survey answers from mentors on both Sector Insight and Life After School spring cohorts. Overall, 49 mentors responded to the exit survey across both projects (44 for Sector Insight and 5 for Life After School):

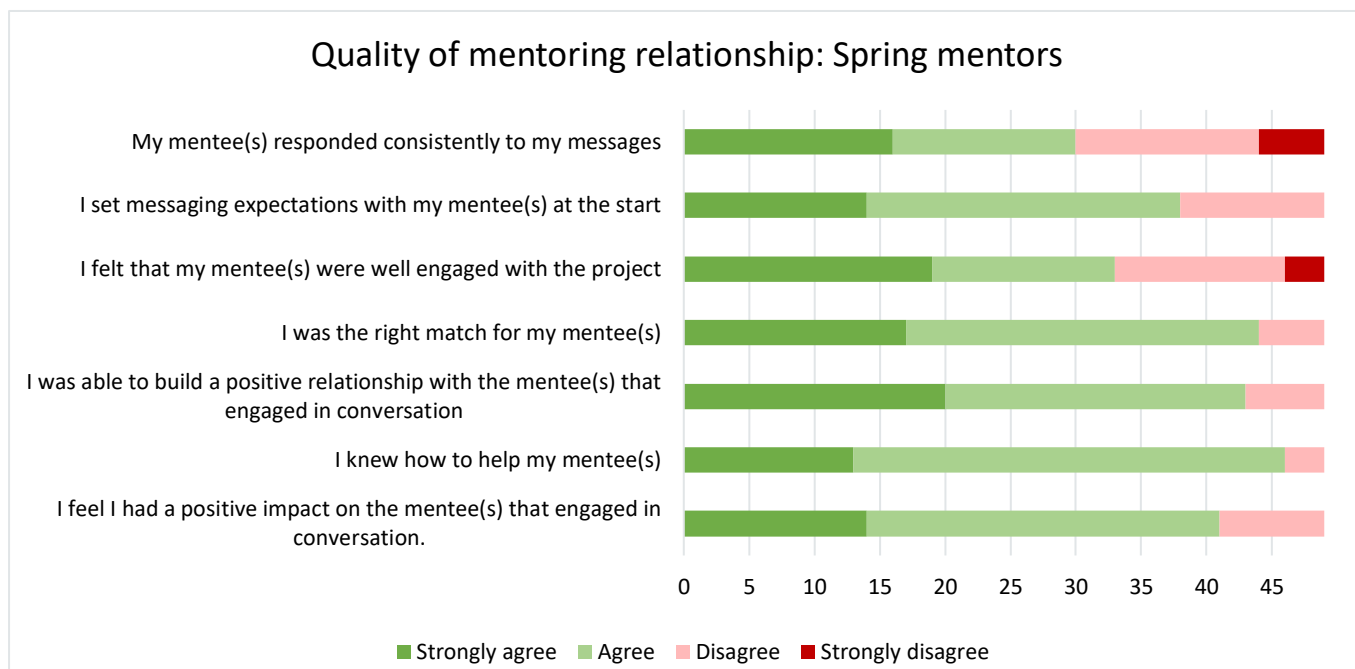


Figure 6

Similar to the autumn cohort, the spring cohort mentors also responded positively to the exit survey. 46 respondents to the exit survey strongly agreed or agreed that they knew how to help their mentees, while 41 strongly agreed or agreed that they felt they had a positive impact on their mentees and were the right match for them. The NPS score for the spring cohort was 42, which translates to a 'good' score. It should be said that recent mentor quality results in the Brightside portfolio have been negative, mostly due to lack of mentee engagement. Although there is some disagreement with the questions in both cohorts, it is good to see that the results were positive for the most part.

Across both cohorts there was disagreement with the question related to mentees' consistent engagement. Those who answered with strong disagreement also left comments relating to their mentees' engagement being low. This is an issue that arises across the Brightside portfolio. STEM Learning and Brightside should continue to set expectations with mentors during all contact points, including sign up, training and continuous communications. Brightside should continue to follow up with mentees who are not engaging in the project, and could set a cut-off point for engagement (e.g. 'if you have not messaged your mentor by X date, we will unmatched you'). However, it has been seen in other projects that mentees still benefit from messages from their mentor despite not engaging, so this should be discussed by STEM Learning and Brightside.

Mentors across both cohorts also mentioned how the experience would vary between mentees:

“I had 3 mentees and they were all different. One was very engaged, one a bit and the third hardly at all” - mentor

This highlights the need to set the minimum, and maximum, number of mentees for each mentor to five. If the scale is set at one to five, mentors who choose one mentee can limit their experience if that mentee does not engage. Brightside should ensure that this is done on the platform ahead of mentors joining.

Across both cohorts, mentors expressed a desire to have video-based mentoring:

“The lack of a platform to talk made me feel more distant from the mentee than in my previous experiences where I could speak to the mentee. Never the less, this has been a great experience” - mentor

“The tradeoff of keeping mentors and mentees ignorant of the other's identity and circumstances is that the mentoring itself is at a more detached level and cannot achieve the same goals as an in-person or even teleconferencing-based mentoring program” - mentor

This was similarly echoed in the mentee feedback, and Brightside will begin to advertise the new developments as soon as possible.

Mentors also indicated that they found the training sessions useful:

“I was really happy with the training, and I think it equipped me well, because I felt prepared for the questions and how to keep a warm but formal/distant communication with the mentees” - mentor

Brightside was able to incorporate feedback from STEM Learning and utilise learnings from other projects to improve the mentor training. It is good to see that this was received well by mentors. Brightside should continue to update the slides used and ensure that adequate time is given to the example conversations, as mentors picked up on this part as especially useful.

These quotes further illustrate the positive mentor experience:

“I think the programme has developed my written communication skills and has allowed me to come out of my science shell and empathise and encourage young people from many different backgrounds and with varying interests” - mentor

“It gave me a real sense of purpose and I felt like I was really helping my mentees” - mentor

“The mentoring experience was the best encounter I have had because I was able to impact useful skills and knowledge into young adults” - mentor

“I think overall, my mentoring experience was great” - mentor



## Conclusion and recommendations

### Engagement

Overall engagement fell just below Brightside's benchmark for 75% engaged mentees but remained similar to engagement for previous years. It was also positive that well over half of mentees sent 5+ messages, suggesting those who were engaged remained engaged throughout the project.

Recommendations for future cohorts include:

- STEM Learning should communicate with schools ahead of the project launch to ensure that Brightside is not blocked by their firewall
- Ensuring projects are accessible for all STEM Learning mentees. This could include assessing if there are any additional needs to consider in the mentor matching tool or initial survey, and also including STEM Learning as a participant in our trials to see how video calling would work on the Brightside platform
- Providing additional support to mentors whose mentees don't know what to discuss or what help they need. This is now built into our mentor training
- Providing additional support in training and in communications sent out via the platform or email for mentees who don't know what support they need or what to discuss. Building in more discussion ideas, or ideas of who to message or email when mentees are stuck for topic advice could help them be more engaged or reach out where they need support

### Impact

Mentees were able to increase their knowledge around post-18 options, particularly about apprenticeships and alternate vocational courses like Higher National Diplomas. Many were set on attending university but were still able to learn about the practical elements of higher education. In future:

- Reminders to signpost to useful resources should be included regularly in the weekly communications to mentors
- Faith and student loans could be addressed in the mentor training and project guide to ensure that mentors have the relevant information should this come up
- Include a topic in the mentor guide that focuses on myth-busting around apprenticeships

### Quality

Mentees and mentors had a positive overall experience. Some users indicated that they would like to be able to use video, which is currently in development. For future projects:

- Brightside and STEM Learning should ensure that correct survey links are used in communications to users

- STEM Learning should consider how they can call on teachers to encourage students to complete the exit survey, and whether incentivisation is viable
- Brightside should ensure that mentor engagement is monitored throughout, and should re-match mentees where possible
- Ask the expert could be considered as an additional function
- STEM Learning should consider whether they would like mentees to return to the spring cohort after completing the autumn project
- STEM Learning and Brightside should continue to set expectations with mentors around engagement from mentees
- Brightside should follow up with mentees that are not engaging in the project, and could set a cut-off point for engagement
- Brightside should ensure that the minimum number of matches for mentors is set to five ahead of mentors joining
- Brightside should continue to update the slides used and ensure that adequate time is given to the example conversations

## Appendix A

Brightside's quality and impact framework was developed with CAN Invest, a leading social impact advisor for UK charity, social enterprise, and other social purpose organisations.

Brightside's Theory of Change outcomes are measured through baseline and exit surveys for mentees, and quality is measured through exit surveys for mentees and mentors.

The following Theory of Change outcomes were used in this project to measure impact of mentoring on confident and informed decision-making:

Outcome	Question	Answer options	Source
<b>Social capital</b>	I know people I can call on for employment or further education advice	5-point strongly agree – disagree scale, including 'I don't know' options.	NPC designed survey (think tank), developed as part of New Philanthropy Capital's Journey to Employment project
<b>Human capital</b>	Do you know how to go about getting the qualifications or training you need to get the job you want?	Yes / No / Not Sure	Based on the LSYPE (Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) survey
<b>Hope</b>	I feel positive about my future	5-point strongly agree – disagree scale, including 'I don't know' options.	Based on the LSYPE (Longitudinal Study of Young People in England) survey.
<b>Coping</b>	On a scale from 0-10 (where 0 is extremely difficult and 10 is extremely easy), how difficult or easy do you find it to deal with important problems that come up in your life?	0-10 scale and a 'Not Sure' option	From the European Social Survey.
<b>Self-efficacy</b>  <b>Growth mindset</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Other people decide what happens to me</li> <li>- It is important to think before you act</li> <li>- It is important to think before you make a decision</li> <li>- If I study hard, I will do better (growth mindset)</li> <li>- People notice when I try to be nice</li> <li>- If you work hard, you will get what you want (growth mindset)</li> <li>- I am responsible for what happens to me</li> </ul>	YES! / Yes / No / NO!  <u>Or</u> 4-point strongly agree – disagree scale	Phillips-Springer Self-Efficacy scale.
<b>Decision making</b>	(Mentees are asked to select their most likely next step (e.g. Go to university, start an apprenticeship	Extremely confident / Quite confident / Not very confident /	Developed by CAN Invest and Brightside

	etc) and then a follow-up question): How confident are you that this decision is right for you? (exit survey only): How much of this decision was because of your involvement with the Brightside programme rather than other people or influences?	Not at all confident / I don't know None / Some / A lot / Almost entirely/All	
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The following quality questions were designed to indicate the quality of the mentor and mentee experience:

Quality indicator	Question	Answer options
<b>Quality of the mentoring experience (mentees)</b>	I got on with my mentor Conversations with my mentor helped me think more clearly about my future Conversations with my mentor helped me feel positive about the future My mentor gave me useful feedback I learned new things through conversations with my mentor My mentor understood my needs All things considered, I enjoyed the mentoring programme	Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
<b>Quality of the mentoring experience (mentors)</b>	My mentees responded consistently to my messages. I felt that my mentees were well engaged with the project. I was the right match for my mentees. I was able to build a positive relationship with the mentees that engaged in conversation. I knew how to help all of my mentees. I feel I had a positive impact on the mentees that engaged in conversation.	Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

## Appendix B: Bright Knowledge resources in conversation

### Autumn 2022

The following articles were sent or mentioned by mentees in the autumn cohort:

- [My job explained: Astrophysicist](#)
- [Environmental apprenticeships](#)
- [What are my skills](#)
- [How to build a network](#)
- [Mental and emotional health/wellbeing](#)
- [The importance of optimism in challenging times](#)
- [Preparing for university checklist](#)
- [Choosing a university](#)
- [Questions to ask on a university visit](#)
- [Applying to Oxford or Cambridge](#)
- [CV writing skills](#)
- [Jobhunting with social networking](#)
- [Job adverts explained](#)
- [How to build a network](#)

### Spring 2023

The following articles were sent/ mentioned by mentees in the spring cohort:

- [Questions to ask on a university visit](#)
- [Managing your time at university](#)
- [Career profile: biomedical scientist](#)
- [Career profile: Clinical biochemist](#)
- [What can I do with a biology degree](#)
- [The importance of optimism in challenging times](#)
- [Mental and emotional health/ wellbeing](#)
- [What are my skills](#)
- [Careers in video games/technology](#)