



Inspire Mentoring Programme Evaluation

NOVEMBER 2023

Interactions Research & Evaluation

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Foreword

Innovate Communities commissioned research to review and evaluate Inspire Mentoring, operating since 2020. The purpose of the research is to assess the programme and its impact on young people who participated as mentees.

Significant progress has been made around equity of access to higher education for groups including those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. However, there are still considerable challenges remaining to support the transition from education to employment for this cohort.

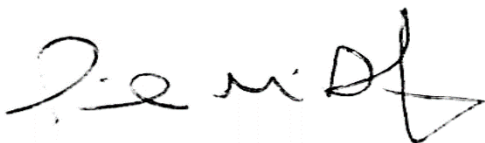
We know that 33% of disadvantaged graduates earn more than €40,000 compared to 51% of affluent graduates. That 60% of affluent graduates were working in professional occupations compared with 51% of disadvantaged graduates. (Higher Education Authority, 2023).

One of the core reasons is that disadvantaged students lack social capital. This lack of Social Capital is an issue for Irish society and a source of untapped economic potential for employers. There is a risk that significant numbers of graduates are not getting the opportunity to fulfil their potential because of this uneven playing field.

Talent is spread evenly, but opportunity is not. However, things do not have to be this way. Inspire Mentoring is changing this narrative, we believe that potential and career opportunities should not be defined by where and how you grew up. We are aiming to create a level playing field that allows disadvantaged students with the support of their mentor to start appropriate and relevant careers in professional environments and build their professional networks.

We are particularly pleased to see that mentees reported a growth and improvement in the two key areas of Social Capital and Employability and that after participating mentees reported that they had higher ambitions for themselves.

As the Chair of Innovate Communities I wish to acknowledge the support of the Irish Youth Foundation in funding the evaluation. The results will be used to reflect on the development of Inspire Mentoring and will help guide its future strategic direction and growth. Despite the adverse economic, social, and cultural barriers experienced by our mentees, Inspire Mentoring demonstrates that young people who participate gain hope and perception that graduate opportunities are a real possibility for them.



Paul McAuliffe, TD
Chair Innovate Communities

71% of Mentees are the first generation to attend college

75% of Mentees look for career support from their mentor





Inspire Mentoring is a unique social innovation project created by Innovate Communities that grew out of its work with young people in Ballymun and Finglas in Dublin.

Its aim is to connect marginalised young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds with a professional who has volunteered to become a mentor.

Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not.

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Executive summary

Progressing through third level education and on to the world of work is not always the easiest transition, especially when you are a young person from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background. That is why Inspire Mentoring was formed. A unique social innovation, Inspire Mentoring connects those young people with professional volunteers, who help them develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in higher education and in the workplace.

This report was commissioned to document their experiences and presents valuable insights regarding the programme, which could be used to tailor it further towards their needs, and examines the effect Inspire Mentoring has had on mentees' social capital and social mobility.

The project began with a literature review, followed by qualitative research with both mentors and mentees, after which we arrived at a set of five indicators:

- Social capital
- Goals
- Resilience
- Imposterism
- Employability

Mentees who joined the programme but unfortunately dropped out midway were also surveyed, with questions focused on their self-perception across each of the five indicators. We found that:

- mentees consistently improved across all indicators following mentor guidance, as opposed to prior
- there were significant differences between mentees and those who left the programme in how they see themselves across each indicator, especially with regards to social capital and employability
- mentees' have higher ideals for themselves, and greater hopes and ambitions compared to those who left the programme.

Having completed the research and thoroughly analysed the results, our recommendations include:

- broadening the mentor base to cover more industries
- facilitating engagement of hard-to-reach students with training workshops
- aligning with government policy by opening the programme to other cohorts
- bringing mentees together to share experiences
- using technological advancements to enhance the offering

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Innovate Communities was founded in 2015 and works tirelessly alongside local communities to create and deliver projects which solve their real-world problems.

Their Inspire Mentoring programme offers free formal online mentoring to young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds who lack access to professional contacts or networks, providing them with the skills and confidence they need to build a better future.

To gauge its success, Innovate Communities commissioned Interactions Research to conduct this independent evaluation of Inspire Mentoring.

1.2 Objectives

The evaluation objectives were as follows:

- 
- Critically appraise current practice and operations
 - Review and glean insights from international best practices
 - Assess the impact of mentoring on low social capital
 - Explore innovations in online mentoring and alignment with government policy

1.3 Methodology

A three-part plan was designed to achieve these goals:



1.3.1 Literature review

The evaluation began with a thorough review of programme activities to date, work completed, progress reports, case studies and outputs from previous interviews and surveys conducted by Inspire Mentoring.

Academic and grey literature was also studied in-depth to identify online mentoring best practice and evaluation techniques.

The review gave rise to numerous indicators for successful mentoring, with the next step being to investigate the relevance of them to the Inspire Mentoring programme through consultation with key stakeholders.

1.3.2 Qualitative interviews

Next, mentors were invited to an online focus group to explore their perceptions of 'success' and discuss the indicators developed from the literature review. In all, six mentors participated.

Current and previous mentees were also invited to attend online focus groups assessing change or progress on the indicators developed from the literature review and mentor focus group. In total, 18 mentees took part across two groups, sharing how the experience had impacted them and reflecting on opportunities for future iterations of the programme.

1.3.3 Survey methodology

Finally, a survey was designed for measuring personal growth along the metrics identified. The indicators were applied to these elements:



The survey link was mailed to 296 previous programme participants – a mix of those who had completed the programme and those who had expressed interest but not completed the programme.

75 completed surveys were returned (a 25% response rate):

39 stayed with the programme:

38 had not completed:

- 15 completed the programme
- 24 currently on the programme
- 17 filled in application form
- 5 attended training
- 6 completed an online profile
- 4 selected a mentor
- 6 started the mentoring process but then dropped out

2. Results

2.1 Findings from the literature review

We found that high-quality mentoring is based on:

- clear expectations
- adequate onboarding
- appropriate matching
- empathetic mentors who provide 'authentic' advice and guidance based on their own experiences or research
- mentors providing a safe space, active listening, and support for mentees.

Students characterised their mentoring relationships as positive or successful when:

- they offered a balance of personal closeness and academic accountability
- they built on shared values and identities.
- they were multidirectional in nature, with both mentor and mentee sharing responsibility for setting goals and initiating contact

Mentor-mentee pairings with shared beliefs, values and backgrounds are preferred by both groups, and may yield more positive outcomes. 'Culturally relevant' mentors were perceived to better understand and closely relate to their mentee's ethnic, gender and class background.

However, some studies have suggested that mentoring success is more likely to depend on the extent to which mentees view themselves as sharing similar values and beliefs to mentors, rather than to what extent they match each other culturally or ethnically.

One study found that programmes have been more effective when:

- participating youth have either had pre-existing difficulties or been exposed to significant levels of environmental risk.
- there has been a good fit between the educational or occupational backgrounds of mentors and the goals of the programme.
- mentors and youth have been paired based on similar interests.

A successful mentoring programme should have:

- **Matching process:** Some programmes have a formal matching process managed by an administrator, while others might be more informal, allowing mentees and mentors to self-select each other
- **Training:** Equipping both mentors and mentees with the necessary skills and set clear expectations for the mentoring relationship
- **Goals and objectives:** Setting clear objectives at the outset helps guide the mentoring process
- **Feedback and evaluation:** Regular check-ins, feedback sessions and evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the mentorship
- **Support structures:** This might include resources, regular meetings, workshops and other support mechanisms to facilitate the mentorship process

While in-person mentoring or a hybrid approach is preferred, both mentors and mentees believe virtual mentoring has its own benefits:

- an ease in scheduling meetings
- the ability to share documents
- the ability to be mentored by someone outside of your local area
- helping mentees prepare for the online world of job interviews and work
- being able to build or feel empathy on-line

Innovative developments in online mentoring have transformed the way people access guidance and support. Leveraging technology to make mentoring more accessible, personalised and effective, some notable developments include:

- Platforms increasingly using artificial intelligence to match mentees with suitable mentors. Algorithms analyse mentee goals, skills, and preferences, as well as mentor expertise, to create more meaningful connections
- Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies enabling immersive mentoring experiences. Mentors and mentees can meet in virtual environments, making the interaction more engaging and lifelike. For example, VR can be used for job shadowing or skill development in a virtual workplace
- Gamified mentoring platforms incorporating elements of games to engage users and encourage active participation. Gamification can make the mentoring process more enjoyable and motivate users to achieve their goals
- Mentorship platforms leveraging data analytics to track progress and measure the impact of mentoring relationships. This data-driven approach allows mentors and mentees to assess their growth and refine their goals
- Peer-to-peer mentoring connecting individuals with similar goals or interests, in addition to traditional mentor-mentee pairings. This can provide a valuable, supportive community of learners
- Increasing efforts to ensure mentoring is inclusive and culturally sensitive. Programmes are designed to address diverse needs, backgrounds and perspectives to make mentorship more accessible and relevant to all

As technology continues to advance, we can expect even more creative and impactful approaches to mentoring in the future.

2.2 Alignment with government policy

In 2022, 26% and 27% respectively of the graduates Ireland's two oldest universities – Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin – had attended one of the 7% of private fee-charging second-level schools.

The *Irish Times Feeder Schools Report 2022* highlighted that the overall proportion of students from disadvantaged schools who secured a college place has fallen. The report also lists some stark statistics regarding the disparity in the profiles of those accessing third level:

1. 8 of the top 10 schools are fee-paying, with the two non-fee paying schools having a similar student social class profile to their neighbouring fee-paying schools

2. Apart from the school a child attends, where families live also seems to determine overall third-level progression rates

3. The most affluent parts of Dublin saw approximately 90% of entrants who sat their Leaving Cert in 2022 progress to third-level that year, compared with less than 50% of other postal districts

The vision of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* is to address this disproportionate representation and ensure that the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education at all levels **reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population**. The plan proposes the development of local partnership initiatives with a particular focus on mentoring in target communities where levels of educational participation and attainment remain low. The plan recommends initiatives by community and voluntary groups in such areas to assist and encourage young people to participate in and complete higher education.

The Inspire programme is clearly aligned to this plan and other government policies such as Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) which lists key outcomes of:

1. Achieving full potential in learning and development
2. Economic security and opportunity
3. Connected, respected, and contributing to their world

The *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* seeks to increase 'active inclusion' by providing high-quality, more accessible, and flexible education, training and skill development interventions and supports suited to the individual. There are currently not enough opportunities for further education graduates to transition to higher education, and the number of students who do so is low. This may represent an opportunity whereby Inspire Mentoring could credibly facilitate the existing higher education offering to further Education graduates.

Action 14 of the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017 - 2021 (Education Actions)* states:

In line with the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015-2019), the Department of Education and Skills will support the development by the higher education sector of a network of peer support and mentoring for Travellers and Roma in third level education.

There is evidence that the number of Irish Travellers accessing higher education has increased from 35 (2012/2013) to 61 (2017/2018); a 74% increase since the commencement of the plan. While this is a small cohort, Inspire Mentoring could align itself with this strategy by specifically targeting Travellers in Higher Education.

2.3 Qualitative research with mentors

The review of mentoring practices and evaluation literature, including the *Inspire Mentoring Strategic Plan and Theory of Change*, highlighted several key themes:

Social Capital

Resilience

Imposter
Phenomenon

Employability

During the mentors' focus group, each was explored for deeper meaning and relevance.

Mentors mentioned the **well-structured platform** used by the programme to facilitate the selection/mentoring process:

The platform is easy to use, especially for follow-up with my mentee.

The process meant that mentees must be **proactive** and select their own mentor, which develops a sense of self-efficacy, **increases commitment** and improves their likelihood of sticking with the programme.

"The online system is so well set up. It ensures the mentor matches their needs."

Mentors saw themselves as someone to give a first 'leg-up' by leveraging professional and social networks, and as a role model where one was lacking.

"A neutral, objective space not based on friendship or other relationship."

They also offer an empathetic listening ear, providing both college and career advice and guidance, helping mentees develop projects, make connections and manage their own progression.

"To help them grow in the industry or to successfully navigate third level"

They defined **social capital** as the ability to make social connections and being part of a variety of different social circles.

“Knowing how to approach people, making small talk, inviting someone for coffee.”

Imposter phenomenon was described as a feeling of not fitting in, not being good enough and always feeling underprepared, as opposed to connecting and relating to people and integrating with new groups, having something to contribute and recognising their own achievements (for example, helping students realise that summer work experience counts towards their CV).

“I encouraged my mentee to join societies in college. You demystify it for them – show them we are all the same.”

Mentors can alleviate this by sharing examples of people from different backgrounds and acting as role models who have been through the same. Peer pressure often means that mentees feel socially excluded at home and in college.

“Feeling like a fish out of two ponds.”

One mentor pointed out that Imposter syndrome, as it is known, is not a real syndrome or psychological disorder, and would be better described as 'imposterism'.

To enhance **employability**, mentors noted the importance of providing practical tools and techniques, such as CV preparation, interview skills, a LinkedIn profile etc. Gaining experience, being prescriptive in looking for internships, being flexible, having a vision and knowing what opportunities are open and available to them are all equally useful too.

Being open to different pathways, taking a different perspective.

On the other hand, it is important they are not overwhelmed by the long-term vision and are able to plan for short-term and long-term goals.

It's about working together so we both end up with a clear picture of what they want and how to get there – what next, where next and how next.

Mentees' ability to sell themselves to a potential employer is vital and is linked to their awareness of their strengths and confidence in their skills.

Resilience is about determination, having goals, having a clear plan and knowing how to get there, and being flexible in reaction to challenges.

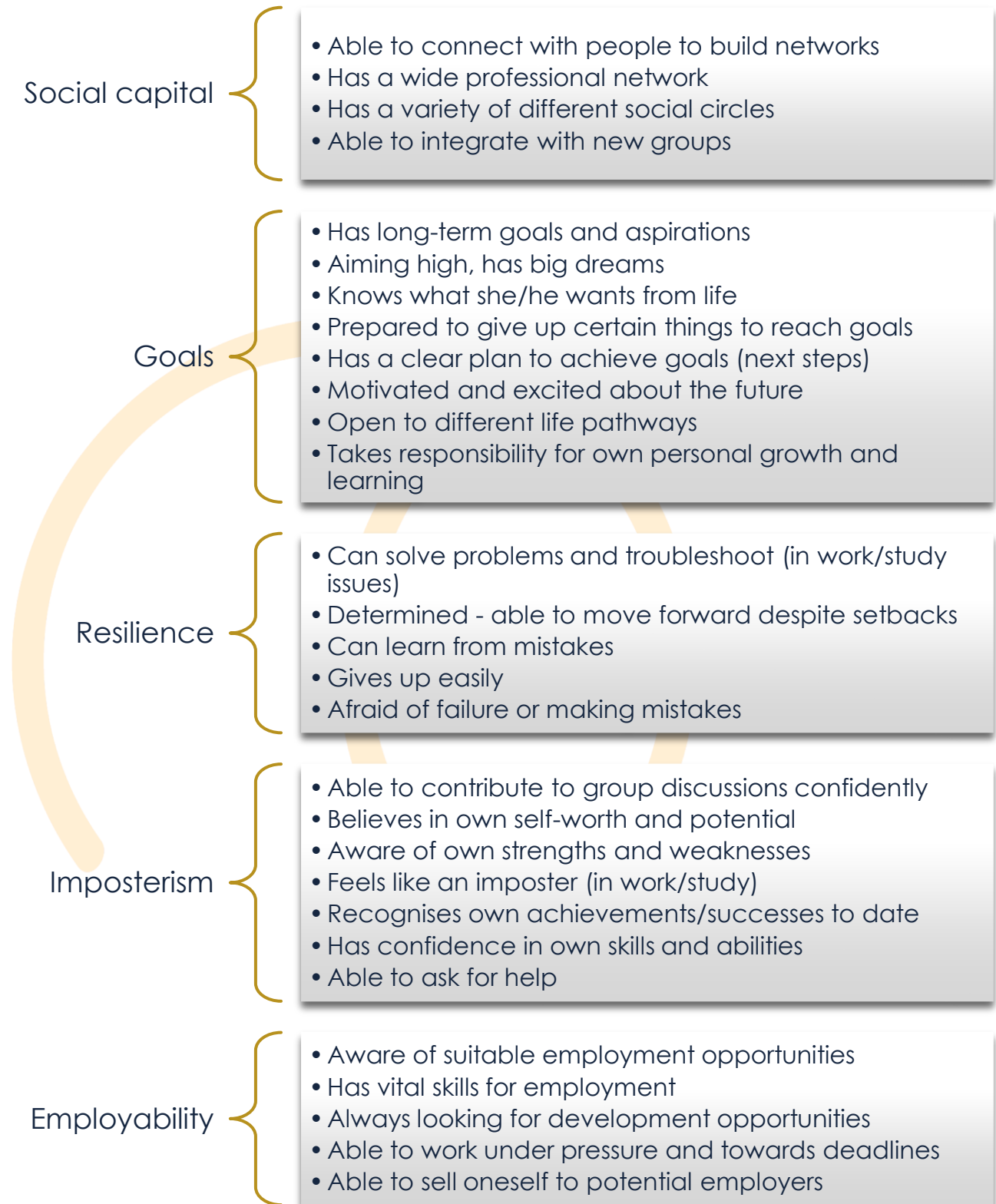
Show them other ways to respond or react.

Through this qualitative process with mentors, the initial list of indicators was refined and simplified. **Goal setting** was prevalent throughout discussions, and so was added as a separate domain.

The final set of indicators fell under five headings (as shown in the table on page 19), which were evaluated through the third and final methodology section, the online survey.



Table of five indicator themes and specific metrics:



2.4 Qualitative research with mentees

The two online focus groups with mentees explored their experience of the programme and how it helped with college life and professional development.

Mentors assisted with focus and discipline during college, particularly with deadlines and exam preparation.

It's good to have someone that was able to encourage me to kind of meet my deadlines and kind of get work done rather than leaving it to the last minute. It's good to have someone that was a bit disciplined with me.

The skills fostered by the mentor helped with academic success.

I was able to even do better in some of my modules because they required me to do presentations in front of the class.

Mentors also broadened horizons by encouraging students to think beyond their current circumstances and aim high.

There just happened to be no kind of course or master's degree that I really wanted to do. But I was just going to settle anyway. Someone that comes from my background would never dream that they could get there. And my mentor had a chat with me about branching out and highlighted the positives of branching out and of broadening your education elsewhere.

The discussion then focused on separately exploring each of the five domains.



Goals

Setting out next steps and linking them with longer term goals proved effective.

It turned out to be far more beneficial to me in the sense that we set short-, medium- and long-term goals on the first day we met, which included doing well in college, getting an internship, a summer internship, and then a training contract. And I think within six to eight months, we had achieved all of those things and more, which before joining up to this I didn't even think would be possible.

Having someone to report back to ensured that students remained focused on their goals.

Updating my mentor about my timetable, updating them regularly about if I achieved my goals - it motivated me. I was more inclined to do it than if I was just doing this myself.

Learning to be flexible and adaptable around goals is important for mentees' confidence and resilience.

Goals can be subject to change and don't need to be set in stone.

Also allowed me to realise that not all my goals must be achieved in the short term but can be worked over the long term.

Resilience

Mentees mentioned mentors' support making them more resilient.

There are different things that I would put my mind towards or try to achieve, and sometimes they would work out and sometimes they wouldn't, but there was always, I guess, that support in the background regarding just trying again or just moving on to the next step.

Mentors showed them how to learn from mistakes and adapt when things go wrong.

Mentor helped me to look from the different perspective on my problem and find new approaches.

Being able to adapt and change during challenging situations; outcomes don't always turn out the way we want them to but being able to learn from it makes all the difference.

This has set them up to be more resilient in the workplace.

I've learned on my internship that it's okay to make mistakes and I don't take criticism personally anymore.

It also helps them when faced with imposter thoughts.

A lot of careers look very daunting and everyone looks like they have it all together but that's resilience not perfection.

Employability

Mentors helped mentees to understand the world of work...

It was good to talk to someone that kind of has the experience and understanding - the know how - in the work environments and stuff like that, which you don't really get in college or on placements.

... and provided direction on career paths.

My mentor helped me make sense of what I wanted to do with my career and how to use my skills. He gave me some really good ideas and options for my career that I wouldn't have thought about.

Helped me realise my strongest traits and what interests of mine make me employable.

Practical support with CV writing, interview skills and job applications helped increase their confidence and ultimately get employment.

My mentor gave me advice on how put my best foot forward in interviews and always send the best CV or cover letters that best presents myself. And I guess it made me feel more confident in what I wanted to do.

I think having that bit of practise/mock interviews and just being able to bounce a few ideas off my mentor was very important and I do think it did help me secure my position.

Introducing mentees to their networks or pointing them in the right direction also opened doors.

In my final year in college, I realised that I had to start thinking about beyond college. And I quickly learned that I knew nothing about the profession and didn't know anybody in it.

Imposterism

Mentees had a lot to say about having imposter thoughts, from starting college through to the world of work. All had experienced it at some stage and felt their mentors helped them to deal with it.

With everyone talking about their CAO points, when you did not get those points, you can't share in that conversation. I was always feeling that I should not be there. My mentor told me that "you have earned it; you wouldn't be here if you didn't put in the hard work".

I just explained my feeling like I was an imposter in certain spaces - the words that would come from my mentor and him highlighting who he sees me to be on paper on my CV and things like that.

Mentors normalised 'imposterism' by sharing their own experiences

The fact that my mentor would share the feelings of his own imposter syndrome was really beneficial because it makes you feel like you're not the only one having those feelings.

It was definitely very grounding to know I wasn't alone and that everyone is in the same boat and we are all trying to get through.

By pointing out their qualities, achievements and hard work, mentors helped mentees recognise their own self-worth and develop self-belief.

I have always said I'm not a creative person. But my mentor encouraged me and said: "I can see you doing that. I would assume that you would be the kind of person that's creative." So I went ahead and applied for it and I got it, and it was the best experience of my life.

My mentor helped me by describing my achievements back to me with securing both summer job and graduate programme. I learned it's a bigger achievement than I made out to be in my head.

Social capital

Mentors helped increase the social capital of mentees in many ways. Firstly, they encouraged and developed their confidence in social situations.

Having a mentor allowed me to widen my involvement in different activities. Before I started the mentorship, I wouldn't have put myself forward for different opportunities that came my way. One example would be putting my name down as a committee member for a society. It would involve me being social, which is something that I wasn't really interested in before.

One of the things my mentor did was encourage me to improve my interaction skills - whether that's having a five-minute conversation or just saying hello to someone and making small talk with someone.

They also encouraged building social skills to help improve career prospects.

My mentor encouraged me to partake in activities that would, I guess, develop my career profile - whether it was through societies or through just involving myself in different things in college.

Mentors offered broader advice than would normally be available to mentees.

A lot of the time our peers are in an echo chamber and your family also is a bit of an echo chamber. So you're getting very limited view on where you can get in future, because they only have so much experience, whether it be your family or your friends.

I wouldn't have had information on how to progress or proceed, know what I wanted to do. And there wasn't much help in college regarding what I wanted to do either, even with the guidance counsellors.

And finally, they opened doors for mentees by helping them make the right connections, explaining the importance of networking and how to do it effectively.

The reason I joined in the first place was to create a network with one person, but it ended up being a whole lot more than that.

He was great for networking and kind of bringing opportunities to me. So it just opened up a lot of avenues.

My mentor played a role in introducing me to people that she knew that were in law, where I would get to sort of discuss different things to do with where I would be going in my career.



Further comments

Feedback on the programme itself included the need for a wider variety of mentors...

Would love to see a wider range of mentors and industries.

... and having the opportunity to meet other mentees.

Meeting people who are in a similar stage of life to me would be very comforting and it would be good professional networking practice.

Suggested improvements to the web-based platform include sending message notifications and an app version would be useful.

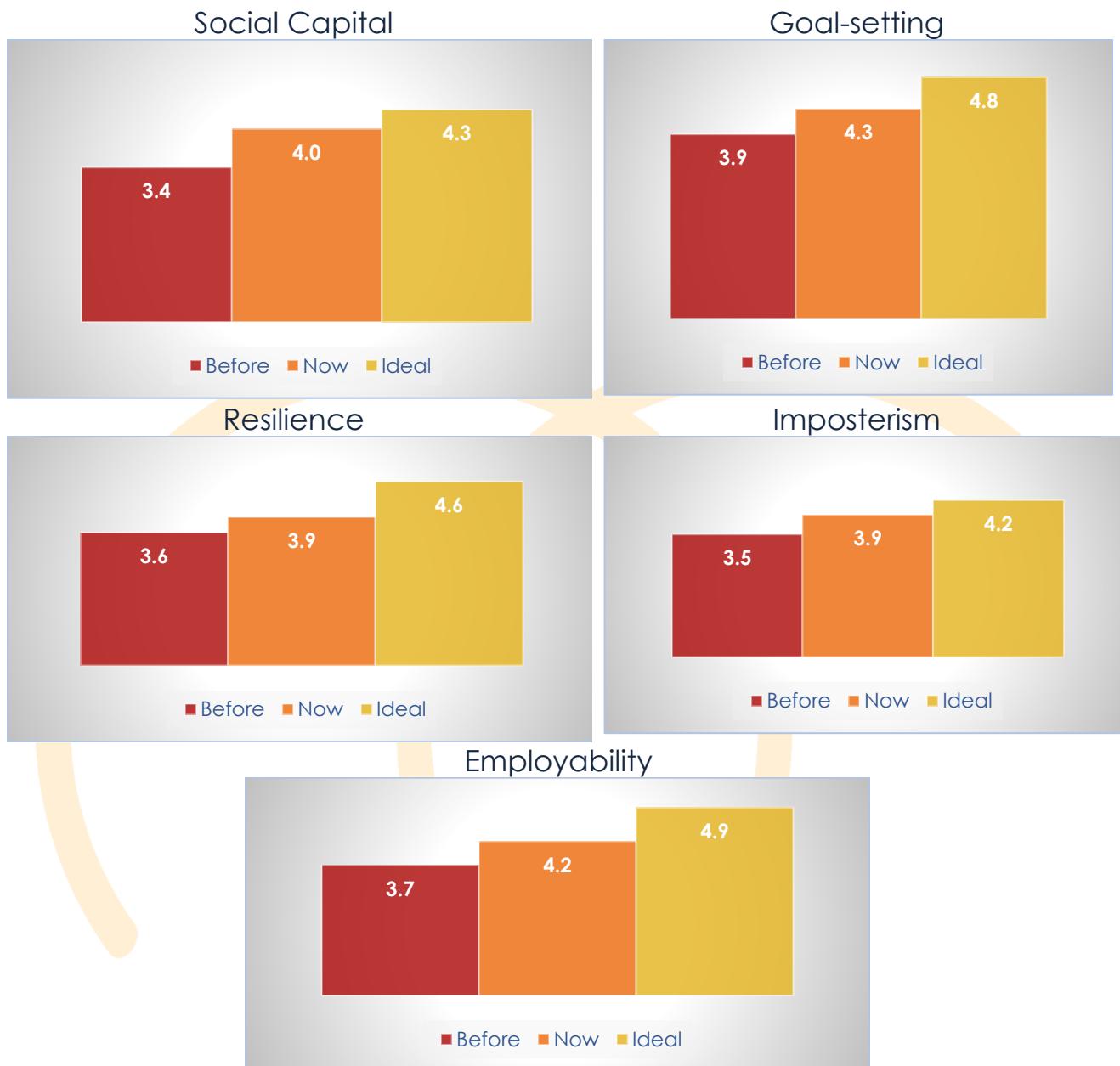
It's a bit awkward and I don't use it on my phone- only laptop.

I don't get every notification- and neither does my mentor. Sometimes we don't see messages for a day or two at a time.



2.5 Quantitative research with mentees

The following charts show mentees' progress from before the mentoring programme to how they see themselves now and how they want to be ideally.



Scores for each domain are calculated as the average across the indicators for that domain and are presented on a scale of 1 to 5. Mentees show a significant increase across all domains and are now closer to the ideal they have for themselves.

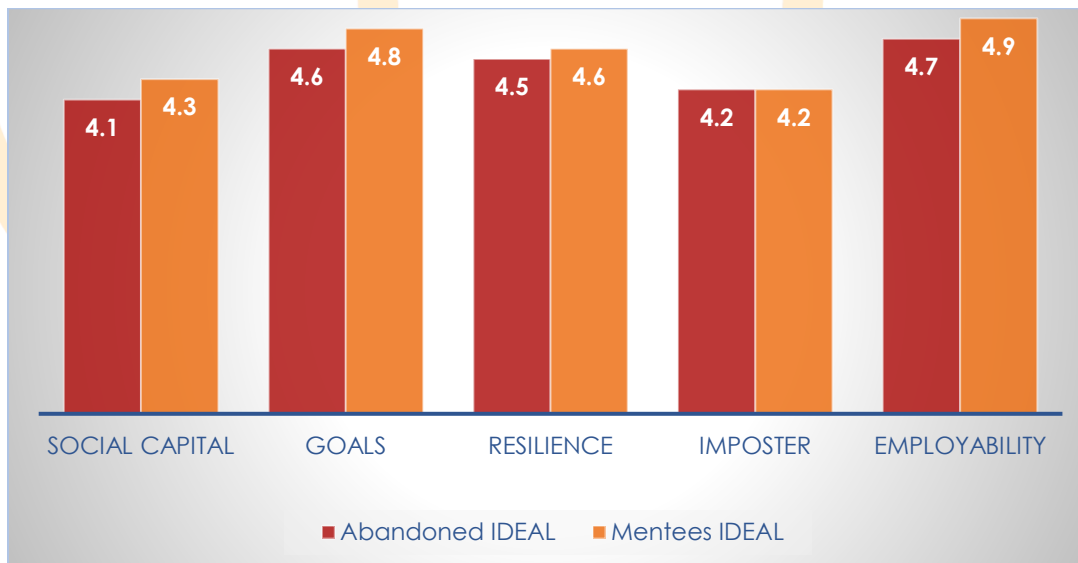
The following charts compare mentees (those who completed the programme or are currently on it) with those who abandoned it, on a scale of one to five.

How I see myself now



Mentees have a more positive perception of themselves currently, especially in social capital and employability.

How I see myself ideally



Mentees have slightly higher ambitions (ideal self) compared to those who abandoned the programme, apart from 'imposterism' where they are similar.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The results speak for themselves. While some differences may be small, there is a consistent pattern of mentees having a more positive sense of self than those who dropped out of the programme, especially in the key areas of social capital and employability. Their ambitions – how they want to be ideally – are also higher across the board.

To extend the impact of Inspire Mentoring, those who abandoned the programme and their reasons for doing so should be examined. Many of those who dropped out mentioned the lack of a suitable mentor.

"I could not find a mentor that suited my needs."

"Did not get good interaction with my mentor."

"The programme was not applicable to students from my course."

While building a cohort of volunteer mentors is difficult, more mentors and a wider variety of mentors are needed.

- Partner with more local/national organisations to broaden the type of mentors
- Utilise online platforms to reach a wider audience and make it easier for potential mentors sign up
- Highlight the benefits of mentoring and the impact it can have
- Ensure that mentors have access to the necessary training and resources

Inspire Mentoring is already reaching out to deserving students in higher education institutions. However, there is a concern that those who most need mentoring are not engaging with the programme. The solution may lie in deeper engagement with third level institutions to embed mentoring as part of the student journey, so that it becomes part of their 'exit strategy' in their final year, plugging the gap between education and employment. This would require stronger partnerships with the educational institutions, working closely with career officers and participating in career days. This would broaden referral pathways for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack the social capital needed to succeed.

The vision of the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population and specifically recommends

The use of mentors/role models from within communities – to enable students to make informed decisions about their post-secondary education options.

There are several cohorts that Inspire Mentoring could target in support of this plan – traveller and Roma students, mature students, those with disabilities and further education graduates.

For many students who go onto further education rather than higher education, their Further Education qualification is an end, and with it they can achieve an entry qualification for the labour market. For others, it is a step along a pathway to higher education. Currently, however, there are not enough opportunities for further education graduates to make the transition to higher education, and the number of students who do so is low. Making the Inspire Mentoring programme available to further education graduates could make a significant contribution in this area.

One finding from the qualitative phase with mentees was the need for interaction with others participating in the programme. By facilitating this, Inspire Mentoring could create a supportive community of learners, where students could effectively become 'peer-to-peer' mentors and share their experiences and learning.

Keeping abreast of current and future developments in technology - AI, VR, AR, and gamification - are ways to make the mentoring process more interesting and engaging. Providing an app version of the platform so that mentees can engage 'on the go'.

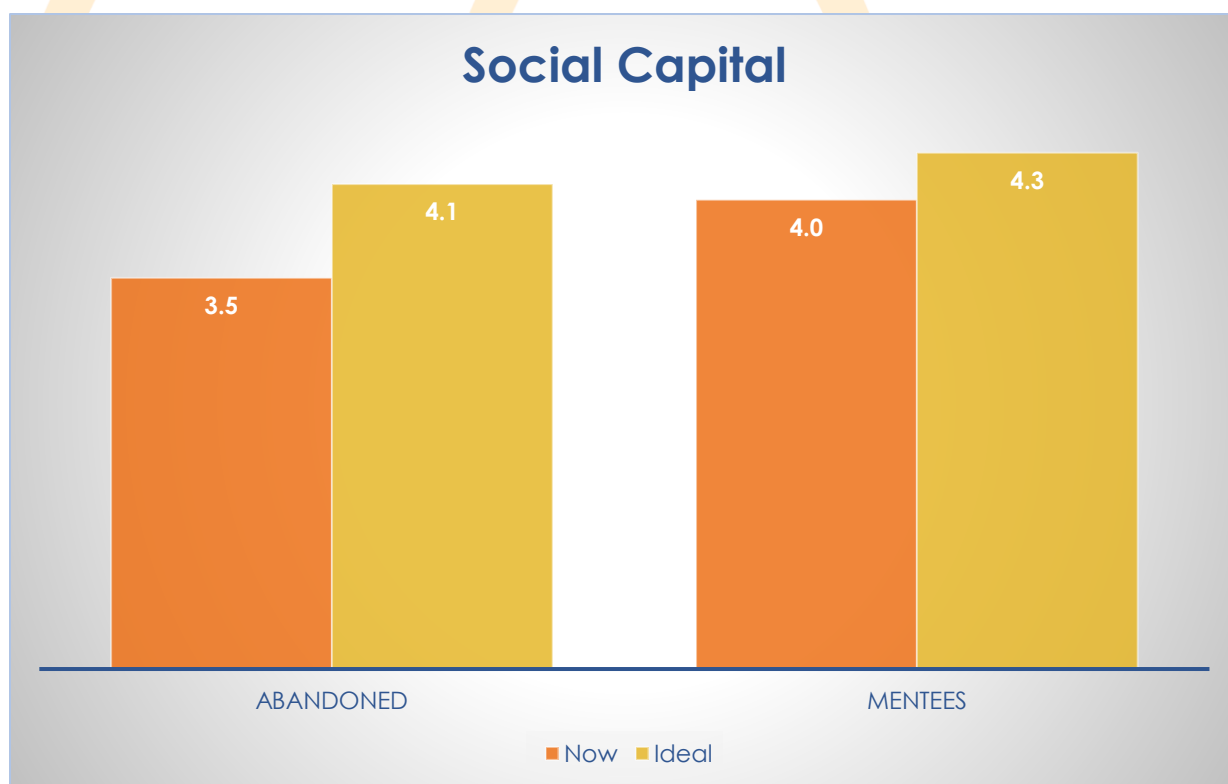
Appendix A. Results in detail

Each domain is examined in detail over the following charts, in which mentees' perceptions of themselves NOW and their IDEAL selves are compared with those who abandoned the programme.

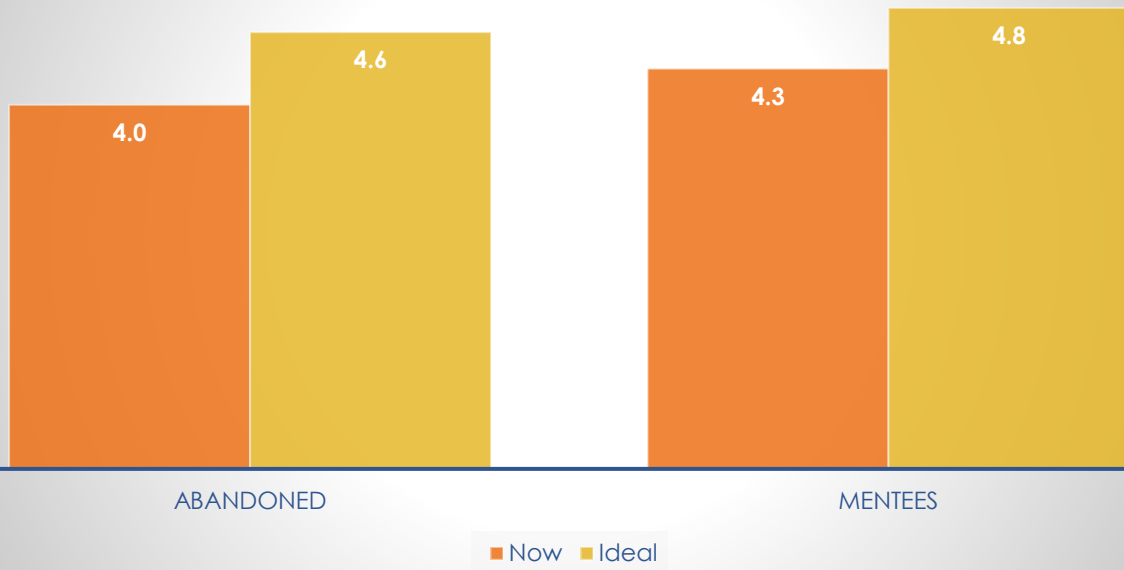
Across the board, regardless of whether students remained in the programme or chose to leave, mean scores reflecting their hopes for their ideal selves are generally quite high. Among the students who stayed with the programme, however, their expectations are slightly higher than those of their counterparts who dropped out.

Those who abandoned the programme have lower perceptions of themselves now, and generally have further to go to reach their ideal selves.

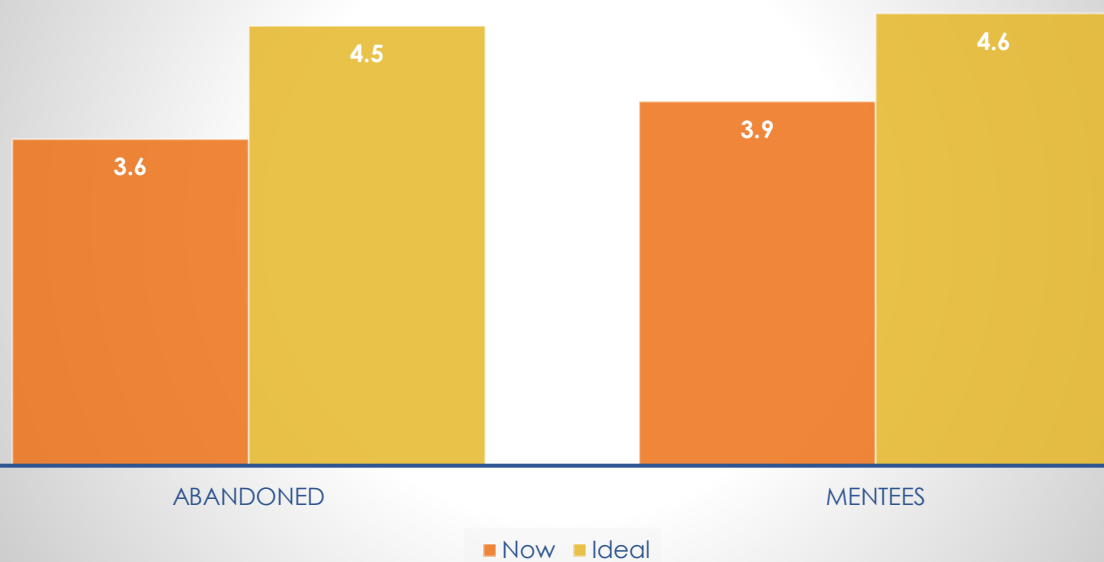
The biggest difference is in employability, with mentees scoring themselves 4.2 compared to 3.6 for those who abandoned the programme.

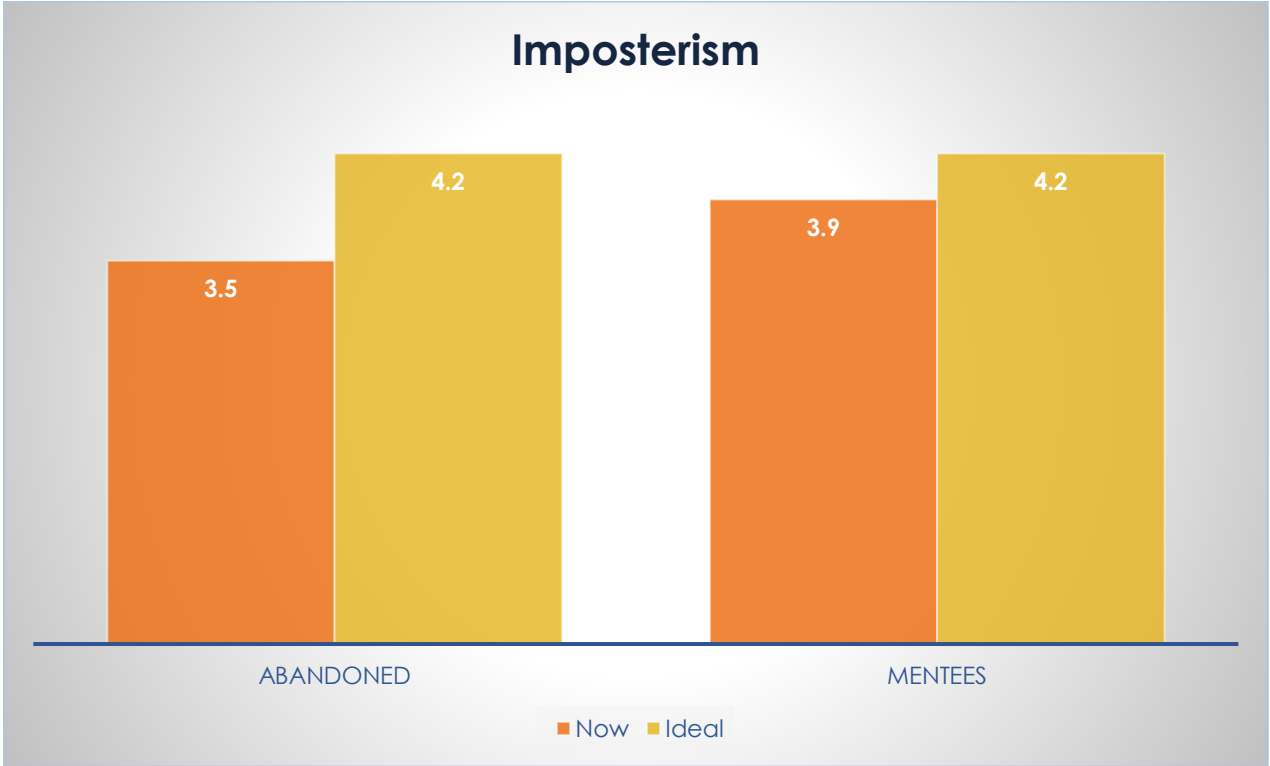


Goals

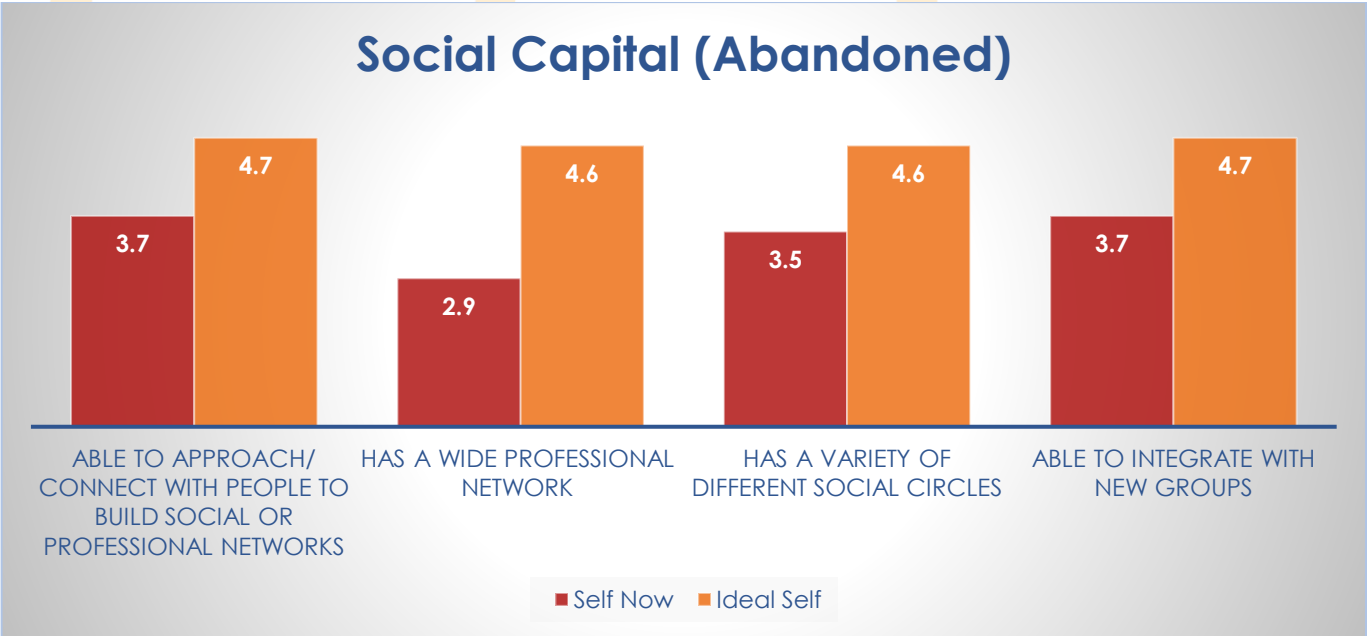
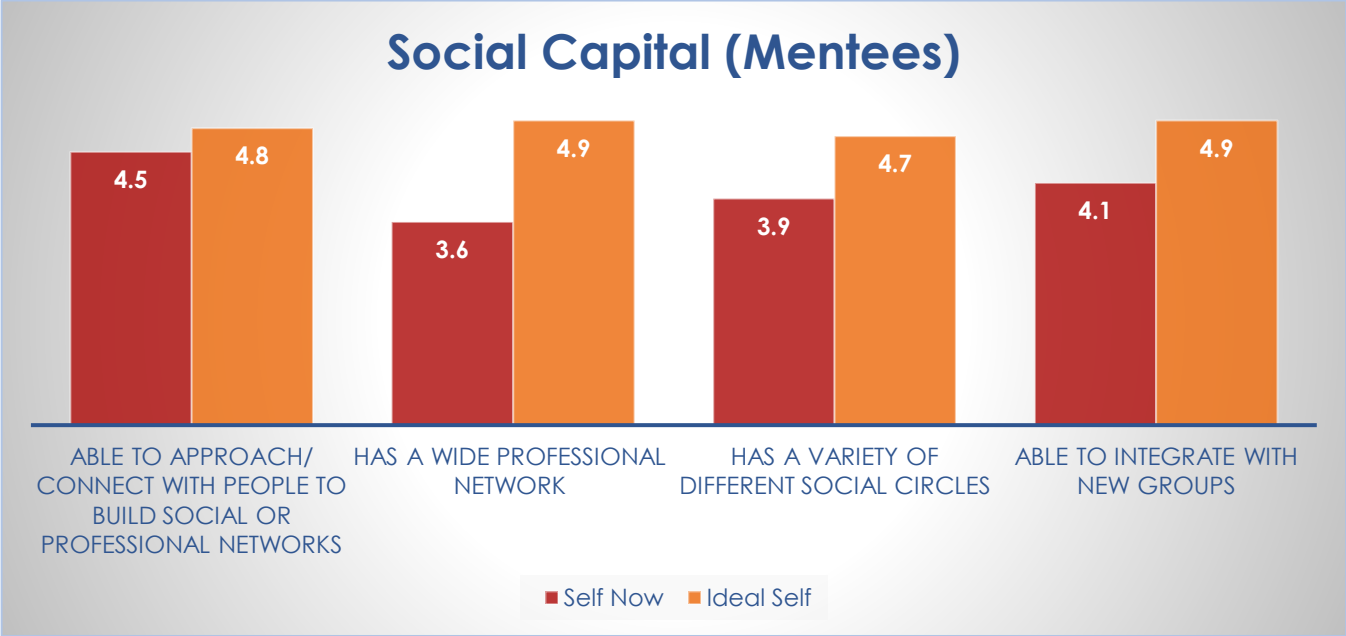


Resilience

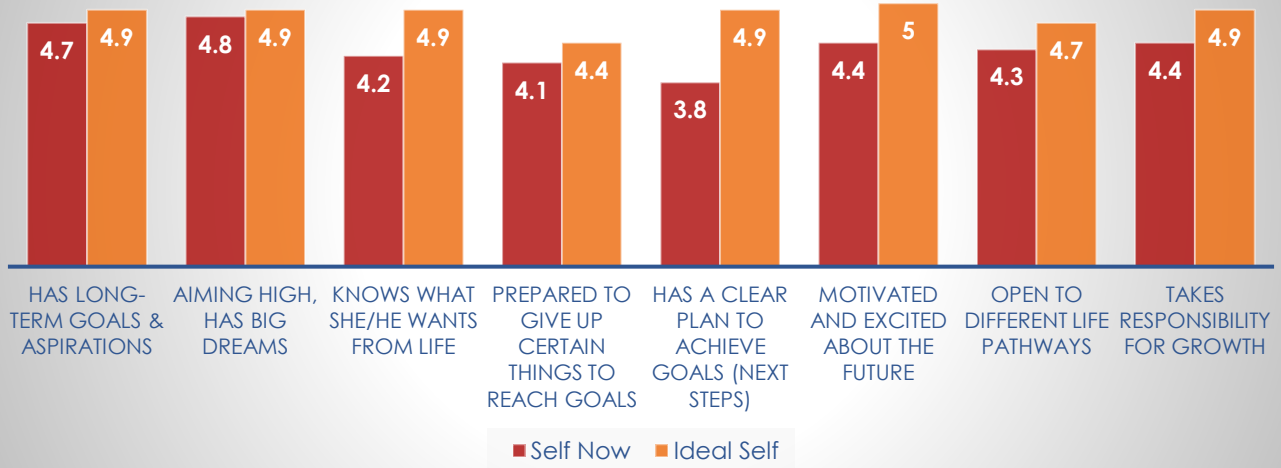




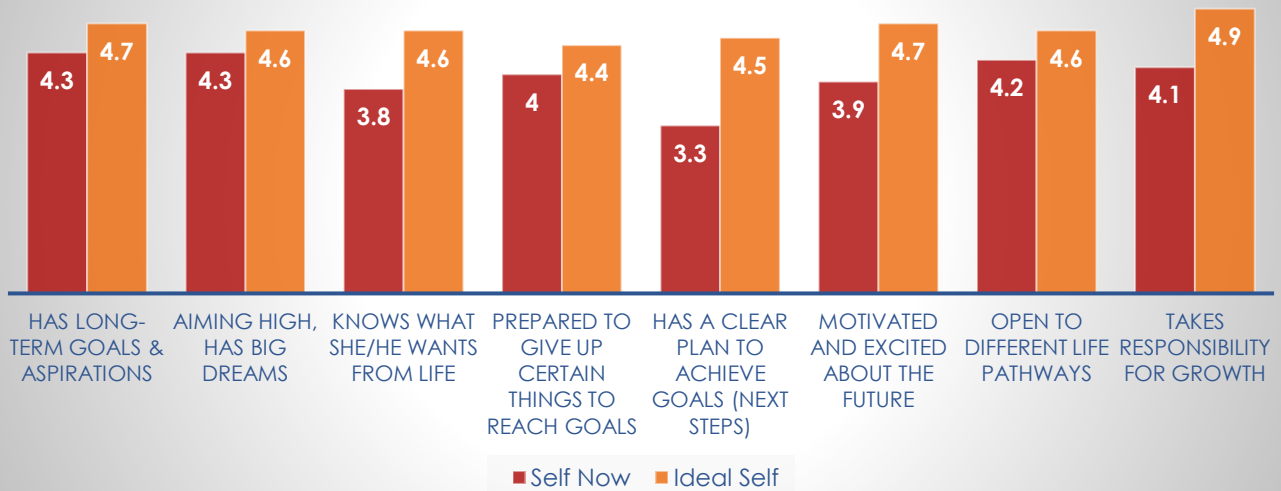
The following charts show the results for each indicator for mentees and for those who dropped out across each of the five domains.



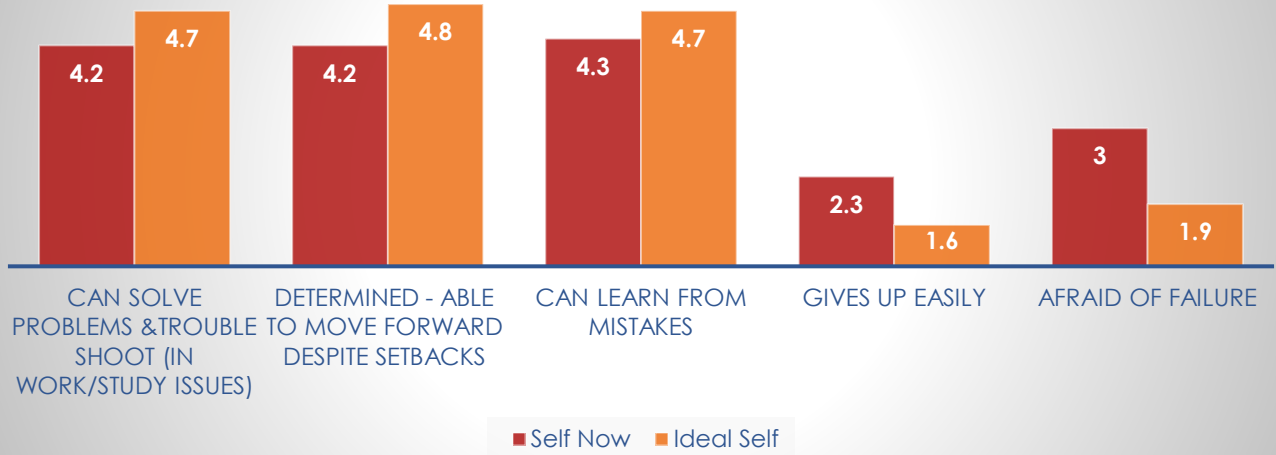
Goals (Mentees)



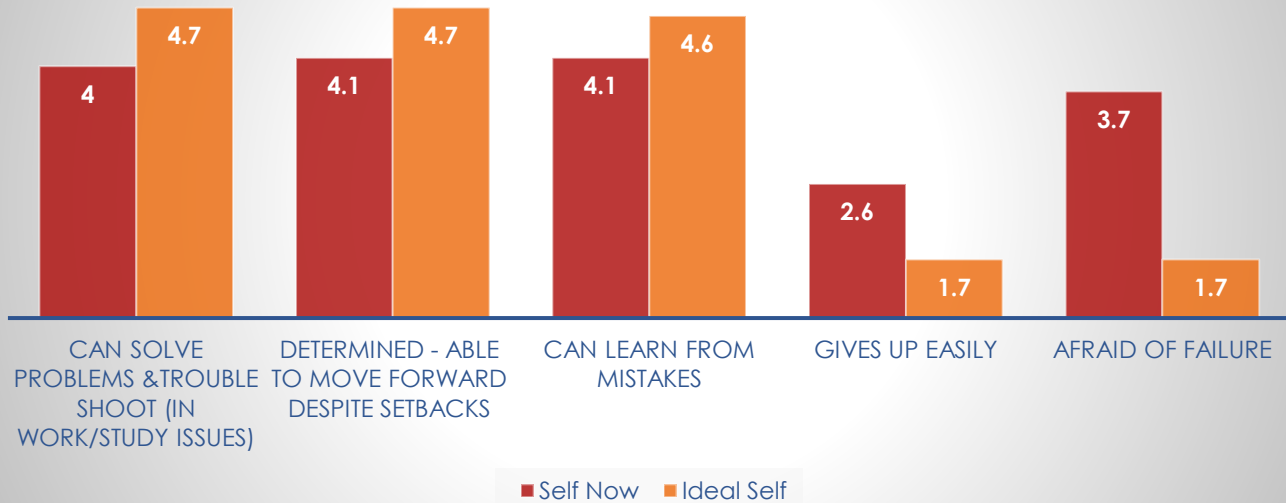
Goals (Abandoned)



Resilience (Mentees)



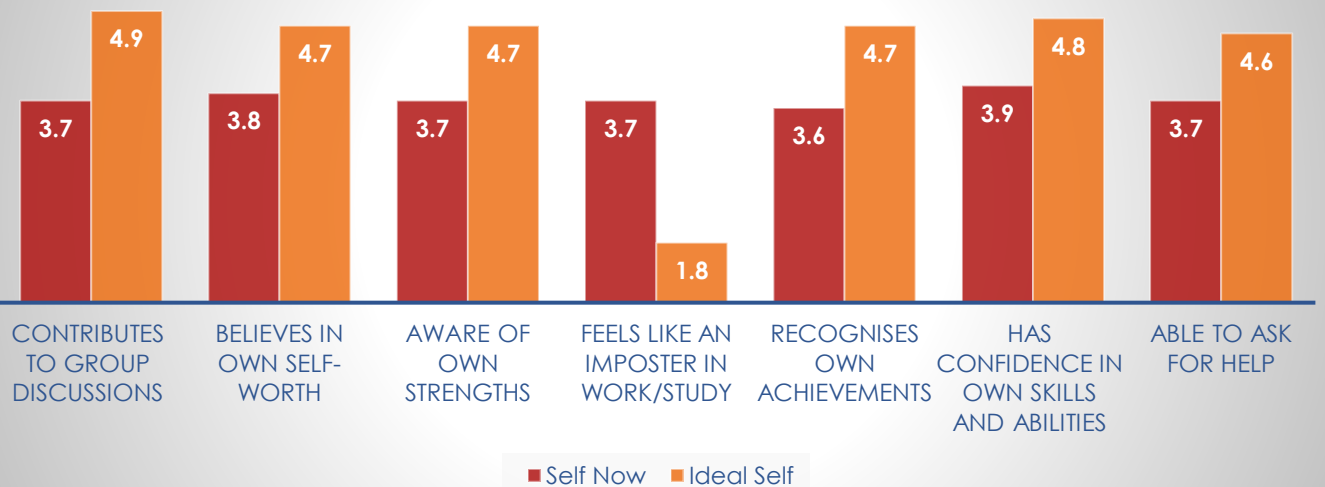
Resilience (Abandoned)



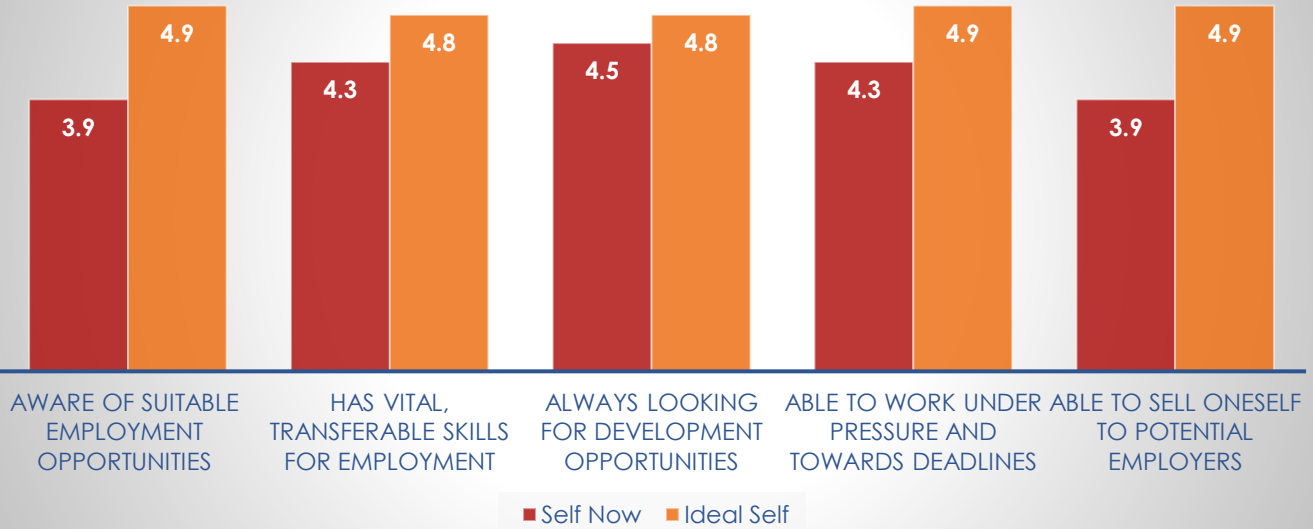
Imposterism (Mentees)



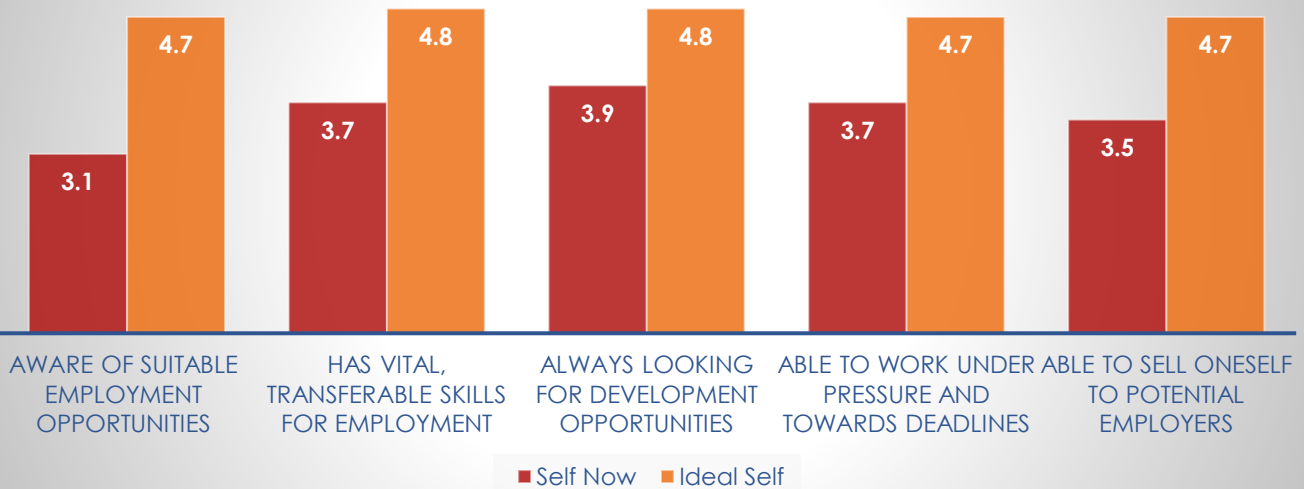
Imposterism (Abandoned)



Employability (Mentees)



Employability (Abandoned)



Appendix B. Literature review

Overview of mentoring practice

The review of mentoring practices revealed that most focus on internal mentorship, used as a career management tool in organisations to nurture and develop staff. In this context, it generally means giving in-person advice and guidance, wisdom and experience, and knowledge and information to help newcomers settle in, or providing a role model for existing staff.

Inspire Mentoring, on the other hand, offers a bespoke online mentoring programme to 18-25 olds from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds by matching them with experienced professionals similar backgrounds. Nevertheless, despite these differences, our review provided some interesting perspectives and relevant indicators of success that can be applied to any mentoring programme, with insights into best practice and lessons to be learned.

The Inspire model of 'community-based' mentoring is practised by One Million Mentors (UK) through the provision of mentors from the local community who have experience and expertise in the world of work. They provide support and advice to young people with unmet needs in the areas of education, employment and social action. They found that effective mentoring relied on a positive relationship and rapport between the mentor and mentee, and that high quality mentoring is based on the following factors:

- clear expectations
- adequate onboarding
- appropriate matching
- empathetic mentors who provide 'authentic' advice and guidance based on their own experiences
- mentors provide a safe space, active listening and support for mentees

During their investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of in-person and online mentoring, they found the following:

- ✓ Mentors appreciated being able to better read the mentee's body language, make eye contact and read other visual cues during in-person mentoring.
- ✓ Mentees agreed that they valued the rapport and ability to build a relationship easily during in-person sessions.
- ✓ Both groups were able to identify the benefits of virtual mentoring, including an ease in scheduling meetings, the ability to share documents, the option to be mentored by someone outside of their local area and that it helped mentees build online experience for the new online world of job interviews and work.
- ✓ Mentors and mentees reported being able to build empathy online.

Student mentorship

Literature on student mentoring is limited and mainly focuses on in-person mentoring of undergraduates by faculty staff or subject specialists.

Beals et al (2021) investigated the impact of faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer mentoring in the WAESO-LSAMP programme in US community colleges, in developing social capital, collaborative support systems, confidence and self-efficacy, combating impostor syndrome and embracing the importance of failure. The WAESO-LSAMP program is an alliance of the Louis Stokes Access to Minority Participation and the Western Alliance to Expand Student Opportunity. It consists of intensive mentoring strategies to stimulate the development and activation of social and cultural capital through the embedding of mentoring chains within STEM environments. The most frequently mentioned themes drawn from the research include:

Impact of collaborative mentoring
Mentoring chain develops through peer-to-peer contact
Programme impact on student academic growth
Develop self-efficacy through learning to fail
Challenging impostor phenomenon

Findings suggest that WAESO-LSAMP activities positively impact community college students in terms of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce

specific achievements (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behaviour and social environment. This influences all manner of human experience, including the goals for which people strive, the amount of energy expended toward goal achievement and likelihood of attaining particular levels of behavioural performance.

The study found that students frequently mentioned having more confidence in their ability to transfer to a four-years college, obtain a bachelor's degree and advance toward graduate education. Being exposed to a community of peers and supportive faculty was a significant part of this growth in confidence.

Programme leaders mentioned that one of their primary goals is to expose students to the campus environment to show them that they have what it takes to be successful, demystifying it. Students concur, and often speak about their increased confidence in being able to navigate the community college environment, STEM education and bureaucratic processes such as locating and applying for financial aid.

Researchers found that mentoring has other benefits including the ability to impact the attraction and recruitment of underrepresented students to STEM, as well as support their retention, progression, and long-term success in various STEM environments. They also found that this intensive form of mentoring is crucial to increasing diversity in the workplace.

A 2020 study of STEM students by Atkins et al (*Looking at Myself in the Future*) seeking to understand the relationship between mentoring and scientific identity found that students with research mentors tended to say they strongly identified as scientists, whereas those who lacked research mentorship varied in their level of scientific identity. Students valued mentors with whom they identified based on demographic similarity or shared values, as well as those who challenged them in their academic and research endeavours.

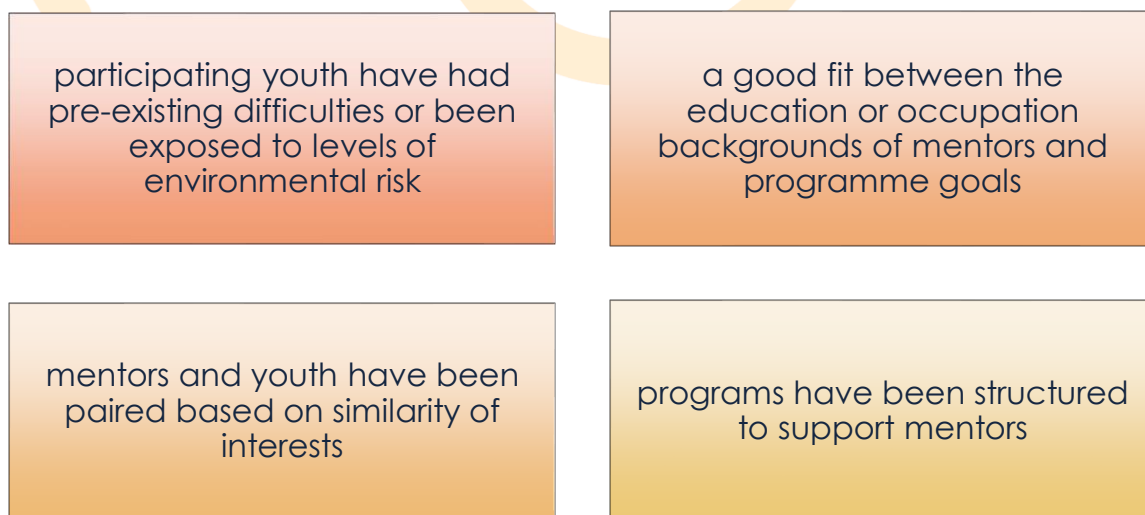
Other studies also found that mentor-mentee pairings with shared beliefs, values and backgrounds are preferred by mentors and mentees, and may yield more positive outcomes (Aikens et al., 2017; Eby et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008; Eby et al., 2000).

An assessment of undergraduate students at a public minority-serving institution in the US found that socioemotional and culturally relevant mentoring were strongly correlated with development of research skills and independence (Haeger & Fresquez, 2016). In this study, socioemotional mentors were perceived as warm and friendly, good listeners and positive role models. Culturally relevant mentors were perceived to understand their mentee's ethnic, gender and class background and to closely relate to that it.

While demographic similarity to mentors may play a role in forming quality relationships, some studies suggest that the success of mentoring is more likely to hinge on the extent to which mentees view themselves as similar to mentors in terms of their values and beliefs, rather than by the extent to which mentors and mentees “match” each other culturally or ethnically.

Atkins et al (2020) found that students characterised their mentoring relationships as successful when they offered a balance of personal closeness and academic accountability, when they built on shared values and identities and when they were multi-directional in nature, with both mentor and mentee sharing responsibility for setting goals and initiating contact.

DuBois et al (2011) found that mentored youth exhibited positive gains across behavioural, social, emotional and academic outcomes, while non-mentored youth exhibited decreases in these domains. They found that gains on outcome measures for the typical young person in a mentoring programme have been modest (equivalent to a difference of nine percentile points from scores of non-mentored youth). However, this level of impact is within the range of effects observed for other types of interventions for children and adolescents. They found that programmes have been more effective when:



The Together platform for mentorship (<https://www.togetherplatform.com/>) describes the key success factors in a mentoring programme:

- ✓ **Matching process:** Some programmes have a formal matching process managed by an administrator, while others might be more informal, allowing mentees and mentors to self-select each other.
- ✓ **Training:** Equipping both mentors and mentees with the necessary skills and set clear expectations for the mentoring relationship.
- ✓ **Goals and objectives:** Setting clear objectives at the outset helps guide the mentoring process and provides a framework for the mentee's growth and development.
- ✓ **Feedback and evaluation:** Regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and evaluations help assess the effectiveness of the mentorship and make necessary adjustments.
- ✓ **Support structures:** This might include resources, regular meetings, workshops, and other support mechanisms to facilitate the mentorship process.

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About the Author

At Interactions Research and Evaluation, we are passionate about understanding how people interact with ideas, products, services and each other. Our projects get to the heart of what motivates people to influence real change.

Our unique research approach to values and motivations and how they link to behaviour are underpinned by a powerful psychological framework in which our principal researchers are qualified, practiced and experienced. We provide in-depth insights into the nature of resistance to change, how to overcome it and bring about the change required for more sustainable behaviour.

We have worked with many national and international partners, including academic and third sector partners, and across various subject matters developing and implementing impact evaluation approaches, collecting and analysing data and producing deliverables.

Eileen O'Connell, Managing Director of Interactions, has over 25 years' experience in applying social marketing and behavioural science theory and concepts to the design, delivery and subsequent evaluation of interventions and programmes. In her role as Evaluation Work Package Leader for a number of national and international projects, she has developed extensive expertise in designing evaluation frameworks and impact indicators for programmes and initiatives focused on societal change and social good, for Irish commercial clients and social enterprises as well as in EU-funded multi-agency projects.

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