**Designing your mentoring programme**

**What? Types of mentoring programmes**

There are many types of mentors you can recruit which each group having some advantages associated with them. Many schools use mentors from multiple backgrounds with choices depending on location, timetabling, mentoring format and the target mentee year group. Make sure to take all these into consideration when deciding what type of mentors you will recruit.

1. **Peer-Mentoring**

This type of mentoring uses older students in the school (usually senior cycle) as mentors for younger students (usually junior cycle). This has many advantages in terms of organisation as all your mentors will have similar availability and will be well known to staff in the school. Peer mentoring can also be very effective at promoting a more open and collaborative atmosphere within the school as it allows different year groups to interact with each other in a structured and positive way outside traditional academic activities. The peer-mentoring relationship can also be especially useful to incoming students adapting to their new environment. A further advantage to peer mentoring is that it allows your programme to affect a greater number of students as student mentors benefit from the relationship as well as their younger mentees. A peer mentoring programme can help develop more responsible and engaged senior cycle students while helping junior cycle students adapt to their new environment, set goals and gain feedback on their progress from their peers.

Although peer mentoring can be hugely effective and beneficial to both the student and wider school community, it does have one significant drawback when considered in the “College For Every Student” context. While student mentors can act as positive role models, they do not enable mentees to gain access to supportive and informative networks outside of the school in the same way that college or community based mentors can.

1. **College Mentors**

This type of mentoring uses current college undergraduates/postgraduates as mentors for second level students. This has the major advantage of exposing mentees to positive role models currently engaged in third level education, allowing mentors to share recent experience of the application and progressions processes. Research has shown that many students from non-traditional backgrounds develop misconceptions and anxieties about the financial and social aspects of college which can be a major obstacle when considering their future. College-going mentors can help their mentees to gain insight into college life and thus help in developing college going aspirations.

1. **Community Adults/Local Business Mentors**

This involves using residents and professionals from the local community with experience of third level education as mentors. This can be very effective in forming stronger links between your school and the local community. Additionally, by developing relationships with people from their local area who have accessed higher education, students can develop greater knowledge and confidence in their own pathways to college.

1. **Staff as Mentors**

Like Peer-Mentoring, there are numerous logistical advantages to using teachers as mentors. Your mentors are already comfortable working with young people, will have similar availability and will be familiar with the school/local community. Despite this familiarity with the students and school, it is critical to develop a strong training programme for staff wishing to act as mentors. It is essential to emphasise the differences between the student-teacher relationship and the mentor-mentee relationship in order to have an effective mentoring programme. When implemented properly, this type of mentoring programme can be hugely beneficial to the relationship between staff and students within the school.

You may wish to use many if not all of these types of mentors when designing the programme to best suit your school or year group. Below is a sample mentoring plan for a ‘whole school’ approach. In this school, peer mentoring between the 5th and 1st year students has been used to help new students integrate well into their new environment as well as developing leadership skills in their senior cycle cohort. College and Community mentors have been used in 2nd and 3rd year to raise student aspirations, develop key skills and help with more informed decision making regarding subject choice for senior cycle. TY students have been linked with mentors from local businesses by integrating the mentoring and work experience programmes. Finally, teachers have acted as mentors for 6th year students allowing for more frequent meetings and feedback on progress and college options in an exam year.

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| Year Group | Mentors | Topics |
| 1st | Peer | Adjusting to school |
| 2nd | College/Local Community | Aspiration Building, Goal Setting |
| 3rd | College/Local Community | Subject Choice for Senior Cycle, |
| TY | Local Business | Career Options |
| 5th | Peer | Acting as mentors for 1st years |
| 6th | Teachers | College Options |

**Where/When? Mentoring Formats/Timetables**

Deciding on an appropriate format and timetable for your mentoring programme is one of the biggest factors that will affect its success. Making sure that both the times and venues suit you’re your mentors and mentees will help ensure consistent engagement in the programme. There are a two important questions you should ask when deciding on a format to best fit your school or class group.

1. **Class time/After School?**

It is important to consider what type of mentors you are planning to recruit and their availability before any timetabling can be done. Some schools run their mentoring sessions during class time or lunch breaks. This has the significant advantage of ensuring good attendance from scholars and makes it easier to find staff for supervision of mentoring sessions. This can also be particularly useful when considering peer mentoring and staff mentoring programmes. One disadvantage is that it can sometimes be impossible for college or community mentors to find time away from work or study during the school day.

After-school mentoring can ensure the maximum number of mentors are available and can also reduce the amount of class time used to run the programme. It can however, in some cases, significantly reduce the number of scholars who engage with the programme as attendance at after school events can be quite variable. Depending on circumstances it may also be more difficult to organise adequate staff supervision for after-school mentoring sessions.

1. **In person/online?**

Online mentoring through email or live video or audio conferencing can be a great way to increase the availability of your mentors. College and community based mentors may find it easier to find the time to log in online at work or in college rather than travelling to the school in person. Online mentoring can also be a great way to link scholars internationally. It can be difficult to timetable when access to IT equipment in the school is limited and is often less preferable to students and mentors. The in-person interaction can often be quite important in developing raport and helping build a lasting engagement with both mentors and mentees. In cases where e-mentoring is used, it can be beneficial to adopt a blended approach by organising some sessions in person such as a launch or end of year celebration.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions as each school and community will have different needs and circumstances. The time and format for mentoring should be carefully chosen to best suit your specific case.

**Who? Mentor Recruitment**

Before mentor recruitment can begin, you must first determine the ratio of mentees to mentors you wish to have for your sessions. This may vary depending on the type of mentoring, the age of the mentees and the number of mentors available. The smaller the ratio of mentees to mentors the more time the mentor will be able to spend with each mentee. However, having a group of mentees rather than one to one mentoring can allow for group based activities and the incorporation of collaborative learning into the mentoring experience. Having between 2 and 5 mentees to each mentor can help strike a balance between these two considerations. The ratio you decide will determine the number of mentors you need to recruit.

Although finding peer and staff mentors can be quite straightforward, it can often be crucial to recruit partners from outside the traditional school environment. There a number of avenues of recruitment available to secondary schools with some listed below.

1. **Alumni**

Linking current students with past pupils with experience in third level education can be a powerful motivator for scholars. Familiarity with the specific school environment and local community can be help encourage mentors to volunteer and can even aid in developing raport with mentees. Continuous engagement with past pupils can also increase overall alumni involvement in other school events such as careers fairs, fundraisers etc. Developing and managing an up to date alumni database is key to easily maintaining mentor recruitment

1. **College based Mentors**

Recruiting undergraduate and post graduate mentors can be a great way to increase your mentees knowledge and confidence regarding their own third level options. If your school is linked with a third level institution, it is advisable to recruit some of your mentors through those links. If you do not have any formal links with third level education, consider contacting colleges in your area with recruitment proposals. Many of your alumni may also be currently be enrolled in third level courses. Drawing on your alumni base can help ensure your mentors come from a range of courses and institutions.

1. **Community based Mentors**

Mentors recruited from the local community and businesses can be key in developing and maintaining useful partnerships with local organisations that can support the school in a number of ways. You should consider sending letters or emails to local parents associations, Community groups such as VDP and businesses with information about your mentoring programme.

If you are recruiting from multiple sources it can be useful to use a centralised application system so you have all your mentor details in the same place and format. Sending out a link to an online application is the easiest way to achieve this. Surveymonkey.com is a powerful tool that can be used to create custom applications allowing you to collect and store information on your mentors such as background, availability and contact details. *See attached instruction sheet on using survey monkey.*

**How? Managing your mentoring programme**

Once you have timetabled your mentoring and recruited for your programme you will need to train and manage your mentors. It is good practice to assign more than one staff member for this as dealing with numerous mentors and mentees can be time consuming.

1. **Training?**

Mentors need to be trained before any mentoring sessions can take place. A good training programme will introduce mentors to the school and set out the expectations of the programme, clearly defining roles and responsibilities. It should also give mentor trainees a chance to ask questions and discuss their own thoughts on the programme each other. Trinity Access 21 offer train-the-trainer workshops to help you to develop a tailored training programme. Contact Rónán Smith at smithr8@tcd.ie for further details.

It is critical that you familiarise your mentors with the child protection policies within your school. Mentors should be given a copy of these guidelines and should be Garda vetted by the school. During training it can be helpful to provide examples highlighting child protection issues and demonstrating best practice to mentors.

In order to ensure mentoring covers the topics you wish your groups to explore, you should provide suitable scaffolding for both your mentors and mentees. This can be achieved by giving out sets of instructions, worksheets and activities/assignments in advance of each session. *See sample materials provided for junior cycle students.*

1. **Supervision & Feedback?**

Adequate supervision from staff is essential for your mentors as well as mentees. The number of staff required to supervise the mentoring sessions will depend on the venue (i.e number of rooms), type (online/in-person) and the mentor background (peer, community/college based). It is also important that a staff member be contactable outside the session times to address any issues that might arise for mentors around child protection, behaviour and scheduling. Assigning each CFES team member a number of mentors for whom they are responsible for supervising can be a good way to share workload. Gathering feedback from your mentors through online poling or focus groups at the end of each year can help improve your programme going forward.

1. **Scheduling?**

Once you have decided on a timetable that best matches your mentors and mentees availability, you will have assign mentors to a group for the duration of the programme. Depending on the number of mentors this can be a time consuming process when done through individual communication with mentors. An easy way to match mentors with specific sessions is to create an online poll allowing mentors to see the times available and to sign up to whichever one suits best. Doodle.com is a free online service that allows you to create and manage these types of polls. *See attached instruction sheet on using doodle polls.*

1. **Motivating your mentors?**

Recognising and celebrating the contribution of your mentors to the school is an important part of maintaining a strong programme. Having an end of year celebration for your mentors and mentees can be a great way to achieve this. Inviting mentors to other schools events such as awards ceremonies, open days and graduations can also help encourage further participation.

Tips: Peer & Teachers & e-mentoring