



## **Transforming Lives: The first 18 months of the MCR Pathways Mentoring Programme**

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**Glasgow**

**November 2014**

***Suggested bibliographic reference:***

Fassetta, G., Siebelt, L. & Mitchell, I. (2014). *Transforming lives: The first two years of the MCR Pathways mentoring programme*. Glasgow MCR Pathways.



## Foreword

The MCR Pathways Mentoring Programme is a collaboration between four partners: the MCR Charitable Foundation (a trust founded by Dr Iain MacRitchie, CEO of MCR Holdings and a Strathclyde alumnus); Glasgow City Council; the University of Strathclyde; and CELCIS (the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland).

The programme is imbued with the MCR Charitable Foundation's three key values of *motivation*, *commitment* and *resilience*. The partnership was formed to realise a vision for the most disadvantaged pupils in Glasgow secondary schools, in particular looked after children. The vision is that they can achieve significantly more in education as a result of having the support of a volunteer adult mentor.

The programme, which grew out of the MCR Foundation's experience during five years of providing scholarships and related support for young people, began in January 2013 in three secondary schools in the east of Glasgow. One year later it was operating in six schools, and the programme has ambitions to scale up across the city in the next few years.

The programme is school-based and aimed at young people who are 'looked after' by the local authority or have previously been looked after. Volunteer mentors are recruited for their skills in relating to young people and for their knowledge of the various pathways into further and higher education and employment. The volunteers have been recruited by appeals to university alumni, the third sector, major organisations, the business community, and through word of mouth. The programme has benefited from the support of *The Herald* newspaper which has run a series of feature articles and news stories during 2014.

This report is the first output from a research group set up by the programme's governance group to help inform the direction of travel. There are three aims for this work. First, it is an opportunity to take stock: what has been achieved during the first 18 months? Second, it will help to identify research questions to guide further reviews of the programme. Third, it is intended as a vehicle for stimulating discussion among everyone involved in the programme about what it is that we intend to achieve and what we need to do to be successful.

I am grateful to the following individuals for their help with this work: Giovanna Fassetta, Lindsay Siebelt and Iain Mitchell for compiling the report; Donna Cunningham, Lisa Murphy, Nyree Tobias and Drew McNaught for supplying information; Robin Dewar for guidance on the web-based aspects of the programme; Iain McLeod of the University's School of Social Work and Social Policy for directing the work; and Professor Tony McGrew, Executive Dean of the University's Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, and Jennifer Davidson, Director of CELCIS, for funding the research.

**Dr Graham Connelly**

**Chair of the MCR Pathways Research Committee**

## Executive Summary

- The MCR Pathways Mentoring Programme involves four partners: the MCR Charitable Foundation; Glasgow City Council; the University of Strathclyde; and CELCIS (the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland).
- The partnership was formed to realise a vision for looked after young people in Glasgow secondary schools, which is that they can achieve significantly more in education as a result of having the support of a volunteer adult mentor.
- The programme currently operates in six Glasgow secondary schools and has ambitions to expand across the city. There are plans to expand to include 10 schools and a total of 250 mentoring relationships in 2015.
- At the time of the data collection, 96 mentors had been recruited, 54 of whom were matched and meeting with a mentee. More female (58%) than male (42%) mentors had been recruited, across a broad age range, though 60% were in the 51-70 age-group. Most mentors were educated to at least first degree level. Almost half were retired; of those in work their employers were equally divided between public and private sectors.
- The modal personal strength volunteered by mentors during recruitment was being a good listener.
- Considerably more female pupils (63%) than males (37%) were being mentored. Although mentees are in all of the secondary school year groups, 39 of the 54 (72%) were in S4 or S5.
- The principal target group for MCR Pathways is young people looked after by the local authority. Of the 54 matched and meeting, 59% were currently looked after, while a third were formerly looked after and the rest were not looked after but were recruited to the programme on the advice of their school.
- Mentors indicated during recruitment their willingness to help young people in a broad range of ways, including with homework and coursework, offering career advice and helping them to find a suitable work placement.
- Positive informal feedback about mentoring relationships has been volunteered by mentors and mentees. Useful feedback about how to develop the programme is beginning to emerge.
- Many of the young people took part in the Strathclyde Summer Experience in 2013 and 2014. Feedback from these young people indicates that this is a valuable experience which offers useful insight about university life.
- There are plans to carry out more research in the Programme during 2015 and the conference for which this report was compiled is regarded as an important opportunity to engage in discussion about the data emerging and identify the questions which should guide further inquiry.

## **Introduction**

Developing close relationships with caring adults is essential to ensure the healthy development of youth (Elsley, 2013). Having access to a number of more expert others to which the young person can turn to for guidance and support has been directly associated with positive behavioural, academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Chan et al., 2013). This is particularly important for young people who, for various reasons, may not have access to consistent and positive role models within the nuclear family (Spencer et al., 2010a). In this instance, non-parental others can take on the supportive role young people need and become a point of reference in their lives.

Mentoring relationships can take on a variety of forms. Ties with mentoring figures can occur naturally, when young people establish caring and supporting connections with older youth and/or adults they encounter in their daily lives, in the world of school, sport or among extended family (Collins et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012a). In other cases, mentoring is offered as part of planned programmes aimed at providing guidance figures in the lives of young people who may be experiencing challenges. Mentoring programmes can be community-based or school-based. Despite structural differences, both community-based and school-based mentoring programmes focus on fostering young people's positive development through the provision of support by dedicated adult volunteers who can establish a relationship of care with young mentees (Herrera et al., 2011).

In the next sections we will look at the ways in which mentoring is defined and understood in the literature, and at the benefits identified by different authors in relation to mentoring programmes. We will then look at the main challenges that mentoring can pose, and at the training, on-going support and guidelines needed to ensure that mentor/mentee relationships are as stable and as beneficial as possible.

### **Mentoring: Definitions and Understandings**

Youth mentoring is defined as the development of a relationship of trust between a young person and an older, more experienced non-parental figure. As Elsley (2013, p. 12) notes, mentoring is:

*A relationship-based approach to supporting an individual... by another or others. It should include both goal orientated and social aspects of mentoring, based on the intrinsic value of relationships and the consent of the child or young person. It should be undertaken formally by trained mentors, taking into account existing relationships with family members and other informal mentor-type relationships with trusted adults.<sup>1</sup>*

The goals of the mentoring relationship may be of a practical and immediate nature - such as those directed towards a specific educational achievement - but the relationship should also be socially

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<sup>1</sup> Italics in original.

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oriented. Mentors offer encouragement and guidance to the mentee (Chan et al., 2013; Nuñez et al., 2013) and promote positive developmental outcomes by acting as role models and by providing emotional support and positive feedback. In becoming reassuring and constructive role-models, mentors have the potential to improve adolescents' behaviour, self-perception and general attitude (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). While all young people who experience relational and/or academic difficulties can benefit from a mentor's guidance, the social support that a mentoring relationship offers is particularly valuable in the case of vulnerable young people (Collins et al., 2009; Spencer, 2006). These are youth who do not always have positive adult role models readily available within the family (Herrera et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; DuBois et al., 2011) and who may be, or have been, in foster care (Spencer et al., 2010a).

Mentoring programmes originated in the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Spencer et al., 2010a). Programmes may be targeted towards specific outcomes, such as improving academic performance (e.g. Nuñez et al., 2013) or countering the experience of bullying (e.g. Elledge et al., 2010). Sosu and Ellis (2014) note the potentially crucial role in closing the attainment gap that mentoring programmes can have. However, more generally, mentoring aims to provide disadvantaged youth with a non-parental figure for social and emotional support (e.g. Spencer, 2006 and 2007; DuBois et al., 2007; DeWit et al., 2007). In all cases, the ultimate aim of the mentoring programme is to promote positive development for the young people (Spencer, 2006), increasing their confidence and feelings of self-worth, improving their educational outcomes (Ahrens et al., 2011) and promoting their health and well-being (DeWit et al., 2007). The community-based Big Brothers Big Sisters organisation provides the largest mentoring programme in the USA (Elledge et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012a) and serves thousands of youth around the country. It is now active in several other countries worldwide, including the UK<sup>2</sup>, under the umbrella organisation *Big Brothers Big Sisters International*<sup>3</sup>.

A report by the Centre for Policy Studies in 2008 identified 3,500 mentoring schemes in the UK, of which a large proportion were youth mentoring schemes (Meier, 2008).

### **Benefits and Open Questions**

While more traditional community-based mentoring programmes focus on a range of activities, school-based mentoring focuses on the improvement of young people's academic achievement through regular help with school-work, as well as on offering emotional support, guidance and companionship (Herrera et al, 2011; Spencer et al. 2010a; Chan et al., 2013; Collins et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2012a; Schwartz et al., 2012b). School-based interventions are shorter term than those carried out within community-based programmes, and are usually less frequent (Spencer et al., 2010a). While this may result in less clear-cut outcomes, school-based programmes have been

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbbsola.org/en/Home/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbbsi.org/>

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shown to have positive influence on young people's perception of their academic abilities, an important aspect of academic achievement (Schwartz et al., 2012a; Sosu and Ellis, 2014). Moreover, the more structured, planned nature of school-based interventions can also have a positive influence on mentor recruitment, being less time-consuming than the more traditional community-based approaches, and confined to the safe space of the educational institution, thus making participation more attractive for prospective volunteers (Elledge et al., 2010).

Some authors report a need for caution in relation to the effectiveness of school-based mentoring programmes (Ahrens et al., 2011; DuBois et al., 2011; Elledge et al., 2010), but overall there is agreement on the positive benefits that it can have on the behavioural, social, emotional, and academic aspects of young people's development (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 2010a). For example, an analysis of 19 evaluations of mentoring programmes in the USA found that those which supported children and young people in areas such as education, social skills and relationships were more effective than those which focused on behaviour problems (Lawner & Beltz, 2013). Further, a UK-based study of 181 mentoring relationships among young people leaving care found that mentoring was valued by young people, supporting them with relationships, confidence building and impacting on their well-being (Clayden & Stein, 2005).

Even though effects on academic performance may be short-lived (Herrera et al., 2011) or overall modest in magnitude (Spencer et al., 2010a), there is evidence to suggest that school-based mentoring has positive consequences for young people's confidence levels. Mentoring can help to prevent school drop-out and enhance young people's educational experience (DuBois et al., 2011; Herrera et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2012a; Sosu & Ellis, 2014). Even limited gains in academic performance can translate into improved relationships with parents and teachers as young people become more self-reliant, and this, in turn, can lead to long-term benefits for young people's social and emotional wellbeing (Elledge et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2013). Moreover, as Spencer et al. (2010b) note, contrary to common perception, mentors are not necessarily filling a void in young people's lives but are, in some cases, complementing the work of other important adults whose points of view, expectations and concerns also need to be taken into account for the mentoring relationship to be fully effective.

Several elements contribute to determine the extent to which school-based mentoring is effective in helping young people achieve better academic and social outcomes. The length, intensity and quality of the mentoring tie is crucial to the success of the mentoring programme, and studies demonstrate that longer-term, more frequent interventions that lead to greater emotional closeness have more lasting improvement (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Collins et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2010a; Schwartz et al., 2012a). Grossman and Rhodes (2002) identify mentoring that lasts for 12 months or longer as having the greatest benefits, with shorter mentoring periods losing effectiveness in direct proportion to their decrease in length.



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The structure of the programme also needs to be considered. As Schwartz et al. (2012b) observe, some school-based mentoring programmes are, in fact, timed to coincide with planned school lessons, and young people are taken out of class for the mentoring. Other programmes focus on extra-curricular mentoring outwith the school hours, during the lunch break or in the afternoons/weekends. Schwartz et al. (2012b) argue that programmes that take place after school provide greater benefits to academically vulnerable youth, as missing class time may further exacerbate difficulties and send the message that some school subjects are not important.

Finally, mentors' attitudes and personality traits also influence the outcomes of the mentoring relationship, and more lasting and wider reaching positive results can be found when mentors show themselves to be available, non-judgemental, and empathic (Ahrens et al., 2011). Lasting relationships are also more easily established when mentors and mentees have shared interests and take pleasure in the same activities (DuBois et al., 2011). Bernard and Marshall (2001, p. 6) have noted that mentor-mentee matches should be 'safe', focused on the needs of the child, and 'built to last'.

On the other hand, different interests and relationship styles between mentors and mentees may lead to early termination of the mentoring relationship (Ahrens et al., 2011). Another factor which may cause the premature dissolution of a mentoring dyad is relocation of a mentor or mentee (moving home and/or school), and indeed this is not uncommon in the case of looked after children (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Mentors' unrealistic expectations about the requirements of mentoring, or about the extent of change they have the power to affect in young people's lives, can also lead to early termination of the relationship (Spencer, 2007; Spencer et al., 2010a). The interference of mentees' family members and mentors' inability to bridge cultural differences are further possible causes of early termination (Spencer, 2007). Mentoring relationships can also be ended by young people if they do not feel that the mentoring is making any difference or because they perceive mentors as too overbearing or demanding (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

Some authors have investigated the effects of gender and ethnic differences on the mentoring dyad. Literature emanating from the USA shows that mentors tend to be predominantly female and white; and that mentees are balanced in terms of gender but are disproportionately from minority ethnic backgrounds (Herrera et al., 2011; Spencer et al., 2010a). However, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) note that gender and ethnicity do not appear to have a substantial effect on the length of the mentoring relationship, and that other factors such as age of mentor and mentee and mentor's income seem to have more influence on the formation of a lasting bond. Further research needs to be carried out to explore the effects of demographical differences in the mentor/mentee relationship and to highlight any challenges that 'mismatching' may pose for a lasting bond.

Early termination of the mentoring relationship can have a damaging effect for already vulnerable young people (Spencer et al., 2010a; Schwartz et al., 2012a), increasing their sense of worthlessness and their mistrust of adults. In particular, in the case of young people who have already experienced

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difficulties in maintaining contact with one or both parents, the withdrawal of a mentor can further exacerbate the challenges the young people experience in forming positive relationships with others (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However, when a mentoring relationship becomes established, it is likely to improve further with time and to provide the young person with a constant source of support and security. As well as having an increasingly positive effect on young people's lives, this can also modify their more general attitude to relationships, with lasting improvement in other social relations (ibid).

### **Operational Issues**

In order to maximise the effectiveness of mentoring programmes, and to avoid the mentoring relationship running into difficulties (including terminating the relationship early), a number of authors stress the need to train mentors to recognise the specific needs of the young people, the requirements of the role, and the challenges they may have to confront (e.g. Chan et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2010a; DuBois et al., 2011). Clear guidelines and on-going support are also identified as essential elements of mentoring programmes, to ensure that mentors' expectations are realistic, that objectives are achievable, and that any challenges or doubts mentors may experience find an appropriate forum within which they can be addressed (Spencer, 2010a; Schwartz et al., 2012a).

Carrying out a rigorous evaluation of mentoring programmes is also recognised as an important factor in guaranteeing positive outcomes, and practice should always be research-based to avoid any harmful consequences to young people (Herrera et al., 2011; DuBois et al., 2011; Durlak, 2011). It has also been noted in relation to resilience-based mentoring in the USA that effective mentoring relationships are supported by strong programme management (Bernard & Marshall, 2001). The collection of data should allow for comparison between different programmes, so programmes should provide a degree of consistency while making the necessary adaptations for specific contexts (Chan et al., 2013; Spencer, 2006). Being able to compare programmes aids the identification of best practice, allowing future programmes to be responsive to specific needs (Spencer et al., 2010a; DuBois et al., 2011). Sosu and Ellis (2014) emphasise the lack of systematic evaluation of mentoring programmes in Scotland, and stress the importance of evidence-based practice to ensure that mentoring most effectively supports the academic achievement of disadvantaged students.

### **Conclusions**

Mentoring allows young people who may lack positive role models in their lives to establish a connection with an adult who can support and guide them. The benefits of mentoring include enhanced self-confidence and psychological wellbeing, as young people can find a point of reference in an adult volunteer who is available to offer help and reassurance. This is particularly important for vulnerable young people who experience challenging relationships with one or both parents and/or looked after children. Forming an attachment with a non-parental adult may be the only way for

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some young people to find a role model and to experience forms of relating that are positive and constructive.

Traditionally mentoring has taken place primarily within the community, but school-based mentoring programmes are becoming increasingly popular as they can help tackle young people's academic difficulties. This may help to improve attainment and can also build young people's confidence and self-esteem, enhance their general psychological wellbeing and, ultimately, lead to better relationships with others and to improved general behaviour.

In order to ensure positive outcomes mentoring programmes need to be based on careful evaluation and practice needs to be guided by research aimed at identifying potential pitfalls and at maximising positive experiences.

### **The MCR Pathways Mentoring Programme**

The MCR Pathways programme aims to provide volunteer adult mentors for the most disadvantaged young people, principally those who are 'looked after' by the local authority. The programme - which received pilot funding from the MCR Charitable Foundation, Glasgow City Council, the University of Strathclyde, CELCIS and Scottish Government - currently operates in six Glasgow schools, and all looked after young people within those schools are invited to take part. The programme has targeted pupils principally in the third year (S3) of secondary school. The rationale for this approach is that by this stage the young people are established in the school and known to staff, but it is also the time when the difficulties some pupils have coping with school become most evident. Targeting younger rather than senior pupils is deliberate to enable the benefits of mentoring to influence engagement with school, supporting young people to focus on achievement, gaining qualifications and planning for post-school opportunities. Some older pupils were involved in the programme because they had been recruited to an earlier pilot activity for senior pupils. Since the aim is for mentoring relationships to be maintained throughout the young person's school career, in time pupils from S3 to S6 (and post-school) will be engaged in the programme.

#### **Looked After Children**

Children can be looked after 'at home' (under compulsory supervision measures by the children's hearing system), or 'away from home' (where a hearing specifies a place of residence which may be in foster care, kinship care or residential care)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Readers unfamiliar with these terms will find more information at [www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org)

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While about 1% of the 0-18 population in Scotland is a looked after child, the proportion is considerably higher in Glasgow at 3.2%.<sup>5</sup> Data from the 2013 Pupil Census shows that there are 10,745 looked after children in Scottish schools, 4,592 (43%) of whom are in secondary schools<sup>6</sup>. Looked after young people tend to leave school at an earlier age than young people who are not looked after – with around 80% leaving school at the minimum age of 16 or younger, compared with 30% of all school leavers, according to Scottish Government statistics<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, on average they tend to leave school with fewer qualifications (though some do very well), have poorer attendance records, and have higher risk of being excluded from school than non-looked after children. Although there have been improvements in recent years, looked after children on average are less likely to go on to positive destinations (college, university, training, employment or volunteering) on leaving school compared with non-looked after children.

### **MCR Mentor Recruitment**

Volunteers are recruited by a range of means, including word of mouth and by appeals among university alumni and major employers. *The Herald* newspaper became MCR's media partner during 2014 and publicised the programme's recruitment website along with feature articles and news items about mentoring.

Mentors join the programme by submitting an expression of interest on the MCR Pathways website, followed by attendance at an information session. Those who decide thereafter to volunteer complete a more detailed application, including the Disclosure Scotland screening procedures which apply to all paid and voluntary work with vulnerable groups. All applicants are interviewed and all are informed of the outcome by letter which is then followed up by personal contact. For applicants who are selected, training in mentoring and child protection procedures is provided by University of Strathclyde and Glasgow City Council staff.

In order to aid the mentee-mentor matching process, the young people describe their hobbies and interests, academic/career aspirations, personality and expectations of the programme; and mentors also identify their hobbies and interests, career/profession, skills and interpersonal/social awareness. Prior to completing a match, mentors are provided with a confidential overview of the mentee, and mentees are also given information about their potential mentor. Once the match is confirmed, availability is established and a meeting is arranged with a school Pathways' coordinator.

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government. Table 3.1, Children's Social Work Statistics 2012-13. Retrieved from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/03/8922>

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government. Pupil Census 2013 Supplementary data. Retrieved from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/dspupcensus/pupcensus2013>

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government. Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children. Retrieved from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/09/6499>

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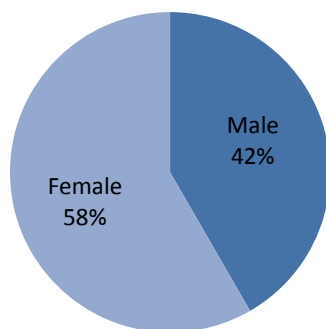
The MCR Pathways programme is overseen by a governance group representing the four partners and management is provided by a core team known as the Pioneers, meeting generally weekly. The programme is administered by a small programme office. Pilot funding for this service has been provided by the partners and by a grant awarded by Scottish Government.

Liaison between the programme and the schools has been provided by Pathway coordinators. The Pathway coordinator role has been performed by senior students on the University of Strathclyde's BA degree in Education and Social Services. During their internship coordinators received payment as interns and also gained course credit by writing dissertations based on their experience. The students also helped to develop mentor training materials. The coordinators liaise with an identified member of staff in each school, as well as engaging directly with mentors, and with young people and their families. The coordinator role within the programme has now become a paid post.

## **Snapshot of MCR Pathways at September 2014**

### **Who are the MCR Mentors?**

By September 2014, a total of 96 volunteers had successfully graduated from the selection process and 54 had been matched with a young person. In addition to the 96, a further 49 people had recently indicated an expression of interest following marketing activities. Of the 96 volunteers, 56 (58%) are female and 40 (42%) are male.



**Figure 1 Mentors' gender**

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The majority of the volunteers recruited (88) completed a profile (a desk-based exercise) upon joining the programme.<sup>8</sup> These profiles show that, overall, mentors are older adults, with 60% between the ages of 51 and 70. Younger adults between 31 and 40 years of age represent 15% of the total, and small numbers of mentors are either below 30- or above 71-years-old.

Fifty-three percent of the mentors have been educated to degree level, while a further 32% hold a master's or doctoral degree. In terms of occupation, almost half of the mentors (47%) had retired from work. Those still working are in a variety of occupations, equally distributed between the public and the private sectors. Three mentors were unemployed at the time of joining the project. A majority of mentors (87.5%) support charity work and/or are engaged with other volunteer organisations.

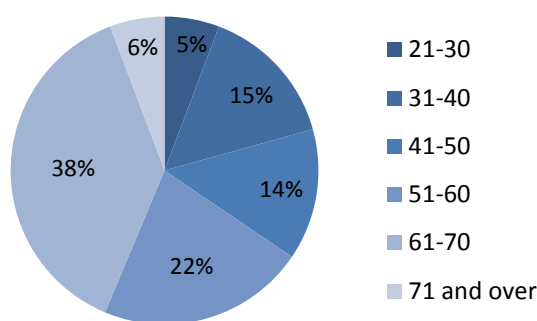


Figure 2 Mentors' age

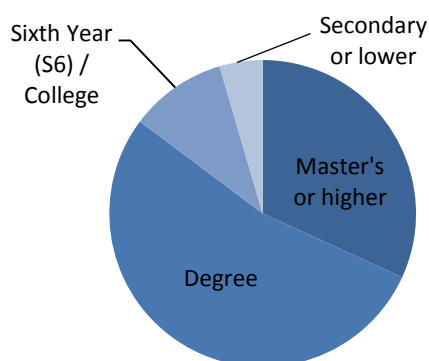


Figure 3 Mentors' education level

<sup>8</sup> Six of the mentors did not complete the profile as they joined the project in the early stages when the exercise was yet to be established. Additionally, two mentor profiles were unavailable during the compilation of this report.

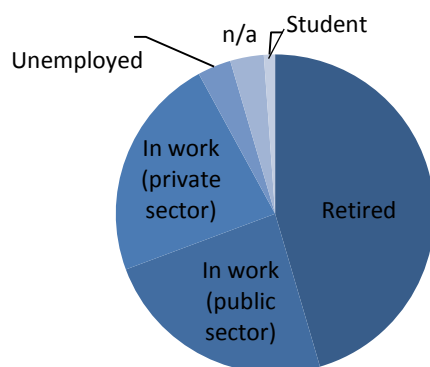


Figure 4 Mentors' employment status

As shown by Figure 5, most mentors, irrespective of gender, indicated willingness to help the young people with homework and coursework (HCW), and would also be willing to help with subject-specific difficulties (SS). An even greater number of mentors would be willing to give mentees work-related support, such as offering career advice (CA) and helping young people find a suitable work placement (WP). A smaller number of mentors said they would be willing to accompany young people on trips and days out (TDO).

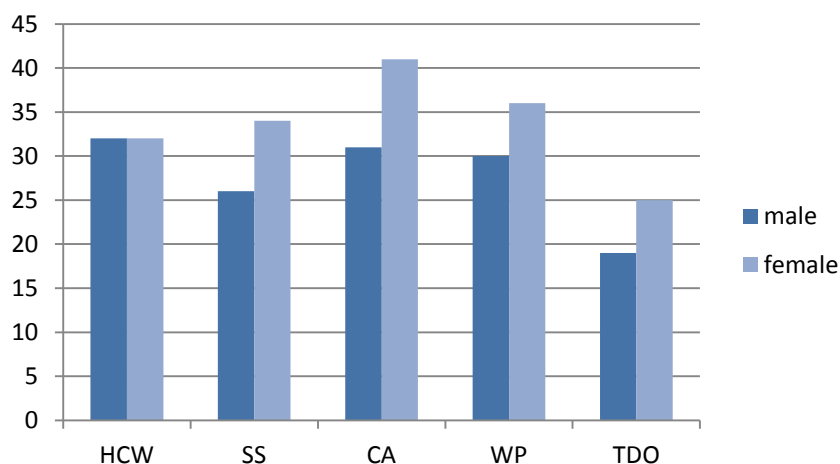


Figure 5 Areas in which mentors can offer support

As part of their profile, mentors also described their personal strengths. These descriptions provide an interesting picture of the range of positive attributes and characteristics that the mentors bring to the mentor-mentee relationship and the programme as a whole.

Mentors' strengths include being good listeners and good communicators; being understanding, thoughtful, empathetic, caring, compassionate, non-judgemental, open-minded, friendly and having

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a sense of humour; being loyal, honest, trustworthy, reliable, and committed; being optimistic, positive, enthusiastic, motivated; being flexible, adaptable, easy-going, calm, patient and resilient; being creative, practical, passionate, analytical, problem-solving, and having an interest in learning; being organised, determined, hard-working, persistent, perseverant and focussed; having the ability to relate well to others and strong interpersonal skills, and being sociable, approachable, a team-worker, encouraging of others and having leadership skills. The strengths which the mentors most frequently mentioned are depicted in Figure 6.



**Figure 6 Mentors' strengths**

In addition to personal strengths, the mentors noted their reasons for getting involved in the programme. As well as helping the young people generally, a number of the mentors want to help tackle the disadvantage which may be experienced by the young people involved in the programme, contribute on a wider social level, and make a difference in the mentees' lives.

*I want to give time to someone to help them feel that they are not limited due to their own circumstances. (Mentor)*



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*I simply want to play a part in contributing to a better society and supporting young people who have not had the same opportunities as others. (Mentor)*

*I am committed to finding ways to help to transform the lives of young people who have had to face social and economic disadvantage and I strongly believe in the potential of education to be the means by which people are able to develop their aspirations and to bring about lasting change in the lives of individuals. (Mentor)*

The mentors frequently mentioned that they would like to help the young people to fulfil their potential and achieve their goals, objectives, dreams and ambitions. They also referred to building relationships, listening, acting as an 'anchor', inspiring, providing guidance and a supportive space, encouraging and motivating the young people, and passing on life skills, experience and knowledge.

*Whenever possible, people should be given the necessary support and encouragement to elevate themselves to a level where success becomes achievable, and they become recognized as a valued member of society. (Mentor)*

*I would like to try to make a positive difference to a young person's life by engaging with them and giving them confidence to be what they want to be... if I can encourage a young person this should hopefully help them on their journey through life. (Mentor)*

In addition to benefitting the young people, some of the mentors talked about what they expect to gain from being involved in the programme. They mentioned, for example, the satisfaction felt in helping others and making a difference, and how volunteering can be challenging and rewarding. A number of the mentors became involved in the programme because they want to 'give back' in some way. Others had opted to become involved as a good way to use the spare time they have.

*The opportunity to mentor seems to me exciting and 'pioneering', challenging and hopefully greatly beneficial and rewarding to children who deserve more in their lives. (Mentor)*

A number of the mentors conveyed their positive feelings about the programme as a whole, indicating the value of the initiative and their support for the programme and its aims.

*I feel very strongly that every child, regardless of their background, social standing, current situation, family history or whatever else, should be given an equal chance to achieve their full potential. Your campaign and passion really caught my attention and I am willing to help in any way I possibly can. (Mentor)*

*I believe inspiration can come from self-worth, a commitment to education and learning. (Mentor)*

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Some of the mentors felt they could relate to some aspect of the programme, including the young people themselves, the need to give help and support, and the value of increasing confidence. It was also clear that many of the mentors enjoy working with and interacting with young people.

*I would be honoured to have the chance to build a relationship with a young person at a formative time in their life. (Mentor)*

### Who are the MCR Mentees?

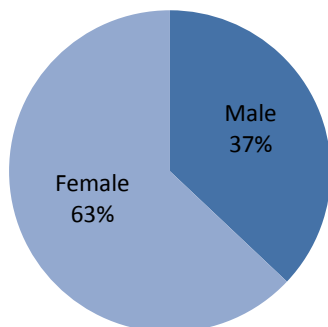
The 54 pupils who are matched with mentors come from each of the six target schools, as shown in Table 1 below. A further 15 mentees had been matched but had not yet started meeting with mentors, and two more mentees were ready to be matched. A further 79 pupils have recently been identified as possible mentees and will be matched with a mentor as soon as possible. Only one pupil opted out of the opportunity to be matched with a mentor.

**Table 1 Matching status of the mentees**

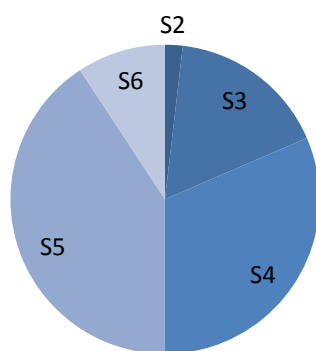
School	Matched & Meeting	Potential Mentees
School 1	11	15
School 2	8	20
School 3	14	43
School 4	9	17
School 5	5	17
School 6	7	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>151</b>

Of the 54 mentees who are matched and meeting, 34 (63%) are female and 20 (37%) are male (see Figure 7 below).

The mentees are distributed across school year groups (see Figure 8 below). One mentee is in S2, nine are in S3, 17 are in S4, 22 are in S5, and five are in S6.



**Figure 7 Mentees' gender**



**Figure 8 Mentees' year groups**

The target group for MCR Pathways is young people who are looked after by the local authority. Of the 54 so far matched and meeting, 26 (48%) are looked after at home, six (11%) are looked after away from home, and 17 (33%) were previously looked after. Five (9%) of the mentees are not from a looked after background but were recommended by their school for other reasons.

In the majority of cases (85%), a male mentee was matched with a male mentor and a female mentee was matched with a female mentor. This is not, however, an explicit aim of the programme, with mentor-mentee relationships instead being established principally according to common interests and overall 'best match'.

## **What Do Mentors and Mentees Say About Their Experience So Far?**

Although the MCR Pathways programme has not so far been formally evaluated, there have been more informal opportunities to gather information about its operation, including face-to-face and email feedback mentees, mentors and school staff members have given to the programme team and the Pathways coordinators. This feedback provided valuable insight into how the programme is developing.

The writers conducted a review of feedback which has been documented by the programme team and had informal discussions with key team members. From these discussions it appears that mentoring relationships are viewed positively by mentees and mentors. Feedback suggests that mentees and mentors have indicated they are happy with their pairings, that the relationships are developing well, and that the meetings and discussions are positive. A number of the mentors have documented the content of discussions, which range over homework, mentees' interests, achievements and future plans.

*It's really good, my mentor's helping me with stuff. (Mentee)*

*I'm surprised about how much we have in common... she's really nice. (Mentee)*

*It's going really well... he's really nice. (Mentee)*

*Oh yeah it's going really well... we have some good discussions. (Mentee)*

*My mentees... are loving the support of their mentors... Those YP who have been match identified and who are waiting to meet their mentor are very excited about the prospect of a new relationship forming. (Pathways Coordinator)*

*I am really enjoying getting to know him. (Mentor)*

*The meeting... was really great. We chatted about loads of different things. (Mentor)*

*The mentee was chatty and quite open. (Mentor)*

*All in all another great meeting, feel like we're really building up a great relationship! (Mentor)*

*[The mentee] was initially somewhat reserved... However, as we progressed, and with some prompting, [the mentee] began to open up and appeared reasonably relaxed and confident to contribute to the discussion... I enjoyed the meeting. (Mentor)*

*The mentoring appears to be going well in my view... We have been getting to know each other and we seem to have connected really well. (Mentor)*

*He is certainly opening up with conversation, even at this early stage. (Mentor)*

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Some mentors have identified areas for improvement, or raised concerns related to meeting the young people, such as the need for additional support on the first visit to the school to meet the mentee, the need for an appropriate space to meet with the mentee (which is private and allows concentration), and having the time and availability to meet with the young people. Some of the feedback has identified the role of the Pathway coordinator as being important for supporting the mentors and mentees to maintain their relationship, and to ensure that mentors feel connected to their school and the programme more generally.

Feedback was also available about the 'mentoring coffee mornings' which were held in the schools. These provide an opportunity for the mentors to meet with the Pathways coordinators and school staff to discuss how mentoring is progressing, and for mentors to share their experiences and support each other. Pathways coordinators commented on the positive, relaxed and friendly atmosphere during these meetings, the opportunity they afforded for discussion and feedback (including in relation to the qualities of a good mentor, reasons for becoming a mentor, difficulties or issues that may have arisen, and ways to further improve the programme). It was suggested that the coffee mornings could be developed into a community of mentors.

## **The Strathclyde Summer Experience**

S2 and S3 MCR Pathways mentees took part in the University of Strathclyde's Summer Experience programme in both 2013 and 2014. This three-day programme aims to increase pupils' awareness about university life, encourage them to aspire to higher education and raise their confidence about participating in university-level studies. The programme includes subject-specific challenges, social events, and pupils have the option to stay in university accommodation.

In 2013, 10 mentees from three schools attended (eight of whom took part in the residential element). The evaluation of the programme (questionnaire-based) indicated that the programme was enjoyable for the young people, and that meeting new people, working and developing relationships with the mentors, working on subject-related challenges, and working with individuals who are knowledgeable about particular subjects, were valuable aspects of the programme.

*I loved every single second. (Mentee)*

The findings indicate that the programme has a positive influence on perceptions and attitudes towards education and university: mentees seemed for example to be less apprehensive about attending university and more confident about going to university.

*I feel more confident about Uni. I feel I will do well and it would be easy for me to make new friends. (Mentee)*

## *Transforming Lives...*

Some said that, because of the Summer Experience, they had definite ideas about attending university, and others indicated greater motivation to work hard in school. There was also an increase in knowledge about university and in having concrete plans for courses and careers. Confidence, team work abilities, communication skills and presentation skills also seemed to increase.

*... before I wasn't sure about Uni but now, after this experience, I would love to go. I really hope I get the grades to get in. (Mentee)*

The student mentors (undergraduate and postgraduate university students) who were involved in the programme also pointed to the benefits of the programme for the young people, including increased knowledge about university, increased aspirations for higher education, increased confidence, and insight to the university experience.

In 2014, 17 mentees from six schools attended the programme (with 12 pupils taking part in the residential element). These included four young people who had attended in 2013 and who returned as 'junior mentors' to support their younger peers. Broadly speaking, the findings from the 2014 evaluation (also questionnaire-based) are consistent with those from 2013. Pupils found the experience positive and enjoyable, and they indicated that working with the programme mentors was a positive aspect of the programme, as were the subject-related challenges.

*I loved my mentors... They were all so helpful, everyone was. (Mentee)*

The findings suggest an increase in positive attitudes towards attending university, more definite plans to attend university, and increased confidence to embark on university study. They also point to increased skills in team work, communication and presentation, as well as increased leadership skills.

*It makes me want to go to uni. (Mentee)*

As in 2013, 2014 student mentors pointed to the benefits for the young people of attending the Summer Experience, with a main focus on increased confidence, increased knowledge of higher education, and increased skills in relation to communication, presentation, team-work and leadership.

*I believe this programme is fantastic for the young people... The idea that 'anything is possible' became a theme with the young people throughout the week. (Summer Experience Mentor)*

*... it has broken a barrier... Such an experience makes university seem less unfamiliar, and makes progression onto university appear more attainable. (Summer Experience Mentor)*

Pupils attending the Summer Experience in 2014 indicated that they would be willing to come back to act as junior mentors for the Summer Experience programme in the future.

## **Future MCR Pathways Research**

The MCR Pathways mentoring programme has plans to expand significantly, reaching approximately 250 mentor-mentee relationships in 10 schools during 2015. In order to support this growth and ensure that the programme is evaluated, a research element will be introduced. The aim of the research will be to explore the process and outcomes of the MCR Pathways mentoring programme.

We plan to gather baseline and follow-on data about the mentoring relationship and pupils' engagement with school. For example, we are interested in the feelings, attitudes and experiences of mentees, mentors and staff involved in the programme, as well as measuring the impact of the programme on the young people. There will be a particular focus on capturing the voice of the young people so they remain at the centre of the programme and are given the opportunity to contribute to its evaluation and development.

The programme office will assist by gathering demographic data, information about engagement between mentees and mentors, school attendance, and mentees' engagement with school, leisure activities and the programme's group activities (summer school etc.). The research will also have an interview component, potentially both individually and by focus group. We also aim to include a participatory element and to maximise the young people's active involvement in the research process.

The conference for which this report has been compiled represents the start of consultation and reflection about how to research the programme. We aim to involve as many people as possible in the research design so that the final outcome effectively measures all its components and accurately reflects the experiences of all those involved.

## **Conclusion**

This report is not intended to be an evaluation of the MCR Pathways mentoring programme, since this would require baseline measures, research questions and a substantial qualitative element in order to be effective. Rather, this report draws upon the information which has been collected, such as information about the mentors, mentees and their involvement in the programme so far. The report also has limitations: for example, it does not include a comprehensive survey of the key participants.

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The intention of this report is three-fold: first, to provide a snapshot description of the programme and its early achievements. In doing this, we have also been able to identify the kinds of data that could be made available and to test the capacity of the programme's administrative system and identify areas for further development. Second, it has allowed us to consider potential research questions and the design for future research. Third, it is intended as a vehicle for stimulating discussion among everyone involved in the programme about what it is that we intend to achieve and how that should be evaluated.

What we can conclude is that school-based mentoring is now established in the six schools that have so far participated in the MCR Pathways mentoring programme, that the relationships between mentees and mentors are continually developing, and that positive feedback about the programme is evident. The mentor recruitment campaign, with *The Herald* as media partner and the goodwill of the university sector and some large employers, has recruited volunteers in impressive numbers in this early stage in the programme's life. Pupils also appear positive about the opportunity to be involved in the project, with an encouraging number already matched and more still awaiting their match. The programme has initiated support arrangements for mentors (e.g. coffee mornings) and more support is planned (including more extensive use of the digital forum).

There are many more aspects of the programme which are yet to be explored and understood. It seems for example that female pupils have been recruited in a greater proportion than males, while in the target group of looked after children boys outnumber girls. Investigating the gender aspect of recruitment is particularly important given that the risk of poorer outcomes is greater for young men with a looked after background. We have been unable to inquire in any depth about the mentoring relationship and what facilitates and hinders its development and maintenance. We would also like to understand the involvement of families and how carers and parents view the involvement of another adult. We wish to understand in far greater depth the impact and benefits to young people of being involved in the programme: is it possible, for example, to see positive changes in attendance and curriculum-based activities as the mentoring relationship progresses? Finally, because the voice of the young mentees is so far limited, we have a limited understanding of what they feel works and what could be improved. It is essential that we allow young people's feedback on the mentoring process to emerge, and that we are willing to ensure that their experiences take centre stage in shaping the future of the programme.



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