

mobilise

One Million Mentors

Evaluation 2020/21 – Final Report

A Report from Mobilise Public Ltd

July 2021



Contents

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations	3
1.1 Recommendations:	7
2. Introduction & Method	8
2.1 Our Method.....	9
3 Findings	11
3.1 General – in-person.....	11
3.2 General - Online	13
3.3 Fostering empathy/Building Rapport	15
3.4 Meeting Needs	18
3.5 Environmental Factors	20
3.6 When the Pandemic is Over	22
3.7 Getting the balance right.....	25
3.8 Could more choice in matching lead to better mentoring outcomes?.....	26
3.9 Skills development	26
3.10 Youth Partners in under 18s settings	27
Appendix 1 1MM Evaluation Framework – 2020/21 and Addendum	30
Appendix 2 Sale Sharks Case Study	37

1. Executive Summary & Recommendations

One Million Mentors (1MM) is a charity that is trying to scale up mentoring opportunities for young people to support their career development. Before the pandemic, 1MM provided mentoring in schools, colleges, universities, employment programmes for 14 - 25 year olds. Mentors were recruited, then matched sometimes during physical 'speed networking' style events, with the mentoring taking place in the school or college setting, at set times, to ensure the safeguarding of students. As the pandemic hit, 1MM had to quickly pivot its model and develop a virtual mentoring offer. 1MM and their Youth Partners (schools and colleges) felt that continuing to mentor under 18s was not possible as the safeguarding concerns were too great. Some mentoring relationships ended at the onset of the pandemic and others shifted to online. In year 4 of the programme, all mentoring now takes place online, and 1MM have developed a self-referral model for those 18 and over.

Mobilise's evaluation was designed to explore the advantages and disadvantages of in-person and online mentoring with a view to supporting 1MM to make decisions for the future about the most advantageous mentoring model going forward. In the first phase of the fieldwork, we spoke to mixed groups of mentors and mentees, a group of mentees and undertook individual interviews with mentees and youth partners. In the second phase of the fieldwork, we talked to further mixed and mentee only groups, we developed a case study around the Sale Sharks Advantage programme of online mentoring for under 18s and held an in-depth workshop with Youth Partners.

Overall, there are perceived benefits of both in-person and virtual mentoring, although it became clear that there is something qualitatively different about doing this work in-person. Mentors who worked with their mentees face-to-face really valued those in-person interactions. They talked about being able to better read the mentee's body language, they felt that there was something important in feeling the mentee's physical presence, being able to make eye contact, and read other visual cues. Other benefits of in-person mentoring included being able to introduce mentees to the workplace, and mentors being able to see and support development with communication and body language.

Whilst mentees could see the efficiencies of virtual mentoring, many we spoke to recognised the qualitative difference of being in an in-person mentoring relationship. Those with experience of in-person mentoring agreed that they valued the rapport and ability to build a relationship easily. Yet all participants were able to identify the benefits of virtual mentoring, including an ease in scheduling meetings, the ability to easily share documents, the ability to be mentored by someone outside of your geographical area, and that it helped mentees build online experience for the new online world of job interviews and work. However, there were concerns about distractions during online mentoring as well as a sense that there is a loss of connectivity or relationship building, in comparison to in-person. Some mentors also expressed concern about being able to build relationships online with younger (under 18) mentees, although this was based less on experience than on expectation. Mentors also discussed the potential loss of valuable skills for mentees if they spend too much time in the virtual world.

Mentors and mentees still reported being able to build or feel empathy on-line. Though whilst some mentees felt that mentors could still be empathetic regardless of being online, they felt that the bond formed or level of connection built online was perhaps lesser than it would be in-person. Even those who conducted their mentoring relationships using voice only (cameras off) still reported being able

to build empathy and that emotion could still be responded to. However, for some mentors, starting a mentoring relationship online with the mentee's camera off felt like an impediment to building a relationship and others said they would refuse to mentor with cameras off. For those that had experienced in-person and then moved online, some felt the relationship they had built in-person meant nothing was lost when they had to move to online.

We also asked mentors and mentees about whether the safeguarding practice was helpful or a potential hindrance in building the mentoring relationship. Some mentors felt it was very helpful that this was up front even though they felt virtually there were fewer safeguarding risks. Other mentors felt it wasn't helpful, felt unnatural and could get in the way of helping put the mentee at ease. For mentees, addressing safeguarding was normal for them and mostly helpful. Some youth partners were frustrated that safeguarding concerns had closed the mentoring programme for under 18s.

We explored whether being from the same geographical area was an important factor in being able to meet needs within the mentoring relationship and whether being from the same or similar industry was important. Generally, mentors and mentees saw being from different geographies as an opportunity. It was also suggested that matching industry was more important than geography. However, for some, particularly where they felt that mentoring was also about being able to access industry networks for work experience or job opportunities, both geography and industry were considered important. Other mentors felt that supporting a mentee to find work experience for themselves was a more developmental or empowering thing to do for them. For younger mentees or those less clear about their career path, the industry the mentor is from mattered less.

Interestingly, when discussing the needs of mentees, shared identity characteristics between mentee and mentor was flagged as important by mentees. Respondents highlighted that coming from the same gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion was really important to them, particularly where mentees were seeking to enter careers perhaps less associated with their gender or ethnicity. They still suggested that sharing an identity is not essential, however a mentor's understanding, cultural awareness and support may be.

We explored a number of environmental factors in more depth particularly associated with the online mentoring experience, including whether it felt more intrusive, more awkward or more personal; and whether online or in-person meetings were most likely to be missed or moved. Some suggested that although face-to-face was more natural, that online was a new normal and satisfactory. For mentees, the picture was mixed with those more nervous or anxious stating a preference for online mentoring and referring even to the challenge of the arrangements of meeting in-person. For others, online feels more awkward and in-person feels more natural or is preferred. For some mentees, their preference to meet in-person was related to poor internet connection at home, a lack of space, or fear of noise or interruption from other, often younger siblings. Interestingly, it was generally agreed that online mentoring engagements were more likely to be missed or moved than in-person ones. One suggested this was because of his lack of commitment to it, and that he gets less from the virtual meeting than in-person. But for most this was more about there being so many online meetings that it is easy to miss one or because they are easy to arrange.

We explored a range of other areas in this research. Mentors and mentees both felt that online mentoring helps build confidence for online work including for job interviews. Others noted that in-person meetings might mean mentees need to use the telephone more – a practice and skillset rapidly being lost in the younger generation that some felt needed addressing. There was a suggestion also that mentees may feel less accountable online and not undertake work they agreed to. It was also noted that in-person encounters allow more time and natural pauses for reflection while another coffee is bought, or someone takes a toilet break.

Toward the end of our discussions with groups and individuals, we tried to gauge their view of the future for 1MM with a multiple-choice question. ‘When the pandemic is over which of the following statements would you agree with’ and the choice of answers was as follows.

- A. There is no need for 1MM to go back to in-person mentoring. Virtual mentoring works perfectly well and is much more efficient.
- B. Virtual mentoring works, but something is missing. Perhaps a blended approach would work best – you meet your mentor in-person 2 or 3 times a year with the remainder of the mentoring sessions going online.
- C. 1MM should strive to bring all mentoring back to in-person as soon as possible – you cannot replace a real, in-person encounter with a virtual one.

Although the majority of those we spoke to, by some distance chose B, the blended approach, there is much learning for 1MM to be drawn from this section. There was only a tiny minority that felt that there is no need to go back to in-person mentoring at all. There were more that thought all mentoring should come back in-person, whilst most (about 80%) felt that the blended approach would be the optimum way forward. This serves to demonstrate that the vast majority agree that in-person mentoring should form part of 1MM’s future and should not be lost altogether.

Having the first few interactions in-person, building the relationship and then moving online. Almost as if it’s video messaging a friend. You’ve already built that relationship and having a chat about something specific. Rather than getting to know each other online.

At the start of this research, as a research team we predicted that most of the answers to this question would be B, the mixed approach. However, we were surprised, particularly by the views of the mentees that opted more towards C, bringing the programme back in-person as soon as possible. Whilst the convenience of virtual was noted by many, many also noted aspects about the quality of an in-person relationship that are not replicable online.

I’ve seen the benefit in face-to-face mentoring, and I believe in the benefits of face-to-face contact. It’s so beneficial in so many ways, in my job and career and its makes for a superior mentoring environment.

At the interim report stage for this evaluation, we suggested the following areas for further investigation during the second phase of field work.

What might be the right balance for a blended approach to mentoring? How would it start? How often would mentors/mentees want to meet in-person? Would travel be an issue for mentees? What about those who have less access to technology or space at home for online mentoring?

What more could be built into the programme to support young people with the skills they need for the workplace? Do 1MM strongly discourage camera off/sound only mentoring? Should 1MM encourage starting with telephoning your mentor? Should different approaches be encouraged for different personality types?

If 1MM intends to bring back mentoring for 14 – 18 year olds in due course, it may be worth exploring with more of them how a mixed model could work in a school setting – some in-person meetings with more done online.

The second phase of fieldwork supported and built on the findings of the first phase. The more in-depth discussions about the right balance for the blended approach led to some interesting conversations. It should be noted, that for corporate mentors and partners, online mentoring is a much more efficient use of time and was preferred by most. Some went as far as saying it might be hard to recruit to in-person mentoring now, though others said that their company still allocated volunteering days that could be used for this purpose. Nevertheless, there was much support for a blended approach going forward for mentoring for over 18s. Discussions in the focus groups led to an approach we loosely called option D, that is a blended approach but leaving it up to mentors and mentees to determine for themselves how often they meet in-person, and any other parameters they wish to set out. Mentors and mentees also saw a value in allowing the process to be more mentee led to lead to the best outcomes. This also led to a discussion about how many other factors could be more user led through the on boarding process at 1MM, for example, mentees and mentors could indicate how far they are willing to travel, how important is finding a mentor from the industry the mentee wishes to pursue, or how important gender or ethnicity is to a mentee in their mentor.

There was also continued support for some in-person meetings say at the beginning, in the middle and towards the end of the mentoring relationships. Participants in the research felt that this could maximise the new efficiencies through virtual mentoring, whilst helping ensure more meaningful relationships could still be built and reinforced through the process. One of the focus groups suggested that the initial face-to-face session could be delivered as a major event either regionally or nationally where each new cohort of mentors and mentees could gather for their first sessions as well as to receive training and hear from speakers. This was supported in subsequent focus group discussions also with the proviso that mentees might need support with travel costs.

When we discussed with mentees and mentors about more of a focus on skills development through the mentoring offer, most mentees felt that they would resent this imposition and would prefer to include their needs or skills interests in their profile at the beginning of the process rather than have it as a requirement. Mentors generally agreed and preferred a more informal approach to skills development many already believe they give a focus to.

The first round of research suggested that the only way youth partners could see the programme resuming online was for the virtual mentoring to take place ‘en masse’ with students in an IT room with a teacher supervising. In the second phase, our youth partner workshop based on the Sale Sharks Advantage model of virtual mentoring supervised from the classroom suggested that, at least for perhaps smaller cohorts, there are ways that virtual or a blended approach to mentoring could be reintroduced into under 18s settings. Aside from ensuring safeguarding leads were able to provide approval for a teacher monitored virtual mentoring programme, youth partners highlighted a number of issues that would be challenging for them in bringing the programme back where more support could be offered centrally. These included issues of suitable spaces with enough computers/headsets; the challenge of timetabling particularly during the recovery from Covid; the additional challenges of engagement in virtual mentoring for less motivated under 18 year olds; the challenge of late DBS checks and the need to supervise more closely when they are not in place. Again, it was suggested that a blended approach with some in-person mentoring session could help build relationship and trust at the start, say of each term.

1.1 Recommendations:

- i. Whilst many believe that much will move online and mentoring is no different, many mentors and mentees valued in-person mentoring above all else. We would be cautious about losing in-person mentoring all together because of the value that mentors and mentees placed on these physical encounters and the benefits they bring.
- ii. A blended approach to mentoring is likely to be able to benefit from ‘the best of both worlds’ – a relationship can be built face-to-face and revisited at intervals during the year, with mentoring also taking place online for the greater efficiencies.
- iii. 1MM should develop and offer guidance as to its view as the optimum balance for this, however mentors and mentees want to be able to set the parameters of this for themselves, agreeing what works best for them.
- iv. As more mentoring goes online, 1MM should consider more regional and national ‘kick off’ events where mentors and mentees have their first mentoring sessions and a range of other opportunities are on offer. Mentors would also appreciate the opportunity to join a network of other mentors for support, idea sharing, and perhaps some social element.
- v. Mentees want more choice through the onboarding process and the ability to be matched according to those choices be that industry, geography, gender, ethnicity and perhaps other things too. Further research could be undertaken to explore these factors and how they impact mentoring outcomes alongside consideration of designing its systems to give greater choice in the matching process.
- vi. There is an appetite from 1MM’s Youth Partners to resume mentoring programmes for under 18s in schools and colleges. Again here a blended approach is likely to be a viable way forward assuming the Sale Sharks approach to safeguarding can be replicated with larger cohorts. 1MM will need to consider the timing of any resumption in the context of Covid recovery and the many pressures on schools and how much more support to the programme could be given centrally

2. Introduction & Method

1MM is a community-based mentoring programme with an ambition to scale up mentoring for young people and connect one million young people to one million life changing opportunities. 1MM believe that, through one-to-one mentoring, more young people can grow the knowledge, networks, skills and confidence they need to succeed. Through the provision of trained volunteer mentors from the world of business and the community, 1MM connects young people with business and community professionals for a year-long programme, of once-a-month mentoring. Mentors are recruited and trained and are matched with a mentee. The programme began with a pilot in 2016 and already operates in East London, the West Midlands, Cardiff, and Greater Manchester. Over 2000 mentees had gone through the programme by late 2020. The programme was disrupted in 2020 as face-to-face mentoring had to be curtailed once the Covid 19 pandemic impacted on the UK. The 2019/20 cohort had some face-to-face mentoring sessions with the rest provided virtually. The 2020/21 cohort is operating entirely virtually and, due to safeguarding considerations, the programme is only now delivered to young people aged 18 and over.

1MM received a grant from Spirit of 2012 and this evaluation is attached to that funding stream. In 2019, the Behavioural Insights Team were appointed by 1MM to undertake a process evaluation. That work and report is comprehensive and there is no need to repeat elements that were undertaken then. However, with the move in 2020 from face-to-face to virtual or online mentoring, it was agreed that the best use of this evaluation budget would be to explore the relative benefits of in-person and virtual mentoring. This is because 2019/2020 presents a unique opportunity where mentors and mentees experienced both modes of delivery. The focus of this evaluation is to explore the relative benefits of the different approaches and will explore any adjustments that may need to be made to compensate for the move online.

Mobilise was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of 1MM's in-person and online mentoring programmes, capturing data that demonstrates the impact of the new delivery model, and comparing it with the existing face-to-face delivery model. The evaluation work focused on the overall impact of the programme, established how mentors and mentees experienced the programme, the perceived benefits for mentees and examines any differences between the cohorts who were mentored in-person, and those who received online mentoring.

The first phase of the research was carried out during the second pandemic lockdown in the early part of 2021 and the second phase was carried out in the spring of 2021 as restrictions in the UK were beginning to lift. Whilst the use of Zoom and other online tools became ubiquitous during the pandemic, by the second lockdown, due to the severity and length of it (and the poorer weather than the first), people, and particularly young people were feeling stronger negative impacts of restrictions on our liberty. Whilst we know that different people react differently to lockdown according to their personality traits (for example, introverts enjoy having to see less people whilst extraverts struggle with it), it is quite possible that these impacts caused some in the research to reflect more strongly on the disbenefits of online mentoring in their yearning for face-to-face contact. Although this may have impacted on mentees' responses in the first phase, we would argue this is positive for 1MM. Respondents were becoming more aware of the limitations and risks of only operating in a virtual world and therefore more aware of the potential importance of in-person interactions.

2.1 Our Method

At the start, we developed an evaluation framework that sets out the scope of the evaluation, key questions, and data sources. The plan includes information about the programme, what the evaluation will do, the purpose of it and key evaluation questions we will try to answer. It also sets out how it will be done, what data will be collected, how data will be analysed, and how and when results will be reported. The initial Evaluation Framework can be found in Appendix 1.

1MM asked us to focus the purpose of this evaluation on exploring the relative benefits of face-to-face and virtual mentoring. We hoped therefore to consolidate learning from the BiT process evaluation by focussing on some of the moderating factors which they suggest moderate the quality and fidelity of the mentoring model. We focused mainly on the relationship building domain as this is the area that is most likely to be impacted by the change of the mentoring environment – from face-to-face interactions to virtual. The evaluation will be used to demonstrate any differences between face-to-face and virtual mentoring relationships and their impact on the moderating factors that BiT suggest are key ingredients for building relationships that support successful mentoring.

At the beginning of the first phase of field work we designed a focus group discussion guide (see Appendix 2) that allowed us to explore both the key lines of enquiry, and any differences between the face-to-face mentoring programme and the virtual programme. The research involved using more than one method of gathering data including focus groups and structured interviews with staff and youth partners. Alongside a document review, and our work with 1MM, the combination of individual and group research options was used to help reduce bias such as peer pressure on focus group participants.

During phase one we held two mixed focus groups involving both mentors and mentees and one mentee-only focus group. Due to challenges around recruitment, the second mentee focus group was cancelled and we switched to a one-to-one interview format instead. One-to-one interviews were also held with three youth partners, with whom 1MM had previously worked with their under 18's cohort but were unable to continue during the pandemic due to safeguarding concerns. This included, one youth partner who delivered face-to-face and virtual mentoring; one youth partner who decided not to work with 1MM, one mentor, and four mentees.

Prior to beginning the phase two field work, we created an addendum to the Evaluation Framework (see Appendix 3) and revisited the focus group discussion guides to account for the further areas of research we identified. For the second phase, we wanted to speak to more mentors and mentees and either confirm the interim findings or otherwise. Further areas we identified at the interim report stage that would benefit from further research included:

What might be the right balance for a blended approach to mentoring? How would it start? How often would mentors/mentees want to meet in-person? Would travel be an issue for mentees? What about those who have less access to technology or space at home for online mentoring?

What more could be built into the programme to support young people with the skills they need for the workplace? Do 1MM strongly discourage camera off/sound only mentoring? Should 1MM encourage starting with telephoning your mentor? Should different approaches be encouraged for different personality types?

If 1MM intends to bring back mentoring for 16- to 18-year-olds in due course, it may be worth exploring with more of them how a mixed model could work in a school setting – some in-person meetings with more done online.

In the second phase of the fieldwork, we held one mentee only focus group, one mixed focus group involving both mentors and mentees, and one corporate partners & mentors focus group. In addition, we met with Sale Sharks Advantage and Manchester City Council in order to develop a case study about the Sale Sharks mentoring programme (see Appendix 2). We also ran a workshop for Youth Partners, drawing on the research from the case study and exploring how schools, academies, and other educational establishments might be able to resume mentoring for under 18s. We concluded by holding a workshop for 1MM staff members to go through some of the emerging findings and discuss a viable way to move under 18s mentoring forward.

3. Findings

3.1 General – in-person

We started all the conversations with two ‘headline’ research questions: ‘What is valued about face-to-face mentoring’ and ‘what is valued about online or virtual mentoring’. This allowed us to understand the views of the respondents from the start which then helps us know where to explore further as the questions become more detailed. We continued this approach in the second round of focus groups.

Overall, there are perceived benefits of both in-person and virtual mentoring, though it became clear that there is something about doing this work in-person that feels qualitatively different to those taking part. For a retired mentor, part of the ‘deal’ was that mentoring would get them out, enable them to meet people and enjoy coffee shops.

I feel like the personal human interaction, the things you can't pick up through virtual that you can face-to-face, like body language, the way you speak. That's the thing that's lost through virtual.

For other mentors, they felt in-person meetings were more practical and helped with introducing mentees to the workplace, looking at things together, or making and sharing notes in-person. One mentor also talked about a key benefit of mentoring was being able to support mentees with coaching around things like communication and body language.

Face-to-face I really valued that we could meet and I could show them around the workplace and the teams, and things they were interested in. I kind of miss that.

My mentee wants to be a lawyer and doesn't have access to a firm or network. I would have been able to do a lot more, I could have met her in the office, introduced her to other people... you can't replicate that online.

It was nerve wracking when you first meet your mentor in-person and go into their office into their space. If the mentor is good then within ten minutes you feel comfortable and have that connection, within an hour and half of conversation you feel like you get to know the person quite well.

This was described even more powerfully when a mentee spoke about sharing their design work with a mentor. One suggested it was more helpful for her to work with someone face-to-face so that CVs could be annotated working together on a physical document.

It was being able to be physically in the company of someone in the industry. Show them stuff I was doing and see their reaction to it. Having someone physically there to tell you this is great, how to improve.... more of a personal connection when its face-to-face contact.

In-person, I got to speak to the person more on a level. You get to more – it's more normal. Never done online before so was different when that started. I'm not a call type of person. It was a lot better face-to-face.

Youth partners also talked about the benefits of in-person mentoring in supporting mentees in building trust and confidence in talking to people outside of students' normal circles.

A lot of our students only talk to family and friends, so having someone outside of that is good for their development. There is a hesitancy from students to talk to other people.

For some mentors, the age of the mentee was a factor in whether they thought a virtual mentoring relationship could be successful. A few felt that younger students would respond better to face-to-face whereas older mentees might be a better fit for a hybrid or virtual approach.

If I think back to the 14-15 year olds I was working with [before Covid] I don't think there would have been any chance of establishing a mentoring relationship without reading body signs and cues. It takes a degree of maturity for a virtual session to work.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, many mentees we spoke to also recognised the qualitative difference of being in an in-person mentoring relationships and the benefits of this. They also felt that you lose the visual cues and body language of the other person if the mentoring takes place online. Those with experience of in-person mentoring agreed that they valued the rapport and ability to build a relationship more easily.

For me, I preferred face-to-face. In my previous mentoring sessions... (not 1MM) I've done face-to-face mentoring and you see their body messages and tonality, the ways they speak to you and eye to eye. They are present in the moment – it makes a lot of difference.

For me, the big disadvantage is building the relationship and rapport. I think it would have been easier if you had met in-person before virtually as I could easily just talk to the mentor and get across how I felt. Seeing the reaction of someone is totally different. You can understand more, talk freely. Feeling wise it is better. Trying to make them understand is a lot easier when you can say face-to-face what's on your mind.

Many of the mentees also felt that meeting and mentoring face-to-face was more natural and that they felt more understood. They often came back to the issues of what is lost not meeting in-person or by meeting online particularly for those mentees that had experienced both in-person and online mentoring. At the same time, some mentees talked about how important maintaining the mentoring relationships online during the pandemic was for their mental health or how meeting online could be easier for people with anxiety.

Not meeting face-to-face you feel less connected. Your feelings and emotions are sort of at arm's length – the person can't understand what you think or feel as good as they normally would face-to-face. I do see myself as less informative online.

In a room there are ice breakers, a lot of things around you. In a Zoom room especially if the background is plain, where do you start? I think there is a sense of getting to know you has to be more carefully thought through or even contrived. You do have to work at that. If 1MM goes on with a big offer of online mentoring their training ought to highlight that.

Online instantly I felt it was tougher. What I valued was connectivity. Keeping connected to my mentor instead of letting it tail off was really important for me. I have personal issues, health wise, I wasn't really going anywhere with it, but even through the lockdown, after a bit I started mentoring and there was still a person there in my life to help me focus on what's happening next. I'd have been at a loss otherwise.

3.2 General - Online

We also asked at the outset 'What is valued about online or virtual mentoring?'. Throughout all the conversations we had, all groups and individuals were able to identify advantages of mentoring online. One of the main benefits cited was the flexibility of online meetings and being able to fit in meetings easily, especially at short notice. One mentor noted that going virtual allowed her to commence the mentoring role; it was not something she could have done otherwise with young children at home. While another, a lawyer in a large firm, noted that he and colleagues who signed up did so knowing it would be virtual and therefore easier to manage within the working day. Some also noted that meeting in-person in a public environment can be more distracting and that it can be easier to focus online or on the phone. Just like the in-person mentoring benefits, some suggested it was easier to share documents online using screen share.

I'm pretty certain more people signed up from my firm because they knew it would be virtual. I think it would be hard with time management, the unpredictable nature of our work and travel... am sure it has made a real difference.

Doing it online, the benefit is that it has made it more normal to have intervening touch points... we have a one hour meeting scheduled every month but there is an exchange of emails as well. It has enabled more ongoing dialogue. If it was just face-to-face each month you might not establish additional touch points.

What I like about online - easier to arrange and rearrange if needed, and easier to attend. What we lose is intangible elements of conversation, some elements of body language, some of the rapport. It's a lot more visual so we can share over screens, we can jump on a call and they can show me what they're doing.

Mentees and partners also valued the ease of arranging meetings online, and the ability to have frequent meetings with a mentor who was not in a close geographical location. Some mentors we spoke with were not currently based in the UK and had continued mentoring from abroad; one said their mentees had also returned to their home countries in Europe during the pandemic and that they had continued the relationship. Some mentees expressed a preference to meet online from the comfort of their homes without the need to travel.

Just looking at the practicalities made it a lot easier for me to volunteer for 1MM – I live 40 miles away from my mentee and I can do this with him and no problem with the distance or having to travel.

The problem is that it's a very urban scheme, everyone is based in a city. You don't want to shut out those a long way from a city. The hybrid model works much better for them. There are people in small villages and no one around them has studied the course they want to do or been to Uni.

It's the convenience really, it fits in more easily with people's lives. Many of our students live far out in Oldham, Rochdale. So they don't have to travel into central Manchester. That also helps save on the cost of transport which can be prohibitive.

I've had different mentoring experiences before, and everyone is really nice, but it feels like I'm interrupting their working day. This way, they don't have to do the extra travel. Feels good for both of us.

Although some, especially in phase one of the research mentioned feeling that being online interfered with their ability to read body language, some of the participants in the second phase of the research felt differently. This may be in part due to having undertaken the research at a later stage of the pandemic (May/June '21), with more people now accustomed to virtual meetings and how to make the most of them.

When people want to concentrate on body language you can do it reasonably well on Zoom... it can be picked up on Zoom.

I got better at reading body language nuances as time went on.

The intimacy of face-to-face on Zoom means there is a connection.

Mentees talked about the benefit of gaining online experience that would help build confidence for interviews, recruitment exercises, and speaking to people in professional roles. They also suggested that meeting senior professionals in-person could be quite intimidating, though seeing them dressed casually in their own homes helped them get over some of that and made them seem more approachable.

Before I started mentoring, I was quite intimidated by people in quite senior positions in companies and my mentor was a director level. seeing her in her home was a much more approachable scenario.

That was really beneficial, I had virtual interviews, telephone interviews and virtual assessment centres which were like 5 hours on Microsoft Teams – having used the technology before was really beneficial and made me feel a lot more calm when I was then going into that interview situation.

My mentor has offered me the opportunity to sit in on one of his Zoom meetings with his colleagues at work, to understand workplace dynamics – this may not have been possible in-person.

However, from the mentor's perspective, if mentees spend too much time in the virtual world, they will miss out on a variety of things associated with in-person encounters, from using transport to get there to learning about body language. Even the journey home was cited as an important time to

reflect on the conversation. Some mentees also felt strongly about this. Some pointed to the intensity of the online experience, the lack of opportunity to pause, or the chance to reflect during natural pauses in a face-to-face meeting such as using the toilet or getting the coffee. They also talked about the opportunity to learn by observing their mentor face-to-face and the importance of the social connection.

With face-to-face there are natural pauses. If you go out for coffee, you say have another coffee, would you like a cake, it gives someone a chance to reflect. Where is this conversation going? Will this work online? The answer is yes for some people and not for others.

I think if you are a mentee, you are looking at your mentor as a role model, not just listening to words they say – how they carry themselves, dress, interact with others. That is so much more limited in this 2D method of communicating. It works both ways also – mentors can see how mentees carry themselves, posture etc.

I think there is something in making the effort to go meet someone in-person and making that connection. Online you just hang up and you're gone. In-person there's a lot more...

I agree that physically making the effort, getting dressed, going there, as you come home, you're thinking about what you talked about. I think that's missed in the virtual one.

3.3 Fostering empathy/Building Rapport

We asked mentors and mentees, 'did moving to online/virtual mentoring affect the mentor's ability to foster empathy with you?'. Some felt you could still respond to emotion over Zoom though others felt not being able to meet face-to-face affected that. One felt that just committing time to each other builds trust whether online or offline. Mentees in the 2nd round of field work generally did not believe that the mentors had less empathy because of sessions being online. However, mentees said that trust was built with their mentors online as it's easier to be in touch between sessions.

Other than the differences between remote and face-to-face there are a lot of other factors that can play on empathy. My mentor, she had a daughter the same age going through a similar thing, I think that helped our relationship become casual quite quickly.

I think if anything empathy is less diluted by Zoom because my mentee has told me some difficult stuff and it feels quite powerful because we are head-to-head.

They talk about stories like what happened at work and make casual conversation and that made me trust my mentor, the same back I'd say what happened at university. Because we're on Zoom we're responding to each other's emotions. That helped me as well. No lack [of empathy] with a virtual mentor.

We also asked if virtual impacted on mentees' ability to feel confident and open, or if it impacted on mentors' ability to connect and build rapport. Generally, mentors felt that this was not a problem though some suggested the relationships naturally became less one of becoming friends and more

about being professional. Others felt that they could be more friendly and relaxed speaking to the mentee online from their own homes, whereas in a neutral environment they might feel the need to be more professional. They felt that empathy was not affected by the virtual relationship, though that a level of 'bonding' or friendship building might be. They told us about the techniques mentors used such as talking about a daughter of a similar age or making casual conversation about what happened at work. For some mentees, an interest in the industry that the mentor worked in and plans to follow a similar career path were strongly influential on their ability to form a close mentoring relationship.

I'm a clinical psychologist. I pick up on a lot of signals because of my training as a clinical behavioural psychologist. Being taken away from the one-to-one scenario was a difficult challenge for me. I was able to form that empathy with the mentee, but what I failed to achieve was that bonding – it wasn't friends online it was mentor and mentee; it was a different type of relationship. It is absolutely a different relationship.

There's a lot to be said for online mentoring, in that it can be more private and people are more relaxed in their own environment, you can get people to open up to things they wouldn't be comfortable [discussing] in a public setting.

My relationship with my mentor was easier to get into because she was what I wanted to be – I want to be a lawyer. So me being excited about a relationship with someone who could help me get to know the industry allowed me to make a really positive relationship with her. If she wasn't a lawyer and was in a different industry, we might have had a different relationship.

It is to do with personality. I can sit here and talk for hours. We have been paired by an organisation; I know this person is safe. I don't mind opening up about job prospects etc and things that are happening in my life. It has a lot to do with personality.

Some only mentored by phone (or with video conferencing and cameras turned off). They still reported being able to build the relationship with their mentees.

I didn't find that it was lacking, I still formed quite a personal relationship with my mentor despite being just on calls not even on video. I don't even know what he looks like.

We just said let's have a phone call and just carried on like that. We established a high degree of empathy quite quickly. I could envisage this guy; he was from Manchester and I went to university there.

With some mentees, they felt that the in-person mentoring allowed them to establish a trusting relationship that they were then able to go back to when they really needed it.

My mentor has been with me previous to the pandemic. If it had started in March (i.e., all online) I would have said no way. They wouldn't be able to feel what I was feeling. Nothing was lost because the relationship had been put in place before, when we could meet face-to-face.

Safeguarding and Its impact?

We were interested in whether safeguarding training or practice had a positive or other impact on the building of a trusting mentoring relationship. There were mixed views as to whether the safeguarding framework helps or hinders the establishment of a trusting relationship. Some mentors like that safeguarding is part of the structure they are working to and that addressing it as a given is helpful. Others either feel uncomfortable addressing it directly or even that doing so could create tension. Mentors felt that with virtual mentoring there is less safeguarding risk than with in-person mentoring.

I think as a mentor you need to feel confident that you understand the guard rails and working within guidelines of what is appropriate. It's very important.

If anything, it equalises the relationship and brings everything that needs to be said to the fore, as part and parcel at the first meeting. We need to do a, b, and c. I expect from you and you expect from me. Virtually, in some respects there is less risk than face-to-face element.

For other mentors, addressing safeguarding felt unnatural and creates an unnecessary tension.

I didn't even think about mentioning safeguarding. It would have felt unnatural to start having that discussion, would have created a strange tension.

I thought I wasn't going to be addressing this anymore, it clearly wasn't needed or warranted. The role of the mentor should be putting the mentee at ease. It is a different experience the face-to-face and virtual. That question of safeguarding, I just leave it out.

Definitely it can get in the way. Having that conversation with your mentee puts a barrier up straight away. In virtual it's more in your face. You have to do or say something so that makes it more obvious for the mentee.

For the mentees we spoke to, addressing safeguarding was more normal for them, and they generally found this to be helpful.

It's a benefit and a hinderance as well. A benefit, it sets a boundary on what the relationship is but need to abide by the boundaries. If you want to do something spontaneous or in the moment oh I can't because that's not what we're allowed to.

Safeguarding training is important as it clarifies the relationship and future conversations. Given Covid, and even before, young adults may cling onto this person as something more than a mentor – having this training, keep to more career and CVs enables better guidance for the relationship. You know where this person stands in your life.

Safeguarding helps to create a professional bond and it is like the initial level of trust which is required, and it provides clarity.

3.4 Meeting Needs

With mentoring relationships going online, it was now possible for mentors and mentees in 1MM to be in very different geographies. We asked respondents to reflect on how being in different geographies could impact on the mentoring relationship, particularly with regards to meeting the mentees' needs as well as how important it was for the mentor to be from the industry the mentee is seeking to get into. Generally, mentors and mentees saw being from different geographies as an opportunity. At a simple level, it was a hook that could be spoken about in order to get to know or build relationships at the start.

I think you will find kinship in someone with the same accent, or similar age or has experience of Birmingham or Manchester. But the flip side is there is an exciting opportunity to speak with someone who is not in the same area at the same time.

It's not about where they are from. We were put together based on industry and what they want to do later on, the same sector. I don't think it matters geography if you are doing it online. You need someone in the same country, so they know the system. The same sector and interest are easier to advise.

However, mentees looking to break into specific industries in specific areas, suggested that matching industry was as important, if not more, than geography. Mentees said this was important because it provides them with insider knowledge and good advice regarding ways to gain work experience or employment, useful contacts, and a better understanding of what employers are looking for.

I think it depends on the sector and what [you're] trying to achieve. With a lot of university students close to graduation in Manchester which is a city they have chosen for the creative industry here; they are looking for advice on how to break into that. Knowing the city, what's going on, events, networking opportunities. I think that local knowledge is really useful.

My mentor works in Cardiff about 40 min away and, even though although we've not met in-person, our being quite close geographically meant it was easier for me to get work experience in-person. My mentor works in construction and I work in environmental management – she was able to contact construction sites close to where I live and when restrictions eased, I could get there quite quickly. That made virtual to in-person easier when restrictions eased.

For me it was really important my mentor was in the industry. I knew what I wanted to do when I finished A level. My family has never... I've never had connections in that industry. I used my mentor's contacts to get into the industry that I wanted to.

I was very particular when it came to the form about wanting a lawyer [as a mentor] otherwise I didn't want one, because I was coming up against a lot of rules when I was applying and didn't know what I wasn't doing right. That allowed me to have a great relationship with my mentor. She knew it [the industry].

Other mentors suggested that you can still support a mentee to gain work experience even if you do not live in the same geography, and that encouraging mentees to find the right work experience opportunity for themselves is a better way to support and develop the mentee.

With the most recent one this was a guy doing biomedical science. Clearly work experience was something we spoke about. I could speak about the sort of work experience you would look for to put yourself ahead of the game. The conversation was good, and he found something locally. I think you're not helping them to develop if you give it to them on a plate, "I've got a mate down the road give them a ring," it's not helpful for the mentee's resilience. I pointed him in a direction.

You help your mentee to think a bit more creatively, we can ask some questions they may not even be thinking about. We'll open up the conversation to get them to think about the local area and what is available to them. I think it actually can be used creatively to the advantage of the mentoring experience.

Most agreed that being in the industry that the mentee wishes to pursue does help with both understanding the needs of the mentee and supporting their journey into work. However, that isn't an absolute, and mentors and mentees realised their role could morph more into a coaching role if the industry match wasn't close.

Really as I understand it, the job of the mentor is to prompt a mentee to do the research to find the opportunities themselves. It would be counterproductive if I said there's X organisation in Manchester City Centre, and you should contact them. I think it's very disempowering.

There was an initial disappointment I was hoping for someone who has connections but then building on it, it's someone [who] teaches me with the mindset how to make those connections in any industry.

Industry is important, but in my case, my mentor has showcased to me that it is not. He's in finance, which is what I initially wanted to be in, but I changed to marketing. And now, my mentor provides a different perspective.

For younger mentees or those less clear about their career path, the industry the mentor is from matters less.

I went in thinking I wanted accountancy or something along those lines... to thinking about working in the foreign office to finance and tech – he's a coach for CEOs and has always been there to go through the merits of all of them...really effectively.

I think it depends on age group. With my first mentee it was younger. More about life skills, confidence, equipping with the framework rather than specific, practical advice. More of a chat about goals and ambitions. With my current mentee, she is older and much more focussed on her ambitions and the sector she wants – journalism, that definitely helps.

Some mentees felt strongly that their needs could only be met by being paired with someone with a similar identity as them, for example from the same gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion.

1MM's underlying principle is to promote community cohesion by bringing people from different backgrounds together in trusting relationships, and that these characteristics should not be the basis for matching people. However, these factors were highlighted as important for some mentees as it helped create a safe environment whereby the mentee felt comfortable opening up to their mentor about specific experiences or situations. Mentees said that sharing an identity is not essential, however a mentor's understanding, cultural awareness and support **are** essential.

I'm mixed race and I am used as a trophy to my university as I look white but am not. If I had a white mentor, I may have had issues bringing this up in conversations.

Being able to have a trusting relationship is important. For a transgender person, they need to be accepting of that. My mentor has been very understanding and willing to talk to me with trust, even if it is only online.

Some of the discussions I have had are about being a woman in a certain industry, being an ethnic minority in a certain industry and how that can be navigated and some of the challenges, especially when they collide.

3.5 Environmental Factors

We asked respondents if the mentoring environment felt more artificial in-person or online and if online is more or less awkward than face-to-face? For mentees, the response was varied, with some individuals arguing the mentoring process does feel more artificial online due to the inability to read body language and difficulty 'humanising' the mentor. In contrast, other mentees said they felt more comfortable opening up over a computer screen due to the disconnect and distance that online mentoring provides. Preferences for in-person or online seem to be linked to personality types.

Face-to-face is natural for me, that's my preference however this has now become the new normal.

I think that depends on each person. I personally find speaking virtually at the beginning a bit easier than meeting in-person for the first time but it's more difficult to develop a broader relationship. That's my experience. I think it stunted that relationship.

I prefer online, it feels less awkward online. We're both in our own environments where we feel comfortable and relaxed. It's normal to talk to them whereas if I'm face-to-face... I am an awkward person anyway. Do you handshake or what to say hi...?

Online feels more awkward. You have to stop and think and go over in your mind what you want to say.

We also asked if a window into your home felt good, a personal touch or intrusive and if it helps build rapport? Again, responses were mixed. Some responses stated it does not feel intrusive and that it can support a meaningful relationship with mentors, whereas other mentees found it difficult or embarrassing to be mentored from home. They want to be professional, and they find that things like a lack of space, a noisy environment, the presence of younger siblings or a lack of connectivity can

get in the way of that. One raised a question over cultural perceptions, especially if the mentor was from a different background.

You're sharing your world with someone new. They are sharing their personal world. When you meet in a coffee shop you are only sharing the human side of things, you don't know what they do, where they live, how they act. When you do things virtually, you're opening yourself up a lot more. That can lead to building relationships quicker or finding it a bit more difficult if you're a little more guarded.

Whenever I do zooms in my front room, there's something on the wall that looks Christian, so my mum always makes me take it down – because she doesn't want people to make assumptions of what sort of family we have. I tend to use fake backgrounds.

If I had to do it virtually, I think I would because I have four siblings so they would be intruding every time and they are so noisy. That would be embarrassing.

Mentors were also aware of the window into their homes and what it might convey.

One has to curate the background. I'm sitting in my study now... I'm also aware that my bookshelf is far enough away that no one can read what the books are about... it's important if you are a mentor because you are bringing that background into the conversation.

Sometimes I feel like I have to be careful about presenting a very neutral background, if I move the camera this way you can see wine glasses, or this way you can see the piano. I don't want people to think 'she's this' or 'she's that'. I'm always quite conscious of what people might think, especially with the age range. Some of the mentees might feel uncomfortable.

For some students and mentees, the preference is to keep their cameras off on a Zoom or virtual session. Some of the mentors were strongly opposed to this, saying it made communication and the ability to build a relationship harder. However, one mentee explained that until trust is built up some young people are reluctant to share their home environment. When we asked mentors if having the camera on should be required, they felt that it should be something that mentees are asked to do, and that this can support the dialogue around skills and professional experience.

If they want to use mentoring to help with their professional future, you have to know how to conduct yourself with another adult.

So much of the way you communicate is through visual expressions, it helps you build that rapport. Obviously, a lot of students rather have their cameras off in lectures. But you get a better discussion if you have the camera on and try to focus on the conversation.

I would refuse to mentor somebody with their camera off. It's the equivalent of walking into a room and someone has a blanket over their head and saying let's have a conversation. It's just not human and wouldn't do it. It changes the power relationship.

Camera on helps, otherwise it feels completely disconnected. We never had a conversation about it, but automatically I put my camera on.

Even calling your GP is hard work; I wouldn't want my mentor to be just a voice. It's scary.

We also found mixed opinions over whether respondents were more likely to miss in-person or virtual meetings. Some mentors said in-person meetings were difficult to arrange with mentees, or difficult during the working day to make the time particularly when urgent things came up. Mentees highlighted distance and the time it takes to travel to the meeting as reasons why it was harder to cancel in-person opposed to virtual meetings. Virtual meetings were felt to be less of a commitment and therefore easier to forget, due to an overload of online events and commitments. One mentee suggested it was easier to miss online meetings because they are harder for him and he needed to put more effort in, yet he got less reward due to a preference for mentoring in-person. Others suggested that because virtual meetings are relatively easy to attend, they are also easier to move.

I think it's actually easier to miss a digital one. There are so many things to think about with face-to-face, I have to think about parking, times scales and be more organised. With digital we don't allow any time in between. It's easier to miss one of those.

Online, I'm at home. I felt like, how can I cancel if I'm already at home. I'm not going anywhere! I felt more embarrassed to say I can't make it. When it's face-to-face... things can happen.

I forgot about one session until after and I felt terrible. My timetable is too congested with online events and zoom events, it feels less real, which is less of a dedication than meeting in-person.

I'd say it's easier not to miss a face-to-face. Once you work your schedule around face-to-face, there's less opportunity for something to come up and get in the way.

3.6 When the Pandemic is Over

Toward the end of our discussions with groups and individuals, we tried to gauge their view of the future for 1MM with a multiple-choice question. 'When the pandemic is over which of the following statements would you agree with' and the choice of answers was as follows.

- A. There is no need for 1MM to go back to in-person mentoring. Virtual mentoring works perfectly well and is much more efficient.
- B. Virtual mentoring works, but something is missing. Perhaps a blended approach would work best – you meet your mentor in-person 2 or 3 times a year with the remainder of the mentoring sessions going online.
- C. 1MM should strive to bring all mentoring back to in-person as soon as possible – you cannot replace a real, in-person encounter with a virtual one.

Although the majority of those we spoke to, by some distance went for B, the blended approach, there is much learning for 1MM to be drawn from this section. We will explore the views under each of the responses below.

A. There is no need for 1MM to go back to in-person mentoring. Virtual mentoring works perfectly well and is much more efficient.

There was only a minority that felt that there is no need to go back to in-person mentoring at all. A few mentors living abroad did not want to lose the opportunity to continue mentoring and felt that it had worked quite well overall. There were more that thought all mentoring should come back in-person, whilst most (about 80%) felt that the blended approach would be the optimum way forward. This serves to demonstrate that the vast majority agree that in-person mentoring should form part of 1MM's future and should not be lost altogether. One mentor voted for A simply due to practicality, while one mentee noted that he prioritised the pairing with his mentor over the ability to meet in-person.

I wouldn't want to compromise my pairing with my mentor for the sake of meeting in-person.

The fact that some of the mentors are a bit busy, that's why I went for A. I would be of much more use if there was an online offer. It takes away the need for a physical meet up... you can watch my body language, it's all there. I may not be able to make it in-person. It's a question of whether the cohort of mentees prefer face-to-face.

B. Virtual mentoring works, but something is missing. Perhaps a blended approach would work best – you meet your mentor in-person 2 or 3 times a year with the remainder of the mentoring sessions going online.

This was by far the most common response to this question from those we spoke to. Although all accept that, with the pandemic, the move to more online, home working, virtual meetings and conferences has accelerated. Still, most did not want to lose physical interaction altogether and some said that the mentor and mentee should be responsible themselves for the level of blend (ie. how much online and how much in-person) they wished to have.

Blended. B. That's already what we are planning to do. We recognise it is easier and we can get more engagement, but we don't want to miss the face-to-face as we know there are benefits that come from that too.

If you meet them in-person, it solidifies a relationship. So meeting in-person would be cool.

Even meeting 2-3 times a year, I think that would be great. Not all the time but some of the time. I want to meet mine and give her chocolate and flowers!

Agree would go with B providing that both parties can then have a conversation about what that blend looks like. Where you meet, how you spread that.

Having the first few interactions in-person and building the relationship and then moving online. Almost as if it's video messaging a friend. You've already built that relationship and having a chat about something specific. Rather than getting to know each other online.

It is down to individual needs. If a student is 100 percent evident that they prefer face-to-face for their learning style, then face-to-face is for them. On the other hand, if the learning style prefers virtual... take a step back with face-to-face. It should be a hybrid model for mentoring, but mentor and mentee should have autonomy. Power should be with mentor and mentee not 1MM.

We also asked some if they would be prepared to travel further if they were only meeting up a few times during the mentoring relationship.

It would depend if 1MM offered money for travel. I would go for B, but tailored by the mentor and mentee, and hopefully expenses paid for.

If you offered me the chance to meet someone in the industry I want to work in and go into their office, I'd go to London for that and I'm in Manchester. A couple of times a year. It's worthwhile for the mentee.

I think you'd have to consider it more. I wouldn't be as willing to travel across country to meet a mentee as I would be to travel half hour by tube. I think it changes the offer and what the ask is from 1MM. I think you'd have to be really upfront.

C. 1MM should strive to bring all mentoring back to in-person as soon as possible – you cannot replace a real, in-person encounter with a virtual one.

As a research team we predicted that most of the answers to this question would be B, the mixed approach. However, we were surprised, particularly by the views of the mentees that opted more towards C, bringing the programme back in-person as soon as possible. Whilst the convenience of virtual was noted by many, many also noted aspects about the quality of an in-person relationship that are not replicable online. Understanding their reasoning for this is helpful as pressure to move everything online perhaps becomes greater.

I want to speak to someone, be interactive with the sheets and physical note taking. I just miss it and want it back.

If you go physically to meet them, you're in that mindset, you want to improve... I'm not in the mindset when I'm at home. It takes me a while once I'm talking to him. If I was there I would be immediately in the mindset.

Personally, I would be B with a bit of C, but this is a mentee driven programme. It may very well be some want more face-to-face some might want virtual and some no face-to-face. It's that flexibility and down to that choice for each person. As a programme if you have both available, mentors and mentees can choose, short or long term, geography. It's about having a holistic rather than a prescriptive approach.

I've written down 'the energy in the room' – doing this virtually that's missing... I don't know how we measure it as human being, but there is that energy in the room you just do not get virtually.

For me 100% C. the authenticity of meeting a person in real life is never the same online at all. Younger people hate it now (online) maybe they would prefer C also. The new toy syndrome has died out by now.

3.7 Getting the balance right

In the second phase of the field work, we explored with mentors and mentees what they felt the optimum approach would be for a blended model of mentoring, whether the relationship should start face-to-face, how often pairs should meet in-person, whether mentees would be willing to travel once or twice to meet their mentor, again raising the issue of how much weight should be put on geography. Some mentors created and voted for an option D, in which 1MM leaves the balance between in-person and online entirely up to the mentors and mentees who are paired together:

There should be an option for in-person or online, to be decided between you and your mentor.

I would like to think that it's a contract that mentor and mentee establish for themselves that suits their lifestyle and how they like to work... I'd like to see it not as something prescribed for us.

I would vote for D. 1MM ought to offer the option of either blended or in-person or online and that both mentees and mentors can discuss what suits them best. There are so many advantages that it [online] can't be dropped, but it ought to be brought into a suite of offers rather than A, B, or C which are too definite.

It should be mentee led. Go at the pace the mentee wants to go at. My mentee was the one who put in the first Zoom meeting. It was so much more natural, like two people who had known each other a long time. There is something about the mentee being empowered to feel they can establish the pace.

For the blended approach it was also suggested that an initial face-to-face session could be held as a major event either regionally or nationally. That is, an event organised for each new cohort of mentors and mentees to meet in-person, hold their first mentoring session, and attend a range of training opportunities and hear from speakers. Additionally, events could be held at the end of their mentoring process. This way, mentees would be able to say goodbye to their mentor as well as having the opportunity to meet with different mentors – thus enhancing mentees' networking skills and their ability to grasp alternative points of view and explore other industries of interest. Mentees would also be able to socialise and share experiences with other mentees. There was much enthusiasm about this kind of approach in the mentee focus group. Mentees suggested that if an event required travel,

however, they would need expenses reimbursed. Some mentors were more reticent, suggesting that an event would need a structure and planning to offer something beneficial for both the mentors and mentees.

1MM could host an event with all mentees and mentors to socialise and meet... helps with networking, talk to other mentors and mentees in a more relaxed setting. This would eradicate it being awkward as everyone is in it together.

With the right planning we could establish some common footings and a sense of community which could be helpful when relationships became more virtual.

3.8 Could more choice in matching lead to better mentoring outcomes?

As previously highlighted, mentees in the second round of research expressed strong interest in making the pairing process more personalised. This referred to being able to express preferences as to whether their mentor is from the industry they aim to pursue; a choice about whether geography is important – for those who prefer meeting in-person or want to utilise their mentor’s industry networks; or whether their mentor shares similar characteristics as themselves (eg, race, gender etc.).

Here the feedback was clear – all mentees have different needs which they suggest could be better accommodated through the pairing process. Identity, geography, and industry present a tough checklist to meet, yet all these aspects are seen as important to mentees. Further research might benefit 1MM here. If more choice in pairing could deliver stronger and more beneficial mentoring relationships, would 1MM consider designing its systems to give greater choice in the matching process? Race and ethnicity were also highlighted as an important factor when pairing mentee with mentor, as it allows mutual understanding regarding certain situations as well as being culturally aware, as was awareness or acceptance of LGBTQ.

LGBTQ acceptance is important. If not personally sharing it.

One thing important for me in a mentor is race. I can talk to anyone but having someone of the same race breaks the barrier, it’s more personal and adds value.

Some of the discussions I have had are about being a woman in a certain industry, being an ethnic minority in a certain industry, and how that can be navigated and some of the challenges, especially when they collide.

3.9 Skills development

Mentees felt that 1MM should be cautious in their approach to adding any type of definitive programme of skills development. Many felt that it would become a chore and take away from relationship building with their mentors. One suggested that mentees could fill out a form expressing their preferences for how they would want to use their mentoring time. Another mentee noted the importance of allowing them to work at their own pace, and that mentors needed to be aware that some sessions might need to be different than others.

I would become very resentful and would probably result to leaving 1MM...if I had to do a set of tasks and skills I would likely not want to do it anymore. I enjoy the mentoring side of it.

If we let 1MM know the skills we wanted to focus on, for those who want to improve on these skills can do, and those who don't want to, then they won't have to engage in it.

In terms of skills, you both have to want to do it to prevent it becoming a chore. Monthly, when we meet, I'm meant to do things that will benefit me. If a skill came into play, it would make it more forced.

One session, I was having a struggle with mental health and I made it clear before the meeting that I wouldn't be able to complete set tasks. They were very understanding. Go at the right pace for us, it was useful for me to have an option to go at our own pace.

Some noted that young people find making a phone call more challenging than using IT. It was suggested that even using the telephone to call mentors to make arrangements would be lost if mentoring only became virtual, and this is a skill that young people are quickly losing due to the many virtual and messaging options available to them. This is reflected within the following statement:

I don't know why but we hate phone calls. Ringing someone is scarier than talking to someone in-person...

I call them and they said they would rather talk on the messaging.

3.10 Youth Partners in under 18s settings

In phase one of the research, we spoke to a small number of the youth partners to try and ascertain their views on some of these issues, and in particular how virtual mentoring could be introduced for under 18s. One suggested that online mentoring might be more flexible and convenient as well as potentially allowing mentees to have more than one mentor. In terms of being able to offer the programme again for 16 to 18-year-olds, one partner we spoke to had this suggestion:

What would work would be to have virtual sessions during school time or after school. I could book the computer classroom and she could be there walking around and seeing what's going on. If mentors and mentees are at home, then that's difficult. Once a month in school. Ideally if we were to continue with virtual in school sessions we would have during the school day and chase students to make sure they haven't gone home. Ideally, we would start next academic year and if we can't get mentors in-person, we would like to start virtual mentoring as above.

In phase two we spoke to Sale Sharks Community Trust Advantage project, an education and enrichment programme, to better understand a model of virtual mentoring for under 18s they had begun piloting during the pandemic. Sale Sharks work with small groups of mentors and mentees. Each student is given a device and a headset to use to talk to their mentor in individual break out rooms. Supervisors can drop in and out of the breakout rooms, and also supervise the mentoring from the classroom. We developed a case study based on their model and experiences (see Appendix 4)

which we then utilised in a Youth Partners workshop to discuss ways in which mentoring for under 18s in schools and colleges might be able to resume. The Sale Sharks approach provided a model, albeit for smaller groups and with a cohort of 'NEETs' who can be more difficult to engage.

Those who attended the Youth Partner workshop included ten youth partners from a range of organisations around the UK, members of the 1MM team, and a representative from Sale Sharks - who presented in-depth information about the programme and their experiences running a pilot virtual mentoring project in conjunction with 1MM. The Youth Partners were keen to bring back mentoring for under 18s in the future. They agreed that it was important that staff drop in to monitor meetings, to support safeguarding for mentor and mentee. They also discussed the potential of recording meetings for an extra level of security, conducting virtual mentoring within a managed school environment, the continuation of social distancing and the importance of setting expectations for mentors before meeting students.

I like the idea of dropping into conversations in breakout rooms. I like the professional friendship and aspiration elements, a professional taking time out of their day to talk to them – this would encourage learners eventually.

There were several concerns around timetabling, especially due to a feeling within many schools that students need to catch up after the pandemic. One Youth Partner noted that they are not allowed to organise mentoring outside of school hours. The time and effort involved with DBS checks for mentors was also raised, as were staffing resources and space. Youth partners would like to find a way for DBS checks to be done differently in order to speed up the process and reduce the work required on their part.

Not allowed to do it outside of school hours. Fit around student's individual timetable previously. as Des has done, could allocate once a month or every two weeks we could allocate a time, for example lunch, and then run it then. How I see it working for us.

We couldn't possibly timetable it. There is not a chance. Since Covid we are so strapped for time.

The larger the scale, the more DBS you need to do. It takes weeks and is a massive task. The easiest way is if they are all DBS checked beforehand, but I'm not even sure this is acceptable internally.

We would have to deploy specific members of staff for this. I don't know if we have the resources. It would work with a small year group, but not large.

When asked what it would take to restart mentoring in the Youth Partners' establishments, the feedback indicated that: small cohorts, high levels of supervision both in-person and online, perhaps an initial face-to-face meeting to get started and gain trust and then moving onto a blended approach. Some elements of careers advice or opportunities were also highlighted as a "carrot" to support student 'buy in' that were used previously and might need to be considered going forward. In addition, one Youth Partner noted that some NEET young people are less computer literate and would be reluctant to go online, preferring to meet in-person.

Hard to get them to see the benefits without this element (careers), it shouldn't be primary element for mentoring.

Some students didn't have the technology. Was only a small majority who wanted to go online. Looking at the NEET children who are not engaged in education and learning, they are very reluctant to go online and would rather be in-person. Not all are computer literate. They even requested paper over lockdown.

Similarly, Youth Partners liked the Sale Sharks' idea of briefing mentors beforehand on what to expect and how to work with NEET and vulnerable people. However, youth partners again suggested any support in undertaking this would be helpful, again due to their limited resources and time.

Appendix 1: Evaluation Framework

1MM Evaluation Framework – 2020/21

1. Introduction

Mobilise Public Ltd was appointed by One Million Mentors (1MM) to evaluate their 2020/21 programme. This document sets out the evaluation plan - the scope of the evaluation, key questions, and data sources. The plan includes information about the programme, what the evaluation will do, the purpose of it and key evaluation questions we will try to answer. It also sets out how it will be done, what data will be collected, how data will be analysed, and how and when results will be reported.

2. 1MM

1MM is a community-based mentoring programme with an ambition to scale up mentoring for young people and connect one million young people to one million life changing opportunities. 1MM believe that, through one-to-one mentoring, more young people can grow the knowledge, networks, skills and confidence they need to succeed. Through the provision of trained volunteer mentors from the world of business and the community, 1MM connects young people with business and community professionals for a year-long programme of once-a-month mentoring. Mentors are recruited and trained and are matched with a mentee. The programme began with a pilot in 2016 and already operates in East London, the West Midlands, Cardiff, and Greater Manchester. Over 2000 mentees had gone through the programme by late 2020. The programme was disrupted in 2020 as face-to-face mentoring had to be curtailed once the Covid 19 pandemic impacted on the UK. The 2019/20 cohort had some face-to-face mentoring sessions with the rest provided virtually. The 2020/21 cohort is operating entirely virtually and, due to safeguarding concerns, the programme is only now delivered to young people aged 18 and over.

3. Evaluation

3.1 Scope

1MM received a grant from Spirit of 2012 and this evaluation is attached to that funding stream. In 2019, the Behavioural Insights Team were appointed by 1MM to undertake a process evaluation. That work and report is comprehensive and there is no need to repeat elements that were undertaken then. However, with the move in 2020 from face-to-face to virtual or online mentoring, it has been agreed that the best use of this evaluation budget would be to explore the relative benefits of in-person and virtual mentoring. This is because 2019/2020 presents a unique opportunity where mentors and mentees experienced both modes of delivery. The focus of this evaluation will be to explore the relative benefits of the different approaches and will explore any adjustments that may need to be made to compensate for the move online.

3.2 Timescale

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Appointment & inception								
Review of info and creation of evaluation plan								
Development of research tools								
Milestone 1: Deliver 4 focus groups, 6 interviews								
Interim Report & Mid-term review								
Milestone 2: Deliver 4 focus groups, 6 interviews								
Draft final report								
Final Report								

Significant milestones are indicated with a bold border around the box

3.3 Purpose

1MM have asked us to focus the purpose of this evaluation on exploring the relative benefits of face-to-face and virtual mentoring. We hope therefore to consolidate learning from the BiT process evaluation by focussing on some of the moderating factors which they suggest moderate the quality and fidelity of the mentoring model. We will focus mainly on the relationship building domain as this is the area that is most likely to be impacted by the change of the mentoring environment – from face-to-face interactions to virtual. The evaluation will be used to demonstrate any differences between face-to-face and virtual mentoring relationships and their impact on the moderating factors that BiT suggest are key ingredients for building relationships that support successful mentoring.

Audience: The Spirit of 2012, commissioners, other funders and 1MM Board.

3.4 Evaluation Questions

The following are the core questions which this evaluation will be aiming to answer:

General

- What is valued about face-to-face mentoring?
- What is valued about online or virtual mentoring?
- What might be the optimal model for 1MM once the pandemic is over?

Fostering empathy/Building Rapport

- How has moving to online/virtual mentoring impacted on mentors' ability to foster empathy?
- Do safeguarding concerns or practices (e.g., communication, place of meeting) help or hinder in the establishment of a trusting relationship?

Meeting Needs

- Have mentors still been able to be responsive to mentees' needs?
- As the mentoring moves online, and a mentee and mentor do not need to be located near each other geographically, will that have an impact
 - On the potential to introduce the mentee to local opportunities?
 - On the mentors potential to build rapport?

Environmental Factors

- Does the mentoring environment feel more artificial in-person or online?

3.5 What does success look like?

Our evaluation will establish how effective 1MM has been in delivering its outcomes and value to individuals as it has shifted to a virtual or online environment. We are particularly interested in those who have experienced both in-person and online mentoring and we wish to access the cohort of 2019/20 as quickly as possible while they still remember their experience of both. We are also interested in the experience of youth partners, employers, and funders. In particular, we want to explore their sense of the move to online, whether excluding 16- to 18-year-olds is a significant issue for them, how safeguarding issues have been impacted by the change, and their sense of the optimal post pandemic in terms of the balance between in-person and online.

4. Data Collection

1MM use an online pre and post mentoring survey for mentees and mentors to measure their impact. Qualitative work has been undertaken in the past, though not extensively. 1MM will continue to administer these surveys, monitoring and reporting on them this year. This evaluation will use the reporting from the surveys to provide context and background to the evaluation questions we are asking, however we will not be undertaking any additional analysis on the survey data sets.

Our focus in answering the research questions is the building of qualitative data. By talking to different groups of mentors and mentees who have experienced face-to-face only, face-to-face and online, and online only, we hope to begin to understand the relative benefits of each of the methods of delivery of the mentoring relationship.

We will also talk to a range of stakeholders – youth partners, funders, an employer and staff/trustees from 1MM. Here we hope to understand also the perceived benefits and disbenefits of online mentoring versus in-person relationships from a range of perspectives.

The evaluation will twice seek to speak to mentees and mentors in separate and mixed groups drawing on discussions from 8 focus groups that will aim to host 10 participants in each group. We will also speak to 6 stakeholders using structured interviews again twice through the evaluation period.

All stakeholder interviews and focus groups will be held virtually both to keep costs down for 1MM, to ensure we are Covid compliant throughout and to ensure it is easy for mentors and mentees to participate. Focus groups will be facilitated with a member of the Mobilise team also present to take a note. All stakeholder interviews and focus groups will also be recorded so that a full, verbatim note can be written up for each.

4.1 Theory of Change

The starting point for any evaluation is the theory of change and we are pleased to have reviewed the 1MM theory of change. With this evaluation, we are focussing in on only a few areas of that:

- Mentor and mentee know how to fully engage and get the most out of mentoring
- Mentor builds a trusting relationship in which the mentee feels comfortable to communicate
- Mentor provides active listening and support to mentee

Our report will be written with the 1MM Theory of Change in mind and, if needed, we will suggest any changes to it that might be needed as a result of the shift to a virtual mentoring environment.

4.2 Detailed Evaluation Questions

The following set of questions will be reviewed and built into relevant discussion guides for the different focus groups and stakeholder interviews, however at this stage, from the document review, discussions with you, and understanding of your theory of change we would ask you to review the following set of research questions:

General

- What is valued about face-to-face mentoring?
- What is valued about online or virtual mentoring?

Fostering empathy/Building Rapport

- How has moving to online/virtual mentoring impacted on the mentor's ability to foster empathy?
 - Are mentors and mentees still able to establish trusting relationships?
 - Do mentees feel confident to be honest and open?
 - Are mentors still able to connect on a personal level? How were you able to build rapport?
 - Might not coming from the same geographic area impact on the mentor's ability to build rapport with mentees? Is there a preference?
- Does safeguarding training, concerns, or practices (eg, communication, place of meeting) help or hinder in the establishment of a trusting relationship?

Meeting Needs

- Have mentors still been able to be responsive to mentees' needs? Would mentors/mentees not being in the same geography impact on this eg, being able to utilise local networks for work experience?
- How important is it that mentor is well matched to the mentee in terms of the industry the mentee wishes to pursue?
- Are there any differences in the responses to the above questions between mentors and mentees that are well matched for mentees specific goals, and for those that are not well matched?

Environmental Factors

- Does the mentoring environment feel more artificial in-person or online?
- Is it easier to find a time and a space for mentoring in-person or online?
- Does online feel more or less awkward than face-to-face – why/why not?
- Is it easier to keep to/not miss online mentoring sessions than face-to-face?

Other Areas for Exploration

- Does online mentoring help build confidence in on screen meetings/working?
- Does a window into your home feel good, a personal touch, or intrusive? Does it help you build rapport with your mentor/mentee?
- For those who did both in-person and online mentoring:

- What do you think is gained by mentoring in-person that might be missed with online mentoring?
- What do you think new mentees might miss out on who only have virtual mentoring?
- Were you able to make a connection with your mentee/mentor in-person? Online?
- For those who only did virtual
 - What do you think is missed with online mentoring? What is gained?
 - Were you able to make a connection/build a relationship with your mentee/mentor online?
 - Do you think it would have been any different if you met face-to-face?
- When the pandemic is over which of the following statements would you agree with:
 - There is no need for 1MM to go back to in-person mentoring. Virtual mentoring works perfectly well and is much more efficient.
 - Virtual mentoring works, but something is missing. Perhaps a blended approach would work best – you meet your mentor in-person 2 or 3 times a year with the remainder of the mentoring sessions going online.
 - 1MM should strive to bring all mentoring back to in-person as soon as possible – you cannot replace a real, in-person encounter with a virtual one.
- Do Youth Partners/Employers:
 - Perceive any differences (benefits and disadvantages) in the experience or outcomes for mentors/mentees through the move to an online programme?
 - Worry about not being able to offer mentoring to 16- to 18-year-olds through the virtual programme (due to safeguarding concerns)?
 - How could these be overcome?

4.4 Qualitative Evaluation

This qualitative evaluation will explore how successful 1MM has been from a delivery perspective as it has moved online. It will draw on a range of mentors, mentees and stakeholders who have had differing experiences of the 1MM mentoring relationship. It will explore any differences that the mentoring environment might make to the moderating factors in the relationship domain identified by the Behaviour Insights Team. We will seek to assess the processes involved in looking at things like the setting up of the mentoring, mentor/mentee journeys, staff, youth partners and funder experience, and how the change has impacted upon implementation and monitoring. We will also be interested in perceptions of how safeguarding has been positively or negatively impacted by the move to an only virtual environment.

Focus groups

We will run four focus group discussions which will enable people to express their points of view about their perceptions of the mentoring experience in-person, online and mixed. These will provide us with insight of participants' experiences of mentoring through the changes that took place, from in-person to virtual, because of Covid. The focus groups will be run using an Appreciative Inquiry approach which will help 1MM to understand the best elements of the changes and how to build on these.

Participants taking part in the focus groups will be provided with full information about the purpose of the group and how their contributions will be used.

The suggested make-up of the focus groups is as follows:

1 mixed group of mentors & mentees from year 3 of the programme who experienced both in-person and online mentoring

1 group of mentees only from year 3 of the programme

1 mixed group of mentors & mentees from year 4 of the programme (ie. this year, all virtual)

1 group of mentees only from year 4 of the programme

We have chosen to focus particularly on year 3 and year 4 of the 1MM programme, the year the programme shifted, as participants experienced both in-person and online mentoring; and year 4 where participants have only experienced online mentoring. We will undertake a mixed group and a mentee only group for each as this will ensure mentee views can be fully explored. Our sense is that mentors will be able to get their views across in a mixed group, however mentees may find it more difficult, hence the need for mentee only discussion groups.

Following the first round of focus groups, analysis and interim report, we will make recommendations on the proposed makeup of the 2nd round of focus group discussions.

5. Report structure

We will follow a standard report structure including recommendations and an executive summary whilst bringing it to life with quotes, and a strong narrative.

Addendum to the Evaluation Framework Following Interim Report

The recommendations from the interim report for the next phase of the research were as follows:

- *Overall, we spoke to fewer mentors and mentees for the first round of fieldwork for this evaluation than planned. That in itself needs understanding as part of the stakeholder interviews in the next phase. For the second phase, we need to talk to more mentors and mentees and confirm the interim findings or otherwise.*
- *Some of the issues raised through the conversations would benefit from more in-depth exploration:*
 - *What might be the right balance for a blended approach to mentoring? How would it start? How often would mentors/mentees want to meet in-person? Would travel be an issue for mentees? What about those who have less access to technology or space at home for online mentoring?*
 - *What more could be built into the programme to support young people with the skills they need for the workplace? Do 1MM strongly discourage camera off/sound only mentoring? Should 1MM encourage starting with telephoning your mentor? Should different approaches be encouraged for different personality types?*
 - *If 1MM intends to bring back mentoring for 16- to 18-year-olds in due course, it may be worth exploring with more of them how a mixed model could work in a school setting – some in-person meetings with more done online.*

	Year 3 Mentees	Mentors	Year 4 Mentees	Youth Partners & stakeholders
Phase 1 Planned	15	10	15	6
Phase 1 Actual (through a combination of focus groups and 1:1s)	5	9	13	5

The challenge is how we apply the remaining resource to greatest effect (4 focus groups, 6 stakeholder interviews and a final report). We cannot do everything we would like to.

We also know we want to speak to more mentees. They are the beneficiaries and, particularly after a pandemic year, we really need to understand what will be most beneficial for them in virtual or blended approaches. We had planned to speak to 30 mentees in the first phase and we only got to speak to 18. We also want to speak to mentees again as, in the first phase of this research, we spoke to them at the height of the second lockdown. We want to see if their responses are any different now we are coming out of lockdown and opening up again.

There is also the challenge that although we spoke to enough youth partners, those conversations were not particularly fruitful – we will need to review the discussion guide for them – we need to anyway to build in the blended approach exploration.

Phase 2 field work

For the second phase of the field work, after a meeting with 1MM we agreed the following use of the remaining resource available for the

- **1 focus group of mentors and mentees**, seeking to speak to 5 mentors and 5 mentees in total here – here we will seek to speak to mentees who began in June 2020 (40) and are now ending.
- **1 focus group of mentees only seeking to speak to 10 mentees** – here we will recruit from the pool that began in September 2020 (240) and will be midway through their programme
- **1 focus group of youth partners (under 18s only)** to explore what a blended or virtual model might look like for under 18s – we will run this as a workshop, using an action learning approach. (Introduction, feedback from evaluation interim report, challenges of blended or virtual mentoring, Sales Shark case study, break out rooms to address key questions). This will be run after the Sales Shark case study is complete.
- **1 focus group/workshop for corporate partners** – we agreed funders can't really help us answer the research questions; this focus group will invite corporate partners with some of their mentors to discuss what works for them in terms of online mentoring, and what an optimum blended approach might look like from their perspective.

Stakeholder Interviews * 2

Chair of 1MM – we agreed to cancel this

1MM team – this will be the final meeting where Mobilise tests out any findings and seeks to fill any of our gaps in understanding.

Case Study

Sale Sharks (as soon as possible so it can feed into the focus group of youth partners) .

Appendix 2: Sale Sharks Case Study

Introduction



Sale Sharks Community Trust Advantage project is an education and enrichment programme to help young people gain skills and employment, run by the Sale Shark Rugby Union club. The programme, aimed at 16–18-year-olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), is designed to help them gain the ‘advantage’ by passing qualifications, improving health and undertaking work and volunteer experience in their local community.

As a further education provider alternative to mainstream schools, Sale Sharks Advantage has a life skills and employability focus. As many of the students have some level of barrier to learning, the small class environment allows Advantage to offer a high degree of ‘hand holding’. The programme has a satellite hub model across four sites in the Manchester area, most of which are local community centres, with a team of Advantage officers based at each site. “Not only do learners come to learn but to also be part of the community.” Each of the sites can accommodate 8-12 learners, with 2 tutors to each class. One Million Mentors (1MM) is the strategic lead for mentoring across the city of Manchester. Manchester City Council (MCC) commissioned 1MM’s mentoring project with Sale Sharks as a pilot programme for the 2020-21 academic year, finishing in July 2021. The programme is not confirmed yet for the 2021-22 academic year.

Mentoring provision

Mentoring provision has helped to provide another layer of support for the young people Sale Sharks work with. With a willingness to talk and listen in the role of a “professional friendship,” mentors can help boost learners’ aspirations and provide validation. Sale Sharks also emphasized that mentors often fill a gap by becoming “at least one adult they [the learners] can trust... and [help to] break the cycle of distrust of adults.” Moreover, a mentor can provide positive messages and support that the learners may be receptive to in a way they are not when it comes from a parent or teacher.

“One thing I have enjoyed about 1 Million Mentors the most is meeting a new person and getting to know them...My relationship with my mentor has developed into something very positive and I can take a lot of things away from it such as confidence, positive thinking, leadership skills and communication skills.” Callum

“The relationship I have had with Rich, my mentor, has developed. It was just a talk at first then it moved on to a friendship. The skills I have developed are communication, positive outlook, initiative.” Lewis

“I have really enjoyed my mentor sessions with Sarah, the best part about these sessions is talking about the goals I want to achieve in life and talking about the job I want to go into in life.

In the sessions I have learnt how to communicate with professional people, and I've learnt how to be confident in tough situations." Allyce

Due to Covid-19, the 1MM mentoring project with Sale Sharks was delivered in an online only format. 1MM, having recruited a pool of mentors, ran an initial "Meet the Mentors" online session in which learners could hear from the mentors and the young people could speak about themselves. The learners could then choose the 2 or 3 mentors that they would most like to work with and 1MM matched them on factors such as personality and interests.

Each Advantage site engages in online mentoring once every fortnight with a group of 5 learners and mentors in the morning and another group of 5 in the afternoon. This provides a regular schedule for both the mentors and mentees, something that Sale Sharks reported has worked quite well.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding was a major concern for Sale Sharks in designing the programme. All communication is managed by the site officer, who organises the Zoom meetings for their cohort and breakout rooms for each mentor and mentee. To help ensure safeguarding was as tight as possible, mentors are required to have undergone DBS checks. In addition, mentors and mentees are not permitted to have each other's



contact details and no surnames are shared. If a work experience opportunity is offered by a mentor, Sale Sharks continues to manage all aspects of the communication and incorporates the experience into the young person's learning programme to ensure that it does become an independent, and therefore unmanaged, relationship.

The decision to hold sessions at the Sale Sharks learning sites, rather than from individual homes, stemmed from both the "vulnerability of the learners" and concern for mentors, who

might see inappropriate activity or behaviour and be placed in an uncomfortable or difficult situation if learners logged in from home.

Highlights

Sale Sharks students are embedded in their local communities both as learners and as volunteers – whether it is working in the community hub food bank or helping to run a holiday sports camp for children - contributes not only to their own learning experiences but also to community development.

Future Challenges

Safeguarding: Sale Sharks is considering how to manage the mentor/mentee relationships after the programme ends. For learners over 18, this would be up to them, however, there is concern over younger learners developing social contact with their mentors. The ability to manage numerous work experience opportunities could also become more challenging over time, requiring a review of staffing resources or the approach to safeguarding in external environments.

Face-to-face mentoring: While there are no plans in place to introduce a hybrid model involving both face-to-face and online mentoring, Sale Sharks recognized that face-to-face mentoring would help learners with skills such as the ability to sit down and have a “polite conversation.” While attendance was good during the online pilot programme, there are some concerns around inconsistent attendance and wasting a mentor’s time if face-to-face sessions were introduced. MCC has noted that while they recognized the need for holding sessions online during the pandemic, they noted a strong preference for face-to-face mentoring provision.

Scalability: Transferring the Sale Sharks model to a larger school environment could be a challenge, depending on the number of students receiving mentoring. While Sale Sharks can manage mentor/mentee relationships and respond to mentor concerns, programme the themes and content for sessions, and drop-in to break out rooms, this is viable due to the small number of learners in their programme. A large secondary school might struggle with the noise levels of having a number of online conversations being held in a room, perhaps requiring access to additional classrooms, and might therefore also require additional staffing resources. There might also be challenges around effectively safeguarding a bigger cohort of students.

Further Testimonials from Sale Sharks learners



“1MM has provided me with the opportunity to speak to a professional. I’ve been able to take away advice for my preparation into employment.” Logan

“I have found the 1MM experience good as it has given me a chance to speak to someone in a profession that interests me, because of this I enjoy having a chat with my mentor.” Alfie

“I have found working with them improved speaking to other people and has given me confidence to talk to more people.” Uchenna

“If I am struggling with anything to do with college or work, I have someone I can ask the questions too who has been in my shoes. I have learnt that not all successful people start successful.” Angel