

# LSIS Leadership in Technology (LIT) Grant Based Intervention

## Casestudy/ Report

### BEDFORD COLLEGE PEER MENTOR PROGRAMME

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

##### 1.1 The College

Bedford College is a College of Further Education, providing education and training for learners and employers from a wide geographical area and across a range of sectors. The College offers courses at all levels from entry level to higher education, including NVQs, Apprenticeships, short courses & workshops, customised training and degree level training. In 2009-10 training was provided to over 18,000 learners.

The College has been graded by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as 'Outstanding' in four key areas and has achieved an overall rating of 'Outstanding,' the highest grading available.

Bedford College holds the British Quality Foundation five star **Recognised for Excellence award**, which recognises the College's continuous focus on achieving sustainable excellence in areas covering results, customer focus, leadership, people development, learning and innovation, partnership development, and corporate social responsibility.

##### 1.2 The Project

The Peer Mentor project was to develop processes and resources on Moodle to support a peer mentor programme for learners in the Computing department who find the transition from school to College or between college levels difficult. It was felt that in some cases disaffected learners can be more effectively supported by other students who have recently been through a similar experience than by a member of staff.

The processes and resources developed during this project will be shared in order to extend the programme to other academic areas of the College and to the Foundation Degree level. Effective communication was facilitated by the use of i-pods and i-phones

The aim of this project was, therefore, to develop technology-based processes and resources to support trained student mentors and their mentees in order to improve learning skills and motivation, and to increase retention and achievement.

Intended outcomes were:

- Improved motivation, confidence, retention and achievement of mentees

- Student mentors develop transferable leadership, communication and problem-solving skills
- Technology-supported processes in place to support student mentors and mentees
- VLE resources in place to support the mentoring process

This programme is a part of a wider series of activities taking place at the college to help student integrate effectively and to motivate and inspire. These include 'A Taste of the Action' (taster days), student experience days in which applicants are paired up with a student champion, inspirational talks to existing learners and university visits.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The project followed a number of steps as follows:

### Identification of student mentors

Staff were asked to suggest students who they thought could become successful mentors. These students were invited to a meeting with the project leader who explained the mentoring process and the training requirements, pointing out the possible benefits to the mentor.

### Training of student mentors

The mentors attended a 6-week training course delivered by a student services assistant. On completion of the mentor training they achieved a peer mentoring certificate and a £20 voucher.

### Identification of mentees

Tutors were asked to suggest students who they thought would benefit from mentor support. The project leader met with them to explain the mentor process and the benefits of being a mentee. The students were strongly encouraged to take part in the programme but it was their decision.

### Allocation of mentors

A workshop was held at which the mentors and mentees were encouraged to talk, using a speed-dating model to find out who they felt they could work well with. Following this the project leader spoke to mentors and mentees separately and allocated mentors based on this discussion.

The programme leader informed tutors of the proposed assignments and the tutors were given the opportunity to comment on any issues resulting from the pairings. Some adjustments were made as a result of this...

### Development of Processes

The staff team met regularly during the project development to discuss all aspects, including the implications for confidentiality, access to information, mentor and mentee responsibility, effect on the mentors' own work and the use and monitoring of resources and procedures. Strategies for encouraging mentees to actively participate in the early stages of the process were discussed.

Documentation and Processes were put in place to include:

- Step-by-step guide to setting up the scheme
- Training guide to using the Moodle peer mentoring course
- Contracts for participation
- Guidelines, responsibilities and expectations for the mentoring process
- Code of conduct for using the mobile technology

### Development of Resources

The staff team worked on the development of a new peer mentoring course on Moodle. This comprised a range of relevant resources to support the mentoring process:

- Assessment questionnaires to be completed by mentors, mentees and tutors at the start of the mentoring process and again at the end
- Action planning forms and other relevant documentation for use during the mentoring process
- Mentor photos and profiles
- Forums & discussion groups with appropriate security (confidentiality issues)
- Motivational videos and quotes
- Learning styles quiz with tips for learning
- Video case studies

Applications for the mobile technology were downloaded to include:

- Building self esteem
- Confidence building
- How to mind map
- Exam techniques
- Revision techniques

The mentors and mentees were then trained in the use of these resources and encouraged them to use them regularly

### The Peer Mentoring Process

At the start of the mentoring process mentees completed a self assessment questionnaire to assess their perception of themselves under a range of headings. The mentors completed the same questionnaire for their mentee to give their perception and tutors were asked to do the same for mentees in their tutor group. In this way we were able to triangulate results. The questionnaire will be completed again at the end of the mentoring process to identify changes in perception.

Using the skills developed during their training, the student mentors worked with their mentees, meeting weekly to provide support, review progress, and agree action plans. Some mentor-mentee pairs were allocated i-phones or i-pods to facilitate communication outside these meetings.

The students were expected to use Moodle resources to support the mentoring process and were asked to update their journals and action plans regularly. They were encouraged to make regular use of all the facilities available on Moodle. The mTouch application allows the students to use the Moodle resources whilst on the move. Regular monthly progress meetings were held between the project leader, student mentor support assistant, mentors and mentees in order to monitor progress of the programme.

### **3. RESULTS**

The LSIS project has supported the development of the processes and resources needed to extend the peer mentoring scheme to a wider audience. Although the LSIS project ends in March 2011 with his report, the peer mentor programme will continue until the end of the academic year after which it will be offered to all areas of the College and to other providers.

For this reason the results provided in this section are a snapshot of progress to-date and do not reflect the final results and evaluation of the whole project.

14 mentors from level 2 and level 3 courses successfully completed the first round of training in October 2010. 13 mentees were identified by December 2010. Matching took place and the mentoring process started at the start of January 2011. Since then three further mentors from the Foundation Degree (level 4) have successfully undertaken mentor training in order to mentor level 3 learners.

#### **Use of Technology**

All identified resources were added to Moodle, and the students and staff were trained prior to the start of mentoring. Students were encouraged to make regular use of the resources, and to update meeting logs & complete action plans as mentoring meetings took place.

Activity reports are run every two weeks to build up a picture of the usage of different sections and activities. These reports allow us to drill down and identify individuals. The statistics are discussed at tutor meetings; students are encouraged to access less-used resources and the project leader is able to focus on the students who participate least. We will continue to collect and analyze this data up to the end of the project in June and we will hold focus group with both the mentor and mentee groups to get feedback which will inform changes for the next academic year.

It is clear from the Moodle Activity Table below that the students are making good use of many of the available resources. We are particularly pleased that logs of mentor meetings and the resulting action plans are being completed regularly. Some students are making use of the reflective logs and the project leader is encouraging all mentors and mentees to make this a priority. Resources relating to the use of mobile technologies (in the study support section) show little use currently as the phones have not yet been allocated to the students. Activity in this area should increase once the phones have been allocated and they can perform tasks while on the move.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Views</b>
Questions for mentoring quiz	11
Meeting Log	102
Self Assessment Form	10
Action Plan	121
Mentee Forum	47
About You	40
Pre-mentoring Survey	20
Mentee Views (before)	103
Mentee About You (before)	35
Mentor Views (before)	33
Tutor Views (before)	11
Tutor Questions	3
Peer Mentoring Forum	16
Who's Who	166
Study Support	1

MOODLE ACTIVITY TABLE

Moodle has proved an excellent mechanism for gathering student and staff perceptions through completion of the pre-mentoring questionnaires. The data was entered remotely without the need for time consuming meetings, and was analyzed quickly and efficiently to provide the summary below. The 'after mentoring' questionnaires will be completed on Moodle when the mentoring process is finished. Analysis of this data will demonstrate how successful the mentors, mentees and tutors perceive the mentoring process to have been.

## **Pre-Mentoring Questionnaires**

### Tutor Feedback

Analysing the responses provided on the Pre-Mentoring Questionnaire, it was evident that all tutors responsible for mentees participating in the peer mentoring project viewed the scheme as being helpful in supporting the student's academic studies (see Appendix 17). The coordinator for the mentoring scheme has clearly demonstrated their effectiveness in communicating the aims and objectives of the scheme to all staff, which has resulted in positive feedback about the organisation of the programme and its ability to prepare the participants for mentoring. The majority of tutors have identified that they are happy to support their student(s) if they encountered difficulties whilst being mentored. However, it would be useful for the coordinator to ensure that all tutors are aware of any procedures that are in place for supporting students in the event of unforeseen issues arising between mentors and mentees.

### Mentor Feedback

The responses received from the mentors indicate that they believe the peer mentoring scheme will help the mentees with their studies and were of the opinion, that the mentees would gain a lot from being involved (see Appendix 18). All of the mentors agreed that the mentoring scheme was very well organised and sufficiently prepared them to take on their roles and responsibilities. A small number of mentors

were unsure if they would be good for their mentee, so it would be appropriate for the coordinator to discuss these views with the individuals concerned, to ensure their suitability for working with their mentees. Likewise, a few of the mentors were not clear if they were pleased about having a mentee. For both of these situations, it would be good practice to discuss these points to ensure they are happy to continue their role as a mentor.

### Mentee Feedback

The mentees indicated that the peer mentoring scheme will be helpful to them and they were pleased to be working with a mentor (see Appendix 19). The organisation of the scheme was viewed as being very well organised and the mentees agreed that mentoring would be good for them and they would most likely benefit from the experience. All of the mentees were confident that there was someone they could go to if they had problems whilst being mentored.

Overall, the initial phase of establishing the peer mentoring programme has been very successful. The mentors and mentees have confirmed that they have been adequately prepared by the scheme coordinator to engage in one-to-one exchanges and the tutors would appear to be fully supportive of the entire process.

### **“About the Student” Questionnaire**

#### Tutor Feedback

All tutors completed a detailed questionnaire for each of their students identified to participate in the peer mentoring programme. Combining these responses provides a description of the mentees' characteristics, based on the tutors' perception of each individual. One of the main aims of the mentoring scheme is assist the students in realising their academic potential, by overcoming situations that are likely to prevent students from completing their course programmes. The information derived from the questionnaires successfully identifies important areas where with the assistance of a mentor, the mentees can improve and develop.

The positive aspects arising from the tutors' feedback clearly illustrates that many of the students participating in the peer mentoring scheme like being at college. The tutors and felt they experienced good relationships with all of their students and they also perceived that the mentees got on very well with their peers, especially when working together as part of a team. More importantly, many of the tutors were in agreement that the students on the mentoring scheme had the capability to progress on to the next level of study and there were no barriers that could prevent individual learners from achieving their qualification.

The factors that were of most concern to the tutors were associated with those problems experienced by students, in their ability to cope with change and transition, for example, between school and college and progression from one academic level to another. There were other issues that concerned tutors to do with attendance, punctuality, commitment to towards studies, motivation, effort, focus, enthusiasm, and working to deadlines, time-management and the students' abilities to problem-solve. In addition to these concerns, tutors also indicated that many of their students

lacked confidence, both in themselves and in their academic skills. Taking these concerns into consideration and encouraging the mentors to incorporate strategies that develop target setting and goal setting skills, would be a very good use each mentors time. Through the utilisation of appropriate resources on the virtual learning environment (VLE) each mentor would have at their disposal, a range of practical tools they could introduce in a one-to-one setting.

### Mentee Feedback

Each of the mentees participating in the mentoring scheme successfully completed the 'About You' questionnaire and it was evident from the results that all of the mentees got on well with their tutors and classroom peers. Many of the mentees enjoy being at college and indicated they had a lot in common with the other students in their group. They also agreed that they all worked well as part of a team and this declaration was endorsed in the feedback received from the tutors, providing a positive indicator that tutors and students shared similar perceptions of each other.

The mentees enjoy most aspects of their college work and believe that their college work is of a very good standard. For some, this is an accurate reflection as around half of the tutors agreed with this statement. Where tutors and mentees were in almost complete agreement was that all mentees were keen to achieve their qualifications and were capable of progressing to the next level. There did not appear to be any barriers that prevented any of the mentees from being able to complete and achieve their respective courses.

### General Comments

It is important to note that some differences of opinion existed between the tutors and the mentees. There were a number of key issues outlined in each of the questionnaires where opinions differed, for example, all of the mentees feeling that they worked very hard at college and put in a lot of effort into their studies. These contradictory perceptions provide an example of how unaware the mentees are about their behaviour and performance in the classroom and the mentoring process has the potential to resolve this.

Other examples of this type of disparity include the mentees' perceptions that they successfully set personal targets and goals and worked to deadlines. Several mentees also believed they were good at problem-solving, something that many of the tutors disagreed with. Even claims that mentees were good at finding time to study, regularly attending college, being punctual, being focused and being motivated towards their studies did not concur with the views of their tutors. With the exception of one respondent, who recorded these areas as weaknesses, it would be useful for the coordinator of the mentoring scheme to analyse the data captured on the questionnaire to obtain a better understanding of the mentees' position.

Another area of slight disagreement between the mentees perceptions and those of the tutors relates to the issue of the students' abilities to cope with change and transition. With the exception of one mentee, everyone felt this was an area of

strength. Similarly, the majority of mentees appear confident about their academic abilities, although another individual recognised this as a weakness.

The most striking observation emerging from the analysis of these questionnaires has been the positive responses provided by the mentees. Contrasting the results with the tutors' feedback highlights the importance of the peer mentoring scheme. Through the uses of these two documents, the mentor is able to compare and contrast both sets of information that relate to their mentee and having evaluated the information, a more accurate picture of the mentee circumstances can be ascertained and used to inform the initial meeting(s) between the mentor and the mentee.

## **Historical Evidence (2005 – Present)**

### **Data Analysis**

The Peer Mentor project was primarily developed to support those learners who found the transition from school to college challenging and for those making the transition from within the College, to higher levels of academic study. In an attempt to identify a more accurate measurement of how these issues impact on student retention and achievement, it was necessary to conduct an analysis of previous trends across all levels of academic provision within the Computing department. Student records were obtained from the College's Management Information System (MIS) for the purpose of establishing a more accurate overview of the trends and patterns associated with student enrolments, transfers, withdrawals, retention, completion rates and more importantly achievement and success.

A series of datasets containing students' details enrolled on full-time computing programmes were reviewed to investigate the year-on-year trends referred to earlier. The data spanned a period of 5 years and focused on National Qualification Framework levels one to three inclusive. The findings from this small-scale research activity resulted in the creation of a series of display charts illustrating the year-end performance figures of the Computing department.

The following paragraphs provide a series of narratives that summarise the results of the course data analysis. Each paragraph section describes the main key points that will be used to offer recommendation to the peer mentoring coordinator on how to develop and adapt the programme to support the needs of the learners involved in the scheme.

#### Level 1

The numbers of students enrolling at this level has been in steady decline since 2008-2009, reducing by 24% in 2009-2010 and by a further 10% in 2010-2011 (see Appendix 1).

A small-scale mentoring programme was in operation in 2009-2010 and this coincides with a comparative increase of 5% in the number of students successfully completing their programmes and achieving their final qualification. During this period, one student who had been a participant on the peer mentoring scheme



successfully completed and achieved and this may have been a significant factor contributing to the percentage increase indicated above (see Appendix 2).

When compared to previous years, student progression from Level 1 to Level 2 in 2009-2010 declined by 55% (see Appendix 3). One recommendation to help address this negative trend would be to consider how the peer mentoring scheme could be enhanced to incorporate additional intervention strategies to proactively encourage student to consider the benefits of making the transition to the next academic level.

Since 2005-2006 (with the exception of 2007-2008) the rate of withdrawals from Level 1 programmes equates to the loss of around 6 students each year (see Appendix 4). Inclusion of more students in this grouping on the peer mentoring scheme may potentially help to reverse this trend, especially if 'at risk' students experience some anxiety when making the transition from school to college.

### Level 2

In contrast to the previous group, the enrolments on to Level 2 courses have been on the increase since the lowest intake was recorded in 2007-2008 (see Appendix 5). For the past 2 years the numbers have been encouragingly high despite an 8% decrease in 2010-2011.

The achievement rate for Level 2 students in 2009-2010 was the second lowest during the 5 year period. However, this was a significant improvement on the previous year, especially if partially achieved is taken into consideration (see Appendix 6). With 7 of the current Level 2 cohort participating in this year's peer mentoring scheme, it could be anticipated that the completion and achievement figures for 2010-2011 continue to improve. All existing mentees who are currently active on the programme are on track to achieve predicted grades, indicating that with effective support and mentoring, improvements in attainment can be anticipated.

Setting aside the progression figures for 2006-2007, the number of students progressing from Level 2 to Level 3 in 2009-2010 equated to the second highest number of students making the decision to study at a higher level (see Appendix 7). However, nearly half of students who completed and achieved their Level 2 qualification failed to progress. As mentioned in the analysis of Level 1 students, the peer mentoring scheme may have the potential to address this issue.

The number of students transferring from Level 2 IT programmes amounted to 1% of the total population who enrolled in 2010-2011 (see Appendix 8) and this is an improvement on previous years (with the exception of 2006-2007). Currently, 10% of the this year's Level 2 cohort have already withdrawn from their course, but when combined with the number of students who have transferred, the cohort still shows the lowest number of departures. If the 7 mentees participating in the peer mentoring scheme are successfully retained this year, it will certainly improve the retention statistics and contribute to making this the most successful year for retention.

### Level 3

In reviewing the data for students enrolled on Level 3 IT programmes, it was necessary to create discrete datasets that recognised variations between the 1st and

the 2nd years of programmes like the Level 3 Diploma and the Extended Diploma. Retaining students from one academic year to the next appears to be difficult and it is likely that during the initial year of study, learners are more likely to withdraw from their course (see Appendix 9). This chart illustrates that retention is an issue, especially for the period between 2006-2007 and 2009-2010, where the retention rates were at 50% or below. The enrolment figures for the 1st and 2nd year Level 3 students have remained stable over the past couple of years (see Appendix 10, 11 & 12). If the Colleges peer mentoring scheme is successful, it could help to maintain the exceptional retention rates currently being experienced.

Since 2006-2007, the number of students completing and achieving their qualifications in their final year of study (including partial achievement) has consistently exceeded 90% (see Appendix 13). For those individual students participating in the mentoring scheme, it is likely that they will also be successful in achieving their qualification if they receive effective support from a mentor.

The past couple of years have seen an increase in the number of students making the transition from Level 3 courses onto Foundation Degrees (see Appendix 14). The utilisation of peer-mentors currently studying at Level 4 can help to communicate some of the benefits associated with continuing in education, for example, preparing for entry into the world of work and paid employment.

Finally, the number of students withdrawing and transferring from the 2nd year of Level 3 courses has remained low over the past few years. However, the figures for 1st year students over a similar period have been significantly higher in comparison (see Appendix 15 & 16). The peer mentoring programme may have a positive role to play in reversing this trend, especially for those pupils making the transition from the schools sector into the more independent environment of further education.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider the benefits of using ProAchieve in conjunction with MIS data when analyzing benchmark figures.
- Review how the mentors are matched with their mentees to ensure that unforeseen barriers are avoided e.g. gender matching, matching by ethnicity etc.
- Investigate the reasons why there is an absence of mentees or mentors from Black and Chinese ethnic groups.
- Where possible, retain records on the mentees attendance to mentoring sessions, especially during the initial few weeks of the scheme.
- Conduct focus group meetings with the tutors, mentors and mentees so that qualitative evidence and feedback can be collected.
- Identify how many of the mentees attended the motivational sessions and the university taster event.
- At the end of the peer mentoring scheme, make comparisons between the predicted and actual grades achieved for each of the mentees and compare with other students who were not part of the scheme. This will allow the coordinator to identify if mentoring has been effective in motivating them to focus more on their studies.

#### **4. SAVINGS**

Since the project will finish in June, it is not possible to report on actual savings at this stage. However, it is anticipated that savings will include reduced tutor time, improved retention & achievement (therefore success) and associated funding implications.

#### **5. LESSONS**

This project has already confirmed that disaffected learners respond well to help provided by other learners who have had similar experiences.

The use of technology (Moodle) has been instrumental in the success of the project to-date and we have been very encouraged by the willingness of the students to use it to document their activities. We predict that usage will increase even more when the i-phones have been allocated and students are able to access the resources on the move.

We had underestimated the positive impact of the process on the mentors, who appreciated the opportunity to learn, develop and test out a range of skills. They can also use this experience on their CV.

Regular meetings with staff involved in the development of this programme were very important in keeping the project to timescale, and the staff team were action-planned to ensure that targets were met.

A strong set of expectations and procedures, agreed with the students in advance, was important in ensuring the effectiveness of the mentoring process.

The processes and resources developed are now available on Moodle to extend the range of this project across the college to other academic areas and levels.

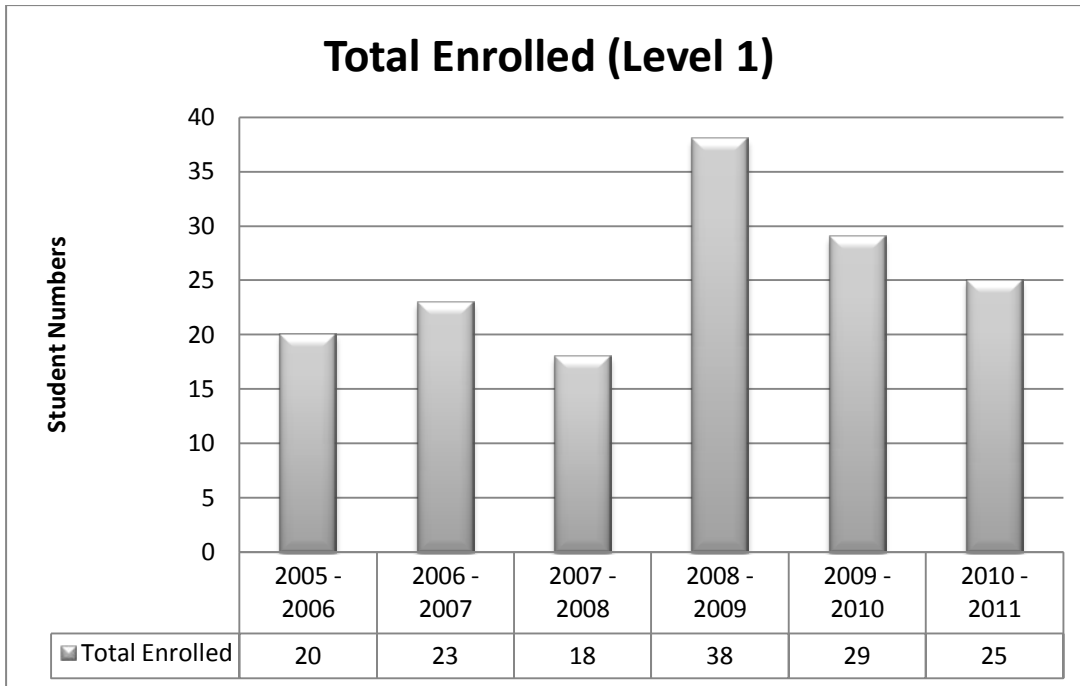
We have already trained two Foundation Degree students to mentor the level 3 learners. Since our Foundation Degree is a University of Bedfordshire programme, we have discussed the possibility of extending the peer mentor process to partner with the University of Bedfordshire; their higher level degree students to provide mentoring for our Foundation Degree learners in order to ease the move to the final year of their degree at the university.

We would like to share our experience of running this successful programme with local schools and with other providers in the FE sector.

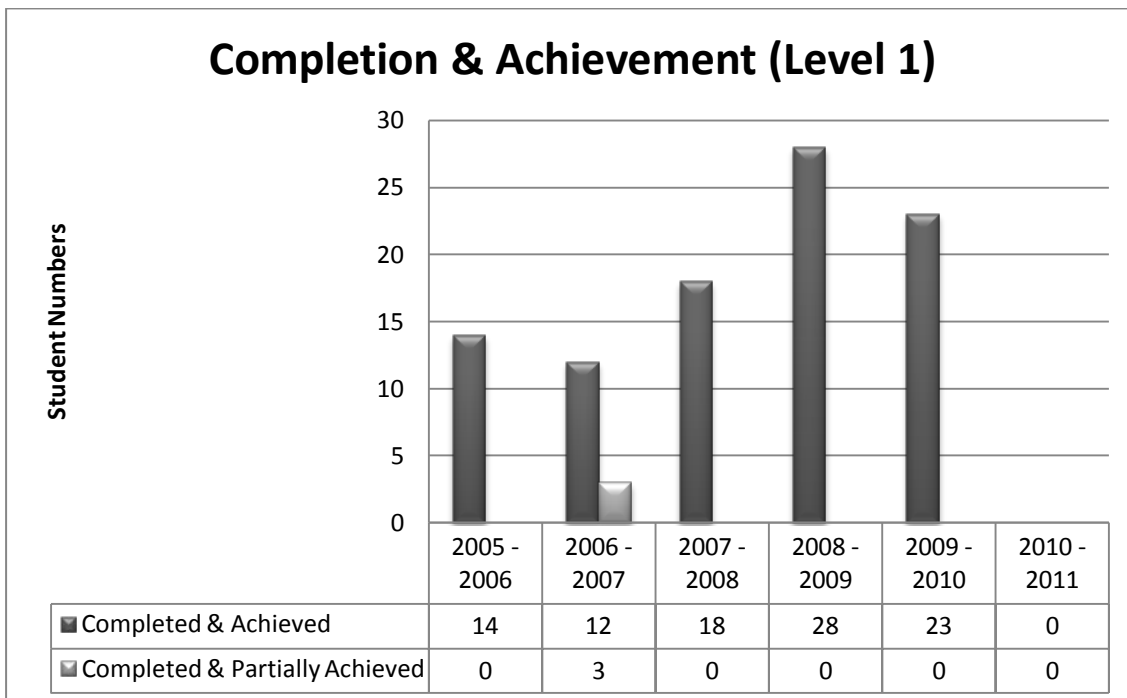
*“The funding for this project has provided us with the opportunity to develop a robust set of processes and resources to support peer mentoring at Bedford College. It has made a real difference to student mentors and disaffected students”*

## APPENDICES

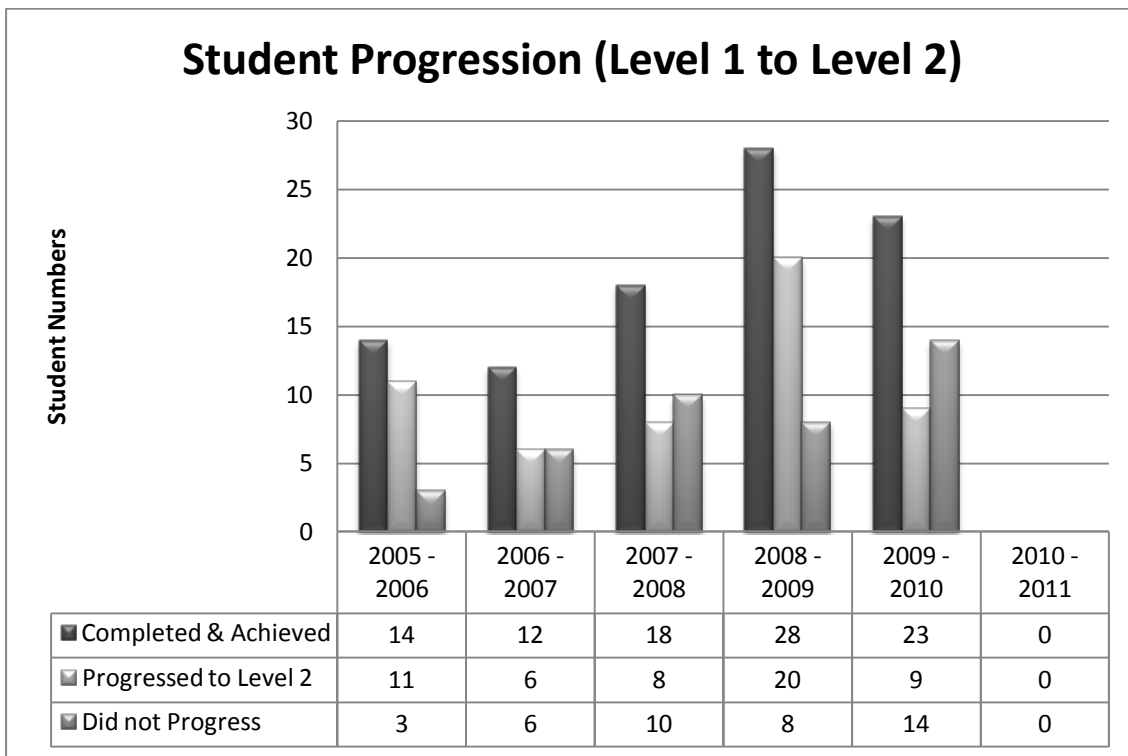
### Appendix 1



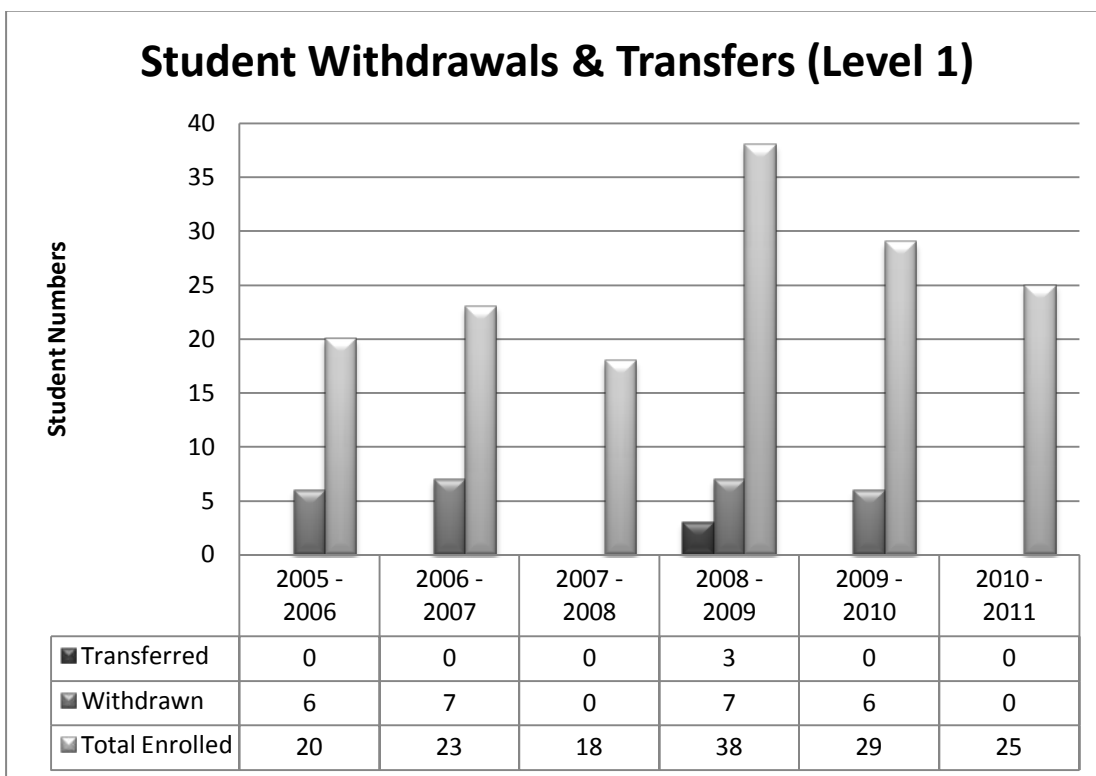
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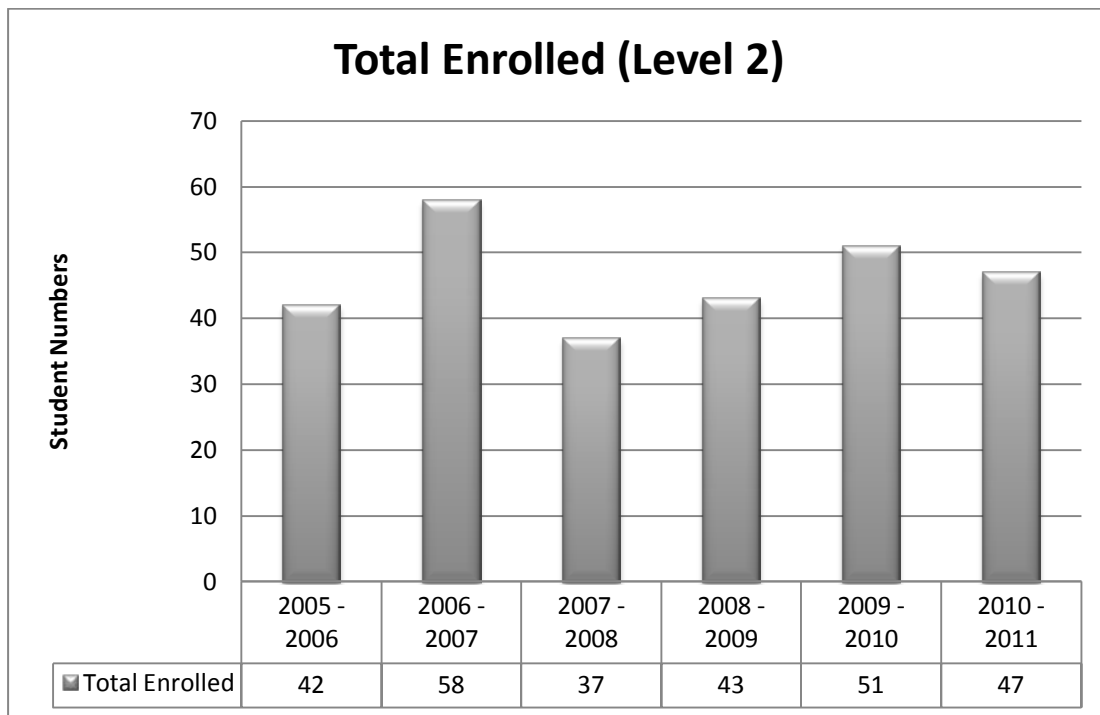
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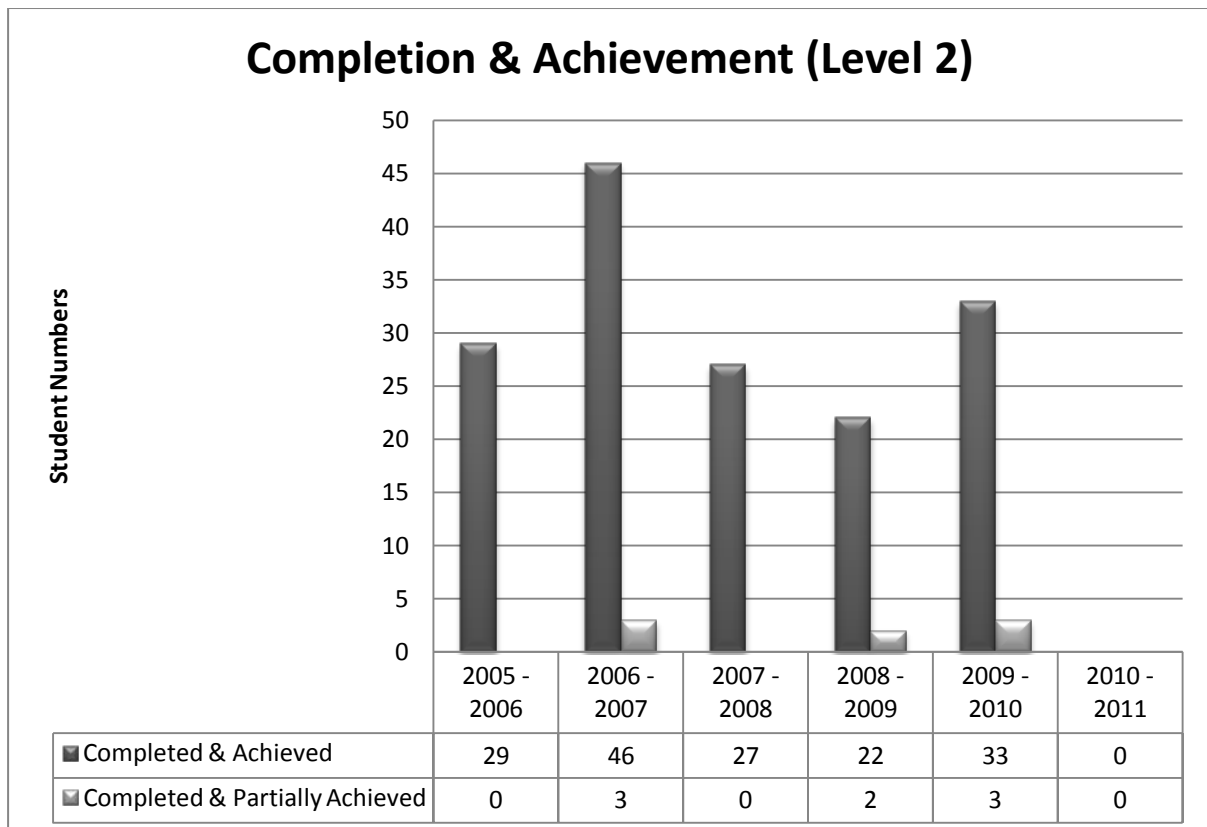
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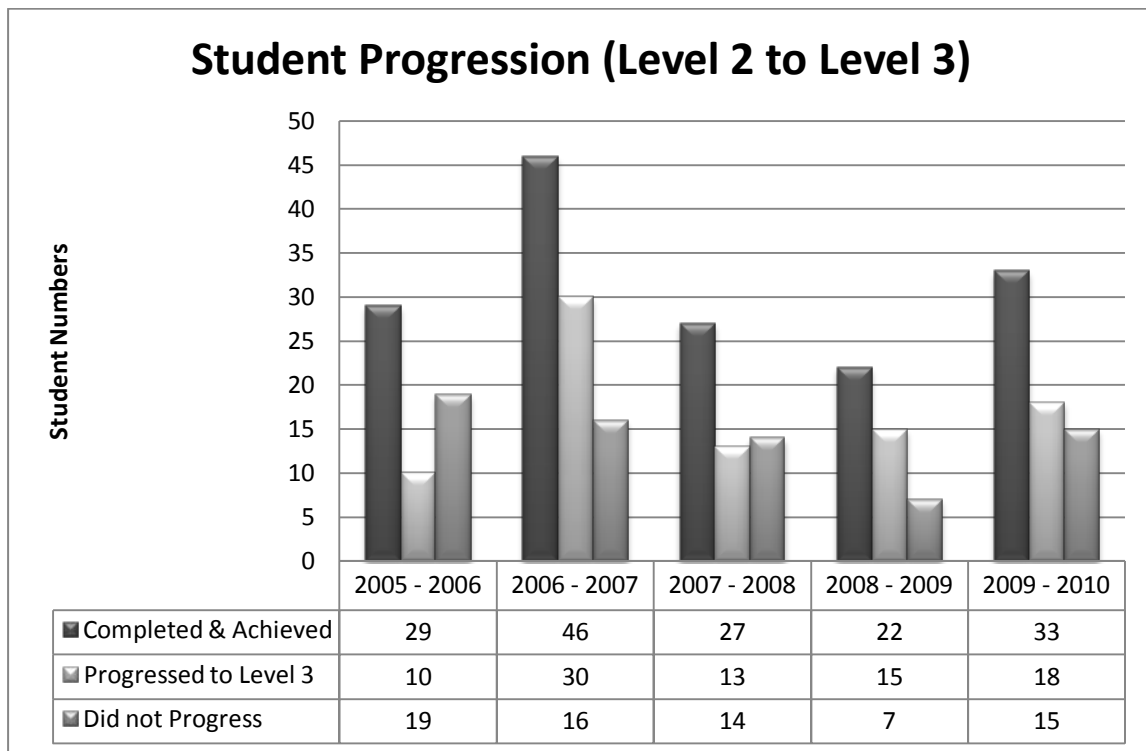
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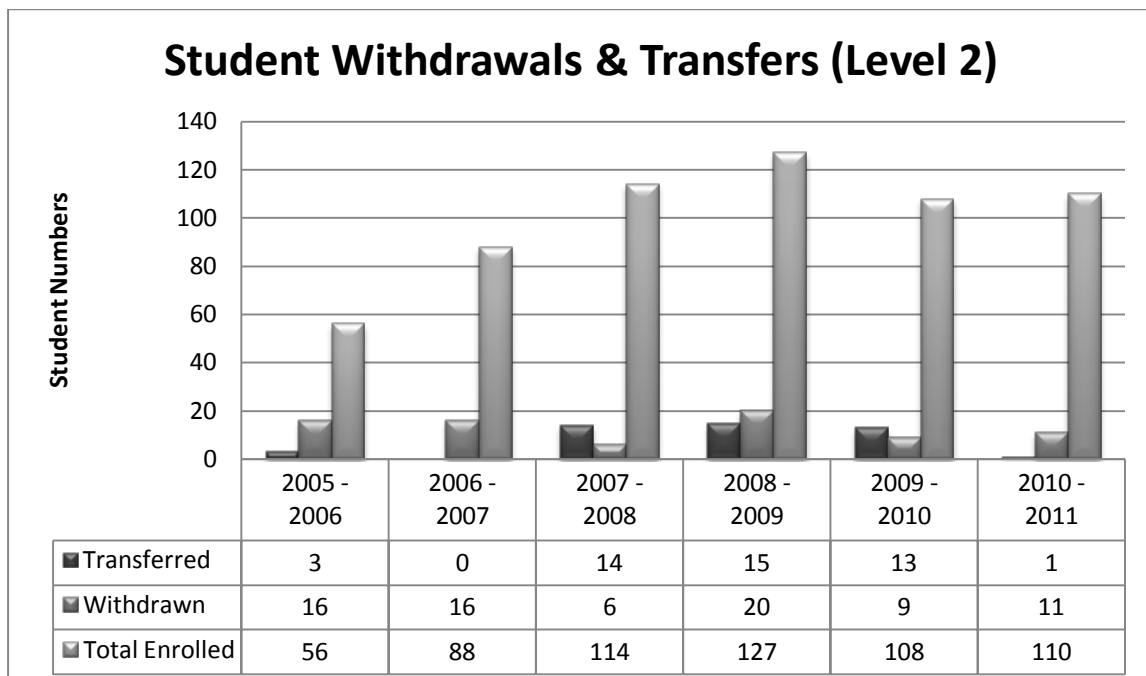
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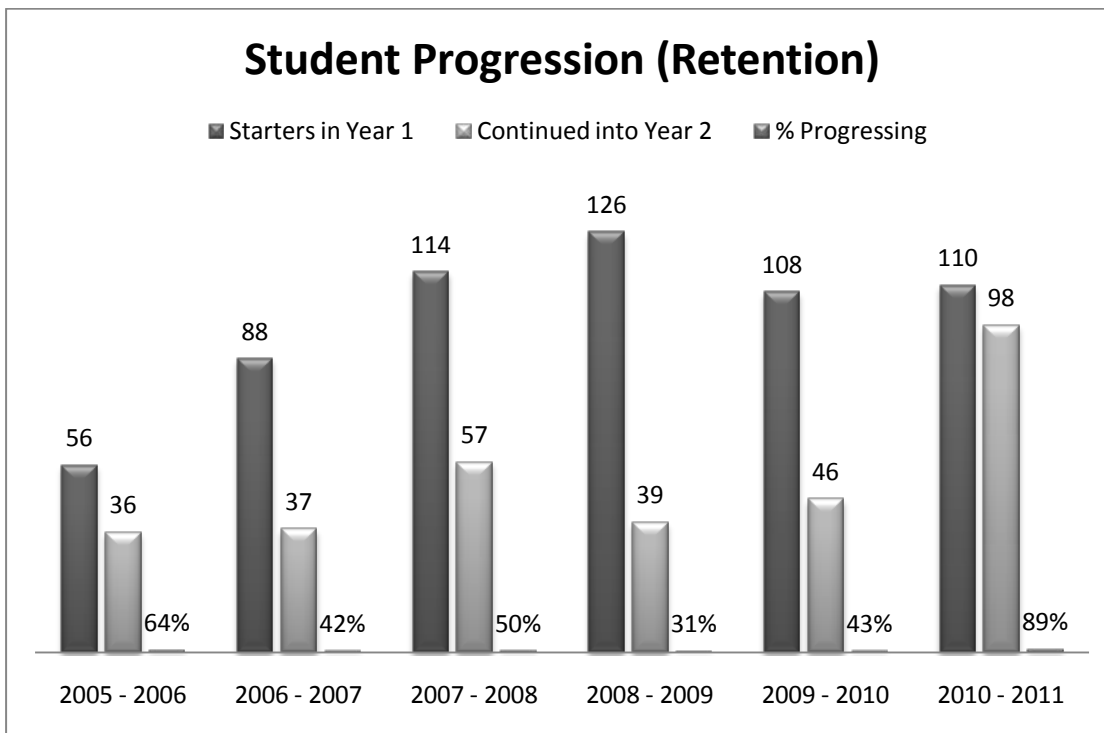
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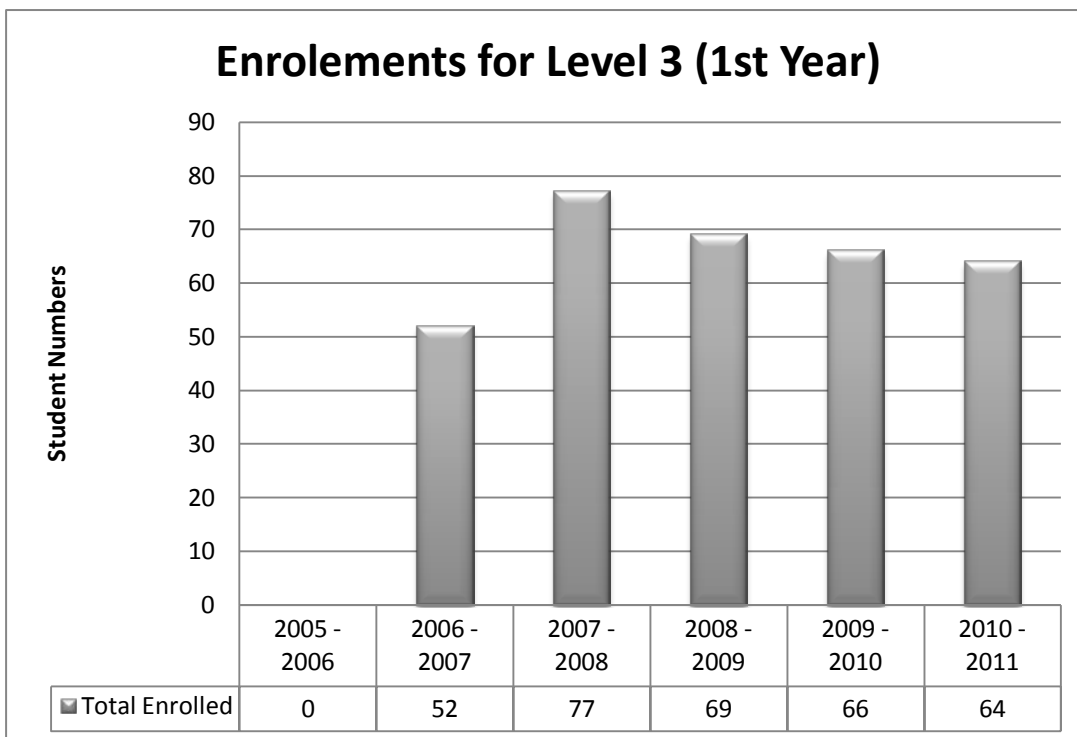
## Appendix 8



## Appendix 9

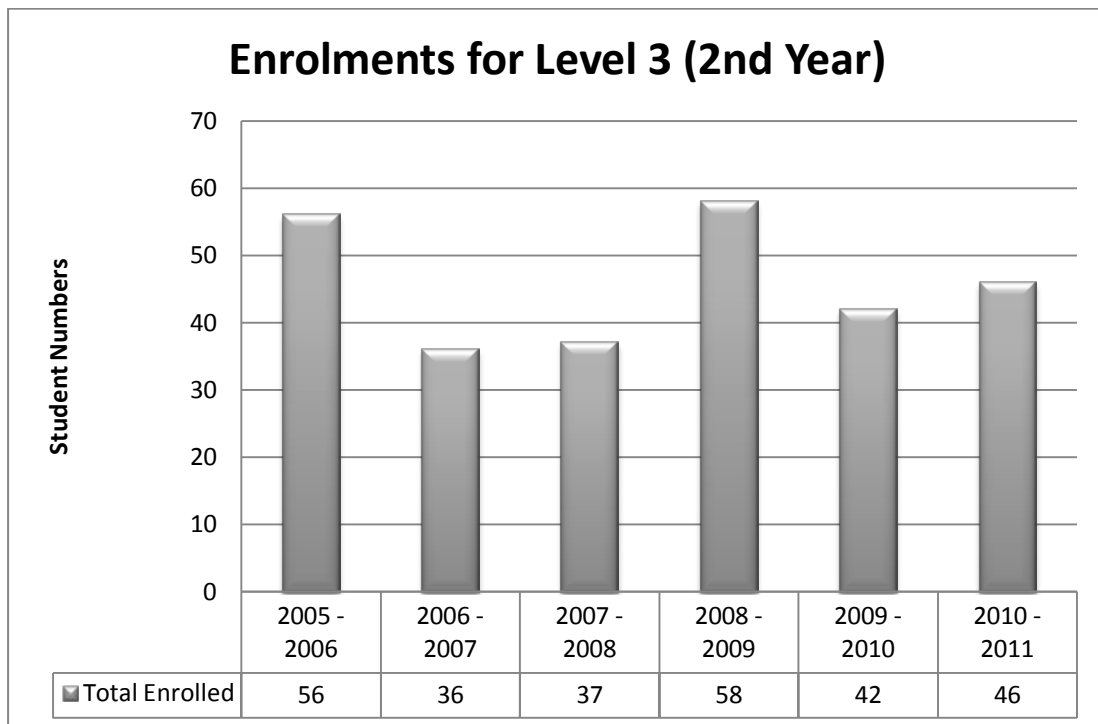


## Appendix 10

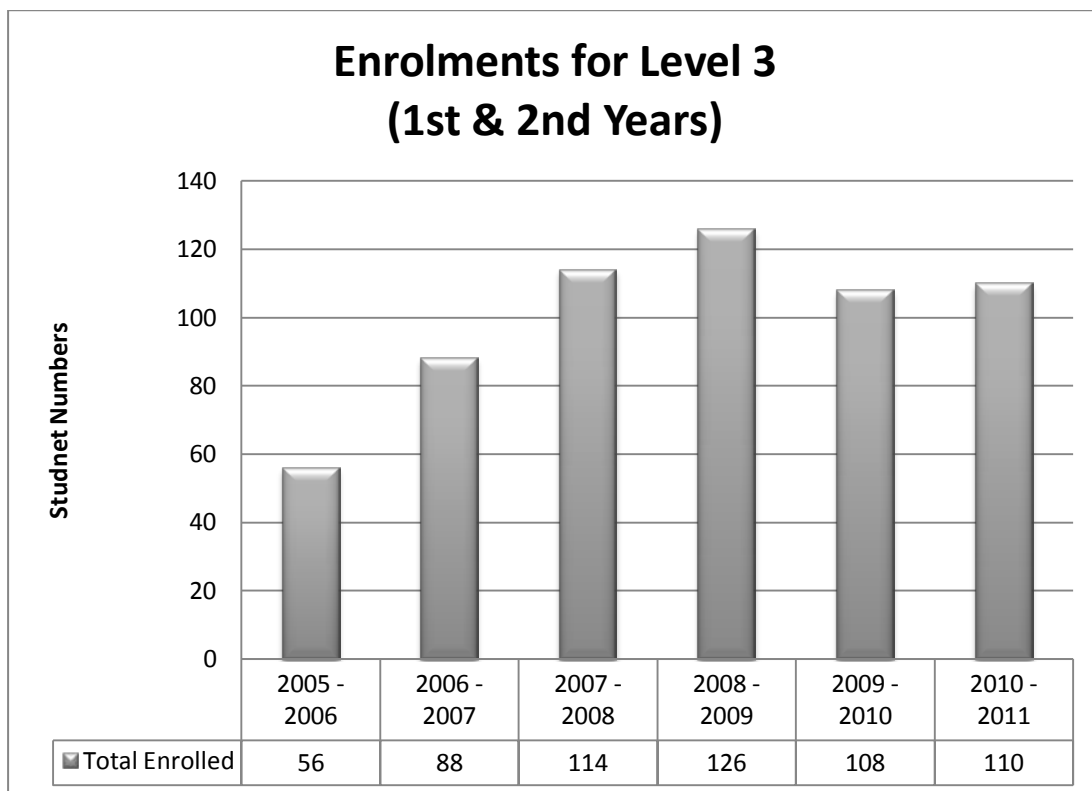




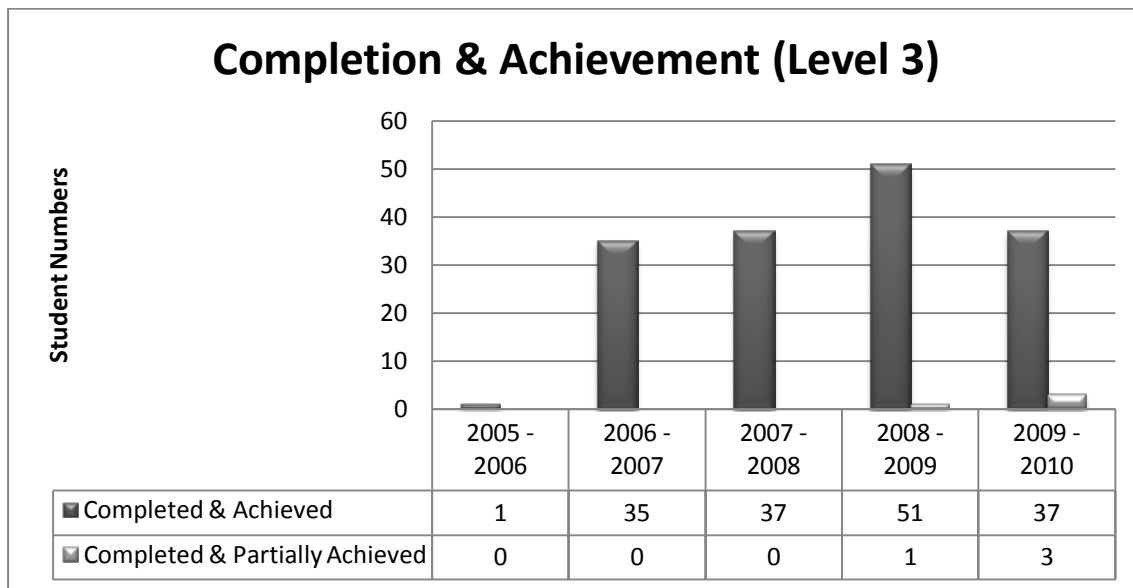
**Appendix 11**



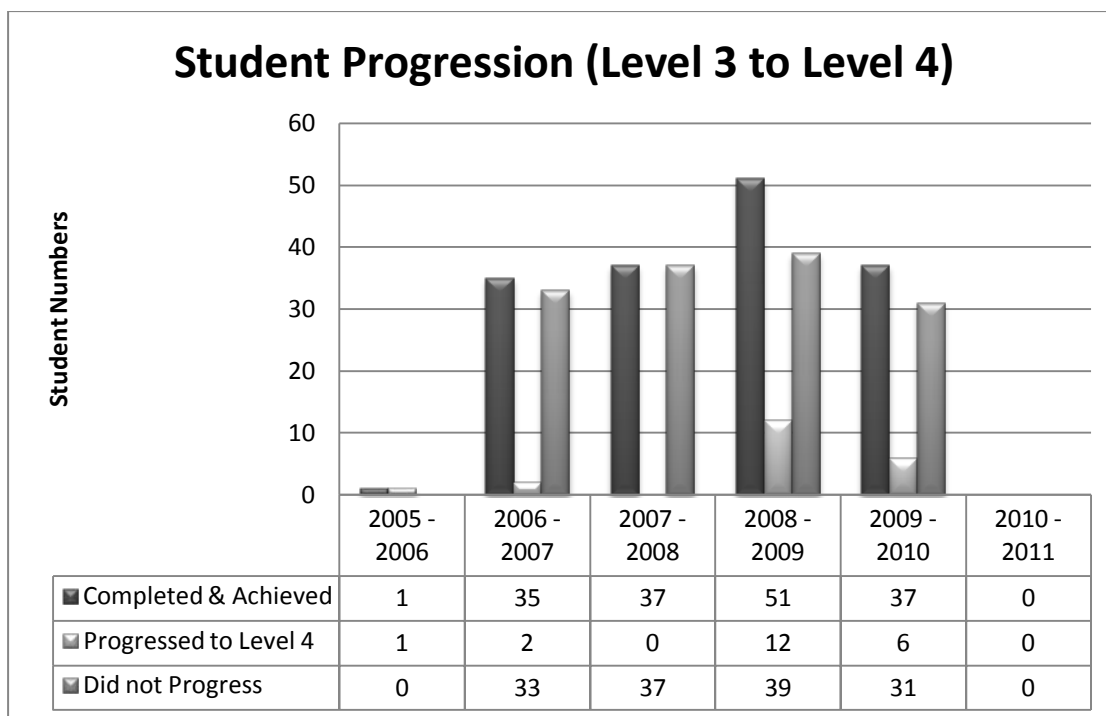
**Appendix 12**



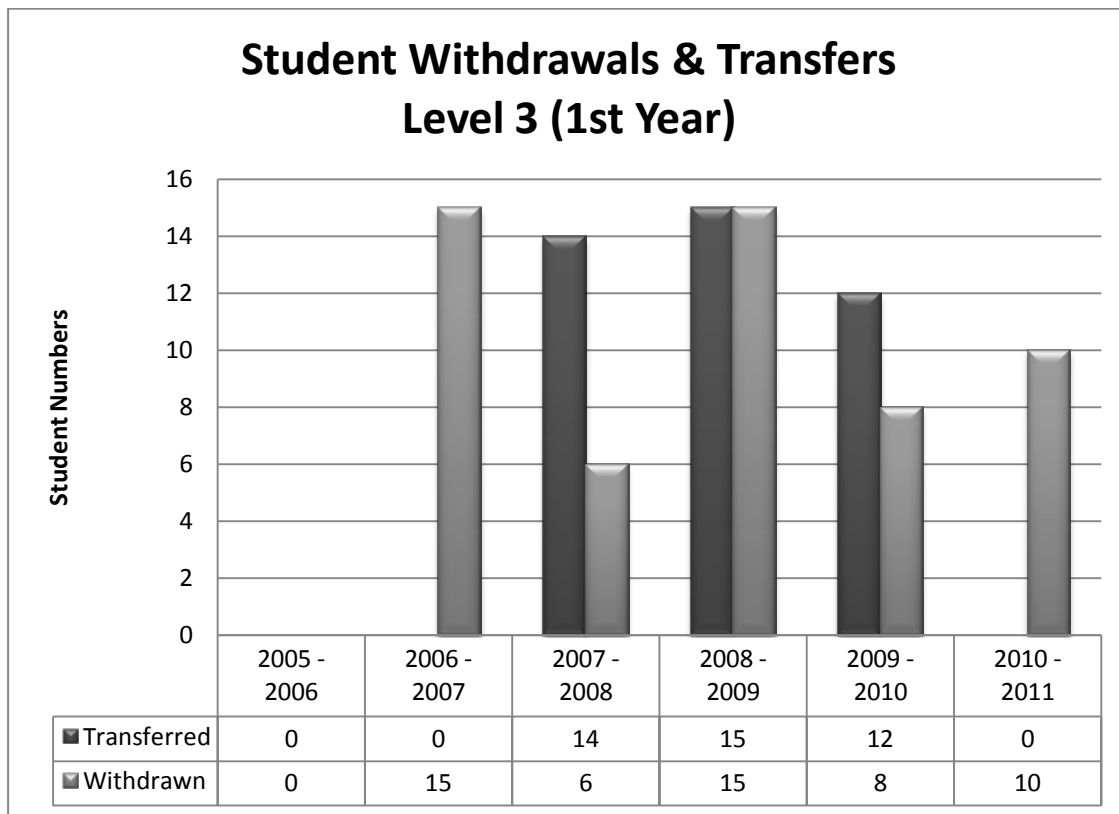
## Appendix 13



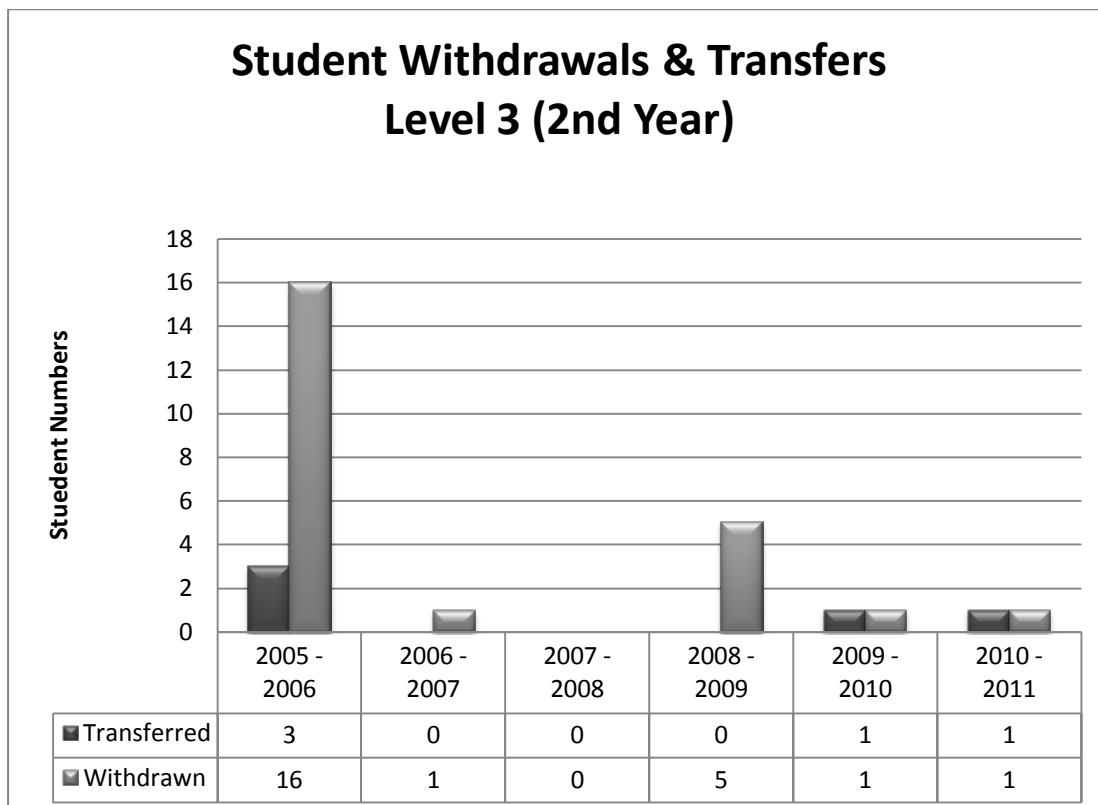
## Appendix 14



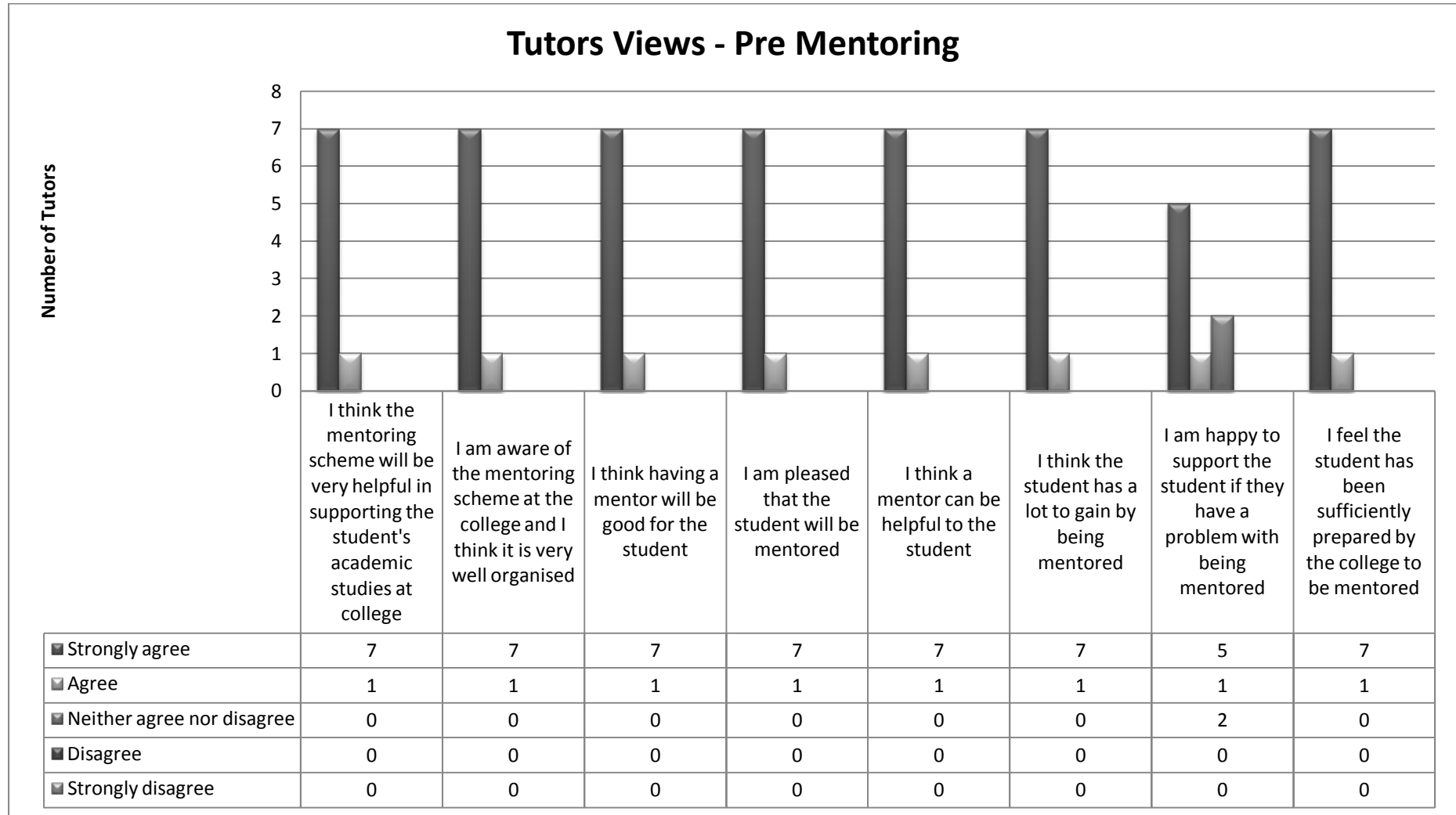
**Appendix 15**



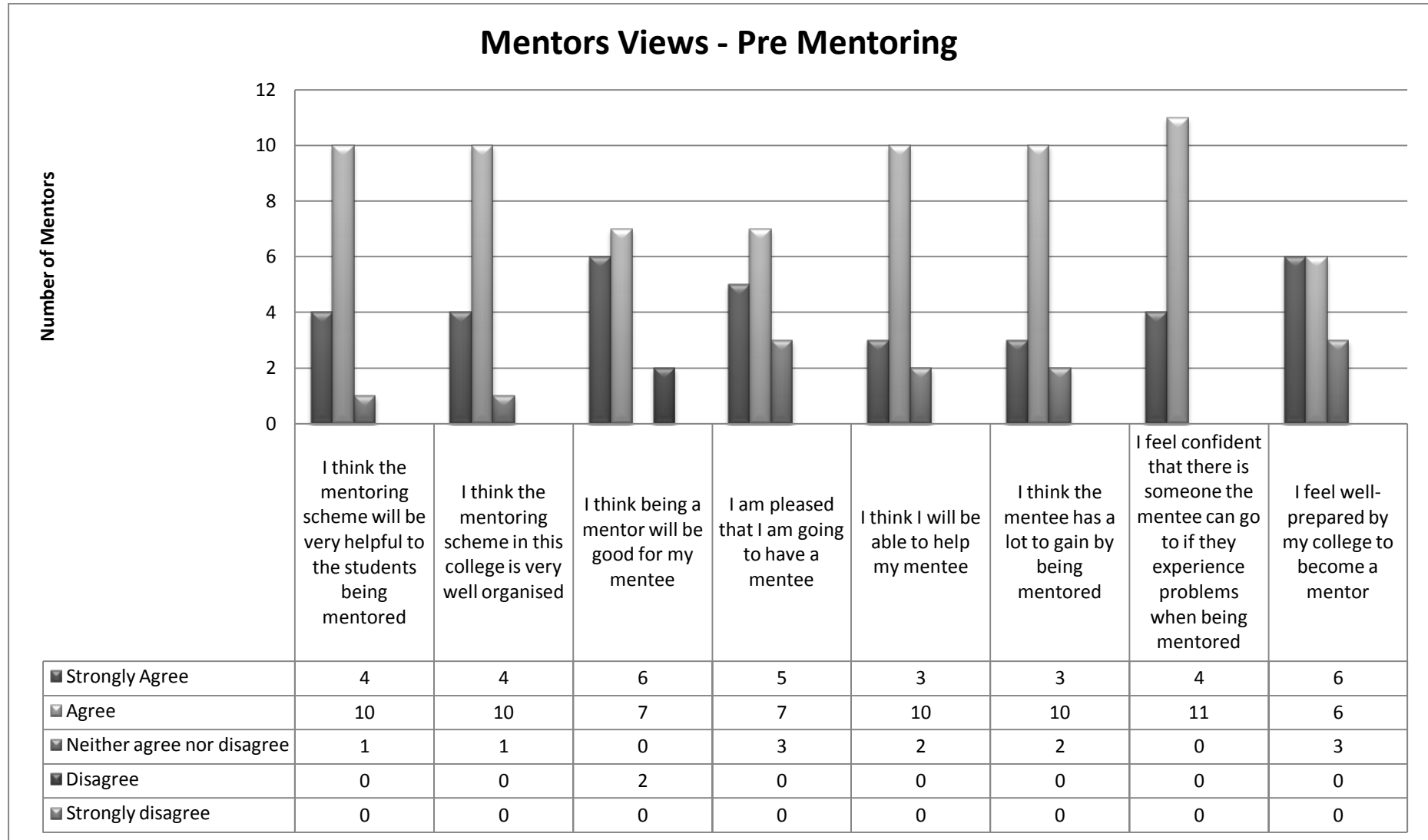
**Appendix 16**



**Appendix 17** Pre-Mentoring Questionnaire Results (Tutors)



**Appendix 18** Pre-Mentoring Questionnaire Results (Mentors)



**Appendix 19** Pre-Mentoring Questionnaire Results (Mentees)

