



An Excellence Gateway case study

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Uxbridge College: Mentoring 'at risk' students

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Outline the aim

The aim of this project was to narrow the achievement gap for Black Caribbean students by delivering extra support through mentoring. The project identified 39 'at risk' Black Caribbean students and facilitated 1-1 mentor meetings between them and 8 mentors (2 of whom were University students). The target was to ensure retention of 90% of these students by the end of the project.

The challenge

This project was aimed at improving the retention rates of Black Caribbean Students. In 2008/9 Uxbridge College received an 'Outstanding' grade for Equality and Diversity from Ofsted. Part of the reason for this grade was the high success rates across different ethnic groups, gender and disabled students. Each group has achieved success rates above the national average for the past 4 years. For the last 2 years one group of students 'Black Caribbean' (both male and female) have underperformed when compared to the rest of the College especially in retention.

Partnership organisations

Brunel University – provided mentors from their BA in Education programme. Two Brunel University students joined our mentoring team and had 3 mentees each. They have fully embraced the programme and report to the project leader regularly. Their University Tutor is also monitoring their progress and their findings are used to inform their own assignments and dissertations.

The outputs

1. The College's MIS department and the Heads of School for each subject area identified 39 'at risk' students.
2. SMT and Heads of School identified a group of 8 mentors most suited to this role.
3. Mentor training was provided for 6 Uxbridge College staff and 2 University students.
4. Resources were created: A training pack with handy tips; recording sheets; MIS monthly report.
5. Buddy training was delivered to 10 of the 'at risk' group so that they could act as peer mentors
6. Mentoring meetings were held between Dec and March. 39 x 6 mentor meetings - on average each Mentor held 6 meetings with their mentees.
7. Gathering feedback of each mentoring meeting (via email) on central database.
8. Mentoring report generated with updated comments on each mentee. A monthly report was produced and shared with SMT & CMM.
9. Web link to the mention of the project as part of our Equality Specific duty: <http://www.uxbridge.ac.uk/about-us/equality-a-diversity.html>

The impacts and outcomes

The Project got off to a successful start. 39 'at risk' students from Black Caribbean backgrounds were identified and all were allocated a mentor.

The mentors all attended a training session and a further briefing on their role on 'how to have a successful mentoring experience'.

The project has been fully embraced by the College. It has been discussed on a number of occasions at senior management meetings and curriculum managers meetings.

The Principal, Vice principal, all Directors and Heads of school are interested in the project, or directly linked in some way.

The meetings between mentees and mentors were held between December and March.

The usual difficulties were faced in terms of attendance at meetings. A number of strategies were employed to ensure these meetings did occur as outlined below. So far only two 'at risk' students have left the College.

10 of the 'at risk' students were also involved in peer mentoring, for which they have received training. They have met with other students on a peer to peer basis where neither is identified as 'at risk'.

The general feedback from this parallel scheme was that it initially had a positive impact and students were happy to work together in a 'buddy' system.

However, without continued efforts to encourage the scheme it wasn't able to sustain regular meetings.

The conclusion was that this sort of scheme probably works best at Induction times when a 'buddy' can be useful, and is best when given a time frame of a month. A 'September buddy' scheme is planned for next year.

The end of year retention and success rates will provide the full realisation of the main intended impact (available in Oct 2012).

The project impacted **39 Black Caribbean** learners.

This project had intended to benefit 30 Black Caribbean students:

Profile	Intended Number	Actual Number
16-18:	20	30
19+:	10	9
Male:	15	24
Female:	15	15
Level 1:	15	9
Level 2:	10	13
Level 3:	5	17
Total	30	39

Working relationship with LSIS

Working with LSIS has been crucial to the success of this project. It is so much easier to get buy-in from staff and SMT when a project has backing from LSIS. It allows for small payments to be paid which in normal circumstances might take longer for approval. It also helps when negotiating partnership work to have the credibility of an LSIS funded project to focus on.

Good value for money

As a direct result of this project we have established a sustainable placement for University Students. This will allow similar work to continue for the future. Everyone benefits from this partnership model and apart from some expenses it does not cost anything.

Mentor time provided by staff in the College was provided free.

There is an argument to be had for reducing the NEET number in the local community as a result of improved retention. A number of these students will be progressing as a result of turning themselves around during this project. Many will return on to higher courses within the College and some are applying to university.

Senior managers involvement

Two SMT members were part of the mentoring team and one acted as manager of the project.

Reports from the project were given at Senior Management Team meetings, College Middle Managers meetings and the Equality and Diversity forums. It was also discussed at a full governors meeting as part of the Equality and Diversity Annual Report.

Stakeholder involvement

The College has a Children's Centre on its site that provided a mentor to work with two of the students who were teenage mothers. This has worked well as the needs of everyone were met. The students benefited from the advice and support the Children's Centre could offer and responded well to their mentor meetings

Learner involvement

Learners have given their feedback on the project and this will influence and shape how the project continues for next year. The most positive comments were about how much they enjoyed the free food vouchers.

They have been largely positive about the mentoring they received. Only 4 out of the 39 did not see benefit in the project. The remaining 35 all said they had benefited from it in some way. Most felt it didn't need to go on for so long – 3 months is a maximum.

Comments from students:

' I feel happier. I have started looking into universities (St. Mary's; Roehampton and Brunel).'

'My mentor helped me through a stage 3 disciplinary and now I have to sort myself out'

'It helped going to the Children's Centre as they have so much more to offer me, which helps.'

Raising awareness

The project was reported on at three separate SMT meetings and one Governing body meeting and has been included as part of the College's Annual Equality and Diversity Report. It is included on our website information on the College as part of the specific duties required by the Equality Act. It is part of the College's Action Plan which feeds into our overall objectives in line with the Equality Act. The specific objective it contributes towards is to: Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics by: narrowing the gap for success across groups and achieving student success above the national averages. This objective will be reported on each year.

Continuity of project, after LSIS funding

Internal funding has been applied for 2012-13 budget approval.

The project has now been included in the 3 year development plan for Student Services. The proposal is to continue with it (in a slightly revised format following on from lessons learnt). It has been hugely popular with Senior Management Team two of whom volunteered to be mentors and there is a strong will for it to continue. This is the first time we have had Brunel University students working in our College in this way and we are already committed to their involvement for next year. Additionally, one of the staff mentors who is a lecturer at the College is considering starting up a business providing this service based on the model we are using.

Did you experience any difficulties in implementing the project and how did you overcome these?

The biggest challenge for any mentoring programme is making the 1-1 meetings happen. The students being mentored were already 'at risk' and, therefore, by definition were less likely to attend college and an extra activity such as mentoring.

This was addressed by having a dedicated team of mentors. Full explanation was given at the training event about the need to 'go the extra mile' to make the meetings happen. The mentors really grasped this concept and if the text reminders etc didn't work they have been 'door stopping' students at the end of classes.

We have also used £3.00 lunch vouchers as incentives which has worked well.

Time was another key factor – the most effective mentors were the University students because they had the time to track down the students who didn't turn up to their meetings. The least effective were those with the busiest workloads. A compromise was sometimes found if busy staff worked in the same department as their mentees and would come into contact with them more often and could arrange 'ad hoc' meetings.

The lessons learned

- To be an effective mentor needs time.
- To be an effective mentor needs commitment.
- To mentor 'at risk' students requires patience and perseverance.
- Mentoring works best over short periods of time approximately 3 months. Even shorter for peer to peer buddy systems (which are probably best done in September).
- Every pairing is different, for example, some work better for longer periods. Some simply don't work and need to be changed.

We tried to use Black Caribbean mentors as much as possible; however, those from other ethnic origins were equally successful.

Some things help:

- Early identification of 'at risk' students (mentoring meetings started in December, which helped with the motivation to return to College in January). Each Head of School was asked to identify 'at risk' students by end of November.
- Force students to attend (e.g. enforced attendance at meetings as a result of an agreement following a disciplinary hearing)
- Incentive to attend mentor meetings – for this project free food vouchers were used, which proved popular. To get the voucher they had to see their mentor.
- Pairing people with similar interests. E.g. students studying for A levels paired with University students worked well. Teenage mums paired with the family support worker in Children's centre. Engineering students paired with the tutor for the most sought after engineering course in the College.
- Keeping perspective – there is a need to manage expectations - it's a part of a whole set of measures that are part of regular support which helps 'at risk' students. It is not a replacement for: good tutoring, great teaching, student support, learning support, learner support funds or any other measures. It can help tip the balance in some cases. Sometimes students can click into a new mind set and this can be the catalyst to do it. In some cases (the most successful) it has inspired students previously 'at risk' to aspire to university.

Ensure regular updates from both mentors and tutors. Sometimes it has worked simply because there is a focus on these students and Tutors and Managers are asked to comment on progress as well as mentors, this ensures this student will be part of a heightened focus. E.g. one student who hadn't attended for 3 weeks was continually chased by the mentor after the tutor had stopped until eventually he returned to College.

Sustainability – lasting legacy

The project has now been included in the 3 year development plan for Student Services. It is part of our evidence for meeting our specific duties under the Equalities Act which remain in place for a four year reporting period.

Demonstrating impact – evidence of short and long term impact

Short term impact will be based purely on retention of 'at risk' students. The long term impact will be based on positive destinations and case studies.

Starts = 39

Retention at 26th March = 37

Target retention = 90%

Current retention = 95%

Progression and destination was never part of the original target setting, but this will also be reviewed each year end as the project continues.

Current intended progression:

12 are applying to UCAS

5 are seeking employment

20 are hoping to progress to a higher level course within the College.

Case study: X is an Engineering Level 1 student. He is Black Caribbean ethnic origin and 17 yrs old. He was identified as being 'at risk' because of poor attendance between September and November. X was given a mentor - an Engineering tutor who doesn't teach him. At first X did not show up for his first two arranged mentoring meetings, despite text reminders and a verbal reminder from his tutor. His attendance dropped to 52%. There were reports from the classes that he did attend that he wasn't motivated in class and could be disruptive. His mentor tracked him down at the end of a class and explained the mentoring to him. It was a brief meeting and the mentor handed X a lunch voucher telling him if he saw him the next day for 10 minutes he could have another voucher. The next day X turned up. They talked for 30 minutes discussing all sorts of things, but particularly what X wanted to do next year. X was keen on the course which the mentor was a tutor for. It is the most popular L3 course in Engineering as it has a direct link with British Airways and leads to an Apprentice opportunity with them. X's mentor arranged for X to pop into a class for this course to see what it is like. He sat in the class and observed for about 15 minutes and then asked to leave. At their next meeting they discussed it. X's mentor thought it might have put him off because it was quite advanced compared to X's course. It turned out that X had left because he realised the distance between himself and the students on this course was big and he felt embarrassed. They discussed this and how X could progress towards this through L2. X's attendance continued to be erratic and he got into an argument with a lecturer, became annoyed, swore at the lecturer and stormed out. X was suspended and called in for a disciplinary hearing. X's mentor provided a reference for X and part of his entry back into College was dependent on his continuation with the mentoring programme. X was grateful for this second chance as he had thought he would be excluded. X has since been seeing his mentor regularly and has improved his attendance to 90%. He is on target to progress next year to a L2 course which is the next step in his goal of a place on the L3 course.

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