

# Hillingdon CONNECT Mentoring Pilot Programme 2023 - 2024



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# *Overview and Programme Detail*

## ■ Introduction

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With thanks to our funders, the Careers and Enterprise Company and West London Careers Hub, Spark! were commissioned to deliver a pilot career mentoring programme to 25 young people in Hillingdon from January - July 2024.

Our target group were Year 10 and Year 11 students who fit our eligibility criteria of being a vulnerable learner or having SEND.

In December 2023, a planning meeting took place between Spark!, West London Careers Hub, Hillingdon Council and the 3 schools that were chosen for the pilot. The programme kicked off in January 2024 with West London Careers Hub supporting on school and student recruitment and Spark! on employer engagement and mentor recruitment.

A programme restructure took place in July 2024 and was implemented at the start of the academic year in September.

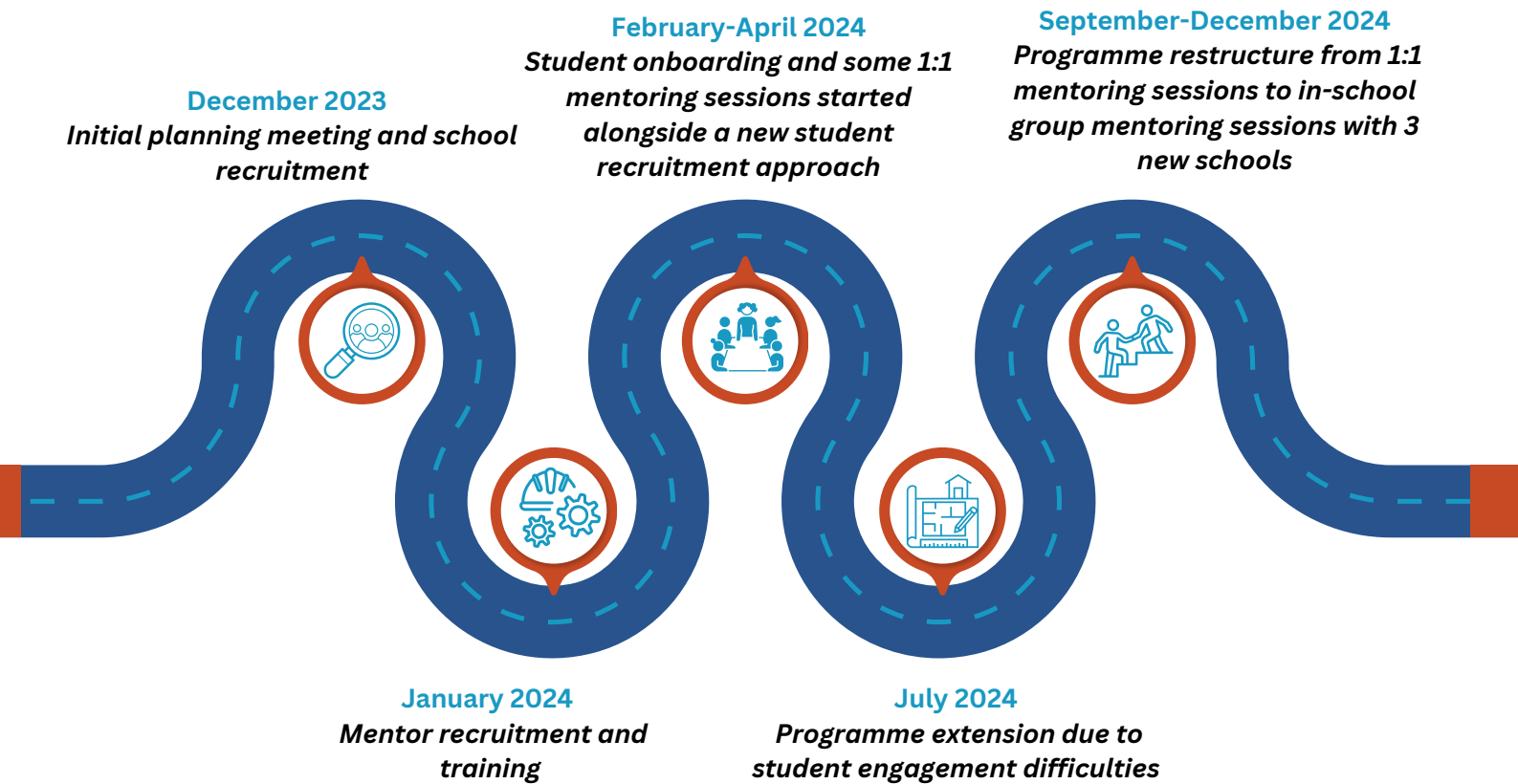
We concluded programme delivery in December 2024, and the total number of young people supported on the Hillingdon CONNECT Programme was 23.





## ■ Programme timeline and delivery

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## ■ Aims of the programme

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1. Enhance employability skills and work readiness for vulnerable learners or young people with SEND
2. Foster greater confidence and elevate the career aspirations of the young people
3. Provide meaningful and rewarding volunteering opportunities for organisations across Hillingdon and west London

## ■ Employer recruitment

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Spark! recruited volunteers from existing employer partnerships as well as approaching new employers who we have not worked with before.

Hillingdon was a priority focus for us with recruitment, but due to the immediacy of the programme start, we expanded out to organisations across west London.

14 volunteer mentors came from 10 organisations.



## ■ Programme restructure

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A programme extension was agreed in July 2024, due to low numbers of engagement from January-July. This was followed by a programme restructure to overcome the engagement and retention issues we faced with our target group and 1:1 mentoring model.

All 17 remaining spaces that were not filled were offered out to Uxbridge College, specifically targeting the ESOL group. There were delays in getting student names and an onboarding session booked in so we were unable to move forward with this group prior to the college closing for the summer break.

In the new academic year, 3 new schools in Hillingdon were identified to target.

Due to a fast-approaching deadline, it was decided that we would continue to support students with 1:1 mentoring but an additional focus would be on booking in group mentoring sessions to take place in school. The employer partners initially recruited for 1:1 mentoring were invited to join these sessions.

Learning outcomes remained the same and the content from the 1:1 mentoring sessions were tailored to be more suitable for a group setting. As the sessions took place virtually, activities were kept as interactive as possible to ensure that all students got the most out of the programme.

The sessions focused on the employability building blocks and skills.

Exploring careers

Motivation

Communication

Teamwork

Building resilience

Life after school and next steps



# *School and student recruitment*

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## ■ School recruitment in Hillingdon - 1:1 mentoring

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Park Academy, Harlington School and The Skills Hub were initially identified as our target schools.

**Harlington School** - allocated 6 spaces and 3 students were onboarded in March. All 3 students were matched to their mentors.

**Park Academy** - allocated 9 places and 3 students were onboarded in April. All 3 students were matched to their mentors.

**The Skills Hub** - allocated 10 spaces and 5 students were onboarded in May. Unfortunately, all 5 students did not want to progress with 1:1 mentoring.

Low school attendance, lack of motivation, upcoming GCSE exams and communication issues were some of the barriers faced with student engagement levels.

## ■ School recruitment in Hillingdon - Group mentoring

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A new batch of school recruitment took place with the programme restructure. Uxbridge College, Oak Wood School, Bishopshalt School and Uxbridge High School were offered in-school group mentoring sessions.

Young people with SEND and vulnerable learners were prioritised and the ESOL group were our target group for Uxbridge College. Schools were encouraged to recruit as many young people as possible for the group introductory sessions.

Sessions were to take place during the school day with a member of staff present at all times.

## ■ Young people supported on the programme

Student	Sessions attended
Alfie – Harlington School	3 x 1:1 mentoring
Carys – Harlington School	1 x 1:1 mentoring
Archie-Lee – Harlington School	2 x 1:1 mentoring
Frankie – Park Academy	3 x 1:1 mentoring
Leonie – Park Academy	1 x 1:1 mentoring
Shirley – Uxbridge College	2 x 1:1 mentoring
Mahtab – Uxbridge College	1 x 1:1 mentoring
Kowthar – Uxbridge College	1 x 1:1 mentoring

**23 students  
participated in  
the programme**



**10 students were  
male and 13  
students were  
female**



**20 students  
had an EHCP  
plan and 3 had EAL**



**10 students  
were identified as  
at risk of becoming  
NEET**



Riley – Uxbridge High	3 x group mentoring
Keira – Uxbridge High	3 x group mentoring
Maggie – Uxbridge High	3 x group mentoring
Adam – Uxbridge High	3 x group mentoring
Jibreel - Bishopshalt	3 x group mentoring
Sophie - Bishopshalt	4 x group mentoring
Arya – Bishopshalt	4 x group mentoring
Olga – Bishopshalt	3 x group mentoring
Arda – Bishopshalt	3 x group mentoring
Ewan – Bishopshalt	1 x group mentoring
Lexie – Oak Wood	1 x group mentoring
Ronnie – Oak Wood	3 x group mentoring
Freddie – Oak Wood	3 x group mentoring
Rowan – Oak Wood	3 x group mentoring
Joseph – Oak Wood	2 x group mentoring

## ■ Successes

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- 1) Very enjoyable group mentoring sessions with Oak Wood and Uxbridge High
- 2) Positive teacher feedback and new school relationships built for Spark!
- 3) New employer partnerships formed in West London



*I found the session very enjoyable - thank you for inviting me! If anyone is interested in pursuing 1:1 mentoring, I am standing by if required.*

**Volunteer mentor from British Petroleum who took part in a group mentoring session**

## ■ Challenges

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- 1) Engaging with students with very low school attendance
- 2) Lack of support and poor communication from some schools
- 3) Student drop outs after having only a few sessions
- 4) Mentor retention due to a shift in the programme timeline



*It is proving quite difficult to get in contact with him to organise and do the mentoring sessions. I feel the momentum has been lost somewhat. I found the sessions I managed to do with him very enjoyable and I think he found it useful, but it seems he is not interested in continuing the programme further.*

**Archie-Lee completed 2 mentoring sessions with his mentor from British Airways**



# *Focus group feedback*

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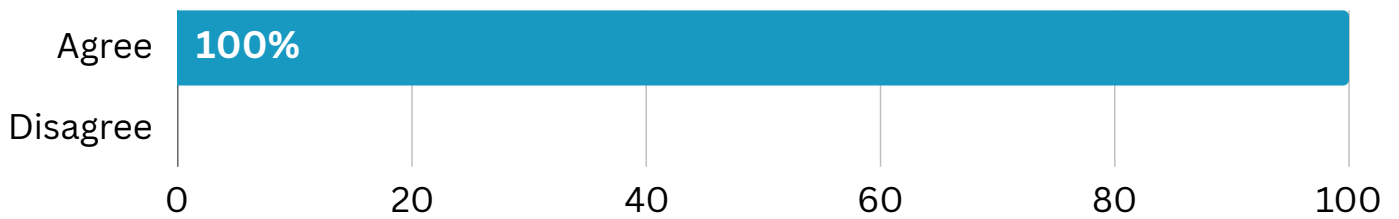


## ■ Student feedback survey responses

Students who took part in the group mentoring sessions at Oak Wood School and Uxbridge High School were given a range of questions and statements to answer. The main findings from students are:

**Q1**

**After the sessions, I have a good idea of what employers are looking for.**

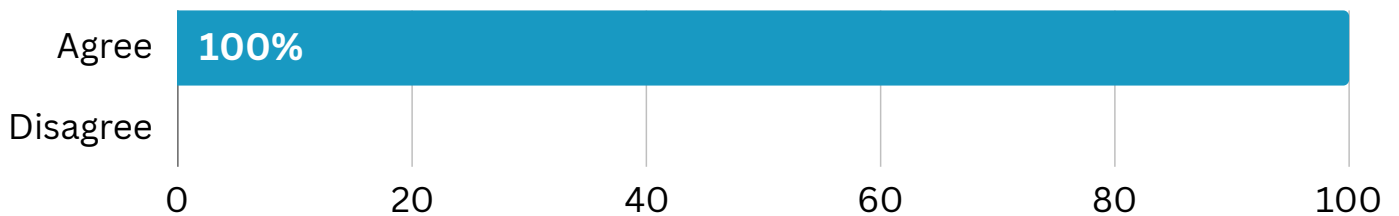


**“Your personality is very important. Find a balance between being yourself and being professional”**

**“Make sure you conduct yourself correctly”**

**Q2**

**After the sessions, I can identify the skills and qualities employers are looking for.**



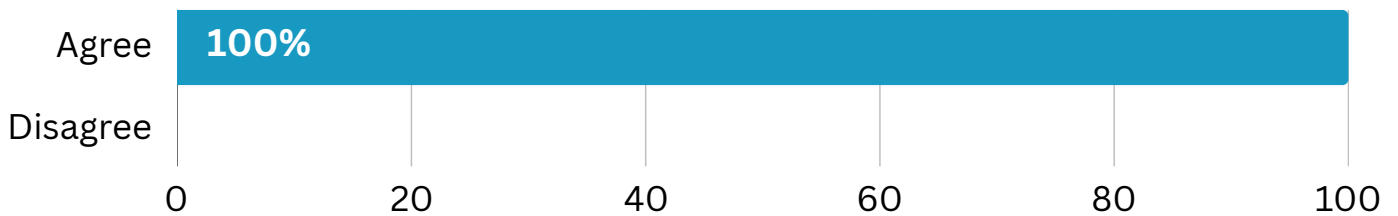
**“I agree, I learnt more about my myself and how to work on my weaknesses”**

**“Be vocal in an appropriate way and be kind”**

## Student feedback survey responses

Q3

After the sessions, I have a good understanding of employability skills.



Q4

What would you change about the programme?

“  
More in-person sessions as they would have made the sessions more interactive  
”

“  
Longer sessions and some outside of school for a change of scenery  
”

“  
If we could have gone to visit Ed (volunteer) at his workplace after we did the session on teamwork  
”

Q5

Which of the focus areas do you feel you improved the most in?

Teamwork

Building motivation

Communication

Career exploration

## Student feedback survey responses

Q6

Any personal reflections or comments?

“  
Entering the room felt like a fresh start. You didn't know anything about us and you trusted us as a group. In school, other teachers would see us together and split us up whereas we could work together here. Usually when we come to school, we know we are going to get shouted at again but you trusted us to work together here.”

“  
We didn't get seen as 'the bad group' and we felt comfortable in the new environment. We could be open without being worried of getting judged.”

“  
It is important to go over stuff that is important for later on in life that we don't cover in lessons as not all school lessons are important to me.”

Q7

Would you recommend the programme to a friend?



Yes  
100%

“Yes, but I would choose wisely”

“Yes, but it depends on who the person is. To get the most, you need to be engaged and show that you want to be there. Otherwise there is no point”

“Yes, but only if it does not interfere with their personal time”

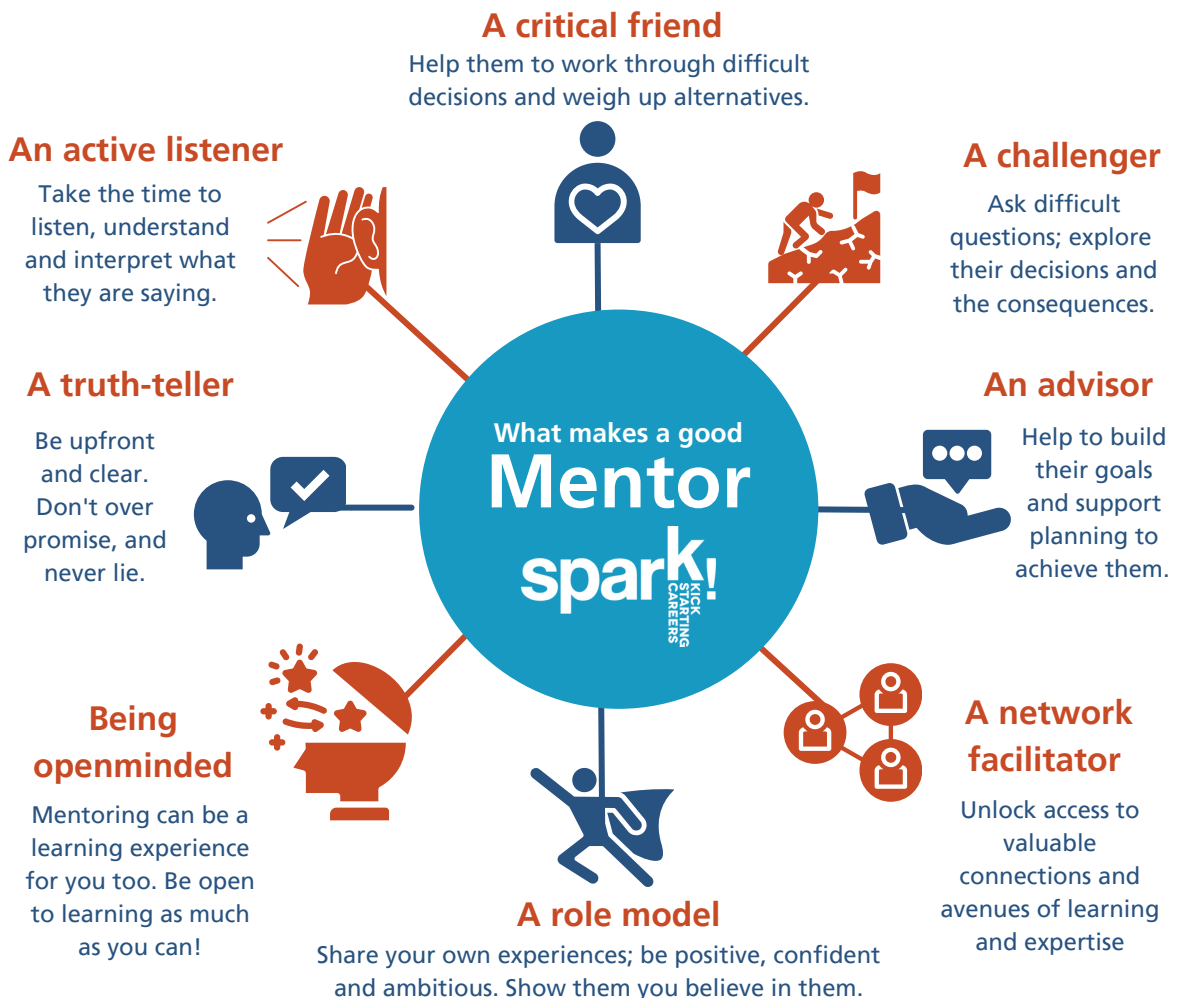
## Student feedback survey responses

### Q8 Finally, please share your thoughts about mentoring.

Who you are around and spend your time with impacts your commitment to school programmes. Some young people don't even want to try things even if it will benefit them.

The mentor needs to be patient, non-judgemental and understanding

Mentoring needs to be a safe space. Having it in a group setting made it feel more safe and the louder people in the group pushed the shy people to speak out.







# *Testimonials and case studies*



## ■ Focus group 1



■ Students from Uxbridge High School who took part in the group mentoring sessions

“

*It has been wonderful to work with Spark! and the students have benefitted from personalised guidance and a tailored approach. Careers is a huge word for our students and the sessions helped to break it down successfully.*

**Luke Heslin, Careers Lead at Uxbridge High School**



## ■ Focus group 2

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■ Students from Oak Wood School who took part in the group mentoring sessions



*Thank you for the time you have invested in our students, all students benefitted from your sessions in a number of ways. They really enjoyed the “where does your character fit” activity and the desert island activity. And the the discussion and Q&A time with a BP employee, allowing them to showcase their skills and character strengths, and feeling listened to and valued.*

*We will be acknowledging and sharing the students progress and commitment to the sessions in the Year 10 assembly next week.*

*We look forward to welcoming and working with you again the future*

**Marie Capel, Careers Coordinator at Oak Wood School**

## ■ Group mentee case study - Freddie (Oak Wood)

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***Freddie completed all 4 group mentoring sessions in December and subsequently used this experience and support from his Careers Coordinator to prepare for a week of work experience at QPR in January.***

**What do you think are some barriers that young people face with engaging in employability programmes?**

*Lack of motivation and commitment. With a job, there is motivation to work for money, food and your lifestyle. We lack motivation in school and in doing other programmes because there is nothing to work towards. Being at QPR for work experience motivated me because I wanted to prove myself to them and do a good job and I felt I did the same with the group sessions too.*

**Did you use any of the employability skills we worked on during your work experience placement?**

*My punctuality and time management in school is very bad. For all of the group mentoring sessions, I was on time as it was important to me to be on time and then for my work experience, I was early every day because I wanted to be respectful and professional. I'm still working on my punctuality in school.*

**What advice would you give to other young people considering mentoring either 1:1 or in a group setting?**

*You don't know the benefits of something unless you try it. Don't be afraid of being judged because that is not what mentoring is about. I didn't feel judged in the room when we did the sessions. I was straight up about my behaviour when I went for my work experience and I did tell them that I was excluded and I was open and honest. I conducted myself well in a very professional way and I'm glad because they told me that once I am 16, they are happy to have me come back to work during match days.*



## ■ 1 to 1 mentor case study - Aayushi (BDO)

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**What are some common themes you and your mentee discussed during your sessions?**

*We spoke about career goals and aspirations and how to navigate a hobby and passion into a full-time job. She is incredibly talented with nail art.*

**Do you think the programme helped your mentee with confidence and personal growth?**

*I hope so, although I would definitely say yes if we had more sessions. She is a confident speaker and we had a lot in common for 2 people that have never met each other before!*

**Do you think the programme helped your mentee think about some goals?**

*Frankie was open and honest in telling me why she doesn't attend school. She was very aware in what she needs to pursue her passion of being a nail technician and we discussed how important sitting her GCSE's is in order to achieve her career goals. She told me she would be returning to school.*

**Frankie completed 3 mentoring sessions with her mentor from BDO.**

“

*It was lovely to have an in-person introductory and mentoring session with Carys at her school. We spoke about her interests in arts and her hopes to study this in college. We found we had hobbies in common around cooking, cleaning, listening to music and spending time with her family which helped to break the ice. She did let me know that about her extended period of school absence and we spoke about the impact of this on completing her final exams. She did appear to be motivated to sit them and mentioned the importance of having formal qualifications. Although she didn't pursue further mentoring sessions with me, I wish her all the best in her academic studies and hope she remains motivated to pursue her passion around arts.*

**Carys completed 2 mentoring sessions with her mentor from Spark Inside**



# *Conclusions*



## ■ Future learnings

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- 1. Student recruitment** - Students must be willing to commit and maintain good communication links in order to reap the full benefits of the programme. Low school attendance was the biggest engagement barrier.
- 2. School support and teacher endorsement** - The success stories from the pilot programme came from the schools where teaching staff actively encouraged student participation and involvement. This made delivering the virtual group mentoring sessions more enjoyable for both Spark! and the employer volunteers.
- 3. Preferred style of mentoring for the target group** - A key factor in student retention numbers for the group mentoring sessions is that they took place during the school day with no interference to their personal time outside of school. Overall, there was a bigger preference for group style sessions taking place during curriculum time.

## ■ Conclusion

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In conclusion, this pilot programme highlighted the engagement and retention issues faced with our target group when engaging in 1:1 mentoring. The majority of the young people we worked with had low school attendance or other barriers to engagement and this impacted commitment to the programme. The feedback received from volunteers supporting the 1:1 mentoring sessions was very similar with some students not completing all of their sessions.

For this target cohort, mentoring is not an ideal first point of engagement, as it requires quite a lot of initial commitment. In future we would recommend driving engagement through workshops and industry insight visits, which will lead to mentoring for those young people who are willing and able to participate and commit.

The group mentoring sessions were successful and enjoyable at Oak Wood School and Uxbridge High, due in-part to teacher advocacy and the willingness of young people to participate in the sessions.

Student feedback indicated that the success of these sessions was partly due to the them taking place in a group settings and during the school day.





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