Future Ready Mentoring: An Assessment of Impact and Effectiveness

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Introduction

The University of Westminster's (UoW) Future Ready Mentoring (FRM) initiative features three programmes: Ask a Mentor (AaM), Career Ready Mentoring (CRM), and Group Mentoring (GM). Collectively, these programmes are designed to develop and imbue participating students with the skills they need to build their professional network and gain insight into the world of work. Given UoW's institutional objectives and emphasis on employability, FRM programmes allow students to connect with experienced mentors with industry knowledge and networks.[1] The objective of this analysis was to investigate the impact of each mentoring strand, understand the experiences of participants, and make suggestions for program improvement. This report presents an analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings from the 2021-22 academic year through 2023-24. Examination of the available data revealed "mentor helpfulness/support" and "knowledge/skills gain" to be the major themes emerging from the qualitative responses, though disaggregation did uncover specific group patterns, such as the importance of industry "insiders" for recent graduates participating in AaM. Additionally, on balance, the quantitative data analysis highlighted that all programmes demonstrate a positive impact on participating students' confidence and awareness of employability and other related topics, with the effect size ranging from small to moderate.[2] However, the analysis did highlight several discrepancies between what students hoped to discuss during their mentoring sessions and what came to fruition. Overall, the findings were positive. Nevertheless, several suggestions have been provided with the aim of enhancing the programme and data collection.

Structurally, this report is divided into four major sections. The first three sections comprise individual discussions of each FRM programme. Each opens with a programme description, followed by a discussion of qualitative and then quantitative findings. The patterns and trends from each programme are then compared in the fourth, discussion, section. The report concludes with several recommendations.

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[1] University of Westminster, *Being Westminster, 2022-2029* (University of Westminster, 2022), https://www.westminster.ac.uk/sites/default/public-files/prospectuses/Being-Westminster-2022-29.pdf.

[2] According to Cohen (1988), r values above .1 can be described as small, values above .3 can be described as moderate, and values above .5 can be described as strong. J.W. Cohen, *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioural Sciences* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988).

1. Methodology: Qualitative and Quantitative

1.1 Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative data were collected through post-programme surveys that followed the conclusion of each mentoring scheme.[3] Post-survey comments from the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24 were combined to form whole-programme data corpora. All data is complete except for 2023-24 cycle 2 (semester two) CRM responses.[4] Data for the AaM and CRM programmes included comments from two respondent groups: current students and recent graduates. The two groups' responses were kept separate as demographic data accompanied comments from current students but not those from recent graduates. GM data only contained responses from current students at the time of participation. Administered in teaching settings, the GM data remain individuated by course. The data corpora were cleaned to remove immaterial or item nonresponses (i.e., 'n/a', 'nothing to add', 'no, I don't think so'), and a few comments were edited for clarity without detriment to meaning. Comments were anonymised to remove any personally identifiable information. Accompanying demographic data was also limited; at most, the analysed datasets included the respondents' course name, education status (i.e., fully enrolled), study year, study load (i.e., full-time or part-time), School, and College.

Cleaned datasets were uploaded to Explorance's MLY (mi-lee)[5], a machine-learning artificial intelligence (AI) tool used to analyse survey responses thematically.[6] Due to the nature of the programmes, the decision was made to utilise the Employee Learning Insights (ELI) framework instead of the Student Experience Insights (SEI) framework. Broadly, as opt-in extra-curricular activities with a goal setting, skills, and self-efficacy focus, it was felt that the SEI would too much limit analysis to the scope of the academic/pastoral experience. The datasets were uploaded alongside a UoW-specific glossary of terms to aid the AI's interpretation. The glossary is a working document derived from previous analyses and updated during data familiarisation.

To better understand the participants' experiences on each mentoring branch, a phenomenological interpretivist epistemology was adopted to inform the analysis of free text comments.[7] This is the first in-depth study into the experience of participants since the programmes' pilots in the academic year 2020-21, and the

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[3] The pre-programme surveys did not collect free text responses from prospective, self-selected applicants.
[4] To be collected in July 2024.
[5] Explorance, "MLY," *Explorance*, accessed June 18th, 2024, https://explorance.com/products/mly/
[6] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3*, (2006): 77-101.
[7] Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. "Doing interpretative phenomenological analysis," in *Qualitative Health Psychology: theories and methods*, eds. M. Murray & M. M. Chamberlain (Sage, 199) and Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to methods.* (Sage, 2003).

qualitative analyses seek to give primacy to participant experience to better understand the reality of participating in FRM programmes whilst studying at UoW.[8]

1.2 Quantitative Methodology

Quantitative data for each mentoring programme was collected pre- and post-mentoring. The data discussed here refers to the GM pilots in 2020-21, and pre- and post- data for AaM, CRM and GM for the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24. For all intervention types, students were asked, pre- and post-, for their perceptions of the impact of the programme(s) on their confidence and awareness levels. These were captured using a five-point Likert scale.[9] Students participating in the AaM or CRM programmes were asked an identical set of pre- and post-questions:

How confident do you feel…

1. *In your ability to communicate effectively?*
2. *In your ability to problem solve?*
3. *In your ability to form a professional network?*
4. *Communicating in a formal setting (such as a job interview)?*
5. *Talking to others about the subject knowledge you have gained during your degree?*
6. *Talking to others about the skills you have gained during your degree?*
7. *That you will gain employment in a sector related to your degree subject?*
8. *Demonstrating your ability to problem solve in a job interview?*

How aware are you of…

1. *What 'employability' skills are?*
2. *The career opportunities available to you that relate to your degree subject or chosen industry*
3. *The skills that employers (related to your degree subject or chosen industry) are looking for?*
4. *What being in a workplace environment is like?*

While the awareness questions were consistent for all interventions, GM participants were asked a slightly different set of questions related to confidence:

How confident do you feel…

1. *In your ability to communicate effectively?*
2. *In your leadership abilities?*
3. *In understanding your strengths and how to utilise them in the workplace?*
4. *In your ability to learn from constructive criticism?*
5. *In your ability to grow resilience?*
6. *In understanding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues in the workplace?*

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[8] Holloway, I., & Todres, L. "The status of method: flexibility, consistency and coherence." *Qualitative Research*, (2003): 345-357.
[9] 1 = Very confident, 2 = Fairly confident, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Not very confident, and 5 = Not very confident at all. A three-point scale was used for views concerning awareness: 1 = Aware, 2 = Neutral, and 3 = Not aware.

7.   *In exploring career pathways related to your degree?*
8.   *In your ability to form a professional network?*
9.   *Communicating in a formal setting (such as a job interview)?*
10. *Talking to others about the subject knowledge you have gained during your degree?*
11. *Talking to others about the skills you have gained during your degree?*
12. *That you will gain employment in a sector related to your field?*
13. *Demonstrating your ability to problem solve in a job interview?*

Several further questions presented students with "True" or "False" options to capture responses. Questions varied from intervention to intervention. For instance, a question about topic coverage and who participants would tell about their taking part in a programme were common to all. However, AaM also included a question about the arrangement of opportunities or offers following a session, as well as a sequence of questions on participants' "extent of agreement" with a given statement.

In each case, the data was cleaned, with unique student IDs being used to match pre- and post-survey responses. Text responses to the question using Likert scales were converted to numerical terms (i.e., Very confident = 1) to allow for SPSS analysis. Duplicates were filtered out from any analysis, with the first interaction with a programme being used. Incomplete records were also excluded from the analysis, such as when students only completed the pre-intervention survey or post-intervention survey.

Data collection before and after the delivery of a mentoring intervention has made it possible to statistically test for changes in confidence and awareness and the significance of those changes. Where it has been possible to match pre-survey and post-survey responses, SPSS software was used to run a series of Wilcoxon-signed rank tests to ascertain any post-intervention impact of the mentoring programmes on students' confidence and awareness. These inferential statistics were supplemented with a range of descriptive statistics, created and visualised using Microsoft Excel. Furthermore, the FRM surveys were designed with reference to the NERUPI (Network Evaluating & Researching University Participation Interventions) Framework: this analysis maintains this dialogue.[10]

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[10] NERUPI. "NERUPI Framework Overview." Last modified 2024. https://www.nerupi.co.uk/about/nerupi-framework-overview.

2. Ask a Mentor

Descriptive Overview: AaM

AaM sees participating students engaging in one-off mentoring conversations with mentors. The programme is open to students at all levels of study and recent UoW graduates. The programme is open year-round, and matches are established on a rolling basis. Once matched, AaM sessions are usually arranged within two weeks; AaM sessions take place online, by phone or in person, depending on the preferred format of the mentees and mentors. To participate, students self-select and complete an AaM request form at the point of need. The form asks about participants' career interests, what they would like to speak with a mentor about and any additional experience they have in the area. The Mentoring Team use this information to shortlist suitable mentors from the database or recruit new mentors to establish the match. AaM is advertised through multiple channels such as the Mentoring Team's webpage, social media, Westminster Connect, newsletters and blog posts, and direct email to recent graduates and CRM candidates who did not complete the pre-programme training or who were not successfully matched with a mentor.[11] Further promotion of the AaM programme is conducted by the Careers and Employability Services (CES) and academics. In 2022-23, a targeted campaign was aimed at final-year students and recent graduates who had not secured employment; this campaign was rerun for 2023-24. Participants complete a pre-programme survey when requesting an AaM session and a post-programme survey is sent two weeks after participants are matched with a mentor.

2.1 Qualitative Findings

2.1.1 Data Analysis

Post-programme responses from AaM participants were collected and analysed in two sets. Current students and recent graduates provided free text answers to the same questions:

> AaM Q1. How useful did you find having a one-off conversation with the mentor?
> AaM Q2. Do you have any feedback about the AaM service?

As demographic data did not accompany recent graduate respondents' answers, the two groups were not combined. 2022-24 responses from current students totalled 208 comments (Q1, n = 150 comments; Q2, n = 58 comments). MLY's sentiment analysis found a 79% positive global sentiment.[12] Considering the phraseology used in the questions, this was suggestive of all respondents having written at least one thing they found useful or enjoyed about their one-off conversation; additionally, the sentiment analysis is aligned with the proportion

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[11] University of Westminster's online alumni community portal.
[12] 'Global sentiment' refers to the sentiment of the entire dataset, comprised of thematically categorised and uncategorised comments.

of data extracts by question. Across the current student dataset, the most commented-upon themes were "mentor–helpfulness/support", "knowledge/skills gain", "quality", and "relevance". These were also the most positively commented-upon themes.

Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses over half of the responses to questions 1 and 2 were positive (85% and 64%, respectively). The mixed or non-explicit sentiment focuses on the suitability of matching, with some respondents expressing that their matches were suitable but not as impactful as they could have been. Some comment on nuanced differences in skillsets – e.g., creative vs. technical writing skills – while others express disappointment at the lack of opportunity to employ the knowledge or skills gained form the experience in other employability-related activities once the session had occurred.

2022-24 responses from recent graduates totalled 41 comments (Q1, n = 27 comments; Q2, n = 14 comments). MLY's sentiment analysis found a 63% positive global sentiment. Across the recent graduate dataset, the most commented-upon themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support", "mentor – experience", and "mentor – knowledgeability". These were also the most positively commented-upon themes.

Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to question 1 were majority positive (78%) with the remainder being mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Responses to question 2 were split between positive, negative and mixed or non-explicit sentiment (39%, 29%, and 36%, respectively). The mixed or non-explicit sentiment focuses on the amount of time spent with in the one-off session and mentors' occasional reticence to divulge professional information, both appear to limit participants' ability to engage in-depth with the session as they felt their questions could not be answered in full. We may surmise that mentors who are less forthcoming do not meet recent graduate participants' expectations of the sessions; between current student and recent graduate participants, there appears to be a difference in the level of personal-professional information provided by mentors.

Disaggregation of current students by year of study showed limited variation in the themes commented upon by AaM participants. The dataset included responses from undergraduates in years 1-4 of study. There was a fairly even split between the first three years of study; students in their first year totalled 44 respondents (64 comments), those in their second year totalled 52 respondents (67 comments), and those in their third year totalled 40 respondents (59 comments). Those in their fourth year of study were fewer in number, totalling 11 respondents (14 comments). The most frequent theme identified in each year group was "mentor – helpfulness/support", and there is a crossover between the following most frequent themes. Students in years 1-3 commented on "knowledge/skills gain" second most frequently, followed by one of "relevance", "quality", or "instructiveness". Students in year four of their studies did not comment so readily on "knowledge/skills gain". Instead, they focused on their mentors; these students commented second most frequently on the mentor's "experience" and "knowledgeability".

The dataset included 179 comments from full-time students, 18 from part-time students, three from students studying sandwich courses, and five comments from module retrievers.[13] There was only slight thematic variation between the different study loads. "Mentor – helpfulness/support" was the most frequently identified theme, followed by "knowledge/skills gain". An exception was identified in the module retriever group, wherein "mentor – temperament" was the second most frequently identified theme.

All University colleges and schools were present in the current student dataset. Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) had the most current student representation with 75 respondents (102 comments), followed by Design and Digital Creative Industries (DCDI) with 38 respondents (49 comments), and Westminster Business School (WBS) with 34 respondents (53 comments). The remaining comments (n = 14) are from respondents whose education faculty (college) is not listed or is marked as 'Westminster Owned'[14].

A by-school breakdown of 2022-4 current students is presented in the figure below. The number of participants by year is derived from the pre-mentoring request form. The average post-programme survey response rate in 2022-24 was 39% (47% LAS, 39% DCDI, 32%). Between 2022-23 and 2023-24, all schools witnessed a drop in AaM participants at an average of 8 participants per school.

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[13] A module retriever is a student who has not passed enough credits overall to progress to the next level of their studies or complete their studies with the intended award. Such students must register to retake or defer module(s) or may have outstanding (re)assessments to complete in the next academic session. "Module Registration." University of Westminster. Accessed June 7th, 2024. https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/guides-and-policies/academic-matters/module-registration

[14] 'Westminster Owned' was used in the datasets to identify participants whose unique identifiers were associated with multiple programmes of study and, therefore, multiple schools. These participants could not be linked to one school specifically.

School[16]		College[15]											
		LAS				DCDI				WBS			
		HUMNTS	LIFSCN	SOCSCN	WESLAW	ARCCIT	COMENG	WESART	WESMEC	APPMGT	FINACA	MGTMKT	ORGECO
N of respondents (sum)		21	21	21	12	12	7	9	10	5	9	13	7
N of participants	2022-3	25	20	39	22	21	13	16	15	9	20	25	11
	2023-4	12	15	20	11	9	8	7	9	4	13	19	10
Response rate 2022-24		57%	60%	36%	36%	40%	33%	39%	42%	39%	27%	30%	33%

Figure 1. *A table showing the number of students in each UoW school and aggregate response rates to the post-programme survey for 2022-24 AaM participants. Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.*

"Mentor – helpfulness/support" was shared by all colleges as the most frequently identified theme. WBS and DCDI students commented second most frequently on "knowledge/skills gain", whereas LAS students commented second most frequently on "instructiveness".

The 2022-24 recent graduates AaM data did not include demographic details that would allow for comparability to current students, e.g., no year of graduation or similar, no previous study load or similar, and no college or school studied at or similar.

2.1.2 Findings
2.1.2.1 Mentor – Helpfulness/Support

There is much that both current student and recent graduate respondents liked, admired, and found useful during their one-off AaM sessions. In addition, the process of self-selecting and applying was found to be straightforward and simple.

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[15] College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS), College of Design Creative and Digital Industries (DCDI), and Westminster Business School (WBS).
[16] LAS: Humanities (HUMNTS), Life Sciences (LIFSCN), Social Sciences (SOCSCN); DCDI: Architecture and Cities (ARCRIT), Computer Science and Engineering (COMENG), Westminster Arts (WESARTS), Westminster Media and Communications (WESMEC); WBS: Applied Management (APPMGT), Finance and Accounting (FINACA), Management and Marketing (MGTMKT), and Organisations, Economy & Society (ORGECO).

> *I feel the mentor I was paired with was an excellent match, considering my career aspirations. This pairing undoubtedly amplified the benefits I have received from this one-off conversation.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

Many respondents lauded the suitability of their matched mentor, using a variety of emphatic adjectives to describe the pairing; 11 different adjectives were used – 'perfect', 'great', 'excellent' – in 57 comments to refer explicitly to the pairing that was established for them. Mentors from course-matched or related industries and job roles were viewed as especially beneficial to the participants.

> *I found the one-off conversation with my mentor extremely beneficial. The opportunity to discuss with someone like ??? who has firsthand experience and knowledge of the UK finance sector provided me with invaluable insights. It definitely helped in clarifying some of the concerns I had, providing practical advice, and setting expectations for my journey in this sector. This experience has amplified my excitement and confidence about embarking on this career path.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

Though the theme of "mentor – helpfulness/support" at large was the most frequent across both datasets, how respondents found their mentors helpful, supportive, or encouraging varied. The majority commented that their mentor's helpfulness manifested as answers to myriad specific questions, whether career-, profession-, or subject-oriented, and their provision of advice, guidance, or feedback. Participants often sought advice and guidance regarding goal setting or career planning, weighing up postgraduate study or professional certifications, and non-conventional routes to access desired career paths.

> *A one-off conversation with the mentor provided me an opportunity to gain new insights, ask questions, receive advice, and learn from their experience and knowledge in a particular area. It helped me gain clarity on my goals, challenges, and opportunities and provide[d] me with a fresh perspective on work and personal life. Additionally, the mentor offered guidance and support to help me navigate difficult situations and make informed decisions. […] a one-off conversation with a mentor was highly valuable for me to grow and develop, especially [as] the mentor was highly experienced and knowledgeable in the area I was seeking advice in.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, MSc Digital Business, WBS)*

Alongside an appreciation for their mentor's professional experience and knowledge of a relevant sector, respondents greatly benefitted from practical advice and support that increased both their confidence and knowledge of application processes and hands-on development of CVs and cover letters.

> *[…] the guidance and information I received from the Ask a Mentor Service and the mentor I was matched with could not have been better, and I feel much more confident going forward and progressing with my education post-graduation. I never felt silly asking my mentor any question, and he/she seemed really happy to give me the information he/she did. Without this service and my mentor, I would not feel as confident or knowledgeable about my options.*
> *(Current student, 3rd year, Psychology, LAS)*

2.1.2.2 Knowledge and Skills Gain

The knowledge and skills gained by AaM participants fall into two camps: employability skills and industry-specific knowledge and skills. Participants noted the impact of the mentoring conversation on their confidence, drive, and ambition, expressing how worthwhile and beneficial the conversation was. After meeting their mentor, most participants felt a greater sense of self-belief or self-efficacy and increased confidence speaking with professionals in both formal and informal settings.

> *Speaking with my mentor opened new opportunities and goals that helped me understand different steps to the career path I want to take. It also gave me more confidence in my abilities and experience previous but enough ambition to gather more.*
> *(Sandwich student, 3rd year, International Marketing student, WBS)*

When commenting on industry-specific knowledge and skills gained through the AaM programme, participants often commented on their increased understanding of how to stand out in a difficult-to-navigate job market: 'how to build a proper CV, how to show your efficiency in problem-solving, how to demonstrate you are unique and capable to succeed in a job interview.'[17] Respondents also noted the rapid development of understanding of common interview questions, techniques, and application questions by industry, further bolstering their confidence and awareness of navigating job markets.

> *[My mentor] gave me valuable insight into the cybersecurity sector. [They] also assisted me in practising for my technical interviews for internships and also checked over my CV and cover letters for me. I feel much more confident in interviews, particularly coding and technical interviews. This was a very good match in my opinion as I was able to learn more about roles in cybersecurity and certifications I could look into obtaining.*
> *(Current Student, 2nd year, Computer Science, DCDI)*

Respondents wrote these insights were not attainable without interacting with an industry insider. This was particularly marked in the AaM experience of recent graduates, who often felt they could make a determined and successful start on their career paths after graduating.

> *The [Ask a Mentor] programme has been a discovery for me and game-changing on my job hunting. I spent around 5 months applying for roles trying to get my foot on professional field and I have been rejected over and over again. When I have got the chance to have a Mentor from Westminster that boo[s]ts my chance and I have received an offer within weeks. I am extremely happy with the experience I will definitely use the service again and I will highly recommend [it] to all graduate students.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

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[17] Recent graduate

We may extrapolate that, aside from the above merits of the mentors, speaking with an external professional who is removed from the normative academic experience of the students creates space for both openness and comfort. This manifests in students using the session time for individual purposes without concern for the opinions of those responsible for their degree outcomes.

In answer to Q2 ("Do you have any feedback about the AaM service?"), participants' responses focused on a few distinct suggestions. First, despite knowing that this mentoring programme is limited to a one-off conversation, participants would like to have a follow-up conversation to review their progress against the mentor's feedback or to report their successes. This was especially clear in responses where the participants' answer to Q1 noted the session's usefulness for goal setting, career planning, or interview preparation. Moreover, given the perceived value and impact of the AaM sessions, students expressed a desire for longer sessions.

2.2 Quantitative Findings

2.2.1 Inferential Statistics

Data for AaM covered the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. When data from all academic years was aggregated, confidence levels were significantly higher across all variables. For example, if we consider those variables related to communication (Figure 2), we see competency improvements across the board, with a moderate effect size in all cases. Increases in mean scores were recorded for all variables, while the decrease in standard deviation for all areas demonstrated student scores to be more consistent. We observed similar results when the data was disaggregated by academic year.

	Pre-mentoring		Post-mentoring				
Competency	Mdn	N =	Mdn	N =	z =	p =	r =
Effective communication	4.00	136	4.00	136	-5.17	<.001	.31
Communicate in a formal setting	3.00	136	4.00	136	-5.48	<.001	.33
Talking about subject knowledge	4.00	136	4.00	136	-5.81	<.001	.35
Talking about degree skills	4.00	136	4.00	136	-6.44	<.001	.39

Figure 2. *Participant confidence relating to communication variables*

Westminster places much value on student progression and employability. Institutional research has emphasised how securing employment in an industry related to their undergraduate degree or of their choice is important for students, as are establishing links or networks with figures and organisations in their field of

study and future work.[18] Restricting our analysis to those questions concerned with employability and/or employment and which have not previously been discussed (i.e., "forming a professional network," "gaining employment," "problem solving in a job interview," "employability skills," "career opportunities," "skills employers are looking for," and understanding a "workplace environment"), we find confidence and awareness levels to be significantly higher after mentoring than before, with a moderate effect size in each case except "workplace environment," which had a small effect size (r = .16). Given the significance attached to improving employment prospects, the balance of evidence suggests that attending an AaM session may benefit students interested in enhancing their employability. Considered against the NERUPI framework (Understand, Levels 5 and 6), the results demonstrate how students feel more confident applying their knowledge to settings beyond the university and how it can be adapted for scenarios such as job interviews; much the same could be said for CRM and GM.

When we analyse awareness, a similar pattern emerges, with awareness levels among students significantly increasing following the intervention. We find significant improvements in students' confidence when we disaggregate the data by academic year. In 2022-23, most areas experienced a substantial increase in awareness levels, except "workplace environment," which saw a modest increase, the mean increasing from 2.40 to 2.58. Overall, the evidence suggests that students became more aware of key employability factors after being part of the AaM program.

2.2.2 Descriptive statistics
2.2.2.1 Topic coverage

The descriptive statistics for AaM on topic coverage present a slightly different picture, highlighting areas where the programme has been strongest and where there is, perhaps, room for improvement. For example, most participants (n = 153) in AaM for the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24 reported that their session covered career pathway guidance, CV advice, industry-specific guidance, and job-hunting techniques/strategies. However, only 40% reported searching for internships/work experience as being raised as a topic of discussion. This figure was 27% for researching employers, and less than one quarter mentioned interview preparation (22%); raw figures are provided in Figure 2. The "Interview preparation" figures are noteworthy when we adopt a by-year approach. While 24% reported this as a topic of conversation in 2022-23, this decreased to 11% in 2023-24. Accounting for the smaller respondent total in 2023-24 and the fluctuation in percentages this may

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[18] Kirsty Bryant, "Career Mentoring Scheme Focus Groups Report," (University of Westminster, 2021); Kirsty Bryant, "Westminster Working Cultures UK Focus Group Report," (University of Westminster, 2021); Scott Rawlinson, "Drivers and deterrents of undergraduate and postgraduate re-enrolment at *alma mater*," (University of Westminster, 2023), access report here.

cause, the substantial reduction indicates that only 1 in 10 participants discussed "Interview preparation." For all years, the proportions of current students and graduates mentioning "Interview preparation" as topic of discussion was similar (i.e., current = 79.1%, graduates 75%). Given the importance afforded by students to their future employment and employability and that placed by Westminster in the GO survey, it is recommended that each topic be at least raised with students during their session.

TOPIC AREA	All Years				2022-23				2023-24			
	TRUE	FALSE	TOTAL	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	TOTAL	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	TOTAL	% TRUE
Academic guidance / study skills	53	100	153	35%	40	83	123	33%	15	30	45	33%
Application forms	35	118	153	23%	30	93	123	24%	6	39	45	13%
Assessment day preparation	11	142	153	7%	10	113	123	8%	1	44	45	2%
Career pathway Guidance	119	34	153	78%	97	26	123	79%	36	9	45	80%
CV advice	80	73	153	52%	63	60	123	51%	26	19	45	58%
Goals/objectives (personal or professional)	94	59	153	61%	75	48	123	61%	25	20	45	56%
Industry-specific guidance	96	57	153	63%	76	47	123	62%	34	11	45	76%
Interview preparation	33	120	153	22%	29	94	123	24%	5	40	45	11%
Job-hunting techniques/strategies	81	72	153	53%	70	53	123	57%	17	28	45	38%
Research employers	41	112	153	27%	32	91	123	26%	10	35	45	22%
Searching for internships/work experience	61	92	153	40%	51	72	123	41%	14	31	45	31%

Figure 3. What did you cover in your session?

Comparing the topics covered based on graduate status reveals a distinct pattern (see Figure 3). For topics directly related to employability, a higher proportion of recent graduates report talking on those subjects (i.e., career pathway guidance, CV advice, industry-specific guidance, interview preparation, and job-hunting techniques/strategies). Conversely, a higher proportion of current students discussed topics about study, assessment, and researching about employers and internship/work experience opportunities than recent graduates.

TOPIC AREA	Current, n = 129		Recent, n =24		
	TRUE (%)	FALSE (%)	TRUE (%)	FALSE (%)	TRUE Difference (%)
Academic guidance / study skills	37.2	62.8	20.8	79.2	-16.4
Application forms	24.8	75.2	12.5	87.5	-12.3
Assessment day preparation	7.7	92.3	4.2	95.8	-3.5
Career pathway guidance	76.7	23.3	83.3	16.7	6.6
CV advice	48.8	51.2	70.8	29.2	22
Goals/objectives (personal or professional)	59.7	40.3	70.8	29.2	11.1
Industry-specific guidance	58.9	41.1	83.3	16.7	24.4
Interview preparation	20.9	79.1	25	75	4.1
Job-hunting techniques/strategies	51.2	48.8	62.5	37.5	11.3
Research employers	27.1	72.9	25	75	-2.1
Searching for internships/work experience	41.9	58.1	29.2	70.8	-12.7

Figure 4. What did you cover in your session? Current and recent students and differences (All Years)

The findings in Figure 5 present a potential caveat to the evidence from Figure 4. It was not possible to align pre- and post-mentoring responses to topic coverage for AaM. However, it has been possible for six categories (see Figure 5). The data illustrates that, for the most part, the topics that participating students hoped to cover during their sessions were covered. The largest discrepancy was found in relation to "CV Advice," where there was a 14 percentage point gap between pre- and post-mentoring. In this case, a higher proportion of students (n=137)

reported discussing CV advice (n = 70, 51%) than those who hoped to speak about the topic (n = 51, 37%). This raises a question about who is best placed to steer the conversation, mentors or mentees? In practice, it is likely to be most beneficial to strike a balance between what mentees want to talk about and what mentors think, based on their experience, would be helpful for mentors to know.
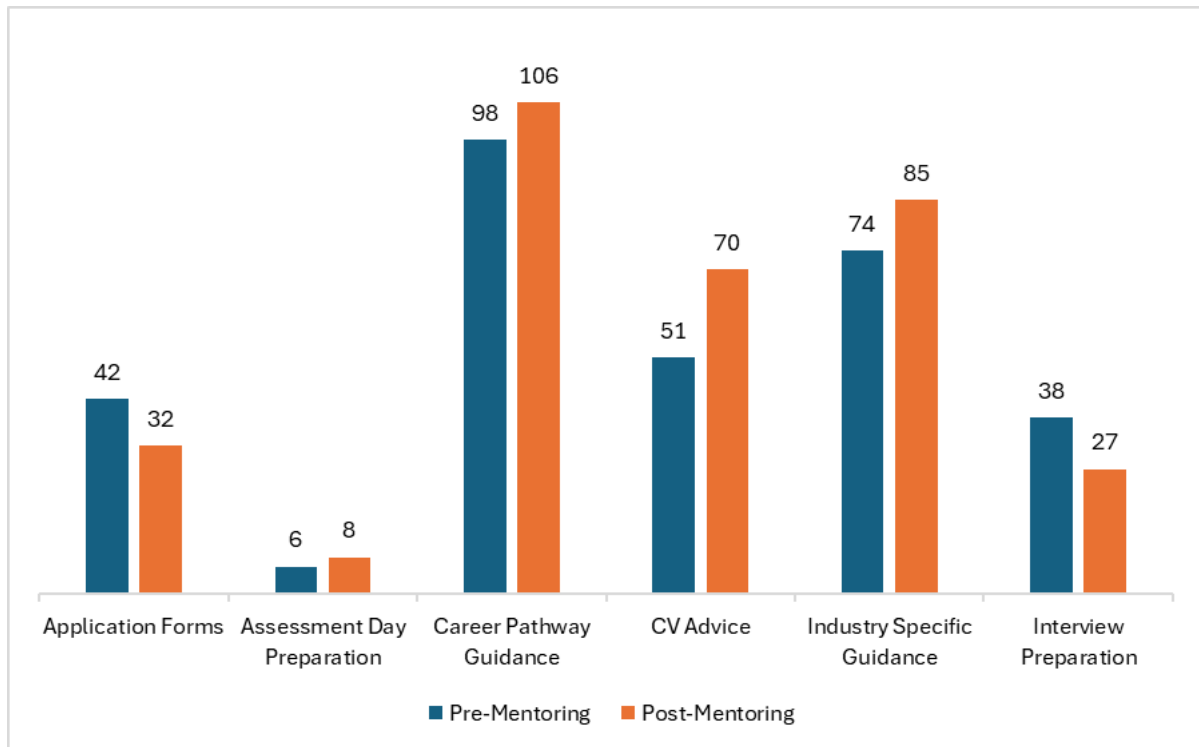

Figure 5. *Topic coverage hopes and realities, AaM*

2.2.2.2 Who do you think you will tell about your participation in AaM?

Student participants were asked who they thought they would tell about participating in AaM. In contrast to CRM and GM (see below), AaM participants appeared far less likely to tell prospective employers about their participation (see Figure 6). One interpretation of this finding is that students think that prospective employers will place limited value on their attending an AaM session. This may be acceptable unless the intention is to see a reference to AaM attendance on application forms or raised as part of an interview process. As with CRM and GM, friends and family are amongst the groups with whom participants are most likely to share their participation with. In terms of future recruitment, it is reassuring to see that "people on your course" ranks highly. Read as a positive, AaM participants can be seen as recommending the programme to the course-mates.
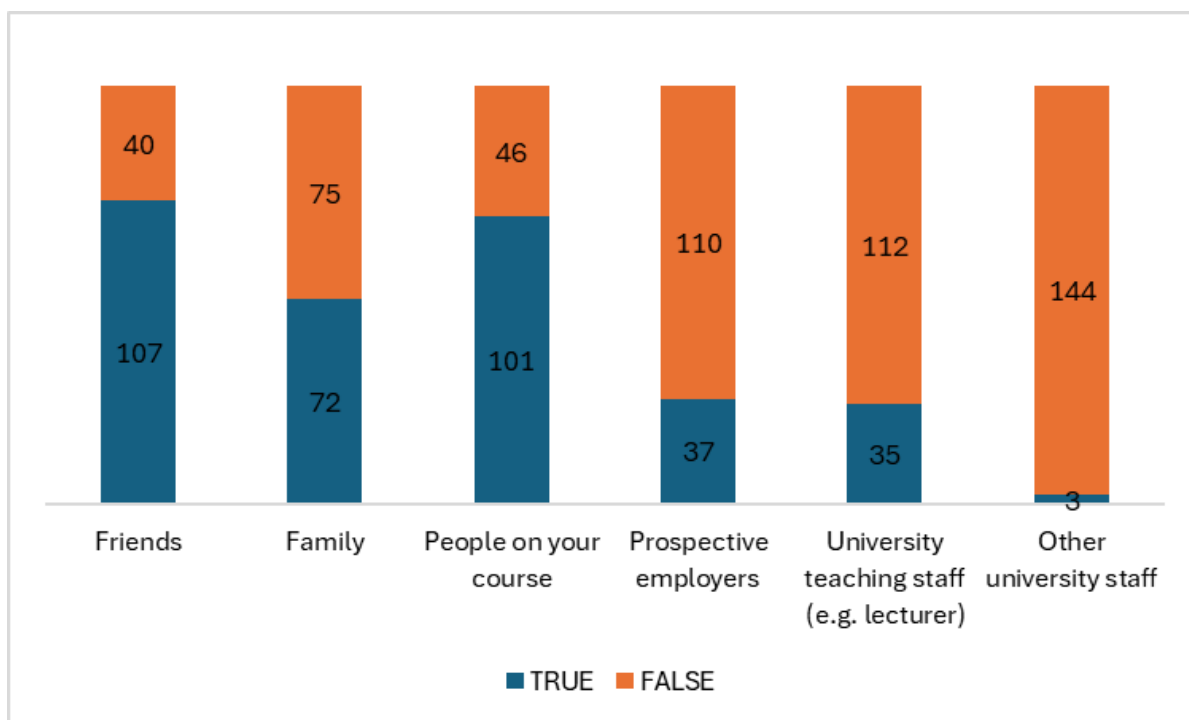
Figure 6. *Who do you think you will tell about your participation in AaM?*

3. Career Ready Mentoring

Descriptive Overview: CRM

The CRM programme sees participating students engaging in structured, long-term mentoring over two cycles. Cycle 1 runs from November to April, and Cycle 2 from May to July. Mentees are expected to complete sessions on an approximately monthly basis. The programme is open to students at all levels of study and recent graduates of the University. Applications for Cycle 1 open in September and close in mid-October. Pre-programme training occurs in late October, and matching commences in mid-November. Applications for Cycle 2 open in January and close in February. Pre-programme training occurs mid-February and matching commences in late February. CRM sessions take place online, by phone or in person, depending on the preferred format of the mentees and mentors. To participate, students self-select and complete a CRM request form. The request form asks about participants' career interests, what they would like to speak with a mentor about and any additional experience they have in the area. The Mentoring Team use this information to shortlist suitable mentors from the database or recruit new mentors to establish the match. Following pre-programme training, mentees submit short biographies that are shared with mentors in matching communications. Mentees also submit SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goals in relation to what they hope to gain from the CRM programme. Like AaM, CRM is advertised through multiple channels such as the Mentoring Team's webpage, social media, Westminster Connect, newsletters and blog posts, and direct email to current students and recent graduates ahead of each cycle. Further promotion of the CRM programme is conducted by

the Careers and Employability Services (CES) and academics. Participants respond to a pre-programme survey when completing the post-training acceptance form to confirm their place on the programme. A post-programme survey is sent during the final month of each cycle e.g., April and July.

3.1 Qualitative Findings

3.1.1 Data Analysis

Post-programme responses from CRM participants were collected and analysed in two sets. As demographic data did not accompany recent graduate respondents' answers, the two groups were not combined. Still, as with the AaM programme, both current students and recent graduates were asked the same questions:

> *CRM Q1. What aspect of the mentoring experience has had the most impact on you?*
> *CRM Q2. What has been the most challenging aspect of your mentoring experience?*
> *CRM Q3. How did your mentor support you with achieving your SMART[19] goals?*
> *CRM Q4. How could we improve mentoring in the future?*
> *CRM Q5. Please use this space to share brief reasons for your selection(s) above. Do you have any other feedback or suggestions regarding cycle lengths/time of year/minimum number of mentoring sessions?*
> *CRM Q6. Would you like to write a thank you message for your mentor?*
> *CRM Q7. Do you have any additional feedback for your mentor?*
> *CRM Q8. Please use this space to write a testimonial about your mentoring experience.*

Post-CRM 2022-24 responses from current students totalled 1,212 comments. The decision was made to exclude responses to questions 6, 7, and 8. The research team felt that these questions were less substantive, given that the purpose of enquiry here is to understand participants' experience and to assess and improve the mentoring programme. Responses to questions 1-5 provided 807 comments (Q1, n = 203; Q2, n = 188; Q3, n = 201; Q4, n = 168; Q5, n = 47).

Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses over half of the responses to questions 1 and 3 were positive (54% and 75%, respectively). The phrasing of questions 2, 4, and 5 encouraged respondents to give suggestive, critically reflective feedback or to comment on the difficulties they experienced. As such, the responses to questions 2, 4 and 5 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on scheduling and content. Using the terms "schedule OR time OR meeting OR busy", a text query of the data returns 126 instances across questions 2, 4 and 5. Respondents cite the arrangement of meetings as the greatest challenge faced as CRM participants. To a lesser but still notable extent, this difficulty is exacerbated when participating in cycle 2; existing scheduling challenges are expounded as students prepare

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[19] Conzemius, A., and O'Neill, J. The Power of SMART Goals: Using Goals to Improve Student Learning. Solution Tree Press, 2009.

their end-of-year assessments. Regarding session content, negative and mixed responses indicate that participants may feel overwhelmed by mentors imparting huge swathes of industry-specific, technical information in one-go. Additionally, this presents a greater challenge for students in the earlier years of study, who may not yet have broached that kind of content on their course.

The dataset included responses from participants in years 1-4 and 6 of study. Students in their first year of study totalled 82 (483 comments), those in their second year totalled 37 (225 comments), those in their third totalled 68 (398 comments), those in their fourth year totalled 16 (93 comments), and those in their sixth year of study totalled 2 (13 comments). In all cases, the most frequently identified theme was "mentor–helpfulness/support". Students in their first or sixth years commented on "knowledge/skills gain" second most frequently. In contrast, students in their second, third or fourth years commented on "mentor-knowledgeability" second most frequently. Other prominent and recurring themes were "mentor–knowledgeability" or "instructiveness".

> *Since my mentor is in the career I want to pursue, it was helpful to hear his/her tips for applications for Pupillages, and how to get a career in Law after I graduate. He/she also shed light on the timeline of his/her journey which helped me to understand the roles I could take before I am able to get pupillage, such as paralegal roles. ??? showed me ways to find roles suited to me, and explained the best ways to write in application forms.*
> *(Current student, 3rd year, LLB (Hons) Law, LAS)*

The questions 1-8 dataset included 1,087 comments from full-time students (n = 186), 74 from part-time students (n = 11), 30 from students on sandwich courses (n = 5), eight from open/distanced learners (n = 1), and 13 from students with an assessment-only study load (n = 2). Open/distanced learners and assessment-only responses are suppressed here due to small sample sizes. Full-, part-time and sandwich course students most frequently commented on "mentor – helpfulness/support", whereas students with non-traditional study loads commented on "knowledge/skills gain" most often. We can surmise that participants studying non-traditional courses of study have less need for mentors' help and support in preparing for professional roles as they are likely balancing their studies with employment already. More pertinent to these participants, perhaps, is the continued development of existing competencies to help them progress in their career pathways.

LAS was represented by 67 students (434 comments), DCDI by 86 students (505 comments), and WBS by 44 students (258 comments). The most frequently identified theme at college level was "mentor – helpfulness/support" and was always followed by "knowledge/skills gain". Participants' comments do not appear to suggest a difference in the knowledge and skills gained based on the student's college. There is uniformity across responses about the gains made through participation in CRM.

Below is a by-school breakdown of 2022-24 current students CRM participants and respondents. The number of participants by year is derived from the pre-mentoring application form. The average post-programme response rate in 2022-24 was 23% (26% LAS, 21% DCDI, 23% WBS).

			College											
			LAS				DCDI				WBS			
School			HUMNTS	LIFSCN	SOCSCN	WESLAW	ARCCIT	COMENG	WESART	WESMEC	APPMGT	FINACA	MGTMKT	ORGECO
N of participants	2022-23	Cycle 1	11	48	29	26	19	84	22	46	12	11	23	26
		Cycle 2	10	27	15	8	35	49	12	35	6	18	15	20
	2023-24	Cycle 1	9	49	12	35	19	30	35	42	10	21	14	17
		Cycle 2												
Number of respondents (2022-24 sum)			8	24	19	16	18	32	14	24	6	13	16	9
Response rate 2022-24			27%	19%	34%	23%	25%	20%	20%	20%	21%	26%	31%	14%

Figure 7. *A table showing the number of students in each UoW school and aggregate response rates to the post-programme survey for 2022-24 CRM participants (cycles 1 and 2, excluding cycle 2, 2023-24). Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.*

CRM participants were placed in banded groupings by the number of sessions to date.[20] Respondents who had participated in 1-3 sessions totalled 45 (250 comments); in 4-6 sessions, totalled 143 (850 comments); in 7-10 sessions, totalled 10 (69 comments); and those who had participated in 10 or more sessions totalled 7 (43 comments). When entering their response to the question "How many mentoring sessions have you had with your mentor to date?" respondents wrote free text comments. Where, for example, the response fell within a banded grouping but was not specific – e.g., 'I have had 5 online meetings through Zoom, but also multiple ongoing email conversations' or '12-14' – the number of official online/in-person sessions (*not* email exchanges) and/or the lower end of the specified range was used. All responses were converted to numerical data ranging from 1 to 12, totalling 973 CRM sessions attended by current student respondents. Rounded down to an integer, the average number of sessions per participant was 4.

There was limited thematic variation between respondents in different banded groupings by the number of sessions to date. "Mentor – helpfulness/support" was the most frequently identified theme in each banded grouping. "Knowledge/skills gain" was the second most frequent theme in responses from participants of 1-10 sessions. Participants who attended more than 10 sessions commented second most frequently on "mentor –

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[20] At the time of completing the post-programme survey. Data suggests that after formal sessions concluded, participants remained in touch with their mentors through other channels, such as email correspondence or work experience opportunities, following the CRM cycle's conclusion.

temperament". The data suggest that there is a saturation point for the knowledge and skills gained; participants who reported over 10 sessions less frequently commented on specific skills, such as CV building, more often citing the ongoing support and inspiration provided by mentors that kept them engaged in the programme.

The average number of sessions by year of study was, in year 1, 4 sessions; in year 2, 4 sessions; in year 3, 4 sessions; in year 4, 5 sessions; and in year 6, 5 sessions. Some outliers exist in the data; participants who attended 10 or 12 sessions (n = 7) appear in years 1 through 4 (ns = 3, 1, 1, and 2, respectively). These high attendees are from the Schools of Social Sciences (n = 4), Management Marketing (n = 2), and Applied Management (n = 1). There appear to be no thematic links between the 10+ session participants. The average number of sessions by college was LAS 4, DCDI 4, and WBS 4.

Post-CRM 2022-24 responses from recent graduates totalled 208 comments. Responses to CRM questions 1-5 provided 145 comments (Q1, n = 34; Q2, n = 29; Q3, n = 34; Q4, n = 14; Q5, n = 24). Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses over half of the responses to questions 1 and 3 were positive (68% and 76%, respectively). As with current student respondents, the responses to questions 2, 4 and 5 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Session scheduling recurs as a dominant theme in the recent graduate dataset, but for different reasons. Recent graduate respondents do comment on the challenges of arranging sessions, but further commentary provided by current students when describing difficulty in getting to the target of five total sessions. Recent graduate respondents also note session content as an area for improvement. Like current students, they too describe feelings of overwhelm; however, this appears to be due to adapting to a new work environment and learning as they go in situ, as well as receiving a lot of important information from their mentor in tandem. Commentary suggests a disconnect between recent graduates' use of the sessions and their new professional experience. Rather than using the sessions to discuss this, participants seem to keep the two experiences separate.

The 2022-24 recent graduates CRM data did not include demographic details that would allow for comparability to current students, e.g., no year of graduation or similar, no previous study load or similar, and no college or school studied at or similar.

Recent graduate CRM participants were also placed in banded groupings based on the number of sessions attended. No recent graduate respondents reported participating in less than three sessions. No respondents reported participating in sessions ranging from 7-19; one outlier reported logging at least 20 sessions. Respondents who had participated in 1-3 sessions totalled 16 (98 comments); in 4-6 sessions, totalled 17 (104 comments); in 20 or more sessions totalled 1 (6 comments). All responses were converted to numerical data ranging from 3 to 20, totalling 154 CRM sessions attended by recent graduate respondents. The average number of sessions per participant was 4. "Mentor – helpfulness/support" was the most frequently identified theme in each banded grouping. "Knowledge/skills gain" was the second most commonly identified theme. There did not appear to be much differentiation between what was helpful and what knowledge and skills were gained when

comparing responses between current student and recent graduate respondents. Section 3.1.2.2 explores these themes in further detail.

3.1.2 Findings
3.1.2.1 Mentor – Helpfulness/Support

Like the AaM participants, those engaged in the CRM programme felt that the pairings established were entirely suitable for the participants' intended use of the sessions. Respondents' comments about the sessions' worthwhileness often centred upon mentors' affability, eagerness to be supportive, and the extent to which they made themselves available to students. Such attitudes and behaviours made for quality and engaging mentoring.

> *My mentor was readily available throughout the day and eagerly answered all my doubts. Her availability and the depth of her knowledge, due to her position in, and familiarity with, the biomedical industry, was very useful to me. I think I was assigned a mentor that was very much in line with my professional needs and so the matching process has been very helpful to me.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, MSc Biomedical Science, LAS)*

Participants who explicitly referenced their mentor's career path or job role did so with unanimous positivity. In addition to being matched with considerate and competent professionals, students lauded the sincerity of the mentoring experience when paired with a mentor who had experiences or expertise that the student sought to emulate. This notion was apparent regardless of the year of study.

> *I was able to hear feedback from someone who has gone through [my] career about my career plan, and able to receive feedback on my CV and cover letter.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, BA Digital Media and Communication, DCDI)*

The sincerity of interaction was often expounded by mentors' pragmatism, matter-of-factness, and honesty. Participants who reported their mentor having explained the harsh reality of being an early-career professional in the industry did not find it to cause distress. Instead, responses take on a tone of forewarned is forearmed, appreciating this input as an aspect of holistic mentoring provision.

> *Just his/her advice on not to give up and giving me useful advice on the nature of securing a job as a solicitor. She was very honest in telling me that it took him/her a few years after graduation to secure a training contract and continued to remind me not to be disheartened if I don't secure anything straight away.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

A frequently commented-upon aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship was the ease of interaction, led by mentors' keenness to be a wellspring of support, advice, and guidance over the pairing lifecycle. Whereas the aforementioned free expression enabled by one-off conversations through the AaM programme may be a

consequence of the low-stakes, finite nature of the interaction, we may surmise here that, over time and as the mentoring relationship grew, participants felt more comfortable and had an increased understanding of what the mentor/pairing could bring them and sought to maximise on this.

> *He/She listens, he/she cares, and when he/she speaks, you can't help but want to hear more. His/her way of explaining things is clear and inspiring, and I loved learning from his/her career stories. His/her genuine passion for what he/she does, along with his/her dedication and eagerness to keep learning, always impresses me.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

As familiarity, mutual respect and enjoyment of the sessions grew, participants found that the sessions became ever-increasingly more tailored. In most cases, mentors adhered to the steer of the participants, providing activities, preplanned conversation topics, and conducting wider research to inform their support of the students pursuing their SMART goals. Such degrees of preparedness were greatly appreciated by participants, who found the scaffolded and instructive nature of sessions to be of significant benefit as it 'accelerated my growth in areas where I previously felt uncertain or lacked clarity.'[21] The establishment, review, and progress towards SMART goals were central to each session, enabled by the mentor's adaptability.

> *For each session we chose a topic and both did some research on this topic. He/she was able to provide excellent tips and suggestions for how I can improve my process for these various SMART goals. Very useful.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, MSc Software Engineering (Conversion), DCDI)*
>
> *I could not have gotten a better mentor than ???. His/her organisational skills meant I got the most from our meetings. We had agreed upon topics we would discuss in relation to the SMART goals and for each session he/she was very prepared to advise on these topics. This meant that I always received excellent, well-thought-out advice from him/her. He/she was also flexible in the sense that he/she would change which topic we would discuss in the next session to suit better with my circumstances at the time. [...] Between each meeting he/she would send summary of what we discussed and some tasks I could do. This was very helpful for me as it kept me on track between meetings.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

Further to supporting students in working towards their SMART goals, mentors helped participants better understand and enhance the skills they held, where gaps existed, and how to bridge these to become competitive candidates. One participant noted that the CRM programme is 'great for learning new skills and realising skills you never realised you had.'[22] Numerous responses about the impact of CRM refer to the participants' increased understanding of the transferability of their existing skills, leveraging work experience

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[21] Current student, 1st year, MSc Business and Organisational Psychology, WBS
[22] Recent graduate

and academic and volunteer work in professional capacities: that which is 'all relevant information to include in my CV, cover letter, and when I have interviews.'[23]

> *Speaking to a professional in my field of interest made me realise it is okay not to have relevant experience. ??? showed me how to utilise the experience I gained from part-time jobs and how to use it to my advantage. I was able to receive career guidance as well as some critical feedback. I have more self-awareness and have improved my interpersonal skills throughout the course of this programme.*
> *(Current student, 4th year, BSc Biomedical Science, LAS)*

With this bolstered understanding of transferability came a lessened sense of self-doubt; participants reported gaining more confidence in realising and achieving what options are available to them. Frequently, participants coupled this feeling with descriptions of raised aspirations and ambition, feeling more certain about the 'necessary skills I can hone during my time at the university.'[24]

> *I've been kind of lost about what I wanted to do, so to have someone to meet that has gone through it all and can help me understand myself professionally better has been amazing. He/she has helped me to stay motivated when I needed the push.*
> *(Current student, 3rd year, BA Fashion Marketing and Promotion, DCDI)*

With such a positive experience concluded, it tracks that participants appreciated the mentors' continued support once the formal cycle of sessions had ended. The dedication of the mentors extended to post-programme support for many participants, though this occurred in numerous fashions. Some maintained email contact to support progress towards SMART goals, some hosted participants for work experience or internships during semester breaks, and some supported academic pursuits with their knowledge of the industry.

> *My mentor has agreed to guide me until the end of my course (September 2024) and also getting some very useful tips from him/her for my final project.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, MSc Finance (Banking), WBS)*

3.1.2.2 Knowledge/Skills Gain

Respondents gained various knowledge and skills through the CRM programme. This is most apparent in the data related to CV-building and interview skills. Though present in both datasets, recent graduates were more likely to refer specifically to CV-building and job applications as a principally impactful part of the CRM

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[23] Recent graduate

[24] Current student, 1st year, MA Multimedia Journalism (Print & Online), DCDI

experience. Whether shortening, restructuring to respond to a job description, or starting from scratch, participants noted the invaluable industry-specific input of their mentors in CV-building.

> *The collaborative process with my mentor to review and refine my CV allowed me to effectively highlight [my] skills, experience, and qualifications relevant to the energy consulting field in the UK. By seeking feedback from my mentor and incorporating his/her suggestions, I was able to create a polished CV that aligns with industry expectations. This refined CV showcases my expertise, making me a more appealing candidate to potential employers.*
> *(Recent graduate)*

With relevant experience identified, reflected upon, and spotlighted in their CVs, participants felt a subsequent development in their ability to talk about these aspects in a professional context. Promoting their skills and experience was practised by many pairings in mock interview settings and sometimes ahead of actual interviews. The impact of such practises emboldened participants with interview techniques – 'I now have the STAR method which will help me give effective answers'[25] – and went some way to demystifying the experience as a whole, making interviews less daunting.

> *We ran three sessions that focused on interview skills. The first was a personal interview, one was a technical interview and the other was a code review where I had to create a small prototype. While also learning how to approach questions, I also learned new areas of technical ability that I had not encountered before. These sessions have prepared me for applying to jobs after graduation.*
> *(Current student, 3rd year, BSc Computer Games Development, DCDI)*

Further to participants' increased understanding of what makes a competitive candidate in their desired field, some referred specifically to the UK job market. Knowing how, when, and where to search for desired job roles and the process from start to finish of successfully landing a job in the UK was an important touchstone for participants' conversations with their mentors. This attitude was present in data from all years of study.

> *The most impactful aspect for me was understanding how [the] job search process differs in the UK vs. the US. In the UK, there is greater emphasis on making sure that candidates are team and company[y] fits that are not always as highly regarded in the US. Additionally, ??? provided me with great resources to use in my job search to assist me in securing a role when my program is finished. She also helped me restructure my CV in a way that he/she has seen successful candidates use to better help me stand out to employers and recruiters.*
> *(Current student, 1st year, MSc Investment and Risk Finance, WBS)*

Notably, these were often participants whose prior experience, of either work or study, had been outside of the UK (but this does not necessarily mean they are not UK-domiciled students – overseas or international student status was not included in the demographic data analysed alongside the free text responses).

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[25] Current student, 1st year, MSc Software Engineering (Conversion), DCDI

Though to a lesser extent than other aspects of the knowledge and skills gained by CRM participants, awareness of professional working environments did occur in the dataset. This aspect was not readily apparent in the AaM data. In addition to better understanding how to enter the field, participants felt that they 'developed a better understanding of how the sector operates and the various roles and responsibilities a [job title] has in their day-to-day.'[26]

3.2 Quantitative Findings

3.2.1 Inferential statistics

Data for CRM covered the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. Statistical testing revealed significant improvements in several areas. In terms of confidence, students showed marked increases in their ability to communicate effectively, solve problems, build professional networks, communicate in formal settings, discuss subject knowledge and degree skills, gain employment in related fields, and problem-solve in job interviews. For example, confidence in communicating effectively and problem-solving saw significant increases, with effect sizes of .33 (moderate) and .26 (small), respectively. Other areas, such as building a professional network and communicating in a formal setting, also saw notable gains, again with moderate effect sizes of .39 and .43. Across confidence metrics, mean confidence levels increased. At the same time, the standard deviation decreased, indicating that post-mentoring, students' confidence levels were more consistent and closer to the mean. Similar results were observed when the data was disaggregated by graduate status (i.e., recent or current).

Testing also showed improvements related to awareness. The programme equipped students with an improved understanding of what constitutes employability skills, career opportunities, the skills sought by employers, and the workplace environment. For example, awareness of the skills employers seek increased significantly, with a moderate effect size of .48, while awareness of career opportunities saw similar improvements with an effect size of .42. Overall, CRM can be said to have enhanced the confidence and awareness of students, demonstrating alignment between qualitative and quantitative findings.

3.2.2 Descriptive statistics

3.2.2.1 Topic coverage

Figure 8 summarises the topics discussed with programme participants during their CRM session, divided into different categories; all data refers to the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. The most common topic,

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[26] Recent graduate

discussed by 79% of participants, was "CV guidance", followed by "Job application advice" (73%) and "Job searching advice" (71%). Indeed, "CV guidance" was the most common topic for all the categories analysed, with the lowest proportion being recent graduates (73%) and the highest international students (82%). "Job searching advice" and "Job application advice" were second and third, respectively, for current graduates (74%, 70%), home students (73%, 70%), and international students (76%, 70%). For recent graduates, "Information about career pathways" (73%) and "Job searching advice" (73%) were discussed as much as "CV guidance", followed by "Information about different careers available" and "Understanding of workplace environment", both at 67%. "Job application advice" was the sixth most common topic at 64%. The least common topics were "Understanding the digital workplace" (26%, n =236) and "Understanding of workplace etiquette" (38%, n = 236). This is consistent across all categories analysed.

Topic Area	Overall			Current			Recent			Home (Current only)			International (Current only)		
	TRUE	FALSE	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	% TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	% TRUE
Interpersonal skill development	147	89	62%	128	75	63%	19	14	58%	71	44	62%	57	31	65%
Information about options for further study	103	133	44%	90	113	44%	13	20	39%	54	61	47%	36	52	41%
Information about different careers available	155	81	66%	133	70	66%	22	11	67%	76	39	66%	57	31	65%
Information about career pathways	163	73	69%	139	64	68%	24	9	73%	77	38	67%	62	26	70%
Job searching advice	167	69	71%	143	60	70%	24	9	73%	81	34	70%	62	26	70%
Job application advice	172	64	73%	151	52	74%	21	12	64%	84	31	73%	67	21	76%
CV guidance	186	50	79%	162	41	80%	24	9	73%	90	25	78%	72	16	82%
Cover letter guidance	123	113	52%	105	98	52%	18	15	55%	61	54	53%	44	44	50%
Job interview advice	148	88	63%	131	72	65%	17	16	52%	71	44	62%	60	28	68%
Networking opportunities	134	102	57%	115	88	57%	19	14	58%	69	46	60%	46	42	52%
Understanding of workplace environment	132	104	56%	110	93	54%	22	11	67%	63	52	55%	47	41	53%
Understanding of workplace etiquette	89	147	38%	78	125	38%	11	22	33%	44	71	38%	34	54	39%
Understanding of digital workplace	61	175	26%	54	149	27%	7	26	21%	35	80	30%	19	69	22%

***Figure 8**. Which areas did you cover with your mentor during your sessions?*

Figure 9 presents data on what CRM participants hoped to discuss during their mentoring session and what topics arose during the conversation. When we compare pre- and post-mentoring, "Networking opportunities" stand out, given the gap between hopes and realities. This reinforces the importance of aligning student topic preferences with the content of mentoring sessions. Preparatory sessions before the commencement of mentoring could achieve this purpose.
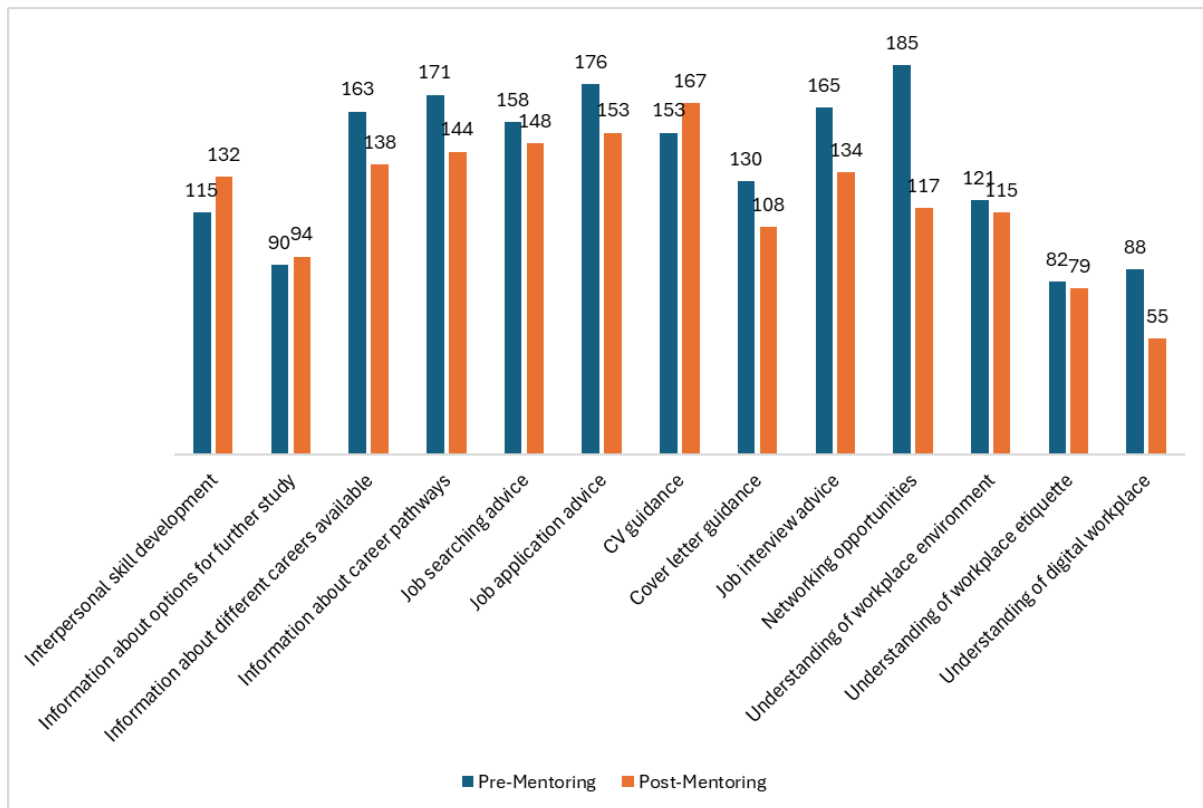
Figure 9*. Topic coverage hopes and realities, CRM*

3.2.2.2 Arrangements or offers post-mentoring

In addition to topic coverage, participants were asked to report whether mentors had arranged or offered follow-up opportunities due to conversations (see Figure 10). This series of questions is especially interesting as it captures what the university arranged for or offered to students after mentoring. Only a minority of students were offered any additional opportunities; the most common offer to students was for "Mock interview practice" (n = 70). We find similar patterns when the data is disaggregated by graduate status, academic year, and international/home students. This should be considered an area ripe for improvement. Thus, while students enjoyed the CRM sessions (see Figure 11), a case could be made for placing more emphasis in future iterations on what practical things mentors can offer their mentees. For instance, it should be explored whether there is additional scope for mentors to leverage their contacts or networks to support students or provide links or invites to internal or external events related to the sectors students are interested in working in. On a broader note, the low number of students offered work shadowing, work experience, internships, or placements links to conclusions and recommendations of earlier institutional research, highlighting the benefits of closer academia-

industry linkages.[27] Moves in this direction would extend the programme's impact and demonstrate the university's commitment to students' future employment and employability.
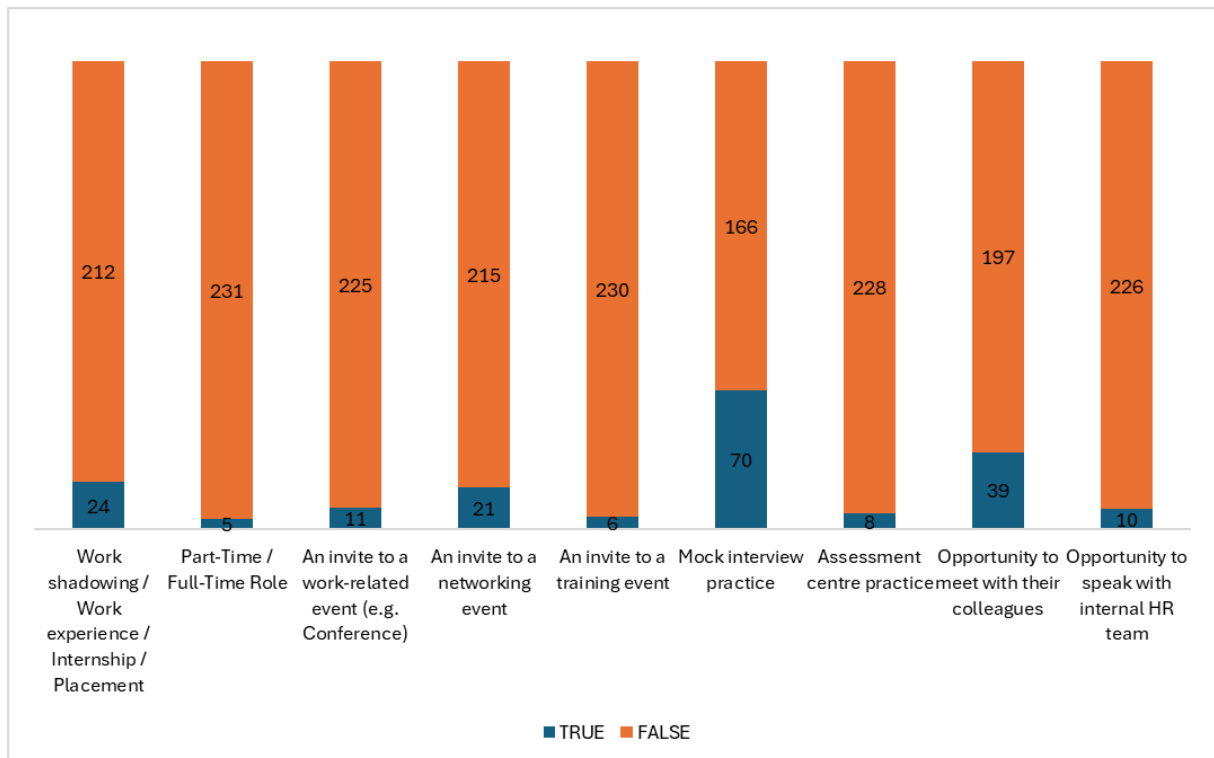

Figure 10. *Has your mentor arranged or offered you any of the following additional opportunities?*

3.2.2.3 Extent of agreement

Participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed with several statements. Figures 11-17 present aggregated data covering the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. Overall, most students (n = 221) enjoyed being part of the mentoring programme. Similarly, most students felt they had been matched with a suitable mentor (n = 206). Comparable levels of agreement were found regarding the timing of participation in CRM (n = 198), interest in applying for the programme in the future (n = 183), and whether participants would recommend it to other students (n = 219). However, while most participants agreed completing the mentoring logs was useful (147), a significant proportion were neutral (n = 59, 25%). The usefulness of Blackboard Mentee received similar results, with 154 of 236 students finding the platform helpful and 67 (28%) neutral. The drivers of participant neutrality on the subject are unclear and would require further research to fully unpick.

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[27] Rawlinson, "Drivers and deterrents of undergraduate and postgraduate re-enrolment at *alma mater*."

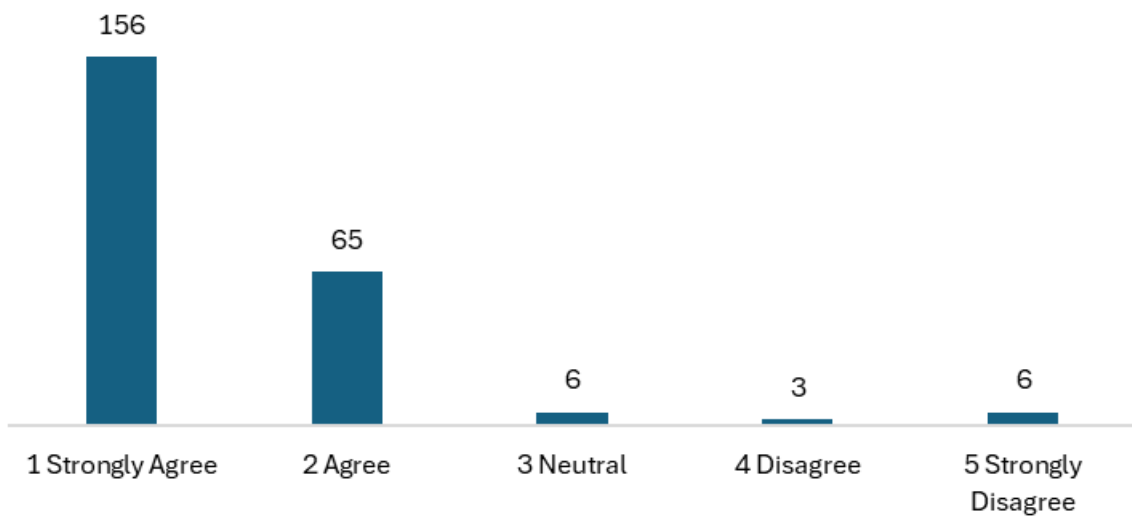Figure 11. Overall, I have enjoyed being part of the mentoring programme

1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
156	65	6	3	6

Figure 12. My mentor was a suitable match based on my career and life interests

1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
139	67	18	5	7
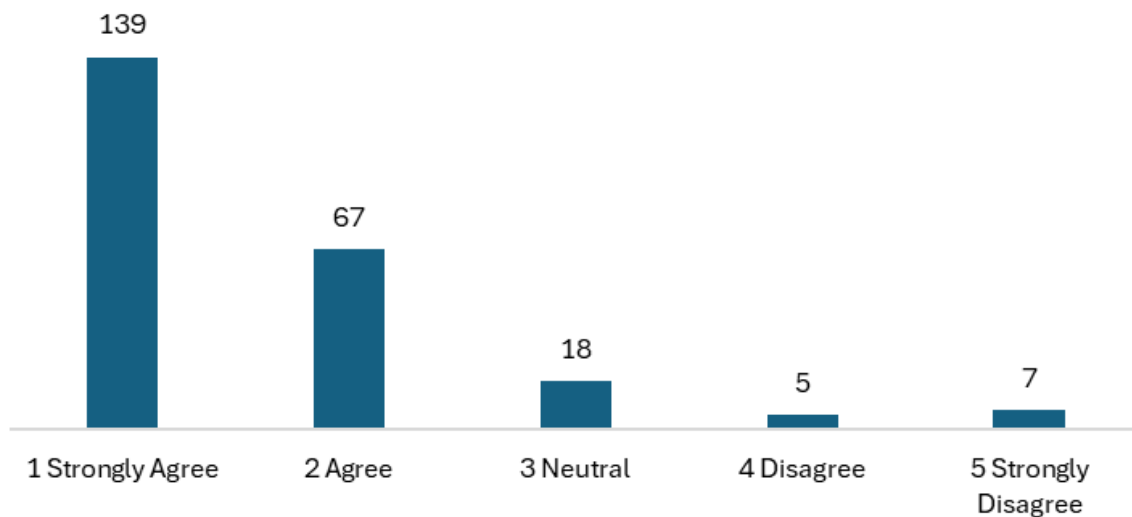
Figure 13. I found completing mentoring logs useful to track my progress during the programme

1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
70	77	59	24	6
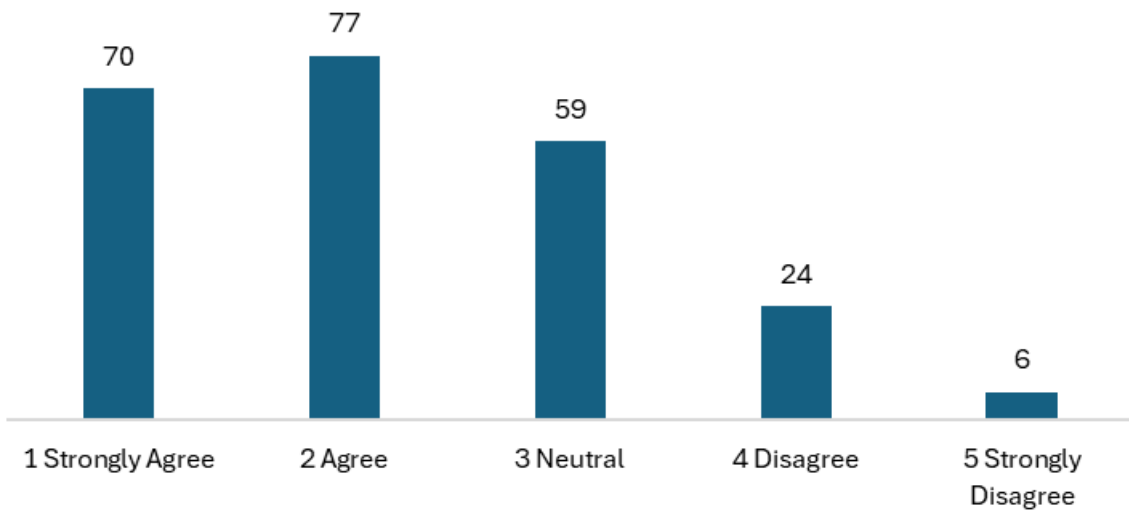
Figure 14. I found the Blackboard Mentee Module useful throughout my time on the mentoring programme

1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
71	83	67	9	6
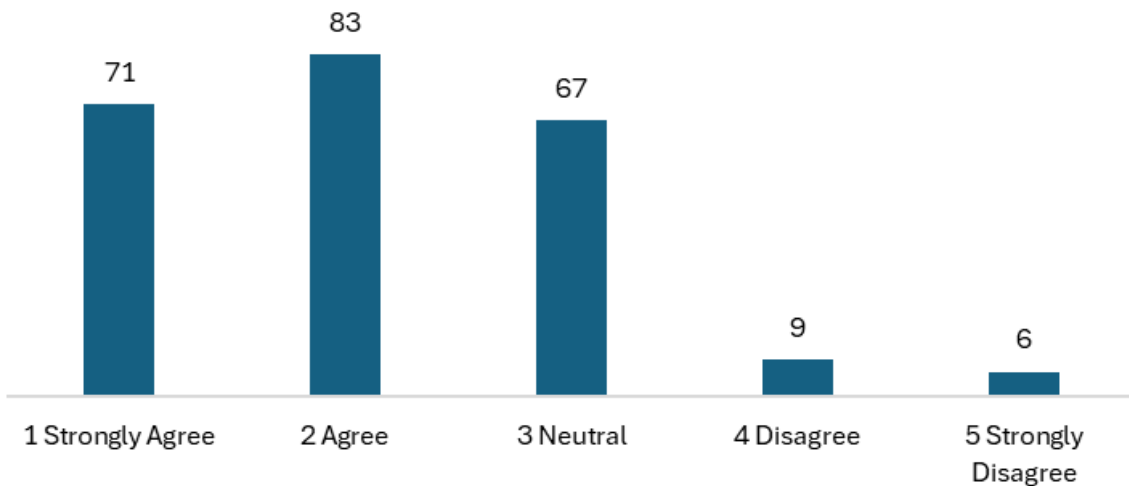
Figure 15. I believe I participated in the mentoring programme at the right stage of my academic studies

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
	129	69	24	8	6
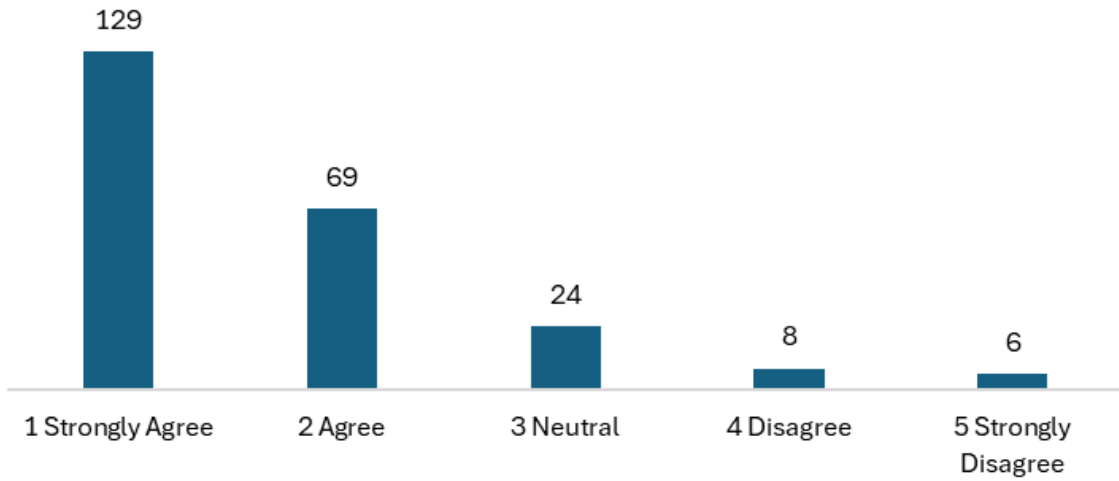
Figure 16. I would be interested in applying to be on the mentoring programme again in the future

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
	119	64	39	7	7

Figure 17. I would recommend the mentoring programme to other students / recent graduates at the university

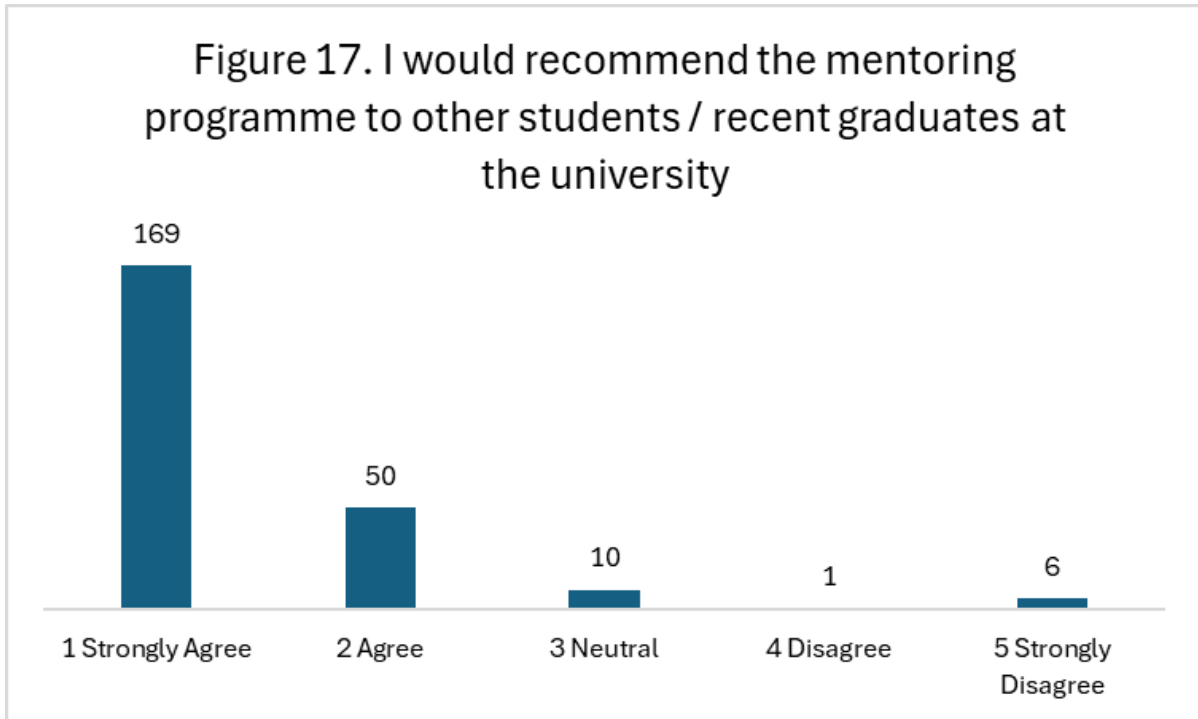|	169	50	10	1	6
	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
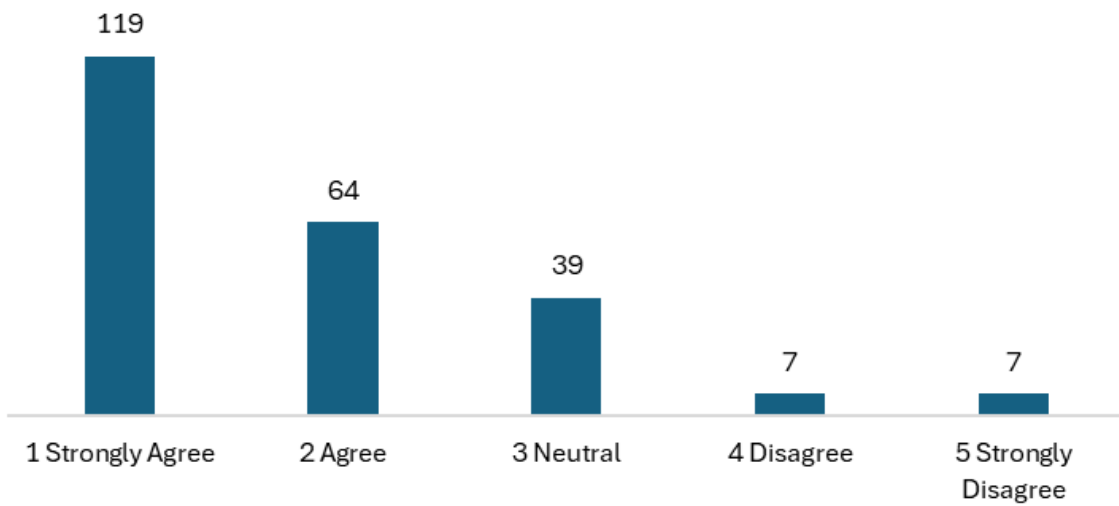
Figure 11-17*. To what extent do you agree with the following statements…?*

3.2.2.4 Who do you think you will tell about your participation in CRM?

Participants were asked who they would tell about their taking part in CRM. The results (Figure 18) indicate that mentees were most likely to tell friends, family, people on their course, and prospective employers while being least likely to tell university teaching staff or other staff at Westminster. As with AaM, the popularity of "people on your course" as a group participants would think about telling about their involvement highlights how past participants could act as effective "salespeople" in future recruitment drives.
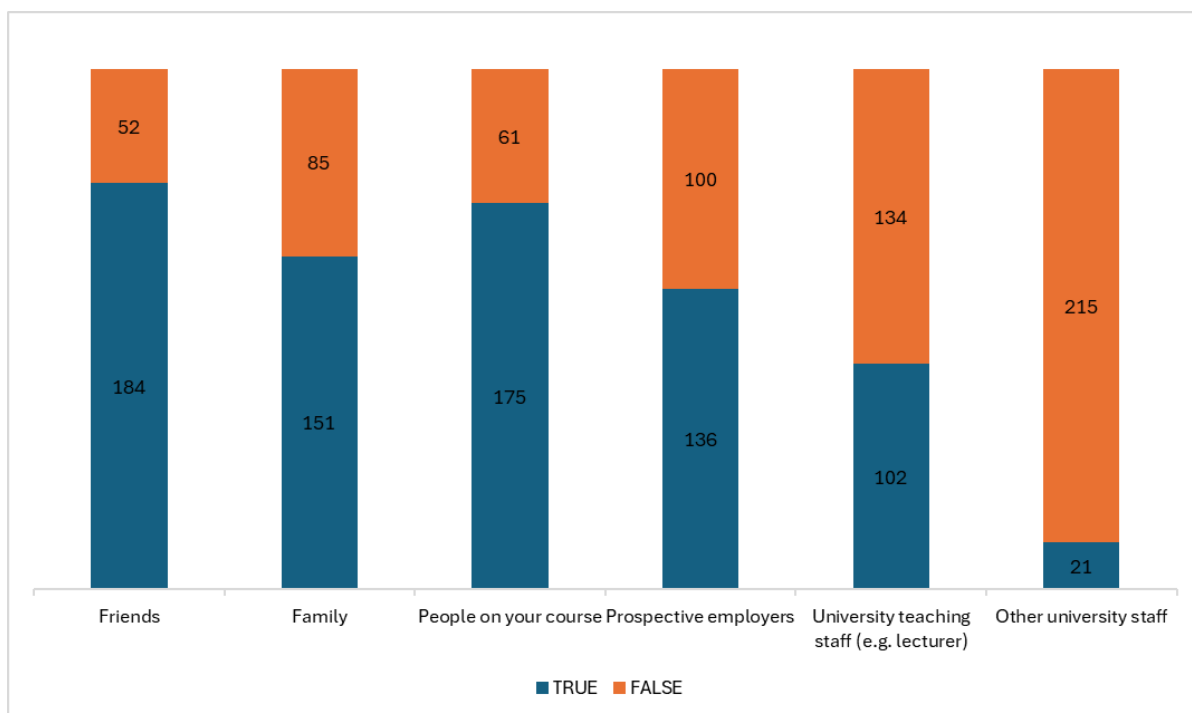
Figure 17. *Who do you think you will tell that you have taken part in the Career Mentoring Programme?*

4. Group Mentoring

Descriptive Overview: GM

GM programmes are module-specific; during the twelve weeks of teaching, three one-hour sessions take place. GM sessions occur during timetabled seminars and take place in person. As such, there is no application process for GM. Participants respond to a pre-programme survey in the week before the first GM session. At this point, the Mentoring Team briefs students on what to expect and how to prepare for the sessions. A post-programme survey is completed in the week following the final GM session.

A review of historic CRM applications revealed that many could not be fulfilled due to mentor availability in specific subject areas. Initially, two GM sessions – one for Psychology and another for Film/TV – were trialled in online settings for which students could self-select to attend. Consultation with the Employability Director for Westminster Business School further developed the notion of embedding GM into the curriculum. It was determined that the programme needed to be broad enough to recruit suitable numbers of mentors without the need for specialist knowledge. Central to the sessions was a link to module content and assessment so that students understood why they were participating, especially as GM participants did not self-select.

The pilot courses were selected against Graduate Outcomes (GO) data, cohort size, mentor requirements and the ease of mapping session content onto existing module curricula. During the pilot period, GM was embedded into modules on three courses: BA Business Management (various modules), BA Psychology and Counselling

(Mindfulness in Psychotherapeutic Practice), and BSc Computer Science (Information Driven Enterprise and Entrepreneurship). Computer Science courses had previously seen a surplus of available CRM mentors due to a lack of uptake by students, but GO data showed that Computer Science students were in particular need of support; these modules were thus included in the GM pilot to ensure students' access to mentoring support.

4.1 Qualitative Findings
4.1.1 Data Analysis

Post-programme responses were collected from GM participants studying on 9 different courses, 8 of which had GM embedded into the course in 2022-24, while 1 course joined the programme in 2023-24. The participating courses were Business Management, Computer Science (Information Driven Enterprise), Computer Science (Professional Engineering Practice), Computer Science (Software Development), Film, Humanities (various), LLB Law, MBA, and Photography.

GM participants were asked 6 free-text questions in the post-programme survey:
GM Q1. What aspect of the group mentoring experience has had the most impact on you?
GM Q2. What has been the most challenging aspect of your group mentoring experience?
GM Q3. How could we improve group mentoring in the future?
GM Q4. Please use this space to share any other comments/suggestions you may have about your experience of group mentoring.
GM Q5. Would you like to write a thank you message to the mentor(s) you worked with?
GM Q6. Please use this space to write a testimonial about your mentoring experience.

As with the CRM programme analysis, the decision was made to exclude responses to some questions. In the case of GM, questions 5 and 6 were excluded from the thematic analysis. The research team felt that these questions were less substantive, given that the purpose of enquiry here is to understand participants' experience and to assess and improve the mentoring programme.

Below is a by-course breakdown of 2022-24 GM participants and respondents. The number of participants by year is derived from the pre-mentoring self-reflection form. The average post-programme response rate in 2022-24 was 28%. All GM programmes ran once per academic year except for the MBA course, through which GM ran in semesters 1 and 2 in 2022-24.

GM-participating course	Number of respondents (2022-24 sum)	Number of participants		Response rate 2022-24
		2022-23	2023-24	
Business Management	50	211	324	11%
Computer Science (Information Driven Enterprise)	15	27	32	25%
Computer Science (Professional Engineering Practice)	13	16	14	43%
Computer Science (Software Development)	14	n/a*	220	6%
Film	12	24	21	27%
Humanities	9	35	28	14%
LLB Law	11	35	84	9%
MBA	52	29	41	74%
Photography	9	3	17	45%

*Figure 18. A table showing the number of students studying GM-participating courses and aggregate response rates to the post-programme survey for 2022-24 GM participants. Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer. * GM was expanded to include Computer Science (Software Development) in 2023-24.*

What follows is a by-course account of GM. Each of the 9 courses is be explored regarding year of study and study load. Later, commonalities and differences between participants' experiences will be discussed. Where there are large pockets of mixed or non-explicit sentiment, this can be explained by the respondents' free-text answers often including short phrases or single-word responses; a limitation of the analysis software is that question wording sentiment analysis in relation to the response is not currently conducted by MLY. Major themes across GM datasets are discussed in section 4.1.2.

4.1.1.1 Business Management

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 167 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 138 comments (Q1, n = 46; Q2, n = 37; Q3, n = 45; Q4, n = 10). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – experience", "mentor – helpfulness/support", and "mentor-knowledgeability". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses over half of the responses to questions 1 and 3 were positive (54% and 75%, respectively). The responses to question 2 and were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed/non-explicit commentary focusses on group size and programme availability. The number

of participants in each group is felt to be too large, the consequence of which is that sessions often feel less like a two-sided conversation – students don't feel that there is a meaningful degree of interactivity or 1-1 time with mentors. Respondents from later years of study comment that they would benefit from GM earlier in their studies. Specific reference is made to GM participation being a potentially positive influence on aspects such as future module choice.

The dataset included respondents in years 1-5 of their studies. Students in their first year of study totalled 5 respondents (23 comments). Those in their second year of study totalled 7 respondents (23 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 28 respondents (85 comments). Those in their fourth year of study totalled 9 (32 comments). There was a single respondent in their fifth year of study (4 comments). "Knowledge/skills gain" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in years 2-4 of study, whereas "training concept/content" was most frequently identified in responses from first year students.

The Business Management dataset included 164 comments from full-time students and 3 comments from module retrievers. There was little thematic variation between the different study loads. "Knowledge/skills gain" and "training concept/content" were the most frequently identified themes.

4.1.1.2 Computer Science (Information Driven Enterprise & Entrepreneurship)

GM participants on this course were asked an alternate question set. Questions1-4 remained the same, but questions 5 and 6 were replaced with "Please share your experience of the networking event". 2022-24 post-programme participant responses totalled 42 comments (Q1, n = 15; Q2, n = 9; Q3, n = 11; Q4, n = 1; Q5, n = 6 comments). The most positively commented upon themes were "quality", "groups – worthiness", and "interactions – worthiness". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-4 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed/non-explicit commentary focusses on group size and academic support. Commentary suggests that learning from the experiences of peers is a positive, but it can detract from individual needs. Third-year students expressed a desire for professional advice on their coursework. Students lauded the professional expertise of their group mentors, but their commentary indicates a desire to translate GM discussions into actionable plans and goals for students to take away and implement. Question 5, regarding the networking event, was answered with 100% positivity. Participants felt it to be insightful and purposeful; going into the event they understood its purpose and consequently engaged with it in individually beneficial ways, mostly through the exchange of ideas.

The dataset included respondents in years 2-4 of their studies. Students in their second year of study totalled 2 respondents (7 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 9 respondents (26 comments). Those in their fourth year of study totalled 4 respondents (9 comments). The comments from respondents in their third year of study present a bias towards the majority represented themes in the dataset overall. Aside from these,

students in their second year commented most frequently upon "training depth" and "quality"; students in their fourth year of study commented on "quality" and "mentor – experience" most often.

The Computer Science (Information Driven Enterprise) dataset included 38 comments from full-time students and 4 from students on sandwich courses. There was little thematic variation between the different study loads. Full-time students commented most frequently on "knowledge/skills gain". Sandwich course students commented most frequently on "training – discussion".

4.1.1.3 Computer Science (Professional Engineering Practice)

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 52 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 40 comments (Q1, n = 13; Q2, n = 12; Q3, n = 13; Q4, n = 2). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support", "quality", and "worthiness". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-3 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Responses to question 4 were split evenly between positive and mixed or non-explicit sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on mentors' unspoken expectations of participants and the diversity of the mentors. Participants praise the ability to receive feedback from a professional but felt that academic expectations were different to the individual mentor's professional expectations of how a task should be complete and how its output should look. We may surmise that this is a consequence of mentors' unfamiliarity with specifications and rubrics familiar to students. Some commentary suggests that participants would like to see a broader range of backgrounds in GM mentors.

The dataset included respondents in years 2 and 3 of their studies. Students in their second year of study totalled 4 respondents (15 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 9 respondents (37 comments). "Training – helpfulness/support" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in year two of study, whereas "training concept/content" was most frequently identified in responses from third year students.

The Computer Science (Professional Engineering Practice) dataset included 26 comments from full-time students and 8 comments from module retrievers. There was little thematic variation between the different study loads. "Knowledge/skills gain" was most frequently commented upon by full-time students, and "training concept/content" was the most frequently identified theme in comments from module retrievers.

4.1.1.4 Computer Science (Software Development)

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 49 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 39 comments (Q1, n = 14; Q2, n = 12; Q3, n = 13; Q4, n = 0). The most positively commented upon

themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support", "groups – worthiness", and "engagement/interest level". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-4 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on teamwork and networking opportunities. Participants acknowledge that teamwork is a critical competency for professionals. Alongside engaging in teamwork activities in GM sessions, they would appreciate learning how to effectively manage teams and resolve conflicts in a professional manner. Respondents noted that networking opportunities would improve the GM experience.

The dataset included respondents in years 1-3 of their studies. Students in their first year of study totalled 2 respondents (10 comments). Those in their second year of study totalled 11 respondents (35 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 1 respondent (4 comments). First year students commented most frequently on "mentor – helpfulness/support". Second year students commented most frequently on "training content/concept". The third year student commented on "knowledge/skills gain" most frequently.

The Computer Science (Software Development) dataset only included feedback from full-time students.

4.1.1.5 Film

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 40 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 37 comments (Q1, n = 12; Q2, n = 12; Q3, n = 12; Q4, n = 1). The most positively commented upon themes were "knowledge/skills gain", "relevance", and "quality". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-3 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Responses to question 4 were 100% positive in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on sharing with peers and session preparedness. Respondents noted that sharing experiences and learning from peers is a positive, but this was challenging due to the nature of the group. Other participants were familiar to students as coursemates, but unfamiliar as co-members they would share experiences, thoughts and opinions with. This sometime prevented participants from engaging as they would have liked to. Being able to prepare questions ahead of time would be of use to participants, who felt that now knowing the topic of the next session or even who would be the mentor running it was a barrier to getting the most of out each session.

The dataset included respondents in years 2 and 3 of their studies. Students in their second year of study totalled 6 respondents (20 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 6 respondents (20 comments). "Knowledge/skills gain" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in year 2 of study, whereas "training concept/content" was most frequently identified in responses from third year students.

The Film dataset only included feedback from full-time students.

4.1.1.6 Humanities

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 36 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 27 comments (Q1, n = 9; Q2, n = 7; Q3, n = 9; Q4, n = 2). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support" and "mentor – engagement/interest level". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-3 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Responses to question 4 were split evenly between 50% positive and 50% mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on participants' self-reflection. Though encouraged to consider strengths and areas for development in the sessions, doing so in a group setting and without prior preparation disengaged some participants. This appears to be due to the group nature of the sessions, and having to provide a response off-the-cuff, rather than having time to purposefully introspect beforehand.

The dataset included respondents in years 3 and 4 of their studies. Students in their third year of study totalled 5 respondents (20 comments). Those in their fourth year of study totalled 4 respondents (16 comments). "Mentor – helpfulness/support" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in year 3 of study, whereas "mentor – engagement/interest level" was most frequently identified in responses from fourth year students.

The Humanities dataset included 32 comments from full-time students and 4 from part-time students. "Mentor – helpfulness/support" and "knowledge/skills gain" were the themes most frequently identified in comments from full-time students. Part-time students commented most frequently on "training – discussion".

4.1.1.7 LLB Law

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 37 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 30 comments (Q1, n = 11; Q2, n = 9; Q3, n = 10; Q4, n = 0). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – experience" and "knowledge/skills gain". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-3 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on engagement opportunities and perceived relevance of the sessions. Respondents' commentary notes that GM sessions do not include enough time for questions and answers, normally due to group size. Relatedly, some respondents note groups differentiated by participants' desired route in Law would be beneficial; for example, content specific to being a solicitor is less relevant to those intending to be barristers and vice versa. In some cases, this has evidently led to disengagement.

The dataset included respondents in years 2 and 3 of their studies. There was 1 respondent in their second year of study (3 comments). Those in their third year of study totalled 10 respondents (34 comments). "Knowledge/skills gain" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in year 3 of study.

The LLB Law dataset included 32 comments from full-time students and 5 from sandwich course students. There was little thematic variation between the different study loads. "Knowledge/skills gain" was the most frequent theme in responses from full-time students, whereas "mentor – helpfulness/support" was the most frequent theme in sandwich students' responses.

4.1.1.8 MBA

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 194 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 147 comments (Q1, n = 50; Q2, n = 36; Q3, n = 49; Q4, n = 12). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support", "mentor - quality", and "knowledge/skills gain – relevance". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-4 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on equal opportunities for participation, and mentor inexperience or perceived disagreeability. Respondents felt that sessions were allowed to be dominated by a small proportion of the group; moreover, the sessions were poorly facilitated due to the mentor's lack of experience in settings such as GM. Commentary suggests that the most beneficial sessions were those that the participants led, rather than the attempts at facilitation made by the mentors that did not include all group members.

As a one-year postgraduate course, all MBA GM participants were in the same year of study. The MBA dataset only included feedback from full-time students.

4.1.1.9 Photography

2022-24 post-programme responses from participants totalled 29 comments. Responses to questions 1-4 provided 25 comments (Q1, n = 9; Q2, n = 8; Q3, n = 7; Q4, n = 1). The most positively commented upon themes were "mentor – helpfulness/support" and "knowledge/skills gain". Sentiment analysis by question revealed that responses to questions 1-3 were majority mixed or non-explicit in sentiment. Reponses to question 4 were 100% positive in sentiment. The mixed and non-explicit commentary focussed on sharing work, strengths and areas for development, and mentor variety. Participants' commentary suggests that the expectation to share work with a whole group rather than just a mentor was a daunting prospect, especially if it was work in progress. Similarly, some participants experienced reluctance to do so if the mentor's practice was aligned with a different branch or approach to photography.

The dataset included respondents in years 1 and 2 of their studies. There was 1 respondent in their first year of study (3 comments). Those in their second year of study totalled 8 respondents (26 comments). "Knowledge/skills gain" was the most prevalent theme in responses from students in year 2 of study.

The Photography dataset only included feedback from full-time students.

4.1.2 Findings
4.1.2.1 Mentor – Helpfulness/Support

The GM sessions appear to have propagated participants' development in rapid time; the mentors 'played a pivotal role in our personal and professional development by providing guidance, support, and valuable insights.'[28] Across the datasets, many respondents commented upon the mentors' 'transformative'[29] encouragement and advice, noting that the mentors capably instilled a greater sense of self-belief and confidence in participants. Through the mentor-driven development of participants' goals, respondents felt these raised aspirations positively influenced their university experience.

> ???'s encouragement and advice were instrumental in my journey to be successful, fostering a positive and enriching learning experience. Overall, ???'s impact was transformative, shaping my journey and contributing significantly to my growth.
> (1st year, MBA, WBS)

Moreover, participants in their final year of study or who participated in GM near finishing their course noted the support of mentors when considering their options for post-graduation. Notably, participants felt they had a better sense of their options, the process of job hunting and applying, and increased optimism about leaving the University.

> I have gained some self-confidence and realised that it is a marathon, not a sprint. I'm not going to get the first job I apply for, and interviews will doubtlessly be difficult, but I will learn with practice. The mentoring programme is a great service to offer students, especially those in the final year who may be struggling with what direction they want to go down after university.
> (4th year, Humanities – Chinese and International Business, LAS)

Respondents commented frequently on the specificity of the advice and support received regarding the conclusion of their studies. Respondents appeared to highly value the externality of the mentors, lauding their 'fresh perspective'[30] which helped participants determine the desirable qualities related to desired career pathways; mentors grew participants' understanding of how to 'excel in interviews [by providing] insights into what attracts employers.'[31] These beneficial interactions were further impacted due to the mentors' professional experience and sector knowledge.

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[28] 1st year, MBA, WBS
[29] 1st year, BSc Computer Science, DCDI
[30] 3rd year, LLB Law, LAS
[31] 1st year, BSc Computer Science, DCDI

Having plentiful experience under his/her belt in the field, [the mentor] was able to pass on important knowledge to our group, allowing us to open our eyes wider to issues with our project that we had previously never considered (and would not of considered without his/her help).
(2nd year, Computer Science and Engineering, BENG Smart Computer Systems, DCDI)

Where participants commented upon the timing of the GM programme, respondents in later years of study noted how worthwhile the experience would be earlier on. There were numerous first- and second-year participants across the programmes, but where participants were exclusively in their upper years, they commented on the value of establishing beneficial mentor-mentee relationships with exigency upon enrolling on their courses.

I would recommend to lower levels in university to get involved sooner rather than later approach these mentors and create a strong bond between them they will support you into your future in and after university.
(3rd year, full-time, BA Business Management, WBS)

Mentors' sharing of insight experience evidenced their ability to convey information to participants in an accessible manner. This was unanimously appreciated by GM participants, especially when applied through the activities selected by mentors that left participants 'empowered and brimming with confidence.'[32]

Your guidance on the dynamic pitch of our business idea in just 20 minutes has been instrumental in boosting our confidence. [the] support has truly made a difference, and we are grateful for [the] expertise and encouragement.
(1st year, BSc Computer Science, DCDI)

Coupled with the mentors' invaluable professional insight, the holistic aspects of GM sessions were lauded by respondents. Specifically, Humanities GM participants commended the mentor's emphasis on the importance of well-being, self-care, and work-life balance. Whether through 'self-reflection'[33] activities or sharing wisdom about what is 'not often discussed in talks about life in the working world'[34], mentors on the Humanities GM programmes enhanced participants' developing confidence regarding responding to job adverts and maintaining their own well-being at university and in work.

The value of interactions with group mentors was noted by many respondents. Mentors' helpfulness and support were further exacerbated by the quality of the selected mentors. Apparent in comments across the datasets, a number of qualities were cited as essential to quality group mentorship. Oration and being an engaged/engaging speaker, establishing a welcoming environment that makes all participants feel heard, and

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[32] 1st year, BSc Computer Science, DCDI
[33] 4th year, Humanities – Chinese and International Business, LAS
[34] 3rd year, Humanities – BA History, LAS

an obvious willingness to invest time into the developmental mentoring experience were commended as attitudinal and behavioural aspects of mentors' dispositions.

> *I honestly believe that these sessions have been some of the most important, insightful, engaging and inspiring sessions I've had at university and even though the world of photography is a difficult one and the future isn't always bright, you have helped me reassure myself in the field and that I need to keep on going and giving it my all.*
> *(2nd year, full time, BA Photography, DCDI)*

4.1.2.2 Knowledge/Skills Gain

Many respondents to the GM post-programme survey reported learning a lot from the experience. Those who provided specific commentary did so across myriad topics. As was apparent in the commentary provided by respondents to the AaM post-programme survey, GM participants developed both softer employability skills and industry-specific knowledge or skills.

The softer employability skills gained or developed through GM participation can be further delineated into competencies and practical skills. Alongside the aforementioned senses of self-belief and confidence, respondents mainly reported developing competency in interpersonal engagement (teamwork, group discussion, boundary-setting) and introspection for improvement (self-reflection to identify areas of strength and development, resilience). With their increased aspiration, participants expressed an understanding of the value of these competencies to increase their employability prospects.

> *The aspect of the group mentoring experience that has had the most impact on me is the opportunity for collaborative learning and diverse perspectives. Engaging with peers and mentors from different backgrounds and experiences has provided invaluable insights and knowledge that I wouldn't have gained on my own. Sharing ideas, challenges, and solutions within a supportive group environment has not only expanded my understanding but also fostered personal growth and development. Additionally, the sense of community and camaraderie that comes from working together towards common goals has been incredibly motivating and inspiring. Overall, the group mentoring experience has been instrumental in shaping my journey and perspective, highlighting the power of collective wisdom and shared learning.*
> *(3rd year, Full-time, BSc Computer Science (Software Development), DCDI)*

Respondents reported developing practical skills such as problem-solving, presenting, time management, professional etiquette, and receiving feedback or constructive criticism.

Participants gained industry-specific and industry-relevant skills and knowledge through the GM programme. Aspects of these gains are evidenced in respondents' commentary regarding workplace environments and the hierarchical structures therein, as well as their comments regarding the increased understanding of alternate career trajectories and/or the diverse breadth of roles that exist within a given field. Additionally, respondents frequently commented on the increased understanding of how to identify and express the transferability of their

existing skill sets through an enhanced understanding of CV tailoring. Self-promotion was evident to a lesser extent in the datasets, but some commentary acknowledges an increased understanding of using sites such as LinkedIn to promote oneself as a viable, desirable candidate. Similarly, some participants reported an increased awareness of the employability services offered at UoW.

> *From offering insightful advice to challenging me to think critically and pursue new opportunities, my mentor has been an invaluable source of inspiration and encouragement. Through our mentoring relationship, I've gained valuable insights, expanded my network, and developed essential skills for navigating the complexities of my career journey. I wholeheartedly recommend mentoring to other students and graduates seeking guidance, support, and mentorship. The opportunity to learn from someone with experience and expertise in your field can truly accelerate your growth and open doors to new possibilities. Mentoring is not only a rewarding experience but also a powerful tool for unlocking your full potential and achieving your goals.*
> *(3rd year, Full-time, BSc Computer Science (Software Development), DCDI)*

1.1 Quantitative Findings

4.2.1 Inferential statistics

Data for Group Mentoring covered the 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years; the first year was a programme pilot. As with AaM and CRM, statistical testing revealed significant improvements in all areas. The effect sizes ranged from small to moderate. For example, the largest effects were seen in the area of "Understanding your strengths and how to utilise them in the workplace." Confidence in this area was significantly higher after mentoring (Mdn = 4.00, n = 235) compared to before (Mdn = 4.00, n = 235), $z = -7.41$, $p = <.001$, with a moderate effect size, $r = .34$. Comparable effect sizes were recorded for "Exploring career pathways related to your degree," ability to "Form a professional network," and "Demonstrating your ability to problem solve in a job interview." The smallest changes were observed in EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion). Although confidence levels were significantly higher after mentoring (Mdn = 4.00, n = 197) compared to before (Mdn = 4,00, n = 197), $z = -3,01$, $p = .003$, the Wilcoxon-signed rank test returned an effect score of $r = .15$. As such, we can conclude that while meaningful, GM did not lead to large changes in confidence levels.

Concerning awareness, testing demonstrated a significant improvement after mentoring. Students had higher median awareness levels post-mentoring, with mean awareness increases and standard deviation reductions for all categories. For instance, testing revealed that awareness levels about the "skills that employers are looking for" were significantly higher after mentoring (Mdn = 3.00, n = 235) compared to before (Mdn = 2.00, n = 235), $z = -7.38$, $p = <.001$, with a moderate effect size of $r = .34$. Overall, this consistency indicates that students not only felt more confident but also more aware about crucial aspects of their future careers.

4.2.2 Descriptive statistics
4.2.2.1 Topic coverage

The descriptive statistics below are based on 301 unique responses to the post-intervention survey. 100 students stated they were International; the remaining 201 were Home students. The tables below cover topic coverage and which students will tell they have participated. Figure 20 summarises the topics discussed with programme participants during their GM session(s), divided into different categories; all data refers to the 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years. The most covered topic during sessions was "Interpersonal skill development" (73%), followed by "Understanding of workplace environment" (64%). Overall, the least covered topic was "Cover letter guidance." There were some notable differences between the coverage reported by Home and that reported by International students. Six of the 13 options show a difference of 10 percentage points or more. These were "Job application advice" (20 percentage points), "Information about options for further study" (18 percentage points), "Information about career pathways" (18 percentage points), "CV guidance" (14 percentage points), "Information about different carers available" (12 percentage points), "Job searching advice" (10 percentage points).

	Overall			Home			International		
All Students	**TRUE**	**FALSE**	**TOTAL**	**TRUE**	**FALSE**	**TOTAL**	**TRUE**	**FALSE**	**TOTAL**
Interpersonal skill development	220	81	73%	143	58	71%	77	23	77%
Information about options for further study	139	162	46%	105	96	52%	34	66	34%
Information about different careers available	138	163	46%	117	84	58%	46	54	46%
Information about career pathways	130	171	43%	105	96	52%	34	66	34%
Job searching advice	138	163	46%	105	96	52%	42	58	42%
Job application advice	124	177	41%	113	88	56%	36	64	36%
CV guidance	85	216	28%	66	135	33%	19	81	19%
Cover letter guidance	44	257	15%	33	168	16%	11	89	11%
Job interview advice	126	175	42%	86	115	43%	40	60	40%
Networking opportunities	141	160	47%	113	88	56%	47	53	47%
Understanding of workplace environment	194	107	64%	134	67	67%	60	40	60%
Understanding of workplace etiquette	128	173	43%	89	112	44%	39	61	39%
Understanding of digital workplace	85	216	28%	62	139	31%	23	77	23%

Figure 19. *Did you cover any of the following topics during your group mentoring sessions?*

Figure 21 illustrates a discrepancy between the topics that participants hoped would be discussed during their GM session(s) and those that were discussed. As with AaM and CRM, the figures provided offer a pre-mentoring/post-mentoring comparison of the number of students (total = 235) who answered "TRUE" to any question. Most notably, "CV guidance" and "Cover letter guidance" were a desired topic of discussion for 131 (56%) and 99 (42%) participants, respectively. However, the post-mentoring survey demonstrated that only 70 participants (30%) spoke about "CV guidance", and only 36 (15%) discussed "Cover letter guidance." The findings for GM regarding "CV guidance" contrast substantially with AaM and CRM, the gap between desired and actual being larger. Inversely, while a minority of participants stated pre-mentoring that they wished to talk about "Interpersonal skill development" (n = 103, 44%), "Understanding of workplace environment" (n = 81, 34%) and "Understanding of workplace etiquette" (n = 57, 24%), many

more students reported actually discussing these topics during their GM session(s), 74%, 64% and 43%, respectively. The pre- and post- figures for CRM in these areas were more balanced. The precise reason for this is unclear. However, it could be illustrative of a situation where the mentor is guiding the conversation based on what they think it would be useful for mentees to know. To fully comprehend the dynamics in play would require further research.
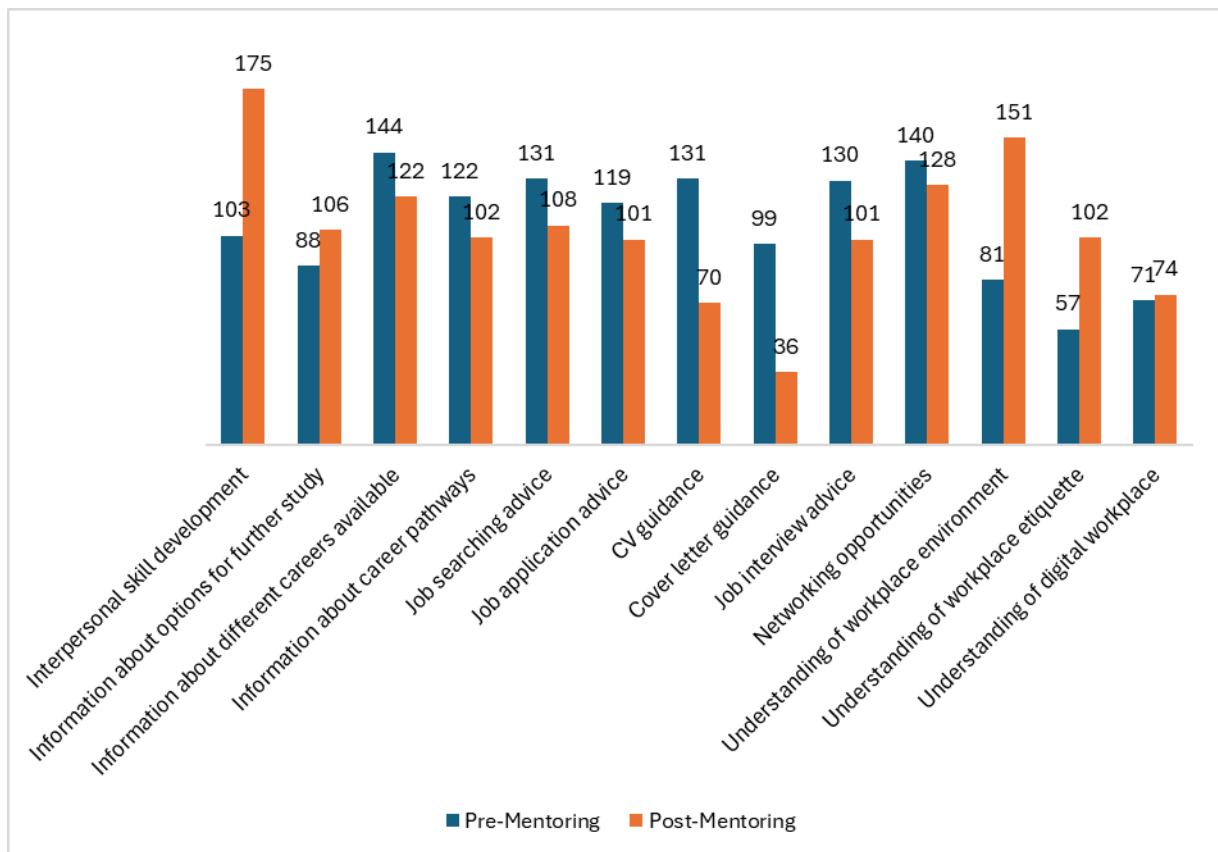

Figure 20. Topic coverage hopes and realities, GM

4.2.2.2 Who do you think you will tell about your participation in Group Mentoring?

Group Mentoring participants were asked who they would tell about their participation in the programme (Figure 22). The results show that mentees were most likely to tell friends, family, and people on their course; they were least likely to tell university teaching staff or other staff at Westminster. As we can see, a majority of participants who answered this question said they would tell their "Friends", "Family" and "People on your course" about taking part in GM; this is broadly similar to what we saw for AaM and CRM.
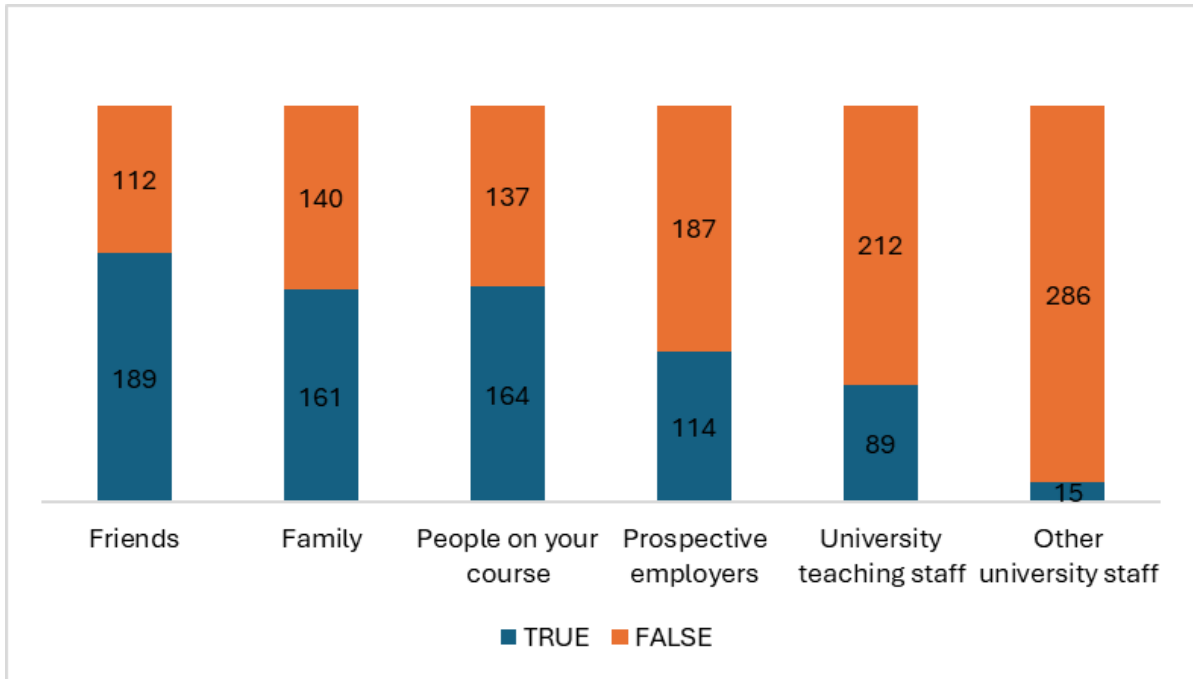
Figure 21. *Who do you think you will tell that you have taken part in Group Mentoring?*

5. Discussion

The following discussion synthesises qualitative and quantitative findings, presenting them in six distinct areas of interest: overarching themes, mentor-matching, session guidance, mentoring structure, session logging, and session content.

5.1 Major Themes

"Mentor – helpfulness/support" and "knowledge/skills gain" were the major qualitative themes that emerged from the FRM datasets. The key takeaway points from the quantitative analysis are that each programme strand led, on balance, to improvements in participants' confidence and awareness of employability and other related themes. The research team acknowledge the limitations of this study; due to the varied low rate of post-programme responses by FRM participants, we cannot assume that the development of the competencies, knowledge, and skills described above is a direct consequence of the programmes. It may well be that students likely develop these in some way while studying at the university; however, it is apparent that FRM sessions encouraged participants' development in these areas. Qualitative analysis suggests that there are many contributing factors to the thematic dominance of "mentor – helpfulness/support" and "knowledge/skills gain." Nevertheless, the predominantly positive phraseology concerning knowledge/skills gain was a notable output from the qualitative analysis. Similarly, the pre- to post-mentoring change, as measured quantitatively, may be due to a multitude of reasons. As such, we cannot talk about FRM *causing* the generally positive changes in confidence and awareness. However, we can suggest an association between the intervention and the improvements observed. Furthermore, it is possible to map the qualitative findings to the results from several quantitative variables, particularly those concerned with awareness, such as the improvements observed concerning what 'employability' skills are, what career opportunities are available, what skills employers seek, and knowledge of the workplace environment.

5.2 Mentor-matching

AaM and CRM participants highlighted the value of suitable mentor-mentee matching. The importance of appropriate matching has been emphasised in earlier institutional research.[35] While most AaM respondents felt the matches to be entirely suitable, receiving a small number of mentors' biographies would be appreciated. Providing participants with a choice of mentor may lead to further increased enjoyment of and engagement with the sessions; already well-matched by profession and experience, participants' choice of a mentor that they feel suitably reflects their lived experience or background has the potential to exacerbate the benefits of the session. Further, a pre-session awareness of the mentors' experience and skills may lead to a choice based on the participants' desired session outcomes. CRM participants, too, felt the established pairings were well suited to their needs, owing to the mentors' professional experience and skills. Further to the sentiments shared by AaM participants, CRM participants felt that the suitability of the pairings could be expounded by the purposeful recruitment of University alumni as mentors. Embedded into other Employability initiatives, this practice has been well-received; the What it Takes[36] events, though different in format to mentoring, aid current students' visualisation of success as University of Westminster students. The data presented here shows an engagement corollary between the CRM participants' desired career path and the mentor's current career. It stands to reason that such mentors who are *also* UoW alumni would further enhance engagement. Anecdotally, this was reported in the CRM datasets:

> *'The aspect of the mentoring experience which has had the most impact on me has been having a point-of-contact with someone who not only works in the pharmaceutical industry (which is an industry I would like to pursue a career in) but also someone who attended the University of Westminster. This common ground allowed my mentor to draw parallels between his/her journey and mine. As a result, his/her familiarity with the university and keen understanding of my career aspirations translated into tailored guidance and unwavering encouragement to tackle my goals and ambitions.'*
> *(Current student, 2nd year, BSc Biochemistry, LAS)*

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[35] Bryant, "Career Mentoring Scheme Focus Groups Report."
[36] The What it Takes event series features an array of exciting and innovative alumni speakers sharing their experience and advice on a diverse range of topics, focusing on employability, personal and professional development. "What It Takes" University of Westminster. Accessed June 13th, 2024. https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/alumni-and-supporters/alumni-events/what-it-takes

It has not been possible to ascertain the importance of appropriate mentor-mentee matching for AaM as this question was not put to participants. However, CRM participants were asked on a scale of one (Strongly Agree) to five (Strongly disagree) to respond to the following question: "My mentor was a suitable match based on my career and life interests." The results indicated that participants overwhelmingly felt that the mentor they were given was appropriate based on their life and career goals, with 206 of 236 unique participants either expressing strong agreement or agreement with the statement. Furthermore, most CRM participants said they would recommend the programme to other students/recent graduates (219 out of 236).

5.2 Session Guidance

Participants in both the AaM and CRM programmes felt they would benefit from guidance, either at the start of the process at large or when preparing for session(s). Scaffolded support in the form of preparatory materials or briefings led by the CES Team would positively influence participants' mentoring experience by clarifying their intent for the session(s). CRM participants in particular expressed a desire for pre-mentoring training or preparatory guidance to help them 'hit the ground running'[37] in their first sessions. Pre-mentoring briefings may also help to iron out some of the discrepancies observed in the quantitative data between what students hoped to talk about and what was actually spoken about. As intimated above, this raises a question about who should steer mentor-mentee conversations. To ensure that students have a well-rounded mentoring experience, it is recommended that a balance be struck via pre-mentoring briefings to ascertain the topics that students wish to talk about and those which, based on their employment and industry experience, mentors feel would add value and further enhance student attractiveness to employers.

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[37] Recent graduate

5.3 Mentoring Structure

5.3.1 Session Organisation

Participant discussion concerning session organisation raised contrasting perspectives. The only significant dissatisfaction that AaM respondents felt was regarding the session's organisation and coordination. If something prevented either the participant or mentor from attending the initially planned time, there arose difficulty in rearranging. AaM respondents noted that mentors were often supportive and as flexible as they could be around their own work; still, in acknowledging this, some participants were left unsure about how to rearrange as they did not want to be a burden to the mentor. Participants would benefit from support in organising sessions initially or if they need rearranging. AaM participants' desire for support in organising sessions was not shared by CRM participants. GM being embedded into the curriculum meant that this concern was not felt by participants on this programme. Perhaps CRM participants' awareness of the length of the pairing encouraged a less immediate consideration of (re)arranging. Additionally, some CRM participants voiced a desire to receive more input from the Mentoring Team during the mentoring cycle. Mainly, a check-in after the first or second mentoring session to ensure that all was running smoothly would be appreciated by participants, who may otherwise be unsure how to raise a query, a concern, or access light-touch support from the programme coordinators.

5.3.2 Session/Mentoring Length and GM Group Size

AaM participants would benefit from support in organising sessions, but CRM participants have a longer time period and more session opportunities and, as such, did not express an apparent need for this type of programmatic support. However, comments from CRM participants show a desire for cycle two of the programme to be extended beyond the end of the taught academic year in April. In addition to suggesting extending the programme into May or June, respondents suggested increasing the session length to greater than an hour and raising the minimum number of required sessions to at least five. Recent graduate respondents commented more frequently on the extension of CRM cycles past the end of the taught academic year, calling

for a 'longer time scale'[38], as '3 sessions is too short a time'[39] to get the most out of mentoring at a pivotal time in their studies.

GM participants frequently commented upon session and programme length. Qualitative analysis revealed that longer sessions would allow participants to have their questions answered and experience more one-to-one interaction within the larger group setting. Longer GM sessions would facilitate deeper discussion – respondents felt that time constraints hindered the likelihood of delving deeply into a topic. Commentary illustrates an appetite for smaller groups, the consequence of which being the same as longer sessions. Moreover, a way for participants to submit their questions in advance may help ameliorate participants' frustration at not receiving an answer and may help mentors plan for their sessions to include answers that cover popular or recurrent question themes. To a lesser extent, some GM commentary across the datasets suggested that participants would benefit from longer cycles of GM. Respondents expressed a desire for more sessions, the assumed consequence of which is that each group member would be able to have their questions addressed and get one-to-one time with the mentor at some point.

5.3.2 Timing in the Academic Year

The timing of GM sessions was also a point of relative contention in the qualitative data. A comparison of commentary suggests that GM sessions were best experienced in quick succession, such as three sessions over three consecutive weeks. The longest identified gap between sessions was three weeks; where respondents noted that sessions were spread out, the commentary suggests that this was to the detriment of the gains made by attending. Engagement and attendance may be improved by preplanning session dates in conjunction with mentors and informing participants of these in advance. Moreover, consideration should be given to the time of the academic year at which sessions occur. Where participants explained reasons for their non-attendance or lessened engagement, sessions happening around coursework deadlines appeared to be the main cause of this. GM sessions near or on deadlines reduce participant attendance in favour of more immediate academic

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[38] Recent graduate
[39] Recent graduate

concerns. No participant commentary explicitly referenced the cause of the gaps between sessions. Although approached in a different way, when CRM students were asked about whether they felt they had participated in mentoring at the right stage of their academic career, the majority selected either "Strongly agree" or "Agree" (198 of 236).

5.3.3 Session Logging

The process for recording mentoring sessions over the course of the CRM programme recurred in respondents' commentary. The session-logging process was felt to be somewhat unclear and would benefit from pre-programme guidance. This qualitative insight aligns with the results from the quantitative data. Particularly, when asked for their extent of agreement to a series of statements, there was a spike in neutral sentiment regarding mentoring logs and the Blackboard Mentee Module. As the pertinence of both is questioned, it is suggested that these are reviewed through collaboration with students. Alternatively, explanations of their value should form a core part of pre-programme guidance. Additionally, participants would like to access previously submitted logs so that previous notes and progress towards SMART goals can be revisited by participants when preparing for and during sessions.

5.3.4 Session Content

GM qualitative data show inconsistencies between mentors' approaches and session content. There was similarity between participants' commentary on what content was desired, regardless of which GM stream they participated in. Participants felt GM sessions would benefit from deeper, explicit exploration of the link between session content and the day-to-day practicalities of a job role in industry. Participants would like to engage in sessions that dive into specific job roles, as standard. Extending the cycle of GM sessions may go some way to accommodate this. Interestingly, the quantitative data tells a slightly different narrative. Here, the data on topic coverage highlights substantial differences between what students hoped to talk about and what they actually spoke about with regard to "CV guidance" and "Cover letter guidance." At the time of mentoring, GM participants studying project-oriented courses, such as the MBA, expressed a desire for a less project-focused approach. The perceived benefits of broader, career-oriented GM sessions were lessened where mentors favoured supporting participants' academic pursuits. In short, the findings related to session content highlight the importance of

clearly establishing the parameters of mentoring prior to its commencement in pre-programme briefings that also allow space for students to put forward the topics they want to see covered.

5.4 Post-programme opportunities

The quantitative data from the CRM programme allows something to be said about post-programme offers or opportunities made available to mentees. The key finding is that the majority of mentees do not receive any form of post-mentoring opportunities from their mentor. The most common post-programme offer is for mock interview practice. The qualitative data illustrates the benefits of mock or practice interviews provide, particularly the insight they give into industry-typical techniques and questions. However, this finding needs to be qualified by the fact that fewer AaM than CRM participants shared this feeling. Therefore, there is an argument for the embedding of interview practice into the CRM programme. Nevertheless, the wider point gleaned from the triangulated data is for a general increase in the offer and arrangement of post-programme opportunities for mentees, through means such as mentors leveraging their contacts within industry.

6. Recommendations

The following are separated into recommendations for further inquiry, approaches to recruitment and matching, programme design, and best practice.

Further Inquiry

- The research team encourages increased participation and continued evaluation of student demographics that are underrepresented in the datasets.
- The experience of module retrievers in the AaM programme requires further investigation, as they are underrepresented in the post-programme survey data. Research should explore what makes the programme less appealing for this group. The research team hypothesises that AaM is deprioritised due to immediate concerns such as deferrals and resubmissions.
- Given their underrepresentation in the CRM data, the CES and FRM coordinators should target first-year postgraduates for marketing and recruitment. Research should explore why the programme may be less appealing to this group; this may be due to heavy study load and/or lack of awareness.

Approaches to Recruitment and Matching

- Survey structures should be reviewed to align pre- and post-mentoring questions. Misalignment of pre and post surveys for AaM meant that analysis of what participants hoped to talk about and what they actually spoke about was limited to a few variables. Additionally, questions that proved to be insightful from the CRM questionnaire were absent from AaM and GM.

- Pre-mentoring training for mentors should emphasise what knowledge and skills CRM participants benefit from gaining, and that this does not differ by college as might be assumed. Illustrating to mentors that, for example, knowledge of utilising LinkedIn and developing soft skills competence is helpful to CRM participants across the board.

- FRM participants should be included in the pool of prospective mentors. Mentors who are UoW alumni were well received by participants. Initial contact should be made by the Alumni Relations Team.

- Participants on the AaM and CRM programmes should be given a degree of choice about their mentor as participants' commentary demonstrated a desire for flexibility in the matching process. The Mentoring Team should provide students with a small number of mentor biographies when applying to participate.

- It is recommended that support to organise sessions is provided to AaM and CRM participants, both at first when establishing the pairing and during – in the case of CRM – the mentoring relationship. The Mentoring team should proactively provide avenues for participants to swiftly seek support if they have concerns about their pairings.

- Given that a majority of participants for each programme said they would tell people on their course about their participation, efforts should be made to utilise these mentoring advocates as "salespeople" for future recruitment drives.

Programme Design

- Pre-mentoring guidance should be supplied to participants. This may be in the format of a participant briefing sheet or a recorded video that can be shared with students who sign up. The guidance should explain what the students can expect, what their mentors are likely to bring to the sessions, and how to get the most benefit from the experience.

- Given the discrepancies between pre-mentoring expectations of topic coverage and actual coverage, there should be greater clarity on mentor/mentee, coach/coachee roles; this could be covered in pre-mentoring information sessions.

- CRM pairings should be encouraged to set a minimum target number of sessions (i.e., 4 or 5). Participants' commentary suggests that knowledge and skills gain is most rapid up to this point. Higher than this, and especially when reaching 10 or more sessions, these gains diminish in favour of the positive relationship that participants seek to maintain.

- GM sessions should be made longer, or the programme should contain more sessions. Participants' commentary clearly shows an appetite for more opportunity to engage with mentors, session content and to have their questions answered.

- It would be beneficial for GM sessions to occur closer together. Participants understand the potential impact of the sessions, but this is lessened by the interval between sessions. Under the existing model, three GM sessions over three consecutive teaching weeks is preferable to participants.

- GM sessions should be organised to avoid bottlenecks around assessment deadlines. Whereas AaM and CRM participants are freer to choose when their sessions occur, GM participants are constrained by their timetables. Avoiding critical times in the term will help to raise engagement with the sessions. This will likely require the Mentoring Team to receive information about deadlines from Course Leaders.

- GM should become commonplace in the earlier years of courses. Participants in their first and second years of study praise the timing of GM, and those in later years express a desire for GM to have occurred earlier. Embedding GM into core modules in earlier years of study will not only expand the reach and benefit of the programme but will meet this apparent need.

- GM participants should be able to submit questions to their mentors in advance of sessions, with commentary highlighting students need time to consider their questions rather than generating them in the session itself. Guidance to mentors on how to prioritise common queries and ensure these are addressed at the top of the next session is highly recommended.

- Data from CRM showed a dearth of post-mentoring arrangements or offers. Where possible, mentors should capitalise on their academic and industry contacts/networks to provide opportunities such as work experience, internships, placements, meetings, etc.

Best Practice

- Student and Academic Services (SAS) should be informed of this report's findings. In particular, the significant value of CV-building in the datasets gives cause for signposting to occur. Should students seek support in this way from SAS, redirecting them to the AaM or CRM programmes will provide access to tailored advice for this purpose.

- Positively received and impactful GM practices should be shared as examples of best practices with the We Thrive personal tutoring initiative.