



Mentoring Professionals Conference Report 2015

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Hosted by

KING'S
College
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In association with

ALUMINATI
NETWORK GROUP

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Mentoring Professionals Conference 2015 Report



About MPC

The **Mentoring Professionals Conference** was an exclusive, one day mini-conference, which took place on Wednesday 29th July 2015, hosted by King's College London, in association with Aluminati Network Group.

This year, the conference was made up of 38 professionals from Alumni Relations and Careers departments across 19 higher education institutions and 3 business schools from the UK. The day was made up of four presentations and an open floor, guided discussion. This report is compiled to neatly summarise the wealth of information and advice shared by practising mentoring professionals.

MPC on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/2015mpc>

Common Challenges Faced by Mentoring Professionals

- ❖ Putting a business case together for online mentoring to obtain extra funding, extra staff, and for more focus on the programme.
- ❖ How Alumni Relations teams and Employability, Careers and Student Recruitment departments etc. can collaborate and work effectively.
- ❖ Recruiting students – generating interest and maintaining their commitment.
- ❖ Mentoring application processes and determining who has a genuine interest.
- ❖ Getting the right alumni from the right sectors to be mentors.
- ❖ Managing volunteers/mentors and students that are left unmatched.
- ❖ Maintaining mentor-mentee relationships after initial contact.
- ❖ Dealing with and re-engaging unresponsive participants.
- ❖ Conducting participant feedback analysis of mentoring programmes for strategic development and to drive programmes forward.
- ❖ Upscaling and expanding the number of participants while maintaining high quality mentoring experiences.
- ❖ Balancing control of matching vs giving more responsibility to mentors and mentees.
- ❖ Resourcing - how to be more effective with limited staff and time, as well as upscaling programmes with the same amount of resource e.g. by using technology to increase efficiencies.
- ❖ Making programmes relevant to alumni at different life stages.
- ❖ Measuring the outcome and impact of mentoring programmes to the institution (e.g. after to DLHE results).
- ❖ Interpreting all the data that you can gather to report and convince management of the value and ROI, and to identify what you need to focus on or who to target.
- ❖ How to share the data and participant names with colleagues in other departments.

Guided Discussion: Topics Covered

- 1. Terminology for mentoring and branding**
- 2. Getting funded: presenting a business case for mentoring**
 - a. Dealing with limited resource
 - b. Launching pilots and growing
- 3. Institutional Engagement**
 - a. How alumni and careers can work together
 - b. Getting buy-in from the wider university and departments
 - c. Which departments?
 - i. Academic
 - ii. IT
 - iii. Student recruitment / experience
 - d. What should departments do for you?
- 4. Marketing and promoting your mentoring programme**
 - a. Recruiting mentors (and who are they?)
 - b. Matching skills and experience to demand
 - c. Recruiting mentees (students and alumni)
 - d. Reaching international participants
 - e. On boarding participants
- 5. When things go wrong**
 - a. Unresponsive participants
 - b. Maintaining interest
 - c. Dealing with complaints
 - d. Vetting
- 6. Measuring KPIs and ROI**
 - a. Getting the right data
 - b. Interpretation
 - c. What is important?
 - d. What is "success"?
 - e. DLHE results
 - f. Long term impact
- 7. Scaling a programme**
 - a. Dealing with complexity
 - b. Maintaining quality

Guided Discussion: Notes and Findings

1. Terminology for mentoring and branding

There is a common debate of what an institution should call their mentoring programme and what they should call mentors and mentees.

Many institutions are still using the terms 'mentoring', 'e-mentoring' and 'mentors'.

Some institutions refer to their mentoring schemes as 'Ask Alumni', although this can raise the issue of students often not knowing who 'Alumni' are and what this means.

Alternatives used for mentors have been Experts, Buddies or Champions e.g. Loyola University (<https://luconnect.pivotplanet.com/>).

The terminology used should be influenced by how formal your mentoring is and the depth of involvement i.e. whether it is just emailing a quick question once or an informal group discussion, more focused one-to-one telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings.

Branding and visualisation can strengthen participants' perception and recognition of the mentoring programme and alumni networks.



For example, the University of Exeter's career mentoring service's logo depicts two owls, which has been promoted to become recognisable without even needing to mention the mentoring programme name.

Some examples of branding and names include:

- ❖ **King's Connect** at King's College London
- ❖ **KEW-NET** (Kent Experiences of Work) at the University of Kent
- ❖ **Manchester Gold** at the University of Manchester
- ❖ **Aberystwyth eMentoring** within the **Aber Opportunities Network** at Aberystwyth University
- ❖ **Warwickgrad.net** (short for Warwick Graduate Network) at the University of Warwick

The ultimate long term goal would be to embed mentoring into the very culture of an institution, so that students and alumni expect to participate in mentoring as the 'done thing' - as in the case with Manchester Gold, a programme that has existed for over 14 years.

2. Getting funded: Presenting a business case for mentoring

- a. Dealing with limited resource
- b. Launching pilots and growing

Asking for resources and funding can be a tough task, given the competing requests for funds from different departments and stakeholders.

Working in collaboration with multiple departments (e.g. Alumni relations, Employability and Careers, Student Recruitment, Admissions, IT, etc) and building support, enthusiasm and commitment from these will give your case more weight - a classic example of strength in numbers. It may also be easier to spread the budget and workload of the programme across departments. Communication will be fundamental when working with other departments.

Show decision makers the value and benefits of mentoring such as adding to the student experience, giving students an early positive experience of their alumni network, providing another channel via which to engage students and alumni, providing a volunteering opportunity as a non-financial way for alumni to give back, improving your data with updated alumni employment and contact details, boosting student recruitment with mentoring between prospective students and students and alumni (e.g. through Aluminati's Ambassadors mentoring module) and enhancing employability and rankings (e.g. DLHE)

Another consideration is the source of funding – should mentoring be funded by the institution or be funded by the alumni themselves via their donations? One institution mentioned they received their funding from alumni philanthropy and provide mentoring as a gift to the students. Does funding from alumni mean that they will be more likely to use the scheme? One university mentioned they had a corporate sponsor to cover costs.

When growing a service, patience and perseverance are essential. Initial numbers may be small but over time will grow as a 'culture of mentoring' is established. One programme which now has over 400 participants had only 8 mentoring pairs in their first year. Case studies and success stories are particularly effective. Make sure you highlight successful mentoring relationships with positive outcomes (e.g. mentee encouraged to apply for a particular job by mentor and now is employed).

3. Institutional Engagement

- a. How alumni relations and careers can work together**
- b. Getting buy-in from the wider university and departments**
- c. Which departments?**
 - i. Academic**
 - ii. IT**
 - iii. Student recruitment / experience**
- d. What should departments do for you?**

Both Alumni Relations and Careers benefit from a mentoring programme.

It is fundamental to set out the intended objectives of the scheme and emphasise the 'higher purpose'. Regular meetings amongst heads of each department are highly advisable to keep efforts aligned.

One department found it successful to simply have an honest conversation with other departments and explain what their day-to-day workload was like so that others could empathise.

To begin getting buy in from others or to accelerate the process, project leaders should approach their 'warm' contacts first who may then help to spread the positive word. These contacts effectively will act as 'referees', which give your cause more credibility.

You may also want to roll out the idea in phases to the different departments and groups/segments.

Some institutions experience resistance from academic departments, however it is advantageous to get their buy in and work with them to promote the scheme to students in their different departments and help run more targeted campaigns.

Utilising different departments will ensure you get maximum benefit and exposure for your mentoring programme, as they add their own resources which will know how to promote to their individual audiences.

4. Marketing and promoting your mentoring programme

- a. Recruiting mentors (and who are they?)
- b. Matching skills and experience to demand
- c. Recruiting mentees (students and alumni)
- d. Reaching international participants
- e. On boarding participants

This topic generated substantial discussion. Marketing one's mentoring programme is fundamental to its success and should be established within an overall annual marketing plan.

Some find it beneficial to promote to potential mentors first, so that there will be sufficient numbers of willing alumni as soon as students/mentees join.

A major challenge experienced by many institutions however has been recruiting and maintaining students as mentees, given their busy lives with exams etc, so marketing to students has come to the forefront.

Some examples of how institutions have been targeting students as mentees is with:

- ❖ Targeted email campaigns
- ❖ Including mentions of the mentoring service and benefits in other marketing communications
- ❖ Student training sessions or lectures
- ❖ Producing training videos on their mentoring programme e.g. King's Connect
 - <https://alumni.kcl.ac.uk/training-video-kings-connect>
- ❖ Case studies such as:
 - <http://alumni.kcl.ac.uk/kings-connect-mentoring-story>
 - <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/alumni/services/warwickgrad/ementoring/casestudy/>
 - <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/employers/otherways/mentoring>
- ❖ Social media announcements
 - <https://twitter.com/warwickalumni/status/600632499056738305>
- ❖ Promotion and showcasing at careers fairs and alumni events
- ❖ Organising specific mentoring events
- ❖ Holding a "Meet the Mentors" drinks
- ❖ "Contracting" academic schools/departments/faculties to communicate to students
- ❖ Having staff that are enthusiastic and engaging that will have real magnetism when attracting participants and communicating the message

Rolling out your programme in phases, whether departmentally or to different segments, will allow for more targeted campaigns and more control of the impact of initial campaigns, which you can then learn from and improve upon as you roll out to others.

Word of mouth can be extremely powerful in spreading the concept and love of mentoring, and can lead to a snowball effect. There is evidence that second year and final students often tell their peers about the scheme, particularly if they have had a positive experience.

This communication channel can become so strong that the idea of mentoring is then embedded within the culture of the institution and applying for the mentoring scheme becomes the 'don't thing'.

Business schools in particular have been finding that their members can already have a high level of experience in their fields of business and as such they need to recruit very senior level mentors that will still be beneficial to them.

Attracting the 'right' mentors is one of the most common challenges and this calls for identifying what attributes and knowledge the 'right' mentors would have by identifying mentee needs and targeting campaigns.

Some institutions' mentoring programmes have been restricted to particular subject areas due to interest and resource availability. Whilst most recruitment programmes are 'mentor led' (recruit mentors first and then market to students), a couple were strongly 'mentee led' where students were recruited, their needs assessed and then very specific mentors were recruited to meet their specific requirements. This was generally acknowledged as very resource intensive but resulting in high quality matches.

There was strong concern expressed by a few institutions over the impact on mentors whom remained unmatched. Other institutions felt that expectations could be set accordingly so that unmatched mentors did not feel left out.

Mentor programmes with an international scope necessarily have to support distance interactions via email, phone or skype. Regional marketing is an advantage and it was noted that, for example, Chinese students were particularly interested in mentors from China.

5. When things go wrong

- a. Unresponsive participants**
- b. Maintaining interest**
- c. Dealing with complaints**
- d. Vetting**

Online platforms are predominantly trust-based systems. Some platforms offer a reporting mechanism, therefore allowing conversations to be private, unless the user feels that an instance needs to be reported and escalated to an administrator/the institution. Complaints in reality however are generally extremely rare.

Vetting usually appears in the form of application forms and/or interviews, which are used to provide more information about the applicants' motives and verify whether they are a potential participant with a genuine interest and commitment. Those who do not exhibit sufficient motivation to fully complete a mentoring relationship may be directed to other avenues.

A programme must maintain the interest of participants to ensure they still engage with their mentor/mentee. Some examples of ways in which institutions have tried to reengage and maintain the interest of participants include:

- ❖ Conducting a survey midway through the relationship to ensure things are working out or to gather their feedback if not.
- ❖ Offering a Mentor and Mentee of the Year award and recognition as an incentive. Recognition could also be achieved with a visible performance indicator e.g. within the Aluminator online platform a counter is shown of the number of mentoring relationships completed by each mentor. Introduce a competition for those that feedback about their mentoring experience.
- ❖ Motivational emails with quotes from inspiring figures about learning and mentoring.
- ❖ Distribute reminder emails either directly to participants or general email campaigns reminding people of the benefits of mentoring or create urgency by implying deadlines with calls to action e.g. 'you have 6 weeks left to finish your mentoring relationship'.

6. Measuring KPIs and ROI

- a. Getting the right data
- b. Interpretation
- c. What is important?
- d. What is “success”?
- e. DLHE results
- f. Long term impact

Measuring KPIs and ROI is vital for analysing and evaluating the success of mentoring programmes; identifying areas of improvement and future focus, reporting to senior management, and justifying spend.

Both quantitative and qualitative data needs to be gathered. This can be achieved inherently within a technology system that records such information and by asking participants to feedback about their experience via survey forms. It is important to measure the important outcomes of mentoring (increase in confidence, clarity of career path, success in interview) and not just the mechanics (number of messages exchanged). Some interactions may also appear ‘off system’ so the survey should ask about any other communication channels and frequency of use.

Some KPIs that can be significant to institutions include:

- ❖ The number of participants
- ❖ Which faculties/departments were represented
- ❖ The number of international participants / per country
- ❖ The number of matched relationships
- ❖ The number of dissolved or incomplete relationships
- ❖ The direct time spent within the mentoring relationships
- ❖ % of participants that would recommend the scheme to someone else
- ❖ How many participants go on to become donors
- ❖ Number of ‘first time engagers’
- ❖ The amount of updated information received e.g. employment data, etc.
- ❖ The number of job offers or internships to come out of mentoring relationships
- ❖ The impact on employability/DLHE results (one institution reported an uplift by nearly 10% in the DLHE results of participants of their mentoring programme)
- ❖ Case studies and success stories – qualitative feedback

A question was raised on the methodology of deriving meaningful impact data from DLHE. The institution in question has since explained:

We took the list of all the students who had completed the Career Mentor Scheme and extracted their DHLE scores. The scores of this cohort of students were then compared against the scores of the university as a whole which identified that on average they were 9.5% higher.

7. Scaling a programme

- a. Dealing with complexity
- b. Maintaining quality

Scaling your programme will often require a decision on how much control you want to maintain when it comes to the administrative processes and matching.

Of course you can manage the expansion of any mentoring programme by recruiting more staff. Most institutions tend to have 1-2 staff involved in working on mentoring programmes, although many express that this isn't enough resource as they would like to ensure maximum success, particularly if these staff have broader roles and responsibilities.

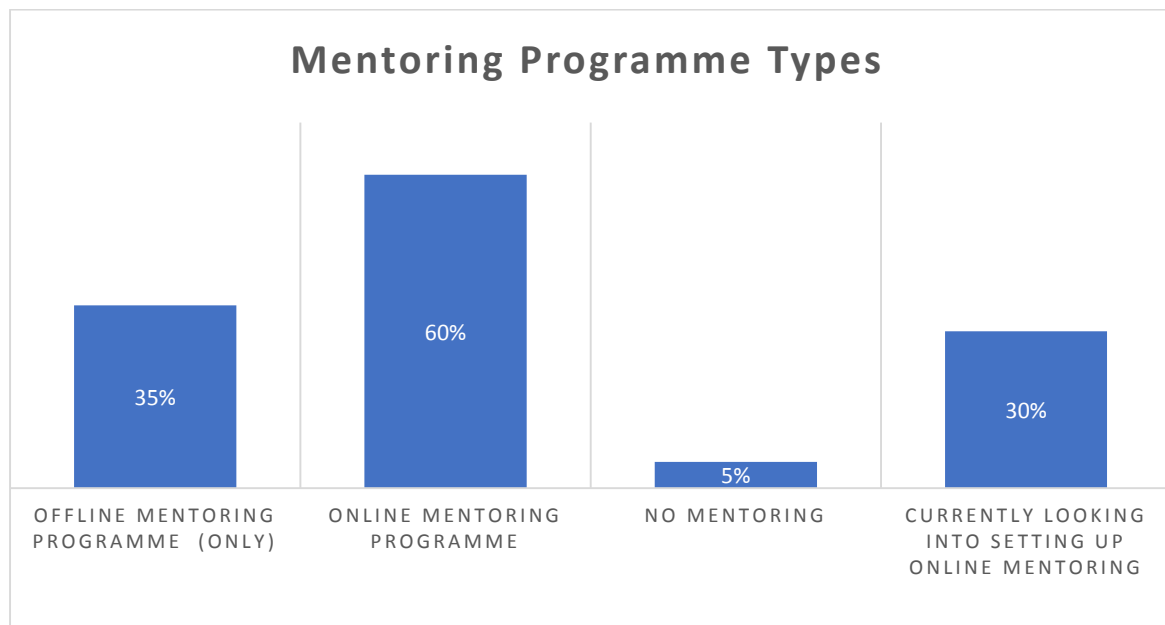
Moving a mentoring scheme from an offline process to an online channel/platform is an effective method of upscaling any programme, and administrative workload may even be reduced.

One institution at MPC presented how having hit the limit of their resources they are researching ways to upscale their service using the careful application of technology. They are currently working with Aluminati to develop a new Managed Mentoring module, which allows them to scale up a traditional programme in a way that empowers participants but does not compromise quality.

RESULTS FROM THE MPC: Mentoring Snap Survey

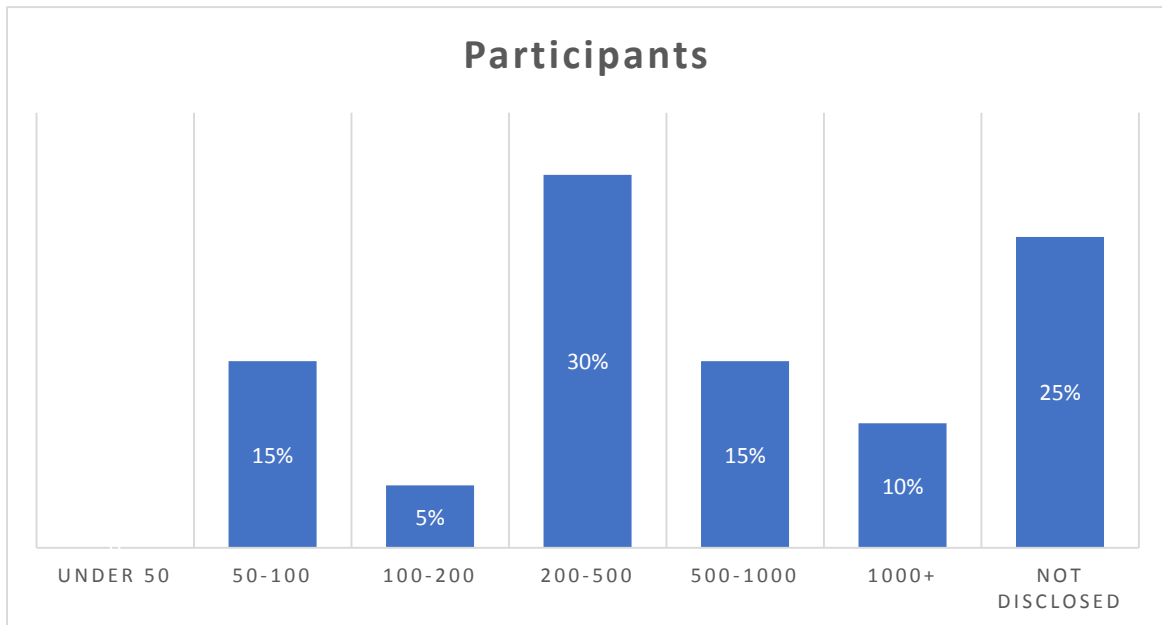
The following figures were collected from information provided by the 20 institutions at MPC15, consisting of 17 universities and 3 business schools in the UK.

1. % of programmes by the type of mentoring scheme offered:

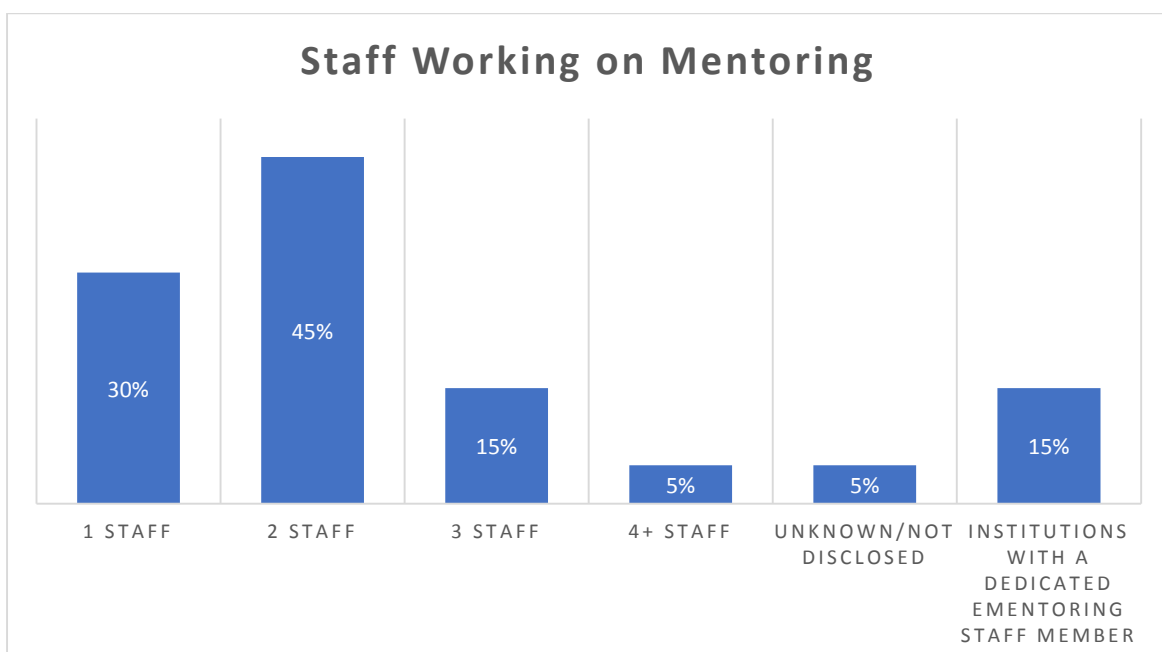


N.B. Interestingly, all three business schools present only had offline mentoring schemes.

2. % of programmes by the number of participants:



3. % of programmes by the number of staff involved:



Key Findings

- ❖ Mentoring has become a key part of alumni engagement and careers strategies.
- ❖ eMentoring is becoming ever more popular for universities.
- ❖ eMentoring is a successful way of upscaling traditional mentoring programmes.
- ❖ Institutions are increasingly recognising the importance and resource required for mentoring, with some institutions hiring dedicated mentoring staff.
- ❖ Tracking is key, for performance analysis, strategy and programme development, aiding marketing communications and for reporting on ROI to senior management.
- ❖ Marketing and ongoing promotion is vital to the success of mentoring programmes.
- ❖ Getting buy in from other departments will strengthen your business case, provide you with more resource and budget, and give you greater influence and reduce resistance when spreading the word throughout the institution.
- ❖ It is beneficial to roll out mentoring schemes in phases, for better control and targeting, therefore improving uptake.
- ❖ Reduce the risk of problems with participants by vetting applicants and targeting those with a real interest and commitment to the scheme.
- ❖ Offer incentives and/or send reminders to encourage participants to complete relationships, thus reducing the number of dissolved relationships.
- ❖ Gather case studies and qualitative feedback to help you reengage participants, provide you with powerful ammunition for marketing campaigns and reporting.

Due to limited time but continued interest and scope for discussion, we would love to have covered these topics in more depth, therefore we will look to revisit some of these at next year's Mentoring Professionals Conference.

Thank you to the following for their contribution to MPC15:

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For any queries about this report or the Mentoring Professionals Conference or to request presentation slides, please contact info@aluminati.net