AdvanceHE

Appendices

Peer mentoring for supporting students with mental health and wellbeing: Stories and outcomes

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Professor Helen Payne

AdvanceHE

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1. Appendix 1: Examples of staff feedback on film

'I thought the film was very good and clearly conveys the advantages of the mentoring scheme for both mentees and mentors. The one thing I thought was a slight shame was that there was a gender imbalance, with only one male. The guidance document is excellent'.

'Yes, to all three questions. Staff have recently expressed their concern about the prevalence of mental health issues among students and dealing with these. We already have a peer mentoring scheme and a postgraduate mentoring scheme that have operated with some success. However, take up of offers of mentoring has been disappointing'.

'Yes, we have tried a similar process to that. We will be revisiting peer mentoring ideas in relation to our course before the start of the next academic year. As with all mentoring schemes when it does work it is extremely valuable for mentor and mentee'. 'I found the video engaging and am sure students would too. I did think both staff and students would benefit from viewing the video – perhaps in the induction at the start of each year but also in skills modules and perhaps at strategic points through the year i.e. after exam grade release.

'I would caution in relation to staff understanding the importance of the training process and both mentors and mentees having an understanding of the ground rules and remits of the role (in the way those in the video seemed to reflect). I agree that the expansion process would need to be carefully monitored by trained staff to prevent an inadvertent simplifying the training process which could make the process an unhelpful one for those who might be particularly vulnerable. We had peer mentoring running this year for the first time and I raised this concern before we rolled it out for the same reasons as mentioned above. That said, it would be a positive initiative to set up similar schemes to help students achieve their potential and benefit in the way that some mentors described in the video. I think it would be a good idea for students to view the film and I would be happy to advertise this if you provide instructions for the students in terms of what feedback you require. There may be some practical difficulties as the turnaround deadline appears to have passed, and currently the exams are finished, but I could send this to the student reps as they may be some willing to engage with this'. Wishing you every success with the project'.

'Just watched the video. I thought the video was engaging and the messages were positive. We are looking to establish a programme wide peer mentoring scheme for all L4 and L5 students. I will be liaising with the year tutors over the summer to get this established for September'.

'Thanks for sharing this informative video. I must admit prior to viewing the video I was a little cautious about delving into mental health support through a peer mentoring system due to the potential vulnerabilities of either those being mentored or the mentors themselves. However, I think you have struck a really good balance within the video and, personally, I

found the reflections engaging; I could see this being a spur for other programmes to set up similar schemes and that seemed a positive initiative at UH in helping people achieve their potential and even exceed it in the way some of the mentors have described in your video (for example, in the skills and confidence they achieved in the mentoring process).

Just in case I am a little unclear about what you mean by 'is the call to action in the best place?', I will simply add that I did think both staff and students would benefit from viewing the video – perhaps in the induction at the start of each year (not just the outset of the degree). As a clinical psychologist I also thought that mental health is often associated with more extreme experiences – yet, it can start with a lack of appropriate knowledge and support during a difficult time. Thus, enabling all students to access mentoring at any time point, and not just for 'mental health' reasons, may be beneficial for everyone and not just the few who may be willing to admit they have an issue. My remaining caution would be that I hope staff understand the importance of the training process and for both the mentors and mentees to have an understanding of the ground rules and remits of the role – in the way those in the video seemed to reflect. As you extend it out, it would be easy for some people to inadvertently simplify the training process and through this perhaps make the process an unhelpful one for those who might be particularly vulnerable. Thanks again for sharing this, I think it is a great initiative and as I say I enjoyed viewing it'.

'The video is extremely informative and is based on the students' experiences which I think will help to gain interest from other universities and other UH courses. I think move the 'call to action' to the end as this is easily missed at the beginning. I don't know whether it's possible to add what the training covers in a bit more detail and with specifics as the training is referred to a lot but not explained'.

2. Appendix 2: Guidance document on setting up peer mentoring to support student mental health and wellbeing

2.1 Introduction to the Peer Mentoring Scheme

This section introduces the idea of peer mentoring to support students' mental health and wellbeing. The peer mentoring scheme at the University of Hertfordshire was developed from acknowledging the important role students play in supporting each other day-to-day during their time at university. Students are most likely to approach each other for help in thinking through issues and for emotional support as the first port of call. However, friends can feel overwhelmed at times, unsure of how best to help and worried about how and who to ask for advice for fear of betraying their friend's trust.

The Scheme aims to better equip students for such a role, feel more confident in supporting their peers and be more aware of the support networks available to which they can signpost mentees for their mental health, wellbeing and other concerns. Peer mentoring is accessible and a relatively informal opportunity to talk through issues which may be concerning to a mentee. Contact may be face-to-face or email, text, facetime or phone. Talking things through is often enough or the mentor can support mentees to seek more professional help.

Peer mentoring schemes are best if university-wide according to research. Student mentees could select their own mentor, opting-in or opting-out as they need to. All new students could be offered a mentor at the outset. This way the scheme cannot be viewed by students as a deficit model, putting off some students.

2.2 Peer Mentors

Peer mentors can be both undergraduate and graduate students who have formally applied to the role or have been referred by staff. They are carefully selected and trained to take up this role and receive ongoing support from the Student Engagement Team. Student peer mentors meet with their mentee informally to discuss anything that is of concern to their mentee. They will have received training on the purpose of their role, in active listening, sensitive communication skills, the maintenance of confidentiality and boundaries and to recognise when and how to signpost to other institutionally based services and/or encourage self-referral to the student wellbeing services.

Peer mentors are not counsellors, but they can help students new to the university to settle in, which is especially important at this time of transition, so they feel they fit in and belong. Offering listening, understanding, signposting to other support and helping to cultivate a positive learning relationship creates a mutuality whereby mentors and mentees may grow and succeed together. Mentors can develop transferable skills such as self-management, leadership and communication and gain personal satisfaction in giving something back.

2.3 Peer Mentees

First year students can be encouraged to apply for a mentor through the scheme emphasising the success model rather than a deficit one. Meeting a mentor can be another way to just get things off their chest. It is always helpful to know someone is genuinely willing to listen and take time to understand. The transition to university can be very stressful for some so a safe, supportive peer relationship can help to promote student success. The first few weeks at university are known to be crucial to student success, as is returning after Christmas and summer breaks, or going on placements for some students.

Peer mentoring may help existing students to develop new skills and may also reduce student attrition. If required the scheme could offer longer-term support, other than in the first year, where the relationship can continue to meet both academic and pastoral support. This can provide a much needed safety-net for some students. It can help to build confidence, resilience and self-regulation. The social support acts as a buffer against mental health

concerns triggered by the stress of transitions, debt, work, placements, relationships, deadlines, isolation, examinations/assignments etc. experienced by some students.

Additionally, peer mentoring may strengthen academic understanding, knowledge and skills, improve grades and possibly enhance final degree classification.

The relationship between mentor and mentee is collaborative, horizontal and without hierarchy. It is built on the first meetings and often develops to become mutually beneficial. Outcomes from peer mentoring can therefore be academic, personal, professional and social.

2.4 Recruitment to the Scheme

Recruitment of peer mentees can be through signing up on induction programmes (mentees) and for mentors by invitations from tutors or self-referral/nomination. Ideally recruitment would include students from a range of ethnicities, ages, programmes of study, those who have struggled themselves with mental health concerns (disclosed on non-disclosed), those whose first language is not English, and those who are first generation in their family to attend university. Both under and postgraduate peer mentors can be recruited.

2.5 Peer Mentor Training

A short, half day training for mentors is essential. For example, boundaries, role and responsibilities for the relationship are defined, together with an awareness of resources for signposting for mental health concerns, communicating sensitively, and skills in conversation and active listening. Mentors need to be mindful the onus for the work lies with mentees, but be willing to provide support, guidance and feedback. The training introduces students to mentoring principles and addresses a number of possible scenarios which prepare mentors on how to better respond and support their peers by taking into account safeguarding considerations.

2.6 Step-by-step Guidance to Set up a Peer Mentoring Scheme

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2.7 Peer Mentees

1. Appoint a suitable 'peer mentoring scheme co-ordinator' from the staff team.

2. Design marketing materials e.g. leaflets and posters for raising awareness of the scheme.

3. Promote the peer mentoring scheme across the faculty/school/institution in first and last weeks of the academic year e.g. during the last weeks of the academic year mentors can be recruited and trained to be ready to welcome the new students in September.

4. Provide clear benefits for mentors such as additional value to their c.v.

5. Offer either an opt-in or an opt-out system to recruit mentors for each first-year student from second or third years within the same undergraduate programme or another undergraduate programme. Repeat for masters and doctoral students.

6. Design, organise and schedule the peer mentor training course (a very important aspect half a day's workshop) for each level

7. Request volunteer mentors write a profile, including some information about their learning journey, their own struggles on entry to University and what they can offer a mentee.

8. Provide benefits for mentees e.g. new skills, support to achieve higher grades etc.

9. Invite first years (mentees) to select a mentor by scrutinising the mentor profiles.

10. Encourage a meeting face-to-face within the first two weeks following the selection process.

11. Offer opportunities for contact with staff for both mentor and mentee when needed.

12. Offer regular guidance and support to the mentor as required.

It will be important to evaluate the scheme, for example, designing mentor/mentee 'participant experience forms' (PEF) requesting comments on the scheme through closed and open-ended questions followed by a survey for further comments.

If you have any queries or need advice, please email the staff below:

Professor Helen Payne, Lead Researcher, University of Hertfordshire School of Education, H.L.Payne@herts.ac.uk

Graça Martins, Student Engagement Lead - can consult on training mentors and setting up a scheme G.M.Martins@herts.ac.uk

Associate Professor, Rosemary Allen, Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, University of Hertfordshire School of Education, R.Allen@herts.ac.uk

We will contact you in about three months to inquire about your progress in setting up your peer mentoring scheme. We hope you will send us an update including how the training was received.

3. Appendix 3: UH Learning and Teaching conference - extract from programme page showing presentation of the film Introduction to the Peer Mentoring Scheme

14.30 Parallel session 4 - Smoothing the transition to UH – designing a student support "Reach your potential pack" Marianne Rial and Nina Walker

14.30 Parallel session 4 - Learning and Researching at the University of Hertfordshire: what can we attribute to new undergraduates? Grant Bage and Nirjaree Patel Transition to Higher Education (HE) can be a process that students find difficult. This early phase can cause confusion at the least and lead to withdrawal from the Programme at worst. With input from students, a pack was designed to smooth some of the issues encountered in the transition process. One of UH's six graduate attributes is 'Learning and Research skills'. Others describe students becoming stronger in related fields: knowledge, problem-solving, analysis, evaluation, criticality and ethics. Two partnership projects – undertaken with and about first-year undergraduates – researched 'learning and research' skills, uncertainties and assumptions students bring into (and develop) at university.

14.30 Parallel session 4 - Peer mentoring to support student mental health and wellbeing Helen Payne and two student volunteers This session will report on a recent project which engaged students to make a film on peer mentoring for supporting student mental health and wellbeing. It has been funded by Advance HE and will be promoted by Hertfordshire Students Union, Student Minds and Advance HE to engage other universities to apply for a guidance document on how to set up their own peer mentoring scheme.

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