youth futures FOUNDATION

Rapid Evidence Assessment

Exploring mentoring interventions and their evaluation

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November 2025

- Youth Futures Foundation is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people. We want to see an equitable future society where all young people have the opportunity to be in good work.
- For more information about this research please contact research@youthfuturesfoundation.org

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About the research team

SQW

SQW are a leading independent provider of research, analysis and advice in economic and social development. Established in 1983, and operating across the UK, Europe and internationally, we work for clients from the public, private and voluntary sectors. We are experts in public policy and work with our clients to research, develop, implement and evaluate social and economic development interventions across a wide range of policy domains. Our breadth of expertise is one of our strengths: it equips us to work across different fields in an integrated way, avoiding "siloed" assessments and solutions.

Bryson Purdon Social Research

Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR) is an independent research partnership set up in 2009 specialising in policy and programme impact evaluation and survey methodology. We work on evaluations across a wide range of policy areas, including early intervention and support for families, health and disability, and ageing. We collaborate with academics, research organisations, consultants and third sector organisations, typically leading on the design and analysis of the impact evaluation. We specialise in quasi-experimental and randomised controlled trial designs. We also conduct methodological scoping and feasibility studies in relation to evaluations and surveys, and provide ongoing and ad hoc consultancy and advice.

Executive Summary

In September 2023, the Youth Futures Foundation (hereafter referred to as "Youth Futures") was awarded £15m from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver a Building Futures programme to support secondary school students at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training) when they leave compulsory education.

The Building Futures multi-year programme will run between 2024 and 2028 and aims to support at least 5,000 young people at risk of becoming NEET. The initial test and learn phase will involve the delivery of a mentoring intervention by Football Beyond Borders (FBB). Within this phase, the Behavioural Insights Team and Nesta will conduct test and learn activity to help determine the final delivery model for Building Futures. The second phase will expand delivery through multiple partners nationwide, providing mentoring services while tracking longitudinal datasets. In the final stage, Youth Futures will commission a large-scale impact evaluation to measure long-term outcomes and impacts of early interventions with young people.

In June 2024, Youth Futures commissioned SQW and partner BPSR to undertake the first of several Rapid Evidence Assessments (REA) to support the design and delivery of the Building Futures programme. This REA assesses evidence on how mentoring (and similar) interventions can support young people aged 11-16 years to develop skills, knowledge and attributes that improve their employment prospects later on.

The REA explored the effectiveness of key aspects of mentoring interventions and identify outcomes associated with mentoring and how these are measured by delivery organisations and evaluators. It also explored how mentoring and similar interventions have been evaluated using Randomised Control Trial (RCT) methodology.

It involved a rapid evidence search, culminating with a detailed review of 49 documents identified as most relevant after a systematic three-stage sifting process. These were quality assessed as being 'good'. Nine interviews were also conducted with individuals involved either in the delivery of mentoring interventions, evaluation of mentoring or similar interventions, or with academic expertise in youth mentoring.

Defining mentoring and its typologies

Defining mentoring

There is no single definition of youth mentoring used in practice or research. Nevertheless, there are common elements that describe the characteristics of a mentoring relationship:

- **Mentoring is embedded in a relationship.** The relationship is between an adult and either

one young person or a small group. Crucially, the adult needs to be trusted, and not part of a family relationship.

- **Mentoring is used to achieve a range of different objectives.** These objectives can include: employability, self-efficacy and confidence; improved academic achievement, reduced drop-out rates and transition to higher education; improved resilience, connectivity, interpersonal relationships, and wellbeing; and reduced drug and alcohol use, use of weapons, and other anti-social behaviour.
- **Mentoring is often targeted at specific groups of young people with identifiable needs**, often at critical junctures or transition periods in their lives. In some cases, interventions are tailored to suit groups with specific needs.
- **Mentoring can be a discrete intervention or delivered alongside other activities,** making it difficult to set parameters on "*where mentoring finishes*" and where other types of interventions such as youth work, begin.

Mentoring typologies

There is a **clear distinction in the literature between school-based and community-based mentoring.** Mentoring within school premises benefits from school infrastructures to manage the process and provide an appropriate environment. Whereas community-based mentoring can be flexible in terms of timing and duration of mentoring relationships. While there are distinct advantages to both approaches, **different types of young people are likely to benefit from the two different modes of mentoring.**

Some literature discusses **distinct typologies of 'developmental' (relationship-focused) and 'instrumental' (goal-oriented) mentoring** although these are not necessarily discrete and can be blended within a single programme or relationship:

- Developmental, relationship-focused mentoring has been linked with stronger benefits and higher levels of satisfaction, with some hypothesising that relationship-building can subsequently facilitate problem-focused interactions.
- Instrumental mentoring relationships may yield larger effects through clear and specific goal setting, and a close personal connection can be the by-product of an instrumental mentoring relationship.

Effective practice in mentoring delivery

Before mentoring

Programme design

In designing a mentoring intervention, programme funders and delivery teams must consider several factors, including gathering data and insights from all stakeholders, starting small and conducting an initial needs assessment, and integrating

monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including a well-articulated Theory of Change, from the outset. Each intervention should be bespoke to the specific needs of a cohort of young people.

Effective programme coordination requires good administration skills. Administrative responsibilities include monitoring participation, managing expenses, and allocating resources across the programme.

In school-based interventions, relationship building with key stakeholders is core to ensure smooth delivery and active engagement throughout, programme coordinators need good relationships with schools, mentors and mentees, and other stakeholders. For most mentoring programmes, **active school involvement is essential and can be supported by key practices.** These include having defined communication practices, named points of contact among school staff, flexibility with school day arrangements, and an exchange of successful engagement strategies between mentors and school staff.

At the same time, it is important that young people know that mentors are independent of the school team. It is particularly important to emphasise the confidentiality of conversations between mentors and mentees, and to support young people where relationships between their parents/ carers are strained.

Mentoring programmes should also consider whether, and how, to engage parents/ carers. Positive parental engagement can amplify the benefits of mentoring as messages are reinforced at home. At the same time, ineffective communication might lead to a misunderstanding about the purpose of mentoring.

Recruitment of mentors and mentees

Programmes seek mentors with specific characteristics and skills. They prefer mentors with; previous mentoring experience; professional backgrounds that involve working with young people; and positive attitudes towards young people including an ability to empathise with them.

All mentors need training, and a good peer and professional support infrastructure. Good quality and well-resourced support to mentors supports effective mentoring relationships, and in turn, positive outcomes. Best practice around mentor training includes clear induction processes and tailored training sessions. Mentors also need programme staff support through regularly scheduled meetings, relationship monitoring, ad hoc support, and peer support sessions with other mentors.

Mentors need to feel valued and rewarded to continue their work. Incentives can be about personal development and recognition of their work. Some mentors are paid and there are different views on the effect this has on mentoring programmes. While paid mentors might be more effective in

sustaining longer-term mentoring relationships and providing relevant knowledge of the local landscape, young people might value volunteer mentors because they see their motivation as being genuinely altruistic and focused on their needs.

Young people can be identified and recruited through effective use of data and referral mechanisms. Setting clear eligibility criteria and using a wide range of data or indicators can help to identify young people at higher risk. School-based mentoring programmes also benefit from guidance from school staff in recruiting young people. However, mixing groups to involve some young people who are not the target population for an intervention can also be an effective method of reducing the stigma of being involved in a mentoring programme.

Young people most at risk need more support than volunteer mentors can provide. Unless mentors are specially training and supported, they do not typically have the capacity or willingness to support especially challenging young people. In such cases mentoring alone will not be sufficient to impact a young person's environment or behaviours.

Start of mentoring

There are different considerations to inform the mentor-mentee match. Match-makers should consider young people's career goals, mentors' professional backgrounds, and mutual interests. Similarly, having shared experiences, or shared life histories, may enable more empathetic understanding within the mentoring relationship.

Matching based on personal characteristics is not always beneficial, but it can be useful for some groups. There is limited evidence that matching based on personal characteristics such as ethnic background and gender has any impact on outcomes. However, instances of matching based on similar socioeconomic class and disability have had positive impacts on the quality of the mentoring relationship and mentees' outcomes.

During mentoring

The mentoring relationship should start with setting goals/ expectations, but should also be youth-centred and flexible throughout. Setting individualised goals between a mentor and mentee provides a framework to focus the mentoring relationship and sets mutual expectations. At the same time, allowing flexibility and letting the mentee lead the discussion can support stronger ties and encourage prolonged engagement.

Mentoring programmes should include fun or developmental activities. These activities, such sport, arts and crafts sessions, and social activities, support recruitment of young people, enable stronger relationship building and bolster engagement in the programme. Conversely, mentoring relationships heavily

focused on school work were found to be less likely to endure.

The quality of a mentoring relationship is essential in sustaining matches and achieving outcomes. Trust is a key component in a high quality mentoring relationship. Similarly, the accumulation of shared experiences, attentiveness and commitment from the mentor, and an emotionally safe environment can further enable a high quality mentoring relationship.

Mentoring needs time to work – at least six months, with at least one meeting or engagement each week. There is consensus in the literature that 12-month interventions are most effective for a range of outcomes. However six-month interventions have been found to yield some positive impacts. In terms of frequency, a greater number of hours spent with mentees per week (i.e. one to three hours) presents greater opportunities to develop enduring and trusting relationships.

Individual and group mentoring have different benefits for mentees. While evidence is limited around which approach might be better than the other, group mentoring has been found to have a greater influence on peer relations and social outcomes. One intervention found a mixed model approach can enable the benefits of both individual and group mentoring models to be achieved.

End of mentoring

A managed end to a mentoring relationship can maximise positive outcomes and minimise potential challenges. This can be facilitated by training mentors around providing closure to mentees and tapering support towards the end of the mentoring relationship.

When mentoring successfully ends as planned, it needs to be a marked event. When it doesn't, young people report negative outcomes as a result. Best practice around managing the end of mentoring relationships include hosting a celebration event to mark the culmination of the programme and conducting exit interviews. Where mentoring relationships end prematurely, it is important to have policies in place around re-matching.

Outcomes and outcome measures

The strongest evidence relates to the effect of mentoring on mental health and wellbeing, with mentoring interventions demonstrating a positive impact on emotional wellbeing, stress management, self-confidence, and, in some cases, physical wellbeing. Several studies highlighted the role of the mentor in generating wellbeing outcomes, as they support mentees, model effective behaviour, and provide inspiration to young people.

Mentoring can help improve child / parent relationships and build other social skills, supporting relationship building with peers and other adults. Mentoring interventions were found to challenge young people's view of themselves and demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible. However, the impacts of

mentoring on social skills were not apparent in longer-term studies.

Some mentoring programmes improved attainment for some students, mostly from school-based interventions. In several interventions, positive effects on attainment were visible for certain groups, such as those with a lower grade point average at baseline, young people with 'intact' mentoring matches, and where young people reported being close with their mentor.

Mentoring can increase commitment to continued or further education. While one longer-term study found increased enrolment in post-secondary education among the treatment group, other studies found interventions had increased aspirations to commit to future education. However one study noted that intention to study did not always lead to course entry or completion.

For some young people, mentoring interventions can improve engagement with current schooling. In four interventions, students demonstrated positive attitudinal changes and outlooks towards school and learning. More substantial impacts were evident in two interventions, where students reported more positive views of teachers and other adults in schools and improved ability for active learning.

Mentoring can prevent misbehaviour in school among some young people, with one intervention finding that for the first time in their schooling, none of the mentored students obtained a discipline referral during the intervention period. However, some studies found that positive behavioural changes were not sustained post-mentoring.

Mentoring can improve attendance for some young people, but these improvements are often not statistically significant. Nevertheless, mentoring can have a prominent impact on attendance for specific groups, such as minority ethnic students and young people suffering from anxiety.

There is limited evidence about employment or direct employability outcomes. While one study found a substantive and persistent impact on labour market orientation, there was very limited evidence around employment and employability outcomes. This is likely due to the short- to medium-term timescales of evaluations and the age group of mentoring cohorts, with most young people addressing their attitude towards school in relation to their future rather than employability outcomes.

Longer-term mentoring can contribute to reductions in substance and alcohol misuse and anti-social behaviour, with some studies identifying links between mentoring interventions and reductions in alcohol and substance abuse. One prominent study conducted a 10-year follow up and found a positive long-term effect of a mentoring intervention in decreasing rates of arrest for misdemeanour crimes.

Outcome effects for whole cohorts are often small, and measured

outcomes may not reflect the range of actual outcomes. While both literature and interviewees revealed that mentoring interventions can lead to a varied range of outcomes depending on the objectives of the programme, most studies find only modest benefits for young people. Often, benefits have only been observed for particular groups (including young people with disabilities, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, or young people in care). Moreover, unintended consequences can sometimes be more significant than the stated aims of an intervention.

Occasionally, mentoring can result in no, or even negative, outcomes when programmes are poorly designed. Negative outcomes were found to be associated with interventions that had limited frequency of contact, short duration of mentoring matches, or early termination of mentoring relationships.

Measuring outcomes and mechanisms

When evaluating outcomes and mechanisms of change, studies tended to use multiple, validated measures. Studies often replicated or adapted existing validated measures and drew on multiple sources of data to measure outcomes. However, this approach had limitations around limited resource for adequate survey data collection and inconsistencies in data collection.

Outcome measures used by studies are varied, reflecting the range of outcomes associated with mentoring interventions. Outcomes mentioned in the literature include those around retention in education, academic performance, skills development, behaviour, employability, mental health and wellbeing. The use of a range of different scales limits researchers' ability to compare approaches between different projects.

Alongside measures of outcome achievement, studies sought to measure mechanisms of change, with a particular focus on relationship quality. Change mechanisms measured in the literature include relationship quality, intervention characteristics, and other mechanisms, such as stress exposure and relationship sensitivity.

Evaluation of mentoring and similar interventions

To explore how RCT methodology can be utilised to evaluate youth mentoring interventions, this section draws on learning from both evaluations of mentoring interventions and evaluations of similar interventions targeted at young people.

Rationale for randomisation approach

The rationale for individual-level randomisation is often led by smaller sample sizes and concerns around engagement. In comparison to cluster RCTs, individual-level randomisation requires fewer schools and smaller pupil sample sizes and may better enable a balance of characteristics in the sample. Programmes also justified the use of this approach where there was deemed to be minimal risk of contamination (by pupils sharing their learning with the control group), oversubscription to an intervention, and a greater ability for evaluators to engage schools in the trial.

The rationale for delivering a cluster RCT is often driven by contamination risks associated with individual-level randomisation. In the latter, there is a risk that pupils in the intervention group would share their learning with friends in the control group in the same schools, or, that pupils in the control group might become beneficiaries of the intervention. There were also concerns about the acceptability of randomisation within schools, by both young people and their parents/carers.

The randomisation approach should be led by the intervention's design. The logic of the trial design should follow the logic of an intervention, i.e. if a programme aims to recruit individuals, then an individual-allocation trial is probably most appropriate. Practical consideration around the delivery of the intervention, such as location, capacity of schools, and capacity of practitioners, should also be considered in choosing the randomisation approach.

Sample sizes for cluster RCTs are larger than individual-level randomisation. Sample sizes for cluster RCTs ranged between 1,500-3,000 pupils, recruiting between 70 and 200 schools. Sample sizes for RCTs using individual-level randomisation were considerably smaller, ranging from 250 to just over 900. Individual-level randomisation RCTs also recruited a smaller number of schools, with each trial typically recruiting fewer than 50 schools.

Trial management is often delegated to delivery staff and schools, although this can be burdensome. This includes responsibilities around identifying and recruiting eligible pupils and overseeing primary data collection.

Recruitment of schools

School recruitment is best undertaken by intervention deliverers, with support from evaluators. They are in a better position to engage with schools, having a greater understanding of individual schools and an ability to

explain and relate requests in a way that schools understand.

School eligibility criteria varies, but willingness to engage with the trial is an important factor. While some trials were open to all schools, other studies restricted school participation with selection criteria, e.g. having a certain proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium or for Free School Meals, high levels of deprivation, or being non-selective. Crucially, several studies mentioned agreeing to undertake administrative responsibilities of the programme was a prerequisite for schools to take part in the programme.

There is limited information on how the cost of intervention delivery is covered or used. Some trial reports discussed cost of delivery intervention being covered by the trial funder. Some evaluators also mentioned making incentive payments to school for their participation. However, for most evaluations, no information was provided around how incentive payments were paid.

Evaluators and delivery teams need to carefully consider the challenges of school recruitment and ensure they secure buy-in from school leadership. Challenges in the recruitment of schools included the extent to which schools felt the intervention would add value; concerns from schools around being allocated to the control arm of the trial, and concerns around the administrative burden of participation.

Identification and recruitment of eligible young people

Schools are often responsible for identifying eligible young people, based on eligibility criteria centred in school-held data or subjective assessment. Many trials adopted objective eligibility criteria, drawing on existing information schools hold about their pupils (e.g. markers of disadvantage, poor behaviour or poor predicted educational outcomes). However, some trials had eligibility criteria which required schools to make more subjective assessments, including perceived lack of engagement and pastoral input. In most cases, schools were granted a strong degree of autonomy with broad eligibility criteria for young person recruitment.

There is limited evidence around the pupil identification process or eligibility adherence as this was mainly handled by schools. Where schools had identified eligible pupils, the extent to which pupils had volunteered for the trial was not always clear.

Schools tend to have primary responsibility for recruitment and consent, although processes are not well clarified in the literature. While evaluators often provided schools with information sheets and consent forms, obtaining parental consent was handled by schools. Obtaining parental consent was thought to be easier within a school-based trial, where schools have an ongoing existing relationship with parents/ carers. There was less clarity and discussion around the pupil consent process

and the challenges in recruiting young people into trials. In general, there was little discussion in reports around how far parents/ careers and pupils understood the randomisation approach.

Baseline and follow-up survey data collection

Evaluators approach survey data collection in different ways. Most trials adopted the same or very similar approaches to survey administration at baseline and for later follow-ups. Where there was variation between the two stages, this was sometimes due to learning from the baseline stage (e.g. around feasibility of online completion and reservation about outcome measures). School involvement in survey data collection also varied, with some schools granted more autonomy than others, and the media used for delivery (i.e. online or paper-based surveys). In obtaining more sensitive outcomes data, face-to-face interviews were recommended.

In some cases, there were challenges in obtaining adequate response rates. With baseline data collection conducted prior to randomisation, the important response rates relate to the follow-up surveys.

Approaches to randomisation

Randomisation in cluster RCTs varied, sometimes related to what worked best for the capacity of intervention deliverers. While there were some examples of simple randomisation without stratification or blocking, many studies employed stratification or conducted random allocation with minimisation. Practicalities of delivery also impacted randomisation, with some studies taking a pragmatic decision to pair schools and randomise them into intervention and control. In most cases, schools were randomised equally into the intervention and control arm.

Trials took different approaches to randomisation in individual-level RCTs. In most cases, there was an equal allocation to both arms. However, in larger schools, there was further randomisation of the intervention arm by teaching group. For some trials, it was also more practical to randomise in batches or on a case by case basis, rather than in one go at the start of the intervention.

Who, and how, randomisation was undertaken differed across trials. In most studies, randomisation was undertaken by the evaluator, with delivery partners being responsible for informing schools or young people of the outcome. Evaluators used a variation of methods to randomise, including computerised randomisation, random number generators, and a manual approach (e.g. shuffled card set).

Business as usual, contamination, fidelity, and non-compliance

Control groups were mostly given business as usual, with some instances of incentivisation. Some studies suggested that schools in the control arm of the study be offered activities different to the intervention. In studies that used waitlist designs, control groups

were expected to benefit from the intervention at a later time. Pupil incentives (such as a gift or voucher) were more common in non-UK based trials

There is some evidence of contamination experienced across trials, as pupils in the intervention arm reported sharing learning with other pupils or with their friends. In one intervention, deliverers were asked to do some whole-class work involving pupils in the control group. In waitlist design interventions, one source of contamination was when some pupils in the control arm started the intervention prior to completing follow-up measures.

Trials experienced distinct enablers and challenges to fidelity and non-compliance, some of which have wider applicability. While some of these were specific to the trial, several themes were applicable to wider projects.

- Enablers included: collecting attendance or completion data to aid assessment of fidelity and non-compliance; and school leadership buy-in, which was important to the continued involvement of schools.
- Challenges included: varying quality of provision offered by providers; school attrition from the intervention; school holiday interventions which appeared to have struggled with attendance; pupil and deliverer absences, which were a barrier to high levels of compliance; and attendance issues among disengaged pupils.

1. Introduction

1.1 In September 2023, the Youth Futures Foundation (hereafter referred to as "Youth Futures") was awarded £15m from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver a Building Futures programme to support secondary school students at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training) when they leave compulsory education.

1.2 Young people who have low school attendance, are excluded, and/or achieve low attainment at GCSE, are much more likely to become NEET from when they are 18 years old. It is often recognised that young people do not suddenly become NEET, and that young people in higher risk groups could benefit from early intervention. To decrease the likelihood of young people becoming NEET at 18, Youth Futures are implementing engagement and support actions for secondary school students. However, there is limited evidence on which actions work best to effectively improve employment outcomes for this age group.

Introduction to Building Futures

1.3 The Building Futures multi-year programme will run between 2024 and 2028 and aims to support at least 5,000 young people at risk of becoming NEET. The initial test and learn phase (September 2024 to July 2026) will involve the delivery of a mentoring intervention by Football Beyond Borders (FBB).

1.4 FBB are a youth charity with a track record of successfully delivering school-based mentoring services among young people, often from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. They have been delivering their mentoring intervention in deprived areas of England since 2014.

1.5 The first phase of intervention delivery will involve evaluation and testing of FBB's existing model to help determine the final delivery model for the rest of the programme. Youth Futures have appointed an evaluation partner, the Behavioural Insights Team, to conduct the initial test and learn evaluation.

1.6 To accommodate potential changes and iterations in this first phase, delivery will happen in four waves – starting between September 2024 and July 2026. Each wave will run over three school terms, and will seek to adapt the existing FBB model in different ways, to test and learn from different approaches.

1.7 Key delivery parameters will be identified and refined in the first phase of the programme. The second phase of Building Futures will expand programme delivery and involve multiple delivery partners across the country to provide mentoring services and track longitudinal datasets. A large-scale impact evaluation is intended to enable Youth Futures to

measure long term outcomes and impacts of interventions with young people at an earlier stage.

Introduction to the Rapid Evidence Assessment

1.8 In June 2024, SQW and their partner BPSR were commissioned by Youth Futures to undertake the first of several Rapid Evidence Assessments (REA) to support the design and delivery of the Building Futures programme. This REA **assesses evidence on how mentoring (and similar) interventions can support young people aged 11-16 years to develop skills, knowledge and attributes that improve their employment prospects later on.** It seeks to:

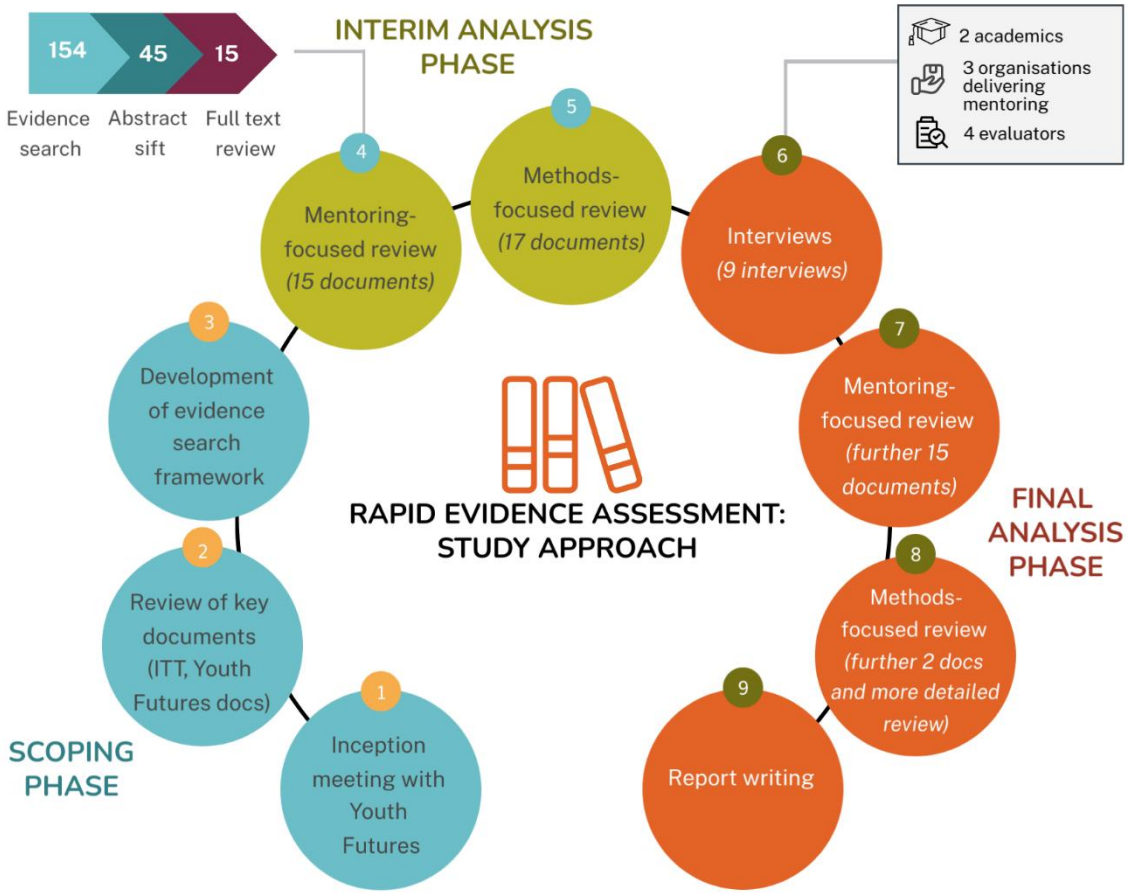
- Explore the effectiveness of key aspects of mentoring interventions (including their duration and intensity, mentoring relationships, mentor-mentee match, mentor characteristics, support offered to mentors, and the recruitment and selection of mentees).
- Identify outcomes associated with mentoring and how these are measured by delivery organisations and evaluators
- Understand how mentoring and similar interventions have been evaluated using Randomised Control Trial (RCT) methodology.

1.9 This REA draws on a three-phase approach to evidence identification, collection and analysis. It draws on:

- Evidence from a rapid evidence review culminating in a full review of 49 documents. This included documents focused on mentoring interventions for young people aged 11-16, both in England and internationally, in predominantly school-based settings. It also included documents focused on trials of school-based mentoring or similar interventions in the UK, for young people in secondary school or final years of primary school (full references are provided in Appendix A).
- Nine interviews with individuals involved in the delivery of mentoring interventions, evaluation of mentoring or similar mentoring interventions, and those with academic expertise in youth mentoring.

1.10 The evidence collection period ran from July to November 2024. The study methods are presented below, with a detailed overview in Appendix B.

Figure 1-1: Summary of approach



Source: SQW

1.11 When reporting findings from specific studies, we adopt the language of that study, for example reference 'youth' 'young people,' 'students' or 'pupils' to maintain authenticity to the source.

Key considerations

1.12 When reading this report, it is important to keep the following methodological considerations in mind:

- All 49 documents were assessed against Ludlow and Puttick's (2013) Standards of Evidence framework[1]. Based on this framework, the overall quality of the evidence is good, with the majority of sources (37) classified as Level 3. An overview of the evidence base is explored in detail in Appendix C. Gaps and associated limitations are explored in the final section of this report.
- This REA was delivered over a relatively short timescale (June 2024-December 2024). The budget and timescale parameters meant that no

[1] See here for more information: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf

more than 50 documents could be fully reviewed and a maximum of 10 interviews could be undertaken. Other relevant searches, documents or interviews may have yielded useful insights, but it was not possible for SQW and BPSR to undertake these within the study parameters.

- This report builds on an interim report delivered to Youth Futures in August 2024. This was followed by a workshop with Youth Futures to identify key gaps and areas of interest. While this final report seeks to address these, the review has sometimes been limited by the availability and quality of relevant literature.
- Specific illustrative examples have been presented where relevant throughout the report. These have been chosen because they provide a concise illustration of an important point, but it should not be inferred that they were the only examples of a particular practice or lesson.

Acknowledgements

1.13 This report has been compiled by an SQW and BPSR team. The SQW team was led by Dr Jo Hutchinson, managed by Jane Meagher, with extensive research support provided by Jenna Galapia and Emily Atkins; the BPSR team was Caroline Bryson and Dr Susan Purdon.

1.14 Our thanks go to members of the Youth Futures Research and Evaluation team for their support with the design and implementation of the REA, in particular Anna Round and Tanya Basi.

1.15 Our thanks also go to those who have contributed to the REA, including people from a wide range of evaluation, research and practice organisations who gave their time and insights by participating in evidence interviews, and also, to other members of the Youth Futures Foundation who contributed to the REA workshops.

2. Mentoring

2.1 This section presents a summary of evidence around how youth mentoring is defined, and key typologies identified through REA activity. It draws on the nine expert interviews, and specifically references 19 documents. In summary:

- Most of these 19 sources involved an RCT of mentoring interventions. Two used quasi-experimental approaches, and two used mixed-methods or qualitative approaches to evaluate interventions. One source is an evidence review.
- 11 focused on USA-based interventions, with only three based in England. Four were focused on mentoring interventions based in other UK (Scotland) or European countries (Ireland, Germany, Netherlands).
- The majority (14) were primarily school based interventions, with the remainder based in the community.
- Only one intervention was universal, 17 were targeted interventions, primarily for those at risk of poor academic performance or school drop-out.
- Most involved 1:1 mentoring activity (18), with four either group only mentoring or a combination of 1:1 and group mentoring.

Defining mentoring

2.2 There is **no single definition of youth mentoring** used in practice or research (Busse, 2018). This is encapsulated by Freedman (1991, cited in Busse, 2018), who states that "*mentoring is flexible, accommodating whatever attributes people want to give it*". Nevertheless, there are common elements that describe the characteristics of a mentoring relationship, identified in both the literature and by interviewees.

Mentoring is embedded in a relationship

2.3 **Mentoring involves a relationship between two people – and in this instance, an adult and a young person.** Definitions describe a relationship between a mentor and mentee, often referring to mentors as 'role models' (Bartlett, 2012; Bernstein, et al., 2009; Jacob, et al., 2022; Taussig and Culhane, 2010). Literature sources refer to mentoring as a "*special relationship*" (Busse, 2018) or a friendship between an adult and a young person where the foremost goal of mentoring is the relationship itself (Brady, et al., 2011, Bayer, et al. 2015).

2.4 However, in the context of youth mentoring, this individual aspect of a mentoring relationship is broadening. **Group mentoring models are also used,** where more than one young person engages with a single mentor (usually in a mix of group and 1:1 settings). In some cases, multiple young

people interact and form relationships with more than one adult (Deutsch, et al., 2016).

2.5 **The adult needs to be trusted and not part of a family relationship.** Mentors are often described as unrelated "*trusted adults*" who provide guidance and influence for young people. Both Kanchewa, et al. (2016) and Bayer, et al. (2015) describe this as a caring, nonparental relationship. A young person engaged in one evaluated mentoring programme described this as being able to "*speak to people more about certain things that you wouldn't normally speak about*" (Jacob, et al., 2022). Randolph and Johnson (2008) extend this definition, noting that as trusted and influencing adults, mentors can compensate for a lack of parental connectedness (or strengthen links between parents and children).While it is occasionally the case that mentors have an additional 'official' relationship with the young person (such as a teacher-pupil relationship), this tends not to be common or the norm.

2.6 The literature makes clear that the relationship is fundamental to mentoring, and uses language that reflects the social and emotional bonds that can be observed (terms such as special, friendship, caring). For mentoring project designers and evaluators this is a challenge to recreate (as facilitating these relationships is socially complex) and to interpret and measure (as they change over time and may be characterised differently even within the same pairing.

Mentoring is used to achieve a range of different objectives

2.7 Mentoring can support projects that seek to deliver a wide range of objectives. These include:

- **Employability, self-efficacy and confidence**, for example through a group mentoring programme for young people aged 11-18 who could "*benefit from raised aspirations*", delivered by volunteer mentors through one-hour sessions (Bartlett, 2012).
- **Improved academic achievement, reduced drop-out rates and transition to higher education,** including through a 1:1 mentoring programme for young people aged 9-13 designated to be 'at-risk' for poor academic outcomes, dropping out of school, anti-social behaviour and/or gang involvement (Bernstein, et al., 2009); and a 12-month, 1:1 mentoring programme led by volunteer mentors with STEM careers to young people aged 15-16 (Mtika and Payne, 2014).
- **Improved resilience, connectivity, interpersonal relationships and wellbeing,** including through an activity focused, 1:1 mentoring programme for 'vulnerable' young people aged 12-16, involving two-hour weekly sessions for one academic year (Busse, 2018); and a 6-month, community-based mentoring programme delivered by trained youth workers (who are supported by a CAHMS practitioner) mentoring

young people with mild to moderate mental health and wellbeing difficulties (Jacob, et al., 2022).

- **Reduced drug and alcohol use, use of weapons and other anti-social behaviour,** for example through a 1:1 mentoring programme for young people aged 9-13 designated to be 'at-risk' for poor academic outcomes, dropping out of school, anti-social behaviour and/or gang involvement (Bernstein, et al., 2009).

2.8 Some mentoring interventions have one core thematic objective, for example the Advantage Programme which focused on mental health and wellbeing objectives (Jacob, et al., 2022), or Rock Your Life which focused on labour market prospects (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024). However, most seek to make progress against multiple objectives, for example Project Arrive (Kuperminc, et al., 2019), which aimed to improve young people's resilience (through improving self-efficacy, empathy, problem solving and self-awareness), their engagement with school, and their relationships with their peers and those at home.

2.9 In the evidence reviewed for this REA, objectives were often made explicit in describing individual programmes. This is likely because of funders' objectives, and because most of the evidence involved evaluation, and therefore specific and measurable aims were required.

Mentoring is targeted at specific groups of young people with identifiable needs

2.10 **Often (but not always), mentoring involves targeting particular at-risk groups,** (e.g. vulnerable young people, at risk for poor academic outcomes and anti-social behaviour) often at "*critical junctures*", or transition periods, in their lives (Bernstein, et al., 2009). As Converse and Lignugaris (2009) note, mentoring involves fostering a trusting and supportive relationship between an adult and a young person who would otherwise have limited opportunities.

2.11 In some cases, this can include **tailoring interventions for groups of young people with specific needs to achieve defined objectives.** For example, Heppe, et al. (2020) delivered a study exploring how mentoring can improve social participation of young people with a visual impairment, and Taussig and Culhane (2010) explored the impact of mentoring on mental health outcomes for maltreated children in foster care. Both of these examples illustrate that mentoring interventions targeted at specific groups of young people also seek to generate outcomes considered most appropriate or important to that cohort. It is also notable that both of these interventions were community-based interventions rather than school-based interventions. It is not clear from the literature why this is, but it could be as a result of the desired outcomes of these interventions (i.e. social participation and mental health) being less school-related – targeting of school interventions tended to be on groups who were at risk of school drop out or poor academic outcomes.

2.12 While targeting interventions at particular groups was common across the literature, there was also recognition that those at greatest risk would likely benefit from more intensive interventions (for example, with professionals such as social workers or mental health practitioners), and mentoring alone would not be appropriate for these groups. This report explores this further in Section 3.

Mentoring can be a discrete intervention or delivered alongside other activities

2.13 Interviewees noted that mentoring had many different forms, and **it was difficult to set parameters on *"where mentoring finishes"*** and where other types of intervention, such as tutoring, coaching or youth work, begin.

2.14 This is seen across literature sources, with considerable differences in how mentoring interventions are applied. Some mentoring interventions stand alone, whereas others are delivered alongside additional modes of support. For example, Holt, et al. (2008) describe an intervention in which mentoring is delivered to students integrated alongside a programme which teaches young people leadership skills and connects young people across year groups, and Taussig and Culhane (2010) describe mentoring as one component of a broader programme of work involving the delivery of a skills development curriculum.

Mentoring typologies

2.15 There are two distinct typologies of youth mentoring evident in the literature. The first typology characterises different forms of mentoring based on where it takes place (in the community or in schools), and the second type of mentoring describes on the how the relationship is focused (goal-oriented or relationship-focused).

Mentoring is often (but not always) delivered either in schools or the community

2.16 **There is a clear distinction in most of the literature between school-based and community-based mentoring.**

- School-based mentoring, characterised both by where and when it is carried out (on school premises, in the school day), but also as a result of referral mechanisms (which come from school staff), has certain advantages. Because it can be integrated into the school environment, it can be organised efficiently, mentors are better able to advocate on young people's behalf (because structures are in place), and school-based interventions are often better able to reach at-risk youth, as long as they attend school (Rhodes, 2002, cited in Heppen, et al., 2017).
- Community-based mentoring meanwhile can be flexible, with mentors and mentees able to meet however frequently they wish and for periods of time longer than a school term or year, and relationships do

not need to end if a young person moves school. In addition, community-based mentoring can open a wide range of opportunities for engagement in various social activities which facilitate relationship building (Rhodes, 2002, cited in Heppen, et al., 2017).

2.17 In practice, interventions can involve both school and community-based elements. For example, the Quantum Opportunity Programme recruited students through schools but delivered mentoring and other support activities in community settings. This approach allowed the programme to identify students who were in need of further support and continue to deliver activities throughout school vacations and the summer holidays (Schirm, et al., 2006). By delivering services in a community setting, the programme was able to continue delivery even if students moved to another school, dropped out, received custodial sentences, or were inactive from the programme for a long period.

2.18 This REA has drawn on literature focused predominantly on school-based mentoring (40 of the 49 papers) given that Building Futures will be delivered in schools, but has included some community-based mentoring programmes, if those programmes included a component of interest to Youth Futures. In the following sections, the review has drawn out any key differences of note between school- and community-based interventions.

Mentoring can be instrumental, developmental, or a mix of both

2.19 Some literature discusses **distinct typologies of 'instrumental' (goal oriented) and 'developmental' (relationship-focused) mentoring.** However, views on the relative benefits and importance of each typology differ across the literature. This is further explored in section 3.

2.20 Karcher (2020) brings both types together and notes that **the two typologies are not wholly discrete;** they are both types *of "collaborative authorship"* which place 'we' at the centre (as opposed to unilateral authorship which puts 'me' at the centre, as the mentor or the mentee). Therefore, interventions can integrate both typologies by viewing them as *"complementary and central."* An interviewee involved in evaluating mentoring programmes also emphasised the importance of finding a balance between the two approaches, particularly if an intervention is subject to an RCT.

2.21 Some interviewees also reflected on the key tensions between instrumental and developmental typologies of mentoring. Notably:

- Different mentor and mentee personalities may favour one type compared to another. Some mentors may feel more comfortable with a more prescriptive, goal-oriented practice, whereas mentees may take greater benefit from a more relational, young-person centred approach.

- Evaluation methods may favour goal-oriented interventions because pre-determined outcomes can be more straightforward to measure. However, this may miss those incidental outcomes that may arise from relationship building. This may also limit the flexibility of the mentor and mentee to use time to explore outcomes that are of more interest to the young person.

2.22 It is not possible to assess the balance of developmental-focused and instrumental-focused interventions across the literature. While some of the literature discusses these typologies, typically, the interventions included in this review focus on both relationship development and goal setting. While some interventions do prioritise relationship development, it cannot be inferred from the evidence whether goal setting is also a component of these interventions or not. Section 3 expands on how both developmental and instrumental mentoring have been effectively implemented to achieve outcomes.

3. Effective practice in mentoring delivery

3.1 The evidence describes several aspects of delivery that worked efficiently and effectively within their delivery context. This section summarises those accounts and draws on interviews conducted with nine experts, and specifically references 31 documents. In summary:

- 18 of these 31 papers involved an RCT (or pilot RCT) of mentoring interventions, and two drew on quasi-experimental approaches to evaluate interventions. Four papers evaluated interventions using mixed-methods approaches, and three papers used predominantly qualitative approaches. These papers covered 25 interventions. Three papers were reviews of evidence or meta-analyses, and one was a tool validation study.
- Most (22) focused on school-based interventions, and eight focused on community-based interventions (one did not specify).
- 17 focused on USA-based interventions, with seven based in England. Four were focused on mentoring interventions based in other UK (Scotland) or European countries (Ireland, Germany, Netherlands).
- Most (24) interventions used a primarily 1:1 mentoring model, of which 20 also integrated other activities (e.g. developmental activities, tutoring, or alongside other types of interventions including some group mentoring). Four interventions used a primarily group mentoring model, although in practice, some of these also included elements of 1:1 activity.
- Only one intervention was universal (i.e. accessible to all individuals), 24 were targeted interventions, primarily for those at risk of poor academic performance or school drop-out, or who were facing difficulties at school. Other target groups covered by the 31 documents included those with mild to moderate mental health difficulties, visual impairment and young people in foster care.
- Of the 22 papers which specified the intervention length, 10 focused on open ended interventions (of which most were Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring interventions), a further seven focused on interventions which ran for at least one academic year (but had a clear end date), and five focused on interventions which spanned between five to nine months.

3.2 Given the flexibility with which youth mentoring is defined, as outlined in section 2, it is unsurprising that there are many different delivery models.

Nevertheless, many youth mentoring interventions typically follow a similar process of delivery, simplified in Figure 3-1 (Busse, 2018).

Figure 3-1: Formal mentoring programme processes

Source: Re-presented from Busse (2018)

3.3 In the context of Building Futures, this evidence review categorises practices into each of the four process phases (before, start, during and end), and presents effective practices drawing from both the literature and interviewees.

Before mentoring

Programme design should consider several factors and make clear and deliberate decisions accordingly

3.4 Delivery teams and funders need to consider the different factors and make clear and deliberate decisions about the young people they want to support, the model they want to adopt and which mentors are best placed to support their objectives. In doing so they may need to balance

certain factors such as the priorities of the funders, and the role of monitoring and evaluation evidence.

3.5 Prior to programme development, Komosa-Hawkins (2010) emphasised the need to **invest time and resource to research and plan for programme development and evaluation**. The literature and interviewees, particularly those involved in delivery, highlighted several key considerations in designing a mentoring intervention which meets the needs of young people and supports their objectives:

- **Gather data and insights from all stakeholders**: This includes students, parents, and school staff.
    - Engaging with stakeholders at an early stage can enable stakeholder buy-in at from the outset. Engagement can include conducting individual interviews or focus groups, undertaking an initial needs assessment, and forming an advisory council with stakeholders (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010).
    - In a mentoring programme evaluated by Wong, et al. (2023b), programme coordinators had conducted effective scoping exercises with school staff, allowing them to tailor the programme to respond to the specific needs/ concerns at each school.
    - One interviewee involved in intervention delivery described the involvement of young people, teachers and career leads in the design of their mentoring models, to ensure that the model is fit for purpose.
- **Start small**: The initial needs assessment and advisory board can inform the focus and objectives of the mentoring programme. With these in place, Komosa-Hawkins (2010) recommends programmes start small and carefully consider budget constraints, ensuring that adequate funding and/or grant fund application writing is considered in planning.
- **Integrate monitoring and evaluation from the outset**: One interviewee involved in intervention delivery talked about the challenges in delivering evidence-based programme design in the constraints of commissioners and funders. They are often contractually required to deliver to a certain specification set by a funder or commissioner, so it can sometimes be difficult to implement their own learning around what works (based on their previous experience).

3.6 While this section focuses primarily on considerations for school-based mentoring interventions, it is of note that the literature does emphasise consideration of if school or community-based mentoring is most appropriate. Herrera, et al. (2007) note that while both approaches come with distinct advantages, **different types of young people are likely to benefit from the different modes of mentoring**, as young people have different needs that neither option can fully address alone. They state that

community-based mentoring might be best suited to those who are missing a role model and would benefit from a stable, long-term mentoring relationship, whereas school-based mentoring is likely to better suit young people who would benefit from additional attention in school to improve their behaviour and performance.

3.7 As a result, they advocate for a "*complementary approach*." Using both strategies, they report, would ensure that an intervention can reach a wide and diverse group of young people, (which, as noted above, can be more difficult for community-based interventions), alongside offering the longevity of mentoring relationship which school-based interventions often struggle with. The Quantum Opportunity Programme demonstrates the benefits of a complementary approach. Combining the elements of both a school-based and community-based model, the Quantum Opportunities Programme was able to target students and refer them to more specialist support in the community where needed (Schirm, et al., 2006).

3.8 The difference between the aims and objectives, and therefore, outcomes, of community-based and school-based interventions were also highlighted by interviewees. They stated that school-based mentoring interventions were more likely to achieve specific outcomes, such as those associated with attainment or attendance, given the original objectives and focus of many school-based mentoring interventions. Community-based interventions were more likely to achieve a broader range of outcomes, particularly those associated with positive behaviours, improved health, and wellbeing.

3.9 When considering good practice in intervention design, interviewees advocated for **interventions to be designed with the needs of a specific cohort of young people**. This approach is widely used, with a review of 39 school-based mentoring interventions finding that most programmes are selective prevention programmes that deliver structured activities directly related to their specific target cohort (Randolph and Johnson, 2008).

3.10 To ensure effective delivery against intended objectives and to best enable positive youth outcomes, one expert interviewee recommended having a plausible and well-articulated Theory of Change[2] in place. Another interviewee involved in intervention evaluation stated that models of schools-based mentoring provision should be tailored to the specific needs of schools and individuals engaged, too.

[2] A Theory of Change is a model that explains the logical sequence of events from inputs and activities that are expected to lead to specific outcomes within a given context.

Effective programme coordination involves a range of administrative and relationship-building responsibilities

3.11 **Effective management and programme coordination are necessary** to set up essential infrastructure and policies, devise monitoring systems to monitor participation and engagement, and track expenses to ensure financial sustainability of the programme (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). The amount of resource allocated to programme coordination can vary.

3.12 However, MENTOR (2005, as cited in Komosa-Hawkins, 2010) recommends hiring a full-time coordinator for programmes with approximately 25 or more matches. They note that coordinating a mentoring programme which serves adolescents can present more challenges than programmes with younger children, who tend to be more receptive and less likely to withdraw. Effective project management can prevent early termination of a mentoring relationship, as oversight and management from programme coordinators can help to ensure the satisfaction and engagement of participants, thereby improving retention.

3.13 The role of the coordinator must include several key responsibilities for smooth delivery of the mentoring programme:

- **Liaising with schools.** One interviewee involved in programme delivery highlighted the importance of "*cultivating and maintaining good, strategic relationships with organisations and schools.*" They noted that they worked closely with schools to ensure they are using mentor time effectively, and help them to understand the time commitment required from mentors.
- **Checking in with mentors and mentees** for the duration of the programme, enabling positive mentoring experiences for all involved (MENTOR, 2005, as cited in Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). In the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programme, coordinators were required to check in with volunteers and young people (and/or their parents) once a month for the first 12 months of delivery, allowing them to track relationships and take action where additional help was needed (Herrera, et al., 2007).
- **Engaging with other stakeholders where helpful and needed.** One interviewee involved in programme delivery worked with employer organisations (who employ mentors) to help them understand the value of their employee's mentoring role, and the importance of allowing the mentor to work flexibly.
- **Ensuring mentor caseloads are manageable,** with mentors having enough time and resource to adequately deliver mentorship to each mentee (York Consulting, 2024). As is discussed later in this section,

caseload can vary according to availability of mentors and whether they are paid or volunteer mentors.

Active school involvement is essential and can be supported by key practices

3.14 There is limited evidence around how schools are recruited to engage in mentoring programmes. That said, one study discusses the **importance of schools being actively involved and engaged in mentoring interventions**. Mtika and Payne (2014), evaluating a Scottish-Based Mentoring Programme, note that school support provided reassurance to mentees and additional support for mentors, leading to higher quality relationships.

3.15 In the interviews conducted as part of this study, interviewees involved in intervention delivery reported that **communications with schools are key to delivering effective school-based mentoring interventions.** In particular, one interviewee noted that a good relationship with senior leadership in schools is important in negotiating school timetables, ensuring space for mentoring to occur. They also noted that while building good relationships with schools is key to success, it does mean that interventions may be difficult to replicate in other schools where relationships are less successful.

3.16 Highlighting the importance of relationships between mentoring programme coordinators and school staff, York Consulting (2024) provided **a framework on good practice in engaging schools in mentoring delivery**. In their evaluation of the Watchtower Project pilot, a school-based mentoring programme aimed at improving attendance rates, an effective working relationship between mentors and school staff was characterised as having:

- Defined communication practices (e.g. set meeting times, informal communication)
- Named point of contact among school staff for mentors to talk about any additional support or alterations needed for mentees
- Flexibility with school day arrangements while pupils built up attendance – Mentors in this evaluation said that flexibility and capacity to respond to requests for additional support among school staff contributed to success for certain mentees.
- Mentors sharing successful strategies for engaging specific pupils with school contacts.

3.17 However, it is also important to **highlight the independence of the mentors from school staff.** York Consulting (2024) found that young people and their parents were more likely to engage with the programme when it was made clear that mentors were independent and that the programme was

externally provided. Young people valued the confidentiality of one programme evaluated by Wong, et al. (2023b), with one young person commented that "*[In the mentoring programme], you can say stuff you've done and you can actually talk about it without getting grassed on.*"

3.18 This was similarly important in cases where relationships between parents / carers and school staff were strained. Illustrating the benefits of highlighting the independence of mentors from school staff, mentees in a boxing-based programme said that they viewed programme staff and mentors differently to school staff, with some regarding them as friends they can relate to (Wong, et al., 2023a).

3.19 Another key consideration when engaging with schools is **finding appropriate neutral and private space for mentoring.** Citing Clutterbuck (2001), Mtika and Payne (2014) emphasise the importance of school involvement in "*meaningful dialogue*" with mentors if meetings are school based, to identify and agree on mutually appropriate spaces in which mentor meetings can take place. Having these discussions at the outset of any intervention would improve trust between teachers and mentors.

3.20 However, one interviewee involved in intervention delivery noted that **for some, school is not a safe environment**. Similarly, Mtika and Payne (2014) highlighted challenges in finding appropriate spaces in which privacy can be upheld, reticence amongst teachers to let mentors meet privately with students, and power imbalances when meetings are held in schools and mentors are automatically seen as authority figures. When evaluating a Scottish-Based Mentoring Programme, they found that students would have felt more comfortable engaging with their mentor outside of school. As a result, some mentors held meetings in informal public spaces outside of school, such as a coffee shop, to align with mentee preferences.

3.21 These issues highlight the challenges facing school-based mentoring interventions in ensuring that power dynamics and trust do not adversely impact their effectiveness. However, the literature does not elaborate on how (or if) in-school spaces can be adapted to support young people to feel more safe or comfortable.

Mentoring programmes should also consider whether, and how, to engage parents / carers

3.22 Effective engagement of parents/ carers in the mentoring programme can reinforce key messages outside of the mentoring relationship (Rowland, et al., 2024). This engagement was described as parents being supportive of the aims and objectives of mentoring. One mentee on the programme reflected that, even after the end of the programme, their

parent/carer continued to support them towards the goals the young person created with their mentor. Conversely, inconsistent messaging at home from parents who are hesitant about their child's participation can cause barriers to outcomes being realised.

3.23 Recognising the **value of involving parents / carers** in mentoring programmes, several interventions implemented some level of parental involvement. For example:

- The Watchtower Project pilot (evaluated by York Consulting, 2024) and the Breakthrough Mentoring programme (evaluated in Busse, 2018) supported **active dialogue between mentors and parents**. In the former, parents and carers received updates from mentors around progress being made, as well as conversations with mentors about how they could support this progress at home. Feedback from mentees showed that active communication with their parent/ carer enabled progress and messages from the mentoring relationship to be re-enforced at home (York Consulting, 2024).
- A Scottish-Based Mentoring programme (evaluated in Mtika and Payne, 2014) involved a **mentor-mentee 'mingle' session** for mentors and mentees to meet for the first time, to which parents were invited.

3.24 Randolph and Johnson (2008) discuss this issue in more detail, noting that while many mentoring programmes included a parental involvement component, there was variability in how this was implemented across different programmes. They reflect that this variation is likely to have an effect on youth outcomes, but that it is under-researched. However, Rowland, et al. (2024) posit that **ineffective communication with parents/ carers might lead to a misunderstanding about the purpose of mentoring**. They refer here to cases where there might be stigma around mentoring, with some parents perhaps viewing interventions as exposing family problems or being about mental illness, or where families might have had negative previous experience around welfare provisions.

3.25 Overall, the evidence regarding what effective engagement with parents and carers should look like, including good practice around the frequency of involvement, was limited within the reviewed literature.

There are multiple approaches to recruiting mentors

3.26 Summarising best practices in developing school-based mentoring programmes, Komosa-Hawkins (2010) proposes several practices around successful recruitment of volunteer mentors in the programme.

- **Using a range of media and outreach tools,** including traditional (e.g. letters, flyers, and phone calls) and online media (e.g. emails and websites) to reach a wider base of mentors and mentees.
- **Holding a mandatory information session** for prospective mentors and mentees to gain a better understanding of what the programme involves, the time commitment needed, and the outcomes that can and cannot be achieved in the timeframe of the programme.
- **Having a waitlist of mentors and mentees** to account for participant attrition during an intervention.

3.27 Mentoring interventions identified through this REA used a broad range of recruitment strategies. One German mentoring programme recruited university students on a voluntary basis to a pool of applicants, then screened them through a combination of certificates of good conduct and personal interviews (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024). Another programme hired full time mentors to deliver their intervention from a pool of applicants (Heppen, et al., 2017). Interventions also incentivised mentors in different ways to support recruitment, explored later in this section. However, there is limited evidence in studies reviewed around the impacts of mentor recruitment strategies on youth outcomes.

Good mentors have relevant life experience and a commitment to mentoring

3.28 Mentors should have the **appropriate background to meet mentees' needs** and be sufficiently committed to establishing and maintaining a relationship with their mentee (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010).

3.29 Some studies **advocate for older or more experienced mentors as effective in sustaining mentoring relationships.** Bernstein, et al. (2009) propose that while recruiting younger mentors, such as high school or college-age students, can increase the number of mentees a programme can serve, younger mentors may not have enough life experience and insight to offer to the young people they are mentoring. Relatedly, Grossman, et al. (2012) found that college-age mentors were 46% less likely to have an intact match. They attribute this to the "*unpredictable schedules and transitory nature*" of college students, which can affect their ability to provide continuity, or simply being less prepared for the role.

3.30 However, Resnjanskij, et al.'s (2024) study of a German mentoring programme that recruits university student mentors found that students can provide meaningful advice to young people on what it takes to complete a further education. Likewise, one interviewee involved in intervention delivery noted that younger mentors, who have recently had the same experiences as young people, could be more relatable role

models for mentees. For this reason, they sought to recruit young mentors from similar backgrounds with lived experience of the same challenges mentees are facing.

3.31 **Recruiting mentors with prior experience of mentoring could lead to more successful relationships**. Mentors with prior experience of mentoring young people were 55% more likely to sustain their matches compared to other mentors, likely due to having more realistic expectations about the mentoring experience (Grossman, et al., 2012). Additionally, mentors with greater exposure to young people, or previous experience in youth activities as a young person themselves, are more likely to be confident in their ability to mentor a child, be a role model, and provide emotional support (Herrera et al., 2007).

3.32 Mentors coming from **professional backgrounds** that involve working with young people or prior experience in a "*helping role or profession*" (Taussig and Culhane, 2010) are **more likely to have the necessary skills** to engage with their mentees, be sufficiently motivated to actively work towards the improvement of their mentee, and see positive outcomes with young people. This was expressed in multiple sources of evidence:

- In an evaluation of a mentoring programme for young people with mental health difficulties, existing skills gained from prior experience working with schools and colleges was identified by mentors as a key factor to their ability to provide insight and advice to their mentee (Jacob, et al., 2022).
- Karcher (2020) proposes that a professional background in working with young people can be viewed as a proxy indicator that a mentor will understand the importance of creating a compassionate environment to allow a young person to feel comfortable enough to discuss difficult topics or tasks.
- In the fieldwork conducted to support this review, one interviewee involved in intervention delivery recruited mentors with a minimum of three years' previous experience in working with young people, for example, former teachers, community youth workers, etc. These mentors become full-time staff at the delivery organisation, so must show "*a genuine commitment to support young people*."

3.33 The **personal attitudes and outlook of mentors** can also make a difference. Mentors' attitudes towards young people and their ability to connect and empathise with them was associated with sustained mentoring relationships and positive outcomes (Busse, 2018).

All mentors need training, and a good peer, and professional, support infrastructure

3.34 Providing **good quality and well-resourced support** to mentors is more likely to lead to effective mentoring relationships, and in turn, more positive outcomes, compared to recruiting and training replacements (Grossman, et al., 2012). However, in the context of school-based mentoring, it is vital that the support offered to mentors realistically takes into account the capacity of the school or programme staff to adequately deliver this (Randolph and Johnson, 2008). Mentoring programmes where insufficient resources are allocated to providing support to mentors can make the role more difficult for mentors. Jacob, et al. (2022) note that the lack of relevant resources led to mentors feeling ill-equipped to effectively carry out the role.

3.35 Several best practice mechanisms for providing mentor training were identified in the literature:

- **Induction and pre-training session:** Comprehensive induction and training sessions prior to the mentoring relationship can orient mentors about the goals of the programme and better equip them with tools and techniques to use with mentees (Herrera, et al., 2007). Topics can include effective time management, trust building strategies, and communication strategies (Converse and Lignugaris, 2009). Training sessions can also be used to inform mentors about specific challenges or sensitivities with their mentees, which can enable them to appropriately tailor their approach to the mentoring relationship (Kanchewa, et al., 2016).
- **Tailored training sessions:** In addition to providing training on general topics and techniques, training must also be tailored to cover the needs of the population served by the programme (Jacob, et al., 2022; Mtika and Payne, 2014). Similarly, expert interviewees recommended that mentors are equipped with the tools needs to support specific groups (e.g. providing training around cultural competency).
- **Training duration and frequency:** While too many training requirements might pose a greater challenge for mentors in terms of time commitment, mentors who received less than two hours of training were associated with lower satisfaction rates and poorer quality of mentoring relationships (Rhodes and Spencer, 2005 as cited in Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). Several programmes delivered 3-4 hour training sessions for mentors (Kuperminc, et al., 2019; Holt, et al., 2008).

3.36 The literature also provided several recommendations around monitoring and providing ongoing support to mentors:

- **Regular scheduled support sessions between mentors and programme staff:** The frequency of these sessions can vary, likely according to the needs and key objectives of the programme. The Advantage Programme, a mentoring programme for young people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties (Jacob, et al., 2022) supported their mentors with weekly sessions. Mentors were trained youth workers, but were provided weekly supervision by a specialist CAMHS practitioner, alongside wider training activities (including in cognitive behavioural therapy). In contrast, Campus Kids, a mentoring programme mentioned in Komosa-Hawkins (2010), hosted monthly reflection meetings for mentors.
- **Ongoing relationship monitoring:** Periodic monitoring or assessment with mentors can avoid mentors feeling unappreciated and overwhelmed, and mentees feeling unsupported or disappointed – they note that these feelings, if left unaddressed, can lead to premature termination of a relationship, resulting in adverse consequences for both mentor and mentee (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010).
- **Ad hoc support from programme staff**: Highlighting the potential benefits of open lines of communication with programme staff, mentors on the Advantage Programme felt that working with and speaking to the programme team allowed them to "*bounce ideas off each other*" (Jacob, et al., 2022).
- **Peer support sessions:** Interviewees also recommended facilitating peer support sessions so that mentors can share learning on techniques they're using, and discuss difficulties and challenges faced. It was noted that this can improve consistency of delivery across mentoring relationships. However, examples of mentor peer group support in the literature is limited. Of the 39 school-based mentoring evaluations reviewed by Randolph and Johnson (2008), only one programme facilitated a mentor support group.

Mentors need personal reward or satisfaction to encourage retention, but this can vary across mentoring programmes

3.37 To support continued mentor engagement and retention, **incentives for mentors must be built into mentoring interventions** (Barlett, 2012). The appropriate incentives can vary across mentors with different backgrounds and could be financial, peer recognition, career development or otherwise (e.g. contribution to company CSR, training, etc.).

3.38 While most programmes reviewed as part of this REA recruited volunteer mentors, some programmes **hired full time, paid mentors.** For example:

- In the Check and Connect mentoring intervention, it was assumed that full time mentors would have greater capacity to take on a larger case load of about 50 student mentees, meeting with each mentee at least twice a month (Heppen, et al., 2017).
- Similarly, the Quantum Opportunities Programme involved more intensive case management and support for young people, which likely benefitted from hiring full-time employees with expertise in social work (Schirm, et al., 2006).

3.39 For both programmes, hiring full time employees was especially helpful as these were both multi-year interventions. However, there are also some benefits of hiring mentors for short-term programmes; a mentoring programme evaluated by Rowland, et al. (2024) employed full time mentors to ensure the consistency in the quality of mentoring and to accommodate the significant time requirements of evaluating the programme using an RCT approach. However, the literature does not explore the relative costs and benefits of using volunteers with professional support compared with paid mentors within comparable programmes.

3.40 **Interviewees had mixed views on the effectiveness of paid or volunteer mentors**. Some, reflecting Heppen, et al. above, reported that the payment model meant that mentors were more likely to engage with the programme long-term, reducing the negative impacts of mentors exiting a mentoring relationship early. One interviewee involved in intervention delivery stated they had tested both paid and volunteering models and found the paid approach resulted in a more sustainable mentor population. As their mentoring model was long term (up to 4 years), this was most appropriate. Another interviewee involved in intervention delivery agreed, noting that paid mentors were more likely to be embedded in local networks, know the local landscape (e.g. job market, apprenticeship opportunities, mental health services, etc.) and share this knowledge with their mentees.

3.41 In contrast, **some interviewees advocated for a volunteer model.** One expert interviewee stated that having an unpaid mentor could be more beneficial in generating a trusting and quality mentor relationship, as the mentee feels that an adult is engaging with them just because they want to as there were *"no obvious external benefits,"* in contrast to a paid teacher or youth worker. They noted that this was particularly significant for certain groups (e.g. young people who had experienced care). That said, the interviewee also recognised challenges in recruitment of volunteer mentors – they noted in a trial they delivered, 35% of young people were not matched because of a lack of volunteer engagement.

3.42 In general, interviewees acknowledged that **volunteer models required more effort to retain mentors**, including ensuring adequate training and

implementing clear exit processes (e.g. a notice period). One interviewee involved in intervention delivery noted, "*We spend a lot of time training [volunteer mentors], and we always emphasise that they need to commit their time with young people, because those young people have been let down so many times, [mentors] cannot miss the appointments that they make with them.*"

3.43 Some literature sources also advocated for volunteer models. Jacob, et al. (2022) note that for some mentors, **intrinsic purpose and wanting to make a difference** is the key motivation to give their time to a mentoring programme. In addition, providing **opportunities for personal development** was found to incentivise continued participation, offsetting some issues that might arise from being a mentor (e.g., burnout resulting from increased demand on mentors' time). In an evaluation of the employability-focused mentoring programme Mosaic, mentors reported improvement in their personal skills and professional skills, which was proposed as a contributing factor to the high rate of satisfaction and retention among mentors (Barlett, 2012).

Effective use of data helps identify and recruit the right young people to engage in mentoring interventions

3.44 Mentoring interventions should carefully consider how to target and engage with young people. One interviewee involved in evaluating interventions noted that **setting clear eligibility criteria** was key to ensuring the intervention reached the right students.

3.45 To support identification of eligible young people, the literature recommended the use of a **wide range of data or indicators to identify young people at higher risk,** including those at-risk of becoming NEET, who would potentially benefit from mentoring interventions.

- Early Warning Indicators (EWI) relating to academic attainment and attendance rates were developed by Gurantz (2011, as cited in Kuperminc, et al., 2019) were used to identify students with a higher likelihood of dropping out.
- Similarly using attainment and attendance as indicators, the Check and Connect Mentoring Programme also considered performance against a 'citizenship grade,' which was an indicator of general behaviour and school participation (Heppen, et al., 2017).
- One interviewee involved in intervention delivery similarly employed a data-led approach to identifying at-risk youth by using behaviour points and attendance levels. Data might also be available at a local level. In England, local authorities are required by the Department for

Education to collect data to identify young people who are not participating, or are NEET, using a range of indicators[3].

3.46 Several indicators were also identified among young people in successful mentoring relationships:

- **Young people who had recently experienced stress** (i.e. in the last three months preceding the mentoring relationship) were likely to remain in the mentoring programme for longer (Grossman, et al., 2012).
- **Young people who tend to have a stronger reaction to rejection or criticism were** found to be more likely to engage in mentoring programmes for longer. This might be due to mentees avoiding rejection by engaging more fully into the mentoring relationship or mentors being more hesitant to end the mentoring relationship as they get a better understanding of this vulnerability in the young person (Grossman, et al., 2012)). Mentoring is also considered a well-suited intervention for decreasing rejection sensitive behaviour as young people are provided with a safe setting to practice taking relational risks (Kanchewa, et al., 2016).

Young people rarely volunteer to be mentored – referral mechanisms need to be sensitive to this

3.47 In several school-based mentoring programmes, **school staff (e.g. teachers, guidance counsellors, etc.) play an essential role referring and recruiting young people.** In an evaluation of the Watchtower Project pilot, it was recommended that the referral mechanism (e.g. referral form) is simple and that support is provided to school staff where needed (York Consulting, 2024). One interviewee involved in intervention delivery noted that "*long conversations*" with schools to make the rationale for the recruitment and referral approach clear ensured schools are on board.

3.48 However, while schools can play a role in recruitment and identification of young people, **a young person's willingness to engage in the programme** was also highlighted. One interviewee involved in the delivery of a mentoring intervention said that alongside clear criteria for young person enrolment to the programme, young people have to volunteer or make a personal commitment to the programme from the outset. They noted that they often have long waiting lists, and generally, those engaged were those that were identified through applying eligibility criteria.

3.49 **Involving young people who are not the target population for an intervention** (i.e. involving those on track to get their predicted GCSE grades in an intervention targeted at young people at risk of exclusion

[3] Department for Education (2024) *Participation of young people in education, employment or training*

and becoming NEET) was noted to be an effective method of reducing the stigma of mentoring involvement by interviewees delivering mentoring interventions. In an intervention where this didn't happen, the organisation reflected on the challenges. They noted that some students involved in their intervention saw mentoring as a punishment.

3.50 The importance of reducing stigma in recruiting young people as mentees is highlighted by an evaluation of a mentoring programme by Wong, et al. (2023b). Focus group data showed that the programme successfully recruited and engaged young people, with feedback showing that mentees felt privileged rather than stigmatised by selection.

Young people recruited into mentoring interventions should not include those who are at greatest risk

3.51 Targeting specific groups at higher risk (e.g. of becoming NEET, becoming involved in anti-social behaviours, or not fulfilling their potential) was found to have stronger outcomes than programmes addressed to a wider, more general population (Christensen, et al., 2020).

3.52 However, **evidence suggests that young people deemed to be at the *highest* risk levels or demonstrating signs of significant social or emotional turmoil should be screened out of the mentoring** (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). Grossman, et al. (2012) concur, noting that mentors do not typically have the capacity or willingness to support these young people, and that mentees in these cohorts may find it relatively difficult to establish close relationships with mentors. These issues put these relationships at greater risk for early match termination, which can have an adverse effect on young people who are most likely to experience negative consequences associated with rejection (Downey, Khouri, & Feldman, 1997 as cited in Grossman, et al., 2012).

3.53 Echoing this idea, interviewees noted that if a young person's challenges are more severe, mentoring by itself is unlikely to have an impact. Those experiencing the most severe challenges are likely to benefit from a more intensive multi-dimensional intervention. Therefore, mentees at the highest risk levels or currently experiencing challenges should be referred to different support models (Rhodes and Lowe, 2008 as cited in Komosa-Hawkins, 2010).

3.54 This is a practice reflected in several of the school-based mentoring programmes reviewed.

- In the Advantage programme, youth clubs or GP practices helped to assess and screen mentees, with only young people who were found to

have mild to moderate mental health needs referred onto the programme (Jacob, et al., 2022).

- In the initial RCT Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE), students who had a history of abuse were excluded from participating in the programme (Karcher, 2020).

3.55 Mentoring does have a role in different support models for the highest at risk young people. The Quantum Opportunity Programme for example, supported low performing students in schools with high dropout rates for up to five years. It involved individual case management by experienced social workers who carried out mentoring activity, and involved wider support programmes such as transport and substance abuse treatment programmes (Schirm, et al., 2006). Notably, the programme still screened out young people with severe physical and learning disabilities in cases where programme participation would be considered inappropriate.

Start of mentoring

There are different considerations to inform the mentor-mentee match

3.56 Ensuring an effective match between a mentor and mentee was discussed across the literature. Some matches were made based on **career goals and mentors' professional background.** On the former, mentors recruited into school-based programmes evaluated in the reviews often come from a range of different backgrounds. In the Scottish mentoring programme evaluated by Mtika and Payne (2014), the coordinator and programme steering committee used the information about mentors' professional background and mentees' career interests to inform their matching process.

3.57 Matches were also made based on **mutual interests between mentor and mentee**. The ability to connect with the young person based on their interests can help facilitate a more effective mentoring relationship. Showing interest in topics of importance to the mentee builds communication and trust (Jacob, et al., 2022). One interviewee involved in intervention delivery said they used this approach and matched mentor and mentees based on a young person's hobbies or interests. Similarly, Mtika and Payne's (2014) Scottish-Based Mentoring programme issued a questionnaire to help the project steering committee match mentors and mentees, which included a section on hobbies. Interviewees reflected that while it's not always possible to match on exact needs, it is important to respect a young person's wishes and recognise their individual needs where appropriate.

3.58 Some studies also matched mentors to young people whose life experience potentially matched theirs. **Shared experiences have been found to enable more empathetic understanding in the mentoring**

relationship, with a deeper level of understanding from both parties (Rowland, et al., 2024). For example, an evaluation of a mentoring programme that involved rugby as a group activity found that sharing life histories can be used as a way to improve engagement and enhance credibility of the mentor's messages (Wong, et al., 2023b). A mentor might have been involved in crime when they were young but have since moved on and can act as a role model to young people in similar circumstances.

Matching based on personal characteristics is not always beneficial, but can be useful for some groups

3.59 In their review of best practice in school-based mentoring, Komosa-Hawkins (2010, citing Darling, 2005 and MENTOR, 2009) found there was **no evidence to support the effectiveness of mentor-mentee matching based on personal characteristics** (e.g. ethnic background, gender). Demonstrating this point, in their study on the role of relationship duration on academic outcomes in relation to the Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentoring programme, Grossman, et al. (2012) found that mentoring matches between individuals of similar ethnic backgrounds were no more likely to be sustained over multiple school years. Busse (2018) argues instead that a mentor's cultural competency and ability to navigate differences is more important.

3.60 However, one study (Bernstein, et al., 2009) did identify a positive association between matches where mentors and mentees were of the same race/ethnicity, and academic outcomes (notably reading and English/Language Arts grades). Herrera, et al. (2007) also found that some mentoring programmes and parents preferred matches to be made based on some personal characteristics to ***"provide the child with a role model of a specific gender or race".***

3.61 Similarly, an evaluation of a boxing-based mentoring programme revealed that the programme had recruited all their mentors from a working-class background (Wong, et al., 2023a). The programme coordinators believed that similarity in social class can facilitate understanding between mentor and mentee, particularly around their circumstance and how institutions impact young people.

3.62 While having similar gender or racial backgrounds was not found to have a clear link to mentoring outcomes, **similarity in disability was found to have some positive impact on mentees.** In their evaluation of a mentoring programme for adolescents with visual impairments, Heppe, et al. (2020) found that mentees who had mentors with similar disabilities reported higher satisfaction with social support compared to those who had mentors with no visual impairments. However, Britner, et al. (2006, as cited

in Heppe, et al., 2020) argues that the positive impact of this type of matching might only benefit mentees who had not been previously exposed to positive role models with similar disabilities.

During mentoring

The mentoring relationship should start with setting goals / expectations but should be youth-centred and flexible throughout

3.63 Section 2 sets out the distinct typologies of instrumental (goal setting) and developmental (relationship-building) seen across the literature. In general, most mentoring interventions identified by the studies in this REA deliver a mixed model, which is seen as an optimal approach for outcomes achievement.

3.64 Indeed, **individualised goal setting between a mentor and mentee** was considered good practice by interviewees. They noted that goals should be developed jointly between the mentor and mentee, should be focused on the mentee's individual needs, and should seek to challenge the mentee. Having a plan or tool to support mentors in delivering this process was considered to be effective practice in goal setting. Tracking progress against set goals was also highlighted as good practice, for example through using reflective practice techniques.

- Some evaluated interventions involved goal setting between the young person and mentor. In Jacob, et al.'s (2022) evaluation of the Advantage Programme tailored goals (e.g. getting exam ready, getting into university, making new friends) were established at the outset of the match, and then monitored and updated as the relationship progressed. Mentees felt this provided motivation, inspiration and a sense of focus and clarity.
- In the evaluation delivered by Rowland, et al. (2024), goal setting provided a **framework to focus the mentoring relationship**, providing a sense of intentionality and structure to the mentoring exercise. Additionally, the process of identifying goals itself was perceived as a driver of positive change for mentees.
- The literature also highlights the importance of **clarifying expectations of the intervention** between a mentor and mentee at the outset of a relationship. MENTOR (2009, as cited in Komosa-Hawkins, 2010) notes that setting out a realistic description of programme aims, expected outcome and potential challenges can avoid disillusionment, unfulfilled expectations and subsequent early termination. This includes through holding mandatory information sessions prior to mentoring commencing. Similarly, interviewees involved in both delivery and evaluation of interventions highlighted the importance of mentors

acknowledging that progress is not linear, and that sometimes young people can seem further away from their goal before improvement is seen.

3.65 Rhodes, et al. (2017) advocates instrumental mentoring approaches should be used, noting that **a close connection can be the by-product of an instrumental mentoring relationship.** They state that young people may come to trust and appreciate their mentors in the context of working with them on goal-oriented tasks. They note that some evidence suggests that it may be *"of limited value, or even counterproductive,"* for mentors to regard developing an emotional connection with a mentee as the primary goal of a mentoring relationship, or to *"foster relationships that are unconditionally supportive and lack structure"* (citing Hamilton & Hamilton, 2005; Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004). Instead, the structure provided by an instrumental intervention can provide a framework in which mentoring relationships can develop.

3.66 However, Herrera, et al. (2007) cite that an **emphasis on instrumental mentoring *only* is a key risk for school-based mentoring interventions**, as the school context may mean that mentors and mentees spend more time on academic activities *"at the expense of engaging in activities and discussions that could promote stronger, longer-lasting relationships"*.

3.67 In agreement with Herrera's assessment, in their 10-year follow-up study of a school-based mentoring intervention, Karcher (2020) found that those young people who felt they mattered to their mentor, and where time had been spent developing the relationship rather than discussing school problems, had a lower probability of later criminal arrest than those young people whose mentors focused more on problem/achievement focused interaction (i.e. instrumental interactions), but spent less time getting to know their mentee. They hypothesise that this is because relationship building *"sets the stage"* for problem-focused interactions as young people feel valued by their mentors.

3.68 Taking a flexible approach, whereby **mentors let the mentee lead discussion, can build stronger ties and encourage increased engagement.** Rhodes, et al. (2017) describes this youth-centred style as one where the interests and preferences of the young person is emphasized. This approach is intended to encourage the young person to trust and appreciate their mentors as an adult working with them for their interests. Similarly, Converse and Lignugaris (2009) found that mentors who allowed conversation to flow freely and engaged in active listening were viewed more positively than mentors who had more structured activities in mind.

3.69 Allowing the young person to lead and direct sessions gives them space to discuss the issues that they are struggling with the most (York Consulting, 2024). Demonstrating how flexibility can facilitate better understanding

and information exchange, one mentor in an evaluation by Wong, et al. (2023b) shared the example of a group mentoring session only scheduled for 15-20 mins each week. They said, *"If that lasts for an hour because I'm getting a lot of good conversation or they're willing to talk about stuff, I'll let it last an hour simply because I am letting them lead that session a little bit."*

3.70 Similarly, taking a **tailoring the conversation according to the needs to the mentee** were perceived as helpful in improving engagement (Wong, et al., 2023a). Project staff on the boxing-based mentoring intervention found that taking extra time to understand pupil's concerns and help them work through their feelings was a useful way to improve engagement among more reluctant students. Mentors on this programme also spoke about responding differently to mentees based on gender, where issues discussed with boys generally centred on anger, aggression, and understanding their emotions and issues discussed with girls generally centred on anxiety, self-confidence, and body issues.

Mentoring programmes should include activities other than talking

3.71 Two of the three interviewees who delivered mentoring interventions embedded mentoring within a wider package of support. One interviewee provided a rationale for this, noting that by having wider 'fun' activities for young people to engage with, **it improved recruitment and reduced the stigma of being associated with a *"naughty club*."** A boxing-based mentoring intervention evaluated by Wong, et al. (2023a) found that other fun activities were also effective in making the programme more appealing to young people, with some participants having engaged with the intervention due to the focus on boxing or a parent's interest in boxing.

3.72 Interviewees also stated that mentors and mentees engaging with fun activities together was **powerful for building relationships**, and having mentees participate in activities together **supported better peer relationships**. Finally, they stated that they used some activities as prompts for mentoring discussions. Sometimes, participating in activities put young people under pressure or in new or challenging situations; these can be discussion points to support self-management and reflect on coping strategies.

3.73 Likewise, some interventions identified in this review **reserved time for mentors and mentees to engage in broader 'fun' or 'developmental' activities**. Examples ranged from structured group activities such as arts and crafts sessions delivered by mentoring programme coordinators for groups of mentees (Pryce and Keller, 2012) and rugby sessions (Wong, et al., 2023b), to 1:1 activities between a mentor and mentee in their mentoring time, such as going to the gym, playing football, eating at a

fast food restaurant (Busse, 2018) and playing cards or board games (Pryce and Keller, 2012), to group activities, such as engaging in weekend or day trips with cohorts of mentors and mentees organised by mentoring programme coordinators (Brady, 2011).

3.74 Literature sources generally agree **that reserving time to engage in wider activities** is effective in enhancing relationships between mentor and mentee. For example:

- In their evaluation of the Communities in Schools Mentoring programme, Karcher (2020) found that **time spent playing games had a statistically significant correlation to total hours of mentoring** (so predictive of a longer relationship in general), regardless of a young person's age, grades, attendance or problem behaviour. They noted that this finding suggests that developmental activities are relationship-enhancing (although they did not observe any direct association with long-term outcomes).
- Pryce and Keller (2012) also observe that in some cases, the bond between mentor and mentee was strengthened primarily through **joint participation in activities and shared experiences.** Brady, et al. (2011) extends this, noting that organising weekend or day trips for mentors and mentees were helpful in energising matches, while also offering additional social activities for young people.
- Wong, et al. (2023b) evaluated a mentoring programme that used rugby as a "*magnet activity*". They found that engaging mentees through sport, along with their partnership with local Rugby Football League teams, was considered as a critical element by project and school staff and resulted in greater engagement from young people. One programme coordinator commented, "*Give them any sport, whether it be rugby, football, whatever, give them any sort of sport and it gives you that foot in the door. It gives you a reason to start talking to them. It truly is* ***an engagement tool and an engagement vehicle***." Moreover, mentees found these activities to be enjoyable as they were "*demonstrably out-of-school activities.*"

3.75 Matches between mentor and mentee were less likely to endure in mentoring interventions more heavily focused on school work, compared to non-academically focused programmes. Grossman, et al. (2012) attribute this, in part, to programmes placing a heavy focus on academics leading to mentors not engaging with their mentee in a way that is "*responsive to the whole child*".

The quality of a mentoring relationship is essential in sustaining matches and achieving outcomes

3.76 The quality of a mentoring relationship is an important factor in how well and how long young people engage in the mentoring programme (Rhodes, et al., 2017) and is considered as the foundation of effective mentoring interventions (Rowland, et al., 2024).

3.77 The quality of a relationship is linked to multiple facets, including:

- Its **duration and intensity.** In their investigation of mentoring relationships, Pryce and Keller (2012) note that the accumulation of shared experiences gives a relationship form, familiarity and substance.
- The quality of a relationship can also be **influenced by how a mentor approaches the relationship.** Mentors showing engagement, attentiveness and commitment (Pryce and Keller, 2012; Pryce and Keller, 2011) were more likely to form a higher quality relationship with their mentees. Interviewees also highlighted that the quality of a mentoring relationship is driven by how the mentor engages with young people (characterised by a mutually warm, friendly and easy interaction).
- Some interviewees described a quality relationship as involving the creation of an **emotionally safe environment** for young people so mentors and mentees can develop a strong inherent connection, where a mentor can "*safely challenge*" a young person and "*show they care.*" Interviewees stressed the importance of mentors challenging young people about their behaviours or expressed views, rather than simply acknowledging them, and that this could only be effective if the mentee respected and valued the mentor.

3.78 While many studies refer to the quality of a mentoring relationship, this is not very well defined in the evidence. However, one expert interviewee described five core dimensions to the quality of a mentoring relationship:

- **role modelling**: the mentor is a healthy, responsible person that a mentee would want to emulate
- **advocacy**: the mentor is connecting a mentee with the right opportunities to help propel their development
- **relationship and emotional support**: the mentee connects emotionally with the mentor
- **teaching and information providing**: the mentor shares their knowledge and expertise with the mentee

- **shared activities:** the mentor and mentee can participate in activities as companions.

3.79 Studies have also sought to measure relationship quality using various tools, including the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001), Lynch & Cicchetti's (1997) Relatedness Scale, the Youth-Mentor Relationship Questionnaire (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005) and Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier, & Contreras's Security Scale (2000). Section 5 outlines many of these in greater detail.

3.80 The literature identifies clear links between a high-quality mentoring relationship and outcomes. Assessments indicating closer and higher quality relationships have been associated with greater improvement on academic outcomes (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010) and behavioural outcomes (Kanchewa, et al., 2016). For example, youth mentoring relationships with a higher level of trust between mentor and mentee often see better outcomes (Kanchewa, et al., 2016).

3.81 High quality mentoring relationships are also closely linked to improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes across the evidence. In several studies (Jacob, et al., 2022; Brady, et al., 2011; Busse, 2018), **the approach of the mentor was key in generating wellbeing outcomes**. Mentors ensure that mentees feel supported, listened to and / or have someone to take an interest in them, and the relationship is enjoyed by young people.

3.82 There was also some evidence that mentors may be improving wellbeing through **modelling effective behaviour, communication and / or emotional regulation** (Busse 2018 and McDowell et al., 2002, cited in Grossman, et al., 2012). Grossman, et al. (2012) theorises that these positive social-emotional experiences with mentors may generalise, leading to knock-on impacts on relationships with others. They base this on links between enduring mentoring relationships and significant improvements in youths' perceptions of their relationships with parents, peers and other adults identified by earlier studies (citing DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2000, 2005).

3.83 Barlett (2012) found stronger effects when young people described their mentor as ***"inspirational".*** Similarly, in Deutsch, et al. (2016)'s evaluation of a mentoring programme for early adolescent girls, the girls reported that receiving mentoring improved their confidence due to the encouragement given by their mentors and viewing their mentor as a role model.

Mentoring needs time to work – at least six months in most cases

3.84 Overall, there is consensus in the literature that **mentoring relationships are most effective when delivered for a minimum of 12 months** (Brady, et al., 2011; Bernstein, et al., 2009; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). This is exemplified by a study by Grossman and Rhodes (2002), who reanalysed data from a random-assignment study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme of America to determine the effects of relationship duration on youth outcomes. They found that young people in mentoring relationships lasting more than 12 months reported significant increases in their self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, parental relationship quality, school value, and decreases in both drug and alcohol use. However, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) caution that while sustained matches have more impact, it may also be the case that well-adjusted young people are better able to sustain mentoring matches and this influences the positive outcomes.

3.85 There is also **evidence of shorter mentoring relationships yielding positive effects**. Although results were non-experimental, Herrera (2004, as cited in Bernstein, et al., 2009) found that those involved in a mentoring relationship for at least nine months saw statistically significant improvements in their relationships with peers, classroom behaviour, numbers of referrals to principals' offices and fighting.

3.86 Grossman and Rhodes' (2002) study also reflected this finding, noting that young people in mentoring relationships for between six to 12 months saw an increase in perceived scholastic competence, a decrease in days skipped, and a decrease in the number of times the young person hit someone else. However, they also found that young people who were in relationships that terminated within three months reported drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence. These findings suggest **that in order for the duration of a mentoring relationship to prove effective, it needs to be delivered over at least six months**.

3.87 Delivery in **a school-based setting limits the duration of the mentoring relationship.** While most school-based mentoring programmes reviewed by Kanchewa, et al. (2016) required mentors to be committed for at least one full school year, school-based mentoring relationships are typically shorter due to time needed to accommodate volunteer recruitment, screening, and training. On average, programmes reviewed in this study saw mentoring relationships with an average duration of approximately five months. Herrera, et al. (2007) further highlights the challenges of delivering in a school-based setting to mentoring relationship duration. They found that one school year of participating in the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme was not enough to produce sustainable improvements to academic performance.

3.88 School-based mentoring programmes also need to consider the challenge posed by school calendars, which pose limitations due to holidays, breaks, early dismissals, and testing schedules (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). To mitigate the impacts of a break in the mentoring relationship, some mentoring programmes ensured that mentors **delivered some support to students and families of the summer holiday period**. In the programme evaluated by York Consulting (2024), the extent of the support provided was tailored to the needs of the mentee, ranging from weekly 1:1 sessions to fortnightly support sessions. Herrera, et al. (2007) also highlight the importance of summer meetings as a way to lengthen and strengthen mentoring relationships. However, it was highlighted that summer support sessions should avoid being "*too much like school.*"

… with at least one meeting or engagement each week

3.89 Komosa-Hawkins (2010) cite that having an adequate intensity of mentoring is a key component that predict positive relationships. Both Bernstein, et al. (2009) and Bartlett (2012) advocate for interventions where mentors met with mentees for one to three hours per week. However, several interventions involve shorter meetings, although it is not clear how effective these are (Kuperminc, 2019; Pryce and Keller, 2012; Holt, et al., 2008). While there is no clear comparison between the impacts of mentoring interventions according to engagement time per week, Bernstein, et al. (2009) and Bartlett (2012) highlight the following trends:

- **A greater number of hours spent with mentees per week presents greater opportunities to develop enduring and trusting relationships.** As noted above, community-based interventions are reported to have an advantage over school-based interventions in this context, as they are less restricted in the number of hours per week mentors and mentees can spend together. (Bernstein, et al., 2009; Komosa-Hawkins, 2010).
- **Relationship intensity is linked with positive mentee outcomes.** In an evaluation of the Mosaic Mentoring Programme, a higher intensity relationship (meeting for between one to three hours per week) was associated with increases in mentee mental health and wellbeing, motivation and confidence, and also professional and personal skills (Bartlett, 2012).

3.90 There is **limited evidence on the effects of the point of mentoring delivery** (i.e. whether mentoring is delivered within or outside of school hours). Herrera, et al. (2007) suggests that the time of day mentoring is delivered is not necessarily a crucial aspect of the mentoring experience. However, having set periods during the school day was felt to have made conducting weekly sessions easier (York Consulting, 2024) and improves programme reach to students unwilling to stay at school after school hours (Schwartz, et al., 2012).

3.91 Alongside in-person meetings, one study (Mtika and Payne 2014) comments on the benefits of **virtual delivery in between these meetings to maintain communication** with greater frequency. This included via mobile phone (texting and calling), email or social media. These methods of communication were considered to be helpful in building and sustaining relationships, although it was noted that there are safeguarding considerations which need to be considered, alongside certain restrictions imposed by mentors' own workplaces.

Individual and group mentoring have different benefits for mentees, but a mixed model approach might offer the benefits of both

3.92 In most mentoring programmes reviewed as part of this study, mentoring interventions were delivered in primarily individual 1:1 sessions between the mentor and mentee, although there were examples of group-based mentoring interventions. Group-based interventions reviewed **varied according to the number of mentees and mentors in each session**. For example, Project Arrive, which aimed to increase resilience among first year high school students, delivered mentoring sessions with six to eight students and two mentors per group (Kuperminc, et al., 2019). Groups in the Young Women Leaders Programme are comprised of eight to ten mentees and facilitated by just one mentor (Deutsch, et al., 2016). Other programmes have suggested that eight students was the ideal number (Wong, et al., 2023a). Programme coordinators in an intervention evaluated by Wong, et al. (2023b) recommended that group mentoring programmes are limited **to up to 12 young people** at one time to enable adequate individual attention.

3.93 There is limited evidence on whether group or individual models facilitate better or different outcomes compared to the other. However, there is some comparison on the impacts of a group mentoring approach on social outcomes. As mentees interact with other mentees and adults as part of group mentoring, Herrera, et al. (2002, as cited in Duetsch, et al., 2016) report that **group mentoring has a greater influence on peer relations and social outcomes compared to individual mentoring**.

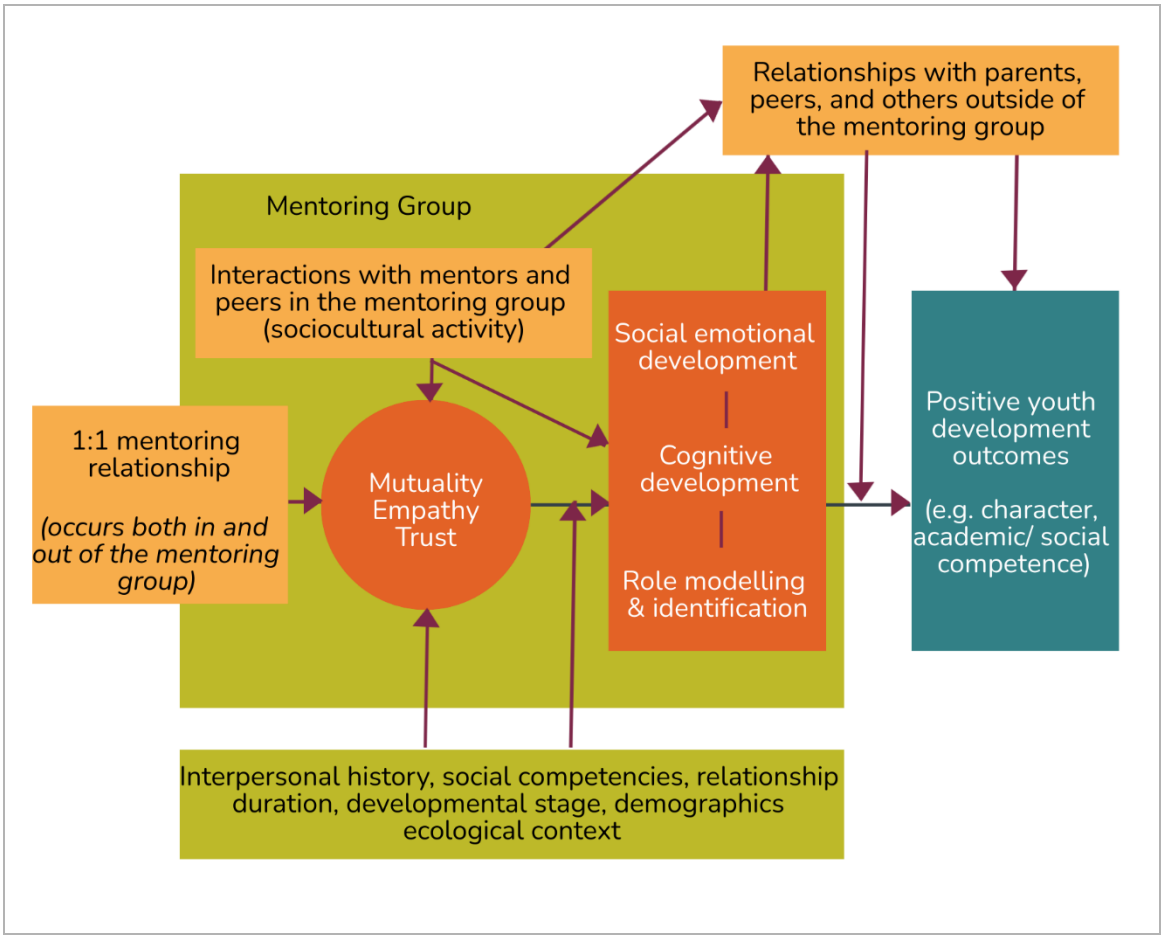
3.94 In one intervention, it was found that **a mixed model approach of both individual and group-based delivery can potentially enable the benefits of both approaches to be achieved.** In a qualitative study of the Young Women Leaders Programme, a programme that delivered mentoring in both individual and group-based settings, Deutsch, et al. (2016) propose that a mixed model approach can amplify the benefits of individual mentoring by "*capitalising on sociocultural activity*" in a group setting.

3.95 Similarly, two of the three interviewees involved in delivering mentoring interventions use a mixed model of group and 1:1 mentoring. They noted

that having group elements can combat the stigma of being involved in mentoring, ensuring that there are 'fun' aspects built into the model. One of these interviewees also stated that using group mentoring first, before transitioning to 1:1 delivery, can support with getting buy-in to the process from young people.

3.96 **Peer relationships are essential in enabling the benefits of a mixed approach.** Peers and mentors in a group setting gave mentees opportunities for relational development by expanding their network and getting feedback on strategies for responding to relational issues (Deutsch et al., 2016). Peer relationships also allowed mentees to improve self-regulation by getting feedback about how their behaviour might make others feel, and improve self-understanding as peers promote caretaking and trust as part of a group dynamic, illustrates the relationships between individual mentoring, group mentoring, and youth outcomes.

Figure 3-2: Pathways of combined 1:1 and group mentoring's influence on individual development



Source: Re-presented from Deutsch, et al., (2016)

End of mentoring

A managed end to a mentoring relationship can maximise positive outcomes and minimise potential challenges

3.97 Effective mentoring programmes establish policies and procedures for handling terminations of mentoring relationships (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). This includes providing **training to mentors around providing closure to their mentees**.

3.98 Mentors can also be encouraged to **taper support towards the end of the mentoring relationship**, allowing the mentee to adjust to the end of the mentoring (York Consulting, 2024). Tapering techniques used by some mentors in programme evaluated by York Consulting include:

- Reduction in frequency of sessions
- Reduction in the length of sessions
- Weekly check-ins to take place over the phone, rather than in person
- Text and phone communications as and when needed, rather than designated sessions.

When mentoring successfully ends as planned it needs to be a marked event

3.99 In their summary of best practice, Komosa-Hawkins (2010) highlights that closing the relationship was an important part of the mentoring process. Based on their review of best practice, they recommended:

- **Building in closing activities as a way to 'mark' the end of the relationship,** for example a celebration event to honour both mentors and mentees and provide opportunities for reflection, recognition and evaluation. Two interviewees involved in delivering mentoring also described that managing the end of mentoring relationships centres around celebrating achievements and considering how young people can continue to move forward to reach their goals.
- **Conducting exit interviews** with both mentors and mentees to assess experiences of the mentoring intervention. One interviewee involved in delivering mentoring interventions said they use group evaluation at the end of the programme. They ask mentees to write down three things that they have noticed about another young person and how they have grown through the mentoring process. This is done anonymously and posted to the young person at programme end.
- In the case of early termination of the relationship, **having policies and procedures in place to support re-matching in a consistent and**

sensitive manner. Komosa-Hawkins (2010) note that providing training specific to closure will prepare participants for both predictable and unpredictable terminations.

- Programme coordinators must also take responsibility for **logistical considerations** in managing the end of the mentoring relationship. This includes giving advance notice to the closure of the relationship and reviewing any scope and boundaries for post-mentoring contact (Rowland, et al., 2024).

When it doesn't, young people report negative outcomes as a result

3.100 Other literature sources were more likely to highlight ineffective practice when completing mentoring relationships.

- **Lack of clarity around when the relationship will close.** In their evaluation of the Breakthrough Mentoring programme, Busse (2018) found that young people were often unaware of when the relationship would end. Coming to an abrupt end led to frustration and anger from both young people and their parents. Qualitative feedback from young people described feelings of nervousness, sadness and disappointment as they felt they still needed support from a mentor. It is notable, given findings around duration set out above, that this intervention was relatively short (a 6-month relationship).
- **Poor management of early terminations.** Grossman, et al. (2012, citing Ragins and Scandura 1997; and Rhodes, et al., 2009) reflect that because mentoring is such a personal relationship, often with young people who are already vulnerable, ineffectively managed terminations and re-matches can "*touch on vulnerabilities in ways that less-personal interventions do not*". These feelings of rejection may lead to a host of negative emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes, including fear of acceptance and support from other adult relationships (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002). To avoid this issue, one interviewee involved in intervention delivery noted that in cases where a young person moves schools and has to drop out of the intervention, the young person is still able to stay in touch with their organisation.

4. Outcomes and outcome measures

4.1 Section 2 of this report describes the different objectives or outcomes that mentoring projects hope to achieve for the young people they work with. In this section we describe what the evidence says about the range and depth of outcomes achieved by mentoring projects. It draws on interviews conducted with nine experts, and specifically references 25 documents. In summary:

- 17 of these 25 papers involved an RCT of mentoring interventions, and two drew on quasi-experimental approaches to evaluate interventions. Two papers evaluated interventions using mixed-methods approaches, and two papers used predominantly qualitative approaches. These papers covered 18 interventions. One paper was an evidence review and one a tool validation study.
- 16 focused on USA-based interventions, with five based in England. Three were focused on mentoring interventions based in other European countries (Ireland, Germany, Netherlands). Seven of these interventions were Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programmes (six in the USA and one based in Ireland).
- Most (17) focused on school-based interventions, and eight focused on community-based interventions. The target groups were similar to the previous sections, with one universal intervention and the remainder targeted, primarily at those at risk of poor academic performance or school drop-out, or who were facing difficulties at school.

Outcomes associated with mentoring

Figure 4-1: Summary of outcomes associated with mentoring

Source: SQW

Outcome effects for whole cohorts are often small

4.2 Both literature and interviewees describe a range of outcomes, noting that the types of measured outcomes arising from mentoring programmes are **largely dependent on the objectives of the intervention**. However, interviewees noted that because there is a wide range of different mentoring models, there were no agreed or standard set of common outcomes. For one expert interviewee, this also meant that *"no outcome is off the table"* in terms of the effect of mentoring.

4.3 Many studies of mentoring interventions **show only modest benefits for young people**. Six studies reported that differences between control and treatment groups were not statistically significant, and a further 19 studies identified significant differences in *some* cases. For example, a large impact evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education's Student Mentoring Programme found no statistically significant outcomes for the sample *as a whole*, despite some 'scattered' evidence of differing impacts on different gender and age groups (Bernstein, et al., 2009).

4.4 Therefore, many of the outcomes reflected in this section **have only been observed for particular groups**, as researchers and evaluators have tested differing participant, mentor or programme characteristics to understand where stronger outcomes are more likely to be found. This includes particular groups who are typically marginalised (including young people with disabilities, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, or young people in care).

The strongest evidence is centred around the effect of mentoring on mental health and wellbeing

4.5 Expert interviewees noted that outcomes associated with mental health and wellbeing were often the most evidenced outcomes of mentoring interventions across the literature. Improved mental health and wellbeing encompasses a range of outcomes and measures. There is evidence from the literature that mentoring interventions have a **positive impact on young people's wellbeing**. For example:

- Brady, et al. (2011) found that across 14 outcome measures, the **strongest statistically significant effects from the mentoring program were seen on the 'Children's Hope Scale',** which they take as an indicator of emotional wellbeing (please note, effect sizes were not reported). This was supported by their case study evidence where young people were described as **happier, calmer or more confident**.
- For young people aged 10-17, Rowland, et al. (2024) identified a positive statistically significant impact of mentoring on **self-confidence**

(with an effect size[4] of 0.20 between the intervention and control group[5], 95% confidence interval of 0.06 to 0.33)**, and problem-solving and decision-making skills** (0.22, 95% confidence interval of 0.08 to 0.35). Qualitatively, they also identified instances of improvements in **physical wellbeing**, with mentors encouraging mentees to engage in physical activities and referring them to sports clubs. This positive impact was seen as reaffirming young people's growing sense of confidence.

- Similar outcomes were found by Jacob, et al. (2022). In pre- and post-intervention surveys, their mentees reported **reliable changes in their wellbeing** (30%), reliable changes in their **stress levels** (52%) and reliable changes in **life functioning** (62%) and qualitatively, most mentees described the programme as being generally beneficial to them in terms of their overall wellbeing, mental health and outlook on life.
- An evaluation by Bartlett (2012) also found a noticeable (approaching, but not quite statistically significant) increase in the **mentees' views that they would be happier in 12 months time,** between pre- and post-intervention surveys.

4.6 A study by Taussig and Culhane (2010) looked more precisely at mental health in relation to maltreated children in foster care aged 9-11. They conclude that (as noted earlier in this report) **for high-risk students, mentoring can have a significant impact in reducing mental health challenges**, especially symptoms associated with trauma, anxiety, and depression (with an effect size of -0.51 between the intervention and control group at 6-months post-intervention, calculated using Cohen's *d,* 95% confidence interval 0.19 to 0.84). They note that this could be as a result of the type of mentor involved in delivery (a social work graduate student with a specific understanding of young people in foster care's needs). However, this mentoring programme was conducted alongside a cognitive-behavioural skills group which may have impacted outcomes.

4.7 Some qualitative case study and interview evidence suggests that positive outcomes in mental health and wellbeing may have a **'knock-on' effect on other outcomes which, in turn, could reinforce the improvements to wellbeing**. Busse (2018) notes that improved wellbeing created changes in health, education and social relationships, and that young people then referred to the positive feedback they had received from teachers or parents about these changed behaviours, which in turn, made them feel proud and happy. Moreover, Jacob, et al. (2022) describe a "*sense of overall benefit*" from mentees, who used terms such as being "*a more*

[4] Effect sizes reported in this section have been taken directly from the evidence
[5] Calculated using Hedges' *g*.

complete person" and their experience on the programme as *"life changing"*.

4.8 These findings are supported by an interviewee. This interviewee was involved in the delivery of a mentoring intervention and noted that **improved confidence was a key outcome of mentoring**. They noted that for some young people, getting them into a point in which they feel they can actively participate in group mentoring sessions was a significant outcome. This may be realised when mentors model positive behaviour and inspire their mentee.

4.9 In their RCT of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland for 10-14 year olds, Brady, et al. (2011) found that the **strongest wellbeing impacts were for those young people who were experiencing family and personal issues** (such as bullying, parental break-up and parental conflict) that were having a negative impact on their sense of well-being and behaviour at school.

Mentoring can help improve child / parent relationships and build other social skills

4.10 In a review of 1:1 school-based mentoring programmes, Randoph and Johnson (2008) found that the primary benefit of these programmes is **increased connectedness at school, in the family and in the community**. Rowland, et al. (2024) attributed this both to mentors demonstrating to young people what a healthy relationship looks like, and to mentors advocating for young people when navigating conflicts at school or home.

4.11 Young people's **relationship with peers** was found to be positively impacted by mentoring in several studies (Brady, et al., 2011; Jacob, et al., 2022; Clarke, 2009; Rowland, et al., 2024). In some cases, these improvements were linked to specific social skills (although evidence on this was limited), such as improved anger management, communication skills, decision-making skills or confidence.

- Deutsch, et al. (2016)'s qualitative study found that the social and interpersonal skills that were gained through group mentoring helped mentored early adolescent girls **create new friendships and advance existing ones**. They developed mutuality, trust, and empathy with peers and mentors within the mentoring groups which they could transfer to relationships beyond the programme.
- Brady, et al.'s (2011) RCT also observed that **mentoring improved young people's *perceived* social support,** and noted that there was a strong body of other evidence that this would, in turn, support wellbeing.

4.12 There was some also evidence that mentoring improved **relationships with teachers**. Busse (2018) reported that interviews with mentees indicated a change of attitudes towards school and teachers following advice from mentors to get on better with teachers, leading to stronger relationships. Holt, et al. (2008) also found that school staff who provided mentoring helped young people aged 14-15 at risk for academic failure feel more connected to teachers and their perceptions of teacher support improved (with an effect size of 0.74 compared with the control group based on Cohen's *d*).

4.13 Rhodes, et al. (2017) reflected that mentors can challenge negative views that some youth may hold of themselves and **demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible**. Similarly, there was mention that a mentoring relationship can become a "*corrective experience*" for young people who have experienced unsatisfactory relationships with parents or other caregivers (Hayes, et al., 1996, cited in Grossman, et al., 2012).

4.14 The impact of mentoring on relationships at home were identified by three studies.

- Brady, et al. (2011) observe **improved parent-child relationships**. Surveys of parents showed a perceived **increase in their child's pro-social behaviours** within the intervention group over time. In contrast, the survey showed a significant decline in control group parents' perceptions of their children's pro-social behaviour. The authors argue that mentoring improved parent-child relationships because it gave parents a break, helped to alleviate tension and conflict in their relationship, and showed young people that they could 'get on' with adults.
- In Deutsch, et al. (2016)'s qualitative study of a mentoring programme for early adolescent girls, the girls explained that their experience in opening up to their mentors modelled how they could open up to other adults such as parents. They subsequently reported improvements in relationships with parents.
- Kuperminc, et al. (2019) report that there was some evidence that positive effects of mentoring extended to the home. Young people aged 14-15 at high risk of school drop out participating in mentoring reported more positive perceptions of meaningful participation at home than a comparison group (with an effect size of 0.35 based on Cohen's *d*).

4.15 However, these findings were often found immediately after the mentoring intervention. Two studies found that positive effects on such relational and social skills were not maintained over time.

- In their RCT of a school-based mentoring programme for young people aged 14-15, Heppen, et al. (2017) found that three years after the mentoring, treatment and control students did not significantly differ on scales measuring teacher–student relationships (effect size of -0.06), peer support for learning (-0.07), or family support for learning (0.00).
- Resnjanskij, et al. (2024) report that the effects that mentoring had on 13-15 year old students' patience and social skills were no longer detectable two and three years after programme start.

4.16 In contrast, as outlined earlier in this report, Heppe, et al. (2020) found that when young people (aged between 15 and 22) with visual impairments were mentored by mentors who also had visual impairments, they tended to report higher satisfaction with their social support networks. They noted that satisfaction with social support did not decrease after the intervention (with an effect size of 0.38, 95% confidence interval 0.02 to 0.49, based on Cohen's *d*).

Some mentoring programmes improved attainment for some students

4.17 There is some evidence of improved attainment as a result of mentoring programmes. **Most of this evidence came from school-based mentoring programmes**. This included programmes which involved an element of tutoring, including one programme which involved tutoring only at the discretion of the mentor (Heppen, et al., 2017). For example, Clarke (2009)'s evaluation of a school-based mentoring programme for 14-15 year olds, which involved an element of tutoring in its activities, found that grades were significantly affected by the end of the fourth semester. The study reported effect sizes of 0.35 in Mathematics and 0.34 in Language Arts between the intervention and control groups. However, this study has a relatively small sample size and was unusual in recruiting teachers to act as volunteer mentors.

4.18 Four studies (Bernstein, et al., 2009; Portwood, et al., 2005, cited in Randolph and Johnson, 2008; Slicker and Palmer 1993, cited in Randolph and Johnson, 2008; and Bayer, et al., 2015) report no difference in grades for mentored students against comparison groups. However, **positive effects were visible for certain groups within these studies**, these were:

- Students with lower GPAs at baseline showed significant improvement in attainment against the comparison group (Portwood, et al,. 2005, cited in Randolph and Johnson, 2008).
- Programmes with higher proportions of mentor-student matches of the same race/ethnicity led to positive impacts on 'English Language Arts Grades' (Bernstein, et al., 2009).

- Bayer, et al. (2015) found that Big Brother Big Sister school-based mentoring programme for 9-16 year olds only had an impact on the students' end-of-year academic outcomes if they had formed a relationship with their mentor that they described as "*somewhat*" close or more. This was the case regardless of the duration of the relationship.
- In addition, Grossman, et al.'s (2012) study of mentoring match duration and academic outcomes found that improved attainment was only seen in students who had 'intact' mentoring matches (as opposed to matches that ended early).

4.19 One study found **modest impact** of mentoring programmes on attainment. Heppen, et al. (2017) found that mentored students were more likely than comparison students to pass at least one 'credit recovery' course in the summer. However, the study found no impact on the number of credits students accumulated from the start of high school through to the end of the evaluation, no impact on mentored students' likelihood of failing fewer than two courses during their fourth year of high school, and no statistically significant differences between treatment and control students' likelihood of graduating.

4.20 Improved attainment was also identified as **an unexpected outcome of mentoring interventions**. An impact study of the Big Brother Big Sister programme for 9-16 year olds in the US was conducted by Herrera, et al. (2007). Despite only 9% of mentors citing academic improvement as their central goal in their meetings with youth and the limited duration (i.e. five months) of the mentoring relationship compared to community-based mentoring, they reported that, although effect sizes were modest, mentored students showed improvements in overall academic performance (0.09), quality of class work (0.12) and amount of assignments turned in (0.14). They also reported that longer and closer mentor-mentee relationships were associated with stronger effect sizes.

Mentoring can increase commitment to continued or further education…

4.21 Multiple studies found evidence of **increased commitment to education** amongst mentored students. Most notably, one follow-up on an RCT study (Karcher, 2020) found that mentored students were **14% more likely to have enrolled in some form of post-secondary education** within five years of graduating than the control group. This increased to 27% for females against a female-only control group.

4.22 Other studies identified increased aspirations to commit to future education.

- Bartlett (2012) reported a noticeable (although not statistically significant) increase in the likelihood of mentees aspiring to **attend**

university based on pre- and post-intervention surveys. Mentees who described their mentor as 'hardworking' or 'inspirational' were more likely to want to/ believe they will attend university.

- Brady, et al. (2011) found mentees were more likely to show **greater intent to finish school and go to college** than those in the comparison group.
- Bernstein, et al. (2009) used a measure of 'Future Orientation' based on survey responses[6] to capture improved aspirations of 9-14 year olds involved in a school-based mentoring intervention, and found that that mentoring had a **statistically significant impact on male mentees' aspirations**. Increased frequency of the average mentee-mentor meeting had a positive association with the mentee's 'Future Orientation.'
- Deutsch, et al.'s (2016) qualitative study found that when mentors illuminated the effort required to attend college and achieve life goals, adolescent girls in the programme became more motivated and knowledgeable on the requirements for further education.

4.23 One interviewee involved in delivering mentoring programmes said that participating young people engaged with professionals who they saw as role models. These were characterised as "*transformational experiences*" as "*young people realise they can achieve things from their hard work.*"

4.24 Intention to study does not however, necessarily lead to course entry or completion. Resnjanskij, et al. (2024) observed that when low socioeconomic status students from low-track secondary schools in Germany are mentored by university students, their aspiration to attend university decreases. In Germany, only 2% of individuals from such a background hold a university degree. Of the control group, 63% felt they could successfully complete a university degree. However, only 50% of those mentored believed that they would be successful at university. The authors suggest that the mentoring provided the mentees with a better understanding of how challenging university courses can be, leading their expectations to be more 'realistic.' However, the self-assessed likelihood of finishing apprenticeship training was unaffected by the mentoring and the probability of pursuing an apprenticeship three years after programme increased significantly.

[6] "How important is it for you: To graduate from high school? To get an education after finishing high school, such as going to college? To be successful in a job or career?"

…and, for some young people may improve engagement with current schooling

4.25 Increased engagement in school was typically expressed in studies as improvements in 'school liking,' 'views on schools' and 'connectedness at school.' Four evaluations found modest effects on engagement after mentoring.

- Bartlett (2012) found that mentors reported they had **created a more positive attitude towards learning,** whilst mentees were found to have noticeable (although not statistically significant) improved views on school. Interestingly this effect was stronger for those who spent more face-to-face time with their mentor, deemed their mentor 'positive' or were in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM). Bartlett hypothesised this was because FSM students started the programme with worse initial views of school than other groups.
- Likewise, York Consulting LLP (2024) found that 65% of students participating in the Watchtower Project pilot programme for 10-16 year olds self-reported their attitude to learning higher after the programme than at baseline. For 32% of students there was no change, and 3% reported that their attitude became worse.
- Improved engagement was also associated with **increases in school belonging**. Holt, et al. (2008) found that there was a slight increase in sense of school belonging for mentored students which was positively associated with the closeness of the mentoring relationship. Comparison students who did not receive mentoring reported a decline in sense of school belonging. Similarly, Brady, et al. (2011) report "*positive, but non-significant trends*" on school liking.

4.26 Other studies found more significant impacts.

- A School Connectedness survey was conducted by Converse and Lignugaris (2009) as part of their RCT of a school-based mentoring programme for at-risk 13-15 year olds. The survey sought to assess how the students viewed themselves, their peers, their current teachers and other adults in the school. They found the post-mentoring mean survey rating of the mentored group (an overall mean score of 3.4) was significantly higher than the mean rating of comparison students (2.82).
- In Deutsch, et al. (2016)'s evaluation of a mentoring programme for early adolescent girls, the girls interviewed reported that the mentoring caused them to care more about grades and appreciate how much grades matter for the future. They reflected that mentoring taught them how to become active learners and feel more confident participating in class.

4.27 However, this was not the case in Heppen, et al.'s (2017) study of the Check & Connect mentoring programme. They found that the programme did not have an impact on students' affective or cognitive engagement with school. As a result, there was no measurable change in students' likelihood of dropping out of high school or graduating within four or five years.

Mentoring can prevent misbehaviour in school among some young people

4.28 There was some evidence of behaviour changes captured for young people. For example, Holt, et al. (2008) found that **none of the mentored students engaging in their study obtained a discipline referral** for the first time during the intervention period, which represented a significant decrease from the pretest period. In the control group, there was an increase. Furthermore, mentored students who reported more support from their school-staff mentor experienced decreased discipline referrals during the second half of the school year. In a replication study of Holt, et al. (2008), Clarke (2009) observed that mentored students self-reported significantly greater perception of teacher support and significantly less negative school behaviour than the control group. As noted earlier, both studies recruited school staff to act as mentors.

4.29 Again, some studies found that **outcomes associated with behaviour were experienced more strongly by specific groups**, although findings were mostly qualitative.

- Brady, et al. (2011) found mentoring programmes had the strongest effects on behaviours when students were a) male or b) had experienced family and personal issues (such as bullying, parental break-up and parental conflict) that were having a negative impact on their behaviour at school.
- In Deutsch, et al. (2016)'s qualitative evaluation of a mentoring programme for early adolescent girls, girls reported that the mentoring improved their self-regulation. This resulted in a decrease of negative behaviours and an improvement in problem-solving. However, sometimes changes were of one degree, for example shouting rather than hitting.

4.30 However, one study indicates that these **positive outcomes associated with behaviour in schools may not be long-lasting**. In their qualitative study, Busse (2018) found that young people reported improved behaviours, some of which was confirmed by parents, but that not all improvements were sustained post-mentoring.

Mentoring can improve attendance for some young people

4.31 Some studies found **observable but not statistically significant improvements in school attendance** of mentored students.

- Heppen, et al. (2017) found that 82% of mentored students attended at least 90% of enrolled days in the 2013/14 school year, whilst for comparison students this was 73%. However, while attendance amongst mentored students was higher, this difference was not statistically significant.
- Similarly, Converse and Lignugaris (2009) found that the average number of absences for mentored students had decreased (from an average of 8.06 days in the 18 weeks prior to the intervention, to 6.69 days during the 18-week programme), whereas the average number of absences for comparison students increased (from an average of 8.07 to 9.06 over the same period). While this is notable, it was not statistically significant.

4.32 Some studies found that the effect of **mentoring on attendance was more prominent for specific groups**:

- Bernstein, et al., (2009) found a positive and statistically significant improvement on truancy for students below the age of 12 but not for students aged 12 or older.
- Teachers reported to Herrera, et al. (2007) that 12% of mentored students had an unexcused absence in the four weeks prior to the post-treatment assessment, compared to 41% at baseline. The impact on improved attendance was more apparent for minority ethnic students than White students.
- York Consulting LLP (2024)'s evaluation of the Watchtower Project pilot found that a higher proportion of primary school students saw improvements in attendance compared to those in secondary schools. They also note significant variability between secondary schools. In some schools there was no improvement in attendance for mentored students, while in others, more than two-thirds of mentored students had improved attendance. It is not clear whether the schools in which there were improvements shared similar characteristics.
- One interviewee involved in the delivery of a mentoring intervention tailored their programme to focus on improving resilience for a group of young people suffering from anxiety. This resulted in increased school attendance across the group.

4.33 Some studies found an **association between attendance and the mentor-mentee relationship**. Studies by Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and

Grossman, et al. (2012) into mentor-mentee relationship duration observe that mentees who had been mentored for six months or over were less likely to skip school. Furthermore, in their evaluation of the Watchtower Project pilot, York Consulting LLP (2024) found there was a slightly positive relationship between the number of weeks of support provided by mentors and improved pupil attendance.

There is limited evidence about employment or direct employability outcomes

4.34 One study **explicitly explored the effects of mentoring on labour market orientation** (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024). They found that the effect on labour market orientation (i.e. a young person's inclination and preparedness for professional life) persists well beyond the duration of the mentoring programme and even increases over time. They found that a mentoring programme targeted at students aged 13-15 in low-track secondary schools in Germany increased the likelihood that mentees would pursue an apprenticeship three years after programme start by 29 percentage points. Furthermore, this effect was more prevalent in mentored students from low socioeconomic backgrounds than those from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

4.35 Beyond this, there was **limited evidence on employment and employability outcomes** which is likely due to the short-medium term timescales of evaluations (only two longer term follow-up RCTs were included in the literature review [Karcher, 2020; Schirm, et al., 2006]) compared with the age of the young people when the intervention occurred. Schirm, et al. (2006) conducted telephone surveys with nearly two-thirds of Quantum Opportunity Programme enrolees and their control group when they were in their approaching their mid-twenties. They found no significant effect of the intervention programme on employment and earnings outcomes. Karcher (2020) explored improved attitudes to work or aspirations for work, rather than job achievement or employability skills (such as CV preparation or careers awareness).

4.36 Qualitative case study analysis by Busse (2018) with 13-16 year olds comments that **employability outcomes were least often addressed by young people** and that, for the most part, young people spoke about changes in their attitude towards school in relation to their future. Where young people did speak about changes in employability, it was typically amongst older young people, who self-reported gaining work experience or applying for college. This reflects findings from the interviews conducted as part of this REA. One interviewee involved in evaluation of mentoring interventions suggested that improved employability, or achieving employment outcomes were challenging to "*causally connect to mentoring.*" It was also noted that many mentoring interventions sought to

address more immediate or intermediate issues, generating outcomes focused on health and wellbeing, behaviours or school/academia recognising that employment or improved employability might be longer-term effects of these outcomes.

Longer-term mentoring can contribute to reductions in substance and alcohol misuse and anti-social behaviour

4.37 Three studies identified some links between mentoring interventions and **reductions in alcohol and substance misuse**. An expert interviewee reflected that these outcomes were associated more with longer-term, community-based mentoring interventions, although examples were identified across both school-based and community-based literature sources.

- One RCT (Brady, et al., 2011) on a community-based mentoring programme in Ireland found that mentoring had a positive (but not statistically significant) trend in relation to delayed drug and alcohol use.
- Case study analysis by Busse (2018) also states that young people involved in a school-based mentoring programme reported changes in drug-taking and smoking, with some mentees attributing this directly to the mentor, who in one case had taken a mentee to a 'stop smoking' awareness class.
- Grossman and Rhodes's (2002) study on the effects and predictors of mentor-mentee match duration found that mentees who were in matches that lasted more than 12 months saw decreases in both drug and alcohol use, consistent with a wider pattern of improved outcomes for this match-length group.

4.38 There are also studies which identified positive associations between mentoring interventions and reductions in anti-social behaviours. The most prominent of these was Karcher's (2020) 10-year follow up study of the Communities in Schools Mentoring Programme in San Antonio, which found positive long-term effects of the intervention **in decreasing rates of arrest for misdemeanour crimes**.

- Findings revealed that mentored young people were 55% less likely to have committed a misdemeanour by age 21 compared to the control group, and as much as 67% less likely to have committed a misdemeanour once the role of age, pre-match characteristics, and mentee gender were considered.
- The study identified that *"perceptions of mattering"* was a key indicator of reductions in the probability of arrest of young people. The

probability of arrest was three times greater than average in matches where mentors spent little time learning about their mentees and when those mentees felt unimportant.

4.39 Qualitatively, Busse (2018) also concluded that mentors **help young people to deal with anger and frustration** with seven of their eleven mentored young people explicitly attributing changes in behaviour to the mentoring.

Measured outcomes may not reflect the range of actual outcomes

4.40 Bartlett (2012) acknowledges that this overall modest effect may be as a result of what is being measured (which can be relatively narrow), rather than what is actually being experienced. They observed that often, **unintended consequences can be more beneficial than the stated aims**. This is exemplified by Rowland, et al.'s (2024) multi-site trial of short-term mentoring in England. While they found no detectable impact of short-term mentoring interventions on the study's primary outcome (the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire score), the qualitative accounts of both mentors and mentees suggested that the interventions had positively influenced certain socio-emotional skills for young people involved.

4.41 Heppen, et al. (2017) identifies the modest impact mentoring tends to have on outcomes such as improved academics, behaviour, attitudes and motivation, and physical health. They concur with Rhodes & DuBois (2008), whom they cite, that the positive outcome of mentoring may sometimes be the slowing of negative trajectories, rather than reversing them completely.

Occasionally, mentoring can result in no, or even negative outcomes

4.42 While, as demonstrated above, there is an array of evidence suggesting mentoring leads to positive outcomes for young people, many literature sources also found no effect of mentoring on the outcomes measured. In addition, some literature reflects that previous research has shown **negative outcomes for poorly designed programmes** (Bartlett, 2012). In the literature reviewed, negative outcomes were most commonly associated with either limited frequency of contact, short duration of mentoring matches, early termination of mentoring relationships, or peer effects. For example:

- In their study of school-based mentoring for 9-16 year olds, Schwartz, et al. (2012) found that when mentoring is conducted during school time and students are "*pulled out*" of lessons, there was evidence of negative affects on academic outcomes. However, when conducted during lunch break or after school, academic performance improved.

- Bayer, et al. (2015) explored how the end of a relationship between a mentor and mentee leads to negative outcomes. They found that negative effects on academic outcomes were present when mentees had to be rematched with a new mentor and this new relationship lacked closeness. Taussig and Culhane (2010) also hypothesised that short-term mental health may be adversely impacted on completion of the programme, when relationships were coming to an end.
- As noted in Section 3, while exploring the effect of match length on mentoring outcomes, Grossman, et al. (2012) identify significant declines in young people's global self-worth and their perceived scholastic competence for those whose mentoring relationships were terminated early (i.e. within the first three months). An important observation was that those who were re-matched following early termination scored lower in relation to teacher reported academic achievement, compared to those who were not re-matched at all.
- In a study of participants in the comprehensive Quantum Opportunity Programme, Schirm, et al. (2006) found that bringing together individual enrolees for programme activities likely undermined the positive impacts of the programme for individuals. Negative peer effects, paired with existing substance abuse patterns in individual programme beneficiaries, led to a lack of positive changes to risky behaviours among the treated cohort.

4.43 The **limitations of short-term mentoring effects on youth outcomes** was also reflected by Rowland, et al. (2024) who note that, particularly in relation to violence reduction and attainment, the scope for affecting change is limited by the amount of time mentors spent with young people, alongside wider factors that mentoring was not able to easily influence.

5. Measuring outcomes and mechanisms

5.1 This section sets out what tools are used to measure some of the outcomes and mechanisms of change detailed in earlier sections of this report. Alongside the nine interviews conducted, this section specifically references 21 documents. In summary:

- 15 of these 21 papers involved an RCT (or pilot RCT) of mentoring interventions. One drew on quasi-experimental approaches to evaluate interventions, and three evaluated interventions using mixed-methods approaches. One paper was an evidence review and one a tool validation study.
- 14 focused on USA-based interventions, with four based in England. Two were focused on mentoring interventions based in other European countries (Germany, Netherlands).
- Most (15) focused on school-based interventions, and six focused on community-based interventions. The majority (19) used primarily 1:1 mentoring models, with only one primarily group mentoring study included in this section.

Using multiple, validated measures strengthens evidence, but there are limitations of some approaches taken to measure outcomes and mechanisms

5.2 In general, studies which used a scale to measure outcomes or mechanisms **either replicated, or adapted, existing validated measures** used in previous studies which have shown efficacy, or are *"well normed"* for use in this context (Taussig and Culhane, 2010). In addition, many studies sought to assess their reliability in the context of their own work, using Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency which is used as a measure of scale reliability (a score of .70 or higher is considered good). Some studies also sought to generate their own tools to measure outcomes or mechanisms. Most measures in the studies we reviewed were open access meaning they are freely available for researchers to use.

5.3 Studies drew **on multiple sources of data to measure outcomes and mechanisms**, including self-reported or teacher-reported scales in surveys (many of which involved pre- and post-test delivery), administrative data or qualitative insights. The use of mixed-methods approaches strengthened methodological approaches, including using multiple validated measurement tools to assess outcomes (Schwartz, et al., 2012; Holt, et al., 2008).

5.4 For example, Holt, et al.'s (2008) study of the influence of a school-based mentoring intervention on school engagement utilised more than one measure of relationship quality. The results of these showed markedly different patterns in changes in mentees' cognitions and behaviours, suggesting the measures might have different predictive value. This exemplifies the value of using multiple measures to evaluate similar outcomes and mechanisms of interventions, and the need for caution in their interpretation.

5.5 However, studies also reflected on the limitations of some of the approaches taken to measure outcomes and mechanisms of change.

- Issuing self-reported surveys brings its own challenges, including **limited administration time, misunderstood questions or incomplete answers** (Komosa-Hawkins, 2010). Furthermore, studies cite the risks of using teacher-reported scales to measure some outcomes, given that teachers may be more likely to report improvements in young people involved in a mentoring programme due to sub-conscious biases (Schwartz, et al., 2012; Kanchewa, et al., 2016).
- In the context of administrative data measures, **a lack of consistency in how data is collected can reduce the reliability of findings**. For example, in their study of the U.S. Department of Education's Student Mentoring Programme, Bernstein et al. (2009) report variability in how grades/attainment is reported between school districts, resulting in consistency challenges when seeking to measure changes in attainment. In an English context, this is unlikely to be an issue if GCSE grades are used as measures, but internal measures of attainment for students up to Year 10 may differ across schools.

Outcome measures used are varied, reflecting the range of outcomes associated with mentoring interventions

5.6 The literature discussed measuring outcomes associated with academia and school (e.g. retention in education, academic performance, skills development and behaviour), mental health and wellbeing, and to some extent, employability. An overview of specific measures is presented in Table 5-2.

5.7 The tools used to measure these outcomes were broad and varied across studies, with **very little overlap in the types of scales used to measure outcomes.** The most overlap was seen in relation to measuring academic performance. Harter's (1986) Self-Perception Profile for Children was used to measure young people's perceptions of academic performance in two studies (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002, and Schwartz, et al., 2012), and a teacher-reported scale developed by Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell (1999) to

assess academic performance was used by both Schwartz, et al. (2012) and Bayer, et al. (2015).

5.8 Outside of measuring academic performance:

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) was used by four studies (Wong, et al., 2023a; Herrera, F., et al., 2024; Rowland, et al., 2024; Resnjanskij, 2024), although three of these were funded by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), who require the SDQ to be used where possible in YEF evaluations in order to maximise learning across their evidence base.
- McNeal and Hansen's (1999) Decision Making Scale from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale were used by both Holt, et al. (2008) and Clarke (2009), noting that Clarke was conducting a replication study of Holt, et al.'s.

5.9 Only one study identified measures related to employability (Resnjanskij, 2024), although, as noted elsewhere in this report, many of the other measures could be used as soft or pre- indicators of employability (particularly skills development, and retention in education).

5.10 As stated above, tools and scales used in studies **were often replications of existing measures**, although some studies sought to adapt these, or develop new indexes by compiling different data sources, for example, Taussig and Culhane's (2010) Mental Health Index, and Resnjanskij, et al.'s (2024) Labour Market Prospects and Labour Market Orientation indexes.

5.11 The mentoring studies reviewed as part of this REA **did not specifically measure changes in NEET rates**. However, one interviewee involved in mentoring delivery did mention the measurement of NEET outcomes. They said their intervention measured not only if young people were NEET, but also time spent as NEET and number of times a young person was classed as NEET. They reflected that many young people in their target group could revert back to being NEET post-intervention, but whether they were NEET for "*two days or six months*" was a significant difference.

Studies sought to measure mechanisms of change, with a particular focus on relationship quality

5.12 Alongside measures of outcome achievement, studies used measures of mechanisms which may influence these outcomes. This approach **enables evaluation from an additional perspective, and allows studies to generate hypotheses about mechanisms of change** (Holt, et al., 2008). However, caution is required when applying mechanism measures to test outcome strength, as breaking down cohorts into sub-categories can mean that the number of subjects in each sub-category can sometimes become too few

to test statistical significance (Pryce and Keller, 2011; Grossman, et al., 2012).

5.13 Table 5-3 presents an overview of the types of mechanisms measured, and the tools used to measure these.

5.14 Many of these measures focus on **measuring relationship quality**, with a range of tools identified throughout the literature and interviews, with limited overlap. However, one evaluator interviewed reflected on challenges in measuring relationship quality. They said they could not find a validated measure that met their needs. Therefore, they sought to measure quality through asking mentors to comment on the more structural aspects of quality (e.g. whether goals had been set, whether attention was given to the process of ending a relationship), and asking young people to complete a five-question rating of mentoring. These were supplemented with interviews and other qualitative material.

5.15 Perhaps linked to this challenge, **one study sought to develop their own measure of relationship quality** (Rhodes, et al., 2017). This tool was commissioned by Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America in response to concerns around volunteer mentor attrition, to better understand, from mentors' perspective, specific factors leading to satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the role. Extensive research activity was undertaken, to create a list of 75 items which captured the experiences and frustrations of mentors in relation to their mentees. From this list, 14 items that best captured mentors' common positive and negative perceptions and experiences in relationships were chosen by a panel of three mentoring researchers and three mentoring practitioners for inclusion in the scale.

5.16 It is also of note that variables which could be classed as outcomes of a mentoring intervention (e.g. relationships with parents, stress and rejection sensitivity) were measured as mechanisms of change by four studies.

Table 5-1: Measures used to assess intervention outcomes

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES
Retention in education	One interviewee delivering mentoring interventions said they measure school attendance as a key indicator of a young person's stability. Most studies measuring retention in education examined absences, usually obtained from school records: • Grossman, et al. (2012) and Schwartz, et al. (2012) analysed data on unexcused absences, measured from teachers' reports of the number of times in the previous four weeks that a young person had been absent from school without an excuse. • Bernstein, et al. (2009) examined school records to measure attendance and truancy. Attendance was defined as the proportion of days that each young person in the study attended school (compared to the number of days in the school year). Truancy was defined as the proportion of unexcused absences. • One study considered school connectedness as an outcome of a mentoring intervention. Converse and Lignugaris (2009) adapted a survey developed by King, et al. (2002) to measure student attitudes about school and their connectedness to school.
Academic performance	Some studies used existing measures of academic achievement such as grades and report cards: • Bernstein, et al. (2009) collated young people's grades for the school year prior to the evaluation, and for the year of the evaluation. Outcome measures were created based on four subject areas: English Language, Maths, Social Studies, Science. Because students were graded differently in different schools, these were mapped to a common measure of performance from 1-5. • Clarke (2009) collated report cards for each study participant resulting in four different semester grades for each student. The first semester grade was considered their 'pretest' grade. Semester grades were analysed based on three academic subjects: Language Arts, Maths, and Science or Social Studies. Others used scales to assess student confidence and attitudes towards school work, or to obtain teachers' perceptions of students' academic performance:

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES
	• Grossman and Rhodes (2002) also explored perceptions of academic performance. They analysed data from a six-item sub-scale of the open access, validated Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1986) to explore young people's confidence in school work. They also analysed data collected using Berndt & Miller's (1986) 18-item measure which assesses the extent to which young people value academic success and the information that they learn in school. Based on Chronbach's alpha, the data reported a high level of internal consistency (a = .86)[7]. • Schwartz, et al. (2012) also used the Self-Perception Profile for Children in their study to assess young people's estimation of their own academic competence. They also assessed overall academic performance based on teachers' ratings of young people's overall academic performance, quality of work, and completion of school work using a validated, open access five-point scale (Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell, 1999), alongside their performance in individual subjects. Based on Chronbach's alpha, the data reported a high level of internal consistency (a = .87 and .86). • Bayer, et al. (2015) also asked teachers to use the same five-point scale (Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell, 1999) to assess the students' overall academic performance, quality of work, and completion of school work.
Skills development	Some studies examined the development of skills outside of academic performance. These tended to be self-reported and assessed through surveys: • Holt, et al. (2008) assessed decision making with three items from McNeal and Hansen's (1999) open access decision making scale, a Likert-scale measure which requires an individual to self-evaluate their ability to think about the options available to them and the potential consequences prior to making a decision. • In their replication study, Clarke (2009) also assessed decision making skills using McNeal and Hansen's (1999) decision-making scale. The scale was used in a survey issued to young people (a = .81). • Resnjanskij, et al. (2024) used three survey items taken from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) to measure patience and social skills. They used five items from the validated, open access Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), creating an index of social skills to measure pro-sociality.

[7] Chronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, used as a measure of scale reliability. A score of .70 or higher is considered good.

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES

	• Heppe, et al. (2020) used two measures to measure social skills in their study:
	  ○ Social Network Mapping to measure the mentees social network. Data were collected by asking them to list network members for every subdomain orally.
	  ○ Degree of Peer Activity (DPAL) questionnaire to measure the amount and frequency of peer contact in leisure time. Respondents use a six-point scale to answer questions (from 'never' to 'everyday').
	• Kanchewa, et al. (2016) also sought to measure social skills, specifically assertiveness with peers, with an eight-item Teacher-Reported subscale of the open access and validated Teacher-Child Rating Scale (Hightower et al., 1986).

Behaviour	Some studies measured impacts on behaviour by administering a survey to either students or teachers containing a scale to report on behaviours such as skipping lessons, decision making and prosocial behaviour. • Rowland, et al. (2024) used Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) which utilises five sub-scales. Three of these sub-scales measure changes in behaviours, including conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, and pro-social behaviour. Each sub-scale includes five items. The scale was also used by Wong, et al. (2023a), and Herrera, F., et al. (2024) • Clarke (2009) assessed young people's negative behaviours experienced in school, based on an open access eight item sub-scale (by Bowen & Richman, 1997). In a survey, young people were asked 3-point Likert-scale questions about the number of times they skipped a lesson, were late to school, had in or out of school suspension and/or were involved in a physical altercation with another student (a = .90). • Kanchewa, et al. (2016) used a teacher-reported prosocial behaviour four-point scale with eight items which asks teachers to rate how often a given student engages in prosocial behaviour (1=never, 4=very often). Studies also used school records data to measure behaviour: • Bernstein, et al. (2009) reviewed school records and categorised a range of reported infractions into seven categories harassment, general non-compliance, property offenses, drug related infractions, truancy, violence, and other. Outcome measures were constructed to indicate if students had records of repeated infractions.

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES
	• Converse and Lignugaris (2009) used office disciplinary referrals and absences as an 'objective' measure of violations of the social norm. They are also an indicator of the effect of a schoolwide intervention program. To standardise different procedures used across schools in their study, an open access model of school-wide positive behavioural support (Horner, Sugai, & Horner, 2000) was used. • One interviewee said their intervention measures a young person's behaviours as intermediate outcomes. They use data collected from schools, including number of behaviour points and number of fixed term exclusions. One study sought to measure behaviour outside of the classroom: • Herrera, F., et al. (2024) also used the validated and open access Problem Behaviour Frequency Scale (PBFS), an eight item scale which measures the frequency of anti-social behaviour within the previous two months. One study looked longer-term, beyond school and used criminal records data to measure criminal behaviour: • Karcher (2020) measured young people's likelihood of being arrested before the age of 21. They did so using publicly available data on criminal records 10 years following young people's engagement with the mentoring programme. Findings from the literature review were similar to the insights provided during the stakeholder consultations. • One interviewee said their intervention measures a young person's behaviours as intermediate outcomes. They use data collected from schools, including number of behaviour points and number of fixed term exclusions. • Another interviewee said their intervention measures behaviours outside of school, including time spent clean from substance misuse.
Employability	Resnjanskij, et al. (2024) measured both labour market prospects and orientation by developing two indexes. The index of labour market orientation combined two measures, the wish to conduct an apprenticeship and knowledge about their future career. The index of labour market prospects combines labour market orientation with school grades, and a measure of patience and social skills. This was based on measures taken one year after programme start.

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES
Mental health and wellbeing	Mental health and wellbeing was often measured by using self-report scales and surveys, evaluating a range of indicators such as self-perception, stress, perception of classmate acceptance, self-awareness and quality of life: • Rowland (2024) used four outcome measures to measure short term socio-emotional skills, with the questions taken from previous open access evaluations of the National Citizen Service programme (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). These focused on self-confidence (a = .85), problem solving (a = .76), decision making (a = .67) and emotional regulation (a = .75). While not a validated tool, the outcome measures were said to have proven sensitive to change in other studies delivered over a three-month period. • Jacob, et al. (2022) used three tools to measure wellbeing to measure change over time (using reliable change calculations): the free and validated Outcome Rating Scale to assess personal or symptom distress, interpersonal wellbeing, social role and overall wellbeing; the validated Perceived Stress Scale[8] (a 10-item measure of stress); and the validated and open access World Health Organisation- Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5), a 5-item measure of current wellbeing. All rely on young person self-reporting. • Building on Holt, et al.'s (2008) use of the tool, Clarke (2009) assessed young people's perception of teacher support using the validated 4-point, open access Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993) to assess the degree to which the students perceive teachers to be interested in them and available (a = .62). They also assessed young people's perception of classmates acceptance, using 6 items from Bowen and Richman's (1997) 4-point social support subscale of the free and validated School Success Profile (a = .74). • Kuperminc, et al. (2019) used Hanson and Kim's (2007) pay to use Resilience Youth Development Module to measure several variables such as: (1) self-efficacy (confidence in abilities to complete tasks and work through problems), (2) empathy (caring about others' wellbeing and perspective), (3) problem-solving (ability to find solutions to problems), and (4) self-awareness (understanding of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours). • Taussig and Culhane (2010) assessed children's wellbeing by getting them to complete Andrews and Withey's (1976) Life Satisfaction Survey. This survey was a quality of life measure, which asked respondents to rate satisfaction in several different domains (e.g. school, home, health).

[8] Owned by Mapi Trust, for which a license agreement must be completed

OUTCOME AREA	MEASURES
	• Taussig and Culhane (2010) also created a Mental Health Index by combining three validated tools: the Trauma Symptoms Checklist for Children, the Child Behaviour Checklist (completed by caregiver) and the Teacher Report Form. The CBCL and TRF are *"well-normed measures of child emotional and behaviour problems"*, but are not open access. All three interviewees involved in the delivery of interventions also discussed ways in which they measured a young person's wellbeing. This included through using tools such as a Mental Toughness Tool, the free and validated Delaware Social and Emotional Competency Scale, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale[9].

Table 5-3: Measures used to assess intervention mechanisms

MECHANISM AREAS	MEASURES
Relationship quality	Several papers used relationship quality between the mentor and mentee as a variable for outcomes: • Pryce and Keller (2012) issued a mentor follow-up assessment which assessed closeness, conflict, dependency and wish for a closer relationship using the open access, validated Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). They also used Lynch & Cicchetti's (1997) open access and validated Relatedness Scale to assess mentor's positive feelings, and overall relationship quality using seven items from the open access and validated Youth-Mentor Relationship Questionnaire (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). A student follow-up assessment measured security (using Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier, & Contreras's validated Security Scale, 2000), and closeness to their mentor. Based on Chronbach's alpha, all data reported a high level of internal consistency (a = .70 or above) • Grossman and Rhodes (2002) measured the quality of the mentoring relationship by using scales which characterised young people's feelings towards their mentors (based on Langhout, Osborne, & Rhodes, 1999).

[9] Owned by the University of Warwick, usage requires a licence

MECHANISM AREAS	MEASURES
	• Schwartz, et al. (2012) measured the emotional engagement (Jucovy, 2002) of the mentee by using an eight-item, validated self-reported scale including items about how the mentee feels about the mentor. The items were scored on a four-point scale. • Kuperminc, et al. (2019) also used a four-item self-reporting scale at mid-point and post-test to assess relationship quality with mentors, with items including "My mentors care about me" and "Time spent with my mentors is worthwhile." • Bayer, et al. (2015) only used a one-item measure for the mentees using a four-point scale which asked, "How close do you feel to your mentor?". The scale was identical to those above. • Holt, et al. (2008) assessed both the mentor and mentees attitudes towards the relationship, with portions of a survey developed by Harris and Nakkula (2003). They used a six-point scale with 28 items and 20 items, respectively. • Rhodes, et al. (2017) developed their own Mentoring Strength of Relationship scale, which was created at the request of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. It is a five-point mentor-reported scale consisting of 14 items. Items on the scale were created based on theory, research, and consultation with volunteers, programme staff, and researchers. One expert interviewee signposted to the US-based National Mentoring Resource Centre[10], which sets out a range of tools which can be used to measure relationship quality. This includes: • Multi-dimensional measures (e.g. the Network of Relationships Inventory-Social Provisions Version, which measures 10 characteristics of personal relationships as rated by the mentor or mentee) • Unidimensional measures (e.g. the Youth and Mentor Strength of Relationship Scale which measures a mentee or mentor's perceptions of, and experiences in, the mentoring relationship) • Measures for specific facets of relationships (e.g. the Group Mentoring Climate Scale, which measures a young person's report of group processes including group engagement, group cohesion, and mutual help).

[10] https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/

MECHANISM AREAS	MEASURES
Intervention characteristic	• Grossman and Rhodes (2002) analysed mechanisms which may affect outcomes achieved. This included mentor-mentee match duration and mentor characteristics (e.g. their income levels). • Bayer, et al. (2015) measured the length of the mentoring relationship. Rather than collate the total number of days like Grossman, et al. (2012), they defined match length by classifying the duration as short (lasting less than 12 weeks), medium (between 12 and 24 weeks), or long (more than 24 weeks). • Rhodes, et al. (2017) used a similar mechanism by accessing agency records and calculating the duration between the date matches were initiated and the date matches closed.
Wider mechanisms	Grossman, et al. (2012) analysed a range of mechanisms to explore whether outcomes experienced through mentoring were affected by different variables. This included: • Stress exposure: based on a 12-item checklist adapted from the validated, open access Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes and Rahe 1967). Youth were asked if they had experienced stress-related events in the previous six months (including whether they had changed where they live, or if someone they knew well was hurt or ill. • Rejection sensitivity: using a five-item teacher reported scale adapted from Coie and Dodge (1988). The scale asks teachers to assess behavioural evidence of children's sensitivity to rejection (e.g. their tendency to get angry) Three studies measured relationships with parents as a mechanism which could affect mentoring outcomes: • Kanchewa, et al. (2016) used a dichotomized variable adapted from Schwartz, Rhodes, Chan, and Herrera (2011) to measure how mentees' relationship with parents can impact the outcomes and impact of mentoring. • Grossman and Rhodes (2002) also sought to explore the influence of parental relationships (using the validated, open access 23-item Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment by Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). • Bayer, et al. (2015) wanted to assess the ability that each mentee had to develop relationships with nonparental adults to measure whether this affects the outcomes of mentoring. To do this, they used a four-point student-reported scale with 11 items (Karcher, 2003). Students responded to statements about their relationship with their teacher.

6. Evaluation of mentoring and similar interventions

6.1 This section is largely based on a review of 19 England-based trials identified as relevant, focusing on those published by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and the DfE. The section draws on published reports and protocols as well as interviews with three evaluators and one funder. Details of the 19 trials are included in Appendix D (Table D-2). In summary:

- 14 trials were complete with a published report; five were ongoing, with published protocols.
- 15 were full trials and four were pilot trials.
- All but one of the trials involved recruiting schools and, in turn, recruiting pupils. The other trial had some recruitment of young people via schools, but it was not primarily school-based.
- Nine trials had employed school-level randomisation, nine used pupil/young people-level randomisation, and one (a pilot) had tested both (school level randomisation, with randomisation of pupils within the intervention schools).
- Nine trials involved interventions that happened in school settings (either during the school day or after school), five had sessions both at and outside of the school setting, and five involved interventions held outside of school.
- Seven trials focused on interventions with at least some element of mentoring or coaching, and a further four focused on improving young people's social and emotional learning through other mechanisms. Of the remaining eight, six were educational interventions, one was a work placement programme, and one aimed to reduce teenage pregnancies.
- 13 trials included outcomes which required running surveys with pupils/young people.
- 14 trials (all of the EEF trials) were testing the impact of the intervention on educational attainment, usually accessing results via the National Pupil Database (NPD), but some utilising standardised tests, administered at school.

6.2 Where there is learning relevant to the UK context, we also draw on the methodology of seven non-UK schools-based trials included in the wider

review of the mentoring literature described in earlier chapters. All of these trials employed individual-level randomisation and included primary data collection, with six conducted in the USA and one in Germany.

Figure 6-1: Summary of findings from review of evaluations of mentoring interventions

Source: SQW

Rationale for randomisation approach

6.3 As summarised above, nine trials employed school-level randomisation, nine used individual-level randomisation, and one (a pilot) tested both (school level randomisation, with randomisation of pupils within the intervention schools). Among the cluster RCTs, pupils were the unit of analysis.

6.4 A number (but not all) of the protocols and reports included a justification for the chosen unit of randomisation, and there was further discussion of these issues in the interviews.

The rationale for individual-level randomisation is often led by smaller sample sizes and concerns around engagement

6.5 The rationale for choosing individual-level randomisation included the following:

- **A requirement for fewer schools and smaller pupil sample sizes, in comparison to cluster RCT designs** (Demack, et al., 2016; Boxford, et al., 2023; Maisey, et al., 2012): This was particularly pertinent where the number of schools was pre-specified, or where increasing the number of schools or pupils to power a cluster RCT was seen to risk placing an unrealistic burden on the intervention deliverers in terms of raising the required funds, liaising with schools and delivering the intervention.
- **Greater confidence in achieving balance between pupils in the intervention and control arms** (Demack, et al., 2016; Maisey, et al., 2012): Randomising at the unit of the pupil was felt by some to provide greater control over the profile of the pupils in the arms of the trial. There were several elements to this. Boxford, et al. (2023) adopted this approach to reduce the risk of school level effects, particularly when a study involves only a small number of schools. Others chose the approach because of concerns that, for a cluster RCT design to work, there needs to be confidence that control schools can identify and recruit eligible pupils with the same or a very similar profile to those in the intervention arm. While this may prove feasible for interventions with standardised, objective eligibility criteria, this was seen as potentially problematic for interventions with a greater degree of flexibility or discretion in relation to their recruitment criteria. An example of this is the Teens and Toddlers intervention (Maisey, et al., 2012) where schools did not follow standardised protocols for selecting pupils for the intervention. Maisey, et al. (2012) discuss the fact that they did not feel it was appropriate to amend the recruitment criteria to a more standardised approach for the purpose of the trial. Such an amendment would have altered a significant element of the intervention – namely the discretion of school

staff on who they put forward - and the way in which it is intended to work within schools.

- **Where there was deemed to be minimal, or restricted, risk of contamination by pupils sharing their learning with the control group**: Although Maisey, et al. (2012) acknowledge that there was the risk of a degree of contamination, given that pupils in the intervention arm were encouraged to share their experiences and learning from the Teens and Toddlers intervention, they worked on the basis of guidance from Torgerson (2001) that individual allocation tends to be more appropriate than a cluster RCT where contamination is unlikely to account for more than 30% of any benefits of the programme being passed on to control participants. That is, where the risk of contamination is only moderate, even allowing for an associated dilution effect in the sample size calculations, a trial with individual randomisation would need a smaller sample size than a clustered trial. This was the view of one interviewee who perceived a significant risk of contamination given the limited number of pupils in the two arms (although see below for a counterview).
- **Greater ability to engage schools in the trial** (Demack, et al., 2016; Boxford, et al., 2023): Evaluators cite that an advantage of pupil-level randomisation is that all schools receive the intervention.[11] This is perceived to help ensure that schools are more supportive of the administrative tasks required during the trial (e.g. around data collection), leading to better quality data overall (Boxford, et al., 2023).
- **Where there is oversubscription for an intervention:** Where demand outstripped supply within schools, evaluators have taken advantage of this to implement randomisation of which pupils receive the intervention (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024 (German trial)).
- **Learning from previous trials:** evaluators drew on examples of previous trials of similar interventions which successfully employed individual-level randomisation (e.g. Philliber, et al., 2002 cited in Maisey, et al., 2012).
- **Simplicity of analysis:** one interviewee said that they felt that individual-level randomisation lent itself best to a clear and simple presentation of the results.

[11] Although, see below for a discussion of the advantage of a cluster RCT waitlist design.

The rationale for delivering a cluster-RCT is often driven by contamination risks

6.6 Whilst sometimes acknowledging the need for larger sample sizes (e.g. Wong, et al., 2023a; 2023b), rationale for choosing school-level randomisation included:

- **Risk of contamination with individual-level randomisation** (Wong, et al., 2023a; Sutherland, et al., 2019; Demack, et al., 2016)**:** The risk that pupils in the intervention group would share their learning with those in the control group in the same schools was cited as a key reason for choosing a cluster RCT design, and also raised in interviews. Demack, et al. (2016) also raise the potential risk that the intervention might be delivered to members of the control group. This was highlighted as a particular issue when the intervention was targeted at particular pupil demographics (e.g. high-risk pupils) (Sutherland, et al., 2019), when the eligible pool was relatively small (raised in an interview) and when the intervention involved project work which might draw in pupils in the control group (Husain, et al., 2019). Wong, et al. (2023a; 2023b) describe this in terms of pupils in the same schools as not being considered as independent from one another.
- **Concerns about the acceptability of randomisation within schools**: one interviewee raised the fact that inherent in pupil-level randomisation is the risk that young people (and parent/carers) will be negatively affected by the result of the random allocation, despite careful explanation of the process. For instance, for pupils, with individual-level randomisation, being 'chosen' or 'not chosen' for the intervention could potentially be seen as a reflection on themselves (e.g. their behaviour).
- **Waitlist design** (as in the case of the Empire Fighting Chance and Rugby Football League pilot RCTs (Wong, et al., 2023a; Wong, et al., 2023b), and raised in by an interviewee)**:** A waitlist design was felt to overcome some of the concerns about engaging control schools in cluster RCTs, as they have the incentive that they will receive the intervention in the near future.

The randomisation approach should be led by the intervention's design

6.7 In terms of general principles, Maisey, et al. (2012) cite Blandy and Kerry (1997) in saying that **the logic of the trial design should follow the logic of an intervention:** "*if an intervention principally aims to recruit targeted individuals and to intervene with these individuals in order to benefit them, then an individual-allocation trial is probably most appropriate. If an intervention recruits entire clusters, such as schools, and principally aims to intervene with an/or achieve benefits for all or most individuals within that cluster, then a cluster-allocation trial is probably most appropriate.*"

6.8 In addition, **practical issues related to the delivery of the intervention can influence the choice of pupil-level randomisation versus a cluster RCT.** For instance, an interviewee discussed how they chose individual-level randomisation because it worked best given the location and capacity of the schools and the intervention practitioners. The views of the intervention deliverers can also influence the design, with waitlist designs cited as making the trial design acceptable to those delivering it (e.g. cited in the case of the multisite trial of mentoring, Rowland, et al., 2024). In one non-UK based trial (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024), the design was made acceptable by using natural oversubscription to the programme: it was a prerequisite for the intervention deliverer to be involved in the trial that demand outstripped supply.

6.9 Demack, et al. (2016) had tested both approaches within their pilot trial, randomising two schools to intervention, and then randomising pupils within those schools to intervention or control, and two schools to control for the cluster RCT element. This was in order to test which approach might be best suited to a full trial, given the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches described in the subsections above. While Demack et al (2016) concluded that the programme was not ready for a full-scale trial, on balance they recommended against pupil-level randomisation because of the risks of contamination of the control group.

6.10 Finally, in the Teens and Toddlers trial, **a hybrid approach to randomisation was considered and rejected**, whereby pupils would be assigned to friendship 'clusters' prior to randomisation (Maisey, et al., 2012). It was felt to introduce complication without clear gains, whilst requiring a larger sample size.

Sample sizes for cluster-RCTs are larger than individual-level randomisation

6.11 The target sample sizes for the trials varied fairly considerably across the trials, but they were **consistently larger for the cluster** RCTs than for the trials with individual-level randomisation.

- The sample sizes for the cluster RCTs were predominantly in the range 1,500 to 3,000, For most of the cluster RCTs the number of schools recruited was between 70 and 200. The average number of pupils in the trial per school ranged from 11 to 38, but averaged 20, giving pupil-level sample sizes typically within the range 1,500 and 3,000.
- The sample sizes for the RCTs with individual-level randomisation were considerably smaller, ranging from 250 to just over 900. Generally, this was achieved by recruiting much smaller number of schools rather than by reducing the number of pupils within each school. The number of schools in each trial was typically less than 50.

6.12 Two of the cluster RCTs have socio and emotional learning as a primary outcome (Willis, et al., 2023 and Herrera, F., et al., 2024). For both of these two, the intra-cluster correlation coefficient (ICC) was estimated at close to 0.1. Assuming a within-school sample size of around 15 to 20 participants per school, this suggests that, for any given target effect size, the clustering leads to a required sample size of approximately 2.5 to 3 times greater than would be the case for individual-level randomisation.

Trial management is often delegated to delivery staff and schools, although this can be burdensome

6.13 In most trials in this review, **the intervention deliverers were the main point of contact for the schools**, from the recruitment of the schools onwards, with evaluators adopting a largely advisory or backseat role. This approach relies on the intervention deliverers being sufficiently informed about the trial design and the processes required for its successful implementation, particularly as they, in turn, were required to pass this information on to the schools.

6.14 However, there **was limited information in the reports about the extent to which intervention deliverers had prior experience of trials** and what briefing they had received by the evaluators. One interviewee described the process they had gone through to work with the intervention deliverer to ensure that they were happy with and understood the trial design. In contrast, another interviewee reported that the deliverers had no prior trial experience and reflected on the potential benefit of the evaluator having more of a role (e.g. around briefing staff).

6.15 In turn, in most trials, **schools played the – or at least a - key role in identifying and recruiting eligible pupils,** and many were responsible for overseeing any primary data collection. Again, there was limited information in the report about how schools were briefed in these tasks. However, the intervention deliverers sometimes had preexisting relationships with the schools they recruited (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023; Maisey, et al., 2012). In some cases, evaluators provided schools with a written protocol, for instance in relation to the survey administration (Gorard, et al., 2017).

6.16 A number of evaluators reflected on **the burden of the trial requirements on schools and delivery teams** both prior to and after randomisation, suggesting that streamlining those requirements would be important for future trials (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023; Scandone, et al., 2021).

- After the initial work involved in recruitment, there were issues in relation to the subsequent work including monitoring participation, logging activities and attendance, helping with survey data collection and so on (e.g. as discussed by Gorard, et al., 2017). This was particularly

problematic if the work involved had been underestimated by intervention deliverers and schools (e.g. as discussed by Wong, et al., 2023a).

- Roy, et al. (2021) reported that schools were sometimes unhappy with the fact that the intervention deliverer did not appreciate the additional burden that the trial placed on staff.
- Wong, et al. (2023b) talked about the value of having senior person in the school championing the trial, especially when it came to schools needing the resources to keep to tight timetables. An interviewee discussed this further, highlighting the need to design trials in collaboration with intervention deliverers, ensuring the trial fits within the realms of what is realistic in relation to on the ground delivery.

6.17 Boxford, et al. (2023) took a somewhat different approach to most trials, and **recruited two evaluation research assistants** to lead the recruitment, consent and data collection, thereby reducing substantially the burden on schools. Although the research assistants were employed by the intervention deliverers, they had no involvement in the intervention, thereby ensuring a clear separation between the two elements of the trial.

6.18 Although Rowland, et al. (2024) were not running a schools-based trial, **their approach to the trial management has a lot of potential learning for schools-based trials.** The intervention deliverers were responsible for recruiting young people, obtaining consent and managing the survey data collection processes. However, by **providing a bespoke online data portal,** the evaluators facilitated the deliverers to closely manage the processes, and for the evaluators to know what was happening in real time and to be able to provide support as needed. Intervention deliverers used the portal for uploading and monitoring information about the pupils and the programme at each stage, including initial recruitment details and demographic information, young person and parent/carer consent, baseline and follow-up outcomes data, and attendance and feedback surveys from mentors and mentees. This, alongside frequent 1:1 meetings and workshop briefings, meant that the deliverers had intensive support from the evaluators. An interviewee on a different trial described a similar monitoring programme, run by the intervention deliverers, who provide access to the evaluation team.

Recruitment of schools

6.19 Among the 18 UK trials which directly recruited schools, they were aiming to recruit between four and over 200 schools. Four evaluators reported recruiting fewer schools than originally anticipated and a further two directly discussed challenges with recruitment.

6.20 The following subsections summarise how the schools were recruited, to what eligibility criteria, what funding if any was provided, and the challenges and facilitators to successful recruitment.

School recruitment is undertaken by intervention deliverers, with support from evaluators

6.21 In the main, the **recruitment of schools into trials had been the responsibility of the intervention deliverers**, with evaluators usually taking, at most, a backseat role (although one interviewee described a three-way meeting between the intervention deliverer, the school and the evaluator). An interviewee funder felt that the intervention deliverers are in a better position to engage with schools, with a greater understanding of the schools and a greater ability to explain things in a way that schools will understand. In a number of trials, the deliverers drew on existing relationships with schools (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023; Husain, et al., 2019; Wong, et al., 2023a; Wong, et al., 2023b; Maisey, et al., 2012), sometimes supplemented by advertising on social media (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023). Funders were another recruitment route mentioned (Willis, et al., 2023).

6.22 For many trials this meant **recruiting schools which were local to the intervention deliverers.** For instance, the Ascents 121 support for science was run by a number of universities, each of which recruited local schools via their outreach departments or school-centred teacher training departments (Scandone, et al., 2021; Duysak, et al., 2023). Chatterbooks also recruited schools close to the university running the intervention (Styles, et al., 2014). For the Children's University trials schools were recruited via Children's University local offices, with invitations sent out through their offices and/or the Local Authority as well as being publicised via their website (Gorard, et al., 2017; Bamford, et al., 2022).

6.23 Evaluators discuss a **range of methods for recruiting schools including via email and face-to-face meetings** (e.g. Styles, et al., 2014). For some trials, evaluators discuss **providing support to the intervention deliverers** in the form of briefing webinars (Bamford, et al., 2022), information leaflets (Torgerson, et al., 2014), and provided the text for information sheets, Memoranda of Understanding and consent forms (Willis, et al., 2023). In one trial, where recruitment was problematic, the evaluators became more directly involved in the process, phoning interested schools to sign them up to the trial (Roy, et al., 2021).

School eligibility criteria varies, but willingness to engage with the trial is an important factor

6.24 **Some trials were open to all schools,** with the only school-level eligibility criteria being that they were able to take part in all elements of the trial (e.g. Torgerson, et al., 2014).12 However others chose to **restrict the eligibility of participating schools.** Selection criteria included having a certain proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium (Willis, et al., 2023) or for Free School Meals (Husain, et al., 2019; Sutherland, et al., 2019; Wong, et al., 2023b), with high levels of deprivation (Gorard, et al., 2014; Sutherland, et al. 2019) or being non-selective (Duysak, et al., 2023). Not being in special measures was another eligibility criteria mentioned (Husain, et al., 2019).

6.25 Several evaluators mention that **schools had to agree to undertake the administration involved in the trial as a prerequisite for taking part**, often alongside the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (e.g. Solomon, 2017).

There is limited information on how the cost of intervention delivery is covered or used

6.26 Few trial reports discuss the extent to which the **cost of delivery of the intervention was covered by the trial funder.**

- Within the trial of Adventure Learning (Willis, et al., 2023), the funder covered 70% of these costs, and this was seen as integral to the schools' ability to participate, with the remaining cost mostly covered from within a school's Pupil Premium budget).
- For the Children's University effectiveness trial (Bamford, et al., 2022), schools allocated to the intervention group were required to pay £300 towards the cost of the intervention, and in the multisite mentoring trial (Rowland et al, 2024) delivery organisations were given funding which covered a portion of the costs of running the intervention.

6.27 Some evaluators mentioned **incentive payments to schools,** sometimes in both arms (Husain, et al., 2019; Herrera, F., et al., 2024; Demack, et al., 2016) and on other occasions only to the control group (Willis, et al., 2023; Bamford, et al., 2022; Roy, et al., 2021). One interviewee funder discussed the fact that they would usually provide a financial contribution to control schools but not intervention schools in cluster RCTs, with the basis that the intervention group is receiving the intervention. However, on occasions, if

[12] Within these schools, there were eligibility criteria for the pupils.

there is a perceived need to help with recruitment, they might consider a financial contribution to schools in both arms.

6.28 Often there was **no information about when the incentive was paid**, although Willis et al (2023), Husain, et al. (2019) and Herrera, F., et al. (2024) reported paying it in stages. While there was some discussion about the incentive helping to cover some of the administrative costs, Willis, et al. (2023) reported that schools were encouraged to spend the money on enrichment-type activities for the control group, with broad advice given to avoid adventure-learning related activities.[13]

Evaluators and delivery teams need to carefully consider the challenges of school recruitment

6.29 While some evaluators reported no particular challenges to recruitment (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2014), others did, with some needing to expand their geography to accommodate the recruitment (e.g. Roy, et al., 2021; Sutherland, et al., 2019). One interviewee stressed the need for sufficient time for the recruitment process.

6.30 Where evaluators discuss challenges in the recruitment of schools, these included:

- General challenges faced by schools, for example, needing to reach targets (Gorard, et al., 2017) or staff absence/illness (Wong, et al., 2023b).
- Other factors included **the extent to which schools felt that the intervention would add value** alongside activities they might already be doing (Bamford, et al.,2022). One interviewee discussed the tensions involved in schools having to accommodate activities (the intervention and the trial procedures) which were not part of their 'core business.'
- One evaluator reported that **schools were reticent to sign up to the trial because of concerns that they would be allocated to the control arm** – particularly in circumstances where the school might have otherwise considered paying for the intervention outside of a trial situation (Demack, et al., 2016).
- Some evaluators mention that the **additional administrative work was a barrier** to some schools taking part in the trial (Demack, et al., 2016; Wong, et al., 2023a), as well as the available timelines related to the work required before randomisation (Wong, et al., 2023a; Wong, et al.,

[13] In the event, the pandemic affected control schools' use of the incentive payment. Among those who reported how they had used the funds, they cited a range of activities and purchases (e.g. mentoring, psychological interventions, cultural capital, outdoor activities).

2023b). This work included the selection and recruitment of pupils (especially in light of the restrictive eligibility criteria), providing administrative data and administering the surveys (Wong, et al., 2023a).

- As written above, in several trials, the intervention deliverers often **built on existing relationships when recruiting schools**. However, for some trials, a prerequisite to a school taking part was that they had not previously been involved with the intervention. This introduced challenges to some trials (e.g. Wong, et al., 2023b) especially when the recruitment timetables were tight (and during the pandemic).

6.31 Reflecting on facilitators to recruitment, having buy-in from school leadership was seen by some as key to successful recruitment (Gorard, et al., 2017).

Identification and recruitment of eligible young people

Schools are often responsible for identifying eligible young people, based on eligibility criteria centred in school-held data or subjective assessment

6.32 Ten of the reviewed UK trials involved pupils in Key Stage 3, with eight focusing on Key Stage 414 and four conducted with primary school pupils in Key Stage 2. Among those trials focusing specifically on mentoring or coaching, six involved Key Stage 3 and three involved Key Stage 4.15

6.33 **Most trials involved schools identifying eligible pupils,** with a limited number of involving pupils volunteering themselves for the trial. Where schools were identifying eligible pupils, many trials adopted objective eligibility criteria drawing on information that the schools would hold about their pupils. These included:

- Markers of financial disadvantage (e.g. eligibility for Pupil Premium (Willis et al, 2023) or Free School Meals (Gorard, et al., 2014; Boxford et al, 2023))
- Poor behaviour or engagement with school (e.g. attendance or unauthorised absence rates or incidents or exclusions (Boxford, et al., 2023; Wong, et al., 2023a; Wong, et al., 2023b; Herrera, F., et al., 2024))
- Having English as an additional language (Gorard, et al., 2014; Boxford, et al., 2023)
- Child protection concerns (Boxford, et al., 2023)

[14] Three trials covered both Key Stages 3 and 4.
[15] Two trials covered both Key Stages.

- Poor predicted educational outcomes (e.g. not reaching given levels at a particular Key Stage or predicted GCSE grades (Scandon, et al., 2021; Duysak, et al., 2023; Styles et al, 2014; Gorard, et al., 2014)
- Special educational needs (Gorard, et al., 2014).

6.34 These latter, education-related criteria related more to the educational trials, and were not a feature of trials about mentoring or coaching.

6.35 **However, some trials had eligibility criteria which required schools to be making more subjective assessments**, either used as the sole criteria or, more commonly, in addition to some objective criteria. These included:

- A perceived lack of engagement with education (Willis, et al., 2023)
- Pupils at most risk of exclusion (Sutherland, et al., 2019)
- Pastoral input (Wong, et al., 2023b; Herrera, F., et al., 2024)
- Pupils interested in the academic subject who might otherwise find a placement difficult (Roy, et al., 2021)
- Interest in sport (Wong, et al., 2023a; Wong, et al., 2023b; Herrera, F., et al., 2024)
- At risk of teen pregnancy (Maisey, et al., 2012)
- At risk of youth violence (Rowland, et al., 2024).

6.36 For many trials, **eligibility was based on reaching one of the criteria set**, which, for some trials (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023) meant that the broad criteria gave schools a strong degree of autonomy. However, for others, it appears to be a combination of factors. In a couple of examples (Wong, et al., 2023b; Herrera, F., et al., 2024, both involving the same intervention), a scoring system was devised taking into account each of the eligibility criteria. One interviewee raised the potential tension between requiring more specific criteria for the purposes of trial management and schools identifying pupils who could usefully benefit from the intervention, outside of the strict criteria.

6.37 While most trials adopted an approach where all of the pupils should fulfil the specified eligibility criteria, **some trials specified that a certain proportion of the pupils should reach the criteria** (e.g. Solomon, et al. (2017) specified that at least 30% of those in the trial should be in receipt of free school meals), with flexibility about the other pupils who were recruited.

6.38 Some trials also had **exclusion criteria to ensure that the trial participants were suitable,** and that they would be in school for the duration of the trial. For instance, Boxford, et al. (2023) had exclusion criteria including pupils with

advanced learning or communication need and pupils where there was evidence that they might be excluded. Rowland, et al. (2024) reported that young people at high risk were excluded from the trial, on the basis that they should be offered the intervention immediately without the risk of being put on the waiting list.

6.39 **Three trials' only formal eligibility criteria was that the pupils volunteered themselves** (Gorard et al., 2017; Bamford, et al., 2022, both focusing on the same intervention; Husain, et al., 2019), although Bamford, et al. (2022) report that, in fact, schools were asked to encourage disadvantaged pupils to participate. In some other trials, there was a combination of pupil self-referral and schools identifying pupils to specific eligibility criteria (e.g. Bamford, et al., 2022).

There is limited evidence around the pupil identification process or eligibility adherence

6.40 Because **the identification process was largely handled by schools**, many reports did not contain detail about the process that schools went through to identify eligible pupils for the trial. Where mentioned particular staff, pupils had been identified by school leads (Scandone, et al., 2021; Boxford, et al., 2023) or teachers (e.g. Husain, et al., 2019; Sutherland, et al., 2019).

6.41 **In some trials, the identification of eligible pupils was a more collaborative process between schools and the intervention deliverers or evaluators.** Styles, et al. (2014) checked the eligibility of the pupils identified by the schools, while Demack, et al. (2016) described intervention deliverers taking a longlist provided by the schools and making decisions in conjunction with the schools. Boxford, et al. (2023) had a system whereby the intervention deliverers met with schools to discuss the suitability of each pupil the schools had identified.

6.42 **Overall, there was limited information about the extent to which schools had managed to adhere to the eligibility.** Some (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023) had feedback from the Implementation and Process evaluation that the criteria had been adhered to. However, where the criteria were more subjective, there were explicit (Boxford, et al., 2023) and implicit opportunities (as mentioned by Willis, et al., 2023) for schools to exclude pupils deemed unsuitable (e.g. extreme behavioural issues; learning or communication needs). Roy, et al. (2021) raised some concerns about variation across schools in how eligible pupils were selected in relation to their FSM status.

6.43 **Where schools had identified eligible pupils, it was not always clear the extent to which those pupils then volunteered for the trial,** or whether they were simply put forward (contingent on obtaining parent/carer and pupil consent). Some (e.g. Bamford, et al., 2022; Husain, et al., 2019; Gorard, et

al., 2014) explicitly discussed pupils volunteering although, in some cases (e.g. Bamford, et al., 2022), schools were also asked to actively encourage disadvantaged pupils.

6.44 **In a small number of trials, there was a combination of pupil self-referral and teacher encouragement** (e.g. Roy, et al., 2021; Gorard, et al., 2017). One trial, which allowed for different referral approaches – including pupils putting themselves forward and others putting forward whole cohorts or only those with the greatest levels of disadvantage – found that this flexibility hindered the analysis. At the analysis stage, it was necessary to include only those who volunteered in order to maintain consistency and balance, and to measure the impact of the intervention it was intended to be delivered (Gorard, et al., 2017). 16

Schools tend to have primary responsibility for recruitment and consent, although processes are not well clarified in the literature

6.45 The recruitment and consent process were largely handled by schools, who in turn were liaising with the intervention deliverers. As a result, many reports did not contain much in the way of detail about how parent/carers and pupils were approached about trial, nor about the consent process. However, a number of trials involved substantially fewer pupils than originally planned.

6.46 One interviewee talked about the fact that **obtaining parental consent can be easier within a schools-based trial,** where schools have more contact or a relationship with parents, than in trials with young people running outside of schools.

6.47 After the identification of eligible pupils, **in two trials, the intervention deliverers, rather than the schools, took main responsibility for the recruitment and consent processes,** with one of these being the trial which was not schools-based (Boxford, et al., 2023 (see Trial Management for more detail); Rowland, et al., 2024).

6.48 Evaluators had **often provided schools with information sheets and consent forms** for schools (or in a few cases, intervention deliverers) to use with parent/carers and pupils. Although little information was provided about these, one trial (Rowland, et al., 2024) discussed producing child-friendly versions of the documentation. In some instances, schools had sent parent/carers a letter asking for their consent (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2017), whilst others (e.g. Scandone, et al., 2021) reported pupils being provided with information for themselves and a letter for their parents, seeking

[16] The inclusion of all pupils, including those who would not have volunteered for the programme, risked diluting the observed impact of the intervention.

parental consent. Some evaluators (e.g. Boxford, et al., 2023) had offered school the option of approaching parent/carers by email, post or in person, depending on the school's preference, with consent given either online or on paper.

6.49 **The process usually appeared to involve parent/carers giving signed consent, although some trials adopted an opt out approach,** particularly where this was in relation to the use of the administrative data (Bamford, et al., 2022; Styles, et al., 2022; Solomon, 2017). Some reports, and interviewees, discussed challenges in obtaining parent/carer consent. Parent/carers were seen as having the potential to be an encourager/facilitator to the pupils taking part, but also a barrier if they did not provide consent (Gorard, et al., 2017). This was viewed as a particular issue for parents with more chaotic lives and/or limited capacity to engage with the consent process (Wong, et al., 2023a). This could leave to a level of unexpected burden on schools, with examples of schools following up with parents by phone to promote the programme and obtain parental consent (Wong, et al., 2023b).

6.50 One approach taken to overcome this barrier was cited by Rowland, et al. (2024), where some intervention deliverers had held sessions for parent/carers and young people to explain the trial and obtain consent (and baseline data collection, see later). Similarly, Torgerson, et al. (2014) also held information sessions for parents of eligible pupils. Wong, et al. (2023b) discussed ways in which the intervention deliverer helped schools streamline the consent process (providing enveloped packs for pupils to take home to their parents).

6.51 **The pupil consent process was not always clear.** This could involve providing explicit consent (e.g. Maisey, et al., 2012) or, on other occasions, assent (e.g. Herrera, F., et al., 2024; Wong, et al., 2023a, 2023b). Boxford, et al. (2023) described a process by which the intervention deliverer met with pupils to explain the trial and gain consent (and administer baseline surveys, see below).

6.52 **There was limited discussion about difficulties recruiting young people into the trials.** Where barriers to recruitment were mentioned, they included transport (Scandone, et al., 2021); other commitments after school (Scandone, et al., 2021); and not feeling that the intervention was for them (e.g. Wong, et al., 2023a found it hard to recruit girls into an intervention focused on boxing). One theme in the reports related to the particular challenges of recruiting to interventions in the school holidays. Interventions which took place in the school holidays (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2014; Torgerson, et al., 2014) appear to have been harder to recruit to (with evaluators speculating that these may have been less appealing or had clashed with other plans).

6.53 In the main, there was **little discussion in the reports about how far parent/carers and pupils understood the randomisation approach, or how acceptable it was.** However, there was some mention (e.g. Scandone, et al., 2021) of parent/carers and pupils not understanding the process, despite the information provided, and being disappointed with the outcome. Others mentioned pupils not being sufficiently aware of the selection criteria leading to later unhappiness (Maisey, et al., 2012) or a discontent among pupils about being allocated into one arm or the other (Demack, et al., 2016). Herrera, F., et al. (2024) discussed plans to minimise any demoralisation in the control group, using transparent communication and providing regular updates to ensure that those in the control group feel valued in the trial.

Baseline and follow-up survey data collection

Evaluators approach survey data collection in different ways

6.54 **In the main, trials adopted the same or a very similar approaches to survey administration at baseline and for the later follow-ups.** Most trials included only one follow-up, but a number included two (e.g. immediately after intervention end and then later) (e.g. Willis, et al., 2023).

6.55 Where there was variation in how the baseline and follow-up data collection was carried out, this was sometimes due to **learning from the baseline stage** (e.g. around the feasibility of online completion and reservations about the measures (Styles, et al., 2014)) and at other times due to the need for greater flexibility in how the follow-up surveys, if pupils were less available at a particular time or place. Issues with pupil availability were particularly the case for follow-ups which happened later than the end of the intervention period. One example of this was Willis, et al. (2023), where pupils completed the baseline survey online in exam conditions, while the Time 3 follow up was completed either at school or at home, either online or on paper.

6.56 There was variation in how evaluators approached the survey data collection, with **some leaving oversight completely to schools and others getting involved to a greater or lesser extent.**

- In several trials, the intervention deliverers (Styles, et al., 2014; Wong, et al., 2023a, 2023b; Herrera, F., et al., 2024) or the evaluators (Gorard, et al., 2017; Solomon, 2017; Bamford, et al., 2022; Boxford, et al., 2023) attended to supervise or help oversee the process. These decisions were both to maximise data quality and to reduce burdens on schools.
- One interviewee who had undertaken a cluster RCT discussed the fact that it was easier to obtain the follow-up data from pupils in the intervention arm, as the deliverers were in the schools. In contrast, the

intervention deliverer needed to make special appointments to go to control schools.

- Some evaluators mentioned providing schools with a protocol for the administration of the survey (Gorard, et al., 2017).

6.57 **The trials varied in their decisions to use online or paper self-completion,** partly dependent on issues around internet/device access. Some evaluators felt that it was most practical to use paper self-completion (e.g. Demack, et al., 2016); others used online surveys (e.g. Husain, et al., 2019; Boxford, et al., 2023; Rowland, et al., 2024).

- Rowland, et al. (2024) discussed the fact that their survey had been designed to work on smartphones and other devices.
- Roy, et al. (2021) described the need for a hybrid approach, with a paper option required for schools unable to get pupils into an IT suite together.
- Wong, et al. (2023a) reported that, for practical reasons, the intervention deliverer managed a process of pupils completing paper surveys which were then entered online. The evaluator recognised the delays and risk of error that this process introduced. As a result, at follow-up, the intervention group completed the surveys online (although in the control group the baseline approach was replicated).

6.58 Maisey, et al. (2012) had given particular thought to **the optimal approach to obtaining very sensitive outcomes data** (around sexual behaviour and pregnancy). In order to encourage disclosure, they moved from an initial approach of face-to-face interviews with self-completion elements to paper self-completion in small groups in a classroom setting, without teachers present.

6.59 **While some evaluators ensured that those involved in the data collection were not involved in the intervention delivery** (e.g. Styles, et al., 2014; Boxford, et al., 2023**), in other cases this was not explicitly discussed**. Boxford, et al. (2023) provides the only example where specific evaluation staff were employed (by the intervention deliverer) to oversee the recruitment and data collection processes, thereby reducing the burden on schools whilst ensuring that the data collector was not directly involved in the intervention. In contrast, Demack, et al., 2016 discussed in their report that the involvement of the intervention deliverers in the data collection could have introduced a bias, with pupils less likely to honestly respond in their completion of the outcome measures.

In some cases, there were challenges in obtaining adequate response rates

6.60 **With baseline data collection conducted prior to randomisation, the important response rates relate to the follow-up surveys.** A number of the trials included in the review were adversely affected by the pandemic (Willis, et al., 2023) and, as such, their response rates are omitted here, because they do not provide a fair reflection of what would have happened in the absence of COVID-19. Among those outside of the pandemic, some achieved follow-up response rates of over 90% (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2017; Roy, et al., 2021; Maisey, et al., 2012), others were as low as 30% among the control group in a cluster RCT (Demack, et al., 2016).

6.61 **Studies varied in the detail they provided on reasons for non-response,** but reports included schools dropping out of the study as well as pupils/young people stopping or having poor attendance, or having managed moves or school exclusions (e.g. Rowland, et al., 2024). Although trial protocol is to follow up on all those randomised, those who had dropped out of the intervention would be more likely not to complete the follow up survey. One interviewee discussed the difficulties of trying to get access to pupils to complete the follow-up surveys when it does not fit well with the school timetable, and another raised the challenges of data collection periods falling in the school holidays. However, an interviewee funder reported that they view trials with more than 10% attrition as having less valid outcomes.

Approaches to randomisation

Randomisation in cluster RCTs varied, sometimes related to what worked best for the capacity of intervention deliverers

6.62 In the reviewed trials, there was variation in the way in which schools were randomised to the intervention or control arms:

- **While there were some examples of simple randomisation without stratification or blocking** (Willis, et al., 2023), **many employed stratification** (e.g. Bamford, et al., 2022; Husain, et al., 2019) or conducted random allocation with minimisation (Sutherland, et al., 2019). For some, this was to help ensure that the spread of schools in each area fitted with the capacity of the intervention deliverer (e.g. Bamford, et al. (2022) stratified by locality; Roy, et al. (2021) stratified by Local Enterprise Partnership), while for others it ensured an even spread across key characteristics. For instance, Husain, et al. (2019) stratified by the percentage of pupils ever in receipt of free school meals and the percentage of pupils achieving certain levels in GCSE maths and English, while Herrera, F., et al. (2024) plan to stratify by whether a school is above or below the median percentage of pupils receiving free school meals in the past six years. Sutherland (2019) carried out randomisation

with minimisation to achieve balance in Free School Meal eligibility, SEND, school size, gender and baseline pupil behaviour.

- **Some evaluators employed block randomisation** using key characteristics of the schools (e.g. Husain, et al. (2019) used proportion of pupils on free school meals and prior GCSE attainment).
- **Practicalities of delivery sometimes led to a pragmatic decision to pair schools and randomise them into intervention and control**. For instance, Wong, et al. (2023a; 2023b) adopted this approach, pairing similar schools, optimally geographically close schools, in order to match the delivery capacity of the intervention deliverers. While Demack, et al. (2016) paired schools with similar characteristics, in practice this approach introduced challenges getting the paired schools to join the trial at the same point. A similar point was raised by an interviewee.
- Depending on the rollout of the trial, **there were examples where all schools had been randomised in one go** (e.g. Wong, et al., 2023b) **and others where the design was to randomise in batches** (e.g. Herrera, F., et al., 2024; Willis, et al., 2023; Roy, et al., 2021)
- **In most cases, schools were randomised equally into the intervention and control arm.** However, on occasion, sometimes where more or fewer schools had been recruited than anticipated, slightly more schools had been randomised to one arm than the other (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2017; Sutherland, et al., 2019).

Trials took different approaches to randomisation in individual-level RCTs

6.63 In most cases, pupils were either stratified by school or the randomisation was done school by school, to ensure that the per school numbers were even. Key points from the literature include:

- **In most cases, there was an equal allocation to both arms.** However, where this was not the case, sometimes more pupils were allocated to the intervention arm. This happened when fewer pupils than expected were recruited into the trial but the intervention places needed to be filled (e.g. Gorard, et al., 2014). In other trials, more pupils were allocated to the control group, because schools had overachieved in the recruitment of pupils to the trial but limited numbers could be included in the intervention arm (e.g. Solomon, 2017).
- **In some cases, with larger schools, there was further randomisation of the intervention arm by teaching group** (Styles, et al., 2014), with other trials having planned to do so, but ending up needing to take a more pragmatic approach to fit with the intervention delivery (Torgerson, et al., 2014).

- **While some trials randomised all pupils/young people in one go, for other trials it was more practical to randomise in batches or on a case by case basis.** For instance, Gorard, et al. (2014) moved from an initial plan to randomise in one go to doing so in three batches. Slow recruitment, and parents/pupils wanting to know which arm they were in, made this a more practical approach. Boxford, et al. (2023) randomised in termly blocks to match the capacity of the delivery partners within schools. Rowland, et al. (2024) adopted a block randomisation design where young people were randomised on an individual rolling basis, as a mentor's capacity allowed, with a block randomisation design ensuring that there was a good balance between arms over time.
- **The review included a couple of examples where pupils were firstly grouped into matched pairs, with one pupil randomly allocated to the intervention arm.** Maisey, et al. (2012) paired pupils on the basis of their age and sexual experience. Resnjanskij, et al. (2024) paired pupils (in Germany) in schools with their 'statistical twins' using information gender, classroom and maths and German grades from their baseline surveys.
- Within the non-UK literature (Bernstein, et al., 2009) was an example of a study where the pupils were randomly ordered, with the top slice (as many as the intervention had capacity) allocated to the intervention and the remainder to the control arm. In this trial, if intervention places became available within the first month, control group members (around 2%) at the top of the list were offered a place, and switched arms.

Who, and how, randomisation was undertaken differed across trials

6.64 **Largely, the randomisation was undertaken by the evaluator (either in one go on or in batches), with the delivery partners responsible for informing schools or young people of the outcome.** In the case of the multisite mentoring trial, the evaluators had embedded a randomisation button within a data portal for the intervention deliverers, meaning that the deliverers were in control of the moment at which the young people were randomised (Rowland, et al., 2024).

6.65 **While some evaluators used a computerised randomisation algorithm** (e.g. Rowland, et al., 2024) **or computer random number generators** (e.g. Husain, et al., 2019), **others took a manual approach** (e.g. using playing cards with odd and even numbers, Gorard, et al,. 2017; a mechanically shuffled card set used for generating random numbers, Gorard, et al., 2014; a coin toss (Demack, et al., 2016; Clarke, et al. (non-UK trial), 2009).

Business as usual, contamination, fidelity and non-compliance

Control groups were mostly given business as usual, with some instances of incentivisation

6.66 Most trials specified that the **control group received 'business as usual.'** Only one UK-based trial, a cluster RCT, (Husain, et al., 2019) reported giving a financial incentive (in the form of a high street voucher) to pupils in the control group. Pupil incentives were more common in the non-UK-based trials, where pupils were often given a gift or voucher each time they completed a survey (e.g. Clarke, et al. (2009; Herrera, F., et al., 2007; Holt, et al., 2008). In one non-UK trial, only pupils in the control group received an incentive (Resnjanskij, et al., 2024).

6.67 A number of trials specified that schools or intervention deliverers could **offer pupils in the control group activities which were distinctly different to the intervention** (Willis, et al., 2023; Gorard, et al., 2017; Sutherland, et al., 2019). One other trial (Torgerson, et al., 2014) offered pupils in the control group support which differed from the intervention, after the intervention group had completed their sessions.

6.68 Those with waitlist designs cited the fact that all pupils would receive the intervention at some point (Styles, et al., 2014; Rowland, et al., 2024; Gorard, et al., 2017).

There is some evidence of contamination experienced across trials

6.69 **Few evaluators mentioned actively recording what the control group had received,** with one exception being Rowland, et al., (2024).

- One evaluator had explained the risk of contamination to schools, providing guidance that the 'no risk' approach was to implement the intervention, or a similar intervention, at the end of the trial but that a 'low risk' approach would be to implement interventions of a different nature, intensity or to a different target population, as long as it was unlikely to affect the target year groups (Herrera, F. et al., 2024).
- Some individual-level trial evaluators did report a level of contamination. In an individual-level RCT, Scandone, et al. (2021) found from their mentee survey that half of those in the intervention arm reported sharing learning with other pupils, and this was also reported by Demack, et al. (2016) and Maisey, et al. (2012), who reported that 45% of pupils in the intervention group had shared learning with their friends. Demack, et al. (2016) also reported that the intervention deliverers had been asked to do some whole class work which involved pupils in the control group.

- In two trials (with educational outcomes), there was a discussion about whether having the control group in class while the intervention arm was taken out might have had an impact on the educational outcomes in the two arms (Styles, et al., 2014; Gorard, et al., 2014). Related to this point, Maisey, et al. (2012) raised the question of whether pupils in the intervention group missing PHSE lessons (including lessons on sex and relationships) may have affected their outcomes.
- There was some evidence in cluster RCTs of control groups undertaking similar activities to those in the intervention (Husain, et al., 2019).
- Another source of contamination – a risk specific to waitlist trials – was when some of the control arm started the intervention prior to completing the follow-up measures (which was an issue in Rowland, et al., 2024).

Trials experienced distinct enablers and challenges to fidelity and non-compliance, some of which have wider applicability

6.70 Information about fidelity and non-compliance **can be very specific to the trial.** However, there are some themes which may have wider applicability.

- Some, but not all, of the trials reported collecting attendance or completion data to aid an assessment of fidelity and non-compliance (Rowland, et al., 2024; Wong, et al., 2023a were examples where this happened).
- One evaluator discussed issues related to the fidelity of the intervention, with varying quality about the provision offered by providers making the measurement of impact problematic (Roy, et al., 2021).
- A number of trials experienced some schools dropping out, although they often agreed to continue with the follow-up data collection (e.g. Roy, et al., 2021; Gorard, et al., 2017). On some occasions, schools dropped out of the intervention because of the time commitment required alongside other time pressures (Gorard, et al., 2017).
- School holiday interventions appeared to have struggled with attendance, particularly where there was insufficient time between selection and the start of the intervention, when other plans may have been made by families (e.g. Torgerson, et al., 2014; Gorard, et al., 2014).
- As reported in the school recruitment section, evaluators saw school leadership as important to the continued involvement of schools, as well as how they perceived the intervention alongside other activities.
- Some trials cited pupil and deliverer absences as a barrier to high levels of compliance. Scandone, et al. (2021) reported this issue being compounded by a lack of communication between mentors and

mentees about being able to attend sessions, and the importance of future trials collecting good attendance information and observing sessions. Others cited behavioural issues and problems with motivation (Styles, et al., 2014) and not wanting to take part because their friends had not been selected (Gorard, et al., 2014). An interviewee discussed the challenges of running trials in real life situations, where teachers used attendance at the intervention as a behavioural tool, not permitting pupils to attend if there had been behavioural issues in class.

- Wong, et al. (2023a) spoke of the particular challenges of achieving high attendance among pupils selected because of their disengagement with school (e.g. they were more likely to have been suspended).

7. Conclusions

7.1 This Rapid Evidence Assessment has assessed evidence on how mentoring (and similar) interventions can support young people aged 11-16 years to develop skills, knowledge and attributes that subsequently improve their employment prospects. It sought to explore the effectiveness of key aspects of mentoring interventions, identify outcomes associated with mentoring and how these are measured, and understand how mentoring and similar interventions have been evaluated using an RCT methodology. Its findings will inform the design and delivery of Building Futures; a Youth Futures programme whose pilot delivery partner was commissioned in the early phases of this work.

7.2 The evidence base drawn on for this REA comprised a review of 49 literature sources, alongside nine interviews with individuals involved in the delivery of mentoring interventions, evaluation of mentoring or similar mentoring interventions, and those with academic expertise in youth mentoring. The evidence was collated by following an agreed search protocol (see Appendix B) that included search parameters (key terms, language, and publication date), review and selection criteria. A quality assessment undertaken on the selected literature sources **determined the quality of evidence as good, with the majority of sources classified as Level 3 against Ludlow and Puttick's (2013) Standards of Evidence framework**. There are some limitations associated with this evidence base, notably that the types of studies varied, and this evidence review has combined evidence from randomised control trials with that of qualitative studies and literature reviews. Furthermore, nearly half of the sources are based on mentoring interventions delivered outside of the UK, notably in the USA (and eight of these sources focused on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America mentoring intervention).

7.3 There are also gaps in the evidence which, aligned with areas of interest identified by Youth Futures. This includes gaps around how to engage young people who initially resist engagement, the collection of NEET data during trials, and differences in the experiences of specific groups of young people (e.g. young people characterised as SEND, and young carers). This does not mean this evidence does not exist, for example, in grey literature, but it was either not picked up by the REA evidence search, or was not included because it did not pass a quality threshold.

7.4 The REA was designed to address six research questions set by Youth Futures. This section summarises the findings from the evidence for each of these questions in turn. A separate paper has been developed, to consider what this means for its subsequent evaluation.

How is the relationship between mentor and mentee described and defined in evaluations of mentoring programmes for young people aged 16 and under?

7.5 Mentor – mentee relationships are described in terms of 1) the characteristics of both parties, 2) their purpose, 3) the activities they pursue and 4) how long they last, and 5) where they take place.

- **The relationship between a mentor and mentee (or mentees) is the centrepiece of mentoring interventions**. Mentors are described and defined as role models and trusted adults who offer a different type / level of support to young people, which set them apart from family members or other adults in positions of authority (e.g. teachers or youth workers). Mentors were generally able to bring some relevant experience to the young people they were mentoring, in terms of shared background, relevant skills or common experiences. They could be paid or volunteers, and, in some of the sources, they were youth services or school staff. Mentees are young people who are identified in terms of their characteristics and their engagement with their education, or their community. Mentees were often targeted to redress a deficit in their lives.
- **Mentoring programmes were established to achieve specified outcomes for young people that were either to limit a negative behaviour or encourage positive behaviours (or a combination of both).** The mentoring relationship could achieve this either through gearing towards developmental activity (where the most important element was building a trusting relationship) or through instrumental activity (where the focus was on setting and working towards goals, with good relationship building through this shared endeavour).
- **Mentoring programmes described a range of activities within a single programme.** These included 1:1 or group discussion sessions, alongside a series of other activities that included participation in sport or arts activities, trips out, residentials and community events.
- **Programmes lasted for different periods of time ranging from 12 weeks to over 12 months, and involved frequent interaction – with some form of contact each week.**
- **Mentoring in the evidence reviewed was mostly face to face and took place either on school premises or in community settings.** School-based mentoring programmes could include off-site activities, just as some community-based mentoring could use school facilities.

How do the duration and intensity of mentoring programmes for young people aged 16 and under relate to their effectiveness in driving the outcomes of interest to this project?

7.6 The studies described the outcomes from mentoring in different ways, including pro social behaviours, wellbeing, heath or educational outcomes. They also make a link between duration and intensity, and the achievement of some of these outcomes. However, other factors apart from duration were also linked to good practice in delivery and the achievement of outcomes of interest, such as quality of the mentor - mentee relationship.

7.7 Mentoring outcomes included:

- Significant impacts on **health and wellbeing outcomes**, including improved mental health, self-confidence, decision-making skills and life functioning.
- **Better social relationships**, including with peers, parents and teachers. Social experiences were measured in a range of ways, from mapping social networks, to measuring the frequency of peer contact, to using a teacher-reported measure of young people's social skills
- **Positive effects on young people's academic attainment**, including improved attainment, which was commonly measured through administrative data, or through self- or teacher-reported perceptions of academic performance.
- **Commitment to education** including increased commitment to continued or further education, improved engagement with current schooling, improved school-related behaviours, a more positive attitude towards learning, increases in perceptions of school belonging, improved attendance and attainment.
- **Reductions in substance and alcohol misuse and anti-social behaviours**, more often associated with community-based mentoring interventions.
- **This REA did not identify studies which evidenced a direct link between mentoring and young people's employment or employability outcomes,** although this does not mean that this evidence does not exist. The lack of identified evidence may be because of the challenges in causally connecting interventions to these types of longer-term outcomes, or the focus of interventions on achieving shorter-term outcomes. Nevertheless, all the outcomes mentioned above can support young people to make positive transitions from education to employment, or training with employment.

7.8 The duration of a mentoring relationship is strongly linked to its effectiveness in achieving outcomes for young people.

- Overall, mentoring relationships are most effective when delivered for **12 months**.
- **There is some evidence that managed short-term interventions do generate some outcomes**. Some interventions included in this study were purposefully short (12 weeks) to fit within one school term. While some benefits were reported, evidence papers acknowledged the limitations of achieving extensive outcomes within this time period.
- There was some evidence that **relationships that were terminated within three months tended to report negative outcomes,** and this was often associated with relationships ending prematurely.

7.9 In addition to an intervention's duration and intensity, there were a range of other factors associated with driving outcomes.

- **Across the literature, the quality of a mentoring relationship is emphasised**. The quality of a mentoring relationship is positively linked to a relationship's duration and intensity and the development of an emotionally safe environment for young people. While multiple studies have sought to measure the quality of mentoring relationships, and indeed, there have been many tools developed to do so, there is limited discussion in the literature of what quality means in the context of a mentoring relationship. That said, the quality of a mentoring relationship seems to be linked to five core dimensions, including role modelling, advocacy, emotional support, teaching, challenging and information providing, and shared activities.
- **Notably, the quality of a mentoring relationship is linked to a wide range of outcomes for young people**, including an increased commitment to further education, improved wellbeing, and improved relationships with peers, parents and teachers. This was largely attributed to the modelling of effective behaviours and mentors inspiring their mentees. Relationship quality was deemed so important by many studies who sought to measure it. It is interesting that there are a wide range of tools available to measure the quality of a mentoring relationship, so much so that there was limited overlap between their uses. However, the evidence indicates that the type of measure used needs to be aligned with the objectives and design of the intervention, which has led to some studies developing their own measures.
- **The quality and sustainability of a mentoring relationship often relies on an effective mentor-mentee match**. The evidence suggests a range of ways in which an effective match can be reached, including matching on shared life experiences, mutual interests or a young person's career

goals (for interventions where the objective was to support student transitions from school). The evidence around matching mentors and mentees based on shared demography was more mixed, with limited evidence to suggest that matching based on gender or racial background resulted in better mentoring outcomes. However, one study did find links between matches based on mentors and mentees having the same disability, and outcomes associated with social support networks.

- **A mentor-mentee match can either be individualised, group, or a mix of both**. While there is limited evidence to suggest that one approach is more effective than the other, it is of note that group mentoring can have a greater influence on peer relations and social outcomes.
- **Mentor characteristics are important for an effective mentoring relationship.** The key factor which tended to lead to sustained mentoring relationships was a mentors' experience, related to prior experience of mentoring, working with young people or their age (although the latter was disputed in the literature, as younger mentors can be more relatable to young people). Interestingly, while much of the literature reflected that a mentoring relationship should be outside of a young person's sphere of authority, one study did highlight the influence of school staff as mentors on young people's positive perceptions of school support.
- **Evidence suggests that mentors need to be incentivised to support retention and engagement**, in order to sustain a mentoring relationship, and therefore maximise outcomes for young people. However, views on what incentives this should be differed across the literature, with some advocating for mentors to be paid (including as full-time staff), and others preferring a volunteer model with mentors incentivised by training opportunities and personal satisfaction. While in general, the evidence indicates that it is easier to maintain relationships under a paid model, there is limited evidence on which model is most effective, making it difficult to draw conclusions.
- **Developing a mentors' practice supports mentor retention and a good quality relationship, leading to positive outcomes**. Mentoring interventions reviewed as part of this study typically identified a wide range of effective approaches to support and develop mentors, including formalised and frequent training sessions (including induction sessions and sessions tailored to the programme's objectives), alongside ongoing monitoring and support, including from programme staff and peer support mechanisms (although examples of the latter were limited). There did not seem to be any patterns across different types of mentoring models.
- **How a mentoring relationship comes to an end also affects outcomes for young people.** When relationships end suddenly, or there is little

communication to the mentee around the end of a relationship, mentees can experience negative emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes. Effective ways to end a relationship include a tapering process, or a marked event, such as a celebration event, at the end of the intervention.

What approaches are used to recruit or select young people aged 16 and under to mentoring programmes?

7.10 **Recruitment processes are informed by two fundamental observations,** the first is that young people tend not to volunteer for mentoring programmes without additional support, and therefore recruitment has to have an active element. The second, is that mentoring can be seen among young people as a deficit measure, and might be regarded as a punishment or be associated with stigma. Mentoring inventions need to give their approach careful consideration to mitigate both of these observations.

- With school-based interventions, **school staff play a key role in referring young people** to programmes. Mentoring projects need to work with key staff to ensure that they understand the aims, purpose and delivery approach so that the right young people are approached to participate. Parents or carers can also play a role in supporting recruitment, although the literature offered little around best practices.
- The literature recommends the **use of data** to identify young people eligible for a mentoring intervention, often to guide school staff in making decisions. These are linked to the objectives of an intervention, and are typically data which is relatively straightforward for schools to access and measure (e.g. attainment, attendance or behaviour).
- **Interventions should be targeted at young people at risk of poor outcomes, but not at the highest levels of risk**. It is important to note that while setting eligibility criteria, and having a target population, was generally seen as effective, the evidence was in overall agreement that mentoring interventions should not target those at the highest risk levels, or who demonstrate significant social or emotional turmoil. It was agreed that for these young people, mentoring interventions would not achieve the best outcomes, and more intensive support or intervention is required.
- **Participation must be voluntary.** There were multiple ways in which interventions sought to achieve this, including only involving young people who actively put themselves forward to participate, or through involving young people who are not the target population to build mixed groups (although neither of these approaches had been assessed for their efficacy).

7.11 **There was little evidence around which groups of young people are more responsive to mentoring,** with the exception of targeting young people at risk of poor outcomes (although as noted above, not those at highest risk), and mentoring young people with disabilities by adults who share their disability. While some studies identified significant outcomes for specific groups, this was often due to the focus of the study, and there were limited patterns across the literature. However, there is some indication that mentoring is more effective in improving attendance for younger children (i.e. in primary school, and therefore outside of Building Futures' scope), improving wellbeing outcomes for those with mental health challenges, and improving behaviour for those experiencing family and personal issues. That said, these patterns are very small scale, and so firm conclusions cannot be drawn.

What outcomes and mechanisms have been included in previous evaluations of mentoring programmes?

7.12 Each evaluation and research report were able to report some positive impact arising from mentoring for some of the young people who were mentored. However, **the literature reports only modest effects for whole cohorts of young people** and some report negative outcomes, ascribing this to the result of ineffective practice (e.g. short match length or early termination of relationships).

7.13 **Mentoring has the potential to generate a range of positive outcomes for young people.** Different projects seek to achieve different effects and therefore they focus their evaluation research on capturing change within a narrow band of potential outcomes. This means that how outcomes are measured has varied substantially across the literature.

- **A wide range of different validated and devised and tested tools have been used** in the literature reviewed. Very few studies used the same tool, although two studies used Harter's (1986) Self-Perception Profile for Children, and two studies using a teacher-reported scale developed by Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell (1999) to assess academic performance. Wellbeing was the most frequent outcome to be measured through a wide range of validated tools, most commonly using the SDQ (Goodman, 1997), but also including the Delaware Social and Emotional Competency Scale, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, and Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale.
- There was **little discussion in the literature or interviews about the relative strengths and weaknesses of specific tools,** although one study that used several tools argued this made its findings stronger.

How have evaluators collected administrative or survey data for evaluations of mentoring programmes or comparable interventions, and with this cohort of young people?

7.14 **The approach to survey administration was generally consistent across the literature**, with baseline and follow up surveys used. However, there were variations in the processes of administering surveys. This included who was responsible for survey data collection (although responsibility tended to fall largely on schools), and whether online or paper self-completion were used. That said, there was limited comment around the effectiveness of different administration processes, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions around what processes work best.

7.15 **There is little known about the quality of data collected,** although some trials reflected on challenges in achieving adequate response rates to follow up surveys (although some of these were related to COVID-19). There was also little mention of collection of data around NEET outcomes, although across the mentoring literature, related data was collected to assess outcomes (including absence rates).

In evaluations of either mentoring programmes or any other comparable interventions, what randomisation approaches have been used and what was the rationale behind them?

7.16 **The primary trial design decision for all the trials in this review was whether to adopt a clustered design,** with the unit of clustering being schools, **or individual-level randomisation** of pupils within schools. The two main drivers of the decision appear to be:

- Sample size, with the cluster trials being around two to three times larger than the trials adopting individual-level randomisation.
- Concerns about the risk of contamination. Where it was considered likely that outcomes for pupils in the control group could be affected if pupils from their school received the intervention, this would rule out individual-level randomisation.

7.17 **The decision between cluster and individual-level randomisation leads to a range of different trial delivery implications:**

- For clustered trials, the key issues mentioned tended to be around the problems of keeping control schools engaged with the trial. Evaluators use a range of methods to try and keep control schools engaged, including MOUs at the start of the trial and incentives for the control schools, but evaluators do report engagement as a problem.

- For trials adopting individual-level randomisation, the key issues mentioned were around maintaining low levels of contamination, keeping the control group pupils engaged in the trial, and ensuring that those in the intervention arm stayed involved in the intervention, with barriers including behavioural issues and friends not being allocated to the same arm of the trial.

7.18 **Intervention deliverers and schools play a considerable role in trial delivery.** Trial management, the recruitment of schools and young people, and data collection, is often delegated to intervention deliverers and / or schools. While this works well when deliverers and schools have clear information (e.g. around trial design, eligibility criteria), it does place a significant burden, which some trials have tried to mitigate (e.g. through increasing capacity through research assistants, or using digitised systems for ease).

Appendices

Appendix A: References - evidence reviewed for the REA

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Appendix B: Rapid Evidence Assessment approach

This Appendix presents the REA research questions and the approach used by the study team to identify, collect, review and analyse evidence.

Research questions

Table B-1 presents the research questions which have underpinned the study. These research questions were developed by Youth Futures Foundation.

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1: REA research questions*

1. How is the relationship between mentor and mentee described and defined in evaluations of mentoring programmes for young people aged 16 and under?
How is this relationship assessed in programme evaluations in the evaluation literature?
What evidence is there that other outcomes are moderated by the mentor-mentee relationship?
What does a good mentor-mentee "match" look like and how is it implemented in practice?
What approaches exist to support and develop mentor's practice, e.g. through training, feedback, supervision or other reflective practices? Which are most effective and does this vary for different mentoring models?
How do the mentor characteristics (including qualifications and training, life experience) or factors (including paid vs voluntary) affect outcomes for young people?
2. How do the duration and intensity of mentoring programmes for young people aged 16 and under relate to their effectiveness in driving the outcomes of interest to this project?
3. What approaches are used to recruit or select young people aged 16 and under to mentoring programmes?
How do different approaches to recruitment/selection relate to programme effectiveness in driving the outcomes of interest to this project?
How is programme delivery on the basis of demographic characteristics associated with programme effectiveness in driving the outcomes of interest to this project?
Are there different outcomes for different target groups and what do these suggest about characteristics which are more responsive to mentoring?
4. What outcomes and mechanisms have been included in previous evaluations of mentoring programmes?
What candidate measures or tools might we consider to capture these outcomes and mechanisms for the cohort of interest in our evaluation, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
5. How have evaluators collected administrative or survey data for evaluations of mentoring programmes or comparable interventions, and with this cohort of young people?

Where evaluators have collected NEET or similar outcome data (including for the intermediate outcomes or causal mechanisms in line with the Theory of Change) for this cohort, what processes have they introduced to collect this and what is known about the quality of the data collected?

Where evaluators have collected data using surveys for this cohort, what processes have they used and what is known about the quality of the data collected?

6. In evaluations of either mentoring programmes or any other comparable interventions, what randomisation approaches have been used and what was the rationale behind them?

What processes have evaluators introduced for individual-level randomisation where programmes have either been delivered in a school setting, or where referrals to a programme have come through schools?

How did evaluators mitigate risks around practitioner or recipient acceptability of randomisation, fidelity to random assignment, or other spillover effects?

REA approach

The REA delivered a three-phase approach, involving a scoping, interim and final phase. Each phase culminated in a report reviewed by Youth Futures that informed the next phase.

Scoping phase

The purpose of the scoping phase was to define the parameters of the study. The scoping phase involved:

- An inception meeting with Youth Futures and a scoping meeting with the Building Futures delivery and evaluation team at Youth Futures
- A review of key documents/sources, namely the REA Invitation to Tender, Youth Futures website and Annual Review[17] and Building Futures' Call for Expressions of Interest[18]
- The development of evidence search and extraction frameworks, agreed with Youth Futures.

Interim phase

At interim stage, the REA involved a review of relevant evidence to explore the research questions. This involved two strands of activity.

Mentoring-focused review

Undertaken by SQW, the mentoring-focused review explored evidence relating to mentoring interventions and involved a three-stage approach.

[17] Youth Futures Foundation (2023) Annual Review 2023 https://youthfuturesfoundation.org/about-us/about-youth-futures-foundation/annual-review-2023/

[18] Youth Futures Foundation (Jan 2024) Building Futures Test and Learn Delivery: Call for Expressions of Interest

Stage1: An evidence search. Search terms for the mentoring-focused evidence search were identified following a review of the research questions, and some key documents identified within the research Invitation to Tender.

Table B-2 lists search terms that were used to identify evidence for the mentoring review during the scoping phase. Search terms are presented by theme. All primary search terms were used with selected secondary search terms. Search terms were used in Google Scholar and OpenAlex to source key reports and papers.

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-2: Evidence search terms*

	Intervention	Characteristics	Outcomes	Evaluation
Primary	Mentor Mentoring Employment-focused mentoring	11-16 Characteristics (gender / disability / race / ethnicity / socio-economic / disadvantage) Secondary / High School Young people Youth Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)	Career Career decision Job Volunteer Employability Employment Skills Transition	Randomised Control Trial Randomised Controlled Trial Experimental
Secondary	One to one support Guidance Advice Employability Big Brother Big Sister Role model Career counselling	Matching Trust Respect Frequency Duration Intensity Length Frequency Commitment Mentor training / experience / supervision / feedback Volunteer NEET risk	Attendance Educational engagement Educational attainment Destination College / higher education / university Apprenticeship Friendship Confidence Psychological benefit / wellbeing Mental health	RCT Trial Randomisation Quantitative Data Evaluation design Impact evaluation Mechanisms of change Measures of success Research tools Administrative data

	Intervention	Characteristics	Outcomes	Evaluation
		Adolescence	Resilience	Monitoring data Survey data School/school-based Consent Recruitment Ethics/ethical approval Retention

Documents identified through this search were added to:

- Key documents identified by Youth Futures through their own evidence review including applications from Building Futures delivery and evaluation partners.
- A review of items referenced in key documents (i.e. citation chaining).

Documents from these three approaches were collated into an Excel spreadsheet and document titles were mapped against the research questions. As the REA has taken a realist approach, search terms were used pragmatically – items were only listed where the titles and publications seemed potentially relevant to the study.

This search yielded 154 relevant documents (based on document title).

Stage 2: An abstract sift, involving a review of all evidence abstracts. Table B-3 presents the abstract sift framework applied to the evidence identified. The sift identified documents for inclusion, and exclusion and all items were reviewed by at least two members of the research team.

This process yielded 45 documents which were considered for inclusion, after discussion with Youth Futures, 15 of these were considered the most relevant for full initial review.

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-3: Abstract sift framework*

Document characteristics	Options
Geography	
Age range	In years or Grade
Type of study	
Intervention(s) description	

Document characteristics	Options
Intervention(s) comparability to Building Futures intervention[19]	High, Medium, Low, Not clear, Not applicable
Intervention place of delivery	School-based, Not school-based
Research question alignment	RQ 1, RQ 2, RQ 3, RQ 4, RQ 5, RQ 6
Recommendation	Inclusion, Exclusion, Unsure
Notes	Rationale for inclusion/exclusion

Stage 3 A full text review. The 15 most relevant documents were coded using a bespoke coding framework, which was designed to identify key findings against the research questions. Analysis was undertaken by extracting all codes from MaxQDA into an excel spreadsheet, enabling review across each key thematic area.

Methods-focused review

Undertaken by BPSR, this review focused specifically on RCTs, largely drawn from the Education Endowment Foundation's evidence base, as well as relevant Department for Education evaluation and Youth Endowment Fund reports (see Appendix D). Given the smaller sample of documents, this search involved a joint sift of titles and abstracts to identify the most relevant methods-focused documents for full text review. In order to capture issues likely to be of most relevance to YFF's Building Futures programme, the criteria for inclusion were:

- The trials were to be UK-based, given our key interest is in how to conduct trials within the context of the UK schools system
- The trials were to be conducted within schools or to have an element of schools-based recruitment
- That the interventions ideally focused on mentoring or coaching, although educational interventions were included if there was relevant methodological learning
- That sessions were offered, 1:1 or in groups, between young people and a qualified adult
- That the interventions were targeted (rather than offered universally) and not mandated[20]

[19] Based on delivery partner application, to be shared by Youth Futures
[20] In one trial, pupils' involvement was not voluntary, but it has been included because it had relevant elements in relation to trial delivery.

- That the interventions focused on secondary school children or, where there was relevant learning, the final years of primary school.

This process yielded 17 documents, all of which were reviewed in full.

Findings from the mentoring-focused full text review (15 documents) and the methods review (17 documents) were synthesised in an interim paper. This paper was submitted to Youth Futures for review, and a workshop was held to identify key gaps and areas of interest.

Final phase

The final phase extended the findings and learning from the interim phase. It involved three strands of activity.

Mentoring-focused review

Using learning around gaps from the interim phase, SQW re-sifted the remaining abstracts which were deemed relevant during the interim sift. A further 14 documents were identified for full text review. An updated extraction protocol (based on learning from the interim phase) was applied to all documents to identify key findings against the research questions.

MaxQDA software was used to extract the data against the protocol. Applying the framework in MaxQDA meant the research team could consistently code and collate information with the framework refined and updated as coding progressed. Reviewers remained in contact throughout the process, to ensure any changes to the protocol were reflected across all documents reviewed.

Methods-focused review

The 17 documents identified at interim stage were reviewed in further detail to draw out key findings against the research questions using the same coding framework. Two further documents were identified during the interview stage, which were subsequently reviewed in full.

Interviews

Nine interviews were conducted to supplement the review of literature and fill gaps in the evidence base. Interviews included:

- Two interviews with academics with expertise in youth mentoring. Experts were identified using the mentoring review title sift to understand the leading academics in this space (based on the number of citations). A shortlist was then developed and agreed with Youth Futures.
- Three interviews with organisations involved in the delivery of mentoring interventions identified by Youth Futures.
- Four interviews with those involved in delivering or commissioning evaluations of mentoring or similar interventions. These interviewees were

identified using the methods review title sift, identifying those evaluators who had undertaken trials most recently.

When contacting interviewees, briefing notes were shared, setting out a detailed overview of the purpose of the REA and a privacy notice, to ensure informed consent. Notes were taken during interviews. All notes and contact details were held securely by SQW and BPSR, accessible to research team members only.

This final phase culminated in this final report to Youth Futures Foundation. It draws on all evidence from all 49 documents reviewed during the interim and final phases, alongside learning from the nine supplementary interviews.

Appendix C: Quality assessment of the evidence base

This report is based on a full review of 49 documents related to either the effectiveness and impact of mentoring, and/or RCTs of mentoring or similar interventions. Based on Ludlow and Puttick's (2013) Standards of Evidence framework[21], **the overall quality of the evidence is good**. The majority of sources (37) were classified as Level 3 against the standards framework (including RCTs, including pilot RCTs, and Quasi-Experimental evaluations). Eight sources were classified as Level 2, citing correlational evidence such as interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and surveys. The remaining three sources were reviews of evidence, and so were not classified.

This suggests that the findings presented in this report have a strong evidence base on which judgements and conclusions have been drawn.

Table C-1 provides an overview of the evidence base in terms of year published, geography, age range, setting and research approach. The evidence is drawn from both the mentoring-focused and methods-focused searches. While Table C-1 demonstrates that the evidence used within this report is fairly recent, broadly relevant for the Building Futures context, and of good quality, there are some caveats. Specifically:

- While mentoring interventions are of primary interest to Youth Futures, the availability of literature focused on RCTs undertaken on mentoring interventions in England is limited (eight of 49). Therefore, to better explore the delivery of RCTs, other, similar interventions were also included in the sample. However, most (35) documents did focus on mentoring interventions (and where findings from similar interventions have been identified, it has been clearly presented as such in this report).
- Nearly half (22) of sources focus on mentoring interventions delivered outside of the UK. While these are in countries with advanced industrial economies, a difference of culture and institutional context does bring implications for the applicability of findings to an English context. Most of these sources (19) draw on mentoring interventions delivered in the USA. Of these, eight focus on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America mentoring intervention (in fact, five are based on findings from the same RCT, delivered by Herrera, et al. in 2007). A further source evaluates the Big Brothers Big Sisters model in Ireland.
- Most sources of evidence cover the age range of 11-16, which was identified as the cohort of interest for this study by Youth Futures. However, many sources (27) focused on interventions which also engaged young people outside of this core cohort, with the age range

[21] See here for more information: https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf

of young people spanning 8-22 years. That said, the majority (35) of sources did include the Building Futures sub-group of 14-16 year olds.

- Youth Futures are keen to understand the impact of school-based interventions. However, community models were included if there was a component of the programme which was also of interest to Youth Futures.

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1: Overview of the evidence base*

FEATURE	SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE SOURCES (N=49)
Year of publication	15 sources were published between 2020-2024 26 sources were published between 2010-2019 Eight sources were published between 2002-2009
Research approach	36 sources drew on data from an RCT (including pilot RCT) approach. This included multiple sources which drew on the same RCT data. Two sources utilised a Quasi-Experimental approach Four sources involved mixed-method evaluation approaches Three sources were based on qualitative data only One study sought to validate a research tool Three studies were reviews of evidence, including one meta-analysis
Geography	23 sources were focused on interventions delivered in England 19 sources were focused on interventions delivered in the USA Three sources were focused on interventions delivered in Europe (Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany) One source was focused on an intervention based in Scotland The remaining three sources were evidence reviews, so did not focus on an intervention within a specific geography.

FEATURE	SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE SOURCES (N=49)
Age range	46 sources focused on young people aged 11-16 35 of these focused on young people aged 14-16 Three sources did not specify the age range of young people
Setting	40 sources were focused on primarily school-based interventions Eight sources were focused on primarily community-based interventions One source (an evidence review) incorporated findings from both intervention types

Assessing the quantity of evidence related to good practice and outcomes

To indicate the availability within the evidence reviewed of links between good practice and stated outcomes we used coded data perform a frequency count of instances where the material referenced both an element of good practice, *and* a specific positive outcome. Outcomes were themed into four areas: academic or school related outcomes (e.g. attainment, attendance), employment related outcomes (e.g. job aspiration, awareness), health and wellbeing outcomes (e.g. mental health, confidence), and wider behavioural outcomes (e.g. anti-social behaviour, substance misuse).This analysis provides an indication of how comprehensive reports of both practice and effect are, and provides an indication of the quantity of evidence associated with elements of good practice and specific outcomes.

It should be noted however that some of the mentoring-focused papers were brief and did not provide a full account of the intervention, while several papers were based on the same mentoring programmes. It is also important to note that studies did not assign causality between a particular aspect of their practice and a specific outcome (neither did they rule it out).

This simple analysis therefore has its drawbacks ,nevertheless, the findings do align well with qualitative findings from this review. They suggest that:

- **The quantity of evidence relating to employment or employability related outcomes is more limited than other outcomes**.

- **There is also less evidence is in relation to wider behavioural outcomes** (e.g. anti-social behaviour, substance misuse), although sources which discuss programme design (again, in relation to the inclusion of wider activities alongside mentoring meetings) and the quality of the relationship between a mentor and mentee, were more likely to identify these outcomes.
- Overall, the **amount of evidence associated with programme design elements and mentor support in relation to the four outcome themes was particularly high**. In terms of mentor support, sources which discussed the provision of ongoing or wraparound supervision, and more formalised training, were more likely to report positive academic, school, health and wellbeing outcomes.
- In alignment with qualitative findings, sources which highlighted elements of good practice such as **relationship duration** (particularly for relationships lasting at least 12 months), **intensity of the mentoring relationship** (particularly weekly engagement), and **mentor-mentee match processes** (particularly matching based on mentor or mentee characteristics or interests), were more likely to report positive outcomes.
- The **quantity of evidence associated with both mentor and mentee characteristics and positive outcomes was also relatively high**, although this was slightly stronger in relation to *mentor* characteristics. In particular, sources which highlighted mentors' prior experience working with young people were more likely to report positive outcomes associated with academia, school, health or wellbeing.

Annex D: Overview of trials and interventions

Table D-1 presents a summary of interventions examined in the papers and reports reviewed in the mentoring review. The table provides a summary of the nature of the mentoring intervention including its target group, duration, age range, setting and outcome focus. Full references are provided in Appendix A.

Table D-2 presents a summary of trials examined in the methods review. Please note, these tables do not include interventions analysed in evidence reviews or meta-analyses.

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1: Overview of interventions included in the mentoring review (sections 2-5)*

	AUTHORS AND YEAR	GEOGRAPHY	AGE RANGE	PRIMARY SETTING	LENGTH OF INTERVENTION	TARGET GROUP	NATURE OF INTERVENTION	OUTCOME FOCUS	RESEARCH APPROACH
Achievement Mentoring	Holt, et al., 2008	USA	14 to 15	School	Five months	At risk of school drop-out, urban low income	1:1 mentoring; Peer Group Connection outreach programme	School engagement; school retention; academic performance; relationships	RCT
	Clarke, et al., 2009	USA	14 to 15	School	Five months	At-risk for academic failure, urban minority	1:1 mentoring; Peer Group Connection outreach programme	Self-efficacy; relationships; school behaviours; academic achievement	RCT
Advantage Programme	Jacob, et al., 2022	England	14 to 15	Community	Up to six months	Mild to moderate mental health difficulties	1:1 mentoring	Mental health and wellbeing	Mixed-methods evaluation
Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of America	Grossman and Rhodes, 2002	USA	10 to 16	Community	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Academic performance; school retention; relationships; self-worth	RCT

	Herrera, et al., 2007	USA	9 to 16	School	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Academic performance; school retention; relationships	RCT
	Pryce and Keller, 2011	USA	8 to 11	School	Open ended	Experiencing family crisis or demonstrating social, emotional or behavioural difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	*Process evaluation*	Mixed-methods evaluation
	Pryce, 2012	USA	8 to 11	School	Open ended	Experiencing family crisis or demonstrating social, emotional or behavioural difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	*Process evaluation*	Mixed-methods evaluation
	Grossman, et al., 2012	USA	9 to 16	School	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Academic performance; school retention	RCT
	Schwartz, et al., 2012	USA	9 to 16	School	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Academic performance	RCT

						academic difficulties			
	Rhodes, et al., 2014	USA	Average 11.5	Community	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	*No outcomes explored*	Tool validation study
	Bayer, et al., 2015	USA	9 to 16	School	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Academic performance	RCT
	Kanchewa, et al., 2016	USA	9 to 16	School	Open ended	Economically disadvantaged or with academic difficulties	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Rejection sensitivity; prosocial behaviour; self worth; relationships	RCT
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ireland	Brady, et al., 2011	Ireland	10 to 14	Community	Open ended	Young people who demonstrate a need	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Wellbeing; attitudes to school; risk behaviour; relationships	RCT
Breakthrough Mentoring	Busse, 2018	England	13 to 16	School	One academic year	Difficulties at school; social	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based	Resilience; connectivity; wellbeing	Qualitative study

						or emotional difficulties			
Check and Connect Mentoring Programme	Heppen, et al., 2017	USA	14 to 15	School	Three years	At risk of school disengagement or drop out	1:1 mentoring; targeted academic support (e.g. tutoring)	School retention; school graduation; academic progress	RCT
Communities in School Mentoring Programme	Karcher, 2020	USA	10 to 18	School	Not specified	At-risk of poor academic outcomes; low income	1:1 mentoring; activity or interest based; access to wider youth support services	Post-secondary educational engagement; criminal activity	RCT
Fostering Healthy Futures Programme	Taussig and Culhane, 2010	USA	9 to 11	Community	Nine months	Young people in foster care	1:1 mentoring; cognitive and behavioural skills development groups	Mental health and wellbeing	RCT
Mentor Support	Heppe, et al., 2019	Netherlands	15 to 22	Community	One year	Visual impairments	1:1 mentoring; activity based	Social participation	RCT
Mosaic Mentoring Programme	Bartlett, 2012	England	Primary and secondary	School	Not specified	Universal	Group mentoring	Aspirations (education and employment); wellbeing	Quasi-experimental

Project Arrive	Kuperminc, et al., 2019	USA	14 to 15	School	One year	At risk of school drop out	Group mentoring	Resilience; school engagement; relationships	Quasi-experimental
Quantum Opportunity Programme	Schirm, et al., 2006	USA	14 to 19	Community	Up to 5 years	Low attainment and at risk of school drop out	Group mentoring; other educational and community support	Retention and progression to further education/ training	RCT
Rock Your Life	Resnjanskij, et al., 2024	Germany	13 to 15	School	One to two years	Highly disadvantaged backgrounds	1:1 mentoring; activities outside of school	Labour market prospects	RCT
School-based Mentoring Programme	Converse and Lignugaris, 2008	USA	13 to 15	School	18 weeks	Young people with poor behaviour and school absence	1:1 mentoring	Behaviour; school retention	RCT
Scottish School-based Mentoring Programme	Mtika and Payne, 2014	Scotland	16 to 17	School	One academic year	Young people with interest in STEM careers	1:1 mentoring; broader business/education partnership project	Aspirations for STEM careers	Qualitative study
U.S Department	Bernstein, et al., 2009	USA	9 to 14	School	Open ended	At-risk of poor academic	1:1 mentoring	Relationships; school	RCT

of Education's Student Mentoring Programme						outcomes, dropping out of school, anti-social behaviour or gang involvement		engagement; academic achievement; high risk behaviour	
Watchtower Project	York Consulting LLP, 2024	England	10 to 16	School	Up to 20 weeks	Persistently or severely absent from school	1:1 mentoring	School attendance	Mixed-methods evaluation
Young Women Leaders Programme	Deutsch, et al., 2016	USA	Avera ge 12	School	Not specified	Girls facing academinc, social or emotional risk and not receiving other services	Combined group and 1:1 mentoring; activities or interest based	Academic performance; relationships; self-regulation; self-understanding	Qualitative study

*Table **Error! No text of specified style in document.**-2: Overview of UK trials included in the methods review (section 6)*

	AUTHORS AND YEAR	FUNDER	PUBLISHED DOCUMENT	TRIAL TYPE	UNIT OF RANDOMI-SATION	YEAR/AGE GROUP	NATURE OF INTERVENTION	NATURE OF OUTCOMES	OUTCOME DATA SOURCES
Adventure Learning	Willis, et al., 2023	EEF	Report	3-arm efficacy	School	Y8/Y9	Group activities (one arm in school; one off-site)	Social and Emotional Learning (SEL);	Surveys; teacher assessment; National Pupil

								educational attainment	Database (NPD)
Ascents 121 support for science	Scandone, et al., 2021	EEF	Report	2-arm efficacy downgraded to pilot	Pupil	Y11	Science mentoring (outside schools hours)	Educational attainment	NPD
Ascents 12 support for science (retrial)	Duysak, et al., 2023	EEF	Protocol	2-arm efficacy	Pupil	Y11			
Children's University (efficacy)	Gorard, et al., 2017	EEF	Report	2-arm efficacy	School	Y5/Y6	Learning activities beyond normal day (e.g. clubs, visits) inside and outside school	Educational attainment; SEL	NPD; surveys
Children's University (effectiveness)	Bamford, et al., 2022	EEF	Protocol	2-arm effectiveness	School	Y5			
CREST Silver	Husain, et al., 2019	EEF	Report	2-arm efficacy	School	Y9	Science based project work	Educational attainment; SEL	In school tests; surveys
Chatterbooks	Styles, et al., 2014	EEF	Report	3-arm waitlist	Pupil	Y7	Extracurricular reading initiative	Educational attainment	In school tests

Discovery Summer School	Torgensen, et al., 2014	EEF	Report	2-arm efficacy	Pupil	Y6	Summer school re reading/writing including enrichment activities	Educational attainment	In school tests
Future Foundations	Gorard, et al., 2014	EEF	Report	2-arm efficacy	Pupil	Y5/6	Literacy and numeracy catch up in holidays, plus enrichment activities	Educational attainment	In school tests
Think Forward	Demack, et al., 2016	EEF	Report	Pilot	Both	Y10/11	Coaching programme to help with transition from school	Educational attainment; attendance; SEL	NPD; surveys
Engage in Education	Sutherland , et al., 2019	EEF	Report	2-arm	School	Y9/Y10	1to1 and group support to engage in education	Educational attainment; take up of further education; involvement with police	NPD; UCAS; police record
Community Apprentice	Solomon, 2017	EEF	Protocol	2-arm	Pupil	Y10	Group project work	Educational attainment;	NPD; surveys; National Citizen

								SEL; future social action	Service database
Generation STEM Work Experience	Roy, et al., 2021	EEF	Report	2-arm	School	Y10	Work experience	Educational attainment; attendance; attitudes	NPD; surveys
Future Men's Boys Development Programme	Boxford, et al., 2023	EEF and YEF	Protocol	2-arm efficacy	Pupil	11 to 16s	1to1 sessions focusing on improving SEL and school engagement	SEL	Surveys
Empire Fighting Chance: Boxing-based mentoring	Wong, et al., 2023a	YEF	Report	2-arm pilot	School	Y8/Y9	Mentoring and weekly physical activities	SEL	Surveys
Inspiring Futures: Rugby Football League	Wong, et al., 2023b	YEF	Report	2-arm pilot	School	Y8/Y9	Mentoring and weekly physical activities	SEL	Surveys
Inspiring Futures: Rugby Football Leage	Herrera, F., et al, 2024	YEF	Protocol	2-arm efficacy	School	Y8/Y9	Mentoring and weekly physical activities	SEL	Surveys

Multi-site trial of short-term mentoring	Rowland, et al., 2024	YEF	Report	2-arm efficacy	Young person	10 to 14s	Mentoring	SEL	Surveys
Teens and Toddlers Programme	Maisey, et al., 2012	DfE	Report	2-arm efficacy	Pupil	13 to 17s	Working in nurseries, counselling and group work	Sexual behaviour, knowledge and perceptions.	Surveys