**EXCELLENCE IN CITIES**

# LEARNING MENTORS PHASE 3 STRAND STUDY

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# 1.    INTRODUCTION

## 1.1    Background

The Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative was launched by the Government in 1999 as one of its key policies for tackling low levels of educational achievement and student under-performance in schools located in some of the most deprived inner city areas of England.  The initiative consisted of a package of measures which were introduced as seven individual Strands of support.  This included: the introduction of Learning Mentors; the provision of Learning Support Units (LSUs) and a focus on the needs of Gifted and Talented students.  The EiC initiative was introduced in three Phases over an 18-month period.

The national evaluation of EiC being undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), in consortium with the London School of Economics (LSE) and Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), includes national surveys of EiC Partnership coordinators, schools, teachers, students, training providers and employers.  In addition, studies of individual EiC Strands are being undertaken.

The objective of the Learning Mentor Strand is primarily to support schools in raising standards by offering increased levels of support to students and reducing barriers to learning.  In 2002, the NFER evaluation (see Golden *et al.*, 2002) of the Learning Mentors, in Phase 1 and 2 Partnership areas, revealed that the Strand was performing well and that it was making a useful contribution to reducing barriers to learning and raising educational standards.  Furthermore, there was evidence to suggest that the role of the Learning Mentor was becoming increasingly accepted and valued in schools.  However, it was suggested that the role of Learning Mentors was still developing and was yet to be fully embedded in schools' existing support systems.

This report is based on a study of the Learning Mentor Strand in Phase 3 Partnership areas, which included visits to secondary schools and telephone interviews with Partnership Link Learning Mentors.  The research was carried out in the summer term of 2003.  The aims of the study are outlined in the following section.

## 1.2    Aims of Strand Study

There were two main aims of the strand study.  These were:

- to provide additional information to supplement the data from the longitudinal surveys of students and teachers which are being undertaken as part of the wider evaluation of EiC.  In addition, to contextualise the quantitative information and provide a more in-depth analysis
- to ascertain the extent to which Phase 3 EiC Partnerships have drawn on and replicated the experiences and practices of Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships.

The study focused on the following main areas:

- Link Learning Mentor role
- recruitment and retention of Learning Mentors
- induction and training provided
- management and deployment of Learning Mentors
- working relationships, for example with students and teachers
- outcomes and impacts
- challenges and future developments.

The study also considered the evaluation of the Strand at both a Partnership and school level.  This provided insight into the overall strategic development of the Learning Mentor role and how it was incorporated at a more operational level.

## 1.3    Methods

The strand study focused on ten of the 11 Phase 3 EiC Partnerships.[1]  The evaluation comprised of telephone interviews with the Link Learning Mentors in eight of the ten Partnerships.  The remaining two Partnerships were selected as case studies, which consisted of visits to two schools in each Partnership and face-to-face interviews with each of the Partnership coordinators and Link Learning Mentors.

The two case-study Partnerships were selected by analysing earlier EiC Partnership interviews, which identified those which were employing particularly innovative or creative approaches in their use of Learning Mentors, such as:

- successful links with other EiC Strands such as Gifted and Talented

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[1]    Sefton was not included in the study because it consists of schools in both Phases 2 and 3.

♦ expansion of the Learning Mentor role, for example by the development of transitional Learning Mentors

♦ well-developed training packages.

Although the schools visited in each of the two case-study Partnerships are not representative of EiC as a whole, certain characteristics were taken into account when they were selected, including:

♦ location of school

♦ characteristics of students, for example ethnicity or eligibility for free school meals (FSMs)

♦ size of school population

♦ variety of use of Learning Mentors.

The telephone interviews with the Link Learning Mentors in eight of the EiC Partnerships were carried out between May and June 2003. The focus in these interviews included: their role as Link Learning Mentor, a strategic overview of the Strand's development, and the ways in which Learning Mentors were being used in schools throughout the Partnership.

The four case-study schools were visited in summer term 2003 – two from each of the selected EiC Partnerships. A series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with senior staff (headteachers and Learning Mentors' line managers), heads of year, LSU managers (where appropriate), form tutors, Learning Mentors and students. In addition to this, interviews were also carried out with the Partnership coordinators and Link Learning Mentors for both of the Partnerships.

A total of eight Learning Mentors were interviewed in addition to four headteachers, four line managers, seven heads of year, nine form tutors and three LSU managers.

A total of 14 students (eight male and six female) were interviewed across year groups 8 to 10.

## 1.4 Structure of Report

**Chapter 2** outlines the role of the Link Learning Mentor and provides details on their background and the training opportunities they have received.

**Chapter 3** provides details on the recruitment and retention of Learning Mentors, including pay, terms and conditions. It also outlines the induction process, training opportunities and the management and review of Learning Mentors within schools.

**Chapter 4** reports the barriers to learning in schools and the characteristics of the students referred for Learning Mentor support. It also examines referral and access procedures and the ways in which Learning Mentors are deployed within schools.

**Chapter 5** examines perceptions of the Learning Mentor role and looks at their working relationships with Link Learning Mentors, teachers, LSUs and external agencies.

**Chapter 6** reports on the outcomes of seeing a Learning Mentor. This covers monitoring and assessments techniques, outcomes for students meeting with a Learning Mentor and outcomes for the school as a whole.

**Chapter 7** details Partnership- and school-level challenges in using Learning Mentors and identifies the lessons learned since the introduction of this role. It concludes with a discussion of the future development of the Learning Mentor role and notes the key issues associated with it.

## 2. LINK LEARNING MENTORS

This chapter presents the findings from the telephone interviews carried out with the Link Learning Mentors in the Phase 3 EiC Partnerships. In particular it focuses on:

♦ the backgrounds of Link Learning Mentors
♦ the training received whilst Link Learning Mentors are in post
♦ the role of Link Learning Mentors
♦ sharing practice.

### 2.1 Background

A small number of the Link Learning Mentors reported having some degree of prior mentoring experience, usually school-based. However, others had no experience of mentoring when they applied for the role and originated from a diversity of backgrounds, including:

♦ pupil referral units (PRUs)
♦ Local Education Authorities (LEAs)
♦ social services
♦ teaching profession
♦ working with young people.

In some cases, the skills acquired in their previous employment had been extremely useful in this new role. A Link Learning Mentor in one Partnership commented:

> *I would say human resources experience is a must, which I had. It's good in terms of familiarising you with the conditions and legalities of employment, the laws etc. I would say you need management experience, training experience, human resources and project management experience.*

### 2.2 Training

The majority of Link Learning Mentors had received no formal training relevant to their role. However, a number of interviewees suggested areas where they would have welcomed some level of formal support. These included:

♦ interviewing techniques
♦ managing change

- negotiation
- people/project management skills
- presentation skills
- recruitment skills
- Link Learning Mentor role
- training delivery
- working with young people.

In most cases, Link Learning Mentors felt they had gained the relevant knowledge *'on the job'*.

## 2.3    Link Learning Mentor Role

The majority of Partnerships had one Link Learning Mentor in post, and one Partnership had more than one.  Nearly all posts were appointed on a full-time basis, if not initially, then at some point during the development of the role.   Only one Partnership had appointed initially on a full-time basis, which subsequently became part-time.  Most interviewees felt the post demanded a full-time position, however this was conditional on a number of factors such as size of Partnership and funding availability.

The following are the key areas of responsibility which all Link Learning Mentors cited:

- induction for Learning Mentors
- training for Learning Mentors – assessing training needs, managing and delivering
- monitoring and evaluation of the Strand
- networking
- involvement in devising and/or executing Strand development plans.

A combination of additional responsibilities was also undertaken in many of the Partnerships, which included:

- policy formulation
- providing information, support and guidance
- recruitment, for example interviewing Learning Mentor candidates.

These activities were facilitated by visits to individual schools, liaison within the Partnership itself and with other organisations and key areas, such as Connexions, Playing for Success and New Deal for Communities. Networking activities constituted a significant part of the role. Link Learning Mentors were frequently involved in arranging and participating in the following:

♦ conferences

♦ meetings, including at cluster and Strand level

♦ sharing of good practice events

♦ workshops.

In the majority of Partnerships, line management responsibilities for Learning Mentors were retained within the school. However, one Link Learning Mentor said that he line managed Learning Mentors on full-time contracts, within his Partnership, during the summer period. This was to provide Learning Mentors with access to support and guidance whilst schools were closed.

School visits were of paramount importance in maintaining close and workable relationships with Learning Mentors, their line managers and headteachers. However, a number of interviewees highlighted the difficulties they faced in connection with their credibility in schools. In most cases this was due to a misconception of the Link Learning Mentor's role. This was increasingly likely if they had been recruited from a non-educational background.

In general, visits to each school were on a termly basis. However the Link Learning Mentors could also be contacted directly by Learning Mentors to deal with any issues or problems.

School visits tended to include the following tasks:

♦ examining referral systems

♦ monitoring general working practices

♦ overseeing monitoring and evaluation techniques (discussed in section 6.1)

♦ resolving any issues or problems

♦ speaking with staff, for example Learning Mentors.

Assuring and promoting the development of the Learning Mentor Strand within schools, was another key priority of the Link Learning Mentor role. This involved ensuring the Partnership-wide vision for the development of the Strand was reflected in School Development Plans.

Interviewees highlighted a number of areas which had been problematic in the initial stages of the development of the Link Learning Mentor role and which had been a primary focus for them. In particular the conceptualisation of the Learning Mentor Strand and the introduction of two new roles into schools had been a challenge. Therefore, building good relationships with schools during the first few terms was cited as particularly important. In support of this, where the line management responsibility of Learning Mentors was retained at school level, Link Learning Mentors were keen to provide clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities to help ensure a positive induction period.

## 2.4  Sharing Practice

As noted in section 2.3, Link Learning Mentors supported the sharing of practice between Learning Mentors within their Partnerships and between Partnerships. The phase in which the Partnership had become involved in EIC did not appear to be a primary consideration in identifying with whom to consult, rather this was influenced by the particular area of expertise, geographical proximity or an existing network. The main mechanisms for sharing practice were:

- **Informal relationships** These existed between Learning Mentors in different schools and between Link Learning Mentors in different Partnerships. Link Learning Mentors contacted each other through e-mail and through internet discussion groups and built on relationships which may have been engendered through more formal meetings. Similarly, Learning Mentors met through Partnership-wide, or regional or national, training and maintained these relationships with Learning Mentors in different schools, including visiting them at the school. One Link Learning Mentor explained that she was encouraging this so that Learning Mentors did not feel that they had to wait for a formal meeting to share practice or seek advice. In addition, Learning Mentors searched the websites of other Partnerships for examples of documents and resources, particularly in the initial stages of developing their role.

- **Cluster meetings** Partnerships with larger numbers of schools, and therefore Learning Mentors, grouped them into clusters. As they had a smaller number of people, these clusters were able to meet half termly on average and to build fruitful relationships for networking and sharing practice and resources.

- **Partnership-wide meetings** Even where there were clusters of schools, Learning Mentors across the Partnership met together, generally on a termly basis. These

meetings were facilitated by the Link Learning Mentor and could be located at the LEA or in Partnership schools.

- **Inter-Partnership meetings** In addition to the informal networking between Link Learning Mentors in different Partnerships, there were more formal means of networking including regional meetings. Although in one region this was said to be organised relatively informally by the Partnerships themselves, in two other areas it was noted that this level of networking requires strategic direction and for one organisation, such as DFES or the NMN, to have ownership of it. It is worth noting that, where they existed, these networks and links were not limited to any specific phase of EIC Partnership and that all three Phases appeared to contribute and learn equally.

- **Special events** A number of Partnerships cited special events as an opportunity for sharing practice. Examples included annual celebration events, a conference with mentors, such as adult volunteer mentors, who were not Learning Mentors and a resource sharing event to which each school brought some resources and guests could circulate and share.

In addition, in some cases, line managers of Learning Mentors met through formal network meetings which were generally termly and facilitated by the Link Learning Mentor.

The role of the Link Learning Mentor in facilitating these networks emerged as critical and, in Partnerships which had lacked a Link Learning Mentor for at least some of the time, it was noted that sharing practice between Partnerships was difficult.

## 2.5    Key Findings

- A small number of Link Learning Mentors reported having some degree of prior mentoring experience, usually school-based. Others had no experience of mentoring when they applied for the role and originated from a diversity of backgrounds, including a PRU, LEA and social services

- The majority of Link Learning Mentors had received no formal training relevant to their role. However, a number of interviewees suggested areas where they would have welcomed some level of formal support. These included interviewing techniques, managing change and negotiation

- Link Learning Mentors were frequently involved in arranging and participating in the following events: conferences, sharing of good practice events and workshops

- School visits were of paramount importance in maintaining close and workable relationships with Learning Mentors, their line managers and headteachers.

## 3.    RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING MENTORS

This chapter focuses on the recruitment and retention of Learning Mentors, their induction, the training they have received whilst in post and details of how they are managed in schools.  It covers the following areas:

♦  recruitment to Learning Mentor posts (background and pay and conditions)

♦  retention of Learning Mentors at a school and Partnership level

♦  experiences of induction and introduction to the school

♦  training opportunities experienced by Learning Mentors.

### 3.1    Recruitment of Learning Mentors

As with Phases 1 and 2, the recruitment of Learning Mentors within Phase 3 EiC Partnerships has been positive.  Both Partnership- and school-level interviews revealed an overwhelming number of responses to their advertisements for the posts. One Link Learning Mentor reported receiving 29 applications for one Learning Mentor post.  The main difficulty cited by interviewees was shortlisting the number of applicants.  This had led some Partnerships to be more prescriptive in their recruitment strategy by producing more specific person specifications, which included:

♦  experience of work with young people

♦  good communication skills

♦  IT skills.

Qualification levels of applicants for Learning Mentors posts did not appear to be a primary concern.  In some cases applicants were educated to degree level, however this was not seen as a prerequisite.  In such cases, progression to the role of Learning Mentor was thought to provide a stepping-stone for recruits, perhaps into teaching or social work careers.  However, Learning Mentors were also just as likely to be recruited from these professions.  On the whole, interviewees tended to feel it was more important to encourage diversity in the role rather than stagnate or restrict it. One teacher highlighted the issue of whether it was more effective to recruit younger applicants to the role, who may be better able to relate to the students, or to concentrate on older applicants, who may be more experienced.

### 3.1.1  Backgrounds of Learning Mentors

Learning Mentors originated from several backgrounds, these included:

- mental health services
- police service
- prison/youth/social work services
- residential care
- teaching profession
- charitable organisations.

Several Learning Mentors had previously been employed in other posts within the same school and a small number were past students themselves.  It was felt that these were positive qualities, as such individuals were already familiar with the school including the structures, policies and staff.  In addition, they could perhaps empathise more easily or hold a certain level of status with students in the school.  A number of Learning Mentors also reported that their own life experiences were particularly useful in helping them to prepare and deliver the role.

### 3.1.2  Job descriptions and terms and conditions

In most Partnerships, a generic job description had been developed at a Partnership level.  This was then customized by individual schools to reflect their own needs and requirements.  While some schools had adapted their job descriptions over time in order to respond to the changing role of the Learning Mentors, other schools had job descriptions that were no longer in line with the requirements of the role.  One Learning Mentor reported that *'a job description could never really cover the job unless it was huge'*.

The terms and conditions of employment varied between Partnerships.  Four Partnerships revealed that they had introduced a combination of term-time and full-time contracts.  One of these had concentrated the term-time contracts in the primary schools and full-time contracts in the secondary schools.  Two Partnerships exclusively had full-time contracts and one was term-time only.  The rationale behind these differences appeared to hinge on the availability of sufficient funding.  There was some deliberation amongst interviewees as to the most effective contract on which to employ Learning Mentors.  A number of issues regarding this point were raised.  In particular, some interviewees were concerned about ensuring a sufficient level of activity for Learning Mentors during the summer holiday period, if employed

full-time. In these cases schools had introduced a range of additional tasks for Learning Mentors to become involved with, which included:

♦ homework clubs
♦ summers schools
♦ school trips
♦ training courses.

A number of Partnerships were keen to ensure that mentees could continue to access the support of Learning Mentors over the summer holiday period.

Other issues highlighted included that potential Learning Mentors who were currently employed full-time, had to balance their interest in the job, against having term-time only contracts and reduced pay. Also cited was the restricted ability for those Learning Mentors employed on a term time only basis to recoup any accrued time in lieu.

The Learning Mentors were employed on a mixture of temporary and permanent contracts. Although this highlighted a concern that Learning Mentors might be less willing to stay in the role if they knew it was on a temporary basis, as discussed in section 3.2, this did not materialise. It was also suggested that recruiting to posts that were not permanent could oppose the recognition of mentoring being viewed *'as a career in education, not just something until funding ceases'*.

### 3.1.3 Salaries

Salary levels remained a contentious issue for many of the interviewees spoken to. A number of the issues were similar to those found in the 2002 evaluation of Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships.

In some cases there was a Partnership-wide approach to salaries, with all Learning Mentors in the Partnership on the same pay scale. In other Partnerships, salaries were differentiated according to individual schools. Across all Partnerships, reported Learning Mentor salaries ranged from £9,000 to £22,000. Within Partnerships, salary differentials meant that in one Partnership, Learning Mentors could earn between £9,000 and £17,000, depending on which school they were employed in. Particularly where there was little parity between the salaries of neighbouring Partnerships retention of Learning Mentors was said to be a concern. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.2.

The key issues which were reported in connection with Learning Mentors' salaries were:

♦ Salaries need to be of a sufficient level to attract and retain Learning Mentors with appropriate experience, such as teachers and social workers.

♦ Pay structures should reflect equivalent salary levels in related organisations such as Connexions Personal Advisors.

♦ The introduction of a clear, national pay structure would help to avoid inconsistencies both between and within Partnerships.

♦ Pay structures could be extended to recognise different levels of Learning Mentors, for example Assistant and Lead Learning Mentors.

One Link Learning Mentor felt, that in some schools, Learning Mentors were performing at a senior level but were not paid accordingly.

## 3.2    Retention of Learning Mentors

A number of concerns were identified about the retention of Learning Mentors in the research carried out in 2002 with the Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships.  Principally, these were:

♦ competition from new roles, for example Connexions Personal Advisors

♦ salary differentials

♦ short-term nature of many Learning Mentor contracts

♦ lack of opportunities for professional development.

The current findings suggest that, while in some Partnerships these issues have dissipated, in others they remain a concern.  One Link Learning Mentor felt that in practice there had been no move by their Learning Mentors to the Connexions Service.  She cited that improving links with the Personal Advisor role was something she would like to see in the future.  However, another Link Learning Mentor remained concerned about the potential attraction of the Connexions Service to Learning Mentors.  In particular, *'they are paid more money and the post-graduate training programme is free'*.

Salary differentials remained a concern in relation to the retention of Learning Mentors.  In particular, even where Partnerships had adopted the same pay scale in all schools, if the salaries in neighbouring Partnership areas were higher, this could lead to Learning Mentors applying for posts in other Partnerships and contribute to

feelings of disaffection amongst staff. One interviewee remarked *'at national conferences, people find out they are not all being paid the same in other areas'*.

As discussed in section 3.1.2, Learning Mentors were employed either on temporary or permanent contracts. As suggested, temporary contracts could be viewed as potentially less attractive to new recruits. However, there had been a positive response to recruitment and both school and Partnership level interviews did not identify temporary contracts as an issue surrounding retention.

Where Learning Mentors had moved to new employment, the view was that it was not dissatisfaction with the role but a desire to build on their experience and develop new skills elsewhere. This may be expected, especially in the Phase 3 Partnerships areas, where many of the Learning Mentors have been in post from the outset, accumulating two years experience. A broadening of the role and the development of a clear progression route within it, for example Assistant and Link Learning Mentors, were seen as potential solutions to support retention. However, a number of Partnerships were reluctant to demarcate the role too much for fear of creating a structure which may be divisive, especially in small teams of Learning Mentors. The professional development opportunities for Learning Mentors are discussed in more detail in section 7.4.

## 3.3   Induction of Learning Mentors

There were two aspects to the introduction of Learning Mentors into schools. The first involved induction for Learning Mentors as new members of staff in the school and providing them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the role. The second involved explaining this role to members of the teaching and wider school staff. These two aspects were interrelated and both are discussed in this section.

Partnership- and school-level interviews revealed the use of a number of structured induction packages for introducing Learning Mentors into schools. Several schools favoured a designated introductory period. In one school this encompassed the first term, in other schools it consisted of a two-week period.

During this time, Learning Mentors were able to familiarise themselves with the school in a number of ways, which included: speaking to other members of staff, establishing the layout of the school, opportunities to assess the resources they required or procedures they needed to establish, and time to promote their role within the school. During this period, Learning Mentors tended not to have a caseload.

Several Learning Mentors highlighted the importance of the induction period as an influential time. It allowed them to publicise what they were doing, particularly to other school staff, students and parents. Some found that creating explanatory booklets or leaflets were an effective method of achieving this. A line manager at one school explained that *'at the beginning you need to communicate with staff, talk to key people and get them on pastoral meeting patterns'*. Interviews at one school revealed that they found it beneficial to seek advice from other schools on the most effective ways to introduce Learning Mentors. A line manager at another school spoke of accessing the websites of other Partnerships in developing their own induction documentation.

Schools were also keen to deliver a number of training activities during this introductory period, which included the following areas:

♦ child protection
♦ confidentiality
♦ Learning Mentor role
♦ self-esteem.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of the two-way familiarisation process, which was key to the effective introduction of Learning Mentors into schools. On the one hand, Learning Mentors needed to acquaint themselves with the school and their role, and on the other hand, other members of staff, students and parents also needed to understand and become knowledgeable about the Mentoring role. The following methods were mentioned as important catalysts of this process:

♦ introductions at staff meetings
♦ lesson observations
♦ school assemblies
♦ school newsletters
♦ shadowing more experienced members of staff.

Despite a clear drive by most of the schools to introduce Learning Mentors into schools as effectively as possible, a number of teachers remained uncertain about the role. This was an issue also highlighted in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships. A head of year in one school explained that it would be helpful for staff to receive a clear outline of the role of the Learning Mentor and details of the sorts of problems and issues for

which they could refer students. The increasing likelihood of teachers working alongside a range of support staff in schools, such as classroom assistants, presents a challenge in introducing an additional role, with potential for also working in the classroom. Such roles need to be clearly differentiated in order to make the most effective use of all support staff. This working relationship is explored more extensively in section 5.3.

## 3.4    Training of Learning Mentors

As discussed in section 2.2, in most Partnerships the primary responsibility for assessing and providing training lies with the Link Learning Mentor. The interviews revealed that Learning Mentors were able to access a number of informal and formal training opportunities. These included:

- formal training courses (national and local)
- informal training through work with other organisations such as The Fostering Agency
- In-Service Educational Training (INSET)
- training within network meetings – for example cluster meetings.

A number of Learning Mentors had participated in the national mentoring training programme, which they complemented with attendance at additional courses as and when required. These were either locally provided, for example through the EiC Partnership, or nationally provided, for example by the National Mentoring Network (NMN). The areas in which training was provided were similar to those in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships. These included:

Behavioural and emotional
- anger management
- bereavement
- eating disorders
- self-esteem
- stress
- mental health.

Educational
- key stage 3 strategy
- vocational training.

Organisational

♦ communication

♦ group work

♦ organisational skills.


Specialist areas

♦ transition

♦ child protection

♦ cultural awareness.


At one Partnership, the Link Learning Mentor outlined the importance of training, which they were hoping to extend and develop by seconding a Link Learning Mentor with primary responsibility for this area. This person would be able to concentrate exclusively on the training requirements of the Learning Mentors.

Interviews at one Partnership revealed they had experienced some problems in connection with schools releasing Learning Mentors to attend training courses. The Link Learning Mentor remarked:

> *Schools are relying on them so heavily, they won't release them for network meetings or training. Instead of letting them all go, they have to go one at a time.*

However, there appeared to be a general appreciation within schools of Learning Mentor training requirements. A line manager at one school was supportive of the opportunities available to Learning Mentors:

> *They are encouraged to think of any other training needs as part of the Performance Management System. It is school-wide and Learning Mentors are part of it too, as staff members themselves.*

## 3.5   Management of Learning Mentors

Management responsibility for Learning Mentors was located predominantly within schools. However, as mentioned earlier, in one Partnership the Link Learning Mentor acquired this additional role over the summer period. In the majority of Partnerships, line management was not the responsibility of Link Learning Mentors. Their role was aimed at *'managing the Strand'*. This was an important point raised in one

Partnership to emphasise that one of the principal elements of the Link Learning Mentor's role was to advise and support schools about managerial issues, rather than any direct line management responsibility themselves. This differentiation needed to be highlighted to ensure clear lines of accountability and clarity of the management structure which existed.

Line management responsibility in schools tended to be held by a senior member of staff, such as the deputy head or a head of year. As highlighted in the findings from 2002, in the Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, the key to effective management of Learning Mentors was accessibility. The opportunity for Learning Mentors to approach another member of staff, a senior or Link Learning Mentor or a line manager, either formally or informally, was imperative. Line managers spoke of some of the core constituents of their role. These included:

- budget responsibility, including authorising resource or equipment purchases
- discussing and reviewing caseloads
- encouraging development of new skills and undertaking training
- providing advice, guidance and reassurance, for example related to child protection issues.

Various methods were employed to review the work and progress of the Learning Mentors. In one school, the Learning Mentors were required to submit to their line manager a timetable and short summary of each of the sessions they had undertaken during the week. In another school, Learning Mentor reviews were carried out by the line manager every half-term and concentrated on assessments of pre- and post-referral student behaviour, attitude, punctuality and grades. Other approaches used to review both Mentor and mentee progress included:

- analysis of existing student data
- review meetings with other members of staff such as heads of year, LSU managers, Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinators
- weekly target review sheets.

In addition to these review processes, most schools had weekly Learning Mentor team meetings, with less frequent one-to-one sessions, perhaps on a termly basis. One school had trialled weekly individual meetings but found they were an ineffective means of providing support. It was decided to arrange them on an ad hoc basis, if people had a particular issue or concern.

Line managers were also keen to promote independence within their Learning Mentor teams. This was echoed in the response from the line manager in one school *'if you don't give people responsibility then they don't take responsibility'*.

Overall, both school- and Partnership-level interviews revealed no immediate issues concerning the management of Learning Mentors. The vast majority of interviewees were positive about the existing provision and the systems that were in place appeared to be well received.

## 3.6    Key Findings

- The recruitment of Learning Mentors within EiC Partnerships has been successful. Both Partnership- and school-level interviews revealed an overwhelming number of responses to their advertisements for the posts.

- In most Partnerships, a generic job description had been developed at a Partnership level. This was then customized by individual schools to reflect their own needs and requirements.

- Retention of Learning Mentors had not proved problematic. Where Learning Mentors had moved to new employment, the view was that it was not dissatisfaction with the role but a desire to build on their experience and develop new skills elsewhere.

- Several Learning Mentors highlighted the importance of the induction period as an influential time. It allowed them to publicise what they were doing, particularly to other school staff, students and parents.

- A number of Learning Mentors had participated in the national mentoring training programme, which they complemented with attendance at additional courses, as and when required.

- The effectiveness of management of Learning Mentors was assisted by the accessibility of the manager. The opportunity for Learning Mentors to approach another member of staff, a senior or Link Learning Mentor or a line manager, either formally or informally, was valued.

## 4.    THE USE OF LEARNING MENTORS

This chapter examines the access to and deployment of Learning Mentors in schools and outlines the referral process by detailing the main reasons students are referred and the processes involved.  It covers the following areas:

♦   main barriers to learning in schools

♦   characteristics of students who are referred

♦   referral procedures and Learning Mentor accessibility

♦   how Learning Mentors operate within schools.

### 4.1    Main Barriers to Learning in Schools

Interviewees were asked to describe the main barriers to learning for students in their school.  The main barriers identified included:

♦   attendance or punctuality problems

♦   bereavement

♦   drug and alcohol problems

♦   emotional and behavioural difficulties

♦   English as an additional language (EAL)

♦   family problems – including sibling disaffection or criminal behaviour

♦   ethnic diversity – including a higher number of asylum seekers

♦   high teenage pregnancy rate

♦   lack of positive role models

♦   mixture of very able and less able students

♦   social issues such as bullying or low self-esteem.

### 4.2    Main Characteristics of Mentored Students

The students who were receiving Learning Mentor support were referred for a variety of reasons.  These included:

♦   anger management problems

♦   attendance/punctuality problems

♦   behavioural problems

♦   bereavement issues

- low levels of attainment
- low self-esteem
- problems at home such as divorce
- students with permanent or fixed-term exclusions.

## 4.3    Referral and Access

Establishing and promoting effective referral procedures for students was one of the key priorities for Learning Mentors within schools in Phase 3 Partnerships and similarly reflected the referral processes highlighted in schools in Phase 1 and 2 Partnership areas.  In most cases, referrals were initiated by a teacher or, in some instances, a parent through a designated individual such as the head of year or the learning coordinator.  This was made via a referral form providing relevant information.  This tended to consist of recommendations that a particular student was experiencing difficulties for which Learning Mentor support could be appropriate, for example punctuality, non-attendance, behaviour.  Details of additional information could also be provided, such as any previous strategies which had been used with the student.  Subsequently, a meeting with the appropriate departments and services would take place to discuss the most effective course of action.  Students were also given an opportunity to decide whether they would like to meet with a Learning Mentor or not, and parents were contacted to provide them with information.  A form tutor in one school spoke about his experiences of the referral process:

> *I gave a list of pupils initially in my form I felt needed support from a Learning Mentor, and that was to the Learning Mentors, to provide them with information.  Now if I wanted, I would probably approach a Learning Mentor directly if I was to refer someone.*

This teacher also went on to explain that he was more likely to refer students from his own form class, rather than subject classes.  This was because he spent less time with students in their subject classes and was less appreciative of any problems or issues that they may be experiencing.

Once a referral to a Learning Mentor had been confirmed, the Learning Mentors tended to formally introduce themselves to the students and issue them with a permission slip to give to their class teacher.  In some cases, the Learning Mentor would supplement their knowledge about the referred student by observing them in the classroom environment or speaking to relevant staff members.

Most schools also supported self-referral. In such cases, students were able to approach Learning Mentors or heads of year directly and ask for support. It was felt this improved accessibility to and availability of the service. However, one line manager pointed out the potential pressures placed on Learning Mentors due to providing a constant level of provision, with little non-contact time built in. A Learning Mentor in another school also expressed concern about self-referral commenting that *'every kid would want to do it'*.

Access to Learning Mentors was, as mentioned, generally through a formal referral process but included a less formal, drop-in basis. Most schools operated an open door policy before and after school and during break and lunch times. Students were encouraged to make use of this facility and needed no prior permission to attend.

Learning Mentor caseloads varied between individuals and between schools. Reported caseloads were between 12 and 17 students, with an average of 14 students highlighted as a workable caseload. Also taken into account in some cases was the intensity of the cases involved, in order to manage them more effectively. Interestingly, when compared to the reported caseload of Learning Mentors in the Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships (between 14 and 60), there is a significant reduction in caseload number in the Phase 3 Partnerships. Of course a direct comparison cannot be made, due to the combination of other factors involved and the specific nature of schools in each of the three Phases.

The process of drawing Learning Mentor support to a close varied slightly between schools. However, in all schools the process was referred to as *'exiting'* the mentee. In one school mentees were issued with an exit questionnaire. Learning Mentors in another school simply explained to the student when it was time to move on, and in another school they made half-termly reviews of each student to decide if they should be exited. Across schools, the main aim of exiting a mentee was to make it a gradual process, emphasising that the support was still available to the student despite the fact they were no longer meeting their Learning Mentor on a formal basis.

## 4.4    Deployment of Learning Mentors

### 4.4.1  Partnership level

Most Partnerships initially prioritised the deployment of Learning Mentors in schools with the greatest demand, for example those with a high level of free school meal recipients. However, with additional funds, many have extended this provision to

provide supplementary posts at secondary schools and in primary schools to complement and extend the work they were doing at a secondary level. The development of transitional Mentors was also seen as a positive extension of this Strand, which included targeting support at vulnerable students during the move from primary to secondary school. Where Partnerships indicated the number of Learning Mentors they currently employed (secondary, primary and transitional), numbers varied between 41 in one Partnership and 120 in another. Some schools employed assistant and lead Learning Mentors in addition to Learning Mentors and others recruited exclusively at the Learning Mentor level. Interviewees outlined their reasoning behind both of these approaches. On the one hand, it was felt that offering more than one level of Mentor would provide opportunities for progression, on the other hand, concerns were aimed at whether this may cause friction or discontent within the team if certain individuals had more authority than others.

### 4.4.2  School level

Schools focused Learning Mentor support either at a behavioural, educational or pastoral level or a combination of these. Primarily, schools decided which approach best suited their individual needs. Care was taken not to make the focus too prescriptive or limited. Schools that adopted a predominantly behavioural focus felt that working on educational issues was the domain of the classroom assistant. Others who were more attainment orientated felt that behavioural issues should be the focus of the LSU. Overall, the interviews revealed that schools and the EiC Partnerships seemed satisfied with the approach they had adopted. The key factor appeared to be ensuring people were clear about the area they were focusing on in order to minimise duplication and maximise effectiveness.

In some cases, Learning Mentors were assigned to a particular year group or key stage. One Partnership had initially decided to deploy Mentors at key stage 3. Strategically, they felt this would offer an effective approach and would complement key stage 4 support provided by the Connexions service. Subsequently, with the change in focus offered by Connexions, this was reassessed in order to target transition between the two key stages. Those Mentors who supported particular year groups found that the type of work they were doing varied according to the year group they were supporting. For example, in Years 10 and 11 the emphasis was on coursework and revision but in Year 7 the focus was more about raising general achievement levels.

Several Learning Mentors reported providing support to large student cohorts. In one school a Learning Mentor was working with Year 7 students prior to the school's award ceremony, in order to improve their confidence. In schools in another Partnership, Learning Mentor posts had been created specifically to target Somali and Black African-Caribbean young people. The Link Learning Mentor spoke of the work they had been doing:

> *There are often language barriers here and the parents found school intimidating. We have helped bridge that gap and provide coffee mornings. So rather than only coming to school when a child is bad, parents have the opportunity to visit the school at other times and this has increased communication between the two areas.*

The introduction of transitional Learning Mentors was another area which interviewees identified as an effective deployment strategy. A headteacher at one school explained why they had adopted this approach:

> [The Learning Mentor] *has been working closely with the primary feeder schools. It was felt that this would aid transition and enable the Learning Mentors to identify any pupils in need of additional support, before they come to the school.*

The incorporation of Learning Mentors into the wider school structure was also reflected in interviews with Learning Mentors and LSU managers. They revealed a cooperative and integrated approach adopted by both parties in providing a comprehensive support service to students. In those schools with an LSU, Learning Mentors, although not actively based within the Unit, would provide support to their mentees if they were attending the LSU or facilitate student transition back into mainstream provision. The working relationship between Learning Mentors and LSUs is detailed more extensively in section 5.4.

### 4.4.3  Working with students

The meetings between Learning Mentors and their mentees were arranged in a number of ways. In some cases the support was primarily on a one-to-one basis, in other cases the meetings were arranged with pairs of students or as group work sessions. In this way, more students could be targeted and it provided extra support for those involved. However, some students appreciated the privacy and more concentrated support offered by an individual session.

In some schools, and with some mentees, the support was provided outside the classroom in a more private area, in other cases the support took place within the classroom. Some schools felt that supporting students in the classroom encroached on the work of classroom assistants and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) department. In such cases, it was felt that the role of the Learning Mentor in the classroom should be that of an observer and that any learning support should take place outside the classroom environment. However, a head of year in another school felt that Learning Mentors should work more extensively in the classroom to ensure the compatibility and achievability of student targets set by teachers and heads of year, with their own targets and to encourage effective lines of communication between relevant parties.

In addition to formally arranged meetings and group work, the Learning Mentors' role encompassed a range of other activities and responsibilities. These were similar to those reported in the Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships and included:

- anger management/self-esteem workshops
- break time duty
- fund-raising – for example, arranging sponsored events
- liaison with other services, for example social services, Connexions, pregnancy units
- liaison with parents
- lunch time groups, for example targeting social skills
- student peer mentoring
- school trips and residential visits
- support to students in further education.

Learning Mentors in one school had also produced information packs which targeted specific areas including bullying, classroom survival and anger management. These were felt to provide a re-usable resource which equipped Learning Mentors with a structure around which they could base their meetings with students. The availability of other resources differed between schools. In some, the Learning Mentors shared an office with other members of staff, in others they had considerable space and extensive facilities in which to carry out their work. In one case this included access to direct phone lines, through which they were able to guarantee greater levels of confidentiality which was considered important when, for example, conducting conversations with parents. One Link Learning Mentor spoke about their concerns about the availability of resources:

*It would be good if the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) had written into the original plan that schools must make available confidential, private places for people to work in. Especially when trying to work in confidence. There is a real lack of resources.*

A number of Learning Mentors spoke about the skills they thought were necessary to carry out their role effectively. These included:

- confidence
- creativity
- empathy
- good communication skills
- good sense of humour
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills
- listening skills
- organisational skills
- patience
- trustworthiness.

One school was keen to make sure that the Learning Mentors were included in the wider school structure. This was highlighted by the line manager:

*Each has a caseload but each has responsibility to become involved in the School Action Plan. They have wide school involvement in activities such as homework clubs, study support and the library.*

There was also a real drive to ensure Learning Mentor services were used appropriately. In particular it was pointed out that they were not classroom assistants or there to impose discipline. One interviewee described them as *'a professional friend'*.

## 4.5 Key Findings

- A number of barriers to learning were identified in the school and Partnership interviews. These included attendance and punctuality problems, bereavement, drug and alcohol problems, and emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The students who were receiving Learning Mentor support were referred for a variety of reasons. These included low self-esteem, problems at home and students with permanent or fixed-term exclusions.
- Establishing and promoting effective referral procedures for students was one of the key priorities within schools. In most cases referrals were initiated by a

teacher or parent through a designated individual such as the head of year or the learning coordinator.

- Access to Learning Mentors was primarily available through a formal referral process or on a less formal, drop-in basis. Most schools operated an open door policy before and after school and during break and lunch times. Students were encouraged to make use of this facility and needed no prior permission to attend.

- Most schools focused Learning Mentor support either at a behavioural, educational or pastoral level or a combination of each. Primarily it was seen as the school's responsibility to decide which approach best suited their individual needs.

- There was a real drive to ensure that Learning Mentor services were used appropriately. In particular they were not classroom assistants or there to impose discipline.

## 5.    WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter explores the nature of the working relationships between Learning Mentors and other staff and students.  It discusses:

♦    teaching staff's and students' perceptions of the role, including Learning Mentors' views on teachers' and students' understanding of the role of Learning Mentors

♦    nature of the working relationships between Learning Mentors and Link Learning Mentors and between Learning Mentors and teaching staff and LSUs

♦    extent to which Learning Mentors liaise with external agencies.

### 5.1    Perceptions of the Learning Mentor Role

### 5.1.1   Staff's perceptions of the role

As noted in Chapter 3, the Learning Mentor role was introduced to staff through assemblies, newsletters and staff meetings.  Individual staff and students' perceptions of the role are discussed in this chapter.

Learning Mentors commonly noted that school staff had not fully understood their role initially, and indeed pointed out that there had been some resistance, but that this had improved as time had progressed.  This reflects the findings in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships.  As one Learning Mentor explained, teachers were *'slowly starting to appreciate the role and have generally accepted that we are here to stay'*.  These improvements were attributed to the increased experience that teaching staff had of working with them and, for one Learning Mentor, because they were working in classrooms some of the time and teachers could see them working.  Learning Mentors identified a need to continue improving the understanding that staff had of the role through raising their profile and publicising some of the outcomes for young people more widely.  This need was ongoing due to staff changes.

This perspective is supported by the interviews with teaching staff.  A widespread view was that interviewees were positive but that there was initially a lack of clarity about the role among staff.  However, this had changed over time, partly because, as a head of year explained, the role had been *'proved to me because I work so closely with them'* while a second teacher commented that *'now, I lean on them a great deal'*.  Nevertheless, for staff who worked less closely with the Learning Mentors, a need for training was noted particularly because, as one teacher commented, unlike the roles of

many non-teaching staff in schools, the role is *'not standard'* so new colleagues may not be familiar with it.

Overall, as was the case in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, interviewees perceived the Learning Mentor role to have a pastoral focus, although some also saw it as entailing a behavioural support role. Some staff believed that Learning Mentors fulfilled an educational support role either explicitly, through study support and encouraging students to complete their coursework, or more subtly through assisting the student in overcoming their barriers to learning so that they could then succeed educationally. There appeared to be a general acceptance of the individual and responsive aspect of the Learning Mentor's role. For example, a head of year indicated that Learning Mentors *'do whatever they can to encourage pupils to overcome their barriers'* and that their focus *'depends on what the individual's problem is'*, while a second teacher concurred that the aims of the Learning Mentor were *'personal to the needs of the individual child'*. A few teachers simply described the role as being to *'keep kids in school'*.

As was the case in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, the role of the Learning Mentor was often said to not be disciplinarian, as the role of the *'big stick'* remained with the head of year, but more to explore the issues which might underlie challenging behaviour. Many teachers who were interviewed noted that Learning Mentors had more time to achieve this and were helped in this by having a non-teaching role. One teacher explained that, as a form tutor, *'no matter how hard you try to get to know them* [the students], *there is a teacher–pupil barrier and it's very hard to break that down ... I think that for someone to be in school, to be totally pastoral and not have the academic pressures that a teacher does, has to be a good thing.'*

Finally, one head of year noted an evolving aspect of the role of Learning Mentors, which was to give advice and guidance to staff. The way in which teachers and Learning Mentors worked together is discussed in section 5.3.

### 5.1.2  Students' perceptions of the role

All of the teaching staff who were interviewed observed that students saw the Learning Mentors positively and, in general, there was no stigma associated with seeing a Learning Mentor. This was also found in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships. As one head of year summarised it: *'I have never heard anything derogatory being said about any of the pupils because they see a Learning Mentor.'* The absence of any stigma was generally attributed to the fact that Learning Mentors worked with a wide

range of students and so any perception that a student saw one because they were *'thick'* was quickly dispelled.  As a Learning Mentor explained, students realised that the Learning Mentors *'work directly with you for whatever difficulties you are having as a person'*.  Other comments suggested that the lack of stigma was due to the way in which Learning Mentors were introduced and to the individual characters of the Learning Mentors.

Indeed, rather than any stigma, there was some evidence of over-demand for the Learning Mentors who were described as *'very popular'*.  Teaching staff noted that some students value the attention, which in many cases they do not receive at home, and consequently *'clamour'* for the Learning Mentors' attention.  The Learning Mentors were reportedly seen by students as *'big uncles'*, and the stability which they provided was valued.  It appeared that the Learning Mentors were respected by the students, although one teacher said this had taken time to develop.  They were said by one head of year to be seen as different from teachers which was particularly beneficial where students' relationship with teachers was poor.  This is supported by another head of year who commented that *'even some usually poorly behaved pupils seem to have a certain amount of respect for them* [the Learning Mentors] *and work well with them'*.

The positive perception which students had of the Learning Mentors emerged from the interviews with a sample of students who had met with one.  All of the students viewed the Learning Mentors positively and regarded a Learning Mentor as someone who could help them *'with your difficulties'* and with whom they could discuss their feelings.  Although some commented that they would ask a teacher for help with work-related issues, students felt that they could talk to a Learning Mentor more easily, and they generally contrasted the role of the Learning Mentor with that of the teacher.  Their comments revealed that Learning Mentors and teachers were seen to be different in terms of:

- The **time** they could give to the student – the comments of one student, that *'he has time for me, teachers don't have time'* and of a second that *'teachers are too busy to help you, but Learning Mentors have time'*, reflect the comments of many.

- The **interest** they could take in the student as an individual – as a student expressed it, *'to a teacher you are just one person in a whole class.  A Mentor has more contact with you and is interested in you as a person.'*

- The **approach** and manner which they adopted – as illustrated by the comment of one student who said that Learning Mentors *'listen to you without interrupting or telling you you're wrong'* while a second described how they *'give more explanation and they're friendly in the way they say things'*, and others described

the non-judgemental approach – as one said, *'no matter what mood I am in, they don't judge me'*. In the view of a fourth student, a Learning Mentor was *'someone you can go and see when things have gone wrong, and not get hassled'*, while a fifth contrasted this with teaching staff who didn't listen to the students' point of view but were said to *'ask after they have made the decision'*.

♦ The **trust** which the students felt they could place in the Learning Mentor. Students observed that they could tell things to a Learning Mentor confidentially, whereas in general, they felt that this was not the case with teachers.

The views of students in Phase 3 Partnerships reflected the experience of those in Phases 1 and 2.

## 5.2    Working Relationships with Link Learning Mentors

As described in Chapter 2, the Partnership Link Learning Mentor's role incorporated provision of training and support for Learning Mentors, support for line managers, networking and communicating and monitoring and evaluating. In the two case-study Partnerships, the Link Learning Mentors did not line manage the Learning Mentors directly.

The line managers generally valued the support which the Link Learning Mentors provided. They brought expertise and guidance which helped the line managers to perform their role. One manager emphasised the importance of the role in representing the Learning Mentors in the school and helping to ensure that the role progressed.

The Learning Mentors had benefited from training organised by the Link Learning Mentors and from the strategic guidance they provided, including suggestions for structuring their time. In addition, they were also often in regular contact for ongoing support and guidance. The challenge for Link Learning Mentors in supporting the Learning Mentors, while not having direct line management responsibility, was illustrated by the concern expressed by one line manager that, on occasion, Learning Mentors did not consult with their line manager but rather with the Link Learning Mentors.

## 5.3    Working Relationships between Learning Mentors and Teachers

As was the case in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, Learning Mentors tended to work most closely with the heads of year who were one of the main sources of referral and were also the main people to whom the Learning Mentors provided feedback. There were

varying degrees of formality to the relationship which, in some cases, was *'on the hoof'* whilst in others was more formalised with regular weekly meetings to review progress. In general, a more formal meeting every term occurred between the Learning Mentors and the appropriate heads of year to review the progress of the students and identify new referrals.

As discussed in section 4.3, once a student was referred, the Learning Mentor would gather information together. In some instances, this involved discussions with form tutors and/or classroom observation. For many of the form tutors who were interviewed, this was the main point of contact which they had with the Learning Mentors. Other occasions for working with the Learning Mentors included providing information to support students with revision, or identifying students who had not completed their coursework and then allowing them *'some slack'* as they were working with their Learning Mentor to complete it.

Communication was widely noted as central to developing an effective working relationship between Learning Mentors and teaching staff. One common approach was to provide a list to teachers of the names of students who were in the Learning Mentors' caseload. One head of year commented that, in some instances, staff would approach the relevant Learning Mentor instead of the head of year if there was a concern with a student who was on the list. A further aspect of communication was sharing feedback between teachers and Learning Mentors. In addition to feedback for teachers on the work of the Learning Mentors and the progress of the students, which was generally provided to the heads of year, Learning Mentors noted a need for teaching staff to provide feedback on the students and their progress. As one Mentor explained, as they were not in lessons, it was not always possible to investigate the progress of students. To address this, one school had implemented a form for teaching staff to *'grade'* the behaviour of the students in their lessons. A second reason identified by a Learning Mentor, for requiring feedback from teachers, was to gather positive feedback which could be given to the student. She noted that part of the role of the Learning Mentor was to act as a *'mediator'* and bring the perspectives of the teacher and student together and address any misconceptions. In her experience, students were sometimes surprised to receive positive comments from a teacher whom they had thought disliked them and the students subsequently adapted their attitude.

Establishing effective communication and building the working relationships between Learning Mentors and teaching staff generally remained an ongoing challenge. One

line manager described how she sometimes had to *'build bridges'* as there could be *'friction'* between the different parties and emphasised the need for the teaching staff to feel that they were being heard. Learning Mentors and their managers were seeking ways of establishing good working relationships through, for example, inviting teachers to an open evening at the Learning Mentors' centre, meeting teachers out of standard school time through involvement in after school clubs, and spending time in the staff room.

There was variation in the extent to which teaching staff drew on the experience of Learning Mentors and consulted with them. In some cases, as noted in section 5.1.1, teaching staff regarded them as trained experts and would either *'bounce ideas off'* the Learning Mentors or consult them regarding, for example, anger management. Other staff had not done so. Although there may be a variety of explanations for this, it may be, as one Learning Mentor observed, because teachers did not perceive the Learning Mentors to be *'the same level of staff'* and thought that *'they know best what the kids want'*. Nevertheless, as noted in section 5.1.1, one head of year saw the role of Learning Mentors as experts in specific areas evolving as they became more established in the school.

With one or two exceptions, interviewees did not believe that there was duplication or overlap between the roles of the Learning Mentors and school staff. Where the roles were not believed to fit together well, it was noted that *'more discourse'* was needed between the two parties to clarify their respective roles. More generally, it was felt that the Learning Mentors had the time to build a relationship with the student and, in some cases, their family, and to take on some of the work that heads of year in particular had been undertaking previously. Moreover, they had expertise in areas of pastoral support, or could access alternative sources of support, which some form tutors might find challenging, such as support with mental health issues.

## 5.4    Relationships between Learning Mentors and LSUs

All four of the schools visited had a Learning Support Unit (LSU) although they were given different titles. In all of the schools, the Learning Mentors and LSU managers were part of the same team, often the inclusion team, and usually had the same line manager. Consequently, at a strategic level, they attended the same meetings and shared information and discussed referrals. At a more operational level, Learning Mentors in three of the schools worked closely with the LSU. In the fourth school, the line manager explained that the DfES guidelines precluded the Learning Mentors from working in the LSU and consequently it was not part of their job description.

In the schools where the Learning Mentors and LSU managers indicated a close working relationship, there was generally an *'overlap'* between students who were attending the LSU and the Learning Mentors' caseload.  Therefore, if a student was working with a Learning Mentor and was in the LSU for some of their school day, the Learning Mentor might visit and work with them there.  In one school, a more formalised approach was taken whereby each Learning Mentor was timetabled to work in the LSU for one lesson a week.  One LSU manager highlighted the importance of communication between these two EiC Strands to exchange information when Learning Mentors and LSUs were working with the same students.  In addition to the formal meetings noted above, ongoing communication between Learning Mentors and LSUs was said by one manager to have *'naturally evolved and we've worked together to achieve it'*.  In addition, communication helped the students not to be over-burdened, as she explained: *'we communicate with one another so we avoid duplication of things'* such as report cards for students.  In a second LSU, the manager coordinated the data collection about students' progress for the Learning Mentors and LSU to provide to the person with line management responsibility for both.  The variety of approaches which schools adopted, and the extent to which Learning Mentors and LSUs worked together, reflect the findings of the LSU strand study.

Although staff in the LSUs included Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) or the equivalent, one LSU manager explained the distinction between the roles of LSAs and Learning Mentors with the latter seen to be focusing on *'the emotional side of things'* while LSAs concentrated more on learning.  Furthermore, Learning Mentors were said to be beneficial because they were able to work with students both within the LSU and in the main school.  The manager explained that she perceived their role as *'to provide a link between the* [LSU] *and the school.  It's a big jump.''*

A further aspect of the working relationship between the Learning Mentors and LSUs was the mutual support that they sometimes provided.  A Learning Mentor commented that he could speak with the manager of the LSU if he had a concern and his line manager was unavailable.  Similarly, one LSU manager valued the support she received from the Learning Mentors as she worked largely independently with the most challenging students in the school and appreciated being able to talk and discuss with her Learning Mentor colleagues.

## 5.5  Working with External Agencies

In all four of the schools visited, Learning Mentors were involved to some degree in liaising with external agencies.  There were two elements to this:

- liaising with agencies and individuals who were already involved with the student
- identifying new agencies to support the student.

Some of the students who were working with a Learning Mentor were already involved with other agencies, most commonly social services.  Some Learning Mentors would liaise with these agencies and attend meetings and keep the relevant member of the teaching staff informed.  Learning Mentors were also often involved in liaising with the parents or carers of the students.  As noted earlier, and was found in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, the Learning Mentors were said to have more time to develop a relationship with the family of the student.  In addition, one Learning Mentor observed that parents could find teachers *'threatening'* and did not feel as comfortable talking with them as with a Learning Mentor.

In order to provide appropriate support to meet the needs of the students with whom they were working, Learning Mentors often drew on the specialist support of external agencies.  In many cases, the links which they had established were new for the school and two heads of year remarked on the valuable knowledge which the Learning Mentors had of such agencies.  Learning Mentors had drawn on a wide variety of agencies including:

- drugs awareness agencies
- community police
- fire service
- counselling services
- befriending and outreach services
- post-adoption service
- anger management specialists
- sexual health specialists.

More formal links were apparent with the Connexions Service, who were said by some Learning Mentors to attend regular meetings with them.  The Learning Mentors' role in liaising with external agencies was said to be increasing and evolving, and in doing so, reducing the burden on some senior staff in school.

## 5.6    Key Findings

♦ Although some staff were initially uncertain about the role of the Learning Mentor, their understanding and appreciation of the contribution increased overtime. This was more likely to be the case among teachers who worked directly with Learning Mentors.

♦ Students viewed Learning Mentors positively and there was no evidence of any stigma associated with seeing a Learning Mentor, due mainly to the fact that Learning Mentors worked with a wide range of individuals.

♦ Students particularly valued the time, interest and approach of Learning Mentors whom they felt they could trust.

♦ The training and ongoing support and guidance provided for Learning Mentors and their line managers by the Link Learning Mentors were valued.

♦ Learning Mentors worked most closely with heads of year who were the main sources of referral. Effective working relationships required good communication and this remained an ongoing challenge for Learning Mentors and their managers.

♦ In general, Learning Mentors worked closely with LSUs, as there was some overlap between the students who saw a Learning Mentor and those who attended the LSU.

♦ Learning Mentors liaised with external agencies who were either already involved with students or new agencies who could provide specialist support. This was an increasing part of their role.

## 6. OUTCOMES OF SEEING A LEARNING MENTOR

This chapter outlines the impact of Learning Mentors on the students with whom they worked and more widely.  It examines:

- approaches adopted to monitoring and evaluating the role of Learning Mentors at Partnership and school level
- outcomes for students who had met with a Learning Mentor
- outcomes for the school as whole, including both staff and other students
- distinctive contribution made by Learning Mentors to the school.

### 6.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

Learning Mentors identified a range of ways in which they monitored and assessed the progress of the students with whom they worked.  Generally, they used Action Plans and/or set targets with individual students, which were then reviewed on agreed dates, as the main mechanism for reviewing progress.

The approach to monitoring differed from school to school.  Learning Mentors identified some of the following ways in which they monitored the effect of the intervention on their students:

- questionnaires to teachers at the beginning and end of mentoring
- a tracking system to monitor behaviour
- feedback from teachers, parents and students
- school's existing system of being *'on report'*
- teaching staff completing a form *'rating'* the behaviour of the mentored students in lessons.

In addition to the internal school monitoring processes, the Link Learning Mentor in the Partnership was involved in monitoring and evaluating the Learning Mentors. This took the form of formal assessment visits to the schools, where the coordinator would conduct a review with the Learning Mentors and their line manager.  Learning Mentors also submitted monitoring forms to the Partnership: these forms provided details of the numbers of students referred and the reasons for referral.  These were collated at Partnership level and enabled the coordinators to have an overview of the work of the Learning Mentors and even identify any common themes where preventative work could be implemented.  One coordinator noted the value of

involving the Learning Mentors in the design of the forms so that they had ownership which could encourage them to return them. Learning Mentors also reported that they provided case studies to the Partnership. In one instance, both a *'positive'* and a *'negative'* case study were required.

The impact of seeing a Learning Mentor on an individual was apparent to those who worked with the students, as a Learning Mentor commented: *'You can usually see the impact you've had on the pupils yourself. For example, you can see how their confidence has improved through how they now interact with other kids in the group.'* However, at school level, other than in one school where the data for the cohort was aggregated to look at their achievement, there appeared to be few instances of the data on students who had seen a Learning Mentor being gathered together in order to evaluate the overall effect. Indeed, one Learning Mentor regarded this as an area for development.

## 6.2 Outcomes for Students who had met with a Learning Mentor

The effect of Learning Mentors on the young people with whom they had worked or were working was demonstrated through the professional judgement of staff and through the observations of the students themselves. As a Link Learning Mentor observed, not only will it take time for the *'hard impacts'* in terms of GCSE attainment to become apparent, some of the effects of Learning Mentors on young people are not easy to measure: *'if you convince someone to stay in education, that's not something you can measure, but it's made a difference to that person'*. The extent of such differences are outlined in this section.

The impact of the Learning Mentors was often situated by the teaching staff within the wider context of the school's strategies for supporting students. Learning Mentors were said to have *'contributed to'*, or to have *'a central role in'* positive developments in the school such as improvements in grades or attendance. Nevertheless, teaching staff noted the individual successes which Learning Mentors had with students. As one head of year expressed, Learning Mentors had *'made an impact, and an observable one, on some individual pupils'*. The main areas which they identified were also noted by the students interviewed. These areas, which were often interrelated and impacted on each other, included improvements in:

- behaviour
- attitudes
- self-confidence

- ♦ self-esteem
- ♦ attendance and exclusions.

Each of these aspects, which broadly reflect those found in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, will be discussed below. It is worth noting that, as Learning Mentors work with the individual needs of each student, the outcomes for each individual will vary. Nevertheless, some common themes emerged.

Many of the students who were interviewed said that their **behaviour** had improved and that they were *'calmer'* as a consequence of seeing a Learning Mentor. Teaching staff noted that there was less disruption and students were more settled and *'ready to learn'*. Students reported that they were more inclined to *'listen in class'* and less inclined to *'shout and bawl'* at their teachers and peers. A head of year's observation, that the students were *'generally improved as people...most people aren't bad, they have bad social skills'*, indicates how the input of the Learning Mentors can impact on students' behaviour. Not all students were working towards becoming more calm, however, and the comment of one student who had become *'more lively'* as a consequence of seeing a Learning Mentor and more able to interact with his peers illustrates the variety of needs with which the Learning Mentors worked.

Changes in the **attitudes** of students were noted by a number of those who were interviewed. One young woman explained that she had changed *'a lot. I've changed in the way I say things, the way I go about things. I've calmed down a lot and am much happier.'* A recurring theme in the interviews with students related to the change in their attitudes towards teachers and others. A number mentioned that they understood *'a bit more about how they* [teachers] *think and how they might see a situation'* as a result of the Learning Mentors explaining an issue so the student could now *'see things from their point of view'*.

Students indicated that their **self-confidence** had improved since they had seen a Learning Mentor and a number of staff had noted such improvements. This had helped some to make more friends and be less isolated, and had made them feel more able to talk with adults. Although students were less likely to comment specifically that their **self-esteem** had improved, some staff had noted this as an impact of Learning Mentors, this was said by one teacher to be due to the fact that *'someone else was caring about them'*.

Some staff and students noted an improvement in their **attendance** and a reduction in **exclusions,** where these had been an issue. A head of year and a teacher at the same school noted that, because of the Learning Mentors, students who would otherwise have been excluded remained in school. A number of students felt that they might have been temporarily or permanently excluded if they had no Learning Mentor, as illustrated by the comment of one that *'if it wasn't for my Learning Mentor, I would have been expelled by now…because of her, I'm still here'*. In addition to students who might have been excluded, Learning Mentors also supported those who excluded themselves, such as school refusers. In such cases, attendance had also improved. Many of the students who were interviewed indicated that their attendance had improved and one student was said by a head of year to have improved his attendance from 15 per cent to 95 per cent since meeting with a Learning Mentor.

Overall, it was evident that the Learning Mentors were impacting positively on the lives of the young people with whom they worked. It is worth noting the comments of some interviewees that, even with the support of their Learning Mentor, a student may be *'still not perfect'* and that, although as a head of year explained, significant improvements may have been made, they may *'still be naughty'*. Indeed, as one student commented, *'I still don't do my homework.'*

### 6.3 Outcomes for the School as a Whole

As noted above, one outcome of the work of Learning Mentors was said by some interviewees to be a calmer atmosphere and reduced disruption overall. In this respect, Learning Mentors could be said to have wider effects than just on the students with whom they worked directly. Interviewees identified other wider effects of Learning Mentors which included:

♦ reducing the workload of senior staff
♦ developing relationships with parents
♦ providing for the wider student population
♦ providing an alternative viewpoint.

Heads of year and the line managers of the Learning Mentors observed that they had been a *'massive help for heads of year'*, as a head of year expressed it. She explained that it had been valuable having *'someone who has been able to devote a whole bank of time to those children that I think we would have found it very difficult to give'*. A second head of year had valued the reduced pressure on him as a result of Learning

Mentors conducting home visits, contacting parents, monitoring students and liaising with external agencies. Furthermore, a third head of year noted that Learning Mentors were able to intervene and be an *'adult presence'* in *'low-level arguments'* between students, again reducing the pressure on staff. Finally, a line manager commented that many *'staff in a senior role in the school would have been run ragged'* without the support of the Learning Mentors.

As noted previously, in many cases Learning Mentors liaised with, and indeed supported, parents as part of their role. This role was said by one line manager to be an important one and had been well received by parents and families who were glad of any support they could have for their child. A Link Learning Mentor believed that, as a result of Learning Mentors' interventions, parents *'felt more comfortable about going into schools'*.

In addition to the direct support and guidance provided to individual students, there were said to be outcomes for other students. Students were said to benefit from knowing *'that the support is available, should they need it'*. Learning Mentors' involvement in out of school activities such as breakfast clubs, benefited the students and raised the profile of Learning Mentors among the students.

Finally, there were indications that staff valued having access to non-teaching professionals in the school who could provide an alternative viewpoint and a different approach. As one teacher observed, *'some teachers don't listen...they* [Learning Mentors] *teach us to listen'*.

## 6.4 The Distinctive Contribution of Learning Mentors

School staff generally noted that Learning Mentors were part of the overall support provided in the schools and were said by some to have *'added to the support culture of the school'*. The most commonly identified distinctive contribution of the Learning Mentor was the **time** which they were able to give to individual students. The fact that they had time was noted and valued by students, as outlined in section 5.1.2, and by staff. The dedicated time which they could devote to students *'meant that somebody can really go into the problem and actually monitor it and provide ongoing support, rather than a one-off chat'*, as a teacher explained. In doing so, they could build a rapport with an individual student and explore any issues in more depth. Moreover, a line manager noted that, in one case, because the Learning Mentor had time to develop a relationship of trust, loyalty and respect with a student, the young person was willing to do things for his Learning Mentor which he would not

otherwise do. The time which Learning Mentors had also enabled them to identify students who might benefit from support. A teacher felt that their particular contribution was to identify *'invisible kids that have problems and we don't find out because they don't tell us'*.

A further distinctive contribution was said to be the Learning Mentors' role in bringing to teachers' attention that some students are *'immensely troubled'* and that this influences their behaviour and attitude at school. A teacher explained that *'what Mentors do, is remind you, and say, "Hang on, you'd be playing up if you had their issues."'*

The approach of Learning Mentors in supporting young people in addressing their own issues, which was noted by students and reported previously, was acknowledged as a distinctive contribution by a head of year who commented that *'they ask the pupil "well, what did you do in that situation, is there any other way that you could have handled it?" They get them to think about their actions. They're very professional.'*

In most of the schools visited, the Learning Mentors were based in a distinctive and separate location to the main school which was said to have a different atmosphere. This was regarded as a benefit by a number of staff who felt that that this offered a *'safe haven'* for students, providing them, for example, with a place where they could go and calm down or think if they needed to. In many cases, teaching staff noted that such a place was not previously available for students.

## 6.5    Key Findings

♦   Learning Mentors had systems to monitor and review the progress of their students and provided data to their Partnership.

♦   The main outcomes of seeing a Learning Mentor were positive impacts on students' behaviour, attitudes, self-confidence and self-esteem, attendance and exclusions.

♦   Wider effects of Learning Mentors included reducing the pressure on senior staff, building relationships with parents supporting the wider student population through extracurricular activities and providing alternative viewpoint and approach in the school.

♦   The distinctive contribution of Learning Mentors to the school was the time which they could dedicate to identifying, and seeking to address, barriers to students' learning.

## 7.    LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

This chapter outlines the main challenges experienced and lessons learned by the Phase 3 Partnerships and schools.  It concludes by outlining interviewees' perspectives on the development of the role of Learning Mentors in the future.

### 7.1    Partnership-Level Challenges

Interviews with Link Learning Mentors across the Phase 3 Partnerships explored some of the challenges which they had encountered in supporting the development and delivery of the Learning Mentor Strand at Partnership level.

Link Learning Mentors highlighted the challenge of ensuring that the role of the Learning Mentor was understood by schools.  This challenge was also encountered by Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships.  One Link Learning Mentor noted that, as this was a new role, it was not easy in the initial stages to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of the role while a second also emphasised the need for clarity.  One challenge which had been experienced in clarifying the role of the Learning Mentor was described as *'resistance'* from existing colleagues in schools, including support staff who feared that this new role might *'encroach'* on their role in school.  As well as the Learning Mentor role, a further challenge was noted in clarifying the respective roles of the line managers within schools and the Link Learning Mentor who did not have direct line management responsibility.

A second challenge which was identified related to the fact that the way in which Learning Mentors were used varied from school to school within a Partnership.  Consequently, as some Link Learning Mentors explained, it could be hard to manage a group of individuals who were spread across a number of schools and whose role differed from school to school.  Moreover, differences in the approach, and  in the pay, terms and conditions between schools could lead to dissatisfaction among Learning Mentors across a Partnership.

Link Learning Mentors themselves had, in some cases, found building relationships with the schools and gaining credibility with staff to be challenging.  Other challenges identified by Link Learning Mentors included:

- developing the role in future, now that it had been through the initial implementation phase, and the associated training and professional development needs. This will be discussed further in the next section.

- schools' unwillingness to release Learning Mentors for training and networking meetings

- improving Learning Mentors' use of, and understanding of, monitoring and evaluation data

- Learning Mentors' need for acknowledgement and reassurance from senior staff, which was not always forthcoming.

The challenges which were identified by school staff are discussed in the next section.

## 7.2    School-Level Challenges

The challenges experienced by Learning Mentors and school staff in implementing a new role in the school and building working relationships were discussed in Chapter 5, and will not be revisited here. Nevertheless, although some interviewees indicated that they had not experienced any challenges, others identified some other issues which they had encountered in their experience of working with Learning Mentors, as follows.

In some cases, the line managers had found it challenging to **manage the Learning Mentors** and ensure that Learning Mentors considered the whole school community, and represented the staff, when working with students. This was echoed by one teacher who commented that Learning Mentors had, on occasion, confronted teachers in class while another felt that some Mentors had initially been *'too familiar'* with the students. In both cases, teachers stated that Learning Mentors had developed strategies to overcome these concerns. A line manager summed up the challenge of managing the Learning Mentors by saying that it involved *'taking their eagerness and enthusiasm and moulding it into a team without crushing their spirit'*.

Some teachers expressed concern that student used the excuse of seeing their Learning Mentor to *'skive'* **lessons** or that they did not always have a formal note from the Learning Mentor to explain why they had not been in a lesson. A lack of **clarity of the role** of the Learning Mentor was a further challenge highlighted by teachers and line managers. In addition, some staff considered that there had been a lack of information or clarity regarding referral criteria and procedures.

The overall lessons which interviewees mentioned that they had learned in working with Learning Mentors are discussed in the next section.

## 7.3    Lessons Learned

Three main lessons were learned by interviewees in the early implementation of Learning Mentors in Phase 3 schools.  These lessons, which were similar to those in Phase 1 and 2 Partnerships, were:

♦ The need for **clarity about the role** from the outset, and for this to be communicated effectively to staff.  In addition to clarifying the role, the associated procedures, such as criteria for referral and the names of students who are meeting with a Learning Mentor, should be provided to all those involved.

♦ The need for staff, including form tutors, to be given **feedback** on the progress of the students who were meeting with the Learning Mentors, within the constraints of confidentiality.

♦ Consideration of greater **delegation** of responsibility for students to the Learning Mentors.  Two heads of year noted that their willingness to delegate had increased over time as they became more confident in the Learning Mentors.  One suggested it was valuable to learn to *'let go a little bit...its very hard at first to trust their judgement'*.  Nevertheless, in doing so, teaching staff could more effectively make use of the *'huge wealth of experience'* which Learning Mentors from their varied backgrounds could bring, as a line manager explained.

## 7.4    Future Development of Learning Mentors

Developments of the Learning Mentor role, at both a strategic and operational level, were identified by Link Learning Mentors and school staff who were interviewed.  At a strategic level, three main issues were identified:

♦ professional development

♦ common pay structure

♦ management and supervision.

The **professional development** of Learning Mentors was widely noted by Link Learning Mentors and, to an extent, by line managers as an important issue in the future development of the role.  They commented that in *'establishing a new profession'*, there was a need to provide opportunities for career progression, training and continuing professional development.  It was acknowledged that work was underway nationally to develop a qualification which, it was said, should be nationally recognised in order to improve the profile of Learning Mentors and *'consolidate'* the idea of Learning Mentoring as a profession.  The diverse backgrounds of the Learning Mentors, discussed in Chapter 3, were mentioned as a factor for consideration in developing a qualification.  It was said that some graduate

Learning Mentors may not perceive a need for a qualification where others, who are less qualified, may feel uncertain about achieving a qualification.

Other approaches to supporting professional development and career progression which Link Learning Mentors considered included introducing different levels of Learning Mentor, to provide opportunities for progression. In addition, a number of interviewees considered that there may be increasing specialisation of Learning Mentors in future, which might also provide variety and development for Learning Mentors. For example, one might focus on working with students who are on the borderline of grades C and D at GCSE, whilst a second Learning Mentor in the same school might focus on behaviour issues. Indeed, there was some evidence of such specialisation already, such as transition Learning Mentors who focused on transition from primary to secondary schools and Aimhigher Learning Mentors supporting progression to higher education.

The issues surrounding the differential pay, terms and conditions for Learning Mentors in different schools or different Partnerships were discussed in depth in Chapter 3. The need for a **common pay structure** was mentioned as an area which would require attention as the role of the Learning Mentor developed in the future. One Link Learning Mentor suggested that addressing this may also contribute to the potential for career development for Learning Mentors.

The third issue which raised concern was the **management and supervision** of Learning Mentors. As one line manager observed, initially, there had been no training provided for line managers and, when training was provided by the Partnership, it had proved useful. In addition, a Link Learning Mentor questioned how effectively schools would be able to support Learning Mentors if the funding for Link Learning Mentors ceased in future.

At a more operational level, staff in schools noted the following possible developments in the Learning Mentor role, a number of which were specific to the individual school's interests and priorities:

- consolidating the role following the initial start-up phase
- keeping the main focus on learning and achievement and re-emphasising that Learning Mentors are not therapists or social workers
- developing an integrated system of support across the school which includes Learning Mentors

- extending the Learning Mentor role in liaising with parents and the wider community

- developing peer mentoring to provide students with an opportunity to be responsible

- focusing on *'stress'* when examinations are taking place at key stage 4

- supporting students participating in alternative timetables, including linking with local colleges

- developing group work with students.

It is worth noting that a number of the teachers anticipated the role remaining as it was and did not suggest any developments.

Overall, the work of the Learning Mentors appeared to be valued by the teaching staff who were interviewed, as illustrated by the comment of a head of year who said that they are *'an asset in my work and I hope that we continue to have them'*.

## 7.5    Key Findings

- The main challenges encountered by Link Learning Mentors in Phase 3 Partnerships were clarifying the role of Learning Mentors and line managers and the variation in the way schools adapted the role.

- The issues underlying the future development of the Learning Mentor role were said to be the need to provide for professional development, the need for a common pay structure and supporting the effective management and supervision of Learning Mentors in schools.

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