



## Reaching Wider National Online Mentoring Programme

Paula Griffiths, Partnership Manager, Reaching Wider

### Background and context

Reaching Wider's national online bilingual mentoring programme was launched in 2022 in partnership with Brightside, with the aim of supporting, informing and inspiring young people from under-represented groups to consider their educational pathway into all forms of education. The mentoring programme aligns closely with Reaching Wider's outreach programme by providing flexible online one-to-one support to learners who are aged between 14 and 19. The impartial and customised online support is a flexible programme that gives mentees the opportunity to develop their understanding of the different pathways available to them and an insight into student life. Mentoring takes place through a secure platform with clear safeguarding procedures to ensure the mentor and mentee relationship is safe to maximise the benefit for all. Both mentors and mentees are supported by regional project officers to share weekly themes, conversation starters, optional training and resources to provide the best mentoring experience.

An important consideration was to offer Welsh speakers the choice to be mentored entirely in their native language in a safe online space. Welsh language users can easily switch between Welsh and English versions. This also supports Welsh learners to gain confidence and encourages the use of the Welsh language in mentors' and mentees' conversations, which aligns with the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' strategy to increase the number of Welsh speakers to 1 million by 2050.



### The Power of Mentoring

Mentors are recruited from colleges and universities across Wales. Mentors are paid the national living wage, complete the necessary enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS) check and receive training before being matched to 3-6 mentees from Reaching Wider's priority schools or colleges. Mentees undergo a baseline assessment to gauge their understanding of educational pathways and are paired with mentors who share similar interests. The mentoring programme delivers three projects.

- **Core mentoring project** - mentees in years 11-13. Each mentee is paired with a mentor and can join free weekly online classes on different subjects to help them move to further or higher education. Reaching Wider also supports mentees to visit any Welsh university open days.

- **STEM mentoring project** – mentees in years 9 and 10, who are interested in careers in STEM. Mentees are paired with a STEM mentor, visit a local industry, meet industry experts, and access short masterclasses on topics like sport, maths, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence (AI).
- **Young carers project** - young carers aged 14-25. The 6-week project matches each mentee to a mentor with caring experience, optional training to overcome educational barriers, and support to visit any open day at a Welsh university.

## Impact and scope

The pilot programme was launched in 2022, with 315 mentees being matched to a mentor. The programme has since increased and Reaching Wider now offers 8 projects across the year with over 1000 mentees being matched to a mentor between 2023 and 2024 with 54% of mentees being learners who are under-represented in HE. Impact is measured quantitatively by measuring the distance travelled by both mentors and mentees through baseline and exit surveys and qualitatively through forums and evaluation sessions.

“....mentoring undoubtedly made a difference in my mentees' attitudes towards university. Initially, all of them seemed uncertain, even intimidated by the idea of university – some indicated concerns about getting along, managing finances, or managing studies.... As the sessions progressed, I noticed an actual change in attitude. One very inspiring mentee went from saying, ‘I don't think university is for someone like me,’ to actively searching for courses and attending open days”.

Mentor



“Being part of the Reaching Wider Mentoring Project has been very beneficial for the pupils and us as a school. For the pupils, the project has given new opportunities to develop skills, attitudes and has helped to build their confidence and academic success. By working together on such projects, they have been able to learn about their career paths and prepared them for the future, as well as giving them purpose and motivation in terms of their education....The project has also promoted greater contact between the pupils, their teachers, and the wider community, building stronger relationships and a commitment to work towards common goals.

The project has helped to improve attendance and give a positive approach to education, as well as providing a feeling of recognition and success for everyone involved in the school.”

Teacher

Based on survey feedback, all mentees reported increased confidence in what they were going to do when they left college and over half felt they had a better understanding of how to apply to their preferred HE choice.

"I have grown a lot throughout this project - I've developed significantly better communication skills which is super important for me and my career goals. In fact, this mentoring project was one of the main discussion points and experiences that has enabled me to get into a very competitive internship with Oxford University Natural History Museum for the summer!"

Mentee

On the young carers project 90% of the participants asked about next steps to HE or employment.



"....my academic confidence has increased significantly....I have developed that close relationship to feel comfortable to ask any questions and to be honest about my concerns. The opportunities the project offers are amazing and have helped me make decisions for my future that I hadn't considered in the past. I feel more confident to make decisions regarding my further education."

Mentee

Reaching Wider is committed to making education truly inclusive; by continuing to expand our outreach work and developing our mentoring programme, we aim to create a lasting impact on young people's lives, helping them unlock opportunities that may have once seemed beyond their reach.

For more information, watch our [video](#) or go to: [www.reachingwider.ac.uk/en/](http://www.reachingwider.ac.uk/en/)

This case study has been produced and shared as part of the Medr-funded QAA Cymru project: Enabling learner progression into and within higher education.

Find out more about the project on the QAA Cymru [website](#).

