Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring

AN EVALUATION OF THE PILOT INITIATIVE

Liz Folan O'Connor
Fiachra Ó Súilleabháin
Sheila McGovern
Máire Leane

SOAR
Inter Institutional Collaboration on Access

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

MTU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan
Munster Technological University

PATH
Programme for Access
to Higher Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS page

Table of Figures

*'You are not supposed to be the sage,
the one with the solutions, you are just there
to guide them to find the solutions themselves.
I love that idea. I am sorry I didn't know that
years ago.'*

Research Participant

Acknowledgements

---

1. In 2015, Cork achieved a UNESCO award as a Learning City, one of only three cities in Europe and one of 12 cities worldwide. UNESCO defines a Learning City as a city which effectively mobilises its resources across all sectors to maximise the opportunities for lifelong learning for all its citizens. This award recognises Cork's continuing excellence and commitment to lifelong learning and social inclusion. The Learning Neighbourhoods Programme aims to continue to build a culture of lifelong learning across Cork City's neighbourhoods by taking the Learning City concept to the neighbourhood level. There are six Learning Neighbourhoods in Cork City: Knocknaheeny, Ballyphehane, Togher, Mayfield, The Glen and South Parish. The programme aims to assist local education networks and organisations to showcase and develop lifelong learning opportunities.

2. Cork Migrant Centre provides information on access to services and immigration issues. The Centre advocates on behalf of migrant children, families, and communities to ensure they have access to services, supports and the best possible opportunities to empower them individually and collectively.

Foreword

As Deputy President and Registrar of University College Cork, it is a pleasure to present this important evaluation report on behalf of the South Cluster SOAR Project.

Innovative research and knowledge generation are developed through deep connections between communities and higher education institutions. Inclusive learning spaces, which focus on multiple entry points to learning, valorise diverse pathways to learning, and nurture civic orientation, enable transformative social and cultural change in our society.

This report provides an evaluation of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring programme, which was created to support community-based mentors in their efforts to support under-represented target groups access lifelong learning and higher education. This pilot initiative under the SOAR Project was undertaken by the Access services in UCC and MTU-Cork campus in collaboration with Adult and Continuing Education, UCC; Cork Learning Neighbourhoods and Cork Migrant Centre. This report reiterates the benefits of university-community partnerships in co-curating impactful, engaging learning opportunities for under-represented target groups. It demonstrates how reciprocal and collaborative curricular co-design translates into agile, flexible lecture content, which in turn garners community-based engagement and respect. The report highlights the importance of recognising the integral role community mentors play in encouraging and promoting educational access and attainment, and the benefits of developing supportive mentor networks. Finally, this report incites HEIs to further consider embedding sustainable university-community connections and increasing diverse access opportunities.

Prof. Stephen Byrne
Deputy President and Registrar
University College Cork

Executive Summary

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a steady reorientation of universities and higher education institutes towards deeper and more meaningful forms of community engagement for the purposes of research and real-world problem solving. Referred to as university–community partnerships, what makes these forms of collaboration unique is that they are mutually beneficial approaches to the creation and exchange of knowledge through a process of co-inquiry and co-learning.

The Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring was developed as part of a university–community partnership initiative developed to improve access pathways for education and lifelong learning to under-represented groups in the Cork area. Using a mixed-methods approach to data collection, the purpose of this evaluation was to document and evaluate the unique development process of this university–community cooperative initiative and to gain feedback from the first students.

Research Objectives

Three main objectives informed this evaluation, as detailed below:

Objective 1: Document the development process: The first objective was to document the unique development process of the newly established Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring, which was the first programme of its kind in Ireland.

Objective 2: Evaluate the programme from the perspective of the students: The second objective was to provide an evaluation of the programme from the perspective of the first cohort of students who took part in the pilot mentoring certificate course, which took place over six months in spring and autumn 2021.

Objective 3: Capture models of best practice: Thirdly, given that this programme was the first course of its kind nationally, this research also captured models of best practice in order to provide best practice recommendations for the sector and for future teaching and learning in the area.

Data Collection

This research used a mixed-method approach to collect data for the purposes of evaluating the programme. Fieldwork took place in two phases between November 2021 and February 2022 with two cohorts participating in this research. The first cohort of participants consisted of the partners responsible for the design of the mentoring certificate programme. Fieldwork for the first cohort took place between November 2021 and February 2022 and consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews which took place online via MS Teams. The second cohort of participants consisted of the students who had completed the pilot mentoring certificate course. Fieldwork for the second

cohort, which took place in November 2021, consisted of an online survey and online and in-person focus groups (please see Appendices 4–6 for data instruments). Data was analysed using thematic coding.

Key Findings

- A key aspect of what made the university-community partnership successful was the co-equal and reciprocal approach adopted.

- For the partners, the mutual respect and the value placed on the complementary approaches to the development of the Mentoring initiative was another key strength.

- From the perspective of the first cohort of students in the pilot mentoring certificate course, the collaborative design of the lectures and open approach to lecture content was highly regarded.

- Students were inspired by the lecturer's flexible and agile approach each week, which they regarded as highly conducive to reciprocal learning.

- Students and stakeholders reported that the mentoring certificate course gave students the skills, tools and confidence they needed to become mentors in their communities, as well as the critical consciousness required to encourage others to consider (further, adult and higher) educational and lifelong learning opportunities.

- The course gave students a strong sense that they were part of a larger community of mentors, which motivated them to maintain and build upon the networks established during the course in order to better keep abreast of access pathways to lifelong learning and higher education.

- Both cohorts emphasised the need for sustainability of the initiative going forward.

Key Recommendations

1. Overall, the university–community partnership approach is a successful partnership paradigm and should be used as a model for future projects and initiatives.

2. Embedding mentors within the community develops and scaffolds access initiatives for lifelong learning and higher-education access. Therefore community mentoring programmes deserve sustained and continued university and community support to increase access pathways into further learning.

3. A co-equal spirit of collaboration between university and community partners should be fostered to support mentorships, further enhance existing university–community connections and help contribute to better outcomes.

4. Flexible approaches to lectures and lecture content works well for the development of mentoring knowledge and skills and this should be maintained and embedded into future programme delivery to enable lifelong and life-wide learning.

5. Building confidence is a bedrock of the student experience and this should be fostered and sustained through the development of networking opportunities among student and graduate cohorts.

6. Maintaining and further embedding reciprocity and trust in the university–community partnership will support sustainability for future iterations of this programme.

7. Equipping students with the core values of a civically engaged university community and embedding these graduate attributes into future practice should become an explicit part of the curriculum for future iterations of the mentoring certificate programme.

8. To maintain the high standards of best practice as evidenced in the programme during this research, it is recommended that a stringent process of critical analysis and reflection be implemented at regular intervals between future programme cycles.
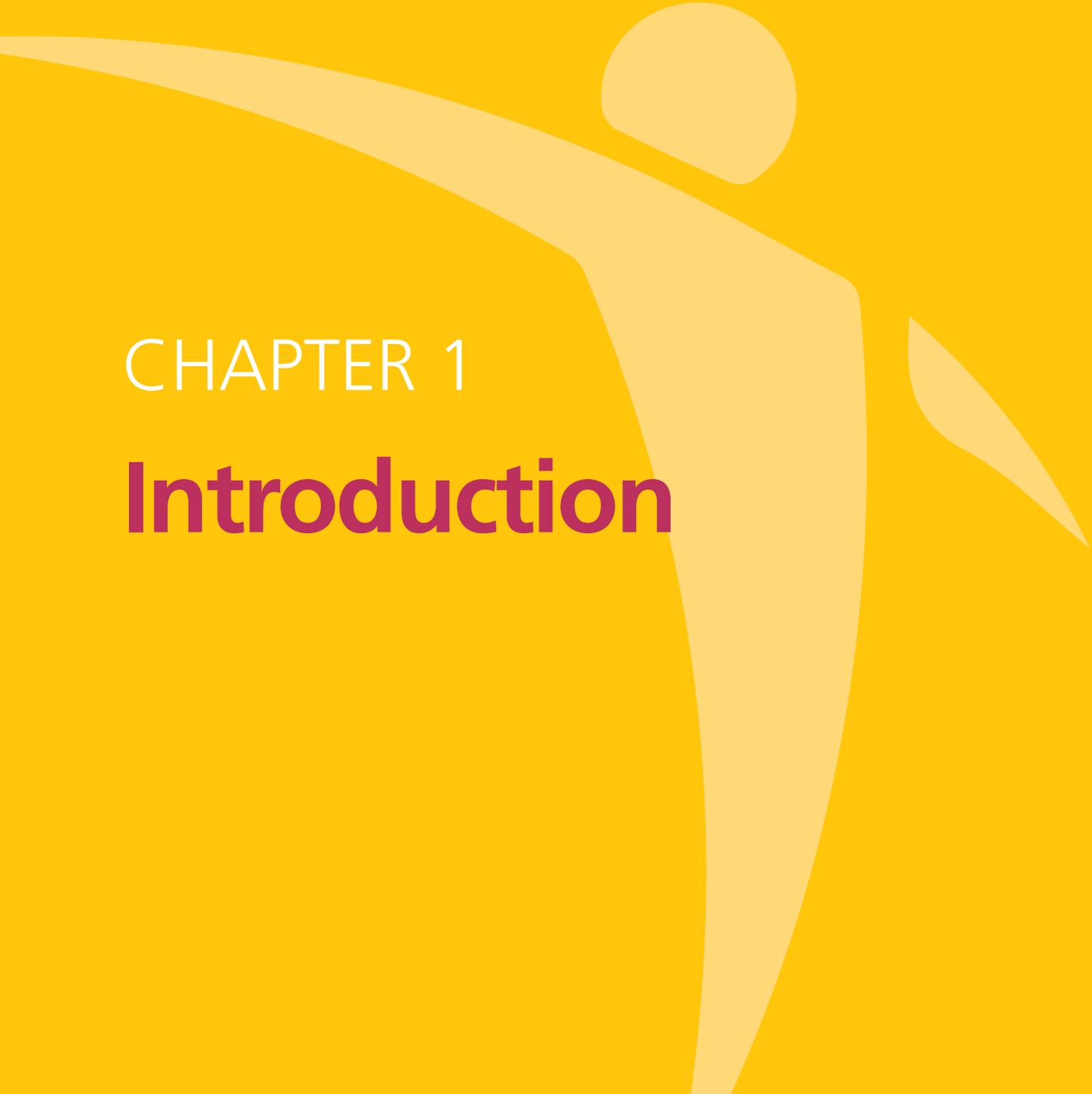
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Highlighting the importance of education for democratic and civic engagement, the UN in 2016 published *Education 2030*, a framework for action to provide flexible education and learning opportunities throughout life (UN, 2016). By calling for an 'inclusive and equitable quality education' and the promotion of 'lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN, 2017), the UN elevated the importance of education and lifelong learning to the level of a fundamental 'human right and a force for sustainable development and peace' (UN, 2015).

This wasn't always the case. Prior to this, the thinking around education had been 'guided by a human capital approach to education' which did not 'fully endorse education as a human right' (Elfert, 2021: 540). In calling for the political will to 'tackle educational challenges and build systems that are inclusive, equitable and relevant to all learners' (UN, 2021), *Education 2030* marked the 'emergence of a rights-based approach to adult education as an international paradigm' (Elfert, 2021: 538).

In Ireland, education and lifelong learning were prioritised in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, which called on higher-education institutions (HEI's) to widen participation and engage more deeply with wider society by 'taking on civic responsibilities and cooperating with the needs of the community that sustains higher education – including businesses, the wider education system, and the community and voluntary sector' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 74). For Zeldin, community networks are so valuable because they share 'a sense of common cause' and 'offer a web of opportunity and scaffolding' to 'encourage new friendships among peers' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 393). It was envisaged that strengthening and extending existing links to the community would help 'progress quality, community development and further social innovation' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011: 76–7).

This evolves the idea of university engagement in the community, first envisaged by Ernest Boyer in his 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered* (see Moser, 2014), into a mutual relationship with the community in the co-creation of new forms of knowledge. The HEA, in calling for deeper engagement with the community, signalled its desire to move away from a one-way model of community engagement characterised by a one-way 'delivery of knowledge' into the community, towards a more 'collaborative approach to knowledge exchange' between 'mutually beneficial partnerships' (Sathorar and Geduld, 2021: 90).

In this new paradigm, university–community engagement becomes more focused on mutual objectives brought about through a process of co-inquiry and co-learning, and the mutual discovery of new forms of knowledge stemming from innovative research engagement orientated towards real-world problems (see Sathorar and Geduld, 2021: 91).

1.1 Building Partnership for Lifelong Learning and Access

The SOAR Project was developed to answer the call for higher education to engage more deeply and more meaningfully with the community in the co-creation of new forms of knowledge, as formalised in the fifth goal of the *National Access Plan* 'to develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education with particular focus on mentoring' (HEA, 2015: 24). In the spirit of developing a mutual and collaborative approach to knowledge creation and exchange, the Access Services in both University College Cork (UCC) and Munster Technological University – Cork Campus (MTU Cork) set about exploring the feasibility of a community-based mentoring initiative to increase access among under-represented groups. Through the SOAR Project and with assistance from UCC-based partners including Adult Continuing Education (ACE) and the School of Applied Social Studies, the initial objectives were to (i) identify models of best practice in student mentoring; (ii) establish and extend community mentoring partnerships; (iii) co-design and co-deliver an accredited mentor training programme; and (iv) extend the mentoring programme model into colleges, schools and communities (see Figure 1).

Identify models of best practice in student mentoring	Establish community mentoring partnerships	Design and deliver accredited mentor training programme	Delivery of mentoring programme in colleges, schools, communities

Figure 1. Community-based mentoring objectives

Recognising that mentoring already exists within communities both formally and informally, the university partners extended the initiative to include valuable insights from key individuals who were already providing a positive and encouraging influence on others in their communities. The Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring programme (mentoring certificate) was created to support natural mentors in their efforts to provide critical support to under-represented target groups seeking to access lifelong learning and higher education (see Appendix 1 for module description). Student mentors were selected through individual Cork Learning Neighbourhood steering groups and the Cork Migrant Centre and were invited to take part in this accredited mentoring certificate designed to equip them with the education, skills and training to become confident and effective community-based mentors. Course fees were jointly funded by UCC and MTU Cork Access Services.

This initiative had two distinct phases: (i) the co-design of a mutually beneficial programme to extend access initiatives and opportunities to access education and lifelong learning into the community; and (ii) the development and delivery of the pilot mentoring certificate for members of the community who have been chosen for their strong relationships within the community.

After the first phase, when the partnership was established and the criteria for the mentoring initiative was agreed, the second phase focused on working with community partners to identify those who were already engaged in mentoring work in their communities. These community members, with their unique insights into the needs of their communities, became integral to the second phase as the first cohort of students in the pilot mentoring certificate. This person-centred approach was in a sense a formal recognition that community-based informal mentoring already exists among individuals who provide a stable and encouraging influence on others in their community. Inviting these community members to develop the knowledge, training and networking skills with their peers had two important effects: (i) a recognition and formalisation of their role within their communities, and (ii) an example to their communities of the benefits of higher education and/or lifelong learning. In this way, a key feature in the development of this mentoring programme was to develop the agency of these mentoring students and to empower them (Suoranta et al., 2021) to become facilitators for others in the community who may also benefit from access to lifelong learning or higher education and become, in their own right, positive examples to others who may be considering their own journey of personal development.

Given the role mentors play in providing critical support to members of their communities as well as setting positive examples of the benefits of higher education, the mentoring certificate empowered these students with what Freire refers to as 'conscientisation' (1994), a critical consciousness which gives them an enhanced voice in their communities, facilitates change in their own lives, and ultimately brings about positive social change (Sathorer and Geduld, 2021: 93). In this sense, by focusing on those who are already doing this work in their communities, students in the pilot project became, in effect, de facto partners alongside university partners in the development of efforts to extend access and pathways to higher education and lifelong learning to those who may have been excluded from such access previously.

1.2 Conclusion

This introduction outlined the key phases of the development of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring and introduced the key partners who were integral to the design and evaluation of the pilot mentoring certificate, which was designed to extend outreach efforts deep into the heart of the community to reach individuals who may be interested in education or lifelong learning. Key to this requirement was the person-centred approach and the principle of recursiveness – identifying the right candidates for the pilot certificate programme and training them to become mentors so that they could learn how to help identify and assist those in their own communities who might benefit from access to education and lifelong learning.

The purpose of this report was to document and evaluate the unique development process of the newly established Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring and the pilot delivery. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research also captured models of best practice in order to inform best practice recommendations for the sector, as this was the first course of its kind nationally.
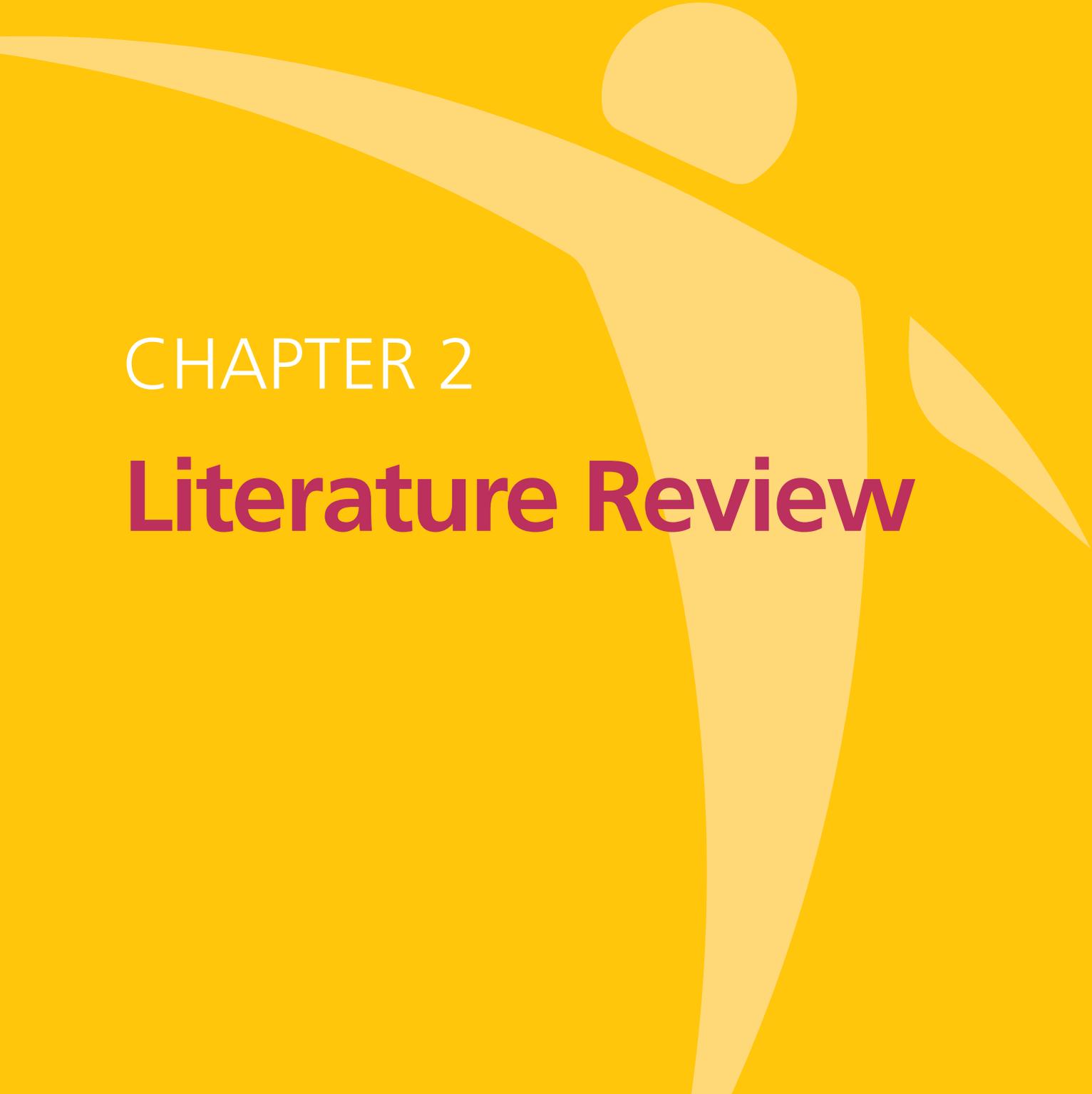
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Although universities have a long history of engagement with their communities, particularly through Adult Continuing Education and Access programmes, the relationship has typically been characterised by the university positioning itself in a leadership position engaged in general education, research and the development of new knowledge and scientific advancement. In this sense, the university understood itself as the leader in community engagement, oriented towards attracting students, the retention of students and adult continuing education (GUNI, 2014).

Inherent within the shift in emphasis towards education as a human right (UN, 2015) is the emphasis today on university–community co-equal partnership. No longer the object of university engagement, the community is today understood as an equal partner in the co-creation and exchange of new forms of knowledge and the sharing of 'resources, skills and processes with the public good in mind' (GUNI, 2014: xxxv).

This revitalised understanding of the community–university partnership model is at the heart of this community-based mentoring in that it views the community as a vital partner in increasing access to education and lifelong learning. The university, working in concert with the community, embarked upon this partnership initiative to build upon existing relationships within the community with those who may be outside the reach of existing engagement pathways. Key to this was building on the trust and strong ties established within these communities. In this sense, those approached to take part became partners not only as trusted members of the community, but as co-equal partners in the co-creation of new forms of knowledge about ways to increase engagement and access pathways into higher education and lifelong learning for all.

In many ways, we might regard the university–community partnership approach as a radical new way to get to the heart of something in order to discover a fundamental essence (Westoby et al., 2019: 2) as mentoring students become part of the 'conversation about what it would take to empower critical citizens and workers who would be prepared to challenge existing structures, values and power relations' (Westoby et al., 2019: 2).

2.1 Mentoring Programmes

Given that the earliest mention of the concept of mentoring dates back to Homer's *Odyssey* (Landsberg, 2003), it is easy to imagine why a literature search on mentoring today results in many different definitions and 'typologies' (Carragher and McGaughey, 2016: 2) within 'a wide variety of contexts and for different reasons' (Tee Ng, 2012: 25).

In the traditional sense, mentoring has referred to any relationship or process whereby a more experienced/mature/senior person facilitates and assists in the development of someone less experienced or mature (Carragher and McGaughey, 2016: 2). For Carragher and McGaughey (2016) and Castanheira (2016), the concept of mentoring specifically describes a relationship in which an individual (the mentor) with more expertise or

experience provides knowledge, information or support to a less experienced individual (the mentee) through a shared learning experience which can develop over many years (Mullen, 2016: 132).

Although similar to coaching, mentoring in this sense is typically characterised by mutually enriching relationships which are typically more focused on individual development as opposed to specific 'performance' or educational outcomes (Jones, 2015: 294). More 'empathetic' in its approach, these mentoring relationships tend to provide emotional support, guidance, encouragement, time management and advice within a neutral and supportive environment (Jensen, 2017; Sola et al., 2021).

2.2 Formal Mentoring Programmes: Institutions of Education

In their meta-analysis of mentoring types for education across all grade levels, Mullen and Klimaitis (2021: 19) argue that changing learning environments are 'forging new mentoring possibilities'. For this reason, a new framework for mentoring in education is required in order to delineate mentoring in these contexts from other forms of mentoring which occur in other contexts. In their attempts to acknowledge the growing use of many relationship types in contemporary mentoring practices in education and to differentiate these from other developmental relationships, the authors catalogue mentoring into nine types (Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021: 19).[3]

For those engaging in new forms of mentoring, there is much to learn from the literature about formal and traditional mentoring relationships. Formal and traditional types of mentoring are quite similar in that they refer to programmes which have been developed with a specific outcome in mind, usually for the mentee to acquire skills, mastery and maturity from a mentor within a specific context. Within institutions of higher learning, mentoring is typically aimed at students at all levels, from those transitioning into higher education (Carragher and McGaughey, 2016; Ginty and Harding, 2015; Denny, 2015), to undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral students (Mullen, 2016: 132).

In their research summary of first-year student experiences of peer-assisted learning programmes in two Irish technical institutes, Ginty and Harding found that from the students' perspective, 'the most important outcomes' for improving transition to higher education and reducing attrition rates were 'enhanced engagement, sense of belonging and overall satisfaction' (2014: 3). This is in keeping with ongoing research which seeks to understand the factors giving rise to greater student persistence and retention (see Tinto, 2017, 2006–7 and 1993). In one study, the data found that 'mentoring as an intervention' was proven to have a 'dramatic effect' on the retention rates of disadvantaged students (Salinitri, 2005: 867), with more recent research into student retention finding evidence that 'mentorship has been shown to be a valuable asset toward increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion' (Sola et al., 2021: 1742).

---

3. Mullen classifies these nine mentoring types as consisting of formal, informal, diverse, electronic, co-mentoring/collaborative, group, peer, multilevel, and cultural mentoring (Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021: 22).

2.3 Community-Based Mentoring and Informal Mentoring Practices

Arguing that traditional forms of mentoring practices are increasingly losing traction, Mullen and Klimaitis (2021: 19) identify new mentoring possibilities and contexts which build on human capacity and social transformation as 'alternatives emerge for mentoring theories, relationships, processes, programmes, and organizations'. Among the mentoring types with the most potential, it has been identified that informal mentoring could be the key to building new mentoring frameworks, with natural mentors taking centre stage in these new mentoring paradigms.

Informal mentoring relationships are those where the mentor and mentee meet naturally (Mullen, 2016: 133) outside a formal programme and by mutual consent (Zeldin et al., 2013: 391). Building on trust which already exists, these relationships can develop naturally between young people and those outside their family home and outside formal educational settings. These informal mentors, also described as natural mentors, can include, for instance, other parents, role models, coaches or community workers active in community group settings. Within the literature more widely, informal mentoring relationships led by natural mentors highlight the organic way in which these relationships develop (see Oster et al., 2021).

In their work on mentoring in youth and community work settings, Brady and Dolan's research 'suggests that greater attention be focused on mentors as key agents and beneficiaries in supporting young people in need' (Brady and Dolan, 2009: 365). Their argument that the 'presence of adults capable of functioning as natural mentors is elemental to the creation of successful partnerships' (Brady and Dolan, 2009: 365) is developed further by Timpe and Lunkenheimer (2015: 12–13) into three characteristics which are typical of successful natural mentor–mentee relationships:

- There is a common interest, such as a recreational interest;
- An emotional bond and frequent contact occur;
- The relationship spans over time, typically a year or longer.

There is evidence that natural community-based mentorship relationships, particularly intergenerational relationships, are more effective than schools-based mentoring programmes both in terms of the quality of relationships and outcomes (Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum, 2010). It has been suggested that this could be because community-based mentoring relationships may avoid some of the pitfalls associated with traditional forms of mentoring experienced by minority communities (see Oster et al., 2021), and the 'the power of socialisation' which can impede mentoring success in school settings (see Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum, 2010). Citing Bourdeau, the authors argue that while complex issues of power may empower some student voices, it may restrict others to a set of prescribed outcomes (Ibid) or even hold them back from full participation (Mayo, 2006).

Informal settings such as those that exist naturally in the community allow for greater opportunities to develop learning partnerships between mentor and mentee (Dominguez

and Hager, 2013; Parylo et al., 2012; Searby, 2014). Because mentoring relationships developed in those contexts are free from the institutional restrictions of formal mentoring programmes and prescribed outcomes, the relationship can become intersubjective 'for the purposes of helping each other in the difficult process of realising oneself' (Honneth cited in Curty, 2020: 1342). Although specific goals often do feature in these relationships, because guidance tends to be 'relational and emotional' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 390), this can counteract the social harm of exclusion by removing 'obstacles to [mentees'] social inclusion and to their identity development' (Stojanov, 2010: 163). In this sense, informal mentoring can become integral to the pursuit of recognition (Honneth, 1995) through what Fleming and Finnegan refer to as the 'ideal care situation' (2014: 153). This is because a special relationship with a mentor can help mentees become more self-aware and conscious of their own uniqueness and special characteristics (Ibid).

For Timpe and Lunkenheimer, natural mentors are 'positive role models that emerge naturally' from a mentee's 'daily interactions and activities' (2015: 12). Because young people outside formal settings have choices, they will choose adults whom they trust because they have seen these adults behave in appropriate and admirable ways (Brady and Dolan, 2009: 365), such as 'adults who are non-judgmental, passionate, and well organised' (Goggins et. al., 2002, cited in Zeldin et al., 2013: 390–1). In the literature exploring the characteristics of effective natural mentors, one study identified the best mentors as adults 'who are willing to work collaboratively' (Zeldin et al., 2013, 390–1). Others defined the best mentors as 'those who are positive communicators, active listeners, and act their age' (Murdock et al., 2010, cited in Zeldin et al., 2013, 391). More broadly, a National League of Cities study found that 'adult partners must be able to empower without abdicating, support without taking over, and encourage without preaching' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 391), suggesting that understanding boundaries is an important element in the success of natural mentoring relationships.

For Zeldin, natural mentoring relationships based on respect have the potential to 'promote positive youth development, increase civic engagement, and support community change' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 385). Because they are situated outside formal settings which can be stressful for some, the independence and stability of natural mentors can help provide stability and 'unconditional support' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 391) to young people who may be experiencing risk in the home (Timpe and Lunkenheimer, 2015: 12–13) or 'other challenging environments' (Zeldin et al., 2013: 391). In this sense, natural mentors become role models (Zeldin et al., 2013: 391) who can help at-risk young people cope with stress, regulate emotions (Halpern, 2005: 15–17) and focus on the future in the face of adversity (Hurd and Zimmerman, 2010).

For Mullen, informal mentoring can be more beneficial than formal mentoring 'when it comes to retention, satisfaction and morale' (Mullen, 2016: 133). This might be because mentoring is not the goal in informal mentoring relationships but rather the by-product of trusted relationships with natural mentors in the community who, even if they don't see themselves as mentors, have demonstrated their commitment to the community with particular emphasis on the overall well-being of the individual.

Overall, for Mullen and Klimaitis (2021: 21), the literature reveals that 'trust, values, respect, empathy and control are all essential to mentoring' alongside feelings of 'belonging and connectedness'. For this reason, these informal mentoring relationships in the community may have 'policy messages that go beyond practice' (Brady and Dolan, 2009: 365).

2.4 Conclusion

Mentors do matter. So too does context. Within the context of university–community engagement, it is clear that focusing on alternative forms of mentoring can lead to a renewed emphasis on the relationship as opposed to outcomes. Informal mentoring which occurs naturally in the community has the flexibility to meet the challenges of the new age with its focus on relationships. This shift in the nature of the mentoring relationship from something which seeks to produce measurable outcomes to that which is more relationship-oriented is key to building stronger, more resilient communities and people. Outcomes are broadened to include the development of the individual, they are uncoerced and they are not tied to specific educational outcomes. Making the possibility of lifelong learning the objective means that individuals can choose freely their mentors and decide for themselves their needs. It is clear from the literature that key to building on these mentoring relationships is trust, reciprocity and intersubjectivity.
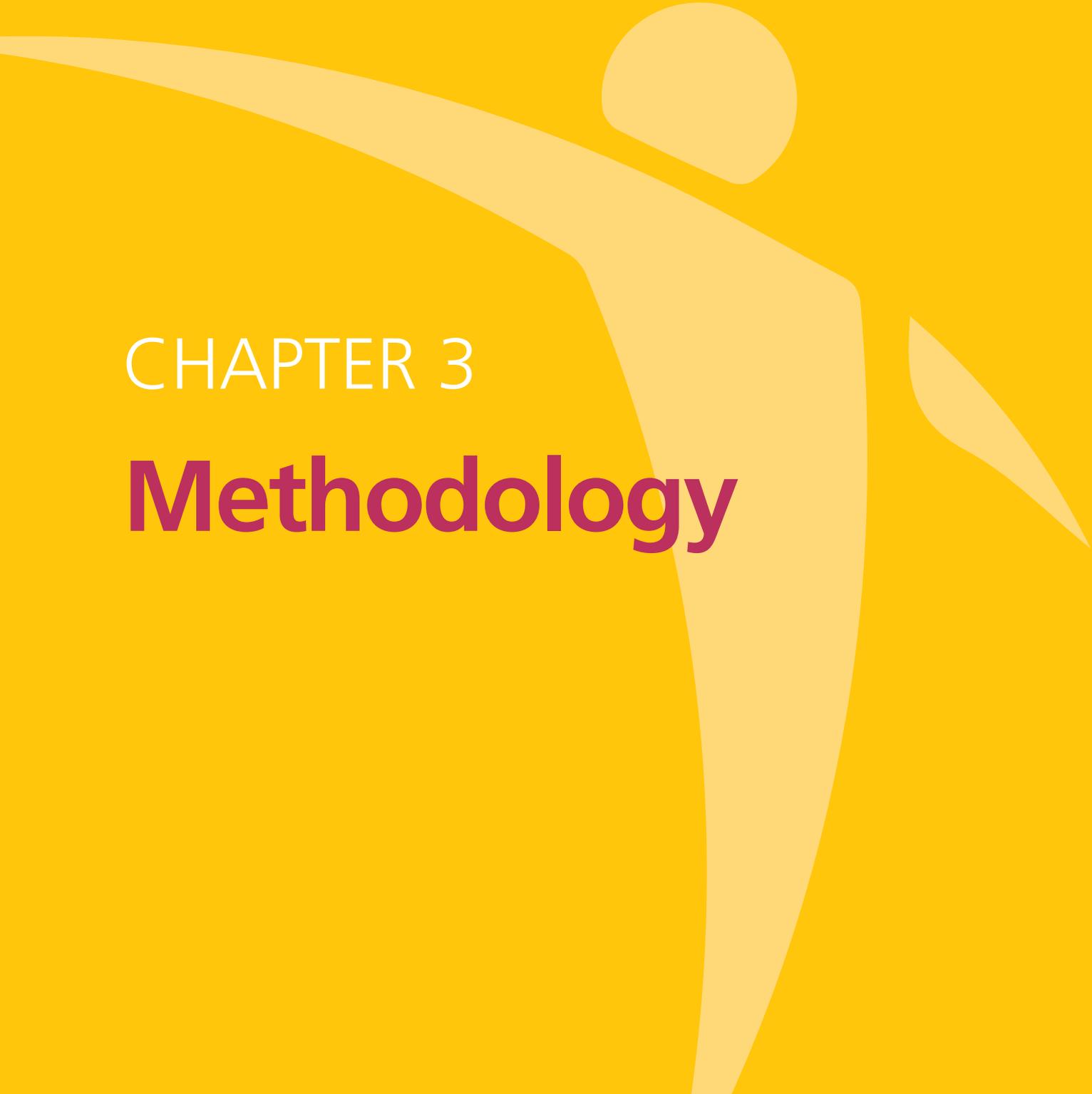
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the research design employed in this evaluation, including a discussion of the research objectives, research methodology, research approach, sampling strategy, research methods, ethics, data collection and data analysis.

3.1 Objectives

This research programme was designed to explore, from a multifaceted perspective and using various tools, a pilot programme developed to train mentors already working in the community who are engaged with informal mentoring. This research had three main objectives, detailed below:

Objective 1: Document the development process: The first objective was to document the unique development process of the newly established Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring, which was the first programme of its kind nationally.

Objective 2: Evaluate the programme from the perspective of the students: The second objective was to provide an evaluation of the programme from the perspective of those enrolled in the pilot certificate programme.

Objective 3: Capture models of best practice: Thirdly, given that this programme was the first course of its kind nationally, this research also captured models of best practice in order to provide best practice recommendations for the sector and for future teaching and learning in the area.

3.2 Research Methodology

The methodological approach to this community-based participatory research was mixed-methods research – a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches – to give voice to and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of those who designed the certificate programme (Phase 1) as well as those who participated in the first iteration of the certificate programme (Phase 2). The 'methodological openness' of university–community participatory research reflects a commitment to open and non-coercive research processes which endeavour to treat participants as partners in the acquisition of knowledge (see Kindon et al., 2007: 2). Designing the research to gauge the experiences of these two cohorts gave the research deeper insights into the meanings each of these cohorts brings to their experiences, perceptions, behaviours and processes (Creswell, 2018; Korstjens and Moser, 2017).

3.3 Research Approach

The approach underlying this mixed-methods research was a community-based participatory research paradigm, 'a collaborative process of research, education and action' (Hall, 1981, cited in Kindon, 2007: 10) which 'involves researchers and participants working together to examine a problematic situation or action to change it for the better'

(Kindon et al., 2007: 1). For Cohen et al., participatory action research is 'a type of critical reflective enquiry which participants undertake on and for themselves, focusing on problems and practices which they identify themselves and which affect them, with the intention of understanding and improving the educational and social practices in which they are involved' (2018: 445). Founded upon an ontology which rejects positivism and views human beings as dynamic agents capable of 'reflexivity and change' (Kindon, 2007: 13), and an epistemological position that views knowledge as being rooted in social relations, researchers undertaking participatory research must, for Kindon et al. (2007: 13), '… adopt a participatory perspective or worldview, which asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research'.

Through the prism of community-based participatory research, this research views the university–community partnership as a new possibility in the efforts to achieve lasting social change (Cohen et al., 2018: 442; Korstjens and Moser, 2017: 277) through pathways towards education and lifelong learning as a human right. Guiding this research in Phase 1 was an evaluation of the certificate programme from the perspectives of both the university and community stakeholders. Because each university and community partner represented different stakeholders and institutional perspectives, ascertaining the characteristics and mutuality of the partnership was key to this evaluation. In Phase 2, given the unique role of the first students who were approached to take part in the programme, critical social theory was used to more fully explore how their consciousness and empowerment was key to their becoming agents of change within their communities. In many ways, the success of the programme going forward depended upon the extent to which this cohort of students regarded themselves as agents of social change. As vital partners in this university–community project, it was envisaged that their empowerment would strengthen the programme in future and inform best practices as to how this programme might be implemented elsewhere.

For all participants, whether working in the community or in the university, all were committed to prioritising opportunities for greater access to education and lifelong learning, particularly among target communities. This perspective was ideal for this research because it honoured the perspectives of both the university and the community and underscored the synergistic relationship between both in developing this mentoring certificate programme. In this way, this research relied on the experiences of those engaged in the pilot programme, taking into consideration the importance of their empowerment to the success of the programme as well as their human right to access knowledge for their own lifelong learning.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

There were two cohorts of participants in this research. The first cohort consisted of the partners responsible for the design of the programme and the second cohort consisted of the students who have completed the pilot.

All partners were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. Specifically, each cohort consisted of:

- Cohort 1: The professionals who were instrumental in designing the course (Phase 1): the SOAR Project; UCC's Adult Continuing Education (ACE); UCC's School of Applied Social Studies; Cork City Learning Neighbourhoods; and the Cork Migrant Centre.

- Cohort 2: Those individuals who were already involved in informal mentoring through Cork City Learning Neighbourhoods and the Cork Migrant Centre who completed the mentoring certificate (Phase 2).

3.5 Research Methods

The data collection methods employed in this research were semi-structured interviews,[4] focus groups and a survey. Three university partners and two community partners (Cohort 1) were interviewed individually online via MS Teams during working hours. For student participants (Cohort 2), the data collection strategy was twofold – a survey which they filled out anonymously online at their convenience, and a focus group meeting held during the final lecture. Of the 16 students who took part in the mentoring course, online survey data was collected from 11 students, and 12 students in total for the focus group. For both cohorts, questions were thematised in advance to agree the purpose of the study with the subject matter. The intent of this research was mainly exploratory as an assessment of the pilot programme, but there was some expectation as well that the evaluative conclusions drawn from the data would be used to improve future iterations of the programme and may even be used as a 'best practice' template for other programmes employed elsewhere. The application of these research methods and the specific data collection processes are discussed in Section 3.7. For further details about interview/focus group schedules, one-on-one interview questions, focus groups questions and online survey questions, please see Appendices 4–6.

3.6 Ethics

Advocating a 'respect for persons' in community-based participatory research stipulates that (Kindon, 2007: 35):

- Research participants have the capacity to understand the risks and benefits of participation;

- They have the right to be informed what these are;

- They have the right to participate only on a voluntary basis.

With these guidelines in mind, informed consent was obtained from all participants at all stages of this research. Participants were made aware that the research project had received ethical approval from UCC's Social Research Ethics Committee and the research itself was governed by the highest ethical principles including confidentiality, privacy, adherence to GDPR, informed consent, and freedom to withdraw from the study (see Appendices 2 and 3).

---

4. A semi-structured interview strives to understand the themes of the living experience from the participant's perspective (Kvale, 2009: 10–11).

3.6.1 Covid-19 restrictions

Additional ethical considerations were taken with regard to participant safety given that data collection was carried out during the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. In accordance with strict government guidelines, every care was taken to meet the responsibilities of providing for the safety of all participants. In keeping with a low-risk approach, one-on-one interviews were conducted online via MS Teams. For the student participants, data collection was more complicated given that a focus group was used to collect data. Social distancing requirements in place at the time limited the number of students who could be present at one time in the lecture room. For this reason, on the evening of the focus groups, students were divided into two groups in strict accordance with government guidelines, with some students physically present in the UCC lecture room at the normal lecture time and the rest online at the same time in a nearby lecture room for the online focus group. All students were asked the same questions in both focus group settings, with one researcher facilitating the in-person students in the lecture room and another researcher facilitating the online students nearby.

3.7 Data Collection

The fieldwork for the two cohorts involved in this research took place between November 2021 and February 2022. Given Covid-19 restrictions, the survey, one focus group, and all the one-on-one interviews were conducted online and recorded via MS Teams. A second focus group meeting which took place in person was socially distanced in strict accordance with Covid-19 guidelines and recorded using a digital audio recording device. All data collected (audio and video) were sent via HEAnet to a professional transcriber and transcripts returned back anonymised.

Partners were invited to take part in a one-on-one, online interview which consisted of 10 semi-structured questions (Appendix 5). Using qualitative, one-on-one interviews allowed university and community partners to speak freely and explore their own experiences, attitudes and opinions without influence from the other partners or the researcher. The final question was an open question, so every attempt was made to allow the partners to speak freely about their experience as a co-creator/designer of the certificate programme.

The second phase consisted of the first students invited to complete the mentoring certificate. Using a quantitative questionnaire and a qualitative focus group, students were free to explore their own attitudes and opinions without influence from the partners or the researchers. In both the survey and the focus group, the final question asked was an open question (Appendix 6), so every attempt was made to allow the participants to speak freely about their experience as a student of the pilot certificate programme. Data collection was split between those who were present in the lecture hall and those who were streaming online. The in-person focus group was recorded on a handheld digital recorder. The online focus group was recorded via MS Teams.

Overall, five partners (Cohort 1) took part in the one-on-one interviews conducted online via MS Teams. For the students (Cohort 2) – of the 16 students enrolled on the pilot mentoring certificate course, 12 students took part in the focus groups meetings (four

in-person and eight online via MS Teams) and 11 students participated in the online survey (see Figure 2), representing a 75% and 69% response rate overall for the focus groups and surveys respectively.
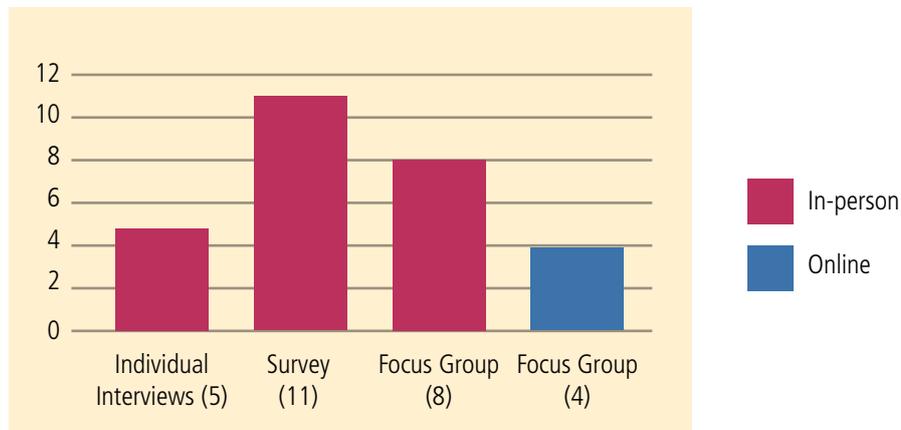
Figure 2. Participants and methods of data collection

3.8 Data Analysis

Data obtained from the quantitative survey was statistically tabulated using MS Forms. For the qualitative data from both cohorts, transcriptions were coded using open coding to find patterns and highlight recurrent themes, views, attitudes, and issues. For the first phase, Cohort 1, the partnership was the key organising theme, particularly the co-creation and co-design of the programme from the perspective of each partner. For the second phase, Cohort 2, focus on the empowerment of the students and their engagement with their communities was highlighted. For the third objective, themes from the first two objectives were used to critically analyse the programme from the perspective of best practices.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological framework guiding the evaluation of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring programme, which was developed to support natural mentors in the community who were already engaged in providing critical support to under-represented target groups seeking to access lifelong learning and higher education. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data was collected through an online survey and qualitative data was collected via two focus group meetings and five interviews. The first cohort consisting of university and community partners took part in one-on-one interviews which were conducted online via MS Teams. For the second cohort, the students taking part in the mentoring certificate, data was collected using an online survey and via focus group meetings. All interviews and both focus group meetings were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Findings and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The analysis of this research took the form of participatory analysis of the university–community relationship as well as the critical social theory of the students engaged in the pilot programme. The development, design and analysis of the mentoring programme was also critically assessed for best practices.

4.1 Objective 1: Document the development process

In order to more effectively engage with the needs of the community, the university and the community must each reflect on their own perspectives about social responsibility in order to assume 'a shared responsibility with stakeholders through a democratic process' (Cortez Ruiz, 2014: 44). This is because the most successful university–community collaborations are working partnerships based on 'mutual understanding, a common good, reciprocity, collaboration in decision making and transparency regarding outcomes' (Cortez Ruiz, 2014: 44). In order for social transformation to take place, successful forms of university–community engagement require the 'mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity' (Cortez Ruiz, 2014: 45). For Sasson, this requires a comprehensive evaluation of the university–community partnerships in order to 'understand the contributions of the partnership itself to the attainment of the outcome objectives' (2019: 2330).

This research found that characteristics of the networks each partner represented mattered just as much as the approach, shared commitment and sustainability of the mentoring programme. Given this, there were several key themes which came to the fore in interviews with key partners from both the university and the community:

1. Partnership representation is key in the development of a university–community partnership;

2. Complementary approaches to the development of the mentoring programme make a difference;

3. Co-equal partnership and reciprocity supports successful outcomes;

4. Support for under-represented groups is important; and

5. Critical reflection and evaluation are important aspects of the partnership process.

4.1.1 Key Theme 1: Partnership representation is key in the development of a university–community partnership

Although the university–community partnership consisted of five representatives, three representatives from the university and two representatives from the community, representation went much deeper on both sides given that both sides had their own unique networked relationships with other engaged partners. As the community partner represented a wide range of '*broad partnerships*' of different '*initiatives and groupings*'

across all sectors of Cork City and beyond, the university partner represented other institutions of higher education, initiatives and stakeholders throughout the South Cluster. In many ways, this partnership was an internetwork of two networks partnering together to achieve a mutual goal. This meant that this university–community partnership programme represented the interests of more stakeholders than might otherwise be obvious.

For all partners, the partnership approach presented an opportunity to create a mutually beneficial framework to increase the scope of and, as one participant stated, '*enhance the overall learning opportunities for all the citizens*'. As the university welcomed new ways to access difficult-to-reach students for education and lifelong learning, for one community partner, engaging more deeply in the community presented a unique opportunity to move beyond traditional forms of mentoring.

After the principal university–community stakeholders agreed to take part in this mentoring certificate initiative, other partners were invited into the partnership. Representing the university were representatives from the SOAR Project, Applied Social Studies, ACE and Access Service MTU Cork. On the community side, strong links to UNESCO Cork City Learning Neighbourhoods and the Cork Migrant Centre were, as one community partner stated, all '*very obvious*' partners to '*approach because the Learning Neighborhoods are all about encouraging learning, all kinds of learning, celebrating learning*' at '*all levels*'.

For one university partner, it mattered that '*the Learning Neighbourhoods have an international dimension*' via its links to '*the UNESCO process*' because:

> '*The people at a local level in Cork can see that what they are doing is having an impact outside of Cork in other parts of the world, and maybe helping other communities to strengthen their lifelong learning missions as well.'*

Another university partner agreed that it was important that '*the Learning Neighbour-hoods and the wider community*' knew that the university was committed to '*engaging with them*' and '*supporting them*' and that the university recognised the '*added value*' the communities '*bring to what the University does as well*'. For another partner, this partnership was '*kind of a dream team*' which endeavoured to '*break down barriers between the university and the community*'. This was because:

> '*Universities very often engage in a kind of top-down way, and I think this is wrong – it is a mistake – and it is really important that communities – the communities we serve – are given the esteem they deserve.'*

After two initial consultation sessions, 24 stakeholders reached a consensus on how to proceed with the partnership:

> '*So straight away we knew it was going to be very relevant and I suppose that was a big thing for us.'*

For one partner, this partnership was promising because:

'We can create and do more things together than we can on our own and that there are always new possibilities in terms of partnership building, so that is really important.'

4.1.2 Key Theme 2: Complementary approaches to the development of the mentoring programme make a difference

That the university and the community were each working towards models of access into higher education and lifelong learning was also highlighted. For the community partners, the certificate programme complemented work that had already been underway to provide '*mentoring training*' to '*learning ambassadors at local level*':

'... because these are young people that really have been mentoring other people […], they've been there, done that. They've gone to college or they're working and they're trying to kind of help other people. The will was there but the training wasn't there, so it was one of the things we were looking at.'

For one university partner, the programme complemented and supported the university's existing efforts to attract people into education. This was because it provided another resource to connect with those in the community who may be beyond the reach of the various outreach programmes, such as those with disabilities or those who may be wavering in their commitment to pursue higher education or lifelong learning. Working together with the community towards the mutual goal of providing access to education and lifelong learning meant that:

'... there is somebody there locally in their local Library or their Community Centre or Family Resource Centre that they know, "Oh that person, he knows a little bit about this, maybe I'll go and talk to him", and that person can be that local support and that local encouragement.'

For this university partner, it was an opportunity to extend the reach of the university's Access programmes directly into neighbourhoods and communities. '*Having a group of mentors in the neighbourhoods and communities*' to '*support prospective students*' was a '*huge resource*' for this partner given efforts in their Access office to identify '*gaps in information and understanding or messaging*' among those who may wish to '*access all education and hopefully higher education as well*'.

The hope for all was that the university–community partnership would be able to attract '*natural leaders and mentors within their communities*' who could '*be that mentor, be a conduit of information, be that support*' to bridge the gap '*between residents there and the Higher Education Institutions*'.

Having '*people in the mentorship role*' who were '*available in their communities to listen to people*' was important for one university partner because it agreed with '*UCC ambitions*' as not only a '*national university, but also a regional university*', and ongoing efforts to:

'... engage with the community within their catchment area and I suppose increase levels of participation by non-traditional cohorts'.

4.1.3 Key Theme 3: Co-equal partnership and reciprocity supports successful outcomes

Once Access Services in both University College Cork (UCC) and Munster Technological University – Cork Campus (MTU Cork) agreed to collaborate on the development of a community based approach to increasing access amongst under-represented groups, all partners agreed that the '*hands on*' partnership model was the right approach to take and one of the greatest strengths because, as one partner stated, it was '*very much grounded*' in development from '*an experiential point of view*'. This approach was preferential to starting from a '*theoretical framework*' given the '*knowledge*' and '*experiential expertise*' already present in the community. Other partners agreed that the consultation approach taken to engage '*with stakeholders to find out what they wanted*' made for a '*better program*', particularly when it was decided to extend the emphasis on education to include lifelong learning:

> '*From the very outset, we had this idea that it wasn't about third level. We were always saying that it was about any return to any kind of education or participation. So if someone wanted to go and learn to crochet or if they wanted to go and learn something about fly-fishing, or whatever it was, it didn't matter, and the mentor would be there to listen to that person and offer them whatever support they could.*'

For another partner, the approach taken to '*co-create and co-design*' the programme alongside individuals who were nominated for mentoring training by '*the local community level leadership group*' created a '*strong degree of commonality*' among those selected given that they were all already '*well-known in their own local community*' and were '*seen as leaders in their own way*':

> '*The reason for that was very straightforward really. The long-term ambition for the graduates […] was there from the very start. This wasn't to be another course where somebody studied […] and got the qualification and then went about their own lives. This was a different concept from the start.*'

Despite the co-equal partnership, there were some partners with access to more resources, but for one partner, '*UCC's role in minding*' the partnership was welcome, with special merit given to the '*strong*', '*seamless*' and '*inter-organisational cooperation within UCC*'.

4.1.4 Key Theme 4: Support for under-represented groups is important

For one community partner, the '*first cohort*', with their '*qualification achieved*', had '*a significant role to play as leaders that can also help individuals who are part of under-represented groups*' to '*change the dynamic*' at local level because:

> '*The Learning Neighbourhoods local leadership groups can identify, encourage and support other individuals to take up this opportunity.*'

It was thought that the first cohort of students would also help support greater access to education for under-represented groups through existing partner structures because:

> '… the people in the Learning Neighbourhoods are part of the group that are under-represented in the university and a very big hope I suppose of this type of programme is that it can be part of something that will bring more people in from there.'

This sentiment was echoed by one university partner, who stated the importance of 'having that group of people armed with information' and:

> '... that team of mentors with the knowledge of the system and supports and pathways'.

Another community partner agreed that it was 'very important' that the support provided to under-represented groups maintain 'that note of human dignity and value' for those students who experienced financial difficulty and, crucially, that this does not come across as 'charity'.

For another university partner, although 'it is part of a bigger process', they regarded having 'informed people who can give that level of support' important for those at 'local level' in order to provide 'more opportunities for people'. The key thing was for communities to realise 'that they are entitled to third level education as much as any other community around' and to get to a place:

> '... where people in disadvantaged communities don't see the university as something alien or something not for them. I want people to get to a place where […] the university supports their ambitions as much as it supports the ambitions of the more privileged people in society …'

For one partner, apart from opening up the programme to 'more people', they would like to see more support from the university partners for those who 'lived in a direct provision centre' for many years and a mentoring programme within the college because:

> '… once they are in college, they are like a duck out of water, they are completely lost'.

4.1.5 Key Theme 5: Critical reflection and evaluation are important aspects of the partnership process

In order to build sustainability into the university–community partnership model, reflection is important to determine if the partnership can help 'identify relevant programme models, approaches, or evidence to inform, enhance, or deepen its work' (Hoy and Johnson, 2013: 280).

Given that there was, as one partner stated, 'no perfect model', the partnership model was in itself 'a huge lesson learned' because they had to develop their own 'models of practice'. Another lesson learned was the time it took to establish partners in the community who were 'already mentoring'. Giving people 'a bit more skills' and the 'opportunity to share' their 'learning with others' was an important lesson learned for this partner.

Strengths

For all university partners, the university–community partnership approach to planning and delivery of the programme was one of the main strengths of the programme.

Other strengths besides planning and delivery were the flexible, '*bespoke*' consultation approach to course design and the '*quality mark*' of accreditation, which, for one partner, enhanced the confidence of the volunteers accepting the call to take the course.

For one community partner, the main strength was that it gave people '*who wouldn't speak anyway because they are so different*' a '*platform to speak*'. For them, '*being together*' and '*communicating*' with one another was a welcome development because it was intergenerational:

> '*... the youth used to just stay in their corner and do their youth things and there are the women who then are either in the Mother-and-Baby group who do their own motherly things and, inasmuch as we have those two in the same space, we never have a platform where they're talking to each other or learning from each other or gaining from each other.*'

Other strengths discussed were the person-centred '*experiential participative approach*', as well as the link between the community and the Access staff at university. As one university partner stated, '*we are incredibly lucky with our programme coordinator*' because '*it was not an easy ask*' to get involved at all levels of the planning including consultation, facilitating discussions, researching existing programmes, and '*pre-development work on the module*'. For this partner, the programme coordinator was '*a huge factor in the success*' of the programme:

> '*... I think we were incredibly lucky that we had somebody who came with a real genuine interest and wasn't here to [just] deliver a programme or develop a module but was genuinely interested in what we were trying to do long term and in the short term in terms of our approach ...*'

Challenges

For both the university and the community, aside from the significant challenges that came with the Covid-19 pandemic, other challenges included '*trying to identify the correct people in the community to do the course*'; managing expectations for a long-term, sustainable '*community betterment programme*'; proper funding for the programme, making sure the mentors are properly supported; and:

> '*... staying true to our approach in terms of it being very much in consultation with the communities and responding to their needs […] what I would like us to do is to be led as much as possible in terms of the local needs.*'

For one partner, although they are '*looking forward to*' seeing how the programme develops in future, given that '*this is just the beginning of a bigger project, a bigger journey for all of us',* the challenge is for the university sector:

> '*… to appreciate that it doesn't know everything and doesn't have the solution to all problems – that it needs to listen to communities, and it needs to support communities*'.

University–community partnership: Success in future

For all university partners, understanding the programme as a process was as important as reviewing the programme to determine the '*next steps*' without being, as one partner stated, '*too prescriptive*'. Another partner said:

> '*We need to review this in a sincere and open way. We will see lots of good things, we will see things that we can do better and that is just the process.*'

Several partners mentioned the importance of understanding that the mentoring certificate is evolving as opposed to '*a done and dusted model*', which should also include an evaluation of the module content because:

> '*... it will change depending upon the environment and the context of where it can be delivered*'.

For one partner, the importance of being flexible with the coursework itself, the delivery of the coursework and the financial assistance university partners make available to students encountering difficulty was key to '*enable them to attend in a way that they would not have been able to attend before*'. For this partner, key lessons learned from the person-centred development of the course framework included a reflective analysis of themselves, their personal experience of mentoring, the different types of mentoring, and connection to the community.

Looking towards the future, one community partner suggested the programme could be a '*template*' for other '*themes and topics that might provide other access points for some of the under-represented groups*' with a '*willingness to re-engage in lifelong learning*'. This partner also expressed their hope that '*this would be the first of many that is seen as a template*' which was not '*funding dependent*'.

For another partner, '*supporting greater access to education*' where '*there is a low level of participation beyond the compulsory requirements of education*' was also important. It was felt that those who have risen above difficult circumstances '*would have a great rapport*' with '*young people out there*' and those '*who maybe are walking on the wild side a bit*'. For this partner, getting more '*positive male role models*' involved would encourage '*greater participation*' in the programme among a broader cohort of participants. As another partner stated, because the module was '*very heavily gender skewed*', the programme could be improved by striving to achieve greater gender balance in future:

> '*It would be great, I think, if we had more gender balance on the programme [...] Certainly it would be great to have more men for a whole number of reasons in terms of accessing particular target groups that may be male-to-male; mentoring may be more effective, and I think maybe there might be different approaches or styles ...*'

For one partner, given the cultural currency of sport, particularly Gaelic games in Ireland (Hogan et al., 2021: 3) and the positive influences sport has on those who participate in it, including coaches in future iterations of the mentoring certificate would be a positive development. As this partner stated:

'I think this would work really, really well with people involved in sporting organisations be it soccer clubs or GAA clubs or boxing, basketball – whatever it is – that there are people there where young people or sporting participants hang on their every word. They are a huge influence and a really, really positive influence and a role model in people's lives.'

Maintaining a connection to the community and seeing the students as '*an important source of information not just at individual level but also as a group*' is important for one partner because '*the lived experience*' is so '*valuable*'. For another partner, the importance of strengthening the networking aspect of the module was important as well to maintain social connections to visiting speakers from the community.

4.2 Objective 2: Evaluate the programme from the perspective of the students

For Cortez Ruiz, an important feature in successful university–community partnerships is to understand that the community is seen 'not as a target but as a stakeholders, taking a central role in the design, planning, execution and evaluation of the activities' (Cortez Ruiz, 2014: 48).

In this sense, it was important for the university–community partnership to regard the students as important partners in the co-creation and development of this community engagement programme. For Hoy and Johnson (2013: 274), it is important that this engagement 'involves collaborative and responsive teaching and learning, as well as a philosophy that promotes continuous learning by all those involved'. For Freire (1994), if university–community partnerships are to become 'change agents', '[T]hey should be willing to share their authority with the community in community engagement projects, and they must encourage community participation through dialoguing and problem posing' (cited in Sathorar, 2021: 99).

In total, the students represented in the survey include 11 participants. Six respondents had been involved in mentoring work for 5+ years, one for 4 years, three for 2 years and one for 1 year (Figure 3).

1 Year: 1
2 Years: 3
3 Years: 0
4 Years: 1
5 Years: 6
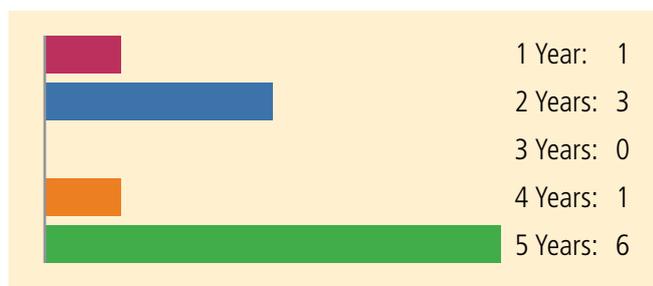
Figure 3. Number of years students have been involved in mentoring

In total, 12 students took part in the focus groups, 4 in-person and 8 via MS Teams.[5] The key themes which emerged from an analysis of both the focus groups and the survey were as follows:

5. Given that there were 16 students enrolled on the course, and due to the anonymity of the survey, it is impossible to determine the degree to which the students who engaged with the focus groups (12 in total) also took part in the online survey (11 in total).

i.   The lecturer as facilitator;

ii. The acquisition of new skills;

iii. Confidence gained;

iv. The need for connection through networking;

v.   Programme sustainability;

vi. Reaching out to the community.

4.2.1 Key Theme: The lecturer as facilitator

For Freire (1998: 91), because education 'is a form of intervention in the world', a teacher must offer theoretical perspectives as well as a nurturing environment for self-reflection and engagement. (Aronowitz cited in Freire, 1998: 18). For Freire, the key to converting the curriculum into authentic educational experience is:

> *'The climate of respect that is born of just, serious, humble, and generous relationships, in which both the authority of the teacher and the freedom of the students are ethically grounded' (*Freire (1998: 86).

It is impossible to overstate just how pleased the students were with the course overall and the lecturer, who was, as one student stated:

> *'... the ideal person to actually deliver this particular course because he was really relaxed, he was very inclusive and he just handled it very well.'*

As another student stated:

> *'I personally appreciated [the lecturer's] take on the way he worked with us – nothing was a problem really.'*

For many students, the pedagogical approach of the lecturer – whom they regarded as a '*facilitator*' as '*opposed to a lecturer*' – was, as one student stated:

> *'… great with us as well because he wouldn't just put up the theory, he knew the theory and he would just talk through relevant experiences and let us pitch in ours as well. I thought that was really beneficial for me so yeah I thought praise […] for [their] way of doing things.'*

For another student, the lecturer inspired students with their dedication and knowledge, and was praised for creating a supportive and '*relaxed environment*' which was '*more conducive to learning*' because it:

> *'... allowed everyone to open up more. No one was forced to talk about their experience or anything but, because it was so relaxed, everyone just felt comfortable'.*

For one student, the lecturer set a positive example which would inspire them in their own work:

> *'... as the weeks rolled out, then we understood what was going to be ahead of us and the amount of work that was put into it by the university, by [the lecturer]. He*

was after giving us [their] all and then to pass that on to us, so we were going to be giving it our all when we went out into the community.'

In response to a 5-point Likert scale (from 'very poor' to 'excellent'), the mentoring certificate course scored highly among students in terms of overall impression, with 6 students considering the course to be 'very good' (N=6) and 5 students considering the course to be 'excellent' (N=5) (Figure 4).

| Very good |
| Excellent |

- Very poor
- Poor
- Average
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

Figure 4. Overall impression of the mentoring certificate course

Similarly, the survey also revealed that the mentoring certificate course content was regarded highly as well. In response to a 5-point Likert scale (from 'extremely helpful' to 'not at all helpful'), the course content overall was considered either 'extremely helpful' (N=6) or 'very helpful' (N=5) (Figure 5).

| Extremely helpful |
| Very helpful |

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not so helpful
- Not at all helpful
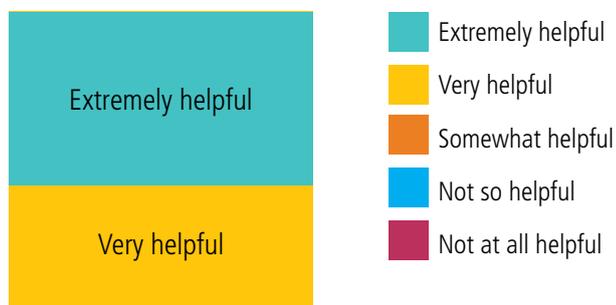
Figure 5. Overall impression of the mentoring certificate course content

In the focus group, all students stated that they enjoyed the course ('*I think just well done on the whole thing really to be honest with you*'), with many regarding the course as '*rich and varied*' with '*relevant*' information they would use in future. Others agreed that the course gave them access to rich information every week:

> *'it started off with a little snowball and next here we go with a big, huge thing at the end of it. It just gathered, gathered, gathered as it went along every week, so I just think it was fabulous, like.'*

The lecturer's open structure to the course from week to week and '*how the class was structured*' was what most students enjoyed, with most agreeing that the open and loose structure:

> *'... made it feel more like a discussion rather than being [...] something hard'.*

Reading lists and a '*load of information*' each week guided the discussions towards theory, stories, boundaries, and '*testing and provoking*' questionnaires. For some, this allowed the module to flow from one week to the next:

> '*... whatever came up in class came out then for next week with an extra little bit on it and so on and so on. There was a constant flow of new stuff. Everybody's input was a part of all our learning.*'

For one student, the learning was layered with personal, professional and community development theory, which for another student represented a '*good mixture*' of subjects both '*light and heavy*', including '*self-care*', '*role play*' and with '*scenarios*' and '*reflections*' played out. Others agreed that the course was '*an enriching and fantastic experience*' and overall a '*learning experience*' which was '*really worthwhile*'.

Most participants in the focus group stated that they were approached to take the course because they were recommended by someone in their organisation or because it was a natural progression from their existing role within their organisation. Asked in the survey if they felt they had enough support, in the main students felt supported, with 10 students saying yes, they had enough support and one who felt they were somewhat supported (Figure 6).

Yes

I felt somewhat supported

Yes: 10

No: 0

I felt somewhat supported: 1

I did not feel supported: 0

Prefer not to say: 0
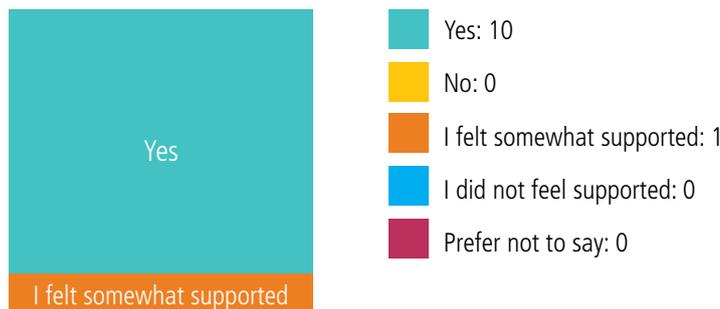
Figure 6. Degree to which participants had support to successfully complete the course

When asked in the survey how they would describe their knowledge of mentoring, on a range from 0 to 10 (0 being 'no knowledge' and 10 being 'excellent knowledge'), participants rated their knowledge of mentoring before taking the course at –7.3 and after at +6.4 (Figure 7).

Knowledge before and after taking the course

Pre-course (-7.3)

Post-course (+6.4)
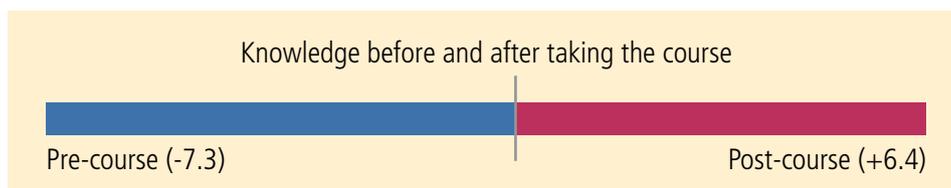
Figure 7. Mentoring knowledge before and after taking the mentoring certificate course

Furthermore, all 11 survey respondents agreed that the course reflected their day-to-day practice to varying degrees including 'yes' (N=8), 'it significantly reflects day-to-day mentoring' (N=2) and 'it reflects day-to-day mentoring a little' (N=1) (See Figure 8).
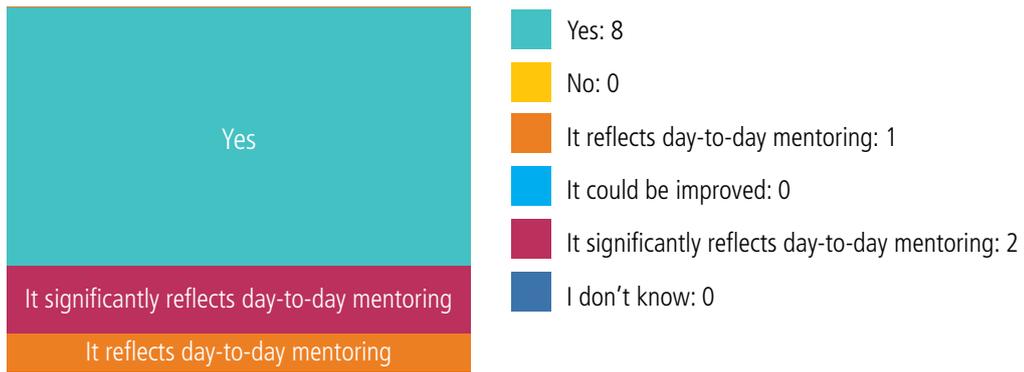
Figure 8. Degree to which the mentoring course reflects day-to-day practice

These survey results were corroborated in the focus groups, where all respondents agreed that '*the formal framework*' and the clearly defined concepts and pathways were welcome:

> '*I am a big theory person anyway, so I love sucking that stuff up! There you go.*'

> '*you couldn't say anything was superfluous*'.

> '*I even had a particular situation where I came in and I read something and I thought oh my God if I had known that last week, I would have had a bit more empathy […]. Definitely the theory coming from different angles, you know, psychology and sociology and social studies – that melting pot of information for me.*'

> '*I must admit when that was going on, you know, at the very start I was saying "good God can we just get down to action here?" I wanted the active learning; I was resisting all these philosophical discussions and everything else but sure then I did realise ... I learnt so much actually. Stopping and reflecting and reading on all of the theories – it has just been so beneficial.*'

4.2.2 Key Theme: The acquisition of new skills

Asked in the survey if they had gained new skills, all respondents indicated they had gained skills to varying degrees, including 'yes' (N=7), 'I gained some skills' (N=2) and 'I gained a lot of skills' (N=2) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Degree to which participants gained skills to assist in mentoring work

Survey data was also corroborated in the focus groups, with all students agreeing that they had gained new skills. For one student, the course:

> '... gave me a chance to reflect on some of the skills that I did have but I knew I could improve on'.

Among the aspects of the course students most enjoyed, lessons on '*boundaries*' and '*ethics*' and the importance of '*self-care*' and '*minding yourself*' came in for special mention:

> 'We have people in the community who need, but who helps the helpers? Who cares for the carers?'

> '… appreciating boundaries, appreciated your own space, taking care of yourself, they are huge …'

Other new skills mentioned included the process of mentoring ('*you are a mentor, but it is a process*'), and the fact that:

> '… the good mentor means constantly evolving, adapting and learning'.

Other important skills learned included communication skills, relationship building, learning how to be non-judgmental, honesty, adaptability and emotional intelligence, with one student talking about the reward that came from breaking through to:

> '… kids that have suffered either a bereavement or a separation'.

For several students, it came as a surprise to learn that the relationships they had built with members of the community were mentoring relationships because:

> 'a lot of us are already doing mentoring'.

> 'I didn't know I was mentoring until they told me I was mentoring.'

For another student, the course helped them realise that mentoring was about relationship building:

> '… when parents or children came in, I always felt I had to serve them […] in my mentoring role; whereas the idea here was lovely that the mentee has a role in this relationship as a mentor has and being aware of that – both people being aware of that.'

Other key things learned was the reciprocity of mentoring relationship and the importance of their mentee '*solving their own problems*', with one student stating:

> 'You are not supposed to be the sage, the one with the solutions, you are just there to guide them to find the solutions themselves. I love that idea. I am sorry I didn't know that years ago. Actually, I was always trying to fix them in school, whereas actually much more important and more relevant […] is when they do solve it for themselves with your support as opposed to giving them the solution.'

For another student, the course allowed them to realise the importance of being a mentor and respect for all that goes into it:

*'It is not being a mentor for fun or "I am just doing it because I love to help people"
– it is more than that – so the course allowed me to know that it is more than just
thinking that I want to help people because I love ... I want to be of service. It is
more than that. People are trusting you with their story, with their life and they
want to move on with the next step. They might be afraid to go to a counsellor –
there is a label around counselling – but they feel more comfortable talking to you
[as a mentor]. So, I think the structure of the course – in allowing us to know how
important our roles are – was really key for me. That is why I recommend the course.'*

4.2.3 Key Theme: Confidence gained

For Freire, 'conscientisation involves a type of knowing that includes understanding and
also the ability to act on this knowing in such a way as to bring about change' (cited
in Sathorar, 2021: 93). In the survey overall, the level of confidence students felt after
taking the course was in the positive range. In response to a 5-point Likert scale (from
'much more confident' to 'much less confident'), respondents indicated that they either
felt 'much more confident' (N=7) after taking the mentoring certificate course or 'more
confident' (N=4) (Figure 10).
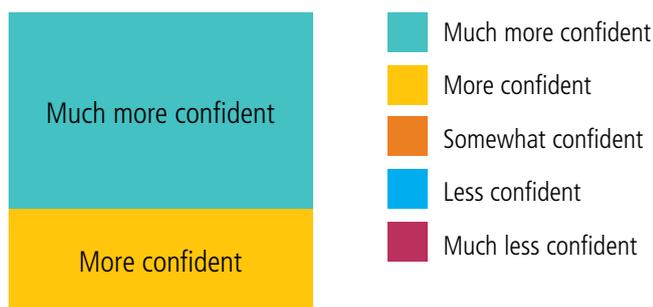
Figure 10. Level of confidence after taking the course

For many in the focus group, their confidence came from the open structure of the course
and the formalisation of their engagement in the community, something which many felt
enabled them to '*place a structure around*' or '*professionalise*' the natural mentoring roles
they had in their communities:

*'I mean, we only had volunteers in the community back in the 70s and 80s in youth
work, […] so we need – if we want people mentoring out in the community –
programmes like this to formalise it.'*

This formalisation of mentoring was, for one student, a reason they would recommend
the course because 'the work that is being done isn't recognised':

*'Acknowledging it and putting a cert around it is a fabulous step going forward. The
amount of people that are out there who are already doing this job and mentoring,
so many youth workers and teachers – so many different people – that giving them
that recognition I think is massively important and that there is credit given for the
work that is being done in a formal kind of a setting. I think that is hugely important.'*

*'I think definitely it is going to give us more confidence that the structure is there
because it is needed in the communities.'*

For many students, the academic framework helped them with '*putting theory into practice*'. For another, their confidence came from thinking differently about how to approach situations, with many students stating that taking the course with other mentors was a way to build confidence in their decision making.

4.2.4 Key Theme: The need for connection through networking

In the survey, when participants were asked how beneficial the experience of participating in the course overall was, all respondents indicated that the experience was beneficial. On a 5-point Likert scale (from 'very poor' to 'excellent'), participants considered the experience either 'very good' (N=4) or 'excellent' (N=7) (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Degree to which participation was considered beneficial

We know from social change theory that social movements are 'catalysed' by 'members who build the movement by mobilizing efforts and organizing resources to bring about collective action' (Jenkins, 1983, cited in Tremblay et al., 2017: 335). This desire to connect with and learn from one another appeared as a significant theme during the focus group interviews in both the desire to learn from one another and the desire to form greater networks with the larger community in order to be more effective in their outreach efforts.

One student expressed a desire for more opportunity '*from the outset*' to learn '*more about everybody else's daily practice*':

> '... maybe a session like that could have been given for each of us to say "well I am here and I do this and you can come down here if this happens". Just something more structured about each single one of us because, at the end of the day, this is a practical subject, and we are going to go away from here and we are going to need each other. I am still a little vague about that. I am still kind of hoping it comes together at the end.'

For others, '*because the sessions are long*' a coffee break would have been appreciated as an opportunity to socialise, mingle, make a connection, and get to know one another better. At the same time, there was an understanding that with Covid-19 restrictions which were in place at the time, it was not possible to accommodate '*the social side of it*' with '*chats over coffee*'.

Networking with the larger community

Networking with the larger community was also a strong desire, as indicated by language such as '*connections*', '*networking*', '*confidence*' and '*reassurance*'. One student stated

that they enjoyed knowing that they had the backup of others coming *'from a place that was unique'* but who nevertheless *'will know what I know'.* Another student expressed a desire to:

> *'… make sure we keep the momentum of the group going and meet up for definite'.*

For many students, building networking relationships with other mentors in the community is important not only to build and maintain connections with other mentors (*'the connections are actually vital'),* but also to better help those in the community:

> *'you don't have all the answers, but you have a network'.*

Networking and meeting others who are passionate about mentoring was cited as a reason for being confident should the need arise to refer a mentee. Others agreed:

> *'You can safely say I have met them myself instead of sending them to a stranger, that would seem very unwise to me because you don't know what that stranger is going to be like or how they would interact with them – that was important as well.'*

For another, it was building an awareness of the work others are doing and where to go for help:

> *'it really just helped me to see who I can come to for help'.*

Another spoke about the benefit of learning that *'there were services that we didn't know about'*:

> *'Even to get somebody to go to a flower arranging class could […] get them out into the community.'*

For another student, networking with others helped them feel confident to '*redirect*' mentees '*when the goal is met*' to '*the appropriate kind of service, the appropriate direction whether it is further education*' or '*just being aware of that relationship changing and you changing along with it*'.

Another said that some mentees need '*something social*' which '*doesn't have to be formal*' because it was the connection that mattered. Other students spoke about how the course allowed them to reflect on their role in the community, particularly how they were trained. For others, the course allowed them to reflect on the ways people have helped them in their own lives. Another student talked about meeting resistance from people in their lives to try something new and how this course helped participants understand the power of building that person's confidence:

> *'That is the thing – the effect that you have on somebody that you don't actually realise.'*

There was much feedback about the importance of having someone who can support them in their work and help them with '*self-care*', with most students agreeing how '*comforting*' it was to have '*supervision*' and '*sharing experiences*', '*debriefing*', '*sharing your worries*' with a '*support network*' to help process experiences '*without breaching confidentiality*':

'There has been a brilliant amount of sharing actually.'

'it is kind of humbling.'

'Someone will know what to do.'

'If you don't know, someone is going to help you or you can talk to somebody about it – that was huge really.'

Another student mentioned the importance of time and a space '*to sit down and open up conversations*' and the importance of giving mentees the '*space to work out issues'* and the time to help them acquire '*skills for their life'*. For one student, although they weren't entirely sure *'what the benefit is for myself as a mentor'*:

'I know that I can see that there is a huge need for mentors in the community. For every one of us, there are 100 or 500 mentors needed.'

For others, it was *'an enriching and fantastic experience', a 'learning experience'* which was *'really worthwhile'* because it *'awoke something'*:

'... there is a very positive feeling in myself about the whole prospect of going out there now to the community as a result of doing this and meeting the group ... I am really grateful for the experience – it was just amazing to be honest with you and it definitely has helped me to think forward as to where we are going to go next and to go back and share it with the community. […] it is brilliant like, there is a real buzz about it actually in the community as well, so it is really positive.'

4.2.5 Key Theme: Programme sustainability

In order to sustain the programme for the future, several students agreed that the course might benefit from the inclusion of other '*modules, that would come together to form your level eight'* or, for another student:

'a choice of modules and something that you are particularly interested in relating to community work obviously'.

Other students agreed that electives might be a good idea, such as, for instance:

* A focus on the arts in the community (*'that you then could go out to your community and allow all those talents that are hidden under stones to come out and enjoy the arts'*);

* Intergenerational work (*'working with different generations'*);

* Mental health in the community and support for those whose English isn't that strong.

When asked how they might improve the course, many students said that they would like to see the graduates put together a handbook to serve as a practical guide for the purposes of *'showing the community what is out there because a lot of people aren't actually aware of it'*. Creating a handbook of community resources, would, for one student:

'… be number one for me to have that resource available because it is all about putting people in front of the right people'.

Similarly, another student suggested *'a template for our neighbourhoods'* to show the *'different services that are in the neighbourhood'*. Another student suggested that this information sharing might become part of the structure of the course:

'Have your lecture for maybe the first […] 1 hour 45 minutes and then have a guest come in for your last 45 minutes […] if that was done every week over all the weeks that we were here, we would have met quite a number of people coming from different places.'

One student suggested that instead of the essay requirement for their accreditation, they might have instead a *'portfolio on mentoring and a 10-minute presentation to the group about an agency that we are involved with'* because *'sharing information'* in this way means that *'everyone gets the benefit of acknowledging'* each other's work.

For several students, having an expert *'from different areas'* come in for every class *'would be lovely'* if it was *'feasible'*, and helpful as well to those who might be directed to services much closer to where they live.

Others welcomed the chance to learn about other opportunities for learning in the community. More awareness of cultural information came up as a desire as well, with interest in tours at Elizabeth Fort and Spike Island mentioned in particular. Other creative outlets and hobbies too were mentioned, including knitting, crocheting, and how to put together music videos from someone in Cork who had done one himself:

'There are huge riches – amongst ourselves even – just to be aware.'

Similar to the partners, all students agreed that having more men involved in the course would be an improvement. Within this context, another student mentioned in the focus group, with all others agreeing, that they would like to *'try and get more guys involved'* in the course. Another student agreed that *'good role models'* are badly needed. Getting more men involved in the mentoring programme would better assist men in the community to start, for instance, a Men's Shed in their neighbourhood. As one student stated, in their community:

'... we don't actually have a Men's Shed. I know I would love someone from a community amongst ourselves who could stand up and tell me a little bit about it, how they got it to happen, what did they do and I know men in [one community] who would love it.'

Several students agreed when one stated that the course was *'a little bit'* on the *'academic side of things'*, which another described as being *'a small struggle'*. Being exposed to academic terms was especially difficult for several students, as it had been some time since students had been in the classroom:

'I haven't been in any form of academia in nearly 20 years, and I found that actually a little bit daunting; […] I was nearly having to look up what certain words meant.'

For another student, however, it was *'like riding a bike'* in that *'it kind of eventually comes back to you'*.

When asked in the survey how likely they were to recommend the course to others on a range from 0 to 10 (from 'not at all likely' to 'extremely likely'), the mean was 8.2 (Figure 12). This finding was supported in both focus groups, where participants affirmed that they would recommend the course to others. When asked why, one student stated it was because the course changes your *'perceptions, your concepts and everything'* and *'opens your mind to all other concepts'*.
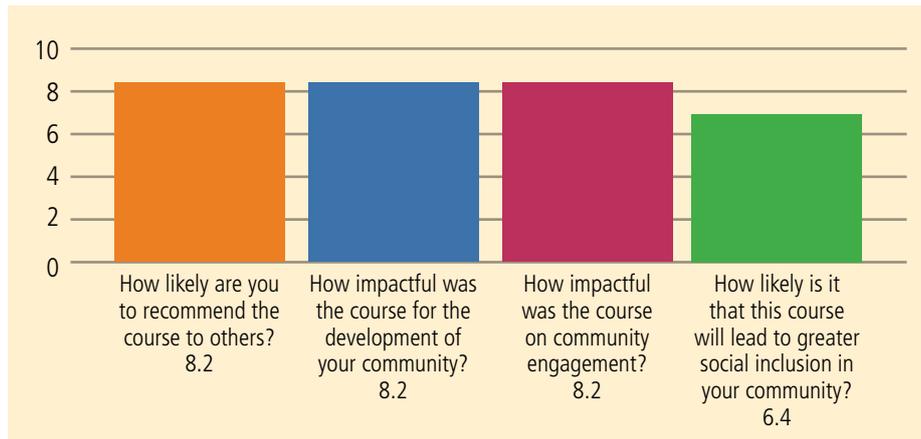
Figure 12. Measures of mentoring course impactfulness

Others spoke about how much they learned *'about other people and about yourself really'*. Others praised the environment, its *'informality'*, appreciation for '*cultural diversity*', openness, and an atmosphere based on reciprocity and trust.

4.2.6 Key Theme: Paying it forward: Reaching out to the community

In the survey, when asked (i) how impactful they thought the mentoring certificate course would be for the development of their community overall, and (ii) how impactful they thought the course would be on community engagement overall, on a scale from 0 to 10 (from 'not impactful at all' to 'extremely impactful'), the mean was 8.2 for both questions (see Figure 12).

Students expressed a desire for more community outreach to reach members of their community who might be more difficult to reach (e.g. young parents, people in direct provision, members of the Traveller community, the LGBTQ+ community, those who are multi-lingual), so that they know there is a welcoming and safe place to go where *'somebody is on their side'*:

> *'You feel like it doesn't need to be said but there are certain people that need to see that to make them feel welcome and make them feel safe.'*

Formal referral processes were also mentioned as a way to reach those who may be *'lonely'*, *'bored'* or just *'looking for places to go'*. Also mentioned was the importance of being:

> *'... aware of the networks because some people will come one time and when they see what they are looking for is not in this place, it would be nice to direct them somewhere where they feel more comfortable'.*

In this sense, students agreed that it was important to keep members of the community connected to *'people we trust in the Learning Neighbourhoods'.* Also important to students was maintaining accessibility for everyone who wanted to connect and getting *'more of a mix together'* with other activities such as, for instance, dances and *'community litter picking'*.

It was agreed in the focus groups that there was a need to advertise via, more specifically, a community newsletter, a website, or with posters on display in the community centre, local chemist, supermarket, and the local library *'so that people are aware that there is such a service there'*:

> *'I think the idea of putting together posters that we are hoping to put together would be a great one for broadening it out to the community.'*

> *'I actually think the poster could actually be key to us sharing with the community that there is something there for them if they wanted to just pop in and ask about anything […] and maybe we could help them or give them a bit of direction.'*

> *'I think making it part of something like the Lifelong Learning Festival which is kind of a flag for who we are and where you can find us.'*

Given the importance of viewing social movements as 'phenomena that develop and evolve' over time (Tremblay et al., 2017: 336), asked how likely it was that the programme would lead to greater social inclusion in their community, on a scale from 0 to 10 (from 'not at all likely' to 'extremely likely'), the mean was 6.4 (see Figure 12).

4.3 Objective 3: Capture models of best practice

In their critical analysis of university–community partnerships, Sathorar and Geduld (2021: 88) 'propose a critical engagement process to enhance collaboration in engagement projects'. Drawing on their experiences in post-apartheid South Africa, the authors' research found that when mutuality and reciprocity were prioritised from the earliest planning stages, '… authentic engagements emerge that support the development of collaborative communities that work together to create new knowledge' (Sathorar and Geduld, 2021: 101).

Because their findings suggest that the biggest challenges to the success of university–community partnerships were 'power relations, inequality, and claims to knowledge ownership', the authors (2021: 101) suggested that a 'process of reflection and analysis' occur at four stages of the programme. Where the first three stages focus on the development and process, for the authors (2021: 101):

> *'The final critical interaction proposes a process of reflection and analysis that will allow the university and community to critically look at what has happened in the project and to identify where they need to change what they are doing. This interaction, like all the others, is dependent on true dialogue between the university and the community, and this will only be possible if a trust relationship has been developed.'*

Both university and the community and mentoring certificate participants – Cohorts 1 and 2 respectively – included in their responses a degree of critical reflection and analysis of the programme developed. Given the obstacles that power imbalances can present to such partnerships (Sathorar and Geduld, 2021: 101), the data suggests that this was not a concern in this partnership due to the iterative approach to decision-making and the strong sense of co-equal partnership and trust established early on. This clearly continued throughout the duration of the development of the mentoring certificate. For one community partner, that a strong sense of co-equal partnership was maintained despite '*UCC's role in minding that sense of partnership*' augers well for future partnership programmes:

> *'... emerging from their success in holding that middle ground is a lesson I think for future programmes that you can have a host organisation that can deal with the accreditation, deal with the academic standards, deal with the teaching but it is on behalf of a broader range of partners. I think that is quite an exciting way of thinking also because it opens up the possibility that a different theme – a different topic – could be taken on in a similar way.'*

Given the success of the co-equal partnership established, both university and community partners expressed the hope that the experience learned from the partnership could be refined into a '*template*' which could then be '*adapted*' to meet the needs of local communities elsewhere:

> *'I think the programme can run again, it should run again, and it might form kind of a template for other programmes as well as mentoring. There could be other themes and topics that might provide other access points for some of the under-represented groups.'*

Key to achieving this was, for many partners, the critical consciousness of the students invited to take part in the pilot programme who, for one community partner, can '*change the dynamic*' at local level:

> *'The first cohort that have progressed through the programme [who] have come through and have the qualification achieved, have a significant role to play as leaders that can also help individuals who are part of under-represented groups.'*

In order to ensure sustainability, it was important for one partner that the course was not '*funding dependent*', for it to maintain a strong connection to the community, and continue to see the students as '*an important source of information not just at individual level but also as a group*' because '*the lived experience*' was so '*valuable*'.
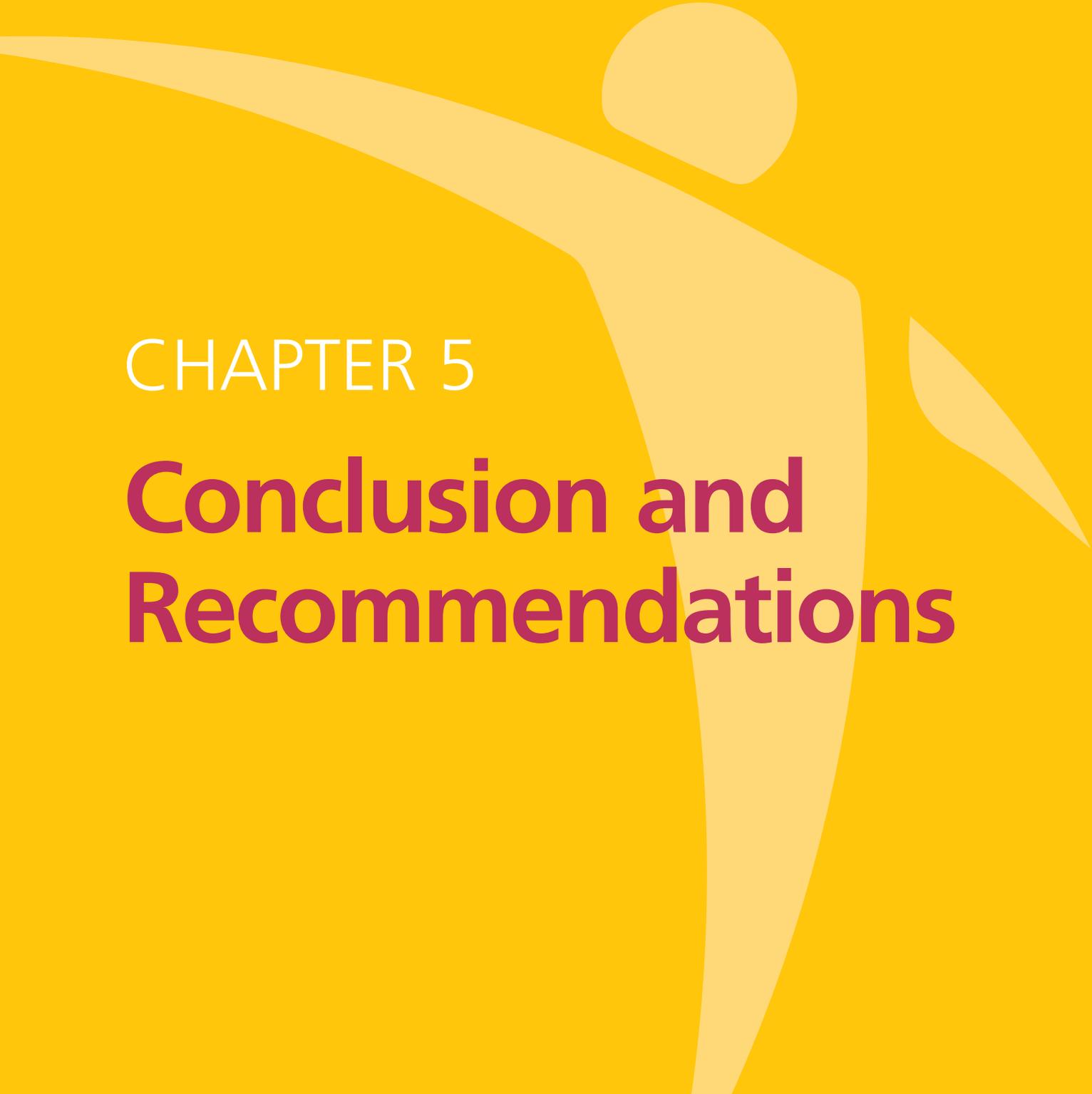
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Discussion

Target 4.7 of UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals of the Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action calls on countries to provide learners of all ages with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development through education as a human right. In the spirit of developing a mutual and collaborative approach to knowledge creation and exchange, the Access Services in both University College Cork (UCC) and Munster Technological University – Cork Campus (MTU Cork) set about exploring the feasibility of a community based mentoring initiative to increase access amongst under-represented groups. The goal was for the university and the community to co-design a mutually beneficial programme to empower natural mentors in the Cork area to promote access to education and lifelong learning in their neighbourhoods and communities. Identifying members in the community with established relationships within the community was a way for this research programme to build on existing trusted relationships within the community to extend already existing outreach programmes deep into the community.

University–community based participatory research is the preferred theoretical perspective given the complexities that arise when stakeholders with varying degrees of resources work together towards a common goal. This research revealed the potential for success when both the university and the community – and their networks of institutions, community organisations, affiliations and individuals – engaged in mutual efforts to promote education and lifelong learning. For the university, it complemented existing access initiatives and programmes and extended these efforts into neighbourhood community centres to promote education and lifelong learning. For the community, the programme allowed them to tap into their existing talent and resources to more fully empower the first cohort of mentoring certificate students to engage with the relationships they have built over time. This research shows that their partnership had all the characteristics of a successful partnership, chiefly mutuality and reciprocity.

Overall, engaging with natural mentors within the community contributed to the success of this programme for three reasons:

1. It gave them the tools they needed to become mentors in their communities;

2. It gave them the critical consciousness required to encourage others to consider education and lifelong learning; and

3. It gave them a stronger sense that they were part of a larger community of natural mentors. That the course was iterative meant that they had a significant part to play in the development of the programme. For these students, research suggests that they gained a sense of pride and ownership in the certificate programme and a sense of mission to engage others in lifelong learning opportunities.

Designing the programme in this way, with the university and the community, and their respective institutions and people, opened up the possibility that this could be a sustainable template for the future. The results show that for this programme to be

considered successful, the egalitarian nature of the partnership must be maintained, and the community must be viewed as a valued partner in the process. If that were to prove sustainable, it is easy to see how this may open up the opportunity for this programme to become not only successful in attracting more members of the community into education and lifelong learning, it may also be a template for future iterations of this mentoring programme (or indeed future university–community participatory research). Towards that end, this evaluation will help elucidate some of the issues that can contribute to success and help reveal best practices.

In conclusion, this university–community based participatory research allowed this project to:

1. Create strong university–community partnership based on mutuality and respect;

2. Approach access to education and lifelong learning from the perspective of a human right;

3. Develop a mentoring certificate which would build on established community relationships;

4. Agree an iterative mentoring programme with students to encourage co-learning and critical consciousness raising to affect social change at community level;

5. Disseminate findings and knowledge gained to all partners; and

6. Critically evaluate the programme to determine best practices for future programmes (see Mitchell, 2018: 382).

5.1 Key Findings

The key findings of this research focus on the benefits of the planning process, the execution of the mentoring certificate course, and a vision for the future. All partners agreed that what made the university–community partnership so successful was the co-equal and reciprocal approach to the development of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring initiative. Placing an emphasis on a cooperative effort at developing a course that would meet the needs of both the university and the community was deemed successful during the development stages of this initiative. For both university and community partners, this research determined that the mutual respect and the value placed on their complementary approaches to the development of the mentoring certificate initiative was a key strength.

For the first cohort of students in the pilot mentoring certificate course, research findings show that the collaborative design of the lectures and open approach to lecture content was highly valued. Students were inspired by the method and practice of the teaching and the lecturer's reciprocal teaching approach and creative methods of linking theory to practice, qualities students regarded as highly conducive to learning. Overall, not only did the course give students the skills, tools and the confidence they need to become mentors in their communities, it also gave them a critical consciousness to encourage others to consider education and lifelong learning. Students left the course with a strong sense that they were part of a larger community of mentors. The strong relationships built

during the mentoring certificate course inspired and motivated students to build upon these networks so that they can support one another and stay abreast of opportunities to lifelong learning and higher education. All participants in this study, university and community partners and students alike, emphasised the desire to sustain the reciprocity of the partnership process for future practice, a commitment which will require that a stringent programme of critical analysis and reflection be implemented at regular intervals between future programme cycles.

5.2 Key Recommendations

Based upon the key findings of this research detailed above, eight recommendations are as follows:

1. Overall, the university–community based partnership approach is a successful partnership paradigm and should be used as a model for future projects and initiatives.

2. Embedding mentors within the community develops and scaffolds access initiatives for lifelong learning and higher education access, therefore community mentoring programmes deserve sustained and continued university and community support to increase access pathways into further learning.

3. A co-equal spirit of collaboration between university and community partners should be fostered to support mentorships and help contribute to better outcomes.

4. Flexible approaches to lectures and lecture content works well for the development of mentoring knowledge and skills, and this should be maintained and embedded into future programme delivery to enable both lifelong and life-wide learning.

5. Building confidence is a vital aspect of the student experience and should be fostered and sustained during the course and afterwards through the development of networking opportunities.

6. Maintaining and further embedding reciprocity and trust in the university–community partnership will support sustainability for future iterations of this programme.

7. Equipping students with the core values of a civically engaged university community and embedding these graduate attributes into future practice should become an explicit part of the curriculum for future iterations of the mentoring certificate programme.

8. Finally, in order to maintain the high standards of best practice as evidenced in this programme during this research, it is recommended that a stringent process of critical analysis and reflection be implemented at regular intervals between future programme cycles.

Bibliography

Andrews, J. and Clark, R., 2011. *Peer Mentoring Works! How Peer Mentoring Enhances Student Success in Higher Education*. Birmingham: Aston University

Balzarova, M.A. and Castka, P., 2012. 'Stakeholders' Influence and Contribution to Social Standards Development: The Case of Multiple Stakeholder Approach to ISO 26000 Development'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111(2): 265–79

Blessinger, P., 2015. 'Lifelong Learning as a Human Right'. *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*, [online] 13 March 2015. Available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20150303150758108 [accessed 3 March 2022]

Borkowska, K. and Osborne, M., 2018. 'Locating the Fourth Helix: Rethinking the Role of Civil Society In Developing Smart Learning Cities'. *International Review of Education*, 64(2018): 355–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-018-9723-0

Brady, B. and Dolan, P., 2009. 'Youth Mentoring as a Tool for Community and Civic Engagement: Reflections on Findings of an Irish Research Study'. *Community Development*, 40(4): 359–66. DOI: 10.1080/15575330903279655

Carré, L., 2021. 'An "Enchanted" or a "Fragmented" Social World? Recognition and Domination in Honneth and Bourdieu'. *Critical Horizons: Journal of Social & Critical Theory*, 22(1): 89–109

Carragher, J. and McGaughey, J., 2016. 'The Effectiveness of Peer Mentoring in Promoting a Positive Transition to Higher Education for First-Year Undergraduate Students: A Mixed Methods Systematic Review Protocol'. *Systematic Reviews*, 5(68): n.p. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-016-0245-1

Castanheira, P., 2016. 'Mentoring for Educators' Professional Learning and Development'. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5(4): 334–46. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-10-2015-0030

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2018. *Research Methods in Education*, 8th edition. Abingdon and New York: Routledge

Cortez Ruiz, C., 2014. 'Engagement and Partnership of Higher Education Institutions with Society: Experiences, Learning and Worries'. In B.I. Hall and R. Tandon, eds., *Higher Education in the World: Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change* (GUNI series). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 44–9

Creswell, J.W., 2018. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Cumming-Potvin, W.M. and MacCallum, J.A., 2010. 'Intergenerational Practice: Mentoring and Social Capital for Twenty-First Century Communities of Practice'. *McGill Journal of Education*, 45(2): 305–23

Curty, G., 2020. 'Capitalism, Critique and Social Freedom: An Interview with Axel Honneth on Freedom's Right'. *Critical Sociology,* 46(7–8): 1339–49

Denny E., 2015. *Transition from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education*. Focused Research Report No. 6 Final Report. Dublin: National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education. [online] 22 July 2015. Available at: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/NF-2015-Transition-from-Second-Level-and-Further-Education-to-Higher-Education.pdf [accessed 3 August 2022]

Department of Education and Skills, 2011. *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030: Report of the Strategy Group*. [pdf] Dublin: Department of Education and Skills. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/24560/c2c313d875134a89bcc6353f2f7e4388.pdf [accessed 3 August 2022]

Elfert, M., 2019. 'Lifelong Learning in Sustainable Development Goal 4: What Does it Mean for UNESCO's Rights-Based Approach to Adult Learning and Education?'. *International Review of Education*, 65(4): 537–56

Elliott, J.S., Beltman, S. and Lynch, E., 2011. 'If you make a difference, you have changed someone's life': Outcomes from a University Student Mentor Program'. In: *14th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference 2011*, Fremantle, Australia, 29 June – 1 July 2011. Available at: https://unistars.org/past_papers/papers11/FYHE-2011/content/pdf/1E.pdf [accessed 3 August 2022]

Ferlaino, J., 2017. 'Establishing Best Practices: The Business of Quality, Safety and Efficiency'. *Focus in Business*, [online] June 2017. Available at: https://www.businessinfocusmagazine.com/2017/08/establishing-best-practices/ [accessed 11 March 2022]

Fleming, T. and Finnegan, F., 2014. 'A Critical Journey Towards Lifelong Learning: Including Non-Traditional Students in University'. In: A. Loxley, A. Seery and J. Walsh (eds), *Higher Education in Ireland: Practices, Policies and Possibilities*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Foucault, M., 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–1979*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Foucault, M., 2005. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981–1982*. New York: Picador

Ginty, C. and Harding, N.M., 2015. 'The First-Year Experience of a Peer Assisted Learning Program in Two Institutes of Technology in Ireland'. *Journal of Peer Learning*, 2014(7): 36–56. http://ro.uow.edu.au/ajpl/vol7/iss1/5 [accessed 23 Nov. 2015]

Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), 2014. *Higher Education in the World 5: Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Goerisch, D., Basiliere, J., Rosener, A., McKee, K., Hunt, J. and Parker, T.M., 2019. 'Mentoring with: Reimagining Mentoring across the University'. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 26(12): 1740–58. DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2019.1668752

Hahn, R. and Weidtmann, C., 2016. 'Transnational Governance, Deliberative Democracy, and the Legitimacy of ISO 26000: Analyzing the Case of a Global Multistakeholder Process'. *Business & Society*, 55(1): 90–129

Halpern, R., 2005. 'Instrumental Relationships: A Potential Relational Model for Inner-City Youth Programs'. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(1): 11–20

Hogan, I., Bowles, R. and Kitching, N., 2021. 'Using the Ecological-Intersectional Model to Explore the Experiences and Perceptions of Volunteer Women Ladies Gaelic Football Coaches in Ireland'. *Sports Coaching Review* [in press]. DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2021.1933847

Hoy, A. and Johnson, M., 2013. 'Future Possibilities: High-Impact Learning and Community Engagement'. In: A. Hoy and M. Johnson (eds), *Deepening Community Engagement in Higher Education: Forging New Pathways*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 273–81

Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2015. National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2021. [pdf] Dublin: HEA. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/283c3-national-plan-for-equity-of-access-to-higher-education-2015-2021/ [accessed 3 August 2022]

Higher Education Authority (HEA), 2013. *The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)*. Dublin: HEA

Hernandez, P.R., Bloodhart, B., Barnes, R.T., Adams A.S., Clinton S.M., Pollack I., et al., 2017. 'Promoting Professional Identity, Motivation, and Persistence: Benefits of an Informal Mentoring Program for Female Undergraduate Students'. PLoS ONE 12(11): e0187531. https://doi.org/10.1371/

Honneth, A., 1995. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Hurd, N.M. and Zimmerman, M.A., 2010. 'Natural Mentoring Relationships Among Adolescent Mothers: A Study of Resilience'. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(3): 789–809

Jensen, D., 2017. 'Mentoring in a Distributed Learning Social Work Program'. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 53(4): 637–50

Jahan, S., 2019. 'Human Development and Universalism: From Ideas to Policies'. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(2): 233–50. DOI: 10.1080/19452829.2019.1574726

Jones, M., 2015. 'Mentoring and Coaching in Education Practitioners' Professional Learning: Realising Research Impact'. *International journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4(4): 293–302

Jones, M.M. and Goble, Z., 2012. 'Creating Effective Mentoring Partnerships for Students with Intellectual Disabilities on Campus'. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9(4): 270–8

Kindon, S., Pain, R. and Kesby, M. (eds), 2007. *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge

Korstjens, I. and Moser, A., 2017. Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 2: 'Context, Research Questions and Designs'. *The European Journal of General Practice*, 23(1): 274–9

Kvale, S., 2009. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications

Lepore, W., Hall, B.L. and Tandon, R., 2021. 'The Knowledge for Change Consortium: A Decolonising Approach to International Collaboration in Capacity-Building in Community-Based Participatory Research'. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 42(3): 347–70

McIlrath, L., Lyons, A. and Munck, R. (eds), 2012. *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: Comparative Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Miles Sr, J.L., 2017. 'Ubuntu and Defining Community in America: A 21st Century Viewpoint'. *Anthropology of Consciousness,* 28(2): 178–86

Mayo, M., 2006. 'Social Capital and Lifelong Learning'. *Community Development Journal*, 41(1): 119–20

Mitchell, F.M., 2018. 'Engaging in Indigenous CBPR within Academia: A Critical Narrative'. *Affilia*, 33(3): 379–94

Morey, S., Robbins, S., O'Regan, M., Hall, K., Fleming, S. and Mumford, C., 2012. *Comparing and Evaluating the Impacts on Student Retention of Different Approaches to Supporting Students Through Study Advice and Personal Development at the Universities of Reading and Oxford Brookes*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Moser, D., 2014. 'To Lift the Leaden-Eyed: The Historical Roots of Ernest L. Boyer's Scholarship Reconsidered'. *American Educational History Journal*, 41(1): 337–56

Moser, A. and Korstjens, I., 2017. Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 1: 'Introduction'. *The European Journal of General Practice*, 23(1): 271–3

Mullen, C.A. and Klimaitis, C.C., 2021. 'Defining Mentoring: A Literature Review of Issues, Types, and Applications'. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1483(1): 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14176

Mullen, C.A., 2016. 'Alternative Mentoring Types'. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 52(3): 132–6. DOI: 10.1080/00228958.2016.1191901

Nixon, J., 2001. 'Imagining Ourselves into Being: Conversing with Hannah Arendt'. *Pedagogy Culture and Society*, 9(2): 221–36. DOI: 10.1080/14681360100200116

Okoye, K., Hosseini, S., Arrona-Palacios, A. and Escamilla, J., 2021. 'Impact of Educational Coaching Programs and Mentoring Services on Users' Perception and Preferences: A Qualitative and Quantitative Approach'. *IEEE Access*, 2021(9): 48105–20

Oster, R.T., Toth, E.L., Bell, R.C. and ENRICH First Nations Community Advisory Committee, 2021. 'Wîcohkamakew ("S/he Helps Someone"): A Qualitative Description of Experiences with a Community-derived Elders Mentoring Program for Indigenous Parents-to-be'. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*, 15(2): 177–87

Ó Tuama, S., 2020. 'Learning Neighbourhoods: Lifelong Learning, Community and Sustainability in Cork Learning City'. *Studies in Adult Education and Learning*, 26(1): 53–65. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4312/as.26.1.53-65

Perna, F.M., Zaichkowsky, L. and Bocknek, G., 1996. 'The Association of Mentoring with Psychosocial Development among Male Athletes at Termination of College Career'. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 8(1): 76–88. DOI: 10.1080/10413209608406309

Salinitri, G., 2005. 'The Effects of Formal Mentoring on the Retention Rates for First-Year, Low Achieving Students'. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(4): 853–73

Sasson, I., 2019. 'Building a Sustainable University–Community Partnership: Case Study in Science Education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(12): 2318–32

Sathorar, H. and Geduld, D., 2022. 'Developing and Sustaining Community–University Research Partnerships: Reflecting on Relationship Building'. In: L. Wood (ed.), *Community-Based Research with Vulnerable Populations*. Palgrave Studies in Education Research Methods. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86402-6_4

Sathorar, H. and Geduld, D., 2021. 'A Critical Approach to University–Community Partnerships: Reflecting on the Diverse Realities'. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 10(2): 88–104

Shannon, J. and Wang, T.R., 2010. 'A Model for University–Community Engagement: Continuing Education's Role as Convener'. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 58(2): 108–12. DOI: 10.1080/07377361003661499

Sola, R., Roberts, S., Thomas, T.J., Dickerson, T.A., Soriano, I.S., Cook, T.F.A. and Barksdale, E.M., 2021. 'Impact of Mentoring on Diversity and Inclusion in Surgery'. *The American Surgeon*, 87(11): 1739–45

Spray, R., 2007. 'Asking, Listening, Learning, and Reflecting: Tactical Approaches to Community–University Partnerships'. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Culture, and Composition*, 7(2): 285–94

Steverink, N., Lindenberg, S., Spiegel, T. and Nieboer, A.P., 2020. 'The Associations of Different Social Needs with Psychological Strengths and Subjective Well-Being: An Empirical Investigation Based on Social Production Function Theory'. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(3): 799–824

Stojanov, K., 2009. 'Overcoming Social Pathologies in Education: On the Concept of Respect in R.S. Peters and Axel Honneth'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 43(S1): 161–72

Suoranta, J., Hjelt, N., Tomperi, T. and Grant, A., 2021. 'Reinventing Paulo Freire's Pedagogy in Finnish Non-formal Education: The Case of Life Skills for All Model'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*: 1–15

Talloires Network, 2022. 'Who We Are'. Tufts University Medford MA: Talloires Network of Engaged Universities. [online] Available at: https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/ [accessed 10 March 2022]

Tandon, R., Hall, B., Lepore, W. and Singh, W., 2016. *Training the Next Generation of Community-Based Researchers: A Guide for Trainers.* UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. [online] Available at: https://unescochair-cbrsr.org/pdf/FINAL_Training_the_Next_Generation_2016.pdf [accessed 3 Feb. 2022]

Tee Ng, P., 2012. 'Mentoring and Coaching Educators in the Singapore Education System'. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 1(1): 24–35

Timpe, Z.C. and Lunkenheimer, E., 2015. 'The Long-Term Economic Benefits of Natural Mentoring Relationships for Youth'. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 56(1–2): 12–24

Tinto, V., 2017. 'Through the Eyes of Students'. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(3): 254–69

Tinto, V., 2006–7. 'Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?' *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1): 1–19

Tinto, V., 1993. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Retention*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Tremblay, M., Martin, D.H., Macaulay, A.C. and Pluye, P., 2017. 'Can We Build on Social Movement Theories to Develop and Improve Community Based Participatory Research? A Framework Synthesis Review'. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 59(3–4): 333–62

UNESCO, 2016. *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All.* France: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. [online] Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656 [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO, 2022. *Leading SDG 4, Education 2030 Website*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. [online] Available at: https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4 [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO, 2021. *Education 2030 Website.* United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. [online] Available at: https://openlearning.unesco.org/partners/17/ [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021. *Inclusive Lifelong Learning in Cities: Policies and Practices for Vulnerable Groups*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. [pdf] Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379538 [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017. *Learning Cities and the SDGs: A Guide to Action*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. [pdf] Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260442 [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO, 2017. *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*. France: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. [online] Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444 [accessed 3 May 2022]

United Nations, 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [online] Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda [accessed 3 May 2022]

UNESCO, 2015. *Institutionalizing Community–University Research Partnerships: A User's Manual.* University of Victoria: Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. [pdf] Available at: https://unescochair-cbrsr.org/unesco/pdf/CURP_Guidelines.pdf [accessed 3 May 2022]

Urbančič, T., Polajnar, A. and Jermol, M., 2019. 'Open Education for a Better World: A Mentoring Programme Fostering Design and Reuse of Open Educational Resources for Sustainable Development Goals'. *Open Praxis*, 11(4): 409–26. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.11.4.1026

Wadsworth, Y., 1998. 'What is Participatory Action Research?' *Action Research International*, Paper 2. Available at: http://www.aral.com.au/ari/p-ywadsworth98.html [accessed 1 April 2022]

Watson, D., Hollister, R., Stroud, S.E. and Babcock, E. (eds), 2011. *The Engaged University: International Perspectives on Civic Engagement*. New York and London: Routledge

Westoby, P., Lathouras, A. and Shevellar, L., 2019. 'Radicalising Community Development within Social Work through Popular Education: A Participatory Action Research Project'. *The British journal of Social Work*, 49(8): 2207–25

Wintre, M.G. and Yaffe, M., 2000. 'First-Year Students' Adjustment to University Life as a Function of Relationships with Parents'. *Journal of Adolescent Development*, 15: 9–37

Yorke M. and Thomas L., 2003. 'Improving the Retention of Students from Lower Socio-economic Groups'. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25(1): 63–75

Zeldin, S., Christens, B.D. and Powers, J.L., 2012; 2013. 'The Psychology and Practice of Youth–Adult Partnership: Bridging Generations for Youth Development and Community Change'. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 51(3–4): 385–97

Appendix 1

Module Description: Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring

1. TITLE OF PROGRAMME

Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring

2. AWARD TYPE & NFQ LEVEL

Level 8 Special Purpose Award

3. COURSE OUTLINE

This Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring is designed to meet the educational and professional skills needs of those engaged in mentoring within their local community with a particular emphasis on access to further and higher education for target groups currently under-represented.

The mentoring certificate introduces the student to the concepts and processes of mentoring, access to education and practical ready-to-use tools and resources to support students in enhancing their mentoring skill set. Reflecting current best practice, students are supported to develop effective skills, to enhance their competency and to effectively engage with and mentor access target groups in the community.

4. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

To enhance and develop the capacity of participants to act as community mentors in their own communities and Learning Neighbourhoods by:

1. Developing their theoretical knowledge and understanding of mentoring practice.

2. Supporting the development of appropriate practical mentoring skills.

3. Provide them with practical knowledge and information, relevant to their day-to-day practice as community mentors.

5. COURSE CONTENT

The participants are introduced to the concepts and processes of mentoring, access to education, and practical ready-to-use tools and resources aimed at enhancing and developing their mentoring skill set.

Reflecting current best practice, students are supported to develop effective skills, to enhance their competency and to effectively engage with and mentor access target groups in the community.

6. PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this programme students should be able to:

1. Recognise and understand community mentoring as a concept (theory and practice).

2. Appreciate the importance of awareness of self and others in the mentoring context.

3. Employ key mentoring skills in their community mentoring practice.

4. Apply their knowledge and understanding of the Irish education system to their role as community mentors (including access routes, grant system, supports, etc.).

5. Adopt a professional approach to community mentoring, including appreciating the importance of working within an ethical framework.

6. Demonstrate a practical knowledge of the day-to-day role/practice of community mentors in this context.

Appendix 2

Information Sheet for Partners and Participants of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring Initiative

Purpose of the study

The SOAR Project is an inter-institutional collaboration on Access. It brings together the South Cluster – Cork Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Carlow, Institute of Technology Tralee, University College Cork, and Waterford Institute of Technology together with community partners to collaborate on devising and delivering strategies to increase access to higher education for under-represented groups. The purpose of this research is to document the development process of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring and provide an evaluation of the course through student experience.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve your participation in group interview with a researcher and other participants to discuss your opinions, experiences, ideas, and the challenges that under-represented groups may encounter in transitioning, engaging, performing, and progressing in higher education.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are connected with the development process of the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring or are a student who undertook this course.

Do you have to take part?

No. Participation is voluntary. You will be asked to sign a consent form. You also have the option of withdrawing before the study commences (even if you have agreed to participate) or discontinuing two weeks after the discussion.

Use of a transcriber

This research will use the services of a transcriber in order to produce a written version of your interview/focus group and the recording of your interview/focus group will be utilised for this purpose.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. This research will undertake to anonymise participants as far as possible; however, there may be the possibility that some participants might be identifiable. We will ensure that your identity will not appear in the final report or subsequent publications. Any extracts from the interview that are quoted, in any subsequent report and publications, will be entirely anonymous. We ask participants to respect the confidentiality of other participants and to not share information disclosed in the group. However, we cannot guarantee this.

Confidentiality agreement

A confidentiality clause will also be included in the consent form (Appendix 3) to further reinforce the significance of confidentiality within the focus group.

What will happen to the information that you give?

The data gathered will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. It will be securely stored on password-protected computers and only be available to the research team on the SOAR Project. On completion of the project, data will be retained for a minimum of a further ten years and then destroyed, according to policy at UCC.

What will happen to the results?

It is expected that results of this study will be published in a project report and in academic articles, as well as on the project website.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

We do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

Who has reviewed this study?

Approval has been given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC.

Any further queries?

If you have any queries or concerns about this research, you can contact Dr Máire Leane, the Principal Investigator (PI) at m.Leane@ucc.ie or you can contact the Head of the School of Applied Social Studies Prof. Cathal O'Connell at c.oconnell@ucc.ie.

Appendix 3

Consent Form

- I ……………………………………… agree to participate in a focus group/interview/questionnaire for the SOAR Project.

- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification.

- I understand that participation is voluntary.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted. This is in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) introduced in 2018.

- I give permission for my interview with the SOAR research team to be audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially and that this research will undertake to anonymise participants as far as possible; however, there may be the possibility that some participants might be identifiable.

- I agree to maintain and uphold the complete confidentiality of all participants within the focus group.

- I will keep all information shared by participants during the focus group private and will not repeat or discuss outside of the focus group.

- I understand that anonymity will be ensured as far as possible in the write-up by disguising my identity; however, there may be the possibility that some participants might be identifiable.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in progress reports, academic journals and/or the project website.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a minimum of ten years, in line with UCC policy.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

- I am over the age of 18.

Signed: ……………………………………….   Date: ……………….................................

PRINT NAME: …………………………………….

Appendix 4

Interview Schedule

Cohort 1: University–Community Partners

One-on-one online interview schedule:

- 15 December 2021: University Partner

- 17 December 2021: University Partner

- 27 January 2022: Community Partner

- 7 February 2022: University Partner

- 17 February 2022: Community Partner

Cohort 2: First students of the mentoring certificate course

- Survey: MS Forms Survey form made available between 11 November and 24 November 2021

- Focus Group: Both online focus group and in-person focus group were held from 6 p.m. on Wednesday, 24 November 2021.

Appendix 5

Cohort 1 Mentoring Certificate Programme Partner Questions

One-on-one Interview Questions

1. What is your involvement in this initiative and how did that initiative come about?

2. What was the approach taken in developing the mentoring certificate course?

3. How effective was the approach taken?

4. How does the mentoring certificate course complement the work in your organisation?

5. What do you think were the strengths of the mentoring certificate programme?

6. What do you think were the challenges of the mentoring certificate programme?

7. What lessons have been learned from the mentoring certificate programme?

8. How can the programme support greater access to education for under-represented groups?

9. What ways would you recommend to improve the mentoring certificate programme in future?

10. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

Appendix 6

Cohort 2 Mentoring Certificate Programme Students' Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you decide to take the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring course?

2. Do you think that you gained new skills to assist you in your mentoring work from doing this course that you did not have before?

3. If you feel that you have gained skills to assist you in your mentoring work, can you please describe these newly acquired skills?

4. How did the course benefit you as a mentor who works in the community?

5. What did you like about the course?

6. Was there anything you did not like about the course?

7. Would you recommend this course to others?

8. If yes, why?

9. If no, why?

10. How could this course be improved?

11. Will the theory related to mentoring covered in the course help you in your day-to-day practice?

12. If yes, how?

13. If no, why?

14. What other information would you have liked to have been included in this course?

15. What other ways would you recommend to reach out to members in the community?

16. Any further comments?

Online Survey Questions

1. What gender do you identify as?
   - Question Type: Choice (Female/Male/Gender neutral/Non-binary/Transgender/Other/Would rather not say)

2. Where did you first hear about the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring course?
   - Question Type: Choice (The SOAR Project/Cork City Learning Neighborhoods/Cork Migrant Centre/Community Organisation/Other)

3. Which community organisation do you currently mentor for?
   - Question Type: Choice (Cork City Learning Neighborhoods/Cork Migrant Centre/Other)

4. Which Cork Learning Neighborhood are you currently involved with?
   - Question Type: Choice (South Parish/Togher/Knocknaheeny/Ballyphehane/The Glen/Mayfield)

5. How long have you been involved in mentoring work?
   - Question Type: Choice (1 year/2 years/3 years/4 years/5+ years)

6. How beneficial is your experience of participating in this course overall?
   - Question Type: Likert Scale (Very poor/Poor/Average/Good/Very good/Excellent)

7. Before taking part in this course, how would you have described your knowledge of mentoring?
   - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: no knowledge to excellent knowledge)

8. After participating in this course, how would you describe your knowledge of mentoring today?
   - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: no knowledge to excellent knowledge)

9. What are your overall impressions of the course?
   - Question Type: Likert Scale (Very poor/Poor/Average/Good/Very good/Excellent)

10. Did you think that the programme content is:
    - Question Type: Likert Scale (Extremely helpful/Very helpful/Somewhat helpful/Not so helpful/Not at all helpful)

11. How confident in mentoring do you feel after taking the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring course?
    - Question Type: Likert Scale (Much more confident/More confident/Somewhat confident/Less confident/Much less confident)

12. Do you think that you have gained skills to assist you in your mentoring work that you did not have before taking this course?
    - Question Type: Choice (Yes/No/I gained some skills/I gained a lot of skills/I did not gain enough skills/Other/I don't know)

13. Do you think that the Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in Community Based Mentoring course reflects the day-to-day practice of mentoring in the community?
    - Question Type: Choice (Yes/No/It reflects day-to-day mentoring a little/It could be improved/It significantly reflects day-to-day mentoring/I don't know/Other)

14. Will the theory related to mentoring covered in the course help you in your day-to-day practice?
    - Question Type: Choice (Yes/No)

15. Did you feel that you had enough support to successfully complete the course?
    - Question Type: Choice (Yes/No/I felt somewhat supported/I did not feel supported/Prefer not to say)

16. How likely are you to recommend this course to others?
    - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: Not at all likely/Extremely likely)

17. How impactful do you think this mentoring certificate course will be for the development of your community overall?
    - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: Not impactful at all/Extremely impactful)

18. How impactful do you think this mentoring certificate programme will have on community engagement overall?
    - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: Not impactful at all/Extremely impactful)

19. How likely is it that this mentoring programme will lead to greater social inclusion in your community?
    - Question Type: Net Promoter Score (0–10: Not at all likely/Extremely likely)

20. If you have any further comments, constructive feedback or suggestions that will help us improve how this programme is run, please comment here.
    - Question type: Open Text

HEA | **AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS**
HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY

www.soarforaccess.ie