



How do professionals, parents/carers and children view  
the role of the learning mentor in a multi-agency setting?

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## CWDC Practitioner-Led Research

### How do professionals, parents/carers and children view the role of the learning mentor in a multi agency setting?

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The reports were completed between September 2009 and February 2010 and apply a wide range of research methodologies. They are not intended to be longitudinal research reports but they provide a snapshot of the views and opinions of the groups consulted as part of the studies. As these projects were time limited, the evidence base can be used to inform planning but should not be generalised across the wider population.

These reports reflect the views of the practitioners that undertook the research. The views and opinions of the authors should not be taken as representative of CWDC.

A new UK Government took office on 11 May. As a result the content in this report may not reflect current Government policy.

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# **How do professionals, parents/carers and children view the role of the learning mentor in a multi agency setting?**

## **1. Introduction**

Learning mentors were introduced to Brighton and Hove in 2003, first through government funded Excellence in Cities (EIC) and then, subsequently, through the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP). As funding has devolved through the local authority, further schools have been funded to employ mentors and many schools have used their own resources to employ learning mentors. The term learning mentor includes the following roles; transition, inclusion and academic mentor.

The profile of learning mentors is championed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) who have drawn up a comprehensive guide to deploying mentors in schools and introduced National Occupational Standards (NOS). This guidance has been adapted by Brighton and Hove and is relayed to schools through the Learning Mentor Guidance (2009).

Mentors and schools also take direction from the CWDC Learning Mentor Practice Guide (April, 2007) which clearly states the role of the mentor within multi-agency working as *'a key resource in schools to help make the links between school, family and the wider community'* (CWDC, 2007: p41)

More recently the future of the mentor role has been anchored in the government White Paper 'Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system' (DCSF, 2009) which states that *'trained staff such as Learning Mentors...will be at the forefront of a co-ordinated system of early intervention, linked to other professionals including, for example, social services...'* (DCSF, 2009: p91)

This project will enable the learning mentor team to establish what links have been made with outside agencies and how professionals view the role of the learning mentor. There is little research locally into this area and it is hoped important learning can be fed back to policymakers and strategists within the local authority.

The two researchers involved in this project were Lauren Wallace and Aline Gibson. Learning mentors are supported through the local authority's Behaviour and Attendance Team which employs Lauren Wallace as their learning mentor co-ordinator. Her remit is to provide ongoing support, continuous professional development and induction training to mentors and those in similar roles.

Lauren's background is within the education welfare service and as a drama youth worker; she completed a BA Honours degree in Criminology and Social Policy in 2005. Aline has worked as a learning mentor for six years and prior to this was a play worker; she completed a BSc Honours degree in Social and Management Sciences in 2001. Both Aline and Lauren are committed to achieving positive outcomes for the children and young people they work for and raising the profile of mentoring in Brighton and Hove.

The close correlation both Aline and Lauren have with learning mentoring within Brighton and Hove means that concerted efforts will need to be made to ensure that the project is as objective as possible and remains fair and unbiased.

## 2. Aims of the project

The aims of the project were focused on how learning mentors work in a multi-agency setting. As the role of the mentor is to work closely with families and other professionals the project needed to look at all the different perspectives on the role. From this the research team hoped to inform future practice.

- To highlight good practice and share this with fellow professionals, especially learning mentors, across Brighton and Hove.
- To establish where practice is not consistent and the possible ways through which this can be resolved.
- To illustrate the child's view of working with their learning mentor and how they feel supported when there is multi-agency involvement.
- To identify and understand the parents'/carers' thoughts on the learning mentor role.
- To identify and understand the different perceptions other professionals have regarding the learning mentor role.
- To establish if there are any conflicting or confused ideas of the learning mentor role.
- To learn more about other professional roles and how the learning mentor can complement the work professionals do with children and young people.
- To identify how best to work together as professionals to support children and their families.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Organisations and people participating in the research

Initially it was planned to carry out the research in Brighton and Hove central area cluster of primary schools covering five schools. However, we decided to take advice from our mentor, which was to focus more closely on two primary schools. One school from the central area and another from the east area of Brighton and Hove Local Educational Authority (LEA), were approached (Appendix 1). In choosing these schools we hoped to create a balanced approach, as the schools are different in terms of size, catchment area, economic backgrounds (free school meals) and numbers

of children who have special needs. After meetings with the headteachers and learning mentors, and explaining the project, both schools agreed to take part.

The research question meant there were three categories of participants who would be invited to contribute their views. These were:

- children of primary school age;
- parents; and
- professionals including headteacher, teacher, school nurse (SN), social worker (SW), educational psychologist (EP), educational welfare officer (EWO) and a primary mental health worker from the children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS).

All of the above would have experience of, or were in the process of, working in a multi-agency setting.

### 3.2 Obtaining ethical permission

Before the research could commence ethical and governance permissions had to be obtained from Brighton and Hove City Council. This was a relatively straightforward procedure as the council has a well established protocol for research (see application form in Appendix 2). The main issues that needed to be considered were the well being of the participants, confidentiality, storage of data and introductions to the schools. The consent from the LEA on the 25 November 2009 and the reply to their questions are included in Appendix 3 and 4.

### 3.3 Delays and access

Once the governance consent was received it was hoped the process of carrying out the research would be straightforward. However, December in schools is an incredibly busy time with Christmas play rehearsals etc., so access was only possible in the New Year.

When the new term started, further delays were encountered when the schools had to close for three days in the first week of term and then a day in the second week due to the snow. The knock on effect was the rescheduling of a children's poster workshop by a week and an interview with a headteacher by two weeks.

Access to the second school was not obtained until the 20 January 2010. The workshop and interviews were organised for the 4 February, but closer to the time were rescheduled for a week later due to circumstances at the school.

Response from the professionals varied from being prompt to slow. This resulted in the lead professional having to follow up letters with phone calls and emails. Once contact and initial consent was agreed then the logistics of organising a mutually convenient time and place was simple.

### 3.4 Children and Young People

Filming was the original method planned to record the ideas of the children in groups of two or three. The small groups would have allowed all the children to express their opinions and ideas. Prior to filming the lead practitioner would have designed a question script to help prompt and guide the children with their ideas. However, after careful consideration, this methodology was changed, primarily because of the difficulties it created with preserving confidentiality and obtaining ethical permission.

As an alternative it was decided the children would be asked to make an eye-catching poster of what they thought of their learning mentor and how the learning mentor had helped them. For each school one group of four children would create a poster in a workshop run by the lead practitioner, so there would be a total of eight posters made by the children.

In a letter sent to the parents and carers a consent form for the children to take part in the workshop was enclosed for them to sign (see Appendix 5), along with an invitation for them to come to view their children's work and an information sheet (See Appendix 6).

The plan was for the posters to be displayed around the room when the lead practitioner fed back the research findings at the Learning Mentor Conference in March 2010 and at the CWDC Celebration Event in April 2010.

### 3.5 Parents and Carers

Parents/carers were identified during the first meeting with the school's headteacher and learning mentor. We decided the school's learning mentor would be the best person to approach the parents/carers with a letter inviting them to take part in the research project (See Appendix 7).

A semi-structured interview was used to gather the opinions of parents and carers (See Appendix 8). This approach was chosen using a simple topic guide, firstly, because it allowed people to talk around a subject and add in information that a structured questionnaire might miss and secondly, because it allowed the researcher to support a participant if there was any ambiguity in the questions, or if they had any literacy issues, as well as allowing the researcher to ask further questions in response to an answer given. *'This allows the interviewer to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee.'* (May, 2001: p123)

Before the interview started the information sheet and the consent form were read and explained. Participants signed the consent form if they agreed to take part (See Appendix 9). The participants were offered a choice to have the interview recorded with a dictaphone or scribed by the lead professional.

Initially the project aimed to interview two parents from each school, so four altogether. However, it was only possible to interview three.

### 3.6 Professionals

Originally, the lead professional was going to design a questionnaire to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. However, questionnaires sometimes have a low return rate and it was planned that, if this happened, the lead professional would follow up by interviewing. May (2001) highlighted, *'Unless people have an incentive, either through an interest in the subject which the*



*survey is covering or some other basis, then response rates are likely to be low.'* (p97) The use of questionnaires was changed to inviting the professionals who were attached to the identified schools to be interviewed (See Appendix 10). Again, a semi-structured interview was used to help create a dialogue between the researcher and the professional. The lead professional piloted the interview script prior to interviewing the participants in the project (See Appendix 11).

Before the interview started the participants were asked to read the information sheet and the consent form. The lead professional interviewed the headteacher and a teacher at the schools, as well as a school nurse, educational psychologist, primary mental health worker and educational welfare officer. The lead professional invited social workers to take part. However, there were no responses to this invitation. In addition to the professionals attached to the schools, the lead professional interviewed a representative from the Targeted Mental Health project in schools (TaMHS).

Altogether, nine professionals were interviewed. These included; two headteachers, two teachers, one educational welfare officer, one school nurse, one primary mental health worker from community CAMHS, one educational psychologist and one representative from the TaMHS project.

In summary, a total of 20 people took part in the research project. Eight children took part in the workshops at the schools. Within the schools, two head teachers and two teachers were interviewed. Outside of school it was possible to interview five other professionals. Lastly, it was possible to interview three parents. In total the lead professional interviewed 12 participants, of which all were recorded with a dictaphone.

All of the information gathered was used as background for developing the findings. The interviews were not fully transcribed due to time and monetary restrictions. However, the interviews were repeatedly listened to for any recurring themes and patterns. The core findings from the two schools are described in the following section and may not necessarily reflect mentoring across the city.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 What Learning Mentors do

*'Learning Mentors work with groups of pupils and individuals, teachers and managers, parents, carers and families, schools and other agencies, helping to construct a support network. Within that framework they develop trusting relationships in which information can be shared.'*

(Good Practice Guidelines for Learning Mentors, 2001: p8 )

<b>A Learning Mentor</b>	
Is a:	Is not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ role model</li> <li>➤ active listener</li> <li>➤ observer</li> <li>➤ encourager</li> <li>➤ professional friend</li> <li>➤ challenger of assumptions</li> <li>➤ guide</li> <li>➤ target negotiator</li> <li>➤ reliable, approachable, non-judgemental and realistic supporter – with pupils, parents and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ counsellor</li> <li>➤ classroom assistant</li> <li>➤ babysitter</li> <li>➤ disciplinarian</li> <li>➤ person to whom a pupil is sent when naughty</li> </ul>

Source: Good Practice Guidelines for Learning Mentors, 2001, pg 8

In both of the schools involved in this project the learning mentor role had been established through Excellence in Cities six years ago. *'The LM role is crucial to our school' and is now 'part of the school's culture'* (Headteachers). *'Learning mentors are absolutely fantastic and highly valued members of the team, all schools should have them. They are worth every penny.'* (Headteacher).

Learning mentors can work with children who have social and emotional issues which, in turn impacts on their learning. Best practice shows children are identified through a referral system; these have included friendship issues, exclusion by other children, children with behavioural difficulties, children who are selective mutes, low self esteem, bullying, family separation and divorce, bereavements and child protection issues amongst many other reasons.

In Brighton and Hove, many schools have adopted vulnerable pupil registers (VPRs) to identify children with high needs in their school, which in turn can lead to referrals to the learning mentor. In some schools socio-grams are also used to identify children who may be disaffected, (TaMHS project).

*'The interventions are fluid and flexible which encourages proactive ideas for new ways of working with children'* (Headteacher). The learning mentor role takes a holistic view of the child, so the interventions are tailored to their specific needs, always with the view of 'What is best for the child?' (Headteacher). The key message for good practice is the interventions must be proactive and preventative rather than reactive or 'fire fighting.' (Head teachers and TaMHS service)

Lengths of interventions vary depending on the needs of the child, highlighting the philosophy of a child centred approach. *'Long term interventions are much more effective, rather than the six to eight weeks set out in the original government guidelines.'* (Headteacher)

Activities planned by the learning mentors at the two schools have included: creative classes in art, cooking, environmental work, sports clubs, friendship groups and social skills groups.

Learning mentors have attended and continue to have access to a wide spectrum of training opportunities including: solution-focussed therapy, emotional literacy awareness, introduction to cognitive behavioural therapy, bereavement and loss training, attachment difficulties, silver social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL), group work, child protection, teenage psychology, speech and language and the link to behaviour, parental support and much more.

Part of the learning mentor's role is to monitor and evaluate interventions. This can be done in the process of observations, action planning and target setting with the children, teachers, professionals and parents/carers.

*'Learning mentors observed children which was really good, as a class teacher you don't always see everything that is going on and at playtimes, as we are quite often not out there. They are really good at feeding back the information.'* (Teacher)

However it is really important to remember, *'Monitor and track but don't get too bogged down in paper work. The learning mentor job is about dealing with people and the successful relationships they build up with children, parents and other professionals.'* (Head teacher)

Establishing communication channels between all the professionals will mean information is up to date and constantly flowing, allowing everyone to respond quickly to the child's needs.

Learning mentors can also organise team around the child meetings (TAC) to help support school staff who are dealing with particularly difficult children or situations. These meetings can help with communication, information sharing, reduce the effects of secondary stress and isolation of staff.

*'In the past we had a TAC meeting, which was very important. That was suggested by the learning mentor. Now actually as a school we do them regularly. The meetings were constructive and proactive, as well as looking at what was going well.'* (Teacher)

In the two schools learning mentors were supported in their role by their line managers and headteachers whenever it was needed, as well as formal meetings every 1-2 weeks. Further supervision has been offered to learning mentors whose schools are part of the TaMHS project or supervision can be organised through the learning mentor coordinator.

## 4.2 Children

The children expressed their ideas of how the learning mentors helped and what they do with their learning mentors on posters (Appendix 12-19).

The posters show four main themes.

The children felt they were listened to and were given the opportunity to talk:

*'They listen to me'*

*'We talk about feeling angry.'*

*'We talk about being good and bad and how to change.'*

*'My mentor helped me be more open.'*

*'My mentor helped me get stuff off my chest.'*

The children recognised the mentors had helped them with their anger:

*'I'm not rude to teachers anymore.'*

*'I used to get into fights with people most of the time but I hardly ever now.'*

*'They help me keep my anger down and give me peace.'*

*'I used to punch people and call them names. Now I am calm. I don't kick or punch anymore.'*

The children acknowledged the mentors helped them with their friendships:

*'They have sorted out problems with friends and showed us how to sort out problems when they are not here.'*

*'I have more friends.'*

*'I got to know my friends a bit more.'*

The children felt supported in other ways too:

*'Play games to have some time not worrying about our problems.'*

*'They help me when people call me names and are mean to me.'*

*'Being respectful.'*

*'Draw pictures to show what I mean.'*

During the sessions with the learning mentor the children are listened to and they are able to talk about their feelings and experiences at home and at school. Through this, the learning mentor is able to help the children solve problems and understand their emotions. This was emphasised by the following comments:

*'Helping children to understand what is happening in their life.'* (Parent)

*'Understand they are feeling angry and say, "I'm feeling angry."'* (Parent)

*'They really look forward to going out with their learning mentor.'* (Parent)

*'He is now enjoying school, as he is now being understood.'* (Parent)

*'They are now a completely different child.'* (Parent)

*'Learning mentors are on the children's side.'* (Teacher)

*'Learning mentors are able to do the things we don't have time to do. Talking to the children really.'*

*'The children know they have somebody who can always listen to them.'* (Teacher)

### 4.3 Parents/ carers and families

*'Learning Mentors have a distinct role to play with families and carers. They act as intermediaries on behalf of the child between school and home, so need to work closely within the school's guidelines and those of other agencies involved.'* (Hayward, 2001: p28)

Working with parents/carers and families is a key area for the role of the learning mentor. In the two schools the learning mentors have regular contact with the families, so they can share ideas and strategies for home and school.

*'Involvement of the parents is good practice, as there is more impact if the parents are involved.'*  
(Headteacher)

The learning mentors at the two schools have proactively encouraged links with families; these have included family learning groups, dads' clubs and hand over times at the beginning and end of the day. There were many positive comments about links with the learning mentor:

*'The learning mentor is an approachable friendly face of the school, so the parents are able to talk. As a teacher it is sometimes hard to bring up difficult subjects.'* (Teacher)

*'They are friendly faces, who make people feel safe and welcome.'* (Community CAMHS)

Parents feel the learning mentors are there to support families and their children. 'Learning mentors listen and give advice. Sometimes they just encourage and say, "Yeah, you are doing the right thing." This is especially helpful when the behaviours are really difficult.' (Parent)

#### 4.4 Agencies

*'Both school and learning mentor need to be aware of their limitations and recognise when it is time to call in an outside agency, who can bring their specialist expertise and a fresh perspective, often broadening the range of services on offer to pupils.'* (Hayward, 2001: p21)

'The children's workforce can be defined as those professionals .... including learning mentors working in a multi-agency context to improve children's life chances'  
(Cruddas, 2005: p20)

Running in conjunction with this project, the Learning Mentor Team issued an anonymous questionnaire to all learning mentors asking them to detail their involvement with multi-agencies (Appendix 20). Forty-three out of 80 learning mentors replied (54 per cent) and 86 per cent answered they had had contact with outside agencies as a learning mentor. Forty-seven per cent of mentors answered they would like to have more time dealing with outside agencies. The data clearly shows that learning mentors in the east of the city are much more likely to interact with outside agencies and be involved with meetings compared to their counterparts in the west of the city. However, this may be because mentors have been established longer in the east and have had more time to build relationships with agencies. The spread of mentors across the city is not equal and, therefore, disparities are sure to arise.

When asked which agency the mentor had a particularly good working relationship with, the most popular reply was the school counsellor. Social services and CAMHs were named as the agencies mentors sometimes found hard to work with and/or get in contact with. The questionnaire responses clearly showed that, generally, there is a large amount of partnership working between learning mentors and other agencies which is relatively positive. One mentor said *'In my experience of working with outside agencies once contact has been made face to face, the barriers seem to come down and links are forged'*.

At the two schools there can be as many as 45 different agencies working with children. These are usually coordinated through the special needs coordinator (SENCO). The main agencies that have had contact with the children, parents/ carers and professionals taking part in the research are:

social services, community CAMHS (tier 2), tier 3 CAMHS, alternative centre of education (ACE), school nurse, TaMHS, educational psychologists, educational welfare service and school counsellors.

One important role of the learning mentor is to act as a link between the school, teachers and outside agencies.

*'With the learning mentor the feedback from multi-agency meetings is instant and face to face.'* (Teacher)

*'The learning mentor organised regular meetings to discuss strategies to help a child.'* (Teacher)

*'Before the learning mentors started working with my children, I wouldn't get this information for days or I would get it in the report three weeks later from the core group meeting stating these decisions had been made. I didn't know these decisions were being made- I'm only the class teacher.'* (Teacher)

*'The role of the learning mentor could alleviate the, 'Frustration when outside agencies don't come into school to see how the children are doing.' (Teacher) and 'Frustration of things not moving fast enough and us seeing the fall out of what is happening and saying, "Why can't you see this?" We can only write it down so many times. I've only had one social worker come into class to actually see the detrimental effects of what is happening.'* (Teacher)

Below are some comments from interviews which provide different views of the learning mentors' role in relation to the different agencies:

#### *Community CAMHS*

There have been recent changes to the CAMHS structure, with community CAMHS created in September 2009 with the aim of building links and partnerships with schools. However, they have inherited a large waiting list of referrals which has slowed down this process.

*'My role is to work systemically with schools and families. So the aim is to get us out into schools to provide more consultative based work.'* (Community CAMHS)

*'My child saw CAMHS for a while to help with his anger and violence. I'm not sure if it was terribly helpful. They took a very much systemic approach.'* (Parent)

*'CAMHS refused to get involved with the family when there were child protection issues and a court case.'* (Parent)

Improvements could be made in links with CAMHS. *'I would like to understand the learning mentor role more. Raising awareness and building links through training at CAMHS team meetings.'* (Community CAMHS)

This highlights the need for increased clarity around the learning mentor role and the need to strengthen the partnership between CAMHS, learning mentors and schools. One mechanism to achieve this may be offering CAMHS the opportunity to access training and development around the learning mentor role.

#### *Social services*

Learning mentors have contact with social services if there are child protection concerns at school, or the school is invited to attend child protection conferences and core group meetings. In the two schools, when a child is on a child protection plan the learning mentors will have regular contact usually through telephone or email with the social worker.

*'The learning mentors helped with communication between family members and social services. They were in regular contact'* (Parent)

*'The learning mentor acted as an advocate for my child.'* (Parent)

*'The learning mentor feedbacks to me from social services straight away now. I'm told immediately face to face.'* (Teacher)

One of the possible reasons for social workers not responding to the invitation to take part in the research project might be the time pressures they are put under by the caseloads they have. It would have been incredibly useful to hear their opinions on the role of the learning mentor. However, the lead professional will continue to seek their opinions to inform future practice.

#### *School nurses*

*School nurses tend to have informal direct contact with the learning mentors, 'We pass in corridors and have a quick catch up.'* (School nurse) *The main contact with school is through the SENCO, who then passes on relevant information to the learning mentors. 'Working with the learning mentor has been beneficial and pleasant.'* (School nurse)

#### *Educational welfare service*

The educational welfare officer worked closely with learning mentors. Together they were able to offer the children 'meet and greet' sessions in the morning to help with the transition from home to school. This can often be a difficult time for children and families which can sometimes be the trigger for poor attendance or punctuality.

*'The support for the young people is invaluable.'* (Educational welfare officer)

*They were able to communicate more formally through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) meetings or Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings.*

*'Working together works really well. There is good two way communication and support.'* (Educational welfare officer)

## 4.5 Impact

When learning mentors are working with children and families, the role requires them to record and measure the impact the intervention is having on the child and family. Sometimes the nature of the work is not always easy to quantify. However, seeking opinions and experiences from children, families and professionals has shown the role of the learning mentor has had an impact in many ways.

*'The biggest and the most easily measured impact of the learning mentor role has been the reduction in fixed term exclusions.'* (Headteacher)

Learning mentors are also perceived very favourably in different ways by many people:

*'Learning mentors have often very much gone above and beyond the call of duty.'* (Parent)

*'Gives hope for world and humankind.'* (Parent)

*'Learning mentors are inspirational.'* (Parent)

*'They care by giving their time and effort.'* (Parent)

*'Investing in the future and equipping children with the skills they can carry through life.'*  
(Headteacher)

*'Learning mentors have influenced the culture of the school, like a ripple effect.'* (Parent)

*'Learning mentors are so approachable. If you go to them things will get done.'* (Teacher)

*'I couldn't have coped without them.'* (Teacher)

*'I don't know how schools managed before.'* (Educational welfare officer)

*'The school can't do without learning mentors.'* (Headteacher)

*'The local authority has got it right, let's not undo that. We know it works.'* (TaMHS)

*'They are also very good I think, as well when you are in the class and you see the children day in day out sometimes you can't always see the little improvements and they are very good at showing you actually look this has got loads better. They are very supportive.'* (Teacher)

*'I couldn't have lived the last two weeks without them to be honest.'* (Teacher)

#### 4.6 Status

Learning Mentors are championed through the CWDC who are working hard to raise the profile of the mentor role and ensure their status as part of the children's workforce is recognised. In Brighton and Hove Learning Mentors are offered the chance to complete an NVQ Level 4 in Learning, Development and Support Services which links directly to their role as a Learning Mentor. The CWDC has shared plans with co-ordinators for future developments to the role such as Youth Professional Status; however these remain in consultation stage at present. Locally the status and profile of the mentor role to all stakeholders including parents, carers, children, teaching staff and outside agencies is at the forefront of the mentor co-ordinators work and is a key priority for the behaviour and attendance team. In the interviews some participants also wanted to raise the status of the learning mentor role.

*'Learning mentors are skilled employees, whom many have degrees.'* (TaMHS)

*'They are incredible value for money.'* (TaMHS)

*'They are being asked to do too much- they are just not paid enough.'* (Teacher)

#### 4.7 Misunderstandings of the role and barriers to partnership working

*'Learning Mentors need to be recognised as making a valuable contribution to the school, its teaching staff and its pupils. For that to happen, the whole school must fully understand the role of the Learning Mentor and the crucial part they play in improving individual achievement, altering student attitudes and behaviour and in turn supporting staff.'* (Hayward, 2001: p6)

Six years ago, the learning mentor role was completely new to the two schools. Together with headteachers, line managers, SENCOs and along with support from the LEA, BIP and especially the learning mentor coordinator the role was established within the schools. *'Initially some teachers and support staff saw the role as a glorified TA.'* (Head teacher) *Or they thought, 'They are just playing games.'* (Teacher) *However, this was turned around through working with and educating all the staff. 'The teachers started to see the impact and successes, so the role became more important and established.'* (Head teacher)



*'On the induction training learning mentors felt there was not sufficient planning/ liaison with the class teachers and other key people as well as a confusion about the aims of their interventions, but then it might be because they were new to posts.'* (Educational psychologist) Establishing the role in schools takes hard work and dedication from all involved. However, schools with new learning mentors need extra support from the learning mentor coordinator and could even be partnered with schools who have established learning mentors. All members of staff need training on the role of the learning mentor and mentors need to be released for further professional development as well as learning mentor cluster meetings where ideas of good practice are shared.

The barriers for successful communication and information sharing between learning mentors and professionals from agencies are time and the lack of understanding the learning mentor role either by the learning mentors themselves, schools or professionals.

Looking at the comments made by the teachers about their frustrations of working with outside agencies, improvements can be made to the links and communication channels between the agencies and school staff. When the learning mentor has worked with outside agencies the findings show communication was improved between the agency and school. Raising the status and the awareness of how the learning mentor can support the work of professionals like primary mental health workers and social workers will improve links and partnership working.

## 5. Conclusion

Referring back to the aims of the project it was interesting to see how the project had developed. The first aim was to share the findings of this study with other professionals, especially learning mentors across Brighton and Hove. The lead professional presented the findings at the learning mentor conference in Brighton and Hove on the 26 March 2010. After the general election the full report will be published on the learning mentor website. There are plans to share the full report with policy makers in Brighton and Hove, again, after the general election.

The project was able to highlight where practice was not consistent with the communication between professionals and learning mentors. It showed some agencies had better communication links with learning mentors and, therefore, a closer working relationship. However, the lead professional was unable to find out if there were any inconsistencies between the different learning mentors practice. Comparing two very well established and experienced learning mentors may have prevented the analysis of any inconsistencies.

Looking at the children's view of the learning mentor the project was able to gather their opinions; however, the children did not focus on the multi-agency setting but rather on how the learning mentor has helped them. This was due to the questions put forward to them by the lead professional.

The research was able to identify and understand the parents'/carers' thoughts on the learning mentor role. The lead professional was able to interview three parents. This is an area that could be investigated further.

The learning mentors' work with families showed good practice, as they were proactively involving parents. The learning mentors had organised family art groups and dads' groups after school and at weekends. The TaMHS project will also be offering training to learning mentors in Brighton and Hove on how to run Family SEAL groups.

Looking at the aim to identify and understand the different perceptions other professionals have regarding the learning mentor role, the project was able to identify the differences between in school professionals and outside agency professionals. Headteachers, teachers, school nurses and educational welfare officers have a better understanding of the learning mentor role and a closer working relationship.

The project has identified areas for improvement in the role of the learning mentor in a multi-agency setting. Awareness of the role needs to be clarified and links established with community CAMHS and social services. The lead professional will continue to seek opinions of social workers and how partnership working can be improved from their point of view. The education of professionals in the Brighton and Hove children and young people's trust (CYPT) could also be beneficial.

Most of the interviewees wanted to see more learning mentors in schools across Brighton and Hove. As shown in the findings, integration of learning mentors into the school system and to the wider agencies needs careful planning and implementation. To support the schools in this process new learning mentors could be partnered with schools who have established learning mentors.

Throughout all the findings good communication was identified as the key to successful partnership working.

*'If there is no communication it makes it very difficult to make a difference.'* (School nurse)

Also being a learning mentor, too, some bias may have occurred. However, there are shared experiences with some of the participants but also conflicting experiences. For example, professionally I have worked closely with both social workers and primary mental health workers from Community CAMHS.

Overall, as the lead practitioner I felt the project had raised some very interesting subjects which show good practice and areas which need further work and investigation.

## References

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Hayward, A. (2001) *Good Practice Guidelines for Learning Mentors* [Online]. DfES: Nottingham. Available at: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/documents/LMGoodPractGuide.pdf> [Accessed 5 March 2010]

May, T. (2001) *Social Research, Issues, methods and process*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Open University Press: Buckingham.

Wallace, L. (July 2009) *Learning Mentor Guidance*, Brighton, Behaviour and Attendance Team.

## Appendix 1



Learning Mentor Team  
Learning Development Centre  
Brighton  
BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 293665  
Fax: 01273 294200

Dear Sir/ Madam,

You may be aware that our Learning Mentor team has received funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to research how Learning Mentors are viewed as part of a multiagency team.

We are asking two schools to take part. Your school's participation would involve the following commitment:

- One face to face interview with yourself (Head Teacher) regarding your view of the Learning Mentor role and multiagency working. This will be recorded using a Dictaphone with your permission and would last approximately half an hour.
- One face to face interview with a teacher regarding their involvement with a Learning Mentor. This again will be recorded using a Dictaphone with their permission and would last approximately half an hour.
- Two interviews with parents/ carers of a child who has received mentoring at the school. This interview will focus on the parents'/carers' perception of Mentoring. We will work very closely with yourself and your Learning Mentors to decide which parents/ carers would be best approached.
- One small group workshop with 3/4 children to be held in school. This session will be run by Aline Gibson with the support of a Learning Mentor from the school. The children will create a poster to describe, "What it is like working with my Learning Mentor and how they help me." We will need a room/space within the school. All resources will be provided by the research team.

The research project will also interview two or three professionals attached to your school, such as School Nurse, Educational Psychologist, Educational Welfare Officer, ACE Consultant etc. These will be organised independently of the school.

We genuinely hope that you decide to participate in this research. All schools details will be kept anonymous and individuals will not be identified.

This research will be published by the CWDC and we anticipate its findings will be used to shape future developments for Learning Mentors and multiagency working within Brighton and Hove.

Please see enclosed copies of Information Sheet, Professional's Interview, Parent's Interview, letters and consent forms. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Aline Gibson 07971470542. Alternatively, we shall contact you within the next week and look forward to taking this further.

Yours faithfully

Lauren Wallace  
Learning Mentor Co-ordinator

Aline Gibson  
Learning Mentor



## Appendix 2

<b>Title of the project/consultation</b>	How do professionals, parents/carers and children view the role of the Learning Mentor in a multi-agency setting?
<b>Our ref.</b>	

### Is the work being undertaken by council staff?

✓	Yes, council staff only
	Yes and with external partners – please specify:
	No – please specify:

### Contact information

Name of lead person	Aline Gibson
Telephone number	07971470542
Directorate and division	c/o Behaviour and Attendance Team - CYPT
Lead officer in Analysis & Research Team	
Which service area is the research/consultation concerned with? e.g. housing, waste or community safety Please specify	Schools – Learning Mentors

<b>Project start date</b>	October 2009
<b>Project finish date</b>	February 2010

### Give a brief outline of the proposal and why the consultation, research or information gathering is being undertaken

- Funded by the CWDC as practitioner led research (PLR)

#### If the request for approval is external where else is project approval being sought? e.g. other authorities or ethics boards

Project internal but consent will be sought from all participants.

#### What are the ethical considerations? Please detail

- Informed consent of children who participate and consent from their parents/carers.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ using any information which could identify participants.</li> <li>○ Ensuring no participant feels under pressure to participate.</li> <li>○ Ensure information reported is a precise account of interviews and is represented accurately.</li> </ul>			
<b>Project details</b>			
Who are the participants?		Learning Mentors, Head teacher/Line Manager, EWO, Social Workers, School Nurse, Teachers, ACE, Family Support Workers, CAMHS	
How is the sample selected and what is the sample size?		<p>Our sample is three primary schools located in Brighton within one area team. They have been selected according to their ability to meet our criteria, i.e. an established Learning Mentor programme and their willingness to engage.</p> <p>The sample size is three schools with five members of the integrated team attached to it. Therefore we anticipate 15 interviews (qualitative).</p>	
Who is designing your research tools?		Interviews will be conducted by Aline Gibson with Lauren Wallace (Learning Mentor Co-ordinator) acting as support.	
<b>Project methods - please mark all that apply</b>			
✓ (possibly)	Focus groups		Case file audits
✓	Face to face interviews		Secondary data analyses
	Questionnaires		Other – please state:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Investigating how Learning Mentors are viewed as part of an integrated team.</li> <li>○ Looking at good practice of Learning Mentors in schools and how this is viewed by the multi-agency team.</li> </ul>			
<b>What will be your project outcomes?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gain a better understanding of how Learning Mentors are viewed as part of a multi-agency team.</li> <li>○ See how consistent this view is across the schools</li> <li>○ Highlight areas of good practice.</li> <li>○ Highlight areas for possible consideration and development.</li> </ul>			
<b>Is the work a statutory requirement?</b>			
	In the future	✓	No

Don't know	Yes – please specify:
------------	-----------------------



## Appendix 3

### Research Guidance Consultative Panel Proposal Feedback

**Project title:** Role of the Learning Mentor

**Our Reference Number:** 069/1109

#### This project has been:

Agreed to start with no comments

Agreed (but the following comments should be considered)

Strongly recommended that project does not start until the areas below have been addressed

#### Areas to be addressed before starting the project and any other comments:

- *What is the justification for the project? Is there confusion about the role or role expectations; has there been previous research and will this add to it or will it be the first that will then be referred to in any future research.*
  - *Could do with more detail about how the information will be kept confidential and protected.*
  - *Some confusion over who is being interviewed – no mention of Children & Parents on project form in the participants section but children referred to under ethical considerations, yet there is a questionnaire for parents (but nothing for children) – how many of these. Also a lot of abbreviations used e.g. EWO, not sure who these are.*
  - *On the information sheet it talks about two schools but the project form talks about three.*
  - *There is a lot of jargon and abbreviations making the information difficult to grasp will that be an issue in itself?*
  - *Presumably there will be introductions before the interviews begin, outlining the purpose, asking if OK to interview, what will be done with results etc.*
  - *On the professionals interview Q7 – assumption is made that would want to add to role, would it be better to ask what “changes” rather than add.*
  - *Parent/carers interview Q1 – is question a bit too open? It might be off-putting (out of context a very personal, wide reaching question) – unless a good introduction as to why the exercise is being done has been given by the interviewer beforehand. I’m not sure that the Information Sheet in itself would be meaningful or reassuring for parents – seems of more relevance to agency staff.*
  - *Parents/carers Q6 – are these examples of helping with other professionals. Is it of interest to get examples of activities that the learning mentor has undertaken with a child that the parent/carer has found especially beneficial.*
- Project monitoring arrangements:**  
*Not applicable as you have already confirmed that you have considered the comments and whether they have been addressed.*

**Date feedback sent:** 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

## Appendix 4

### **FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE RESEARCH GUIDANCE CONSULTATIVE PANEL**

#### **HOW DO PROFESSIONALS, PARENTS/CARERS AND CHILDREN VIEW THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING MENTOR IN A MULTI-AGENCY SETTING?**

This is a reply to your suggestions and queries regarding our research project.

- The justification for the project is twofold. It will be the first research project into this subject in Brighton and Hove. Currently, we perceive there are different expectations of the Learning Mentor role across the city. We hope to find out if this is correct or not. If there are differences then this information will be fed back and actions will be planned to change this.
- Information will be kept confidential as no names will be attached to the information gathered, as well as all records kept in a secure manner, e.g. on my person or password protected. The schools where the research is taking place will be kept confidential.
- Information gathering.

We will carry out interviews for the professionals and parents. Please see attachments for the changes you recommended.

The children will be able to express their views during a workshop organised by myself and the school's Learning Mentor. During this time they will design and make a poster about their Learning Mentor, highlighting what they think the Learning Mentor does and how they have helped them.

- The research will be carried out in two schools.
- Introductions before the interviews will be essential.

A letter will go out to the Head teachers of both schools outlining the project. This will then be followed up with a phone call to arrange a meeting. At this meeting the Head teacher will be able to ask any questions and then sign a consent form allowing the research to go ahead. After this, a meeting will be arranged with the Learning Mentors who will then identify children and parents who could be approached and the best way to do this. All parents will be asked to sign a consent form for themselves and their children.

Professionals will be approached by letter then a follow up phone call to invite them to take part. All professionals will be asked to sign a consent form.

- The issue about jargon and abbreviations. While completing the Governance form we felt it more appropriate to abbreviate due to space. However, we do want to make sure everything is clear. An EWO is an Educational Welfare Officer; ACE stands for the Alternative Centre of Education; and CAMHS stands for Children Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The reason we chose to use interviews was so if there were any problems with the wording it could be clarified straight away.

Appendix 5



Learning Mentor Team  
Learning Development Centre  
Brighton  
BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 293665  
Fax: 01273 294200

Dear Parent/ Carer,

You may recall speaking to your school's Learning Mentor regarding an opportunity for your child to participate in a research project. I am writing to ask for your consent to allow your child to take part. The project is seeking the views of the children on the role of the Learning Mentor.

Aline Gibson and the school's Learning Mentor will run an afternoon workshop where the children will be able to create a poster displaying what the children think of their Learning Mentor and how the Learning Mentor has helped them. You will be invited to come and view these posters at the end of the day. The children will be asked to exclude any names so the work will be of a confidential nature.

Please find enclosed an information sheet with my contact details at the bottom. If you do have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and if you agree to this please complete and return the attached consent form to your school's Learning Mentor.

Yours faithfully

Aline Gibson  
Learning Mentor

Lauren Wallace  
Learning Mentor Co-ordinator



Learning Mentor Team  
Learning Development Centre  
Brighton  
BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 293665  
Fax: 01273 294200

I have read and understood the information sheet. I  
\_\_\_\_\_ consent to  
\_\_\_\_\_to join in the poster  
workshop as part of the CWDC (Children's Workforce  
Development Council) research, which will be carried out  
by Aline Gibson and the school's Learning Mentor.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT?

Lauren Wallace (Learning Mentor Co-ordinator) and Aline Gibson (Learning Mentor) have been funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to research the question,

**“How do professionals, parents/ carers and children view the role of the Learning Mentor in a multi-agency setting?”**

The aim of the research is to find out people's views on the Learning Mentor role and improve practice. The research will be carried out in two schools in Brighton and Hove. The information from professionals, parents and carers will be collected using interviews recorded by Dictaphone, with their permission. The children's views will be recorded on individual posters. All identities of participants will be kept confidential.

The findings will be published in a report and presented to the CWDC at the end of February 2010. Then in March 2010, the research and possible recommendations will be presented at the Learning Mentor Conference in Brighton and Hove.

“The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

Our decisions and actions are informed by constant dialogue with employers, the workforce, children, young people and their families, as well as high quality research.”

([www.cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk))



If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact:

Aline Gibson

[agibson@coomberoad.brighton-hove.sch.uk](mailto:agibson@coomberoad.brighton-hove.sch.uk)

07971470542

## Appendix 7



Learning Mentor Team  
Learning Development Centre  
Brighton  
BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 293665  
Fax: 01273 294200

Dear Parent/ Carer,

You may recall speaking to your school's Learning Mentor regarding an opportunity to participate in a research project. I would like to invite you to take part in this research. We feel it is very important to find out the views and opinions of parents/ carers on the role of the Learning Mentor.

What we would ask you to do is to take part in an individual interview with Aline Gibson (Learning Mentor at Coombe Road Primary School, Brighton). The interview will take place at your child's school at a convenient time for you. The information will be recorded using a Dictaphone with your permission. All identities and identifying information will be removed for confidentiality.

Please find enclosed the interview questions and an information sheet with my contact details at the bottom. If you do have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I will phone you within the next week to see if you would like to take part.

Yours faithfully

Aline Gibson  
Learning Mentor

Lauren Wallace  
Learning Mentor Co-ordinator



**PARENT/CARERS' INTERVIEW**

- 1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your children?**
- 2. Why was your child/children referred to the Learning Mentor?**
- 3. From your point of view, what is the role of the Learning Mentor?**
- 4. How have they supported you and your child? Can you give me some examples of activities and strategies?**
- 5. Have they helped you work with the other professionals? How have they done this?**
- 6. Have you seen your child improve and develop? Or have you seen no change?**
- 7. Do you think the Learning Mentor could have helped in other ways?**
- 8. Overall, how would you sum up working with a Learning Mentor?**
- 9. Have you anything else to add?**

**How do professionals, parents/carers and children view the role of the Learning Mentor in a multi-agency setting?**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Please tick the boxes to show you have read and understood each statement.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project.
2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the process at any point if I wish to.
3. I understand that the researcher wishes to use a Dictaphone to record the interview but I can request for the recording to be stopped at any point or not be used at all.
4. I give permission for the interview content to be used for the research project and that my words may be used as quotes.
5. I understand that all identifying information will be excluded from the report and any presentations of the report, so confidentiality is upheld.
6. I agree to take part in the research project.

Signature of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 10



Learning Mentor Team  
Learning Development Centre  
Brighton  
BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 293665  
Fax: 01273 294200

Dear Sir/ Madam,

You may be aware that our Learning Mentor team has received funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to research how Learning Mentors are viewed as part of a multiagency team.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research. We feel it is very important to find out the views and opinions of professionals on the role of the Learning Mentor.

What we would ask you to do is to take part in an individual interview with Aline Gibson (Learning Mentor at Coombe Road Primary School, Brighton). The interview will take place at a venue of your choice at a convenient time for you. The information will be recorded using a Dictaphone with your permission. All identities and identifying information will be removed for confidentiality.

Please find enclosed the interview questions and an information sheet with my contact details at the bottom. If you do have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I will phone you within the next week. We genuinely hope that you decide to participate in this research.

Yours faithfully

Lauren Wallace  
Learning Mentor Co-ordinator

Aline Gibson  
Learning Mentor



**PROFESSIONAL'S INTERVIEW**

- 1. What is your role and the main aspects of it?**
- 2. From your point of view what is the overall role of the Learning Mentor?**
- 3. Currently, how is the Learning Mentor supporting the children in your care?**
- 4. How do Learning Mentors support you in your role?**
- 5. (Schools only- Do your Learning Mentors work with other agencies?)**
- 6. How do Learning Mentors support families?**
- 7. Can you give me examples of successes/ good practice as a result of the Learning Mentor within a multiagency setting? Why do you think it worked?**
- 8. Are there situations where the Learning Mentor role hasn't worked or made little difference? Can you give me examples?**
- 9. Roles can evolve. What changes would you like to make to the role of the Learning Mentor?**
- 10. Overall, how would you sum up working with a Learning Mentor?**
- 11. Is there anything else you would like to say?**

Appendix 12

**Learning Mentors and Multi-Agency Working**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. We are asking you for your opinions and views so we can form a bigger picture of how Learning Mentors work with outside agencies and how consistent this is across the city. You will not be identified at any point. If you have any questions please contact [Lauren.Wallace@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Lauren.Wallace@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

1) Please circle which area of the city you work in:

**East** **Central** **West**

2) Please tick which phase of schooling you work in:

**Primary**  **Secondary**

3) As a Learning Mentor (or similar role) have you worked with outside agencies as part of your role?

**Yes**  **No**  **Unsure**

4) If you have worked with an outside agency please can you indicate below how often you have worked with each agency by ticking the relevant box? (Your level of contact could change year by year – please give an estimated answer and tick all that apply)

<b>Name of Agency</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Termly</b>	<b>Yearly</b>	<b>Never</b>
School Nurse					
Education Welfare Service					
Education Psychologists					
Alternative Centre for Education (ACE)					
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHs)					
Social Services					
Anti Social Behaviour Teams					
Police					
Connexions					
Targeted Youth Support Service (TYS)					
Youth Offending Team					
School Counsellor					
Playworkers					
Speech and language support service					
Others .....					

5) In your opinion which is the best method for communicating with outside agencies? Please tick.

**Face to Face**  **Letter**  **Phone**  **Email**  **Fax**

6) Which outside agency(s) do you have a particularly good working relationship with?

7) In your opinion, is there an outside agency which you find difficult to make contact with or/and work with?

8) As a Learning Mentor have you been involved in any of the following multi agency meetings? (Please tick all that apply)

Name of Meeting	Been involved	Never been involved	I'm not sure what this is
Team Around Child (TAC)			
Common Assessment Framework (CAF)			
Looked after child review (LAC)			
Personal Education Plan (PEP)			
Annual Review (Statement Child)			
Attendance Support Meeting (ASM)			
PARMS meeting (Primary)			
All agency meeting (Secondary)			
Pastoral Support Plan (PSP)			
Core Group (Social Services)			
Case Conference (Social Services)			
Other.....			
Other.....			

9) If you have been involved with the CAF process, have you taken the role of 'Lead Professional'?

Yes  No

10) As a Learning Mentor (or similar role) please rate your level of involvement with outside agencies

Too much time  about the right time  I would like to have more time   
I have little or no involvement with outside agencies

11) Finally, have you got any further comments you would like to share regarding your experience of multi-agency working?

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. YOU CAN EITHER EMAIL THIS FORM TO [KRISTINE.MURPHY@BRIGHTON-HOVE.GOV.UK](mailto:KRISTINE.MURPHY@BRIGHTON-HOVE.GOV.UK) OR SEND TO THE LEARNING MENTOR TEAM, LDC, MOULSECOOMB VIA THE SCHOOL COURIER. PLEASE RETURN BY FRIDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2009**

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

[www.cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk)

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**  
or visit [www.cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk)

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange  
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES  
email [info@cwdcouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@cwdcouncil.org.uk)  
or fax us on 0113 390 7744

Contact us to receive this information in a different language  
or format, such as large print or audio tape.

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