

Mentor Points: Pilot Year Evaluation

Sarah Golden, Ann Lines, David Sims
National Foundation for Educational Research

**Research Report
No 369**

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ISBN 1 84185 789 0
August 2002

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their thanks to Colin Blake and Janette King at the DfES, and to Peter Collins at the National Mentoring Network, for their support throughout the study.

Thanks are also due to the Mentor Points, partner organisations and schools for so readily agreeing to participate in interviews and for providing essential information and data for the projects.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the additional help provided by our Research Associate, Annette Massey and by Maureen Greenaway and other members of the administrative team.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) launched Mentor Points with the purpose of improving the coherence and the quality of volunteer mentoring for young people. Three pilot Mentor Points were established in 2001, initially for one year, in three Phase One Excellence in Cities (EiC) areas. The aims of the pilots included raising the profile of mentoring, increasing the supply of volunteer mentors for school-age children and young people, and working towards the implementation of minimum quality standards within all partner organisations.

The DfES commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to evaluate the extent to which the Mentor Point pilots had achieved their objectives and identify any changes to increase their effectiveness. The results reported here are the key findings from the evaluation, carried out between February 2001 and April 2002. This included interviews with Mentor Point staff, 29 teachers and 15 Learning Mentors in 29 schools, and representatives of 12 partner organisations (e.g. Education Business Partnerships (EBPs) and mentoring programmes).

Key Findings

- ◆ During their pilot year, Mentor Points had established their profile in the areas they served. Their recognition by schools, employers, community organisations and other agencies involved in mentoring was increasing. They had effectively conveyed key messages about their purpose and roles, including being trainers and suppliers of mentors.
- ◆ The Mentor Points had raised awareness of mentoring generally in their areas and increased the supply of volunteer mentors by recruiting a total of around 500 new mentors, as well as offering support to more than 100 existing mentors.
- ◆ The Mentor Points' role in ensuring that mentors were trained to a common standard was valued by partner organisations and a majority of the schools which commented (17) reported that the mentors they had received were well trained.
- ◆ The Mentor Points were beginning to develop a strategic approach to assuring quality, including working towards the implementation of quality standards frameworks.
- ◆ Mentor Points had made creditable progress towards achieving the aims and objectives of their pilot year, including bringing coherence to local mentoring arrangements, which proved to be the greatest challenge.

Background

There has been a considerable expansion in the scale and variety of mentoring programmes aimed at helping young people to realise their potential and become effective citizens. Recognising that a plethora of organisations are involved in the coordination and delivery of mentoring programmes, the DfES decided to fund three Mentor Point pilots to find out if they could help bring about coherence and a strategic approach to the recruitment, training and support of volunteer mentors across their areas.

The Mentor Points were selected from bids submitted by organisations and consortia in phase-one EiC areas. They piloted three different models and each had priorities in order to respond to local circumstances.

The consortium-model pilot sought to coordinate the work of several specialist mentoring organisations and to provide a centralised service for training and conducting police checks of mentors. The volunteer bureau model set out to develop cross-borough strategies for increasing the number of organisations involved in mentoring, and for recruiting and training mentors, through networking and its experience of working with volunteers. The EBP model aimed to enhance the coordination of mentoring by building on existing education-business networks across two EBPs and linking with other local education initiatives, including EiC and EAZ.

The Evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned both to ascertain the extent to which the Mentor Points had improved the coherence of school-based mentoring arrangements and had increased the number of new mentors available in schools and to identify lessons learned in the pilot year. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- ♦ assess the extent to which Mentor Points were successful in achieving their objectives
- ♦ identify the key outcomes from Mentor Points both for schools and other partners involved, explain how these outcomes came about, and identify the extent to which they are sustainable over the longer term
- ♦ identify the factors which influence schools' use of the Mentor Points and explain the way use varies across schools
- ♦ establish the extent of any externalities from the use of Mentor Points such as unforeseen benefits or unwanted consequences of using them
- ♦ identify any changes which could be made to Mentor Points to increase their effectiveness.

The NFER research team collected evidence from the Mentor Points through interviews with the coordinators who were also asked to provide data on the characteristics of mentors.

Data was also collected from 29 schools (27 secondary and two primary) across the three Mentor Point areas. The schools were asked to provide information on their experience of using volunteer mentors. Interviews were carried out with 29 teachers (including heads, deputies and senior teachers) and 15 Learning Mentors. The interviews aimed to find out what level of understanding schools had of the Mentor Points and how they rated the service provided.

The research team undertook interviews with representatives of 12 partner organisations, including mentor programmes, EBPs, EiC, and an Education Action Zone. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a broader understanding of the emerging role of the Mentor Points and to find out the extent to which they were helping to develop a more coordinated approach to mentoring.

Communication and Understanding of Purpose and Roles

The evaluation revealed that the Mentor Points had effectively conveyed key messages about their purpose and roles to partner organisations and schools.

Partners perceived Mentor Points primarily as providers of a supply of trained mentors which they could use as part of their mentoring programme. Partners also viewed them as promoters of high-quality mentoring and a resource base providing access to key information.

The majority of teachers indicated that the Mentor Points had explained their purpose and roles clearly. However, the research revealed that communicating the purpose and role of the Mentor Point is not a one-off event and that initial messages should be reinforced periodically.

Building Mentoring Capacity

Promotion

Mentor Points used a variety of strategies, including advertisements, visits and presentations, to establish their profile and promote their services in the local community. Eleven of the twelve partner organisations considered that the promotional activities had achieved some success in establishing the Mentor Point and in raising the profile of mentoring. These developments were reflected in the hundreds of enquiries received about becoming mentors. They also noted that DfES's support had helped to give Mentor Points status.

Schools valued the visits made by Mentor Point staff which enabled them to ask questions and gain reassurance about the quality and safety of mentoring being offered.

There was some evidence that the Mentor Points were helping to increase the use of mentoring. Eight of the 29 schools included in the research were using volunteer mentors for the first time as a consequence of their involvement and

12 schools, which had some experience of mentoring, had increased their number of mentors.

Recruitment

The Mentor Points used a variety of recruitment methods, including working with partners such as EBPs, media advertising and visiting businesses. The overall approach taken by the Mentor Points to mentor recruitment was more industrious than strategic which was partly the result of the emphasis on target numbers.

The three Mentor Points had recruited, trained and placed a total of around 630 mentors, of which around 480 were new mentors and the remainder re-engaged. One Mentor Point recruited just over the target figure of 320 mentors. The other two Mentor Points had recruited 153 and 156 mentors each*.

Around 70 per cent of the mentors recruited were female and 30 per cent were male. Partner organisations and schools reported a continuing need for male mentors. In addition, some noted that there was a lack of black male mentors and volunteers from other ethnic minority groups, including Muslims. Schools reported that the mentors they had received from the Mentor Points were well trained.

Partner organisations continued to recruit mentors as well as placing mentors recruited through the Mentor Points which were, therefore, contributing to a net increase in the numbers of mentors in their areas.

The Mentor Points varied in the extent to which they had recruited mentoring programmes with which, and through which, they could work. In some cases, there were tensions related to issues of ownership and the perceived impact of the advent of Mentor Points on the continued existence of small mentoring organisations.

Training and Support

The Mentor Points' role in ensuring that mentors were trained to a common standard was valued by partner organisations and by 17 of the schools which reported that the mentors that they had received were well trained.

The Mentor Points had established a common approach to the training of mentors which they recruited or which were referred to them by partner organisations. They offered basic training which could be supplemented by specialist training relating to the specific focus of particular mentoring programmes.

* figures include peer mentors

One Mentor Point had provided training for school coordinators, one had researched and developed a training programme for Learning Mentors, and one had organised a programme which prepared pupils to become mentees.

Mentor Points were aware of the importance of providing customer care for mentors and considered that the contribution of schools and community projects was vital to providing care on a day-to-day basis. Schools were found to offer some support, including providing feedback to mentors and including them in review sessions.

Developing Coherence

Working with Partners

During their pilot year, the Mentor Points had made contact with 15 local partners (e.g. EBPs and mentor projects) and started to work with them, for example in the recruitment and placement of mentors. However, they had not conducted thorough audits to ascertain the full range of organisations and mentoring programmes and the range of work in which they were involved.

Where partner organisations agreed to cooperate, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each party, and the value that the Mentor Point could add to mentoring locally, was a key challenge for coordinators.

The training of mentors was an area where partner organisations made use of the Mentor Points and the provision of a standard training programme across an area was widely regarded as making an important contribution to achieving coherence.

Quality

While the Mentor Points did not adopt a strategic approach to assuring quality in their areas from the outset, they were working towards implementing quality standards frameworks.

During the pilot year, Mentor Point staff grew increasingly aware of the need to be more systematic in dealing with quality issues in their work, including management and administration, marketing and publicity, recruitment, training, and monitoring and evaluation.

The Mentor Points viewed supporting mentoring programmes to achieve the NMN's Approved provider status as part of their future role.

Outcomes of Mentor Points

The evaluation found that the Mentor Points had made creditable progress towards achieving the aims set for their pilot year. The outcomes achieved were consonant with what was expected of them in this relatively short timescale.

There was evidence that the Mentor Points had established a profile and raised interest in mentoring in their local areas. They had significantly increased the

supply of volunteer mentors, though two had not met their target recruitment figures. They had had a measure of success in attempting to make the training, support and the services they offered as accessible to all parts of the community. Progress was also being made in implementing minimum quality standards.

Mentor Points had found bringing improved coherence to local mentoring arrangements to be the greatest challenge. The evaluation found that the EBP-model Mentor Point had achieved most success in fulfilling the role of a Mentor Point.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Mentoring is playing an increasing role in the education and development of young people. The general purpose of mentoring is to help young people to realise their potential and become effective citizens.

The scale and variety of mentoring programmes have expanded markedly in recent years. There are hundreds of mentoring programmes around the country making use of the experience and expertise of adult volunteers from business and the community. Furthermore, mentoring is now part of the support provided for young people participating in government-funded training programmes (e.g. New Deal) and programmes aimed at addressing social exclusion and crime. The Connexions Service will also draw on the resources of volunteer mentors.

A significant development has been the introduction of Learning Mentors through Excellence in Cities (EiC) which aims to reduce barriers to learning and enhance young people's performance and achievements. Learning Mentors are paid employees based in schools whose job involves supporting pupils, including accessing appropriate services, such as the support of volunteer mentors, if needed. A Learning Mentor network has been formed and the first national conference took place in February 2002.

Peer mentoring – the mentoring of younger pupils by older students – is increasingly being used to provide additional support to young people and tackle a wide range of issues, including helping pupils to improve their literacy and easing their transition from primary to secondary school. The three Mentor Points (described later in this section) helped to coordinate a pilot programme, in which six schools trialled a mentoring guidance and support pack developed by the National Mentoring Network (NMN). The peer mentoring materials will be used by a further 150 schools from September 2002.

Another significant development has been the introduction of the Approved Provider Standard for mentoring programmes. Developed by the NMN, and supported by the Home Office Active Community Unit and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), its purpose is to establish an operational standard for mentoring programmes and to provide a benchmark for organisations which aim to establish programmes.

An Excellence in Mentoring award has been developed to enable schools to evaluate their performance through a self-review process. This is currently being piloted.

Acknowledging the rapid expansion of mentoring programmes which were being coordinated by numerous organisations, including schools, education business partnerships (EBPs), and community organisations, the government decided to launch three pilot Mentor Points. Focused particularly on mentoring in schools, their purpose was to improve the coherence and enhance the quality of volunteer mentoring. It was envisaged that the Mentor Points would act as one-stop shops to recruit, train, and support people volunteering to be mentors.

In 2000, the DfES invited bids to set up and run Mentor Points from organisations or consortia in the first round of EiC areas. Established in 2001, initially for one year, the Mentor Points were located in three Phase one EiC areas. The funding for the Mentor Points was channelled via the DfES Schools Plus Division to the NMN which managed the contracts.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Mentor Point Pilots

The three Mentor Points were established as pilot agencies in order to enable the DfES and NMN to explore the ways in which a Mentor Point could work most successfully. Identification of key lessons learned in implementing such an agency, through observing the practice and approaches adopted in each pilot Mentor Point, would contribute to the expansion of Mentor Points in other areas.

The aims of the Mentor Points were to:

- ◆ bring improved coherence to the recruitment, training and support of volunteer mentors across the EiC areas
- ◆ raise the profile of mentoring by raising the awareness and understanding of their benefits
- ◆ significantly increase the supply of volunteer mentors for school-age children and young people
- ◆ work towards the implementation of minimum quality standards within all partner organisations
- ◆ ensure full equality of access to the range of training, support and services on offer.

The Mentor Points were expected to work closely with schools and partner organisations to achieve these aims. They were also required to develop and maintain monitoring and evaluation procedures to measure individual, educational and community impact.

Each Mentor Point was given a target of recruiting 400 volunteer mentors. The target figure comprised 300 new mentors and 100 re-engaged mentors (those who were already involved in mentoring). Peer mentors could be included in the number of mentors recruited.

The Home Office and the DfES jointly established four new Mentor Points in spring 2002. Altogether, the seven Mentor Points will expand on the DfES's mentoring in schools remit and seek to contribute to the Government's civil renewal agenda, in particular by focusing on the most deprived parts of the areas that they cover. Each Mentor Point will target one or more of the following:

- ♦ Mentoring young people outside the school environment
- ♦ Mentoring for, and by, older people (those over 50 years of age)
- ♦ Mentoring serving a rural community.

The DfES commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake an evaluation of the original three Mentor Points between February 2001 and April 2002. The aims and objectives are set out in the next section.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

The overall aims of the research were to evaluate the extent to which the Mentor Points had improved the coherence of school-based mentoring arrangements and had increased the number of new mentors available to schools.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- ♦ assess the extent to which Mentor Points were successful in achieving their objectives
- ♦ identify the key outcomes from Mentor Points both for schools and other partners involved, explain how these outcomes came about, and identify the extent to which they are sustainable over the longer term
- ♦ identify the factors which influence schools' use of the Mentor Points and explain the way use varies across schools
- ♦ establish the extent of any externalities from the use of Mentor Points such as unforeseen benefits or unwanted consequences of using them
- ♦ identify any changes which could be made to Mentor Points to increase their effectiveness.

When interpreting the findings from the evaluation, it should be noted that the pilot Mentor Points were expected to explore the possible roles that they could play within the context of their locality which differ across the three areas.

1.4 Research Methods

The project used qualitative research methods to gather information and data from the three Mentor Points and from the community partners and schools with which they worked.

Four visits were carried out to the Mentor Points during the lifetime of the project. The purpose of the visits was to undertake in-depth interviews with the coordinators (the word ‘coordinator’ is used throughout the report to refer to staff who are running Mentor Points) and administrative staff in order to gain an understanding of how the Mentor Points were set up, how they were organised and how they were operating. One of the visits focused on the recruitment and training of mentors and one focused on quality assurance issues.

The researchers played the role of ‘critical friend’ to the Mentor Point staff which involved discussing issues and facilitating the exchange of practice. The role also involved giving aggregated feedback to the Mentor Points on users’ views of the services that they were providing.

The Mentor Points were asked to complete questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the project providing data on the numbers of mentors they had recruited and their characteristics.

The evaluation gained data from 29 schools (27 secondary and two primary) across the three Mentor Point areas: 12 schools in one Mentor Point area, nine in the second, and eight in the third. The schools were selected to represent the type of schools in each area and to include schools which had a range of experience of using volunteer adult mentors.

Background data was collected from the schools by telephone interview on their previous and current use of adult mentors. Interviews were undertaken with staff at 29 schools. A total of 29 teachers and 15 Learning Mentors were interviewed. The teachers interviewed included heads, deputy heads, senior teachers and those with responsibility for organising learning support. The aim of the interviews was to ascertain how mentoring fitted into schools’ policies for pastoral support and improving pupil performance, what level of understanding schools had of the Mentor Points, and how they rated the service provided by them.

Interviews were also carried out with representatives of 12 partner organisations, including mentor programmes, EBPs, EiC, and an Education Action Zone. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a broader understanding of the emerging role of the Mentor Points within their communities and to find out the extent to which they were helping to develop a more coordinated approach to mentoring.

The evaluation benefited from the researchers' participation in two workshops attended by DfES and Home Office personnel, representatives of the NMN, and Mentor Point staff.

1.5 Structure of the Report

The structure of the report is as follows:

- ♦ Chapter 2 presents the key characteristics of the three Mentor Points and examines how schools and partner organisations viewed their roles
- ♦ Chapter 3 investigates the progress made by the Mentor Points in building capacity through promotion, recruitment and training
- ♦ Chapter 4 focuses on the extent to which the Mentor Points had achieved the aim of developing coherence through working with other organisations and promoting quality assurance
- ♦ the final chapter presents observations on practice, including lessons learned, identifies areas for future development of the Mentor Points and presents the main outcomes of the pilot year of the three Mentor Points.

2. MENTOR POINTS

This chapter presents an outline of the main features of the Mentor Points. Firstly, the context in which the Mentor Points are working is described. Secondly, the aims of each Mentor Point are set out. Thirdly, management and staffing arrangements are explained, followed by an exposition of the approaches taken by the pilots.

The second part of the chapter presents research findings on the understanding that schools and other partner organisations have of the purpose and role of the Mentor Points.

2.1 Key Characteristics of the Mentor Points

2.1.1 The Consortium Model

Background and Context

The consortium model Mentor Point serves a large multi-ethnic city where nearly half of the population are from ethnic minority communities. There are nearly eighty secondary schools in the LEA which are spread over a wide geographical area. As with all the Mentor Point areas, it is located in a first-phase EiC area. From its inception, the Mentor Point formed close links with the EiC partnership, in particular through the Learning Mentor coordinator.

Through the consortium model, it was envisaged that a number of small organisations, which were well-established providers of mentors to schools in the area, would be brought together under the umbrella of the Mentor Point. The individual organisations tend to have a focus on a specific target group of young people, such as those from particular ethnic minority communities or with specific needs such as care leavers, and have expertise in supporting these types of young people.

Aims

In addition to the national aims of the Mentor Points, the consortium model sought to hold an accurate database of mentors and organisations looking for and/or able to provide mentors.

Management and staffing

The Mentor Point is staffed by one full-time coordinator and a part-time administrator. They were located for the pilot year in the offices of the Careers Service but have recently moved to a city centre location to be more

accessible. The Mentor Point has a steering group comprising representatives of EiC, Careers Service and EBP, Voluntary Service Council, the economic development department of the local authority, the youth and probation services and some of the organisations which provide mentors to schools. Individual members of the steering group are identified to take the lead in supporting the Mentor Point coordinator with different aspects of the Mentor Point's activities.

Approach

The consortium model Mentor Point aimed to meet the national aims and objectives through adopting the following approaches:

- ◆ improving coherence in recruitment, training and support of mentors through linking with existing organisations and providing a police checking and centralised training service which they could access;
- ◆ raising the profile of mentoring through having a clearly badged identity and central location and through a range of promotion campaigns which reach out into the community;
- ◆ increasing the supply of volunteer mentors for school age children through the recruitment campaigns and information packs for potential mentors and through linking into existing Learning Mentor networks to promote the value that volunteer mentors could add to their role;
- ◆ working towards quality standards through identifying and negotiating with partner organisations and providing the service of recruitment, police checks and training as an incentive for partners to become involved with the Mentor Point;
- ◆ ensure full equality of access through promoting widely to all communities and to all schools in the area.

The distinctive contribution of the consortium model to the provision of mentoring in the area was to seek to coordinate the range of activity which a number of specialist organisations were undertaking and to provide a centralised service for training and conducting police checks of mentors.

2.1.2 The Volunteer Bureau Model

Background and Context

The Mentor Point covers two central inner-London authorities. The area is characterised by stark contrasts of wealth and poverty, high levels of social deprivation in some wards and extremely ethnically diverse and transient communities. More than 120 languages are spoken in this area which has a considerable number of residents who are refugees and asylum seekers.

The area is relatively small and self-contained and has a total of 12 secondary schools and 68 primary schools. There is access to a wide range of businesses which are located in close proximity to schools and community organisations.

Connexions was piloted in this area and Personal Advisers are currently being appointed.

The model is based on a partnership between two volunteer bureaux both of which have considerable experience and expertise in recruiting and working with volunteers. The Mentor Point can draw on the expertise of both volunteer bureaux in recruiting and working with volunteers, and can draw on the expertise of the other partners in securing mentors from the business community. It has links with both local EBPs.

Aims

The main purpose of the Mentor Point as articulated in its bid was to bring coherence and clarity to volunteer mentoring for young people aged 11 to 19, with a particular focus on local ethnic minority communities.

Management and Staffing

The Executive Director of one of the volunteer bureau, which holds the contract for the Mentor Point, supervises the three members of staff who are employed by the bureau. The Mentor Point Advisory Group, which meets quarterly to advise and review strategy, has representation from a wide range of organisations including the LSC, EiC, Connexions, the volunteer bureaux directors, and EBP managers. The Mentor Point Management Group, comprising the two volunteer bureaux directors and the Mentor Point staff members, meets monthly to schedule work tasks and review progress.

Approach

The volunteer bureau model Mentor Point aimed to meet the national aims and objectives through adopting the following approaches:

- ◆ taking the lead in recruiting, training and supporting volunteers in school mentoring projects
- ◆ refining, developing and bringing greater permanence to existing mentoring projects
- ◆ providing support where necessary, particularly to new mentoring projects
- ◆ working towards the development of an effective brokerage system for mentoring opportunities
- ◆ developing a cross-borough standard and quality framework for the mentoring of young people in school- and community-based projects.

The distinctive contribution of the volunteer bureau model to the provision of mentoring in the area was to provide the impetus, networking skills, experience in working with volunteers, and support required to develop cross-borough strategies for increasing the number of organisations involved in mentoring and for recruiting and training mentors.

2.1.3 The Education-Business Partnership Model

Background and Context

This model involves two EBPs working together. It covers all of the schools in one LEA and those in an Education Action Zone (EAZ) in a second LEA. Both LEAs contain areas of unemployment and deprivation and the population is predominantly white, working class, although some refugees and asylum seekers have recently been housed locally. Interestingly, the two LEAs are not contiguous and Mentor Point staff have a journey of approximately 16 miles between the two areas.

The local EBP had previously supplied mentors to schools in both LEAs. One of these EBPs now hosts the Mentor Point team, while the other remains responsible for recruiting mentors for the EAZ. The two EBPs and the EAZ and EiC teams were all partners in the Mentor Point bid.

Aims

The purpose of the Mentor Point as set out in its bid was to extend mentoring coordination and coherence over a larger area than one EBP. In addition to the aims that all three Mentor Points were seeking to achieve, the EBP model had some particular targets, including:

- ◆ developing mentoring programmes to support identified groups of young people: peer mentoring, support for Looked After Children, literacy mentoring, primary-secondary school transition mentoring and occupationally focused mentoring that will enhance work experience provision
- ◆ developing a marketing and promotion strategy to tap sources of potential volunteers
- ◆ providing additional training for EiC Learning Mentors.

Management and Staffing

A new unit with two full-time staff was established in the premises of one of the EBPs to run the Mentor Point. One staff member coordinates the Mentor Point project and the main task of the second is the recruitment of mentors. Their location provides them with direct access to the staff overseeing the mentoring schemes in schools in one of the LEAs. Mentor Point staff are advised by a steering committee which includes representatives of the two EBPs, the EiC, the EAZ, business and community and teachers.

Approach

The education-business partnership model aimed to meet the national aims and objectives through adopting the following approaches:

- ◆ cross-boundary working within a compact area. The Mentor Point tested a model in which two business-education partnerships worked together;

- ♦ encouraging the growth of current mentoring provision and broadening the range of mentoring programmes locally;
- ♦ providing a means to develop and roll-out a City-wide service to resource mentor projects and to be seen as a focal point for supporting the development of new programmes;
- ♦ improving consistency – through developing a Mentor Point wide methodology for the recruitment and training of mentors;
- ♦ developing of a local quality framework in line with national developments.

The distinctive contribution of the consortium model to the provision of mentoring in the area was to build on existing education-business networks within the two EBPs. This provided good links with local businesses, with schools and with other local education initiatives (e.g. EiC, EAZ), as well as the expertise of the EBPs mentor trainers.

2.2 Mentor Point Roles

This section examines the perceptions that partner organisations (e.g. EBPs and established mentoring programmes) and schools had of the Mentor Points. When interviewed for the research, they were asked what they considered were the purpose and the roles of the Mentor Points.

The evaluation found that partner organisations perceived Mentor Points primarily as providers of a supply of trained mentors which they could then use as part of their mentoring programme. A typical view was that a Mentor Point was *'an umbrella group supplying a pool of mentors'*. Partners drew attention to the important role that Mentor Points were playing in training mentors to a common standard which they said enhanced the credibility of mentoring and helped in placing mentors.

Some partners had a broader perspective on the role of the Mentor Points viewing them as promoters of mentoring in general, promoters of high quality mentoring, and a resource base providing access to relevant publications.

Schools perceived Mentor Points mainly as providers of trained mentors who had been police checked. Teachers emphasised the importance of the police checks which they found reassuring. Another main role for the Mentor Points identified by six schools was to undertake key tasks such as the recruitment of mentors and related administration work. This was summarised by one interviewee who viewed the role as *'to select, and recruit and screen, so that it takes all the burden off the school. It's great that they do all the police checks and chasing up'*.

Six teachers thought that the Mentor Points would provide continuing support for them. This included offering advice, particularly during the start-up phase of the school's use of mentors, and help with matching mentors with mentees.

The teacher who viewed the local Mentor Point as ‘*a resource pool and advisory body*’ encapsulated this outlook.

The majority of the teachers interviewed considered that the Mentor Points had explained their purpose and roles clearly. A typical remark made by one interviewee was: ‘*I think I understand who they are and why they are there*’. Some also noted that the Mentor Points had usefully clarified what role they expected schools to play in working with them.

Another view was that the local Mentor Point was a new organisation which was clarifying its identity and purpose ‘*along the way*’ as it developed.

It is worth noting that in one area, where the Mentor Point supplied mentors to organisers of mentoring programmes rather than directly to schools, teachers were less aware of the Mentor Point’s role. Schools and partners were found to have similar perceptions of Mentor Points in the other two areas.

The following issues for consideration regarding the purpose and role of Mentor Points were identified:

- ◆ It is important that Mentor Points not only clearly set out their purpose and role, but also inform partners and schools what is expected of them.
- ◆ Communicating the purpose and role of Mentor Points is not a one-off event – it is advisable that initial messages are reinforced periodically.

3. BUILDING MENTORING CAPACITY

This chapter examines the way that the Mentor Points built capacity. The first section looks at how Mentor Points were promoted to businesses and community groups, schools and to individuals. This promotional activity led to the recruitment of partners, schools and mentors and this is discussed next, followed by information about the training provided for mentors and how this was viewed by partners and schools.

3.1 Promotion

Mentor Points targeted their promotional activities to inform and recruit three distinct types of partners. These were:

- ◆ the organisations currently providing mentors to schools in their area
- ◆ businesses and community and voluntary groups that were potential sources of mentors
- ◆ schools and community groups that were potential sources of young people who needed mentors.

In order to promote themselves, the Mentor Points therefore needed to:

- ◆ devise a marketing plan and develop marketing materials
- ◆ ‘badge’ provision to make it distinct and recognisable
- ◆ identify the existing mentoring programmes in the locality
- ◆ Identify the local business, community and voluntary organisations that could potentially provide mentors
- ◆ identify schools and community organisations that were likely to want to recruit mentors.

Mentor Points quickly recognised the importance of ‘branding’. They all emphasised the importance of having good quality marketing materials, both to be visually appealing and to promote the Mentor Point as a business-like organisation committed to quality. They set about trying to achieve their ‘branding’ quickly (e.g. through the development of a logo), in order to proceed with developing marketing materials, such as leaflets and brochures, posters and information packs. All three Mentor Points made use of commercial advertising for promotion. However, this was found to be costly and they pointed out that the choice of medium had to be carefully considered to ensure they were getting value for money. All three Mentor Points also put resources into developing a website in recognition of the increasing use of the internet by a range of individuals and agencies as a source of information.

Indeed one Learning Mentor reported that he had become aware of the Mentor Point through an internet search.

Promotion to other Mentoring Programmes

An important task of the Mentor Points was to coordinate the recruitment and supply of mentors in their locality and it was, therefore, crucial that they obtained the cooperation of the existing mentoring programmes. In promoting the Mentor Point, the staff needed to allay fears that they were a rival organisation. Promotion to the mentoring programmes was usually carried out through visits from Mentor Point personnel, who would explain their proposed function, face-to-face with the staff.

Promotion to Businesses, Community and Voluntary Groups and Individuals

The Mentor Points undertook a variety of established and innovative approaches to raise their profile in their local areas and to promote to businesses, community and voluntary groups and individuals. These included launch events, bus and radio advertising campaigns, leaflets in doctors' surgeries and community centres and presentations to companies, community and voluntary groups. Staff in two of the Mentor Points remarked on the high cost of advertising, particularly in the local press. Indeed, one reported that it had definitely rejected press advertising as 'too costly'. However, the third Mentor Point had used press advertising extensively. There was no evidence that the extent of press advertising was directly related to success in recruiting mentors.

All but one of the partner organisations reported that Mentor Points had been successful in raising the profile, and the success of these campaigns is further reflected in the large number of enquiries received, a number of which became mentor recruits. The large number of enquiries and expressions of interest which could be generated by promotional activities raised issues for the Mentor Point coordinators in terms of the staff resources required to respond to this level of interest. One of the Mentor Points, in particular, had some anxieties about balancing supply and demand when the number of volunteers exceeded the number of identified mentor requirements. During one interview, the coordinator said recruitment was '*at capacity – we've recruited all we can handle*'. This highlights a key role for the Mentor Points in identifying the level of demand for mentors in their area and developing this further. This could involve working creatively to identify uses for mentors within organisations to whom mentors are supplied already, who might consider themselves at 'capacity'. In addition further promotion of the benefits of mentoring, and the role of the Mentor Point in supporting this, to organisations who are not currently involved in mentoring could contribute to developing the demand for mentors to balance the efforts made to have a supply of mentors in their areas.

Mentor Points found that it was necessary to have systems in place to track potential mentors through the training and induction system. Waiting time

between volunteering and beginning training needed to be kept to the minimum, otherwise potential mentors lost interest. Marketing also had to be clear and unambiguous to ensure that potential mentors were fully aware of the commitment they were asked to make, and to whom. A coordinator said that she had *'got to be very careful when recruiting because sometimes maybe they haven't understood properly'*. Two Mentor Points reported that some potential mentors thought that volunteering was a way into becoming paid learning mentors which, though possible, was not the aim of the scheme. There were also recruits who did not wish to mentor school children, preferring to work with some other age group, although this was easily remedied by referring them to other local mentoring schemes.

Having an organisation locally that could dedicate time and resources to promotion and marketing was valued by partner organisations. They also acknowledged that the DfES's support for Mentor Points, and thereby for mentoring, helped to raise the status of this role among existing and potential mentors.

Promoting the Mentor Points in Schools

All three Mentor Points made early and ongoing contacts with schools. Usually starting off with a formal introduction by letter, or through a presentation to a group of school representatives. Presentations, to explain the function of Mentor Points, were made to headteachers, mentoring coordinators and Learning Mentors. To promote mentoring to schools, and the service which the Mentor Points could provide, Mentor Point coordinators made visits to individual schools.

Having opportunities to ask questions and gain reassurance was valued by school staff, and found to be the most effective approach to promoting Mentor Points in schools. Evidence suggests that the Mentor Points had been successful in promoting to schools and raising the profile of mentoring locally. For example, one school coordinator said the Mentor Point had *'helped to bring more business people into the school'*. Eight out of the 29 schools indicated that they were using volunteer mentors for the first time as a consequence of their involvement with the Mentor Points, and 12 schools reported that they had increased their numbers of mentors. However, schools sometimes expressed concern at the numbers or types of mentors that were provided by the Mentor Points. There were school coordinators who said they had been promised more mentors than were provided, while others had made a specific request to fit in with the profiles of particular students (e.g. gender, ethnicity) and matches were not available. Mentor Points need to be realistic about the level and profile of recruitment they are likely to achieve and, if promises are made, they need to carefully target their marketing to ensure that they can be fulfilled.

Nearly all schools visited for the evaluation indicated that they thought the function of Mentor Points was to recruit, train and police check potential mentors. In one area, schools, whilst acknowledging that they had met with Mentor Point personnel, were unsure of their actual role. It is worth bearing in

mind that Mentor Points were set up to support and work with existing mentoring programmes. The existing programme may have continued to be the main point of contact for schools, requiring them to have contact with or understanding of the Mentor Point.

The following issues for consideration in promoting mentoring were identified:

- ◆ Advertising is costly and the medium needs to be carefully selected to provide best value.
- ◆ Consideration should be given to having sufficient staff and resources to respond to large numbers of enquiries from the public.
- ◆ Responses to advertising should be followed up quickly, or interest may be lost.
- ◆ Information should be clear and unambiguous to ensure that recruits are fully aware of what they are being asked to do.
- ◆ Mentor Points and their partners need to be realistic about what they will be able to provide.

3.2 Recruitment

Promotion to the three types of partners was aimed specifically at recruiting them to work with the Mentor Point. However, the Mentor Points' relationships and way of working with each type of partner differed.

- ◆ Organisations currently involved in mentoring in the area were to be recruited to work alongside the mentor point. Recruitment of mentors would become the joint responsibility of the mentor point and the other mentoring organisations. The mentor point would also oversee training to ensure that it was all of comparable quality and ensure that police checks were organised and recorded.
- ◆ **Businesses and community and voluntary groups and individuals** were potential sources of mentors. They were to be targeted to recruit employees or other contacts to participate as mentors.
- ◆ **Schools and community groups** were potential sources of young people who needed mentors and were to be recruited as users of the provision.

Recruiting Other Mentoring Programmes

In order to fulfil their role as a 'one-stop shop' for mentoring, the Mentor Points needed to identify the mentoring programmes operating locally and to seek to develop effective working relationships in order to support local delivery.

The evaluation found that as mentoring programmes were already in place in the Mentor Point areas, there were concerns about ownership. Careful negotiation was required to recruit these existing organisations to cooperate with the Mentor Points, which was costly of both time and personnel. For example, all three Mentor Points visited programmes individually, in order to negotiate access and coordination arrangements. Existing mentoring organisations could choose whether or not they became partners with the Mentor Point, there was no compulsion. Therefore, the Mentor Points' marketing strategies tended to make much of what they could offer the programmes in terms of help with recruitment, free training and, in two of the mentor points, police checks. The issues and challenges which the Mentor Points encountered in working with partner organisations in seeking to achieve coherence will be discussed further in Section 4.1. The evidence with regard to recruiting these partners suggests two good practice recommendations for the work of Mentor Points:

- ◆ An audit of mentoring programmes should be carried out, ideally during the process of preparing the bid, or alternatively, as soon as the Mentor Point is set up, to provide data on the extent of mentoring in an area.
- ◆ All mentoring programmes in a locality should be invited to participate in the bid to set up a Mentor Point. Providing a degree of 'ownership' could help build relationships and develop the coordinating role of the Mentor Point.

Recruiting Businesses, Community and Voluntary Groups and Individuals

The second strand of the Mentor Points' promotion strategy was aimed at recruiting businesses, community groups and voluntary groups which had potential for providing a pool of mentors, and at recruiting individual volunteers who were willing to become mentors. Each Mentor Point had a challenging recruitment target of 300 new mentors and recruitment began at a very early stage, often while marketing materials were still in preparation.

Liaison between personnel in the three Mentor Points was encouraged from the start, through early meetings arranged by the NMN and DfES. This liaison, which continued throughout the project, proved very useful, since the mentor points were able to learn from each other. An example was the exchange of marketing strategies. For instance, a successful radio appeal made by one Mentor Point encouraged another to try this. In addition to personal contact and the radio, the Mentor Points produced a range of marketing materials, including:

- ◆ Leaflets and brochures to raise interest in the Mentor Point concept
- ◆ Posters
- ◆ Information packs for companies and for potential recruits
- ◆ Advertising
- ◆ Websites.

Two of the three Mentor Points aimed their recruitment mainly at businesses and community and voluntary groups, since these were viewed as likely to provide the most cost-effective way of targeting larger numbers of potential recruits. Linking with organisations sometimes provided Mentor Point staff with access to internal communication methods, such as email, postal ‘pigeon-holes’ and company newsletters, which provided ideal opportunities for sending individual appeals to a large number of potential recruits.

The two Mentor Points that had approached organisations found that a preliminary discussion with company personnel paid dividends. They would telephone or visit to explain the scheme and then arrange to give a presentation to a group of employees, usually on the company’s premises, followed by a question and answer session during which they could hand round information packs to those who expressed an interest. Running these sessions regularly enabled Mentor Point personnel to refine their presentation and increase confidence in their professionalism, which also helped their marketing.

Community organisations were also potential sources of mentors and Mentor Point personnel made early contact with these and charities in their area. These contacts were sometimes followed by presentations to groups of charity workers or their client group (e.g. retirement groups).

In targeting individuals, the third Mentor Point devised two of the most innovative methods of contact. These were, an advertising slot on a local radio station serving the local African-Caribbean community, which produced a large number of responses and advertisements on buses, which gained fewer applicants. This Mentor Point succeeded in recruiting a high proportion of mentors from ethnic minority communities which could help to address the need identified by school personnel to match mentees with adults from similar ethnic, social or religious backgrounds.

Evidence on the numbers recruited suggests that recruiting through businesses or other organisations provided a larger pool of recruits in a shorter time than targeting individuals. Recruiting individuals may be more difficult to do for the following reasons:

- ◆ Information sent by post following a direct enquiry from an individual may be more difficult to convert into a recruit. Individuals responding to an advertisement and asking for an information pack can remain anonymous, whereas those who have met face-to-face with Mentor Point personnel may feel under more obligation to inform them whether they intend to participate.
- ◆ In a group presentation, questions or doubts can be dealt with immediately by Mentor Point personnel, rather than lingering while the individual debates whether or not to commit.

During their pilot year the Mentor Points recruited, trained and placed 156, 153 and 329 mentors (including peer mentors). This represents between 40 per cent and 82 per cent of their target of 400 (i.e. 300 new mentors and support for 100 ‘re-engaged’ mentors). The Mentor Points were able to

include a small number of 're-recruits' (i.e. mentors who had been previously engaged by the mentoring programmes) and peer mentors in their target figures. There may be a number of explanations for the shortfall in numbers recruited. For instance, as mentioned earlier, although some promotional campaigns were very successful, the small staffing teams in the Mentor Points meant there were some difficulties in responding quickly to the volume of enquiries. Staff changes and the late recruitment of staff to the Mentor Points also added to the burden of administration and reduced the time available to follow up enquiries. These findings highlight the importance of planning the recruitment of Mentor Point staff carefully in the initial stages and putting in place contingencies to account for staff change or sickness.

The Mentor Point that met its recruitment targets divided the total number required into a series of milestones which staff could work towards in each quarter. It also set up administrative systems to track enquiries. This appears to have been helpful both in planning promotional drives and in handling enquiries efficiently.

The mentors recruited were from a range of backgrounds, reflecting the context of the local area. For example, more than half of the mentors recruited by one Mentor Point were black. Around 70 per cent of mentors were female and 30 per cent male, across the Mentor Points. Although, in some instances Mentor Points had been able to respond to specific requirements, schools and partner organisations reported a continuing need for male mentors, especially black males. They also required particular types of mentors, including Muslims and those from the range of ethnic minorities that reflected the diversity in their institution. Partner organisations continued to recruit mentors as well as placing mentors recruited through the Mentor Points, therefore Mentor Points were contributing to a net increase in the numbers of mentors in their areas.

The evidence suggests that when recruiting mentors, Mentor Points should begin by targeting larger organisations, build capacity quickly and then target smaller businesses, communities and individuals.

Recruiting Schools and Community Groups

Mentor Points targeted and recruited schools and community groups in need of mentors to work with their young people. They visited schools early in the life of the project in order to discuss how many mentors they required. All three Mentor Points were also contracted to facilitate the DfES peer mentoring pilot and negotiating this and the training for EiC Learning Mentors, undertaken by one Mentor Point, provided an additional link giving access to schools.

Whilst schools had been primed to receive mentors, in practice this tended not to happen until rather later than anticipated, due to the time it took to recruit and train new applicants and get them police checked. Indeed, a few schools complained that they had not got all the mentors they had asked for, although most reported that their requirements had been satisfied. Some teachers were adamant that they could not cope with increasing the number of mentors they

had in the school, since they created additional work. These teachers often felt obliged to meet and greet the mentors, track mentees and hold follow-up sessions in which mentors could be provided with feedback on the mentees' progress. Three schools raised issues about taking pupils out of lessons. Teachers said that schools, particularly those in the most deprived areas, experienced some tension between the benefits that young people could gain from being mentored and the possible deleterious effect on SATs results of their being taken out of lessons to meet the mentor. As one teacher remarked, *'the school is driven by the league tables and OFSTED inspections'*. These comments emphasise the context within which mentoring, and the Mentor Points, operate and the need for sensitivity towards this from Mentor Point staff. In addition, it suggests that Mentor Point staff need to ensure that they identify approaches which can be adopted to minimise disruption to the pupils and school through discussions with teachers.

Schools were more likely to raise issues about the types of mentors provided than mentor numbers. For example, some schools wanted more males and some would have preferred mentors from a greater range of ethnic backgrounds that fitted with the ethnicity of the mentees. It was also suggested that a pool of mentors would have been useful, from which schools could select those most suitable for their pupils.

While some schools interviewed new mentors, met and talked with them, and knew exactly the training and police checking they had gone through, others seem to have accepted them without question and not had any contact once the initial introductions to the school had been made. This indicates a need for training for some school staff in how to facilitate mentors' relationship with the mentees, and with the school.

Good practice recommendations for recruitment of schools include:

- ◆ ascertain at the outset the numbers and types of mentors needed
- ◆ agree with all partners the scope of mentor interviews and who will carry them out
- ◆ ensure that school staff are adequately trained to provide mentors with appropriate customer care.

The following issues for consideration in recruiting mentors were identified:

- ◆ Do not underestimate the time and staff required to manage enquiries from individuals and agencies. Ensure that adequate staff are recruited in the initial stages of the Mentor Point and put contingencies in place to address staff change and sickness.
- ◆ Targeting businesses and community organisations provided a larger audience for the promotional materials and correspondingly larger numbers of recruits and was therefore more cost-effective.
- ◆ Schools often have specific requirements for mentors. Mentor Points need to know what these are, so they can target recruitment.
- ◆ New recruits need to be engaged quickly in the mentoring scheme or they may lose interest and be lost.

3.3 Training and Support

The potential provision of volunteer mentors who were trained was one of the motivating factors for schools making use of the Mentor Points. Furthermore, some of the partner organisations which also provide mentors welcomed the opportunity to have generic mentor training provided for their mentors and the introduction of a common standard. As one explained ‘[Mentor Point] is supposed to provide a benchmark training to all individuals involved in mentoring.’

The approaches to training which were adopted by the Mentor Points developed over the course of the pilot year following reflective review.

Initially, all of the Mentor Points made use of **external providers** to deliver their training, although the nature of the providers, and the issues which emerged, differed across the Mentor Points.

- ◆ One Mentor Point used two of its partner organisations which had existing expertise in delivering training to mentors. This required care in recognising their expertise while developing and enriching the training and negotiating a common approach to ensure that mentors were trained to the same standard.
- ◆ Two Mentor Points used consultants, or another organisation, with recognised expertise in training mentors to deliver the training and developed appropriate training courses in consultation with the providers. This approach proved costly was not sustainable.

All of the Mentor Points offered mentors the opportunity to gain **accreditation**, although this was not compulsory. Two offered accreditation through the Open College Network (OCN) and one through the City and Guild’s Mentor Award. However, this option was delayed while awaiting approval or recognition of an appropriate qualification by the National Awarding Body. Nevertheless, the value of offering accreditation was

acknowledged by the coordinator of one partner organisation who stressed that the possibility of sending mentors on an accredited programme, and informing schools that mentors were accredited, '*goes a long way*' in gaining the involvement of organisations and individuals.

At first, the **duration** of basic training across the Mentor Points varied but six hours emerged as a common length of time for this provision. The **content** of the training was informed by the expertise of the Mentor Point coordinators, reviews of training provided by other mentoring programmes and, in one case, gaining feedback from mentors on the training which they had previously received. The main elements of training which were common across the Mentor Points were found to be:

- ◆ the concept of mentoring – 'What is mentoring?'
- ◆ roles and responsibilities
- ◆ practical advice and 'dos and don'ts'
- ◆ boundaries
- ◆ communication and listening skills, including 'active listening'
- ◆ confidentiality and child protection issues.

This general training could be supplemented by '**specialist** training' relating to the specific focus of a programme a mentor would be linked with, for example literacy or working with African-Caribbean boys. In some cases, such additional training was provided by the Mentor Point's training providers. However, some partner organisations emphasised the need for this training to be delivered by them as they had the relevant knowledge and expertise. One effect of '*taking the burden of generic training*' away from the specialist partner organisations, reported by one partner programme coordinator, was to enable him to spend more time focusing the training of his mentors on the specialist area in which they were working.

One of the challenges for the Mentor Points was to identify the **training needs** of individual mentors, in particular those who had previously mentored or who used 'mentoring' skills in their work and life. The level of existing skills of a potential mentor were usually identified through a recruitment interview and mentors generally undertook the induction training regardless. Indeed, the attendance of experienced mentors at these sessions was said to enhance the provision for novices. Mentors could also attend units of the more extensive, accredited training, should they wish to augment their skills and one Mentor Point coordinator noted that mentors were often keen to undertake additional training even where they had been trained previously. There may be value in exploring mechanisms for systematic identification of the skills and training needs of mentors in order to ensure a smooth and consistent approach in Mentor Points' response to recruiting, training and placing large numbers of mentors.

In order to **evaluate** the training provided, two Mentor Points had developed feedback sheets for participants and the third gained verbal feedback from

mentors. In addition, Mentor Point coordinators sometimes attended training sessions. The importance of having an explicit evaluation process for the training, which involves participants, was emphasised by one partner organisation representative who explained that the existence of evaluation was one of the measures by which mentors, and partner organisations, assessed the quality and value of the training.

In general, **school staff** perceived that their mentors were of good quality and, although often not aware of the detail of the training they had received, around two-thirds of school staff who commented considered them to be well-trained. One teacher commented: *'It's brilliant that the mentors are all trained, although it is only six hours, it is better than nothing'* and another said that *'these people coming in are so well trained that they are just [ready] for us to use'*. A learning mentor observed that the Mentor Point *'offers adults training, quite intensive training, in mentoring. For mentors themselves it is a gateway for another career activity, for the receiver it is an opportunity to use a trained adult in a mentoring capacity for free.'*

The evaluation found that, schools had provided **additional support** to mentors in various forms as follows:

- ♦ Most schools provided an induction to the school and in some cases put together a *'pack'* for mentors containing the school prospectus and key policies.
- ♦ Some schools provided a briefing about individual pupils to the mentors who would be meeting with them, while others preferred to allow the pupils to *'speak for themselves'*
- ♦ Some school staff provided regular feedback to the mentors, in some instances after every mentoring session and occasionally before and after mentoring. Alternatively, feedback was provided as needed, for example in response to a specific issue or incident arising. A few teachers noted the burden this placed on them but one senior teacher stressed the importance of regular communication between the mentors and school staff.
- ♦ Support from Learning Mentors in some schools was extensive. In a number of instances, volunteer mentors were regarded as part of the team and deployed in the same way as Learning Mentors. Consequently, they would sometimes shadow a Learning Mentor before meeting their mentee and would be supported on an ongoing basis by the Learning Mentors. Some Learning Mentors noted that supporting a volunteer mentor could be a constraint on their time for mentoring pupils, but also valued the opportunity to supplement what they could offer pupils by having a volunteer mentor.
- ♦ Some schools held review sessions with groups of mentors every term or half term in order to support them.

The Mentor Point coordinators recognised the importance of customer care in supporting, and thereby retaining mentors. They regarded the provision of day-to-day customer care for mentors when they were in the host school, as

primarily the responsibility of schools. Indeed, as one Mentor Point coordinator commented '*it is important that schools actively engage mentors*'. In order to encourage and support schools to undertake this role, one Mentor Point provided training for school coordinators. Alternatively, where the Mentor Point was linking with organisations who placed mentors in schools, the ongoing customer care role was largely undertaken by partner organisations. Nevertheless, the Mentor Point coordinators were a point of contact for mentors and one aimed to establish self-support mentor groups. Through adopting these approaches, Mentor Point staff sought to manage the numbers of mentors which they had recruited in recognition of the challenge, which was also highlighted by a programme coordinator, who said that '*if [Mentor Point] was to place mentors directly in schools, mentors would be isolated because [Mentor Point] does not have the resources to support 500 mentors*'.

In addition to organising and facilitating training for volunteer mentors, two of the Mentor Points had developed training for others involved in mentoring, as outlined below.

- ◆ One Mentor Point provided training for **school coordinators** which briefed them on their roles and responsibilities in supporting the delivery of volunteer mentoring in schools and provided guidance and documents.
- ◆ One Mentor Point provided 'training' or preparation for **young people** who would be mentees to ensure that they understood what the experience would involve.
- ◆ One Mentor Point researched and developed a training programme for **Learning Mentors** which included training in ICT and learning styles.

The following issues for consideration in training were identified:

- ◆ consulting with partner organisations in developing the content of training and draw on their knowledge and expertise and identifying what will be covered in the generic and specialist training elements
- ◆ investigating the cost implications of using external providers for training, especially where large numbers of mentors are to be trained
- ◆ communicating the dates of training to mentors and partner organisations well in advance of the sessions
- ◆ how to keep the waiting time for mentors undertaking training to a minimum
- ◆ keeping partner organisations regularly informed of the attendance at training sessions of mentors who will be placed by their programme and when the training has been completed and, if appropriate, accredited
- ◆ how best to draw on and be sensitive to the diversity of experience, knowledge and skills of the mentor and provide the training at an appropriate level
- ◆ providing good quality, professionally presented, training materials to mentors
- ◆ developing a clear formal evaluation procedure for the training which involves participants, the outcomes of which are communicated to partner organisations.

4. DEVELOPING COHERENCE

This chapter outlines the impact which the Mentor Points had on developing coherence in mentoring provision in their areas. It discusses the two main aspects which contribute to coherence – building relationships with existing mentoring programmes and developing a common approach to quality assurance. Issues for consideration in undertaking each of these roles are also presented.

4.1 Working with Partners

One function of the Mentor Points was to seek to coordinate and develop coherence in mentoring in their areas. As noted in Section 3.1, the three Mentor Points had promoted themselves to, and made links with, some of the key mentoring deliverers which they had identified in their areas. In some cases, these organisations had already committed to their involvement as part of the bid to establish a Mentor Point in an area. For example, one explained that the organisation was working with the Mentor Point because of an explicit agreement that the Mentor Point would take over the supply of mentors to a group of schools with which the organisation was working. As the coordinator of the partner organisation explained, he used the Mentor Point because *‘in a sense we had no option [Mentor Point] were having to fulfil a contract in our schools’*.

In the course of their pilot year, the Mentor Point coordinators’ awareness of the other main providers of volunteer mentoring in their areas was increasing. However, no formal audit of provision, which identified the key players, their mode of operation, the numbers of mentors they supplied and the client groups they worked with, had been undertaken and documented. Moreover, a similar audit of the range of mentoring within schools, had not been a focus of the pilot year of the Mentor Points. Nevertheless, the Mentor Points had each linked with around five mentoring programmes in their areas, such as those run by the local EBP and voluntary organisations which worked with specific target groups such as the Pakistani community. In their second year of operation, there is scope for the Mentor Points to explore further the range of organisations which are providing and using mentors locally, in order to promote the potential to form mutually productive relationships between the Mentor Point and mentoring programmes.

The Mentor Points’ role in working with the partners which they had identified, in order to establish coherence, related to six key elements:

- ◆ gaining the involvement of partner mentoring programmes
- ◆ clarifying roles and responsibilities
- ◆ recruitment of mentors

- ♦ training of mentors
- ♦ quality assurance
- ♦ networking and sharing practice.

The Mentor Points had very different environments in which to seek to **gain the involvement of partner mentoring programmes**. For example, one had few and clearly-identified mentoring organisations which had committed themselves to the Mentor Point in the bidding process. Even so, careful negotiation was needed to agree each organisation's roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the Mentor Point, although there was already an assumption that they would work together if their bid was successful. Another Mentor Point had identified other key mentoring programmes in the locality and had made contact with them. However, working relationships had not yet been established with all of these programmes.

The third Mentor Point had great difficulty in gaining the involvement of partner mentoring programmes. This was mainly due to the issue of ownership because these existing programmes, which were many, tended to charge schools for the provision of mentors to cover the administration and staff costs of supplying and supporting volunteer mentors. The programmes were often run by small charities which recruited mentors from the community to support very specific young people, often based on ethnic or religious groups. The staff were often members of the communities which enabled them to understand the issues for the young people and recruit appropriate mentors to support them. Indeed, one coordinator of a partner organisation commented that mentoring *'is best done by organisations born out of the communities they serve'*. DfES funding enabled the Mentor Point to make mentors available to schools at no cost. This was reported to be an area of concern for the existing small mentoring programmes, to both their revenue and their established relationships with schools. This view was substantiated by both of the coordinators of such programmes which were interviewed for the evaluation. As a result, Mentor Point personnel expended much time and effort trying to resolve these issues and involve the partner programmes with limited success.

Where partner organisations agreed to work with the Mentor Point, clarifying the respective **roles and responsibilities** of each party, and the value which the Mentor Point could add to mentoring locally, was a challenge for the Mentor Point coordinators. It emerged that partner organisations wished to link with the Mentor Points to meet their individual needs and that there was no one common approach. For example, one partner programme used the Mentor Point to conduct police checks and take up references, while another used it as a facilitator of training and a third as a recruitment agency. As a service provider to partner organisations, partners emphasised the importance of the Mentor Point maintaining accurate records and effective mechanisms for communicating with partner organisations regarding mentors' progress through the police checking process or training.

In addition, in developing the relationship between the Mentor Point and partner organisations, coordinators had to strive to ensure that partner organisations felt *'respected for what we know and do'* in order to reassure partners that the Mentor Point was *'not set up to undermine and duplicate existing organisations'*. This view is illustrated by the perception of *one coordinator of a partner programme who observed that '[Mentor Point] is here to service mentoring, to develop mentoring, to keep mentoring high profile and give it credibility so it has to find ways of working with existing grass-roots service deliverers.'* Once the roles of the partner organisations and the Mentor Point had been negotiated and agreed, a further challenge encountered was communicating the respective roles to schools and voluntary groups where mentors will be placed, to avoid the *'hurdle of the schools and employers asking "where does [partner organisation] fit in?"'*

Access to additional mentors who had been **recruited** by the Mentor Points was a motivation for some partners to work with the Mentor Point and one organisation reported that it had been able to reach its targets for mentors for the first time due to the mentors supplied by the Mentor Point. Those partners who used the Mentor Point for recruits, generally continued to recruit themselves and the Mentor Point mentors supplemented what they could provide, consequently the Mentor Points were not the sole recruiters of mentors in any area. One way in which Mentor Points were said to have contributed to coherence in mentoring in their local areas was through raising the profile of mentoring. Having a clearly badged agency for mentoring which had government support was reported to help volunteer mentors to feel part of a wider movement which was nationally recognised.

In addition to recruitment, some partners used the Mentor Point to undertake the police checks and take up references of mentors. One organisation explained that the Mentor Point's role should be to *'help organisations like us operate more effectively – i.e. help with the training side and police checks and vetting procedures'*. However, some of the partner organisations wished to continue to use their own processes for recruitment, for example asking mentors to complete a programme-specific application form or interviewing mentors themselves. One partner coordinator considered that this contributed to the quality service and commented that his programme was *'getting the right people as we're putting them through two sets of hoops'*. This finding highlights the challenge for Mentor Points in coordinating practice and gaining the confidence of the partner organisations in the Mentor Point processes so organisations are content to accept mentors without need for additional application processes. Alternatively, there may be a need for Mentor Points to explore mechanisms for identifying where the Mentor Point need not, for example, interview a mentor as they will be interviewed by the individual programme, in order to minimise duplication. One such mechanism which was being developed by the Mentor Points was an individually tailored Service Level Agreement document between the Mentor Point and the mentoring programme which outlines their respective roles and responsibilities.

Training of mentors was the main area where partner organisations made use of the Mentor Point and the provision of a standard training programme across an area was widely regarded as an important contribution to achieving coherence. One Mentor Point had worked closely with the two main existing providers of training to develop and improve the training and ensure a common approach. This was facilitated by the commitment of the two organisations to the Mentor Point. Other partners whose mentors received their generic training through the Mentor Point acknowledged the value of having an accredited programme to ‘*create ease in the minds of schools*’. In achieving a coherent approach to training, it was noted that Mentor Points need to consult with partner organisations and communicate details of training to their partners. Furthermore, if one organisation is to provide all the training of mentors in an area, partners noted the need for this provision to be as flexible as possible in order to respond to the times at which they had mentors ready.

As will be discussed in Section 4.2, **quality assurance** was a focus of the later stages of development of the Mentor Points and the impact on partners at the time of the evaluation was limited. However, some partners regarded this as a valuable role of the Mentor Point and felt that quality would be underpinned by common structures for recruitment and training which the Mentor Points were in the process of establishing. Although a few partner organisations mentioned that the initial work of the Mentor Point on quality standards had led them to reflect their own practice, some Mentor Point coordinators noted the, as yet largely unresolved, challenge of gaining the commitment of partner organisations to an agreed common quality standard and ensuring that they implement the standard.

The opportunity to **network and share practice** was a further way in which partners believed that Mentor Points could enhance coherence in mentoring locally. To a certain extent this was occurring, for example through practitioner meetings of local mentoring programmes and through providing a resource centre for Learning Mentors where they could also meet, but some partners indicated that this role could be further enhanced.

The evaluation found that Mentor Points had not succeeded in gaining the involvement of all of the mentoring programmes in their areas, indeed, they did not have a comprehensive list of all the programmes. In addition, they had no jurisdiction over the Mentoring Programmes in their area and could only work as amicably as they could with those that were willing to participate. Consequently, it emerged that, in this respect, full coordination and cohesion across an area was not yet happening. However, where partner programmes did work with the Mentor Point, they valued the existence of a common training programme and access to an agency which could provide recruits and undertake police checks.

The following issues for consideration in working with partners were identified:

- ◆ In negotiating with partners, consideration should be given to the extent to which common administration systems can be developed and the mechanisms for communicating between partners and the Mentor Points. The question of 'ownership' of the mentors who might be recruited by the partner and trained by the Mentor Points and placed and supported by the partner should be addressed.
- ◆ Where partner organisations charge schools for their mentors, partners and the Mentor Points needed to agree how to work together without affecting the income of the partner organisation.
- ◆ It was suggested that the development of common documentation, such as evaluation forms and a mentor handbook, by the Mentor Point would make a useful contribution to creating a coherent approach to mentoring.

4.2 Quality

Establishing a framework for quality assurance in the three Mentor Points took some time and, on reflection, the coordinators believed that such a framework should have been developed at an earlier stage in the Mentor Points' existence. It could be argued that the Mentor Points did not adopt a strategic approach to assuring quality in their area from the outset, insofar as they did not specify the constituent parts of quality in mentoring, or systematically review existing national and local frameworks, in order to develop a documented framework to which partner organisations and schools could pledge their commitment, and which could underpin their activities. However, the Mentor Points did implement, and were continuing to implement, operational structures and systems which, together, formed the basis of the provision of a quality service. Many of these have been discussed in earlier sections of the report. This section draws together and discusses the aspects of the Mentor Points' role which were identified by interviewees as being of particular relevance to assuring quality.

The main areas identified by Mentor Point coordinators which were considered to be central to quality provision, and where they aimed to develop quality systems, related to:

- ◆ management and administration of the Mentor Point
- ◆ marketing and publicity
- ◆ recruitment
- ◆ training
- ◆ preparation and matching of mentees
- ◆ links with partners
- ◆ customer care

- ◆ monitoring and evaluation.

Each of these areas, and some of the challenges encountered in addressing them, is discussed in turn below. It should be noted that each Mentor Point did not necessarily explore all of these aspects in developing their approaches to assuring quality.

There was a realisation among the Mentor Point coordinators that quality in the **management and administration** of Mentor Points included the identification of clear aims of the Mentor Point and an organisational structure with differentiated roles and responsibilities and sufficient staff. In addition, they acknowledged the need for a Mentor Point to develop appropriate procedures, such as protocols on data protection, and ensure that they were adhered to. To assist with the administration of the Mentor Point, and thereby to assure quality, coordinators aimed to set operational targets for example for answering the telephone and returning calls or the maximum length of time between an enquiry from a potential mentor, and their receipt of an application pack. However, some coordinators noted the challenge of meeting targets within the constraints of staff time.

In considering how to ensure quality in **marketing and publicity**, Mentor Point coordinators noted the need to have publicity materials which contained comprehensive, accurate and honest information. The quality of these materials could be assessed by other practitioners. As discussed previously, the Mentor Points adopted a range of approaches to promoting mentoring and the Mentor Point. They highlighted the need to evaluate the effectiveness of different marketing approaches and the content of materials, including through feedback from mentors, in order to identify and inform the further development of good quality approaches in marketing and publicity.

Quality practice in the **recruitment** of mentors was identified as a critical element in the overall delivery of a quality programme in order to ensure that the individuals who became mentors were suitable to undertake the role of mentor and form a good quality relationship with their mentee. Central to this was undertaking police checks for all mentors and following up references. Effective record keeping, and communication with partner organisations where appropriate, were key elements in taking a quality approach to these activities. In addition to these processes, quality could be assured by interviewing mentors and managing their expectations by communicating clearly the role of the mentor and the level of commitment involved. However, this requires considerable time and staff when large numbers of mentors are recruited. Furthermore, Mentor Point coordinators mentioned the potential conflict between achieving the target numbers of mentors to be recruited and assuring that all recruits were of an appropriate quality. The perception of one coordinator was illustrated by the comment '*can we really say "no" when we have to hit the numbers?*'. Nevertheless, all Mentor Points had systems such as references and police checks in place, and training of mentors, to assure the quality of mentors placed in schools.

A further critical factor in supporting quality in mentoring by ensuring that mentors were well-prepared for their role was the provision of good quality **training**, as discussed in Section 3.2. Mentor Point coordinators, and some of their partners, emphasised that there should be a standardised core training programme, which all mentors in an area undertake, and that coordination of this should be a key role of a Mentor Point. In assuring the quality of such training, coordinators noted that they should negotiate relevant provision with the training providers and undertake regular liaison with them. Having a rolling programme, to limit waiting times, flexibility in the timing of training and dates of training which are communicated well in advance of the sessions facilitate achieving the aim of ensuring that all mentors are fully trained, although there were challenges involved in seeking to provide such a responsive service.

It was suggested that quality in training is further enhanced by offering the opportunity for mentors to gain accreditation which could contribute to assuring schools or partner organisations of the quality of the mentors. Indeed, one measure of the quality of the Mentor Point used by teachers was the extent to which mentors had received training. The final aspect of quality assurance in training of mentors which was identified was the need to undertake evaluation through gaining feedback from participants using evaluation forms or discussions.

Mentor Point coordinators suggested that, in addition to the training of mentors, the **preparation and matching of mentees** was a further element in assuring quality. Consideration was given to limiting the variability in preparation and matching, which was generally carried out by schools, through providing a briefing or guidelines for school staff who would be undertaking this role, and additional support as required. Such guidance should ensure that mentees are clear about what they can expect and the boundaries of the mentoring relationship and what will happen at their first meeting. One of the challenges in assuring quality of provision in this area was that time, which is a scarce resource, was required by either Mentor Point or school staff to achieve this.

The development of effective links with partners, through which a common approach to quality assurance could be pursued, is a key contributing factor to the Mentor Point's role in coordinating mentoring across an area and establishing coherence. With regard to partner schools, ensuring that coordinators were aware of their roles and responsibilities, and were supported by the Mentor Point in responding to these, was considered to be important. However, ensuring that school staff undertook their roles was sometimes a challenge because, as one teacher explained, *'it's a tiny, tiny fragment of our work'*. Service Level Agreements were identified as a useful contribution to this although none of the Mentor Points had developed these in the initial stages of their existence. Some school staff identified the extent to which they were briefed and received follow-up contacts from the Mentor Point as a measure of the quality of the service provided. Developing effective relationships with partner organisations which provided mentors in schools through which common quality standards could be agreed and implemented in

a non-threatening and supportive manner was critical to the success of assuring quality across an area and, as discussed in Section 4.1, presented some challenges to the Mentor Point coordinators.

Consideration of quality in the **customer care** for mentors informed the overall quality of mentoring and helped to ensure retention as '*mentors need to feel valued*', as one interviewee observed because, as another commented '*we are using the goodwill of these people*'. Provision of a code of conduct, mentor handbook and regular meetings which were documented and shared were all said to contribute to quality in customer care. This was further supported by quality training and ongoing support which was accessible and courteous. Undertaking these roles did not always come under the remit of the Mentor Points, in which case it was suggested that their role was to ensure that partner organisations provided such care. To establish whether mentors were satisfied with the care they received, it was felt that it should be assessed through evaluation by mentors.

As indicated above, **monitoring and evaluation** was a key consideration which contributes to, and underpins, quality assurance in all elements of the Mentor Points' role. Coordinators noted that feedback from all participants including partner organisations, schools, mentors and mentees, should be gathered through standardised forms or documented meetings. Key factors for consideration in the overall evaluation of the programme included the numbers of mentors or mentees who 'drop-out', and the reasons for this, and the extent of any improvements in specific areas which mentoring was seeking to address, such as reading ages. The extent to which a service has systematic monitoring and evaluation emerged as a key measure by which schools and partner organisations assessed the quality of the service provider. This suggests that there is a need to ensure that interested parties contribute to any evaluation, where appropriate, and receive feedback.

While the Mentor Point coordinators did not initially focus on the issue of quality assurance, in the course of the pilot year they had increasingly reflected on the issue and by the end of the year had a better understanding of the focus of quality in mentoring and the Mentor Point's potential contribution to this. The main issues for consideration which they identified are provided below.

The following issues for consideration in assuring quality were identified:

- ◆ Although it is not easy while establishing a new organisation, quality should be addressed at an early stage of the development of the Mentor Point. This should include identifying to which aspects of mentoring and the Mentor Point's role assuring quality is critical. Subsequently it should be '*part of everything you do*', as an interviewee expressed it.
- ◆ Gather together all the relevant documentation which supports quality provision at an early stage and identify any gaps.
- ◆ Do not underestimate the time required to investigate existing arrangements for assuring quality and to develop quality assurance procedures and guidance.
- ◆ Bring partner organisations together early on and clarify their role in ensuring quality in mentoring. Draw on their knowledge and expertise in this area and recognise the care needed to ensure that, where mentoring is well-established, partner organisations feel valued and respected. Ensure that partners are fully informed of progress.
- ◆ Highlight for the partner organisations the value in working with the Mentor Point to assure quality in mentoring provision locally.
- ◆ In addition to drawing on the expertise of partner organisations, make use of the experience of members of the Mentor Point's management or steering group and of the NMN. Developing a common approach from the outset across the three Mentor Points would have been beneficial.
- ◆ Be realistic about what can be achieved in terms of quality assurance when working with partner organisations.
- ◆ Develop a quality assurance framework which is realistic and achievable.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the pilot year of the Mentor Points. Reflections on the main lessons learned during the year are presented and observations for the future development of the Mentor Points are provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings of the evaluation of the Mentor Points in relation to their original aims.

5.1 Lessons Learned

Establishing a new concept and a new service, whilst taking into account the contextual issues pertaining to an area, takes considerable time. Moreover, conveying the difficult concept of a Mentor Point, and the value it can add, to parties who may be interested in the provision of mentoring requires clarity and care. The experience of the three pilot Mentor Points, identified through the evaluation, suggests that the focus of the initial stages of a Mentor Point should be on:

- ♦ developing and implementing effective administration systems to support the promotion of mentoring and the recruitment, training and placement of mentors
- ♦ conducting an audit of local provision among mentor suppliers and the potential capacity in schools and other organisations, which use volunteer mentors, to support young people. Such an audit is necessary to underpin the Mentor Points' ability to build capacity and achieve coherence, and to assess the extent to which they succeed
- ♦ examining ways of assuring quality within the Mentor Point and across mentoring in the area, including through developing quality checklists for mentor programmes and users of mentors and undertaking, or supporting, systematic evaluation and review.

Among the local organisations which may have an interest in mentoring provision are other agencies such as the LSCs and Connexions partnerships, which are beginning to be established. Mentor Points should consider whether, and by what means, they should build strategic alliances with such organisations in order to have a significant role in coordinating mentoring locally. In doing so, they need to consider their role: do they want to operate as a mentoring programme, delivering mentors to schools and other users, or do they want to take a more strategic approach, in partnership with mentoring programmes, by coordinating the supply of quality mentors to meet local demand?

Running a Mentor Point well is time and resource intensive. There are a variety of tasks involved in running a Mentor Point including:

- ♦ liaising and negotiating with a number of organisations, with the aim of establishing credibility and building effective working relationships
- ♦ promoting and raising the profile of mentoring among suppliers and users of mentors
- ♦ recruiting large numbers of mentors and managing the associated administration and enquiries
- ♦ facilitating good quality training and assuring the quality of training by attending sessions or seeking feedback from participants
- ♦ ensuring that not only the Mentor Points, but also partner organisations and schools, are providing a quality mentoring experience for young people.

The time and resources required, including staffing, to undertake all these activities to a high standard, should not be underestimated.

In managing the Mentor Point, management support for the Mentor Point coordinator, through the steering group, or identified members of the steering group, should be used to supplement the skills and strengths of the coordinators in addressing the multiplicity of tasks involved in running a Mentor Point. Consideration should also be given to having staff whose role is dedicated to key aspects of the work of the Mentor Point, for example one individual who is responsible for recruitment and handling enquiries and another who leads on training.

When supplying mentors to schools and partner organisations, Mentor Points should seek to be responsive to their needs. This entails, for example, providing the number of mentors required at times which fit in with the priorities of the schools and partner organisations. Furthermore, Mentor Point staff need to be sensitive to the possibility that a young person, especially one with complex issues and needs, may not be ready to meet with a mentor when one is available, consequently, they may need to develop strategies to maintain the interest and commitment of mentors while they wait for the young person to be willing to meet them.

The Mentor Points had shared experience and practice in the course of their pilot year both through workshops facilitated by DfES and NMN and through their own communications. The Mentor Points could benefit further from working more closely together on elements of their work to share and build on effective practice, including sharing their experience of what has and has not worked in undertaking their role. Additional workshops, with specific foci such as assuring quality, could contribute further to sharing and developing practice among Mentor Points.

5.2 Observations for Future Development

In addition to reflecting on their experiences of running or working with a Mentor Point during the pilot year, Mentor Point coordinators, school staff and partner organisations commented on possible areas for the future development of the Mentor Points. Their suggestions related to:

- ◆ the number and type of mentors
- ◆ the focus of mentoring
- ◆ practical and operational issues
- ◆ networking and sharing of practice.

As might be expected, some schools mentioned that they would like to have **more mentors** in the future. The deployment of volunteer mentors in schools was generally valued by the school staff who were interviewed and they wished to continue to have mentors, as one teacher explained *‘I happened to have a need in this school which wasn’t being dealt with in other ways’* while another said *‘we would dearly love to have more people coming into this building’*. Some interviewees commented on the need to broaden the **type of mentors** in future, for example having more men or positive role models from business in an area where young people had low aspirations. One partner organisation identified a future role of the Mentor Point in identifying any gaps in the types of mentors required by potential mentees locally and helping to address this by *‘highlighting that many...people have the qualities that young people need [and] breakdown class barriers and stereotypes’* in their promotional activities.

Some interviewees considered that the **focus** of the Mentor Points could be extended in the future. Examples included developing a literacy or numeracy support focus within schools or to broaden the use of mentors outside schools. This is illustrated by the comment of one Learning Mentor that *‘if the provision that [Mentor Point] offered, catered for other areas where mentoring has been shown to be effective – such as probation, youth work, foster care, which I think is a very overlooked area, if [Mentor Point] could provide for those areas as well as for schools, I think that would be the way forward’*. It is worth noting that the joint directors and funding of future Mentor Points through the Active Community Unit of the Home Office will respond to this suggested additional focus. However, there was some ambivalence among interviewees who were aware of the proposed extension of the Mentor Points’ role to incorporate the use of mentors in community settings. For example, one partner organisation observed that *‘[I] would have liked them not to have changed so radically, more input in education would have been helpful’*. As another partner organisation observed that it would *‘not go down well with the schools’* if the service they had received was withdrawn as they perceived it might. The challenge for the Mentor Points would appear to be to reassure partners that existing provision would be maintained, while extending it into new areas.

Interviewees identified a range of **practical and operational issues** relating to the service provided by the Mentor Points which could be enhanced in the future. These included augmenting the guidance for schools, such as giving advice on how to induct a mentor into the school, and on how to monitor and evaluate the mentors' role. Systems for communication could be further improved through, for example, providing '*hard copies*' of information and placing all the documents together in one pack for schools which could be colour-coded for ease of reference. Suggestions for future developments to the training programme included elements on how to manage anger and how to work with young people who were shy or had been bullied, and seeking contributions from Learning Mentors to the training of volunteer mentors. In addition to training or providing guidance to school staff, a partner organisation recommended that training could be provided by the Mentor Point for other staff who liaise with volunteer mentors, such as youth workers. One interviewee mentioned that mentors might value a hotline which they could contact for ongoing support and a partner organisation commented that the Mentor Point could provide ongoing support to community projects.

The final area for the future development of the Mentor Points was as facilitators for **networking and sharing practice**. This could be addressed in three ways. Firstly, Mentor Points could gather together and share key documents, for example handbooks for mentors and evaluation forms. Secondly, Mentor Points could provide a forum for partner organisations, or school coordinators, to meet together and share experience and expertise. Some of the Mentor Points were already undertaking this role through their practitioner forums. Thirdly, Mentor Points could contribute to local networks at a strategic level, for example through participating in local Learning and Skills Council networks.

5.3 Outcomes of Mentor Points

This section presents the main findings of the evaluation of the outcomes of the pilot Mentor Points. These are presented in relation to the initial objectives of the evaluation. It is worth reiterating that the three Mentor Points were the pilots of a new initiative. Much time and effort was expended on establishing this new service in their areas and implementing the systems to support the service. As outlined earlier, a number of challenges were encountered and valuable lessons learned in the course of the pilot year. These have to be taken into consideration when assessing the achievements of the Mentor Points. It is in this context that the following overview of the findings should be considered.

Objective 1: to assess the extent to which Mentor Points were successful in achieving their objectives

In considering to what extent the Mentor Points had met their objectives, it is necessary to return to the aims set down for them at the outset and to consider

how far they can be said to have achieved them. The aims of the Mentor Points were to:

- ♦ bring improved coherence to the recruitment, training and support of volunteer mentors across the EiC areas
- ♦ raise the profile of mentoring by raising the awareness and understanding of their benefits
- ♦ significantly increase the supply of volunteer mentors for school-age children and young people
- ♦ work towards the implementation of minimum quality standards within all partner organisations
- ♦ ensure full equality of access to the range of training, support and services on offer.

Bring improved coherence

One of the pilots had made discernable progress in fulfilling the role of a Mentor Point as originally envisaged by the NMN and DfES: recruiting mentors, overseeing their training and making them available for placement through existing mentoring schemes as distinct from placing mentors directly into schools itself. Whilst partner organisations appeared satisfied with their contact with the Mentor Point and thought the partnership was working well, schools were largely unaffected directly by the Mentor Point as their main point of contact was the existing mentoring programmes. Thus, while coherence could be said to have been achieved in having one organisation overseeing recruitment and training, local organisations and individuals would not naturally think 'Mentor Point' if they wanted to get involved in mentoring.

In contrast, the approach adopted by the other two Mentor Points had more similarities with the functions of mentoring programmes. Not only were they recruiting mentors and organising training and police checks, but also placing and supporting them in schools. In one case, this was a consequence of difficulties in gaining the full cooperation of existing mentoring programmes due to unresolved tensions and issues. In the other, the approach taken was guided more by seeking to establish the Mentor Point's profile and credibility with schools, than attempting to forge strategic alliances with existing mentoring programmes and identifying how they could work together. These developments had two effects on the Mentor Points. Firstly, it created additional work because they needed to place the mentors they had recruited and provide schools with the supply of mentors that they promised. Secondly, it led to the creation of an additional programme, rather than the coordination of existing activity. In order to achieve coherence, there are valuable lessons to be learned here about identifying all those organisations that are likely to be involved and, through a consultation process, gaining some measure of agreement and support prior to establishing the Mentor Point.

One aspect of coherence to where Mentor Points had made progress was through the development of a training programme which could be accessed by

mentors in their areas. Partner mentoring programmes generally valued having access to a common training programme and schools appreciated the fact that mentors were trained and often praised the training provided for mentors, and, where they had previous experience of working with mentors, often noted an improvement in the quality of training. The contribution of training to coherence was noted by one teacher who said that the Mentor Point had '*provided uniformity – I can tell that all the mentors have received the same training*'.

Raise the profile of mentoring

All three Mentor Points were said by partner organisations to have raised the profile of mentoring locally through their promotional activities. The evaluation found that having one agency locally with a badged profile and time and resources which they could dedicate to promoting mentoring was valued by mentoring programmes. Other evidence from the evaluation showed that eight of the schools visited had become involved in mentoring for the first time as a consequence of their contact with the Mentor Point, and that promotion had led to a large number of enquiries.

Increase the supply of volunteer mentors

Although only one Mentor Point achieved its target number of mentors, all three Mentor Points had increased the supply of mentors in their locality and between them they had recruited around 500 new mentors. Twelve of the schools visited had increased the number of volunteer mentors in the pilot year of the Mentor Point. However, one of the Mentor Points, which had only a small number of schools, reported that there had been some difficulties in persuading schools to take on more mentors. As mentioned in Section 3.2, mentor numbers were said to have reached capacity in some schools, and teachers said they could not cope with more. Two reasons were given for this:

- ◆ the additional workload that overseeing mentoring imposed on school staff
- ◆ concerns that taking pupils out of class might have a deleterious impact on SATs results.

Whilst the Mentor Points had increased the volume of mentors, some schools would have valued having access to a greater variety of mentors including more males and representatives from particular ethnic minority groups. Some schools wanted access to a pool of mentors, from which to select the most appropriate ones for their pupils.

Work towards the implementation of minimum quality standards

All three Mentor Points were aware of the importance of quality and were working towards implementing quality standards frameworks. However, they admitted that this strand of their work began rather late in the pilot, appreciating now that quality standards should play a central role in the management of a high quality Mentor Point. Partner organisations in one

Mentor Point area observed that they were reflecting on the quality of their provision in response to the work of the Mentor Point. It should be noted that the Mentor Points are going to support local mentoring programmes in achieving the NMN's Approved Provider Status.

Ensure equality of access to the range of training, support and service on offer

Mentor Points had worked hard to raise their profile and to promote the pilot including contacting all of the secondary schools in their areas. Even those organisations that chose not to participate were aware of the training and support that they could access and from which they could benefit. Indeed, Mentor Points tended to highlight these benefits in their promotions to potential partners.

Objective 2: to identify the key outcomes from Mentor Points both for schools and other partners involved, explain how these outcomes came about, and identify the extent to which they are sustainable over the longer term

Mentor Points had **raised awareness** and the profile of mentoring in their areas through having time and resources to dedicate to promotion and marketing activities and to making face-to-face contact with key organisations. The progress which the Mentor Points have made in establishing a clearly identifiable profile, with supporting marketing materials, should underpin their work in continuing this role.

Through deploying a range of recruitment strategies, the Mentor Points recruited a substantial **number of new mentors** in each of their areas who could support young people. In addition, they had put in place systems and procedures to ensure that these individuals were appropriate to work with young people and trained to fulfil their role. The issues underlying the sustainability of this outcome include the extent to which volunteers are available who meet the criteria needed by the end users, the capacity of schools and other organisations to absorb large numbers of mentors, and the ability for the systems which have been established by the Mentor Points to expand to manage larger numbers of volunteers being recruited and deployed.

The Mentor Points had each established **training programmes** which could be accessed by mentoring programmes and which reassured schools of the quality of the mentors who would be working with their students. They had consulted, and made use of, specialist training providers in developing their programmes which are now established for future mentors to access. Partner organisations benefited from the development of a generic training programme which they could access for their mentors and supplement as necessary with more specialist input. While the training exists which can be used in future, Mentor Points will need to explore the extent to which they have the capacity to facilitate the training of large numbers of mentors and establish effective administration systems to support this.

The final main outcome of the pilots is the beginning of the establishment of the Mentor Points as a forum for networking. One Mentor Point provides a resource centre for use by Learning Mentors and the practitioner forums which had been created provide a further opportunity for sharing of practice locally. In addition, through their work on raising the profile of mentoring, Mentor Point coordinators were sometimes the first point of contact for enquiries regarding mentoring and were able to refer people to appropriate individuals and agencies.

Objective 3: to identify the factors which influence schools' use of the Mentor Points and explain the way use varies across schools

It should be noted that, as outlined earlier, the Mentor Points developed differently in each area and did not always undertake the role that was originally envisaged. Consequently, schools had differing levels of contact with, and experience of, the Mentor Points. Nevertheless, schools welcomed the offer of volunteer mentors who could support certain pupils and appreciated that the mentors had been recruited, trained and police-checked by a reputable organisation since this gave them a sense of security. Some noted that DfES sponsorship of the Mentor Points influenced their decision to work with them. The selection and training of mentors were considered to be done well and schools thought that mentors were well prepared for their mentoring role.

Objective 4: establish the extent of any externalities from the use of Mentor Points such as unforeseen benefits or unwanted consequences of using them

In general, the evaluation did not find evidence of any unwanted consequences of using a Mentor Point and few instances of unforeseen benefits. A few schools noted that volunteer mentors had applied, or had become, Learning Mentors in the school. It was suggested that this was beneficial to the school as the individual was already known to them and the person was acquainted with the school. The other unforeseen benefit which was identified by some schools was the enhancement of links between the school and the business world which could lead to additional activities.

Objective 5: identify any changes which could be made to Mentor Points to increase their effectiveness.

In order to enhance their effectiveness as they progress into their second year of operation, there would be value in the Mentor Points conducting a **critical review** of their systems for administration, monitoring and evaluation. Such a review, which could benefit from the guidance and expertise of steering or advisory group members, should be undertaken with a view to improving and fine tuning the systems and procedures which underpin their work to further strengthen and improve the service provided in the future.

Mentor Points would benefit from reflecting on the extent to which they have formed **strategic links** with key players in their locale who have an interest in,

and involvement with, young people. Where links are established, Mentor Point coordinators could consider strengthening them further in order to garner support for their role which could assist them in coordinating mentoring locally and bringing coherence.

A further way in which links could be enhanced is through **participation in networks** which may include those that are broader than the Mentor Points' immediate area, such as LSC sub-groups, and regional mentoring networks. Participation in such groups could broaden the horizons of the Mentor Points, through greater sharing of experience and practice, and establish them as key players in mentoring across an area. In addition, Mentor Points could explore their capacity to further develop their role in providing a forum for networking and sharing of practice in their areas.

The evaluation has revealed that there is a continued need for a more **diverse range** of individuals to become mentors. Mentor Points could consider whether there is scope for identifying the main types of mentors required by organisations locally and seeking ways of responding to these needs. There may be value in adopting a targeted approach to recruiting specific types of individuals through, for example, building relationships with organisations who represent certain communities.

Conclusion

The evidence of the pilot year of the evaluation has shown that, of the three models adopted by the Mentor Points, the EBP model was the most effective in fulfilling the role of a Mentor Point. The ingredients of success of this model appear to be that the EBP, as a major partner, had strong links with schools locally and had contributed to developing a culture of mentoring in the area. The Mentor Point personnel were able to benefit from an understanding of mentoring within the schools and the expertise of EBP staff. Furthermore, mentoring within schools in the area was mainly undertaken by the EBPs, which had committed to the Mentor Point from the outset. This meant that staff did not have to liaise with a large number of mentoring organisations, although a careful and sensitive approach was still critical for the development of working relationships.

Finally, it is clear that the other two models piloted – the consortium model and the volunteer bureau model – will need to take a more strategic approach in order to develop the effective working relationships and culture of mentoring which already existed in the EBP model. This would enable them to benefit more from local experience and expertise and to play a more significant role in helping to improve coherence in mentoring in the future.