Progress Mentor

A pilot evaluation

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Acknowledgements

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What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) are merging. The new organisation is operating initially under the working name of What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care.

Our new single What Works centre will cover the full range of support for children and families from preventative approaches, early intervention and targeted support for those at risk of poor outcomes, through to support for children with a social worker, children in care and care leavers.

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Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

BSFC	Birkenhead Sixth Form College
CiC	Child(ren) in Care
CiN	Child in Need
CP	Child Protection (Plan)
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
LAB	Learning Assistance Base
MI	Management Information
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PM	Progress Mentor
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WWCSC	What Works for Children's Social Care

Executive summary

The transition to Further Education (FE) from school can be challenging for students, as it often involves more personal responsibility, less supervision and less of an emphasis on pastoral care from the education provider[1]. Students who have a social worker also typically perform worse on average than their peers at every stage of their education and face barriers to securing post-education destinations.[2]

The Progress Mentor (PM) is a role at Birkenhead Sixth Form College (BSFC) that was created in response to the need to provide additional specialist pastoral support to help students with experience of children's social services. It is intended that the programme provides individualised packages of support provided by a college-based mentor, with the aim of supporting students to overcome the barriers to success in FE and achieve better education, progression, wellbeing, and housing stability outcomes.

The programme involves a full-time equivalent college-based PM, who provides bespoke support during term time. Following agreement from What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) to fund the programme, the eligibility criteria were defined as students who have or have had a social worker within the past six years.

This evaluation focussed on understanding the implementation, process, mechanisms and how and why the programme works (or does not work) to support students. The pilot evaluation has also explored indicative evidence of outcomes, where possible. Given the nature of the programme and the scope of the evaluation, these are short-term outcomes only. The evaluation has involved both qualitative and quantitative research.

Research questions

The pilot evaluation aimed to address the following research questions:

1. **Evidence of feasibility:** How is the PM programme being delivered in BSFC, and how far is implementation as intended?
2. **Readiness for trial:** What (if any) changes are needed to the design, procedures, or delivery approach of the PM programme before any wider rollout?
3. **Indicative evidence of impact:** In the short term, do the destinations, wellbeing, and housing stability of students (who have received support from the PM programme) improve?
4. **Costs:** How much does it cost to deliver the PM programme per student?

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[1] For example, Packer, R. and Thomas, A., 2021. Transitions to further education: listening to voices of experience, Research in Post-Compulsory Education Vol. 26, Issue 2, and Centre for Mental Health. Finding Our Own Way: Mental health and moving from school to further and higher education (2019)
[2] DfE Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection (2018)

Methods

The evaluation has involved both qualitative and quantitative research across two main phases of data collection: early implementation (November 2021 and March 2022) and summative (April and July 2022). Data collection included:

- Interviews with PM delivery staff – five at early implementation and four at summative phase
- Interviews with students – 15 at early implementation and ten at summative phase
- Focus group with college personal tutors – one group with three attendees during the summative phase
- Interviews with external stakeholders – four at summative phase
- Interviews with parents/carers – two at summative phase
- Collection and analysis of programme management information, including:

  o College-wide data: this was collated from the college's management information system and shared with the evaluation team in Excel. Variables included a range of demographic information for all college students (including ethnicity, gender, free school meal eligibility, SEND status) and a flag denoting those in the PM cohort. Data relating to attendance was also included

  o PM-cohort data: this was collated by the second PM into an Excel template designed by the evaluation team to capture evidence relating to the support needs, received support, and external party involvement for the PM cohort. Additional demographic information was also collected using this template (e.g. housing and children's social service status). The PM gathered the data based on conversations with the students.

All interviews were written up in detail, including verbatim quotes, in an analytical framework in Excel. The framework was structured around the logic model and research questions, and detail from each qualitative interview entered individually per row. The framework also included key sample data, to allow for comparison of findings by different characteristics. The data was analysed to search for themes and trends, both present and absent. Within this framework, analysis of the qualitative data was iterative and inductive, building up from the views of participants. Quantitative data was analysed using Excel.

More detail on the evaluation can be found in the pilot protocol here: [OSF Registries | Progress Mentor Pilot Evaluation](#).[3]

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[3] The pilot evaluation was registered with the OSF on 22 December 2022 (registration number 10.17605/OSF.IO/2XQSR).

Key findings

Evidence of feasibility: delivery and implementation of the programme

- In total, 66 students received support from the PM programme in the academic year 2021/22 – a 65% increase on the anticipated 40 that the pilot planned for

- There has been a high level of engagement and take-up of the support offered by the programme from eligible students. All but one student who was offered support, engaged with it

- The programme was intended to provide a range of support that would help students improve their wellbeing, post-college aspirations, and housing stability, and this has largely been implemented as planned

- There was strong support for the PM programme and its delivery model amongst the students, college staff, external stakeholders and parents/carers who contributed to the evaluation

- A risk identified on the logic model was demand from students outstripping PM capacity, and evidence to date suggests that this does have the potential to negatively impact programme delivery.

Readiness for trial: changes before any wider roll-out

- The logic model developed at the outset summarises the programme well. However, some elements have been added or amended based on the pilot findings, to better reflect how the programme operates. The updated logic model can be found in [Appendix A](#)

- In addition to the challenges/barriers to intended delivery described above, there is a need to improve the recording of information about students supported by the programme before any wider roll-out. At present, the PM is independently deciding how information about students should be recorded and whether (and to what extent) it should be shared with colleagues (both internally and externally). Creating a unified and transparent system for securely recording student information would help to minimise any risks associated with oversharing or not sharing important information about students.

Indicative evidence of impact: short-term outcomes

Although this evaluation was primarily focused on exploring the programme's implementation and did not seek to undertake a formal outcomes analysis, the evaluation evidence shows early promise of short-term outcomes for students.
These include:

- Raising aspirations, with many students considering progression pathways (and in particular university) that they had previously felt to be unattainable
- Improving wellbeing as a result of receiving support through the programme, such as feeling better able to manage their anxiety, greater confidence, and improved resilience

- Supporting students to stay in college
- Reducing the number of students living in unstable housing.

Cost of delivering the programme

- The total direct cost of delivering the PM programme across the academic year 2021/22 was £28,357
- This equates to an average cost per student of £429.65 per year
- Most of the costs associated with delivering the programme were staffing costs (£26,807).

Discussion

Overall, the programme was well received by students, college staff, external stakeholders, and parents/carers, with all those who contributed to the evaluation reporting high levels of satisfaction with the support provided.

The programme was largely delivered as planned, though the logic model has been refined to reflect how the programme was delivered in practice. References to helping students access careers clinics and academic skills programmes, and supporting with clearing have been removed, as these activities have not been undertaken as part of the PM programme. The majority of students have seen positive outcomes as a result of the PM support. In many cases, students have explored and increased their knowledge of progression pathways, including those that they had not previously considered (e.g. university). Some students' aspirations also increased, and the PM had supported students to put in place plans to achieve their future goals. However, some students felt that although it was helpful, they still would have applied for university without the additional PM support. Most notably, student wellbeing improved, with the PM providing strategies to help manage their anxiety and improve confidence and resilience. Some students suggested that their attendance at college had not been impacted by the support received from the PM, in most cases because they did not have an existing issue with attendance or because they already understood the importance of education. Only one student felt that the support provided by the PM did not have a significant impact on them.

Qualitative data suggests that many of the outcomes above have supported with improved college retention, attainment, and attendance. However, there was less clear quantitative evidence for these outcomes.

There were several barriers to delivery which need to be considered in terms of the possibility of "scaling up" the programme. These barriers were predominately practical, with limited capacity of the PM to meet demand and lack of available space being key. The process of identifying eligible students at the start of the academic year could also be more systematic, to ensure students receive support as early as possible.

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings from the evaluation suggest that the PM programme offers promise for students with involvement with a social worker in the past six years, with some limitations and caveats. The evaluation highlighted several issues with delivery which could helpfully be addressed through the following recommendations:

- Increasing information requested on the college application form to capture a more detailed history of a student's social services involvement. The form should explicitly ask if a student has been involved with a social worker in the past six years

- Improving the quality of recording of information about the PM cohort and ensure information is easily accessible for college staff (where required)

- Providing more opportunities for the PM to discuss students supported by the programme with more college colleagues and for peer review of the PM role and performance

- Monitoring the workload of the PMs and ensuring they have adequate support in place to manage the emotional demands of the role. The delivery team are planning to make alterations to programme delivery, including having a second PM three days per week from September 2022, which should assist with this

- Providing (where feasible) a separate, private room for the PMs to use whenever they are speaking with students

- Ensuring external stakeholders and college staff are aware of the programme's eligibility criteria and that the PM plays a specific role in supporting students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years

- Including more activities around future employment within the PM programme, e.g. supporting students to access a careers clinic or to have a meaningful employer interaction. This would assist students with planning for life post-college and potentially reduce the workload of the PM.

It is recommended that future research should include running another pilot at a larger scale. As the programme is at capacity in BSFC, this would mean extending the progress mentor model to other colleges with a similar intake of students. Future research may also consider further testing the revised logic model and use of quantitative outcome measures.

Introduction

Project background

The transition to Further Education (FE) from school can be challenging for students, as it often involves more personal responsibility, less supervision and less of an emphasis on pastoral care from the education provider[4]. In many cases, students will move to a much bigger site, with new surroundings and peers. Students with experience of children's social services typically find this transition to college more difficult than their peers and are more likely to be negatively affected by the changes.

Students who have a social worker perform worse on average than their peers at every stage of their education and face barriers to securing post-education destinations.[5] The DfE's Children in Need Data Review (2019) found that, in 2018, students who had a social worker in the year of their GCSEs were almost five times less likely to enter higher education (HE) at age 18 than their peers.[6] By age 21, half of students with a social worker had not yet achieved Level 2 qualifications (which include GCSEs), compared to 11% of those not involved with a social worker.

The reasons for poorer performance amongst students with experience of children's social services compared with their peers, include having higher rates of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), lack of positive role models, lower expectations from adults in their lives, concerns about affordability of education, and lack of guidance about how to find and apply for opportunities.[7]

The aim of the Progress Mentor (PM) programme is to provide individualised packages of support to help students with experience of children's social services to overcome the barriers to success in FE and achieve better education, progression, wellbeing, and housing stability outcomes.

The programme involves a full-time equivalent college-based PM, who provides bespoke support during term time. Following agreement from WWCSC to fund the programme, the eligibility criteria were defined as students who have or have had a social worker within the past six years.

Progress Mentor Programme

Why: The PM role was created when the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at Birkenhead Sixth Form College (BSFC) identified a need to provide additional specialist pastoral support to help students with experience of children's social services.

Who (recipients): Sixth form college students aged 16-19 who currently have or have had a

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[4] See for example, Packer, R. and Thomas, A., 2021. Transitions to further education: listening to voices of experience, Research in Post-Compulsory Education Vol. 26, Issue 2, and Centre for Mental Health. Finding Our Own Way: Mental health and moving from school to further and higher education (2019)

[5] DfE Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection (2018)

[6] DfE, Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need Review (2019)

[7] WWCSC and CASCADE (University of Cardiff), Care Experienced Students and Higher Education, May 2020

social worker in the past six years.

Who (provider): One full-time equivalent PM based at BSFC, supported by the DSL and their Director. Note the initial PM left the role in November 2021 and the role was re-recruited.

What (materials, procedures): The PM contacts the student to discuss support available to them, both inside and outside of college. The brief is to be as innovative as possible, making a practical difference by using technology effectively, maintaining instant communication with Microsoft Teams messaging, and making morning alarm calls where necessary to ensure students are attending college on time every day. The PM also leads completion of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and attends PEP review meetings.

Once in college, the PM liaises with teachers to communicate relevant information and they meet regularly with the student to build a positive relationship. The frequency of meetings is tailored to students' needs. The PM works closely and coordinates with various staff in the college who can provide different support to the student, including their pastoral tutor, the Student Engagement Officer, the Designated Mental Health Lead[8], the additional learning support team, the academic skills programme staff, the non-counselling listening service, the bursary team and the careers advisor/careers clinic staff. The PM reports on their cohort monthly to the safeguarding team and has instant access to advice during the week from the DSL and Deputy DSL if needed.

Outside of college, the PM contacts external agencies who can help the students and facilitates access to resources, such as work experience or contact with universities to discuss fields of interest. If the student is already working with agencies such as children's social services, the PM will contact the social worker to make sure the PM is invited to all the relevant meetings, so the PM can advocate for, and support, the student. The PM also has a network of contacts to call on for advice, direct referrals, and information, which includes housing, health, and Universal Credit. The PM ensures that all stakeholders are kept updated on the student's progress at college and acts as a liaison between the student, their teachers, and the external agencies they interact with.

How (format): The PM has regular face-to-face meetings and Microsoft Teams contact with students. The PM also maintains contact with parents and carers, particularly those on child protection (CP) plans, to check on the student's welfare and ensure they have the resources required at home to continue learning outside of college hours. The PM will follow up with students by email after they have left college to ascertain their post-college status and to invite them to join the college alumni group.

Where (location): The PM provides support both on the college premises and virtually. The PM is based centrally in the college Learning Assistance Base (LAB), so is available to the students during college hours. Instant messaging on Microsoft Teams facilitates contact outside of core hours. The PM may also attend meetings outside of the college premises if needed, in a support and advocacy role, for example with social workers and other agencies the student may interact with such as housing.

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[8] The Mental Health Support Lead is the designated mental health professional within the college. Any student can approach them for support. The role helps students get the support that they need and maintains relations with local support services that help young people with wellbeing.

When and how much (dosage): The dosage varies according to the needs and preferences of the students. Some students want or need more frequent meetings with the PM and more regular or more intensive support. For example, 'light' dosage is a meeting between the student and the PM a couple of times per term, whereas a 'high' dosage can involve daily contact at key points, for example if the student needs more intensive support.

Tailoring (adaptation): The frequency and intensity of support is tailored to individual student needs. Each student's support plan is tailored to their needs assessment and personalised plan, which are both regularly revisited.

PM logic model

A logic model for the PM programme was developed in collaboration with stakeholders from WWCSC and BSFC during the scoping phase of the evaluation. It is presented overleaf and summarised below. A revised version of the logic model, reflecting findings from the evaluation can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The box on the left-hand side shows the **context** in which the PM programme was implemented. This is also outlined in the project background section at the [start of this chapter](#). As outlined in detail above, the **intervention** involves the PM delivering regular, one-to-one support for students.

The intended **short-term outcomes** (i.e. those intended to be achieved by the end of the pilot academic year) are grouped under three headings: destinations, wellbeing, and housing stability:

- Destinations: improved retention, attendance (including at exams) and educational attainment. It is also anticipated that students' knowledge of possible progression pathways will be improved
- Wellbeing: students have greater confidence and resilience
- Housing stability: students have a stable housing situation and have improved skills to live independently (e.g. financial and time management).

The **mechanisms** by which it was intended that the short-term outcomes would be achieved included open and effective channels of communication amongst those identifying students for support (notably between college admissions, virtual school and staff working in social care). It was also anticipated that the PM would create a transition plan tailored to the needs of students and build strong relationships with them using flexible and creative approaches. The PM will also use internal and external networks to provide holistic support to students, including around gaining future employment.

There were three **risks** (highlighted in red on logic model) to the mechanisms not leading to the short-term outcomes. These were: eligible students not being identified at the start of the academic year; demand from students outstripping PM capacity; and the PM leaving the post.

The column on the far right shows the intended **longer-term outcomes** (i.e. those intended to be achieved six months after leaving college) for the students involved in the programme. Assessing achievement of these longer-term outcomes was not within the scope of this pilot evaluation.

Context

Young people who have a social worker perform worse on average than their peers at every stage of their education and face barriers to securing positive post-education destinations (1). The DfE's Children in Need Data Review (2019) found that, in 2018, students who had a social worker in the year of their GCSEs were almost five times less likely to enter higher education (HE) at age 18 than their peers (2). By age 21, half of young people with a social worker had not yet achieved Level 2 qualifications (which include GCSEs), compared to 11% of those not involved with a social worker.

The reasons for poorer performance amongst students with experience of children's services compared with their peers, include having higher rates of SEND, lack of positive role models, lower expectations from adults in their lives, concerns about affordability of education, and lack of guidance about how to find and apply for opportunities (3). The transition from school to further education (FE) and HE can also be challenging for students with experience of children's services, as it often involves moving to a bigger site and to a timetable that places much more emphasis on individual responsibility to attend classes and complete work.

The Birkenhead constituency (where Birkenhead Sixth Form College (BSFC) is located) has high levels of deprivation compared with the North-West and England, with 40% of children and young people living in low-income households (4) and 24% being eligible for free school meals as of Autumn 2020/21 (5).

Within this context, BSFC identified a need to provide additional specialist pastoral support for young people with experience of children's services and created the Progress Mentor (PM) role in 2018. The aim of the PM programme is to provide individualised packages of support by a school-based mentor to help young people with experience of children's services overcome the barriers to success in FE and achieve better education, progression, wellbeing and housing stability outcomes.

Intervention

One full-time equivalent PM (supported by the Director of Learning Support (DSL) and Safeguarding/Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead) coordinates individualised support for c. 40 16–19-year-olds who have/have had a social worker in the past 6 years

Engage young person
- PM engages with young people via college admissions or other staff including tutors, virtual school, social care and the bursary team

Transition
- If a young person is known to the college before enrolment, the PM completes a needs assessment with social care/schools/young person/carer
- PM attends care planning meetings and PEPs
- PM creates individualised transition plan for young person with social care/school staff/carer input

Support
- PM has regular face-to-face and Teams contact with young people
- PM delivers one-to-one academic support including tutoring, revision planning, and progression planning
- PM provides practical support e.g., home visits, delivering resources, and working with parents/carers to ensure young person has access to resources to continue learning at home
- PM holds young people accountable and celebrates their achievements
- PM leads PEP completion and attends PEP review meetings
- PM facilitates young person's access to existing college resources, including:
  - Career clinic
  - Assigned pastoral tutor
  - Designated Mental Health Lead
  - Non-counselling listening service
  - Academic skills programme (8 weeks)
- PM facilitates young person's access to external resources and support as needed e.g., work experience, housing, and mental health support

Destinations
- PM helps with Clearing on results day
- After the young person has left college, the PM follows up by email to ask about their post-college status
- PM invites young person to college alumni group
- PM can refer to university support for care leavers

Mechanisms

Open and effective channels of communication between college admissions, virtual school and staff working in social care

Eligible young people not identified at start of academic year

Transition plan is tailored to the needs of young people and revisited regularly to ensure it stays current

PM builds relationships with young people
- PM builds positive student relationships and young people trust the PM
- Young people know that there is someone available in the college when they need them
- Young people feel their achievements are praised and celebrated in the way they want

Flexible/creative approaches (including use of technology) are used to communicate with and engage young people, e.g., MS Teams instant messaging, morning alarm call, and pick ups for exams

Demand from young people outstrips PM capacity thereby limiting relationship building/ bespoke support

PM using internal/external networks
- Based in office with Learning Support Coordinator so can discuss support needs
- Fortnightly safeguarding meeting between PM and DSL means easy escalation via senior management
- PM builds college staff relationships (supported by DSL) e.g., career clinic, tutor, learning support
- PM builds networks outside of college (supported by DSL) e.g., housing, employers, universities, CAMHS, social care, schools, Universal Credit

PM leaves post and takes away established networks/ relationships

Future employment
- Young people access a careers clinic once a term
- Young people have a meaningful employer interaction

Short-term outcomes (by the end of the academic year)

Destinations

Improved retention within the college

Improved attendance at college

Young people have improved attendance at exams

Improved educational attainment

Sub-outcome: Young people have greater confidence/skills to communicate with others about their aspirations

Young people have raised aspirations

Wellbeing

Young people have greater confidence and resilience

Destinations

Young people's knowledge of possible progression pathways has improved

Housing stability

Young people have a stable housing situation (for those who need support in this area)

Sub-outcome: Young people have improved skills to live independently, e.g., financial mgmt., time mgmt., professionalism, navigating medical support

Long-term outcomes (by 6 months after leaving college)

Out of scope of evaluation

Destinations

Young people continue education in field of interest

Young people may struggle in further/higher education without continued intensive support

Young people move into an apprenticeship in field of interest

Young people move into employment in field of interest

Wellbeing

Young people have improved resilience and wellbeing

Housing stability

Young people have a sustained stable housing situation

Young people are living independently

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(1)   DfE Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection (2018)
(2)   DfE, Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need Review (2019).
(3)   See for example: WWCSC and CASCADE (University of Cardiff), Care Experienced Young People and Higher Education, May 2020.
(4)   Wirral Intelligence Service (2019)
(5)   DfE Explore Education Statistics (2021)

Pilot Context

The programme was evaluated by IFF Research following commission from WWCSC. It is a pilot evaluation which has covered the 2021/22 academic year.

The pilot includes one sixth form college, BSFC, which is a mainstream, mixed-gendered, state-funded college for 16- to 19-year-olds located in the Wirral, Merseyside, England. The college was rated as outstanding in all areas during its most recent Ofsted inspection in December 2016[9]. In the 2021/22 academic year, BSFC had 1,434 students on roll, 66 (5%) of whom received support from the PM programme.

The Birkenhead constituency (where BSFC is located) has high levels of deprivation compared with the average for both the North-West and England, with 40% of children and students living in low-income households[10] and 24% being eligible for free school meals as of Autumn 2020/21.[11] The latest data (from 2021) shows that the Wirral also has a high number of children in care (CiC) per 10,000 (123), compared to both the North-West (97) and England (67).[12]

Pilot Evaluation

The evaluation is a process evaluation focusing on understanding the implementation, process, mechanisms and how and why the programme works (or does not work) to support students. The evaluation has also explored indicative evidence of outcomes, where possible. Given the nature of the programme and the scope of the evaluation, these will be short-term outcomes only.

The evaluation has involved both qualitative and quantitative research. More detail on the method is provided in the next chapter.

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[9] OFSTED | Birkenhead Sixth Form College (bsfc.ac.uk)
[10] Wirral Intelligence Service (2019)
[11] DfE Explore Education Statistics (2021)
[12] Local authority interactive tool (LAIT) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Methods

Research questions

The pilot evaluation aimed to address the following research questions:

1. **Evidence of feasibility:** How is the PM programme being delivered in BSFC, and how far is implementation as intended?
2. **Readiness for trial:** What (if any) changes are needed to the design, procedures, or delivery approach of the PM programme before any wider roll-out?
3. **Indicative evidence of impact:** In the short-term, do the destinations, wellbeing, and housing stability of students (who have received support from the PM programme) improve?
4. **Costs:** How much does it cost to deliver the PM programme per student?

Protocol Registration and Ethical Review

The pilot evaluation was registered with the OSF on 22 December 2022 (registration number 10.17605/OSF.IO/2XQSR). The registration can be found here: OSF Registries | Progress Mentor Pilot Evaluation.

All our research was conducted in accordance with the five principles of research ethics, as set out by the Government Social Research unit and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines. We also complied with the Joint Code of Practice for Research, and the guidelines provided by the Market Research Association, UK Evaluation Society, and the National Children's Bureau. All team members interviewing students held an up-to-date DBS certificate. Before starting data collection, ethical approval was gained from WWCSC Ethics Panel.

Research design

This pilot evaluation employed a mixed-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The full research design and methods are presented in the pilot protocol.[13]

Data collection

The evaluation started with scoping activity to build our understanding of the programme and identify data sources that could be used in the evaluation. This included a review of ten programme documents and three delivery staff interviews (DSL, PM, and Vice Principal). The evaluation then had two main phases of data collection. The first phase – early implementation – took place between November 2021 and March 2022, with the key findings presented to WWCSC via an internal interim summary. The second phase – summative – took place between April and July 2022. This final report contains the findings from both phases. Table 1 below shows the data collection conducted in both phases.

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[13] WWCSC-Pilot-Protocol-Progress Mentor FINAL.docx (whatworks-csc.org.uk)

Table 1. Data collected during this pilot evaluation

Data collection type	Early implementation	Summative
Interviews with PM delivery staff (including PM, DSL, and Vice Principal)	5	4
Interviews with students	15	10
Focus group with college staff (i.e. those providing pastoral support for students at the college)	n/a	1 group (3 attendees)
Interviews with external stakeholders (including social workers and those working at local housing providers)	n/a	4
Interviews with parents/carers	n/a	2
Management information analysis	n/a	66 students
Cost analysis	n/a	Programme level

Qualitative interviews with PM delivery staff

Interviews on Microsoft Teams were conducted with the PM staff involved in delivering the programme (five in the early implementation and four in the summative phase). These individuals were directly involved in the delivery or oversight of the programme and included the PMs (both phases), the DSL (both phases), the additional support co-ordinator (both phases), the Vice Principal and the Head of the Virtual School (both early implementation only).

The interviews at early implementation were an opportunity to explore how well the programme was being implemented, to understand how the process of recruitment/ onboarding had gone, explore the links that had been made with wider support services and to see if any adjustments had been made to the delivery process (and why). The summative interviews explored how well (or not) the delivery of the programme was working, explored suggested changes and improvements to delivery, and gained perspectives on the outcomes the programme was having on the supported students. Interviews at both phases lasted up to one hour.

Qualitative interviews with students

Telephone interviews were undertaken with students being supported by the PM. The evaluation team spoke with 15 students during the early implementation phase and followed-up with ten of those students again during the summative phase.

Interviews ranged in length between 20 and 40 minutes. Students received a thank-you for taking part in the evaluation, in the form of a £20 Amazon/PayPal voucher in the early

implementation phase and a £30 voucher in the summative phase. The increase in voucher value during the summative phase aimed to support participation in the follow-up interviews. As outlined in the pilot protocol, the initial approach was to purposively sample students to take part in early implementation interviews with the sample reflecting the range of different students receiving support from the programme (e.g. college year group, ethnicity, gender, etc.). The PM then contacted the sampled students, providing them with an evaluation information sheet and consent form, and the evaluation team followed up with an initial email and up to four reminder emails.

Although this approach worked well to arrange a small number of interviews, student engagement in the research was lower than initially anticipated and the decision was made with WWCSC to move to a census approach and expand the sample to include all students receiving support from the PM programme.

At the time of writing the pilot protocol, the evaluation team anticipated that students' phone numbers would be available, so we could text and call them to arrange interviews. However, phone numbers were not available and only provided where a student had already agreed with the PM that they would take part in an interview. This meant that we had to rely to a greater extent on the PM communicating directly with students.

The census approach worked better, alongside support from the PM, which was invaluable in enabling all 15 of the interviews to be completed. However, the change from purposive to census sampling may have affected the sample (and therefore the interview data), as it is likely that those who chose to take part had particularly positive or negative experiences of the PM programme. Therefore, findings from the qualitative data provide evidence on the breadth of experiences but should not be considered exhaustive or indicative of the prevalence of experiences. The relatively small number of interviews (15) is also unlikely to have captured the full breadth of student experiences and early outcomes that may be seen with any future roll-outs of the programme.

Table 2 below shows the final achieved sample of students at the early implementation and summative phases.

Table 2. Characteristics of students interviewed

Characteristics	Early implementation	Summative
Total	**15**	**10**
Gender		
Female	10	5
Male	5	5
College entry year		
19/20	4	2
20/21	5	5
21/22	4	1
Unknown		2

Source: BSFC MI (2022)

The interviews during the early implementation phase were an opportunity to explore students' experiences of working with the PM and any suggested changes to delivery and the support available. The summative interviews encouraged students to explore any outcomes they had achieved as a result of being involved with the programme.

Focus group with college staff

One focus group was conducted and was attended by three BSFC college personal tutors[14], all of whom had previously had some interaction with the PM. The summative phase focus group aimed to understand how the PM programme was integrated with the rest of the college, and to reflect on programme delivery. The focus group lasted one hour.

Interviews with external stakeholders

Interviews were conducted with four external stakeholders during the summative phase, including two social workers, and two support workers from local independent living providers.[15] These interviews explored how the programme had integrated with external services to improve outcomes for students. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes.

To engage external stakeholders and college staff, the evaluation team approached the PM for suggested contacts. Once the sample had been agreed, the PM made the initial contact with selected individuals to inform them about the evaluation. This initial contact included an information sheet produced by the evaluation team, asking them to get in touch if they were willing to take part. Where stakeholders gave consent for their contact details to be shared with us via the PM, we were able to contact them directly by email and phone to schedule interviews.

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[14] This fell marginally short of the intended number (4–6), due to limited staff time and capacity to engage with the evaluation.
[15] This was two more interviews that originally intended to compensate for the challenges recruiting parents/carers.

Interviews with parents/carers

Telephone interviews were conducted with two parents/carers of students supported by the PM programme. These interviews explored how parents/carers viewed the programme, their experience of communicating with the college, and any perceived outcomes for students. Interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Parents/carers received a £20 Amazon/ PayPal voucher, as a thank-you for taking part.

The initial approach to recruitment involved the evaluation team asking students, where appropriate, at the end of the summative phase interviews, if their parents/carers knew they were being supported by the programme and whether they thought they would be willing to be interviewed themselves. If we received a positive response, we asked students to share an information sheet and consent form with their parent/carer, asking them to contact us or confirm with the PM that they were happy for the college to share their contact details with us.

This method was unsuccessful, primarily because it required the student to pass on the information to their parent/carer and the evaluation team had no means of following up on this. The PM was also not able to contact parents/carers on behalf of the evaluation team who they had not been in direct contact with previously, due to lack of contact details and limited engagement with them.

The approach was adapted to instead ask the PM to identify parents/carers who might be willing to be interviewed, and who the PM had previously had contact with. The PM then gained their consent to pass on their contact details to the evaluation team. We then followed up by email or phone to arrange an interview. This approach resulted in two parent/carer interviews being completed, including one parent/carer of a student interviewed for the evaluation and one parent/carer of a student who was not interviewed for the evaluation.

Management information analysis

During the scoping phase, the evaluation team explored the availability, quality, and robustness of the programme's management information (MI) and how this could help support the pilot evaluation. The team considered what programme data was available (e.g. what data was being captured about individual participants and their interactions with the programme) and how we might be able to influence data collection templates to improve the types and quality of data being collected. The availability of college-level data (e.g. data we could use to compare indicators such as completion, attendance, and achievement between programme participants and comparable students) was also explored.

It was intended that secondary analysis of MI would take place during both early implementation and summative phases. However, data was not available during the early implementation phase and so analysis was only undertaken during the summative phase.

The data provided by BSFC to the evaluation team during the summative phase comprised:

- **College-wide data:** this was collated from the college's management information system and shared with the evaluation team in Excel. Variables included a range of demographic information for all college students (including ethnicity, gender, free

school meal eligibility, SEND status) and a flag denoting those in the PM cohort. Data relating to attendance was also included.

- **PM-cohort data:** this was collated by the second PM into an Excel template designed by the evaluation team to capture evidence relating to the support needs, received support, and external party involvement for the PM cohort. Additional demographic information was also collected using this template (e.g. housing and children's social service status). The PM gathered the data based on conversations with the students.

The availability of quantitative outcomes data was limited. The timescales of the evaluation meant that quantitative data on exam attendance and attainment was not able to be shared by BSFC. Any future evaluation work should seek to address the timescales and also work with the programme delivery team to improve the recording of information about the students supported.

Cost analysis

During the summative phase, the evaluation asked BSFC to complete an Excel spreadsheet to estimate the financial costs (related to equipment and staffing) and the time costs (from set-up and supervision) required to deliver the PM programme. This was then used to calculate a delivery cost per student.

Data management and processing

The evaluation team implemented appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect data collected from unauthorised disclosure, use, alteration, or destruction. This includes utilising ISO 27001 certified data handling and information security procedures to protect all personal data.

All personal data collected (e.g. names, contact information, background information such as protected characteristics, interview notes and recordings) was stored on a secure drive, to which only the immediate project team had access. All personal data will be securely destroyed six-months following sign-off of the final report.

All interview transcripts and management information sources were pseudonymised, meaning that personally identifiable information was not stored alongside interview responses, and the two sources of information could only be matched up with a unique identifier.

Analysis

During the scoping phase, the evaluation team designed an evaluation framework, setting out the research questions, indicators, and data sources. The evaluation framework was closely linked to the logic model and informed the basis of our analysis plan for both the qualitative and quantitative data.

Qualitative data analysis

All interviews were written up in detail, including verbatim quotes, in an analytical framework in Excel. The framework was structured around the logic model and research questions, and detail from each qualitative interview entered individually per row. The framework also included key sample data, to allow for comparison of findings by different characteristics. The data was analysed to search for themes and trends, both present and absent. Analysis was an ongoing process, beginning during fieldwork, when the team shared headline findings with each other to inform the ongoing data collection.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using Excel. MI was analysed descriptively, and cross-tabulated to explore differences by key characteristics (e.g. college year group, gender, ethnicity, etc.)

Triangulation of findings

The qualitative and quantitative data was analysed by multiple team members to search for themes and trends, both present and absent. Director-led analysis sessions were then held at the end of each phase of the evaluation to allow the team to share analysis and encourage us to challenge individual assumptions and identify areas for further analysis.

Findings

Evidence of feasibility

How is the PM programme being delivered in BSFC, and how far is implementation as planned?

Summary of findings

- In total, 66 students received support from the PM programme in the academic year 2021/22 – a 65% increase on the anticipated 40 that the pilot planned for

- There has been a high level of engagement and take-up of the support offered by the programme from eligible students. All but one student who was offered support, engaged with it

- The programme was intended to provide a range of support that would help students improve their wellbeing, aspirations post-college, and housing stability, and this has largely been implemented as planned

- There was strong support for the Progress Mentor programme and its delivery model amongst the students, college staff, external stakeholders, and parents/carers who contributed to the evaluation

- A risk identified on the logic model was demand from students outstripping PM capacity, and evidence to date suggests that this does have the potential to negatively impact programme delivery.

The rest of this section is structured around the indicators in the evaluation framework, with sub-headings under each of these, which emerged from the analysis.

Indicators

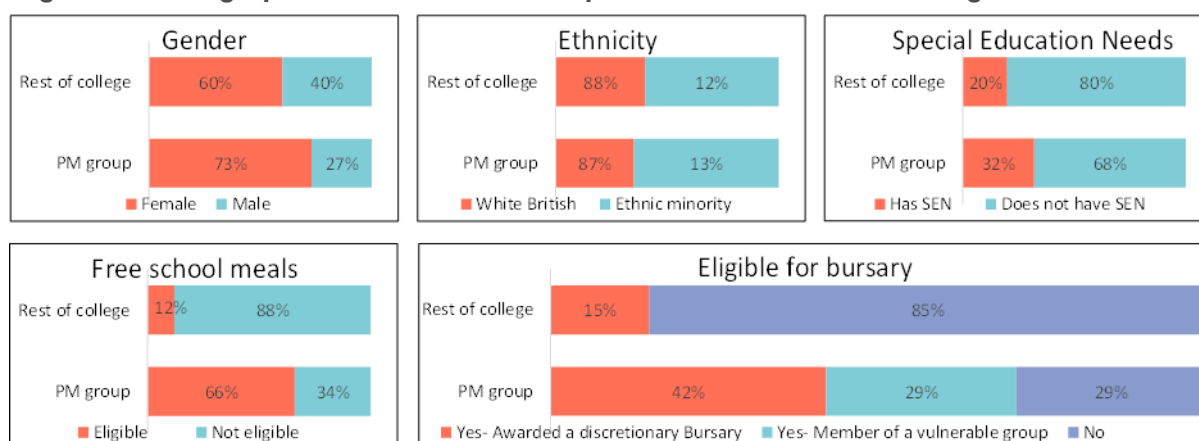### Engagement with the programme

Profile of students engaged

In total, 66 students received support from the PM programme in the academic year 2021/22 – a 65% increase on the anticipated 40 that the pilot planned for. This linked to an initial underestimation of demand, and the success of the PM in engaging students (more detail on both of these is provided later).

Comparing the characteristics of the PM cohort with the wider BSFC population[16] showed that (also represented in Figure 1 below):

- There was a significantly higher proportion of females in the PM cohort (73%) than among the rest of the college (60%), though it is unclear why this was the case

- The ethnic profile of the two groups was similar, with most students being white British

- There was a significantly higher proportion of students with SEND compared with non-PM cohort students (32% vs 20%). This reflects the higher rate of SEND amongst students with experience of children's social services

- There was a significantly higher proportion of the PM cohort who were eligible for free school meals (66% compared with 12% of the wider student population) and for a bursary (42%, compared with 15%). This reflects the nationally higher rate of disadvantage amongst students who current or have historic involvement with children's social services.[17]

Figure 1. Demographics of PM cohort compared to the rest of the college

Source: BSFC MI data (2022). PM cohort base = 62, non-PM cohort base = 1,372

Table 3 shows the status of the students in the PM cohort at the start of their involvement with the PM programme, as recorded in the MI. Twenty-two per cent (n=15/66) were classified as CiC, with 15% (n=10/66) CiN and receiving Early Help, and 11% (n=7/66) on CP. Thirty per cent (n=19/66) had current direct involvement with children's social services, with 18% (n=12/66) having historic involvement.

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[16] Note analysis includes data for 62 out of the 66 students who received support from the PM programme. Four students were not included in the MI, as they had left the college.
[17] Children in poorest areas '10 times more likely to enter care' (communitycare.co.uk)

Table 3. Children's social services status of the PM cohort

Children's social services status	Number of students (n=66)	Percentage
Child in Care (CiC)	15	23%
Historical children's social services involvement	12	18%
Child in Need (CiN)	10	15%
Receiving Early Help support	10	15%
Child Protection (CP)	7	11%
Unknown	12	18%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). Base = 66 students.

In addition (and not shown in the table), 16 (24%) of the students were young carers and 14 (21%) lived independently or with a special guardian.

Range of student support needs

Students receiving support from the PM programme had a range of support needs (Table 4), as identified by the PM, and recorded in the MI. These were identified by the PM during 2021/22 academic year.

The most frequently identified support need (74% of students) was around post-college progression, including students being unsure about possible progression options and practically how they would go about achieving their chosen pathway (e.g. completing UCAS forms, etc.). Over half (58%) of students had mental health concerns and 48% had challenges around low mood, wellbeing, or self-esteem.

Table 4. Range of student support needs

Issue	Number of students (n=66)	Percentage
Unclear about post-college progression	49	74%
Mental health concerns	38	58%
Low mood/wellbeing/self-esteem	32	48%
Poor college attendance and punctuality	29	44%
Lack of motivation with college work	21	32%
Being a young carer	16	24%
Friendship issues (e.g. breakdown in friendship group or challenges connecting with peers)	11	17%
Financial issues	10	15%
Bereavement	9	14%
Unstable housing/living independently	9	14%
Parental substance misuse	7	11%
Other	9	14%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). Base = 66 students

Identifying and recruiting eligible students

The intended plan to identify and recruit students, as outlined in the logic model, was for the PM to engage eligible students during the college admissions process. This would include questions asked on the college application form and via conversations with student's previous school, children's social services and Virtual School staff[18]. It was felt that identifying students before the start of the academic year would be the best approach to ensure they received support in a timely manner and could receive support to transition to the college.

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[18] The Virtual School is a statutory service which exists to support and challenge all those involved with children in care.

Delivery and college staff felt that identifying students before their enrolment had worked well during the pilot. Students identified before the start of the academic year were most commonly flagged via the college application form. The form asks students to tick a box if they are a CiC, as well as asking for the name and contact details of their parents or guardian and the relationship they have to the student. If the student selected someone other than their parents, then during the interview process staff members probed further to help understand the student's home life.

Key delivery stakeholders also felt that channels of communication, and existing relationships between school staff, the Virtual School, and social workers, had worked well to identify students before they start at the college. A key mechanism in the logic model, this communication has enabled the PM to support students with the transition from school to college. However, the effectiveness of this was limited by the high turnover and time pressures on external stakeholders, which meant that it was not done consistently.

"Some social workers and teachers are really, really good, some don't communicate as well, it's hit and miss with those stakeholders." **PM delivery staff member**

Despite this positive feedback, the majority of students were identified during the academic year. Figure 2 shows that nearly three-tenths (29%) of students were identified at the start of the academic years (September of 2020 or 2021)[19]. The remainder of students were identified during the academic year, with March and April seeing the same percentage of students identified as at the start of the academic year (29%).

It is also of note that 59% of students supported during the pilot year were identified at some point during the 2021/22 academic year, with the remainder being identified and receiving support from March 2020 onwards.

Figure 2. When students started receiving support from the programme
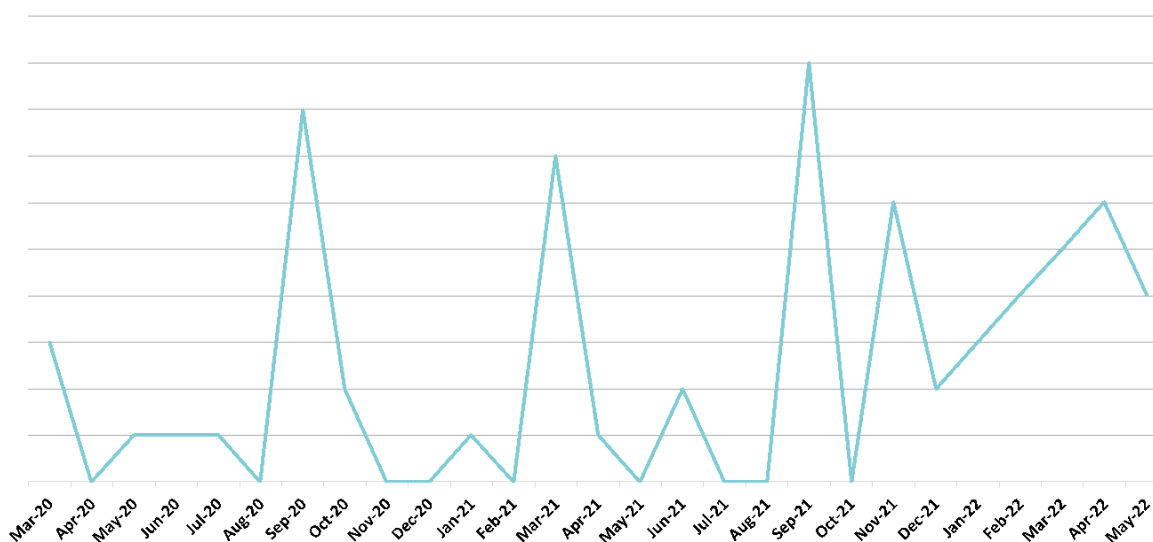
Source: BSFC MI data (2022). Base = 66 students

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[19] Defined as September/October.

Key delivery staff identified two reasons for students not being identified before or at the start of the academic year:

- Students with historical children's social services involvement were more commonly identified during the academic year, rather than before the start of the academic year as is preferable. The MI shows that ten (83%) of those with historic children's social services involvement were identified during the academic year, compared with 53% of those with current involvement. College staff felt that this was largely due to the college application form not asking about historic involvement, students not thinking it was relevant or being reluctant to disclose historic involvement. There were also examples where a student's children's social services involvement started during the academic year and this was disclosed to a member of college staff.

- The need for improvement in the communication between the PM and external stakeholders to ensure students are identified at the start of the academic year. This should include ensuring external stakeholders are aware of the programme's eligibility criteria and that the PM plays a specific role in supporting students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years.

Students were typically identified during the academic year as a result of disclosures about children's social services involvement to members of college staff, e.g. personal tutors. The college staff then discussed the student with the PM and the PM offered the student support. Delivery and college staff felt this was working well, due to the strong working relationships that the PM and college staff had established. The only drawback was the variable knowledge of college staff around specific aspects of the PM programme, in particular that the PM plays a specific role in supporting students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years.

"A lot of students are identified by me having conversations with students and I find out that someone has a social worker or is in foster care … I then talk to the PM about the support they can offer them." **College staff member**

Take-up of the support offer

There has been a high level of engagement and take-up of the support offered by the programme from eligible students. During the pilot, all but one student who was offered support, engaged with it. The reason for this student not engaging was that they did not want to access support of any kind that would identify them as being 'different' from their peers. Recruitment of all students involved a meeting between the PM and student, where the PM explained their role and what support they were able to offer. It was then up to the student whether or not to engage, and how much and which type(s) of support they chose to receive. Initial reactions to the offer of support were mixed, with some students pleased that support was available. Others reacted more neutrally, with some feeling that they did not think they needed any support or that it was unclear why they had been offered the support.

"I didn't think I needed support, but when [the PM] told me about what it all was, I 100% did need it." **Student**

College staff, students, and parents/carers felt that the key mechanism behind high levels of take-up was the wide range of support provided and the ability of students to tailor this to

their needs and take ownership of the support. The skills, personality, and characteristics of the PM in engaging students was also frequently praised. These key mechanisms are discussed in more detail below.

"I was really surprised my son took her [the PM] up on the offer [of support]. Normally he wouldn't even consider it, but it was the way [the PM] framed it and made it on his level and on his terms … I was so pleased she took this approach because [the PM's] help has been invaluable." **Parent/carer**

Although the evaluation only found evidence of one student choosing not to engage with the PM support, it will be important to continue to monitor this if the programme is scaled-up, and ways to mitigate the potential perceived stigma of receiving extra support should be considered.

Support provided by the Programme

Range of support provided

The programme was intended to provide a range of support that would help students improve their wellbeing, increase their post-college aspirations, and ensure they had housing stability. This support was intended to be bespoke and holistic depending on the needs of the student.

In practice, the PM achieved the intended aim of providing a wide range of practical, academic, and emotional support (shown in Table 5 below). Though, as outlined in more detail in the next section of this report, there were some changes in activities delivered compared with the logic model, particularly in terms of the PM not helping students access careers clinics, academic skills programmes or supporting with clearing.

The PM played a key role in coordinating support from other professionals, including by liaising with college staff (82%) and external stakeholders (79%). The PM also advocated for over half of students (58%), to ensure their voices and opinions were heard, for example at college or external meetings. Support around post-college destinations and progression was also provided to over half of students (55%).

Table 5. Support provided by the PM programme

Type of support	Number of students (n=66)	Percentage
Liaison with college staff	54	82%
Liaison with external stakeholders	52	79%
Advocating for the student	38	58%
Supporting with post-college destinations/progression	36	55%
Attending meetings (e.g. CP and CiC)	27	41%
Providing strategies to improve wellbeing	26	39%
Creating and reviewing PEPs	11	17%
Supporting students to engage with extra-curricular activities	7	11%
Liaison with parents	7	11%
Other	10	15%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). Base = 66 students

Students, parents/carers, college staff and external stakeholders frequently praised the range of support provided by the programme, reporting that there was *"nothing too big or too small"* for the PM to support students with.

"[The PM] has helped with everything I could have asked for – with everything I asked, she always tried to help." **Student**

Students particularly valued the support of the PM in liaising with other staff in the college, for example speaking with tutors to arrange deadline extensions or contacting the Mental Health Lead to discuss available support. Students also valued the PM's knowledge of, and signposting to, sources of support outside of college (for example in relation to housing, healthcare, or children's social services). Students and PM delivery staff felt this was an important mechanism in the logic model and was an aspect of the programme that was working well.

"[The PM] kept in contact with me throughout the lockdown and … supported me to get supported lodgings. I was initially concerned about moving into supported lodgings but [PM] was amazing and supported me throughout." **Student**

As well as providing formal support, the PM often played the role of personal cheerleader. As a key mechanism in the logic model, students welcomed someone to offer encouragement in relation to post-college applications and completing coursework, get excited with them about their university or apprenticeship offers, and celebrate their academic achievements.

"[The PM] was the first person I told about uni [getting a place at chosen university] and we celebrated together." **Student**

Volume and frequency of support provided

The programme intended to deliver support on an ad-hoc, flexible basis that was individualised to each student depending on their support needs and preference for frequency of support. This is reflected by the MI data that shows that the frequency of support was variable and tailored to the students' needs.

Table 6 shows that slightly less than half (48%) received support that varied according to the students' needs, in that the frequency of support varied depending on what was happening at the time in the student's life and what the PM was supporting them with. A third (33%) of students received support monthly, and smaller proportions received support daily (3%), fortnightly (11%) and weekly (6%).

Table 6. Types of support that students received

Frequency of PM support	Number of students (n=66)	Percentage
Varies according to need	32	48%
Monthly	21	32%
Fortnightly	7	11%
Weekly	4	6%
Daily	2	3%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). Base = 66 students

Students valued being able to take ownership of the support and tailor it to their needs and preferences for frequency of support. This was a key mechanism for engaging students in the programme, as they felt they had ownership and could engage on "their own terms". Students, parents/carers, and the PM delivery staff all noted how the flexibility of the PM support was especially important for students who were initially reluctant to engage with the programme, because they did not want to commit to regular or structured meetings.

The PM also regularly revisited the support needs of the student and was proactive in offering additional support as required.

Perceived challenges/barriers to delivering the programme as anticipated

Capacity to meet demand

A risk identified on the logic model was demand from students outstripping PM capacity, and evidence to date suggests that this does have the potential to negatively impact programme delivery.

College staff felt that this was a particular concern given the larger than anticipated cohort of students supported and their often complex support needs. This was also reflected in the students' suggestions for improving delivery of the programme. It was repeatedly mentioned that more PM capacity would be helpful to ensure students get the support they need.

> *"Sometimes I go to [the PM's] office or the LAB but she is busy … she does try her best to make time, but I think she has too much on."* **Student**

PM delivery staff also felt that the larger cohort had impacted on the nature of support provided, with support being very proactive and dealing with immediate issues. Delivery staff would have liked the opportunity to provide more preventative support to students, e.g. focussed group work around dealing with emotions or life skills.

The capacity of the PM was made more challenging by the limited capacity of other staff within the college, namely the Mental Health Lead and careers advisors. This meant that the scope of the PM role expanded to meet demand from students for this type of support.

Lack of confidential space

A key challenge faced by the PM was that there was no confidential space for them to speak with students. The PM shares an office with the learning support coordinator, which enables them to discuss the needs of the students they are both supporting. However, it means that the PM does not have an easily accessible private space to speak with students – a problem which was more challenging in times where there was particularly high demand for rooms, e.g. during exams.

This challenge was also reflected in feedback from a small number of students, who mentioned that they found it uncomfortable entering the PM's office when someone else was there and that they would feel more comfortable asking for support when the PM was alone. This has the potential to impact on the mechanism of the PM building trusting relationships to engage students.

PM leaving the role

A key risk highlighted in the logic model was that the PM would leave and take with them their established networks and relationships with students. This was tested in November 2021 when the first PM left the post.

There was no evidence to suggest that the change in PM had a negative effect on programme delivery. All college staff interviewed felt that the handover between the two PMs had been a smooth process, with little impact on the support provided. This was also reflected by the views of the students interviewed at the time of the early implementation interviews. Most students who had been supported by the first PM spoke very positively about them and the support they received.

The PM delivery team suggested that the relatively long handover period (approximately six weeks) and the fact that the first PM continued to work in the college in a different capacity (so could answer any ongoing queries from the new PM), both impacted on the smooth transition between the PMs. In addition, the new PM spent a significant amount of time with the students during the handover process, so as to get to know them quickly and build trusting relationships.

"Establishing a good relationship with them – which is why I spend so much time at the beginning with them – is absolutely vital, and now they drop by themselves, and I think that's a really good sign …" **Key stakeholder**

Value of more opportunities for supervision

As outlined in the logic model, the PM and DSL held fortnightly meetings to discuss the PM cohort and any safeguarding concerns. Whilst this worked well to escalate any issues to senior management, the PM felt that there would be value in having more opportunities to discuss the PM cohort with more college colleagues and for peer review of the PM role and performance.

Views and experiences of the Programme

There was strong support for the PM programme and its delivery model amongst the students, college staff, external stakeholders, and parents/carers who contributed to the evaluation. The reasons for this are explored in more detail within the subheadings below.

Skill and attributes of the Progress Mentors

The personality, experience, and general demeanour of both PMs was almost universally praised. Students spoke positively about the caring, empathetic, helpful, non-patronising, and non-judgemental nature of the PM, which had enabled them to build trusting relationships.

Students also described feeling comfortable asking for support (importantly, this is a key mechanism highlighted in the logic model) and being more open with the PM than they had previously been with other professionals, due to her personal demeanour and consistent provision of support.

"[The PM] is very friendly, down to earth and has made me feel so comfortable."
"[The PM] treats me like an adult and lets me make my own decisions … [the PM is] lovely and makes me feel comfortable talking about things I normally wouldn't."
"[The PM] is consistent and didn't let anything slip – always on top of things."
Students

College staff and external stakeholders also suggested that the PM's personal experience of working in children's social services and attending university had enabled them to relate well to the students.

Importance of the role within the college

The PM role was felt to be a valuable addition to the support network at the college, and there was no suggestion that the support was duplicating other sources of support. The students, parents/carers, and college staff interviewed all felt that the PM role was crucial in providing more time and capacity to support this specific cohort of students and to be able to provide them with more holistic and wide-ranging support.

College staff also described working well with the PM to create a "team of support" around the student. They felt it worked well to liaise and inform each other about what is going on in a student's home life (whilst respecting confidentiality) and the reasons for any behavioural

or academic issues. An example was provided of a student whose poor attendance meant they were going to be asked to leave college. The PM informed college staff and senior leaders about the home situation of the student, which helped them put together a package of support to enable the student to remain in college and improve their performance. Without the input of the PM, the wider college team would not have been aware of the extenuating circumstances or of the need for targeted support.

> *"We all work well to create a team around the student, so they get everything they need. I think the PM fits perfectly within that and has been so invaluable."* **College staff member**

The PMs have also derived substantial professional and personal satisfaction from supporting students as part of the programme. The PMs valued their ability to tailor the support offered to students' needs and felt strongly that they were filling an important gap in the student's support network.

Readiness for trial

What (if any) changes are needed to the design, procedures, or delivery approach of the PM programme before any wider roll-out?

Summary of findings

- The logic model developed at the outset summarised the programme well. However, some elements have been added or amended based on the pilot findings, to better reflect how the programme operates. The updated logic model can be found in Appendix A.

- In addition to the challenges/barriers to intended delivery described above, the evaluation team notes the need to improve the recording of information about students supported by the programme before any wider roll-out. At present, the PM is independently deciding how information about students should be recorded and whether (and to what extent) it should be shared with colleagues (both internally and externally). Creating a unified and transparent system for securely recording student information would help to minimise any risks associated with oversharing or not sharing important information about students.

The rest of this section is structured around the indicators in the evaluation framework, with sub-headings under each which emerged from the analysis.

Indicators

Clear description of the programme

Reflecting on the evaluation findings, the logic model developed at the outset broadly remains fit for purpose. However, certain elements have been added or amended based on the pilot findings to better reflect how the programme operates in practice and to improve the

chances of achieving desired outcomes for students. The main changes recommended to the logic model are described below and an updated diagram can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Assumptions

One of the assumptions at the outset of the evaluation was that *"PM support is sufficient for the needs of students, including those with severe mental health issues."* The pilot findings indicated that a key role of the PM has actually been in signposting and supporting students to access a range of professionals and services to ensure they received the support they needed. This holistic and multi-disciplinary approach has been one of the successes of the programme. The PM does not have the capacity nor specific expertise to provide support to those with severe mental health issues and needs to work in collaboration with other professionals (e.g. the college's designated Mental Health Lead and external mental health support services). We, therefore, recommend this assumption is rephrased as *"The PM has the knowledge to signpost and support students to access a wide range of support that can holistically meet their needs."*

Intervention

We recommend updating the number of students supported by the PM programme to reflect that more than the anticipated number of people were supported.

Another activity that requires updating is how students were engaged. The sub-section on engaging students read *"PM engages with students via college admissions or other staff including tutors, virtual school, social care and the bursary team."* To clarify this and better reflect how this is achieved, we suggest refining to ensure that it is clear that the majority of students were identified during the academic year.

Another aspect of the programme description that requires updating is around the support provided. The pilot findings have found no evidence that the PM helped students to access careers clinics or an eight-week academic skills programme, so these have been removed. Instead, the PM appeared to play a crucial role in providing support around destinations and preparing for life after college – this has been added to the logic model.

There was also no evidence that the PM has helped with students going through clearing (other staff in the college have instead supported with this) and the college alumni group has not yet been established. As such, these have been removed from the logic model.

Mechanisms

As mentioned above, the mechanisms under the sub-heading of future employment (including students having access to a careers clinic and a meaningful employer interaction) have been removed, as the pilot findings have not found any evidence that this was facilitated through the programme. The implications of this are discussed in the summary of the findings section of this report.

A number of additional risks to programme delivery have also been added, reflecting the delivery challenges discussed above. In summary, these are:

- Challenges working with social care, previous school, and Virtual School staff due to high turnover and time pressures. Also lack of understanding about key aspects of the PM programme, including the eligibility criteria

- Lack of confidential space for the PM, meaning students struggled to find the PM or did not always feel comfortable approaching them for support

- Limited capacity of other staff within the college to support students, potentially leading to an expansion of the scope of the PM role.

Short-term outcomes

We recommend rephrasing the outcome *"students have greater confidence/skills to communicate with others about their aspirations"* as *"students have greater confidence that they can achieve their aspirations."* This is because there was no evidence of students having increased their communication with others about their aspirations, but they did report feeling more confident to achieve their aspirations. See the outcomes section for more detail on this.

Perceived changes needed before wider roll-out

The evaluation findings have highlighted the need to improve the recording of information about students supported by the programme before wider roll-out. Currently, the PM records information about support provided to the PM cohort in three ways, as outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Information recording

System	Description of use	Level of access
Sapien Systems[20]	Online software used to log a range of student information, e.g. absences from college	All college staff members have access
CPOMs[21]	Online software used to log student safeguarding issues, e.g. when a student discloses abuse or risk of harm	Select number of staff have access due to the sensitivity of the information recorded
Word documents	Individual Word documents saved in specific folders for each student in the cohort on the PM's computer	PM only (and would be shared with the DSL, if necessary)

The PM independently decides how information about students should be recorded and whether (and to what extent) it should be shared with colleagues (both internally and externally). Although PM delivery staff felt this system had worked well, there are potential implications for effective job-sharing and handover in the case of staff absence. As the PM records a lot of information in Word documents stored locally on their computer, information is not easily shared or accessible by other college staff members.

The evaluation team would suggest the creation of a unified and transparent system for securely recording student information, which would help to minimise any risks associated with oversharing or not sharing important information about students.

Readiness for trial

Future research should include running another pilot at a larger scale, in advance of any decisions about a full-scale impact evaluation. As the programme is at capacity in BSFC, this would mean extending the progress mentor model to other colleges with a similar intake of students. There is potential for impact evaluation, however, the programme would benefit from a larger pilot first, to demonstrate replicability in other colleges, with other individuals fulfilling the PM role. Future research may also consider further testing the revised logic model and use of quantitative outcome measures, for example through surveying participants at the start and end of their involvement in the programme to assess self-reported outcomes, and through more comprehensive MI.

Indicative evidence of impact

In the short term, do the destinations, wellbeing, and housing stability of students (who have received support from the PM programme) improve?

Summary of findings

Although this evaluation was primarily focused on exploring the programme's implementation and did not seek to undertake a formal outcomes analysis, the evaluation evidence shows early promise of short-term outcomes for students. These included:

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[20] Sapien Systems
[21] CPOMS – Safeguarding Software for Schools

- Raising aspirations, with many students considering progression pathways (and in particular university) that they had previously felt to be unattainable

- Improving wellbeing as a result of receiving support through the programme, such as feeling better able to manage their anxiety, greater confidence, and improved resilience

- Supporting students to stay in college

- Reducing the number of students living in unstable housing.

The rest of this section is structured around the indicators in the evaluation framework, with subheadings under each which emerged from the analysis.

Indicators

Students have raised aspirations and improved knowledge of progression pathways

Students described how the PM had supported them to explore and improve their knowledge of a range of post-college options. For example, by explaining different options and courses available. In some cases, the PM has also accompanied students on university or college open days to support their knowledge of possible progression pathways.

College staff, students and parents/carers also felt strongly that support from the PM had raised students' aspirations and that students were considering progression pathways (and in particular university) that they had previously felt to be unattainable. As a result of motivational and practical support from the PM, students were planning to apply for university where they had not previously been considering this, and were taking proactive steps, with the PM's guidance, (e.g. writing UCAS personal statements) to enable them to achieve their new progression plans.

> *"[The PM] had made it [going to university] sound easy and like I could do it … she made it seem possible." Student*

> *"Talking to [the PM] inspired me to go to university much more than I ever have been and made me much more ambitious for my future." Student*

College staff and students also reflected that the PM had supported students to get ready for their post-college plans, for example by helping students apply for bursaries or university accommodation. Without this support, students felt that they would not have been ready to take their planned next step after college.

> *"[The PM] has really good links with the universities and has been a massive help with finding accommodation and helping the students get to university." College staff member*

> *"[The PM] helped me get accommodation [at university] and sort out what money I would be getting … she really helped me out with this, or I would have been lost and not been able to get myself actually there [to university]." Student*

One student suggested that they would have applied for university even without support from the PM. However, this student also acknowledged that without the PM's support, she would

not have had the beneficial experience of meeting the university lecturers and lab workers, as this was organised by the PM in advance of their open-day visit.

Although outlined in the original logic model, there was no evidence to suggest that students have greater confidence/skills to communicate with others about their aspirations, as a result of their involvement with the PM programme. Most students felt that they were already comfortable discussing this with their friends/family members. Students did, though, report feeling more confident about their ability to achieve their aspirations.

"I think I am more likely to get there [to university] because of her [the PM]." **Student**

There was also no evidence that the mechanisms on the logic model around future employment (e.g. the PM supporting students to access a careers clinic or have a meaningful employer interaction) had occurred or had led to students having raised aspirations and improved knowledge of progression pathways. However, considering including this support within the PM programme could further support students in reaching their desired destinations, as well as potentially reduce the workload of the PM.

Table 8 shows the destination of the 2022 leavers among the PM cohort and that nearly two-thirds of this group were heading to university, a higher percentage than the total for the college overall in 2021 (53%).[22]

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[22] This data was sourced from the compare school performance area of the gov.uk website: https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/download-data?currentstep=datatypes&regiontype=la&la=344&downloadYear=2020-2021&datatypes=gias&datatypes=ks5destination&datatypes=ks5destinationhe

Table 8. Destinations of the PM cohort

Destination	Volume	Percentage
University	17	63%
College/education centre	3	11%
Employment	3	11%
Gap year	3	7%
Apprenticeship	1	4%
Unknown	1	4%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). PM cohort base leaving college = 28

Students have greater confidence and resilience

Many students reported feeling better able to manage their anxiety and greater confidence, as a result of their involvement with the PM programme. They also described improved resilience and being better able to control their emotions. They also felt that they were less likely to get disheartened when faced with challenges. College and PM delivery staff felt that this was particularly important given the challenges students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, including working from home during lockdowns.

"[The support] helped how I feel generally, I'm much surer of myself. Less overwhelmed. I've struggled less."

"I always feel better in myself after chatting with [the PM] and better in my head. My mental health is better, and I feel more level-headed."

"Even when I was in a bad situation, I would go in to talk to her and [the PM] would make me feel better so I could get on with the day."

"Most important change [for me]: help with not stressing and worrying, advice on exams."

Students

These outcomes were felt to be particularly key in supporting the positive outcomes described below around attendance and retention.

Improved retention within the college

During the pilot year, eight students in the PM cohort left college during the academic year – representing 12% of the cohort (8/66). This is lower than the college-wide figure of 16%.[23] The reasons for the eight PM cohort students dropping out centred around mental/physical health issues (4) or taking up apprenticeships/courses (2) elsewhere. Two students had their place at the college withdrawn, but the reason for this was not stated in the MI.

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[23] This is the early leaver data for the 2021/22 academic year and includes all students within the college, including those in the PM cohort.

Qualitative evidence from students and college staff suggested that PM support had helped enable students to stay in college. For example, by providing encouragement, helping students plan their workload (e.g. around coursework deadlines), supporting with exam revision, and working with wider-college staff to ensure students receive the support needed. These activities also contributed to increased confidence and raised aspirations among students, which, for some, incentivised them to remain in college.

> *"[Without the PM programme] I would have been kicked out of college and have no life ahead of me, I would have been so stuck without [the PM]. [The PM] made me see that I needed to stay in college to get a good job."* **Student**

This view was also echoed by parents/carers and college staff who provided anecdotal examples of students who they believed would have left the college without support from the PM. In these examples, support had helped students put in place strategies to catch up with missed work, made them feel more comfortable about attending college as there was someone to talk to, and provided them with practical support (e.g. applying for a bus pass) to make travel to college possible.

"I would dread to think where he would be if it hadn't been for the [PM]. I don't think he would still be in college actually." **Parent/carer**

Improved attendance at college

MI analysis has shown that the PM cohort had lower overall attendance than students not part of the PM cohort during both halves of the academic year (Table 9). Average (mean) attendance across both cohorts also decreased marginally in the second half of the academic year (February – July 22), though this was not statistically significant.

Table 9. Average (mean) attendance

	September 21 – January 22	February 22 – July 22
PM cohort	87%	86%
Non-PM cohort	94%	92%

Source: BSFC MI (2022). PM cohort base = 62, non-PM cohort base = 1,372.

Qualitative data from students, parents/carers, and college staff, however, suggests that support from the PM had resulted in improved attendance, compared with participants' perceptions of students' attendance without support from the PM. The key mechanisms behind this were felt to be that:

- Students felt less anxious and happier about attending college, because of the consistent encouragement from the PM, and the knowledge that the PM was available to support and guide them when in college

- The PM liaised with tutors around additional support needed, to help students catch up on college work as quickly as possible after any absences. This was also an

incentive to return to college sooner as, with the PM's support, returning felt less daunting and overwhelming to students

● Students received personalised communication from the PM if they were late or their attendance was dropping, which reminded them of the support available at college and encouraged them to return. In comparison, students not supported by the programme only receive an automated message

● For a smaller number of students, support from the PM had enabled them to overcome specific barriers to attendance, for example practical support to find childcare. The PM felt that attendance did improve when they were able to identify the root cause of students' attendance issues and implement strategies to overcome these.

"[The support] helped with attendance. [The PM would say] 'Can I see you today' and that would be an incentive to go in [to college]." **Student**

However, some students, who either already had good attendance or felt aware of the importance of education, suggested that the PM's support did not impact their attendance. Another student, whose college attendance was poor, felt that the root cause of their poor attendance was generally overlooked by the college and that therefore the support they received had little positive effect. This student found it helpful to have regular check-ins with the PM but did not feel that the support had much impact on them.

"[It's been] nice to speak to [the PM] but not much has helped or improved." **Student**

Students have improved attendance at exams

Quantitative data shows that A level exam attendance in June 2022 was 100% across the cohort. This data includes students who finished their studies in the 2021/22 academic year, but does not include AS level attendance. Qualitative data from key delivery stakeholders and those students interviewed after sitting their summer exams also suggests that most students in the PM cohort sat their most recent summer exams. Though the timing of the summative fieldwork (i.e. before the summer exams period) made this difficult to assess through the qualitative interviews.

Improved educational attainment

Most students felt that their mock exams and coursework had gone well and felt quite confident about achieving their desired grades. Some students attributed this improvement to support from the PM e.g. with exam revision and workload planning.

"The only reason I passed [my exams] was because of [the PM] … without her support I would have failed … [she helped] me keep on track." **Student**

However, there were also views from students and college staff that students' anticipated attainment was not linked to the PM's support. Some students felt they did not need exam support from the PM and others received this support from other individuals in the college e.g. personal tutors.

Others acknowledged that although they did not receive specific exam support from the PM, the other types of support received (and the related outcomes) impacted on their ability to attend their exams and do well. For example, tools for managing anxiety helped to contain nervousness before and during exams.

Some college staff also felt that the college had seen a positive improvement in terms of mock grades. However, college staff acknowledged that many individuals and initiatives in the college (e.g. tutors, revisions sessions etc.) had contributed to this, and as such it was difficult to identify the specific impact of the PM's support.

The results from the PM group who sat A levels in June 2022 show a range of attainment; however more than two thirds of results fell between A and C and similarly more than two thirds of BTEC results were Distinction (D) or above. A breakdown can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10. A level and BTEC results for the PM group

A level grades	A	B	C	D	E	U
Number of results	7	11	13	7	3	2
BTEC grades	D*	D	M	P		
Number of results	15	9	6	1		

Source: BSFC MI (2022). PM cohort base completing exams = 28.

Further quantitative data on attainment was not available for this evaluation. Future research could include exploring options to evidence this outcome quantitatively – this is discussed further in the Discussions chapter of this report.

"There are so many people across the college involved in [attainment] that although [the PM] has made a contribution, it wouldn't be possible to pick out the benefit she has had." **College staff member**

Students have a stable housing situation (for those who need support in this area)

The number of students in unstable housing reduced across the pilot. At the start of the academic year, nine students (14% of the PM cohort) were in unstable housing, with only two of these remaining in unstable housing by the time of the data collection in July 2022. Those no longer in unstable housing had been supported to live independently or move to a different placement. The housing situation of an additional five students had become unstable by July 2022. Across all the students in unstable housing, most instances were due to breakdown in family relationships.

The qualitative interviews with college staff and students identified examples of students benefiting from PM support to secure stable housing. Often this involved the PM working in conjunction with external organisations, such as local supported accommodation services ('Integrated Front Door' and 'Local Solutions') and healthcare services ('Vision Support', 'Drugs Misuse Centre', local GPs, community specialist nurses, and health visitors).

In these cases, the PM supported the students to develop the skills needed to live independently by helping them to access healthcare services, understand their entitlement to benefits, and manage their finances.

For example:

- The PM had encouraged a student living independently and who had been experiencing health issues to make contact and seek support from their GP

- The PM arranged for a student with a child to be seen by a health visitor and supported her with an application to the 'Care to Learn' fund, which subsequently enabled the child to attend nursery, improving the student's ability to attend college

- For another student living independently who had been experiencing a lot of emotional trauma, the breakdown of family relationships, and a cannabis addiction, the PM put them in touch with the local drug misuse service and facilitated a number of solution-focused therapy sessions in which the student set personal goals.

One student mentioned that they had already been living independently for three months when they first began to receive support from the PM and that therefore the additional support did not impact their ability to live independently.

Factors which created variation in outcomes across students

The evaluation identified a number of factors that resulted in variation in outcomes across students supported by the PM programme. Some groups of students were more challenging to work with for the PM, and therefore some of the outcomes were less positive for these groups.

These groups included:

- Students with currently challenging home lives, (e.g. those with parental substance misuse or family breakdown). Outcomes were more difficult to achieve because of what they were experiencing at home and often the lack of support at home. With these students, more time was spent monitoring safety and managing risk, meaning less time was available to invest in mentoring

- Students who were living independently and in supported accommodation, the PM was often required to communicate with various people at the supported-living provider organisation. Communicating with a team had its disadvantages, e.g. there are shift patterns, and a reliance on messages being passed on to the support worker via other colleagues. This meant the PM was often unable to make direct contact with the support worker

- Students with additional learning needs, as support was needed at many levels e.g. for several different issues and possibly from multiple individuals or organisations. Without effective provision of support from a range of professionals, outcomes for these students were potentially negatively impacted.

Cost of delivering the programme

How much does it cost to deliver the PM programme per student?

The total direct cost of delivering the PM programme across the academic year 2021/22 was £28,357. This equates to an average cost of delivering the programme per student of £429.65 per year. Most of the costs associated with delivering the programme were staffing costs (£26,807). Table 11 shows the breakdown of the costs.

Table 11: Costs of delivering the programme

Resource inputs[24]	Total cost (£,2022[25])
Start-up costs	
Additional materials: including stationery and purchase of equipment (e.g. laptop)	£550
Recurring costs	
Staffing: one full-time PM, supported by the Director of Learning Support and Safeguarding and Vice Principal	£26,807
Travel costs: including travel to home visits	£100
PM resources: including mobile phone contract	£300
Professional memberships and training: including safeguarding certificate	£600
Total	**£28,357**

Source: BSFC (2022).

It should be noted that this cost per student is likely to represent the limit of what is practical for the current PM model to deliver. To put it another way, if additional students were supported by the PM, the cost per student would decrease, but it would have a negative impact on the time spent per student, the support provided, and the ability of the PM to manage the demands of the role.

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[24] There were no prerequisite costs.
[25] The currency used in this evaluation was pound sterling (£), with 2022 as the reference financial year. No discounting was applied to PM staffing costs as all costs occurred within the study period, which did not exceed one year. A fixed contribution figure was used for the value of support from the Director of Learning Support and Safeguarding and Vice Principal, as provided by the Programme team.

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

Overall, the programme was well received by students, college staff, external stakeholders, and parents/carers, with all those who contributed to the evaluation reporting high levels of satisfaction with the support provided.

The programme was largely delivered as planned, though the logic model has been refined to reflect how the programme was delivered in practice. References have been removed to helping students access careers clinics and academic skills programmes, and supporting with clearing, as these activities have not been undertaken as part of the PM programme. Further details on the updates to the logic model were discussed in the findings section and the updated logic model can be found in Appendix A.

The programme largely met the intended needs of the target group, with students benefitting from wide-ranging practical, academic and emotional support. The provision of tailored and personalised support generated positive feedback, as did the personality, skills, and knowledge of the PM. Students also valued the input they were able to have into the decisions about the support they received.

The PMs built strong relationships with other college staff and external stakeholders, enabling them to facilitate students' access to other resources and support as required. This was particularly important and valuable in terms of students who needed support to secure stable housing. To strengthen this further, ensuring that external stakeholders are aware of the programme's eligibility criteria and that the PM plays a specific role in supporting students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years would be helpful.

Given the aims and rationale for implementing the programme, it is a good sign that early indications suggest that students have seen positive outcomes as a result of the PM's support. Students have explored and increased their knowledge of progression pathways, including those that they had not previously considered. Students' aspirations have also increased, and the PM had supported students to put in place plans to achieve their future goals. The PM also supported students with strategies to help manage anxiety and improve confidence and resilience, which students reported had contributed to improved wellbeing. Within the qualitative fieldwork with students, parents/carers, and college staff, it was felt that the PM had contributed to improved retention, attainment, and exam attendance amongst students in the PM-cohort. However, there was less clear quantitative evidence for these outcomes. This was partly a result of the limited availability of quantitative data (see limitations section below). It is also a reflection of the role of the PM as a coordinator, helping students to access other support, and working alongside other college and external colleagues to support students holistically.

There were several barriers to programme delivery, limiting the potential of the programme to impact student engagement and outcomes. These barriers were predominately practical, with lack of available space and limited capacity of the PM to meet demand being important

factors. This is especially the case given that the PM has supported more than the anticipated number of students during the pilot academic year.

Although PM delivery staff spoke confidently of identifying the students most in need of support from the programme, the process of identifying eligible students at the start of the academic year could also be more systematic. This would see the number of students identified part-way through the academic year reduce and ensure support is provided to those in need at the earliest opportunity.

Limitations

This evaluation has several limitations. Firstly, the number of students, parents/carers, college staff, and external stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation was relatively low and might limit generalisability. While we have been able to give insight into individual experiences, we are unlikely to have captured the full breadth of student experiences and early outcomes that may be seen with any future roll-outs of the programme.

Interpretation of the findings should also consider that those who chose to take part in an interview or focus group may have had particularly positive or negative experiences of the PM programme. Therefore, findings from the qualitative data provide evidence on the breadth of experiences but should not be considered exhaustive or indicative of the prevalence of experiences.

Whilst every effort has been made to reassure those taking part that they could be completely honest with researchers, there is also the possibility that those taking part in an interview or focus group may have felt unintended desirability effects. This may include reporting the programme more positively because they felt that was what the researcher was seeking, or because they had a positive relationship with the PM.

Finally, the availability of quantitative outcomes data was limited. The timescales of the evaluation meant that quantitative data on exam attendance and attainment was not able to be shared by BSFC. Any future evaluation work should seek to address the timescales and also work with the programme delivery team to improve the recording of information about the students supported.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from the evaluation suggest that the PM programme offers promise for students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years, with some limitations and caveats (as discussed above). Reflecting on the findings in this report and the suggestions made by those who contributed, the evaluation team make the following recommendations to improve the delivery of the programme and the information available to evaluate it:

- Increasing information requested on the college application form to capture a more detailed history of a student's social-services involvement. The form should explicitly ask if a student was involved with a social worker in the past six years
- Improving the quality of recording of information about the PM cohort and ensuring information is easily accessible for college staff (where required)

- Providing more opportunities for the PM to discuss students supported by the programme with more college colleagues and for peer review of the PM role and performance

- Monitoring the workload of the PMs and ensuring they have adequate support in place to manage the emotional demands of the role. The delivery team are planning to make alterations to programme delivery, including having a second PM three days per week from September 2022, which should support with this

- Providing (where feasible) a separate, private room for the PMs to utilise whenever they are speaking with students

- Ensuring external stakeholders and college staff are aware of the programme's eligibility criteria and that the PM plays a specific role in supporting students who have had involvement with a social worker in the past six years would be helpful

- Including more activities around future employment within the PM programme, e.g. students accessing a careers clinic or having a meaningful employer interaction. This would support students' destinations and potentially reduce the workload of the PM.

Directions for Future Research

It is recommended that future research should include running another pilot at a larger scale. Future research may also consider further testing of the revised logic model (Appendix A). This may include whether the mechanisms of the PM programme can be measured quantitatively.

Future rollouts should consider tracking any indicative evidence of impact by collecting quantitative pre- and post-outcome measures. Future evaluations should consider the possibility of measuring these outcomes over a longer period of time (and particularly to include the exam results and progressions data from the academic year under investigation) to consider the full potential benefits of the programme.

The potential to create a matched comparison group of similar students in a different college, who did not access PM/or similar support, should also be considered for a larger-scale, full impact evaluation. This would support with evidencing outcomes including on improved attainment and attendance.

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Appendix A: (Revised) Logic Model

Context

Young people who have a social worker perform worse on average than their peers at every stage of their education and face barriers to securing positive post-education destinations (1). The DfE's Children in Need Data Review (2019) found that, in 2018, students who had a social worker in the year of their GCSEs were almost five times less likely to enter higher education (HE) at age 18 than their peers (2). By age 21, half of young people with a social worker had not yet achieved Level 2 qualifications (which include GCSEs), compared to 11% of those not involved with a social worker.

The reasons for poorer performance amongst students with experience of children's services compared with their peers, include having higher rates of SEND, lack of positive role models, lower expectations from adults in their lives, concerns about affordability of education, and lack of guidance about how to find and apply for opportunities (3). The transition from school to further education (FE) and HE can also be challenging for students with experience of children's services, as it often involves moving to a bigger site and to a timetable that places much more emphasis on individual responsibility to attend classes and complete work.

The Birkenhead constituency (where Birkenhead Sixth Form College (BSFC) is located) has high levels of deprivation compared with the North-West and England, with 40% of children and young people living in low-income households (4) and 24% being eligible for free school meals as of Autumn 2020/21 (5).

Within this context, BSFC identified a need to provide additional specialist pastoral support for young people with experience of children's services and created the Progress Mentor (PM) role in 2018. The aim of the PM programme is to provide individualised packages of support by a school-based mentor to help young people with experience of children's services overcome the barriers to success in FE and achieve better education, progression, wellbeing and housing stability outcomes.

Intervention

One full-time equivalent PM (supported by the Director of Learning Support (DSL) and Safeguarding/Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead) coordinates individualised support for 66 16–19-year-olds who have/have had a social worker in the past 6 years

Engage young person
- PM engages with young people via the college admissions form
- Information from previous school/college, college including tutors, virtual school, and social care staff also helps to identify those eligible
- Students are also identified during the academic year, as a result of disclosures about children's social services involvement to members of college staff

Transition
- If a young person is known to the college before enrolment, the PM completes a needs assessment with social care/schools/young person/carer
- PM attends care planning meetings and PEPs
- PM creates individualised transition plan for young person with social care/school staff/carer input

Support
- PM has regular face-to-face and Teams contact with young people
- PM delivers one-to-one academic support including tutoring, revision planning, and progression planning
- PM provides practical support e.g., home visits, delivering resources, and working with parents/carers to ensure young person has access to resources to continue learning at home
- PM provides support around destinations and preparing for life after college
- PM holds young people accountable and celebrates their achievements
- PM leads PEP completion and attends PEP review meetings
- PM facilitates young person's access to existing college resources, including:
  - Assigned pastoral tutor
  - Designated Mental Health Lead
  - Non-counselling listening service
- PM facilitates young person's access to external resources and support as needed e.g., work experience, housing, and mental health support

Destinations
- After the young person has left college, the PM follows up by email to ask about their post-college status
- PM can refer to university support for care leavers

Mechanisms

Open and effective channels of communication between college admissions, virtual school and staff working in social care

Challenges working with staff in these areas due to high turnover, time pressures and lack of understanding about the PM programme

Eligible young people not identified at start of academic year

Transition plan is tailored to the needs of young people and revisited regularly to ensure it stays current

PM lacks confidential space, meaning young people struggle to find the PM or do not feel comfortable approaching them for support

PM builds relationships with young people
- PM builds positive student relationships and young people trust the PM
- Young people know that there is someone available in the college when they need them
- Young people feel their achievements are praised and celebrated in the way they want

Flexible/creative approaches (including use of technology) are used to communicate with and engage young people, e.g., MS Teams instant messaging, morning alarm call, and pick ups for exams

Demand from young people outstrips PM capacity thereby limiting relationship building/ bespoke support

PM using internal/external networks
- Based in office with Learning Support Coordinator so can discuss support needs
- Fortnightly safeguarding meeting between PM and DSL means easy escalation via senior management
- PM builds college staff relationships (supported by DSL) e.g., tutor, learning support
- PM builds networks outside of college e.g., housing, employers, universities, CAMHS, social care, schools, Universal Credit

Limited capacity of other staff within the college to support, potentially leading to an expansion of the scope of the PM role

PM leaves post and takes away established networks/ relationships

Short-term outcomes (by the end of the academic year)

Destinations

Improved retention within the college

Improved attendance at college

Young people have improved attendance at exams

Improved educational attainment

Sub-outcome: Young people have greater confidence that they can achieve their aspirations.

Young people have raised aspirations

Wellbeing

Young people have greater confidence and resilience

Destinations

Young people's knowledge of possible progression pathways has improved

Housing stability

Young people have a stable housing situation (for those who need support in this area)

Sub-outcome: Young people have improved skills to live independently, e.g., financial mgmt., time mgmt., professionalism, navigating medical support

Long-term outcomes (by 6 months after leaving college)

Out of scope of evaluation

Destinations

Young people continue education in field of interest

Young people may struggle in further/higher education without continued intensive support

Young people move into an apprenticeship in field of interest

Young people move into employment in field of interest

Wellbeing

Young people have improved resilience and wellbeing

Housing stability

Young people have a sustained stable housing situation

Young people are living independently

(1) DfE Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection (2018)
(2) DfE, Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need Review (2019).
(3) See for example: WWCSC and CASCADE (University of Cardiff), Care Experienced Young People and Higher Education, May 2020.
(4) Wirral Intelligence Service (2019)
(5) DfE Explore Education Statistics (2021)

(Revised) assumptions underpinning programme delivery

PM

- There is a qualified person, with the ability to quickly establish networks, to take on the role
- The PM has enough time/resources to deliver programme activities as intended
- Students are supported in the absence of the PM (e.g. (un)planned leave)
- A school-based mentor allows better reach to students, and more relevant support for students
- The PM has prior experience of working in children's social services, through previous roles.

Other college staff

- College tutors/Careers Clinic/admissions staff know to have time to engage with PM.

Students who have, or have had, a social worker in past six years

- Students want to take part in the programme (recruitment)
- Students want to keep taking part in the programme/do not drop out of college (retention)
- Students are not already receiving dedicated mentoring support
- PM has the knowledge to signpost and support students to access a wide range of support that can holistically meet their needs.

External stakeholders

- External stakeholders (local authority, social workers, housing providers etc.) know about PM programme and are willing/able to engage with PM programme
- Good quality apprenticeships/employment opportunities exist for students leaving college
- Know to tell college about eligible young people at start of academic year.