UCD Access & Lifelong Learning Centre

Future Y●u Mentoring

Evaluation of University College Dublin's Future You Peer Support Access Initiative:
A Relational, Community Development Systemic Outreach Approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Future You Programme is part of the UCD Access & Lifelong Learning outreach programme for schools and communities. The outreach programme aims to raise aspirations about progression to third level education through a range of activities, including schools and campus visits, student shadowing days, and summer schools. Future You is delivered in 15 DEIS schools in the greater Dublin area. Participants of the Future you programme can also engage in other outreach activities.

The general aims of the programme are to provide earlier contact with students in DEIS schools who need support to aim for university, establish a framework to provide a joined up and continuous outreach support programme to schools, pupils and parents, foster & develop peer to peer support, and develop cultural confidence and support with students & their families.

This evaluation study investigated the impact of the Future You peer mentoring programme. It sought to identify the programme's impact on secondary school students' attitudes towards university and their perceptions regarding ability to access university-level education. The evaluation also sought to explore the impact of the programme on mentors' self-development. It also examined mechanisms by which the programme's objectives were met or hindered, and sought to highlight any implementation issues influencing its effectiveness. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with student participants, mentors, parents and staff were designed and implemented to examine these issues.

The clearest finding which emerged across all stakeholder groups was that peer mentoring made the most substantial difference to participants of the programme and that it did so by addressing cultural and social barriers that participating secondary school students faced in accessing university. Peer mentoring enhanced participant motivation, confidence, and knowledge. By providing key information in-person through mentors on financial supports available, on the second-level and third level education systems, and on how to navigate university websites and application processes, students, parents and mentors felt that the programme made a significant difference in ability to access university. Visiting UCD increased participant preparedness for transition to

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UCD and other third level institutions. A positive impact of participation on peer mentors' personal development and relevant skill development was also reported. It is clear that Future You offers a) a distinctive relational focus on access issues, b) a peer support network focus and c) a sensitivity to social class needs through ensuring that dialogue is with peers from a similar socio-economic background, living in areas that are either the same or culturally resonant with those of the prospective access students. Furthermore, Future You implicitly follows d) community development principles through establishing mentors as leaders from the community. These are substantial developments of ambition and understanding of access issues compared with much international practice and research.

Reported limitations were with regard to a) Timing/Delivery of Future You in the Schools, b) effectiveness of shadowing and UCD Tours, c) approaches to engagement of parents with the programme, d) overly exclusive criteria for inclusion on the programme and e) the website as an ineffective resource to support dissemination of information.

The key strength of relevant, up-to-date informal knowledge from peers shared across social networks to develop strong community links is a strong feature of Future You. A key contribution of the peer mentoring processes is working class empathy, where inclusivity means encouragement of the survival of potential students' attachment to a working class identity. Peer to peer mentoring processes need to be embedded into systems supported by structures to ensure this key dimension can continue over time, despite a continual turnover of mentors. A sustainability plan for keeping mentors and recognising their work needs to be developed in dialogue with the mentors themselves. There is a need for mentors to be not only from local communities and schools of those potential applicants but also additionally to be from a wider range of subject areas to be able to provide subject-specific insight and guidance.

A focus on stimulating access at primary school through mentors from the local community who have attended UCD is also needed to ensure that change is systemic rather than confined to a few individuals. To ensure more engage with it, an earlier age group is needed, including a whole school approach to higher education for later primary in DEIS schools. A notable finding was that some schools are more engaged with the access process than others. A strategic focus on change to school cultures to help promote access to higher education encompasses more than a channelling of information; a whole school approach is needed in fostering horizons and expectations of attending higher education institutions such as UCD.

There is a need to develop a more active collaborative decision-making role for schools and NGOs representing minority and socioeconomically excluded groups (e.g., Pavee Point for Travellers) in the access service and wider university structures at UCD. It is also recommended to develop a more active collaborative role for secondary students from minority and socioeconomically excluded groups in the access service and wider university structures at UCD, through stronger dialogue with student councils in linked DEIS schools and with Comhairle na nÓg. A key specific area of priority in the HEA Strategy for Access to Higher Education (2015) is to target access to the teaching profession; it is recommended that Future You develop a more intensive strategic focus on mentors, outreach and promotion of this strategic area.

A strong theme in the findings is that approaches to parental engagement require improvement in Future You. The university needs to be a focal point of community education, to establish a lifelong learning centre on-campus to engage a range of parents from communities traditionally excluded from the education system due to socio-economic and associated barriers. In doing so, focus is also on change to the university institutional culture to ensure that students and parents from working class backgrounds feel comfortable in their identity on campus so that their parents can also be further engaged. A clear finding is that the website support is a limited mode of engagement; this illustrates the limitations of simply information based models. Messages to be conveyed more explicitly to students about how university is different from school needs to be done by word of mouth rather than simply on websites, and Future You is a key pathway for this kind of message to take place, based on dialogue with prospective students' prior conceptions of university.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

A key issue in the new HEA Access to Higher Education strategy (2015) is to firmly address access to higher education for those attending DEIS schools. As the HEA report (2015) highlights, analysis by the Department of Education and Skills (2013) indicates that 24% of students completing the second year of senior cycle in DEIS schools progress on to higher education, compared to 50% for all schools.42 DEIS schools account for 12% of entrants to higher education, of which 8% come from rural areas and 4% from urban areas.

1.1 The Future You Programme

Future You is part of the UCD Access & Lifelong Learning outreach programme for schools and communities. The outreach programme aims to raise aspirations about progression to third level education through a suite of activities, including schools and campus visits, student shadowing days, and summer schools. Future You is delivered in 15 DEIS schools in the greater Dublin area and is jointly managed by two members of the Access & Lifelong learning team. Participants of the Future you programme can also engage in other outreach activities.

The five explicit goals of the programme are to:

1. Provide a space for school and college students from the same socio-economic backgrounds to explore options for after secondary school and share information about making the transition to third level;

2. To create an information space where students receive peer support during the application for third level and successfully completing second level;

3. To motivate students about their potential to succeed in third level and encourage them to make informed decisions about future education;

4. To develop leadership skills for mentors;

5. To increase the number of students from participant schools who consider third level an option for them.

The outreach programme aims to raise aspirations about progression to third level education through a suite of activities, including schools and campus visits, student shadowing days, and summer schools.

The programme centres on a Mentoring Model of which there were five strands:

1. mentoring secondary school students;

2. developing leadership & mentoring skills in UCD students;

3. providing academic support;

4. providing knowledge & support for parents; and

5. providing scholarship & transition support in UCD.

In mentoring secondary school students, Future You extends the 14 month programme (which runs from January of 5th Year to March of 6th year) to students in DEIS schools in communities with low university participation rates. The target areas are Ballyfermot, West Tallaght, Bray, Clondalkin, Crumlin, Sallynoggin, Loughlinstown, Cabinteely, & Balally. Only students who are planning on sitting a minimum of three higher level subjects in the traditional Leaving Certificate were invited to participate in the programme. The programme of 14 activities for the secondary school students includes three visits to UCD, six mentor visits to the students' respective schools, an Easter revision course, three parents & student workshops, and participation at the UCD Open Day.

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The majority of UCD student mentors are past pupils of the school in which they mentor or live in the community of the school in which they mentor, in cases where they are not, the mentors are from a similar profile Dublin community. Mentors are Garda vetted and undergo a two-and-a-half day leadership training programme, after which they begin delivery of the structured mentor sessions in schools. They do this in partnership with another UCD student mentor. Mentors also support the campus mentoring activities which the secondary school students attend, and they maintain a private Facebook group for the school in which they mentor.

The academic support provided to secondary school students comes in the form of mentor sessions which focus on making college choices, study skills, planning, preparing for the Leaving Certificate and preparing for college, additional tuition for sixth year students, online Leaving Certificate tutorials (new for 2016) and the provision of Eason's vouchers to buy essential books and/or exam papers.

In terms of providing knowledge and support for parents, the programme delivers three information workshops in the Ballyfermot civic centre and Tallaght Library which focuses on 'supporting your child through 6th year', discussing access routes to university and applying through the CAO, current college fees, available grants and scholarships, and understanding how the points system works.

Finally, in order to provide support for the transition to university from secondary school, Future You offers an invitation to apply for a scholarship, tags students from the programme in the UCD admission system so that they can be offered further support in the university, ensures students are included in the Access orientation programme, and provides general orientation support, academic skills workshops and one to one meetings with an adviser. Future You participants entering UCD are also invited to apply to work as a mentor in their former school.

1.2 Evaluating the Future You Programme

1.2.1. Research Aims

This evaluation study investigated the impact of the Future You peer mentoring programme with regard to whether it achieved the five goals which underpin the programme (as stated above). Specifically, the evaluation sought to identify the programme's impact on secondary school students' attitudes towards university and their perceptions regarding ability to access university-level education. The evaluation also sought to explore the impact of the programme on mentors' self-development. Finally, the evaluation examined mechanisms by which the programme's objectives were met or hindered, and sought to highlight any implementation issues which may have influenced its effectiveness.

The study had four key research questions:

1. Was there evidence of raised aspirations about progression to third level education among secondary school student participants?

2. Did students feel they were better equipped for going to university?

3. Did mentors develop new skills through working on the programme?

4. What aspects of the programme were considered by participants to be most effective in achieving the above goals (for students and peer mentors respectively)? What aspects of the programme were considered to be least effective (as above)?

1.2.1. Research Method and Rationale

A qualitative approach was adopted for the study in order to gain meaningful data on the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders in the Future You programme. Chapter two outlines the methodology in greater detail but a brief outline and justification for the approach taken by the study team is outlined here.

A series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with student participants, mentors, parents and staff were designed and implemented to examine these four central questions. To encourage discussion of the programme and the extent to which it may have impacted students, mentors and other key stakeholders, the evaluation team asked a set of broad questions about views of third level education and the strengths and limitations of the Future You programme (see interview schedule, appendix 1).

The questions were selected so as to open up discussion about the programme and issues in accessing third level education more generally and to allow for other themes to emerge.

The questions were selected so as to open up discussion about the programme and issues in accessing third level education more generally and to allow for other themes to emerge. By providing the same questions for discussion, a range of perspectives on core issues could be identified and compared. Research has shown that interpretations of the causes of inequality in education differ among social groups (Osbourne & Leith, 2000) and it is important to (1) gain a range of perspectives and (2) compare them so that no one group is excluded from the discussion. The major strength of the approach taken in this report is that the recipients of the programme (students and parents), frontline workers (mentors) and programme staff had an opportunity to provide detailed views on the same core issues regarding the strengths and limitations of the Future You programme and more generally with regard to accessing university education and barriers faced by communities.

Key stakeholders were identified by the study team in conjunction with the Future You programme team as: (1) participating secondary school students, (2) past participants of the programme (including those currently attending UCD and those who did not go to university), (3) mentors, (4) parents, and (5) programme staff.

867

Students Future You has worked with since 2012.

224

Students participating in the most recent 2016 cohort.

IRISH AND EU POLICY CONTEXT FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

2

A number of strategic objectives and actions in the HEA strategy operate as an important policy backdrop for the Future You programme. These include as follows:

1.1 To embed whole-of-HEI approaches to institutional access strategies so that access for under-represented groups is prioritised across all faculties. Each faculty to designate an 'access champion' to support and advise on implementation of institutional access strategy.

1.7 To increase access by students from target groups to initial teacher education

1.8 To ensure that teacher education and professional development programmes support the raising of expectations among students in relation to their higher education potential.

3.5 To monitor the participation and outcomes for entrants from DEIS schools.

3.6 To consult with students and prospective students to inform the implementation and development of access policy

5.2 To strengthen the linkages between higher education institutions and local communities.

5.3 To develop mentoring programmes and initiatives for students in second level by regional clusters in collaboration with second level schools, enterprise and community groups.

All of these objectives offer a fresh lens for examination of the Future You project.

The HEA strategy goes on to emphasise that:

Initiatives or strategies that emerge from such engagements should have some or all of the following elements or characteristics.

- A 'whole-of-education' approach to access.
- Communication of the value of higher education.
- Provision of clear information on education pathways.
- Reinforcement of HEIs' engagement with communities and other stakeholders.
- The use of mentors/role models from within communities – to enable students to make informed decisions about their post-secondary education options.
- Involvement of parents and teachers as key advisers to students. (p.31)

Access to higher education is also a major priority at European Union level. Participation in higher education is one of only two EU2020 headline targets across all of education, early school leaving prevention is the other. While Ireland has already gone beyond this EU2020 headline target that (1) the share of 30–34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40 %, an implication of this headline target is that an access to higher education strategy is needed also for socio-economically excluded populations and not only the general population (Downes 2014a).

Participation in higher education is one of only two EU2020 headline targets across all of education, early school leaving prevention is the other.

The European Commission Communication (2015) *Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* (ET2020): New priorities for European cooperation in education and training observes that 'Increasing graduation rates remains a challenge for many Member States, especially among disadvantaged groups' (p.4)

The EU Council (2009 /C 119/02) agreed on a range of strategic priorities for lifelong learning that offer an additional lens for access to higher education issues:

1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:

(a) The personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens
(b) Sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.

Setting out 'a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective', the EU Council (2009 /C 119/02) goes on to state:

Indeed, lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts—whether formal, non-formal or informal—and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools 1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies.

Again within a lifelong learning framework, The EU *Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning* (2011) specifically makes a call to:

encourage higher education institutions to embrace less traditional groups of learners, such as adult learners, as a means of displaying social responsibility and greater openness towards the community at large.

2. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship (p. 3).

Traditional research on barriers to accessing education tends to focus on discrete issues rather than examining these issues in a holistic, systemic fashion (Downes 2014). For example, two well-known US surveys of participation (Carp et al. 1974; Johnstone and Rivera 1965) found the following to be especially significant barriers: cost, lack of time, inconvenient scheduling, lack of information about educational opportunities, job responsibilities, home responsibilities, lack of interest and lack of confidence. This research led to a commonly recognised tripartite distinction between situational, dispositional and institutional deterrents to accessing education for marginalised groups. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) added a fourth category, namely, information barriers. Interpersonal relational barriers, such as fear of success, also require acknowledgment (Horner 1972; Ivers and Downes 2012; Cefai et al. 2015).

Slowey and Schuetze's (2012) international review suggests that 'overall, higher education has been slow to adapts its missions, structures and understanding of knowledge and learning—in short, its culture—to the demands for a more open, flexible and egalitarian system' (p. 4). Hoelscher et al. (2008) found that the most common reason given by students in England for choosing an institution (university or further education college) was its location (though, importantly, this does not concern distance learning). This was mentioned as a single reason for choice by one third of students regardless of the educational pathway chosen. Good location was defined as proximity with home or with family, proximity with a big city or well served by transport.

It would appear that a departmental and faculty level focus on access to education promotion is radically underdeveloped across many European countries (Downes 2014) (see also Croxford and Raffe 2013 for a focus on differentiated access across faculties within the same institution in a UK context). Another feature gaining recent research interest is in engaging with prospective students conceptions of higher education to contrast university experience with that of school.

For instance, in an Australian context, McMahon et al. (2015) offer the following conclusions on their findings based on dialogue with prospective access students:

One of the amazing things that were pedagogically effective in these discussions was when the interviewers offered direct comparisons between university and school. The interviewers did this by highlighting the difference between the two in terms of: weeks of attendance per year (26 at university versus 40 at school); the number and flexibility of face-to-face teaching hours per week (12 at university versus 30 at school – so you can work and study); curriculum content (mandated school content versus studying within your chosen field at university, e.g., if you do not like mathematics you do not have to do it); disciplinary differences (learning and attendance is your responsibility, versus suspensions and expulsions at school); physical differences (campuses often have faces, bars, post offices, shops, food halls; schools are private property but most Australian universities are public spaces you can just walk in and check it out; and social differences (student unions, O-week parties, social calendars). In some cases this moved young people from disinterest to curiosity…and sometimes a resolution to attend (p.16).

A key point here is not simply the message as an informational dimension but also the relational process, namely, that it takes place by way of dialogue and engages with prospective students' prior ideas and expectations about university.

Against the backdrop of this initial research introduction, it is clear that Future You goes much further than these frameworks. It offers a) a distinctive relational focus on access issues, b) a peer support network focus and c) a sensitivity to social class needs through ensuring that dialogue is with peers from a similar socio-economic background, living in areas that are either the same or culturally resonant with those of the prospective access students. Furthermore, Future You implicitly follows d) community development principles through establishing mentors as leaders from the community. These are substantial developments of ambition and understanding of access issues compared with much international practice and research.

METHODOLOGY

3

3.1   Qualitative Method

A qualitative approach was used in this evaluation. Such an approach is defined by openness and inclusiveness on the part of researchers (Hogan, 1996) and privileges the participants' accounts. The research team sought to identify and explore the perspectives of key stakeholders in the Future You programme using a participant-centred approach in order to gather meaningful data about the programme and gain a rich understanding of its impact on stakeholders and the ways in which the programme was perceived by those involved.

3.2   Participants and Sampling Procedure

In total, seven types of key stakeholders were identified for this evaluation:

1. secondary school students participating in the Future You programme at the time of the study (2015-2016);

2. past participants of the Future You programme currently in UCD (i.e. students who had participated in the preceding two years);

3. past participants of the programme who did not attend UCD;

4. past participants of the programme who are currently mentors on the programme;

5. UCD graduates who were the first mentors on the programme;

6. parents of current student participants;

7. UCD staff involved in the delivery of the programme.

Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001, p. 238). Criterion sampling was used to recruit both male and female secondary school students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and locations who were currently in the Future You programme. The sampling procedure for secondary school student participants was as follows: one student from each participating school, were randomly selected and contacted to see if they would participate in the study. If a student did not wish to participate, another student was selected (randomly) until one student from each school was available

to attend a focus group. In total, 14 sixth year participants of the programme attended a focus group on the day they were graduating from the Future You programme (the 14 students were split into two focus groups each comprising of seven students). Secondary school students were aged 17 to 18 years at the time of interview. Five were male and nine were female.

Availability sampling was used to recruit participants for all other focus groups and interviews. Past participants of the programme who subsequently attended UCD (were attending at the time of the evaluation) and past participants of the programme who did not attend UCD after they completed the programme, were contacted by the programme co-ordaintor to seek their involvement in the study.

Three current students of UCD attended a focus group. None of the past participants who did not go to university were available for a focus group but three were available for phone interview. Past participants were aged 18 to 20 at time of interview.

All mentors (those who had participated in the Future You programme as students and those who had not) were approached in person or by phone by the programme co-ordinator to seek their participation in focus groups. A total of five mentors who had participated in the programme at second-level took part in a focus group. A total of eight mentors who had not participated in the programme at second-level as it was not available to them at the time took part in a focus group. These mentors were the first cohort of mentors on the Future You programme. Mentors were aged 18 to 25 years at time of interview.

Parents of secondary school participants were the most difficult group to recruit for the evaluation study. Although all parents from the parent-student workshops were invited to attend, no parents attended the first focus groups which had been arranged. As an incentive for participation, parents were offered an additional information evening regarding accessing third-level education. Three parents from one location attended a focus group.

One of the programme co-ordinators was interviewed individually. Additional staff members were not interviewed due to time limitations. Parents and programme staff were aged between 35 and 55 at time of interview.

Participant Group	Data Collection (type & number)	Number of Participants	Date
CURRENT PARTICIPANTS	Focus Groups A & B	14	14.03.16
PAST PARTICIPANTS (not attending UCD)	Interview x 3	3	03.09.15
PAST PARTICIPANTS (currently UCD students)	Focus Group C	3	02.09.15
PARENTS	Focus Group D	3	19.01.16
MENTORS (past participants)	Focus Group E	5	02.09.15
MENTORS (first cohort, now graduates of UCD)	Focus Group F	8	02.09.15
PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATOR	Interview x 1	1	19.01.16
TOTAL	6 Focus Groups; 4 Interviews	37	

3.3 Data collection

A combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews was used in order to gain an understanding of participant experiences and perceptions of the programme. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded using the Audacity programme and transcribed verbatim. Participants' permission was sought prior to recording.

A focus group is a type of interview (Patton, 1990) rather than a discussion group. However, group dynamics are an important consideration in this type of interview and shape the nature of the data collected and insights made. They are considered to be useful for evaluations in several ways, including when identifying and defining problems in programme implementation, identifying programme strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations, and obtaining perceptions of project outcomes and impacts (Mahoney, 1997). Focus groups are preferred over and above interviews when a single topic or issue is being explored in-depth, the subject is not a sensitive one that may prohibit participation by all in the focus group, and where stakeholders wish to hear participants' views (ibid). They are also considered cost and time-effective where there are limited funds available.

The following considerations were made when conducting the focus groups, especially as most of these were conducted with adolescents and young adults: the setting was always quiet and free from distractions so that it was easy to hear all participants; the setting was convenient for the participants (either where they currently studied or somewhere they regularly attended) and non-threatening; seating was arranged in a circle where possible to encourage involvement and interaction and minimise the role/perception of the researcher as expert in the discussion but rather as a facilitator.

Semi-structured interviews on the other hand allow for deeper discussion of the issues and may be preferable where little is known about a particular topic. In this study, they were primarily used where there was difficulty recruiting a specific cohort for a focus group (for example, past participants of the Future You programme who did not attend university after secondary school).

3.4 Focus Group and Interview Schedule

A common set of questions was asked to all participants irrespective of their stake in the Future You programme. As mentioned, this approach to guiding questions was taken so as to encourage discussion of the Future You programme and participants views regarding its impact and its implementation. All participants were asked the same core questions so that a range a perspectives on a common set of issues could be gathered and compared.

The set of guiding questions were as follows:

1. If you had a younger sister or brother [or child, for parents], what would be the 3 most important pieces of advice/help you would give to her/him about going to university?

2. What are the biggest obstacles people from your area face in going to third university?

3. In your opinion, what are the best [most important/ effective?] parts of the programme?

4. In your opinion, what are the parts of the programme that most need to be improved?

5. If you were Minister for Education what would you do to help more people from your area/school go to university?

In all circumstances, these questions generated much discussion and elaboration by participants. Both the programme and the issues surrounding educational disadvantage were explored primarily in answering these questions. However, the facilitator of each session included follow-up questions to explore emerging themes more fully during the interviews / focus groups.
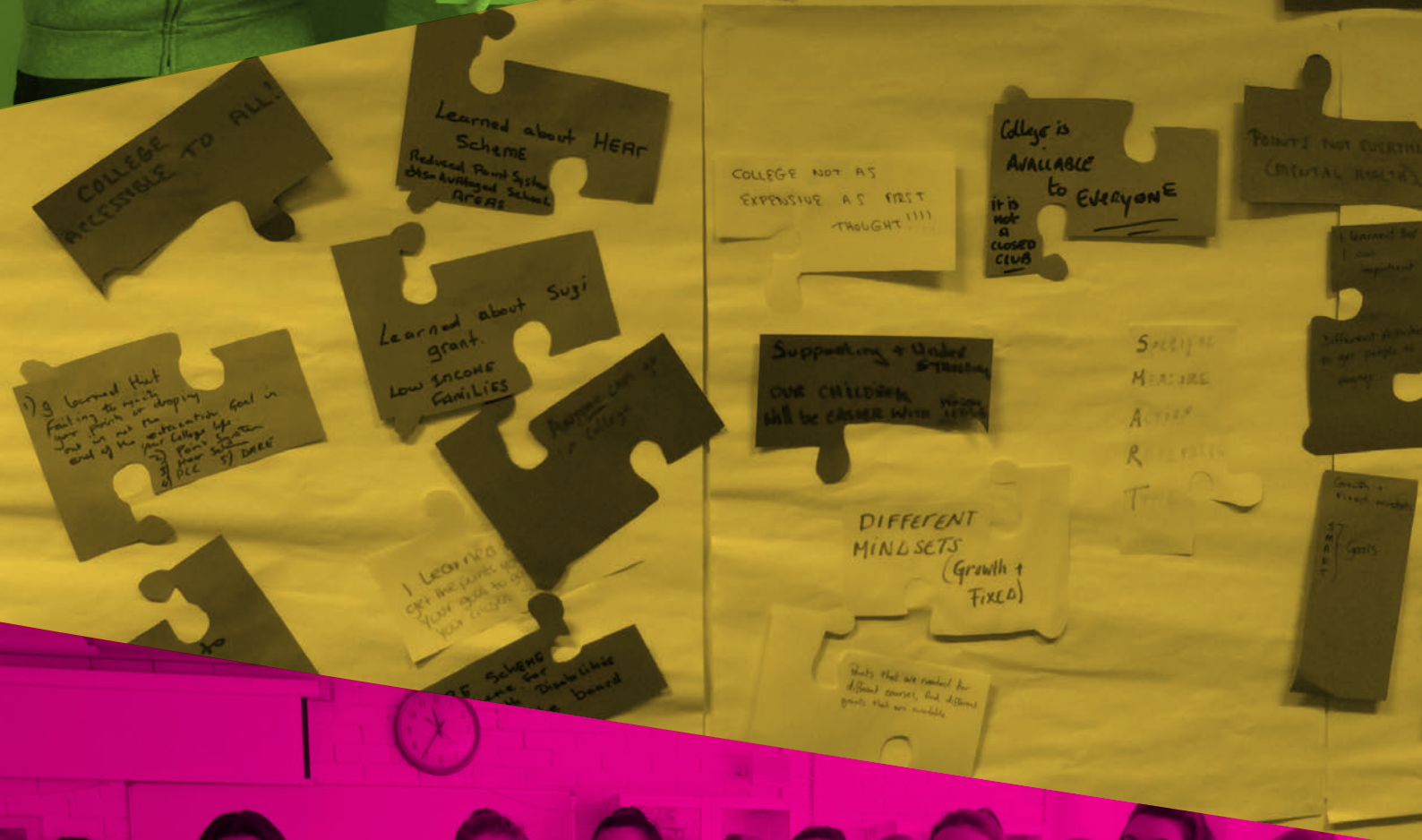
3.5 | Analysis

Data were analysed for major themes using Thematic Analysis. This is primarily a descriptive method which allows for the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Findings from this approach are more readily understood by a wide audience including the public and policy makers (Howitt, 2013). The initial step in the analysis involved reading through all transcripts several times to get a sense of the findings. Through a process of open coding, the transcripts were broken down into meaningful units of data from which themes could be identified by the researcher (after Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were then reviewed before being defined and labelled.

Given the specific aims of the evaluation to identify and explore stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the Future You programme, the approach was not data-led (i.e. inductive) but rather was guided by educational research. This research guided the extraction of themes from the data although emerging, unanticipated themes were also identified and explored.

Findings are presented in the next chapter both in tables and through discussion under theme headings. Quotations are regularly used throughout to illustrate the experiences and perspectives of participants. Participants are anonymised and any identifying markers such as school location, university course of study etc. are removed.

3.6 | Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the National College of Ireland. One of the key ethical principles that underpinned the conduct of the research was informed consent. The purpose of the research was discussed with each stakeholder group and outlined what their involvement would mean in practice. Before the focus groups and interviews were administered, information leaflets and consent forms were distributed to all participants. After having an opportunity to read through these documents, the researcher encouraged questions about the procedure and research. Eight of the secondary school students who took part in the focus groups were seventeen years of age and their parents were contacted with the study information and consent materials several weeks prior to the focus groups. The students' consent was also obtained. In accordance with research protocols, the research team emphasised that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

FINDINGS

4

This chapter reports the major findings with regard to the outcomes of the programme: whether the programme met its stated aims from the perspective of major stakeholders and whether the programme was perceived to be well implemented. These findings highlight any room for development or improvement as observed by the major stakeholders of the programme.

In the following sections, the views of the participants are triangulated to present the predominant and subdominant perceptions of the Future You programme. Quotes are included as supplementary evidence of these views and perceptions and, where possible, several from a range of stakeholders are provided in order to support convergent views. Participants have each been given a pseudonym but are identified in terms of their stakeholder group and whether their input was gathered as part of a focus group or interview.

At the beginning of the findings chapter, we have included a table outlining briefly findings related to the three main research questions of this evaluation (see table 1). A summary table of the major findings by stakeholder groups is also provided at the end of the chapter in order to succinctly present the complex findings from the range of stakeholders' views (see table 2).

Table 1: Research Questions and Key Findings

Research Question		Finding
1.	Evidence of Changing Attitudes towards University and Third Level Education	**YES:** Among secondary school students, past participants, parents and mentors. Several participants reported being highly motivated before entering the programme and viewed this motivation as critical to making the most of Future You. These changes in attitude were viewed as brought about primarily through the peer mentoring system which was highly rated across the board, and through the one-to-one support at parent workshops
2.	Did participants feel better equipped for university?	**YES:** secondary school students, past participants, parents and mentors reported a positive impact on levels of preparedness. Some limitations were reported with regard to preferences for more academic support (from secondary school students). Aspects which worked particularly well included the parent workshops, in-school mentoring, and overnight stays on campus. Shadowing days[1] and university tours were reported by students and mentors as less effective.
3.	Did mentors gain new skills?	**YES:** increased self-confidence and leadership skills in particular. These skills were reported as developing primarily through the responsibility of the role; training; practice; and social supports at the Access & Lifelong Learning Centre in particular.
4a.	What aspects of the programme were most effective?	Peer mentoring system.
4b.	What aspects of the programme required development / improvement?	Website support; parental engagement and buy-in.

[1]Shadowing days are not part of the future you programme but are offered as part of the outreach Programme.

4.1
POSITIVE IMPACTS
of the Future You Programme

Overall, reports from all stakeholder groups were very positive about the content, orientation and impact of the programme. All participants of the study were invited by the interviewer to reflect on what they considered to be the strengths of the programme and ways in which the programme could be improved. Participants of the programme, both secondary school students and mentors, were asked directly about the programme's impact on their perceptions of third level education and on their skills development.

The clearest finding which emerged across all stakeholder groups was that peer mentoring made the most substantial

difference to participants of the programme and that it did so by addressing cultural and social barriers that participating secondary school students faced in accessing university. Mentors who had delivered or were in the process of delivering the programme were particularly supportive of Future You and eager to see it rolled out more generally to other schools and more students. The former mentors (who have now graduated from UCD) critiqued in-depth the relationship between disadvantage and low university attendance and explored the mechanisms by which the Future You programme supported secondary school students from DEIS schools in attending UCD.

1 Peer Mentoring Enhanced Participant Motivation, Confidence, and Knowledge

> *"Really and truly, I couldn't have wished for a better programme. All the way through from the college from the school to everything. So I've no complaints at all […] it's just been fantastic. The volunteers that come over, the mentors - they're brilliant."*
> Christina, parent of secondary school participant, focus group D

All stakeholder groups cited the role of peer mentors as the most important aspect of the programme. By ensuring mentorship was provided by young people who had attended the same school or who came from the same location as the secondary school students, stakeholders felt that the students were better able to relate to the mentors, that they had tangible role models for attending university, and that the students felt supported and listened to.

> *"They actually helped us. […] Oh and they encouraged us! They encouraged us to go for it."*
> Joanna, secondary school student, focus group A

> *"Listening to them worrying about what they're going to do for the rest of their life and then listening to them worrying about finances and then, you know, if they were going to get certain amount of points for a certain course. So it was something that resonated with me quickly"*
> Mick, secondary school student, focus group A

> *"It was helpful because they gave us their life experience. When they went to college. That was really helpful with the Leaving Cert, the CAO and everything."*
> Jane, secondary school student, focus group A

Participants drew on their personal experiences at home and in school to highlight the impact of the peer mentoring system on them. In some instances, students were the first to go to university in their respective families and felt that they had little information or a limited starting point.

> *"The Future You programme actually provided really relevant and factual information about college and I did not know anything about college because I'm the first one in my family to go to college. Literally every single thing that I need to know about college […] and it's been helpful, really helpful as well and it gave me that boost of motivation… confidence to go to college."*
> Belinda, secondary school student, focus group B

> *"I was real terrified to go to college, leaving school after Leaving Cert but my mentors they, they told us how they studied. Where I come from there's loads of kids in my family so it was really hard to study at home so saying, 'go to the library or somewhere really quiet'. But they told us obviously they were scared too so I knew I wasn't the only one. The only one that was scared to death or feeling ill or whatever. But just letting me know I wasn't the only one."*
> Amanda, secondary school student, focus group A

Some but not all students hadn't considered going to university before starting the programme and the role of the peer mentors in changing their perspective was the main strength of the programme for them.

> *"Before this programme, I didn't even want to go to college. I thought it was like America where you have to pay like hundreds and thousands. I, also like, why, why do like three more years of school but I've actually nearly found my ambition. Like saying to me that, it would be like very cheap as well and made me just want to go to college."*
> Maria, secondary school student, focus group B

Having a relatable peer ("someone on your level") who was much closer in age was also considered an important aspect of the peer mentoring system by both the secondary school students participating in the programme and also the mentors delivering the programme in the secondary schools.

> *"I think it's getting the information from the student's point of view about college and not just by a teacher telling you what it's like. Yeah more about the student telling you what it's actually like going into college and stuff."*
> Clara, secondary school student, focus group A

> *"It's more relaxed with people who went to our school and are closer to our age. Like, we feel that they relate to us and we can relate to them. So it just gives you a little boost"*
> Robert, secondary school student, focus group B

> *"You're kind of getting the first person perspective on UCD […] So you're not getting, like someone's opinion, like, someone who works in an office, the perspective you're getting is an actual student perspective […] It's the one-to-one stuff with a mentor. It kind of gives you that extra push, you know?"*
> Caroline, past participant of programme and current UCD student, focus group C

Peer Mentoring Enhanced Participant Motivation, Confidence, and Knowledge

"I already considered third level but when you see someone in the exact same situation as you [...] you see someone in a similar field then it makes your goal a lot more realistic, you know? Like a lot more achievable when you see someone in the exact same scenario you were in has already gone there, it makes it much easier to say 'well, I can do it as well'."

John, current mentor and past participant on the programme

"I think going back to your old school is a big thing as well. 'Cos, you know, they kind of know of you and I think they engage with you a lot quicker and they relate to you."

Mary, current mentor and past participant on the programme

"I think like hearing them talking about their own college experience kind of makes it more real, it's exciting and you're like 'Ugh I want to be them in a year!'"

Katy as above

"For us, because we came from the school where we did our Leaving Cert and everything like that, they can see people who went onto third level education, that wasn't PLC courses, that wasn't x College of Further Education for example. So they had tons of questions. [It was] probably the first time they made contact with anyone that was in the school that had gone on to that. And being from the area probably has a massive effect on that alone."

Adam, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

"I think it's definitely matching to the area is what works really well."

Eve, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

"I think at the start they thought it was gonna be, 'this is what you need to do. This is this and this is this'. Whereas when it was more informed and it was like, 'what do you guys want to know?', they were kind of more, open to it. [...] They want to be there and stuff so I think it's just, you're on their level and it's definitely a lot more open because it's in their environment. Like, they have a visit to UCD and the closing ceremony is here but it's well into it so they're very comfortable with you at the point that they're brought out of their environment and into somewhere like this. [...] You can introduce them to other people, other mentors and say, 'they were just in the school in the corner around the road'."

Carly, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

"I think the fact that its peers coming in, it's not an adult, it's not a lecturer from the university. Whether you're from the exact area or not cause I did my first year in Future You, I did it in my area and then the second year I had to do in a different area in Dublin. So it still was effective that I was just from an area that doesn't typically go on to third level education and the fact that I was their age, well just a few years older. [...] And it's so much more real than having an adult, like it is great having [Future You programme coordinator] come in and giving a talk, it kind of motivates everyone but then to reinforce it with actual students coming in who are not just because they're from an area but also because we're their age as well."

Rebecca, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

In addition to the positive views of the peer mentoring system shared by students, parents and mentors, the programme coordinator cited the peer mentoring system as the greatest strength of the programme.

"The first thing which I think is effective, or hope is, is introducing them [students] to people who have gone to the same schools, who live in the area, who have gone to college, who can demonstrate that college is realistic. Tell them well, like, 'I managed it.' [...] getting them started, showing them how much work is involved you know, these kids made it but they studied. You know? And they're sharing studying techniques. They're sharing, 'well when I was in sixth year, I couldn't play football as much as I used to, I studied instead because I wanted to go to college.' I think that it is the sharing of experiences among people who are neighbours, who are friends, who are relatives, you know, who do come from a similar background is something that's exciting for the kids in the schools and does spark their interest"

Future You programme coordinator

2 Provision of Key Information In-Person through Mentors Increased Participant Knowledge and Motivation regarding University

By providing essential information on financial supports available, on the second-level and third level education systems, and on how to navigate university websites and application processes, students, parents and mentors felt that the programme made a significant difference in ability to access university and that the provision of this information did so through increasing knowledge and motivation.

For secondary school students, the way in which this information was provided (i.e. primarily in person through mentors) made a significant difference in getting timely and important information which would impact on applying to go to university.

> *"The best part of the Future You programme was the fact that if we had any questions about college we wouldn't have to go searching through loads of research pages of college websites. Because we'd ask our mentors and they'd try their best to find out like the answer or if they had the answer right there they'd tell us then. It wasn't as intimidating as going through loads of pages and pages of information."*
>
> Amy, past participant of programme who did not proceed UCD, interview

> *"When the programme first started, I wasn't really thinking about college. It was kind of like 'ah alright get this Leaving Cert done and over with'. That was only in fifth year, college was in the back of my mind. It was so far away, it was almost unreachable. They came in. They were telling you all the options, how to go about it. They gave you advice on applying for HEAR and everything and the scholarship and stuff like that. So then, towards the end then I was more focused, I knew UCD was what I wanted and I was gonna take the Leaving Cert more serious and had clear aims in my mind so, I think, they help that… they get you from one point to another."*
>
> Katy, past participant of programme and current UCD student, focus group C

Students, parents and mentors highlighted that knowledge of financial supports was particularly important in helping to overcome a major obstacle facing some students, namely, financial constraints.

> *"I'd say as well with the finance that people think 'ah it's too much money' and all but the Future You offer a scholarship and I have that myself and that can change someone's life to have that money that really can help put you through college. People need to be aware. There are options. There are ways around the whole finance issue."*
>
> Katy, past participant of Future You and current UCD student, focus group C

> *"The help. The supports. Being given the knowledge there is this HEAR programme, that there are different programmes if you can't manage with the HEAR forms there are open days in UCD. Give Moira [programme coordinator] a ring and she'll help out with them. And the cost. Like I would've kind of have it in my head that you're looking at eight, ten thousand euro for a child to go start first year in college. But when Moira was doing it all, it's not like that. Explaining and even down to explaining the Credit Union do programs that help with laptops and bus tickets."*
>
> Chloe, parent of secondary school student, focus group D

> *"Moira broke it all down first. It was great because she explained what was exactly what. And then she was saying, well this is what you're going to need for them in September, roughly. If they decide to go. Now I was very interested then in the scholarships. So was my lad then when I said to him, 'James you could get… because you're in this Future You', you know? And he said, 'Oh can I?', and I said yeah. So he's even looking into that."*
>
> Sophie, parent of secondary school student, focus group D

One past participant mentioned the provision of online supports as particularly useful as this was somewhere students could log in and ask questions. The fact that students could log in at any time and ask a question they had suddenly thought of or remembered was cited as "really helpful" (Katy, focus group C).

Mentors however highlighted that not all students who were accepted on to the programme were engaged throughout the mentor sessions and that motivation or engagement by students varied by school. This was also highlighted by the programme coordinator, i.e. that the willingness or culture for participation needed to be in place for the programme to work and will be discussed with regard to implementation issues. The following is an excerpt from Focus Group E with past participants of the programme who are currently mentors.

> *"I think it depends on the school as well because I work with two schools and one of them, they really engage, want to hear what you have to say and ask questions, they were really interested. In other schools they are very quiet. You don't know if they are afraid or if they just don't want to take part so…"*
>
> Mary, mentor and past participant of programme Focus Group E

2 Provision of Key Information In-Person through Mentors Increased Participant Knowledge and Motivation regarding University

> *"Because you see the ones who are really like, ask another question or they'll be messing like when we were in our old school last year. We use to do it in the computer rooms and you'd see the ones who like weren't motivated at all and just keep going in the computer room, not listening to you or just messing with the person beside them but you'll have the ones that really engage with us, like sit at the front and listen to every word of every sentence."*
> Alice, mentor and past participant of programme Focus Group E.

> *"- But again it's very student-dependent. You do have those groups that Alice mentioned where they're just there to take the class off. But often times I've noticed that both years I've done it you'll have at least one where you can sort of see they're in that crowd, you can you'll notice them paying attention and asking a question and like you know, you can see they have an interest and they are trying to sort of like set themselves aside from the messing or whatever is going on you know."*
> John, mentor and past participant of programme focus group E.

This lack of engagement was also felt to be an issue by more motivated secondary school students on the programme. For one student, initial motivation to participate in and benefit from the programme shaped the impact of the programme:

> *"I don't think the conversation in my group of friends was different because, we all had plans to go to college, not specific college but just a college in general. […] Although, some of the people who went for the doss might've changed just a little bit like. They would start talking about college but then a few days later would probably just forget about it and leave it."*
> Steven, past participant of programme and current UCD student, focus group C

> *"I have a feeling the programme was good but not everyone contributed like not everyone was part of it. Like some people just sat there. And they just sat on their phones like they couldn't care."*
> Rosie, secondary school student, focus group A

Finally, with regard to gaining information from the mentors, former mentors, (who have graduated from UCD), revealed that they felt restricted in their knowledge of other specialisms when trying to answer students' questions. Thus while they could talk at length about their personal experiences and knowledge of specific programmes, several of the more experienced mentors on the programme highlighted a need to be armed with knowledge of specific university programmes in order to fully inform students. One mentor suggested an 'information sheet' on existing programmes that would aid mentors in explaining the curriculum for programmes available in UCD.

> *"It's just daunting. And then as well the mentors in there, when we went out you'd get asked about a thousand different courses and I don't really know anything about Science, maybe Psychology. My other mentor he was an Arts guy, he wasn't there all the time so when they were asking anything about that I was a bit like, so I think like all the mentors as well should be, maybe have a little course or like all the courses."*
> Eve, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

3 Visiting UCD Increased Participant Preparedness for Transition to UCD and other Third Level Institutions

While many of the current UCD students who were past participants of the programme reported that Future You had helped them transition well to UCD, students who decided not to go to UCD or applied elsewhere also valued the experience of visiting the university as part of the programme and as invaluable in helping them on their current path.

> "Well I actually think that like going to UCD, you know, getting to know some of the other schools that were part of it [Future You] because going into the course that I'm in now I actually know a good few people from around the college because of Future You [...] I've made some very good friends with people from the Future You Mentor Program. So it's very sociable and it'll make you have new friends as well."
>
> Niamh, past participant who did not proceed to UCD, interview

> "You get to go and experience the colleges before you actually go to it. Definitely. I wanted to go to UCD before but when I went out I did change my mind and it wasn't because the course wasn't good or because the college wasn't good. It's just it was so big and I knew it wasn't for me. I was glad then that I didn't just go and apply myself to a course and then, I would've been lost if I had have went. So it was better to experience it all first hand before, you go."
>
> Jade, past participant who did not proceed to UCD, interview

The opportunity to stay on campus was considered a particularly effective way to impart information through lived experience by students' parents. The following is an excerpt from the parents' focus group regarding the positive impact that staying overnight[2] in UCD had on their children:

> "- When they were going out to UCD, they were getting their buses or meeting each other in town. Even though, the age they are, they're being dropped to darts, they're being dropped to football, they're being dropped to gymnastics because it's dark out. So they had to get themselves there, they had the social support.
> (Chloe)
>
> - Yeah and the support of the mentors, from the programme.
> (Sophie)
>
> - Yeah I just think that they got used to college lifestyle. That they wouldn't be daunted if they were going into it. That would've been my thing with John.
> (Charlotte)
>
> - Well I thought it was great now that week.
> (Sophie)"

For past participants, currently studying at UCD, the knowledge that there were "people there that kind of knew your background" (Laura, focus group E) was an important support and source of reassurance: "I wouldn't have talked to people but knowing that like, we had like one on one meetings with Moira as well, she probably would've gotten people in touch with other people and talking as well." The positive role of the Access & Lifelong Learning Centre in UCD was mentioned by other students also who emphasised the importance of not being alone in the first few weeks of university and getting to know other students at the HEAR orientation. Being able to spot a familiar face in the early stages of studying at the university was described as a "lifeline" (John, focus group E), a sentiment that appeared to be appreciated by the rest of the focus group (where students laughed and nodded in agreement).

[2] The Residential Summer school is not part of Future you but is offered to students as part of the outreach programme.

4 Impact of Participation on Peer Mentors Reported Personal Development and Relevant Skill Development

The main outcome in terms of mentors' skill development was with regard to an increase in confidence. One mentor mentioned self-confidence in completing the "CAO and stuff like that. And then actually being a mentor and going in to schools and meeting people, getting up and sharing your experiences as well." (Alice).

Taking control of a classroom, public speaking and developing leadership were also cited by mentors as important ways in which the programme had impacted them in terms of self-development. By working together with other mentors, the social support was a further boost in finding a foothold in university and in their self-development: "You're in control; you're helping the squad; you're talking to the students." (Mary)

The programme coordinator felt that the development of peer mentors' skills was one of the most successful parts of the programme. Initially it was not a main objective but became a target and something that she viewed as critical in increasing the impact of the programme on the wider community:

> "Regardless whether they are in work mode or in mentor mode, they are still coming home here in the evenings and are helping friends, neighbours, sisters and they are such, they are so passionate about this type of work. I think, through the programme, we've connected those that are from communities […] You see them as a little, gang, you know? A gang who are heading together on the buses out to, you know. They're the kids who are going to UCD from x, so it's kind of giving them a peer support, a pride in where they come from, that college is normal. They have developed really positive role model attributes, you know? […] how confident and capable and articulate, they're just brilliant. And that's through giving them an opportunity to make a change in their communities. You know, we give them a training program, which I think is great. But after that it's only them, you know? It's not particularly something we set out to do but it's something that's come across so strongly."

Moira, Programme Coordinator, Interview

The first cohort of mentors on the programme who are now graduates of UCD and either working or studying at UCD were particularly glowing about the personal impact of the programme on them, including the support they received from the Access & Lifelong Learning Centre.

> "It's definitely a case of how much they have given to us. […] Everyone here is very self-motivated to go to college; I was not. It was very much what my friends were doing. I wasn't really thinking about it. I just kind of thought the Leaving Cert would go on forever. Em, so when I did get into college, I just found out that this is something I want to do and in every element, in every year, I needed support I guess. I got the support. I got the support from everyone. From my old leaders to people in Science, you know. People that I wouldn't have met any other way. […] Friends and financial support and the list goes on. And you feel like I want to be able to give the support that I got, just to somebody else. Even if it's just answering a question. And I signed up to every single thing that the Access & Lifelong Learning centre has."

Sharon, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

> "I'll forever be grateful for the Access & Lifelong Learning Centre, for UCD, for being able to you know, make me feel that pride that, I not only got a degree, I got a masters and a career you know? And I'm forever grateful so, I, I, I'll never, I don't think I'll have a negative thought in the matter."

Sharon, as above.

> "When I started [in UCD] I was really shy, like, I could not talk to anyone. I felt sick every day. I'd come home crying. I was like, 'mam I can't talk to anyone', and just doing different stuff with the Access & Lifelong Learning Centre like Sharon said. I signed up to everything. I was, like, no I'll go to Future You. I'll do this, and doing it, I got so much more confident and belonged to, like, a secret group and it was because no one knows who or where you're from or anything so you don't know if anyone is Access & Lifelong Learning centre but you'd walk through like, 'oh I know that person'. So it's like you're in a secret group. As if you actually belong. It gives you that sense of belonging. Like I do all this stuff for UCD - nobody even knows I'm here. I'm doing all this - it actually gives [a sense you are] part of the university, I feel. So that kind of, like, developed in me. Eventually I was, 'yeah, this is grand'. I'm still really shy but I felt inside, 'no this is my place. This is actually. I can come here and I can tell people that I go here. I feel comfortable. At the start I was just one in twenty-four thousand…but the Access & Lifelong Learning centre gives you a sense of belonging kind of. Like it's the support that a lot of people don't have. And I think, I don't know, I might've dropped out."

Rebecca, UCD graduate and former mentor, Focus Group F

4.2
LIMITATIONS
of the Future You Programme

"If I had another child going into secondary, I'd be pushing for the Future You."

Chloe, parent of secondary school student, focus group D.

The programme was felt to be well implemented with regard to peer mentoring and the provision of information, the impact of which has been discussed in the preceding sections.

However, several areas of implementing the programme were highlighted for improvement in order to increase the effectiveness and impact of the programme. These were: (1) the timing of delivery of the programme in the schools and frequency of contact with students; (2) delivery of the UCD tours and shadowing days[3]; (3) gaining 'buy-in' or engagement from parents; and (4) selecting students for participation on the programme.

[3] Shadowing Days were not part of the Future You programme but were offered as part of the Outreach programme

1 Limitations in Timing and Delivery of Future You in the Schools

This issue was highlighted primarily by current secondary school participants of the programme. Both focus groups revealed inconsistencies in the students' recollection of how many visits they received from mentors but students were consistent in finding the visits infrequent and too far spread out to be the most effective delivery for full engagement.

> "The way the mentors came out every few months. And then it was like when they did come out, it was like blocks of an hour or two or something like that. So maybe shorter sessions clustered together?"
> Clara, secondary school student, focus group

> "[...] I think we saw them four times in fifth year? Or five times. Like two or three times in sixth year. I think they kept stressing the point to help you with the steps to get to college but we only saw them like ten times in total. Like how is that really gonna help you that much? You can't really do that much."
> Holly, secondary school student, focus group A

> "[...] we started it last year and then we wouldn't do it for another three or four months. And then forgot all about it and then people just lost interest in it."
> Dermot, secondary school student, focus group B

The following is a full excerpt from focus group C where three past participants of the programme who are currently studying at UCD discussed problems they perceived with the infrequency of contact with the mentors. In it, the past participants outline their frustrations with the infrequent contact and the impact they felt it had on the flow and quality of the mentor sessions.

> "Yeah and the first time we sat down and talked, it was great. And then, the more visits, it kind of was just the same rehashing of the same information and it was kind of getting a bit too tedious and it was just everything that I knew so..."
> (Steven)

> - Yeah I'd say that probably does happen because it's been two years… I don't know, a year now. I think we only got four visits. So every time I think it was two visits in fifth year and two visits in sixth year and every time they came it was kind of like it'd been so long they felt like they had to reintroduce themselves and kind of go over the basics again. So I think, that's probably why if there was a few more visits they wouldn't feel like they have to keep covering the same stuff again and getting to know you each time...
> (Katy)

> - Yeah, for me kind of what Katy and Steven say, kind of doing a bit of a rebrand or something because I know a lot of people probably thought, 'oh yeah I'll just go just to get out of class [...] [I would suggest they] put a bit more emphasis on what the programme actually does. Because a lot of people in my class would just go for the craic.
> (Caroline)

Peer mentors who were past participants (focus group E) focused more on the timing of the programme in terms of when it was begun. The following quote exemplifies the view that starting earlier in the Junior Cycle of secondary school education would allow students start the preparations necessary for successful transition to university:

> "I think there should be more outreach programmes for a younger age in school. Because by the time they get to fifth year and part of Future You, they've kind of made a decision about going to college or not and kind of what they want to do. If they start it from a younger age but they don't really know, you can kind of get them at that age and get the idea into their head of them being capable to go on… gets the idea there; gets them thinking about it. By the time they get to fifth year there'll be a lot more who have the intention to go on. Instead of it being only fifteen you're going to have maybe half the year, three quarters of the school year, with that intention."
> (Mary)

The programme coordinator of Future You addressed this issue in her interview as part of the evaluation. The original plans for the Future You programme were to begin earlier, in the Junior cycle in order to help get students oriented towards university earlier. Engagement and buy-in from secondary school students was emphasised throughout the interview as a key pathway for increasing applications to university. However, funding for the programme was linked to an "employability and economic model" which linked training and education outcomes with the work place. If alternative funding were to become available in the future, earlier commencement of the programme would be considered.

> "There's so much need for a lot of what's being done in Future You at the moment; really needs to be done earlier in order that there are students that are more prepared when the time comes. I think, you know, it's working brilliantly for those who engage with it but it's not working for those that aren't and I suppose I'm not entirely sure what [is going wrong]. But it's not whether it's bad information or misinformation or poorly communicated information."

2 Limited Effectiveness of Shadowing and UCD Tours

Secondary school students expressed disappointment with the repetitive nature of the tours of the campus and with limitations regarding access to actual lectures or labs. In contrast, past participants who currently mentor on the Future You programme felt that the tours of the campus were more engaging and relevant than sitting in sample lectures or classes.

> "Just like when the students come into UCD they'd do something more related to them. Because like they go on like campus tours and they like that but then when they're sitting in lectures their eyes glaze over, they're not listening, they're not there at all. I think they'd rather go out and see different things because it's going to be class based-things that they're doing so just not to do the exact same thing. So their eyes glaze over or you see people on their phones and like they're not really into it as much. Like there's more, there's different things you can do when you come to UCD. I remember when we were on the campus tour we were so much more engaged, asking questions, 'can we go to this building, can we go to that building'. But then when you see them in lectures and they get a taste of it… like 'ugh'.
> Alice

> "- Even if, sorry, before they came out you kind of gave them an option of five different courses like Commerce, Science, History or something and they chose one and were split up into five groups when they got here and then maybe did a taste of lecture or some sort of activity like that, something that they were kind of more interested in. Cause if someone is interested in Science they'd kind of listen if they were doing something related to Science like."
> Mary

3 Limited Approaches to Engagement of Parents with the Programme

Parents commented on the limited engagement of other parents, citing numbers as low as six in some of the workshops despite an open invitation being extended to parents of all children in the school (Chloe). One parent suggested that the Future You programme target parents more deliberately and try to get them involved (Sophie). While the reports of the programme were very positive by the three parents at the focus group, the difficulty in getting participants for the focus groups reflected this lack of engagement that was reported by both parents and the programme coordinator. Given the important role of cultural and social factors in changing access to university education, gaining parental buy-in for the programme could be considered a major recommendation.

One of the graduate mentors who was in the first cohort of programme mentors, highlighted the need for greater parent participation and a focus of the programme on the wider community:

> "Neither of my parents went to college and one of my parents didn't even go to secondary school. And a lot of it is like 'well, what's this? What does this mean? Like, what even is a CAO? What are the points?' and I think a lot needs to be done to be educating parents as well. I know Future You programme's great in educating the children about pushing themselves and going onto university but there also needs to be more emphasis on the community with parents to give them the confidence to then give their children the confidence to go on and try for it."
> Rebecca, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F

4 Overly Exclusive Criteria for Inclusion on the Programme

Secondary school students and past participants expressed surprise and disappointment that the Future You programme was only offered to a certain number of students per school. When asked about the selection criteria (and why they thought they had been chosen for the programme), many of the students were unclear regarding the selection criteria.

> *"I was very surprised. As far as I'm concerned, there was people in my class that wanted it more and I wasn't one of them […] I didn't want to take up the place because I felt that other people deserved it more. I'm so glad I did. Because I wouldn't be in college now."*
> Jade, past participant who did not proceed to UCD, interview

> *"So it's kind of like, 'oh they're best of the best so we don't have a chance to be that good to be on the programme', like get the chance to see universities in Dublin or anywhere actually so they'll get a chance to see what university is really like. So they're not getting that extra push that people in the programme actually get."*
> Alice, past participant and mentor

Similarly, UCD graduates who were former mentors highlighted a preference to see the programme rolled out to more students:

> *"It would be nice if we could reach more students. I know that a lot of students felt excluded because they really wanted to come. Like, it would be nice to make even just a brief talk on, you know, how to apply for the CAO and basic things like that just to the sixth years. Like, okay, if you want to go to individuals that's fair enough but maybe having two leaders in, just to talk to the sixth year group as a whole. Like, I, even as a fourth year tutor, I'd found that I've to explain like the basics between level 8 and a level 7 course just even just to introduce things like that would be a huge benefit."*
> Sharon, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F

The selection criteria and recruitment procedure were outlined during an interview with the programme co-ordinator. Only students taking enough honours subjects in fifth year to be able to apply for a university course were offered a place on the programme. Some schools wished for all students to participate but in some schools none of the students were following a Leaving Certificate programme which would allow them to progress directly to university. Given the aim of the programme to support students trying to access university, criteria regarding feasibility to get a place in university was considered very important and non-negotiable for the programme in its current form. Where schools clearly did not have students who were pursuing the necessary subjects at the necessary level, these schools were offered an alternative plan but this was rejected as it was not the Future You programme:

> *"And also because the mentors we have working only have the experience of going from school to university […] I mean we're more delighted when they get wherever it is that they want to go but this was specifically set up to get from school into UCD hopefully but also another university. Because, when you look at even, you know the research saying what the participation rates in higher education in x, you break that down into how many of them are in university as opposed to an Institute of Technology (IOT) and it's so low […] I'm not suggesting there's any problem there but what's a problem is that there's, look at the figure and you think it's bad enough when you see it's at thirteen, fourteen percent going to third level, well it's probably about two going to university.*
>
> *More generally on engagement levels among various stakeholders, the programme coordinator offered several reflections on ways in which implementation could be improved moving forward and lessons learned regarding engagement.*
>
> *"On a broader level, I think whether they'd be students or schools or parents or even probably mentors, I mean most of them have been amazing, there's always been one or two who haven't been, where they haven't really fully engaged with it or perhaps they didn't quite know what they were getting involved in. You can kind of sense there's no impacts happening there. Either we gave them misinformation about what it was or they weren't selected properly on the programme."*

5 Website as an Ineffective Resource to Support Dissemination of Information

Both the programme coordinator and the former mentors (who are not graduated from UCD) highlighted the programme's specially designed website was not a success. It did not serve its intended purpose. Rather than continue to put money and time into the website, the team used an existing, cheaper social media forum to offer online support to students. The Future You website was a secure, password protected private website. It was developed with the first programme in 2012 and continued in 2013. Students were encouraged to ask questions which mentors would receive an alert and they could then answer. All answers were published. It looked very nice, and was professionally designed. However it was problematic. The mentors found the structure of the website confusing to navigate, especially posting photos etc. Programme staff in UCD found it awkward and could not post information quickly. The students kept losing the password, and the restrictive internet in schools meant they could not use it in class. The programme team decided to change it to a social media format the students were already using, taking care to monitor the (private) Facebook page.

This decision was made by the programme team even though the website had been developed at considerable cost, indicating ongoing reflective practice by the team in ensuring that all aspects of the programme were making as much of an impact as possible.

"We had this website set up where they can ask questions and there was a prize for this website, like the questions that they asked were actually all about finance college etc. etc. etc. After a while it just got into a joke and just you know, you were still answering the questions and it, it was just becoming a waste of your time and a waste of the resource that is there."
Adam, UCD graduate and former mentor, focus group F.

"In this programme, we abandoned using a sort of a privately developed website and have started just using Facebook instead."
Moira, programme coordinator, interview.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The interviewee responses regarding the key strengths and limitations of the Future You programme are summarised in Table 2. The effectiveness of peer mentoring in impacting students' attitudes towards university, and the positive impact of peer mentor participation on mentors' skill development and increased confidence and leadership skills of mentors consistently emerged as the major strengths of the programme.

1. Building on Strengths

The key strength of 'hot knowledge' (Whitty et al. 2015) from peers, i.e., new, context-specific meaningful and unofficial knowledge, shared across social networks to develop strong community links is a strong feature of Future You. It helps students to both 'know the ropes' (cultural capital) and develop social capital 'who you know' (Whitty et al. 2015). A key contribution of the peer mentoring processes is what is described as 'working class empathy' (Wilkins & Burke 2015, p.444), where inclusivity means encouragement of the survival of potential students' attachment to a working class identity rather than experiencing a middleclass cultural colonizing process. This peer mentoring process helps address the cultural barrier of disjuncture (Jarvis 2007, 2008; Wilkins & Burke 2015), a cultural sense of alienation in a university environment for many from working class backgrounds. Jarvis (2007) envisages disjuncture as a continuum (p. 139), where at the extreme it leads to alienation in the learner. The Access & Lifelong Learning Centre, in the words of one student, 'gives you a sense of belonging'. It helps potential students feel comfortable in retaining, for example, their accents and dialects, while engaging with other social groups (see also Wilkins & Burke 2015). This is not to foster a culture that is simply one of 'closure' into groups so that other groups are not engaged with, as is at times observed in an Irish context (Keane 2011); this is viewed as constraining the building of social capital by working class students through limiting their social networks. As Reay et al. (2007) note 'the ability to move in and out of spaces marked as 'other'' (p. 1047) is a feature of cultural capital.

The real strength of peer to peer mentoring processes needs to be embedded into systems supported by structures to ensure this key dimension can continue over time despite a continual turnover of mentors. A sustainability plan for keeping mentors and recognising their work needs to be developed in dialogue with the mentors themselves. This plan also needs to be treated within a lifelong learning framework of the mentors being community leaders and giving manifestation to community development principles and active citizenship. In developing a sustainability focus on the peer to peer networks it is vital that a key feature of these networks, namely, the horizontal lack of hierarchy and informality of communication is retained, so that a network of assumed connection is sustained (Downes 2013). A key dimension of these social networks that is evident is that assumed connection between potential students and mentors is not simply at an individual identity level but also at a social identity level (i.e., identity in relation to a social group, Tajfel 1978).

The social processes of Future You are a key strength. This resonates also with the major motivation of adult learners to engage in lifelong learning courses based on a European study across 13 countries, where the strongest motivation was not an educational one but a social one – to meet new people and friends (Roosmaa et al. 2011). The social opportunities from Future You, evident also in the residential opportunities, must be central to future elaborations of this project. Mangan et al. (2010) highlight that young people from socio-economically excluded backgrounds are more likely to choose to live at home with their parents and this means they can miss out on other aspects of the traditional residential experience of higher education. Even though the residential summer school is not part of the Future You programme, it is part of the wider outreach programme offered to schools and Future You students could have participated in, feedback from mentees suggest it is an important aspect, ripe also for further development.

Table 2. Summary of Programme Outcomes by Participant Group

Participant Group	Programme Strengths	Programme Limitations
CURRENT PARTICIPANTS	• Peer Mentoring • Information on grants • Information on educational policies and applications	• Timing of delivery and frequency of contact • Tours of UCD repetitive and Shadowing Days[4] of limited relevance to subjects of interest • Overly selective criteria for access to the Programme
PAST PARTICIPANTS (not attending UCD)	• Peer Mentoring (provision of a relatable and inspirational peer) • Motivation and encouragement to consider college / changing views about third level	• Overly selective criteria for access to the Programme • Timing of the delivery of the Programme (interfered with some classes)
PAST PARTICIPANTS (currently UCD students)	• Peer Mentoring (provision of a relatable and inspirational peer) • Provision of Financial Supports • Introduced the Idea of Going to University / Encouraging Existing Aims • Provision of Online Supports	• Timing of delivery and frequency of contact • Too few visits with too great a gap between them • Lack of engagement from many students who saw the Mentor visits as time out of class
MENTORS (who are past participants of the programme)	• Peer Mentoring (provision of a relatable and inspirational peer) • Increased Self-Confidence and Leadership Skills for Mentors • Social Support in Transitioning to UCD (through Future You, HEAR orientation and Access supports)	• Overly selective implementation of the Programme • Available in certain schools to certain students • Lack of motivation among some secondary school students • Shadowing Days[5] often lack relevance to Secondary School Students on the Programme
MENTORS (first cohort, now graduates of UCD)	• Peer Mentoring (provision of a relatable and inspirational peer) • Increased Self-Confidence and Leadership Skills for Mentors • Social Support in Transitioning to UCD (through Future You, HEAR orientation and Access supports)	• Greater engagement with parents and broader community required • Overly selective criteria: • Recommended provision of general talks to all students • Mentors limited in knowledge of subject areas outside their own specialism
PARENTS	• Provision of the Parent Workshops for Critical Information and Supports • Provision of Information on Financial Supports and the HEAR system • Students' overnight4 visits to UCD • Peer Mentors • One-to-one support from Programme coordinator	• Not all parents engaged
PROGRAMME COORDINATOR	• Peer Mentoring • The Development of Peer Mentors' Skills	• Ineffective programme-specific website • Failure to get the engagement of all stakeholders (parents and some mentors particularly challenging) • Timing and delivery of the Programme • Would prefer to see implemented from Junior Cycle

[4] Shadowing Days are not part of the Future You Programme, but offered to participants as part of wider Outreach activities

[5] Shadowing Days are not part of the Future You Programme, but offered to participants as part of wider Outreach activities

2. Access Mentors from Students across Every Faculty in UCD

The research literature recognises 'science capital' (Archer 2013) i.e., the need for subject specific knowledge with regard to access; Whitty et al. (2015) argue in a UK context that 'outreach activities themselves should provide subject enhancement opportunities to develop 'subject capital'' (p.51) (see also Downes 2014 on the need for a faculty specific outreach strategy in a European context). This is strongly resonant with the HEA strategic recognition (2015) of the need for university faculty or department specific champions to ensure a welcoming and informative environment in every domain in UCD (1.1 To embed whole-of-HEI approaches to institutional access strategies so that access for under-represented groups is prioritised across all faculties. Each faculty to designate an 'access champion' to support and advise on implementation of institutional access strategy). A dimension of this raised in the interviews is the need for mentors to be not only from local communities and schools of those potential applicants but also additionally to be from a wider range of subject areas to be able to provide subject-specific insight and guidance for not only basic information but 'hot knowledge' of insider advice for these different subjects. Elsewhere this is described as curricular focused outreach (Whitty et al. 2015). A clearer focus is ripe for development in Future You with regard to both student champions of access as mentors across each UCD faculty, combined with the HEA recommended champions in each faculty for lecturing staff.

3. Expanding Future You to Primary School Outreach and Younger Secondary Students

The interviewee's call for 'more outreach for a younger age in school' resonates with previous research such as Tough et al's (2008) findings on the need for more outreach work with younger children for access (see also Downes 2014 on the need for this in a European context). Moreover, Anders (2012) highlights that prior attainment by age 11 is key to access to higher education. A focus on stimulating access at primary school through mentors from the local community who have attended UCD is also needed to ensure that change is systemic rather than confined to a few individuals. 'It's working brilliantly for those who engage with it but it's not working for those that aren't'. To ensure more engage with it, an earlier age group is needed, including a whole school approach to higher education for later primary in DEIS schools. The lack of parental engagement with the programme, evident not only from responses but also from the difficulty in receiving responses from parents regarding the programme, also points to the need to engage parents with this issue at an earlier stage of their child's development in primary school where school bonds with parents are typically more developed.

4a. Developing a whole school approach in fostering horizons and expectations of attending higher education institutions such as UCD

A notable finding was that some schools are more engaged with the access process than others. A strategic focus on change to school cultures to help promote access to higher education encompasses more than a channelling of information. Research highlights the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in overcoming barriers to higher education, as well as the detrimental effect of negative teacher-student relationships on students' motivations to continue their education to third level (McMahon et al. 2015). While other research observes the role of teachers in helping foster aspirations in their students, the issue is not only one of teachers but also of wider school institutional culture. A recent EU Commission document (2015) has emphasised the need for a whole school approach to retaining students in school in areas of socio-economic exclusion; a related issue here is a whole school approach in fostering horizons and expectations of attending higher education institutions such as UCD.

4b. Develop a more active collaborative decision-making role for schools and NGOs representing minority and socioeconomically excluded groups in the access service and wider university structures at UCD

Develop a more active collaborative decision-making role for schools and NGOs representing minority and socioeconomically excluded groups (e.g., Pavee Point for Travellers) in the access service and wider university structures at UCD. This involves an emphasis not only on targeting individuals but also on improving dialogue processes between systems, such as university-school, university-NGOs. This is strongly resonant also with the HEA Access Strategy, including for example, 5.2 To strengthen the linkages between higher education institutions and local communities. Moreover, it addresses the risk recognised in research of simply 'cherry picking' (Wilkins & Burke 2015, p.444) a few students from a local community. This risk also emerged from interviewee responses such as 'oh, they're best of the best so we don't have a chance to be that good to be on the program'. Tough et al (2008) emphasise the importance of working with a whole cohort of students from socio-economically excluded backgrounds rather than a select group, to ensure that systemic changes in attitudes and perceptions of opportunities can pervade a whole social network of a given age cohort rather than moving a few individual students to the periphery of those social networks (see also Ivers and Downes 2012 on fear of success for students who fear leaving their social networks behind upon extending their educational opportunities). There is enormous potential for facilitating improved opportunities for access to education if formal links were established between universities and NGOs representing marginalised groups (see also Downes 2014 on this in a European context).

Criticisms of the timing and delivery of Future You in the schools need to be examined against the backdrop of the whole relationship between the individual DEIS schools and UCD. It is well recognised the intensity of an intervention is key for system change (Morgan 2001, Downes 2014). The intensity of the intervention, including frequency and length of visits all require reconsideration against the backdrop of developing a whole school approach to access to higher education in each participating DEIS school, in dialogue also with mentors and prospective students - and through more entrenched structural links between UCD and schools in the structures of the UCD Access & Lifelong Learning decision making processes.

Mindful of Wolf and Cumming (2000) contention that assumptions made on behalf of minority groups can be both wrong and patronising, these links could help break down cultural and psychological barriers, as well as inform members of these groups of the opportunities for a cohort of these groups to learn together in an educational institution. Such links would also offer the benefit of a support structure already being in place for the individual students through the NGO, as well as furnishing opportunities for dialogue between the NGO and the education institution on the learning needs and wider needs of the individual learner. Formal links would also offer the chance for the NGO to participate with the university in strategic policy design to meet the access and participation needs of their joint target group (see also Mulkerrins 2007 on the challenges of altering educational institutional policy to give expression to community voices). The NGO would also be in a good position to provide feedback to the university on the success or otherwise of implementation of access and participation strategies in practice.

4c. Develop a more active collaborative role for secondary students from minority and socioeconomically excluded groups in the access service and wider university structures at UCD, through stronger dialogue with student councils in linked DEIS schools and with Comhairle na nOg.

Develop a more active collaborative role for secondary students from minority and socioeconomically excluded groups in the access service and wider university structures at UCD, through stronger dialogue with student councils in linked DEIS schools and with Comhairle na nÓg. This is to ensure that secondary access students are not simply passive recipients of services but are actively involved in constructing meaning and control in the university environment, prior to entry. This is to facilitate their individual motivation and to challenge wider cultural barriers through a greater sense of ownership of the university environment by potential access students. Opportunities for such active collaborative role, treated also as a dimension of an EU active citizenship lifelong learning strategic approach and needs to include sports, arts and nature related (e.g., developing community gardens on campus) activities. It is notable that the leadership opportunities for mentors emerged from the interviews as a real strength. However, the leadership opportunities for the secondary students is also an aspect ripe for development in future programmes. This resonates also with the HEA Strategic Objective (2015) 3.6, to consult with students and prospective students to inform the implementation and development of access policy.

5. Access Mentors from Students with a More Intensive Focus on the Education Faculty in UCD

A key specific area of priority in the HEA Strategy for Access to Higher Education (2015) is to target access to the teaching profession: '1.8, to ensure that teacher education and professional development programmes support the raising of expectations among students in relation to their higher education potential'. Against this backdrop, it is recommended that Future You develop a more intensive strategic focus on mentors, outreach and promotion of this strategic area.

6. Approaches to Parental Engagement Require Improvement: A Community Lifelong Learning Centre on Campus in UCD Targeting Needs of Regional Marginalised Communities Offers a Basis for Systemic Change for Parental Engagement

A strong theme in the findings is that parental engagement requires improvement in Future You. The university needs to be a focal point of community education, to establish a lifelong learning centre on-campus to engage a range of parents from communities traditionally excluded from the education system due to socio-economic and associated barriers. In doing so, focus is also on change to the university institutional culture to ensure that students and parents from working class backgrounds feel comfortable in their identity on campus so that their parents can also be further engaged. Gorard & See (2013) observe the limits of removing access barriers without changing the environment of what those students have access to. This potentially alienating force of the institutional culture of the university is recognised in a UK context by Bamber et al. (2000). The findings of the *Future You* interviews clearly point to the need for a wider strategy for engaging parents. This intergenerational focus may be especially important for some minority groups (e.g., Traveller, Roma) as has been experienced for example, in the Kosovo, Balkan Sunflowers Lifelong Learning Centres (Downes 2011), where the intergenerational focus on for example, mothers and daughters brought beneficial cascading effects of motivation and improved educational outcomes across both generations. This recommendation is also as a dimension of an EU active citizenship lifelong learning strategic approach directly relevant for access outreach issues. It builds firmly on the HEA Access Strategy's (2015) commitment to 'Reinforcement of HEIs' engagement with communities and other stakeholders', as well as concern with involvement of parents as key advisors to students.

7. Messages that Distinguish University from School for Prospective Access Students

A clear finding is that the website support is a limited mode of engagement. The website issue illustrates the limitations of simply information based models, highlighted elsewhere for access to higher education in a range of European contexts (Downes 2014). There are lessons from McMahon et al.'s (2015) discussions with prospective access students which concludes that 'marketing could and should be differentiating university from schools in a way that disrupts understandings of 'university as a big school' and makes pursuing educational futures at university an attractive and achievable option' (p.16). This message to be conveyed more explicitly to students about how university is different from school needs to be done by word of mouth rather than simply on websites, and Future You is a key pathway for this kind of message to take place, based on dialogue with prospective students' prior conceptions of university.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW

General Format for Focus Group and Interview Schedules

Introductory question:

1. If you had a younger sister or brother*, what would be the 3 most important pieces of advice/help you would give to her/him about going to university?

Parents and programme staff were asked to consider this question with regard to students on the programme

2. What are the biggest obstacles people from your area face in going to third university?

Programme Effectiveness and Implementation:

1. In your opinion, what are the best [most important/ effective] parts of the programme?

2. In your opinion, what are the parts of the programme that most need to be improved?

Final question:

1. If you were Minister for Education what would you do to help more people from your area/school go to university?

Back-up questions if research questions have not been explored in the course of interview/focus group:

Impact on Access to Third-Level Education:

1. Of the supports given to students, what stands out as most important in your opinion? What was most helpful? Is there anything that could be done differently?

Impact on Mentors' Self-Development:

2. If you were to describe the programme to your class mates in UCD, how would you describe it?

3. What would you say about why you are involved?

4. Has participation in the programme impacted how you think / feel about your time at university?

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