

Tailored Tactics: Measuring Peer Support Impact through Personalisation

Carly Emsley-Jones

Academic Skills and Mentoring Manager

Emsley-JonesC@cardiff.ac.uk

Setting the Scene

- The aim of the Student Mentor Scheme is to support first-year students with their ***transition into university life*** and cultivate a ***strong sense of belonging***
- Every first-year undergraduate student can ***access*** a student mentor from their school and are contacted ***before they arrive*** to university
- Student mentors help first-year students settle in by offering ***impartial, informed and up-to-date advice***
- Over ***40,000 first-year students*** have been supported by 5,000 student mentors who have provided 17,000 mentoring sessions

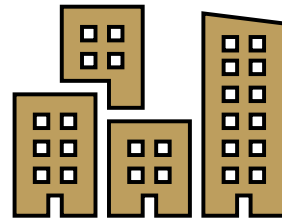
Student-led Support



Welcome email



Student mentor



Arrive at
Cardiff University



Induction week



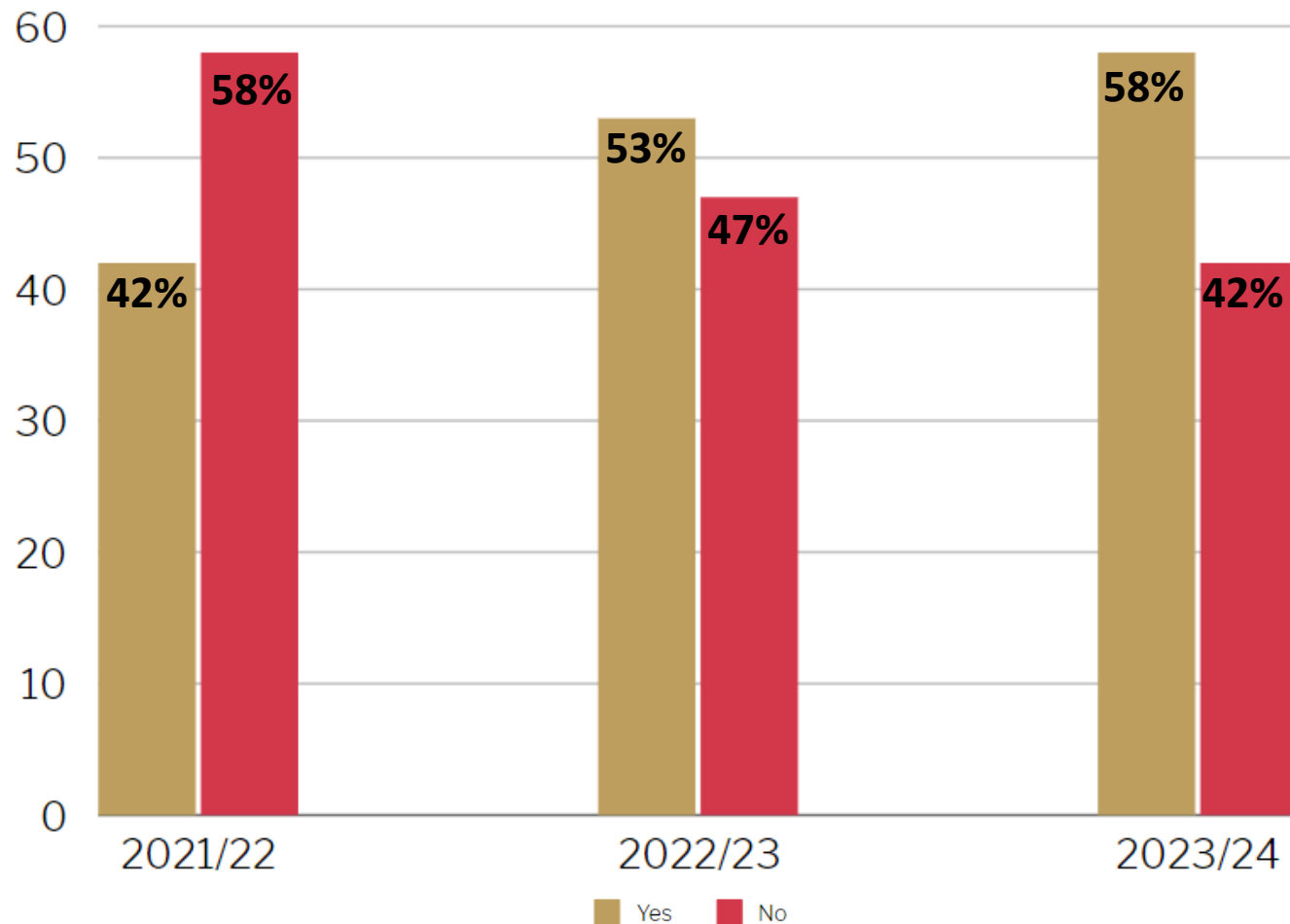
Mentor meetings

Early Intervention

- In 2022/23 we ***checked in*** with first-year students towards the end of October
- A total of 464 responses were received, out of which **33% (n=151)** necessitated some form of action
- This included allocating them a new student mentor, re-introducing them to their existing mentor or signposting to an appropriate support service
- This enabled us to ***intervene early*** to ensure ongoing support which can impact the student experience and potentially, retention

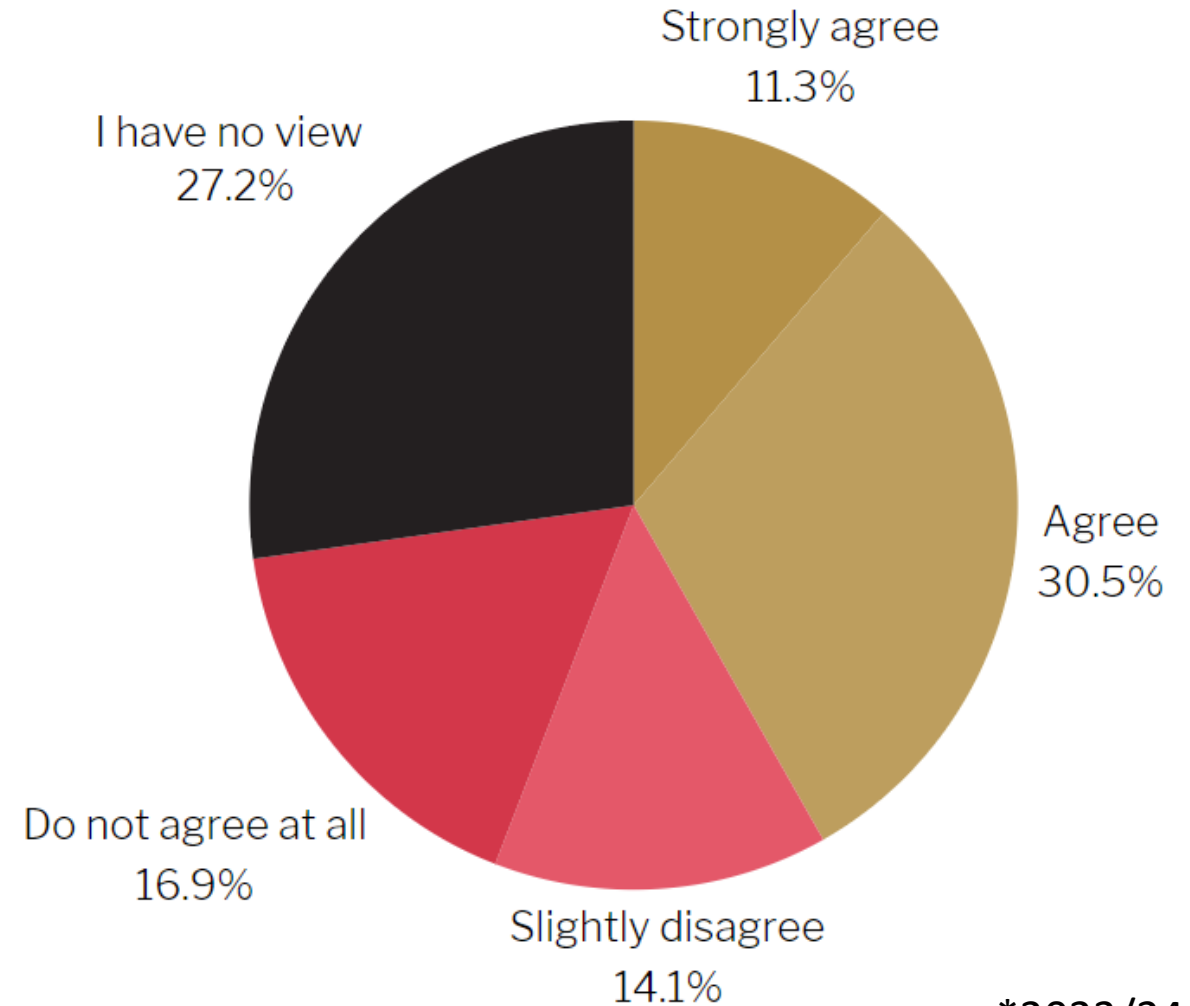
Service Visibility

Did you know there was a student mentor scheme when you started at Cardiff University?



Navigating Campus

Being part of the student mentor scheme helped me navigate my way around campus, finding lecture theatres, libraries and study spaces...



Supporting Retention

- Student mentors support with *academic and social integration* (Tinto, 1993)
- **24%** ($n = 51$) of students considered withdrawing from university
- **63%** ($n = 32$) of students reported that having a student mentor influenced their decision to stay
- 762 first-year students considered withdrawing but **69%** ($n = 523$) of those stated that having a student mentor influenced their decision to stay (2016-24)

Making a difference

“She (student mentor) helped me understand university, housing, coursework tips, etc. She showed me around many university facilities...been very helpful, friendly and approachable. She has kept me in university, without her, ***I probably would have dropped out***”

(First-year student, 2024)

Sustainable

“When I started at Cardiff University in September, having a student mentor was *invaluable*. They really helped me to *settle into life at the university* and answered any questions and helped with any concerns. Therefore, I would like to *give back* to the programme, as it was one of the reasons I settled so well into the university.”

(First-year student, 2024)

Personalise it...

- Personalise emails using mail merge 📧
- Include emojis to inject some fun 😎
- Small incentives to encourage survey completion 💰
- Carefully consider survey design and questions 💭
- Free-text comments are key 🔑
- Acknowledge and act on feedback ✅

