

The background is a dark blue gradient. It features several large, semi-transparent circles in orange, yellow, pink, and purple. At the bottom, there are silhouettes of several people's heads and shoulders, facing each other as if in conversation.

What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes

A rapid evidence summary

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1 Executive summary

There is a large body of research, policy and comment on youth mentoring schemes. Despite this, there is very little evidence on whether such programmes work and, if they do, what makes them effective. This rapid review of the literature explores the existing evidence around what factors make youth mentoring (or intergenerational) programmes effective.

We found that youth mentoring programmes can improve outcomes across academic, behavioural, emotional and social areas of young people's lives. These impacts are small, but nevertheless significant. There is no evidence that youth mentoring programmes can improve physical health, although few studies examine this particular outcome. The evidence provides a number of insights into what makes youth mentoring programmes effective, including that longer mentoring relationships are associated with better outcomes, the importance of training and motivation, the need for goal-orientated programmes and the key role of the matching process.

2 Introduction

Youth mentoring (or intergenerational mentoring) programmes are goal-orientated programmes that offer support, practical skills and advice. They create stable relationships that act as 'vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations for individual and social benefits' (Hatton-Yeo and Ohsako, 2000). Such programmes involve a younger person, typically aged 25 or under, who is mentored by an older person to whom they are not related.

Although youth mentoring programmes have been around for many years, over the last decade or so they have become of increasing interest to policy makers, charities and schools. A number of programmes have been established, both in the UK and elsewhere. Indeed, a number of youth mentoring organisations are funded by Nesta to grow their impact – ranging from Grandmentors, an intergenerational programme for care leavers, to One Million Mentors, which aims to increase social mobility and cohesion through mentoring. Given this, it is timely to consider and draw upon the extant evidence around youth mentoring programmes, to understand whether such programmes are effective and if so, which factors contribute to their effectiveness.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is often poorly (or very broadly) defined. Programmes might be work-based, academic (school- or university-based, focused on improving learning and skills), peer, or youth/intergenerational – but there is no clear way in which these different terms are used. For example, some programmes described as youth mentoring are really academic programmes. Some mentoring relationships are planned. Mentoring programmes might be formal or informal. They can be delivered face to face or virtually; they can be one-to-one or group-based. Some programmes are described as mentoring, but really focus on befriending or one-off support. They are usually goal-orientated. Some of the empirical evidence around mentoring does not always clearly state the type of mentoring scheme that is being researched.

Drawing on existing definitions, for the purposes of this study we see youth mentoring as a trusting, purposeful and ongoing relationship between a younger person or people, and an older, unrelated person, which involves the exchange of support, advice, encouragement, and skills development.

About this report

This report is the outcome of a piece of research on youth mentoring commissioned by Nesta and undertaken by a team at the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University and the Alliance for Useful Evidence. The purpose of this research is threefold: first, to identify whether youth mentoring schemes are effective (whether they work); second, to identify the factors that make them effective (how they work); and third, to provide a number of practical recommendations so that research evidence can be used to improve the commissioning, design and delivery of youth mentoring programmes. In addition to this report, there is also a shorter policy brief.

3 Methods

The research involved three steps – a rapid review, thematic analysis and validation workshop:

- **Rapid review:** This was undertaken to identify research that looks at what outcomes are achieved through youth mentoring programmes, and what makes for an effective programme. A rapid review is a systematic, transparent means of looking at all the available published research in an area. All published research was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al, 2018) to ensure the methods used were of a good standard.
- **Thematic analysis:** Sixteen studies were identified that met the search criteria and were of a good methodological standard. These studies include systematic reviews, randomised controlled trials (RCTs), effectiveness studies and mixed methods research. They were analysed thematically to identify the ingredients of successful youth mentoring programmes. All of the findings identified in this analysis are supported by more than one study (or if by a single study, the finding was from either a systematic review or randomised controlled trial).
- **Validation workshop:** The findings from the rapid review and the thematic analysis were discussed at a workshop (organised by Nesta) involving practitioners currently delivering mentoring programmes. The workshop validated and discussed the findings, and identified implications and recommendations.

The focus of this report is on the evidence base, and therefore on the rapid review and the thematic analysis. The outcome of the validation workshop – a series of recommendations to policy makers, commissioners and providers on how to design and deliver more effective youth mentoring programmes – is reported here www.nesta.org.uk/report/what-makes-for-an-effective-youth-mentoring-programme-a-practitioners-guide-to-the-evidence

Rapid review

A rapid review was undertaken by two researchers at the Alliance for Useful Evidence and completed over three months in 2019. A rapid review is a type of structured literature review, which provides a systematic and comprehensive approach to identifying and assessing the available evidence 'in which components of the systematic review process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a short period of time' (Khangura et al, 2012). The rapid review undertaken for this research included setting a core research question, establishing a search strategy and assessing identified studies against inclusion criteria.

The core research question underpinning the review was:

What makes for an effective youth mentoring programme?

The search strategy focused on empirical studies that examined:

1. **Effectiveness:** Increasing at least one of the following outcomes of interest to youth mentoring programmes:
 - Access to meaningful employment/training/education.
 - Social capital/social networks.
 - Job searching skills.
 - Career readiness.
 - Employability.
 - Confidence.
 - Personal effectiveness.
 - Wellbeing.
2. **Mentoring relationship:** A one-to-one relationship in which a mentor (who is older than the mentee) and mentee speak regularly about the mentee's goals.
3. **Young people:** 14–25 year olds (target intervention age for young care leavers).

The aim of the research was not simply to understand whether youth mentoring schemes are effective, but to identify which factors contributed to effective programmes. Such factors include: first, the process of matching mentors and mentees, including demographic factors, personality, generational differences, choice (of mentee/mentor), mentor/mentee motivation and career plans of mentee; second, operational factors, such as the frequency of mentoring sessions, support provided to mentors and mentees, session setting (online versus face to face), duration of the mentoring relationship, duration of each mentoring session, the number of mentoring sessions and the content of mentoring session; and finally, relationship factors, including the interaction between mentors and mentees.

The search was conducted by two researchers at the Alliance for Useful Evidence, who searched eleven databases in total:

- Child Development and Adolescent Studies.
- PsycINFO.
- British Education Index.
- ASSIA.
- ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Data Citation Index.
- Education Research Complete.
- Campbell Library of Systematic Reviews.
- Education Resources Information Center.
- Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature.
- Practical Research for Education.

As is common to all forms of structured literature reviews, the searches identified a large number of studies (over 2,000). Using titles and abstracts, each study was assessed against the inclusion criteria set out in Table 1, which were established at the outset of this research.

In addition, an important objective of the review was that studies should meet minimum standards of methodological rigour and quality. This can be challenging, particularly as the aim of this review was to identify the factors that make youth mentoring programmes effective. As such, the review focused on studies that described and evidenced these factors, rather than studies that simply demonstrated quantitatively that such programmes are effective – and there are well-documented issues with whether and how such qualitative research is assessed for methodological quality and rigour.

There are several quality appraisal tools available for use for the assessment of rigour and quality. We chose to use the MMAT (Pace et al., 2012; Pluye et al., 2009) as this tool is useful to appraise multiple methodologies (Hong et al., 2018), which we were expecting in the papers that got to this stage. Following this assessment, sixteen studies were identified for inclusion in the review. The sixteen studies are set out in Table 2. It is worth noting that there will be a body of qualitative research that discusses the effectiveness of youth mentoring programmes but is not included here. These studies have been excluded because the method used is not clearly reported, and therefore they did not satisfy the requirements set out in the MMAT tool.

Table 1: Inclusion criteria

Criteria	Criteria
Studies published in English only	Language skills of researchers
Studies focused on young people aged 14–25 only	Advice from practitioners in research team
Studies about mentoring of young people in all contexts (especially education, employability programmes and social action activities)	Advice from practitioners in research team
Systematic reviews or empirical research only, both qualitative and quantitative (i.e. not opinion pieces, book reviews, newspaper articles)	Interested only in research studies
Studies focus on mentoring relationship involving young person as mentee and older person as mentor (i.e. excludes reverse mentoring and peer mentoring)	Advice from practitioners in research team
Studies must include findings on the process of mentoring, not just on outcomes	Focus of research question
Full text of studies must be available online under researchers' university subscriptions	Expediency and time restrictions
Published any time	No reason to reduce date range

Table 2: Studies that met inclusion criteria and are included in the review

Study	Country	Publication type	Research type	Type of mentoring programme
Bodin and Leifman, 2011	Sweden	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Quantitative (RCT with 128 young people)	Mentoring programme aiming to prevent substance misuse
Bogat et al., 2008	USA	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Qualitative (documentary analysis of materials from 51 dyads)	School-based mentoring programme for pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers
Brickley, 2018	UK	Doctoral thesis	Qualitative (interviews with nine young people)	School-based mentoring programme with vulnerable young people
Brown, 2017	USA	Doctoral thesis	Mixed methods (observations of 13 mentoring sessions, interviews with four mentees, focus group with ten mentors)	Mentoring programme for African American boys
Chan and Ho, 2008	Hong Kong	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Mixed methods (questionnaire with 124 young people and interviews with 48 of these)	School-based mentoring programme
De Wit et al., 2016	Canada	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Quantitative longitudinal (pre- and post- surveys with 859 young people)	Big Brothers Big Sisters
DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005	USA	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Quantitative longitudinal (survey of 3,187 young people)	Natural (or informal) mentoring relationships
Dubois et al., 2011	International	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Meta-analysis (73 studies)	Mentoring programmes
Eby et al., 2013	International	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Meta-analysis (173 studies)	Youth, academic and workplace mentoring programmes
Kanchewa et al., 2014	USA	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Quantitative (secondary data analysis of random assignment evaluations involving 1,513 young people)	Big Brothers
Lindsay et al., 2016	International	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Systematic review (22 studies)	Mentoring programmes for youth and young adults with disabilities
Lymburner, 1997	USA	Doctoral thesis	Quantitative longitudinal (secondary data analysis study with 196 dyads)	Big Sisters
McArthur et al., 2017	Scotland	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Qualitative (case studies drawn from study of 80 mentors)	Mentoring programme for young people from socially disadvantaged areas
Schwartz et al. 2013	USA	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Mixed methods (national longitudinal evaluation with 1,173 mentees and interviews with subsample of 30)	Mentoring programme for young people who have dropped out of secondary school
Sanyal and Rigby, 2017	UK	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Mixed methods (participatory action research focusing on 23 mentoring relationships, involving questionnaires, interviews and focus groups)	E-mentoring programme at a Higher Education Institution
Wilson et al., 2017	Australia	Peer-reviewed journal paper	Mixed methods (pre- and post- surveys and interviews with five mentees)	Mentoring programme for young people with intellectual disabilities

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis was undertaken by the research team from Manchester Metropolitan University. Thematic analysis is a method of 'identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis ensures that the identified themes are relevant to the research question, and that the themes identified are robust (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009; Thomas and Harden, 2008). This method was considered appropriate given the focus of this research on identifying the factors that make youth mentoring programmes effective.

The analysis was conducted in four stages: gathering thematic data from the included papers; creating new themes; gathering further evidence; and thematic synthesis. First, themes from the findings sections of all the included papers were collated and discussed. Most of the themes, although similar, were often labelled differently. These different thematic labels may also comprise information that was included within another thematic label in another paper. Therefore, the second stage required the team to devise more practical themes that would be relevant to all of the papers (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Taking into consideration the research question and aims, the team suggested four broad themes that they believed were relevant. In the third stage, two of the researchers reviewed the papers again, gathering further evidence that supported these themes. Lastly, a discussion to synthesise the themes, involving all members of the Manchester Met University team, resulted in the themes being reduced to three. The three final themes were: programme design and delivery; mentee and mentor characteristics; and relationships.

The findings presented in this paper are organised according to these three themes. Each finding is supported by evidence from more than one source (or, if from a single source, from a systematic review or empirical research that compares the effect of mentoring to some other form of intervention or to no intervention).

4 Findings

The key finding from this research is that youth mentoring programmes work. Such programmes can improve outcomes across academic, behavioural, emotional and social areas of young people's lives.

These impacts are small, but nevertheless significant (Du Bois et al, 2011). There is no evidence that youth mentoring programmes can improve physical health, although this may be because few studies examine this particular outcome. It should be noted that no studies identified in this research examine the effectiveness of youth mentoring schemes in the UK.

The research identified a number of factors that make youth mentoring programmes effective. These findings are organised according to the three themes identified in the thematic analysis: programme design and delivery; mentor and mentee characteristics; and relationships.

Programme design and delivery

There is huge diversity in the design and delivery of youth mentoring programmes. Programmes covered by studies included in this research exhibited a range and mix of different expected outcomes, such as: skills attainment; better familial relationships; positive school and work outcomes; and better overall mental and physical health. Social benefits included: increased social capital; practical support for gaining employment; and better relationships with birth families. Programmes also varied in duration, ranging from a few weeks to over two years. Mentors were either paid as part of their current jobs (such as school teachers in school-based, academic mentoring programmes) or (the majority) were volunteers. Each programme had its own way of selecting and training mentors. Some programmes provided training before the mentor met their mentee and gave no further support, while others provided training and support throughout (Lindsay et al. 2016). Despite these significant differences, there are some key common design and delivery themes in terms of what makes for effective mentoring programmes.

The evidence suggests that the recruitment of mentors (Du Bois, 2011), their training (Wilson et al, 2017) (Schwartz et al, 2013) (MacArthur et al, 2017) and their ongoing motivation (DeWit et al, 2016) are factors that contribute to effective programmes. Mentors with professional backgrounds of working with vulnerable young people, such as social workers, tended to have better outcomes than those with no such background. This is because they did not seem to expect as much from their mentee (MacArthur et al., 2017). Mentors also benefitted from ongoing training and opportunities to discuss issues with other mentors (Lindsay et al., 2016; McArthur et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2017). Debriefing to their peers enabled mentors to recognise that others were experiencing similar issues, which made them feel they were being effective within their role, important for mentor motivation. Those who were unable to interact with their peers did not have the opportunity to find out about the issues others were facing and therefore had no

comparison of their effectiveness (Chan and Ho, 2008). Mentors also need to be able to engage their mentee with activities, which is more effective when these are facilitated by the programme. Where there are no facilitated activities, it can be difficult for the mentor to know which activities to initiate, with some mentors not understanding what the mentee wants to do during the sessions (Chan and Ho, 2008). Programmes that matched mentors with skills directly related to the educational and occupational goals of the particular mentorship scheme, or those with similar backgrounds, proved more effective than those without such careful or considered selection protocols (DuBois et al., 2011).

Mentee motivation is important: those with specific goals and commitment were more likely to have the motivation to succeed (Bodin and Leifman, 2011; Bogat et al., 2008; Chan and Ho, 2008; Du Bois et al., 2011). The mentees with the highest level of motivation were also most likely to be those that needed the intervention the least. Those with the highest social risk were less likely to engage fully and were more likely not to have clear goals, to fear intimacy and rejection, and to withdraw from the programme early (Bogat et al., 2008; MacArthur et al., 2016; DeWit et al, 2016). High levels of commitment from the mentor were also important when building the relationship. Contacting the mentee and arranging to see them frequently was key to the success of the relationship (Chan and Ho, 2008; Du Bois and Silverthorn, 2005; MacArthur, Wilson and Hunter, 2016; Sanyal and Rigby, 2017). Lack of commitment, being seen as too busy or not understanding the needs of the mentee often meant that the relationship would terminate early (Chan and Ho, 2008; Eby et al., 2012; Lymburner, 2006). Building rapport and trust between mentors and mentees is key to successful relationships. This can involve agreeing how and when to be flexible, understanding each other's motivations and appreciating the damage that can be caused by the early unplanned termination of the mentoring relationship.

Mentor and mentee characteristics

Most studies identify the role that the process of matching mentees with mentors plays in effective programmes (Wilson et al, 2017) (Du Bois et al, 2011) (Sanyal and Rigby, 2017). There are two (potentially conflicting) findings about what makes for effective matching.

Several studies suggest that matching mentees and mentors who have shared backgrounds (Eby et al, 2012) (DeWit et al, 2016) and matching in a culturally sensitive way (Schwartz et al, 2013) (Bogat et al, 2008) are important ingredients of effective mentoring programmes. Shared backgrounds include values, beliefs and interests. Being culturally sensitive to the mentees when initiating matches is also associated with better outcomes (Schwartz et al. 2013; Bogat et al., 2008). There is conflicting evidence on whether mentoring relationships are more effective when mentors and mentees share the same ethnic background or gender. There is evidence that the length of the mentoring relationship increased when mentors and mentees were from the same ethnic group (Schwartz et al., 2013). However, gender or ethnic similarities between mentor and mentee were not found to be associated with effective relationships (Eby et al., 2013; Kanchewa et al., 2014). Indeed, programmes were found to be more effective when mentors and mentees were not matched based on similarities in ethnicity (Dubois et al., 2011). Stronger evidence exists that matching mentors and mentees based on their interests and values contributes positively to the effectiveness of a mentoring relationship.

On the other hand, matching processes that give choice and agency to mentees are seen to be effective (Schwartz et al, 2013). Giving mentees opportunities to meet and choose their mentor by attending social events, for example, increases the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will flourish and last. Allowing mentees to have choice and agency in matching leads to longer-lasting relationships, which are more likely to result in positive outcomes (DuBois et al., 2011; DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005; Eby et al., 2013; Schwartz et al, 2013).

Risk factors affecting the quality of the match include a mentee's unstable family background – for instance, a family history of illness or violence, or a recent move (Lymburner, 1997). Mentors with expertise in mental health and social work were found to be more likely to establish strong and lasting relationships with mentees. Mentors without that experience but who were able to develop relational skills also tended to establish strong and lasting relationships, though they required support (McArthur et al., 2017). Mentoring programmes in which mentors' educational or occupational backgrounds were well matched to programme goals were found to be more effective than those which were not as well matched (Dubois et al., 2011).

Relationships

Longer relationships between mentees and mentors are associated with better outcomes (Schwartz et al, 2013) (MacArthur et al, 2017) (Eby et al, 2012) (Du Bois et al, 2011). Those mentees who were still in touch with their mentor for a minimum of 12 months, but especially after 21 months, were most likely to have the best outcomes (DeWit et al., 2016; MacArthur et al, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2013). Young people in long-term mentoring relationships (at least 12 months) were found to achieve better outcomes than young people who had never been mentored (De Wit et al., 2016) or those whose mentoring relationships did not last as long (DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005). Specific goals and clarity of purpose were associated with better quality and longer relationships, which generally lead to positive outcomes (Lindsay et al., 2016; Lymburner, 2006; Sanyal and Rigby, 2017). Conversely, early (unplanned) termination of relationships can lead to negative outcomes (Du Bois et al, 2011).

Both mentees and mentors can gain from positive relationships (Brickley, 2018; Lindsay et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2017), but this may not show in specific outcomes such as young people being in education, employment or training EET (Wilson et al, 2018). This is often an issue with mentoring programmes in that the benefits are not always measurable but may still have a positive effect on the lives of the individual participants, particularly if there are other factors such as learning difficulties to take into consideration (Schwartz et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2017). A few studies commented on the importance of building a high-quality relationship (MacArthur et al, 2016; Bogat et al. 2008; Brown, 2017; DeWit, 2016; Wilson et al., 2017) through rapport (Sanyal and Rigby, 2017), trust (Bogat et al., 2008) and the ability to achieve overall goals (Schwartz et al., 2013). Where there was no formal introductory period between the mentor and mentee at the beginning of the intervention, it was more difficult for relationships to build naturally (Bogat, Liang and Rigol-Dahn, 2008). Chan and Ho (2008) found that miscommunication between the mentor and mentee could lead to passivity within the relationship and ultimately the relationship would terminate.

Most mentees relied on the mentors to contact them, initiate further meetings, initiate conversations and arrange social events (Chan and Ho, 2008; Du Bois and Silverthorn, 2005; MacArthur, Wilson and Hunter, 2016; Sanyal and Rigby, 2017). If the mentor was seen to be too busy in their personal lives, or there was a misunderstanding in the communication between the mentee and mentor, this usually resulted in the mentee withdrawing from the programme early (Chan and Ho, 2008; Eby et al., 2012; Lymburner, 2006). Mentors need to show that they have prepared to be a mentor, have time, and are from a similar background as the mentee (DeWit et al. 2016). Mentees who were in contact at least weekly with their mentors were more likely to benefit from the relationship than those with less frequent contact (Chan and Wing Chung Ho, 2008).

Discussion

Youth mentoring programmes work. A significant and growing evidence base demonstrates that such programmes can improve outcomes across academic, behavioural, emotional and social areas of young people's lives. These impacts are small but significant (Du Bois et al, 2011).

Given that they work, the question is: how do they work? That is, what are the factors that make youth mentoring programmes effective? Addressing this question presents a number of significant evidential challenges.

The first of these is that most of the research – that examines factors that make programmes effective – included in this review is from the USA. This raises questions about the extent to which the findings presented here are applicable in the UK (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019). While there have been some UK-based studies, the exclusion of such studies is in part explained by the inclusion criteria used for this study, which included a focus on the methodological rigour and transparency of the studies reviewed. While there is a larger body of empirical evidence about the factors that make programmes effective than is covered by this review, much of it lacks clarity around how the data were collected and analysed.

Secondly, a high proportion of studies focused on programmes which took a deficit model approach to mentoring. This means that the focus of mentoring was on 'improving' or 'correcting' the behaviour and/or aspirations of young people experiencing disadvantage (defined in various ways). Some studies only focused on specific groups of young people (e.g. young people with disabilities), and mentors ranged in age and were not consistently either volunteers or mentoring as part of paid employment. These studies do not therefore reflect a particular model of mentoring, which should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Finally, the mentoring programmes covered various interventions which focused on befriending, as well as general mentoring, or mentoring to increase social networks and relationships. The settings were both formal and informal and each intervention had a different expectation for the setting, and aimed for different outcomes.

Despite these challenges, the extant research does provide evidence of a number of factors that can make youth mentoring programmes effective.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

This review of youth mentoring programmes has shown that there are small but significant benefits to mentees and mentors. It is difficult to compare such diverse programmes in many different countries and it is not surprising that we therefore recommend that more research be conducted in this area. Alongside this recommendation, we argue that commissioners and providers of similar programmes should consider the following:

- **Allow time and resources to set up a programme, to recruit and train mentors, and to match them with mentees.** This includes preparing and training mentors and mentees on expectations, the aims of the programme and practical considerations. Consider including pre-programme information sessions, so that mentors and mentees are aware that successful relationships require commitment from both parties.
- **Focus on the fundamental role that matching plays in successful programmes.** The process needs to give agency to mentees while recognising the role that shared experience and cultural sensitivity can play in successful relationships. A matching process might involve: matching meetings, speed matching, guided matching, giving mentors insight into different mentees and their thoughts about good matches, letting mentors meet mentees in informal group settings to get initial thoughts/ideas on matches.
- **Balance giving agency to mentees in decisions around their mentors with the evidence that shared interests and backgrounds and cultural sensitivity produce better outcomes.** It is important to avoid making assumptions about which shared interests and backgrounds are important to mentees.
- **Ensure that mentors and mentees are supported to develop and sustain longer-term mentoring relationships, as these lead to better outcomes.** More research is needed to understand why longer relationships result in better outcomes, and how this insight might affect programme design and delivery.
- **Focus on how to measure progress and outcomes.** This might involve working closely with researchers and research commissioners, who should consider the need to understand the impact of youth mentoring schemes in the UK. Other areas where more research is needed include the matching process, the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships, and the role that mentee agency plays in achieving outcomes.

Limitations

Our method of synthesis does not enable us to state whether some factors are more effective than others. This means that our findings cannot be used to draw conclusions on, for example, whether monthly meetings or fortnightly meetings make for a more effective mentoring relationship. In addition, we only used the outcomes of interest as inclusion criteria (i.e. if the study referenced the outcomes of interest, we included it). We did not then analyse how effective the different factors were in achieving those outcomes. It is therefore not possible to say, for example, which specific outcome is achieved by mentoring relationships lasting more than six months. Instead, our review gives an overview of relevant findings across the different factors of interest.

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