

Learning development mentor provision – how it's going

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Presentation abstract

Continuing from the presentation in 2022 (see Thomas and Mansfield, 2022), the University of Northampton Learning Development Team used this session to share how the second year of their Learning Development Mentor Project has progressed.

Our session discussed the impact of utilising student mentors on the provision of our service with the objective of reducing barriers to accessing support. Our nine Learning Development Mentors (LDMs) replicate that of Price et al.'s (2018) Student Learning Assistant Model where we offer support to students from any disciplinary subject via drop-ins, tutorials and other formal events. All LDMs are current second- and third-year students and work four or six hours a week to supplement the LD provision by offering a peer perspective to academic and study skills. Furthermore, they are seeping into spaces unable to be penetrated by Learning Development. The talk evaluated how the role was co-created with the LD Mentors and the benefits and impact it has had on the LD provision. We discussed how the Learning Development tutors, mentors and users of the service differentiate the roles. In addition, the impact of the following projects which the LDMs have been involved with was considered:

- University of Northampton Plagiarism Awareness Course (UNPAC).
- Social media and marketing outputs.
- Pathways project to support students' understanding of Learning Development and how to access the service.
- Other institutional events such as open days, exam ready project and many more.

- The conference presentation will describe how we have navigated the project and how measuring impact with the project is not always straightforward.

Keywords: peer mentoring; learning development; co-creation.

Community response

The session was really well received by the community, and it had the added benefit of linking back to their existing work. It was nice to see how the project has continued to develop since the 2022 conference, and there is hope the presenters will return with further updates for 2024!

A helpful update on a valuable project. I was particularly interested in the involvement of mentors in the development of resources (e.g., the friendly and accessible UNPAC resource) and the potential to engage students more often and more directly in both the design and presentation of these kinds of resources. Would be keen to learn more about how students in general respond to these, and what influence, if any, the involvement of fellow students has on the likelihood of their engaging. At the Aston University Learning Development Centre, we also work closely with students as mentors, writing coaches and peer-assisted learning leaders – both in the provision of direct advice and support, and in the development of resources. It would be great to compare notes on all this at some point and see what and how we might learn from each other.

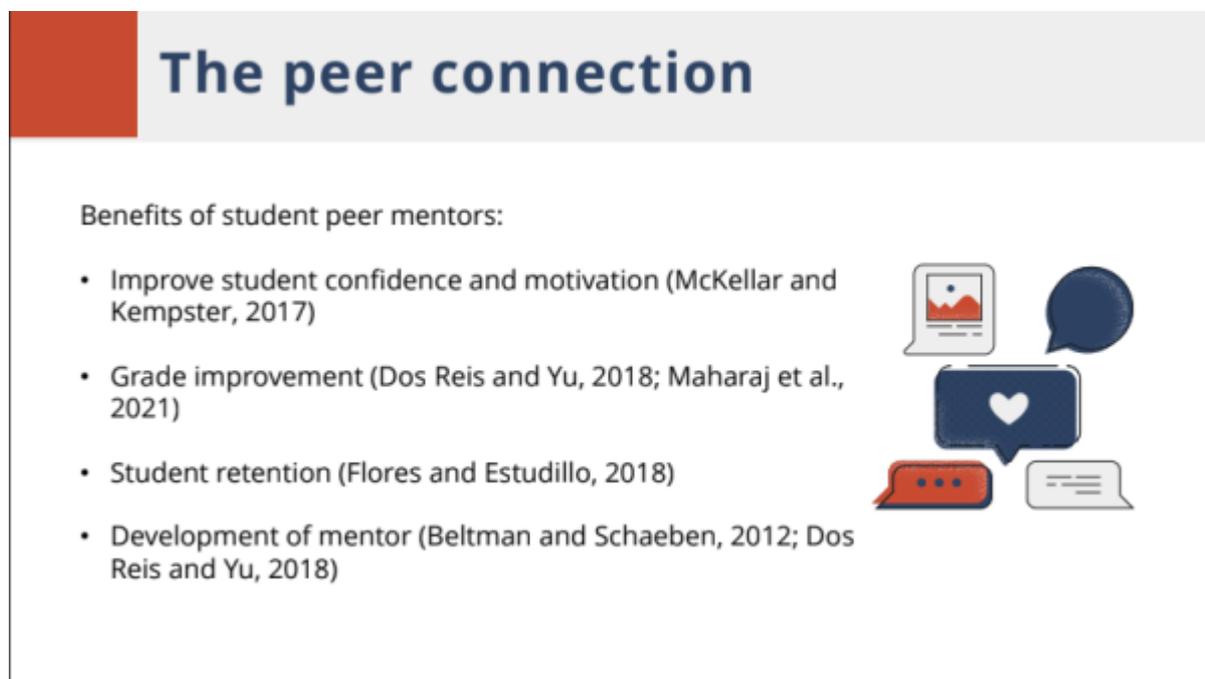
Fantastic to see this work continue to develop. Please come back next year!

Many members of the community draw on the session in their reflections, considering how similar projects could be used in their practice:

This research is of real interest to me. I love the idea of having student LD mentors. I remember seeing the promotional materials at ALDCon 22 at Northampton and thought it was a great idea then, but I have not managed to get anything going at Nottingham just yet. I know that lots of other universities utilise students as mentors,

and there is definitely evidence to support their effectiveness, as outlined in this session (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The peer connection (author slides).



The peer connection

Benefits of student peer mentors:

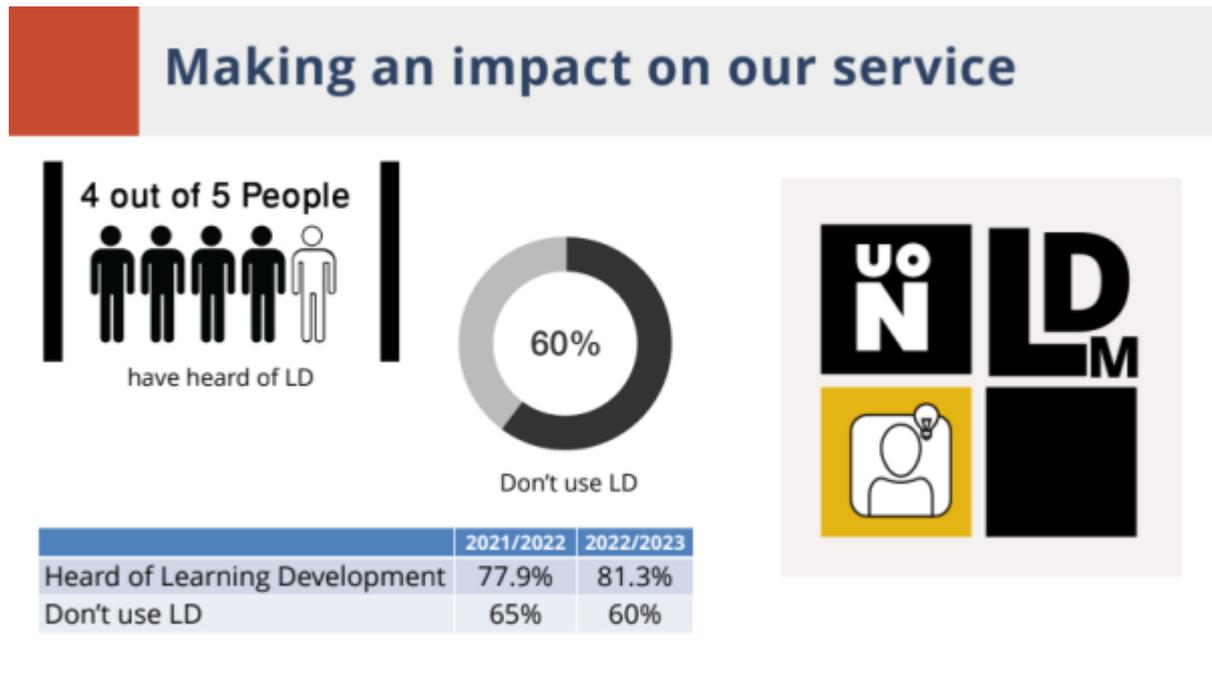
- Improve student confidence and motivation (McKellar and Kempster, 2017)
- Grade improvement (Dos Reis and Yu, 2018; Maharaj et al., 2021)
- Student retention (Flores and Estudillo, 2018)
- Development of mentor (Beltman and Schaeben, 2012; Dos Reis and Yu, 2018)



I know there is funding available at Nottingham for this kind of project, and it is something I will look into applying for this academic year. I am concerned about the level of administration involved with recruiting, training and managing student mentors. I'd love to find out more about the training provided. I will be getting in touch with the authors to find out more. I also like the idea of the convenience of having student mentors on hand for sense checking new online resources, but worry that such a self-selecting group of students might not represent the students who really need our support.

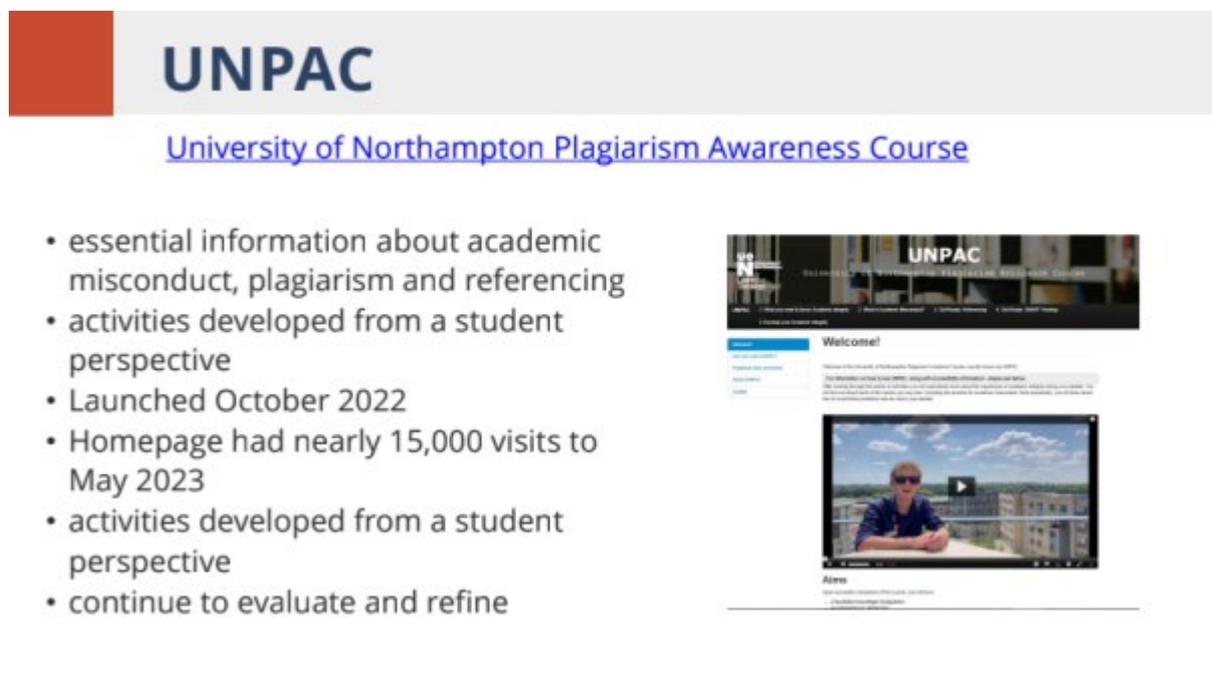
I note the data provided on the increase in awareness and use of the LD service (See Figure 2), but I wonder if this can directly be attributed to the student mentors and not just a general trend?

Figure 2. Making an impact on our service (author slides).



I enjoyed looking through the [UNPAC resource](#) (See Figure 3). I have a similar course which is currently hosted on Moodle. A move to Xerte Bootstrap might make it more accessible. I will consider creating this resource (when I find the time!).

Figure 3. UoN Plagiarism Awareness Course (author slides).



Authors' reflection

These comments are lovely to read. Sharing our practice at the conference has obviously inspired the initiative in other institutions, we have learnt so much during the first two years and feel every year it will develop and support the Learning Development provision at Northampton. Co-creating resources was something all of the LDMs wanted to do as they saw the benefits of presenting our content in a more dynamic way. The tasks offered them credibility in their role and the chance to develop useful skills, and it offered us the advantage of the student perspective. It is important to offer our students a great and honest user experience. Our LDMs have been so honest on areas they feel need more content or to be changed as well as what they enjoyed and why. These conversations are always insightful and develop us as practitioners as well as offer opportunities to have professional conversations as LDMs.

We appreciate the improvement in the number of students who know about Learning Development within the institution might not be down to the LDM project. Although this is the only significant thing over the last year that has changed within our team it might not be the sole cause! We would like to think the social media presence has impacted this but of course unless we have the data to show for sure we can never know!

Working in partnership with students has its difficulties as the number of hours a week are limited and the students' courses always comes first as a priority. We feel the initiative supports all involved staff, student mentors and users of our service and continues to break down the barriers some students may have using our service.

Acknowledgements

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Further reading

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Author details

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Helena Beeson started working as a Learning Development Tutor in 2011 at the University of Northampton but has worked in roles across Library and Learning Services for several years before this. She is currently working as a Learning Development Tutor and Mentor Manager. Helena joined LearnHigher in 2019 to collaborate with colleagues in similar roles across the country and share her wealth of experience. She is an ALDinHE Certified Practitioner, a Fellow of the HEA with a MA in Modern English and Linguistics. Her current research interests include collaboration with student mentors and promoting student autonomy.

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