

London College of Fashion: Attainment Mentoring Project

This case study is an output from a [Collaborative Enhancement Project](#) supported and funded by QAA membership. The project is led by De Montfort University in partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Brighton and University of the Arts London. Find out more about Collaborative Enhancement Projects on the [QAA website](#).

Kath Melandri k.melandri@arts.ac.uk / katherine.melandri@city.ac.uk (Case Study author) Senior Lecturer London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London
Kelly Dearsley k.dearsley@fashion.arts.ac.uk Associate Dean School of Media and Communications, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London
Siobhan Clay s.clay@arts.ac.uk Head of Academic Enhancement (Case Study coordinator) The Exchange, University of the Arts London

Purpose

22/23 data indicated attainment and retention for students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds on Fashion Communication undergraduate courses were not meeting institutional targets. To improve these, using the structure of an existing mentoring project, course leaders identified Level 6 B.A.M.E students who might benefit from extra academic support in their final year. Those who agreed to participate had regular mentoring sessions during the final major project by a senior member of staff from a diverse background to ensure they met or exceeded expectations.

Description

This was a small-scale pilot focusing on proactive intervention. Working in collaboration with Course Leaders, they recommended the mentoring to participants. This helped build trust with students, almost fast tracking the relationship. The mentoring focus was on student experiences and using the existing support systems.

Mentoring sessions were 20 minutes long, every two or three weeks, online. Students set personal goals with an academic mentor. Introductions were made to university support teams and they reflected on success to increase confidence.

The mentoring was offered to nine students, with six actively engaged with meetings every few weeks. For most, the aim was to improve on their expected grades by one increment or complete their studies. This was achieved by five of the students.

Outcomes of activity

Participants reported barriers to learning such as financial hardship, needing to work, long term illness, neural diversity and family responsibilities. They expressed difficulty asking for help, feelings of humiliation. They also had some issues navigating the university support system. They also shared a lack of belonging with their cohort. The mentoring went some way to showing them the institution was invested in their success and that they deserved help. The guidance and assistance positively impacted outcomes.

A challenge was building a trusting relationship in a short time. Longer term mentoring relationships mitigate this issue. For participants, already struggling to engage with university, an extra call on their time did add pressure, it doesn't work for all participants. This work takes time for the academic mentor, and at points a busy workload impacted effective mentoring.

Impact on Students

Fully engaged participants found the experience beneficial, accessing different types of student support. Two main areas of support were technical assistance with visual design of projects, alongside a focus on reflection. Anecdotally participants expressed improved levels of self-confidence. Academic interactions with a senior team member also helped improve trust in the institution and support services.

Institutional Impact

The pilot met the objective to impact retention and attainment, and all participants gained a higher degree classification than their original trajectory, ranging from a 2:2 to a 1st Degree award.

Next Steps

The pilot structure has been shared with another senior academic who will deliver this to an alternative cohort within the School of Media and Communications. This will show if this can be replicated.

What do you think course staff could do to support everyone/B.A.M.E students so that mentoring becomes less critically necessary?

Focusing on relationship building, in particular positive institutional interactions, could go some way to give students a sense their university "sees and hears" them. Swapping mentoring extra personal tutorials with a consistent person/academic would also give B.A.M.E students human connection alongside their teaching team, encouraging them to stay connected rather than drift away if there's minimal sense of belonging.
