

**An Exploration of the Trinity Access Mentoring Programme and the
Perceptions and Experiences of 6th-year Students in Five of its Post-Primary
Link Schools.**

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**A dissertation submitted to the School of Education at Trinity College, in
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy**

March 2024

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted as an exercise for a degree, wholly or partially for any other academic award at this or any other university.

This work is entirely my own.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions.

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David Reilly

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Andrew Loxley for his wise advice and guidance since 2017. Many thanks to all the students, teachers, mentors, and Trinity Access staff who participated in this research. It has been a privilege to listen to the students' views, hear about their progress throughout the programme and plans for their lives.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for their support throughout this project.

Finally, thank you to my mother Cáit, my sister, Grace, and my partner Nicole whose fine eye for detail has been eagle-eyed. A special thanks to Damian and Liz also for being constants throughout my life and who have shown me what the power of belief in another human being can lead to.

Abstract

This research explored the effectiveness of the Trinity Access (TA) mentoring programme in supporting and/or informing the post-school aspirations and expectations of sixth-year students. It assessed the operational aspects of the programme. It also explored how Robert Putnam's bridging and bonding social capital concept helped explain the elements of a positive mentoring relationship. This research was carried out in five TA-linked secondary schools across Dublin.

TA mentoring began in 2014 and grew out of a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme (now known as just Trinity Access) and College for Every Student (an American school outreach programme). The overall TA project includes the delivery of a Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning, alongside workshops in technology-mediated, team-based learning and the development of three other 'core practices': Pathways to College, Leadership in Learning and Mentoring.

The research design applied was a case study approach using research instruments, such as focus groups and interviews to generate data. Data was generated from five focus groups with five sixth-year students from each of the five schools, interviews with the teachers involved in setting up and running the programme, interviews with ten mentors, one principal, as well as interviews with three staff in TCD. These staff were involved in the development of the programme from the outset, as well as the ongoing operation of the programme. There was also some use of general survey data, which TA had collected on all of their programmes, such as mentoring-related questions which were used prior to data generation. It helped shape the research questions, along with a prior study from O'Sullivan, Mulligan, Kuster, Smith, and Hannon (2017), which recommended further research into mentoring relationships and operations. The approach to data analysis in this study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2018) six steps to carrying out reflexive thematic analysis.

Key findings suggested that all parties involved in the programme found it worthwhile but not without its challenges. Logistical and commitment issues led to disjointed organisation over time, as the programme scaled up in numbers of schools and students participating. There was mixed evidence of the programme having an impact on the students' post-school decision-making. It was evident that the decision-making process was multi-faceted, involving

a wide range of social, familial and personal factors. Putnam's concept of bridging and bonding social capital theory showed up in the mentoring relationships, but in a slightly different guise. While many factors affected the growth of these relationships, the most common were trust, mutual understanding and commitment (on both sides). Commitment on the mentors' side was a difficulty for the programme as it grew. Findings showed that more structured training, scheduling and commitment, would allow a popular programme for all stakeholders involved, to overcome its logistical challenges. However, scale, whilst desirable at a policy level, may dilute the quality of engagement in the programme.

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List of Acronyms

CAO: Central Application Office

FE: Further Education

CFES: College for Every Student

CSO: Central Statistics Office

DARE: Disability Access Route Entry

DCU: Dublin City University

DES: Department of Education

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Education in Schools

DIT: Dublin Institute of Technology

DPER: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

EC: European Commission

ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute

EU: European Union

GUI: Growing Up in Ireland: longitudinal study

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HEI: Higher Education Institute

HEAR: Higher Education Access Route

IoTs: Institutes of Technology

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

NESC: National Economic and Social Council

NOEAHE: National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PATH: The Programme for Access to Higher Education

PLC: Post-Leaving Certificate Course

SEG: Socio-Economic Group

SES: Socio-Economic Status

SUSI: Student Universal Support Ireland

TA: Trinity Access

TAP: Trinity Access Programmes

TA21: Trinity Access 21

TU: Technological University

TCD: Trinity College Dublin

UCD: University College Dublin

WP: Widening Participation

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction and Background to The Study

Trinity Access (TA) was set up in 1994 with the core objective of diversifying the student body at Trinity College Dublin. It was linked with post-primary schools around Dublin that were designated as disadvantaged, in terms of the socio-economic status of their student body and lower than national average progression rates to third level. These schools satisfied the socio-economic criteria which granted them Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) status, from the Department of Education and Skills. This means that the school has more students than average from low-income families. These low-income families are identified by using the Pobal HP deprivation Index.¹ The income of each family is distributed into eight categories, from extremely disadvantaged to extremely affluent. Any family who is one category or more below the mean, is regarded as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged and satisfies the criteria of a low-income family (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). The identification process of DEIS schools entails using data sources, such as the Small Area Population Statistics SAPS, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index and the Department of Education and Skill's pupil data, in order to develop a profile of the concentrated disadvantage level of the socio-economic demographic of each school's pupil cohort (Higher Education Authority, 2022). This DEIS status was conferred on a school by the Department of Education, which came with extra state funding. The funding is supplied for support such as the School Meals Programme, School Completion Programme, DEIS Grant and access to various educational resources, such as the Home School Community Liaison Service (DFHERIS, 2022). Since TA was founded, they have run various career guidance initiatives to promote college-going cultures within the schools. One such approach was a mentoring programme which paired students (mentees) with college-going students and professionals as their mentors.

This research project has aimed to investigate the role, if any, the (TA) mentoring programme has had on influencing the decisions of sixth-year students following post-primary education. It also aimed to investigate the operational quality of the programme and how Robert

¹ [Microsoft Word - The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index - Introduction 07.doc](#)

Putnam's (2000) social capital concept could help explain the relationships between the mentors and mentees. The TA mentoring programme was one of three core practices which were run in various link post-primary schools around Dublin. In summary, the Trinity Access model had three core practices:

- 1) Mentoring;
- 2) Leadership in Learning; and
- 3) Pathways to College.

According to Bray, Hannon, and Tangney (2022), the Leadership in Learning core practice involves teachers guiding students in ways that help develop students' autonomy and self-direction, as well as skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking/problem-solving. They explain Pathways to College as a core practice that covers a range of activities designed to increase awareness of, as well as share specific information on, third-level options for students (Bray et al., 2022). They explain that the Mentoring core practice fits in with the overall TA goal to act as a catalyst for 'social transformation', by supporting people to reach their full potential through innovation, research and advocacy.

1.2. The Research Questions

One aim of this thesis was to investigate the role, if any, the TA mentoring programme had on the decisions of sixth-year students in respect of what to do when they leave school. Another key aim was to explore the strengths and weaknesses of how the programme operated, and based on analysis of participant data, to offer recommendations on how to improve the running of the programme. The quality of mentor and mentee relationships was also a crucial area of interest.

The study was conducted with five DEIS-designated post-primary schools. Each school was one of the original schools linked to the TA project between 2017 and 2022. Data was generated by undertaking focus groups with sixth-year students, and interviews with teachers, TA staff responsible for the administration of the programme, mentors and one principal. The following research questions were explored:

RQ 1: How do 6th-year students in five Trinity Access linked Post-Primary DEIS schools perceive the Trinity Access mentoring programme?

Sub-RQ 1: What effect, if any, does the mentoring programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations?

RQ 2: How does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

RQ 3: How is the mentoring programme operationalised in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

1.3. Rationale for Trinity Access and its Mentoring Programme

The rationale behind the TA programme is to support increased progression to higher education institutions from post-primary linked DEIS schools, whose progression rates are lower than the national average. TA originated in 2012, from a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme (TA) & Bridge21, an initiative of the School of Computer Science & Statistics and the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin. According to Tangney et al. (2022), one of their key aims was to build capacity within their eleven partner schools, so that students are informed and prepared to make future educational choices, which will support them to realise their full educational potential.

More specifically, the goal of the Trinity Access mentoring programme is intended to:

Engage students to develop the knowledge, networks, and skills needed to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities.

The mentoring programme is designed to match third-level students and professionals, with second-level students for an extended period, usually an academic year. During this time, the mentors and mentees are allocated 4-6 meetings with each session having a different focus, for example, relationship building with mentor and mentee, supporting mentees through various college course investigations, and assisting mentees to work through their post-school options. However, each school varied in their approach to the operation of the programme. Schools had autonomy over how and when they ran their mentoring sessions, and were

supported by TA staff in terms of mentor recruitment and training. There were significant discrepancies in how each school operated the programme, as each had its respective schedules and commitments for their students, along with unique challenges and approaches to mentor recruitment. The overall aim of this programme and other TA interventions is to improve rates of progression to third-level institutions from the schools they work with. The mentoring programme is one approach from a suite of career guidance-like activities.

1.4. Mentoring: A multifaceted endeavour

Part of the core objective of the TA mentoring programme is to broaden the students' networks, and to enable them to develop the knowledge required to assess all possible career options. According to Scrine, Walker and Reibel (2012), mentoring aims to build capability and self-reliance in the mentee, whilst also providing opportunities for the mentor to learn. Rhodes (2005) highlights that organising successful mentoring programmes can be difficult due to the many moving parts. Engagement in the mentoring relationship in the first instance, is dependent on many external factors, such as the young person's interpersonal history, family background and other community factors (Rhodes, 2005). However, once students decide to engage and the programme begins, Rhodes (2005) offers clarity about what factors are needed from both the mentor and mentee, in order to ensure a successful and positive relationship ensues. The three cornerstones of successful mentoring according to Rhodes, are mutuality, trust and empathy. The gains students can make from participating in successful mentoring relationships include socio-emotional, identity and cognitive development (Rhodes, 2005).

The TA mentoring programme targets students from socio-economic disadvantaged post-primary schools, with lower than national average third-level education progression rates. It links students with mentors from both similar and different socio-economic backgrounds to themselves. This networking approach can be viewed as a social capital endeavour. Putnam's (2000) thoughts on social capital can be mostly related to community and societal level benefits, such as better social relations, improved levels of trust in social structures and how to achieve these goals. It was worth assessing these relationships through Putnam's lens of

bridging and bonding social capital, to investigate what was the best approach for the students. Putnam's bonding type of social capital suggests that people within groups of similar characteristics form close ties quickly, easily and very deeply. However, on the bridging type of social capital, these types of relationships can be characterised by recipients having different characteristics, such as socio-economic backgrounds. It can be more difficult for these social ties to form, according to Putnam (2000), but it can lead to knowledge, opportunities, possibilities for growth and understanding to be shared between both parties.

An important aspect of any mentoring programme is not just the experience of the mentee, but also that of the mentor. DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002), suggest that there is an ongoing need for mentor support and training. The more support and training mentors receive, the more likely it is they will return to the programme and in turn, improve continuity. For students to develop any of the benefits that Rhodes (2005) mentions above, it is important to remember, according to Whalley (2006), that mutuality, trust, and empathy take time to build. Whalley (2006) suggests it can take six to twelve months for this to develop between mentor and mentee. Therefore, offering enough support and training to the mentor is a crucial cog in mentor retention, and for any mentoring programme's continuity and success. It is important to remember that all the mentors in this programme are volunteers who have professional and academic careers to manage, alongside participating in the programme. According to Freedman (1991), without the necessary infrastructure in place to support and direct the mentor's efforts 'all that remains is fervour, and fervour alone is not only evanescent and insufficient but potentially treacherous.'

1.5. Purpose of This Study

The main purpose of this thesis was to explore the perceptions of participating students, mentors, teachers, TA staff and principals, of the TA mentoring programme. It was also to assess whether these perceptions could offer feedback to TA on any improvements that could be made to the programme. The main areas of focus were on how the programme was operationalised in the five Trinity Access link schools (which maps onto the third research question); how Robert Putnam's social capital theory helps explain mentoring relationships

(which maps onto research question two), and how the students perceived the mentoring programme in the five DEIS post-primary schools linked to TA and involved in this study. Another core purpose of this study was to explore if the programme had any impact on the students' post-school aspirations and expectations, which is mapped onto sub-research question one. Since the programme began in 2014, there had been no detailed evaluation of how it has progressed. O'Sullivan et al. (2017) recommended a more thorough investigation into the progress of the programme, with suggestions for further research on the quality of the mentor-mentee relationships, and how the programme was operating. This study was a deeper investigation into those recommended areas for further research from that paper. Data generated from reviewing the broader Trinity Access survey data from all eleven schools, also showed a need to investigate relationship quality and operationality further. Enabling students to make more informed decisions about their careers and education was an important goal of the programme.

1.6. Overview of the Research Design

Forty-three participants were involved in this study. These participants were from across the mentoring programme and included mentees, mentors, teachers, TA staff and a principal. A case study was utilised for this study's research approach. Examining the voices of those involved in the programme was based on the premise that insights have more significance if 'key persons in the organisation' are included (Yin, 2012, p.12). From the eleven schools that began the mentoring programme in 2014, five of these were chosen at random to participate in this study. The mentee data was generated using focus groups of five randomly selected sixth-year students in the five link schools. Interviews were conducted with the teachers involved in setting up and running the programme in each of the five link schools. Interviews were also employed with the mentors involved, as well as interviews with the staff in TCD and one principal. These interviews and focus groups were transcribed *verbatim* and were manually coded, with the aid of NVivo. Braun and Clarke's (2018) six steps to carrying out reflexive thematic analysis were used in this analysis. The data generated for this study was between late 2018 and early 2020. Table 1.6 below outlines the data generated in the study.

Table 1.6: Data Generated in this Research

Group and generation approach	Number
Mentee Focus groups (5 students per group)	25 students
Mentor interviews	10
Teacher interviews	5
Programme administrators	2
Principal interview	1

1.7. Being the Researcher: Positionality and intent

My role in this research involved both researching the programme using focus groups and interviews, and supporting the schools, students and mentees in the operational aspect of the programme. A small number of the students who participated in the study may have encountered me before as part of Trinity Access' staff in previous iterations of the programme and other elements of school outreach, but they would not have known me personally. This section addresses my positionality as a researcher, who was both on the inside and outside of the research at various junctions.

As well as undertaking the dual roles as part of the TA programme, I also grew up in an economically poor urban area and went to a DEIS post-primary school, just like many of the mentees. Throughout much of this part of my education, the prospect of third-level education never really crossed my mind. The highest third-level qualification in my family was a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course (Level 6). My mother worked as a cleaner and spent a large part of my childhood out of work due to mental health problems, and my father had died before I started school. My two older sisters both completed a one-year PLC before entering paid employment. In my extended family, I had two cousins who completed Level 7/8 degrees. My mother's parents were unskilled agricultural workers, and my father's parents were low-paid industry workers. I had very little prior knowledge in my home environment about the merits of third-level education, not to say that it was not encouraged, but it certainly was not seen as the 'gold standard'. Looking back on my experience, I had trust in

my agency but very little guidance on how to navigate the system. It felt very much like I was on my own in my educational journey. I played lots of sports and had lots of mentors in that space, naturally, some ones I responded better to than others. It was this aspect of my life that brought out the competitive nature in me. When I was getting to the latter years of second-level study and talk of college became part of the hallway conversations, I realised I had to go too. This brought out the competitive nature in me and the feeling of 'not wanting to miss out'. However, I had missed so much school, partially due to being left to my own devices, and partially due to suffering the trauma of losing my sister in the middle of my Junior Certificate exams. Luckily, I had two very good mentors/teachers who 'had my back' and understood me long before I understood myself. Through an awful lot of work, blood, sweat and tears, I managed to catch up on many missed days. These two mentors instilled a desire for me to come to school and helped me break down the tasks required, in order to (1) figure out what I wanted to do, and (2) what I needed to do to get there. This was my first and most influential experience with mentors in my formative educational journey.

From here, I entered university on an access course and have had a personal interest in the success of access courses. However, despite these options and positive teachers in the system, there are many more students from similar backgrounds and experiences to me who did not make it to third-level education, or on to their career of choice. Therefore, everyone's story is different and the dynamics that affect each life are also different. This is something I had only began to realise the more I reflected on my journey, compared to that of others. My values around education have been influenced by this journey, and by the commitment of others working tirelessly to improve the outcomes for those students, who did not have the advantage of a head start in life. I have a shared background with many of the students who participated in the mentoring programme and had a desire to see positive outcomes for the students. However, I needed to keep my wishes for a positive experience for the mentees, separate from the evaluation of the programme.

Creswell (2013) points out that as a primary data collection instrument, the researcher must explicitly identify their biases, personal values and backgrounds. He outlined the need for being interpretative and reflexive, as two other vital characteristics of a qualitative researcher. These factors shaped the interpretation of the data during the study. Insider and outsider researcher positionality has always been a contentious debate in social research

(Bridges 2017; Griffith 1998; Hellawell 2006). According to Chhabra (2020), researchers who consider themselves insiders, are the members of specified groups, or occupants of specified social statuses; whereas outsiders are the non-members. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explored the strengths and challenges of conducting qualitative research from each membership, and conclude that rather than consider the issue from a dichotomous perspective, the space between can be occupied more. They go on to explain the strengths and challenges of each group and posit that being a member of either, does not unduly negatively influence the research process. They advise that disciplined bracketing, and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership.

Furthermore, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explain that one does not have to be a member of the group being studied, in order to appreciate and adequately represent the experience of the participants. Instead, they posit that the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status, but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience. It is that space between insider and outsider research that allows a dialectical approach. This space challenges the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status. They acknowledge that a researcher's knowledge is always based on his or her positionality but as qualitative researchers, we have an appreciation for the fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Even in the cases of insider research, it is not possible to share all experiences with everyone in any given population. The same applies for outsider researchers, as the intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows them to remain true outsiders to the experience under study, and because of their role as researchers, they do not qualify as complete insiders.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) outline several strategies for minimising the effect of being an insider. Firstly, recognising the relationship that already exists between participants and oneself, can overcome some of the potential problems of being an 'insider.' This can be done by being reflexive and critically examining any assumptions and actions, about both data collection and analysis. In my instance of researching the TA mentoring programme, I was not exactly an insider with the mentees. None of the mentees knew me or any of my characteristics. They had some familiarity with various TA-related staff and researchers in the

past, but this does not suggest that they knew I shared any characteristics with them. However, I was an insider in terms of already understanding when and where to gather data. I was familiar with the mentoring routines of the schools before I started data generation. This prior knowledge enabled me to gather richer and more focused data, as well as to easily determine when and why changes to the mentoring practice occurred. If I were an outsider to the programme completely, I would not have gained access to the mentees, mentors and teachers. However, there are problems associated with being an 'insider'. Lipson (1984) suggests that recognition of patterns of practice may be difficult to identify because the behaviour is so familiar and that it can be taken for granted. Routine practice can be ignored or glanced over. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe the dilemma of living simultaneously in two worlds and warn of the dangers of over-rapport with research participants. It was very important that I stayed cognisant of the possibility of completely joining the group and losing my research perspective.

An advantage I possessed, despite my links to the TA programme, was that I had never met over 90% of the research participants before the data generation stage. I had previously met some of the teachers and TA staff that I interviewed, but mainly in the capacity of arranging the logistics to meet the students etc. When I introduced myself to my research participants, it was as a PhD Candidate from the TCD School of Education. The previous interactions the teachers, principals, mentees and mentors had with the programme, were all with other TA staff. There are obvious advantages and disadvantages of being an insider or outsider researcher. However, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explain, as qualitative researchers, we are not separate from the study. We are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. They go on to explain that we cannot retreat to a distant 'researcher' role. Our personhood affects the analysis and so too the analysis of our personhood. 'Within this circle of impact is the space between.' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

1.8. Outline of The Thesis

The outline of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 provides an account of the participation, expenditure and ideological shifts in Irish Higher Education since the 1960s. This also includes the widening participation (WP) agenda from legal and policy standpoints. Situated within the WP policy context, is a detailed account of the Trinity Access Programme - its inception, aims and development over time. Chapter 3 discusses the relevant literature on mentoring such as Rhodes's (2005) model on mentoring and the impact this can have on mentee development and decision-making processes. Also discussed are the types and characteristics of mentoring, the length of time it takes for strong relationships to form, and the impact of relationships being terminated too early. For mentoring to take place, the TA programme relied on volunteers, therefore, a review of volunteer mentors and what may be required to support volunteers, was also included. This chapter also includes Robert Putnam's theory of social capital, as well as considerations for other viewpoints on social capital theory. A review of educational decision-making was also included here, with the relevant theory synthesized and visualised in a theoretical model of mentoring.

Section 4 introduces the methodology applied to the study, which used a case study approach. The design was qualitative with a mixture of focus groups and interviews. In this study, the approach for analysing data followed Braun and Clarkes (2006; 2018) six steps to carrying out a reflexive thematic analysis which is discussed in more detail in this chapter. The chapter concludes with the limitations and ethical considerations, of the study. The findings chapter describes the data, which was generated from the mentees, mentors, teachers, principal and TA staff who were involved with the programme. Key points were that the mentees found the programme worthwhile but poorly organised, the mentors' desire for more structure to the programme and at times being too college-focused. The mentoring programme had little impact on post-school decisions, but helped form a culture of awareness of post-school options for the students.

The discussion chapter links the literature, key findings and research questions. It provides insights into what has been learned from the study, whether the research questions can be answered and what has made this study worthwhile. Commentary on whether the findings merge and/or diverge from the relevant literature is also provided. The final and concluding

chapter sums up what this study adds to the body of knowledge of mentoring programmes. It discusses the limitations of the study, what I would do again as a researcher, areas for future research and final thoughts.

Chapter 2: Introducing Higher Education Access Policy in Ireland

2.1. Introduction

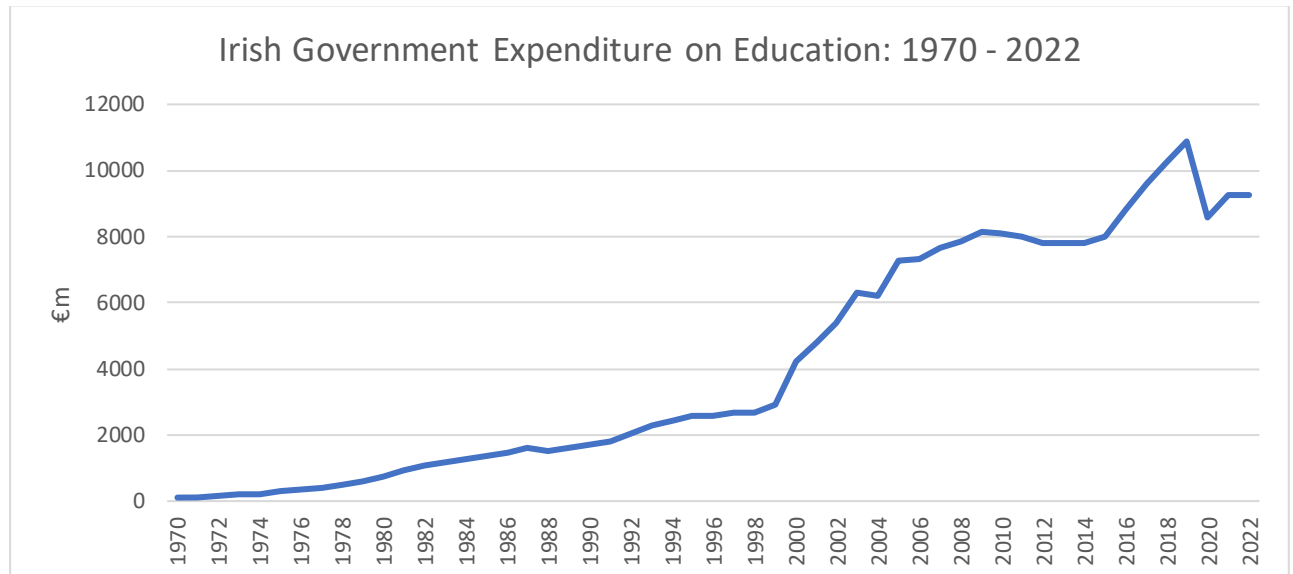
This chapter provides a critical overview of the widening participation literature in Ireland and its international influences. It explores the expansion of participation in higher education generally and between socio-economic groups more specifically. It also investigates the rationale behind the expansion of higher education participation in Ireland. It provides a summary of the evolution of the national policies and legislative frameworks that have helped shape the higher education access agenda in Ireland, including the establishment of the National Access Office, the subsequent National Access Plans that have followed and how these shaped the access programmes, with specific attention on the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) and its initiatives.

2.2. Participation and Expenditure in Higher Education in Ireland

The 1960s was a decade where a major shift in educational policy took place in Ireland, in particular, through the introduction of free second-level education in 1968. This emerged from changing attitudes towards education expenditure and participation (Averill, 2018). Coolahan (1981) described the Investment in Education report (1965) as ‘one of the ground-breaking documents of modern Irish education’. O’Connor (2014) suggested that the report was a central component of a broader wave of change that coincided with a reversal of national development strategy, from an insular pursuit of self-sufficiency, towards a growing appreciation of Ireland’s global interdependence. This strategy coincided with an opening of the Irish economy to more trade with neighbouring partners, which ultimately led to Ireland joining the European Union in 1973 (O’Connor, 2014). Abroad, the OECD established its Education Policy Committee which was committed to ‘providing employment opportunities for all, improving human capital and social cohesion’ (Loxley, Seery, & Walsh, 2014). Figure 2.2.1 below shows the level of overall expenditure on Irish education from 1970 – 2022. The level of overall expenditure was c.€107m in 1970, but continued to rise throughout the 1980s

and the 1990s, before peaking at c. €10.8bn in 2010, with a sharp decrease following the economic retraction of the late 2000s and subsequent fiscal austerity packages.

Figure 2.2.1 Irish Government Expenditure on Education: 1970 - 2022



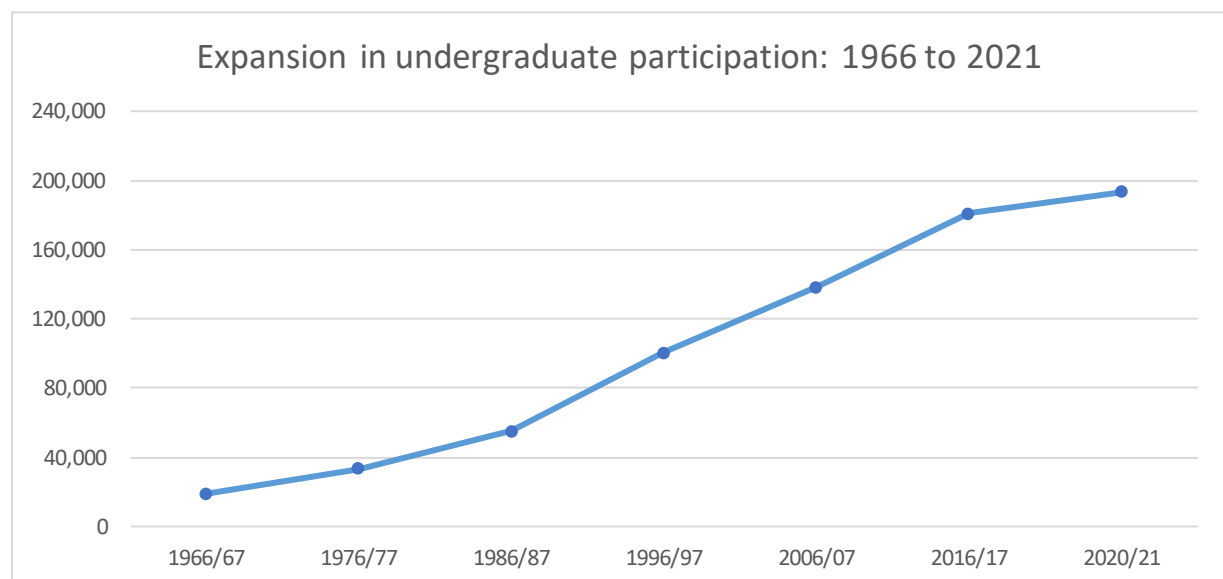
Sources: CSO Databank (2022); Education Statistical Reports ([Annual Statistical Reports](#)); Loxley et al. (2014).

This shift in educational policy, and subsequent increases in expenditure, through the development of what was termed ‘human capital’, had its origins in the Irish state’s ambition for economic growth (Fitzgerald, 2019). Human capital was a prominent economic strand of thought at the time. It is still a key educational policy initiative of the authority responsible for higher education policy in Ireland, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), known as the Human Capital Initiative. Human capital was a term which was developed by Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz (Averill, 2018). The central premise of this theory was that the development of human capital was needed to further economic output and greater technological progress. Walsh (2018) described this phenomenon in Irish HEIs in the late 1990s, as a new phase in the transformation of the Irish higher education system. This phase was characterised by more fine-grained intervention by state agencies at institutional and programme levels; more intensive commercialisation; and sustained national and international pressures on HEIs to pursue explicitly economic functions.

In the context of widening access, the Investment in Education report, also provided strong evidence of the lack of opportunity for students from socio-economic disadvantaged

backgrounds to proceed to secondary and higher education, and exposed the waste of talent which resulted from this lack of opportunity (O'Connor, 2014). According to Loxley et al. (2014), the issue of 'who' participates was empirically unexplored territory before the 1990s. As noted above, the work done by Clancy (1996; 2000) on profiling students in third level, showed that the system was dominated by the higher professional, lower professional and managerial socio-economic groups² (Loxley et al., 2014). Since the 1960s, Ireland has made progress in both post-primary school completion rates, which have risen to over 90% and the numbers now progressing to higher education, which are over 52% (Higher Education Authority, 2021). Figure 2.2.2 below outlines the expansion in undergraduate participation from 1966 to 2021. The figure has risen from just under 20,000 students to just over 193,000.

Figure 2.2.2: Expansion in Undergraduate Participation: 1966 - 2021



Source: (Higher Education Authority, 2021)

Despite the expansion in participation in higher education at undergraduate level, inequalities of access remain (Fleming, Loxley & Finnegan, 2017). The issue of who participates was not empirically explored until the 1990s, when the numbers entering third level began to rise significantly. The student profile work undertaken signalled that the participants had a very distinct demographic (Clancy, & Wall, 2000; Clancy, 1996). The system was dominated by 18-22-year-olds and the 'higher professional', 'lower professional' and 'employers and managers'

² [Industry and Occupation, Social Class and SEG - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

socio-economic groups (SEG), which are the highest earning socio-economic groups, as categorised by the CSO in footnote two on the previous page. The distribution can be seen in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Summary of Clancy's surveys of new entrants to higher education by SEG (%)

	1980	1986	1998	2004
A. Employers	19.5	18.2	21.6	20.5
B. Higher Professional	11.8	12	10.1	9.8
C. Lower Professional	7.1	9.2	10.1	10.3
D. Non-manual	11.1	-	9.4	7.9
E. Manual skilled	10.9	12.9	13.6	12
F. Semi-skilled	12.7	2.5	7.4	5.1
G. Unskilled	1.2	1.3	3.1	4.5
H. Own account workers	-	-	7.2	7.3
I. Farmers	21.1	20.8	16.6	11.3
J. Agricultural workers	0.9	1.4	0.7	0.3
All other gainfully employed	-	-	-	11

Source: Clancy (1996), Clancy and Wall (2000), Fleming, Loxley, and Finnegan (2017)

This table highlights the dominance of the professional and employer SEGs among higher education entrants. These entrants are classified by the earning group in which their highest-earning parent resides. In 1980, just under 40% of new entrants to higher education came from the 'top three' earning socio-economic groupings. This percentage has remained steady throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. One notable change was the reduction of entrants from farming backgrounds entering third level, a possible explanation for this may be the changing nature of the Irish labour market. Fewer people were employed as farmers in more recent years than in the 1980s (CSO, 2019). In 2019 the level of new entrants across all SEGs

is at a record high (HEA, 2022). However, there are disparities between what and where the students across the SEGs study. In recent HEA (2022) data published, there are more affluent students studying at universities than at Institutes of Technology (IoTs). IoTs have a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students (measured by average gross household income). Also, the courses of study which tend to lead to higher salaries such as economics, finance and medicine, are more populated with affluent students than disadvantaged students. This suggests that participation is becoming less of an issue in Irish HE and more of an issue of representative participation across the fields of study (ibid). Is HE participation and access occurring within a system which is highly differentiated and stratified? The socio-economic profiling done by the HEA suggests this to be the case, with a higher proportion of affluent students in the university student bodies, compared to the Technological Universities and IoTs. This mirrors the language used in the 2004 OECD report, which described the IoTs role as 'being on the front line of the widening participation agenda and will be key players in this in future years. They have higher proportions of local students and attract far more students from less advantaged socio-economic groups than the universities' (OECD 2004, p. 32). To follow on from the profile documented by Clancy among third-level entrants, there have been a few developments in access to higher education policies which began in the mid-1990s. The following section will critically explore the evolution of legislation and policies related to access to higher education in Ireland. The widening participation (WP) agenda purportedly seeks to remove structural and cultural barriers that inhibit the progression of the various underrepresented groups to HE. These barriers include, for example, costs and career trajectories, and the availability of trustworthy and relatable role models, through which knowledge about HE can be transferred (O'Sullivan, et al. 2017).

2.3. The Evolution of Higher Education Access Legislation and Policies in Ireland

The Irish Higher Education (HE) sector consists of seven universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs) which merged in 2021/22 to form Technological Universities, four Colleges of Education (initial teacher education (ITE), mostly primary), and three designated institutions: the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, the National College of Art and Design, and the Royal Irish Academy. The HEA, established in 1971, is the statutory body for HE in Ireland.

Under the Universities Act (1997) and the Institutes of Technology Act (2006), the HEA allocates funding to Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) and emphasises equality in HE. There have been several policy and legislative interventions in the Irish higher education system in recent decades. During the mid-1990s, four main recommendations to broaden third-level participation were introduced, including reservation of course places, alternative entrance requirements (including access courses) and post-entry supports, with a focus on semi and unskilled manual groups (Department of Education & Science, 1995). Whilst policy development and implementation (including target-setting) have indeed been supported by research at regular intervals, legislative developments have also played a part. Specifically, this comes in the form of Sections 12, 18 and 36 of the Universities Act (1997), which pertains to the promotion of equality of opportunity and aspects of the Regional Technical Colleges (Keane, 2013). The IoT Act (2006) and the Technological Universities Act (2018), have developed the RTC sector into first IoTs and now Technological Universities. According to Loxley et al. (2014) the White paper (Department of Education & Science, 1995), whilst not determining the shape or form of legislation in the access space, led to the necessity for HEIs to build it into their strategic and operational planning. The legal duty for access for each institution emerged in the late 1990s, with the 1997 University Act, the Education Act (1998), and the Qualifications Education and Training Act (1999) (which established the National Qualifications Authority NQA). In section 34 (1) a and b, of the Universities Act (1997), the duties placed upon the HEA were quite specific about promoting and preserving equality of opportunity and access:

Access to university and university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body, and equality, including gender equality, in all activities of the university. (Section 37, Universities Act, 1997)

As mentioned, the HEA are responsible for promoting and supporting HEIs building access and widening participation within the HE system. There are five relevant legal documents assigning functions, which promoting widening participation in the HE system is one, to the HEA from the 1970s. These are outlined in table 2.3.1 below.

Table 2.3.1: Overview of key legal documents setting out the functions of the HEA since 1971

Legal documents assigning functions to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) from the 1970s	
<i>Document</i>	<i>Key Function</i>
HEA Authority Act (1971)	- Established and set out key functions of HEA which included: - Promoting equality of opportunity in higher education - Focusing on HE accessibility and participation among under-represented groups in Ireland
Universities Act (1997)	- Set out the objectives and functions of a university, the structure and role of governing bodies, staffing arrangements, composition and role of academic councils and sections relating to property, finance, and reporting. - Outlined the legal duty of each HEI to build access and widen participation in their strategic and operational planning. - Reinforced duty of HEA to promote and preserve equality of opportunity
Institute of Technology Act (2006)	Provided a similar relationship between IoTs and the HEA as that between autonomy, improved governance, and a statutory guarantee of academic freedom for the institutes
Technological Universities Act (2018)	The Technological Universities Act 2018 provided an analogous legislative framework for TUs and the eligibility criteria and processes for the establishment of this new type of higher education institution.

	The HEA has overseen the establishment of these new and merged institutions
HEA Act (2022) (pending)	New regulatory and oversight powers allocated to the HEA on the third-level sector

Many of these legislative developments led to policy papers (see table 2.3.2 below) on how best to achieve widening participation in the system, being published throughout the 1990s and 2000s. These reports attempted to create greater equality of participation in the system. After the 2001 report, which is outlined below, a range of policy documents were written on developing and setting targets for access to higher education. These are discussed in more detail in section 2.4.

Table 2.3.2: Policy documents developing the widening participation agenda in the 1990s and 2000s.

<i>Document</i>	<i>Key Function</i>
Education Green Paper (1992)	The key message was economically focused – education needed to be directed towards building a more stable and dynamic economy through the vagaries of equity
White Paper on Education (1995)	Similar aims as the 1992 Green paper but equality is conceptualised more clearly as macro-economic conditions are improving and promotion of access, participation, and benefit for all by their needs and abilities, entered the Irish policy lexicon.
Report of the Action Group on Access to Third-Level Education (2001)	Attempted to set out a national policy framework and outlined a range of recommendations for access to third-level education.

	The report produced 78 recommendations in a 120-page document. These can be distilled into the following main areas: ○ The setting up of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NOEAHE) – established in 2003. ○ Construction of groups needing support (political as much as methodological) ○ Finance access and post-access ○ Target settings – set targets for each group. ○ Developing and providing support infrastructure for both pre-and post-access
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2.4. A Myriad of National Plans for Equity of Access to Higher Education

As part of the Higher Education Authority, the National Office produced several Action Plans on Access to Higher Education. The first plan set out the strategies to widen participation for the period between 2005 and 2007, followed by subsequent plans which covered 2008 - 2013, 2015 - 2019 and the latest plan which covers 2022 - 2028. According to the HEA (2022a), the main targets for the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022 – 2028, included the issue of ‘non-completion’ within higher education institutions. Specifically, the Plan committed to:

- Addressing the issue of non-completion of programmes, particularly for those in under-represented target groups; and

- Developing mechanisms to track progression, retention rates and the student experience of under-represented target groups.

The under-represented groups identified in the plan are as follows:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education;
- First-time mature student entrants;
- People with disabilities;
- Part-time and flexible learners;
- Further Education award holders; and
- Irish Travellers.

A common theme across these plans is the use of categories to corral individuals into tidy homogenous groups. Fleming et al. (2017) asked the question of how non-traditional students become non-traditional students and hypothesised that the reasons are numerous and varied. They go on to argue that non-traditional students (as much as their traditional peers), are a heterogeneous group and are as varied as the number of classification schemes that can be applied to them. Even the use of the term non-traditional is a problematic category, as it makes all sorts of assumptions about the socio-cultural characteristics of participants. The terms non-traditional, second chance or educationally disadvantaged have their meanings rooted in deficit language. Accessing HE is a sort of remediation or redemptive process, or as Fleming et al (2017) put it, the beginning of 'fixing' past transgressions. Across all National Access Plans, the discourses have been unequal and contradictory. According to Fleming et al. (2017), the most notable discourses about HE are that it is a tool for social justice and inclusion on one hand, and the other discourse, is that HE gives priority to entrepreneurial, acquisitive, individualistic and competitive values, as a route for national economic well-being. There have been many variables included in creating these documents and access policies, such as societal changes, the complexity of the sector itself and the inevitable vagaries and contingencies that shape policymaking. This has made the area acquire layer upon layer of aims, and is tasked with achieving a startling range of economic, social and

cultural objectives (Fleming et al., 2017). Finnegan et al. (2017) posit that consequently, the claims made for HE and access policy can often seem both excessive and ill-defined.

According to Keane (2013) and Fleming et al. (2017), before 2008, the discourse about Higher Education and Widening Participation linked social equality, lifelong learning and economic competitiveness. However, the change in economic fortunes altered the political and social landscapes. This was considered in the updated action plan in 2015, which has seen the narrative become grounded in more economic necessity-related language. Discussing the impact of human capital theory on higher education, Walker (2008) argued that the effect of this instrumental approach has been to ascribe a premium value to investment in individual students for increased economic productivity, higher incomes and augmented national wealth (Walker, 2008, p.272). Walker goes on to explain that this orientation is exemplified through the latest national access policies for education. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (Higher Education Authority, 2015), argues that the benefits of higher education are, in the first instance, financial:

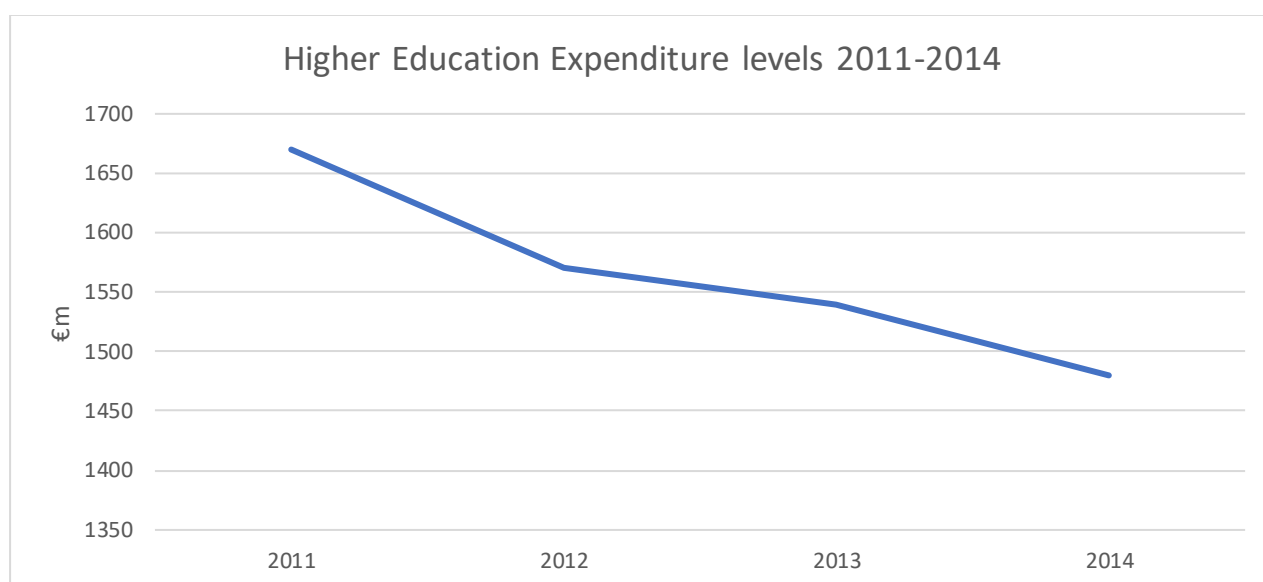
Graduates are less likely to experience unemployment – even during the economic crisis from which we are just now emerging, the chances of a graduate becoming unemployed were half that of a non-graduate. And now in 2015, as employment levels are rising, graduates are being employed at a faster rate than non-graduates. Graduates also enjoy an earnings premium – men who are graduates earn on average 69% more than men without a higher education qualification, while for women the equivalent figure is 90%. As well as the benefits that individuals derive from higher education, there are also wider economic and social benefits—our educated workforce is Ireland’s greatest economic asset, and we need more people to take up higher education to drive economic progress. We are now beginning to see skills shortages in vital and dynamic areas of our economy such as ICT and pharma, and there is some evidence that other sectors too are beginning to experience skills shortages. The Irish economy needs to tap into the skills and talents of all our people so that the economy can continue to grow and prosper (HEA, 2015, p. 15).

In May 2013, the Minister for Education at the time, Ruairi Quinn, wrote to John Hennessey, the chairman of the HEA, and highlighted areas of Higher Education designated for review. His list comprised seven areas to focus on, with promoting access for disadvantaged groups placed number two. Number one was to meet Ireland's human capital needs across a spectrum of skills, however, what was excluded was any mention of social justice, cultural enrichment, citizenship, or other areas of social and personal exploration and development (Loxley et al., 2014). During this period, the DES also published the National Strategy for Higher Education: 2013-2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). This report was an attempt to address the structure of HEIs, given the ongoing pressures faced with increasing student numbers and continued funding pressures. It also discussed the context for a new strategy for higher education, as well as the mission of higher education in Ireland, which as mentioned above, seemed to mirror the human capital and returns from investing in education from the state's perspective. Loxley et al. (2017) describe the report as primarily a response to the economic collapse of 2008, and as a very strident and vigorous re-assertion of the human capital thesis. To achieve the aims of these plans and with the pressure already on HEIs due to increasing teacher-to-student ratios, plans had to be put in place to fund the access agenda.

2.5. Higher Education and Access Funding

Another important area which affects access and participation in HE, is the issue of funding. Throughout the economic downturn period of 2010-2014, public funding towards third-level institutions was reduced by c. by €190m (DPER, 2022). Figure 2.5 below shows the level of expenditure on higher education between 2011 – 2014.

Figure 2.5: Higher Education Expenditure Levels 2011 - 2014



Source: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2022: [Where Your Money Goes](#)

This has consequences on a student's decision to participate or not in HE. Given the pressures of increasing participation rates and decreasing resource allocation, the government called on the group in the DES to produce a report on funding Higher Education in Ireland. The group responsible for producing the report titled *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education*, was chaired by Peter Cassell in 2016. A key recommendation of the report included options for extra funding, which included free student fees at the point of access, student loans and completely state-funded education. However, it noted that the HE sector would require €600m per year by 2021, to maintain quality in higher education (Cassells, 2016). Cassells (2016) explained that whether this is achieved by complete state-funding, student contributions or a mixture of the two, was yet to be decided upon. Whether that decision is made or not, would inevitably have a knock-on effect on students' decisions to participate in HE. Other pressures on the HE sector have manifested themselves in increased staff-student ratios, an increase in student numbers, the casualisation of teaching staff, and a fall in research rankings and staff numbers (Loxley et al., 2017). The Hunt and Cassells reports attempt to set out a direction of how Governments will look to address the ongoing issues of who participates, how well they participate and how much it costs. Ireland's government seemed to prioritise the human capital benefits of higher education alone, and the plans and funding language reflected that. Averill (2018) argued that the function of higher education should go beyond the human capital and economic return rationale, that it

should be broader in its objectives, such as the social and cultural impact higher-educated graduates can have on society, their wellbeing and development.

Funding the Access Plan – The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)

The latest policy development from the HEA (2022b) aims to achieve the participation targets from the groups mentioned in section 2.4, through the development of a fund called The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH). This fund, valued at €16.5 million, was set up in 2017 by the Department of Education and Skills, as a commitment to support the National Plan for Equity to Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. The fund was broken into four strands:

- ***PATH Strand 1: Initial Teacher Education***

The funding for this strand was €2.7 million over three years from 2017/18 and the objectives of PATH 1 were to:

- Increase the number of students from under-represented groups entering initial teaching education.
- Provide more role models for students from these groups that “demonstrate that there are pathways open to them to realise their potential through education.”

- ***PATH Strand 2: 1916 Bursaries***

This strand was set up to commemorate the centenary of 1916 and reflects the Government’s commitment to ‘the type of equality of opportunity envisaged by the signatories of the 1916 proclamation.’ This strand provides financial support to students identified as being the most disadvantaged students, from the specified target groups. There were 200 bursaries of €5,000 awarded for three academic years from 2017/18. In February 2020, the Department of Education and Skills announced the continuation of the 1916 bursary fund for a further three years.

- ***PATH Strand 3: Higher Education Access Fund***

The aim of PATH 3 funding is to support the development of regional and community partnership strategies, for increasing access to higher education, by specified groups. The funding was intended to facilitate the attraction and retention of undergraduate students from target groups. The Department required clusters of higher education institutions to work together and show evidence of how they will engage with local DEIS schools, further education providers, community and voluntary groups and other relevant stakeholders. There was €7.5 million allocated to this PATH over three years from 2018/19.

- ***PATH Strand 4: Third-level access support for autistic students and students with an intellectual disability***

This will target support for autistic students and enable the building of capacity in HEIs for greater participation by students with intellectual disabilities in higher education. Phase 2 (2023-2025) will be based on a call for proposals and will involve a three-year pathfinding pilot, to support an enhancement of course provision for students with intellectual disabilities and to inform future policy considerations for students with intellectual disabilities.

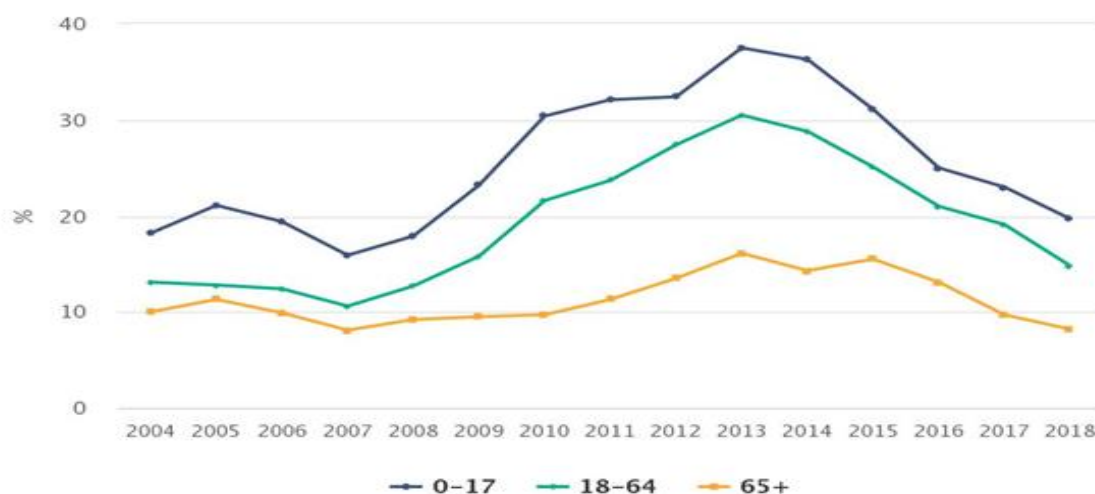
There have been reviews and reports on the Programme for Access to Higher Education since the programme began (HEA, 2018; 2019). The main review was 18 months (HEA, 2018) into the programme and brought together over 160 stakeholders involved in PATH, such as government officials, academics, practitioners, and voluntary organisations, in order to share experiences on the progress of the three strands. The main suggestions from stakeholder feedback from the midterm review of the PATH programme, included the time it takes for incoming third-level students to follow onto postgraduate teaching courses, as such, the evaluation of this strand will take time to complete. Another included the Irish language requirement for primary-level teachers and some suggestions for getting around this requirement, were included. On the 1916 Bursary strand, a suggestion was made to decrease the fund to €2,500 so more students in need could be included. On strand 3, which required HEIs to form clusters and work together on attracting and retaining target groups, presentations were made on various aspects of clustering initiatives that worked well and others that were challenging.

2.6. Access Programmes and the Trinity Access Programme

Access policies and programmes are usually framed on the way equality, economics and economic modernisation, are viewed in relation to each other (Fleming et al., 2017). They continue to state that access policies, like social policy more generally, are not a unified set of ideas with a clear and defined purpose. As outlined earlier in this chapter, access policies and plans in Ireland are a constantly evolving constellation of guidelines, proposals, assessment techniques and normative aspirations. Fleming et al. (2017) describes the access agenda as, albeit stable, constantly subject to revision and contestation. They go on to point out that events such as the financial crisis and the varied nature of the HE spaces, and institutions contribute to changes in the way access is envisaged and approached. Fleming et al. (2017, p. 107) describe the challenging policymaking process itself as the 'inevitable vagaries and contingencies that shape policymaking mean that access policy has acquired layers of aims and is now tasked with achieving a startling range of economic, social, and cultural objectives'. They point out that consequently, the claims made for HE and access policy can often seem both excessive and ill-defined.

Despite all the aims and objectives of the various iterations of Irish HE Access policy, the one constant across policies is the link to economic prosperity and social mobility, from widening HE participation. Considering the increase of circa 60,000 students attending HE in Ireland between 2006-2020, as highlighted in Figure 2.2.2, and the increasing routes into third level for all SEG groups, one would expect the economic elements, as related to the access policy, to have shown positive progress. However, as Figure 2.6.1 below highlights, using CSO data on deprivation rates across all age groups in Ireland, the level of deprivation faced across all age groups has not changed between 2004 and 2018. If economic prosperity was a key goal and objective of access policies, then its success is questionable.

Figure 2.6.1: Deprivation Rate by Age Group in Ireland 2004 -2018



Source: CSO, 2022

When the HEA was set up in 1971 and subsequent HEIs were mandated with increasing widening participation as part of the access agenda, various offices were set up within the HEIs to work in this space. In 1993, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) established an Access department, as part of their remit to increase participation at third level among groups who were underrepresented at TCD. This department became known as the Trinity Access Programme (TAP). TAP's role was focused on widening participation across TCD through developing programmes, conducting research on access-related issues, raising awareness, and engaging in advocacy on relevant issues. TAP works in the space of widening access and participation at third level for under-represented groups. They offer a foundation course for circa twenty-five young adults and circa 25 mature students. These programmes are aimed at people eligible to apply via a range of socio-economic criteria. TAP also engage with communities and schools in low third-level progression areas to encourage progression to college. The programmes range from primary school students right through to postgraduates.

The organisation has evolved since its inception as new national initiatives came on stream, such as the HEAR and DARE schemes and worked with various organisations to work towards a more diverse student population. The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university scheme that offers places on reduced points and extra college support, to those who are resident in Ireland and underrepresented in Higher Education due to their

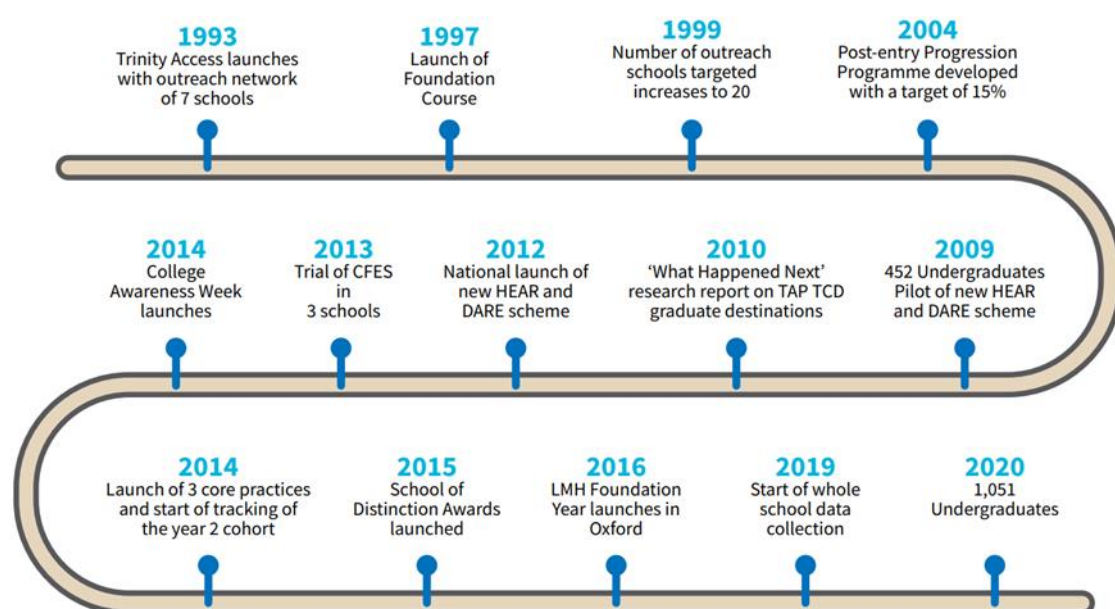
socio-economic background. The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is a third-level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers, whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second-level education. Table 2.6 outlines the history of Trinity Access.

Table 2.6: History of Trinity Access

Development	Content	Year
Founding of the Trinity Access Programme	Promoting TCD courses in schools and areas less represented in the student cohort	1993
Launch of the Foundation Course	Admitted students to a 1-year course that helped them develop the skills necessary to advance to a third-level course.	1997
The number of linked schools increases from 7 to 20	Remit expanded to include more link schools, more connections in the University and further development of outreach programmes	1999
Bridge2College launches (later renamed Bridge 21)	School of Computer Science promote ICT skills among teachers and students in 2nd-level link schools	2007
Launch of College for Every Student pilot project	Piloted a US-style intervention programme with four schools in Dublin before a larger rollout to 11 Dublin-based secondary schools	2013
Trinity Access joins Bridge 21 to create the Trinity Access 21 project	Collaboration between the School of Computer Science and TAP to promote ICT skills in links schools	2014

	alongside college-going TAP programmes	
A total of 1,051 Trinity undergraduates through alternative admissions route since TA began	New Entrants plus current students in TCD on the HEAR, DARE and Foundation programme	2021/22

Figure 2.6.2: Evolution of Trinity Access (Tangney et al., 2022)



For example, Tangney et al. (2022) produced a Project Overview which highlighted the programme's initiatives development and practices. Figure 2.6.2 from the publication highlights the so-called evolution of the TA programme. Most items in the graphic are related to the TA evolution, with the 2012 National launch of HEAR and DARE linked to TA and vice versa. The development of the model in Lady Margaret Hall College of the University of Oxford, was also heavily linked to the TA model.

Current Structure of Trinity Access

As Trinity Access has evolved, there have been additions to the programme, such as its links with CFES in the US and the development of the annual College Awareness Week. Also, other

projects and areas have merged, and these are illustrated in Figure 2.6.1 below and explained in more detail thereafter. According to the TA website,³ they have twenty-seven staff members. The most recently available number that entered TCD through a non-traditional access route is 1,051.

Figure 2.6.3: Current Structure of Trinity Access



The TA structure and programmes fall under the following categories:

1. Evaluation and research

This aspect of the programme focuses on research programmes and disseminating findings. The research group contribute to education working groups and committees in various schools in TCD. They provide updates on how each school is progressing with the initiatives each year. Publications have included papers in various journals, such as the British Educational Research Journal (O’Sullivan, et al. (2017)). They also produced reports on the

³ [Our Team - Trinity Access Programmes - Trinity College Dublin \(tcd.ie\)](https://www.trinitycollege.ie/our-team)

number of activities, students and schools reached for supporters, funders, and alumni. Many of the research reports and papers that are produced, are tailored for specific audiences such as prospective funders or collaborators, and can read like promotional pieces of work, as opposed to a paper for academic publication.

2. Teacher training courses

Trinity Access, along with the School of Education, offer a Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning. This course is a one-year, part-time course that is worth 30 ECTS credits. This course aims to equip in-service teachers with the requisite knowledge, skills, and competence to support the development of an “innovative learning culture within schools, which is team-based, technology-mediated, project-focused, and cross-curricular” (Trinity Access, 2022). This began in 2015 as a link between the School of Computer Science and Statistics at TCD and DEIS schools around Dublin. This was originally called Bridge2College and this later merged with TAP. The course usually has between 50-80 teachers participating.

3. Alternative admissions routes and third-level support

When the students enter their college course, they can require many supports such as extra financial help, academic support and personal support. TA administers student assistance funds, granted by the Department of Education, to qualifying students. There is also a TA guidance counsellor that all the students can see and a TA bursary for financial aid. The alternative admissions routes include the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and Access programmes which Trinity College Dublin use as alternative entry routes, for students recognised as being from a disadvantaged group, either via a range of indicators such as family income and/or disability.

4. Schools and community outreach

The current schools and community outreach element of Trinity Access run three core practices (there were originally four but two were merged (Leadership and Learning for the 21st century became Leadership in Learning) in twenty identified socially and economically disadvantaged secondary schools around Dublin. The three core practices are Mentoring, Leadership through Learning and Pathways to College. The mentoring practice aims to help TA achieve its aim to be a catalyst for social transformation, by supporting people to reach

their full potential through innovation, research and advocacy. The outreach programmes originated from a link TAP made with an American Not-for-Profit organisation doing similar outreach work, called College for Every Student, in 2012. According to the CFES website, CFES help students unlock their brightest futures. They claim to empower educators to do what they do best. CFES claim that for more than 25 years, they have helped ‘level the playing field for 100,000 students’. It began in 1991, when it worked with a handful of rural schools in Central New York to help students find ways to college. The founder of the organisation, Rick Dalton, had co-authored a study exploring the reasons why students from low-income families did not pursue higher education. Since then, CFES has worked in 1,500 urban and rural schools across the U.S. and Ireland. They claim that their experience proved that a college education is the surest path out of poverty. They also point out that with millions of high-paying jobs projected to go unfilled by 2027 because of a lack of qualified candidates, equipping students with the skills to claim those careers is good both for them and all of society. According to CFES, going to college is just the start. Every year, they work with 25,000 K-12 students in 200 schools to instil the skills they need to thrive in school, college and their entire lives. Their team includes professional educators and administrators, corporate leaders, non-profit experts, and others who claim to recognise the potential each of the communities they work with has – and the knowledge of how to maximise it. With the schools where CFES work, the students engage in “core practices” – Mentoring, the Essential Skills and Pathways to College and Career.

The area of Trinity Access that was most relevant to this study was the mentoring programme operated by the schools and the community outreach element of the group. The schools and community outreach aspect of Trinity Access, and mentoring in some iteration, has been a central component of how the programme has operated since its inception in the early 1990s. To achieve its remit of diversifying the student population in TCD, it is obvious that they would collaborate closely with schools with lower progression rates than the state and county average, especially in communities with recognised levels of socio-economic disadvantage, being those designated by the Department of Education and Skills with DEIS status. TA has had staff link up with schools since its inception, initially to run programmes such as college tours and talks on admissions, in order to better equip the students with knowledge and exposure to a third-level environment and application structure.

When the staff of TA met the staff of CFES at a conference in 2012, the overlap in both organisations and work was discussed. It was evident that TA were trying to achieve similar outcomes to that of CFES, as both collaborated with schools of lower earning families. CFES had their structured programme well established at this stage, and discussions began to establish a joined-up approach to coordinating the outreach in Dublin, to mirror that of CFES in New York. This is where mentoring became a formal entity instead of a sporadic, informal approach from the earlier years of Trinity Access' existence. Earlier iterations of mentoring ranged from one-off speaker days going into schools, to online mentoring. However, these were difficult to maintain with low staff numbers, according to O'Sullivan et al. (2017). The branding of this new school and community outreach approach by TA, in 2013, was called College for Every Student. This aligned with their remit from the broader university to collaborate with schools and areas that experience lower progression rates, in order to help widen participation and increase the diversity of entry in TCD undergraduate students. The programme decided to pilot the CFES pillars with four of its link schools in October 2013, before extending it to 11 of its 20 linked schools if the pilot was successful.

Another outreach link has been created between business and legal firms in Dublin as part of the mentoring programmes. These programmes are called Pathways to Business and Pathways to Law. Students from linked schools, partner with various businesses and legal firms for a variety of career-related opportunities, such as mentoring, work experience and CV development. These links aim to encourage more students from diverse backgrounds into fields that are traditionally the least diverse areas of employment. These links also incorporated donations from the businesses to TA. We can see the language overlapping with the economic discourses highlighted earlier, the links between our higher education system and the needs of industry. As the university's outreach remit has expanded since its inception, TA hired more staff. This required greater levels of funding and external sources were sought⁴ to achieve this. It was hoped that the mentoring programme could help support Trinity Access achieve these widening participation targets from a TCD perspective.

⁴ [Grant Thornton Establishes Mentoring Partnership with TAP Foundation - Trinity News and Events \(tcd.ie\)](#)

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of widening participation in higher education in Ireland. It traced the growth in numbers attending higher education and provided an analysis of the groups who attended. It investigated the evolution of the national policies and legislative frameworks that have helped develop the higher education access agenda in Ireland, including the establishment of the National Access Office and the subsequent National Access Plans. How these shaped the access programmes that followed, with specific attention on the Trinity Access and its programmes, was also discussed.

TA utilise their mentoring programmes with the aim that they can contribute to achieving policy targets set out in the National Access Plan 2022-2018, such as increasing access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups. By providing additional support and resources, mentoring programmes aim to help overcome the barriers that may prevent these students from accessing higher education. Mentoring aims to enhance student outcomes by improving academic performance, building confidence and self-esteem, and increasing awareness of higher education and career opportunities. By improving outcomes for underrepresented students, mentoring programmes can help to achieve widening participation targets and create a more diverse and inclusive higher education system.

However, in more general terms, current (as well as prior) Irish policy and legislation provide both challenges and opportunities, for higher education institutions and their outreach programmes. Challenges include funding constraints and the ability of access programmes to address systemic inequalities. According to Cassells (2016) and the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, there was a funding shortfall in the Higher Education sector of over €600m per annum. This shortfall, they argued, could affect the quality of support HEIs could provide around access initiatives. This could arguably make it difficult for institutions to implement and sustain outreach programmes effectively. It may also lead to outreach programmes struggling to address systemic inequalities within the education system, that can prevent students from disadvantaged backgrounds from accessing higher education. Another challenge could be the implementation of policy initiatives. The new *National Access Plan 2022– 2028* is a very ambitious document with lofty targets for participation. To meet these

targets, funding will have to meet the ambition within the Access plan, especially to offset the impact outlined by Cassells (2016).

However, there are opportunities afforded by the current policy and legislative arrangements. This includes a clear policy direction, which can provide a framework for institutions to develop effective outreach programmes that align with broader policy objectives. Although the participation targets are lofty in the National Access Plan 2022 – 2028, having figures can help outreach programmes set clear targets themselves. Within the PATH policy initiative, there has been encouragement of partnerships between institutions, schools and community groups. This can provide opportunities for collaboration and coordination, increasing the reach and impact of outreach programmes. This is evident from the Community Mentoring initiative funded by PATH, which is an inter-institutional and community-based mentoring programme. It is comprised of Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (IADT), Marino Institute of Education (MIE), National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and University College Dublin (UCD). This has allowed for targeted funding for outreach programmes, that can help institutions implement and sustain these programmes effectively, increasing their impact and reach.

Overall, Irish policy and legislation provide both challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions and their outreach programmes. Institutions must work to address the challenges, while taking advantage of the opportunities available to them, in order to ensure that outreach programmes can effectively support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access higher education.

Chapter 3: The Interaction between Mentoring, Social Capital, and Educational Decision-making

3.1. Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the relationship between mentoring, social capital, and educational decision-making. By discussing the differences between formal and informal mentoring in the first section, mentoring in its broad nature is explored. Relevant literature about other mentoring programmes is also outlined, such as the Big Brother Big Sister programme, Youth Advocate Program, and mentoring approaches such as peer-to-peer and group mentoring. While one-to-one mentoring is the most popular approach (Rhodes & Dubois, 2008) peer-to-peer and group mentoring appear frequently in the context of Trinity Access (TA) mentoring programmes. Due to the logistical issues of recruiting mentees, these alternative matching arrangements have been deployed at various points of the mentoring programme (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). The recruitment of mentors for the TA programme is through voluntary channels. There can be difficulties operating a programme when a key stakeholder such as the mentor has other commitments. The literature on how best to use volunteers and navigate these difficulties is explored here. Mentoring at its essence is a social endeavour and these social relationships are explored through social capital theory. The TA mentoring programme at its core aims to assist students in making informed decisions about their futures. Education decision-making literature is explored in this chapter.

A model of youth mentoring developed by Rhodes (2005) provides a discussion on the elements in a young person's life that can be developed through relationships that are built on mutuality, trust, and empathy such as socio-emotional, identity and cognitive development. According to Rhodes (2005), the expansion of these features of identity can lead to positive outcomes, such as higher academic results and greater self-esteem. The decision-making process that students go through around their post-primary school aspirations and expectations is explored here. By exploring the educational decision-making process in Ireland and abroad it is hoped that it will help bring a better understanding of the influences of the student coming to the end of their secondary school education. These outcomes are not only affected by the mentoring relationship but are mediated by other

factors, such as peer and parental relationships. Rhodes (2005) explains that engagement in the mentoring relationship in the first instance is dependent on many external factors such as the young person's interpersonal history, family background, as well as other family and community factors.

Mentoring as a practice in its essence is a process at the individual level. Putnam's (2000) thoughts on social capital can be mostly related to community and societal-level benefits such as more civic engagement, better social relations, improved levels of trust in social structures and how to achieve these goals. This is where a further explanation of Putnam's work helps us to better understand the TA mentoring programme. Putnam's theory comprises two elements – bonding and bridging social capital. According to Putnam (2000), social relations at an individual level can help achieve wider societal goals, such as more trust and interactions across social groupings.

The final section of this literature review introduces the theoretical framework that this study drew upon as a lens for viewing the TA mentoring programme. This model was developed through a combination of Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, McCoy et al. (2014) findings on student decision-making in the Irish context and Rhodes's (2005) model on mentoring. The interaction and synthesis of these three key areas of literature are presented as a visual model which have been used to assess the findings in the discussion.

3.2. What is Mentoring?

This section explores the literature concerning mentoring, tracing the different forms it can take, as well as its origins. It also discusses various models of mentoring from the international literature and how the mentoring model set out by Rhodes (2005) best relates to the workings of the TA21 model. Mentoring aims to build capability and self-reliance in the mentee whilst also providing opportunities for the mentor to learn (Scrine, Walker & Reibel, 2012). Mentoring relationships, according to Greek mythology, occur when a more experienced person guides and counsels a younger individual as they navigate their way through an aspect of their lives. The term mentor is often noted as originating from the story of Homer's

Odyssey. The king of Ithaca, Odysseus, entrusted his friend, Mentor, with the care of his house and the education of his son as he went to fight in the Trojan War (Miller, 2004).

Mentoring is part of the everyday vernacular and is present in almost all our lives in some shape or another. It can take many shapes and forms in both a formal and informal capacity. Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois (2008) claimed that there are three distinct streams of mentoring scholarship: youth mentoring, academic mentoring and workplace mentoring, which individuals may experience at various life stages. Eby et al., (2008) addressed the impact of mentoring by comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals through a multidisciplinary meta-analysis, demonstrating that mentoring is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes in the mentee's behaviour, attitude, health, relationships, motivation, and career-related decisions. The authors compared 112 articles and reports that examined the difference in outcomes for mentored and non-mentored individuals in youth, academic or workplace settings. Although Eby et al., (2008) found more positive results for mentored individuals than non-mentored, the researchers indicate that the effect size is generally small. Measured by examining the correlation strength between the mentored and non-mentored individuals and the strength of each outcome, the effect size revealed that academic-based mentoring has a stronger positive impact than youth or workplace mentoring.

Eby et al., (2008) found that academic mentoring was more successful due to the highly focused nature of a behavioural outcome such as academic performance. National College Access Network (NCAN), an American non-profit organisation working with schools, commissioned Coles in 2011 to conduct a study on mentoring. He found that mentoring was prevalent across various settings and because of the wide range of issues mentors address, scholars have struggled to develop a common definition of the term (Coles, 2011). According to Crisp and Cruz (2009), there are over 50 definitions of mentoring in the social science literature. However, Crisp and Cruz (2009) and Eby et al., (2007) distil these definitions into shared characteristics which are listed in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of mentoring across various disciplines

A learning partnership between a more experienced and a less experienced individual
Providing support for goal setting and future planning in personal and professional life
Role modelling
Psychological support
A process involving emotional (friendship, acceptance, support) and instrumental (information, coaching, advocacy, sponsorship) functions
A relationship that becomes more impactful over time

Sources: Crisp & Cruz (2009); Eby et al., (2008)

According to Kram (1983), the instrumental function of mentoring acts to provide career-related support and focus on skill development, information transfer and advice that is useful for the mentee's career development. In the context of mentoring an instrumental perspective suggests that the driving force in relationship development is the mentor's ability to engage the mentee in challenging, goal-directed activities. Kram (1983), Cohen & Wills (1985), Roberts (2000) and Miller (2004) all discuss nurturing the mentee's social and psychological development, serving as a role model, providing support for goal setting and future planning. Regardless of the definition and aim, mentoring is seen as a two-way relationship based on understanding and trust. However, despite these various ways of looking at mentoring, there are many iterations and perspectives of what mentoring is and how it is defined. Some researchers focus on the instrumental aspect whilst others focus on the holistic, psychological, or social development of the mentee. Many of the approaches emphasise the positivity of mentoring however that does not mean that they all end in successful outcomes for the mentees. Keller (2005) points out that if some or all the following factors are not given enough attention from the outset, outcomes may not be as positive as intended:

- Individual attributes – pairing mentee and mentor according to interests; Motives; Situation or setting; and Duration of relationship.

3.2.1. Categories of Mentoring

Eby et al., (2008) broadly categorise mentoring into three main areas:

1. **Youth mentoring** – examples of such programmes in Ireland are the Big Brother Big Sister Program and the Youth Advocate Program.
2. **Academic mentoring** – The TA21 mentoring falls into this category and the above.
3. **Workplace mentoring** – Any mentor-mentee relationship in a professional environment, usually between adults.

Within each of these categories, there is a variety of types of mentoring such as group, one-to-one and online mentoring e.g., sessions conducted over Skype. According to Blechman (1992), one-to-one mentoring is the most common approach. This type is employed in the instance of the teacher-student mentoring relationship in some of the TA link schools. According to initial discussions with these teachers, timetabled mentoring does not take place as such but more so impromptu meetings with the teacher in question. There is evidence to suggest that informal student-faculty interaction can positively influence a student's intellectual development, academic achievement, career aspirations, and academic self-image. (Jacobi, 1991; Pascarella, 1980).

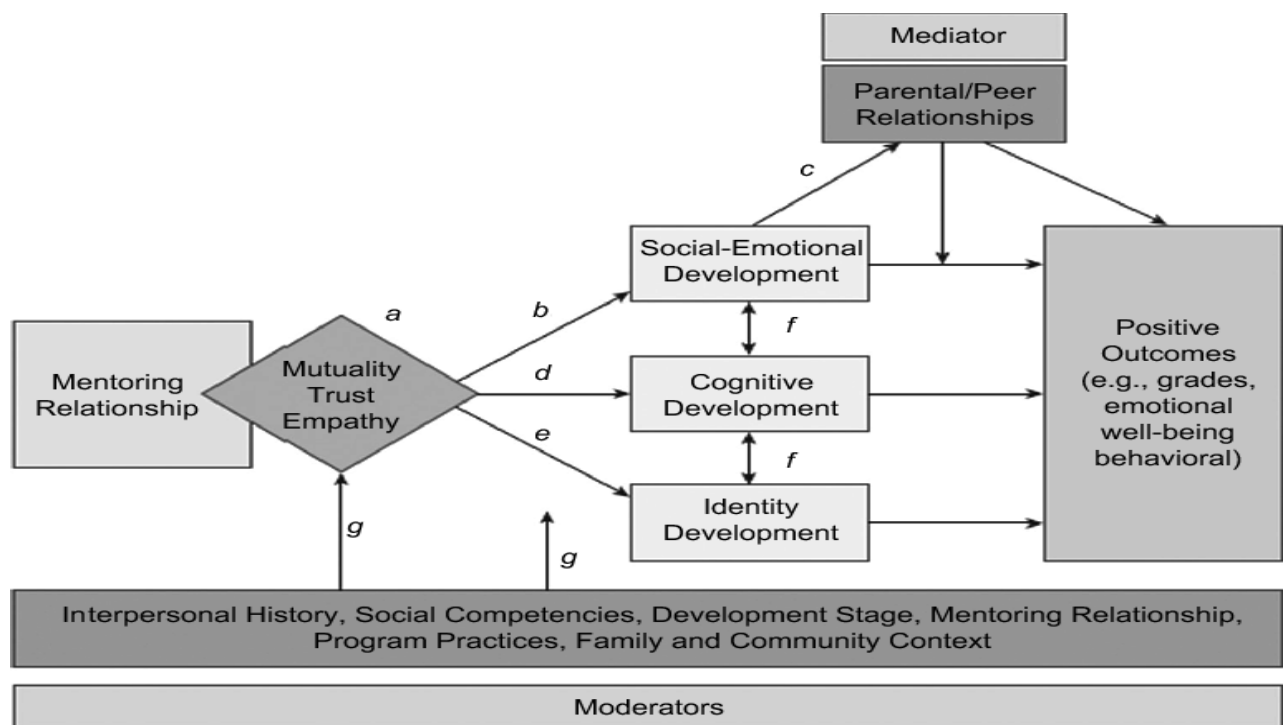
The sociologists Williams and Hornblum (1985) followed 900 low-income students in New York City, Cleveland, Louisville and Mississippi and identified mentors as an extremely important factor in predicting the youths' healthy outcomes. Other studies (Dolan, Canavan, & Brady, 2008; Rutter, 1987) demonstrated evidence of the importance of a mentor who was not a parent but an adult as having a positive influence on student's educational outcomes, behavioural issues and resilience levels. Miller (2004) identified over forty types of mentoring programmes that cover a wide range of settings such as workplaces, educational institutions, community based and online. These are mainly formal in nature. Formal mentoring is said to be planned to have a definite set of goals, and research has shown that these programmes yield positive outcomes, such as increased commitment and communication (Rhodes, 2002). Karcher and Nakkula (2012) point out that unless at least four hours of mentoring takes place each month, it can be difficult to see the effectiveness of such programmes. This can be problematic for schools as timetable constraints can often hamper the best of intentions for

mentoring sessions. It also requires a certain level of commitment on behalf of the mentors which can impact the number of them that sign up. According to Rhodes and DuBois (2008), mentoring is one of the most popular social interventions in American society, with an estimated three million young people in formal one-to-one relationships. The largest and most well-known mentoring programme in the United States is the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBSA). Rhodes and DeBois (2008) estimate that, while over \$100 million of federal funding has been invested in mentoring programmes annually since 2004, even larger numbers of young people report experiencing mentoring relationships outside of these types of programmes with adults such as teachers, coaches, neighbours and extended family.

3.3. Model of Youth Mentoring

Rhodes (2005) has developed a model that describes several processes and conditions presumed to be important for understanding the effects of mentoring relationships on youth. Figure 3.3 below displays Rhodes' model of Youth Mentoring. The first element of the model shows how a strong mentoring relationship is formed by mutuality, trust and empathy (a). Rhodes suggests that any strong connection will be characterised by these traits, but these take time to forge. A recurrent theme in the mentoring literature is the time it takes to develop trust, empathy and mutuality between mentor and mentee. The recommended period for best results is 12 months or more (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Kram, 1983). According to Rhodes and Spencer (2012), for this type of bond to arise, mentors and youth are likely to need to spend time together consistently over a significant period. Grossman & Rhodes (2002) found that youth who were in relationships that were terminated within 3 months reported drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence. They found that the relationships that lasted for a year or more reported the largest number of improvements, with fewer effects emerging among youth in relationships that lasted from 6 to 12 months. These improvements included academic, psychosocial and behavioural outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of considering relationship duration in determining the effects of mentoring programmes.

Figure 3.3: Model of Youth Mentoring (Rhodes, 2005)



By breaking the model into segments, Rhodes demonstrates how a mentee can benefit from participation in the mentoring programme and relationship. For example, segment A suggests that a strong and meaningful personal connection is forged between the young person and mentor when mutuality, trust and empathy are formed. Once the bond is made and interactions occur frequently over 6-12 months Rhodes suggests that the mentee would see positive social-emotional, cognitive and identity development. The three areas — social-emotional (path b), cognitive (path d), and identity development (path e) — are assumed to work in tandem over time (f arrows) (Rhodes, 2005). Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch (2000) explain that positive social-emotional experiences with mentors can be furthered through mentoring programmes and this in turn can enable youth to interact more effectively with parents and peers (path c). Rhodes explains further that these relationships can in turn mediate the effect of gains in social-emotional development on positive outcomes (Rhodes et al., 2000). Rhodes et al. (2000) explain that by serving as a sounding board and providing a model of effective adult communication, for example, mentors may help youth to better understand, express and regulate their emotions. Cognitive developmental aspects of the model include mentoring relationships that have been derived from theoretical models,

highlighting the role of social support from adults in fostering cognitive gains during development. Rhodes and DuBois (2008) go on to explain that, through interactions with mentors, children and adolescents may acquire and refine new thinking skills, becoming more receptive to adult values, advice and perspectives. In a school setting, you often hear phrases from teachers like 'that student has grown up a lot in the last 6-12 months' or 'that student is a different person from last year'. Quite often this reflects the cognitive, social and emotional development that a teenager has experienced and, in the case of the mentor-mentee relationship, Rhodes suggests that this may help expedite this process. The quality of the mentoring relationships and the pathways linking them to positive youth outcomes can be conditioned by a range of individual, family, and contextual influences on a youth's interpersonal history, social competence and developmental stage; duration of the mentoring relationship; programme practices, family, and community context.

Rhodes' (2005) findings suggest that youth who are overwhelmed by social and behavioural problems appear to be less likely to experience strong, enduring ties with their mentors and perhaps also receive fewer benefits. Other adversities such as family instability and socio-economic disadvantage can pose challenges to the formulation of mentoring relationships (Rhodes, & Spencer, 2012). However, DuBois et al. (2002) explain that these are exactly the types of youths who are especially likely to benefit from mentoring, thus suggesting that the challenges presented by such circumstances need not form barriers to effective relationships. Supporting the mentee to explore the positives of participating in advance of starting the programme may help break down any barriers to effective participation. According to Rhodes and DuBois (2008), mentoring may also facilitate identity development which can help shift youths' conceptions of both their current and future selves or help youths draw a picture in their mind that helps construct their sense of future identity.

Markus and Nurius (1986) have referred to 'possible selves,' or individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they fear becoming. They discuss the concept of possible selves as complimentary current conceptions of self-knowledge. For example, the students may have knowledge of future options, but they may see limitations around what is possible, this may derive from representations of the self in the past and they include representations of the self in the future. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain that they are different and separable from the current or 'now selves' (p. 959) yet are intimately

connected to them. For example, possible future selves are not just any set of imagined roles or states of being. Instead, they represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies. For example, I am *now* a doctor, but I *could* be a fisherman, a runner, a journalist, or the parent of a disabled child. These possible selves are individualised or personalised, but they are also distinctly social. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain how many of these possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individual's thoughts, feelings, characteristics and behaviours have been contrasted to those of salient others - 'What others are now, I could become' (Markus & Nurius, 1986 p. 2). These opportunities to see the variety of options that the person could become are derived from the categories made salient by the individual's socio-cultural and historical context (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Also, from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and the individual's immediate social experiences.

An interesting concept alluded to is the aspects of past selves that can be carried with an individual into the future. These can be successful possible selves based on previous experiences such as achieving high grades, or anxious possible selves, linked to anxiety-inducing memories or unwanted memories of being the last person picked on the football team at lunchtime. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain that development is a process of acquiring and then achieving or resisting certain possible selves. Through the selection and construction of possible selves, with the aid of an expanded pool of salient categories, individuals can be viewed as active producers of their development.

Another way of looking at how people or young people look at their future possible selves is to consider incentives. Some possible selves stand as symbols of hope, whereas others are reminders of bleak, sad, or tragic futures that are to be avoided. Depending on the circumstances of the young person's life they may want to extend what they have seen and experienced in their lives to date, or else avoid something bleak that they have experienced. Both are strong drivers of the future self. The idea of who we may become in the future provides a direction and impetus for action, change and development, giving specific cognitive form to desires for mastery, power, or affiliation, and diffusing fears of failure and incompetence (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Motives can be a big driver of behaviour, however some work directly to activate behaviours, such as hunger or thirst, whereas other motives such as the need for achievement, for example, do not appear to instigate behaviour directly.

Instead, Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that a conception of a future self is mediated by what the individual believes to be possible and the importance assigned to these possibilities. There are theories of motivation (Atkinson & Birch, 1978; de Rivera, 1982; Raynor, 1974 (as cited in Markus & Nurius, 1986)) which view motives as 'dispositions' within an individual to strive to approach a particular class of positive incentives (goals) or to avoid a particular class of negative incentives (threats). Markus and Nurius (1986) explain that looking at the varying factors that drive motivation can explain the dynamics of action between two individuals who share an equally strong need for achievement, but their motives are coming from two different possible self-visions. This links to the work of Smyth and Banks (2012) on the factors that affect Irish secondary school students' decisions for post-second-level school. Although both working-class and middle-class groups are motivated to attend college, the factors that drive each group of students can vary. However, despite whatever is driving a motivation it is important that the motivation is there or can be developed in the first place. Bandura (1982) highlighted the importance of individuals' beliefs about personal efficacy. An efficacy expectation is the individual's belief that he or she is competent enough to perform a required behaviour (Bandura, 1982). Mentoring can support the students as they look to build belief and develop future visions of themselves.

3.4. Formal and Informal Mentoring

In recent years, the subject of mentoring has drawn the interest of academics, practitioners and policymakers (European Commission, 2023). Kram (1985) describes two broad categories of mentoring functions that distinguish mentoring from other non-developmental work relationships. First, vocational functions aid the mentee's career development. Second, psychosocial functions help in the development of self-concepts, for example, competence and identity. According to Kram (1985), relationships that provide both kinds of functions are characterised by greater intimacy, and strength of interpersonal bonds and are viewed as more indispensable and more critical to development (p. 24).

The subject matter is examined by various scholars in the context of formal and informal settings. The body of research on mentoring addresses the topic as situated in formal and

informal settings. While schools, workplaces and community programmes are considered formal settings for mentoring programmes (Rhodes & Dubois, 2008), family, friends, sporting endeavours and extracurricular activities provide opportunities for informal mentoring (Brady & Dolan 2007). Brady and Dolan (2007) explain that despite formal and informal mentoring being different in structure and set up there is consensus between the two: usually the mentor has greater experience or wisdom than the mentee, the mentor offers guidance or instruction that is intended to help the mentee grow, and there is an emotional bond between mentor and mentee (Brady & Dolan, 2007). However, there are differences between how each type is set up and structured. According to Coles (2011), informal mentoring refers to naturally occurring, supportive relationships that involve the provision of general guidance and support and, in some instances, helping a student learn something new. Informal mentoring relationships are far more common than formal ones. A survey of mentors carried out in the US in 1998 found that 83 per cent of those responding indicated their relationships with students were established informally whilst only 17 per cent were formal.

Formal mentoring involves a structured and intentional approach to offering students those experiences. In this project, formal mentoring is a secondary school-focused programme. According to Coles (2011), these are often facilitated by an agency or programme dedicated to this purpose. In the instance of this research, the mentoring programme which has been evaluated is facilitated by the Trinity Access Programme in its link schools. According to Brady and Dolan (2007), formal mentoring programmes are a relatively new development in Ireland. For example, the Youth Advocate Programme (YAP), which is an American mentoring model, was introduced whereby a paid mentor or advocate is allocated to a young person deemed to be 'high risk'. Whereas YAP is targeted at young people in need of intense support, another programme called the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) programme is running that looks to position itself as a preventative community-based mentoring programme. This programme is volunteer-driven and is more targeted at young people in need of support and friendship. The ethos of the programme is that each person is different, and the complexities of social issues are best addressed on an individual level by matching the young person with a relatable 'big brother or sister' that will lead to the young person developing more self-confidence and having a role model in a formal setting but in an informal nature. NCAN explain that formal mentor programmes place a strong emphasis on positive youth development, reducing the

likelihood that students will engage in risky behaviours such as poor school attendance or drug use and promoting college and career exploration. However, it also points out that mentoring serves different purposes, especially based on the individual's age and needs. Rhodes et al. (2000) explain that school-based mentoring can help improve grade promotion and reduce unexcused absences, tardiness and bullying or fighting in school. Coles (2011) looked at the role of mentoring in college access and success in the United States and summarised:

- Mentoring focuses and motivates students toward achieving learning goals.
- Youth who perceive high-quality relationships with their mentors experience the best results.
- Discussing with mentors, especially those who have attended themselves, can generate interest in going to college among students whose parents have not gone to college.
- Mentors provide students with important information about college preparatory course courses, financial aid, and the college admissions process.

Levinson (1978) considered mentoring as a 'supportive relationship', in both formal and informal mentoring relationships, that exists between an 'experienced and less experienced individual' through which they offer 'advice, sponsorship and even friendship' (p.98). Levinson (1978) provided a chronology of the lives of 40 men, focusing on developmental transitions and milestones that they experienced throughout their lifespan. Descriptive accounts of these men's experiences highlighted the importance of relationships in human development; specifically, the relationship with a mentor. Ainsworth (1989) also notes the powerful role of emotional attachments beyond childhood, suggesting that relationships with parent surrogates (e.g., teachers, coaches, and mentors) play a critical role in healthy human development and psychological adjustment. According to Freedman (1993), the popularity of mentoring in the workplace and academic settings is a result of several factors:

- **Cheap:** a low-cost alternative to expensive government programmes
- **Simple:** complex social issues can be tackled by focusing on the needs of an individual

- **Direct:** mentoring enables the mentor to give direct help to a young person to make a difference in their lives
- **Flexible:** In that, it can be used for a range of purposes and appeals to all shades of political opinion

Coles (2011) also explored the most effective practices throughout their study of various mentoring programmes in the USA. The practices they found to be most successful focused closely on the following aspects of their programmes –planning, mentor recruitment, training, matching, service delivery and programme effectiveness.

Planning:

Research should be conducted on student needs and effective strategies for meeting these needs. For example, if the TA mentoring programme ranges from 2nd – 6th years, essential planning will be required so the needs of each group are met. The needs of a sixth-year student will be different to those of a second-year student. Before the mentoring sessions planning will be required as to what the sessions entail, what the students expect to get from the session and do the mentors know their roles.

Mentor recruitment, training, and matching:

This is a crucial cog in the wheel of the TA21 mentoring programme. There is anecdotal evidence from colleagues that logistical issues can be problematic in terms of matching up mentors/mentees. With 11 schools to cater for 1000s of students, it is not feasible to recruit a mentor for every mentee. The average ratio is 1 mentor to 5 mentees. However, there is an attempt to match mentees with mentors as much as possible e.g., if there is an engineering undergraduate student match them with students who have an interest in engineering. As part of the programme training is provided to all mentors and this is ongoing. Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper (2002) have found that training that continues throughout the mentoring process produces the greatest positive effects on mentees. For example, how do mentors engage shy students and what strategies could the mentor use to bring the shy student into conversations without making the mentee uncomfortable? A task of this nature might be more natural to some mentors than others. This requires ongoing assistance from the agency involved in running the programme.

Delivery of mentoring services:

Longer and consistent interactions between the mentor and mentee have been mentioned in various research findings as being crucial in having a positive impact on the mentee. To deliver on the service, it is suggested that mentors commit to meeting regularly with their mentees for a minimum of six months and preferably 12 months. This aspect can be problematic in a logistical sense in the TA21 model as some schools are based up to 1.5 hours away from campus. Recruiting mentors who can commit to visiting a school that far away for between 6 months and a year is difficult. Rhodes and DeBois (2008) point out from a meta-analysis of various mentoring literature that first and foremost, beneficial effects are expected only to the extent that the mentor and youth forge a strong connection that is characterised by mutuality, trust and empathy. For this type of bond to arise, mentors and youths are likely to need to spend time together over a significant period. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that positive effects on youth outcomes became progressively stronger as relationships persisted for longer periods and were greatest when relationships lasted at least one year.

Programme effectiveness:

Evaluating a programme is a crucial aspect of assessing its effectiveness. This can be done by engaging the various stakeholders in an ongoing feedback loop to aid programme development. There have been mixed reviews of the value of the programme on an anecdotal level and the short survey results since 2014. The general gist of this usually is mixed and dependent on several factors such as the geography of the school, commitment of mentors and practicality of the programme. When the programme began there was only one year group in each school that was participating but this has grown each year to include every other year group. This has put pressure on each school, especially around aspects of mentor recruitment, retention, and commitment. The greater number of sessions and the limited number of mentors can put pressure on people's commitment and time availability.

3.5. Benefits and Drawbacks of Mentoring Programmes

There are many benefits mentioned within the literature about mentoring programmes and what they offer students. Bush and Middlewood (2005) highlight the powerful ripple effect

that mentoring can have on individuals and society. These programmes can be seen as helping both mentor and mentee reach higher levels of maturity and responsibility (Karcher, 2012). There is also evidence within the literature that shows being mentored can increase self-esteem which affects motivation and this, in turn, can have an overall effect on achievement (Brady & Dolan, 2007; DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher 2012). One aspect of mentoring youths in an academic setting is assisting the student with career and scholarly advancement. Goodlad (1995) points out that psychosocial support such as friendship, encouragement and advice is important for achieving positive outcomes for both mentor and mentee. There is evidence to suggest that self-esteem has also been shown to be reciprocal to the mentors as well as the mentee (Batty, Rudduck, & Wilson, 1999; Charlton, 2003). Goodlad (1995) highlights the power of having someone who listens to the mentee should not be underestimated. This act helps the mentor understand further how to be nurturing towards their mentees and allows them to develop a strong sense of accomplishment and pride whilst also learning about trust and responsibility (Dearden, 1998).

A key benefit of mentoring can be its impact on the student's educational decision-making processes. Whenever two or more people get together in any capacity it is obvious that the strength of the relationship is a big factor in how enduring and/or successful that relationship will be. O'Sullivan et al. (2017) explain that poor mentoring relationships are often a result of the mentor and mentee failing to make a connection or relate to each other. Such relationships can terminate quite quickly resulting in the mentee feeling let down or even abandoned. O'Sullivan et al. (2017) also found that this can risk producing a negative effect on the mentee with feelings of discouragement.

3.5.1. The Importance of Relationships in Mentoring

The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is taken to be at the forefront of successful mentoring programmes (DuBois et al., 2005; Eby et al., 2010; Kram, 1985). For this programme and any other mentoring programme, according to DuBois et al. (2005) to be effective a strong relationship must be formed between mentor and mentee. The model developed by Rhodes (2005) discussed the three factors which must be present and

developed for this relationship to be established – trust, mutuality and empathy. This, according to Whalley (2006), requires a high level of involvement, commitment and time leading to linkages at a deeply personal and professional level which extends well beyond the initial interaction. DuBois et al. (2002) describe positive relationships as possessing three important and distinctive features - contact, longevity and emotional closeness. Throughout the literature, it is evident that the mentoring relationship is beneficial to both the mentor and mentee. Indeed, the success of a mentoring programme relies on the development of a relationship which involves a high level of mutual respect and commitment (O'Neill & Scardamalia, 2000). Lerner et al. (2005) described characteristics administrators hope for youths to develop from participating in programmes like the TA mentoring programme and postulated the use of the 'Five C's' – Competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. It is hoped that as the students meet and get to know their mentors over time these qualities can be modelled for the students and in turn, for the students to develop themselves further. According to Silke, Brady and Dolan (2019) mentees' happiness with their mentor was found to be significantly associated with their perceptions of mutual trust.

3.5.2. A Mentor's Role in Mentoring

Another important aspect of mentoring that is often overlooked is the involvement of the mentor. Much focus is put on the types of mentoring and the input factors that make up positive mentoring for the mentees. However, no programme would exist without the input of the mentor. DuBois et al. (2002) suggest that there is an ongoing need for mentor support. This means providing mentors with support in arranging structured and engaging activities with their mentees. There is evidence to show that structured and engaging activities increase the effectiveness of mentoring relationships (DuBois et al., 2002). It is also recommended that mentors get enough time to link in with each other to share and learn from each others experiences. It is important to recognise that there is an impact both ways from any mentoring programme. The more support and training mentors receive the more likely it is for them to return to the programme and in turn improve continuity. According to Mullen (1998) a survey of mentors in a US mentoring programme suggested that the greatest level of combined vocational and psychosocial mentoring functions is performed by 1) mentors

who initiated the relationship, 2) mentors who feel the students have value to their school or organisation, 3) mentors who allow their students to influence them – a two-way relationship, and 4) mentors who spend more time with their mentees. It also allows mentors to develop many of the professional ‘transferable’ skills increasingly in demand by employers, such as communication, interpersonal and organisational skills (Goodlad, 1995).

Mentors can profit from refining their listening skills and gain by learning by teaching (Charlton, 1993). Self-esteem can also be enhanced by making mentors feel appreciated, wanted, successful and productive (Charlton 1993). By participating in mentoring, it has been shown that mentors not only gain self-esteem but also gain skills which can benefit them throughout their lives whilst also allowing them to learn a sense of achievement through helping others (Charlton, 1993). Whalley (2006) explains that mentors benefit from having the opportunity to develop a sense of competence and sense of self-worth. Other studies have shown that mentors who are more emotionally engaged in the relationship with their mentees have positive attitudes towards the students. Mentors who are more confident and perceive themselves as knowledgeable are far more likely to have successful relationships with their mentees (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Karcher, 2009). Grossman and Furano (1999) discuss the importance of volunteers in the social science arena and their increasing responsibility for delivering services. They highlight the importance of the support volunteers receive from the programmes in which they work as critical for their effectiveness. Grossman and Furano (1999) explored over twenty years of extensive research on mentoring and youth service and what they found is that volunteers cannot simply be left to their own devices without training and supervision. This research is based on volunteerism in America and cites cross-party support for the good outcomes that can result from volunteers. However, not every piece of research they reviewed and participant they interviewed was as sanguine about voluntarism’s ability to address major social problems. Grossman and Furano (1999) feared that governmental backing of volunteerism is motivated only by a desire to cut the federal budget, and they ridicule the notion that volunteers can solve serious social problems. The findings from Grossman and Furano (1999) come from twenty years of studying programmes that use volunteers in major ways – mentoring programmes, service programmes and community-based initiatives. They conclude that three areas are vitally important to the success of a volunteer programme: screening, training, ongoing

management and support. The screening process provides organisations with the opportunity to select those adults who are most likely to be successful as volunteers, by finding individuals who already have the appropriate attitudes or skills necessary to succeed. Orientation and training ensure that volunteers build the specific skills necessary to be effective and that they have realistic expectations of what they can accomplish.

Ongoing management and support of volunteers is critical for ensuring that volunteer hours are not squandered, weak skills are strengthened and volunteers are used most effectively. McClanahan (1998) completed a study of career preparation/career mentoring programmes among 255 mentors and 376 students and found that volunteers who received more hours of formal training at the beginning of the relationship increased the length of the youth's and volunteer's involvement with the programme. Kupersmidt, Stelter, and Rhodes (2017) investigated the role that training, both in person and online, played in preparing volunteers to become effective mentors. They reviewed fifty-one mentoring programmes with 127 volunteers and found that trained volunteers were more self-efficacious, ready to mentor, knowledgeable about the roles mentors should and should not play, and had less unrealistically positive expectations of their mentees and the programmes. Volunteers need to receive sufficient training to establish realistic expectations about what mentoring is and what a mentoring relationship will be like. Training in cultural awareness can help address both expectations and skills related to mentoring diverse populations of youth who have a wide variety of backgrounds and personal characteristics (Sanchez, Colon-Torres, Feurer, Roundfield, & Berardi, 2013). In addition, other reasons for volunteer retention and turnover include work and family commitments (Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002); hence, pre-match training needs to help volunteers anticipate and plan for upcoming demands that may compete with their commitment. Thus, training is expected to impact mentors' expectations about mentees and the relationship such that they develop knowledge as well as more realistic expectations that are neither overly idealistic nor pessimistic. Grossman and Furano (1999) conclude that effective volunteer programmes need to incorporate the critical elements of infrastructure into their regular regimen. They further add that no matter how well-intentioned volunteers are, unless there is an infrastructure in place to support and direct their efforts, they will remain at best ineffective or, worse, become disenchanted and withdraw, potentially damaging recipients of services in the process. They

go on to highlight the importance of allocating programme resources to developing the support and training infrastructure.

The staff of effective mentoring programmes reside at the intersection of busy administrators and overworked employees such as teachers and require ongoing individual support. The staff ensure that qualified volunteers show up consistently when they are expected to do meaningful tasks that accomplish the mission of the programmes, without burdening employees of the host organisations. The aspect of volunteer training and support from the programme staff is also a matter of scale. If the number of required volunteers is low, then a small number of programme staff would manage the administrative task of recruitment and training. However, as a programme grows, the costs attached to staffing the programme grow. This raises the question about programme funding. If the outreach of the programme grows this requires further structures and support, or else the programme may become at risk of becoming disjointed, mentors not being sufficiently trained and a higher risk of poor retention. Grossman and Furano (1999) highlight another critical element of an effective programme infrastructure is good communication, both internal and external. The need for internal communication is more obvious, though not always adequately staffed. One of the most crucial elements of communication concerns scheduling. Volunteers need to have advance notice of when and where they are needed. They also need to know if they are not needed on a particular day, perhaps because the youth they regularly meet with is sick, the school is closed, or materials that are needed for their project have not arrived. They highlight the frustration that volunteers express when they arrive at a school or location and are not needed or there has been a mix-up in communication. Communicating with hundreds of mentors at a time can be difficult if there are only one or two staff responsible for helping a school run a mentoring programme. The level of organisation that goes into running a mentoring programme with eleven schools should not be underestimated.

Rhodes et al. (2000) and DuBois et al. (2002) highlight the importance of encouragement from parents and other family members to support the involvement of the mentee with the mentor. It is not recommended in findings by Rhodes et al. (2000), and DuBois et al. (2002) that parents get directly involved in the mentoring relationship, but their support will increase the likelihood that mentors and mentees will achieve their shared goals. Also, it is a good strategy from the college practitioner's perspective to include the parents from an early point

and help them understand why it is important that they support their child's involvement with a mentor (Coles, 2011).

3.6. Irish Senior Cycle Students' Decision-Making Process

First, in this section I have looked at what decision-making is from a theoretical perspective and secondly, what it is in the educational context of how students use it. I looked at what research has already been done in this area and how it applied to this piece of research. An interesting aspect of decision-making is the assumption that there is always a decision to be made, well if there is then it is important to look at who sets the rules of the game i.e., where do the options that you are picking from come from? Beach (1993) explains that decision theory and research have focused almost exclusively on choice—the selection of the best option from a choice set containing two or more options. He goes on to ask the question which is largely overlooked of how those options got there in the first place—why them and not others? (Beach, 1993). He continues to explain that sometimes none of the options are sufficiently attractive to justify choosing any. Sometimes all the options are so similar that a choice is difficult. He questions the choices people face by explaining that sometimes the options are so silly, trivial, immoral, personally, socially objectionable, or otherwise flawed that they are rejected out of hand. Sometimes the decision-maker merely prefers to wait for or search for, a wider range of options, or more novel, interesting, or plausible options. There is extensive research done internationally on educational decision-making, but limited work done on secondary school students' decision-making process in Ireland. One such study was conducted by Mc Coy, Smyth, Watson and Darmody (2014) which has been explored also.

Although many theories attempt to explain how decision-making works, the reality of it is that it is an incredibly complex process (Moogan & Baron, 2010). There may be overlaps among people facing similar choices around how and what they decide upon doing but each person is different and there are a range of factors that affect each person's choices. These cross many disciplines such as Economics, Biology, Psychology and Education to name just a few. Examples of such theories include rational choice theory, social reproduction theory influenced by various types of capital which will be discussed below along with some related

concepts and a more psychological approach via self-determination theory. Self-determination is a theory of motivation that addresses issues of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Harren (1979) describes another psychological theoretical aspect of career decision-making – he describes four parameters that either constitute or influence how it progresses:

- a. The decision-making process itself.
- b. The characteristics of the decision-maker.
- c. The characteristics of the developmental tasks driving career decisions and
- d. The conditions under which decisions are made.

The list of theories in this space is quite extensive and far from exhaustive, therefore the focus will be on education decision-making literature.

According to Smyth and Banks (2012), explanations for the patterns found in student decision-making can broadly be divided into frameworks that emphasise rational choice and those that emphasise social (or socio-cultural) reproduction. Rational choice theory is seen to reflect an assessment of the relative costs and benefits attached to different options, costs and benefits which differ by social class (Goldthorpe, 1998). The main assumption of rational choice theory is that the decisions taken are rational but Smyth and Banks (2012) argue that little attention has been given to the information used by young people in evaluating their options. Bourdieu (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) are examples of social reproduction theorists. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) developed a sociological theory which emphasised the influence of families' social, economic and cultural capital in shaping students' choices. They went on to explain how the three forms of cultural capital – institutionalised (family's qualifications), embodied (consciously acquired and the passively inherited properties of oneself); and objectified (physical objects that are owned) provide middle-class students with the resources required for effective decision-making about education.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) studied student decision-making from a similar angle to that of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and argued that social and cultural factors shape career-related decision-making and that the way opportunities are structured differently is dependent on the availability of several types of capital. Bourdieu (1986) explains that capital

can be understood as a form of fuel which enables agents to reproduce their position within the social field and represents the immanent structure of the social world. He continued by saying that depending on the field where it functions, capital can manifest itself in three radical forms: *economic, cultural, and social capital*. The theorists in this space focus on how different economic, cultural, and social capitals are possessed by different social classes and the resulting formation of different dispositions to learning, exemplified in the work of Bourdieu (1977). Smyth and Banks (2012) posit that both theories devote little attention to the impact of school organisation and process. Rational choice theory focuses on decision-making at the level of the family and individual level and views school as a black box rather than unpacking the role schools have in shaping aspirations (Smyth & Banks, 2012). They go on to critique Bourdieu's theory on capital accumulation but explain that it has been extended to include 'institutional habitus' (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Reay (2004) explains habitus to be an overused concept in educational research but an important one to understand when discussing Bourdieu's views on social reproduction. She describes habitus as one of Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences. There has been considerable debate about the concept of habitus and some commentators argue that this focus on habitus as durable and largely unconscious results in an overly deterministic explanation (Jenkins, 2002).

There are two other issues important to consider when considering young people's decision-making and they are the ideas of structure and agency. Agency reflects the conscious decisions made by young people in deciding what to do after school (Smyth & Banks, 2012). The concept of agency reflects the capacity of individuals to act independently and their capacity for self-determination, especially their ability to enact or resist change and take responsibility for their actions. Using agency as a key component of decision-making allows for explanations of variations within families, schools and between schools of similar social composition. However, the agency does not explain the variations and disparity of outcomes throughout the social classes and the overarching social structure (e.g., the educational system, the economic situation and labour market situation) that can also influence the students' opportunities.

Despite the wide debate about agency versus structure in social class dynamics in education, there is also a psychological element that the students must contend with. Reay (2004) argues that all too often in sociological research such psychic responses are individualised and pushed out of the wider social picture. However, Reay (2004) argues that there is a powerful dynamic between emotions, the psyche and class inequalities that is as much about the makings of class as it is about its consequences. She argues that in contemporary British society, social class is not only etched into their culture but also still deeply etched into their psyches. This contention can be extended to Irish society as well and despite all the programmes that support students in progressing along their desired pathways, the psychological effects of class dynamics in the education cannot be ignored. If a student understands all the choices at their disposal and has pathways that they can follow, that does still not suggest that things will fall into place. A conscious choice must still be made, and emotions and psyche can influence what is said to be a rational, logical choice. That is why the decision-making process cannot be fully explained by looking at sociological theories in isolation. What happens cognitively and in the social and economic structure they operate in, is just as important.

Reay et al. (2001) further discuss the psychological constraints on choice by citing Giddens (1995) - 'In a world where individuals are increasingly held accountable for their fate it is unfashionable to stress the continuing importance of deeply rooted material and emotional constraints on choice'. Reay et al. (2001) also point out that the nature of these constraints varied from person to person according to ethnicity, class and sex. She mentioned that the emotional constraints were only hinted at and barely articulated by the students in comparison to the material constraints. However, as Giddens (1995) argues in Reay (2001, pg. 9), that does not mean that the psychological element of choice should be ignored:

Choices are blocked, or programmed, by unconscious emotions, which cannot first be thought away by listing indefinite numbers of options. Depending upon how fixed unconscious traits are presumed to be, one's genogram could be setting clear limits to feasible options. To see day-to-day life as an amalgam of free choices is to fly in the face of reality (Reay, 2001, pg. 9)

However, one interview that Reay et al. (2001) conducted with a middle-class student was quite interesting on the psychological aspect of choice. The student in question were

convinced that her working class colleagues are governed by powerful emotional constraints which can lead to a process of psychological self-exclusion.

There is bigotry and bias, there is no doubt about it, but people are very passionate about that in places like this, being a woman, being a single mother, being black, being gay. It is something that is a major issue for these people, and they think that these things are going to be held against them when they go to interview, they feel places like UCL, Kings and LSE will not want students like them, but it just is not true anymore (Reay, 2001, pg. 10)

However, this type of pragmatic rationality for middle-class students does stretch as far as applying for said elite institutions whereas for many of the working-class students that Reay et al. (2001) interviewed it did not. The saturated message coming from those interviews was 'What is a person like me going to do at a place like that?'. Reay (2001) pulled upon a concept Bourdieu penned on this topic called objective limits. Bourdieu (1986) described how objective limits become transformed into a practical anticipation of objective limits; a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which once excluded. Many of the working-class students' priorities were to go to an institution where he was comfortable, somewhere where there was a chance they would feel at home within education. Reay et al. (2001) describe how this response exhibits a Bourdieuan sense of place: of 'one's relationship to the world and one's proper place within it' (Bourdieu, 1986). Many of the working-class students developed expectations that are acceptable 'for people like us.' Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) point out that, in higher education, choices are governed by what it is 'reasonable to expect'. Gardner, Maietta, Gardner and Perkins (2022) also found that age has an impact on what is reasonable to expect when it comes to educational choices. They found that as adults acquire more work experience, their post-secondary educational aspirations are more likely motivated by extrinsic factors.

International research into educational decision-making has been extensive. These studies usually focused on how factors such as social class and gender shape post-school expectations and choices (Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993; Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007). Shavit & Blossfeld (1993) conducted a comparative study of persistent barriers to educational opportunities in thirteen countries and much of the focus in their edited book chapter is on social class dynamics and gender differences rather than on the individual decision-making process. They

argue that opportunities afforded to students depend more on the social origins of the student rather than the personal agency of each decision-maker. 'The stability in the association between social origins and educational transitions in eleven of the thirteen societies indicates that educational selection persistently favours children of privileged social origins' (Shavit & Blissfield 1993, pg. 12). Hartlaub and Schneider (2012) contend that this is consistent with the argument that dominant social classes manage to resist changes in the school system which might diminish their relative advantage in the educational process. Reay et al. (2001) allude to the class-differentiated process with higher education decision-making in a similar vein. She quotes Giddens (2005) by saying choice is a medium of both power and stratification. Reay (2001) points out that individuals applying to do higher education courses are making very different kinds of choices within different circumstances and constraints. In this piece of research, she found that structural factors have a powerful influence on choice. The work investigated the likelihood of middle and working-class students going to higher education in London and what factors influence their choices. She found geographical constraints to be much more relevant to working-class students who were more concerned with material constraints than their middle-class peers. The constraint of travel and finance often means they are operating within very limited spaces of choice in which, for example, an extra stop on public transport can place an institution beyond the boundaries of conceivable choice. Despite this study being based in London the constraints of finance and travel are also common among working-class students in Ireland (Smyth et al., 2005). Geographical constraints are more pressing for rural students than urban ones in Ireland, as most large urban cities have a wider selection of further and higher education institutions to choose from. Studies have also focused on access to finance as a big factor in student decision-making. Fagence and Hansom (2018) surveyed 1,427 applicants to higher education in the UK and found that around half of applicants (54 per cent) said they were 'put off' to some extent by the costs associated with university.

Another perspective of assessing the personal agency versus structuralist debate is how students can make decisions to follow a path if they do not know all the paths available. Information and exposure to the variety of pathways predominantly favour the students whose families have wider networks, resources and experiences in the fields in question. A student may not choose to be a software engineer if they do not know what a software

engineer is. It can be quite difficult navigating the waters of a student's final year in school with the number of important issues they face such as studying, staying healthy, preparing for, and taking exams and deciding what they want to do when they leave school and how they're going to go about it. Second-level students face a complexity of issues when deciding what they want to do when they finish school. According to Moogan and Baron (2010), young people's decision-making when considering extending their education, obtaining training, or deciding on their careers is a complex interactive process. Factors such as their interests and choices can change due to the information available, which may also be modified by influential parties such as peers, teachers, career officers, parents and other significant adults (Moogan & Baron, 2010). They may also be affected by their own life experiences, either within or outside the class. Davis et al. (2003, p.15) suggest that decisions result from a 'complex relationship between different factors. They highlight some of these factors as changing social structures, less formal and lasting relationships, changing employment patterns, and changing skill requirements within existing careers. She regrets that much of the analysis provided in contemporary youth research tends to ignore the complexity. Despite being a different jurisdiction, there are many overlaps between what the process looks like there and in Ireland which we will move on to.

According to sociological theories on educational choice, risk aversion is the main driving force for class-specific educational decisions. Interpretation of these theories suggests that families from upper social classes must opt for the academically most demanding, long-lasting courses to avoid an intergenerational status loss (Hartlaub & Schneider, 2012). Families from lower social classes, by contrast, tend instead to opt for shorter tracks to reduce the risk of failing in a long-lasting and costly education and therefore, entering the labour market without a degree. These theories may help explain why there are fewer students from working-class backgrounds attending third-level institutions in Ireland compared to their middle-class peers. It must be noted that the mentoring programme by itself is not the only factor which will influence student's post-secondary school decisions. According to Thomas and Webber (2001), the decision to continue to higher education is shaped by a multitude of factors. These include family background, gender, ability, work experience and teacher's advice, to name just a few variables. However, one factor that is attracting an increasing amount of attention in the academic literature is the role of peer groups (Sokatch, 2006).

Thomas and Webber (2001) detailed the research of Mac an Ghaill (1994), and Ferguson and Unwin (1990) on the effects of peers in decision-making. Burlingame (as cited in Thomas & Webber, 2001) found that adherence to peer culture was greater amongst boys than girls and that adherence to the peer group was negatively correlated with academic achievement. This finding was followed by Mac an Ghaill (as cited in Thomas & Webber, 2001) identifying an evolving 'macho lads' culture in Northern Irish teenage boys' which was correlated to lower academic achievement. According to Ferguson and Unwin (as cited in Thomas & Webber, 2001) attitudes are conditioned by peer group influences and peer effects can permeate through whole schools to reduce a single pupil from progressing. Sokatch (2006) conducted a study in the US which investigated the roles that peers play in the decisions of low-income urban minority public high school graduates to go to college. It found friends' plans are the single best predictor of 5-year college enrolment for these students, even when controlling for variables assumed to affect college-going behaviour.

Student Decision-Making in the Irish Context

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) think that decision-making is highly unstable. However, what can be usually understood, in the Irish context at least, is that what students decide to do can usually fall into one of the four pathways outlined below:

1. Enter the Labour force.
2. Continue with their education and study some sort of higher-level course.
3. Travel or emigrate.
4. Take time on the unemployment register until they decide upon their next move.

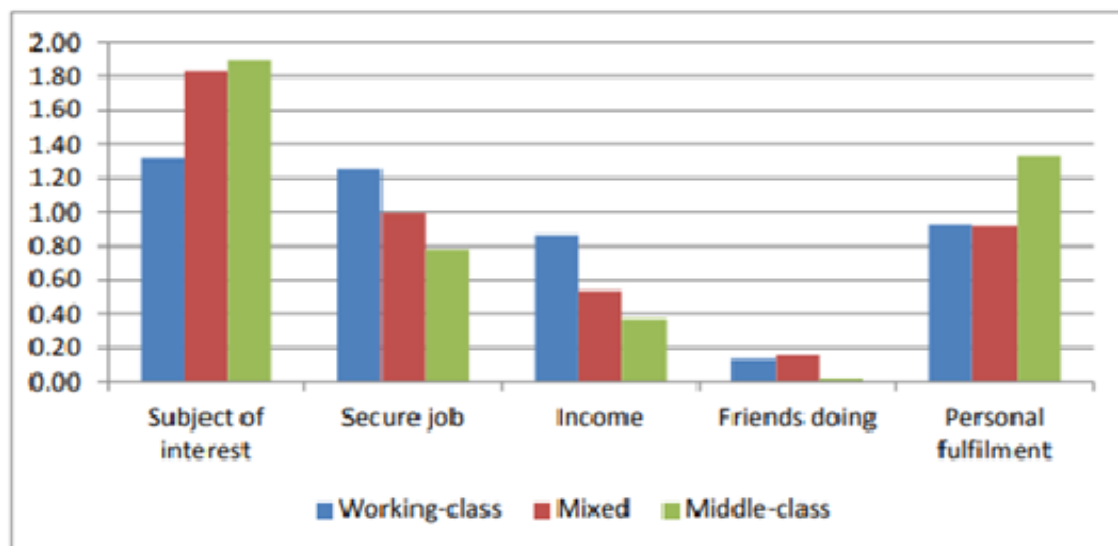
Mc Coy et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of post-school transitions which followed around 900 students from first year to leaving certificate year in 12 schools of mixed gender and socio-economic characteristics. This study provided evidence of how young people experienced the transition from second-level education to further/higher education and the labour force. A key finding around decision-making in this study was that most young people highlighted the importance of intrinsic reasons – wanting to study a subject they were interested in, personal fulfilment and being able to get an interesting job. However, young

people from working-class backgrounds were more likely to put a higher value on extrinsic motivators than their middle-class peers – an income and a secure job, suggesting greater risk aversion among this group (Mc Coy, Byrne, O’Connell, Kelly, & Doherty (2010)). This is not a new finding for social research, however, as Hartlaub and Schneider (2012) explained. The factors that influence sixth-year students' post-school decisions in order of importance, according to a circa 900 student surveys conducted by McCoy et al. (2014) study are as follows:

1. Studying a subject that they are interested in.
2. Personal fulfilment.
3. Being able to get an interesting job.
4. Being able to get a secure job.
5. Having an income (any job).
6. What do friends/family advise?
7. What are siblings/family doing?
8. What staff advised?
9. What friends are doing.

There were also significant socio-economic differences in the perceived importance of influences on post-school decisions by school social mix. Subject interest and personal fulfilment were more important to middle-class students whereas security of tenure and income was more so for working-class students as mentioned previously. This is documented in the figure 3.6.3 below.

Figure 3.6.3: Perceived importance of influences on Post School decisions by school social mix (Mc Coy et al., 2014)



However, subject interest is the most important influence for all students from all backgrounds but more important to middle-class students than to their working-class peers. The socially mixed school was very similar to the middle-class school's response on the subject of interest. What friends are doing influenced the students very little. What staff advised does not rank highly in terms of influence on post-school decision-making in this study. The research questions in this study assessed the students' perceptions of the programme and the mentor's influences on their post-school aspirations.

3.7. Social Capital and Mentoring

This section discusses the theory upon which this study is framed. Robert Putnam's theory of social capital has been drawn upon for this research, however, there are other contributors in this area such as James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu. Each viewpoint on social capital theory will be discussed and an explanation for choosing Putnam's will be offered. Healy (2004) suggests that the development of the concept can be traced along two paths: a functionalist approach found in the work of Coleman and Putnam and a 'class strategizing' approach by Bourdieu.

This sub-chapter aims to provide a better understanding of how the practical aspect of mentoring aligns with a theoretical perspective. Essentially, at the core of any mentoring programme is social contact and relationships. These relationships may or may not form but if they do, they all have different unique features with some common overlapping features. Mentoring can help the mentees develop and create a broader social network between and across social ties. This piece will investigate the nature of these relationships, concepts related to the interactions and what makes them work. In some instances, there may be less bonding in the relationships, yet they are still quite functional. These also include a focus on problem-solving and linking the mentees to opportunities that may better their lives and improve their outcomes, whether they be academic, personal, or professional. Putnam's social capital theory includes elements called bridging and bonding. The relevance of each to this study is discussed in more detail.

3.7.1. What is Social Capital?

The OECD (2001) defines social capital as: *'Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.'* Social ties and associated norms of reciprocity are potentially productive of some personal, social, or economic good. Social capital is understood as a metaphor for important social capabilities which are not adequately covered in notions of physical or human capital. Essentially it refers to trust, social ties, shared norms and relationships among people and communities (Healy, 2004). According to Healy (2004) & Claridge (2018), the term social capital has enjoyed a meteoric rise in terms of the volume of academic references, conference papers and occasional references in mass media and political discourses. The concept of social capital draws attention to the effects and consequences of human sociability, connectedness, their relations to the individual and social structure (Tzanakis, 2013). During the 1990s and early 2000s social capital captured the imagination of many policymakers and analysts. In many respects, the rise of social capital has paralleled the rising disillusionment with both statist and neo-liberal economic ideology (Healy, 2004). Healy (2004) posits that communitarians from both the centre-left such as Amatai Etzioni and the centre-right such as Francis Fukuyama have seen an opening for a rediscovery of civil society, civic values, and social

solidarity. The former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, sees social capital as being connected to the political philosophy of the *Third Way*. Blair commented in 2004 that ‘the tide of debate had swung back to community and mutual responsibility’. Healy suggests that this taken together with Margaret Thatcher’s famous saying in the 1980s that “there is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families” seemed to create space for a rediscovery of community.

In Irish public discourse, there was a time when the two main political parties courted the idea of social capital. Healy (2004) suggested that the two parties courted the concept from a more pragmatic stance than an analytical or political-philosophical one. Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil referred to it in various pre-election manifestos in the early noughties and it also found its way into the Programme for Government in 2003 (Healy, 2004). Tzanakis (2013) points out that it is not a new concept and in various forms has been theorized by Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Tonnies. In more recent times other authors have put their stamp on the concept. These authors include Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putman. Tzanakis (2013) explains that the treatment of the concept by the three authors may have some common threads but there are underlying ideologies which make integration of the concept difficult. Essentially, social capital means different things to different people, but the following section will attempt to explain the viewpoints of each main contributor and ultimately decide which version applies to this study most accurately and why.

3.7.2. Bourdieu on Social Capital

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) social capital is defined as “the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”. For Bourdieu, social capital is related to the size of the network and the volume of past accumulated social capital commanded by the agent (Bourdieu, p. 249). Essentially, Bourdieu links this aspect of capital to the desire to accrue economic and social profit and to control the distribution of capital of all forms. Bourdieu (1977) argues that this exchange of information is advantaged to the

middle to upper classes who have more knowledge due to their own experiences and networks and reproduce this advantage to their offspring. Bourdieu saw social capital as essentially residing in social structure and was concerned with power and status and the uneven distribution of social capital between individuals (Claridge, 2018). Alexander (2004) and Jenkins (2002) explain that Bourdieu's theory has been criticised as reductionist for privileging economic capital as the ultimate source and eventual exchange form of all other capital.

3.7.3. Coleman on Social Capital

Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital is like that of Bourdieu's but, according to Tzanakis (2013), from a completely different point of departure. He explains that Coleman's viewpoint of social capital consists of some aspects of social structure and facilitates certain actions of actors with the structure. Coleman essentially adopts a middle ground between two theoretical traditions. The first is a functionalist viewpoint of social action which is conditioned by social structure and the second is rational theory. This approach suggests that actors are determined by utility-maximizing pursuit of his/her self-interest (Coleman, 1988, p.95). He essentially sees social capital as being productive i.e., it is used so that actors can achieve what would have been impossible without it. It has a clear instrumental purpose. For Coleman, his interests in social capital theory are linked to the economic concept of rational action theory. He tried to bridge the gap between two theoretical dispositions. Coleman (1988) tried to connect sociology and the social actions of individuals with the rational ideas of economists that individuals act independently and for self-interest. Coleman essentially sees individuals engaging in social interactions, relationships, and networks for as long as the benefits persist. This logic stems from rational choice theory which seeks to explain human behaviour through rationality (Claridge, 2018).

3.7.4. Putnam on Social Capital

Social capital is conceptualised in a more positive light by Robert Putnam. His work on American society tends to frame social capital as a producer of 'civic engagement' and a broad societal measure of communal health. He also transforms social capital from a resource possessed by individuals to an attribute of collectives, focusing on norms and trust as producers of social capital to the exclusion of networks.

According to Hawkins and Maurer (2010), social networks may be conceptualised through the concept of social capital. Putnam's (2000) description of social capital is that "social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" and that rich social networks result in the efficiency, productivity, health, life, and vibrancy of a community. These relationship networks are envisioned as webs that connect individuals to individuals, individuals to groups, and groups to groups including formal state agencies, businesses and community organisations. He very much emphasises the power of trust in building social capital and the positive outcomes that arise from these connections. Putnam's central social capital theory concepts are called bridging and bonding. Putnam's work has made a significant contribution to the idea of civic engagement and social connectedness since the turn of the 20th century. His central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Putnam's central thesis is that if a region has a well-functioning economic system and a high level of political integration, these are a result of the region's successful accumulation of social capital (Putnam 2000). One of his most influential pieces of work was *Bowling Alone (2000)* - a study of the decline in civic engagement in the United States. The term Social Capital, according to Putnam, refers to the collective value of all 'social networks' (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ('norms of reciprocity'). He maintains that these connections bring about a wide variety of benefits for the individual and mainly the social fabric of communities such as trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks (Putnam, 1995). He claimed that social capital creates value for people who are connected and – at least sometimes – for bystanders as well.

There are basic examples of how social capital works in practice such as how information flows depend greatly on social capital e.g., learning about jobs, candidates running for office, exchanging ideas about college etc. Putnam (2000) conducted a 20-year study of subnational

government in Italy and concluded that on the face of things each regional government seemed equally effective but beneath the surface there lay great variations. Putnam (1995, p.2) states that 'systemic enquiry showed that the quality of governance was determined by longstanding traditions of civic engagement (or its absence)'. Putnam goes on to argue that life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. To gain a better understanding it was worth discussing the various elements of social capital he developed and how they related to the Trinity Access 21 mentoring programmes.

The main elements of social capital, according to Putnam, are as follows:

- **Bonding social capital** – ties between individuals with a relatively high degree of network closure. Bonding social capital is often associated with local communities where many people know many other people in the group (network closure). Bonding social capital is often associated with strong norms, mores and trust which can have both positive and negative manifestations and implications for social exclusion. Many members have access to similar network assets so while providing solidarity, bonding social capital may not provide useful network assets in some situations. For example, when it comes to knowledge of job opportunities, and college application procedures it may have negative implications if no one within one's particular social group has access or knowledge of the relevant process.
- **Bridging social capital** – ties between individuals which cross social divides or between social groups. From a network perspective bridging social capital places the actors at **structural holes** where each can tap into the social network resources of each other's social group. This is also described as **vertical** ties often operating through formal hierarchical structures. Bridging social capital may not involve many shared norms but is likely to be associated with reciprocity and 'thin trust'. It may provide access to network resources outside of an individual's normal circles and as such can provide significant individual (and group) benefits. This is the element of social capital that the mentoring programme of the TA tries to provide. Considering the main group of mentors that TA recruits from, (past & current Access students) we could assume that a large proportion of mentors would share similar backgrounds to the mentees. However, there are usually a group of mentors who get involved in the programme mainly out of goodwill and a sense of altruism who do not share the same

socio-economic background as the students the programme works with. It would be worth observing, in future research, the relationship these mentors have with the mentees. Does this type of vertical tie lead to different outcomes for the students than that of horizontal ties? In terms of the relationships that the students build with their mentors, does the discourse vary depending on the mentor's socio-economic characteristics and does the strength of the relationship vary?

The focus of the TA mentoring programme is aligned with building trust and not about producing or reproducing inequalities. By building trust and engagement between mentee and mentor it is hoped that students will take more ownership of their educational journey and the decisions they need to make regarding post-second-level options. Expanding their social networks beyond the typical close bonds of family and friends may lead the students to bridge the gap between what they know and what else is out there, career-wise, and the information needed to link them to such opportunities if so desired. This is the rationale as to why this study aligned its theoretical framework with Putnam's theoretical standpoint on social capital.

3.8. Critique of Social Capital and Usage in the Irish Context

A common critique of the concept of social capital can be the dispute over what it means and how you capture it. Putnam has worked on capturing a range of data sources in studies from the USA and Italy (Putnam, 2000). In the case of the US study, this was done by using longitudinal methods to track cohorts over time. According to Healy (2004), work in the United Kingdom was also done to develop a databank of relevant questionnaire items from over 19 public surveys. A few domains were identified as being related to social capital. These included:

- Community engagement – types of social networks and volunteering efforts
- Community efficacy – a shared sense of empowerment and capacity to effect change at a community level.

- Volunteering – a commitment to unpaid time and effort outside of the immediate family for the benefit of others
- Political participation – patterns of active citizen engagement, voting etc.
- Informal sociability – regularity of social contact with others
- Norms of trust and reciprocity
- Inter-personal trust
- Trust in institutions (public, corporate, and voluntary)

According to Healy (2004), the advantage of an empirical approach is that it facilitates easier application and generalisation in empirical models of research and policy analysis. However, narrowing the concept is not without risks given the complexity of the social processes at work in any context. In the Irish context, there is very limited data available on trends and distribution of social capital. According to Healy (2004), there are no comprehensive sources to assess changes over time or across generations in patterns of volunteering, membership of community organisations, social networks, support, trust and political engagement. In 2002, as part of the National Economic Social Forum (NESF) project on social capital, a special survey was commissioned based on a module in the monthly ESRI Household Survey of Consumers. This survey contained variables that were aimed at capturing social capital in action in Irish society and questions focused on social participation, levels of trust in state institutions and the political process. A few conclusions from this survey include:

- Social capital is a multi-dimensional concept – no single measure of social capital is possible to capture a variety of dimensions.
- Groups which seem to be at greatest risk of social isolation and disengagement are the unemployed and those who are ill or disabled.
- Social capital is correlated with many demographic and socio-economic factors which are interrelated – care is needed in interpreting any partial correlation.

However, a key finding advised caution in interpreting the results given the difficulty of defining and measuring social capital for empirical research purposes. Many of the proxy variables used to measure social capital are, themselves, highly correlated with

socioeconomic and demographic variables (Healy, 2004). According to the Irish National Economic and Social Forum (2003), using social capital as a prescriptive in policy discussions is not without its critics. NESF concluded that social capital was a poor substitute for economic equality as an explanatory factor in socio-economic outcomes of interest.

Lynch, Due, Muntaner, and Davey Smith (2000) point to the importance of social class, public spending, and material conditions of life as the key determinants of public health. Other critics of social capital draw attention to the vagueness and possible misuse by economists seeking to colonise the social sciences or neo-liberals seeking to validate a smaller role for government (Baron, 2000). A key message from the NESF report was that while no one can deny the importance of social class and the role of the state in their impact on a wide range of social outcomes, social networks and associated norms of reciprocity have, also, a potential role to play (Healy, 2004). They are not alternatives to pro-equality proofing rather they can be harnessed to support equality and community development.

Even though the main type of capital that this work is going to draw on is social capital there are other forms of capital, which are mentioned in section 3.6.1. Capital – whether physical, human, or social – can be used to bond members of a particular social group or shared identity (Healy, 2004). It may also facilitate cooperation among groups. However, Healy (2004) goes on to explain that it may be used to exclude others ‘not like us.’ It can become a powerful ‘club good’ for the exclusion of others and the preservation of in-group benefits and privileges and their transmission across generations over time. Bourdieu developed cultural capital as a way of trying to explain how the dominant classes reproduce dominant symbols and meanings (values), which are often misrecognized and internalised by the dominant class as their own (Lin, 1999). Bourdieu (1986) argues that the education system is where many of these symbols and values are reproduced. According to Winkler and Sriram (2015), academic capital is a set of social processes that aid students in acquiring the knowledge and support necessary to access and navigate higher education.

The TA mentoring programme has recommended content to be covered in each mentoring session. These sessions usually involve some sort of blend between aspiration building/goal setting and study habits/school-related content. A key aim of the content of these sessions is to increase the student’s academic capital and capabilities. Despite the relationship element and development of social networks, the content is heavily educational-related, so academic

capital formation is still relevant. If social capital, with all its drawbacks and misunderstandings, can help progress a debate and analysis around social relationships, civic values, and human motivation then, Healy (2004) believes, it is worth considering using and re-formulating as appropriate. From Healy's (2004) review of the concept of social capital and its usage and measurement in Ireland and abroad, he concludes that progress is likely to be made from modest steps in the direction of:

1. Greater dialogue, co-ownership, co-design, and co-production across disciplinary and stakeholder constituencies.
2. Increased engagement with communities if practised – be they schools, enterprises, neighbourhoods, or Government Departments – Healy argues that we have much to learn about how to measure social capital from the lived experience and concerns of real communities.

3.9. Theoretical Mentoring Model and Literature Synthesis

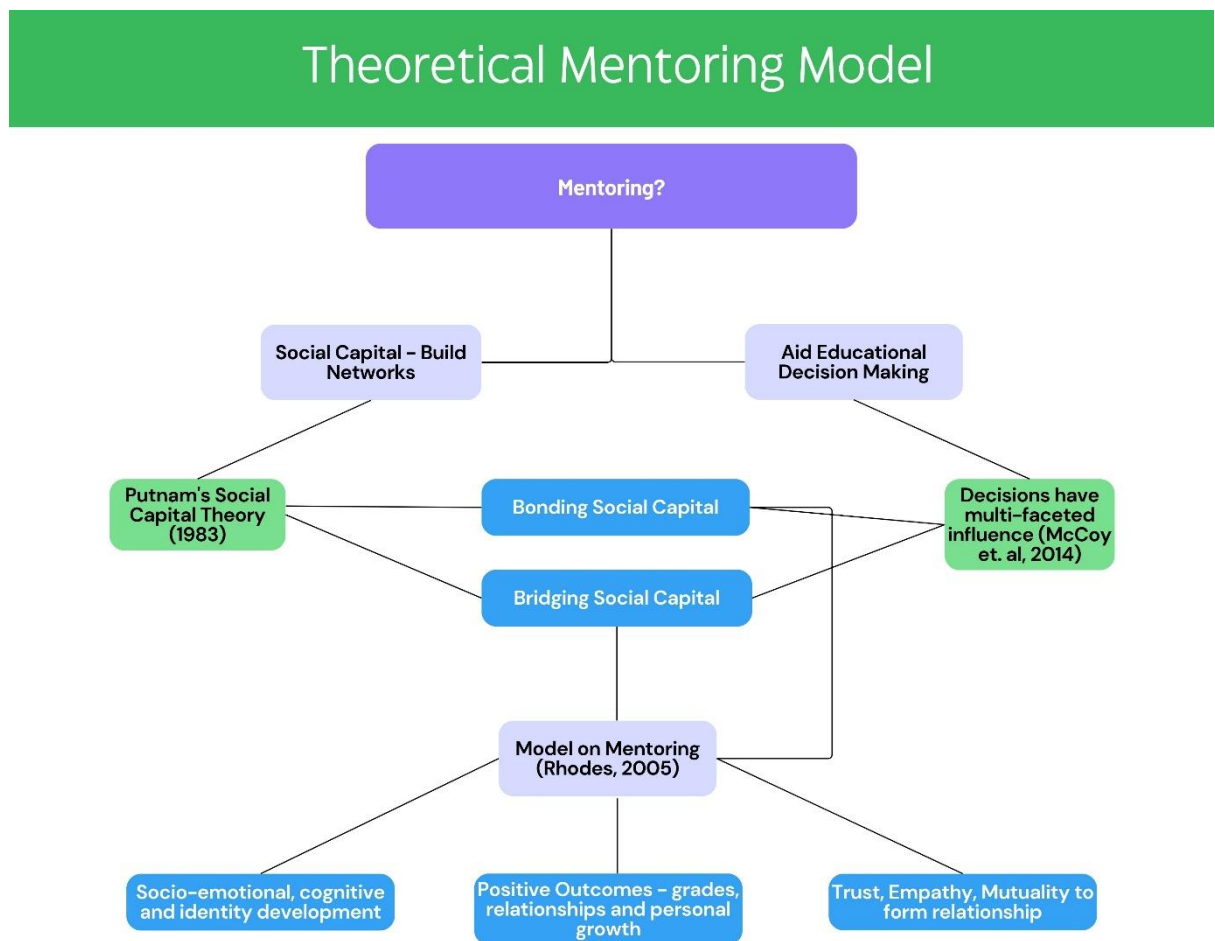
Mentoring, social capital and educational decision-making, are interconnected in various ways. Mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced/knowledgeable person (mentor) and a less experienced/knowledgeable person (mentee), who is seeking guidance and support to achieve their goals. Social capital refers to the network of relationships that individuals have, which provide access to resources and opportunities that they may not have had access to otherwise. Educational decision-making is the process of making choices about one's education, such as what courses to take, what career path to pursue, and what institutions to attend.

Mentoring can play a critical role in educational decision-making, by providing mentees with valuable guidance and support. Mentors can help mentees navigate the educational system, identify resources and opportunities, and provide feedback and advice on important decisions made or to be made by mentees. Mentors can also provide social capital by introducing mentees to their networks, which can expand the mentee's opportunities for education and career advancement. Social capital can also influence educational decision-making, by providing access to resources and opportunities that may not be available to those without

strong social networks. Individuals with strong social networks are more likely to have access to information about educational opportunities, as well as connections to influential individuals who can help them navigate the system. Moreover, educational decision-making can also impact social capital. Individuals who make informed educational decisions are more likely to achieve their educational and career goals, which can lead to increased social capital. These individuals may also become mentors themselves, providing guidance and support to others and expanding their networks.

These interconnections are illustrated in the theoretical mentoring model in Figure 3.9 below. Mentoring in the case of Trinity Access was set up to aid educational decision-making, by helping mentees develop networks through mentors from a variety of backgrounds. If these networks are developed and educational decision-making can be aided, it can allow Rhodes' (2005) model of ideal mentoring to occur and lead to the various positive outcomes associated with his model, as set out below. The efficacy of the model will be critically considered in the discussion chapter, in light of the analysis of the findings emerging from this study.

Figure 3.9: Towards a Theoretical Mentoring Model



The model brings together the three most relevant pieces of theory to the TA mentoring programme. Each area was explained in detail in this chapter. The model develops a visual, from a theoretical perspective, demonstrating the outcomes that can be achieved if these concepts are prevalent in the mentoring programme. For example, this model suggests that influences for the student are heavily dependent on a multitude of factors and many of them are reliant on social interactions. The TA mentoring programme aims to aid these decisions by building networks of mentors. This is where the strength and composition of these networks matter. Rhodes' model is a representation of the positives that can occur for the mentee, if the networks are developed and nurtured.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and discussed the theory relevant to this study. The main objective of this chapter was to examine the interaction between mentoring, social capital, and the student decision-making process. Mentoring models were discussed, along with the various types of mentoring such as youth, academic and career mentoring. Mentoring can include both formal and informal types, with many of us mentored and being mentored in an informal capacity every day. However, the Trinity Access mentoring programme constitutes a formal programme.

Rhodes (2005) developed a model of youth mentoring, which describes several processes and conditions presumed to be important for understanding the effects of mentoring relationships on youths. The model looked at how mutuality, trust and empathy are required for a strong relationship to form between mentor and mentee. This relationship usually took over 12 months to form. When this relationship is formed, this can lead to a range of developmental progress for the mentee such as social-emotional, cognitive and identity development. The aim of the mentoring relationship is that if the students develop across these areas, it can lead to many positive outcomes, such as grades and behavioural well-being. From this mentoring, the students can enhance their social connections, web of contacts and role models. This is viewed as being positive for their social well-being, productivity, health and a variety of other positive indicators.

There are a few theorists in the social capital space who try to encapsulate what social capital is, and how it can or cannot be beneficial. The main contributors to the social capital space are Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Each author looks at social capital in a specific way and tries to capture the social dynamics that explain the concept. Healy (2004) suggests that the development of the concept can be traced along two paths: a functionalist approach found in the work of Coleman and Putnam, and a 'class strategizing' approach by Bourdieu. For this study, Putnam's concept of social capital was chosen over Bourdieu's and Coleman's, as it was more linked to the aims of the TA mentoring programme (which include building trust between and across various social groups). The main elements of Putnam's theory of social capital are bridging and bonding social capital. Bonding social capital represents close ties between individuals in similar social groups, such as family, close

neighbours and community. Bridging brings together people across social divides and groups, for example, working and middle-class people creating a network for a shared purpose or goal. Social capital has had various studies in Ireland and abroad, which tried to capture its effects empirically. This proved complex, as there is a lot of debate on what should be included and how it is measured. However, in Putnam's view, building trust in each other and across communities, will lead to greater levels of civic participation and social solidarity. If these aims manifest themselves in the mentoring programme, it may lead to positive outcomes for the students.

Another area that this chapter focused on was student decision-making. A key research question of this study was how, if at all, the mentoring programme impacts the students' aspiration about what they want to do after school. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, decision-making is defined as a complex cognitive process often culminating in choosing a course of action. The chapter looked at the complexity of decision-making and the breadth of fields that study it. It is relevant across many of the social sciences and physical sciences. Theories across fields such as education, biology, sociology and psychology, all have their theories on decision-making. Many of these were discussed in the chapter, such as social pressure of peer choices, or parental pressure which can be viewed through a social reproduction lens, rational action choice or self-determination.

This chapter outlined studies both in Ireland and abroad, which specifically reviewed educational decision-making. The area is quite vast and complex. One study that reviewed the factors that influence sixth-year student's post-school decisions was by McCoy et al., (2014). This found that the most important factors which impact the student's decisions about what they want to do when they finish school, is the subject that they are interested in studying, personal fulfilment and being able to get an interesting and secure job, among others. These factors were the most important across all social class groups, however working-class students put more importance on job security and income, than their middle-class peers. This points to some literature on the risk aversiveness nature of decisions from working-class students. However, it will be interesting to see if these findings are replicated among the cohort of students in this study and if, or where, the mentoring programme plays a role in their decisions. It is obvious from reviewing the literature across mentoring, social

capital and educational decision-making, that there is a clear interaction between each area and the goals/objectives of the Trinity Access Mentoring programme.

The theory in this chapter influences the research questions in various ways. For example, research question two asks how Robert Putnam's concept of social capital helps explain the mentor-mentee relationship. The premise of the TA mentoring programme is to link a mentor with a mentee to help build their networks. This is directly linked to Putnam's theory on bonding and bridging social capital. Educational decision-making is another core objective of the TA mentoring programme, therefore, utilising the theory and the work of McCoy et al. (2014) is useful. Sub-research question one asked what effect, if any, the programme has on informing the mentee's post-school aspirations and expectations. Ultimately, for the programme to be a success, it needs to meet the basic elements of mentoring and utilising a model of best practice is also useful here. The operationalisation element of research question three, was directly linked to the theory of best mentoring practice, as outlined in Rhodes' model.

This chapter synthesised the relationship between the key areas of literature and theory, and developed a tentative theoretical model which has been tested in the discussion. The next chapter will discuss the research design, methodology and other issues, such as the instruments used, data analysis and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology used to explore the research questions. The chapter will begin with a brief overview of the questions and the theoretical framework that was used in this study. I will follow this by discussing the case study research approach, including the work's philosophical underpinnings, the sample of forty-three stakeholders and the sampling strategy, where I will outline how the participants were selected. The following section will outline the research methods in more detail and why these were chosen for this study. Following on from this, an analysis strategy will be outlined – reflexive thematic analysis was used in analysing and interpreting the qualitative data. The data was generated using two research instruments (interviews and focus groups). A review of a survey conducted by Trinity Access across all their schools will be described as well. This element of the study was used as a scoping exercise to inform the construction of the interview and focus group schedules. The trustworthiness and transferability of the data will be an area that will be discussed, as well as ethical considerations, the role of the researcher and the study's limitations.

4.2. The Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

By generating qualitative data from the students, mentors, teachers and programme administrators, I explored the following research questions (the origins and rationale for each question are described below):

RQ1: How do 6th-year students in five Trinity Access linked Post-Primary DEIS schools perceive the Trinity Access mentoring programme?

Sub RQ1: What effect, if any, does the mentoring programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations?

RQ2: How does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

RQ 3: How is the mentoring programme operationalised in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

Research question 1 and sub-question 1 were developed from the remit I received from the Trinity Access programme when they recruited me to conduct this research. In summary, they wanted the study to investigate whether the objective of the Trinity Access Mentoring programme was being achieved which was to *‘Engage students to develop the knowledge, networks, and skills needed to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities.’*

Research question 2 also stems from O’Sullivan et al. (2017) who conducted a short study on the programme and suggested future research and investigation into the mentoring relationship. O’Sullivan et al. (2017) also highlighted the need for further research into the logistical and operational aspects of the TA mentoring programme. Table 4.2 below links the research questions to the relevant aspects of the objective of the programme.

Table 4.2: Link between the research questions and the objectives of the programme

<i>Research question</i>	<i>Element of Programme objective</i>
RQ 1: Students’ perception of the programme	Whole objective - Students' views on whether the programme has delivered on its objective for them
RQ 1a: Supporting and/or informing post-school aspirations and expectations	Make informed decisions about future educational opportunities
RQ 2: How does Putnam’s social capital concept help explain the relationships?	Students develop knowledge, networks and skills. O’Sullivan et al., (2017) recommended further research into this. Conceptual gap using Putnam’s theory of social capital as a lens.
RQ 3: Operationality of the programme	Whole objective – The programme needs to operate properly to meet the objective – O’Sullivan et al., (2017) recommended further research into this.

As outlined in the literature review chapter, this study was framed using the theoretical mentoring model developed in chapter three. This model brings together elements of Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, Rhodes (2005) model on mentoring and McCoy et al. (2014) findings on educational decision-making to best frame the TA mentoring model. As also discussed, at the core of any mentoring relationship is the notion of social capital, it is often hoped that by forging these relationships students can expand the quality of their social networks. More specifically, Putnam's central elements of social capital – bridging and bonding – were explored in the literature chapter and formed a central aspect of the research design and in particular the interview schedules. The relationship between social capital and the TA mentoring programme is represented in RQ 2 on mentor/mentee relationships, however it may also appear in other RQs as quality and operationality are discussed. The research approach and methods chosen for the study were intended to gain a deep understanding of the nuance and complexity of relationships and perceptions as set out in the research questions.

Yin (2009) explains that a case study approach allows for a rich depiction of a programme which has a wide range of perspectives. The use of a case study approach allowed for this rich depiction of the TA Mentoring phenomena, using qualitative data from schools (teachers, students/mentees, and a principal), mentors and TA staff. The methods used allowed the stakeholders to share in rich descriptions their perceptions of the programme, how the programme informed decision making and whether relationships were being formed or not. The case study also allowed for a flexible orientation towards the setting of the boundaries around the case itself. In this context, the research questions necessitated trying to explore the perceptions and experiences of mentors, mentees and school staff as holistically as possible. Taking each group's perspectives provided a broader, cross-sectional qualitative study of TA mentoring at a point in time. The qualitative approach with its emphasis on being meaning-focused (re participants) and sensitive to their contexts provided ample opportunity to explore the phenomena and research questions in nuanced detail.

4.3. The Research Design

Qualitative research ‘attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations’ (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). The choice of research methodology is based on the type and features of the research problem (Crotty, 1998). Both definitions sit firmly with the aim of this study, to explore how 43 stakeholders viewed the TA mentoring and their ideas on how to improve the programme, better link mentors with mentees and ultimately give mentees the best experience possible of mentoring. The design included interviews with teachers, mentors, programme administrators and focus groups with sixth-year students with experiences of the TA mentoring programme. The cases were carried out in five schools.

Powell (2006) explains that evaluation should be part of an organisation's overall planning process and is integral to the assessment of current services and resources, the development of strategies for change and the monitoring of progress toward goals and objectives. The evaluator must decide what he or she wants to know, that is, focus the evaluation. For example, the purpose may simply be to learn more about the programme, or it may be to determine if the programme is meeting its objectives. Patton (2002) explains that after decisions are made on the type of evaluation, the evaluator must then decide which methods to use. It is a good idea to utilise more than one method to increase the reliability and validity of the study and its findings (Patton, 2002). Weiss (1998) suggests that the researcher should also give careful thought to the best time to conduct the evaluation, the types of questions to ask and any ethical issues that might be generated by the study. Wallace and Van Fleet (2001, pg. 4) explain that when planning an evaluation must have an ‘evaluation action plan’. Table 4.3 outlines these evaluation action plan questions, how each will be answered and their link to the design.

Table 4.3: Wallace and Van Fleet (2001) evaluation action plan questions

Wallace and Van Fleet (2001) evaluation action plan questions	Answers to action plan	Link to evaluative case study design
What is the problem?	We do not know if the programme can explain if the goals have been reached or not, but we can gain the perspectives of each stakeholder involved in the study. ‘Engage students to develop the knowledge, networks, and skills needed to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities’	Qualitative methods aimed at generating data to answer the research questions which are linked to the TA mentoring goal.
Why am I doing this?	It is worthwhile to investigate the views of the stakeholders involved to ultimately assess what if any, value it adds to the students.	O’Sullivan et al. (2017) and the whole school survey findings helped set the scene for a deeper study of this mentoring programme.
What exactly do I want to know?	How the programme is being operated? Has there been an impact on the student’s post-school plans?	Qualitative methods aimed at addressing whether the TA mentoring goal has been achieved and the research questions can be answered.

	What is the student's perception of the programme? How does Putnam's social capital theory explain the dimensions of a mentoring relationship?	
Does the answer already exist?	Anecdotal evidence on operationality already exists. Short O'Sullivan et al. (2017) paper on relationships and programme operation recommends further study.	Review of eight survey question data and follow up on O'Sullivan et al. (2017) recommendations.
How do I find out?	Review eight mentee survey questions and conduct qualitative interviews and focus groups.	Qualitative instruments and review of survey data
Who is involved?	Teachers Mentees (students) Mentors Principals TA Staff David Reilly (PhD Researcher)	As above
What is this going to cost?	TA investment of PhD students' fees.	N/A

	Researcher and research participant's time.	
What will I do with the data?	Used to evaluate programme, answer research questions if possible and give feedback to stakeholders	Present findings and conclusions to stakeholders
Where do I go from here?	Continue with research, and present findings, conclusions, and feedback to stakeholders when the report is complete.	Suggest courses of action, if any, from evaluation.

4.3.1. Research Approach

The research approach which informed this thesis was based on a case study approach, using cross-sectional qualitative research design methods, such as interviews and focus groups of various stakeholders involved in the mentoring programme. In the instance of this research, the phenomena being studied was the Trinity Access Mentoring programme. According to Yin (2009), a case study utilising a cross-sectional approach is commonly used in qualitative research. In this instance, the overarching case was the Trinity Access mentoring programme, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding. Each of the stakeholder groups represents a unique instance, or in Yin's terms a 'unit of analyses'. While the overarching case can set the stage for the research and provide broader context, such as the research questions, objectives and background information.

Philosophical Underpinnings

Seery (2023) explained that ontological positions can be deeply grounded beliefs about the world. These positions are highly persistent, pervasive and have strong influence on ideas of theory, approaches and methods (Seery, 2023). Guba (1990) explained that qualitative

researchers are philosophers in that ‘universal sense in which all human beings are guided by highly abstract principles.’ These principles combine beliefs about ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?), epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?), and methodology (How do we know the world or gain knowledge). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain that these beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it. They explain that the researcher is ‘bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which—regardless of ultimate truth or falsity—become partially self-validating’ (Bateson, 1972, p. 314). The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm (Guba, 1990, p. 17) or interpretive framework, a basic set of beliefs that guides action’. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) go on to explain that at the most general level, four major interpretive paradigm’s structure qualitative research: positivist and postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory) and feminist-post structural. The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), and it is within this paradigm that this research sits.

During my experience working with students as a secondary school teacher, I have observed that the students constructed their knowledge (Epistemology) of the social world based on their interactions with their peers, families and environment (constructivist paradigm) (Blaikie, 2005; Denzin, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I also share this view that social realities are created and constructed by people, along with Merriam’s (1998, p. 22) view ‘that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality’. According to Mogashoa (2014), constructivism is a theory of epistemological approach that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. As a theory of learning, constructivism is relevant in this study as the researcher wished to establish how mentees interacted with the mentoring programme. According to Kim (2006), social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context, in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Au (2005, p. 297) argues that in social constructivism, outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds will be improved as educators address the goal of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction

with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods and assessment. Mogashoa (2014) argues that knowledge is constructed or developed by humans.

This research is shaped around how people make sense of their reality, and their experiences of the mentoring programme as a social phenomenon. The qualitative research approach allowed each stakeholder (mentees, mentors, teachers, TA officers) to discuss their interpretation of the phenomena of mentoring, through interviews and focus groups. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), constructivism is a paradigm that ontologically emphasises, how an individual actively constructs their notions of reality through their cognition, resulting in the existence of multiple realities. Crotty's knowledge framework (1998) explained that the epistemological approach of constructivism can be aided through a case study approach, using methods such as interviews and focus groups. Crotty goes on to explain that these approaches help the participants explain their perspectives and viewpoints of the phenomena in question. Putnam's concept of social capital suggests that social interactions can be positive and shaped through a web of various types of relationships. It made sense to use a constructivist approach, as the aim of the programme was to help the mentees develop knowledge through their interactions with the mentors. Shannon-Baker (2023) explained that methodologically, constructivism is often associated with qualitative research.

My rationale for using a case study echoes other writers, such as Hammersley (2017), whose notion is that as a research approach, it is highly inclusive, as it allows you to traverse a wide range of social phenomena from individuals, to small groups, to organisations such as schools, prisons and geographical regions. Stake (2013) usefully explains that for multi-case study research, the cases need to be similar in some ways – perhaps a set of teachers or the study of a programme. According to Yin (2009), an embedded multiple-case design, is one in which different sub-units may be involved in each of the different cases and a range of instruments might be used for each sub-unit, and each is kept separate from each case. Yin (2009) sets out several general characteristics of when to use case studies, such as the type of research question being asked and the extent of control over behavioural events. Yin further explains, that when a typical question such as 'how' or 'why' is being asked and when the investigator has little/no control over the events, then a case study is a good approach. Yin also points out that when the general circumstances of a contemporary phenomenon, in this instance the TA

mentoring programme, are to be explored, a case study approach is useful. Yin (2009) describes a case study as an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (TA mentoring) within its 'real-life' context (the schools), especially when boundaries between the phenomenon and context cannot be drawn clearly or unambiguously. In this sense, the case study approach was also a good fit for the type of research questions being asked around the dynamic between context and phenomena. As mentioned above, the phenomena of TA Mentoring was explored in the context of five participating schools. The addition of other stakeholders such as mentors and TA staff allowed for a wide range of perspectives to be explored. The boundaries of the study cannot be drawn completely around the schools, as many mentoring sessions happened offsite and online. The phenomena occurred at times in the mentor's place of work or study and sometimes virtually. The TA staff were involved from afar in many instances, so they did not always fall into the location of the school, but were still involved in the operationalisation of the programme, mainly through recruitment and training.

In terms of the evaluative element of case studies, Bassey (2002) explains that these types of studies have their focus on the goal of making informed and evidence-based judgments about the efficacy or not of an educational programme or policy. Case studies are often used for evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a programme, event, and activity of one or more individuals (Creswell, 2013). According to Patton (2014), case studies have a distinctive place in evaluation research for they have at least four applications: a) they can be used to *explain* the causal links in real-life interventions which are too complex for survey or experiment; b) they can also be used to *describe* an intervention and the context in which it occurred; c) they can *illustrate* certain issues within an evaluation and d) they may also be used to *enlighten* situations where the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes (Patton, 2014). In this instance b) is most relevant as it describes the mentoring from the perspectives of the participants in the school context.

As outlined above, the research approach used a case study approach to try and develop an in-depth analysis of the mentoring programme and answer the research questions. These questions and the case were explored by a qualitative research approach. One critical advantage of qualitative methods in educational research is that the use of open-ended or

semi-structured questions and probing follow-ups gives the participants the chance to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.

Table 4.3.1 below outlines the five schools which make up this study.

Table 4.3.1 The five schools

Gender	Location	DEIS Indicator	Ethos	Enrolment (Total)	Teacher	Focus Group
Mixed	North County Dublin	✓	Inter-denominational	516	A	1
Female	West Dublin	✓	Catholic	156	B	2
Female	South Dublin	✓	Catholic	400	C	3
Mixed	North Dublin	✓	Catholic	166	D (and one Principal)	4
Male	South Dublin	✓	Catholic	579	E	5

The research was conducted (excluding the mentors) in five DEIS, TA-linked, secondary school settings as outlined above. These schools were situated in different parts of Dublin and had varying demographics and enrolments. One teacher from each school was interviewed and a principal from the mixed school in North Dublin. The teachers in each school helped select the focus groups at random. There is more detail on the sample in section 4.4. Each school had been involved with TA since the mentoring programme began in 2014. The study sought to have a wide selection of schools from the eleven original schools, to increase the sample of viewpoints. The case study approach allows for a rich depiction of the programme from a wide range of perspectives, but it also lends itself to making some evaluative judgments on elements of the programme.

Powell (2006) explains that there is no unanimity regarding evaluative research's name. It can be referred to as both *evaluation research* and *evaluative research*. According to Patton (2002), it refers to a research purpose rather than a specific method. It can also be referred to as programme evaluation, which Patton (2002) defines as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programmes, in order to make judgements about the programme, improve programme effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. It is also an assessment of the worth or merit of time, money, effort, and resources spent to achieve a goal. Evaluative research is like applied research, so it is intended to have a real-world effect. Wallace and Van Fleet (2001) comment that evaluation should be carefully planned, not occur by accident, and have a purpose that is goal orientated. Powell (2006) explains that for evaluations to be thorough, the following features are required: they are not any more complex than they need to be, they contribute to an organisation's planning effort, and they target multiple audiences and purposes. Powell (2006) and Weiss (1998) point out many benefits that evaluative research offers to an organisation, which include:

1. Gain insights into the programme and/or project and its operations.
 - a. Evaluation Research lets you understand what works and what does not, where we were, where we are and where we are headed. You can find out the areas of improvement and identify strengths.
2. Improve practice and policy.
3. Assess the effectiveness of the programme, test new ideas and choose the best alternatives.
4. Build capacity in the programme. Make corrections if necessary and provide feedback to all stakeholders involved.

Pointing out further characteristics of successful evaluations, Powell (2006) suggests that without the potential for some action, there is no need to evaluate. Evaluation must be more than descriptive; it must account for relationships among operational performance, users, and organisations. Powell (2006) also recommends that it should not be sporadic but be ongoing and provide a means for continual monitoring, diagnosis, and change. It should also

be dynamic, reflecting new knowledge and changes in the environment. Schwandt (2007) explains some of the critiques of evaluative research approaches are usually focused on outcomes, how outcomes are defined and who determines success etc. There are also other elements to keep in mind, including the need to go beyond findings, does it consider context and is the programme goal orientated.

4.4. The Sample and Sampling Strategy

In this next section, I explain how the qualitative data was generated. I will also outline work done on a wider TA survey. In terms of the ideal number of students that should be sampled, Adler and Adler (2012) advised graduate students to sample between 12 and 60, with 30 being the mean, and Ragin suggested the sample should be '20 for an M.A. thesis and 50 for a Ph.D. dissertation'. My total number of research participants was 44, as described in this section. The broad sampling size across participants in the mentoring programme helped increase trustworthiness and transferability, as the interview and focus group schedules for each group were designed with the same research questions in mind. The source of mentee and teacher data was from five of the eleven original TA-linked secondary schools in 2014. The programme expanded to 20 DEIS secondary schools in 2018, however, it seemed most reasonable to choose the sixth-year students from the original 11 schools that were part of programme, since it began in 2014. These were the students who had the most experience of the programme and were at the point of their second-level education where they were deciding upon what to do next. Five sixth-year students from each school were selected at random. The teacher provided a student list and five were randomly selected. The five schools were chosen at random, however, two schools could not participate in the study due to staff turnover. Therefore, I had to choose two more schools from the remaining six that were not initially selected. Each school had a TA liaison teacher, in most cases the guidance counsellor, and I contacted these with a description of my study and a request to participate. Negotiating access to the students and the schools was difficult, as they were under time constraints in an exam year. I worked around the schools' and students' schedules and in some instances, for teacher interviews, I called after school hours. The research sites were the schools in Dublin for the mentees, teachers and principals, and TCD for all the mentors and TA staff

involved in data generation. All mentors were contacted via email and those who agreed to participate were interviewed. The teachers involved in running the programme and principals in each of the five schools were invited to interview. All teachers took part in the interviewing process, but only one principal could commit to being interviewed. The Trinity Access staff involved in the setting up and running of the programme, were also invited to participate and three staff were able to take part. Table 4.5 below summarises the data generated in this study.

Table 4.4: Data Generated

	Number of Participants
Focus groups: Mentees	5 groups - 5 students (25 total)
Interviews: Mentors	10
Teachers	5
TA Programme administrators	2
Principals	1

The above was the data generated for this research and the sample that was collected. There was quantitative data generated by TA which helped shape some of the research questions which were discussed in chapter one and below in the following sub-section.

Whole school survey

The survey was issued to all year groups in all eleven schools. Some of the questions in the survey were shaped by questions that had arisen from previous work by O’Sullivan et al. (2017) and to gather wider numerical data on the effect of the mentoring programme on the students. The whole school survey had eight questions on mentoring and was part of a wider survey on all TA-related activities, as well as demographic and other academic-related questions. The mentoring questions were focused on mentoring relationships and the impact of the programme on decision-making. These were on a 5-point Likert scale, multiple choice options and a check-box response type. This offered the benefit of standardised and open

responses on the mentoring programme from c.65% of the sixth-year population in all eleven schools. The use of the tablets made the questionnaire paperless and quicker to analyse. According to Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2011), a simple rule of thumb can be applied to choosing a type of survey: the larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be, and vice versa the smaller the number. In this instance, the total number of responses from the sixth-year students across the five schools was approximately 360.

4.5. Research Methods

This section will discuss the methods used which were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Each of the five schools operationalised the mentoring programme in different ways; this I discuss in detail in the findings chapter. The use of a variety of data generation methods helped with constructing an explanation as to how the mentoring programme operated in each school. Kvale (1996) remarks that the interview allows the participants, both interviewer and interviewees, to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live. According to McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl (2018), the qualitative research interview is an important data generation tool for a variety of methods within the broad spectrum of education research. Yin (2018) says an interview is not an ordinary, everyday conversation. For example, in contrast to everyday conversation, it has a specific purpose, often question-based, with the questions being asked by the interviewer. The responsibility to set up the interview and make the situation as comfortable as possible for the interviewee falls on the interviewer. McGrath et al. (2018) explain that if the interviewer does his/her job well (builds rapport and asks questions in an acceptable manner), and if the respondent is sincere and well-motivated, accurate data may be obtained. Whilst it is not always guaranteed that data is accurate, a wide number of groups were involved that helped with data validity. They continue to explain that there are many purposes for an interview such as a job interview, sample respondents' opinions or to generate data. They explain that although each situation may vary and the motives for taking part may differ, the common denominator is the transaction that takes place between those seeking information on the part of one and those supplying information on the other. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the structured interview is useful when

the researcher is aware of what she does not know and therefore can frame questions whereas the unstructured interview is useful when the researcher is not aware of what she does not know and therefore relies on the respondents to tell her. In this instance, I knew a considerable amount about the mentoring programme in some schools and nothing in others. The open-ended nature of the unstructured interviews is useful for generating more in-depth data from each direct and indirect participant in the mentoring programme, however, keeping the answers guided towards the research questions is required before tailoring the interview schedules. Therefore, the probing questions that I added to my interview schedule helped prompt me if I needed to guide the participant back on track with what was originally asked.

4.5.1. Interviews

The rationale for using interviews as an instrument was to gain more detailed responses from the stakeholders involved in the mentoring programme. It also allowed me to probe participants on their responses. The topics and questions were decided upon before the interviews, however a semi-structured approach proved useful as it helped keep the questions and conversation tailored towards answering the research questions. On the back of O'Sullivan et al., (2017) and the whole school survey findings research questions were developed. From these, various draft iterations of interview schedules were developed. When I was happy with the interview schedule design, I piloted an interview with one research participant from the teachers, mentors, principal and TA staff member not involved in this research. Yin (2003) claimed that a pilot study helps refine data collection plans concerning 'both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed' (Yin, 2003, p. 79). The content of the interview schedules did not change drastically following the pilots, but the pace and flow of the interviews did, and it allowed me to focus on where I needed to probe for more depth and not take up too much time on one area of questioning.

The interview schedule was emailed to each participant in advance to help them think about their answers in more detail in advance to enrich the conversation. To aid complete flexibility in the interviews and enable more depth in the conversation, I added additional questions

and probing questions alongside the main questions for each section. The probing questions came in useful here, for example, when I was asking mentors what their favourite aspect of the mentoring was, I could probe with a how come question afterwards to aid the depth of the answer. More details on how the schedule is designed and a list of the main, additional, and probing questions can be found in Appendix B onwards.

4.5.2. Focus Groups

Focus groups are a useful method to discover how groups think and feel about a topic and why they hold certain views. They can create a deeper understanding of quantitative data and they are cost and time effective. Some individuals find this format of small group contribution an easier one in which to offer their views, and other people's comments can trigger their memories (Stafford, Laybourn & Hill 2003). However, focus groups can be difficult to analyse and there can be challenges in encouraging some people to participate (Creswell 2003). Williams et al. (2011) remark that developing a strong rapport in focus groups is just as important as it is in an interview setting. In this study, the researcher used an icebreaker, where each participant introduced themselves and told us something unique about themselves. Group discussions of this kind can influence the data, as students may feel pressured to offer up certain responses, or indeed may not contribute at all (Reay, 2006). Hill et al. (1996) suggest interviews lead to more in-depth exploration of feelings. I explored the possibility of conducting interviews with each student, but their teachers felt that this would lead to reduced quality of data. They felt that the students would be less likely to respond openly to me as they did not know me so doing it in focus groups was a better option, especially if a randomly selected student was very shy or nervous. The structure of the focus groups helped as on some occasions there was a more talkative student who would respond first, and this helped spark the conversation among the rest of the group. If I had conducted interviews, it would also have been much more time-consuming and could have possibly led to data not being generated, or poorly generated from quieter teenagers.

Focus group sessions generally consist of four to ten participants, who share their thoughts and experiences on a set of topics with a researcher (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). Just like

the interview schedules, the topics and questions were decided upon before the focus groups and were tailored towards answering the research questions. When I was happy with the focus group schedule design, I piloted the focus group with a randomly selected group of students. The focus group schedule was emailed to each participant in advance to help them think about their answers in more detail in advance to enrich the conversation. More details on how the schedule is designed and a list of the main, additional and probing questions can be found in Appendices B-E. Participants for the focus groups were selected randomly using the cooperating teacher within each school. The teacher and researcher worked together to agree on times that would suit the students' timetables. It was made clear to the students, both by the teacher and researcher, that their participation in both focus groups was optional and there would be no negative consequences arising from choosing not to participate. Also, it was important to take into consideration that most of the respondents were adolescents. Lyon (2014) recommends that interviews with children should try to employ open-ended or semi-structured questions, to avoid a single-answer type of response. The additional and probing questions were added to avoid this issue as much as possible.

4.6. Data Analysis Strategy

The method used for analysing the data in this research is known as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), there are many ways to approach thematic analysis (e.g., Alhojailan, 2012; Boyatzis, 1998; Javadi & Zarea, 2016). The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes, i.e., patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and to use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. Thematic analysis is often associated with a more flexible or predominantly inductive approach to analysing qualitative data. It allowed for the search for Putnam's social capital concepts appearing in emergent themes from the data generated. Thematic analysis is compatible with a range of qualitative research paradigms such as constructivist and interpretive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Another reason thematic analysis was more suitable to this research, was due to its suitability to a study that seeks to understand complex, multifaceted

phenomena rather than a more structured approach such as framework analysis with its tendency for a more systematic and structured approach to analysing data (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017). The flexibility and adaptability of thematic analysis suited this study, due to its accommodation of exploring multiple interpretations, perspectives and realities of the TA mentoring programme. Thematic analysis aligns with the idea that meaning is socially constructed and can vary across individuals and contexts.

The approach for analysing data followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2018) six steps to carrying out reflexive thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke first articulated these phases to thematic analysis in 2006 and refined them in 2018. They explain that the main difference in the tool in 2006 and 2018 is recognising the need for reflexive engagement with the dataset as opposed to phases following a rigid process. Braun and Clarke (2019) describe thematic analysis as a reflexive, recursive engagement with the dataset, to produce a robust analysis. The six steps are outlined in Table 4.6 below, along with a description of each step and how it was done in the study.

Table 4.6: Braun and Clarke's (2018) 6 phases of reflexive thematic analysis and link to this study's data analysis strategy

Phase	Description of the process, according to Braun & Clarke (2018)	Each phase of thematic analysis in this study
<i>1. Familiarisation with the data</i>	Transcribing data, reading data, and noting initial ideas.	Each interview and focus group were transcribed, read, and re-read with notes and observations made.
<i>2. Generating initial codes</i>	Coding interesting features of the data across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	Throughout my transcripts, notes were refined to generate codes for the data – see Figure 4.7.1 below.
<i>3. Searching for themes</i>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering	Codes from various transcriptions were collated

	all data relevant to each potential theme.	into potential themes – see Figure 4.7.2 which outlines some of the teacher interview codes being sorted into potential themes.
4. <i>Reviewing themes</i>	Checking if the themes work about the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.	A thematic map was developed across all stakeholders. Figure 4.7.3 is a sample of this on the student themes.
5. <i>Defining and naming themes</i>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	Draft themes were discussed with my supervisor and ongoing refining took place to generate clear names and definitions for themes
6. <i>Writing up</i>	Final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	Chapters 5 and 6 outline the findings and highlight the themes whereas Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the findings and their relevance to the research questions and convergence and/or divergence to existent literature and concluding remarks in Chapter 8.

Table 4.6 above provides an overview of the data analysis process that took place in this study. After each interview and focus group, the recordings were transcribed *verbatim*, and notes were taken on any key talking points. The transcriptions were read, re-read and compared with initial notes. Further notes were taken, and observations of the transcription were made.

Figure 4.6.1 below offers a screenshot of one transcript and notes in the column. Each of Braun and Clarke's (2018) steps guided the analysis of the data but albeit in steps, there was movement back and forth between them. For example, after I would make my notes from one focus group, I would often compare these with the next to assess whether there were many similarities or differences between mentees in different schools. I made notes of why there might be differences and discussed these with my supervisor and at presentations. This process helped deepen the understanding of the nuanced situation in each school. When I interviewed teachers, sometimes this added more context to the mentee focus groups. Thus, building a clearer picture of mentoring in each school. These reflections and notes helped summarise the mentoring experience in each school and helped outline initial codes, patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies in the information being collected (Miles & Huberman, 2002). Any observations of Putnam's concept of social capital were noted as the data was analysed. There was plenty of evidence of Putnam appearing in the voices of the stakeholders but not as linearly as was expected. This is discussed in detail in the findings and discussion chapters.

Figure 4.6.1: Screenshot of some interview transcripts & and initial coding process

that was a secure system and it was important. But with our learning from that was not too distant than the learning from most mentoring programmes and then the virtual kind of communities were far less developed and it was a really boring interface to be honest and that kind of held it back so we didn't really have the depth of information exchanged a face to face would provide for but we couldn't do face to face interactions because even the Garda Vetting didn't exist ,you couldn't have one to one with between secondary school students and staff from a bank at that time. So we discontinued that programme we didn't feel like there was value for money it was quite expensiv to pay for the software from the UK company so we didn't continue with it but that was the first time mentoring, it was e-mentoring at that time. It was the first time that we were exploring the whys and where fors and the hows of mentoring.

I: Where did the idea come from Kathleen?

P: We were looking with students and I suppose fundamentally we all understood the concept of one important person or one important conversation that could trigger a movement in the right direction, a movement in a positive direction. It was all about access to information that you see in some communities. Information that is so readily available and so omnipresent in other households and communities and largely absent in others so it was really an attempt to bridge that divide.

I: So that probably leads on nicely to my next question of which were the initial objectives of setting up the mentoring with the students and have these objectives stayed the same or changed?

P: The document that I sent you kind of explores what we decided to do and we looked at both distal and proximal mentoring so more regular interactions with one to one or small groups of students combined with TCD undergraduate students and then some more distal experiences where you have like a guest speaker coming in as well because that is still mentoring. Mentoring comes in all different ways it is not exclusively one to one, we found that about five interactions would be the minimum for impact and we wanted both undergraduate students to interact with second level students and for second level students to build their capacity as mentors to assist with second year students in St. Josephs and we also wanted parental involvement as well so that they would be inspired or mentored as well but I suppose really was helping to create a college-going culture in the school. That was one of the broad goals and to ensure that students information advice and guidance as well as in relation to college courses or courses in further education in Trinity. There was information on student finance, how

DR

David Reilly November 05, 2020

e-mentoring nit as affective as face to face + expensive to run

1st time to explore whys, where's and how's of mentoring

[Reply](#)
[Resolve](#)

DR

David Reilly

Where idea for mentoring came from:

1. one important person concept
2. Bridge information divide

DR

David Reilly

Operational decisions at outset – small ratios, one-to-one, guest speakers

Parental involvement

DR

David Reilly

A main aim: Create college going culture in schools

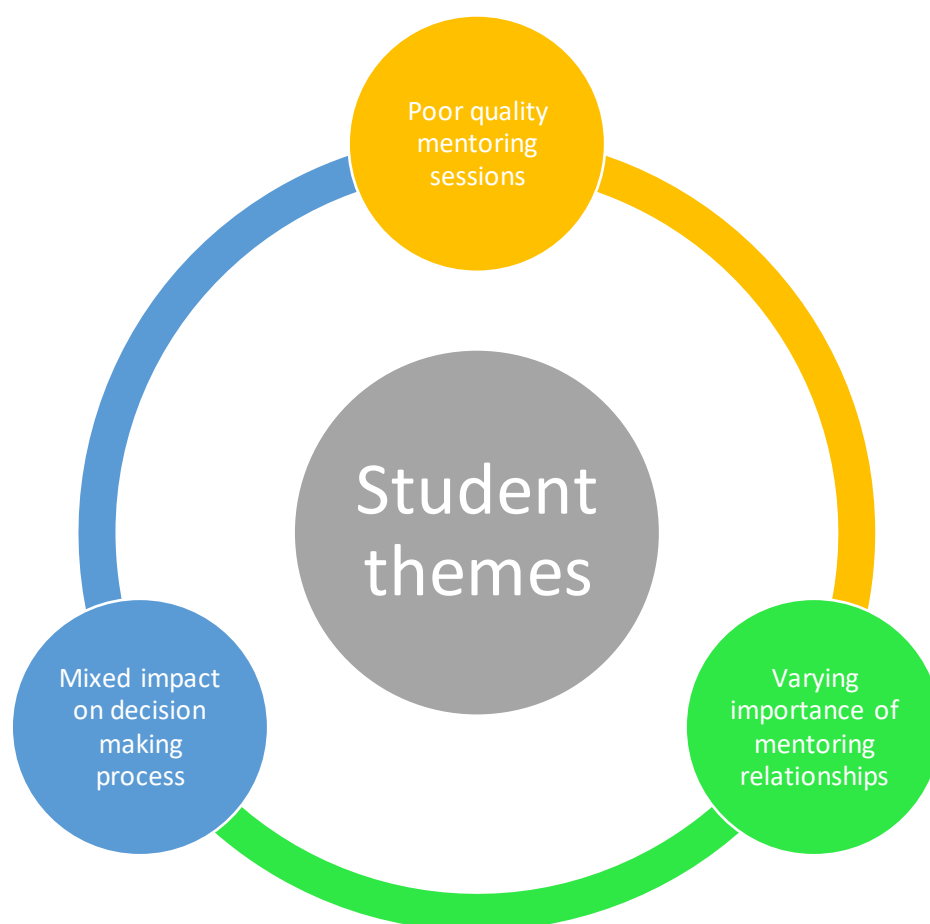
The coding process followed an idea outlined by Lewin and Silver (2014), which included coding which was guided by the theoretical framework and the research questions; (deductive) and coding which was open to new themes and ideas emerging (inductive). Relevant phrases and responses from each participant were grouped into categories, for example, all teachers alluded to the challenging nature of the programme but how worthwhile they found it. These responses were grouped and collated. Patterns emerged throughout the data, and this helped generate codes and themes. This was done using a combination of notetaking, in-depth discussions with my supervisor and using software such as Microsoft Word, Excel and NVivo. Step 4 – 6 outlined in Table 4.6 was a back-and-forth process with a lot of drafting, re-drafting and refining of potential themes. Figures 4.6.2 and 4.6.3 highlight some of the drafting that took place. Several stages of this finding and naming of themes took place across all participant groups, until the themes for each participant group were identified.

Figure 4.6.2: Screenshot of the development of potential themes

Potential themes

- *Teacher Involvement – “Challenging but worth it”*
 - Personally, challenging but life changing
 - Need a bigger team to spread workload to make sustainable
 - Need others involved, a team of organisers/teachers/helpers, replying to good will to frequently
 - So many extras with TA21 that falling between stools
 - Teacher involvement helps build bonding capital as they see the need for the extra support for children from backgrounds not as advantaged as themselves (**Helping to build bonding capital where bridging is the norm?**)
 - *Ideal type of mentoring – “Differs between Junior and Senior Cycle”*
 - **Junior:**
 - Relationship & aspiration building, allowing students to dream and giving them opportunities to see ‘outside worlds’ – ‘Bridge’ communities and build bridging capital
 - Smaller groups very important for younger students
 - Same mentor for 2nd and 3rd year if possible
 - Links with businesses works well as brings students out of usual environment, lets them come out of predefined school roles, try new personas and dream
 - “Let me prove myself to you, earn your respect” – fascination with people outside their communities – helped kids realise others weren’t snobs and break down barriers – **Cultural exchange type of Bridging capital?**
 - **Senior:**
 - College mentors needed here (TAP students worked well) – more
-

Figure 4.6.3: Screenshot of thematic map development on student themes



4.7. Utilising various data sources

Utilising data sources from various stakeholders enables a wider range of perspectives on the area of research. Although the primary data generated in this study was qualitative in nature, it utilised findings from the TA whole school survey and O'Sullivan et al. (2017) to scope out work already done in the area. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), combining qualitative and quantitative approaches is 'in many cases, a no-brainer'. Data triangulation is the process of using contrasting sources of information e.g., from different people, at different times and in different locations (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Triangulation is broadly defined as the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. It is a method used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings (Noble & Heale,

2019). To research various perspectives of the mentoring programme, data was generated using instruments such as interviews and focus groups.

Greene et al. (1989) put forward five key purposes for mixing methods: to triangulate and seek convergence, to complement and seek elaboration and clarification, to develop the research further, to initiate paradoxes and fresh perspectives, and to expand and extend the breadth and range of inquiry. Denscombe (2008) similarly identified mixed-methods research as being used to, inter alia, improve the accuracy of data, provide a more complete picture, and develop the analysis and extend on initial findings. According to Noble and Heale (2019), triangulation is also an effort to help explore and explain complex human behaviour using a variety of methods to offer a more balanced explanation to readers. They go on to say that exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of reality. Utilising various sources of data helps provide a better understanding of the problem that one or another may not do by itself (Creswell, 2014).

4.8. Trustworthiness & Transferability

There are many times during a piece of research where validity can be a concern such as the design, data gathering, data-analysis and data-reporting stages. Trustworthiness and transferability are an important aspect of qualitative research. There are methodological strategies associated with ensuring both. These are outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely - truth-value, neutrality, consistency and applicability, which have the potential to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and the credibility of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), truth-value acknowledges that there are multiple realities. The researcher's experiences and beliefs can create methodological bias, and there is an understanding that the researchers will accurately present the participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Loxley (2010, p. 12) points out that researchers are required to explain how they work with the various issues at all stages and in all aspects of research. Yin (2014) and Merriam (1998) assert that trustworthiness and transferability need to be addressed from the onset of the study and with this in mind, each phase of this study was planned, reflected on and evaluated

thoroughly (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Nolan (2018) outlined a checklist developed by Tong et al. (2007) who devised criterion which acts as a guide for reporting on qualitative studies, such as interviews and focus groups. It aims to increase trustworthiness and requires the researcher to report on aspects of the research, such as student methods, context of the study, findings, analysis and trustworthiness. However, Nolan (2018) explains that there is no evidence to suggest that following a tick-box framework such as Tong et al. (2007) increases trustworthiness and transferability and continues to use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) strategies. As such this study did likewise.

- **Defining:** A qualitative interview study, with a review of prior quantitative data and a short paper by O'Sullivan et al. (2017)
- **Being selective:** Multiple stakeholders across the mentoring programme and specific in identifying the participants, site, and questions to be explored.
- **The method of data collection:** Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
- **Conducting a pilot study** (p.103), it was important to include a pilot of the instruments before the actual project began. This was done in one school, among the students and teachers. A TA staff member and mentor also let me pilot the instruments with them before the study began.
- **The analysis process:** Thematic analysis was rigorously undertaken.
- **Outlining the study's limitations** (p.122) is considered a powerful tool in maintaining intellectual honesty and supporting transferability in research (Yin, 2014).

Following Nolan's (2018) detailed explanation of consistency, there was a similar data collection procedure for each participant, and a consistent set of initial questions for each interview undertaken (Yin, 1998). I read and checked transcripts for mistakes. I remained cognisant to ensure that the definitions of codes or their application during the coding process were strictly adhered to. I was aware that the interviews could not provide a definitive 'reality and are more about performances than the notion of an authentic self' (Denzin, 2001, p.6). This included my performance. In this knowledge, in a bid to address truth value, there was 'a critical hesitancy' in accepting the data at face value, and I remained open to contrary evidence (Alvesson, 2003).

This whole process acknowledges that as the researcher I chose the research approach, the sample and the data-collection method. I conducted the analysis and made decisions concerning coding, defining and refining themes, all of which were influenced by my paradigm. The study began with this understanding and recognised that my experiences and lived reality could influence the research process.

4.9. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval from the TCD School of Education Ethics Committee was sought and approved on October 8th, 2018. Qualitative research involves trying to interpret and faithfully represent what meaning exists in the lives of participants. As a researcher, this is a huge responsibility and brings with it several ethical considerations (Creswell, 2014; Robson, 2002). It is incumbent upon the researcher to not only anticipate but actively address these considerations. The qualitative element was carried out through a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews. There were ethical considerations to consider when carrying out data generation in a setting with children and this required permission being sought by the relevant parents/guardians, gatekeepers and children themselves to carry out the work, which can be viewed in the appendices. Participants were invited to be involved in the study and could refuse or drop out at any stage. The research objectives were shared with the participants at the onset of their involvement. At all stages throughout the process, participants were clear on why they were involved and were always encouraged to make suggestions and amendments to questions asked. All transcripts between the students, mentors, teachers, peers, and parents were recorded faithfully and stored securely. Before publication, findings were shared with the participants to see if they agreed or had anything more to add. As some of the participants are under 18 permissions were not only sought from them but also from their parents/guardians. All information gathered was kept anonymous and no real names of students, teachers or schools were used.

4.10. Limitations

Mentoring programmes for sixth-year students vary in each school, as the time available for non-curricular activities decreases as students enter the final year of their second-level studies. This proved problematic as some schools tended to operate informal mentoring programmes such as teacher-to-student mentoring. In this format, teachers are assigned a few students whom they meet and talk to in an impromptu format. This reduced the number of schools I could generate data with. I originally had planned to do a comparison study of three schools, the highest progression school to higher education, the middle and the lowest. If one school had a vastly different mentoring programme from another, then this would make comparisons more difficult. However, this comparison was not possible as two of the three schools did not run the programme with the sixth-year students in a formal fashion. In terms of evaluating the wide spectrum of variables that impact informed choice, which makes up the core of the TA mentoring programme objective, gaining access to family and friends for data generation was explored. However, there were issues with accessibility to parents/guardians in each school. The availability to interview each student individually was also an issue. The time it would take to interview 25 students was a problem for their schedules, it was easier to release all in one batch that suited them rather than individually. This barrier required me to interview the students in groups. I had also considered an ethnographic research approach, but because of the inconsistent nature of sessions with the sixth-year groups, this proved problematic. Various research approaches were considered but due to time constraints and variation of sessions from school to school, it was harder than expected to carry out any cross-comparison and culture of programme work.

4.11. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed many of the methodological issues for this research project. To begin with, it recapped the research questions of the project which focus on investigating the impact the mentoring programme has on sixth-year decision-making processes around their post-secondary school education, how the programme is operationalised and what a successful mentoring relationship entails. The research questions were designed by findings

from the whole school survey and the O’Sullivan et al. (2017) study which recommended further research into mentoring relationships and operationality. The theoretical lens that this project used to frame the study was the tentative visual model of mentoring developed in Chapter 3. It also outlined the main research approach that was employed – a qualitative approach using focus groups among five groups of sixth-year students in Dublin-based secondary schools, interviews with teachers, principals, and TA staff. The schools were selected at random. TA worked with eleven schools and 5 schools from this were selected at random. Difficulties here included getting access to each student for multiple individual interviews, so I used focus groups instead. Issues around positionality, ethics and limitations of the study were also discussed. The next chapter will share the findings from the data generation stage of this research.

Chapter 5: The Teacher and Mentee Perspective of Trinity Access Mentoring

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study on the Trinity Access Mentoring programme was to explore issues such as:

- How Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital helps explain relationships between mentees and mentors.
- The organisation of the programme.
- How sixth-year students in five TA-linked post-primary schools perceived the programme and if it affected their post-school aspirations and expectations.

The first section gives an overview of the characteristics of the five schools involved in the study. This is an important area to highlight as characteristics such as geography had a very influential part to play in the operational aspect of the programme. The following sections present the key findings from the five teachers and five focus groups with five sixth-year students in each group.

Trinity College Dublin's Access office rolled out the TA21 mentoring programme in 2013-14 to 11 linked secondary schools, after an initial pilot with four linked schools. These 11 schools all have varying characteristics in terms of gender, location, and size. Considering the mentoring programme was being initiated and managed by TCD and many of the mentors that were recruited for the programme came from the TCD student population, the location of the schools strongly impacted the ease of logistics for mentor availability. More will be discussed on this throughout the chapter. Table 5.1 below outlines the characteristics of the five schools chosen at random from the 11 schools participating in the programme. There were also five teachers in total; one from each participating school was interviewed. A randomly selected group of five sixth-year students were chosen by their teacher to participate in a focus group.

Table 5.1: Characteristics of the five schools involved in this study.

Gender	Location	DEIS Indicator	Ethos	Enrolment (Total)	Teacher	Focus Group
Mixed	North County Dublin	✓	Interdenominational	516	A	1
Female	West Dublin	✓	Catholic	156	B	2
Female	South Dublin	✓	Catholic	400	C	3
Mixed	North Dublin	✓	Catholic	166	D	4
Male	South Dublin	✓	Catholic	579	E	5

Each of the teachers recruited for this study were from these five schools. The sample size represented teachers from 45% of the schools where the mentoring programme was being run. Each teacher was the main person responsible for organising the logistics for their school. In some cases, there was more than one teacher involved in organising TA activities. Variables such as where the school was situated and the student population size had an impact on mentor recruitment, number of mentor sessions, mentor retention and availability of mentors from similar backgrounds. This is something I will allude to in the presentation of findings as they become relevant.

5.2. Teachers: The mentoring programme and its impact on their students

‘The programme is great in theory but in practice, it needs work on the operational aspects.’
(Teacher A)

Teacher involvement in the mentoring programmes ranged from organising the logistics around setting up each session i.e., mentor recruitment, matching mentors and mentees, liaising with Trinity Access staff so the correct material was being used for each year group, to mentoring students and facilitating research on the programme. Much of their roles focused on logistics and administration of the programme. Without the teacher's work, it would have been difficult for the mentoring to take place. Garnering their input into the programme is an important part of this piece. I interviewed 5 teachers from the 11 schools participating in the programme.

This section will introduce and discuss the themes from the teacher interviews. These major and minor themes are conceptualised at the beginning of the chapter. The teachers had a lot to discuss around the mentoring programme and this section highlights these reflections and suggestions.

The following table presents a summary of the thematic analysis of the data generated from the responses from the teacher sample. The table illustrates four main themes, respectively: 1) Programme involvement; 2) Ideal mentoring; 3) Sustainability; and 4) Projected future selves. Each theme can be further categorised into several sub-themes that in turn indicate a particular meaning or meanings held by the teachers concerning the mentoring programme.

Table 5.2: Teacher participants' views on the mentoring programme: A thematic analysis.

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning: Mentoring as...
Programme involvement	Empathy led; Altruism driven;	Engagement; experience; enhancement. Chance for their students to build wider relationships
Ideal mentoring	Age-dependent; relationship building; senior level pragmatism;	Empowerment, engagement, relationships, feedback; variation dependent on age;

Sustainability issues	Need for professionalism, Improvement of programme. Worth it but unrealised potential;	Worthwhile but work is needed to refine; a chance to understand experience;
Students projected future selves	Decision-making impact mixed. Higher education: Needs to be broader. Wider web of impact on decisions. Working class risk aversion. The desire for socially beneficial career paths.	Opportunity exploration. Wider breadth of options. Desire to break the mould. Fear of putting family under financial strain. Fear of identity loss. Desire to give back to community

Theme 1: 'Despite a lot of extra work I enjoy my involvement with Trinity and the mentoring programme.' Mentoring: Programme involvement

The first questions put to all teachers interviewed were about their involvement in the wider project and then in mentoring specifically. All the teachers began with a chronology of their involvement, before stating how the mentoring programme and their involvement with TCD-related programmes became a 'very heavy extra workload.' However, they found involvement with the mentoring programme challenging but worthwhile. The intrinsic value of being involved in the mentoring programme was the main driving force for putting extra work into the programme. They were 'acutely aware of the impact positive role models were having on their students.' However, running the programme provided a lot of challenges for them. The main challenge was organising the scheduling and administrative aspects of the

sessions. Teachers interviewed saw this as quite burdensome without the assistance of other staff in their schools. In the beginning, it was okay for them to manage as it was just being done with one group, 2nd years, but as the years moved on and it was rolled out to the other year groups, it became a lot more time-consuming to organise. The issue of recruiting mentors, matching them with students and organising schedules to align between students and mentors proved quite problematic. Four out of the five teachers were also guidance counsellors and they had to attend to their day jobs, as well as what many in their schools had seen as an 'extra' duty. These four teachers explained that goodwill and altruism were their main motivating factors in operating the mentoring programme. They also relied on the mentor's goodwill and altruism in making the programme work. According to the teachers, the programme's logistics became less challenging when they had support from other teachers. The time allocated to TA activities became especially challenging for the teachers to manage, as it often ran into their own time outside of school. Despite many of these challenges, the overarching sentiment towards TA activities and mentoring was that it was worth it. However, they stated that if they were to start again, they would do many aspects differently such as garnering support from colleagues and varying the approach by age group (more on both further in this findings chapter) but would still partake in the programme.

The aspect of support from other teachers came up a lot in the interviews when the teachers were discussing the programme workload. Garnering support from colleagues proved to be a major element in whether the programme was deemed a 'success or not.' They all mentioned that 'It is the cross-school community buy-in that is needed most.' For example, one teacher said, 'It is about trying to get high levels of engagement across the board.'

What the TA21 programme offers the school management is a framework in which to put the various initiatives, which they saw as a positive, as it helped them manage their workloads. For example, another teacher explained,

The other good thing about it that I did not mention was a lot of things have happened in the school and the TA21 programme has given us a framework to put them into. It gives it more status. Management can be under pressure around this or that and if we can put it into this framework, which is built into whatever planning, it gives it that recognition and makes it sustainable (Teacher C).

The teachers discussed how being involved in the programme helped them ‘get to know their students better’, they became ‘more aware of the need for extra support for children from backgrounds not as advantaged as themselves.’ Usually, teacher-student relationships can be a type of bridging capital relationship as the teachers help students achieve academically. However, the bond that can develop between teachers and students becomes especially relevant here as teachers start to put themselves into the shoes of the students, as they become more familiar with their circumstances. Teacher C explained this eloquently below.

Teachers who have not had the challenges a lot of our students have, do not realise it is because most of us are very advantaged and we were brought up knowing we were going to college. So, most teachers coming in have the same idea, so it is important that the teachers are part of this as well, in being exposed to the same things we want the students to be exposed to (Teacher C).

Theme 2: ‘The most suitable mentoring approach varies by age group’. Ideal mentoring approach

When questioned about the ideal type of mentoring, the teachers had lots of views. They reported that they had tried many different forms of mentoring, such as older students mentoring younger students, parents mentoring students, past pupils, college students, teachers and professionals acting as mentors with a wide variety of qualities among each type. The main finding was that an ideal type of mentoring for junior cycle students was different to the preferred type among senior cycle students. Junior cycle students preferred mentoring approaches that focused on ‘relationship and aspiration building where being matched with mentors with different characteristics was helpful.’ The teachers also agreed that ‘smaller groups are very important for younger students as well as having the same mentor for 2nd and 3rd year if possible.’ There was also a convincing argument for local business-linked mentoring put forward by the school that carried out this type of mentoring. The teacher in the school which was linked with a local business, had high praise for their ability to overcome the logistical barriers faced by other schools. The link with the business provided mentors, all employees and a stable calendar of sessions with the mentees. These types of relationships helped pair mentees with mentors from different social backgrounds

and were still reported as being a success, from each stakeholder involved. There was evidence of bridging capital here whilst bonding also occurred but across social groups, rather than just within them, as Putnam described it.

In an ideal junior cycle mentoring programme, the main areas of importance that the teachers suggested included the importance of 'relationship and aspiration building.' 'Building relationships and helping with the students' aspirations' was the most important aspect of mentoring for the younger students, according to the teachers. The teachers also wanted to see that the mentoring was 'allowing students to dream and giving them opportunities to see outside worlds' (Teacher A). They see it as crucial that the students were able to 'bridge' communities and build relationships with people from backgrounds different to their own.

The students seemed to really enjoy the curiosity of meeting people they perceived to be different to themselves. However, to do this the younger students needed the space to get to know their mentors and small groups allowed for this more than larger groups. The links with businesses worked well as they helped bring students out of their usual environment, it let them come out of predefined school roles, and try new personas and dreams (Teacher A).

For example, one teacher explained this relationship-building in a way that 'also broke down barriers.' They felt the students were saying 'let me prove myself to you, earn your respect.' They felt that the students had a fascination with people outside of their communities - 'it helped kids realise people from more affluent backgrounds to them were not snobs and helped break down mental barriers of perception.'

Another important aspect of successful junior cycle mentoring, according to most of the teachers, was the need for 'smaller groups for younger students.'

The students felt more comfortable in groups which were 2-3 in size so they could get to know their mentor more easily and try out personas that may not have been possible, or more intimidating, in larger groups. Students got to know their mentors better in smaller groups and felt at ease talking in front of a smaller group of their friends, or not talking and just listening when they felt like it (Teacher C).

A recurrent sub-theme from the teachers was ‘the importance of continuity of mentors as it takes to build a strong relationship.’ A strong relationship according to the teachers is one that has ‘trust, commitment, and honesty from both parties.’ The point was made ‘that younger students need consistency from the people around them, and it can be hard for them to build strong relationships with people who float in and out of their lives in short spaces of time.’

Having the same mentor for two academic years helped the students not just build up a strong relationship with the mentors, but also make progress in working through various elements of future planning, getting to know themselves and trying out different personas which the teachers noticed the younger students liked to do. Too often the students had a regular change in mentor, and this negatively affected their interest in the programme and questioned the worthwhile nature of partaking in the initiative (Teacher D).

Various teachers discussed the lack of consistency and commitment of the mentors. This seemed like a difficult issue for the schools to fix. According to Teacher E, being able to get the mentors to commit to at least six sessions was a crucial aspect of building a strong relationship with the students.

I could see, going in with the mentors, they had six sessions of mentoring, and I could see the different levels of engagement with the students from ‘Aw I could not care less, who is this?’ to ‘When are they coming back again?’. Then getting to session five or six the use of names like ‘Kenny’s coming in today’ or ‘Shanes coming in’ or ‘he’s with me’ or ‘I was with him before,’ because maybe the mentoring got swapped around for different reasons (Teacher E).

In the senior cycle, the teachers found that the students preferred a ‘more practical approach with college mentors and professionals being useful at this stage.’ They prefer to ‘focus on career mechanics, decision validation and reassurance i.e., study skills and figuring out the logistics of their next step.’

Whereas in sixth year they just need some validation, they do not need the full amount of it but one good evening, around that January time would have been ideal. They

could have looked at their study timetable for their mocks and for the people who did not have a study timetable, they could have helped others to design one (Teacher A).

The area of decision validation is an issue that appears in the mentor and student interviews.

Many of the students worry about whether they are making the right or wrong decision about what is best for them after school. This can be a challenging time for the students so having an outside opinion, from usually people closer to their age than teachers or parents, can help reinforce their choices and reaffirm their post-school decision-making process (Teacher E).

The students also preferred to be matched with mentors 'via interests and have very structured sessions.' This was an interesting finding as it suggests that a more tailored approach from year group to year group would be preferred over a general one-size-fits-all type arrangement. However, there were overlaps in what would be ideal across the participants and that is for consistent sessions, dependable mentors and smaller groups. The teachers reflected on the conversations they had with their student's pre- and post-mentoring sessions and mentioned the need of the students for practical advice rather than aspiration and relationship building. This is an important distinction going forward with mentoring and is an easily achieved goal for programme administrators, mentors, and teachers alike.

Study skills, a college focus and helping with logistics of what, where and how, is what is important to students at this stage of their journey. These aims are better achieved if they are matched via interests and the sessions are very focused and structured (Teacher A).

The matching process of mentoring is a major difference from the junior cycle 'where students like to be matched with someone with different characteristics from themselves and can try out different personas.' Teacher C remarks how her younger students 'like to try out various versions of how they might see themselves in the future whereas older students seem much more business-like in their approach to non-curricular related activities.'

It is useful for the students to be paired with someone who is pursuing a career or course that is like what they want to do so that the sessions can be structured, focused, and have clear objectives (Teacher C).

Some students reported to their teachers that the sessions can lack structure and can be repetitive. 'This is obviously a drain on the student's time if they're repeating exercises that reduce their learning time.' (Teacher B)

The students also mentioned to their teachers the lack of sessions on the variety of options after school which many students are interested in, such as PLCs, apprenticeships, trades and job opportunities. This also came up in the student interviews, therefore this is an area that the mentoring programme could look to address in future iterations of the programme.

The teachers and students worried about concentrating all their efforts on CAO applications. This was especially relevant around PLCs and apprenticeships.

Loads of them did not put in applications for PLCs, if we had put the mentoring in place then they would all have a security net of a PLC now. They are all quality enough candidates, if they were to apply, they would have gotten one. They would be sitting in a position where the pressure was off a little bit so that even if something went wrong, they still had their PLC because we have a lot of eggs in small baskets now and that worries me, and it worries them (Teacher C).

Theme 3: 'I have concerns over the sustainability of the programme in its current format'. Sustainability and reliability issues.

The main concerns around the mentoring programme that the teachers mentioned were the sustainability, reliability and confidentiality of the programme. There had been mixed feedback on the quality of the programme across schools, but these three issues were most frequently mentioned.

Firstly, around confidentiality, there were concerns with the type of mentoring that the school employed. Various types of mentoring were tried by the schools. Peer-to-peer mentoring, where older students mentor younger students; college mentors; and parents-to-student mentoring. In the instances where parent mentoring was tried, the

teachers insisted that this 'was a bad idea.' There seemed to be too much discussion about the students between mentors and the students found it hard to engage with the parents as there was 'the gossip, too much gossip. It was not out of badness; it was too much information about people's families (Teacher B).

The students were not matched with their parents but with the parents of other students. However, 'the small nature of the local community was not ideal for maintaining the student's confidentiality.' This teacher also found that for parent-to-student mentoring some parents 'were discussing confidential student conversations outside of the sessions.' Earlier year groups, according to teacher C, 'can focus on personal development whereas older students want more career/course development assistance. The parents did not always have the expertise, and this was not fair on them to have to learn those processes for the first time too.'

Yeah, so they are talking about their home life, so that was just a little bit too much information about people's private lives, in such a small little community. Also, I judged the year wrong. I think if I had done it with second years, I cannot remember if they were third year or fourth years at the time, and they were doing things like the mock CAO forms and applying to college, but of course, the parents have never been through that and they did not have that skill set, so it did not work that way. It was very hard for them, they had to learn at the same time, and it was too much pressure. If I had geared it to the second year where it is still like extra-curricular activities and your personal development, it might have been better. But I just could not get the confidentiality (Teacher A).

In the instance of programme sustainability among the teachers, it was a common frustration on the teachers' part of 'the irregularity of mentor attendance.' 'It was very hard to develop the programme when there was a constant churn of mentor availability.' However, one example of when a mentor was able to commit fully to all the sessions yielded some positive results for both student and mentor.

Yeah, it was brilliant, one of them, was studying psychology and the kid that was with her was considering psychology but had not realised all the areas, so she brought her in for the day. So, Sophia tracked her for the entire day (Teacher A).

The teacher highlighted her perception of the impact on the student by explaining that 'it was life-changing for Sophia, she's still talking about it, and it has been the highlight of school for her.'

Sophia's experience emphasised for that school and teacher the power of the mentoring type which paired third-level college students with second-level students.

Yeah, it is fabulous, and things like that when it was people who were still within the college system of this amazing set of things, it just opens the world for kids, I would love to get that as an embedded thing (Teacher D).

Theme 4: 'The students gain confidence and support around their aspirations from many aspects of their lives' Projected future selves.

The next theme from the teacher data was around what variables impacted the students' decisions about what they wanted to do after school and how they viewed their projected future selves. These are quite mixed according to the teachers. A sub-theme of working-class risk aversion was evident in the data and connected to a student's career and/or course choice. There are suggestions from the teachers that 'the students' decisions about what to do after school are driven by altruism and careers that offer social value in their communities.' Teacher participants perceived that the mentoring programme had a variable impact on students' decision-making regarding post-graduation aspirations. The impact, according to the teachers, ranged from no impact to a strong impact. However, the viewpoints around 'how the students had grown from their involvement in the programme were evident. Most teachers pointed to wider involvement in the Trinity Access Programme than just the mentoring as influencing the mindsets of the students.

'Other aspects of the TA21 programme helped give the students confidence such as the leadership projects helping develop aspirations because they know they can.' (Teacher B)

According to the teachers, the development of the students' aspirations was evident over time. The teachers highlighted that their students often struggled to know what they wanted to do after school as it is such a big decision to make especially at their ages. 'Our students

always struggle with post-school decision-making. It is such a big decision to make at their age.'

However, according to the teachers, students being involved with the mentoring helped them develop an idea of 'what' they wish to aspire to. Mentors helped the students see the variety of jobs beyond what they knew. 'The mentors helped the students realise they do not have to have an exact formula.' For example, a mentor in one school had done the same degree as the student's teacher but had a very different career. 'When my students met Patricia and we explained we had done the same course but have very different careers it opened their eyes to the variety of choices out there.'

Whether the students would act upon these aspirations and new-found maturity levels the teachers were not so sure, however, they were convinced that their decisions would be much more affirmed.

I think their decisions are much more affirming, certainly any of the questions around college and college-based courses, they're the kind of ones I would have wanted to ask. Whereas, in the past, they'd rarely ask. Only the focused students might have asked, and the other students would have glazed over it. (Teacher B)

The impact that the programme is had on the language the students used towards college and post-school choices seemed to be very strong. One teacher explained that 'the questions second years might ask may well have been the questions the Leaving Certs would ask [sic] when I have them in class.'

According to one teacher's perception, the development of the students' thought processes around post-secondary school options through their exposure to colleges from a younger age, seems to normalise the process to them more so than previous classes of students:

They have a much stronger focus, and they know the questions they want to ask on college information days. They know 'I'm going to this stand, that stand and that stand because I'm going to find out about this and this.' that says a lot, and that is since September. I would not get that a lot (Teacher C).

In terms of what the students are deciding to do after school, the teachers suggested that the students 'want careers that have social value to their area.' They suggest that 'social prestige

and validation are very important so careers that offer these are attractive for their students.' There is a consensus that 'many of their students want to stay in their communities and do something that makes their families' lives better too.' This may reflect a desire to continue to fit into a community at a time when they may be entering a new one.

Sub-theme: Working class risk aversion and mixed influence on the decision-making process.

Despite responses showing that students were 'building the language and knowledge of post-school options from when they were in 2nd year' there seemed to still be a risk of doing something not as well known to the students.

It takes a lot of courage for students coming from a working-class family to say I am going to do something that at the end of four years I'm not going to be anything specific, I'm just going to have a look and see. There is a risk to that especially when their families are supporting them, feeding them, and paying bills (Teacher B).

The teachers at least acknowledged that the students have more knowledge of the variety of careers available to them as 'before mentoring the students only knew the same five jobs – doctors, teachers, guards, army, or social workers.'

According to teacher A, 'the students seemed to have a broader knowledge of careers and college courses because of mentoring engagement, and this shows that the information deficit that once was being displayed is being filled in.'

This is an interesting aspect of the students' thought processes, as two teachers discussed the importance of parental support for the student's choices. However, in contrast, Teacher E did not think that discussing post-school choices with parents has a big impact on their decisions, but approval from parents after their decisions are made is very important - 'I think parental support for whatever decision they make is the most important thing for the student.'

From a teacher's perspective and from organising mentoring sessions, one teacher explained that the students decide what they want to do in isolation and just announce it to them and then 'it is up to us to spend the next year helping them set targets and being realistic with them. Mentoring can help with this as it can offer another avenue of support to the students outside the usual teacher/student, parent/child relationships.'

According to one teacher's depiction of mentoring, it acts in a cohesive manner between many different activities and initiatives targeted at supporting the student's plans.

Mentoring is the glue that makes everything else work. It is the hardest to do, and the easiest to mess up but without it, you can do all the guidance-related activities, but you need someone to help them see what is out there and encourage them to have a look (Teacher E).

From teachers A, B and C's perspective 'the extra person and added relationship dynamic between the mentor and mentee can help solidify the guidance element that is required for many of their students.' They describe it as 'the students having an extra layer of support that helps take the pressure off them and share the workload.'

Summary of Teacher Interviews

The first set of findings in this chapter was from the key themes from the interviews with the teachers who participated in this research. The teachers were from five of eleven schools involved in the mentoring programme. Four out of five of these teachers were guidance counsellors in their schools and the other was a maths teacher. All five had worked with TAP for at least three years and were familiar with what the programme entailed.

The first question posed to each teacher was querying their involvement in the programme and the overriding theme was that they were driven by altruism and empathy. It allowed them to help their students build wider networks and have access to more information about careers and college courses. On a type of ideal mentoring, the teachers suggested that this depended on what age the students were. Focusing on building relationships was important with the younger students and a more pragmatic approach was better suited for the older students. Around areas of programme operation, the teachers recommended that the mentors need to be more professional and less trying to be the students' friends, or in the case where they had parent mentors, to keep the session private. They suggested that the programme had unrealised potential and some areas could be improved but it is still a worthwhile endeavour. This unrealised potential was evident from the teacher in the school which was linked with a local business. She had high praise for their ability to overcome the

logistical barriers faced by other schools. The link with the business provided mentors, all employees, and a stable calendar of sessions with the mentees. The feedback from this school was extremely positive and was an outlier compared to the experiences of the other four schools in this study.

Lastly, the teachers discussed the aspect of student decision-making. They also suggested that the impact of the programme was mixed on the students' educational decision-making. They mentioned that there is a wider web of impact such as families and friends that the students listen to too. When deciding what the students want to do the teachers suggest that the programme offer a broader range of options that are discussed. They also mentioned that many of their students are from working-class families and have a desire to follow careers that are valued in their communities and 'have a strong desire to give back to where they come from.'

5.3. Mentees: Their reflections on the mentoring programme and its impact on their decision-making

In the second section of this chapter, the findings from the focus group interviews with the mentees are discussed. There were five focus groups with five students in each group. These students were all in their final year of secondary school. Each focus group session lasted between 30-60 mins. All students in the focus groups had participated in the mentoring programme for 4 years, since its inception in 2014. The main aim of these focus groups was to address questions relating to the research objectives of this study. The aims of this research were explained to the students and the questions were arranged in a semi-structured way to allow the students to delve further into their own experiences without being tied to a closed-ended question. It also allowed for discussion among the group because not everyone's experiences were the same. This enabled a robust debate on various elements of the programme. Some students disagreed on points but hearing another's perspective on the programme enabled further reflection on their own. For example, some students preferred like-minded mentors in terms of career choices, whilst others preferred a random career which helped broaden their minds to other career avenues and mindsets. This format worked for inducing rich conversation and this section will highlight the main findings from these conversations.

Table 5.3: Mentee participant's views on the mentoring programme: A thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning: Mentoring as...
One-dimensional route exploration	TCD focused; Lack of breadth	Timely information; focused; no agenda
Poor structure	Smaller groups: Structure and consistency required; Professionalism; Ideal programme	An ideal; Better organised; feedback; Variation dependent on age

Multifaceted influence	Influence widespread;	Part influence; Teachers; Family; Friends; Siblings. Catalyst
Breaking social barriers	Building relationships. Meeting people from other backgrounds. Friendships	Opportunity exploration. Wider breadth of options. Expanding network.

Theme 1: ‘We focused too much on third-level courses, especially Trinity’. One-dimensional route exploration

The first theme that emerged across the mentee focus groups was the poor variety of post-school options discussed with mentors. The students felt that they ‘focused too much on third-level courses, especially Trinity.’ Whilst some students were okay with the options discussed as they aligned with their already decided-upon destination, this was not the case for all the mentees. Many of the students regularly highlighted the lack of variety of options discussed by the mentors. There was a heavy focus on third-level course options, and this did not please the students as not all were interested in this direction. Many students wanted to do a PLC, apprenticeship or go directly into the labour force but felt that the mentors either did not know much about these options, or were too old to focus on university or IT routes.

It seemed like Trinity was shoved down our throats a bit. I mean it is a great place to study with a good reputation, but I did not want it to be the only thing. We were hearing about it all the time and when a student came in to talk to us about college, we were sick of hearing about it. We missed the deadline for other colleges, I think it was DIT’s access course because it was so focused on Trinity. In the end, I did not want to go there (Paul, focus group 1).

Acquiring the knowledge and language of third-level courses and options from early in secondary school was beneficial though. However, many argued that this was not just from mentoring but more so via the suite of programmes that were being offered by the Trinity Access connection. One student emphasised the importance of the regularity of college-going conversations. She mentioned that she did not get this in her previous school and did not know there were other avenues into medicine. It had broadened her whole perspective on learning, college options and her career in general.

In my old school, there was nothing like this at all. We were just kind of left to ourselves. My first option is medicine, and I was always told that this is what you want to do, in my old school. I never really knew that there were different courses. The number of different courses I know about now, I never would have known if I stayed in my school. It is so refreshing to know that if I still want to do medicine there are different ways that I can go that I would not have known. I used to think that medicine was a one-way thing, you either got in or you did not. But now I know if you want to do medicine in say, fifty years, if you do biology and come back and do it, you can do it again. I never knew that there were separate ways you could go, CFES has told me that. Even if you want to do something now, it does not mean that that is what you must work with. You can do a course in arts one day and then you can come back and do science if you want to. It is just nice to know that it is not your ultimatum (Valerie, focus group 3).

Despite the focus being so college and Trinity College orientated, the students 'feel more knowledgeable about the mechanics of applications, courses and third-level life than they feel they would have been without engaging with the programme.'

Some stuff you would not even think that you need to know and because the mentors have been through it, they know what they missed and what to give the next person. I cannot believe you can meet so many people with all these different pathways (James, focus group 2).

One student talked about the desire to get her sister to change schools because of how much knowledge the mentoring programme has given her. 'I am encouraging my sister to change schools because we had none of this in my old school and I wish I had been doing it since 2nd

year.’ Participation in the programme was very positive for this student. There was evidence of the programme having an impact across families of mentees and mentors. One mentee that I interviewed had a brother who was a mentor. Both were very positive in their reflections on the access route into college. The mentor was a final year Business Studies student and the eldest in his family, so the mentee and her siblings saw first-hand ‘the impact this avenue has had on his life trajectory.’

Theme 2: ‘Sometimes we would forget the programme even exists. We would be told a mentor is coming in and we would be like ‘Oh, I forgot I was a part of that.’ Poor structure

The second theme was around the lack of structure in the programme and consistency among the mentors. This was spoken about regularly by many of the students. Many of the students seemed frustrated that their mentors changed too frequently and just as they were getting to know their mentors, a new one came along. The students felt they had too few sessions with the same mentor and that the mentoring aspect of TA was on the sidelines.

I think there should be more sessions. Sometimes we forget the CFES programme even exists. We would be told a mentor is coming in and we would be like ‘Oh, I forgot I was a part of that.’ Also, not have them sporadic because they would be at random times, whenever they could get someone in. They should have it once every two months to keep a flow, so students are aware it exists. Sometimes it is just on the sidelines really, compared to other things. CFES, you would think it was an excuse to go on a trip to college, miss a day of school rather than waiting for the mentors and getting a bit of insight from the students there (Jason, focus group 1).

The above student's experience may suggest that impact can be lost due to ‘initiative overload.’

However, one student discussed the benefit of having a different mentor. She got to compare the information she received from each of the mentors before making up her mind.

You get to know more because different people have different information. So, you get different types of experiences from different people. If I were me, I would get one kind of information from one person, but I got kind of like, different information from

different people. That is how I figured out what I wanted to do - from different people (Mary, focus group 2).

Another student in the group disagreed with this point and talked about the toughness of changing her mind so frequently if she had too many points of view.

I think with different people your mind is going to keep changing on what you want to do. Each person sounds interesting, so you do not know what to do. Unless you have your mind set on something, if you cannot decide what to do it is going to mess up your mind (Paula, focus group 3).

The repetitive nature of sessions with new mentors was also problematic for the students.

A lot of the time mentors would just reiterate what the previous mentor was saying, so if it was a bit more structured (Pam, focus group 1).

Michael (focus group 1) agreed - 'Yeah, I would say the same thing.'

Maybe some of them could discuss the social aspects of the societies and college. Someone could discuss lectures and that sort of stuff, home projects. It would be much better if that was the case (Maeve, focus group 2).

The most mentioned point that came up was the lack of regular sessions, the repetitive nature of sessions and the inconsistencies in mentors. Most of the feedback suggested that the students would prefer one mentor throughout the programme, however, a small number either did not mind or else thought new ones each time would be helpful as would get a wider variety of information. A key aspect of this study was to give the students a voice in how they would improve the mentoring programme. Considering the main reason that the programme was set up was to help broaden the number of role models they were exposed to and help them make more informed choices about what to do after secondary school, it is important that their views on what makes high-quality mentoring were garnered. The students were asked to outline how they would design their ideal mentoring sessions and the majority pointed to 'small groups but not too small, consistent sessions and professionalism from the mentors.' The first two points relate to the structure of the programme itself whereas the professionalism of the mentors was an interesting one that is unpacked further in the discussion section. One student mentioned how 'group sizes are important in situations

where relationships are being formed. 'Sometimes big groups are unavoidable such as a sports team or a classroom but according to Peter (Group A), 'they should be small enough that you can get to know your mentor well and then you but not too small that you must do all the talking.' There was not a consensus across the focus groups about the actual size, as a small number of students preferred one mentor for every three students whereas more students preferred anywhere between four students to one mentor to six students and two mentors. However, despite some alternative views on the group sizes most fall into small groups. One group of students agreed that 'probably about 5-6 students per mentor was fine'. When asked why that was fine, they replied by citing the comfort of having others in the group and not always having to speak. 'Well, I think we were all into the same thing so we could ask each other questions and interact with each other. We were comfortable with each other.' (Patricia, focus group 4)

I further asked the students what they would think of 1 to 1 mentoring, and they all agreed that it would be 'too intense as they would be the focus of the full conversation, at times with somebody you do not know.' Again, when discussing group size and quality mentoring with the same focus group it was mentioned about having a consistent mentor. The small group but not 1-1 helped reduce the possibility of the students being under pressure to talk all the time and feeling intimidated.

I think just the same person, it does not have to be one-on-one, even the same person to every two people. Just to lower that intimidation. I do think that the same person can get a better understanding of the students and the students get a better understanding of their mentor and it can become almost kind of like a student-teacher relationship, just not as strict (Paul, focus group 2).

When each focus group was pressed on the ideal group size the responses were quite similar, 'the groups were good, good sizes.' 'They were good yeah.' 'Three, four, five. Not too big, not too small.'

It was again pointed out that some students prefer to listen and contribute less, and this may be a function of both individual personalities and age. By making the groups too small these mentees might disengage completely.

It would be a bit too intimate, would not it? Some people are shy, so they get to listen to other people's questions. If it is just two people, then you are going to be forced to talk and some people do not want to do that (Mary, focus group 3).

However, another student pointed out that the group being too big would be problematic as well. On the other hand, having too many students talking might overwhelm the mentors and dilute the relationships, according to one group, 'if there is too many people then, there is too many people talking so they are talking over each other, and it might be a little overwhelming for the mentors.'

A major problem that the students found with the mentoring programme, which came up in each interview, was the consistency of sessions. The students reported that from their experience 'there was no consistency in the sessions and mentors.' They all mentioned the inconsistent nature of sessions and mentors as being a major aspect of not getting as much out of the programme as they had hoped. Many of the students had various mentors throughout their involvement in the mentoring programme. They felt like having a different mentor led to sessions and information being repeated and their time being wasted.

'A lot of the time mentors would just reiterate what the previous mentor was saying, so if it were a bit more structured and consistent it would improve the programme.' (Paul, focus group 2)

'Yeah, I would say the same thing.' (Peter, focus group 2)

Suggestions on how to structure the sessions were also discussed by the students.

Maybe some of them could discuss the social aspects of the societies and college. Someone could discuss lectures and that sort of stuff, home projects. It would be much better if that was the case (Mark, focus group 2).

A further finding which arose from the focus groups with the mentees centred on the professionalism of the mentors. Many mentees talked about how their mentors kept going off-topic and tried to focus too much on trying to be their friends. This student sums up the experience in many instances:

It is going to sound blunt; it is nice to build up a bond with your mentor and all but a lot of the time they really need to get to the point. They went off-topic too much, I

remember sitting in a session once and she kept talking about her boyfriend and we were thinking we do not care about your boyfriend. It keeps going off on a tangent when it should have been a lot more focused for sixth year (Patrick, focus group 5).

There seemed to be a slight disconnect between mentor and mentee in terms of how both perceive an ideal relationship. The older students felt that the bonding approach which was tried by the mentors above would be better suited to the younger students, 'a bond with second years may be more useful than sixth years as the closer you get to college it should be more focused.' This suggests that Putnam's bonding capital is more evident in the earlier years of the programme, with bridging and instrumentalism becoming more pronounced in the later years. This will be discussed more in chapter 7.

The sixth-year mentees were clear that in their case the sessions should be a lot more focused. Patrick (focus group 5) had the suggestion that these sessions could be each month and that it was quite focused so they would learn something different each month, 'Every month it would be good if I came out and learned something different.'

This finding is a useful piece of information for administrators and persons responsible for training the mentors. The mentor interviews showed that altruism was the main driving factor behind their willingness to volunteer their time. The mentors seemed to be mainly taking the approach which they thought would be most successful in developing a positive relationship with the students. If they know that the senior cycle students prefer a more business-like approach this can help them tailor their approaches to each student. The above student wants to 'learn something different' from each session. This reflects the mindset of many of the sixth-year students in this study. They want their sessions to be focused, structured and regular rather than ad-hoc, repetitive and overly friendly type sessions.

Theme 3: 'Ms. H was a great help, but I also listened to my family and my friends.'

Multifaceted influence on decisions

A lot of students discussed the impact of the conversations that they have with their teachers, families, peers, and mentors in deciding what they want to do after school. Many also mention the importance of getting a job and doing something which they are interested in,

like studying and personal fulfilment. Many were optimistic about the range of opportunities at their disposal and felt that some sort of academic or equivalent qualification is needed in the current economic climate as many people competing for jobs have a qualification of some sort. Decision-making is a complex activity for most people and the students are no different. They all mentioned a variety of factors that will affect their final decision, whilst some mentioned that they may have the decision made for them depending on their leaving certificate results.

McCoy et al. (2014) discussed the importance of career guidance teachers in working-class schools to fill in the information gap regarding college applications that may not be available at home. In one focus group, this shines through very strongly from all participants. There seemed to be a very strong bond between the students and their guidance counsellor 'Ms H.' They were particularly aware of the work the teacher puts in in terms of organising talks and trips to colleges. Patricia highlighted the talks from the colleges that Ms H organised as being beneficial to her.

The colleges coming in to talk to us and talking to Ms. H during the CFES classes because when I started in 2nd year, I was like there is no way I am going to college and now I do want to go to college. I wanted to just work straight away (Patricia, focus group 5).

Patricia talked about Ms. H as having a strong impact on her development, 'Ms. H, she helps you better yourself and she knew what I wanted. She just encouraged me to go for what I wanted'.

Stacey talked about Ms. H listening to her and organising talks from a person in the career she was interested in, despite it being a job that did not require a degree.

Ms H too, some of my teachers were a bit disappointed that I did not want to go to college. My grandad is retired at 50 and living in Spain from owning his own hairdresser's so I knew I wanted to do that since I was about 12 and Ms H was the only one that said that I should. She was the only one who brought people from a hairdresser from a beauty and hair college to talk to us. We never heard of a college for hairdressers before until Ms. H organised them to come in (Stacey, focus group 5).

It is obvious from these three students that their career guidance teacher's input had a strong influence on their decision-making process. The students all mentioned how much work Mrs. H put into her job, and this was quite beneficial for them. It is also notable how Stacey mentions how her teacher did not force the college upon her and encouraged her to pursue her interest despite other teachers being disappointed that she did not want to go to college. This relationship between secondary schools' expectations and students' aspirations is something worth exploring for future research. Some students in another focus group allude to Trinity College being 'shoved down their throats' and a 'lack of variety in post-school opportunities presented to them.' If this is the case, it may be counter-productive to achieving the mentoring programme's core objective of 'helping the students make informed career decisions.' These findings might suggest that the options being presented and discussed are narrow.

The students also highlighted the influence of their families and what their older siblings were doing. 'I was also talking to my sisters who did go to college and realised that it is not as scary as it seems.' (Paula, focus group 4)

Same for me, I like business and want to do marketing and my mom started as an apprentice hairdresser and now she is a HR business partner. She has completely changed her career because of college and that has made me want to go to college. My mam started late, and I do not want to start late. She was my biggest influence. The people coming in talking about courses helped me decide but I always wanted to go because of my mam (Grace, focus group 4).

The mentor's life experience and career trajectory were also mentioned as influential to the students.

When you get people who left college and you add in their experiences with their big jobs, they influence me to go to college. As for what I am studying now it is what I am really interested in, history (Paul, focus group 4).

When asked to rate the mentoring influence on their future decisions the feedback was mixed. One student found the overall conversations useful but could not determine how useful, so he was not sure out of ten. 'I want to do veterinary, and I've never had a talk on that so I'm not sure, but even just the way they were talking about college overall and the

societies and all, it made me want to go to college.’ Two others in that focus group rated the mentoring influence as nine out of ten. Peter talked about the session with the mentor opening and changing his mind. This was a very important issue that was raised by mentors and mentees alike:

Probably like a nine. It really did open my mind to what I wanted to do. I wanted to do accounting and talking to someone doing accounting at Trinity, I thought ‘OK this is not for me, this is not what I want to do.’ It was just all maths. I knew it had maths in it, but I did not know it was that much, so I had to change my mind. That was helpful (Peter, focus group 3).

Lisa talked about the power of focusing her mind on the area that was of most interest to her:

I would say nine as well because I always knew I wanted to do something, but I never knew what I wanted to do. I was looking at business, and during the mega mentoring, I talked to someone who did the BESS course, and he was talking about business. Other people would come in all the time and talk about business courses, so I thought, oh it is not just business, it is international business, global business. So, I decided that is what I wanted to do (Lisa, focus group 2).

Theme 4: ‘I did not even know what a software engineer was before that’. Breaking down barriers & building relationships

Many of the students did not mind the mentor's background once they were consistent, professional, and rife with information about life after school in the workplace and college.

I enjoyed meeting people from different backgrounds, I learned about what life was like as a software engineer and I did not even know what a software engineer was before that (John, focus group 1).

I liked that my mentor was full of information about college and work life (Angela, focus group 4).

The students were asked what a positive relationship looked like to them and in each instance, frequency of engagement and feeling comfortable and at ease with the mentor was highlighted.

They should be optimistic, and if you have any worries, they should explain to you and tell you it is not like that. Let us say I am scared to go to college, they can tell me good things. Interacting with the mentors should not feel like an obligation, it should just feel like talking. It should just feel natural (Martin, focus group 1).

To achieve this, they all agreed that seeing mentors regularly was a key aspect. This relates to many of the findings in the teacher interviews that explained that empathy, time, and mutuality are required for building strong relationships between mentors and mentees.

Yeah. I will be more likely to ask questions if I am comfortable with the person. If it is just someone, I met five minutes ago I am not going to ask them all these questions. If they did not know the answer or could not give you as much information as having other people in at different times, they could possibly give you sources to find that information out (Mary, focus group 2).

They also pointed to the fact that receiving this information at an early stage of their decision-making cycle was crucial for deciding what they wanted to do and how they were going to do it. It was very hard to do this for the students if they were not getting to see their mentor or guidance counsellors regularly.

Early, so people can plan what they want to do in the future, to see the different pathways and stuff. I think being able to speak to them freely. When I was stuck doing the TAP form, I did not know what to do. I emailed Diane and she answered me straight away. I did not think it was a big deal, but people always say 'Oh you can email me if you want to' but I never take it up. I felt like I could email her because I talked to her a lot and she would ask how I was doing when she sees me, so I knew she was okay (Mark, focus group 1).

Summary of Mentee Focus Groups

This section of the chapter presented the main themes that were generated from the five mentee focus groups. The sample size was 25 mentees which consisted of five randomly

selected sixth-years from five of the 11 Trinity Access Programme linked secondary schools. There was a mixture of school types and genders. The sixth-year students who were selected were participating in the mentoring programme since its outset in 2014 when they were in 2nd year, excluding one girl who joined a participating school and the mentoring programme in fifth year. Since the programme began there have been many types of mentoring approaches taken so the students have a breadth of knowledge on what worked well for them and not so well.

The students provided a lot of feedback concerning what they liked and did not like about the mentoring. They had many suggestions about how the programme operated as well. Much of their focus on the operationalisation aspect of the programme centred on the structure of the sessions, the number of sessions, the content of the sessions, the training of the mentor and the size of the groups. They made some excellent suggestions which included keeping the focus on the bond between mentor and mentee when they were in the junior cycle but more professional and focused on senior years. A key finding from the mentees was that sessions were too irregular, and this allowed for interest in the initiative to diminish. They also alluded to a high turnover of mentors which negatively impacted the relationship-building process between mentor and mentee. Solutions put forward by the mentees included having a strict timetable for sessions which included an objective for each session. However, despite the negative feedback on the operational side of things the students, in the main, still found the programme worthwhile and impactful on their decisions.

The mentees felt that meeting mentors from different walks of life when it happened, helped break down social barriers and open their minds to a range of careers and opportunities. An important outcome for many mentees was discovering what they did not want to do when they left school. Many found this quite positive and alluded to a range of people that impacted their decision-making process such as family, teachers, and friends alongside mentors of various types.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented the findings of two sources of data - mentees and teachers. Each participant was asked questions from an interview schedule designed to answer the research questions of the study. These questions were on the operational aspect of the programme, the mentor-mentee relationship, and the impact on the student's post-school decision-making process.

The teacher's findings covered a wide range of issues such as the logistical difficulties with the programme, student desire to give back to their communities and the mentoring relationship. Teachers highlighted the need for professionalism among the mentors but despite the difficulties, they believed the programme had unrealised potential. A successful example was the school linked with a local business that provided mentors. The teachers also mentioned that the programme had a mixed impact on the student's post-school choices but that this process was very broad and multifaceted.

Lastly, the main findings from the mentee focus groups included points on how to improve the operation of the programme and the sessions. These include smaller groups, better structure and consistency required and a broader range of post-school options explored. The students felt that the sessions were too 'one-dimensional' and too TCD-focused. They want the information to be timely and with no agenda. On the aspect of what or who influences their decisions the mentees suggested that influence is multifaceted, partially teachers, families, friends, and siblings. However, in some cases, the mentoring was the catalyst that got post-school option conversations started with people around them. Finally, the mentees were complimentary of the programme and the opportunity to explore various options and meet new people. They were positive about the chance to build new relationships, meet people from different backgrounds and expand upon their social and professional network. Chapter 6 will present the findings from the mentors, Trinity Access staff and principal interviews.

Chapter 6: Findings from Interviews with Mentors, Trinity Access staff and School Principal

6.1. Introduction

This chapter is the second findings chapter and presents the views of ten mentors, two Trinity Access staff and one principal of a school linked to the Trinity Access mentoring programme. These three groups have participated in the mentoring programme in different ways and the findings are presented by each group. The ten mentors were recruited through a TA register of volunteers. A generic email was sent to all previous mentors inviting them to participate in this research. With the TA staff, the two most appropriate staff members were approached and invited to take part. The principal was the only principal from the eleven schools who had the time to participate in this research. The interview schedule for each group was developed to answer each research question. These questions focused on the operational aspect of the mentoring programme, how Putnam's social capital theory helps explain mentoring relationship looks and what was the impact (if any) of the mentoring programme on the mentee's decision-making process for what they wanted to do when they finish school. The findings are presented in this light. Each group had their views on each area and the emergent themes are presented below beginning with the mentors, followed by the TA staff and finally the school Principal.

6.2. Mentor Interview Findings

The first mentors that were approached to take part in this data were mentors from the schools in which the students I interviewed attended. It was hoped that by doing this it would provide a more systematic and synchronised approach to data generation and programme evaluation. As I discussed in the methodology chapter, however, as the original schools that were targeted to take part in this research project changed on a couple of occasions it became more and more difficult to trace specific mentors to mentees. When deciding on which schools to focus the qualitative aspect of this research on from the eleven original schools that the Trinity Access Programme began the mentoring with, it was decided that a top, middle, and bottom-ranked school in terms of progression rates over the previous five years

to 3rd level was chosen. However, not all the schools shortlisted were able to participate in this research for a few reasons, such as staff turnover, not returning my calls and/or emails and a cessation of the programme for the year group of interest. This restricted my access to the students and programme as new staff taking over the running of the programme slowed down the progress of sessions quite substantially. This required me to recruit more schools from the 11 and do this randomly. It was also difficult to gain access to sixth-year students as their time was quite limited as they were in their final year of school. This meant that finding mentors that matched the mentees I had interviewed was problematic. However, my research focused on mentor-mentee relationships, programme operationalisation and the impact of the programme on the decision-making process of the leaving certificate students could still be investigated by picking random schools, random sixth-year students and random mentors. This made recruitment easier, however, it was still quite difficult to get mentors to reply to my calls and emails as many had day jobs, college courses and other life duties to attend to. I interviewed ten mentors who had mentored on the programme for a year or more. The interviews were semi-structured and were all in-person interviews. They were arranged either on campus or at a place that suited the participant i.e., their workplace. These interviews usually took approximately 45 minutes, and, in some instances, mentors would follow up via email with further information to add to the interview. They were very forthcoming and generous with their time. I tried to get access to more than ten and it would have been quite interesting and worthwhile to gain access to mentors who dropped out of mentoring for any reason or ones that did not have a positive experience. Table 6.2 below presents an overview of the mentor characteristics. I had six male participants and four females. Four mentors had graduated from TCD and six were still enrolled there as students. All the mentors had previous experience with volunteering or being part of TA in some capacity i.e., as an access student. This sub-section will focus on the findings from these interviews and how they relate to the research questions of this piece of work.

Table 6.2: Overview of Mentor characteristics

Name	Status	Location	Age	Gender
Alan	Undergraduate student	TCD	19	Male
Daire	Undergraduate student	TCD	18	Male
Lee	Undergraduate student	TCD	19	Male
Luke	Professional	Engineering firm	23	Male
Paula	Postgraduate student	TCD	24	Female
Rob	Professional	Data Analytics firm	23	Male
Husna	Undergraduate student	TCD	19	Female
Kenny	Professional	Telecommunications Company	21	Male
Dove	Undergraduate	TCD	22	Female
Megan	Professional	Academia	24	Female

Table 6.2.1: Mentor views on the mentoring programme: Summary of the thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning: Mentoring as...
Programme involvement	Empathy led. Altruism driven. Inspire students. Love of what TAP represents	Engagement. Chance to give back; opportunity to show students “they can too”.
Flipping stereotypes	Relationship building.	Empowerment; Alternative viewpoints
Positive relationships	Trust. Empathy. Co-operation. Functionality. Similarity	An opportunity to strengthen relationships and make an impact on students.
Low expectations not met	High levels of engagement. Student interest	A chance to let the students surprise you
Structural issues	More structure is required. Concrete objectives. Consistency required	Worthwhile but can be improved
Positive impact on decisions	Impact; positivity	Impact on Student decision making

Theme 1: “I wanted to use it as an opportunity to give back to TAP and help the students”.

Programme involvement is led by altruism.

Many of the people who become mentors to the students who participate in the Trinity Access mentoring programme were once part of the programme themselves. The admissions policy of Trinity College Dublin is multifaceted. The main entry route into the college undergraduate programmes is via the traditional CAO offers to students who have recently completed their Leaving Certificate exams. However, there are other avenues to courses. The college has initiatives which target students from backgrounds less represented in the student population, such as students with a disability, students that are above 23 years old and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. When students enter the university, many develop a strong desire to show their appreciation for what they perceive as the opportunity afforded to them, rather than an opportunity they deserve and are entitled to. This leads to many of the students developing a desire to ‘give back’. This altruistic tendency is a key aspect of why the mentors get involved with the programme and volunteer their time. Lee highlighted the impact TAP had on his decision to come to Trinity. He entered the college through an access initiative that targeted students from his community as they had low progression rates to 3rd-level courses.

For me, it was more about seeing the impact it had on me at an early stage. I was saying to you before, being in school, I was not necessarily interested in college and Trinity was not on my radar. It was not until I ended up going to the summer school programme, which was the summer of fifth year. I spent the week there and knew I did not want to go to this place. I had an argument with my mam and everything. Spent the first day there and it really flipped every stereotype I had, just got rid of it. Then there were individuals there who came from similar backgrounds that inspired me and I thought ‘I can actually go do this thing’, I knew I could better myself in a similar matter. Once I felt that it was a personal victory, to go on and do a little bit better. When I went in and did TAP and then went to Trinity, I was thinking if I could give anybody that inspiration, in a similar situation to me, I’ll be happy. So that was the reason I got involved with those guys and if anything comes across my emails or anything like that, I’ll try to help (Lee, mentor).

Lee talks about his rationale for getting involved in the mentoring programme. He wanted to share the inspiration he got from meeting other Trinity College students with others. 'I was thinking if I could give anybody that inspiration, in a similar situation to me, I'd be happy. So that was the reason I got involved with those guys.'

Like Lee, Kenny had been a mentee on the TAP programme when he was in secondary school. When asked about his motivation for getting involved, Kenny talked about the opportunity he got from being a TAP student and seeing first-hand what vital work it has had in his community. This desire to give back was what motivated Kenny:

For me it was a case of TAP giving me an opportunity, I got in through the foundation course and that was the way I got into Trinity and was able to get a great education, so I always loved what TAP does and the work they do is vital in the community. Especially in my community, I've seen the work and I've seen the impact. I was always going to want to give back and do stuff. I am always down to help, with mentoring and stuff like that. I started off being roped into doing it and then I really enjoyed it and I wanted to do it more over the years (Kenny, mentor).

Theme 2: 'Flipping stereotypes' and building relationships.

The interviews with the mentors repeatedly raised the issue of stereotypes. Many mentors in this study discussed how students they mentored had a stereotype in their mind of a typical Trinity College student. This stereotype usually involved perceiving the typical student as much different as to how they perceived themselves.

This interaction with the programme and college, when he was in school, helped Lee see that his preconceived ideas of the college did not match that. He mentioned that once he spent time there and met other people from a similar background to himself things began to change:

I spent the first day there and it really flipped every stereotype I had, I just got rid of it. Then there were individuals there who came from similar backgrounds that inspired me and I thought 'I can actually go do this thing', I knew I could better myself in a

similar way. Once I felt that it was a personal victory, to go on and do a little bit better. Then I went in, did TAP, and then went onto Trinity (Lee, mentor).

Theme 3: 'Positive relationships are built over time by trust, empathy, co-operation, functionality and similarity.' Positive relationships.

While there may be no such thing as an ideal mentor-mentee relationship as each relationship has its unique qualities, there may be some qualities that overlap. Each mentor was asked to describe what they thought an ideal mentor-mentee relationship looked like. Many alluded to the fact that each relationship is different, and in some cases, they did not get a chance to build a relationship with every student they mentored. Reasons for this included groups being too large, non-returning students to the same group or the mentoring sessions not happening frequently enough. Many of the mentors discussed the realities they faced in fully committing to the demands of the programme and explained that 'this was also a barrier to building strong relationships' (Lee, TCD student). They all mentioned the importance of time in building relationships. Joseph described relationship building as 'taking a long time to build strongly.' Mary, a TCD 2nd year student and mentor, seconded this and said that one or two 2-hour meetings with a student are not enough to build a strong rapport.

However, despite the mentors pointing out the challenges of building relationships with the students, they also suggested five elements that are crucial for having a positive relationship. Functionality and honesty were the first elements so that the students get what they need from the relationship in an honest manner. Trust, empathy, time and cooperation are the other elements. The first category of functionality and honesty was brought up frequently as a central tendency as to why the mentors believed they were there. They thought that offering the student truthful advice on how to navigate the school system, make plans, follow through on tasks that will help achieve their plan and be honest with themselves was the core element of mentoring. If they could achieve this with the students, then that would help build empathy and trust and therefore strong relationships. Paula, a psychologist from North Dublin, took on a student on a shadowing day who was interested in becoming a psychologist. The student thought that psychology meant sitting with people and helping them work

through whatever issue they may be facing in their lives. However, Paula had to be very honest with the student, in a respectful manner.

I mean honest as in, respectful, not running them down but also being honest in where they want to go and how they want to get there. Also, what's the best course of action for them and their families? When I say honest it is telling them that they must work, and that Psychology is not all Freudian intervention (Paula, mentor).

Paula talked to the student about the reality of becoming a psychologist and that it has many different fields within the area itself and clinical is just one element of it. Paula spends most of her time in a lab doing experiments on eye reactions to external stimuli and whilst the student was fascinated with this, more importantly, according to Paula, 'it opened her eyes to how broad psychology is as a discipline'. This shadowing day helped Paula build a very strong relationship with the student as they got to spend a lot of time together and be honest about the type of work, which helped build trust and empathy and heartened both Paula and the student to the benefits of mentoring. According to Paula, spending time with the students impacts rapport and in turn, this rapport helps impact the student's decisions and build strong relationships:

You do not make your decisions based upon someone you have spoken to for fifteen minutes, even if they know what they're talking about, you still do not. I could come in and talk about a big game and a kid could decide based on me talking about a big game and it could fall apart. Or I could come in over a month and over four sessions they kind of have a laugh with you and just realise that you're being respectful and honest to them, and they will be that back. That takes a little while to build. That is a much stronger effect on motivation and decision-making than someone giving a presentation for twenty minutes in a room that has another thousand kids where you can barely hear each other. So yeah, I would say, the positives are getting to know them and building rapport. I think building rapport affects a hell of a lot more change than anything else (Paula, mentor).

Alex talked about the importance of taking students 'under his wing' and of having a connection and relating to them. He also pointed out the socio-economic element of having

strong relationships with people who can help connect the students to opportunities that they may not have as often as middle-class students with broader parental networks.

Taking you under their wing sort of thing. Giving you a hand with things, knowledge, and connections. Other students from different socio-economic backgrounds may have those connections to get internships whereas our kids might not. It is great to have someone who can be a middleman with connections, but I prefer a connection with someone and relate to them (Alex, mentor).

Again, to build a positive relationship and that connection, taking the time is necessary according to Alex:

This all takes time though, takes time to build up a relationship, some people you'll sit down with, and you'll instantly connect with and that is great but not all relationships are like that. You must try relating to them from their point of view (Alex, mentor).

The mentors mention many elements from their perspective that help build a positive relationship, but Husna suggested that it cannot be all one-way traffic. The students must be committed to the relationship too and be willing to participate in the sessions.

Both to be cooperative and wanting to participate, I would say being reliable and there for the mentee. Also, being friendly helps and willing to put 100% in, it needs to be the mentee and the mentor. It is not just the mentor giving and giving, the mentee also must be willing to give. Like, she would propose when to meet but I would go to those places and meetings, it needs to be a cooperative relationship (Husna, mentor).

Rob echoes this in his comments about cooperation and student-led sessions.

It has got to be open, healthy, and non-dominated. I think personally, I tend to steer the conversation quite a lot. I might be a bit more confident than some of the mentors should have been, but the relationship gives the most value to the mentee when they're driving or steering the conversation and they know the questions that they want to ask. They come prepared with questions and some details. So, the best relationship is a two-way one, but I'd like to see a little bit more proactivity from the kids (Rob, mentor).

In his reflection on relationship building, it is evident that Rob is aware of his positionality in the process. He sees the value in the conversations not being driven by him, that the students are steering the process, know what questions to ask and have some detail prepared. More 'proactivity from the kids' would enhance the quality of the sessions and the relationship, according to Rob. Rob found it hard to measure the benefits the mentees gained from participating in the mentoring programme, however if the students had their questions answered and did not find it a 'waste of time' then he thinks participation was worth it and the relationship a positive one.

It is very hard to measure the benefit received by the individual, to the mentees. I think the mentors will benefit regardless, they are here to volunteer their time, and they get the satisfaction of having done that. The mentee gets the most value if they get answers to their questions. If that is measurable in some way, if they feel like they have learned something then it has been a success. It is very hard to measure that though. Some of the values are just intrinsic you know. (Rob, mentor)

This category is an interesting one as the mentors and mentees have varying views on what personality factors lead to strong relationships. Whilst the previous category discussed the aspects of the actual process of mentoring which, in the mentor's view, helps build positive relationships, this category is looking at whether similarity in hobbies, careers and backgrounds play a role in relationship building or not. Many of the mentors believe it does matter as being able to give more specific career advice to students interested in the same path, they have taken is a central part of the relationship. Along with the career similarity many of the mentors share similar backgrounds to the students they are mentoring, as many are past pupils who they are mentoring. Lee, from South Dublin, talked about the strength of sharing your background with the students as an aid in building strong rapport.

We were going out on different occasions chatting, whatever they wanted to chat about, like what was going on in school, what kind of challenges you were facing. I think over time you start developing a dialogue every time that becomes a little bit more trustworthy, so you start to tell the individuals your type of background. You can kind of see that light in their eyes then because they see that the two of you might be similar. When you talk to these individuals you realise everyone has had their kind of struggle and that it is a goal or task that you can accomplish. Sharing your background

and letting them know it is possible is a vital part of the mentoring programme. At least it was in my eyes you know; I think everyone else brings their own thing to it but that was what I took away from it (Lee, mentor).

For Lee, becoming a mentor had to do with the fact his school and family background were very similar to the students he was going to be mentoring. This form of bonding capital can be very strong in building lasting relationships (Putnam, 1995).

Theme 4: 'Low expectations of student engagement were not realised'. High student engagement

The teachers, mentors and students were asked about the level of student engagement in the programme. Whilst both mentioned that levels varied depending on a range of factors, the average levels of engagement were high according to each stakeholder. This question was put to mentors as well. They were asked about their prior expectations of student engagement in the mentoring programme. Many mentors expected the students to be not as engaged in the programme as they turned out to be. This came as a surprise to the mentors as many thought the students would see the programme as an extension of school. I asked the mentors about why they thought students would be less engaged in school-related activities. The responses generally varied around their perspectives of school as a teenager and finding much of it boring. They seemed to assume the students would do likewise. However, some did mention the intrigue of meeting people from outside of school once it did not become repetitive.

I remember when we got to meet people from outside of school during school time, I usually became interested in what they had to say. However, this can become very boring if it becomes repetitive (Megan, mentor).

However, they were all going in with an open mind despite having some prior thoughts about what was ahead of them. The engagement levels of the students were a bit of a surprise though, to one mentor.

I was going in with an open mind. I was expecting kids who would be less interested, disengaged maybe. That was not the case. They were engaged and happy to speak to

me and find out what I could offer them and what I could pass on in terms of knowledge. That surprised me a bit, from expectation versus reality, I expected a little bit less engagement (Dove, mentor).

Theme 5: 'Improved operation of the programme requires more structure, concrete objectives, and consistency'. Structural issues

The mentors had lots of views on the operational aspect of the programme. The aspects of the programme that they felt would improve the format, included having more structure around the number of sessions, work within the sessions, objectives of each session and even the year in which the students began the programme. Mentoring has varied in its structure since its inception. For example, some schools had tried one-to-one sessions, and some tried out-of-school sessions. One such type was called mega mentoring where approximately 10 schools with 100s of students participated in various mentoring sessions in one day. The main idea behind having so many sessions in one day was due to the difficulty in arranging the logistics to align for so many different parties over the year. This mega-mentoring approach was considered a condensed version of mentoring. One mentor who volunteered across all the various types of mentoring was Rob from Dublin. Rob who had volunteered with the Access Programme for five years and had mentored in its various guises had some excellent insights into which structure he felt worked best.

With mentoring, the more one-on-one time that you get, the better. I did get that in the school I worked with, but I did not get that in the mega mentoring. It is a little bit less personal when you are in a larger auditorium and you have got less one-to-one time with individuals. Also, because they've got the group dynamic as well, maybe when you're chatting to one of them, the rest of them are not listening. There is a right size effect, if you are in a circle of three or four it becomes a little more open, but if you are in a circle of nine or ten in a larger auditorium of one hundred people, you can get drowned out by the noise and be distracted. There is probably a perfect body point where you get the highest level of effectiveness for scale (Rob, mentor).

Rob did not mind who he got matched with and did not think it was a big issue as he was just happy to volunteer and would mentor and help each student no matter what they wanted to do. 'There is probably a science between matching mentors to mentees. I imagine there is probably a benefit to that but honestly, I was just happy to volunteer.'

Although it did not matter to Rob who he got matched with he could see why it would matter to the mentee. He felt that if you had an unlimited list of mentors, it would make sense to match by career path interest.

I think I can give value to mentees who are not interested in working in the same area I work in, or maybe following a different path to the path I have taken. It probably makes sense if you have an unlimited list of mentors, you are obviously going to choose the mentor that fits your profile (Rob, mentor).

Other mentors echoed the point of the less personalised rapport this condensed version of mentoring offered. Another mentor talked about the inconsistent nature of the programme and would like more interactions regularly. If the programme had a set schedule at the start of the year, it would resolve many structural issues from the outset and would be easier for all parties to know what they are committing to from the outset.

I would have more interactions on a more regular basis. If you can get a session once every two weeks or six weeks or something like that. When you have to identify a start and end and objectives for the programme, that would probably be very beneficial. At least you are in term time. Just thinking about how the school term is set up, you have got three terms at eight to ten weeks, you could have an objective for term one and carry forward with the same group of students or a different group of students. A different objective in term two, a different objective in term three and a plan to execute them throughout. With a little bit of a contingency for conflict of schedule etc. you know. So maybe you could probably get through term one in four or five sessions or three or four sessions. If the calendar was a little bit more non-negotiable, I think that would make it a little bit more effective because there would be more structure on the endgame of the mentoring programme. Plus, I think it would be easier for the school and the students to articulate the value of the programme (Daire, mentor).

Doing more sessions outside of school time and flipping the mindset of 'Oh hey, this is school stuff' on its head to become more about 'OK, this is not about school, this is about me and my development' would be beneficial, but logistically tricky, according to Rob. Rob went on to talk about his experience as a mentor elsewhere and shared some useful insights into what could help solve the logistic issues with mentoring.

Maybe it is just worth mentioning that I have been involved in mentoring outside of TAP. So, for example, the Trinity Alumni Event mentoring in the community. They have an online platform where individuals match in pairs, in a LinkedIn kind of style, so they have a digital platform. It is one-to-one (Rob, mentor).

Rob suggested that there were ways in which he thought TAP could leverage this type of approach.

Essentially, it has private messaging and communications to facilitate setting up a connection between the students and mentors. The difference here is the mentors are graduates or past students and the mentees are usually current students. So, the age profile is a little bit different from that of secondary school students, obviously, the rules apply differently. The fact that it has got a digital platform is very cool and the fact that they run regular evening events. It is easy to accommodate when you're in full-time work etc. There are probably ways that TAP could leverage other agencies or communities using similar mentoring programmes, to connect and reach a wider audience (Rob, mentor).

Rob was clear that there were areas to improve upon but was complimentary of the programme overall. He mentioned specifically the opportunity for mentees to be presented with such detailed information about the various career and college avenues at such a young age. This is something he would have liked when he was the same age as the mentees.

Thinking back to my own mindset when I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, it would have been good to get access to information that I did not have back then. I would have really appreciated that looking back, so I think it is probably a very good opportunity for the mentees to be presented with the opportunity to get information and mentors who can help steer them and provide insight. With what it is like to work in a college environment or go to university or do a PhD because they will not

necessarily meet people in their peer group who have access to that information. So, what I think would give the most benefit, as I said, the programme is brilliant already (Rob, mentor).

Rob was very detailed in his suggestions, as outlined above, on how to fix the organisational aspects of the programme and gave a parting rating of the programme. 'It is a fantastic initiative, four and a half stars. The extra half-star would be if it had a small bit more rigidity and structure. I think with total clarity of outcomes, I think that would serve to benefit both mentors and mentees.'

**Theme 6: 'I believe I had a positive impact on students' academic decision-making process'.
Positive impact on decision-making.**

All the mentors interviewed felt that they had an impact on the decision-making process of students in one way or another. In some cases, it was helping the students figure out what they wanted to do and in others, just as importantly, what not to do. However, some pointed to the fact that they were not there at the end to see what decision the student made to know for sure. They also recognised that decision-making of any kind is multifaceted, but they were happy to know they were part of the conversation. Luke was very positive about the possibility of somebody showing you what a course consists of and if they are in the course, has an impact on the student's decision on what to do.

I think if someone can tell you what a course consists of and they are in the course, then it will shift you from one thing to the other. Having a role model in a specific area is a reason for you to investigate that specific area as well. So, I think it would have a big impact yeah (Luke, mentor).

However, when Luke was asked whether the mentor had to be doing the mentees' area of interest or not to impact the mentees' decisions, he said that they did not. Luke said that it showed the students that they could go to college, and this was something incredibly important for him.

My parents did not know anything about going to college, they did not know how expensive it would be. I think having someone in college and being able to talk to them is a great help because it shows you can go to college (Luke, mentor).

It helped Luke being brought into Trinity from a young age on various TAP programmes. He felt that 'if I went there, it would not be a huge change because I would slowly adjust to it over time, and I guess knowing I could go to college'. Seeing more people becoming interested in college was the main positive of the mentoring programme for Luke and seeing them realise they can reach their potential. Helping the students see that 'there is something they can work towards rather than just get through school and get a job' is something that Luke valued about the programme. Again, like many other mentors, not having enough time to develop proper mentoring relationships 'instead of having lecture type sessions' was the main drawback of the programme for Luke.

For Paula, it was 'definitely', when asked if she thought mentoring impacted the student's decisions on what to do after school. Her experience was unique as she initially gave a general talk to a class about options after school and used her own experience as an example. From that talk, she got paired with a student for one-to-one mentoring as the student was very interested in doing the same career. Paula works in the Psychology field and mainly does laboratory work. The student shadowed Paula for a day in the lab and learned a lot about Psychology and its relevant sub-categories that she did not know before. This impacted the student's interest in this career but mainly because she knew she did not like this type now, as it was different than what she had thought it was.

It is more interesting to know what you do not want to do, than what you do want to do, to me. At least then you can cross something off the list and walk away from it knowing you do not want to do it. Then, it is also very interesting for the kids. The girl that showed me, had no idea that this was a research degree that we do. She was like 'Oh so it is counselling stuff'? and I was like 'No honey it is not, come on and I will show you (Paula, mentor).

According to Paula, it was a breakthrough moment for the student when she realised there was much more to becoming a psychologist than she thought there was. Showing the student, the broad range of tasks attached to the job as well as the variety of areas within the field

was very helpful in the student making a more informed choice about what they wanted to do after school.

Another aspect of decision-making, according to Paula, which was crucial was knowing the mechanics and matriculation requirements for courses. One student wanted to be an Educational Psychologist but was 'walking away' from the idea of becoming one as she thought Irish was compulsory.

There were other students I was working with, one of them was interested in educational psychology but English was not her first language. She was not studying Irish and because education usually has Irish as a compulsory, she was completely walking away from the idea of educational psychology until I found the word 'or' in a prospectus (Paula, mentor).

Paula pointed this out to the student and told her to inquire further and 'she came back the next week telling me she can'. Paula was very animated about the importance of attention to detail when making decisions and this impacted the student.

The decision she thought was made for her, but only for reading the small print, it was not. So that did affect her decision, but that takes a high level of attention to detail. Teenagers do not usually have that. That is why it is so important to have that mentoring relationship. You have somebody that goes 'No hang on, there is a word here that does not fit that, let's figure out what's going on (Paula, mentor).

Paula's experience of mentoring students echoes that of Rob's. When Rob was asked whether mentoring involvement impacts the student's decision-making process or not, he began to talk about putting the power into the students' hands by making them more informed. He also mentions the need to be honest with the students about how they need to tackle short-term habits if they want to achieve long-term goals. This 'hard smack of reality' is a similar theme to what Paula mentioned helped her mentee arrive at more informed decisions.

I think they would be better informed. That is the aim of the programme, to put the power into their hands and give them a bit of information so they can be better informed when they make decisions about what they want to do next. In the short, medium, and long term. Obviously, to get to your long term of becoming a barrister,

you need to make changes in the short term, like paying attention in school. Sometimes that can be a hard smack to reality to realise it is a hard smack of reality, but I need to make some changes to get there (Rob, mentor).

Summary of Mentor Interviews

The main findings from the mentor interviews included their rationale for getting involved in the programme, which was driven by altruistic and empathic motives with a desire to inspire students and 'a love for what TAP represents'. Another theme that emerged from the mentor data was that of wanting to flip stereotypes of Trinity College and 'the type of student that goes there.' The mentors also discussed what positive mentoring relationships should look like and the features which define them, in their opinions including trust, empathy, functionality and similarity. The mentors admitted that initially, they had low expectations of the mentee's engagement levels, but this was not how their experience turned out, they found the students very highly engaged in the sessions. On the operational aspects of the mentoring programme, all the mentors agreed that the structure needed to be improved. They believed that concrete objectives for each session and consistency across the board in terms of attendance and sticking to dates were crucial for a successful mentoring programme to exist. The mentors also believed that they had a positive impact on the decisions the students make on what they decide to do when they finish secondary school.

6.3. Trinity Access Staff Interviews findings

This section discusses the findings from the two in-depth interviews with the Trinity Access staff. This element of the data generation was aimed at getting the views of the staff who were involved in setting up the mentoring programme initially and those who have been engaged in programme operation since its inception. The programme was initially developed after Trinity Access Office staff met a US not-for-profit organisation called College for Every Student (CFES) at a conference in the US in 2012. CFES ran several educational outreach programmes in secondary schools across America that had low progression rates to 3rd level education. The programmes ranged from leadership-type initiatives called *leadership through service*, a mentoring programme where they matched students with 3rd-level students and professionals and *Pathways to College* which supplied the schools with detailed resources to aid guidance counselling activities within the schools. Each school was provided with a CFES staff member to help them with rolling out the programmes.

The unique selling points that CFES related to schools was that the model provided a framework that standardised language used by students across the system and a language that developed the student's knowledge of how the education system worked. This appealed to the Trinity Access staff as much of the work that they had done with schools since their inception in 1994 was essentially related to raising 3rd-level progression rates in the secondary schools that they were mandated to work with. This CFES model brought all these activities together and could be packaged for schools to frame their activities. Trinity Access staff decided to form a partnership with CFES and introduce their model to the Irish context. Initially, Trinity Access tried the model with three of their link schools for a year before rolling it out to eight schools. Initially, the same name was used for Trinity's school outreach programmes, of which mentoring was one.

The first interview was with an employee who has been with Trinity Access for over 20 years, Ann (pseudonym) joined Trinity Access a couple of years after its formation. Jennifer began working on the programme within the last 5 years and had a more 'hands-on' approach to the mentoring programme. This part of the chapter will outline Ann's perspective from a historical perspective and secondly Jennifer's more recent experiences and will finish by outlining overlapping themes across both

Table 6.3: Themes from TA Staff interviews

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning: Mentoring as...
Programme excitement	New (but not first) endeavour. College going culture	College-going objective; Instillation of fresh impetuses.
Powerful impact on decisions	One good parent or guardian. Timely information leads to confidence.	Empowerment. Alternative viewpoints;
Positive relationships	Trust. Honesty. Commitment.	Two-way approach. Trust and honesty led.
Structural issues	Mentor training is crucial. More than one way to mentor. Time-consuming	Worthwhile but can be improved
Joined up approach	Guidance counsellors. Teacher; TAP	Many groups working together.

Theme 1: ‘There was a lot of excitement for the College for Every Student initiative’.
Programme excitement and college-going culture.

When Ann and her colleagues first met the College for Every Student organisation at a conference, they were quite excited about the work they were doing and the overlap with TAP. Ann talked about the results of the work CFES was doing in school and how it empowered many students to go to college from backgrounds that ‘just did not go to college’. This led Ann to relay the excitement and discovery to her colleagues back in TCD and this started the process of using the CFES model in Ireland.

When we first met CFES we were excited about the overlap and the potential to collaborate and work with the organisation. It was clear that a lot of work went into developing this model and framework in the States and if we could use elements of it too then this would be beneficial to our students and schools (Ann, TAP staff).

When the team worked through the details of the model and how it could be applied to the Irish context, the next task was to pilot the programme with some of Trinity Access Programme link schools. Three schools agreed to be pilot schools for the programme. The pilot aimed to see which parts worked well, which did not so well and what the students and schools benefited from. This also led to excitement from the schools as this was a new venture and an opportunity to take what they thought were ‘best practice’ from the US in the area they work in too.

The CFES model was piloted in three of our link schools and there was a lot of excitement in the schools and the potential to collaborate with experts from America was exciting. This was followed up by trips to America to visit the CFES organisation, meet other schools involved in the programme from across the world and bring home lessons of how other schools managed to support their students on their academic journeys (Ann, TAP staff).

However, mentoring was not a new concept to the Trinity Access team, nor was it new to Ann. ‘It is important to remember that this type of educational approach has been around for a long time in many different guises’, assured Ann. In her early years with the Access programme, they tried an internet approach to mentoring called *E-mentoring*. This early approach was ‘very exciting’ at the time for the TAP team just like the current guise is, but it

did not run without its issues as well. At the time the Access team had built up partnerships with various corporate entities such as Grant Thornton around Dublin and were keen to channel this expertise to benefit their link schools somehow (Ann, TAP staff). After much brainstorming, they came up with the idea of e-mentoring where the employees of the companies would mentor their students via online software. This software was developed by an English firm and was quite expensive to run.

The mentoring project that we did in St Patrick's was not our first try at mentoring. We had done an e-mentoring programme I do not know if your research there any information on that but the first mentoring programme, we did was in the early 2000s (Ann, TAP staff).

Ann discussed the original aim of the programme was to create a college-going culture in the schools. They thought they could achieve this quicker if they included the families. The main aim of including parents in the mentoring was to develop a college-going culture not just within the school but also at home. Another main aim of including parents was that they could help broaden their understanding of the information the students needed around finances, as well as courses for third-level study.

We also wanted parental involvement as well so that they would be inspired or mentored as well but I suppose it really was helping to create a college-going culture in the school. That was one of the broad goals and to ensure that students information advice and guidance as well as about college courses or courses in further education in Trinity (Ann, TAP staff).

This expansion of the points of information that the students received was to broaden their exposure to people working in other areas that they may not have yet known about.

There was information on student finance, and how to apply for financial support so all the type of information that they might traditionally receive from a guidance counsellor or parents or people working in various employment areas they would start to get that in packets from other groups of people working in a variety of areas (Ann, TAP staff).

Theme 2: ‘Supporting students requires a joined-up approach with Guidance Counsellors and other groups involved across Ireland’. Joined-up approach.

Ann discussed the multi-stakeholder dilemma in the work that Trinity Access and CFES were trying to achieve. This was a situation where many different stakeholders such as TAP, teachers, guidance counsellors, and family members were trying to achieve the same thing – ‘provide information on a wide range of opportunities available to second-level students’. Ann talked about having a joined-up approach to this objective and offered suggestions about how to do this.

There are many people working in the space of guidance counselling-related work. It would be worthwhile if we were all working on the same page, it would standardise the approach for the school and the students and would also build relationships between groups trying to achieve the same aims (Ann, TAP staff).

Ann talked about the possibility on a policy level to make mentoring a compulsory part of guidance counsellor’s training. The guidance counsellors could therefore be primed to introduce mentoring into the schools as soon as they begin their practice. Ann mentioned building relationships with The Institute of Guidance Counsellors Association as a starting place to achieve this joined-up approach.

Guidance counsellors in schools around Ireland are very well trained, they all want the best outcomes for their students and endeavour to support them as best they can. Just like we do. It would be worthwhile to work together and possibly with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors too. This would make our work stronger as we’re all on the same wavelength (Ann, TAP staff).

Despite TCD and its Access programme only working within the Dublin area and its link schools, Ann mentioned the possibility of rolling out this programme and model across Ireland. Ann explained that Trinity Access Programme has already contacted IT Tralee and NUIG and initial work was being undertaken to explore the possibility of working together using the CFES model. An Education and Training Board in the Midlands were also in contact, and exploratory talks were in motion there too.

These collaborations were positive developments for access initiatives around Ireland as more people with the same goal began to work together. We were working with colleagues from Tralee, Galway, Laois, and Offaly. There were also links with Queen's University Belfast and this was also quite exciting for us at Trinity Access. (Ann, TAP staff)

Theme 3: 'Power of mentoring for educational decision making'. Powerful impact on decision-making.

A key theme that emerged from talking to Ann about mentoring was clearly how powerful Ann believed mentoring is. Ann talked in depth about the power of mentoring and what drove her to get behind the initiative. When Ann was at the age of making decisions about what to do after secondary school, she discussed the systemic importance of the knowledge of people around her. Ann relied on the power of her network when it came to making her own educational decisions. She talks about how essential this was for her choosing a college, college course and specific modules. Access to this information was crucial for Ann.

For me personally, I always knew that mentoring was something essential and it was something that I was hugely reliant on in forming my own decisions around where to go to college what to study and even how to apply and even in terms getting into college picking your first-year course both the elective and the essential modules. (Ann, TAP staff)

Ann's family were first-generation immigrants in her country of origin and talked about the difficulty in interpreting the college material for choosing courses and course modules. Her mother knew of neighbours who were also immigrants and had a daughter who had been on a similar journey before her and instructed Ann to call them for advice and guidance.

I will never forget it; the course handbook was the size of a third of a bible and it arrived in the mail, I was supposed to flick through it and select my courses for my first semester and I did not know where to begin. And she offered the most practical advice. She said to go over to Peggy O'Brien, Mary O'Brien's daughter. Mary was an

immigrant too, and she said to go over and sit down with her, and she became my mentor, and she helped me. (Ann, TAP staff)

Ann talks much about the information needed to know how the system works, as being a key determinant for success in achieving one's goal. When she called Peggy O'Brien's daughter what initially seemed extremely daunting became straightforward very quickly. It was this timely information that gave Ann the confidence to pursue her course of choice. 'People usually just need help on hurdles and then they build the confidence and then in return can help people down the road. It is timely access to information, advice and guidance.' The guidance mentioned by Ann above is an important aspect of helping students build confidence in deciding what to do next. However, this confidence to make decisions about their educational decisions is still a complex and multifaceted process, according to Ann. Ann mentions that even within 'our respective socio-economic circumstances we still all have a different set of opportunities and experiences'. Ann firmly believes the impact of one good parent/guardian is hugely impactful upon the student's post-school decision-making process.

But when I look back on that group of 18 students whom we have spent a lot of time with them and their parents throughout the year, even those students that had the most challenging circumstances as individuals, once they had one supportive parent, once they had at least one parent that was not actively trying to quash their ambitions to move forward I found that you could make great traction. (Ann, TAP staff)

Ann talked about the impact of the parent upon the child, as well as the circumstances of the child and their background. Ann mentions that disadvantages do not all work linearly. Many disadvantages, according to Ann, are much more complex than what meets the eye and we're not all advantaged or disadvantaged in the same way.

'So, I think it is complex, not everybody is advantaged or disadvantaged in the same way, and I do not really like that expression.' (Ann, TAP staff)

Despite the socio-economic challenges of many of the families that Ann works with, she does think that the support of the family, especially the parents, should not be underestimated.

And I think that goes a long way, you can come from an impoverished family monetarily but if they support you in your endeavours that can make up for an awful

lot in my experience so I do think that the influence of your parents or guardians can be underestimated. (Ann, TAP staff)

With these complexities and situational factors in mind, Ann goes on to discuss the power of high levels of support and expectations of students. The two factors of support and expectations were high on Ann's list of what helps students achieve their goals. 'I do think when people are in an environment of high expectations and high support, I think that those two combinations can mean an awful lot to students.'

Theme 4: 'Training of mentoring crucial for successful guidance and there is more than one way to mentor'. Ideal mentoring structure.

According to Ann an important part of any relationship is the reliability of the information transfer. In the finding above Ann mentioned the importance of timely access to information. She goes on to talk about the importance of such information also being well-considered and not oversimplified. Students need the correct information to have the full picture of options at their disposal. 'But it does need to be well considered because, well we can talk a little about that later but just in terms of distillation of information and oversimplification. Sometimes there are those traps to mentoring programmes as well.' Ann goes on to talk about the danger of information being poorly oversimplified and how that can have negative knock-on effects for students down the road. For example, giving students the wrong information on requirements for courses can lead to students having their hopes set on a pathway but said pathway being blocked due to not having the required matriculation.

Ann also talked about the importance of 'being real' with the students, so you do not give them unrealistic expectations of what is possible. Ann also mentions the importance of being as direct as possible about what the mentoring programme is trying to do and not trying to do. This will help, she assures. 'I think that too often with mentoring programmes they start a flurry of high hopes, and they do not necessarily achieve the results they set out to achieve.' There is a strong emphasis on being honest with the students whenever they look for guidance. A situation which can create unnecessary harmful consequences where students feel under undue pressure to consider course options that are not suited needs to be avoided. This can happen to them simply because they see somebody else role model it or because they are feeling an amount of pressure to attend third level even though my aptitudes and

skills and my own dreams and desires might have me moving in a different direction.' This element of the mentoring programme is a very important aspect to avoid according to Ann, and this can be avoided with proper training for the mentors, so they do not pass on the wrong information to the students.

When the Trinity Access team was first considering what form of mentoring, they were going to use in schools they looked at various forms such as distal and proximal mentoring. Proximal mentoring was a type that included more regular interactions with one-to-one or small groups of students combined with TCD undergraduate students. Distal mentoring on the other hand was where you had a guest speaker coming into the groups of students.

We looked at both distal and proximal mentoring so more regular interactions with one-to-one or small groups of students combined with TCD undergraduate students and then some more distal experiences where you have like a guest speaker coming in as well because that is still mentoring. (Ann, TAP staff)

According to Ann, mentoring can come in more than one form and using a mixture of both approaches helped. There was also a variation of mentor-to-mentee ratios that could be used and was not exclusively one-to-one mentoring.

Mentoring comes in all different ways it is not exclusively one-on-one, we found that about five interactions would be the minimum for impact, and we wanted both undergraduate students to interact with second-level students and for second-level students to build their capacity as mentors to assist with second-year students in St. Josephs. (Ann, TAP staff)

Ann also discussed the importance of getting students' parents involved in the process so they too would be inspired by the wide range of options available to the students when they finish school. Ann talked about how they tried to cover every angle of mentoring in all its guises.

We did everything from career evenings to campus visits to interactions with motivational speakers. We had Frank Clark visit the school. We had a man who set up a social entrepreneurship programme visit the school. We organised coffee mornings for parents as well so they would be in an informal setting and learn in an environment about how they could support their son or daughter to do well in a secondary school

environment and to consider their post-secondary options. So, we tried to consider it from all angles. (Ann, TAP staff)

**Theme 5: 'Strong mentoring relationships are built on trust, honesty, and commitment'.
Positive relationships.**

When asked about how strong mentoring relationships are built, Ann alluded to the power of trust, authenticity and respect. The students need to know that their mentors are committed to them, and this will build trust over time. Being authentic in how mentors approach this trust-building exercise is also important according to Ann. This can be as simple as sharing your own story with the students.

It would be a relationship that is characterised by a high level of trust. You believe in them, and you trust the person that you are working alongside, or it can be as simple as them sharing their story with you... there is that authenticity, there is that sense of respect. (Ann, TAP staff)

The issue of commitment came up time and time again in the student focus groups and was talked about by Ann yet again, albeit from a different angle. Whilst the commitment of mentors is something that is not questionable among the cohort who volunteered for this research, it was talked about by students and teachers about various mentors they have had throughout the programme. However, commitment is a two-way act when there are two or more people involved. Ann talks about the commitment needed on both sides to make mentoring work. It is quite easy to understand how it can be difficult for mentors with work and college schedules to stay committed to the programme, but on the other hand, there is also the issue of involvement by the student. To get around the issue of mentors signing up and then not fulfilling the schedule Ann suggests that we must tease out why they want to be involved and do they know what it entails before committing and understand how the administrators of the programme can support the mentors in ensuring high-quality training and support on logistical issues.

Too often you have mentors that will sign up and it is a flash-in-the-pan day and then they are gone. So, we kind of must tease out why they want to be involved, do they understand what the commitment entails, and do they have what it takes then can we as the administrators support them, can we ensure the training is high quality? Can

we remove the logistical barriers? We must make sure we double up our efforts on that end. (Ann, TAP staff)

These recommendations around supporting mentors also provide operational suggestions as to how the programme can be enhanced. If the programme administrators know that a high number of mentors 'drop-offs' is due to logistical issues, then they are in a good position to explore possible solutions given that they have a clear diagnosis of the problem.

Theme 6: 'Positive relationships need regular interactions that develop a sense of vulnerability and empower the mentees. Positive relationships empower.'

Jennifer talked about various elements of the mentoring programme in great depth such as what works well, what not so well and the challenges of working with more institutions and stakeholders. However, the importance of attending to the mentors overlaps very much with that of the previous TAP employees' experiences of nurturing positive relationships. According to Jennifer, mentoring selection and training are important so they can be best prepared for working with the student.

It is incredibly important that we look after our mentors. How we select and train them is crucial. Some of them have never worked with young people before so helping them become best prepared for this is very important (Jennifer, TAP staff).

Attending to this process is important from the very outset, however, supporting them throughout the mentoring itself is also a vital part of her role. Whilst all of this is time-consuming it may not matter if the positive relationships are not developed, according to Jennifer. To develop positive relationships between mentor and mentee Jennifer suggests that mentors 'learn how to develop a sense of vulnerability and trust to share their personal stories with their mentees.' It is in this sense of vulnerability that students will respond to their mentor. 'They know that if the mentor is willing to share personal stories with them then they can do likewise, and this helps build the relationship between the two.'

To achieve this level of vulnerability and trust between mentor and mentee takes time and more regular interactions. Developing rapport and stability in the relationship can only occur over a prolonged period, according to Jennifer, and this was also helped by having group sizes very small, from two mentees to one mentor maximum.

Building strong rapport and stability takes a lot of time and regular interactions, just like regular relationships. To support these goals small groups would be better in my opinion. The mentor and mentee would be more likely to be open and vulnerable with each other (Jennifer, TAP staff).

The final aspect of building positive mentoring relationships in Jennifer's view is ensuring that the mentors empower mentees to gradually help build autonomy and take their paths into their own hands. This echoes what Ann says when she reflects on her journey to 3rd level and searches for information from Peggy O'Brien's daughter who had taken a familiar path. Having access to Peggy's daughter and an insight into her experience helped but essentially it was Ann and her autonomy that had to make the final decision. However, having a positive relationship with Peggy's daughter helped her access the information needed which reassured her levels of autonomy.

Summary of Trinity Access Staff Interviews

The TA staff were a rich reserve of information about the mentoring programme. One of the participants has been working with TAP for over 20 years and has a wealth of knowledge and experience on various aspects and iterations of the mentoring programme. The main themes that emerged from the TAP staff included the excitement of beginning a new iteration of the mentoring programme, which followed the US CFES model. However, despite it being a new approach it was not their first. TAP had tried various mentoring programmes in the past and their main objective was to create a college-going culture in the schools they were working with. They also believed that the mentoring programme had a powerful impact on the decisions the students made about their futures after school. They mentioned that from their experience you could never undervalue one good parent or guardian in helping students make decisions and that during any form of mentoring timely information for the students leads to confidence being built. An important aspect of this research was to find out the views of the participants on what makes positive mentoring relationships. The TAP staff agreed that trust, honesty, and commitment were crucial here. They also agreed that on the operational side of the programme, mentor training is crucial, there is more than one way to mentor and that the programme can be time-consuming with difficult logistics so any way to alleviate this without losing quality would be a positive development for the programme. They suggested that collaboration among all the groups involved in supporting the students would be

beneficial for achieving the objective of enhancing the students' life chances. They specifically highlighted the role of Guidance Counsellors around Ireland and suggested that this group have a crucial part to play in delivering the mentoring programmes and that it would be useful if TAP found a way to work with them, possibly through the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

6.4. School Principal Interview Findings

This last part of the chapter will discuss the findings from an interview conducted with a principal from one of the Trinity Access Programme link schools. Accessing school leaders was difficult during the study, but this principal was very generous with her time. She was the principal of an all-girls DEIS school in West Dublin. The interview was semi-structured and followed a similar pattern to that of the teachers, mentors, and TAP staff. The interview schedule was developed to try to answer the research questions of this study.

Table 6.4: School Principal Interview: Thematic findings

Theme	Sub-theme	Meaning: Mentoring as...
College-focused and a two-way street	Ideal programme. Commitment.	College-going objective; Commitment from both mentor and mentee.
Government support for disadvantaged areas	DEIS support	Sustaining extra support to the students in the area
Joined up approach	Business links. Community links	More than just the school and TAP working together

Theme 1: ‘Two-way relationship needed to make mentoring successful’. College-focused and two-way street.

A key weakness in any mentoring according to Mary would be that ‘if a student is not listening or does not fulfil what the mentor may have asked them to do in the meantime.’ Mary put a strong emphasis on the two-way nature that any successful relationship needs to have to thrive. Sometimes students expect the mentor to do all the work but that is not how these relationships and programmes should work to be successful, said Mary.

Many times, I have seen students complain about the quality of the sessions or this, that or the other but in many of these cases, the student was not putting in the effort and did not have a huge interest in the initiative in the first place (Mary, Principal).

For Mary challenging the students was a key aspect of the mentoring programme. She described how she used to say to the mentors to challenge the students and get them to do X, Y and Z for the next time that they meet up. An important part of the relationship-building aspect for Mary was commitment. The commitment was needed by both parties, not just the mentor.

Any relationship is only going to be as good as how committed they are. It all depends on the mentor too, sometimes the mentors do not develop that relationship with the young person (Mary, Principal).

Mary also alluded to the importance of having 'follow-through', having a consistent approach is very important and maybe a mentor may lack consistency. According to Mary, a mentor may leave their place of work so changing mentors could frustrate the young person. Mary talked about how a new environment for students can be overwhelming and that when her students were in school, they would 'take them by the hand' and support them to get a leaving cert. However, this can lead to the students finding it difficult to adapt when they leave school, and it is important that they have mentors when they go to college too.

When Mary was asked about what the approach to mentoring was in her school, she used very college-focused language:

Say a student wanted to pursue a career in finance or law or whatever. You try to mix them with someone in those careers which would help. Not always possible to do that. But they can support the young person in all different avenues that they can pursue because sometimes you can get tunnel vision and well this is the course I am going to follow (Mary, Principal).

Mary pointed out that there are so many courses on offer and some very good courses, and some very good avenues that they can pursue and even if they do not get high enough points for one course then there is always 'a plan B and a plan C.'

And you help them see all the different areas, like when you think of law when you look at all the different areas that you can have, the same with finance, all the different jobs (Mary, Principal).

Mary also pointed out the power for her students of the mentor telling them their life story and some things that they would have difficulties with as well. Maybe they did not get the points they wanted to go to college. This would help the mentor and mentees get to know each other better and establish trust. However, Mary would not advocate for the same type of mentoring to be used with junior-cycle and senior-cycle students. For her senior cycle students are mainly getting mentored by mentors outside of school, mainly college students and professionals. The junior cycle students are mentored by the senior cycle students in a brother/sister type approach. Along with the peer support benefits the younger students gain from these relationships, Mary also points to the confidence it builds in the older students.

It was very effective, and I have always been a big believer in peer support and peer mentoring and all that. And again, it gives the fifth years confidence and developing skills of negotiating with the younger and the first years having that support system there daily and we also used to get them to organise clubs and do a little bit of after-school or a lunch thing like go to the breakfast club every morning. It is all about relationships as we know in schools (Mary, Principal).

‘Sometimes effective mentoring can be done in-house’, according to Mary.

Theme 2: ‘The DEIS initiative is a very important development for disadvantaged areas.’
Government support for disadvantaged areas.

When Mary was asked about her role as principal and how she would engage her staff so they would have high expectations of their students, she felt the DEIS initiative implemented in 2009 was a very important development. Mary highlights the importance of being a DEIS school and the responsibility that they must develop the DEIS plan and the different areas of the DEIS planning:

As I keep saying, it is one of the best initiatives introduced to disadvantaged areas in 2009, I think. It made us all stop and think ‘What are we doing’ We started measuring

even the language, gathering the information, setting the baselines, what are your interventions, how you are going to measure it, how you are going to analyse and what way you are going to evaluate them. It encouraged us to work differently in schools and everyone was more accountable (Mary, Principal).

Mary found that bringing every staff member on board around the development of their students was a very important step for the school. It helped Mary get more unity around the staff, to see everybody working together and it was everybody's responsibility to support the young people. Analysing subjects and results was a big development for Mary's school and if a student was doing well in one subject and was doing poorly in others, you can ask the questions.

You cannot say that Jo has not been to school or that she has been misbehaving, you must look at the bigger picture. It really did get teachers to step up and set targets. And if you did not reach your target, fair enough why did not you? And if you did, then build on it the following year (Mary, Principal).

It was building momentum all the time, according to Mary. She went on to say that it was the same thing with the Trinity Access programme. 'It is the same thing. It is the same outcome that you're trying to achieve.'

Growing up in a DEIS area in Dublin was a challenge socially, according to Mary. The students were limited in the range of people they mixed with, and this was a disadvantage. Mary talks about how meeting mentors may be the first time many of the mentees meet people from different walks of life and this is a very important development for them in her opinion.

It is a great start because you are mixing with people, it is not just the work you do but the mixing in and having the chats with different people and getting to know how a big company works. This can be a challenging one for the students. (Mary, Principal)

Mary feels that many of the students need to be prepared for the new environment. Many of her students secure internships with big companies and some need extra support in adjusting to this environment:

They really need to be prepared for that. I know through Business in The Community that they get companies to take young people on internships during the summer, so

it is a big challenge. We need to prepare them for the world of work, and you can prepare all you want in schools, but they need to have that physical experience of going and working in a big company or being mentored by someone. And again, companies need to realise that they need to give maybe a little of that extra support for students that come from DEIS schools (Mary, Principal).

Mary suggests that you do not have to 'take them by the hand or anything like that' but they do need a little bit more mentoring and coaching when they're there in the company.

This is an important point to consider. Helping the students attain life or career goals is an important facet of any mentoring programme but it may not be the end point. Once students enter the workplace or further education, they may also require support adjusting to the new environment. Mary's point about the students being from backgrounds that may not give them as much exposure to careers as their middle-class peers can be an issue. This area is an aspect that will be discussed in the next chapter and may also be worth further research.

Theme 3: 'Community links to business are strong avenues for autonomous and sustainable mentoring programmes'. Joined up approach to mentoring.

At the beginning of the mentoring element of the Trinity Access Programme outreach initiatives, the language and aims of the programme were very college focused. The idea came from a link with an American not-for-profit group called College for Every Student (CFES). When this was used in the Irish context by TAP with their link schools it was introduced and titled CFES. To this end, many of the mentors that were recruited for the programme were college students. They were recruited on the basis that if you put more college students with secondary school students this influence would impact the students and more of them would want to go to college. However, as the programme expanded and more mentors were required to keep group sizes low, TAP started to widen its mentor recruitment net. Many businesses already supported TAP and as many schools had already links with local businesses, both parties decided to pursue mentors from these avenues as well.

Many of Mary's mentors came from a local insurance business. According to Mary, she sees her school as "very lucky" to have a well-structured partnership with a company close by that

provided mentors for both fifth-year and sixth-year students. Mary explains that the lucky 90% of her students see a mentor. Mary explained that she had other companies on board, but some only did it for one year. The local company that mentored their senior cycle students have continued and given it continuity. Building up these relationships was key to developing the mentoring programme in Mary's school. This relationship that Mary built up with the local business helped reaffirm the business's commitment to mentoring and in addition, committed more of their employee's time to allow for one-to-one mentoring. This consisted of regular meetings every 6 weeks and the students going to the business for each session. This was very different to what was experienced by most other mentees in other schools. Mary felt that the students changing sites and seeing what the world of work looked like was powerful and transformative.

Even for the young people that went into the offices and the building and just saw it. This is what the business world is all about so that is even part of it. Looking around and meeting their mentors and having coffee with them or whatever. So very powerful and very successful. And some of them kept in contact with them after the end (Mary, Principal).

Despite TAP formalising mentoring in the school, Mary's experience of seeing the impact of this type of initiative is not exactly new. The school had already created links with an agency called Business in the Community. This helped establish the business links and broaden the remit of mentoring the students. She acknowledges that 'schools cannot fill all the gaps in a person's education, so it is good to go into the business sector'. Mary's school had several links to local businesses throughout their mentoring journey and has tried many types of mentoring approaches, but she still believes that one-to-one is the best approach.

We have another engineering company, that provides mentoring as well, but they do not have as many mentors, but they do group mentoring. It is working out well but going back to the question from a few moments ago I think the one-to-one is better, I have observed a mentoring session with a person in the engineering firm and 3 young people last year and it worked well (Mary, Principal).

Mary found that the ability to share information was important. It was also good for the students to hear from each other as well. She described the importance of understanding the

mentor's point of view in building a relationship with the student. They both need to have a good understanding of each other, and the mentor understands where the young person is coming from and the challenges that he or she may be facing. Mary thinks it is a good idea for them to maybe sit down and talk about themselves, again confidentially, but where they want to be and share maybe their interests and things like that.

You need to start up, if it is a young fella maybe see if he watched the soccer last night or whatever and develop that relationship, only to a basic level and then build on that. So, it is building relationships from that point, having ordinary conversations.

This is one way of going about relationship building according to Mary, however, when it comes to more highly challenged conversations good understanding is required.

For highly challenged conversations there needs to be a good engagement and a good understanding, and that the relationship be comfortable (Mary, Principal).

To build this understanding, engagement and high-quality relationships Mary's experience tells her that the mentor and mentee do not necessarily need to be from the same backgrounds. She finds the work done with mentors beforehand is very important, she explains that some of the employees in the firms that mentored her students did not fully understand the challenges that face young people in DEIS schools. Mary found it useful to have an initial meeting with the mentors and explain from the school's perspective who they are, what they do and what the school's moral purpose is. Mary says that this helps the mentor understand what are the challenges that face these young people every day and what are the challenges that they may hear in their conversations with the young people so that they have sort of an insight into it. It is also vital on the student's part that pre-work is carried out to prepare the students for the mentoring programme. Mary states that it may be challenging for those people who have not had coaches of any shape or form in their schools or workplaces. 'So, I think pre-work is vital but while they're not patronising.'

It is crucial, according to Mary, that the mentors challenge the students and help them to believe that 'They can be the best they can be and forget about their background, if you have that belief in yourself and that you're willing to seek support.'

Mary reflects on the impact that these 'people who meet us along the way can influence these young people if the young people are willing to enter it and listen and walk the walk and continue to look for extra support and are willing to accept it, I think that is the key.'

This needs to come from the students, Mary concludes.

If they are willing to seek learning happening in the school. Wherever learning happens, as I used to say, 'Could be when you wake up in the morning, could be when you go to bed' People can influence you and say, 'Oh I could do it as well.' And for young people to be open to all the opportunities that is in DEIS schools there are lots of opportunities, some provide more than others. But to be willing, I think we need to instil that belief in them from an earlier age, from primary school because we talk about fifth and sixth years but a lot of the bad habits from their aspirations can be changed... they can be reset in their ways so maybe if you can instil that belief in the young people and get them to think 'Well I can be whatever.' I think we have talked before about having interventions for second years because it gets them to think outside the box and where they can be and to set their planning. I think the whole idea of goal setting and setting their targets for the future, students need to set their goals and targets from an early age. Having their diary for their tests, for the summer tests, and Christmas tests. To get them to be more reflective. To get them to be self-aware, and self-reflective, and hopefully help them develop more of those skills. Being self-aware is a big problem. You need to think outside the box (Mary, Principal).

Mary suggests that a strategy that many schools could employ to overcome the logistical difficulties of recruiting mentors would be to reach out to local businesses. It has worked for her school and has been 'a rich resource for my students'. Many of the sessions have been arranged offsite and the business sorts out all the travel logistics. 'It is also a way for the students to build up links with local businesses with the possibility of maybe working for them in the future'. This has also been beneficial to another school in this research and will be discussed further in the conclusion section of this thesis.

Summary of Principal Interview

The last section in this findings chapter included the perspective of a school principal involved in the programme. This perspective included the importance of the mentoring programme in

her school being college-focused. The programme having a college-going objective was always her number one priority for the programme and believed that this is what made it successful. Mary also believed that in an ideal programme both mentor and mentee are fully committed. Mary also believed that for this programme to be successful and for the students to get to where they wanted to go in life government support for disadvantaged areas through the DEIS scheme was maintained and enhanced. Her last main area of concern around the programme was the need to have a joined-up approach between various groups involved such as local businesses in the community supporting the school, students, and programme. To be sustainable the programme needed more than just the school and Trinity Access support. There was a key difference between this school and the others in the research and that was the support of a local business in providing mentors and logistical support. This finding is also interesting as it demonstrates examples of bridging social capital in action.

6.5. Chapter Conclusion and Synthesis of Findings

This chapter outlined the findings from three groups who participated in this research. The first group presented were the mentors involved in the programme. At the beginning of this section, there was a description of the characteristics of each of the ten mentors who took part in the research. 60% of the participants were male and 40% were female and 60% of the participants were TCD students whereas 40% were working professionals. However, all mentor participants attended TCD at one point and had a link with the Access programme. This was the main source of mentor recruitment for the programme and was also the main source for recruiting participants for this research. Each mentor was asked questions from an interview schedule framed by the overarching research questions of this study. These questions were on the operational aspect of the programme, the mentor-mentee relationship, and the impact on the student's school decision-making process.

The Trinity Access staff highlighted the importance of groups working together and not underestimating the impact of that one good adult on the mentees. They also mentioned various suggestions on how to improve the programme such as commitment and mentor training.

Overall, on examining the Trinity Access Mentoring Programme, we find a tapestry of perspectives from different stakeholder groups, each contributing insights while also sharing common themes. One unifying element is the shared motivation that propels these stakeholders. Altruism and empathy drive their participation, as they are all guided by a desire to support and empower the mentees. Fundamental to the success of this programme, all stakeholders emphasise the significance of building strong, trust-based relationships between mentors and mentees. Traits like trust, empathy, functionality, and similarity emerge as the bedrock of these relationships, regardless of whether one is a student, educator, mentor, programme organiser, or school leader.

Yet, differences in these perspectives are equally striking. Each stakeholder presents a distinct lens through which the programme is viewed. The Mentee Focus Groups offer insights from the students' vantage point, revealing their experiences and preferences. In contrast, Teacher Interviews provide the perspective of educators, focusing on how the programme aligns with the educational journey of the students they guide.

Mentor Interviews shed light on the mentors' viewpoint, offering insights into their motivations, expectations, and experiences. Meanwhile, Trinity Access Staff Interviews delve into the programme's historical evolution and draw upon extensive experience to examine its various iterations and impacts.

The Principal Interview provides a unique perspective, emphasising the importance of community engagement and the support of local businesses, which emerge as distinct factors not as prominently featured in the other summaries.

In conclusion, while overarching themes such as shared motivations and the centrality of relationship-building unite these perspectives, each stakeholder group enriches our understanding of the Trinity Access Mentoring Programme by offering specific recommendations, especially on improving the operationality of the programme, and insights tailored to their roles and experiences within the programme. These perspectives paint a comprehensive picture of the programme's strengths and areas for improvement.

While the views of each group vary there is a lot of information presented across the last two chapters which will be discussed further in the next chapter. This chapter is split into three

and follows a discussion of the relevance of the findings in answering, or not answering, the research questions relevant to this body of research.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the relationship between the tentative theoretical mentoring model developed in Chapter 3 and the experiences of the various Trinity Access (TA) mentoring programme stakeholders, in relation to the main research questions (and sub-research question 1a). It is worth highlighting the research questions again at the start of this chapter.

RQ1: How do 6th-year students in five Trinity Access linked Post-Primary DEIS schools perceive the Trinity Access mentoring programme?

Sub RQ1: What effect, if any, does the mentoring programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations?

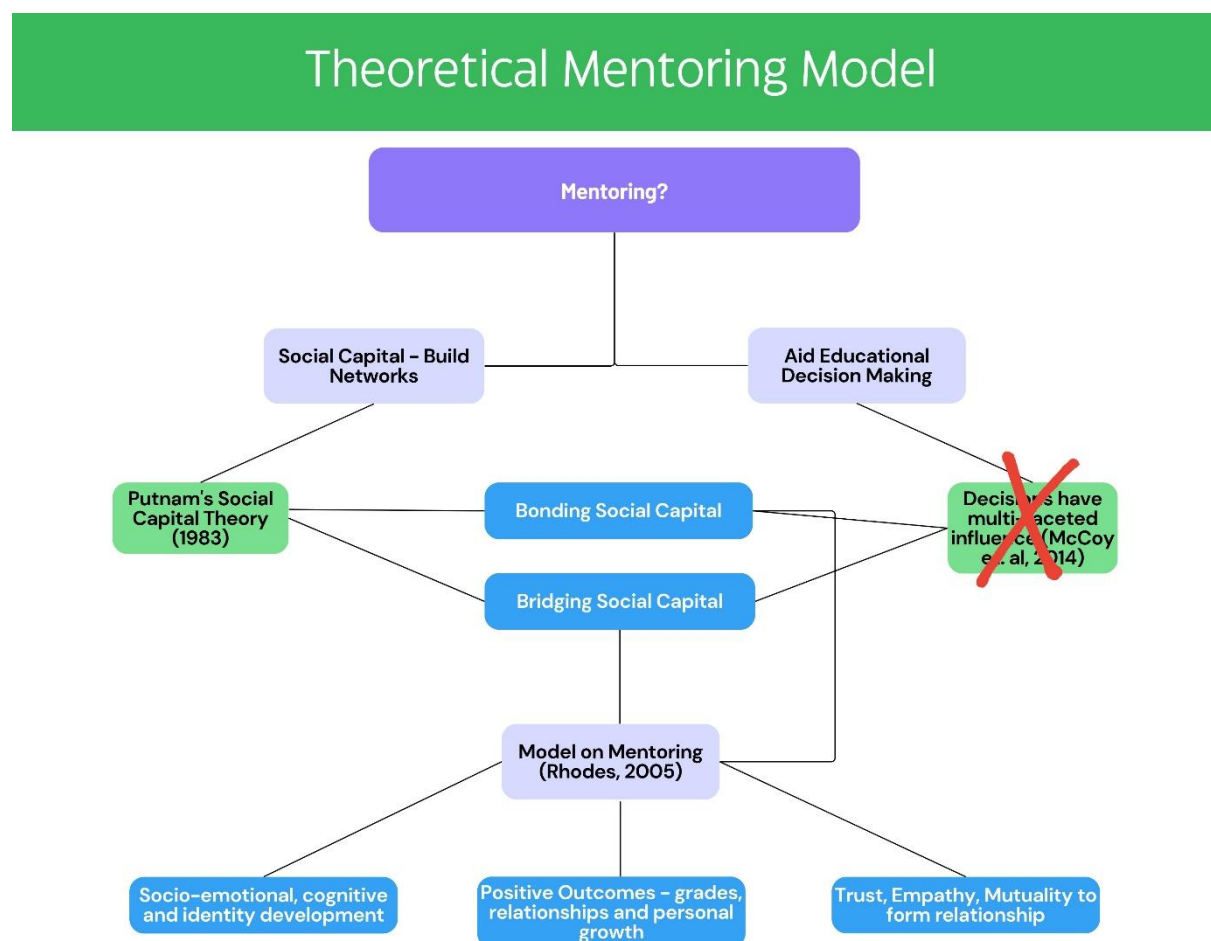
RQ2: How does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

RQ3: How is the mentoring programme operationalised in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?

This chapter is approached in sections that discuss each research question and any similarities and/or differences to the theoretical model outlined in Figure 7.1 below. The model ties together the relevant literature that impacts the TA mentoring programme. It provides a framework that can be used as a lens through which the programme can be assessed and discussed. TA mentoring was set up to aid educational decision-making, by providing broader networks for the students. In Figure 7.1, this explains the first line stemming from mentoring, the key pieces of relevant literature are highlighted, and a discussion around why Putnam was chosen as the social capital lens can be found in chapter 3. Bonding and bridging social capital are the central tenets of Putnam's model. Aiding decision-making through building social networks was the main objective of the programme. Rhodes (2005) developed a model which described how a mentoring programme can be formed and how it can lead to growth and successful outcomes for the mentees.

The model outlined is amended to reflect the findings from the study. Mc Coy et al.'s, (2014) decision-making theory did not feature in the data enough to warrant inclusion in the updated theoretical mentoring model. There was mixed evidence of the programme influencing student decision making. Also, in terms of Putnam's social capital theory bonding and bridging are much more nuanced in TA mentoring than expected and are not as linear as what was expected from reading the literature. However, they do feature heavily in the work and the relationship between social capital, Rhodes (2005) model and TA mentoring. The contribution of this research is discussed in more detail in the last two sections of section 7.5.

Figure 7.1: Towards a Theoretical Mentoring Model



The research questions were explored in the five TA-linked schools by generating data through focus groups and interviews. The purpose was to allow the participants to describe their experience of the programme and to outline ways that could improve it. Each school is discussed throughout the sections in this chapter. Four schools struggled with many of the same issues. However, section 7.6.2 discusses one school as a case that had more operational

and relational success than the others. The themes generated from this process are summarised in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1: Key Themes and Topics

Research question	Themes and topics
How do 6th-year students in five Trinity Access linked Post-Primary DEIS schools perceive the Trinity Access mentoring programme?	• Worth it. The importance of structure and consistency. • Expand and enhance the net of focus. • Positive perception when run consistently.
What effect, if any, does the mentoring programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations?	• The multifaceted influence on aspirations and expectations. • Altruistically motivated career decisions. • Joined-up approach: Teachers, Guidance, The Department of Education, Employers and Families.
How does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?	• The key components: Commitment, Consistency and Mentor Support and Training. • Transfer of Information. • Empathy desired, Professionalism expected.
How is the mentoring programme operationalised in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?	• Geography matters: Access to mentors is crucial. • Enhanced and expanded net of focus. • Strong, autonomous, and sustainable? Local Business Linked Mentoring

7.2. Students in Five TA linked Post-Primary DEIS Schools' Perception of the Trinity Access Mentoring Programme

This section is going to discuss the first research question of this study on how students who participated in the mentoring programme perceived it. Intertwined in the discussion will be key themes from the findings, how these pertain to the theoretical model and key pieces of relevant literature and if, and to what extent, the research question can be answered.

Worth it. The importance of structure and consistency.

The student perception of the mentoring programme was that it was a worthwhile endeavour, but not without its challenges. There was a lack of structure in the mentoring programme across all schools, except for one instance where a business was involved in providing mentors, which will be discussed further in this chapter. Keller (2005) pointed out that across the various models of mentoring, if enough attention is not given to the structure of the programme, its outcomes may not be as positive as intended. The objective of the programme is to engage the students to develop networks, knowledge, and skills to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities. These objectives may not be achieved if programme structures are not improved. Rhodes (2002) defined formal mentoring as having a planned approach with a definite set of goals and research has shown that these programmes yield positive outcomes such as increased commitment and communication. The programme had a planned approach to its layout, but it lacked consistency as it grew from eleven schools to twenty. Karcher and Nakkula (2012) pointed out that unless four hours of mentoring took place, with the same mentor, it can be difficult to see any effectiveness. In many instances, students never met the same mentor more than once. The importance of consistency and structure links well to the findings of Grossman and Rhodes (2002), who found that the relationships that lasted for a year or more, reported the largest number of improvements in areas such as academic, psychosocial and behavioural outcomes. These areas of improvement are what the students perceive to be worthwhile. While the mentoring

programme may support these developments, the programme needs to be more regular, consistent and structured.

Expand and enhance the net of focus.

According to Kram (1983), the instrumental function of mentoring acts to provide career-related support, skill development, information transfer, and advice that is useful for the mentee's career development. However, this instrumental function, as Kram puts it, extends itself to a myriad of options and advice explored from partaking in the mentoring programme. Many of the students felt that the post-school options explored were too Trinity-focused. A key remit of Trinity Access (TA) is to attract and support students that are less represented vis-a-vis the institution's demographics, to apply to the college. TA receives government funding to increase participation rates among these less represented groups, as the government aims to achieve greater access to education among groups that would otherwise not go to third-level education. This remit has extended into many of TA's programmes, such as campus talks, tours and sending TCD staff out to the schools to promote the college as a potential destination after school. This is certainly important to display the options that TCD has at their disposal, if the students wish to pursue any of these courses. However, this is just one institution that the students could explore. The mentoring programme aims to help the students explore information on the full spectrum of post-school options. Coles (2011) studied college access and success in the US, and a couple of important points that described the most impactful relationships included -

- Discussing college options with mentors, especially those who have attended themselves, can generate interest in going to college among students.
- Mentors provide students with important information about college preparatory courses, financial aid, and the college admissions process.

Point two is significant because it does not specify a particular college *per se*, rather the admissions process in general. To give the students the optimal mentoring experience, they need to explore the wide range of options available, rather than just TCD courses, despite the

programme being a TCD programme. TCD is the highest Irish-ranked University in the QS World University Rankings and is held in high regard domestically and internationally. It is no surprise that the schools involved would like to see more of their students attend TCD, however, this may not always be in line with the students' actual interests and outlook.

Positive perception of the programme when run consistently.

Despite the many structural and operational difficulties with the programme, there was widespread support for its overall effectiveness. Nearly all research participants agreed that they would do the programme again. Sometimes it is easy to point out the challenges of such a logistically difficult programme, but not so easy to explore its successes. There were many successes and the first one we will discuss is the positive perception of the mentees, in relation to the opportunity to expand their network and explore various post-school opportunities outside of family, friends, and teachers. Bush and Middlewood (2005) highlight the powerful ripple effect that mentoring can have on individuals and society. These programmes can be seen as helping both mentor and mentee reach higher levels of maturity and responsibility (Karcher, 2012). There is also evidence within the literature that shows being mentored can increase self-esteem, which affects motivation and this, in turn, can have an overall effect on achievement (Brady & Dolan, 2007; DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher 2012). The links built between local businesses and schools were also frequently mentioned by the teacher and principal as being positive for the students. There was one school involved in this research which was linked to one company for their mentoring programme. All the mentors were provided by this one company, and this worked very well for the school. The company provided transport for the students to go onsite for some of their sessions. The planning of the sessions was done by the company's HR department, along with the school. As such, many of the commitments and structural problems encountered by other schools were not encountered by this school. Despite the obvious advantages that the school and students can gain from these types of links, there was also evidence of the businesses gaining from the time and support they committed to the schools. Some of the teachers described how students started out visiting the businesses as part of the mentoring programme and then

found themselves on Transition year placements, due to the links which had been established. These connections helped the students develop their CVs and career opportunities from an early age, whilst also giving the businesses access to talent early. The strength of these positive relationships being built links Putnam's bonding and bridging social capital to the mentoring programme. The strengths of the programme could be felt for the students when it was structured well and consistent.

7.3. What Effect, if any, did TA Mentoring have on Supporting and/or Informing their Post-School Aspirations and Expectations?

This section will discuss the research question - to what effect, if any, did the programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations? Part of the objective of TA mentoring is to have an impact on the student's aspirations and help them develop informed choices in their post-school choices.

The multifaceted influence on aspirations and expectations

McCoy et al., (2014) provided evidence of how young people experienced the transition from second-level education to further/higher education and the labour force. A key finding by McCoy et al., (2014) around aspirations and expectations, was that most young people highlighted the importance of intrinsic reasons – wanting to study a subject they were interested in, personal fulfilment and being able to get an interesting job. However, young people from working-class backgrounds were more likely to value extrinsic reasons – an income and a secure job, suggesting greater risk aversion among this group. (McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly, and Doherty, 2010).

Findings from the teacher interview data, suggested that although the working-class students were averse to the risk of pursuing academic studies over 3-4 years where finance is a concern, when they do, they are motivated by altruistic reasons. Most mentees discussed the impact of the conversations that they have with their teachers, families, peers, and

mentors in deciding what they want to do after school. Decision-making is a complex activity for most people and the students were no different. They all mentioned a variety of factors that will affect their final decision, and some may have the decision made for them depending on their Leaving Certificate results. Many were optimistic about the range of opportunities at their disposal and felt that some type of qualification is needed in the current economic climate, as many people competing for jobs have a qualification of some sort.

According to Beach (1993), an important, but often overlooked, aspect of decision-making is which choices are presented to the students in the first place. Beach (1993) explains that decision theory and research have focused almost exclusively on choice—the selection of the best option from a choice set containing two or more options. He goes on to ask the question which is largely overlooked, of how those options are there in the first place—why them and not others? (Beach, 1993) He continues to explain that sometimes none of the options is sufficiently attractive to justify choosing any of them:

Sometimes the options are so silly, trivial, immoral, personally, or socially objectionable, or otherwise flawed that they are rejected out of hand. Sometimes the decision maker merely prefers to wait for, or search for, a wider range of options or more novel, interesting, or plausible options (Beach, 1993, pg. 5).

This description of decision-making by Beach can be somewhat linked to the experiences of the students involved in the mentoring programme. In previous chapters, the students described how they felt that certain choices were being pushed in their direction, rather than a full exploration of what options they could choose from. This had an impact on how the mentoring programme interacted with these students' decision-making process. It could easily have had the opposite effect of that which was intended. One aspect of the students' mindset that stood out throughout this study, was their awareness of the future career and educational options at their disposal. They seemed aware of these regardless of the mentoring input, although many mentioned the culture of choice created in their schools. The teachers echoed this and mentioned that since their involvement with TA on a broader level, the mentees became more aware of choices at their disposal for when they finish school. However, it was difficult to state whether the mentoring itself impacted aspirations and expectations across all of the mentees.

Working class risk aversion: Altruistically motivated

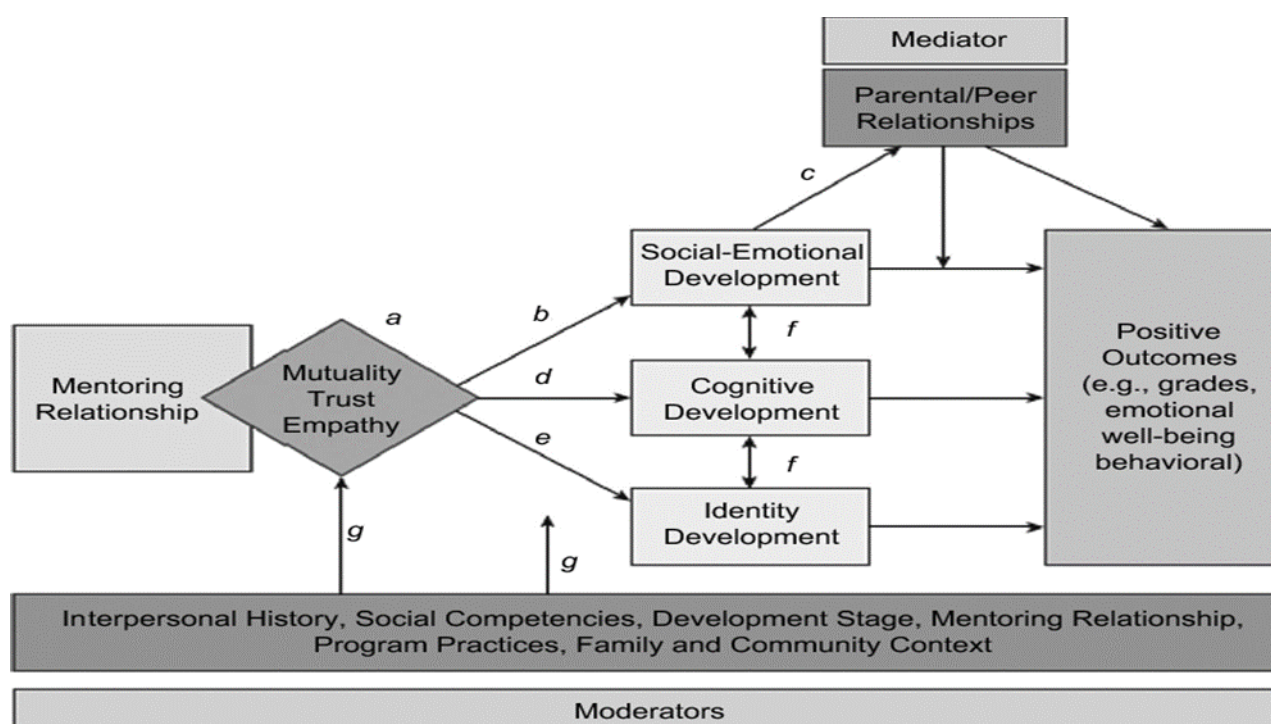
In terms of what the students are deciding to do after school, teachers suggest that the students want careers that have social value in their area. They suggested that social prestige and validation are very important and as such, careers that offer these are attractive for their students. There is a consensus that many of their students want to stay in their community and do something that makes their family's lives better. This may reflect a desire to continue to fit into a community, at a time when they may be entering one that may be completely new to them. However, in many of the mentoring relationships, despite the career or college element of the mentor's life being the main differentiator between the social status of the mentor and mentee - there is a mixture of bonding and bridging happening, as many of the mentors and mentees are from similar backgrounds and have aspects of each other's lives that bond them together. The desire to do a job that offers social prestige within their communities and the desire to do something that offers value to where they come from, shows that career choices tend to be altruistic in nature for this cohort of students. Teachers regularly mentioned in the interviews that their students wanted to work in areas that they perceived offered value to their communities. McCoy et al. (2014) posited that working-class students' educational choices were driven more so by risk aversion. The desire to make decisions about what to do educationally is based on not wanting to put themselves, or their families at too much financial risk. This suggests that educational decisions for these students are directly affected and related to their economic situation. If the findings from this research suggest that the students are driven to make choices that make people in their families and communities better off from their work, it sheds light on the psychological aspect of decision-making also. Decision-making, in this instance, is multifaceted and no one direct variable is the deciding factor for the students. However, what is clear is that their decisions are affected by wider societal structures, such as economic support. When discussing how they make their choices, most students talked about the financial element impacting their decision. For example, one student was interested in a course in NUIG but feared that even with full financial support from the SUSI grant, it would not be enough for her to survive, as she described it, with the living costs of another Irish city. She continued to explain that for her to go to college and choose not to work full-time, would mean she would have to stay living

with her parents to keep the costs down. To this effect, this student was not selecting her preferred choice of college course purely due to economic constraints.

Joined-up approach needed: Teachers, Guidance, The Department of Education, Employers and Families

A clear finding from the students was that their aspirations and expectations of what to do after school, were not wholly impacted by one specific programme or person. There are realities that the students are aware of that can constrain their choices, such as the economic realities of further education. Figure 7.3.1 below illustrates Rhodes' (2005) mentoring model, which shows that student development from interacting with mentoring is moderated and mediated by factors outside of the control of the programme. The students' relationships with their parents, peers, their family and community contexts, for example, have an impact on their ability to interact fully with the programme. TA staff data suggested that a barrier to the programme achieving its goals was the disjointed nature of the various support sources that the students relied on.

Figure 7.3.1: Model of Youth Mentoring (Rhodes, 2005)



To achieve the broad aims of the programme, such as giving the students the ‘knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities’, it would make sense that all stakeholders involved in the students’ lives are involved. However, two of the case study schools do not have career guidance counsellors running the mentoring. Also, in some instances, students’ parents do not know about the programme.

One TA staff member highlighted the national campaign that takes place each year called *College Awareness Week* as an opportunity for the Department of Education to promote programmes like TA and its mentoring programme. She argued that this could help schools and businesses become more linked and for the usefulness of such programmes to be displayed to companies. The principal interviewed suggested that businesses who have mentored students in her school, have brought some students in on work experience, as such, there are mutual benefits to be gained there too, in her point of view. This is a positive example of a moderator, namely the community context as outlined in Rhodes’ model, supporting the programme. According to the TA staff member, this success in one school could be built upon if the department helped promote the programme further, and if other schools, families and employers become aware of its potential.

A fundamental stumbling block to the model reaching more successful outcomes for four out of the five schools in this study, was that bonding and bridging bonding did not occur on a regular enough basis to form strong relationships. Point a and factors from point g, in figure 7.3.1, combined to negatively affect the impact of the programme on the mentees. This points towards a breakdown in programme practices which is a moderating factor, according to Rhodes' model, in programme success. The positive outcomes Rhodes highlights from mentoring programmes do not have a chance of occurring because the relationships do not have enough time to forge.

7.4. How does Robert Putnam's Concept of Social Capital Help Explain the Mentee/Mentor Relationship in Five Trinity Access-linked DEIS Post-Primary Schools?

This part of the discussion chapter will focus on research question two – how does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access-linked DEIS post-primary schools?' Despite mentoring relationships being unique to everyone, Rhodes (2005) describes many overarching features which are common across strong mentoring relationships. These include trust, mutuality and empathy. These features, according to Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Kram (1985), take time to build. As highlighted by mentees, mentors and school staff, consistency of attendance was a significant barrier to the programme growing and thus social capital flourishing in four schools from five.

The Key Components: Commitment, Consistency and Mentor Support and Training

Mentor consistency and reliability were repeated issues across groups. Grossman & Rhodes (2002) & Kram (1985), suggest that it takes 6-12 months of regular contact to form a strong relationship. The same point was made by the teachers, that younger students need consistency from the people around them, and it can be hard for them to build strong relationships with people who float in and out of their lives in short spaces of time. Having the same mentor for two academic years, helped the students not only build up a strong relationship with the mentors, but also make progress in working through various elements of future planning, getting to know themselves and trying out different personas (which the teachers noticed the younger students liked to do). Too often the students had a change in mentor, and this negatively affected their interest in the programme. It also led many to question the worthwhile nature of partaking in the initiative. Various teachers discussed the lack of consistency and commitment of the mentors. This seemed like a difficult issue for the schools to fix. Being able to get the mentors to commit for at least 6 sessions was a big aspect of building a strong relationship with the students according to one teacher:

I could see, going in with the mentors, they had six sessions of mentoring, and I could see the different levels of engagement with the students from 'Aw I could not care less, who is this?' to 'When are they coming back again?'. Then getting to session five or six the use of names like 'Kenny's coming in today' or 'Shanes coming in' or 'he's with me' or 'I was with him before', because maybe the mentoring got swapped around for different reasons. (Mary, teacher school A)

This links back to Rhodes' (2005) point about mutuality and empathy taking time to build. The more time the students spend with the same mentor, the stronger the relationship becomes, according to the teachers. Putnam's premise of social capital being useful for individuals and the social fabric of communities, in this instance the school community, is evident here as we can see the students becoming more engaged in the relationship they are building. However, enough time and consistent commitment must be shown from both sides for these relationships to be developed. Rhodes's (2005) model demonstrates that as these relationships are formed and developed, they will aid the mentee's social-emotional, cognitive and identity development. In turn, these developments can help their peer and parental relationships and help the students achieve positive outcomes such as good grades, emotional well-being and positive behaviours. They did caveat this by mentioning that many external factors such as family, community context and interpersonal history may moderate these outcomes. However, the hope is that engagement in the programme can bring the students closer to the outcomes, than they were before participating in the programme. The students were quite positive about the programme and what it was trying to achieve, by giving the students more outlets to explore and discuss their future. Despite the scheduling difficulties and many logistical issues with the running of the programme, the students still managed to find value in participating. Grossman and Furano (1999) concluded that three areas are vitally important to the success of a volunteer programme: screening, training, ongoing management and support. The screening process provides organisations with the opportunity to select those adults who are most likely to be successful as volunteers, by finding individuals who already have the appropriate attitudes or skills necessary to succeed. Orientation and training ensure that volunteers build the specific skills necessary to be effective and that they have realistic expectations of what they can accomplish. Ongoing

management and support of volunteers is critical for ensuring that volunteer hours are not squandered, weak skills are strengthened, and volunteers are used most effectively.

The students were mainly in two camps on what the most important aspects of a mentor/mentee relationship encapsulated - instrumental i.e., business-like with their mentors, who just wanted information around their experiences and the mechanics of achieving objectives; the second was on relationship building and getting to know each other. However, to partake in either, trust, time, and empathy were needed. Senior cycle students seemed to be more in the instrumental camp and were more focused on the professional knowledge they could gain from the mentoring engagements. This is no surprise considering the stage of their education that they are at. They specifically pointed out that the small group sessions that had structure and consistency, and being matched with professional mentors, were what they found most beneficial. The relationships students valued most at this stage of their schooling were instrumental ones. However, to get to this point in their relationships, trust and time were still required. Despite the reflective nature of many of the students, they seemed to look at the programme in more recent terms, rather than from when they began. Many of the students seemed outcome-oriented. Whether this is down to the structure of the Irish Leaving Certificate, the mindset of the students, or possibly their earlier involvement with the programme, would require further research.

Putnam's sense of social capital is alive and well in both aspects of positive mentoring relationships. The students seemed to reflect Putnam's notion of linking social capital, in terms of knowing the mentors had information about avenues that they wanted to pursue, which they found valuable. Putnam (1989) defined these networks as people who are interacting across explicit social or power gradients in society. This mentoring relationship could fall into this category of social capital, however there is less of a power dynamic at play than in Putnam's formal definition. The fact that the students are looking for some type of knowledge or information capital that they, and their school and TA, assume their mentors possess, is a power imbalance. When Bourdieu discussed the essence of cultural capital, he described how this is a "feel for the game". In this situation, the students want to know more about how the game that they want to get into works. By engaging in the mentoring programme, it is also helping the students grow socially, emotionally and cognitively. These are all elements of Rhodes' model of mentoring. The students are essentially learning how to

engage like adults and develop their mindsets, in order to ask questions of themselves and others about what their futures look like. To embark on this type of journey with a person they may not have ever met before, requires a lot of trust and understanding. With positive mentoring relationships in mind as a core research question, all stakeholders were asked what type of mentors the students preferred, and the findings raised some very interesting points.

Mentoring encapsulates a wide variety of interactions. The common trait across the various types, is to support the mentee build capacity to achieve whatever they want to achieve, whether that be developing a new friendship, support mechanism or something more functional in nature such as settling into a new job. According to Goodlad (1995), mentoring is about helping a mentee build various traits such as self-reliance and aiding them with opportunities to learn, which in turn, builds their personal capabilities to overcome hurdles they face. Shea (2002) explains that the relationship aspect of mentoring occurs when a more experienced person guides and counsels a younger individual, as they navigate their way through an aspect of their lives. However, despite this sounding like a positive intervention in a person's life, there can be many instances where the mentoring does not work, is counterproductive or conducted incorrectly. Quality relationships can be important to many of life's interactions but in terms of young people's development, it can be crucial. These relationships can be formal and informal, but are all around the mentees as they grow up. Many features impact relationship building. Two such factors that arose from the data were frequency of interaction and duration of each interaction. The students were adamant that the best relationships took time to build, and this was only achieved by a consistency of interaction between the two people involved in the relationship. This claim is substantiated by various pieces of literature. Karcher (2015) pointed out that unless at least four hours of mentoring takes place each month, it can be difficult to see the effectiveness of such programmes. In the five schools that this study worked with, there was a great variation in the number and frequency of sessions, but none achieved four hours per month. One of the main reasons behind this, was the logistics of getting mentors to the schools, or the students to the mentors. However, there were other factors and strategies taken to counter this, which will be revisited in the operationalisation section of the discussion and the evaluative element. Along with the four hours per month, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) and Kram (1985) found that for the best results to be achieved in building the relationship, 12 months of

regular interaction was needed for a strong bond to arise. A key point from the literature (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), found that there can be negative effects on young people who were in relationships that terminated within three months. These impacts included drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence; however, these were not found to be the case with the students who were involved in this study. It seemed to be a case of nonchalance among the students if the relationships did not develop. 'It was just another part of school', was the general theme of feedback from students who did not get a lot from the programme. However, for the students who did, there were a lot of benefits gained such as quality advice, a different sounding board and someone more experienced in life that the students could talk to. In terms of high-quality mentoring, three cornerstones summarised what this looked like:

- a. Group size
- b. Consistent sessions
- c. Professionalism of mentors

Each of these factors determined for the students how useful the mentoring was going to be for them and in turn, linked to whether they could develop a good relationship with their mentors. There seemed to be a slight disconnect for some of the students and their mentors, in terms of how to build a bond. All students involved in this study had been mentored in some shape or another since they were in second year and during this study were in sixth year, which was four to five years in total. The students discussed the importance of mentors staying focused on the objective of the session, whether that be setting goals, revising study habits, or another aspect of the programme. Many of the students talked about the mentor's tendency to stray off-topic, in order to try to build a more informal relationship, as they thought this the best way to build a relationship with the students. The students suggested that a bond in second year may be more useful, than in sixth year. The closer they got to their exams, they became more focused on instrumental aspects rather than relationship building. This is an important distinction worth looking at further. Despite relationships being important in a mentoring programme, the students seemed to suggest it was not the most important thing. They suggested that this was more important when they were younger and first engaging with the programme, but not so much so as they were further into the programme. This may suggest that there are stages that a mentee goes through while being

mentored. This would reflect Rhodes' (2005) model of the ideal type of youth mentoring as, outlined in Figure 7.3.1. It displays many features of a mentoring relationship, and the possible outcomes and processes enabled by the successful development of a mentor/mentee relationship.

The feedback from the students on when relationship-building matters, is in second year at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. This would represent points a and g in Figure 7.4.3 above. In the beginning, Rhodes suggests that mutuality, trust, and empathy are required to build a relationship. Rhodes (2005) also points out even where these three traits are met, the relationship will be moderated by a variety of factors such as social competencies, development stage, programme practices, family and community context. Therefore, even if both parties have good intentions, and mutuality, empathy and trust are formed, it is not always guaranteed that the relationship will form, or that they will move successfully on to the next stage of the relationship. More aspects of the programme practices will be unpicked when we come back to those in the operationalisation aspect of the programme, and the overall evaluation aspect of the Trinity Access mentoring programme. It was difficult to conclude based on the feedback from the students on their journeys through the mentoring programme, whether the programme has helped develop their social-emotional, cognitive and identity development. This may be an area worth exploring in future research. Rhodes' model of mentoring suggests that these areas can be developed through a successful relationship built on mutual trust and empathy. Through the students' development within these three areas, it is hoped that this can in turn lead to more positive outcomes, such as good grades, emotional well-being and positive behavioural traits. However, as Rhodes points out and as alluded to above, a positive relationship could be formed, but much of the progress is dependent on the moderating and mediating factors outlined in the model. It is very difficult to ascertain whether all these factors are working positively in sync for each student, and it is beyond the control of any programme given its scope. It highlights the nature of a wide variety of factors that influence the relationships of each of the students. The TA mentoring programme is just one aspect of how the students interact with their environmental influences. Several key factors influence the likelihood that mentoring will be pivotal in the young person's life. Evidence shows that young people who perceive that they have high-quality relationships with their mentors, have the best outcomes

(Funk & Ek, 2002). This last point by Funk and Ek is an important finding from the literature, relative to the findings from the mentee participants in this study. It was obvious in many cases that the mentees had a low perception of the relationships with their mentors. Much of this was down to the irregularity of mentor attendance, rather than the quality of the mentoring. It was very difficult to perceive a high-quality relationship, when at times the students forgot that the programme even existed such was the irregularity. The mentors themselves alluded to this and offered suggestions on how to improve the logistical difficulties within the programme. Karcher and Nakkula (2012) point out that unless at least four hours of mentoring takes place each month, it can be difficult to see the effectiveness of such programmes. This suggestion from Karcher and Nakkula aligns with a finding from the mentors, when they were queried about the ideal duration between each mentoring session. They suggested approximately 1-2 times per month. This could take the form of 2 two-hour sessions or one, 2–3-hour session each month. Another suggestion for building relationships with the mentors, was to have a calendar set out at the beginning of the year, so that everyone could check their diaries from the outset, in order to assess whether they can or cannot fully commit to the programme. I will revisit this in more detail in the evaluation discussion sub-chapter.

A positive relationship, as outlined in the mentee findings sub-chapter, can mean different things to the mentees depending on what stage of secondary school they are at. The older students seemed to value more pragmatic relationships that focused on instrumental aspects of relationships. The older students were approaching the end of their secondary school journey and wanted support around applications, various routes and decision validation. The younger students on the other hand, seemed to value the interpersonal relationship to a higher degree i.e., getting to know their mentor and figuring out whether various personalities would suit them when they get older. This aspect of the projected future self was a key finding in the mentee data. This links back to the literature on positive relationships, where Markus and Nurius (1986) discussed the ‘possible selves,’ or individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they fear becoming. They discuss the concept of possible selves as complimentary current conceptions of self-knowledge. For example, the students may have knowledge of future options, but they may see limitations around what is possible. This may derive from representations of the self in

the past and they include representations of the self in the future. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain that they are different and separable from the current or “now selves” (p. 959), yet are intimately connected to them. For example, possible future selves are not just any set of imagined roles or states of being. Instead, they represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies. For example, I am *now* a doctor, but I *could* be a fisherman, a runner, or a journalist. These possible selves are individualised or personalised, but they are also distinctly social.

This distinct social aspect is where a positive mentoring relationship allows the students to explore various concepts of their future selves. For example, some students shadowed professionals such as psychologists for a day, to get a deeper understanding of what the self of a psychologist looked like in a professional setting. Their teachers suggested that the students' knowledge of the system and college-going language, is far more commonplace since they began interacting with TA in 2014. This suggests that the mentoring relationship has been complemented by a variety of support from within and outside the school system. As Ireland's progression rates to third level have increased dramatically in the twenty first century, the knowledge of how the system works is much more widespread than ever before, according to all the teachers. This diverges from some of the mentoring literature which suggests that the working classes do not have as much access to information as their middle-class counterparts. The theory of Academic Capital Formation discussed by St John (2013), takes key concepts from social (Coleman, 1988), cultural (Bourdieu, 1984) and human capital (Becker, 1994), to explain the barriers to education that low-income students often face. The social capital theory posits that the trusted networks within a student's community transmit information about college, that can reinforce social stratification – such as, ‘College is too expensive for people like us’. Bourdieu states that cultural capital is the accumulated knowledge of education in the cultural/family system, that provides the basis of action and change through trusted networks of information. Based on the cultural capital model, low-income students have less likelihood of accessing post-secondary education, because there is limited explicit and implicit knowledge within their family of how to navigate the system. Whilst the third-level progression statistics for the schools that have been linked with TA and engaging with the mentoring programme are mixed, which suggests that the above assertion is still correct, there was evidence from the teachers and students which suggest that they

know how to navigate the education system very well. This is an area which is quite complex and would require more research. Originally, one of the main aims of the Trinity Access Programme was to help increase third-level progression rates from their linked secondary schools. They did this by offering a suite of support to the schools, such as the mentoring programme and financial support. As the programme evolved and it was clear that there was a myriad of reasons why students from some areas went to third level more than others (O'Sullivan et al., 2017), TA recalibrated the aims of their mentoring programme to imply that the main objective was to provide the students with the information they needed to make 'informed choices'.

It was within this objective of informed choice which reflects much of the mentees' findings on what they said they desired from a mentor-mentee relationship. They wanted their mentors to focus on discussing all the possible avenues after they leave school, not just university and not just Trinity College. As most of the mentees recruited are TCD undergraduates and usually with a connection to the area that the schools are in, they can sometimes be obliged to suggest 'look this is the path I took and maybe you could take it too'. Whilst this is well-intentioned, it is not essentially doing the mentees any favours. The mentees felt like Trinity was being pushed upon them as a post-school destination and this flavoured some students' relationships with their mentors and perception of the programme. From the mentor and mentee findings, there seemed to be a disconnect between what both parties think they are signing up for. The mentors seemed to think that the main aim of the programme was to inform the mentees about college and share their experiences with them. This is one aspect of the programme and can be a way to build trust and understanding. However, from the mentees' feedback, this should be framed within a spectrum of possible avenues that they could take. The mentors are being recruited by TA, which also has a general objective of increasing participation to TCD among certain groups. As the mentees could also fall into these groups, this could also affect the mentors' approach to the relationship. TA must be explicit at the outset and in the training, that if the aim of the mentoring programme is informed choice, then this works across the board and not just for possible TCD choices.

Transfer of Information: Timely, correct and professional

Another barrier to building effective relationships, according to the students, was the propensity of some mentors to overshare and lack professionalism. The mentees want the mentors to be more business-oriented in their approach to the mentoring. As Morrow and Styles (1995) recommend, closer ties are also noted to emerge when the mentor adopts a flexible, mentee-centred style of interaction, which balances the mentee's interests with the overall goal of the mentoring programme. This is an aspect of programme design that lies with TA in terms of the screening, training and ongoing support of their mentors. Grossman and Furano (1999) highlight the support volunteers receive from the programmes, as being critical to their effectiveness. Mary from TA, outlined the negative impact that can occur where incorrect information was provided by the mentors to the mentees. If the mentors do not issue timely information, the mentees could miss deadlines for courses and job applications, or even choose the wrong subjects which can have longer-lasting effects. An ironic weakness of the programme is its expansion from eleven schools to twenty. As the programme expanded, so did its need for mentors. This expansion led to less time being allocated to screening, training and supporting mentors. Grossman and Furano (1999) explored over twenty years of extensive research on mentoring and youth service. They found that volunteers cannot simply be left to their own devices without training and supervision.

7.5. How is the Mentoring Programme Operationalised in the Five Trinity Access-Linked DEIS Post-Primary Schools?

Geography matters: Access to mentors is crucial.

The operational aspect of the mentoring programme was initially centrally controlled by TCD, more specifically the Access Office. They worked in tandem with, at first, the pilot school, and after the one school trial period, their 11 link schools. At the beginning of the programme, each participating school was given guidelines on how to carry out the mentoring programme. They could deviate from these as suited, but these guidelines were designed to support the rollout of the programme. Six sessions ranged from ice-breaking sessions with your mentor,

to setting goals and learning study skills. There was a combination of social and academic-related activities. The main aims were to encourage relationship building between mentee and mentor, and for the students to develop skills to be successful in their academic endeavours. How the six sessions were spaced out, was usually an iterative process for each school. The main criteria for each school was the recruitment and availability of mentors to carry out the sessions. This was more problematic for some schools than others, due to their proximity to TCD. The main idea at the beginning of the programme was that the mentors would be recruited from TCD students, professionals and past pupils of the participating schools, if possible. The thought process behind this aspect of operating the programme, was that the students would relate better with the mentees, if they were from similar backgrounds. Much of the process the programme followed was based on the US programme called College for Every Student (CFES) the US context in which it was taken.

Bourdieu (1977) described academic capital as the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family, and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family). Bourdieu's explanation of academic capital intertwined with the cultural transmission by the family and school, can be quite vague and overly deterministic. However, St. John builds on Bourdieu's academic capital, to include elements of Becker's (1975) human capital theory and Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, to suggest that academic capital theory is a set of social processes that allow first-generation college students, and their families, to develop new levels of educational attainment and success. However, a clear finding from this research suggests that not all students want academic capital formation, nor find aspirations that straightforward. St. John's views on academic capital formation are quite black and white, and assume that by students experiencing 'cross-generational uplift', all of their academic futures will be enlightened. This viewpoint seems quite deterministic, that this is what is best for the students, and if so, it goes against the programme aim of 'informed choice'. The transposition of the American CFES model to the Irish context, at times seemed too evangelical. It underestimated the work already being done in the schools and the knowledge and influences of the students.

The operationalisation of any programme has many aspects to it – structure, scheduled events, objectives, interest and volunteers, to name just a few. For this programme, there are

many facets, which include 11 schools, hundreds of students and thousands of mentors. When one considers the number of stakeholders involved, it is understandable that to organise and coordinate so many schedules would provide challenges throughout. If the programme was just one session, it may be more manageable, but with multiple sessions throughout the school year, it can be very challenging for all parties involved. At the beginning of the TA mentoring programme, there were four schools and a 1-year group with an average of 80 students in the year group. This accounted for 320 students and the ideal ratio of mentor to student, according to the American CFES model that TA was following, was 1:5, making the number of mentors required 64. However, there was scope for the schools to deviate as they saw fit but the recommended number of mentoring sessions over the year was six.

The Trinity Access team were initially responsible for recruiting mentors and many of those recruited, were pupils who had entered TCD through one of the access admissions schemes targeting groups less represented in the college for various reasons, such as socio-economic status and ethnicity. This was more straightforward for some schools than others, as schools with more past pupils in TCD had a greater pool to recruit from. The sessions were designed to happen in the schools, but the additional factor when organising was the distance the mentors had to travel. This took more commitment, the further the school was from the college. However, despite these factors, the programme began to be rolled out to a further seven of the TCD-linked post-primary schools in subsequent years. It also was rolled out to an additional year group in each school, which multiplied the number of mentors needed each year. This increased the number of schools and therefore, the number of mentors required. Schools improvised and utilised teachers and older students as mentors, but the greater the number the greater the need for volunteers. Grossman and Furano (1999) highlight the importance of the support volunteers receive from the programmes for which they volunteer, as critical for their effectiveness. In many instances, as highlighted by the TA staff and teachers, volunteers were not getting the required screening, training and support required, purely due to the large numbers required. The number of mentors required to keep the mentor-to-mentee ratio low as the programme expanded, became difficult. Different types of mentoring were utilised, such as peer-to-peer mentoring (where students from older year groups mentored students from younger cohorts); teacher-to-student mentoring; parent-to-student mentoring; online mentoring and mass mentoring (where a full year's mentoring

would be done in one full day). Most of these iterations were attempted for a couple of reasons: a) to ease pressure on mentor recruitment and b) to test various types of relationships, in order to discover which works better for a particular year group in a school. Given the scale of recruitment, training of the volunteers could only be very brief, if at all. Many students felt the mentors tried too much to become their friends, rather than focus on the business of the session. However, according to the mentors at times they felt this was what they were meant to be doing. These misperceptions of the role can relate to the level of the role description and support the mentors were given in advance, and during the sessions. DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) have found that the training that continues throughout the mentoring process produces the greatest positive effects on mentees. Coles (2011) explored the most effective practices throughout his study of various mentoring programmes in the USA. He found that the most successful programmes focused closely on the following aspects of their programmes - planning, mentor recruitment and training, service delivery and programme effectiveness. Each of these areas became tougher to carry out as the programme evolved and grew. There seemed to not be enough support nor screening, to maintain a commitment of at least 6 sessions. This could be rectified with better planning and training, which in turn would improve service delivery and programme effectiveness.

A Successful Case? Local Business Linked Mentoring- Strong, Autonomous, and Sustainable

Despite the many structural and operational difficulties, there was widespread support for the potential of the programme. Nearly all research participants agreed that they would do the programme again. While it is important to point out the challenges of such a logistically difficult programme, it is also important to explore its successes. There were many successes and the first one we will discuss is the happiness of the mentees being provided with the opportunity to meet people and explore various post-school opportunities, outside of their regular conversations with family, friends and teachers. Bush and Middlewood (2005) highlight the powerful ripple effect that mentoring can have on individuals and society. These programmes can be seen as helping both mentor and mentee reach higher levels of maturity

and responsibility (Karcher, 2012). There is also evidence within the literature that shows being mentored can increase self-esteem which affects motivation and this, in turn, can have an overall effect on achievement (Brady & Dolan, 2007; DuBois et al., 2002; Karcher 2012). While it is difficult to say with certainty that this programme achieved the benefits mentioned above, it is clear from the findings that many students gained some benefit from participation.

The most successful iteration of mentoring that this study found was the links built between local businesses and schools. These links were frequently mentioned as a big positive for the students. There was one school involved in the programme and this research was linked to one company for their mentoring programme. All the mentors were provided by this company, and this worked very well for the school, according to the teacher and principal. The company provided transport for the students to come onsite for some of their sessions. The planning of the sessions was done by the company's HR department, along with the school, as such many of the commitments and structural problems encountered by other schools, were not encountered by this school. Despite the obvious advantages that the school and students can gain from these types of links, there was also evidence of the businesses gaining from the time and support they committed to the schools via extra staff. Some of the teachers described how some students who visited the business as part of the mentoring programme, obtained Transition Year placements with the business due to the links which had been established. These connections helped the students develop their CVs and career opportunities from an early age, whilst also giving the businesses access to talent early. The links with local businesses proved to be a very successful development for schools and their students. The student's perceptions of this iteration of the programme were very positive.

Many of the TA link schools have various links with local businesses, but trying to channel these links into ongoing support for mentoring programmes was less than straightforward. Usually, the issues surrounded the companies not being able to commit staff numbers for the extended number of sessions over the year. However, there were exceptions to this. A financial services company in South Dublin was linked with a small mixed school in North Dublin and the relationship between the two blossomed, according to the teacher interviewed. The company provided staff, logistical and financial support to the school in running the mentoring programme. It also had a profound impact on the students, as many had never heard of the types of roles that the company had available. This was an excellent

example of how forging links between businesses and schools was transformative for the students and programme, and helped overcome the structural and commitment issues discussed above.

Putnam, Social Capital, and TA Mentoring, all that it expected to be?

The theoretical framework that this study used offered an operative framework to investigate the TA mentoring programme. Mentoring as a practice is a process at the individual level, however it is relational. Putnam's thoughts on social capital can be mostly related to community and societal-level benefits such as more civic engagement, better social relations, improved levels of trust in social structures and how to achieve these goals. This is where a further explanation of Putnam's work helped underpin the TA mentoring programme. Putnam's theory comprises bonding and bridging social capital. Putnam's theory views social relations, such as mentoring programmes that take place at an individual level, to be able to advance wider societal goals, such as more trust and interactions across social groupings.

There are other social capital theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (1988). Bourdieu (1985) views social capital as a means that the middle and upper classes use to produce and reproduce their economic advantage. Bourdieu's concept of social capital emphasises conflicts and power function (social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests), demonstrating for instance, how people gain access to powerful positions through the direct and indirect employment of social connections (Siisiäinen, 2000).

Coleman is not too dissimilar in his approach to social capital as Bourdieu, but he tried to connect sociological and economic ideas. He aimed to connect the social action of individuals with the rational action theory of economics, which is that individuals act independently and for self-interest. Coleman essentially sees individuals engaging in social interactions, relationships and networks, for as long as the benefits persist. This logic stems from rational choice theory which seeks to explain human behaviour through rationality (Claridge, 2018). Rational action theory in many regards should negate the mentors getting involved in the programme, unless for direct personal benefit, such as CV building, but all mentors were

asked why they got involved and the overwhelming sentiment was for altruistic reasons. This is also interesting on the mentee side when it comes to career choices. The mentees seemed driven by social goals, more so than personal economic incentives, in their career aspirations. There was also evidence that suggested choices were limited due to financial limitations. For example, many mentees highlighted not considering courses too far away from home which would increase costs. In terms of linking these findings to social capital theory, it lends credence to Bourdieu's viewpoint that economic advantages are stratified. However, despite these prevailing economic challenges, the main driver of post-school choice seemed to be driven by altruistic ideals.

Social Capital is conceptualised in a more positive light by Robert Putnam. His work tends to frame social capital as a producer of "civic engagement" and a broad societal measure of communal health. He also transforms social capital from a resource possessed by individuals, to an attribute of collectives, focusing on norms and trust as producers of social capital. The focus of the TA mentoring programme is aligned with building trust and not about producing or reproducing inequalities. Building trust and engagement between mentee and mentor will help the programme achieve its aim of expanding the students' networks, developing connections, and building trust with their mentors. Expanding their social networks may lead to the students developing their aspirations and expectations of post-primary school.

My data was generated through interviews and focus groups that relied on the stakeholders involved, relaying to me, what they felt worked best in developing the relationships and networks. Rhodes' point that trust, mutuality and empathy took time to build came through strongly in the student data. The students highlighted the infrequent and inconsistent nature of meetings with their mentors. In this regard, it was difficult to assess whether Putnam's bonding or bridging was a defining feature of mentor/mentee relationships. One could argue that it was not, as many did not have the time to properly develop. It was interesting that the older students pointed towards relationships that provided them with the information they sought for their future selves, rather than friendships or a close bond *per se*. This view lends itself towards a type of bridging capital rather than a close bond. However, the mentees did suggest that a bonding-type relationship may be more appropriate for younger age groups. This was a countering viewpoint to some mentors, who were overly friendly and wanted to bond with their mentees throughout, but it seems the bonding is less relevant for older

students. This is a factor that can be worked into future iterations of the TA mentoring programme and mentor training sessions. This research has shown that bonding and bridging occur in different stages of the mentee's involvement with the programme and it can ebb between bonding and bridging, rather than both, throughout. In terms of the operational element of the programme, bridging featured heavily in the case that worked well between the school and the local business. There is evidence that due to the consistency of the business mentors, many elements of Rhodes' model occurred. All other schools struggled with the consistency of mentors for any elements of the theoretical model to develop.

Overall Putnam's theory on social capital does show up in the Trinity Access Mentoring programme, but in much more nuance throughout. It was not the case that relationships were best developed through the means the programme expected i.e., similar characteristics and interests. Mentees did bond with their mentors when the programme ran well, and more so in their early teenage years, but the bond was not based on similar characteristics or interests. The mentees were happy to have another adult to discuss future selves and possibilities in their younger years, but as they got closer to finishing school, bridging capital was much more prevalent. They used the mentors to bounce ideas off them, gain more practical knowledge on careers and ultimately used them as a bridge to obtain the knowledge they required. When the programme ran consistently and with proper structure, both bonding and bridging were prevalent and led to many positive mentoring outcomes such as those outlined by Rhodes (2005), however, this was an ongoing challenge for many stakeholders involved.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the key themes and topics from the experiences of each participant group who participated in this study, how these related to each research question and the theoretical model developed in this thesis. The students' perception of the TA mentoring programme was mixed, whilst they found the programme worthwhile, there were obvious difficulties around the structure of the programme and consistency of the mentors. The students found that the mentoring programme was only one of many factors that impacted their aspirations and expectations for life after secondary school. The programme was

somewhat successful in its aim of helping the students develop informed choices for future educational opportunities. However, the students were well informed and more clued into the operational aspects of the Irish education system, than possibly their US peers (which is where the programme originally stemmed from). On the relationship aspect of the mentoring programme, mentor properties that were sought after more thoroughly by the mentees included professionalism, consistency and commitment. The mentors did highlight the difficulty that stemmed from having to commit to so many students and sessions, and as the programme progressed, this put even more strain on the demands of volunteers. These mentors were essentially giving up their time, which affected careers and studies. As Grossman and Furano (1999) pointed out, programme quality would suffer if the required support, training and screening was not given to the mentors, in advance and during the programme. This seemed to explain many of the difficulties around the structural aspects of the programme. The programme seemed to be a victim of its success as it grew quickly. Suggestions to improve programme effectiveness, included joined-up thinking between all actors, to plan out as much as possible the demands required before signing up. Also, one clear model of success was when a school was linked with a business. The business was able to commit the required number of employees to mentor the students regularly. There is overlap in the findings between the questions. For example, students' perceptions of the programme are related to all questions and have clear implications for each. This is a key part of the study, as the ultimate aim of the programme is to help develop their knowledge, skills and networks to make informed choices about future educational opportunities. To achieve this however, you need an effective programme, and you cannot have this without the input and voice of each stakeholder.

The final chapter of this thesis concludes by considering the implications of these findings for the TA mentoring programme and the stakeholders involved. Limitations of the study are outlined, along with suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research process, along with recommendations for future iterations of the TA mentoring programmes and widening participation policy and practice.

Chapter 8: Implications and Final Reflections

8.1. Introduction

The Trinity Access mentoring (TA) programme has been running with Trinity College-linked secondary schools since 2014, and this is the first thorough piece of qualitative research on its effectiveness since its inception. There was a short paper by O’Sullivan et. al (2017), which set the scene for a more thorough investigation of the programme's impact on the students. The data was generated by interviewing a sample of 25 randomly selected sixth-year students, in five randomly selected schools linked with the Trinity Access Programme. There were also ten mentors interviewed, who were also selected at random. An email was sent to all mentors who had mentored on the programme. More than ten replied, but various scheduling issues meant only ten were able to participate in the interviews. Interviews were also carried out with the five teachers involved in running the programme in each school. Further interviews were carried out with two TA staff and one principal. Following the discussion of the research findings in previous chapters, this final chapter of the thesis considers the implications for the TA mentoring programme and the stakeholders involved in the programme. This takes the form of discussing the research questions, considering the findings and whether these have been answered or not. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research process, along with the limitations and further recommendations for future research and iterations of the Trinity Access mentoring programme.

8.2. Discussing Findings, Research Questions and Their Relationship with the Theory

Question one (**RQ1 How do 6th-year students in five Trinity Access linked Post Primary DEIS schools perceive the Trinity Access mentoring programme?**) considered the perception the participating post-primary students had of the TA mentoring programme. The students’ perception of the programme focused on the inconsistent nature of how it operated, albeit still finding their participation worthwhile. The students highlighted the importance of meeting people outside of their usual day-to-day school lives and that this had a positive

impact on them. The students' perspectives on areas of weakness focused on the very unstructured and sporadic nature of the sessions. This affected their perception of the programme and ultimately its impact on them. It was hard for the students to get a lot from the programme and build a relationship with their mentors, as it was so poorly organised at times. However, they still found the programme worthwhile and would do it again if they had the choice. This points to the programme being worthwhile on a strategic level i.e., that it has a positive impact on the students, but on an operational level it had its difficulties. Rhodes (2005) highlighted the key features needed for mentoring programmes to work and these included trust, empathy and mutuality. It was very difficult for these three key features to take place, as they all needed time to evolve. Time spent with mentors was limited and too sporadic in many instances.

Sub Question one (**Sub RQ1 What effect, if any, does the mentoring programme have on supporting and/or informing their post-school aspirations and expectations**) This question was asked because the main goal of the TA mentoring programme was to ***Engage students to develop knowledge, networks, and skills, needed to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities***. The main findings of this research question suggested that the impact of the mentoring programme, on the students' post-school decisions, were mixed. The decision-making process for any major life event can be complex and, in this situation, it was no different for the students. For some students, the mentoring relationship had a big impact on their choices and for others, not so much. However, they all alluded to other factors that affected their decisions, such as families, friends, interests and hobbies. The complexity of educational decision-making, as highlighted by the students, aligns with the literature and findings by McCoy et al. (2014), showing that there is a myriad of factors that impact students' educational decision-making in Ireland. From the evidence gathered in this study, these students were no different. The mentoring programme was one of several educational factors that influenced the students' aspirations, but there were also other factors, such as family influence, peer decisions and personal preferences.

Question two (**RQ2 How does Robert Putnam's concept of social capital help explain the mentee/mentor relationship in five Trinity Access linked DEIS post-primary schools?**) A key component of mentoring relationships is how well the mentees and mentors work together.

Many of the mentors were either past pupils of the schools they mentored in, or had a prior relationship with the Trinity Access programme. This was quite positive in terms of the enthusiasm the mentors had for working with the schools and students. The main difficulties in establishing the mentee/mentor relationships were the difficulties in the recruitment and retention of mentors. When the programme first started, it was with four pilot schools and only one year group (2nd year students), which was much easier to manage. There were much fewer mentors to recruit than in the subsequent years of the programme. The most effective way for Trinity Access to recruit mentors initially, was to draw on the number of Access students it was linked to in TCD. This was a successful outlet to begin with, but as the programme expanded, the number of mentors required also expanded. The main issue was that each school had a different requirement in terms of number of students, timeline of sessions and distance for the mentors to travel. Most of the mentors had their day-to-day schedules to attend to, and volunteering for 6 sessions per year was difficult for every mentor. This led to a lot of mentor retention issues. Some schools were easier to recruit for, especially schools with small numbers of students and close to TCD. The geographical proximity to the college was a key indicator of whether there were mentor retention issues or not. In terms of the types of relationships and pairing approaches, the students seemed to not mind whether their mentor had similar characteristics or career paths as them. They wanted their mentors to be professional, consistent and the relationship would grow from there.

Putnam's theory on social capital was evident but was much more nuanced. It was not the case that relationships were best developed with similar characteristics and interests. Mentees did bond with their mentors when the programme ran well, and more so in their early teenage years, but the bond was not based on similar characteristics or interests. The mentees were happy to have another adult to discuss future selves and possibilities in their younger years, but as they got closer to finishing school bridging capital was much more prevalent. They used the mentors to bounce ideas off, gain more practical knowledge on careers and used them as a bridge to obtain the knowledge they required. When the programme ran consistently and with proper structure, both bonding and bridging were prevalent and led to many positive mentoring outcomes outlined by Rhodes (2005). However, this was an ongoing challenge for many stakeholders involved. A successful case was a school that was linked to a local business for their mentoring programme. Bonding and bridging were

both prevalent and again, linking to Rhodes, was mainly due to giving trust enough time to build between mentor and mentee. The outcomes for the students were positive in terms of their perception of the mentoring and some even went on to gain work experience there. On many occasions, mentors and mentees had very different backgrounds and shared different career outlooks but a bond still occurred. Bridging happened when the students required it most, as they became more instrumentally focused. The use of Putnam's concept was useful for programme evaluation because it provided lessons that were not necessarily evident before this research began. Matching was usually done on shared interests, characteristics, and backgrounds. This approach demonstrated that the phenomena of TA mentoring can be successful, networks can be developed and trust gained, albeit not in the most expected of ways.

The final research question of the thesis (**RQ 3: How is the mentoring programme operationalised in five Trinity Access linked DEIS post-primary schools?**) sought to address the operational aspects of the programme, and offer suggestions from the groups involved on ways to improve it. The major finding from this question was that operating the programme proved problematic for many schools, students and mentors. Some schools were able to organise the mentoring sessions and recruit mentors much easier than others. A school's proximity to TCD and the main pool of mentors - TCD undergraduate students, was a key factor in the consistency of the programme. According to the perspective of all stakeholder groups, the programme lacked structure and consistency. This had a knock-on effect on the impact and success it had on the students. However, they all agreed that the programme was worthwhile and if they got the opportunity to do it again, they would. This led to questions about how to improve the programme and there were various suggestions across the stakeholder groups. The most common response was around setting out a calendar of events at the beginning of the year and ensuring mentors can commit fully, before the commencement of the sessions. The students and teachers were adamant that the relationship between mentors and students was a key factor in the success of the programme, and this relationship was negatively impacted too often by mentors not being able to return or commit fully. Other suggestions included adapting the mentoring sessions to the age of the students, for example more relationship-focused on earlier years and more instrumental and

decision-focused on the latter years of secondary school. A key finding on the mentoring relationship was that regular, small, grouped sessions were needed to build rapport, trust and mutual respect between mentor and mentee. The same mentor is also required as it takes time to build this type of relationship, usually between 6-12 months, according to the literature, the teachers, mentors and mentees. The overall evaluation of the programme highlights the problems. The main issues centred around the operational difficulties of running such a large programme with varying schedules. However, it was clear that all participants involved were happy that they participated and would recommend it to future cohorts.

8.3. Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of this study was the research approach. All research approaches have strengths and weaknesses, and the qualitative approach is no different. Limitations included my presence during data gathering, this was unavoidable, however it can affect the subjects' responses. There is also the issue that rigour is more difficult to maintain, assess and demonstrate. As the researcher, I took steps to demonstrate this rigour which is highlighted in the methods chapter however it is difficult to guarantee. Sometimes qualitative research is not as well understood and accepted as quantitative research within the scientific community. There were also issues of anonymity and confidentiality when presenting findings, it is difficult to fully anonymise voices and schools when the community involved in TA is so small. Qualitative research is also heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Ongoing steps were taken throughout the research to rectify this but again, it cannot be guaranteed, and all research approaches are value-laden to a degree.

The sample in certain groups was limited for example the study only included sixth-year students. Availability bias may have been a limiting factor in recalling the quality of the programme in their earlier years of participation. The research would have been strengthened by having access to more mentees across year groups and also a larger sample of mentors. A clear limitation was the lack of mentors who participated in the study. When

responding to the invitation to participate, a lack of responses was a clear issue here. There were many more mentors who would have had interesting things to say if they were able to participate. For example, I tried to arrange interviews with the mentors in the school which had successful business links, but availability was limited. It would have been fruitful to have access to the mentors from the business linked to the school that had a positive experience with mentor retention, however, despite best efforts this was not possible. These business links were heavily discussed by the principal interviewed in this research. The findings here highlighted the importance of these links to the mentoring in her school. These findings provide a strong case for programme development in the future.

There also exists a large amount of quantitative data, from the annual whole-school surveys, that would have helped to corroborate research findings (as in data triangulation). Following Denzin (2011), the research may have also been strengthened with further input from colleagues in reviewing transcripts, coding and so on (analytical triangulation). Although my supervisor helped in this regard, more input from stakeholders after they received the transcripts and initial themes could have helped further analytical triangulation. A common limitation of the thematic analysis approach is the time-consuming process involved in coding and organising large amounts of data, which is tedious in large parts. Despite steps taken to triangulate the data, the development of themes and codes is dependent on the researcher's judgement.

Other specific limitations refer mainly to the research approach and accessibility to schools of interest. The approach changed twice, initially, I wanted to do an ethnographic study of the mentoring programme to gain a deeper understanding of how the programme worked from a direct observatory standpoint. However, the schools I had chosen to study decided not to do the programme with their final-year students, as such, there was no programme to observe. Mentoring programmes for sixth-year students vary in each TA-linked school, as the time available for non-curricular activities decreases as students enter the final year of their second-level studies. This proved problematic, as some schools tended to operate informal mentoring programmes, such as teacher-to-student mentoring. In this format, teachers were assigned students whom they met and talked to in an impromptu format. This would have reduced the time I would have been able to spend observing the programme.

Another initial approach I wanted to employ, was a comparison study of the TA-linked schools with the highest third-level progression rate, the mid-ranking school, and the lowest-ranked school. The rationale was to study whether there was anything that one school had done, which was different to another, and to make comparisons and suggestions. Again, if one school had a vastly different mentoring programme to another, then this would have made comparisons more difficult. However, despite variation in approach the aim of each school's iteration was the same – to *engage students to develop knowledge, networks, and skills needed to make informed decisions about future educational opportunities*. It turned out that when these three schools were identified, two of these schools were not planning to carry out any mentoring with their sixth-year students. Therefore, a comparison study was not possible. Five schools were picked at random, as the students in each school and mentors were all contacted and whoever could participate was selected. It would have been worthwhile for this study to evaluate what schools have done differently to each other, but the scope of this was out of reach. I had also planned to interview parents but gaining access proved difficult. The initial plan was to interview each student as well, but the availability to interview each student individually was also an issue. It would have taken up to 40 minutes per student and as there were five students, the school could not facilitate over three hours of interviews, as the students were not available for this duration of time. It was easier for the school to release all five students together during a period that suited them best rather, than over a day, or a number of days. Interviewing more principals and mentors would have helped me gain a broader understanding of what exactly drives the students' aspirations and expectations of life after school, but I was limited in terms of accessibility, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

8.4. Implications and Recommendations

A key implication of this study is the effect scaling programmes can have on quality. It is crucial that as a mentoring programme expands, despite reaching more students, it does not dilute its quality or recruitment, training, and support capacity of the required number of mentors. Grossman and Furano (1999) discussed the danger of a loss of programme quality, if these facets are not afforded to mentors. A key recommendation from this study is that the

requisite planning needs to be done in advance of scale, if the mentees are to continue to benefit from the mentor interactions.

Another implication of the study, is the importance of the mentor to help the students investigate the broad range of opportunities at their disposal. The push of TCD was regularly highlighted by the students, and this harmed some of their experiences. In one instance, a student missed out on a deadline for a course they wanted to do, because it was not explored on time, as there was so much discussion around Trinity. Again, this was not necessarily the mentors' fault as they were recruited by TCD to mentor on a TCD programme. The issue here can be with the training at their disposal. Just like the first recommendation, training a mentor to be aware of this is a crucial element of the programme's success.

8.5. Suggestions for Future Research

- Further investigation into factors which impact the students' aspirations and expectations for life after secondary school. If I had access to peer groups, parents, and all principals this would have helped me get deeper into this research question. Silke et al. (2019) also had similar suggestions in their research on the Big Brother Big Sister mentor programme. An important objective is to explore how mentors' and youths' perceptions of other aspects of relational and instrumental support or quality evolve throughout their involvement in youth mentoring programmes and to examine how these different quality indicators impact youth outcomes over time. This work attempted to build on Silke's work, but accessing a broader range of their relational networks would help unpack aspirations, choices and outcomes in more detail.
- This study primarily focused on class elements within education and the DEIS schools included as research participants. Future studies would benefit by investigating gender more broadly and whether there are any differences between genders within the link schools that participated in the mentoring programmes.
- Research into the wider structural issues that impact the students' decisions and aspirations for example the financial ramifications of picking courses.

- The impact of the CAO points system on DEIS students' abilities to pick from the widest range of pathways possible.
- Whether the 99%-100% progression rates to third level from certain schools and areas are reflective of the student's interests and skills.
- As above, but with the low progressing schools and communities.
- Is there a more holistic way of approaching Higher Education admissions policy? A review of Irish admission policies would be worthwhile.

8.6. Personal Reflection on the Research and the Area

The Trinity Access Programme was set up in 1994 and its main remit was to run programmes that would help widen participation in Trinity College Dublin. It was linked with secondary schools with low third-level progression rates and instructed to develop outreach initiatives that would help more students attend TCD. It is within the remit that all the programmes that the Access programme runs were framed, and this still influences the programmes today, even if in some cases unintentionally. As the Access Programme developed more links with schools, their staff numbers increased to cope with an increased workload. The increased pressure on the organisation of their programmes has been somewhat a consequence of their success. As the policy desire to increase participation in third level among students in disadvantaged areas became a greater priority for the Irish Government (HEA, 2015; HEA, 2022), this put more pressure on third-level institutions to widen participation. Many of the operational issues that were highlighted in this research were a consequence of this growth.

When the mentoring programme was first introduced to the Trinity Access link schools, it was packaged alongside three other programmes in what was termed 'College for Every Student', therefore it was quite evident what the end goal was for the programme. The schools to which the programme was introduced, had lower than national average progression rates to third level, therefore the objective was simple - increase college participation (especially, but not exclusively, progression to TCD). When the one-year pilot with four schools was complete, Trinity Access rolled the programme out to all eleven link schools, starting with their second

year students. When the data was generated for this study, this cohort was in sixth year. This was the cohort selected to participate in the study. Other year groups had begun to participate in the years since the mentoring programme began in 2014, which also led to further mentor recruitment and retention issues. The sixth-year students had participated in the programme and were at the terminal stage of their secondary school studies, therefore in terms of deciding what they wanted to do next, it made sense to select this group and investigate what impact, if any, the programme had on this. This data was generated in year two of four of this doctoral programme and it was hoped that third-level progression rates would increase across the eleven schools because of this focused intervention. However, in year three, when these students had passed through the secondary school system, it was clear that the progression rates had varied results.

Interviews with the students highlighted the focus of the programme having negligible impacts on them at times, as it was so college-focused, especially Trinity College. They highlighted the fact that they felt the mentoring should be focused on helping them explore all possible post-school options, rather than Trinity College focused. The team in Trinity Access listened to the students and reframed the programme to focus on 'informed choice' and trained their mentors accordingly. As such, this was a positive development for the students. The sessions were redesigned to focus on ascertaining the students' needs and goals. The mentors may not have had all the available information to support the students' queries at the time they were asked, but they were able to liaise with teachers and TA staff to help inform the students. However, for the sake of this research, the focus was on the original cohort that began in 2014 and the mentee data generated was based on this cohort. Therefore, this piece does not speculate on subsequent mentee experiences. However, there is a limited amount of quantitative data that highlights mentee experience in years 3 and 4 of this study. This data is quite limited, as it only forms a small part of a wider survey and therefore, there is a lack of depth around student decision-making and their wider experiences of the programme.

The students' views on college and Trinity are quite different from the mentors, teachers, principals and TAP staff. This difference relates to their views on the objectives of the programme. For the teachers, principals and TAP staff, the programme is very much about matching the students with college-going or college-educated mentors, with the hope of

influencing the students towards making that choice. On the other hand, the students seem to be of the persuasion that they arrive at this choice themselves, but would like to be exposed to the various range of post-school options. This raises the question of which perspective matters most, do all matter equally or is there some middle ground to be found? If raising the progression rates to third level among DEIS secondary schools is the overarching aim of the government, the Department of Education and TCD, then perhaps that challenge requires further support than just educational outreach programmes. Considering the structural challenges that the students and communities in question face, increasing third-level participation is quite the challenge to impose on universities, third-level institutions and secondary schools alone, without looking at other arms of the state. The communities that the students in DEIS schools grow up in are economically poorer and have less access to resources. Many of the challenges that the students and their families face, are economic and financial. The mere idea of studying for 3-4 years to complete an undergraduate degree can be a daunting task for a student who has seen their families face financial struggles. The trade-off to continue in education is usually paid employment immediately after school finishes. As highlighted by McCoy et al. (2014), risk aversion is the biggest factor impacting working-class students' decisions to progress to college. The findings from this research did not mirror this exactly, but the students did talk about finances, opportunities to work immediately after school and parents with well-paying jobs that did not require further study, as having a big impact on their decisions. Many of the students who participated in this study and attend the schools linked to the programme, would be eligible for grants and scholarships to attend third-level education, which may mitigate the financial burden for the students. However, with the growing cost of accommodation and living costs, this grant usually cannot cover everything. It also limits the scope of the course and college choices that the students have. For example, if they want to do a course further from home and must pay rent, then costs substantially increase. If increased participation in higher education, among groups that traditionally have lower than the national average participation rates in third level, is to be attained, then there needs to be wider support for the target groups. Another barrier that many of the students face is the competition for college places. These places are usually determined by Leaving Certificate grades and subsequent points tally. Each student sits the same exam for their Leaving Certificate in the respective subject; however personal resources have a strong impact on the level of tuition available to each student. If one student can afford

more private tuition, it gives them an advantage over the student who cannot. This is hardly a meritocratic assessment of student ability.

8.7. Concluding Thoughts

When I began the PhD journey, I was already aware of access to the wider educational spectrum in Ireland, having qualified as a secondary teacher the year before I started this research. The process itself has been winding and difficult, but a great learning experience. I was in a fortunate position to be able to enter so many schools and gain a broad and in-depth view of how these schools operated. In the first year of this research, the approach and general plan were developed, and the related literature was explored. This was an exciting year, as I learned a lot about the area and began to see a plan develop. The building blocks of what this research would be about and why it was necessary were teased out; this was an important but ever-changing part of the process. The timing of the data generation was important, as most of the students who were part of the original cohort were in the final year of secondary school, were thinking seriously about their next steps and had the most experience of the mentoring programme. Meeting the students and other stakeholders on years two and three of the journey was my favourite part, albeit very difficult to generate data at times due to participants changing schedules. This brought the study to life and helped the participants voice their views on how they found being involved in the mentoring. I met so many different people and it was a privilege to listen to their stories and experiences. In the second half of year three, the pandemic began, as such, data generation became virtual for the TA staff, principal and the last two mentors. This was adequate but being in person was more enjoyable and conversations were more fruitful for data generation. The last stage of the process – the write-up – has also been difficult as access to the college was limited and I worked from home for most of this. However, it has been where I have seen all the studies come together and learned the most about my subject field. The whole experience has enhanced me as an educator, researcher and person. This would not have been possible without all the research participants and my supervisor, whose inputs I am grateful for.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project Information and consent forms

Mentor Information Sheet

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete three interviews throughout the school year which will be audio-recorded and a questionnaire at the end of the year. I will also observe each mentoring session to assist me in answering the research questions around how the sessions take place and what do successful relationships between mentors and mentees look like.

The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete, and the interview will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour. These can take place wherever it suits you. I foresee no risks for you participating in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The data generated will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding your identity will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to myself and my PhD supervisor and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

Your dependent is under no obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect them in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

Yes No

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

I have read and understood the subject information sheet.

I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my dependents and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

I know that my dependents participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that my dependents results will be kept anonymous.

I agree for my dependent to participate in the above study....

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet 1 – Interviews, Observation and Questionnaire

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you and your dependent agree to take part in this study, (s)he will be asked to complete three interviews throughout the school year which will be audio-recorded and a questionnaire at the end of the year. I will also observe each mentoring session to assist me in answering the research questions around how the sessions take place and what do successful relationships between mentors and mentees look like.

The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete, and the interview will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Both will take place during school hours but not during scheduled class time. I foresee no risks for your dependent's participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The data generated will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding your dependent will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to myself and my PhD supervisor and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. Your dependent does not have to take part in this study if you/they do not want to and you/they can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

Your dependent is under no obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect them in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

Yes No

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

I have read and understood the subject information sheet.

I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my dependents and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

I know that my dependents participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that my dependents results will be kept anonymous.

I agree for my dependent to participate in the above study....

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet 2 – Questionnaire & Observation only

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you and your dependent agree to take part in this study, (s)he will be asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the year. I will also observe each mentoring session to assist me in answering the research questions around how the sessions take place and what do successful relationships between mentors and mentees look like. The questionnaire will take about 20mins. Both will take place during school hours but not during class time. I foresee no risks for your dependent's participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding your dependent will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. Your dependent does not have to take part in this study if you/they do not want to and you/they can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

Your dependent is under no obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect them in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

Yes No

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

I have read and understood the subject information sheet.

I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my dependent and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

I know that my dependents participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that my dependents results will be kept anonymous.

I agree for my dependent to participate in the above study....

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Principal Information Sheet

Trinity College Dublin

22/08/18

Dear Principal,

My name is David Reilly, and I am currently a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of this programme, I am conducting research in the area of the Trinity Access 21 mentoring program. I am investigating the impact the mentoring program has on student's post-secondary school decision making process. I am also looking at what makes a good relationship between mentor and mentee. My research is under the supervision of Dr Andrew Loxley and is titled **an investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process.**

This project wishes to investigate the properties of the mentor/mentee relationship in Trinity Access 21 schools, the affect mentoring plays in student's post-secondary school decision making process and what does successful mentoring relationships look like. The data collection for the project includes observation of each mentoring session, three interviews (audio-recorded) with mentors and mentees. There will be one group interviewed throughout the year, e.g., 1 mentor and 5 mentees and this group will be chosen at random. Further interviews will take place with possibly parents, teachers, and principals later in the year as a clearer picture of the mentoring takes shape. An end of year questionnaire will be issued to all students in the mentoring program. It is anticipated that the questionnaire will normally take no longer than 20 minutes to complete and that the interviews will last between 30 minutes and one hour. It is hoped to complete the project during school hours, but outside of class time. Class time would therefore not be disrupted in any way.

I am aware that this is a very busy time of year for you and your school, and I would greatly appreciate your assistance with this project. I can foresee no risks being associated with individual and school participation in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with the appropriate privacy and anonymity. No information about your school or the participants, will be identified in the research. All information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners. Data will be destroyed after a period of 10 years. The anonymised results will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in academic literature. As your school would be the site for data collection, a copy of the results can be made available to you if requested.

Please note that your school or the pupils involved are under no obligation to participate in this study. If at any time a participant wishes to withdraw from the study, they may do so at any time, without having to give a reason and without prejudice.

If you have further questions regarding this research, please feel free to get in touch using the email addresses listed below. Finally, I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider

my research. Without your generous participation, conducting such research would be impossible.

Kind Regards,

Email: dreilly1@tcd.ie

Phone: 083-8557088

loxleya@tcd.ie

087-1782574

Principal's consent

I have read and understood the information sheet included with this consent form and I am happy for **[include researcher's name here]** to conduct research in **[name school here]**.

Principal's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Student Information Sheet 1 – Observation and Questionnaire

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes. It will take place during school hours but not during class time. I will also sit in on the mentoring sessions throughout the year. I foresee no risks for your participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding you will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

You are under **no** obligation to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, you are free to do so. It will not affect you in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the subject information sheet.	☐	☐
I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.	☐	☐
I am fully aware of all the procedures involved and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.	☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept anonymous.	☐	☐

I agree to participate in the above study....

Signature of Student:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Student Information Sheet 2 – Interviews, Observations and Questionnaire

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and to take part in an audio recorded interview. The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes and the interview will take 30 minutes to 1 hour. Both will take place during school hours but not during class time. I will also sit in on the mentoring sessions throughout the year. I foresee no risks for your participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding you will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

You are under **no** obligation to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, you are free to do so. It will not affect you in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the subject information sheet.	☐	☐
I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.	☐	☐
I am fully aware of all the procedures involved and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	☐	☐
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.	☐	☐
I am aware that my results will be kept anonymous.	☐	☐

I agree to participate in the above study....

Signature of Student:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Friend Information Sheet

Title of Project: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

The Study: I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course, I am carrying out research into the mentoring program in some of the link schools involved in the Trinity Access 21 initiative. My study is investigating the role mentoring has on student's post-secondary school decision making; it also will investigate different aspects of the mentoring relationship.

Participation information:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete between one - three interviews throughout the school year which will be audio-recorded and a questionnaire at the end of the year. I will also observe each mentoring session to assist me in answering the research questions around how the sessions take place and what do successful relationships between mentors and mentees look like.

The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete, and the interview will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour. It is envisaged that this will take place during school time but not scheduled class time. I foresee no risks for you participating in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The data generated will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding your identity will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to myself and my PhD supervisor and examiners and it will all be destroyed after 10 years. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis and may be discussed at conferences or published in a book or a journal. You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to and you can withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, just ask the researcher to explain it for you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this.

Researchers contact details: David Reilly - dreilly1@tcd.ie 083-8557088

Supervisor contact details: Dr Andrew Loxley - loxleya@tcd.ie 087-1782574

Parent / Guardian Consent Form for Under 18

Title of Project: _____

Your dependent is under no obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect them in any way.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

Yes No

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

☐ ☐

I have read and understood the subject information sheet.

I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my dependents and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

I know that my dependents participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that my dependents results will be kept anonymous.

I agree for my dependent to participate in the above study....

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

Appendix B: TA Staff Interview Schedule

Title of PhD Research: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

Trinity Access Staff member interview schedule

Hi, my name is David Reilly. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. My aim today is to try to understand your experience in relation to the Trinity Access project and specifically the mentoring program. I want to know this information so that I can possibly gain a clearer understanding on your perspectives on how the program is operationalised and does the reality of mentoring match your expectations. I also want to gain insights into your views around the impact of the program on the student's post-secondary school decision making processes.

It is important you know that what you say in here is confidential and your name or personal information will not be passed on to anyone outside of this research.

For this to run smoothly there are some guidelines that we need to stick to.

- There are no right or wrong answers, all your views are important.
- You probably noticed the recording device in the middle of the room. I am recording the session, so I do not miss any information. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down but if for any reason you become uncomfortable and no longer want to be involved just let me know and I will stop recording and end the session.
- This will last for about 45-60 minutes. Have you any questions before we begin?

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Probing Questions
Trinity Access Involvement & Context:		
1. In general, how long have you been involved in TAP?	• What is your exact role?	• How? • Why?
2. What interactions do you have with the schools and school related programme?	• How many other staff involved? • Do you share ideas or discuss quality or future direction of the program?	• Collaboration, Positive/negative?
3. How does your TA work connect with mentoring?	• Can you describe how TA21/CFES has been rolled out in the schools since you began?	• Were you happy about this was done?

4. What has been your involvement in the mentoring programme?	• What types of activities did you organise? • How many years have you been involved?	• When? • Why? • With whom?
Background and Programme evolution:		
5. Where did the idea to begin mentoring in TA link schools come from?	• When was it set up?	• Did you participate in the set up?
6. What was the initial objectives of mentoring when it was set up?	• Have these objectives changed?	• Why?
7. Has the mentoring programme changed since you became first involved?	• How?	• Would you change how this is done, in an ideal situation?
Evaluative:		
8. What type of factors do you think affect the student's decision making about what they want to do when they finish school?	• Do you think the student's aspirations have changed from being mentored?	• How?
9. What do you think a positive mentor-mentee relationship looks like?	• Factors required for positive relationship to develop?	• In your opinion, how can these develop?
10. How engaged have the various stakeholders been with the mentoring?	• Anything that can be worked on?	• How?
11. What have been the main challenges of the programme?	• How have they been addressed?	
12. What have been the main successes of the programme?	• How can it be built upon?	• Outlook going forward?
13. What would an ideal mentoring programme look like to you?	• No barriers on resources	• How can it be achieved?
Conclusion of Interview		
• Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?		

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Schedule

Title of PhD Research: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

Teacher Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is David Reilly. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. My aim today is to try to understand your experience in relation to the TA21 project and specifically the mentoring program. I want to know this information so that I can possibly gain a clearer understanding on your perspectives how the program is operationalised and does the reality of mentoring match your expectations. I also want to gain insights into your views around the impact of the program on the student's post-secondary school decision making processes.

It is important you know that what you say in here is confidential and your name or personal information will not be passed on to anyone outside of this research.

For this to run smoothly there are some guidelines that we need to stick to.

- There are no right or wrong answers, all your views are important.
- You probably noticed the recording device in the middle of the room. I am recording the session, so I do not miss any information. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down but if for any reason you become uncomfortable and no longer want to be involved just let me know and I will stop recording and end the session.
- This will last for about 45-60 minutes. Have you any questions before we begin?

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Probing Questions
TA21 Information/Context:		
1. In general, how long has your school been involved with the TA21/TAP/CFES	• Could anything make it better?	• How? • Why?
2. What affect (if any) has TA21/CFES/TAP had in the school over the last year?	• Do you feel it had any impact on the participating students? • Has it had any impact on you, as a teacher?	• Positive/negative?
Involvement:		
3. What has your involvement been in the TA21/CFES in school this year?	• Can you describe how TA21/CFES has been rolled out in this school over the last year?	• Were you happy about this?
4. What has been your involvement in the mentoring programme more specifically?	• What types of activities did you organise? • How many years have you been involved?	• When? • Why? • With whom?
5. Is there any other teachers or non-teachers involved?	• If so, what's their roles? • Do you share ideas or discuss quality or future direction of the program?	• Help or not? • Too little support, too much, good balance?
Functional:		
6. What type of mentoring takes places? Has it varied for the 6th years since TA21 began in your school?	• Has it varied for the 6th years since TA21 began in your school?	• Do staff participate in the set up?
7. If the mentoring happens in groups, how are the groups formed?	• What's the average size of the groups per mentor? • Does the teacher decide the group formation or the students	• Why this size?

8. How are the mentors and mentees matched?	Interests, practicalities?	Would you change how this is done, in an ideal situation?
Evaluative:		
9. Do your expectations for the students who partake in the mentoring program differ from students who do not?	- Do you think being involved in TA21 has changed your relationship with the students? - Do you think the students' aspirations have changed from being involved?	How?
10. Do you think the mentoring involvement will affect the student's decisions on what to do after school?	If so, to what affect?	
11. How engaged have the 6 th years been with the mentoring?	What have been the positives and negatives of the mentoring from your perspective?	
12. What do you think is the ideal mentor-mentee relationship?		
Conclusion of Interview		
Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?		

Appendix D: Mentor Interview Schedule

Title of PhD Research: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

Mentor Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is David Reilly. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. My aim today is to try to understand your experience of the TA21 mentoring programme. I want to know this information so that I can possibly gain a clearer understanding on your perspectives on what a positive mentoring relationship should look like, how the program is operationalised and does the reality of mentoring match your expectations. **It is important you know that what you say in here is confidential and your name or personal information will not be passed on to anyone outside of this research.**

For this to run smoothly there are some guidelines that we need to stick to.

- There are no right or wrong answers, all your views are important.
- You probably noticed the recording device in the middle of the room. I am recording the session, so I do not miss any information. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down but if for any reason you become uncomfortable and no longer want to be involved just let me know and I will stop recording and end the session.
- This will last for about 45-60 minutes. Have you any questions before we begin?

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Probing Questions
TA21 Information/Context:		
13. In general, how long have you been volunteering for TA21/TAP/CFES	What have you volunteered for during this time?	- How? - Why?
Operationalisation:		
14. What has been your involvement in the mentoring programme more specifically?	What type of activities did you do with students?	- When? - Why? - With whom?
15. Had you any involvement in how your mentees were matched with you?	Do you think you should?	Random or matched interests?
16. What way were the sessions set up when you mentored? Hall, classrooms, other space?	Did the physical arrangements affect the quality of the sessions?	Did you have any problems committing fully to the mentoring?
Relationship:		
17. What was the point of the mentoring relationship?	Has it varied since when you began?	Expectations versus reality?
18. How would you describe a good mentoring relationship?	- Ideal relationship looks like? - What outcomes from the relationship would you suggest are the most important?	Why?
19. What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a mentor?		
Evaluative & decision-making process:		
20. Do you think been mentored had an affect the student's decision of what to do after school?	If so, to what affect?	
21. If you were setting up the mentoring programme, how would you do it?	If you were a student starting it, what would you want to get from it?	
Conclusion of Interview		
Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?		

Appendix E: Mentee Focus Group Interview Schedule

Title of PhD Research: An investigation into the role of mentoring in 6th year student's post-secondary school decision making process

Mentee Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is David Reilly. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. My aim today is to try to understand your experience of the TA21 and specifically the mentoring programme to date. I want to know this information so that I can possibly gain a clearer understanding on your perspectives on what a positive mentoring relationship should look like and does the reality of mentoring match your expectations. I also want to know does it have an impact on your decisions on what to do when you finish school, if any.

It is important you know that what you say in here is confidential and your name or personal information will not be passed on to anyone outside of this research.

For this to run smoothly there are some guidelines that we need to stick to.

- There are no right or wrong answers, all your views are important.
- I will aim to include everybody in the amount of speaking time. Everyone will have a turn to speak.
- You probably noticed the recording device in the middle of the room. I am recording the session, so I do not miss any information. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and I cannot write fast enough to get them all down but if for any reason you become uncomfortable and no longer want to be involved just let me know and I will stop recording and end the session.
- This will last for about 60 minutes. Have you any questions before we begin?

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Probing Questions
TA21 Information/Context:		
22. Tell me what you know about TA21/TAP/CFES – use stickie’s		
23. In general, how long have you been taking part in CFES/TA21/TAP activities?	What was your favourite activity? – use stickie’s	How come?
Mentoring context:		
24. How many years have you been mentored in secondary students?	Would you have liked more or less mentoring?	Were you happy about this?
25. What have been the positives & negatives (if any) of partaking in the mentoring program?	- What types of mentoring did you do? - Had you the same mentor since you started?	
26. How have you found the logistics of the mentoring program?	Would you change anything about the layout/set up of the program if you could?	Space, logistics, schedule?
Relationship:		
27. Had you a say in who you were matched with?	- Do you think you should? - Have you had the same mentor since you started?	Random or matched interests?
28. What did you expect from the relationship with the mentor?	Has it varied since when you began?	Expectations versus reality?

29. What would you ideally like to get from the mentoring?	Information on college? The mentor's career. Just talk like friends or informally?	Why?
Evaluative & decision-making process:		
30. Do you think the mentoring involvement will affect your decisions on what to do after school?	If so, to what affect?	
31. Do you talk to anyone about how the mentoring sessions went and if so, who?	- Friends in school or out of school if friends? - Why, why not, parents/teachers?	
32. In your opinion, do these post mentoring conversations have an impact in your post-school secondary plans?	If so, what type of impact?	
Conclusion of Interview		
Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?		