HM YOI POLMONT

EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EARLY IMPACT OF THE PEER LEARNING HUB

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1   This report presents the findings from an independent evaluation of the Peer Learning Hub pilot that was set up in HM Young Offenders Institution (YOI) Polmont in 2014.

1.2   The purpose of the evaluation was twofold: to document and examine the set up and initial implementation of the Peer Learning Hub; as well as to consider early indications of its impact.

1.3   The evaluation focussed retrospectively on the set up and running of the pilot over the first nine months following implementation and also sought to identify and appraise changes to the pilot model that have subsequently taken place. The evaluation was intended to be formative, insofar as the findings will be used to help the pilot Hub reflect on learning and experience to date, and explore ways in which the project can continue to develop and progress in the future.

Research Aims & Questions

1.4   The evaluation directly explored the following research questions:

- How has the Peer Learning Hub been established? Has it been implemented as planned? What is the fidelity of implementation?
- Have there been barriers to implementation? If so what were they, what was their impact, and how were (or will) they be addressed?
- What is being delivered in the Peer Learning Hub?
- Are activities being delivered as intended?
- Are participants being reached as intended?
- What are the characteristics of participants, the throughput and the attrition rates?
- What are participants' views on peer mentoring?
- What changes, if any, have been made to the Peer Learning Hub as a consequence of initial lessons learned? How and why have changes been made? What impact have such changes had on the success of the Peer Learning Hub?

1.5   Recognising that the Hub is also still fairly new in its implementation, and that impact data was therefore limited to the short term and would be indicative, at best, the evaluation also considered:

- Whether peers are better at engaging young people in Polmont than staff members;
- Whether peers are more effective at sharing and imparting information and knowledge;
- Whether young offenders can act as successful role models;
- If, in custodial settings, prisoners can form pro-social communities that realise wider benefits;
- Whether the Peer Learning Hub increases confidence, self-esteem and self-worth of the mentors;
- Whether peer mentees feel more empowered and responsible;

- Whether deployment of peer mentors works as a symbol and signal of a pro-social, asset building culture;
- Whether peers can become ambassadors to other service users; and
- The extent to which peers can improve service delivery by identifying real issues on the ground.

1.6   It is important to stress that the research did not seek to assess the effectiveness of peer mentoring *per se,* since the benefits of peer mentoring and other peer interventions in the custodial setting is already well documented[1]. It is well known, for example, that under the right conditions, peers may be better at engaging offenders than prison or other staff, that they can act as positive role models and may be more effective at communicating information and knowledge to peers than traditional teaching staff. Research has also shown that peer mentors can be effective in helping to change the behaviour of their peers, and can be especially helpful in reaching traditionally hard to reach groups. Instead, what this evaluation sought to do was to explore the specific approach being adopted at HM YOI Polmont and the suitability for the particular offender group housed there.

Methodology

1.7   A mixed methods approach to the research was employed, combining a number of qualitative and quantitative research strands, as follows:

- interviews with strategic and operational staff involved in the Learning Hub, both from Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and other external agencies including senior managers and partner agency practitioners. A total of eight interviews were completed;
- interviews with wider staff working at HM YOI Polmont who had direct experience of working with mentors or referring young people to take part. A total of five interviews were completed;
- one-to-one and group interviews with mentors involved in the Hub, who had completed their training and had already begun to employ their training in delivering mentoring duties. A total of 12 young people took part;
- attendance at an awareness raising event hosted by the mentors and Hub staff to showcase their work;
- participation in a training session with a group of 8 mentors, to observe the training in practice;
- a review of SPS management information in relation to the characteristics of those involved in the Hub. This included analysis of the demographic and referral data held by SPS in relation to young people recommended for, and taking part as, mentors in the Learning Hub to date; and
- a review of wider peer mentoring research and documented experience of using this approach in custodial settings, to provide context for the evaluation findings.

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[1] Fletcher, D., and Batty, E. (2012) Offender Peer Interventions: What do we know? Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, UK

1.8   Data from across the research strands was analysed to extract key emerging themes and is presented in subsequent sections of this report. Observations on what the findings may mean for the progression and moving forward of the Hub are also presented.

Report Caveats

1.9   In understanding how the Hub has been running, the report focusses largely on operational staff perceptions and feedback. These views were complemented by speaking with senior managers and strategic staff involved in setting up and overseeing the Hub and, where differences in perceptions were noted, these are highlighted. It is important, nonetheless, to stress that these views will not have been impartial and that, without a longer period of independent observation and direct participation in the Hub, it is not possible to provide a more objective view of how the project is operating. To counter this, staff were asked to reflect *critically* on how the project had been working. The views here provide the most reliable data that could be achieved given the constraints of the research.

1.10   Similarly, it is important to note that all of the staff who took part in the research had previous direct involvement with the Hub, its staff or the mentors. The views of staff who had *not* used mentors, or who had limited awareness of the Hub were not canvassed and this may represent a gap in the findings presented below.

1.11   The information presented here also focusses primarily on the set-up and operation of the Learning Hub to date. While some attempt is made to demonstrate some of the perceived impacts of the Hub from both staff and young people involved, these observations are limited insofar as most of those consulted had not yet had sufficient opportunity to fully realise the benefits of participation. A true reflection of the effectiveness and impact of a project of this kind requires a more longitudinal research design which was not afforded here.

1.12   Finally, and perhaps most significantly, an important gap in the data presented here is feedback from mentees who had engaged with peer mentors. This was not possible to achieve for a number of reasons, mostly around facilitating access to young people. Instead, data regarding the perceived impacts on mentees had to be collected through mentors and staff. Although the voice of mentees is not directly represented, therefore, it is hoped that their views might still be at least part way understood by having been conveyed through their peers.

2.   EXPLORING THE SET UP AND EARLY OPERATION

Background and Rationale

2.1   The use of peers as mentors has historically been promoted across HM YOI Polmont, including the use of peers in delivering youth work, as well as in education. It has long been recognised that young people can provide valuable support to staff in delivering these programmes, and supporting their peers to reach their learning and wider personal desistance objectives.

2.2   Historically, peers have been used in both traditional 'education' roles as well as more practical 'mentoring' activities. This includes, for example, more experienced young people offering assistance to new admissions assigned to different work-parties, showing them how to operate machinery, how to maintain equipment and generally "showing them the ropes". Prior to the Hub, however, none of this positive peer mentoring activity was formally recognised within the establishment or rewarded.

2.3   While 'peer education' and 'peer mentoring' already both exist within the establishment, there was also a recognised need to bring the two together to enable 'peer learning' which encompasses not only formal education, but also informal components of prison life, prison experience and helping young people to maximise their time spent in prison to ensure that it is purposeful and assists them in their desistence goals. The 'peer learning' Hub allows for this combination of formal, informal and practical skills sharing as well as providing formal acknowledgement and accreditation for the young people's hard work.

2.4   In 2014, the Learning Environment Change Team was set up to explore new ideas for peer learning and to co-ordinate the existing peer mentoring practices that were already in place. This included staff from SPS, Fife College (who run the Education Centre within Polmont), Barnardo's (youth work) and Education Scotland. This strategic partnership, with overall guidance from the Governor, developed the core model for delivery of the Hub and also developed a job specification for a Hub co-ordinator to lead its implementation.

Learning Point: While strategic involvement for the planning and development of the Peer Learning Hub pilot was shared equally between SPS, Barnardo's and Fife College, feedback from interviews suggests that branding and ownership of the project on the ground perhaps does not reflect this equal three way partnership. In particular, the project has evolved into one which is viewed by some to be one spearheaded by youth work. Clarity around the early and ongoing inputs from all three partners should be recognised in any ongoing dissemination regarding the scheme to make sure that the contributions of all partners are appropriately recognised and acknowledged.

2.5   The Peer Learning Hub model is based on the core principles of peer education in that peers are seen as a more trusted and credible source of information than, for example, staff or other third parties, as they have similar experiences and social norms and are therefore better placed to provide relevant, meaningful, explicit and honest information. A young person involved in the Peer Learning Hub is a 'peer mentor'; an experienced person who provides information, support, advice and encouragement to a less experienced

person, often leading by example of his experience in an area. The young person engaging with a peer mentor to gain educational, practical or other social or emotional support is referred to here as a 'mentee'.

Aims and Objectives of the Peer Learning Hub

2.6   The SPS Vision for Young People in Custody (2014) sets out the overall aim of the SPS and its partners "to use the time a young person spends in custody to enable them to prepare for a positive future." Within this, there are four strands of learning which SPS seeks to promote for young people held in custody in Scotland, namely that they will be:

- successful learners;
- confident individuals;
- responsible citizens; and
- effective contributors.

2.7   The specific aims of the learning Hub at HM YOI Polmont directly complement these wider aspirations with the focus being:

- to train and support young people to become effective peer mentors and/or educators within a variety of roles throughout the establishment;
- to expand/develop opportunities for peer mentors/educators ensuring a meaningful contribution to the learning environment; and
- to develop positive and effective partnerships between young people and staff to consolidate the ideals of the Peer Learning Hub.

2.8   In addition to the formal aims and objectives of the pilot, staff reported that they hoped it would "give young people a voice within Polmont", and would be an empowering experience, which would increase the confidence of those who took part. Staff also wanted young people to have increased self-esteem, to have a sense of being more responsible adults, to learn the value of being non-judgemental, to learn to have an opinion and to respect and trust others. These 'softer' skills exist alongside hard skills in teaching and mentoring *per se* and both can help young people on re-entry into the community.

2.9   Wider intended outcomes reported by staff included a positive change in prison staff perceptions of young people, to see them as being "helpful" to the wider prison functioning and as playing a crucial role in the cultivation of a positive, rehabilitative environment. Staff were keen that wider SPS employees do not view the project as the tokenistic involvement of young people, but as a way of meaningfully involving young people in the progress of the establishment itself. The main aim, however, is to equip the young people with the skills that are transferrable out into the community.

Set-Up

2.10   The Peer Learning Hub pilot commenced in August 2014 and, at the time of writing, had been operational for just over 9 months.

2.11   While peer mentoring and peer education are not new to the prison *per se*, the main 'new' feature of the Learning Hub is that it is a more co-ordinated approach to delivering peer learning opportunities. This involved developing and expanding the existing peer mentoring opportunities as well as developing new roles for peer mentors in identified areas.

2.12   In the early planning for the pilot, job descriptions were developed for mentors working in all the areas where young people would be deployed. Generic to all descriptions was the need to attend and complete peer mentor training and ASDAN qualifications, to engage positively with other young people and staff; and to be able to plan and deliver support, advocacy and advice to mentees. All job descriptions also set out the need to be able to set and review goals, to plan, deliver and evaluate group-work and one-to-one sessions, and to demonstrate commitments to safety, equality and diversity. All mentors are also expected, fundamentally, to demonstrate a commitment to promoting a positive and professional image of the peer education programme.

> *Learning Point: While initial job descriptions were drafted for the young people working as mentors, the diversity in the nature of posts now attracting mentors means that some jobs do not have current job descriptions. Some of the older job descriptions may also be out of date. This is perhaps inevitable given the fast pace at which the project has developed and the need to be flexible in accommodating mentors' different skills. In the interests of transparency and clarity for all those working with mentors, and for the mentors themselves, job descriptions should, however, be clearly documented and updated on a regular basis.*

2.13   The range of different types of work that mentors can get involved with means that there should be something to meet the personal strengths of all those who are trained. Staff recognised early on that some mentors would be good at group work, others would have strengths in one-to-one mentoring, and others at supporting the development of practical skills. Planning for the specific roles that would be undertaken by mentors in each of these areas took up considerable time in the early days of the pilot but once these were in place, staff were able to focus then on the processes for referral and recruitment into the Hub and development and delivery of suitably tailored training.

Staffing

2.14   The Peer Learning Hub is a partnership between SPS, Barnardo's Youth Work and Fife College. As such, the Hub is operated by three core operational staff: a full time peer mentor co-ordinator (prison officer), a part time youth worker and a part time lecturer from Fife College (both non-prison staff). Additional strategic planning and preparatory work, as well as supervision of the core operational staff, is undertaken by the Head of Offender Outcomes on behalf of SPS, the Education Centre Manager on behalf of Fife College and the Service Manager of the Barnardo's youth work service, all based (at least part of the week) within the establishment. Together, these senior staff members provide a direct communication link between the operational team and the senior management within the establishment.

2.15   The role of the peer mentor support officer is to work in close partnership with a variety of internal and external service providers including Barnardo's, and Fife College to

deliver the Hub objectives. The course is facilitated jointly by the SPS, Barnardo's and Fife College. The officer and youth worker liaise with relevant areas to establish the mentoring needs of that area, offer support and supervision to all SPS peer mentors, and ensure relevant systems are developed within the halls to facilitate referral and participation in the Hub. The peer mentor co-ordinator's role was a new role developed specifically for the Hub that was advertised and filled in mid-2014. The incumbent officer is a member of prison staff with considerable prison based experience including more than 16 years relevant experience of working with young offenders delivering programme work. This means that he is already familiar with many of the core skills required for group-work facilitation and prisoner relationship building. The youth worker is trained to degree level in Community Education and brings the ethic and values of this approach to the development of the Peer Learning Hub. The Fife college staff member is a qualified lecturer and is supported in carrying out all internal verification of the mentors' work for qualification by other teaching peers and administrative staff from Fife college.

Learning Point: Feedback from interviews suggests that there may be room for greater inclusion of education partners in the continuous planning and development of the Peer Learning Hub. Fife College played a crucial role in developing the core programme, designing lessons plans, etc. and yet have been invited to take a lesser role in the ongoing development of the programme. This is perhaps an opportunity missed, given that those working in education are likely to have considerable previous relevant experience that could be brought to bear, ensuring that the programme remains educationally fit for purpose as well as appropriate to the environment.

2.16   Considerable groundwork was required by the officer in understanding what works in peer mentoring, how the scheme could be operationalised at Polmont, and what processes needed to be developed to allow its implementation. This involved visiting other establishments to understand what was available throughout the SPS, shadowing youth workers as well as a considerable desk based training and planning activity. It was also recommended that the officer undertake a qualification in youth work to further develop his skills and understanding of his new role, which was pursued. Considerable engagement and consultation with other officers around the prison was also involved to explore how processes could be implemented.

Learning Point: Given that this was a new initiative, the job of the Peer Learning Hub co-ordinator will, inevitably, have changed as the project has developed. Although a job description was developed to guide the role, it is one that has evolved considerably as the Hub has progressed and there may be a need to revise and update that job description now that the demands of the job, and the opportunities that still exist for its widening out, can be clearly identified. This will provide clear direction for the co-ordinator going forward in terms of the ongoing expectations of the role, and ensure that the placement of an SPS officer in this full time role continues to deliver maximum returns.

2.17   The dedicated youth worker was already delivering peer education programmes within the establishment and so has a wealth of experience of engaging with the target group. The role of the youth worker was originally only to assist in the co-planning and co-delivery of the course but this role snowballed in the first six months of operation and has

become more operational than anticipated. The youth worker not only co-plans and co-delivers the formal training, but has also taken an active role in designing and implementing processes for movement and placement of mentors, completing paperwork to support the scheme and act as a visible Peer Learning Hub point of contact for wider staff enquiries/interaction.

2.18   The Fife college staff member assists in delivering the generic peer mentor training and has the co-ordination responsibility of the ASDAN qualification. She undertakes all internal verification of work to be assessed for qualification and acts as the main liaison with the education centre within Polmont. The three staff members meet each week to discuss and prepare for weekly training sessions and work closely to ensure the smooth running of the project week-to-week.

2.19   It is recognised by all those currently working to deliver the Learning Hub that the combination of skills and experiences in the core team is an essential mix and is a strength of the model being used.

2.20   The Barnardo's Service Manager provides an invaluable link to senior managers within the establishment and ensures that learning, as it occurs, is passed on to the Governor and her colleagues. There are regular, two weekly, opportunities to feedback experiences from the Hub and to seek support and assistance for the Hub, where needed. This relationship was seen as working particularly well in conjunction with the support and endorsement from senior staff, as well as this direct communication link, and were seen as key strengths of the project. Support for the Learning Hub from senior staff was described as "excellent" and the team have been helped with all necessary practical resources to enable them to run the learning Hub as desired. Having regular support from senior management staff within the prison has also helped to give operational staff confidence in delivery and has helped to endorse the work of the peer mentoring staff, in the face of some early, minimal scepticism from others.

> **Learning Point:** *Interviews with staff suggest that there may be scope for greater involvement of the Education Centre Manager in the ongoing and forward strategic planning for the project. Although education partners were involved heavily at the start of the project, and continue to provide considerable resource input, they are not perhaps always as fully included in project updates as they could be.*

Training Content & Structure

2.21   The training programme being delivered to mentors as part of the Peer Learning Hub is based on a generic peer learning course already written and established by the youth work service within the prison, and already implemented across Polmont. The course 'skeleton' was tailored to meet the specific new areas in which young people would be working and has been continually adapted as the project has evolved to meet the needs of the different mentors recruited as well as learning on 'what works' with the mentors as the project progresses. The ethos of the trainers is to "start from where the young person is" and to adapt the course to meet their needs and so the training has not been overly prescriptive in either design or delivery.

2.22   The training consists of 12 weeks of structured, interactive group work alongside completion of paperwork to evidence new skills being learned and experiences in practice. The training results in an ASDAN qualification for the young people involved – a Diploma in Helping, Mentoring and Community Learning. The diploma can be used as a standalone qualification or used as part of entry qualifications to other formal education. The full qualification requires completion of 6 units but rewards can also be made for partial completion meaning that young people get rewarded for any contributions, even if they have to leave the course early.

2.23   At the time of writing, two cohorts of mentors had participated in and completed the training and a third was just beginning. An initial group of 14 young people took part in the first tranche with 11 successfully completing the course and going on to work as mentors. A second cohort of 15 young people commenced training in early 2015 with 12 successfully completing the course. Apart from minor changes to the training content, which is continually adapted based on learning among staff, two main changes occurred to the training structure between tranches, these being group sizes and the way in which paperwork is completed.

2.24   For the first cohort of trainees, training was delivered to two separate, smaller groups of young people, one on a Tuesday and one on a Wednesday. The initial intake was split into two groups each meeting once per week on the basis that this would allow for better quality of delivery.

2.25   For the second tranche, all trainees met together as a large group. Training still took place over two days each week – a Tuesday and a Wednesday – and each session lasted approximately 2-3 hours. While the Tuesday session focussed on more structured group work and learning, the Wednesday session focussed on completion of paperwork required to evidence learning and experience (i.e. the ASDAN paperwork). This provided a much more efficient means of collecting written evidence from mentors and also meant that they had an opportunity to assist one another in its completion (for example, prompting one another about what they learned the day before, and how this can be evidenced).

2.26   For the third tranche, teaching and completion of paperwork takes place over two days each week, with the course taking just 6 weeks to complete (i.e. a condensed model). The third tranche also has a slightly smaller group of 10 young people enrolled.

> **Learning Point:** *A minor additional learning point between cohorts was that the timing of training for young people was better reserved for afternoons in the establishment, since morning sessions often clashed with other planned programmes for young people, making it difficult for them to attend on a regular basis. Competing for young peoples' time in an already busy regime is a challenge that can be managed, but is nonetheless ever-present and needs to monitored to ensure that it does not become a barrier to participation.*

2.27   Relative pros and cons to working with smaller and larger groups have been noted by the staff. The smaller group allowed more structured and deeper discussions and learning while the larger group has enabled sharing of a wider range of skills and experiences between mentors and the breadth of learning has perhaps been greater. It is noted that working with larger groups of young people is perhaps more challenging, and in

particular it is harder to accommodate large groups in the existing accommodation, but this revised model seems to be more effective overall at ensuring that the course and paperwork is completed promptly and efficiently.

2.28   Anecdotally, staff report that the young people responded well to the training, seem to enjoy it and offer each other support in completing the training. This was verified by independent observation of the training which was relaxed, engaging and held participants' attention well. There is a wide range of skills and abilities and previous educational attainment among the young people and the training allows for people to complete the exercises at their own pace.

Learning Point: The Hub team collect a great deal of verbal and written feedback from mentors regarding the training structure, content and learning objectives. Not all of this is clearly documented which means that valuable positive feedback cannot be harnessed to maximum effect. The utilisation of standard course feedback questionnaires is suggested to help collect this type of feedback routinely and in a way that is externally auditable. This will also improve the delivery of the programme insofar as any future changes are evidence based and can be defended as such.

Participation Criteria

2.29   The main criteria for young people wishing to become mentors is that they have to have more than 9 months left to serve/before liberation or before they turn 21 years of age (and thus become due to move to an adult establishment), they must be classified as standard or enhanced level security, possess leadership skills and be committed to a 12 week course. They must also be free from poor behaviour reports in the previous 3 months.

2.30   Bright, colourful posters and leaflets were developed by the Hub staff to advertise opportunities for young people to get involved, asking "Would you like to be a peer supporter?" and "Are you interested in helping others?" The criteria listed on the posters were for young people to be:

- friendly;
- approachable;
- a good communicator;
- willing to support others; and
- familiar with the prison.

2.31   The leaflets contained self-referral forms for young people to complete and give back to the peer support officer or a member of youth work staff, and also provided information on how young people could be referred by their personal officer. The leaflets advertised that young people might expect to learn the following from their involvement: group work skills; relationship building; developing self-confidence; and how to facilitate learning sessions, among other things.

Referral and Recruitment of Mentors

2.32   To date, referrals have been made mostly via self-referral, by experienced youth workers in the halls, word of mouth or nomination by personal officers or work part leads. In the early days of the scheme, there was perhaps less active referral from generic hall staff/prison officers than from youth workers, and most referrals were coming from just a small number of officers (i.e. the "usual suspects"). As time has gone on, this has improved, but there is still scope for greater referral activity among officers in general, which may improve as awareness of the scheme and its benefits are realised.

> *Learning Point: Given the limited criteria, and the high turnover of young people within the prison, it may be necessary in the future to send direct letters to young people who meet the criteria to try and recruit them into the programme. This would mean identifying suitable young people and placing letters in their cells for them to read and self-nominate into the training. This will entail more administration for the staff involved but will, perhaps, offer a more inclusive approach and maximise opportunities for people to get involved, thus keeping numbers up and at the requisite level.*

2.33   It is worth noting that there were a few cases of staff suggesting to young people that they might want to get involved and the young people declining to take part. Where this occurred, it was mainly due to stated intentions that they did not want to change their current behaviour (and sometimes had the intention of continued offending lifestyles on release), or simply that they wanted to remain anonymous whilst in prison, to "keep their head down" and simply "serve their time." This highlights an important point about the scheme insofar as it is only suitable for young people who show a desire for self-progression and future desistance since they must provide a positive role model to others in the establishment.

2.34   Among all those who met the criteria, interviews were held with the main Hub staff as a means of deciding who would be recruited. These interviews were informal and designed to allow staff to get a better feel for the personality, character and suitability of young people for the Learning Hub. A number of interview questions were developed to explore with the young people, including:

- Why do you want to be a peer supporter?
- What skills do you have that you would bring to the role?
- What would you like to get out of being a peer supporter?
- Would you be committed to a 12 week course?

2.35   Peer Hub staff endeavoured to meet with each young person at least twice as part of the recruitment process for the first cohort to ensure that their behaviour was consistent, and that they remained appropriately motivated to take part. For the second cohort, this has been increased to 3-4 separate informal meetings which, it was felt, provides a more stringent assessment process.

2.36   In most cases where young people met the various criteria but were not successfully recruited following interviews, this was mainly due to security concerns (for their own and

others' well-being) or poor behaviour reports having been submitted in the period leading up to, or during, the interview process.

2.37   Staff reported that most young people who were unsuccessful in securing a place on the course were understanding of the reasons why they had not been selected. Outcome decisions were always conveyed via face-to-face meetings with the young people involved and, in the case of poor behaviour reports, the need for them to be seen as positive role models was explained and accepted by the young people involved.

> **Learning Point:** *More detailed information about the number of young people who would wish to take part in the peer mentoring course, but who fail to be selected would allow a greater understanding of the main barriers to participation. Similarly, documented information about why some people who were thought to be suitable but choose not to take part, would assist in understanding barriers to participation and would ensure that future access procedures are as equitable as possible, and all potential motivations clearly identified in advertising leaflets/posters.*

Referred Persons Characteristics

2.38   Table 1 below summarises the management information data held by SPS regarding the numbers of young people referred into the Hub, including demographic data as well as results of interviews to join the project. This is presented for contextual purposes only.

2.39   Demographically, there were little differences between the young people referred in tranches one and two for the training. The average age is 20 years of age, mirroring the wider population at HM YOI Polmont, and while there seems to be a broad mix of ages in both tranches, there are noticeably fewer teenagers compared to those aged 20 or 21. Indeed, there are no referrals for young people aged under 18, but this again may simply reflect the wider age profile of the resident population (the full available range being ages 16-21) and the fact that those aged 16-18 years will have had less time to have gained experience that may help them be a worthy mentor, perhaps. Staff were keen to point out that it is "experience not age" that is more relevant in determining how well a mentor can operate and so the absence of younger mentors need not necessarily be seen as problematic.

2.40   The range of index offences among both groups of young people ranges widely from housebreaking and theft to murder. Many of the young people have sentences for assault, which is again perhaps reflective of the wider young offender population in Scotland. As a consequence of the wide range of conviction types, sentence lengths in both tranches have also been very varied, ranging from just under 18 months to life sentences in both tranches. Those in tranche two were, on balance, more likely to have served 2 or more custodial sentences than those recruited in round one.

Table 1 Management Information for Referred Persons

Management Information	1st Recruitment	2nd Recruitment
Total young people referred	28	24
Referral method	Self-referral = 15 Education = 4 Other = 9	Self-referral = 20 Education = 1 Other = 3
Result of Interview	Successful = 14 3 deselected for security purposes	Successful = 15 1 self deselection 2 deselected for security purposes
Number completed the qualification	11	12
Ages	Age 18 = 2 Age 19 =1 Age 20 =11 Age 21 =13 Missing = 1 Average Age = 20	Age 18 = 4 Age 19 =2 Age 20 =8 Age 21 =9 Missing = 1 Average Age = 20
Length of sentence	Minimum = 15 months Maximum = Life	Minimum = 17 months Maximum = Life
Previous Custodial Sentence	Yes (one) = 11 Yes (two or more) = 7 No = 9 Missing = 1	Yes (one) = 4 Yes (two or more) = 11 No = 8 Missing = 1

2.41   The home residences of the young people are also geographically dispersed, and there appears to be no obvious trends in terms of where the young people originate from and their successful enrolment in the Peer Learning Hub.

2.42   The main method of referral into the scheme has been self-referral in both tranches of recruitment. The other main routes are via education or from one of the work-party leads within the establishment (specifically, Bike Sheds and Dogs Trust). Youth workers in the prison also refer some young people into the project. Of the two young people to date who were referred but failed to meet the minimum criteria, one was a self-referral and one was from a work-party lead, which suggests that there is generally good understanding among staff and young people about the entry requirements.

2.43   In both tranches, there were four staff-initiated deselections - these resulted from failed drug tests, poor reports from staff, or missing sessions. In tranche one, there was only one self-deselection, where the young person had been granted a home detention curfew (HDC). In tranche one, in only one case did a young person who had been referred by staff decide that he no longer wished to take part, and one other self-referral also opted not to take up the place. While the self-deselection in tranche two was slightly higher, this occurred at informal interview stage, prior to the group commencing, and the reasons for deselection were not recorded. Staff reported that none of those who had been successful in being selected and commenced the course had chosen to deselect themselves after starting the training in either tranche. This suggests that the deselection cases that are recorded in the management data occurred due to factors beyond the young person's control (e.g. HDC, movement to adult establishments, etc.).

2.44   In other cases where referrals had been unsuccessful, this was mainly due to the prisoners being given external work placements, being reported for fighting or being transferred due to security concerns. In two cases, young people were viewed as not being appropriate for the present recruitment but would be reviewed for inclusion in the next round of training.

Mentoring in Practice

2.45   Table 2 below shows the full range of different roles that can be undertaken by mentors following their training, as described by the Hub staff. It shows that there is diversity with both traditional education roles being offered alongside practical mentoring jobs.

Table 2 Mentor Roles

Youth Work (Groups and Induction)	Mentors are involved in preparing and delivering group work such as 'big man alternatives to violence', gambling and induction. The young people work with youth workers in the hall co-delivering different groups and supporting their peers. Each week peer mentors deliver a youth

	work induction group to allow their peers to have an understanding of what youth work services are available. All the youth work groups are delivered in an informal manner allowing the group to feel comfortable in learning about the various topics in a safe environment.
Education	The mentors are carefully chosen by education staff, typically because they have shown an aptitude in class to be able to help others with their learning in the classroom environment. They complete the generic course (12 weeks) and then assist education staff in helping young people improve their education in various different classes such as maths and English.
Work-parties, including: • Bike Shed • Joiners • Painters • Hairdressers • Dogs Trust • Industrial Cleaners • Radio Station	The mentors from the work-parties are identified by the work-party officers and referred to the peer mentor Hub to complete the generic course. They have proved to be responsible individuals and shown they have the ability to teach other young people skills in the workshop.
Community Safety Unit (CSU)	There is one mentor assigned to the community safety unit to work alongside staff based there. Duties include co-delivery of group work which includes pre-release knife crime and anti-bullying sessions, among others.
Induction	There are two mentors assigned to this area on a Monday and Tuesday morning. They deliver sessions to young people who are new into the prison aimed at making them feel comfortable, allay any fears they may have and giving out information any young person may require. This is done in conjunction with Links centre staff.
Reception	There are various mentors assigned to reception who are placed on a rotational basis. They will meet any young person who is experiencing prison for the first time in order to give out information, allay any fears and make them feel more comfortable before they experience their first night in custody.

Parenting	There is one parenting mentor who is identified by the parenting officers and referred to the peer mentoring Hub to complete the generic course. He will then be responsible for planning and delivering sessions to other young people with the aid of the parenting officers.
Radio	This area is just up and running and the work-party only recently fully opened. There is one mentor who has been assigned and he is currently learning the basics of the work-party.
In hall support	There are various mentors who again are assigned to this area. Any young person who is in prison for the first time and arrives late into the establishment will see a mentor the following day. This is done in the hall and follows the same format as reception. The young person also has the opportunity to ask for any other meetings if he feels the need.
Gym	There is one mentor in the gymnasium and his task is to deliver induction sessions to new users. The goal is to familiarise the young people with all the gymnasium has to offer and demonstrate how to use the equipment and weights.

Facilitators to Implementation

2.46   Nine months into the pilot, all staff involved in its operational delivery were pleased with its operation and the successes achieved so far. Particularly strong components of the project appear to be the communication between all staff involved and with wider SPS staff, the enthusiasm and interest from the young people, and the mix in skills, experience and designations of the main Hub team. Support from the senior management team has also been key to ensuring that the Hub remains a priority for support and resource input and endorsing its value across the establishment.

> **Learning Point:** *In order to keep the project fresh in the minds of wider SPS staff, and to ensure that new staff entering the prison are fully aware of the Hub's offering, there may be a need for more regular communications via newsletters or other internal communication systems, since this will help to ensure that the throughput of referrals remains high. Sharing the learning and outcomes of the Hub will also be reward for those who are working hard to ensure its success.*

Barriers to Implementation

2.47   The pilot is evolving over time and despite some early, minor obstacles, the pilot has run largely barrier free. That said, some valuable lessons were learned early on with regards to 'what works' in establishing a scheme of this kind, and these may provide valuable learning for the set-up of similar mentoring programmes in other establishments.

Awareness and Understanding

2.48   The main barrier at the start was raising awareness of the new Hub among other operational staff within the institution. Some early staff reluctance was observed, but this resulted mainly from a lack of understanding or awareness of the pilot, rather than active unwillingness to co-operate. Early on, the dedicated peer mentor support officer and the youth worker undertook considerable activities to raise awareness of the scheme around the prison, including designing and putting up posters in residential halls, work-party areas and other communal areas of the establishment. Despite this, some early misunderstanding of the pilot meant that, perhaps, some officers were not referring young people into the scheme, as was hoped. This meant that additional, proactive, one-to-one, face to face communication was needed by the peer mentor support officer to engage with peers and ensure understanding and buy in to the project. This lasted only briefly and most misunderstanding of the project had been eradicated within the first 2-3 months of operation.

> *Learning Point: Given that this was a new initiative, the job of the Peer Learning Hub co-ordinator will, inevitably, have changed as the project has developed. Although a job description was developed to guide the role, it is one that has evolved considerably as the Hub has progressed. There may be a need to revise and update that job description now that the demands of the job, and the opportunities that still exist for its widening out, can be clearly set out. This may include a more proactive role in disseminating information and learning outcomes from the project to wider staff within the establishment and encouraging greater uptake and use of the peer mentoring service.*

Role Ambiguity

2.49   Much of the initial misunderstanding and resistance to the pilot centred around whether the involvement of young people to deliver specific roles within the prison would essentially result in the de-skilling of the paid SPS staff. Staff were concerned about mentors potentially 'doing the job' of officers and that this might result in some duplication of effort between mentors and SPS employees.

2.50   In the early stages of the pilot, this led to some staff using the young people inappropriately and, in some cases, seeing the mentors as a form of "pass man" (or cleaner/general helper) rather than as an experienced mentor for their peers. Again, this has changed over time and staff are now using trainees in appropriate roles matched to their level of skills and training.   This was helped, in part, by the development of job descriptions for mentors in each of the new pilot areas which can be used as a shared reference point by mentors and staff alike.

2.51   The key message to staff is that the mentors are working to 'co-deliver' the activities they are involved in, with co-operation between SPS staff and trainees. This message seems to have now been taken on board. Perhaps key to breaking down this barrier was the fact that staff needed to experience the co-delivery directly, to see the young people at work, in order to fully appreciate their respective roles and see the benefits that could be achieved.

Referral of Mentees

2.52   Related to the early lack of understanding among wider SPS staff were some early instances of mentees not being properly briefed on the availability of mentors and not being told what they might have to offer. This meant that some new inductees were simply being asked if they wanted to see or speak to a mentor without being told what that might entail, and what the potential benefits might be. Consequently, the initial uptake of offers to see mentors was low and the dedicated peer mentor support officer was having to revisit new entrants to the prison to more fully explain the offer and invite them to take part based on this additional information. In most cases, those who had originally declined to see a mentor took up the offer once they had a greater appreciation of what this might entail.

Visibility of Mentors

2.53   There seem to have been few, if any, barriers presented by young people themselves. Perhaps the only thing that was initially 'off-putting' to the young people involved was the need to wear a designated uniform (a blue t-shirt) to identify them as peer mentors. In the early days of the scheme, because so few young people were wearing these t-shirts, there was perhaps some feelings of being too conspicuous. As the numbers of trainees has increased, however, and the blue t-shirts are more prevalent and more familiar in the establishment, this barrier has been eradicated. Indeed, it was suggested that wearing the t-shirt was now becoming a motivating factor for being a mentor, with the different uniform creating "a buzz" and a means of generating interest and future referrals into the scheme.

Long Term Challenges

2.54   While most of the initial challenges have easily been overcome, there remain some longer term challenges that are less easy to address.

Turnover of Mentors

2.55   Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing the longevity of the Peer Learning Hub is the high turnover of young people completing the training and being available to work as mentors in the establishment over time. Even at this early stage, it is apparent that the turnover of mentors is high, the main reasons being:

- **Movement to an adult establishment** – for those serving long sentences, movement to an adult facility once they turn 21 means that some mentors will be lost;
- **Home Detention Curfews (HDCs)** – the increasing use of electronic tags as an alternative to custody means that many young people are being released back into the community before the end of their sentence and it is difficult to predict when

these might be used and, therefore, how long the person will remain in the establishment to work as a mentor; and

- **Progression to Outside Work-Parties** – a general progression within the prison that means that young people are moved to outside/more liberal duties which are not suited to peer mentoring roles.

2.56   The 'revolving door' of the young offender population means that there will be a constant need to replace suitably qualified mentors within some of the designated areas. Indeed, given the high levels of attrition and movement of trained mentors outside of the prison, already new trainees are being offered placements to complete while their training is still ongoing. The use of placements is perceived as a positive change in the model over time and something that should be incorporated into similar programmes elsewhere.

2.57   It is important to note that this high turnover in young people could also potentially be dis-incentivising for staff who invest a great deal of time, practically and personally, in the young people's development, only to see them leave before they have had the opportunity to fully realise their new learning and skills. This links to the need, in the long term, for some kind of mutually agreed continuity and follow-up contact with young people in the community, if possible to allow staff to monitor longer term use of skills in the community which might help them to understand true impacts of the scheme.

Throughcare and Transition

2.58   One of the main aims of the scheme is that young people might continue to use the skills they have learned within the Hub not only in the prison itself, but on release into the community. Understanding the impacts outside prison remains one of the biggest challenges for the staff and, although work to take this forward has already started, this may be something to prioritise and expand moving forward.

> *Learning Point: As above, contact could be made with outside agencies to try and find suitable placements, even if on a voluntary basis, that enable young people to continue to use their skills and provide some continuity between prison and community in terms of maintaining positive, pro-social behaviour. This is something that could be written more explicitly into the revised job description for the peer mentor co-ordinator to reiterate the importance of this aspect of the role going forward.*

2.59   Movement of young people to adult institutions also poses some challenges, either if there is no existing peer mentoring in place in the new establishment or if the peer mentoring that is in place contrasts too significantly with what the young people have learned and become accustomed to at Polmont. Adult peer mentors are currently used at HMP Low Moss and HMP Edinburgh to good effect. It is not clear if similar initiatives are available across the SPS estate and if those returning to such prisons will therefore lose the opportunity to continue to use their skills on progression to adult establishments.

Documentation

2.60   The Learning Hub has progressed at a faster rate than originally anticipated and, as a pilot, there has been considerable learning along the way with regards to the paper

recording mechanisms that are required to allow the scheme to run effectively. This includes:

- establishing and documenting processes for getting young people to/from training and to mentoring placements;
- creating timetables for mentoring activity;
- developing job descriptions for mentors;
- liaising with security;
- organising uniforms for young people;
- contact with reception, induction and community safety staff and other work-party leads;
- creating personal achievement/progress files for mentors;
- regular documenting of interactions with mentors (e.g. detailed Peer Mentor Updates);
- documenting their interactions with mentees; and
- offering evaluation/debriefing to young people and ensuring that this is documented.

2.61   While much of this work has been documented by the Hub staff in personal records, nine months into the project, the paper trail seems front loaded and there is relatively little, in comparison, that has tracked outcomes for mentors and mentees or that has captured learning from the early days of implementation. This may be as a consequence of the fast pace at which the Peer Learning Hub has developed but, with the main programme now well established, some retrospective, systematic documenting or wider sharing of evidence would greatly enhance the transparency and auditability of the project.

> **Learning Point:** *All systems and processes associated with the Peer Learning Hub should be clearly documented and existing protocols updated to make sure that they accurately reflect the current methods of delivery. This should be accompanied by the systematic collection and storage of outcomes data to evidence the work achieved.*

Succession Planning

2.62   The scheme currently operates well but is at full capacity in terms of staff resourcing. A real problem exists insofar as there is a lack of cover in the event of long term absence of either the dedicated youth worker or peer support officer.

2.63   In order to ease the burden of work on the dedicated youth worker, other youth workers in the prison might also potentially take a future role in the more operational management of mentors. This would leave more time/room for the youth worker who is currently involved to dedicate to training development. Most of the youth workers in halls already have a good relationship with young people living at Polmont and so the relationship of trust is already in place. This may, however, dilute the strength of identity/visibility that the programme currently has with the one youth work lead.

2.64   There is no dedicated cover for the prison officer working in the scheme and this means that the pilot is fragile insofar as whether it could be managed in the event of his long term absence. At present, the cover for the SPS co-ordinator officer is the youth

worker and vice versa and, while this may be a suitable short term solution, it does not present an ideal scenario in which SPS, as the strategic lead for the project, should always be involved.

> **Learning Point:** *Some form of succession planning and shadowing of the current peer support officer by at least one other member of staff may be prudent to protect the programme's stability and longevity. While nurturing 'specialists' among SPS staff ensures high levels of performance in post, the model of having just one staff member who is suitably qualified and trained to fulfil the demands of any given post means that there may be periods of pause in the project's operation should the incumbent officer move on.*

Vulnerable Prisoners

2.65   At present, the Peer Learning Hub mentoring opportunities are not open to high security or protection prisoners. This means that some of the most vulnerable young people are not being afforded the opportunity to learn mentoring skills which they could then use with other vulnerable prisoners. A number of logistical and security concerns mean that planning to make the Hub inclusive for these people has not been possible as yet but staff are keen to explore, in time, how the model could be expanded to reach this group. It seems, *prima facie*, that there may be real value in doing so.

> **Learning Point:** *In order to maximise opportunities to participate in what is clearly a valuable development opportunity, alternative protocols could be devised to deliver tutoring to those in isolation. This may involve a revision of the model to allow delivery of training in isolation units, i.e. taking the class to these young people, since it is recognised that their movement within the establishment will be limited. This is an area for short to medium term prioritisation to ensure that the Hub is maximally inclusive.*

Reward and Status

2.66   As the project has progressed, mentors have moved from receiving no remuneration to some small remuneration for their work. Alternative 'jobs' within the prison attract a nominal weekly salary and existing mentors are delivering their paid employment alongside their mentoring work. In the future, there may be justification in paying mentors more for their time as a means of recognising the importance of the work they do and, importantly so that the lack of pay does not dis-incentivise people to take part. Juggling mentoring work alongside other paid activities is challenging and needs to be suitably rewarded, perhaps, to maintain the interests of those involved as well as attracting others in the future.

Fragility of Image

2.67   To date, the project is attracting positive comments from wider staff it seems, and young people too are keen to get involved. The young people who have succeeded in completing the training do indeed seem to be acting as positive role models for other prisoners and are seen as ambassadors by staff.

2.68   The whole underpinning value of the initiative is built on trust and therefore there are stringent processes in place to ensure the reputation is kept intact. This, however,

cannot be guaranteed and while the regular support offered by both the co-ordinator and youth worker should highlight any difficulties before they become problematic, it would be prudent to consider additional mitigating steps to minimise the risks of reputational damage to the Hub should there be any cases where a mentor acts in way that goes against the ethos of the mentoring scheme.

> *Learning Point: One way of reducing risks is to implement regular updating or refreshing of for mentors to ensure that their key roles and responsibilities remain current in their minds and that the expectations around pro-social behaviour are regularly reinforced. There is a risk, otherwise, that key messages might be forgotten or diluted over time as mentors work increasingly independently from the central Hub over time.*

2.69   Overall, the evaluation suggests that the early set up and operation of the pilot has been relatively smooth with few barriers to its implementation or running.

3. FEEDBACK FROM MENTORS & MENTEES

3.1   In order to explore how the Peer Learning Hub is perceived by those who take part, a number of one-to-one and informal mini-group interviews were held with mentors. This included mentors who had taken part in both the first and second tranche of training, all of whom had been able to utilise their training in practice working with mentees.

3.2   Although it was not possible to speak directly with mentees, staff involved with the Hub also informally canvassed the views of a small number of mentees who had used the peer mentoring service. Their views are also presented below.

The Idea in Principle

3.3   All young people understood the main aims and objectives of the being a peer mentor and had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. All also agreed with the general principle that peer mentors provided a way that young people could share concerns and learn from one another in a way that would be different to that offered by the prisoner-staff dynamic:

> *"We're in the same shoes as them. We're not just telling them stuff without experiencing it."*

3.4   There was a view among some that the idea of peer mentoring was also something that was more likely to be embraced by young people now compared to when they themselves had entered the establishment:

> *"I think even a couple of years ago, when I came in, people would have laughed at the idea of it. But, I think boys' minds are being more open to it now. And, probably a lot of the boys who are going on to adult jail, they are seeing it in there [peer mentoring] and it's not as laughable as people would think."*

3.5   The idea, in principle, was seen as a good way to encourage young people to talk to one another, as well as to assist individual mentors with their personal development and progression while in custody.

Motivations for Getting Involved

3.6   The majority of young people said that they had chosen to get involved either to help others or because they perceived it would enhance their time spent in custody, potentially giving them skills that would be transferable on their release. Many said that they hoped to achieve positive outcomes for themselves and for others, in both the short and long term:

> *"I did it to help other YOs, to understand the prison system a bit better and also to gain more skills for myself."*

> *"It's about helping young people."*

"It's gonna help me with my ambitions in life, my goals in life. Absolutely."

3.7   Some young people said that they were motivated to take part because of their own experience of youth work during incarceration, and sometimes, as a result of their experiences in care as younger children. Positive experiences with youth workers had made them interested in getting involved in youth work delivery themselves, and the Hub afforded that opportunity.

3.8   Most mentors felt that those expressing interest in becoming peer mentors would do so for the right reasons, but several did comment that there was a risk that some young people might be inappropriately motivated, not least by the increased 'freedom of movement' that the peer mentors were seen to enjoy:

> *"Certain people might want to do it for the wrong reasons, because you get a 'pass'. A pass is really, really wanted in here. It's a card with 'peer mentor' on the back and so, if I want to leave [this area] right now, I can say to one of the officers, "Is it alright if I go back to the hall?" and because I've got my pass, I get to go.*

> *"There'll be certain boys that want to get involved for the wrong reasons - some other boys that just want to get out of their hall for a few hours."*

3.9   That being said, all of the current mentors who were interviewed commented that the interview process was rigorous and said that they were confident that staff would be able to filter out any young people who were not suitable for the role:

> *"The staff are good at realising who wants it for the right reasons and who wants it for the wrong reasons."*

3.10   This, in itself, perhaps indicates the ownership and sense of pride that the young people felt for the scheme and their collective view that it needed to be reserved only for those who possessed the right aptitude and motivation.

3.11   Although mentors were now being paid for their work as mentors, most perceived that this alone was not a motivating factor because the sum was small. For some, this incentive had also not been present when they originally signed up to the course:

> *"You do get paid – I think it's a £1.20 bonus on your wage. And, some of the boys really don't get much money at all so it means a lot. But, again, that's not the reason I done it. When I done it, we weren't getting a wage anyway. I just don't think that's why people do it, but it's extra. Better than a punch in the face!"*

3.12   Overall, in order to work well, mentors perceived that those who took part all needed to be appropriately motivated and, among those who were interviewed, they felt this had been the case with their peer group(s):

> *"Everybody is doing it for the right reasons, because they want to help other people to change, and stuff like that."*

Referral and Recruitment Process

3.13   There were mixed experiences among mentors regarding how they had become involved in the Hub but most said that they had been asked by hall staff or others if they would be interested, and that the process had been relatively straightforward from that point:

> *"I just got flung into it and I started doing it and I started liking it."*

3.14   Mentors did not comment on whether the application or recruitment process had been particularly challenging or that there were any barriers that they had faced in accessing the course.

> *Learning Point: Although the recruitment and interview process is rigorous and robust, the evidence collected suggests that it is appropriately so, and is not acting as a barrier to participation among young people with the right motivations. Retaining this high level of scrutiny will add to the perceived prestige among those who are successful in securing a place.*

Feedback on the Training

3.15   Mentors generally enjoyed the format of the training and in particular the practical aspects of the course including role plays, icebreakers and discussing different scenarios, etc.:
> *"I enjoyed all the ice-breakers and stuff, getting to know everyone, rather than the paperwork. It's not that much, but it's quite confusing, the paperwork."*
> *"We're all on the same wave length. We work well together."*

3.16   Guidance on how to elicit information and encourage openness from peers was also seen as a valuable skills that mentors had been able to put into practice:

> *"Learning how to ask the right questions has been good. Because, you get one word answers out of a lot of people. So, if you know what to ask them, that helps."*

3.17   Several mentors also described how they had particularly enjoyed the social and emotional educational aspects of the course:

> *"Learning about how not to judge people was really helpful. Stereotypes, prejudice, social stereotypes, how to put yourself in others' position. All of that was really good."*

3.18   Mentors felt that the training was realistic to the custodial context and many of the scenarios that that had been discussed the training had been played out in their genuine interactions with other young people, meaning that they felt well equipped to respond:

> *"We come up with scenarios and we talk about those scenarios and then, the next thing you know, you're working in reception, and a boy has come in with that exact*

same scenario that you've discussed, so it gives you something you can put into practice."

3.19   Some commented that they did not particularly enjoy the paperwork, but recognised it was important to evidence their learning. Again, however, the balance between written work and practical learning was welcomed:

"The paperwork is a bit boring. And, there's a high rate of people who didn't finish school and this is just like school you know? But, it's different, because you can do tasks too, like building a spaghetti tower. So, in that way, it's a lot more fun, and a lot more interactive. A lot more hands on."

3.20   The length and timing of sessions was well received. The only complaint was that some sessions had clashed with gym sessions and some participants felt frustrated at missing gym time to participate in the training instead.

3.21   Two mentors said that they felt the group learning might, perhaps, work better if the size of the group was smaller:

"There's sometimes too many folk talking at the one time. A group of fourteen 20 year old boys gets quite rowdy sometimes. I think it would better for a lot of people...instead of working with 14 boys, cut it to 7."

"I would probably just say that, sometimes, the group was too big. It was just, you couldn't really hear yourself think, sometimes."

3.22   In general terms, however, the training had been well received, was seen as engaging and varied, and delivered in a relaxed environment to a group of like-minded young people:

"It was relaxed and was good fun. It felt like meeting up with a group of friends, basically. The group was good."

Learning Point: Consideration has previously been given to reducing the size of the groups but this has not yet happened. Now that the format and content of the course has become well established, it may be possible to explore running two session each week, to accommodate smaller class sizes. This may be better received by the young people taking part.

Mentoring in Practice

3.23   Most mentors said that the course has exceeded their expectations and that the work they were involved in was more varied and interesting than they expected when they agreed to take part:

"I thought we were just gonna speak to them [mentees] for 5 or 10 minutes and that was it, but we're actually spending time explaining everything."

3.24   Feedback on how the mentoring system worked in practice was very positive, and most young people felt there were opportunities to use their skills throughout the establishments, and that their enthusiasm for widening the scope of the scheme was always responded to by the staff:

> "If there's areas that we think would be a good place to work, we can go to [staff] and see if they think it's a good idea."

3.25   Perhaps the one area where they felt the presence of peer mentors was most valuable was in reception and induction, as this gave new entrants to the establishment a chance to air initial concerns and "find their feet" soon after arrival:

> "Reception is probably the best one. When I first came in, there were no peer mentors here at all and, I came in on a Friday, two days before my induction on the Monday. And, when boys are coming in now, they are getting a peer mentor straight away, asking vital questions, "How do I do this? How do I do that? And they're getting the answers straight away instead of waiting."

> "When they first come in, they don't know where to go, they don't know how to book a visit, stuff like that. So, we go in, and basically tell them what to do. How to get involved in football, how to do the gym, how to use your 'kit bag', stuff like that."

> "It's a bit about supporting the young boys who come and don't know what to do because they've never been to jail before. And, they're a bit upset because they've got [been sent to] jail.

3.26   Some mentors commented that they felt that they were better placed to deliver these messages, not only because of the absence of any barriers that might exist between young people and staff, but also because they felt they knew what was more pertinent to everyday life within the establishment, and also that they would be less likely to forget key messages of the regime to convey:

> "One prison officer has to tell the same thing to boys, over and over again, so imagine, they don't always remember to give all the information. Whereas, we do."

3.27   Several of the mentors described how, although their principal role was to assist in work-parties or specific 'jobs' in the establishment in their peer mentoring role, the access that this gave them to peers, and their general presence in the work-party areas, meant that young people would use this is an opportunity to discuss wider concerns:

> "They get to know us in the work-parties, and they just talk away. They get to know us and ask us things about other stuff."

3.28   Some also highlighted that they actively look out for, and make, referrals for other young people (mentees). They noted that if they are aware of someone who is new to the prison and having a bit of a hard time adjusting, or if someone is having other issues or problems, then they highlight this to the Peer Learning Hub staff and/or provide the referrals so these people receive the initial peer support required:

"We tell boys on the halls, any problems, come and see me and we can help to sort it out."

Learning Point: *This is a key strength of the way that young people are working. The reassurance that mentors provide may indeed have wider impacts on such things as reduced anxiety, depression, anti-social or defensive behaviours among new entrants to the establishment. This is one example, however, of a valuable outcome from the project that is difficult to record and measure. Finding ways of encouraging mentors to record these types of informal referrals by would be invaluable in evidencing the wider impacts of the project.*

Impacts on Mentors

3.29   All mentors highlighted that the training and mentor position had made them more confident, both at the work-party tasks or learning from the programme they were part of and also more generally with other young people and with officers/staff. They liked being able to help and reassure others, providing them with the benefit of their experience. There was a clear sense of empowerment among the young people too:

> *"It's helped my confidence. It's knowing that I can do things. That I'm not always going to fail at things."*

3.30   They also indicated that they were now more confident at speaking up and expressing themselves, which they attributed directly to the mentor training and position.

3.31   Many also said that the course and participation in peer mentoring was a sign to people on the inside and outside that they "wanted to change" and described how it had made others' view them differently, adding to the feelings of pride in their achievements:

> *"The older generation of staff – they didn't expect this from me. I've surprised them. They can see I'm trying to change."*

> *"I told my mum I had been doing this as well. And, I think that's the first time I've heard my mum being really proud of me. It will be good for her to see that it's actually helping me."*

3.32   Another spoke confidently about an educational presentation he had delivered recently, and others (Hub staff, wider prison officers and other mentors) commented on how well he had done this. This was something no-one (including himself) thought he would have done before the peer mentor training and role.

3.33   One young person described how he previously would not have been able to take part in an interview, such as that undertaken for the evaluation.

3.34   Several also said that their involvement had improved their general empathy skills and their willingness and preparedness to help others in general:

"When I first came in, I only really cared about myself, really. I didn't really care if other people were struggling around me. But now, I just give them a hand. I think more about others."

Learning Point: *The Learning Hub seems to be particularly successful at teaching mentors essential personal skills which might not necessarily be evidenced by looking at the practical support that they give to mentees alone. Examples include leadership qualities, greater self-respect and increased self-esteem, empathy and respect for others and more positive aspirations for the future. Ways of allowing young people to reflect on their personal learning and achievements in these softer skill areas and systematically documenting this learning would add weight to the current evidence base around the value of participation. Attempts at quantifying these outcomes will also allow their value to be factored into any future cost-benefit analysis around deployment of resources on this initiative.*

3.35   Some young people commented that they had also learned a wider range of new practical skills and information through their involvement in peer mentoring that they would never have been exposed to ordinarily. This included learning about sexual health, mental health, self-awareness, aggression management, managing emotions, body language and arts and crafts (e.g. origami).

3.36   Typically the work-parties and programmes that the young people were mentors in were areas that they had been interested in prior to taking up the mentor training, and had wanted to be more involved in. Therefore, they appear to enjoy the additional responsibility in these roles and the trust conferred upon them.

3.37   The social element of peer mentoring was also highlighted by some. It allowed young people a chance to leave their hall, meet new staff and other young people:

> *"It gets you able to know everyone that's in here."*

3.38   Two young people (both placed in work-parties) indicated that they liked the training as it provided them with a routine, which helped to pass the time and make their sentence more bearable. They noted that it allowed them to be out of their hall virtually all day. One then indicated that this was the first time he had ever had a routine and he felt it had been a significant benefit to him.

Perceived Impact on Mentees

3.39   Mentors all agreed that their presence was a significant advantage to young people in the establishment and felt that their experiences to date suggested that mentees had benefited from engagement. Many commented that they wished that there had been peer mentors in the establishment when they had entered, as this would have aided their own settling in and integration.

3.40   Common questions raised by mentees were around practical issues, like personal hygiene regimes, access to recreational facilities and work protocols:

"When I came in, there wasn't anything like this. I had to fend for myself, basically. And, when you first come in, there's a lot you don't know. When I came in, I was hand washing everything because I didn't know about 'kit bags', and that I could get my washing done for me."

"When I first came in, I didn't know all the 'ins and outs' myself. When I first came in, I knew nothing. I got put in a prison cell, and that was it. I didn't know I was allowed a pillow or a quilt! I didn't know you could get a toothbrush and toothpaste. I just waited until I could buy it myself. You just think it's like the movies, and you don't ask."

3.41   Many mentors stressed that a key role mentors played was in reassuring prisoners about their personal safety in custody. They also sought advice on how to protect themselves, how to avoid trouble with other young people and how to 'keep their head down':

"They want to ask things like, "Do you think everyone will want to fight with me all the time?", and so we can tell them, "No. You just need to talk to everybody and get on with everybody. It's fine."

3.42   Indeed, mentors reported that young people often had concerns about violence within the establishment, as well as questions about territoriality (brought in from the outside), gang membership and wanting to know who else was and was not in the establishment, who might either provide them with a support network or pose a threat as an enemy:

"A common question is, "Is this guy in?", "Is one of my friends in?" They just want a support network and, obviously, if their friends are in, they've got that network."

"It does definitely benefit the other boys. A lot of boys that come in, they don't know much about the jail. See, young 16 year olds, wee guys who just don't know. They think it's dead violent in here, and they think they're gonna get 'battered', but it's just not like that. They've got that impression outside, folk saying that, and they come in and they just need somebody in here to speak to tell them it's not like that. It does definitely help to calm boys down. They're up to 'high doh', coming in, thinking all sorts, and then they speak to us, and we tell them it's not that bad."

In some cases, mentors described how they felt they had helped to convey the importance of conflict resolution or avoidance by speaking with mentees, e.g. *"Helping people to try and not get agitated."*

3.43   Mentors perceived that mentees were definitely more confident and comfortable discussing personal concerns with other young people compared to staff:

"I would say a lot of young people would rather talk to another young person because they can trust the young person a bit better. I certainly would. There's stuff that they wouldn't want to say to staff too. We've got our own 'lingo 'type of thing, so we'll give them better answers."

"You don't know what to ask a member of staff. You don't know, "Should I be asking them?" but, if it's a boy [peer], there's no barriers. Even though they are a peer mentor, they are not any better than you, they're still the same person, and that helps."

"A lot of people in here, staff members, think they are better than you. And, if you speak to them, you can sometimes feel so small. But, if you speak to a peer mentor, they're on the same level as you. They are not any better than you, not less than you, you're on a level peg. So, you can speak to them about anything at all, and they'll not judge you."

3.44   All young people perceived that mentees were honest and perceived there were no barriers in the types of things that could be discussed, or the areas of help sought:

"People prefer talking to us than the staff. It's about authority, isn't it? With us, they don't mind asking daft questions."

3.45   Mentors felt that the other young people listened to them more than they did the officers. Indeed, they indicated that often the officer would give them an instruction or show them how to do something but that some young people would then immediately seek them out to ask them questions and/or have them show them what to do.

> ***Learning Point:*** *Although not apparent from any of the data collected here, either from staff or mentors, there may be potential for this type of activity to undermine staff. It is important that the young people in the establishment understand that the role of the mentor is to support officers, and that relationships between young people and staff are not threatened by the increasing visibility and hands on roles of mentors. This is a message that the co-ordinator, mentors and those who employ them must reinforce wherever possible.*

3.46   Mentors also highlighted that they can smooth/improve relationships between the officers and certain/new young people as the young people listen to, and respect, the opinion of the mentors. Therefore, a mentor simply telling a new admission that a work leader is "alright" can often be enough to make them more relaxed and trusting of the officer from the first contact.

3.47   Overall, mentees were perceived by mentors to benefit from mentoring in two fundamental ways - emotionally (in terms of the thoughts, feelings and experiences during the early days of custody); and practical learning (i.e. how to do particular work based or programme tasks). Mentors felt that their experience was valued and trusted by the other young people, and would be more accepted than if officers were to try to offer the same support or advice. This was particularly the case for those assisting with reception and induction. They felt that the new young people very much appreciated the input from their peers who could provide the perspective from the young person's side rather than the officers/establishments side, and who could relate personally to their current situation and feelings.

Feedback from Mentees

3.48   Feedback gathered by staff from mentees was generally positive, and closely mirrored the perceived benefits that had been reported by mentors.

3.49   Mentees reported that they liked speaking to other young people to find out information and felt that it was good to hear from people who had had the same experiences. Information that was specifically mentioned as being helpful included information about the gym and activities available inside the establishment, and advice on things such as parole and progression. In the ethos of peer learning, the mentees had listed to the mentors because they perceived they were "equals".

3.50   Comments also suggest that the learning and teaching methods being used by mentors in education or youth work were engaging and well suited to the mentees i.e. they reported it was a good laugh having other young people deliver sessions because they w ere "on the same page."

3.51   Similar to the views expressed by mentors, mentees perceived that their peers were more likely to tell them things about life in the establishment that officers wouldn't tell you. They also suggested that young people might tell them 'more' than officers. They reported that mentors had told them what was going to happen and how things worked within Polmont from a Young Offender's point of view.

3.52   Mentees reported that they had been told what peer mentors were at reception and liked that they were offered this service of being able to speak to a mentor. One point of feedback that is helpful or mentors and staff going forward, however, is that some mentees reported that they were not entirely sure of what peer mentors do, in the round, and didn't always understand the role of a peer mentor when officers offered this service. This was also reported by some of the mentors.

> *Learning Point: Mentees are responding well to mentors but more education may be required with officers working in the prison to ensure that they are accurately and fully explaining to young people the role and function of the mentors. This will maximise use of the service among young people in the establishment.*

Awareness of the Peer Mentoring Scheme

3.53   Mentors were not sure how widespread awareness of the peer mentoring scheme was among young people. Some felt that most young people would know, either from seeing the mentors around the establishment in their uniforms, or from word of mouth. Some commented that they young people in their own halls would be aware of the peer mentors, because of their own involvement, but they were unsure if this was true in halls where there were no trained mentors:

> *"They will have heard from other boys, and officers about the peer mentors."*

> *"A lot of the boys in my hall know about it, but I don't know about other halls."*

3.54   Young people were also unsure of whether staff were utilising them as much as they could to help with general queries from young people in the halls. They guessed that this probably was not the case, due to low uptake of young people coming to speak with them on the halls (although this may also have been due to shyness or reluctance of behalf of peers, or a genuine lack of need).

3.55   Mentors also commented that there may be some barriers to accessing the peer mentors brought about by young people not knowing how to be referred, or by being too shy or uneasy about who to ask:

> *"I don't think people would ask the staff to see us. And, I think there could be a bit more support for stuff like that, because a boy is just not going to say to a member of staff, "Can I go and see somebody 'cause I'm not feeling too good." I don't think boys would be confident enough to go and say that to a member of staff, so, see if there was like, slips in your hall, like you get with medical, and you could stick that out to say that you wanted to see somebody, it would be better."*

> *Learning Point: There may be a need to explore the practices of wider hall staff in promoting the availability of peer mentors to young people. It is unclear if staff either are not aware of the scheme, are failing to tell young people how to use the service, or if there is a genuine lack of desire among young people to speak to mentors. This needs to be better understood to gauge the true levels of demand for mentors' services and to understand how they can be most practically accessed.*

3.56   Similarly, some mentors felt that, on induction and in reception, some young people may be sceptical of speaking to mentors as they might fear that this was a sign of weakness:

> *"Some people, I don't think they want to be seen as talking to us, if they think it's a sign of weakness. It isn't a sign of weakness, but that's what they might think."*

3.57   This aside, mentors felt that there should be no barriers to young people accessing their services because they had such a wide presence in the establishment.

Perceptions of Mentors among Other Young People

3.58   Most mentors reported that there was a lot of interest in the peer mentoring role among young people at Polmont. Several of them had been approached by others in their halls and asked about what the role entailed, and how they could get involved. Word of mouth was seen as by the mentors as being one of the best ways to recruit more young people in the future.

3.59   There was a view that mentors were viewed positively by other young people, but not that they were necessarily as 'role models', rather just as being people who were approachable and helpful:

> *"I don't think there's any stigma at all. I think everybody wants to be a mentor.*

"I wouldn't say you were a role model, but I would say that you are someone that people see is 'alright' in here, someone you can speak to."

3.60   There was little that the young people said they would wish to change about their experience, or of being a mentor. The main things were (for just a few) changing the uniform and more equitable pay for the levels of work undertaken:

"The uniform – I'd change the uniform – just have a normal badge."

"You could maybe get paid for how much you do, to make it more fair."

3.61   The only other frustration that was expressed with delivery of mentoring services was the potential for demand to sometimes clash with prisoners' own personal "time out". Although this could usually be overcome, it did, nonetheless cause some minor annoyance at times:

"Getting called to reception to speak to someone when I'm doing something, is a bit annoying. But, it's flexible enough. There are a couple of other peer mentors who could do it instead. But, sometimes, if I'm on the phone, or football, or something, it clashes."

Support for Mentors

3.62   The peer mentor support officer and youth worker meet with the mentors on an ad hoc basis to check on the welfare of the young people and ensure that the scheme is operating as planned.

3.63   This provides a valuable opportunity for the young people to confidentially share their experiences, learn from one another and receive debriefing, if needed. It perhaps was not recognised early on that the impact of some of the activities on young people would be so significant and that they would be affected by their interactions with mentees in a way that means that they too require support to keep their confidence high in delivering the scheme (e.g. helping mentees to deal with bereavement, etc.). The young people recognised the value of this support and were also clear on the limits of what they could offer, and when support from staff should be sought:

"The first person I ever spoke, I was asking if he was alright, and he said he was having thoughts of suicide. Then, that was a bit too much."

"If they say they are feeling a bit stressed, I can then go and get somebody and they can help them."

3.64   None of the mentors said that they had been presented with issues that had been outwith their comfort zone and all said that they had felt sufficiently well equipped to cope with the demands of the job.

Future Deployment of Skills

3.65   Mentors generally liked that participation provided them with a formal qualification, and that they were also able to be more involved in their work-parties and take on additional responsibilities and duties. They considered that this would look favourably on their CV and hoped it would help them to get a job upon release. Indeed, most recognised that the skills they had learned would be transferable into the community and saw this a strength of the project:

> *"It's skills that we're learning that we can take with us, when we leave."*

3.66   Many mentors observed that the skills they had learned would be helpful to them on release and hoped that the qualifications and Hub experience would assist them in finding employment:

> *"It's about getting the skills so that, when I go back out into the community, I can pick up a job similar to this."*

> *"It just gives you more confidence. Being able to speak to people in groups, and all that, that I can use outside."*

3.67   Some commented that they would use their skills and experience to pursue employment in youth work or mentoring type roles, and others said that, even though they did not see this as something they would pursue, they felt that they could contribute, voluntarily, or assisting young people and help them avoid a life of crime:

> *"If my social worker would set something up [in the community], I would go speak to other young boys, and tell them that this isn't the life to live. It's not worth it. And I'm certainly going to try and stay on the right track, when I leave here."*

> *"It could help me in the future. I wouldn't mind helping young people on the outside, groups and stuff like that. I would do that in my spare time, but it's not what I want to actually do with all my time."*

Learning Point: *There may be room for greater action planning with young people to encourage them to think of ways of using their skills on release back into the community in order to fully maximise of the learning opportunity. It is recognised that not all young people will be close to release, but, in cases where release is in the short to medium term, the co-ordinator could take an active role in facilitating opportunities in the community to ensure continuity in the use of mentors new learned skills.*

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4. INTERVIEWS WITH WIDER STAFF

4.1   To explore wider staff awareness and perceptions of the Learning Hub, five informal one-to-one interviews were held with prison officers, including work-party leads, staff involved in the induction programme, and one of the parenting programme officers.

4.2   All staff interviewed had had some involvement in the Peer Learning Hub (either previously or currently), and most had peer mentors working with them. Generally, the young people are involved in the work-party or programme first, and show an aptitude and interest in the work and want to get more involved. This highlights them to the officers as suitable for a referral as a peer mentor.

Understanding of Peer Learning Hub Aims and Objectives

4.3   Most were able to provide an accurate general description of what the Peer Learning Hub was and what it was trying to achieve. They generally understood that the mentors attended training and received a formal qualification at the end, although they did not know what this training involved (however, they did not indicate that they should or wanted to know more about this aspect). They also largely indicated that the aim of peer mentoring was to bridge the gap between prison officers and the young people; that the peer mentors were able to connect with the other young people quicker than the officers could and were there to help other young people in learning new skills.

> *Learning Point: Despite a considerable amount of awareness raising activity already undertaken by the co-ordinator, there may be scope for even more awareness raising especially around the training content to allow officers to fully appreciate the role of the young people and their achievements, and to be able to also identify others who may be suitable for future participation. Increasing staff awareness and understanding of the project in its entirety means that they can also answer any questions about the project from young people living at Polmont.*

Perceived Impacts on Mentors

4.4   Most staff considered that the pilot has so far been "a great success". All indicated that they had noticed a visible change in both the other young people in the work-parties and in the individual mentors.

4.5   For others in the work-parties, it was noted that they often listen better and learn more from the peer mentors that the officers. They felt that having the shared experiences and being able to "*talk the same language*" meant the bond was made faster than it could be by officers, and that they were more likely to listen, interact and respond favourably to peer mentors. One noted that they could see a visible difference in the young people' behaviour, in situations where officers had been delivering training or giving instructions in work-parties and the group may be rather rowdy or boisterous, they would quieten down and pay attention when the peer mentor began to speak/deliver information.

4.6   Even where instructions are provided by the officer, they indicated that the young people will often then go straight to the peer mentor for advice or help about how to do it

or to be shown how to do it from their experience. This would suggest that if young people are unsure about the practicalities of a task they feel more comfortable asking for help from their peers and drawing upon their experience than from the officers.

> *Learning Point: While such feedback is encouraging in highlighting that young people feel comfortable and confident about working with mentors, it might also be indicative of resistance to work directly with staff. It might be useful for the co-ordinator to explore with the wider staff pool if this preference for working with mentors is deterring more staff from taking advantage of the Hub, i.e. do they feel that their own positions and roles are being threatened by the mentors? The role of the mentors is to provide 'support' to frontline staff and getting the balance right will ensure that mentors do not become over-burdened and that the quality of service is not diluted.*

4.7   For mentors, it was cited regularly that their confidence and inter-personal skills had increased, they had better self-esteem, and had "*come out of their shell*", "*boys that were very quiet before, they will now speak up and go across and start speaking to other boys, which they would never have done before*". It was also noted by one work-party lead that mentors were often able to concentrate better now and further develop and enhance their work based skills. Another noted that mentors' behaviour often changed for the better, with far fewer/eliminating behaviour reports, etc. Many also indicated that mentors generally received greater levels of respect from the other young people and had earned a greater level of trust from officers. They were often given greater freedoms and listened to more by officers, some were responsible for designing the training which they would deliver, and their insight into particular issues/young people were sought and valued by officers. This suggests that mentors are able to build and maintain better relationships with officers and not just the other young people, and if officers value their opinions presumably this would further enhance their levels of confidence and self-esteem.

4.8   A few officers also noted the difference that could be seen in particularly difficult young people who had undergone the peer mentor training. They noted that a few young people that had been well known for poor behaviour and attitude had been "*transformed*" by the training and involvement in the pilot, "*it's like night and day with some boys*". They felt that by being given the responsibility of the position, the trust to carry it out, and the skills learned, as well as the time and attention by the trainers/pilot staff, the opportunity had been ceased by these individuals, given them a purpose, and had turned them around.

> *Learning Point: Examples such as these suggest that it may be worth 'taking a risk' with some young people who might not appear, prima facie, to fit conventional mentoring stereotypes. The Hub staff have been employing robust recruitment mechanisms but have also used their own discretion as well in some cases, it seems, to ensure that this valuable learning opportunity is open to all those who demonstrate the commitment required. This is a highlight of the early operation.*

Relationships Between Mentors and Staff

4.9   One officer also indicated that the mentors helped with initial relationships between officers and those new to the group/work-party. Generally, the mentors' opinion of the officer would be listened to and respected, so if a mentor reassured others that the officer

was "*OK*" then they would be more likely to engage and listen to the officer than if they had to win their trust without this recommendation.

Perceptions of Mentors Among Staff and Other Young People

4.10   Mentors would appear to be seen as positive role models, and considered as such by both staff and other young people. The distinctive 'uniform' helps them to be identified and noticed, with some staff noting that certain groups, previously cliquey and closed off, will now seek out and involve the mentor in conversations and activities. Many officers noted that they had seen considerable change in the attitudes of the young people, and most highlighted a marked increase in aspirations to become a peer mentor.

4.11   Generally, it was noted that there is not a lot of discussion among staff regarding the Peer Learning Hub pilot. Some noted that new officers generally accepted and welcomed the scheme, and were happy to engage if/where possible, however, that some more established officers found change (of any type, not just limited to this pilot) more difficult to accept. They did note, however, that any officers that have been involved with the pilot and/or mentors were very supportive of it as they could see the difference it is making.

> ***Learning Point:** There may still be a need to challenge stereotypes around peer mentoring schemes among some officers, and to do this, more proactive work in understanding their resistance may be needed. Again, this is a role that can perhaps best be fulfilled by the co-ordinator, as a staff-peer educator.*

4.12   Some officers also noted how appreciative they and their colleagues are of the peer mentors. As outlined above, they are aware of the impact they can have in establishing initial relationships with new young people, but also they noted that there are often ratios of 1 officer to 10 young people meaning they have a lot to manage/oversee and are limited in their ability to provide one-to-one help if required.   Therefore, they are highly appreciative of the support and assistance that the peer mentor offers, noting that they "*help to take the pressure off*".

Potential Barriers to Success

4.13   The main barrier for young people to get involved in the Peer Learning Hub was mentioned, the nature/time limits on the young peoples' sentences. Some noted that they had other young people who they thought would benefit greatly from the training and experience but that the time left on their sentence was too short for them to complete the training. Similarly the increased use of TAGs limits the young people's time and therefore their ability to get involved and/or complete the training. The only other limitation on the scheme was felt to be a lack of placements for mentors.

4.14   The young peoples' own attitudes, behaviour and levels of commitment were seen as crucial to the success of the Peer Learning Hub. Officers noted that this could also limit the implementation of the scheme as there may not always be a pool of suitable candidates.

4.15   Also crucial to the success of the scheme was the need for staff to encourage those that would be suitable to take part and provide support for them. They also felt it was important to give the mentors the opportunity to be actively involved in their work area and

to shape delivery. Even more crucial was the relationship between the young people and the peer mentor support officer and other staff. They felt that the strong leadership and bonds that were developed were key to the success both for individuals and the scheme more generally. They also felt that the young people appreciated that other agencies were involved (both the college and others providing work-parties and programmes), and that a formally recognised qualification can be achieved.

4.16   One officer suggested that as the scheme was still relatively new there was scope to raise its profile. They did note that the calibre of the current mentors, and their visibility via the 'uniform' was helping to raise awareness and interest in the scheme, but felt that more could be done.   A few helpful suggestions to achieve this included use of the inside radio to inform the young people about the scheme and advertise the next training opportunity, and emails to staff or a section in the Governor's Newsletter regarding what the course involves, what it can achieve, etc.

> **Learning Point:** *More innovative ways of raising awareness of the project should be pursued, including use of the radio system, more awareness raising events or, perhaps, including information about the project in CPD activities. Senior staff guidance on who should be targeted in any future awareness raising may be necessary rather than accountability resting with the co-ordinator alone. This will ensure that an impartial view on who should be targeted can be achieved as well as ensuring that responsibility for dissemination strategy is shared.*

4.17   Only one officer had experienced any problems with the Peer Learning Hub initiative. They had previously been given two mentors to assist with the Induction, but they had not taken to the classroom environment. They highlighted that they now have someone more suitable who is very good. For the Induction, initially the mentors were asked to deliver some of the formal content, however this did not run smoothly either with the mentors being unfamiliar with delivering PowerPoint presentations and being too overwhelmed by the responsibility. Now however, the officer delivers the formal content of the Induction so that no information is missed, and the mentors have designed and deliver their own element to discuss their own experiences and perceptions from the young people's perspective, which is considered to be very effective. The officer highlighted the helpful, approachable and pragmatic nature of the peer mentor support officer in addressing the early issues and providing suitable solutions.

4.18   Overall, the Peer Learning Hub was viewed very positively by the staff interviewed. All had noticed a change in the mentors and the other young people who had contact with them. They felt that the other young people engaged better and learned more from the mentors due to their shared experiences, and that the mentors had grown in confidence, self-esteem, skills and ability. The pilot has been so successful that a number of officers indicated that they would like to see more mentors, both to boost the numbers already available to them and to be placed in Halls and other areas. One officer summed up: "*it's early stages now, but its growing well and should hopefully only get stronger*".

5.   DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

Key Findings

5.1   The specific aims of the Learning Hub at HM YOI Polmont are:

- to train and support young people to become effective peer mentors and/or educators within a variety of roles throughout the establishment;
- to expand/develop opportunities for peer mentors/educators ensuring a meaningful contribution to the learning environment; and
- to develop positive and effective partnerships between young people and staff to consolidate the ideals of the Peer Learning Hub.

5.2   The evaluation suggests that, in the nine months since it began, the Hub has been successful, prima facie, in achieving all three of these aims. The evaluation has, however, highlighted a number of learning points which might assist the Hub going forward in achieving more longer terms success and, in particular ensuring that the reach of the project is maximised at Polmont. These can be broadly summarised under three headings: maintaining operational effectiveness, clarifying roles and responsibilities and promoting appraisal and auditability.

Maintaining Operational Effectiveness

5.3   At the operational level, all staff working in the Hub report positively on its functioning and perceive that it is perhaps working better than originally anticipated. The referrals process seems to be working well and the self-referral numbers in particular indicate that it is viewed positively among the resident population. Staff work well together and the Peer Learning Hub is becoming an accepted and well utilised part of the overall regime at HM YOI Polmont.

5.4   In the context of the SPS vision for young people to use their time in custody to enable them to prepare for a positive future, involvement in the Peer Learning Hub seems to be a success. All of the mentors interviewed here evidenced achievements against each of the SPS four strands of learning:

- **Confident Individuals:** mentors felt more confident speaking to others, both one-to-one and in groups and engaging with staff. Many felt that others viewed them as more confident and emotionally stable personalities and felt that their relationships with staff and other peers had improved.   They also commented positively on their own attitudes to their behaviour and aspirations for change.
- **Responsible Citizens:** mentors demonstrated an understanding of the importance of helping others, of empathy and awareness of others, and helping others to develop skills to engage more pro-socially. Mentors took a lead in developing and delivering practical sessions, becoming confident leaders and decision makers. Many also described how they would utilise these skills on release.
- **Successful Learners:** the range of skills being learned by mentors is vast including both practical, social and emotional skills, and they have achieved accredited qualifications to evidence their learning. Many have new experiences which will

enhance their CVs and some have also been enthused and inspired to try different types of employment on release or to pursue further/higher education.

- **Effective Contributors:** mentoring contributes in a significant way to many environments around the establishment and mentors play a valued role in assisting staff. Mentors have proven themselves capable of delivering work in teams as well as independently and contribute to the wider objectives of encouraging purposeful activity among peers.

5.5   The evaluation supports much of the previous learning in the field, with peer mentors demonstrating increased ability to empathise (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003), acting as successful role models (Huggins, 2010) and significantly enhancing the personal development of the young people involved. There is evidence of empowerment, which has also been found in other studies to satisfy needs previously met by offending behaviours (Adair, 2005) as well as increases in self-esteem, communication skills and confidence, in particular (Foster, 2011). In the short term, these personal benefits might be seen as the most significant output from the project to date.

5.6   It seems that the main operational challenge that will be faced by the project going forward is that the pool of young people possessing the necessary experience, aptitude and skills is not really known and so there is no guarantee that there will be sufficient young people to be referred into the project over time. This, alongside peer turnover, are threats that have been identified for this type of project in other custodial settings (Fletcher and Batty, 2012) and are not unique to Polmont, but will need to be monitored in any consideration of the longevity of the project.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

5.7   Perhaps out of necessity, the focus in the first nine months of the Hub's operation has been on operational delivery – designing the core programme and teaching materials, focussing on recruitment practices and delivering the training, as well as identifying suitable work placements and facilitating their delivery. There has been an "all hands on deck" approach to getting the job done and, perhaps, some blurring of boundaries between the roles and responsibilities and expectations of those involved.

5.8   It is clear from speaking with all key strategic partners that this initiative was SPS led and orchestrated, but with essential input from education and youth work partners to get going. The staff input and other resources allocated by education and youth work partners has also been considerable in the first nine months of operation. What is now needed, however, is to take a step back and more clearly define the respective roles and responsibilities of those involve in operational delivery. This will do three things:

- avoid any future overlap in roles and duplication of effort, meaning that time can potentially be freed up to spend on widening the scope of the scheme;
- allow SPS to take more of a direct role (as was always intended) in leading the project, with ultimate responsibility for achieving long term objectives; and
- ensure that the project is appropriately understood by others as an SPS initiative, and is not confused as being either a youth work or education project alone.

5.9   At the more strategic level, there seems to be scope, going forward, to widen the role of the co-ordinator as well as to more clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of the Hub staff and their managers. A review of roles and responsibilities is needed that allows learning from the last nine months to be captured and future needs and expectations to be voiced and written into individual work plans.

5.10   Clarity around the support role of mentors is also essential to remain on the agenda, so that prison staff and young people at Polmont do not start to experience any dilution of trust in their relationships. While mentors here are utilising their first-hand experience to reach mentees in positive ways, as with previous schemes elsewhere (Devilly et al, 2005), it is important to ensure that staff resistance is kept at bay and that staff do not begin to perceive that the introduction of mentors threatens their own positions. This could result in mentors being used inappropriately, or not at all and is most likely to occur as the project expands and reaches more work areas. Again, the role of the co-ordinator is key in ensuring that wider SPS staff remain clear on the scope of the mentor's role.

Promoting Appraisal and Auditability

5.11   The Learning Hub is achieving many of the original objectives, in terms of formalising and recognising mentors' contributions, and ensuring that mentoring is better co-ordinated across the establishment. Early outcomes, in terms of learning successes for the mentors can also be observed and, with mentees too, to a lesser extent.

5.12   What is absent, however, is a clear and defensible audit trail to document the successes that have been achieved. Appraisal of the Learning Hub has been continuous among those operational staff involved, by there appears to have been no formal opportunity to appraise their work and document this in an auditable way, other than the award of qualifications. While personal project folders are developed for all young people, these need to be analysed independently from the qualification targets to explore and celebrate what is being achieved more widely.

5.13   In evaluation terms, while it seems that data is being generated to capture the reactions and learning from young people there is less documentary evidence of behaviour change and results emerging from the peer mentoring Hub in terms of impacts on mentees (and mentors). This will no doubt come in time but appropriate mechanisms should be to in place now to capture this.

5.14   Essentially, it is important that both qualitative and quantitative evidence of young people's experiences is captured and documented: both mentors and mentees. Whilst this has been occurring informally since the Hub began and has also been possible on a standalone basis as part of this evaluation, formalised systems need to be in place to capture the feedback of these vital stakeholders. This might include:

- Qualitatively – allowing young people to self-reflect and document their experiences as mentors and mentees, in writing or facilitation of focus groups or mini-groups with young people to allow them to convey their feedback (and for these findings to be documented). Importantly, this should include feedback on the perceived *value* of participating in the peer mentoring project.

- Quantitatively - by utilising standardised feedback questionnaires which can be completed by young people, as well as setting quantitative markers of success which can be used to gauge young people's progress. For example, information on qualifications and other awards, verbal accolades received, participation records, etc.

5.15   Such mechanisms need not be difficult to implement and it seems that there is likely to already be the necessary skills and experience within the staff team, both operationally and strategically, to advise on the best ways of implementing this. Collecting such data would ensure that future changes to the programme are evidence based. As with previous research, the young people also seem ideally placed to identify real issues on the ground (Fletcher and Batty, 2012), and this should be harnessed to help keep the programme current for the YO population as a whole.

5.16   There has also been little opportunity for staff involved in the Hub to take stock and reflect on their learning to date in any systematic way. A period of self-reflection is needed to allow staff to think through what has been achieved, what has been learned and how this learning can be harnesses to ensure that the peer mentoring Hub not only continues to run effectively in the future, but is enhanced. The bedding in process in now complete and more thought now needs to be given to how to set out and achieve tangible outcomes which can be used to evidence returns on investment.

5.17   At this juncture, however, it seems that the biggest challenge for the future of the Hub and its managers will be to directly measure long term impacts of the scheme. The high turnover of young people and the fact that contact is lost when they leave the establishment means that there is no way of capturing, in any meaningful way, what their involvement has meant in terms of longer term pro-social behaviours. A longitudinal evaluation would be needed to evidence if these skills really do impact on such things as reduced re-offending, and gainful employment or utilisation of the skills learned in the community. This may be something that the Hub would wish to plan for now.

Conclusions

5.18   Overall, evidence collected as part of the evaluation suggests that the Peer Learning Hub is working well, with few obstacles and none that could not be overcome with hard work and determination. Key to the success of the Peer Learning Hub is the strong relationships developed between the staff and young people working within the area. Future success of the project requires appropriate levels of support from senior managers within the establishment and from partner organisations, communication and the freedom to evaluate and constantly update the training and other processes accompanying the Hub's running. Staff awareness and buy-in, and prisoner understanding of the Hub, are essential to its success. The referrals process seems to be working well and the self-referral numbers in particular indicate that it is viewed positively among the resident population. Young people and staff work well together and the Peer Learning Hub is becoming an accepted and well utilised part of the overall regime at HM YOI Polmont.

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