

Merton Mentoring Scheme Pilot – Survey Report

Background

The mentoring pilot scheme started from September of 2022 and concluded in March 2023. We invited all participants to complete a survey about the pilot.

43 mentees were matched to mentors as part of the pilot. Of those, 17 mentees (40%) and 29 mentors (67 %) responded to the survey. The responses were anonymous.

The survey contained a series of subject headings, each containing questions to be answered on a preference scale and inviting free text comments at the end. This report shows the responses to the questions in diagrammatic form and summarises the free text comments received.

The mentee survey responses are set out in Appendix 1 with the free text responses summarised. The mentor survey responses are set out in Appendix 2 with the free text responses summarised.

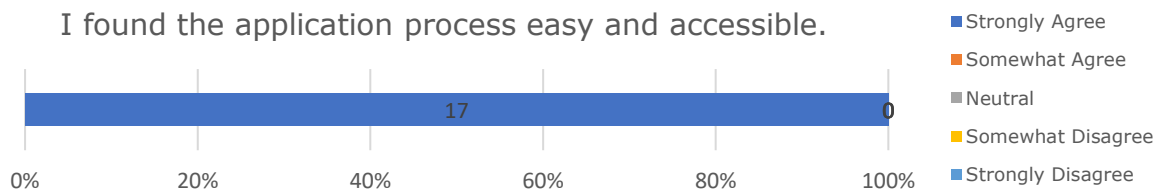
Executive Summary

1. 88% of the mentees who responded in the survey agreed that they had benefited from the mentoring discussions. This matched the proportion of mentors who agreed that their mentee appeared to have benefited.
2. 90% of mentors said that they had enjoyed the mentoring (a question not asked of mentees).
3. The most favoured option for any future scheme would be to extend the mentoring offer to all alumni of Merton, regardless of when they left the College (76% of mentees, 62% of mentors). There was less support for extending the scheme to current undergraduate and post-graduate students (only 55% of mentors and 47% of mentees agreed with that suggestion), and little support for limiting the mentoring scheme to alumni who had just left the College (only one mentee and three mentors thought so).
4. All of the mentees and 93% of the mentors said they would be willing to act as mentors if the scheme was made permanent.
5. 76% of mentees indicated that they would like to come back at some point for more mentoring.
6. 69% of mentors and 88% of mentees thought Merton should partner with a school or College in a deprived area to offer mentoring to a wider range of students. The free text comments suggested some real concerns about how partnering could be achieved, identifying that as, in essence, a separate initiative entirely.
7. As to the mechanics of the pilot:
 - a. The application process was thought to be easy and accessible (100% agreement by mentees).
 - b. The training was thought to be useful and the support provided was thought to be effective. Mentors liked the online training session, they found the PDF guide useful, they liked the coaching style they were asked to adopt, and most felt they were well supported by the Development Office and Merton Society Working Party. Mentees liked the PDF guide, thought the coaching style was appropriate, felt they knew what to do if there was a problem, but were less enthusiastic about the online training session.

- c. Most mentees who responded felt that they had been well matched with their mentor. Most were content being matched "by hand" but a substantial minority (41%) would have preferred to choose their own mentor in which event 82% would prefer the College to remain involved. A minority of mentors thought that it would be better if mentees could choose their own mentors and they agreed overwhelmingly (93%) with the proposition that the College should remain involved even if the mentees were able to choose their own mentors.
 - d. Remote meetings seemed to work well, but some mentees expressed a desire to be able to meet their mentors in person. They felt that they could be left to decide with their mentor how and where to meet.
 - e. The pilot recommendation for six meetings over six months was generally felt to be about right (71% of mentees and 79% of mentors agreed). Some comments from mentors and mentees suggested a desire for greater flexibility in the mentoring arrangements – as to how often they met, over what period, and what the intervals between meetings were.
 - f. 71% of mentees felt that they had got as much benefit as they could out of the mentoring discussions by the time they ended; mentors were more circumspect, with only 22% thinking that was the case (78% were neutral or felt that they had more to give).
 - g. There was a small but significant problem which emerged from the mentors' comments of mentees not fixing meetings at all or, in some instances, seeming not to be fully engaged with the mentoring process.
8. A very high proportion of mentees agreed that participation in the pilot had made them more aware of what the Merton Society does and therefore more likely to attend a Merton Society event. The mentors were generally aware of the Merton Society, but a high proportion said that participation in the pilot had made them more aware of the Society's activities; a substantial majority of mentors (86%) had enjoyed being more connected with the College through their involvement in the mentoring pilot.

Appendix 1: Mentee Responses

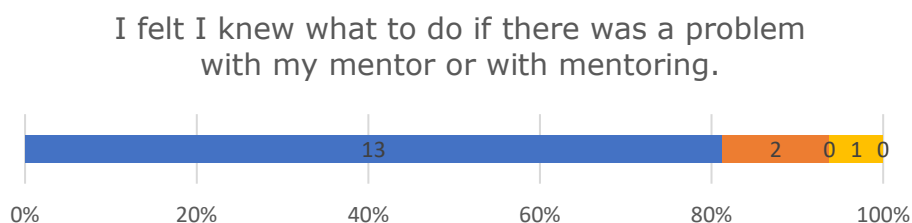
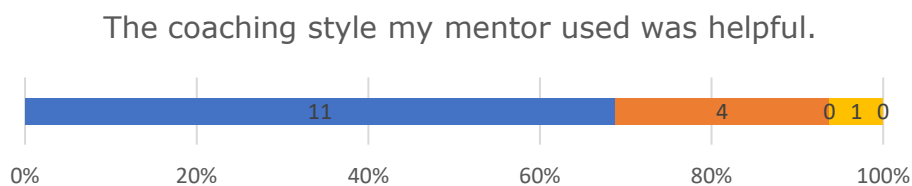
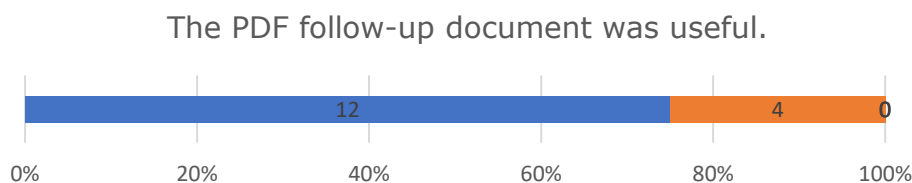
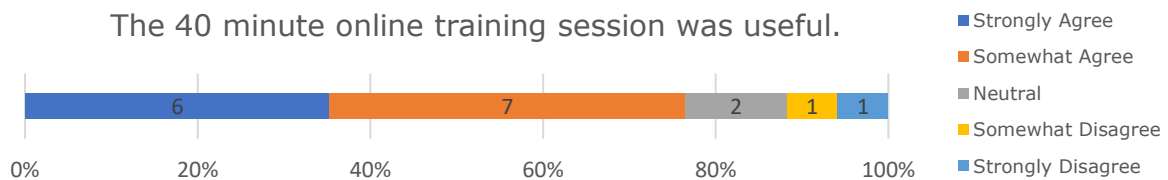
Application Process



Do you think the application process could be improved?

Summary: The application form was easy and quick to complete and provided a welcome opportunity to specify the kind of mentor sought.

Training and Support

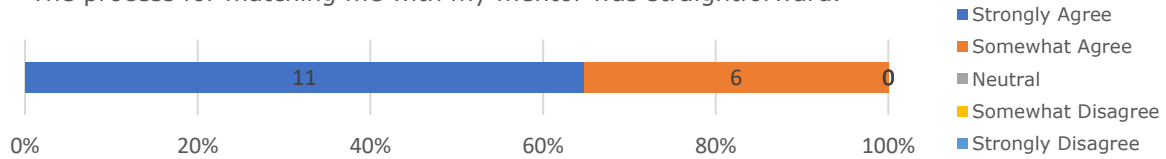


Would you like to add anything about the training or support you received?

Summary: The PDF guidance was universally appreciated by mentees, but views differed as to whether the "live" training session was useful in addition. The PDF could be improved by including examples of questions and areas to work on with the mentor, or examples of good goals to set.

Matching

The process for matching me with my mentor was straightforward.



I was well matched with my mentor.

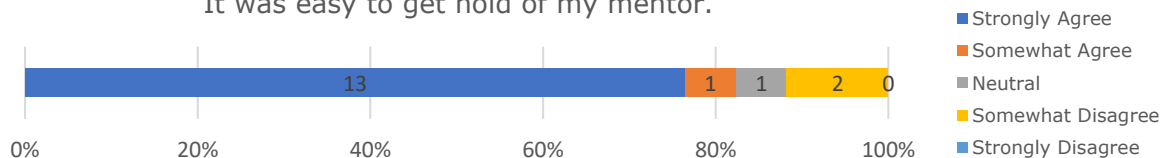


Would you like to add anything about matching?

Summary: mentees appreciated the work which went into matching. Many thought they had been very well matched but not all matches were successful. Mentees wanted different things. Some wanted career advice and stressed the importance of having a mentor with experience in their chosen field. Others wanted a mentor who would listen and guide them to greater self-awareness, and found their mentor's previous career experience less important. There was a suggestion that the scheme should offer different mentoring styles, with some mentors setting work between sessions and others being more relaxed about letting the discussions unfold.

Mentoring Meetings

It was easy to get hold of my mentor.



It was straightforward to fix up the mentoring meetings.



The mentoring worked well online.



Meetings lasting for between 30-60 minutes each, over a period of around 6 months, seemed about right.

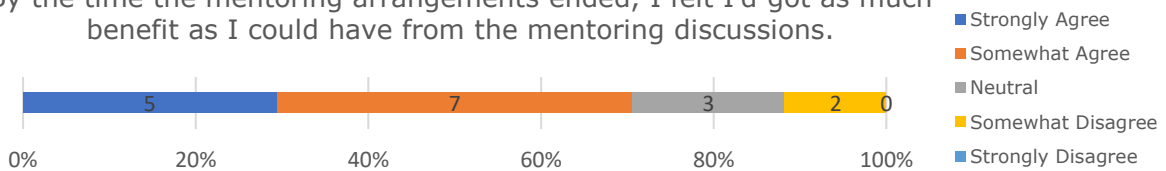


Would you like to add anything about the way the meetings were arranged, their frequency or the duration of the mentoring offer?

Summary: a number of points were made by mentees. The first was that meetings via zoom can be tricky if neither mentor nor mentee has a subscription, meaning that sessions time out after 40 minutes. The second (in answer to this question and in comments provided elsewhere) was a strong sense that the pilot was unnecessarily restrictive in requiring meetings to be held on-line; mentees would have preferred the option of meeting in person if that is what they and their mentor wanted to do. The third was that the pilot was quite regimented in offering six sessions over six months: some thought this led to too many sessions in too short a time, others that this led to too few sessions, especially to start with; some wanted to be able to continue beyond the six months, others thought a shorter period of time would have been sufficient. In short, greater flexibility in the arrangements between mentee and mentor would have been welcome. Fourth, it was suggested that it would have been helpful to have some way to “reset” the mentoring partnership, perhaps with the College being involved, if all was not going smoothly. Some mentees had found it difficult to get hold of their mentors.

Finishing the Mentoring

By the time the mentoring arrangements ended, I felt I’d got as much benefit as I could have from the mentoring discussions.

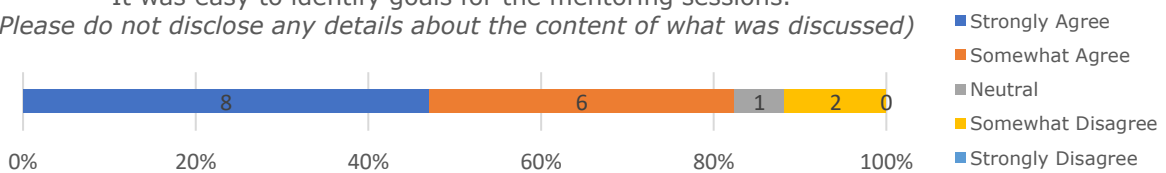


Would you like to add anything about the duration of the pilot scheme?

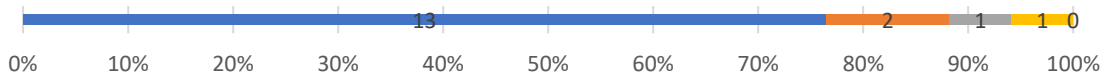
Summary: the comments echoed points already made in the preceding section.

The Mentoring

It was easy to identify goals for the mentoring sessions.
(Please do not disclose any details about the content of what was discussed)



I felt I benefited from the mentoring discussions.
 (Please do not disclose any details about the content of what was discussed)

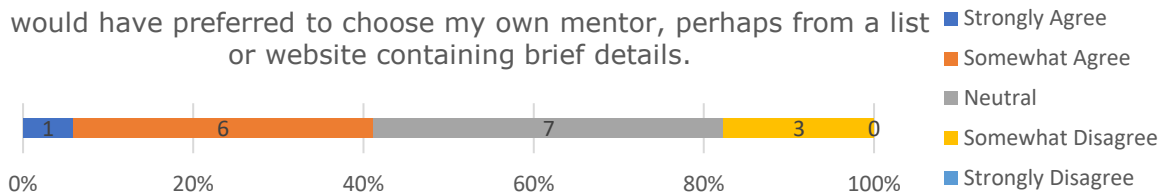


Would you like to add anything about the value of the mentoring to you?

Summary: the mentees found mentoring to have been very useful, in terms of identifying career options, listening to the experience of mentors, gathering advice, and developing self-awareness.

The Future

I would have preferred to choose my own mentor, perhaps from a list or website containing brief details.



I would still like the College or Merton Society to be involved, even if as a mentee I could have greater choice in my mentor.



Merton should offer mentoring ONLY to alumni who have just left the College.



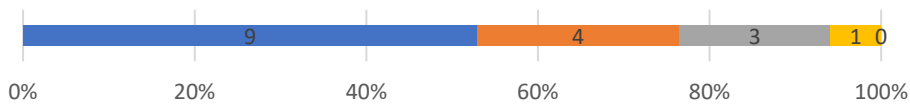
Merton should offer mentoring to ALL its alumni, regardless of when they left the College.



Merton should offer mentoring to all its alumni and to Merton students (undergraduate and postgraduate) whilst at College.



If the College developed a more permanent mentoring scheme, I would like to come back at some point for more mentoring.



I would be willing, in due course, to be a mentor within a mentoring scheme run by Merton.

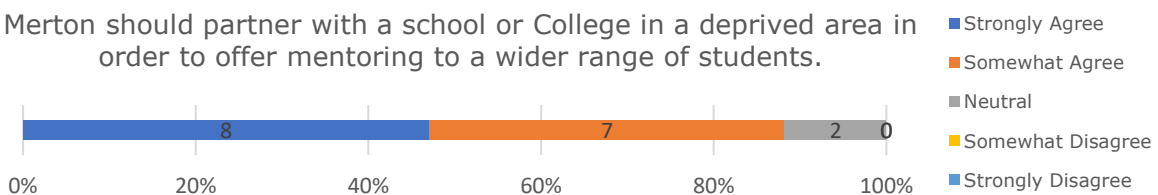


Would you like to add anything about the sort of mentoring scheme you think Merton should put in place on a more permanent basis?

Summary: there was general enthusiasm for a more permanent mentoring offering. Some talked of the benefit of mentoring and of the inspirational effect of being mentored by a fellow Mertonian. The clear consensus was that mentoring should be offered to all alumni, regardless of when they left the College. There was a general sense that current undergraduates would not really be able to benefit from this type of mentoring and that they are already well supported. Some suggested offering this to current post-graduates who may, for example, be thinking of moving out of academia. More flexibility in the way the mentoring was provided – over a longer period, more sessions, etc – would assist in accommodating these various groups. One option would be to have different types of mentoring on offer, including the possibility of one-off conversations with Mertonians who have experience in a particular field to help inform different career choices. Views differed on whether mentees should be able to choose their own mentor or whether the process should involve matching by someone else.

Diversity and Inclusion

Merton should partner with a school or College in a deprived area in order to offer mentoring to a wider range of students.

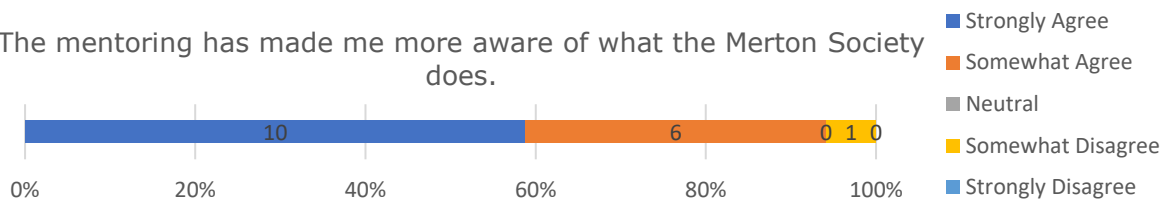


Would you like to add anything about the Merton Society's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in the context of mentoring?

Summary: there was a ready acceptance of the importance of D&I initiatives and some interest in the idea of expanding the mentoring scheme to mentees outside Merton, but there was also a recognition that this would in reality be a separate scheme, that the existing scheme would need to be changed significantly to accommodate this new group, and that there was at the moment little clarity about who should be the target group and how that group would benefit. Another idea was an affinity group type program to allow future, current and past students to connect with others that come from a shared experience or background, but this would be something different from the mentoring scheme altogether.

General

The mentoring has made me more aware of what the Merton Society does.



I would be more likely to attend a Merton Society event given my contact with the Merton Society through the mentoring scheme.

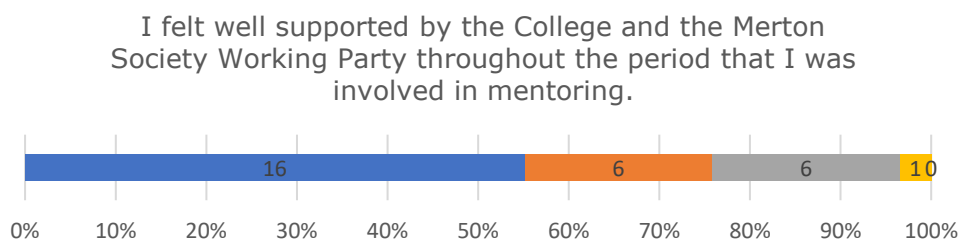
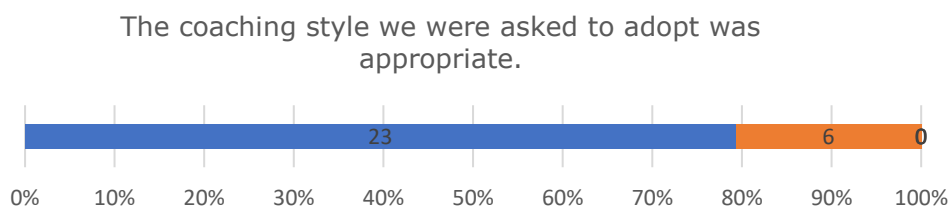
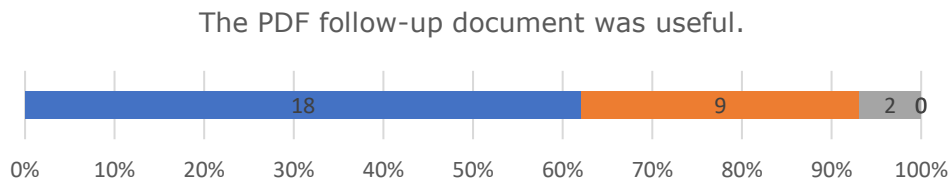
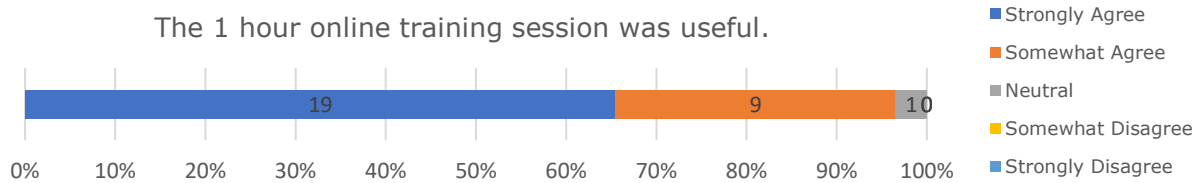


Is there anything you would like to add which you have not already?

Summary: mentees were grateful for the opportunity to be mentored, most felt they had benefited greatly from their discussions with mentors; they had enjoyed getting to know their mentors and sharing stories. A few were disappointed that their mentoring discussions had not progressed as they had hoped. Some felt more part of the Merton community as a result; others already knew of the Merton Society and had attended events.

Appendix 2: Mentor Responses

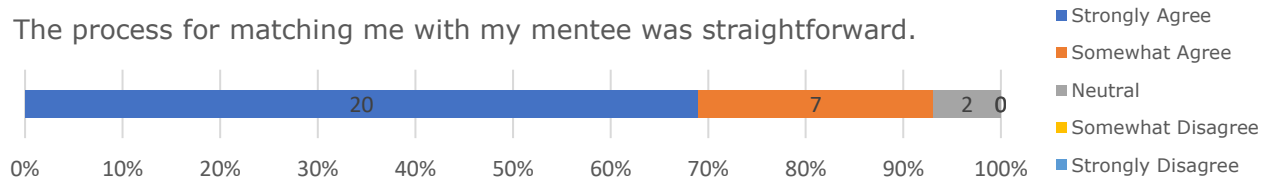
Training and Support



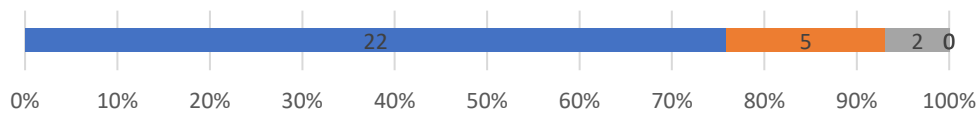
Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything else about the training or support you received?

Summary: all the mentors appreciated the training and the PDF guide, especially those who had not mentored before. Mentors commented on the suggested coaching style, which offered a helpful baseline, but they appreciated the flexibility to do it their own way if they wanted to. Some mentors were not contacted by their mentees and they thought contact from the Development Office or Mentoring Working Group would have been helpful. Most felt well supported during the course of the mentoring; there was a suggestion that the Development Office could have called to check progress. Those who attended the optional call-in sessions found them useful.

Matching



I was well matched with my mentee.

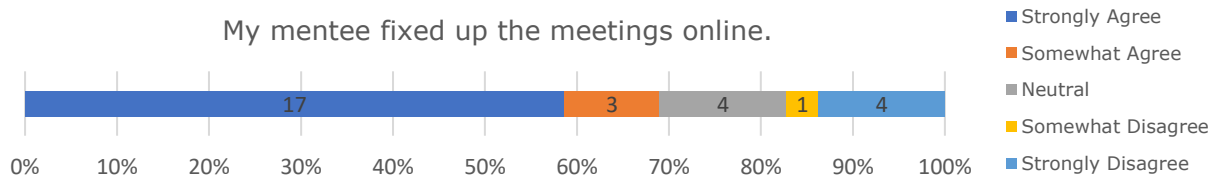


Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything else about matching?

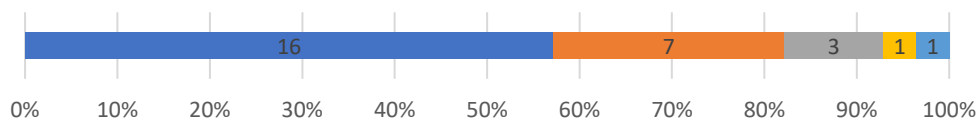
Summary: most mentors felt that they were well or very well matched with their mentees and were able to share common experiences, set goals, enjoy a comfortable exchange and jointly reflect. Some doubted that they had precisely the right experience to help their mentees and felt they could not contribute as much as they would have wished to. Some doubted that the timing of the mentoring discussions was right and mentoring at a later stage in the mentee’s professional life would have been more beneficial. One mentor, who had been involved in doing the matching, commented that the matching was in some cases difficult because what the mentee wanted did not map directly onto a potential mentor, so some lateral thinking was required. Here and elsewhere, mentors whose mentees had not got in contact or whose mentees had not appeared to be committed to the process were concerned about the messaging to mentees pre-launch; they felt that mentees should be made aware of the expectations which were on them; they expressed mild irritation that they had made themselves available, often in their own time, to mentor this group of mentees.

Mentoring Meetings

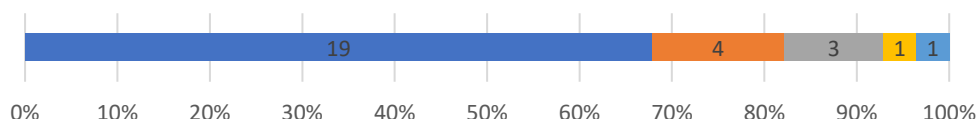
My mentee fixed up the meetings online.



Meeting online and having a wholly remote mentoring relationship worked well.



Meetings lasting for between 30-60 minutes each, over a period of around 6 months, seemed about right.



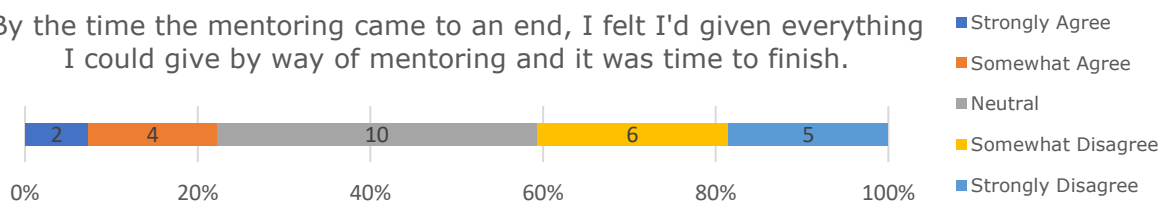
Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything about how the mentoring meetings were arranged, their frequency or the duration of the scheme?

Summary: most mentors were pleased that it was up to the mentee to fix the meetings although in some cases the mentees were not very effective at doing that and mentors

had to chase or were not contacted by their mentees at all. Some mentors took the initiative themselves because they had a Zoom account or because it was more convenient for them to fix the meetings around work commitments. The scheme had seemed overly prescriptive to some for various reasons: because mentees did not want to meet every month, because six months was too long or too short a timeframe for all the discussions to take place, or because it was too early in the mentee's career to have mentoring conversations of this sort. A number of mentors had not completed their suggested six meetings. Others had, and thought they would stay in touch with their mentee. Some thought it was a good idea to have more frequent meetings at the start. Others thought that the scheme should aim to establish mentoring relationships of longer duration to cater for the ebb and flow of the need for a mentor. Some mentors would have liked to be able to meet in person.

Finishing the Mentoring

By the time the mentoring came to an end, I felt I'd given everything I could give by way of mentoring and it was time to finish.

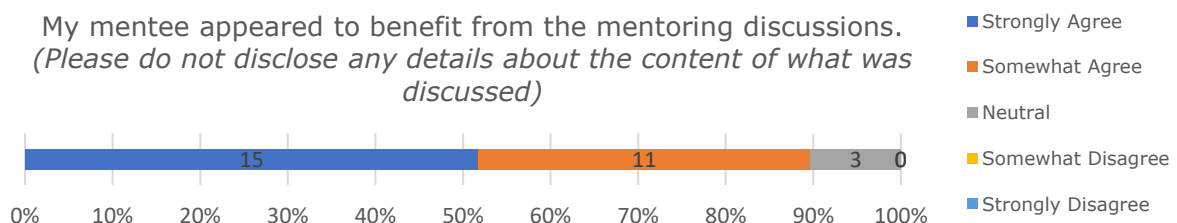


Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything about the offer of 6 mentoring meetings over around 6 months?

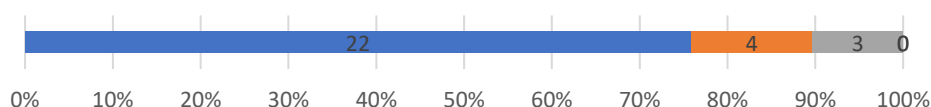
Summary: mentors gave a range of comments which showed that some are continuing their discussions still, because they are behind schedule or because the mentoring relationship is valuable and both mentor and mentee want to continue it. Others had finished their sessions, and of that group, many thought six sessions over six months was about right. A number said they would like to have done more. Some thought it was artificial to stop at six months and the partnership should be permitted to continue. Some thought that fewer sessions would have been enough. A number had left it open to their mentee to come back to them in the future if the mentee wished to. Some were not sure if their mentoring had come to an end because there had been no formal conclusion.

The Mentoring

My mentee appeared to benefit from the mentoring discussions.
(Please do not disclose any details about the content of what was discussed)



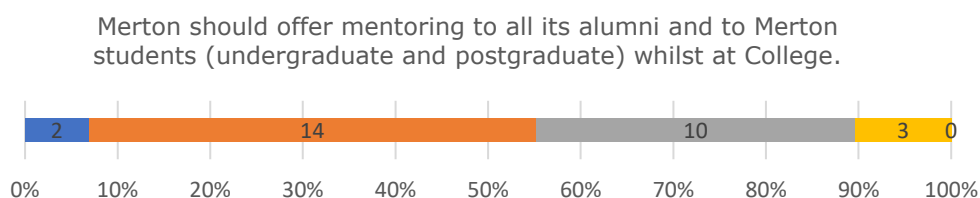
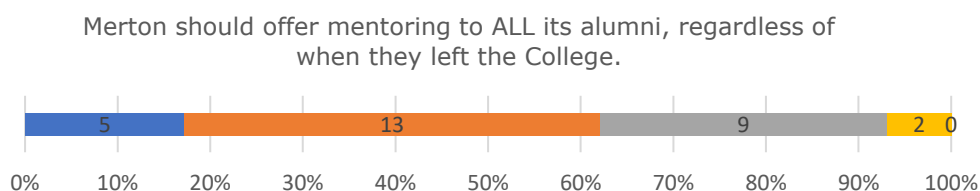
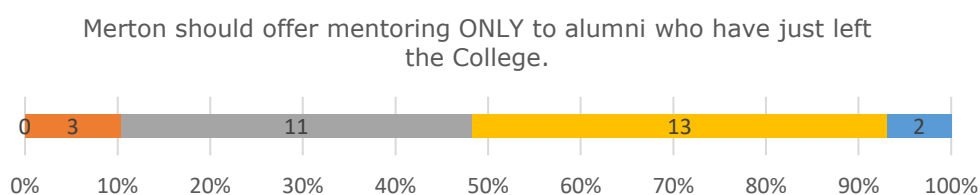
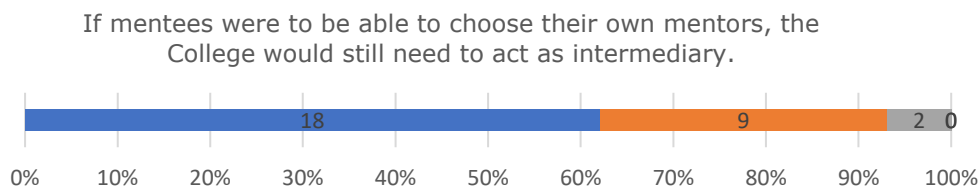
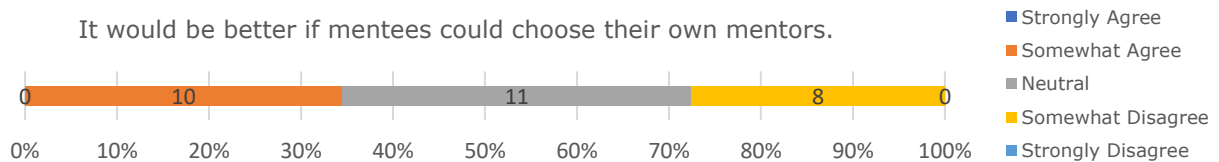
I enjoyed the mentoring.
(Please do not disclose any details about the content of what was discussed)



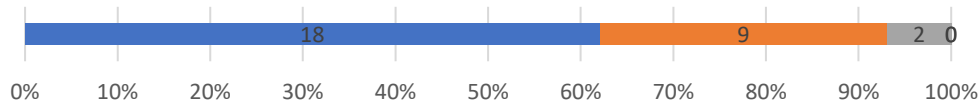
Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything about the value of the mentoring, to your mentee or to you?

Summary: some mentors were doubtful about how useful they had been to their mentee, in many cases because they felt that they lacked specific knowledge of the mentee's chosen field of work, in other cases because the mentee did not seem to need much help. It was difficult to identify concrete outcomes but mentors said that they felt their discussions had been generally helpful, for example, in building the mentee's confidence, in highlighting issues which the mentee had not thought about and by prompting further research and thought by the mentee. One mentor described themselves as a "non-judgmental listener", another said that they were a "sounding board" for their mentee. Most mentors said they had enjoyed the conversations and learnt from them, one mentor describing their participation in the scheme as a "win-win". It appeared from the comments that the mentees were different: some were very driven and discussions were focussed on career goals; others were not sure what they wanted to do and their mentors needed to guide the discussions and make the running. Some mentors wondered whether other mentees with greater needs might not have put themselves forward.

The Future



If the College developed a more permanent mentoring scheme, I would be willing to be a mentor within that scheme.

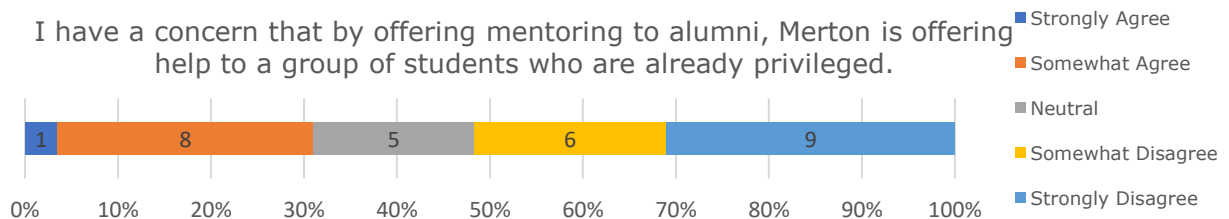


Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything about the sort of mentoring scheme you think Merton should put in place on a more permanent basis?

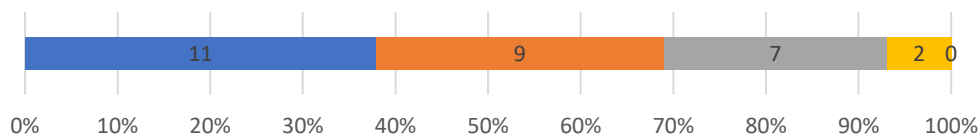
Summary: there was broad support for a more permanent mentoring offering to Merton graduates, regardless of when they had left Merton (and whether they had been undergraduates or graduate students at the College). The views on whether to offer mentoring to undergraduates was more mixed, with some suggesting that group has sufficient support already in place, others seeing a need to offer mentoring before the students finish, possibly to help smooth their path into the workplace. There would be obvious logistical challenges if the current students were to be involved because that would increase numbers and require more training. There was support for mentees choosing their own mentor if that could be managed. In general terms, the scale of the mentoring offered would depend on the scheme’s design: if it was more “DIY”, it could accommodate larger numbers. To expand the scheme to these various groups would require many more mentors to be available. Most were willing to participate in a more permanent scheme but some had reservations based on their experience in the pilot (it had been quite a challenge).

Diversity and Inclusion

I have a concern that by offering mentoring to alumni, Merton is offering help to a group of students who are already privileged.



I would be interested in a Merton mentoring scheme that partnered with a school or college in a deprived area.



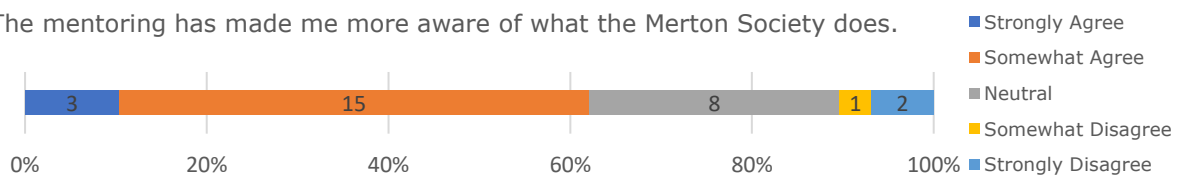
Would you like to give reasons for your answers or add anything about the Merton Society’s commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in the context of mentoring?

Summary: the comments were supportive of offering mentoring to Mertonians, who have worked hard to get their place at Oxford, and regardless of background may benefit from support by a mentor. Mentors commented on the diverse intake of undergraduates to Merton and suggested that as Merton expands the diversity of its student body, the Merton Society should be ready to provide ongoing support to those students after they

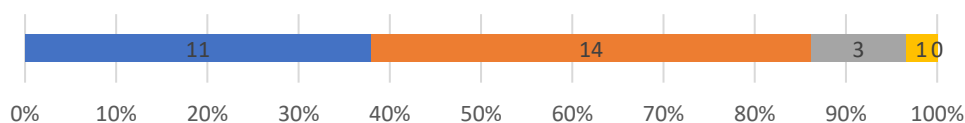
leave. There were mentees in this scheme who came from highly disadvantaged backgrounds. There was some support from a D&I perspective for offering mentoring to undergraduates because mentoring can be a useful exercise for students who come from under-represented communities or demographics. Many also found the idea of a wider scheme, involving a partner school or college, to be attractive, but noted that this would in effect be a separate scheme which would require different training and a different set-up. It would need a separate pilot to test it out. One mentor said that they would not feel qualified to mentor non-Mertonians. Another thought this could be very valuable as an addition to the College's work with schools and colleges in low-participation areas, or schools without a strong record of a pathway into Oxford.

General

The mentoring has made me more aware of what the Merton Society does.



I have enjoyed being more connected with the College through my involvement in the mentoring.



Is there anything you would like to add which you have not already?

Summary: the comments were positive. One mentor said "I congratulate the Merton Society on this initiative and I am delighted to have been invited to participate. I enjoy the way that Merton intersects and curates its development/alumni relations work so that alumni can feel able to give back to the College in a number of ways, not just financially. This mentoring scheme is a valuable addition to the ways in which alumni can become more connected with the College." Other mentors spoke of enjoying the opportunity to meet other Merton alumni and share their experiences. One mentor felt that it had been hard to mentor someone from Merton with whom the mentor had little connection; the connection in the workplace is more natural and makes for an easier mentoring relationship.