



RESEARCH PAPER

‘Inspired by Business’: A case of mentoring among low socio-economic students

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To boost enrolment and retention of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education, existing research has proposed a number of ways to support their university experiences. One initiative highlighted in the literature is mentoring, which has been shown to enhance students' skillsets, networks, and their self-esteem. This study examines the experiences of mentoring for low socio-economic status students accepted into a competitive widening participation programme, 'Inspired by Business', at the University of Sydney Business School. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the programme's perceived benefits for both mentees and mentors. Through interviews conducted with students and mentors, the findings reveal that mentoring was highly beneficial for the students, where the informal networks that developed between the participants developed their social capital and enhanced their sense of belonging. However, we highlight that mentoring processes of matching and preparation are critical aspects of mentor satisfaction.

Keywords: widening participation, low socio-economic status, mentoring, social inclusion, first year

Introduction

The imperative to encourage and retain the enrolments of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in higher education has received increased academic and practitioner attention in recent years (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, & McKay, 2012; Devlin & O'Shea, 2012; Hoare & Johnston, 2011). In Australia, the impetus for this inquiry has been the Federal Government's directive, arising from the Bradley Review (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008), to boost the representation of low socio-economic status (LSES) students at the undergraduate level over the next seven years (Devlin, 2011). However, research suggests that disadvantaged students struggle with a sense of belonging in the social milieu of university and have a tendency to exclude themselves from extra-curricular activities that expand their networks and enhance their employability (Australian Social Inclusion Board [ASIB], 2010; Keane, 2012). As such, how higher education institutions can better support disadvantaged first year students is a critical challenge in the mission to promote the representation and retention of LSES students (Kift, 2009; Yorke & Thomas, 2003).

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In the higher education literature, mentoring has received particular attention as a popular initiative to support first year students (Ferrari, 2004; Gannon & Maher, 2012; Jeste, Twamley, Cardenas, Lebowitz, & Reynolds, 2009; Luna & Prieto, 2009). Research has identified that mentoring programmes benefit both mentees and mentors (Busch, 1985; Jeste et al., 2009), where the most effective mentoring programmes are those that involve matching, preparation, interaction, and evaluation (Gannon & Maher, 2012). However, other studies argue that matching and preparation does not affect the satisfaction of mentors and mentees (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). Our findings extend the literature by showing the importance of matching and preparation to mentor satisfaction.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the experiences of mentors and mentees in a widening participation programme at the University of Sydney Business School. We begin by reviewing the literature on LSES student experiences and mentoring as an initiative to potentially address their unique needs. We follow this with an overview of the case study site—the inaugural cohort of the University of Sydney Business School’s ‘Inspired by Business’ (IBB) programme, before outlining our research methods. The findings around mentees’ and mentors’ experiences are detailed. We conclude with a summary of our theoretical contributions and practical implications, limitations of the study, and avenues for future research.

First Year in Higher Education Support

When making the transition into university, many first year students experience a sense of uncertainty and isolation (Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008). Research on higher education support initiatives have proposed a number of ways through which life and learning support could be offered to students (Kift, 2009). The need for these kinds of support has been argued to be particularly pronounced for LSES students, whose poor representation in higher education has scarcely improved in the last two decades (Devlin, 2011). A report from ASIB (2010) details how Australian youths from disadvantaged backgrounds have often experienced discrimination. Consequently, they are less likely to attend community events and belong to an organised community group, and as such, experience weaker social connectedness and community capacity (ASIB, 2010). The report asserts that it is important to proactively encourage disadvantaged youths to become involved in the community and enhance their sense of social belonging, while also allowing them to develop skills to improve their employability (ASIB, 2010).

Specifically within the university context, research has found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to lack a sense of belonging in the social milieu of university (Keane, 2012). Consequently, it has been suggested that LSES students are more likely to prioritise their academic work at the expense of a rich social life on campus (Keane, 2012). Students’ sense of belonging is grounded in their social capital, which refers to the aggregate resources embedded in an individual’s network of interpersonal connections (Bourdieu, 1997). Social capital is not a fixed object possessed by students, but needs to be continually maintained (Quinn, 2010). In other cases, LSES students treat self-exclusion as a form of resistance, where students seek ‘to gain the *benefits* of being middle class without *becoming* middle class’ (Keane, 2012, p. 156, emphasis in original). Early exclusion from the university’s holistic learning environment may further hinder students’ development of new learning skills, which Nelson, Kift, and Clarke (2008) found is an expectation of first year students that is commonly not met.

One way through which higher education institutions can support students in building social capital and foster their sense of belonging, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is via mentoring (McCluskey, Noller, Lamoureux, & McCluskey, 2004). Mentoring in this context is defined as professional and personal relationship characterised by the mentor's support to mentee in a reciprocal and dynamic learning partnership (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2010). The benefits of mentoring to students have been widely documented, including expanded skillsets and networks (Bibbings, 2006; Ferrari, 2004; Jeste et al., 2009). In particular, Davis (2007) points out that mentored students demonstrate improved communication skills and diplomacy. It has also been found that university students who received mentoring showed better psychological health, higher career goals, stronger self-esteem, and reduced role stress and conflict (Ferrari, 2004; Luna & Prieto, 2009).

In addition, mentoring has not only been found to benefit the mentee, but also reward the mentors (Jeste et al., 2009). Mentors have expressed enjoying a collegial relationship with their mentees and excitement at witnessing their development (Busch, 1985; Hilsdon, 2014). The formation of the mentor's role through their mentoring relationship can also enhance mentors' self-esteem and sense of self-determination (Galbraith & Winterbottom, 2011). Some studies have suggested that the positive effects of mentoring are more immediately apparent to mentors than they are to mentees, who may need some time before they realise the benefits of mentoring (Gannon & Maher, 2012). Mentor satisfaction is important to the success of student support programmes as they enable longer-term retention and commitment (Martin & Sifers, 2012).

The characteristics of 'best practice' undergraduate mentoring programmes have been identified by Gannon and Maher (2012) as matching, preparation, interaction and evaluation. Firstly, matching involves choosing mentor/mentee pairings based on personality, learning styles, interests, values, or demographic links. This is supported by research which indicates mentees of ethnic minorities find mentors who share their ethnicity, or are at least culturally sensitive, more effective (Ferrari, 2004). Opportunities for mentees to identify preferences for mentors have also been found to lead to more beneficial mentoring relationships (Gannon & Maher, 2012). Secondly, preparation involves setting expectations, defining roles and responsibilities, and training. For mentors, training in interpersonal skills has been found to be useful, while mentees are more likely to benefit from training in self-awareness and self-reflection (Gannon & Maher, 2012). Thirdly, once interactions between mentors and mentees begin, Gannon and Maher (2012) recommend keeping records of the interactions so evidence of the students' learning and development can be documented. Finally, the programme itself needs to be evaluated.

Fleck and Mullins (2012) offer a contrasting perspective. In their study of mentoring relationships among postgraduate students, pair compatibility and mentor preparation were not found to be critical components of mentor and mentee satisfaction (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). However, this contradiction may be explained by the different study level of the cohort (postgraduate versus undergraduate) or methodology, as Fleck and Mullins (2012) employed a questionnaire. In contrast, this study of the IBB programme has the potential to explore the processes of matching and preparation in greater depth to better understand their role in undergraduate mentor and mentee satisfaction.

Research Context

In Australia, LSES students are under-represented in higher education. The trend over time has remained stagnant, with representation of LSES students remaining at approximately 15 per cent over the last 15 years (Devlin, 2011, p. 1). To address the under-representation of LSES students, the Australian federal Labor government mandated in 2008 that by the year 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from students from low socio-economic backgrounds (DEEWR, 2008; Devlin, 2011, p. 1).

IBB was established by the University of Sydney Business School in 2011 with the purpose of widening the participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in the School. It consists of two elements. First, the possibility of a lower entrance score and a \$10,000 per annum bursary was offered by the Business School for the duration of their degrees. Second, to complement this, a programme of social and academic support was provided, funded by a 'Widening Participation' grant through the University's Social Inclusion Unit. This enabled a range of initiatives to be implemented such as one-on-one mentoring, customised induction, career counselling, and employer visits.

To be accepted into this programme, principals of a number of public high schools located in suburbs classified as 'low socio-economic status' by the government were asked to nominate final year students whom they believed possessed the motivation and potential to successfully complete a business degree at the University of Sydney. The 27 nominated students were then required to submit a written application, among which 20 were invited for a face-to-face interview. Questions on the application and at the interview focused on motivation for business as a career; community involvement; leadership potential; and behavioural examples of time management. Thirteen students were made offers, and 11 attained the requisite entrance rank (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) of 95. The remaining two students were able to take advantage of the programme's lowered entrance score of 80. By the commencement of Semester 1 2012, eight students accepted the offer and formed the first cohort of the IBB programme.

Eight student mentors were subsequently referred from existing mentoring programmes (in the Business School, its Industry Placement programmes, and University clubs and societies) and were semi-randomly matched to mentees. Programme coordinators stated that they were guided by gender and ethnic similarities, but did not apply any systematic matching criteria or procedure. Although the mentors had prior mentoring experience, they did not receive extensive training on interpersonal skills specifically for the IBB programme. The one exception was a three-hour workshop on LSES students and their needs conducted before the mentoring relationship commenced.

Methods

In order to evaluate the IBB programme, the lead author who was based at the University of Sydney Business School at the time conducted semi-structured interviews with the programme's stakeholders including eight mentees, eight mentors, and two staff members responsible for the design and implementation of the programme from September to October 2012. Although the number of respondents is small, it represents 100 per cent of programme participants, capturing a full range of perspectives and the full scope of the programme at the end of its initial cycle.

Four of the mentors were available to take part in a one and half hour focus group interview, while one-on-one interviews averaging 45 minutes in length were conducted with the mentees, staff members, and remaining mentors. The interview schedule was based on a standard 'template', customised to the specific stakeholder group, with questions relating to the interviewees' roles, experiences, and perceptions. A mid-year report on the IBB programme written by the lead programme coordinator aided the design of the interview schedule by identifying key issues for discussion.

Interviews were transcribed in full and content analysed. This involved systematically examining the data to identify patterns and characteristics, done via a process of coding, categorising, and pattern matching and comparison. The data coding scheme took cues from procedures suggested by prominent researchers (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The basic units of coding were sentences and paragraphs.

Mentors' written, reflective reports constituted another data source, enabling comparison and corroboration with the evaluation interviews. These reports were written by each of the mentors for the programme coordinators at three points throughout Semester 1 2012: Week 2 (16th March 2012); Week 5 (5th April 2012); and Week 13 (8th June 2012—final week of semester). Each of the reports ranged from 300–700 words in length.

Finally, the academic performance of the students of the IBB programme compared with the rest of the cohort 2012 Business School student was recorded to supplement the qualitative findings.

Findings and Contributions

This section assesses mentees' experiences of mentoring and their academic performance, followed by mentors' experiences.

Mentees

Logistics, skillsets and networks

Patterns of analysis in the interview transcripts revealed that for the students of the IBB programme, the mentoring relationship played an essential role in their first year experience:

'[The best thing about mentoring was] probably meeting the mentor on orientation day and having the tour of the campus and everything... And probably also getting to know the other mentors as well, so not just my own mentor but the other mentors, they've been really helpful as well. Because a few of them have been a part of the ambassadors programme and the Washington DC programme¹. And they've been really involved with all these other different programmes in the university, so they've really encouraged us to get on board with that and that's probably how we've heard about it and how we've become so eager to become part of it as well' [Mentee 3 Interview].

¹ The Washington DC Placement Programme is a nine-week programme jointly organised by the University of Sydney Business School, the United States Studies Centre, and the University of California Washington Center (UCDC) where students complete three units of study and a professional placement on Capitol Hill, in think tanks, local government, and law firms.

'I didn't know that many people who were older than me so my mentor was a great help for things I needed help with because I needed to apply for special consideration [application for non-standard provisions concerning an assessment] and I didn't know how to and she helped me—gave me advice for that. A few of the mentors went through like the IPP programme—the Industry Placement Programme—so they were quite informative about that, so I found it quite useful to have people who were so involved with uni as well' [Mentee 4 Interview].

'Our first week into uni I had trouble with one of my assessments—so it was like a quiz that I failed to do... [My mentor] dedicated his own time to show me around and having a chat to the lecturer and we explained the situation which the lecturer found appealing. He allowed me to do my assessment in further time because he realised the error within the system. So without [my mentor] I literally wouldn't have no idea where to go or where to ask for help and stuff' [Mentee 2 Interview].

Although many of the students expressed that their mentors were most useful in providing assistance about the everyday logistics and procedures of university (e.g., layout of the campus, applying for special consideration, etc.), their responses revealed that their mentors were indeed helping them to expand their skillsets and networks. This finding matches the existing literature, which has shown that mentoring helps improve students' communication and diplomacy skills and develop their networks (Bibbings, 2006; Davis, 2007; Ferrari, 2004; Jeste et al., 2009). For Mentees 3 and 4, access to all the mentors in this programme allowed them to connect with competitive international exchange and industry placement programmes. Mentee 2's case suggested that his mentor not only guided him through the processes of an appeal to the lecturer, but coached him in inter-personal communication as they successfully persuaded the lecturer to allow the student to repeat the assessment. The mentoring relationship strengthened the students' learning community, which may assist universities to meet first year students' expectation that they would develop a variety of new skills (Devlin et al., 2012; Nelson et al., 2008).

Sense of belonging

With a small cohort of only eight students and eight mentors, it was possible for a strong informal network to develop between the participants (Davis, 2007). The students and mentors took ownership of this network with one mentor creating a Facebook group to facilitate communication and sharing of information among the entire cohort. The students described their network as greatly enhancing their sense of belonging at the university, and a pattern evident from the transcripts of most students and mentors was a proposal for hosting even more social events in the future:

'And we've got friendships and every time we see them around uni it's always like 'hi' and you know their faces, so it's been really good... It's just become so much more than just the mentees/mentors, it's become such a group thing. And it's really good and even now on Facebook we've all got—we've got a group. So we're all involved in this group and there's different things and there's people—and even each other, we'll give each other suggestions, this is coming up, if you want to go to it, it's a good opportunity, or apply for this, apply for that' [Mentee 1 Interview].

'It's been helpful and... just having the opportunity to just to meet up and have dinner together, have lunch with other IBB, it's been very fun and helpful. And it's just to socialise in general, like not to worry, it's not always about uni, uni, it's just to meet up, talk, have a chat, just socialise with each other like once a week or once every two weeks, the IBB Programme offers [that]' [Mentee 2 Interview].

'I would definitely like more social events with everyone, so the mentees can get to know each other and the mentors as well because the mentees can benefit from different mentors' experiences—because we've all had different experiences, done different subjects and just generally bonding and scheduling times because it's really easy to put it off if you've got an assessment or something. But if it's scheduled and you know from the start then you can plan around, so I think that was the major thing to come out of it' [Mentor 7 Interview].

Student participation and cultural influence

Although the literature suggests students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to resist participation in social activities outside of their studies (Keane, 2012), comparison of the interviews with students suggest that fostering an informal social network among participants of the IBB programme helped to minimise this resistance. The only case where a student felt excluded from social events was due to cultural reasons. Reservations about cultural difference were raised by this student to her mentor as indicated in the mentor's first reflective report written in March:

'She also mentioned the cultural difference between her personal life and university as something she is getting accustomed to... After sharing stories of how I have reconciled my cultural background and University life she opened up about hers and it has become common ground between us' [Mentor 3 Reflective Report #1].

However, when her mentor was interviewed in September, she recalls two instances that hindered her students' participation in social events:

'I didn't realise Ramadan was on and so we organised the IBB dinner. I wasn't pressuring her, I was like 'Oh you should totally come' I was really enthusiastic, and then she quietly told me, she was like 'Oh no I've got to be home by sunset'. So little things like that I didn't pick up on' [Mentor 3 Interview].

'Firstly, I think a big thing for her was, in all of our events that we met at, everyone kept going on about how good first year camp was, and so when I suggested first year camp to her she quietly told me—and this is something I actually could sympathise with because I'm from a similar cultural background—'I don't think my parents would let me go to a camp for 2 days', and I'm like, 'Oh that's absolutely fine' and so little things like that which is more cultural was the biggest hurdle for her, so she felt really upset after that because every time we used to meet up, or other people use to walk past her, I remember a friend [gestures to fellow mentor in focus group] walking past her saying first year camp was really important, he was like 'Oh first year camp, you have to go there, that's how you make all your friends' it was really daunting for her. But that was a cultural thing' [Mentor 3 Interview].

The data suggests the importance of considering cultural factors in widening participation programmes. This student's experience is supported by Lawrence's (2005) study, which found that university students are more likely to experience social exclusion when there is a difference between university and their family/social communities. Recognition of cultural differences on the part of individual mentors may not be sufficient in fostering inclusion, strengthening the informal network, and thus assist students' development of their social capital (Bourdieu, 1997; Quinn, 2010). Following from Lawrence (2005), cultural diversity may be more effectively supported via top-down approaches where programme coordinators take responsibility to make their cultural norms explicit and accommodate for cultural difference.

Academic performance

The academic performance of the students reflects their reported satisfaction with their mentoring. Existing research has found that LSES students tend to only differ from their high socio-economic counterparts in academic performance at the university entrance stage, but not during higher education (Hoare & Johnston, 2011). However, across five core units (courses studied within a degree programme) undertaken by first year students enrolled in a Bachelor of Commerce, IBB students outperformed their peers in all five units. The average results between the IBB students and the entire cohort are compared in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Average grades of 'Inspired by Business' students and all enrolled students

Core Units	All Enrolled Students	'Inspired by Business'
BUSS1001	60.7	66
BUSS1002	62.4	68.25
BUSS1020	66.6	68.29
BUSS1030	67.7	72
BUSS1040	61.4	65.67

Mentors

Expectations regarding mentees

Some mentors reported that participating in the training workshop where they were informed their mentees came from low socio-economic backgrounds created false expectations about their mentoring relationship, revealed in the pattern of responses:

'I'm not saying it's the Business School's fault, but they initially kind of, what's the word, pitched it as if the mentees were coming from really low socioeconomic areas, and also academically kind of disadvantaged. Whereas that was not always the case, and my mentee was—is already—doing quite well, before coming into the programme and he's still doing really well with his uni results... We were kind of given a seminar... where it was all about kind of dealing with low socioeconomic groups and dealing with that kind of people... So for us that expectation was already there, and it was told to me that they were accepted with

a lower grade, but it didn't seem like the case with my mentee. So that information was a bit conflicted' [Mentor 2 Interview].

'So, I know this is a bit silly but before I came to the briefing, I actually thought my mentee may actually be financially disadvantaged and then it may be a problem for her to continue uni just because of her financial problems. But it didn't turn out to be like that in reality' [Mentor 1 Interview].

'They got a scholarship as well [for] like textbooks and stuff. I thought maybe she needs help finding some second-hand books and stuff and she was like 'No, no I'm fine'; there was no financial difficulty whatsoever' [Mentor 3 Interview].

Mentees' quick adjustment to university was supported in mentors' reflective report, which suggested pre-existing networks at university not commonly seen among LSES students (Keane, 2012):

'[She] is settling in quite well... A few of [her] siblings have gone/are going currently in university, so she has had some insight into the university experience' [Mentor 5 Reflective Report #1].

'[She] seems to be settling in well, beginning uni with some friends from high school... She has signed up for the ComSoc [Commerce Society] first-year camp and an inter-society cruise. On the academic side, she's organised her textbooks as well as registered for PASS [Peer-Assisted Study Sessions] and we haven't had any real issues arise' [Mentor 7 Reflective Report #1].

This contradiction between the selection of LSES students and their mentors' reports of their lack of financial difficulties demonstrate that LSES students cannot be treated as a homogeneous group with identical challenges and needs. The \$10,000 bursary awarded to each of the IBB students alleviated many of their short-term financial pressures such as textbook purchases and allowed students to foster their identities as 'students' rather than explicitly and visibly 'disadvantaged students'.

Mentors' relationships with mentees

While some of the mentees and mentors pointed out they were matched well in terms of demographic links, for instance, Mentee 7 expressed delight that because her mentor was also an international student 'we bonded really well', personality differences resulted in disappointment and discomfort on the part of two mentors:

'My mentee was quite quiet so, yeah, I tried to get him involved in things... Initially he was a little bit reserved and didn't want to get involved... Just be comfortable I think was the big thing because the first few weeks he was a little bit awkward, he didn't really know what to do, he just kind of came to uni and then went home, which isn't enjoyable' [Mentor 2 Interview].

'Me and [my mentee] didn't go as much into a friendship kind of relationship as, I don't know, I think I was envisaging. She was quite reserved, and... I think by her standards loosened up quite a lot, but it may not be noticeable to anybody else. But yeah I think it wasn't as intense as I thought it would be. So she was quite happy to do her own thing and it was more me checking in to see how she

was going... So it did stay quite strictly a mentor/mentee if that makes sense, so it didn't transcend into a friendship or anything... Yeah she's just very reserved which I think didn't mesh as well with my personality, if that makes sense. So she was very quiet and submissive and so I tried to get as much as I could out of her, but she's just... she's remained very reserved but that's just who she is. I don't think it's anything wrong, it was just- just personality the way she was' [Mentor 3 Interview].

The mentors who expressed dissatisfaction with their mentoring relationship all conveyed that they were unequipped to mentor students who were more introverted than themselves. In some cases, such as with Mentor 2 above, this lack of interpersonal ability to relate to a mentee who was perceived as 'quiet' and 'reserved' resulted in feelings of discomfort and awkwardness. For the other mentors, their introverted mentees conflicted with romanticised expectations of a more intimate and consuming relationship. As Mentor 3 describes above, her relationship was not as 'intense' as she thought it would be, which resulted in feelings that she was not as valuable to her mentee as she had hoped to be.

In contrast, the findings suggest that, since mentees were all unanimously satisfied with their mentoring relationships, extensive matching and preparation in mentoring programmes may indeed have limited influence on the satisfaction of mentees; a finding which echoes other literature (Fleck & Mullins, 2012). However, contrary to Fleck and Mullins' (2012) study, the findings show that inadequate preparation and lack of consideration of personality differences in pairings impacted on mentor's satisfaction with their relationship and the programme.

Role identity theory offers a useful explanation here, which sees the identity process as a control system (Burke, 1991). Social roles and situations, including religion and ethnicity, produce a set of meanings that serves as reference for one's identity (Burke, 1991). Following from this view, it is understood that different role identities may have greater bearings than others. In the case of Mentor 3 for example, despite coming from a similar cultural background to her mentee, she did not perceive herself to be a good match with her mentee because for her, an extraverted personality was a stronger definer of her identity than their shared Islamic background.

Conclusion and Further Research

By examining the case of the University of Sydney's 'Inspired by Business' widening participation programme, this study has demonstrated that mentoring expanded the skillsets and networks of first year students. While the literature suggests that students, particularly those from a low socio-economic background, struggle with a sense of isolation and alienation at university (Keane, 2012), this study revealed that the informal networks that developed through the mentoring among the entire cohort developed students' social capital (Bourdieu, 1997) and their sense of belonging, corroborating findings from other research (Bibbings, 2006; Ferrari, 2004; Jeste et al., 2009; McCluskey et al., 2004).

Although the students who participated in the IBB programme described their experiences as overwhelmingly positive, a lack of preparation and misguided expectations held by mentors about the needs of LSES students led to feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort, especially when pairings involved personality differences. The findings extend existing theories of mentoring to show that while matching and preparation may have limited

influence on satisfaction among first year mentees, they play a significant role in mentors' experience, and help to specify parameters for fulfilment amongst mentors.

Future implementation of mentoring programmes can emphasise to mentors the significance of skill development, network expansion, and a sense of belonging that mentoring can provide to LSES students in order to help manage their expectations during the preparation stage. With regards to matching in particular, future programmes could incorporate a more nuanced understanding of mentees' and mentors' self-identities beyond gender or ethnic markers during its matching process. It is also important for programmes to recognise that 'LSES students' represent a diverse category whose members' needs cannot be generalised across the entire group. Gaining in-depth understandings of mentees during the preparation and matching stages will ensure that individual student needs, including financial, cultural, family, or health needs can be better addressed by the programme.

The research was funded to evaluate the inaugural mentoring and support programme at the University of Sydney Business School which, necessarily, limited the scope of this research to the participants themselves and the specified timeframe of the funded programme (2012). As such, the sample size was confined to the initial cohort. Additionally, it was not possible to compare the mentoring experiences of the participants with the rest of the first year cohort who did not receive access to the programme, nor was a longitudinal analysis possible. Data gathered from both mentored IBB students and their unmentored peers would enable comparative insights. Tracking widening participation programme cohorts over a longer timeframe would allow the ongoing academic, and possibly also post-graduation, performance of successive cohorts to be traced and would augment the underlying knowledge-base to further enhance initiatives in widening higher education participation among LSES students.

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