

Responses to questions submitted to the Centre for Youth Impact and raised in the delivery partner organisation (DPO) recruitment webinars for the Multi-site Trials of Mentoring Practice

4 October 2021

When assessing expressions of interest from potential delivery organisations, is the research team looking for the ‘best’ programme to roll out to all DPOs? No. We are not making any assessment of the impact or ‘efficacy’ of the mentoring provision offered by potential DPOs. We are also not expecting to ‘select’ one model of mentoring from those offered by DPOs and ‘scale’ it across all DPOs. We are asking all potential DPOs (at expression of interest stage) to tell us about their mentoring provision in as much detail as possible so that we can understand which ‘elements’ come up frequently and less frequently in DPOs’ mentoring models, and where there is already similarity/difference. We also want to understand the rationale for approaches, which will help all of us co-design the shared model based on a collective understanding of what makes high quality mentoring. We will draw on the research literature about mentoring as we work together, but we are not looking for the ‘best’ or most ‘evidence-based’ mentoring programme to roll out. It’s likely that many or all DPOs will have to flex their practice a bit to ensure that the core components we agree together are delivered, but around these core components will be sufficient flexibility.

What’s so ground-breaking about this research? Is it that you’re trying to find a ‘best practice’ model of mentoring? See above - and no, this isn’t the ‘ground breaking’ aspect of this research. We are focused on assessing the feasibility of multi-site trials - this is the ground-breaking element. A multi-site trial has never been undertaken in the UK youth sector, or of mentoring provision.

Can we use the funds to start employing a paid mentor? In short, yes. We are aware that some potential DPOs will not be employing a mentor at present, so the funds may be used to appoint this role (or two people working part-time, for example). However, your mentoring approach/provision needs to be appropriate for a paid mentor. It wouldn’t, for example, be appropriate to start paying people who would normally be volunteers for the mentoring they provide. The funds also cannot be used to ‘sub-contract’ mentoring to another organisation or consultant.

Are you looking to spread the funding geographically, or favouring any particular areas of the country? No. We will be mindful of geography, but we won’t be setting quotas per region or be deliberate about getting proportionate representation across the regions/countries. For this study, our main priority is to find 20 organisations best placed to fully engage with the trials. In being ‘mindful’ about geography, we will try to ensure that the funding doesn’t all end up in one region of

the country, or one type of geography (for example, big cities) but this is a secondary consideration to finding 20 organisations best placed to be part of the research.

What do you mean by ‘mentor qualifications’ in relation to describing a mentoring approach? We don’t expect mentors to necessarily hold a formal qualification or accreditation, but we do want to understand how mentors are selected/recruited by your organisation – what type of experiences and skills does your organisation consider to ‘qualify’ someone to be a mentor?

Are there any contextual factors that you will focus on in the study? We’re not comparing contexts - that is, whether one type of delivery context ‘works’ better (that is, has a greater impact on outcomes) than others - but we will be taking context into account in agreeing what is ‘core’ and what is ‘flexible’ in the shared practice model. This might influence things like where the mentoring meetings take place.

Will young people be able to opt-out of data collection part-way through the research project if they change their minds? Yes, consent can be withdrawn at any stage. However, if all (or many) young people withdraw, we’d struggle to continue with the research, so we will communicate really clearly to young people and their parents/guardians what’s involved at the start, so there are no surprises!

Why will only DPOs working with paid adult mentors be considered? We’re focused on paid mentors for two main reasons: firstly, we will struggle to monitor how closely mentors are following the shared practice model if there are lots of them. Many volunteer mentor projects match one adult with one young person - we would really struggle to understand practice variation across that many mentors. Secondly, we’re concerned about placing too much of a data gathering burden on volunteers.

Interested organisations that don’t have a paid mentor on staff right now won’t be excluded - we know that some organisations might need to increase their capacity in order to be part of the study. But the study will only include paid mentors.

If a young person has an existing mentoring relationship with the organisation, would that make a participant ineligible for the research project? Potentially yes - we would just need to understand a bit more about what this existing relationship looks like. In order to create a true ‘baseline’ - that is, young people’s social and emotional skills at the start of the mentoring relationship - the mentoring relationship needs to be ‘new’. It doesn’t mean that the young person has had no contact with your organisation prior to the research starting, but that they have not been participating in mentoring (or similar structured/focused one to one support) prior. However, we’d

encourage any interested organisations to share as much information as they can on their expression of interest and we can explore it with them.

Do all of the young people participating in mentoring have to be in the same location? Not necessarily. If delivery organisations are working across a number of locations, we would just need to understand how we would collectively monitor 'fidelity' (faithfulness, basically) to the shared mentoring model. It could be that this is more difficult if geographical locations are widely spread.

What age does an adult mentor have to be? Adult mentors would be 18+

Would we be eligible to participate if we're already receiving funding for some (though not all) of our mentoring work from YEF, or another funder? Yes, potentially. We're aware that some organisations will already have funding for mentoring provision. We'd just need to understand the implications of doubling up (for example, the demands of data collection, whether outcomes of interest are the same, similarity in age range etc).

What criteria will determine whether an organisation takes part in the feasibility and the pilot phases? This will depend on the group of delivery organisations that we recruit. All DPOs will be part of the co-development of the shared practice model. However, we'll need to make the decision on who delivers mentoring in the feasibility phase with reference to the contexts that delivery organisations are working in, as we'd like to test delivery in a few different contexts. Confidence in being able to engage with young people in the initial period of the trial (i.e. early 2022) will be important too. We know that some people might need to recruit a mentor, for example, which could take time.

Would you expect a practitioner to be solely working on this particular project - if so would you require practitioners to be 'new' to the organisation so that their mentoring practice wasn't informed by their previous experience with the DPO? No, the mentor does not need to be new to the organisation. In fact, given that the EoI asks for quite a bit of info about the organisation's mentoring experience and experience, bringing in existing members of staff would be useful. Mentors don't need to be working on this research project only - they may mentor young people as part of this study alongside other projects/delivery. Case load could be determined by recruitment targets for the trial. We have estimated that one FTE mentor could support the number of young people required, but this doesn't have to be one person (e.g. it could be two 0.5FTE mentors or similar). This project doesn't have to be the only thing they do.

If the majority of young people in the study need to be 10-14, can we work with only over 14 year olds as long as other DPOs are working with a younger age range? No, each DPO needs to

be working with a majority of 10-14 year olds. This is because 10-14 is the age range of focus for the Youth Endowment Fund.

Who is holding overall ethical approval for the research study? Is there anything that could be shared with trustees, if they're keen to see it? We are working closely with the Youth Endowment Fund to ensure we design and attend to an ethical approach to the trial. We are also working with the NCB Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG) as critical friends and reviewers. We can provide our ethics submission to trustees that may wish to see it. This document will outline our approach to informed consent, data security, the right to withdraw, and minimisation of burden to practitioners and young people. The REAG will provide guidance, advice and recommendation to YEF and to us, the research team, rather than a formal 'approval' process.