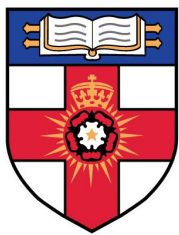


# Development of a Virtual Peer Mentorship Scheme for Public Health MSc Students Undertaking a Research Project via Distance Learning



**UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON**

**CENTRE FOR  
DISTANCE EDUCATION**  
Research and innovation in flexible and distance teaching and learning

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Interim summary report February 2020

LSHTM distance learning (DL) programmes are run in collaboration with University of London Worldwide (UoLW). The optional Project Module for Public Health MSc students by distance learning (PHDL) is managed by Project Module Organisers (PMOs). The Project Module is often the first time PHDL students undertake research, commonly with limited local or peer support. In response, PMOs developed and launched an alumni-peer mentorship scheme in July 2018, funded initially by a Teaching and Research Award from CDE of UoLW. Alumni had not previously been engaged in supporting students in any DL module.

The aim of this project was to develop an alumni-peer mentorship scheme for students undertaking a research project on PHDL, to enhance their learning experience.

The methods/process steps and outcomes were as follows.

1. Development and implementation:
  - a. Mentors were recruited from the alumni who successfully completed the Project Module in 2016-17, and trained via a one hour Collaborate session, with ongoing support provided by PMOs afterwards.
  - b. A series of seven videos, combining responses from eight mentors to questions from PMOs, was produced and released to students via Moodle in July 2018. Questions included how they felt undertaking their project, most valuable skill developed, helpful resources, what they would do differently, challenges and solutions, and local/career impact.
  - c. Seven mentors interacted, via Moodle discussion forums and/or live Collaborate sessions, with a cohort of 73 students 2018-19.
2. Evaluation of the scheme has been through verbal and written feedback from ten mentees and seven mentors received via email and Collaborate at various times throughout 2018-19, alongside quantitative data obtained from a broader student satisfaction survey and on Moodle/Collaborate engagement. Student partners undertook independent inductive thematic analysis of the various qualitative datasets prior to discussions between them and with PMOs to determine a combined set of emerging themes. █
3. Training resources for mentors have been produced and are available as transferable outputs for use/adaptation elsewhere in UoLW. These resources and lessons learnt were discussed during a RIDE conference workshop in March 2019, and a follow-on BLE webinar in June 2019 (with resources available here: <https://www.ble.ac.uk/events.html>).

Our analysis found that students saw mentors as adding value by sharing their diverse first-hand experiences, going beyond what PMOs and supervisors offer. The impact of the scheme is evidenced through increased student engagement, and high levels of reported satisfaction and positive feedback, with both mentees and mentors describing how the scheme helped build their confidence. A PMO-supported group model of alumni-peer mentorship was concluded to be sustainable and transferable. To implement this conclusion the scheme has been sustained (in that a third cohort of mentors have been recruited) and transferred (in that it has been successfully continued by a new set of PMOs 2019-20). In addition, the scheme is being transferred to the Project Module on the DL Infectious Diseases MSc.