

# WIDENING PARTICIPATION AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY



*Meet the students - a shadowing scheme encouraging teenagers to apply to Cambridge University*

## OVERVIEW

Safeguarding the personal details of pupils that are under 18, who are in contact with students over 18, was of paramount importance to Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) when implementing their Shadowing Scheme.

Finding a system that would enable these two groups to communicate safely was therefore a key factor for CUSU. sfG MentorNet enables students and pupils from all different types of backgrounds and age groups to communicate securely, which in turn helps CUSU's Shadowing Scheme to widen participation to the university.

CUSU run weekend shadowing schemes, where pupils currently not at the university can pair up with a mentor who is already at the university. They come and live at Cambridge for a weekend, getting a taste of what life at university is like. The pupils usually leave with a far more positive view than they had before their visit. This helps in widening participation in a university they might not have previously considered. They are then able to continue messaging their mentor securely via the MentorNet platform, throughout their remaining time in the 6th form.

## SOLUTION OVERVIEW

- Online mentoring solution, MentorNet

## CHALLENGES

- Safeguarding children and restricting contact information sharing with over 18s
- Keeping personal data safe and secure
- Moderating messages for swearing and personal data sharing

## BENEFITS

- Maximum safety measures are in place to protect under 18s
- CUSU knows they are running a safe scheme
- Helps widens applications to the university from ethnic minority or poorer backgrounds
- Can message someone throughout 6th form with questions

## MENTORNET BENEFITS

- Ensures Secure Communication
- Alerts to Keywords in Messages
- Reduces Administration
- Ensures Regulatory Compliance
- Encourages Networking & Peer Learning
- Increases Ownership of the Mentoring Process
- Allows Advanced Reporting & Analysis

## CHALLENGES

Christy McMorrow, Representation Campaigns Coordinator at CUSU and the project lead for the shadowing scheme said: "Ensuring the safety of 6th former under 18 year olds who are in contact with students that are over 18 and making sure that no personal data is transferred between them is a key challenge and objective for CUSU."

The university wanted to encourage wider participation and to enable pupils to shadow a current student. Messaging between student and pupil needed to be non-intrusive, whilst at the same time making CUSU aware of any behaviour and communications that might put the pupils at risk.

The use of crude words, or implications that they might share their personal information in email or social media and thus communicate outside of the platform, needed to be monitored.

The university also needed to know that communications were taking place regularly between student and pupil, and to be able to communicate key information to all participants in one place. Ensuring pupils can continue safe and secure communication throughout the 6th form was a priority, so they have someone they can ask questions about applications, student life and more.

*"It is a great long-term opportunity for students from different backgrounds to see what they like and don't about the university and to talk to people to understand what it is like."*

*Christy McMorrow, Cambridge University Students Union*



CUSU Access & Funding Officer  
Olivia Hylton-Pennant hosting an intro talk

## ENSURING SECURE COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH MENTORNET

CUSU's Shadowing Scheme has been using the online mentoring platform, sfG MentorNet, since 2015. This provides secure, on-going communication between pupils and students –

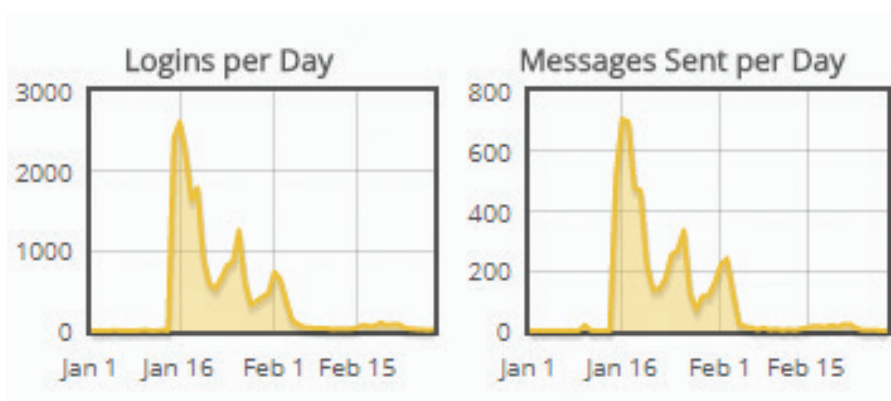
and enables administrators of the programme to pair up mentors and pupils, track progress and communicate with them about key activities taking place.



Through the MentorNet platform, pupils and students are matched and can start communicating with one another. Pupils can get to know the person they will be shadowing, so that when they arrive at the university, they know who they are meeting. They come for a shadowing weekend at the university, where they continue to use the platform, as well as continuing to use it throughout the rest of their 6th form.

All of this is done without the two people sharing email addresses, phone numbers, or being friends on social media, so their identity is protected.

For those administering the scheme and to further ensure safety, alerts are set up on keywords which might indicate if someone is planning to communicate outside of the platform. Words such as 'number', 'Facebook', 'snapchat' and references to alcohol and drugs – if appearing in a communication – will send an alert to the moderator, so that they can intervene and remind the pupils and student not to share such information.



MentorNet Interactions - Daily activity for 01/01/2018 - 28/02/2018

## WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND ON-GOING SUPPORT FROM SFG

CUSU is continuing to run the scheme and receives feedback from pupils that the university is better than they expected. Reports and statistics can be made readily available to those that are involved in university funding.

CUSU intends to continue to use sfG MentorNet to run the scheme, as it provides the security that is necessary for the safeguarding of personal data and secure communication, and the service levels required.

"The support we get from sfG MentorNet is one of the key reasons we continue to work with them," said McMorrow. "We have always found them very helpful, always willing to answer questions quickly, and sort things out. All of that customer service is incredibly useful where none of us are experts in this technology."



*"The support we get from sfG MentorNet is one of the key reasons we continue to work with them. We have always found them very helpful, always willing to answer questions quickly, and sort things out. All of that customer service is incredibly useful where none of us are experts in this technology."*

*Christy McMorrow,  
Cambridge University  
Students Union*

*"Ensuring the safety of 6th former under 18 year olds who are in contact with students that are over 18 and making sure that no personal data is transferred between them is a key challenge and objective for CUSU."*

To find out more about how sfG Software's MentorNet can streamline your mentoring process, phone us on **01463 630200** or email **info@sfgmentornet.com**



sfG Software Ltd. The Green House, Beechwood Business Park, Inverness IV2 3BL  
t: **01463 630200** e: [info@sfgmentornet.com](mailto:info@sfgmentornet.com) [www.sfgmentornet.com](http://www.sfgmentornet.com)

Registered in Scotland No. SC369985 Registered Office: 36 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR UK