# sfG MentorNet
### Supported Mentoring Software

## Brunel University London

# INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WHILST MINIMISING ADMIN



## OVERVIEW

Brunel University London provides a series of high-quality programmes and activities that enhance the opportunities of students as part of their widening access scheme – focused on those groups that are under-represented in higher education. Amongst those activities is the Brunel Professional Mentoring Programme, which seeks to match 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate students with a professional in a sector they aspire to work in or find out more about.

Brunel's original face-to-face mentoring programme started in 2003 and has expanded to include e-mentoring as well. In order to enable the latter, they decided to look at an online mentoring system, which could be used to support both types. Having come up with a chart of their vendor shortlist and requirements, the team at Brunel University London picked sfG MentorNet as the best in terms of product, service and price.

### SOLUTION OVERVIEW
- Online and offline widening access scheme at Brunel University London

### CHALLENGES
- Spreadsheets and relying on different software made the program challenging
- Needed an online solution to support additional e-mentoring scheme and help streamline many of the routine administrative tasks
- Wanted to grow the scheme, but unable to with previous process

### BENEFITS
- Frees up time to offer quality events and activities that meet the needs of the scheme's target students, in addition to the mentoring programme
- Improves the quality of communication and matching between mentors and mentees
- One central location for all materials, all contact information and reports for the scheme, which are vital for evaluation

### MENTORNET BENEFITS
- A flexible, responsive and knowledgeable team that provide a tailored service
- Easy to use and administer the scheme
- Extensive reporting that gives invaluable insights

## AN ONLINE MENTORING SYSTEM TO HELP GROW THE MENTORING SCHEME

Prior to using sfG MentorNet as their online mentoring system, Bertie Ross, Mentoring Co-ordinator at Brunel University London, explains, "We used slate and chalk! We had a series of spreadsheets, forms like survey monkey and different types of software to help manage it. And lots of paper and folders."

It was hard to get one view of things, have one place for all information. Additionally, it was logistically challenging keeping the programme running together. Matching mentors and mentees, tracking progress, producing evaluation data. It was very time consuming and worked when the scheme had a smaller number of mentors and mentees on board. "But in order to grow," Bertie continues, "We needed a system that

would address the paper and spreadsheet challenges. We created a comparison chart of online mentoring platforms and compared the features and facilities and costs. That concluded in us deciding on sfG MentorNet. We could see the product was very flexible for different types of schemes. Additionally, I visited the sfG team, who were so knowledgeable about mentoring and its challenges.

I heard how sfG had set up sfG MentorNet to help a local charity and expanded from there, which showed that this was a company that cared about helping. Their flexibility and responsiveness continues to this day and is important to us. We also spoke to other customers, who reinforced our decision."

*"We knew by working with a smaller company, rather than a larger corporate, that we would have a better experience than just being a small cog in a big wheel. And that has proved to be the case. I sometimes wonder if there is a camp bed in the sfG office, as the responsiveness is so good!"*

*Bertie Ross, Mentoring Co-ordinator at Brunel University London*



## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND EASING ADMINISTRATION

Christel Thames, Careers Consultant and e-Mentoring Co-ordinator at Brunel University London said, "One of the biggest gains was to be able to send messages out to the students easily. We wanted to be able to use sfG MentorNet to communicate with just some of the students sometimes. This saved time and was easy, so we now message far more frequently, which hopefully is better for students."

Jenny Manzi, Brunel Summer Internship and Mentoring Assistant, who is involved in a lot of the day-to-day running of the scheme adds, "Looking for mentors and mentee details is so much easier. I have sfG MentorNet open all the time and just search and find all information I need, such as phone numbers – it's all there.

Whereas with a spreadsheet, you have to look for the row and drill down and that takes time."

Communication is improved through sfG MentorNet. The matching process is enhanced as you can get better matches, thereby increasing the relevance for mentees. Christel mentions, "We match people initially with their mentor, but after that they can do it themselves and can pick a second mentor for e-mentoring. They can do it themselves and don't have to come back to us. Additionally, if a mentor changes job and wants to update their profile, they can do it themselves, rather than contacting us to do it for them. It saves our time, but also enables them to change it instantly and according to their preferred wording."

## FREEING UP TIME FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES

The main mentoring programme is a springboard for the other activities. These include 5-day mini internships, mock panel interviews, a mock assessment centre, insight days, events and more. They now have more time to address those events and spend less time on the administration of matching mentors and mentees. "sfG MentorNet frees up our time to focus on the other activities, such as piloting mentoring support for first year students on the summer internship programme, which wouldn't be possible without it – and which provided candidates for the main programme," stresses Bertie. "Whereas there were piles of paper around for events, matching and more, now it's all organised and easier to run. One mistake or change in a spreadsheet cascaded into others previously. And now instead of only running the mentoring scheme from November until May, it runs 365 days a year because of sfG MentorNet. We couldn't have done that before."

"Freeing up time to do other things", re-enforces Bertie, "Is what our programmes are all about. A lot of universities run mentoring programmes. We are committed to running other events and enhancing student engagement and development - and those take a lot of organising. sfG MentorNet frees up our time to ensure we can run those other events and activities."

## ON-GOING AND FUTURE PLANS FOR GROWTH WITH QUALITY

The team want to continue to maintain quality as they grow, to ensure good mentoring outcomes. Already since last year there is a big difference. "We didn't chase enough, so were down on quality. This year, in the time we are using sfG MentorNet," Jenny highlights, "We ran training and did a quiz before we authorised pairings and that made a difference in making sure matches were good." The team created podcasts and training, which was compulsory and stored in one place within sfG MentorNet. Without it, these resources would have had to be uploaded to other websites to enable access and it would have been much harder.

The programme continues to track engagement – being able to see who has reached out and who hasn't makes it easier to focus on and following up with only those pairs who have not made contact, rather than contacting everyone. Without this facility in the system it would appear all was going well. Everything is now there on one page and helps in terms of chasing and improving the quality of the programme overall.

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**

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## WORKING WITH THE TEAM AT sfG

One of the big reasons Bertie cited as choosing sfG MentorNet was the knowledge, service focus and attitude of the company. Responsiveness is quick. "There is flexibility and they listen to our feedback," said Bertie. "We knew by working with a smaller company, rather than a larger corporate, that we would have a better experience than just being a small cog in a big wheel. And that has proved to be the case. I sometimes wonder if there is a camp bed in the sfG office, as the responsiveness is so good!"

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