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# Peer mentoring in Higher Education: a review of the current literature and recommendations for implementation of mentoring schemes

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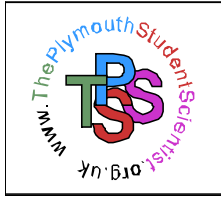
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# **Peer mentoring in Higher Education: a review of the current literature and recommendations for implementation of mentoring schemes**

Poppy A. Husband

&

Pamela A. Jacobs

*School of Psychology, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA*

This work was collaboration between a final year student and a member of academic staff. The report forms part of a research study funded by the University of Plymouth into improving the experiences of direct entry students to the Faculty of Science.

## Contents

Introduction.....	230
Definitions.....	230
Review of Literature.....	230
Theoretical knowledge behind mentoring.....	231
Misconceptions of mentoring.....	231
Advantages of Mentoring Schemes.....	232
Typical problems of Mentoring Schemes.....	233
Benefits to the University.....	233
Characteristics and Responsibilities of mentors.....	234
What has worked in mentoring? .....	235
Why has mentoring not worked in the past? .....	236
Technological change.....	236
Recommendations for implementing Mentoring.....	236
Recruiting Mentors.....	236
Training.....	237
Telementoring.....	237
Making the mentoring scheme work.....	237
References.....	238
Appendices.....	240
Case Study University of Sunderland, UK.....	240
Case Study Aston University, UK.....	240

## *Introduction*

This paper aims to present an overview of how mentoring schemes could be applied to a University setting to assist with the transfer of direct entry students (those who join degree programmes in years 2 or 3) onto current courses. Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh and Wilss (2008) highlight that money is invested into attracting students to study at Universities; however little is invested into retaining students. Direct entry students in particular can suffer from problems related to transition to a University setting. These may include 'feelings of isolation and uncertainty' (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004). The application of a mentoring scheme could help reduce the problems which new and direct students may encounter. However, the concept of the student-mentor relationship is complex (Wilkes, 2006) and schemes need to be constructed with knowledge of current research and careful planning. Few University based mentoring schemes have published critical evaluations of their programmes, however research in other types of organisations and settings can provide insight into how such schemes could be applied to a University setting. It is important to have guidelines for those who wish to adopt such schemes. If the mentoring scheme is carried out inappropriately, it may have damaging effects on both the mentee and mentor (Tabbron, Macaulay & Cook, 1997).

## *Definitions*

The term mentoring appears to be applied to a number of different types of scheme, Griffin, 1995; Hill and Reddy, 2007 suggest most involve 'helping people to focus on their; challenges, choices, consequences, creative solutions and conclusions. Typically, schemes are a 'two-way or reciprocal process' (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004). According to Parsloe and Wray (2000) the general goal of a mentor is orientated towards an exchange of wisdom, support, learning, or guidance for the purpose of personal, spiritual, career or life growth. Treston and Cook (1999) define mentoring as the "relationship in which the mentor provides support, advice, feedback and guidance" to the mentees based on the traditional mentoring model of the 'apprentice learning from a master. In a HE setting students would act as mentors and would aid direct entry students to adapt to a new study environment, course related problems and general studying issues or concerns. Glaser, Hall and Halperin (2006) suggest that a key factor in a successful transition to University is the social networks that students establish. Therefore an important factor of mentoring scheme is to assist the new students with making social connections with other new students. Advances in technology have provided an alternative to face to face mentoring; telementoring (Wood, 1999). Here the mentoring relationship is conducted remotely via telecommunications; such as e-mails or with online volunteers.

## *Review of Literature*

There have been a number of recent case studies that have evaluated mentoring schemes currently running in Universities (Griffin, 1995; Glaser, Hall and Halperin, 2006; Hill and Reddy, 2007). Glaser, Hall and Halperin (2006) carried out a study into peer mentoring and the experiences of first year University students. They found that new students who made the most use of the scheme tended to find it most beneficial. In addition, students who used the scheme reported higher levels of success in making the transition to University, were more likely to identify with the University

community and found the program helpful in a number of aspects of adjustment to university life. Furthermore, many students volunteered to be a peer mentor which suggests that students are interested and concerned with the welfare of new students. However, Glaser et al (2006) propose that future research needs to address the systemic impact of mentoring programs. In addition, Ashwin (2002) reported the outcomes of a peer support scheme showing that attendance at peer support sessions was positively correlated to academic performance.

In 1991, Jacobi reviewed the literature examining the relationship between mentoring and undergraduate academic success and concluded that contact with academic staff was linked to academic successes, suggesting that staff/ student relationships positively influence retention and achievement.

### *Theoretical knowledge behind mentoring*

There are a number of different approaches to mentoring:

1. Competence-based approach which focuses on a set of skills or competencies' which provide a detailed framework and checklist of activities associated with mentoring (Gibb, 1994).
2. A Typology approach that focuses on the variety in the role that the mentor carries out.
3. Murray and Owen (1991) highlight factors which determine whether an organisation can sustain a successful mentoring scheme. These include; voluntary participation, cross-functional pairing (mentor candidates across different domains), flexible duration, no-fault conclusion (if the student-mentor relationship does not jell), creation and communication of policies, procedures and a promotional campaign.
4. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) suggest that mentoring involves an integrated approach flexibly combining four development approaches: coaching, counselling, networking / facilitation, and guardianship. These incorporate both an intellectual and emotional need of the mentee.  
The mentoring relationship has positive characteristics; it induces purposeful change and maximizes the return on the investment in learning. It also shows how learning can be uniting and mutually beneficial processes and it customizes the learning experience fully to the mentee therefore producing more beneficial results.

### *Misconceptions of mentoring*

As mentoring has developed there has been a growing false impression of the aims and outcomes of mentoring. In addition, there has been confusion about what characteristics a mentor should possess. A major issue appears to be controlling individual expectations of both the mentee and mentor during the mentoring process.

- Gibb (1994) believes mentors do not need to be all-wise and wonderfully patient individuals; however negotiation between the mentor and the mentee appears to be a central attribute of a successful scheme. .
- Mentors do not need to be older than the mentee (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2004). Younger mentors may not have as much scope of life experience, but they may be more competent at other skills. For example, new technology is

an area where younger people may have more skills and the University has extensive use of technology so younger student mentors may actually benefit the older students mentees.

- Mentors need not be teachers (Parsloe and Wray, 2000). Although there is a tendency for mentors to try and teach, this should be discouraged. Mentors should only provide assistance for mentees to make their own decisions from the information available to them, not dictate to them what they should do.
- Mentor-mentee expectations are not the same for everyone (Murray and Owen, 1991). Each individual will have certain expectations of the mentee-mentor relationship, a successful mentor assesses where a mentee is, not where the mentee should be.
- Mentoring is not a complicated business (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2004). The most complicated aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship is how to get out of an unsuccessful one. However it is important that attempts are first made to try and improve and retain the relationship which has been created.

### *Advantages of Mentoring Schemes*

Mentoring brings many advantages, in that schemes elicit in a variety of practical outcomes for the mentee, mentor and organisation. The main advantages of the mentoring scheme are to help students explore their strengths and weaknesses in a confidential environment, always being able to find a source of help, reduced amount of attrition, and for the mentors, building their experiences and satisfaction of helping other students. Research studies have highlighted the following advantages:

- Tabbron et al. (1997) found that an important advantage of mentoring is the structure it gives to explore strengths and weaknesses in a confidential atmosphere. His survey of students who had taken part in mentoring schemes found that mentees often saw the mentors as a 'mirror' or role model.
- Student mentors take responsibility for and contributing to a supportive environment for all pupils (Baginsky, 2004).
- It provides social and developmental support to mentees (Jacobi, 1991).
- Rewards for mentors include raised self esteem, social insight and development of interpersonal skills (Hall, 2003).
- Glaser, Hall and Halperin (2006) found that helpful mentors were rated highly on accessing university services and understanding university requirements. Furthermore, mentors were asked what the benefits they were having from participating in the scheme and these were improved communication skills and improved organizational skills.
- Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) state that advantages for mentees include; competence (identifying development needs, action planning and problem solving), goal setting, motivation and satisfaction, networking opportunities, personal change and time-effectiveness. Advantages for the mentor include value, satisfaction, learning experience, credit and own reflection.
- Reduces attrition rates and stress through informal supportive relationships and promotes positive educational behaviours (Hill and Reddy, 2007).

## *Typical problems of Mentoring Schemes*

Although mentoring schemes are effective they can also be problematic. However, these can often be reduced or eliminated by making sure there are specific procedure in place and adapting the scheme to the setting as it progresses. The main drawbacks for the mentor are; the cost of time given to the scheme, misunderstood expectations and objectives, stress; including lack of sufficient skills. However, many of these problems can be reduced by extensive training for mentors and a thoroughly thought out scheme. Research has highlighted some specific issues:

- Expectations and objectives may not be clearly understood by the mentee and mentor. The care elicited by the mentor should reflect natural relationships within the culture of the organisation. This means that the mentor should not force themselves on the mentee (Tabbron et al, 1997).
- The stress mentoring causes for mentors. This may be problematic second and third year students (Earnshaw, 1995). However, Treston (1999) points out that final year mentors actually had a need for “unstructured extracurricular activity as a break from their studies”.
- Mentoring costs (Gibb, 1994).
- Jucovy (2000) found frequent problems with mentoring include conflicting messages from staff, lack of consistency in meeting mentees, absenteeism of the student, and frustration of mentor by lack of impact on mentee.
- Concerns for mentors include; pressure to take on the mentoring role, lack of requisite skills, not taking the coaching and feedback role seriously, no perceived reward, benefit or payoff, possessiveness of mentee (Murray & Owen, 1991).
- Glaser, Hall & Halperin (2006) main reasons for non-attendance to mentoring schemes was that there was adequate support elsewhere, a timetable clash and program was initially helpful.
- Organising the first meeting of mentoring (Hill and Reddy, 2007), lack of time and personality mismatches (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004).

## *Benefits to the University*

Key benefits to the university include portraying a high-quality level of support, reducing exclusion and attrition, enhancing services for the students; promoting self learning and increasing academic success.

- Mentoring supports a positive and caring atmosphere in a University; it can contribute to the reduction of social exclusion which is especially important for direct entry students. It may increase the confidence of students who are unhappy at the University. It allows problems to be addressed early and impresses individuals evaluating the university (Baginsky, 2004).
- Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) suggest that mentoring encourages continuous self-managed learning and is often faster and frequently more cost-efficient than services offered by academic staff.
- Mentoring promotes organizational effectiveness, performance, motivation and satisfaction of students, organizational change (reinforces desirable behaviours and mindsets), retention, strategic succession planning (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2004).

- It may reduce dropout rate by giving students additional support (Treston, 1999).
- Student Mentors gain the satisfaction of knowing that they have the ability and power to make a positive difference for new students (Treston, 1999).
- It helps to improve improved grades, attendance and behaviour (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004).

### *Characteristics and Responsibilities of mentors*

There are certain characteristics that are important for mentors to possess in order for mentoring to be successful. Responsibilities of all parties also need to be addressed to ensure the smooth running of the scheme. Mentors should be able to provide social support (emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental) and have self awareness, commitment, flexibility, patience, self- confidence.

- Darling (1984, as cited in Andrews & Chilton, 2000) list three main functions of a mentor; an inspirer, investor and supporter.
- Personal qualities of the mentors is often more important than their placing in the organisation (Earnshaw, 1995).
- House (1981, as cited in Jacobi, 1991) four broad categories for social support which is important in mentoring; Emotional support (trust, esteem), Appraisal support (feedback, social comparison), Informational support (advice, suggestion) and Instrumental support (money, time and modifying environment).
- Griffin (1995) four stages in successful mentoring experience; foundation (understanding the rules and expectations), building trust, establishing trust and reflecting on experience.
- Megginson (2000) found that it is important for mentors to have emotional intelligence as this means they can use their past experiences to aid mentees.
- Murray and Owen (1991) key elements that mentors need are strong interpersonal skills, knowledge of the organization, exemplary supervisory skills (for example, planning and appraising performance), technical competence, willingness to be responsible for someone else's growth and the ability to share credit.
- Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) research suggest that mentors need skills and abilities that include; self-awareness, commitment, goal clarity and flexibility. Their attributes should include patience, self-confidence and encouragement. They should also have an interest in helping to develop others.
- Hill and Reddy (2007) highlight topics which were discussed in the undergraduate peer mentoring scheme were practical help and advice, for example, with the library, submitting work, time management and buying second-hand books. Students also discussed their career plans and the optional placement year in psychology related to placement.
- Issues that disrupted the mentoring relationship included if the mentee had unrealistic expectations or a lack of commitment (Enrich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004).

In summary, there are certain characteristics that appear to be important for mentors to possess in order for mentoring to be successful and responsibilities need to be



addressed to ensure the smooth running of the scheme. Mentors should be able to provide social support (emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental) and have self awareness, commitment, flexibility, patience, self- confidence.

### *What has worked in mentoring?*

The research suggest that key reasons for success in mentoring schemes are; monitoring of the program implementation, screening of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, preliminary training and on-going training, support for mentors, clear expectations of mentors and mentees, clear communications and set objectives by organisers.

- A meta- analytic study of 55 evaluations of mentoring schemes carried out in the USA showed significant effect on problem or high risk behaviours, academic/ educational outcomes, career/ employment outcomes and some effect on social competence, emotional and psychological adjustment (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine and Cooper, 2002).
- Dubois et al (2002) meta-analysis supports mentoring schemes and suggests two sets of factors which are associated with increased impact of mentoring. 'Theory – based index of best practice' included; monitoring of program implementation, screening of prospective mentors, matching mentors and youth on relevant criteria, pre-match and on-going training, supervision, support for mentors, structured activities for mentors and youth and expectations for both frequency of contact and length of relationship. In addition, 'empirically – based index of best practice' included; setting of mentoring activities, monitoring of implementation, mentor background in helping role, ongoing training of mentors.
- Herrera, Slpe, McClanahan, Arbretton & Pepper (2000) investigated the relationship of matching mentors to mentees, they found nine factors which were important; engaging in social activities, engaging in academic activities, number of hours per month spent together, decision- making shared by mentor and mentee, pre-match and post-match training, mentor screening, matching and age of the mentee.
- Hall (2003) implies that few of the UK based mentoring schemes have measured the impact on both the mentor and mentee. However, many of the USA studies indicate that mentoring can have a significant impact on a number of measures, but this impact may not be large. These measures include; problem/high risk behaviours, academic/educational outcomes, career/employment outcomes, social competence, emotional and psychological adjustment.
- Tabbron et al. (1997) four key factors which make mentoring work; a clear agreed set of objectives by organisers, communications and training, matching of mentors and mentees, evaluation and review of the programme.
- Treston (1999) describes a peer mentoring scheme at James Cook University, Cairns. The study highlights the importance of the "initiatives increasingly taken by the mentors themselves to assist new students with little or no prompting from staff. Examples of this include; mentor corner in the library, workshops explaining how to write up assignments, displaying pictures of mentors in the subject area so students who missed induction can still access a mentor and the mentors producing their own brochures to advertise the scheme. In addition, 'mentors saw opportunities for increasing confidence,

communication skills, experience in working with people, revision of academic concepts and enhancing their curriculum vita'.

### *Why has mentoring not worked in the past?*

- Eby, McManus, Simon and Russell (2000) carried out 156 interviews with mentees and found that there were five main themes that negative experiences of mentoring arouse from; mismatch with dyad, distancing behaviour, manipulative behaviour (by mentor), lack of mentor expertise and general dysfunctionality of the programme.
- Grossman and Garry (1997, as cited in Hall, 2003) outlined four preventives to a successful mentoring scheme, this included; social distance (between mentor and mentee), time constraints, lack of training, recruitment and training of suitable mentors.
- Hall (2003) reports that mentoring has been ineffective due to a mismatch between the aims of a mentoring scheme and the needs of the person being mentored and a conflict of roles such that it is not clear whether the mentor is to act on behalf of the person being mentored or of the authority.

### *Technological change*

- Rosser, Young and Klonsky (2007) describe the potential of Telementoring. Telementoring enables a larger pool of volunteers to be able to mentor from a distance, it is also a cost effective method of implementing mentoring.
- Treston and Cook (1999) suggest that telementoring; using emails and videoconferencing, can be used to reduce isolation of distance learning which can lead to drop out.
- A main concern of the use of the internet is lack of security for unprotected confidential information (Wood, 1999). Another problem is the use of causal language; this raises issues of the conversations being carried out in this medium (for example, using negative words inappropriately).
- Hill and Reddy (2007) show how mentees and mentors communicated in a peer mentoring undergraduate scheme. This included mobile phone texts and email to arrange meetings.

The advancements in technology have enabled mentoring to be taken to another stage. This could be adapted to the University, for example, students use mobiles extensively and if the mentee had a quick question, this would be an ideal way of communicating quickly and effectively. It also means that mentoring can take place from a distance because one of the disadvantages of mentoring is the time cost. Furthermore, this means that mentors and mentees can communicate even before the first day of university. Meetings can then be arranged for further contact through texts and e-mails.

### *Recommendations for implementing Mentoring Schemes in the University*

- **Recruiting mentors:** Murray and Owen (1991) suggest that the way to make mentoring work include; selecting an appropriate title for the role of mentor, describing their responsibilities, advertising and making it easy to respond,

screening candidates for readiness, making a suitable match with the mentee, orientating mentors to the role and making it matter to the mentors. Mentees choosing their own mentor has real advantages (Earnshaw, 1995) such as the mentoring process being more successful.

Jucovy (2000) highlights factors involved in screening potential mentors which include; time available and dependability. It is also important to establish which students will be screened out. This includes; lack of time, history of not following through commitments, volunteering because they think it will help with their status in the university, believing they can change the students, and being a mentor so they can work out problems in their own past. Tabbron et al. (1997) states that "being mentored is the best training for becoming a mentor", which could be used in the future of the scheme to develop a continuing pool of mentors from mentees. Tierney & Branch (1992) suggest the first step for drawing attention to the program is 'circulating flyers, hanging posters, and making presentations in lectures. Furthermore, in the screening it should be fully explained to mentors the extensive commitment they are making.

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) steps to ensure you recruit the right kind of mentor includes; using mentor application/ recruitment form, when describing the mentor role try not to create unrealistic expectations and use effective advertisements such as e-mails, leaflets, intranet communications and bulletin/notice boards.

- **Training:** Jucovy (2000) suggests that training is a central feature of success, training should include information about the first year students, mentors roles and expectations, building relationships and communication skills. In addition, ongoing training should cover issues such as diversity and cultural sensitivity, skills for setting limits with their mentee, problem- solving skills, and conflict resolution.

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2004) highlight the importance of making sure every individual in the mentoring program has had sufficient training; from mentors and mentees needing skills training and briefing to administration staff requiring briefing on scheme and role.

- **Telementoring:** Students could be in communication before they even come to the university. Hill and Reddy (2007) study used mobile phone texts and e-mails to arrange the meetings and to check on the mentees general well-being and if the mentee required any information.
- **Making the mentoring scheme work.** In summary, it is important to be clear about what is required from the scheme. The scheme should satisfy student needs and should be evaluated and reviewed to enable improvements and measure effectiveness (Tabbron et al., 1997).

A number of important factors need to be taken into account when implementing a mentoring scheme into an organisation for the first time. With regards to recruiting mentors the main important points are providing an appropriate title for the mentor, advertising and screening, finding a suitable match (mentor and mentee) and making sure the mentor has the required characteristics. Within training of mentors aspects that should be covered include; information about the student mentee, roles, responsibilities and mentoring skills (for example; communication, problem solving and conflict resolution).

Ways of implementing telementoring would have to be established as this method has not yet been used extensively in a university setting. Although texts and e-mails have been used previously to make contact and establish time and place for meeting.

Ways of improving the mentoring scheme long term would be to make sure feedback was obtained from each year to find out what the strengths and weaknesses are. This means that the weaknesses can be addressed and improved and the strengths continued.

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## Appendix 1 Case Study – University of Sunderland, UK

Griffin (1995) carried out a mentorship scheme in the degree programme at University of Sunderland. The scheme aimed to integrate level two students from colleges onto the degree programme. The mentors were required to keep diaries which were then analysed; mentors were 'responsible for three to four mentees'. The findings showed that four main groups were established which 'were labelled foundation, building, organisation and reflection'.

- Within the foundation stage the mentors got to know their mentees such as 'arranging suitable meeting places and establishing ground rules'.
- This was followed by the second stage called building, within this stage mentors and mentees established trust (comment from student; "I feel the mentees talk to me about their family and responsibilities in a way they would not to a member of staff"), balanced work and other commitments.
- The relationship between mentee and mentor were then observed to develop 'their own organisation' (comment from a student; "We all met in the library to work on the CD ROM. Everyone agreed it was one of the most useful meetings we had had").
- In the final stage there is a reflection on how individuals felt the experience of the mentoring scheme had gone "I believe every one of us has gained something from mentoring, another wrote, I definitely feel I have gained from the experience".
- The findings also showed that the aspects mentees found beneficial about the mentoring scheme were 'talking to someone who understood the problems they were facing. The mentor was able to help them find their way round the University systems for example the library'. Another important point was that mentees 'felt knowing a third level student helped with motivation and information about the programme'. The negative points expressed by the mentees included the difficulty to organise the meetings and they 'would have liked the meetings to continue for the whole of the academic year, not just the first semester'.
- Mentors also referred mentees to other sources of information if they felt it was required, this shows mentoring as 'important link between students and sources of help'.
- Overall, the mentoring scheme used at University of Sunderland 'played an important part as one of the ways in which students can be assisted during their degree programme'.

## Appendix 2 Case Study – Aston University, UK

Hill and Reddy (2007) investigated the 'process, activities and outcomes' of a pilot scheme of undergraduate peer mentoring at Aston University. The reason put forward for the scheme being used in the university is to reduce first year attrition. It will also 'be a means of transmitting the values and ethics' of the university.

- Mentoring was advertised in the form of leaflets to first year students during their induction in Fresher's week,
- Mentors were recruited via emails in the first week of the academic term.
- There were two main expectations that mentoring held, this included 'belief in the value of student support' and 'personal and academic development'.

- Reasons for students volunteering to mentor were the belief that it is important to have the support of another student that has already been through the system.
- Benefits to mentors included 'opportunities for increasing confidence, communication skills, experience in working with people, revision of academic concepts, and enhancing their curriculum vita'. Final year students found the distraction of mentoring helpful as a break from their studies.
- Telecommunications (mobile phone text and e-mails) were used to arrange meetings or check on the mentees well-being. Tele communications also enabled mentees to ask for particular information.
- One of the problems with the mentoring scheme was the issue of making the first contact; this was often due to timetable clashes.
- After the first meeting, most students communicated via mobile phone (usually text messaging) or email, and in some cases did not find it necessary to meet on a face-to-face basis again.
- Topics that were discussed during mentoring included 'practical help and advice, for example, with the library, submitting work, time management and buying second hand books'. Furthermore, career plans and the option of a placement year were discussed and help was given with exam preparation and general academic advice. Specifically advice was given about past papers, reading and coursework assignments.
- All of the mentees apart from one found mentoring a positive experience. 'Apart from valuing the practical and academic advice a theme of reassurance emerged'.
- The experiences of mentoring matched the mentor's expectations of the scheme. Although many felt a 'sense of lack of fulfilment amongst the mentors in that they expected and wanted more contact with their mentees'.
- Mentors were also able to use the mentoring scheme to reflect on their own progression academically and what they had learnt in the course.
- Another benefit of the mentoring scheme is that it encouraged students to concentrate more on their work by reflecting on how much mentors are doing in progressive years.

This case study shows a mentoring scheme that has been extremely successful within a university setting. Through audiotape recordings results from both mentors and mentees show that mentoring was a valuable experience. The first contact between mentor and mentee was shown to be problematic so when designing the mentoring scheme this should be taken into account and researched further.