



Teacher FAQs

How are the mentees safeguarded?

We use the Brightside mentoring platform to ensure safeguarding during this process. This is a purely text-based system where all messages are passed through an automatic filter system; if any concerning language, external documents, websites or special characters (e.g., “@” potentially indicating an email address) are detected, these “stop” words or phrases are flagged and the message is held in a moderation queue. A Brightside coordinator will then manually check the message and wider context. If needed, they will ask the sender to amend their message before it is re-checked and sent on.

The mentors are all STEM Ambassadors who are DBS or PVG checked and do training prior to being a mentor. There is no exchange of email addresses or personal contact information, and mentees and mentors are not allowed to meet in person – all mentoring is done via the platform. User accounts are archived after the duration of the mentoring project.

How do students sign up and access the platform?

The students sign up [via a Google Form](#) which asks for their personal email because they may wish for notifications to go to their personal inbox should they be wanting to communicate in their own time rather than during school hours. If teachers plan to give time at school for the mentoring, students can use their school email address but all notifications, such as reminders and announcements about messages from their mentor, will be sent to their school email address.

After signing up, they will then receive an invitation to create a profile on the secure platform before choosing their mentor. Part of creating their profile will be to input a mobile number. This is purely for administration purposes in case there are problems with their email address or in case they want to use text instead of email. This mobile number will not be shared with their mentor. If you prefer them to use a school contact phone number that is fine.

Students can either message by logging into the platform via a browser or they can download the associated app if they would rather access the platform via their phone. The URL for mentees to use once they have created their account is <https://stemambassadors.mentoring.org.uk/sign-in>.

How does the mentoring work?

The Brightside system isn't 'live' in that the Ambassador and young person do not need to be online at the same time. It is more similar to emails or texts being sent back and forth between them but without either user seeing the email address or phone number of the other. The sharing of contact details is strictly prohibited and any attempt to do so is filtered out during the moderation process.

Is this programme totally free?

The scheme is completely free for everyone involved. The STEM Ambassador programme is funded by UKRI to be free for schools.

How many students from my school can sign up?

As many students as you want can sign up – we are able to accommodate large numbers of students. The timetable for the cohorts is:

Years 10/11 or S3/S4

Cohort 2: 25 Jan – 18 Mar

Years 12/13 or S5/S6

Cohort 3: 24 Jan – 1 Apr

Cohort 4: 4 Apr – 10 Jun

How long is the mentoring for?

The mentoring period is for 8 weeks for years 10 and 11 and 10 weeks for years 12 and 13. At the end of this time the users accounts are archived and communication is no longer possible.

How long are the sessions, are they done after school e.g., from 4pm or over the holidays or during the normal school day? Are they one off sessions or over a few weeks?

The mentoring is not designed as individual sessions where the STEM Ambassador and student are online at the same time. It is instead a text-based messaging platform, and we encourage messages to be sent by either party at any time throughout the duration of the mentoring period. Mentees should aim to send a least one message a week to their mentor.

Embedding the mentoring into the curriculum/ class time is optional but encouraged, i.e., dedicated time and access to a computer within PHSE or enrichment lessons to allow mentees not only to send/respond to messages but also access the online resource “BrightKnowledge”. This dedicated time, however, does not need to be the only time when students send a message.

What is the nature of the support and the conversation with the students?

The discussion can take any path the student chooses. We are encouraging the year 10 & 11s to discuss career insights e.g., different types of STEM roles and years 12 and 13 to discuss life after school e.g., different post school qualifications or work options.

For every cohort, the mentees will receive a mentoring guide with discussion ideas from Brightside. Brightside staff will also send weekly prompts to mentors and mentees, giving them key topics to discuss. Each week, mentoring pairs will discuss topics tailored to help young people develop the specific knowledge and skills they need for the sector. Mentors and mentees also get full access to BrightKnowledge, Brightside’s bank of online resources covering matters such as health and wellbeing, independent living, money and housing to help prepare them for the future.

Can pupils use a school email address instead of a personal one?

Yes, however as this programme encourages students to get the most out of the programme by sending messages often it is useful for them to have access to the email address after school as well as within school hours, therefore a personal email address may work better unless the school email address is also accessible outside of school hours.

Can the mentoring be done in school hours?

The mentoring is designed so that the mentor and mentee do not have to be online at the same time. It is a messaging system rather than face to face. Time could be allocated in school hours for all pupils to do at the same time, i.e., you could dedicate time and access to a computer within PHSE or enrichment lessons to allow mentees to send/respond to messages each week, however this may be difficult if a student hasn’t had a reply from their mentor when the school time is allocated. If students only have access to the mentoring platform at certain times in the week, this should be discussed with their mentor so that they know when to expect messages and when a good time to reply is.

I'm a student. What would this involve for me? /What should students expect?

The online mentoring project gives young people the opportunity to pick their own mentor to support them to make confident and informed decisions about their future! The mentoring is text-based, and they do not need to be online at the same time as their mentor, so messages can be sent at any time by the mentee or mentor on the free Brightside app or via the Brightside platform accessed via a browser.

Before starting mentees should watch the short training video about how to use the platform and what sorts of things can be discussed with the mentor. Next, mentees choose their mentor out of a small selection as well as fill out a questionnaire before and after the mentoring. It is recommended that mentees send at least one message a week to their mentor and respond to their messages within 3 days if possible. Mentees can explore any subjects they want with their mentor around the broad topic of exploring STEM careers and possible future pathways. Mentees and mentors will be sent ideas for what to talk about by Brightside (the online platform).

Can we as a school sign up pupils?

Each student needs to sign up individually so that they have access to the system and can pick their mentor.

How much time do students spend on the mentoring?

It is up to the student how much time they spend messaging. It is encouraged for both mentees and mentors to send a couple of messages each week, but it could be more. We recommend at least one per week.

We have families with little internet access so would like to offer the facility in school and would like to know how we could support this.

If you are allocating school time to students to message, please encourage your students to tell their mentor this e.g. I'll be reading and responding to messages on Thursday afternoons.

There is the Brightside app (accessible on mobile phones and tablets) that young people can also use to access the messaging platform as well, if they have limited access to a computer.

How does the messaging software work?

The student completes a mentor matching quiz and selects one mentor from their top 5 mentor matches. Mentees and mentors then message each other based on topics they want to discuss or prompts from Brightside about suitable topics. The messaging is text based and is similar to an online messaging platform. The messages are moderated to ensure students are safeguarded, thus it is not an instant messaging platform.

Can international students sign up?

I'm afraid this programme is only open to UK students due to our funding from UKRI.