

Academic Mentoring – the Department of International Development

Jyotika Roji, Sude Işıl Baştuğ, Nelly Ziva Graf - LSE Change Makers

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Research Questions

1. How do post graduate students in the Department of International Development experience academic mentoring?
2. How can the current academic mentoring be improved?

Research Aims

1. Develop guidance materials for future students about how to get the best out of their experience, and for academic mentors.
2. Develop recommendations on how to gather evidence on student experiences of academic mentoring in the future.

Literature Review

What is academic mentoring?

- "a formalized process based on a developmental relationship between two persons in which one person is more experienced (mentor) than the other (mentee)" (Nuis et al., 2023).

What are the benefits of academic mentoring?

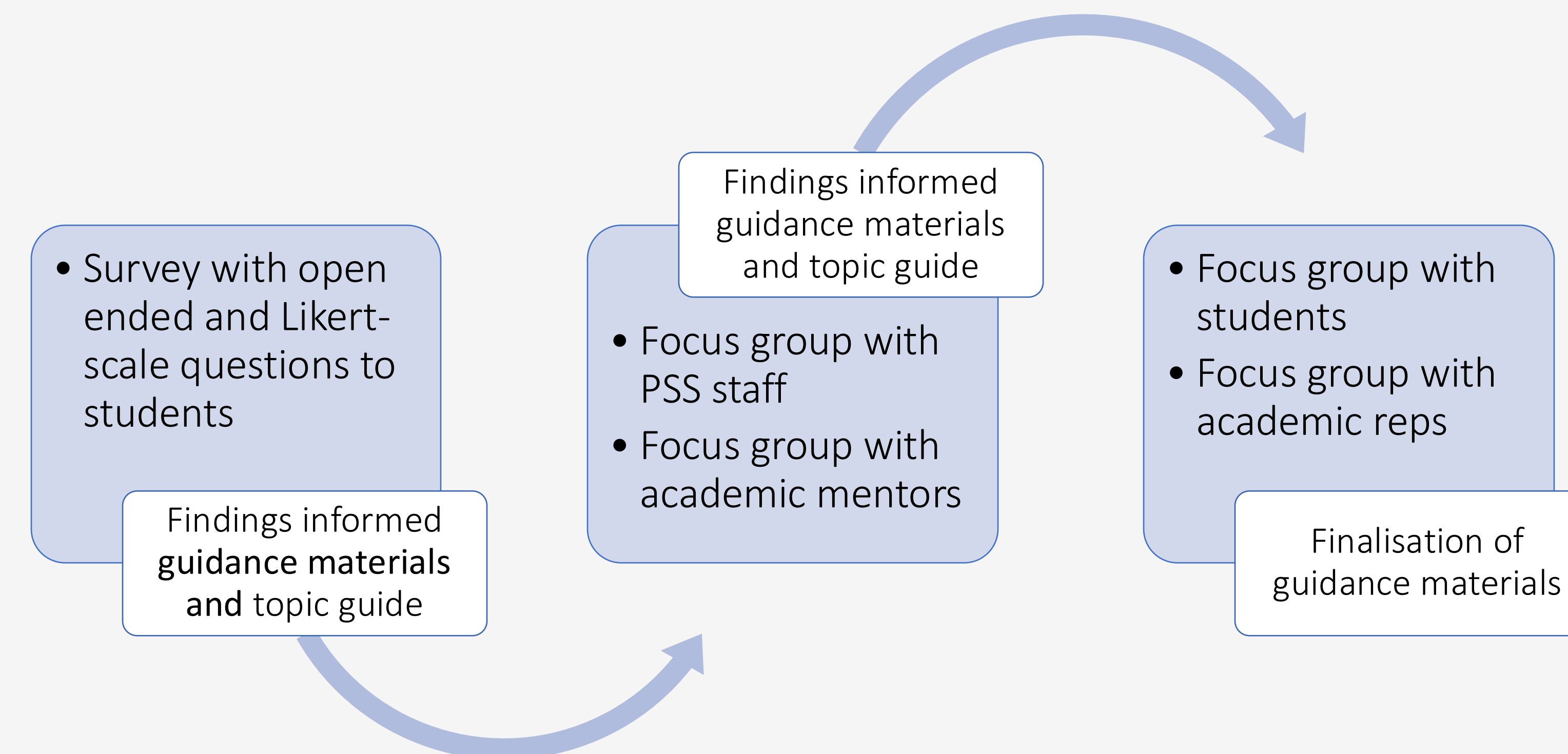
- Favorable academic, behavioral, and career outcomes, particularly in higher education contexts (Eby et al., 2008).
- Career development and professional identity formation—critical for International Development students entering diverse sectors (Greenhaus et al., 2000).
- Enhance academic integration and belonging, though success depends on program design (Gehreke et al., 2024).

Research gap: Limited research examines mentoring within specific departmental contexts.

Academic Mentoring at LSE

- Eden Centre emphasizes that "the academic mentoring relationship is one of development academically and personally" with focus on inclusive mentoring practices (Ahmet, 2020).

Mixed-Methods Approach



Findings

- There is a confusion around the role of academic mentor and their position in providing dissertation support.
- Students expect/want their academic mentors to be genuinely interested in getting to know them and provide personally tailored advice and dissertation support.
- Students wished that they had booked more office hours, prepared in advance, made use of emails and discussed their formatives with their academic mentors.
- Students reported diverse mentoring experiences and recommended the establishment of minimum standards for all academic mentors.
- There is confusion about the scope of mentoring, as many students are unsure what they can discuss in these sessions.
- Student representatives can be treated as a feedback channel, however they may feel unequipped to resolve structural issues.

"I didn't feel comfortable opening up at first as it felt a bit formal and I wasn't sure what I could talk about" - Focus group Participant A

"The expectation gap goes both ways – while some mentors and students are proactive, others wait to be approached." - Focus group Participant B

Recommendations

What works?

- Regular group meetings for students organised by the mentor, especially in the Autumn Term, preferable face-to-face.
- Conversations between Academic Representation, Student-Staff Liaison Committee and students about the confusion about the role of academic mentor.

What needs to be improved?

- Better communication from the Department side on academic mentoring – a specific induction session in Week 2 on academic mentoring.
- Clear understanding around the role of academic mentor in dissertation support. Random allocation of mentors might remove a layer of confusion.
- Academic mentors should be up to date about the changing policies around the School.

Outputs

- Guidance for academic mentors.
- Guidance for students.
- Academic mentoring experience survey to monitor and evaluate value of guidance.

References

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