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## Skills development through an Alumni and student mentoring programme: A collaborative approach

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this voluntary, extra-curricular mentoring programme is to provide guidance and support to students, as well as enhance their personal and professional skills, and further develop industry knowledge. Alumni give their time as Mentors to impart their knowledge, expertise and business experience to guide students in their transition from higher education into the working world.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is asserted (though not proven, according to Clutterbuck<sup>1</sup>), that mentoring is an efficient form of developing talent – not only, of course, by the mentee, but also by the mentor. He suggests that a good mentoring programme should help people to recognise their abilities and limitations, help them to seize opportunities and come to terms with the reality of their career potential.

The Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) Joint Mentorship Programme is a collaborative initiative by the CIT Careers Service and CIT Alumni Office. The programme focusses on enhancing the students' personal and professional skills, while also developing industry awareness. The Careers Service recruits and supports student applications from all disciplines while the Alumni Office recruits and supports industry professionals, the majority of whom are CIT graduates. Student Mentees are then connected to a Mentor via a matching process.

The programme is supported by the CIT Vice President for External Affairs, as well as academic staff members who recognise the benefits of the programme, providing testimonials for students as part of the initial application process.

## KEYWORDS

*Mentoring, professional development, career skills, employability, Role Models, student support, advice, work-ready graduates.*

## PROCESS

Participants begin the programme by attending a launch and networking opportunity in November and the programme comes to an end with a closing event in April, where Mentees present about their time on the programme and the benefits attained. Each mentor and mentee pair work together to set goals for their monthly contact. The programme operates a flexible communication approach depending on the agreement between mentee and mentor. This has included face-to-face contact, emails, skype, social media or phone calls over the years.

Mentors outline how they are willing to assist their Mentee and the kind of information or support they can offer. Companies across the Engineering, Biomedical Devices, IT, Life Sciences, Business, Humanities, Research and Not-for-Profit sectors are involved in the programme.



## ACTIVITIES

6 Month Period from Nov-Apr



Programme Launch

Introductions between mentor & Mentee



Work Shadowing Day

Facilitated by the mentor



Monthly Meetings

Mentee responsibility for organising



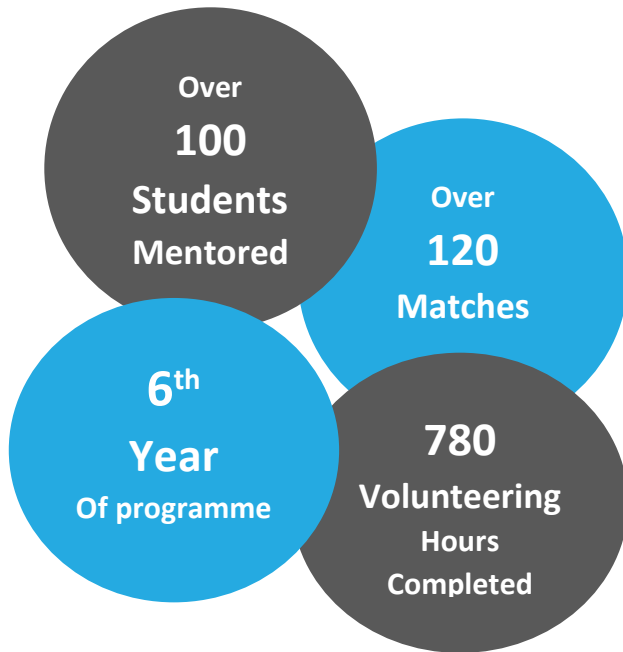
Closing Ceremony

Programme reflection & learning



## OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The impact that the programme has on the overall student experience is very positive with graduates indicating that they are sourcing employment through the programme<sup>2</sup>. In addition, CIT are seeing graduates who participated in the programme as students returning to give back, and support the Programme as Mentors.



### Benefits to Mentees

The programme helps students to make contacts in the business community and provides them with an opportunity to enhance their professional skills outside the classroom.

The Mentees have benefitted in a variety of ways including; company visits, gaining “insider” knowledge, interview preparation, CV reviews and

work-shadowing, adding participation in the programme to CV to help differentiate participants, amongst other benefits listed below:

- Work with an experienced role model from the business community.
- Gain an insight into the workplace and link your academic programme to the world of work.
- Increase your understanding of various job roles and employment opportunities you may have with your qualification.
- Strengthen your confidence and self-awareness, and improve your interpersonal and presentation skills.

Mentees provided feedback about their experience at the end of the programme and all believe the programme adds benefit to their personal, academic and professional enhancement. One Mentee stated, “The programme acts as a bridge between college and industry.” And another saying “The Joint Mentorship Programme helped me greatly with my confidence entering my internship, my personal and professional development, and I gained a valuable contact for the future,” The Mentees’ positive experiences resulted in 100% of them stating that they would strongly recommend the programme to their peers.

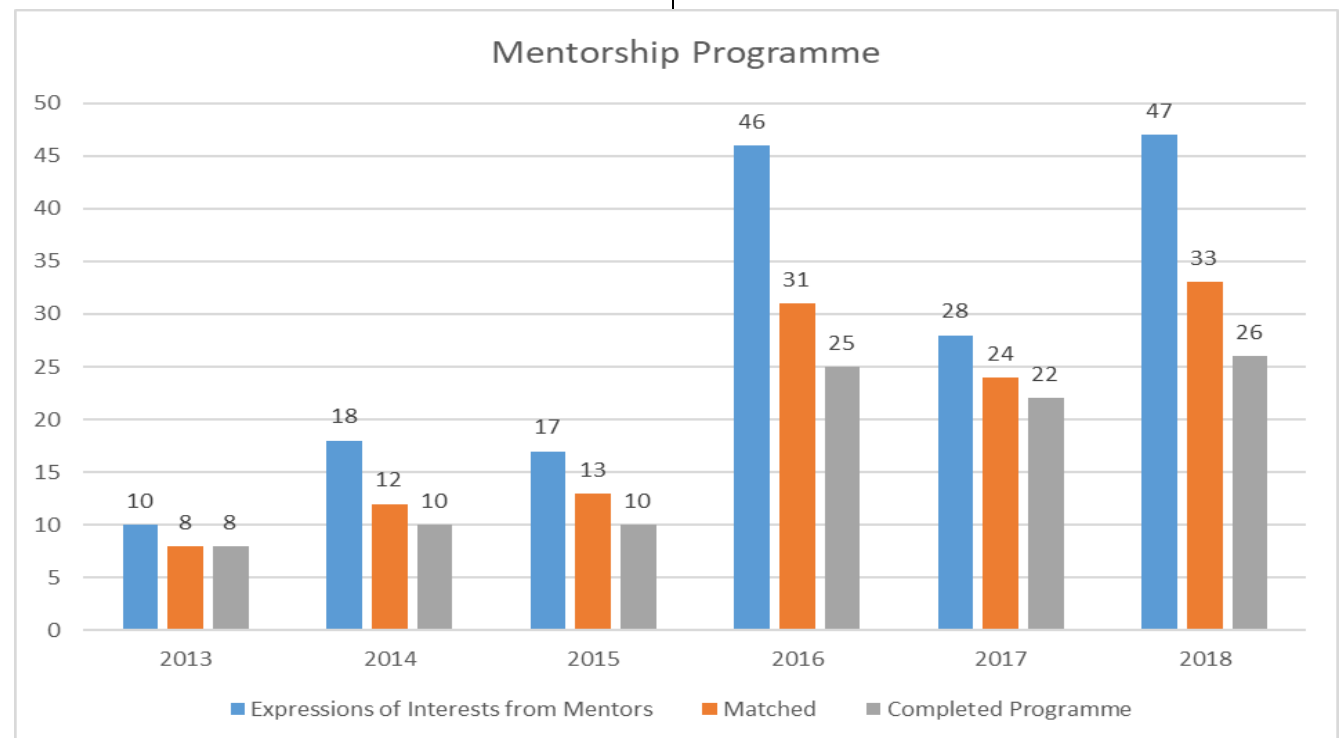


Figure 1 Participation levels in CIT Joint Mentorship Programme

## BENEFITS TO MENTORS

The positive outcomes are also evident among the Mentors with benefits such as:

- Participating in a unique programme where you make a positive difference.
- Sharing your experiences with a person interested in your area of business.
- Establish/re-establish a link with the Institute.
- Networking with other Mentors and colleagues from other organisations and sectors.
- Keep up-to-date with academic developments in your sector and profession.

## CHALLENGES

- Creating suitable matches
- Need for additional resources
- Keeping mentors/mentees actively engaged
- Evaluating programme success
- Establishing clear goals and targets
- Managing expectations

## DEVELOPMENT

CIT have further developed the programme this year by seeking endorsement from professional bodies and professional associations such as IBEC, Network Ireland and Cork Chamber.

“It provides an excellent means of supporting students in Cork to gain insight and advice on the practicalities and realities of the workplace. From the point of view of the local business community, the better prepared graduates are for the workplace, the more valuable they are as future potential employees.”

-CEO, Cork Chamber

## TESTIMONIALS

“My mentor was fantastic and really helped me develop professionally. Over our six months of mentorship meetings, we had a number of insightful conversations about our professional objectives and how we will meet these goals.

“The Joint Mentorship Programme helped me greatly with my confidence entering my internship, my personal and professional development, and I gained a valuable contact for the future,”

-3rd Year, Business Student



“I was very impressed with the student and the care that went into matching...to make sure the experience was highly rewarding for both parties. It was a great feeling to know I was helping by contributing my time toward a student's future well-being. It was definitely time well spent.”

- Mentor



## CONCLUSIONS

The CIT Joint Mentorship programme has continued to grow since its inception and future growth is expected with sufficient resources allocated to the initiative.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This CIT Joint Mentorship programme is a collaborative initiative between the CIT Alumni Office and the CIT Careers Service.

Ongoing support and engagement from the academic staff is greatly appreciated to ensure participation from the student body.

The Programme is a voluntary extracurricular activity for both the mentors and mentees therefore participation and enthusiasm is greatly appreciated.

## REFERENCES AND RELEVANT LINKS

1. Clutterbuck, D., Everyone Needs a Mentor, 2nd ed., Institute of Personnel Management, London, 1991
2. Source: CIT First Destinations Survey of 2016 Graduates.
3. [www.cit.ie/alumni](http://www.cit.ie/alumni)
4. [www.mycit.ie/careers](http://www.mycit.ie/careers)

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