



# The role of near-peers in MSc projects

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# Why are we talking about near-pears?

Near-peers are, in the context of MSc programmes, are current PhD students who have obtained an MSc in the same department.

In ECS in Southampton they are called “**mentors**”.

They are a resource that can be of help in addressing the challenges of offering supervision and support to increasingly large cohorts over the summer.

# Typical mentoring arrangements

The mentor-mentee relationships in these schemes are typically **one-to-one**, and the agenda for discussion is typically **not structured**

***“ You drive the process.***

*You are responsible for driving the mentoring process (not your mentor).*

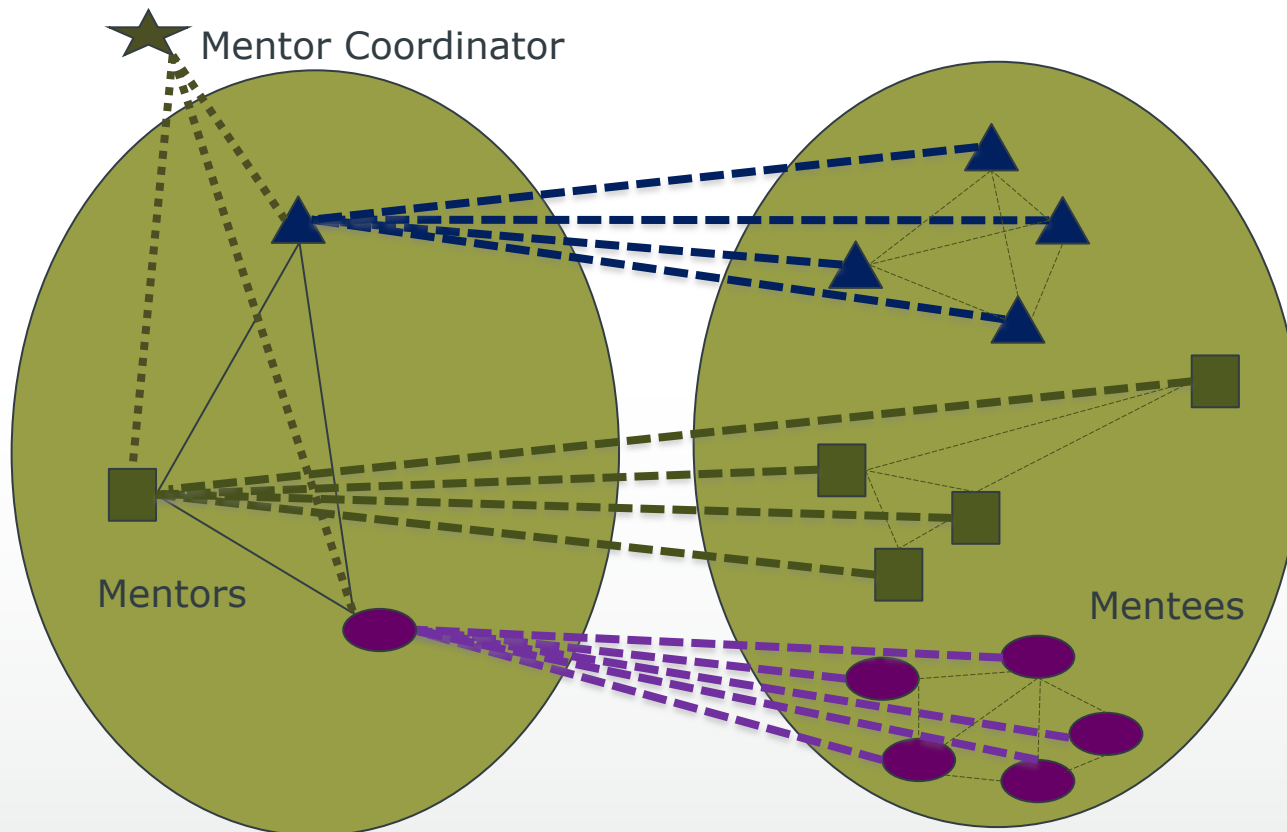
*To achieve this, you need to think about  
what you want to achieve from your mentoring relationship.  
This can then be discussed and agreed with your mentor.”*

[Mentee handbook \(Career Mentoring programme\)](#)

# Existing provision in FEPS

- Offered since 2010
- MSc programmes in Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) and the Optoelectronics Research Centre (ORC).
- Within some other disciplines mentoring is still almost non-existing.

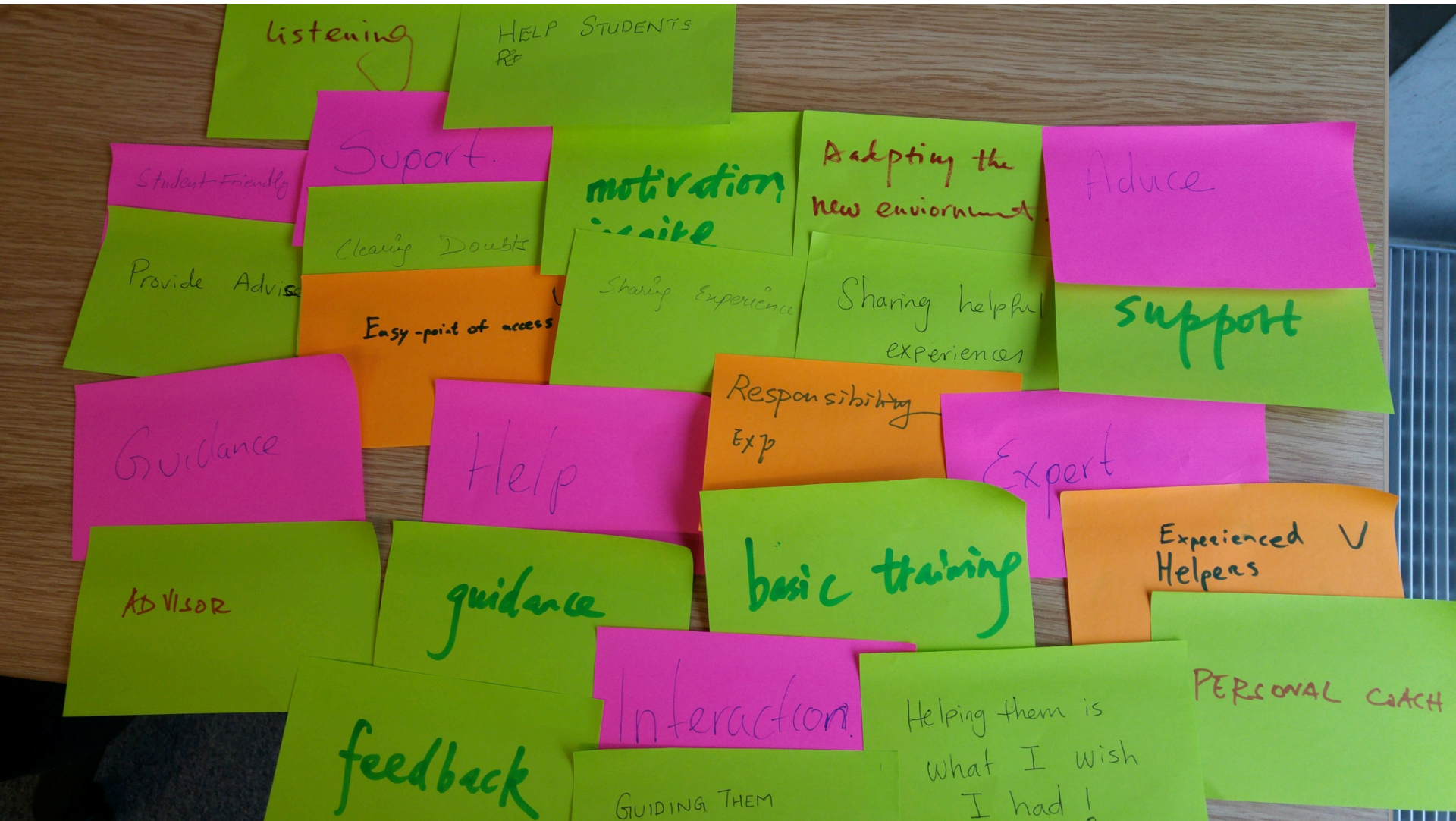
# Existing provision in ECS



Mentor-mentee relationships are **one-to-many**, and the agenda for discussion is structured or **semi-structured**



# Mentors say what they do





# Mentors say what they don't



# What's NOT covered?

Advice to ECS Mentors

## **Coursework**

Discussions on coursework specifications are OK, but with academic integrity in mind when providing help.

## **Academic issues**

Some guidance with required knowledge or tools though academic issues are dealt with by academics.

## **Counselling**

Not trained counsellors or therapists!



# What is a mentor then?

- A role model, a facilitator, a bridge.

# What is the aim?

- To empower students to become proactive, independent learners, informed of their rights and obligations on the path to success.
- To assist academic staff in providing student support

# What is the scheme for?

- Mentors:
  - Gain experience!
  - Role modelling
- Students:
  - Accessing regular support without losing face
  - Understanding what is expected from a ECS student
  - Scaffolding for peer-support
- Academics:
  - Making the best of contact time with students!



# What is mentoring?

- A one-to-one relationship between a mentor and a “mentee” where the mentor is an **expert**
- Longer-term
- Guidance
- “How things are done round here”
- Learning
- A stretching, broadening experience for both parties
- Flexible, to meet the needs of both parties
- A positive a trusting relationship
- Open, but confidential

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*\*PhD students are  
early career  
researchers – they  
are only “expert”  
in being MSc  
students*



Typical guidance include:

- All that is common to all MSc projects
- Help with project management
- Sharing good practice regarding referencing and use of tools suited to the discipline
- Tips on “managing your supervisor”

# Sessions (I)

Session #	Topic	Aim of the session
1	Introduction to university life	To give a broad introduction to the course in general and the first semester in particular.
		To advise the students on how to find the required information.
		To make sure that the students are well settled and to answer their queries about life in Southampton.
2	Adapting to study at ECS	To prepare the students for the amount of work they are going to face in ECS in the first semester.
		To make sure the students know about the teaching system in the UK in general and in ECS in particular.
3	Time management and managing workloads	By this time the students would have received lots of coursework. Most of them will feel stressed about not being able to cope with the work load.
		To share some of the mentor's experience with the students and advise them on how to manage their time and work.
4	Academic Integrity and coursework discussion	To make sure the students know about the University's policy on plagiarism and the expected standard of the MSc students as well as the adopted procedure to safeguard these standards.
		To answer the students questions about plagiarism, working in a group and how can the group deal with someone who is not doing his/her work
		To make sure the students know how to deal with deadlines.

# Sessions (II)

Session #	Topic	Aim of the session
5	Coursework discussion (examples)	For this session the mentors can choose any topics based on the students request.
		To answer the students questions about various coursework specifications.
		To give students a basic tutorial on a programming language if it is needed
		To teach students how to use LATEX and reference manager
		To teach the students how to read a journal paper or a book effectively and how to cite other peoples' work.
		To help the student with their presentations.
6	Coursework discussion	For this session the mentors dealt with the students questions about their coursework.
7	Coursework discussion	(Optional)
8	Coursework discussion	(Optional)
9	Exam preparation and what to expect from exams	Talking through rubrics, expectation of assessments and revising strategies. Looking at past papers may be appropriate.

# Sessions (III)

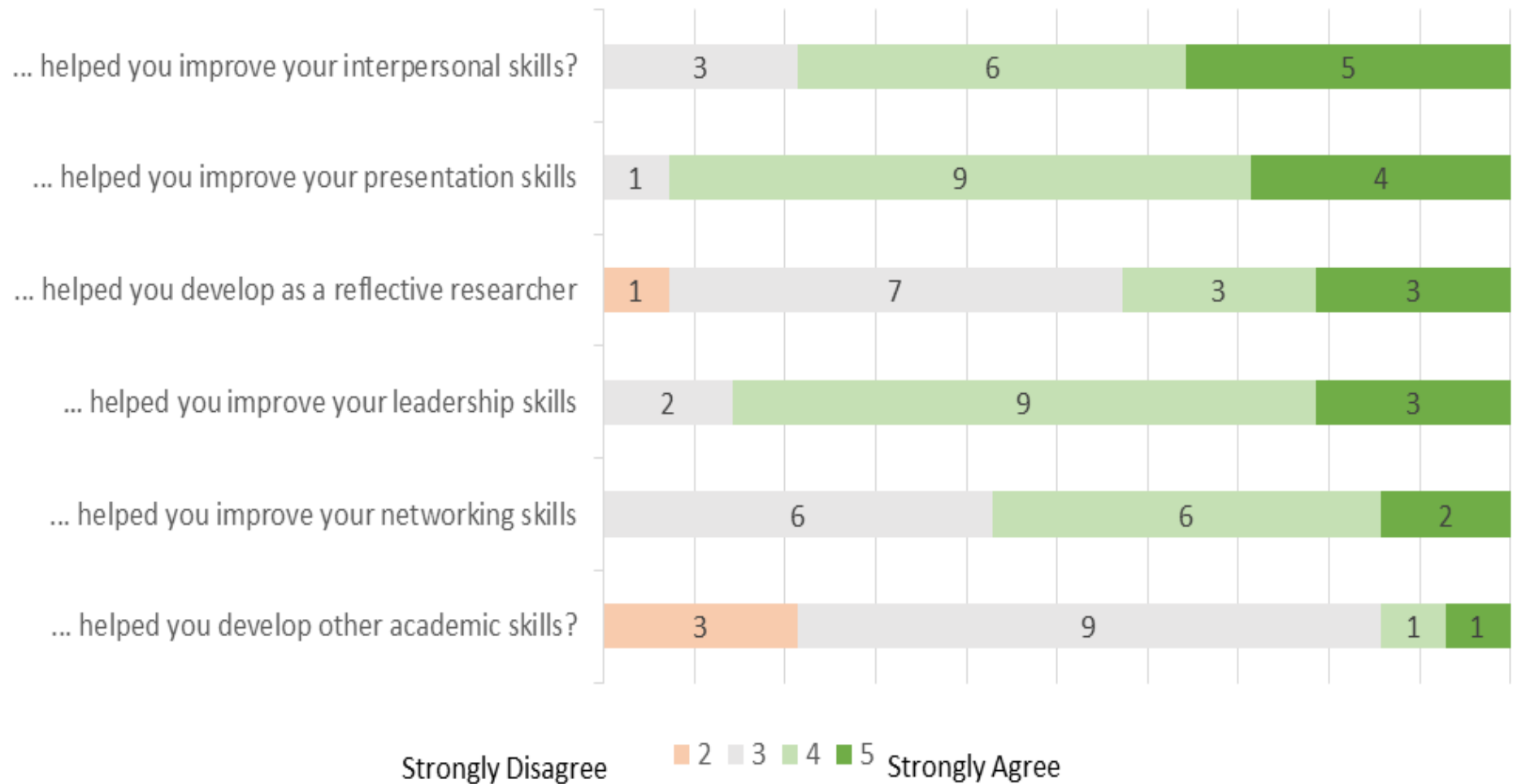
Session #	Topic	Aim of the session
10	Exam preparations and time management.	To make sure they know where to study for the exam and how to study effectively.
		To answer any questions related to the exam such as using a dictionary and getting a university calculator.
11	Exam preparations	To help and advise the students on how to read and analyse exam papers.
		To tell the students how to use the exam time wisely.
		To help the studying analysing the exam questions and tell them what to do if they could not answer one of the questions or if they could not understand it.
		To make sure everyone started studying for the exam.
12	Exam preparations	To discuss past papers and make sure students are managing well.



But does it work?

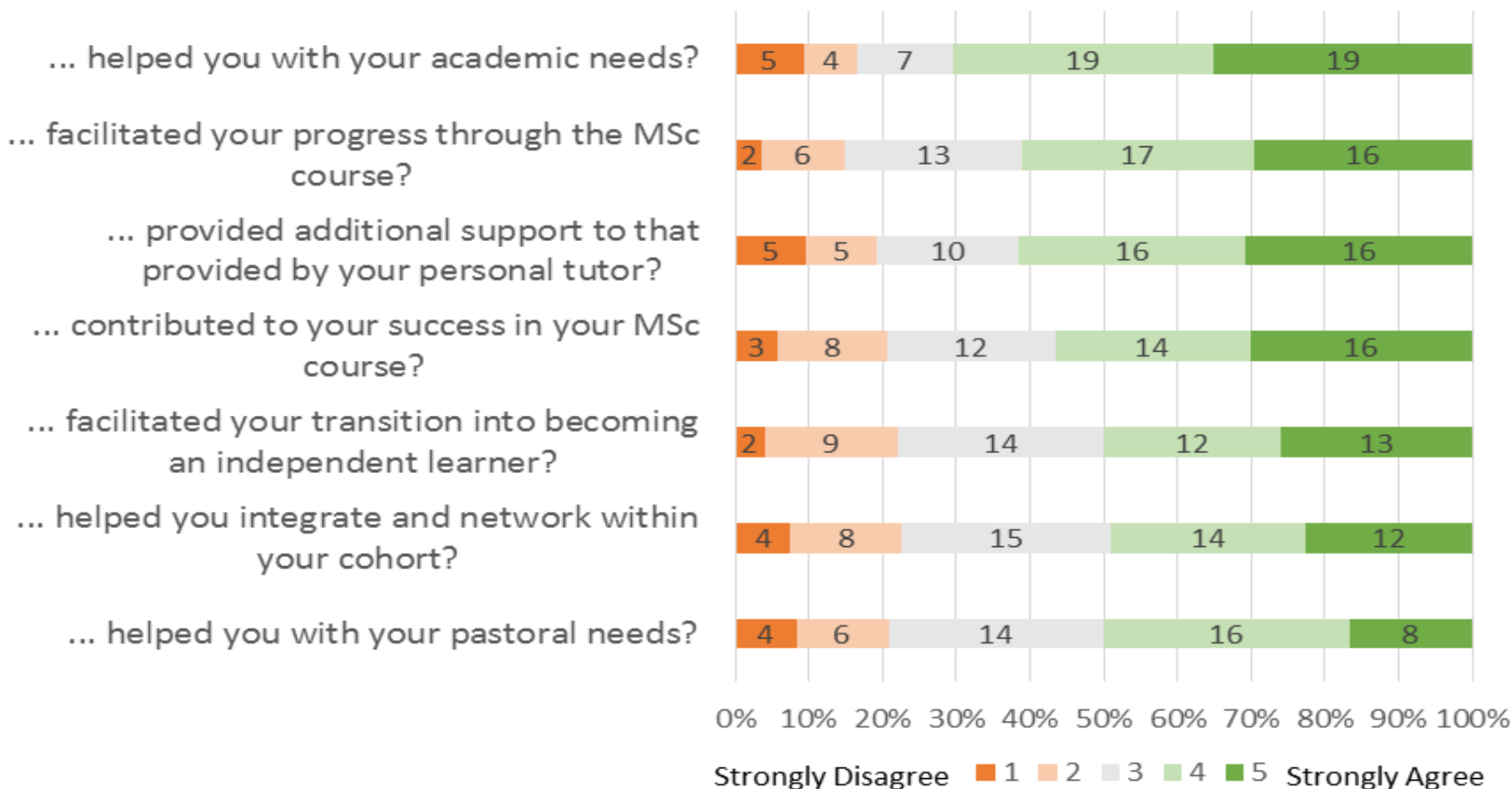
# We asked mentors:

Would you say that participating in the mentoring scheme ...



# As perceived by mentees:

Would you say the mentoring scheme ...



# Potential pedagogic benefits

- Valuable work experience for mentors
- Additional opportunity of discuss topics (“extra processing”)
- Deep learning
- Scaffolding to integration
- Peer assisted learning

*It's not just about  
the efficiency*



# Contrasting but related schemes

- Supplemental instruction from teaching assistants (PhD students are part of teaching team)
- Peer-Assisted Learning (facilitation but not instruction)
- Peer mentoring (one-to-one)

# Conclusions

- Near-pears are good!
- They are a resource that can be of help in addressing the challenges of offering supervision and support to increasingly large cohorts over the summer.
- The scheme is valuable for mentors, mentees, academics, institution
- Uniform provision is tricky but there are potential pedagogic benefits.



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Thank you!  
Any questions?