



SERVICE DELIVERY MANUAL

Guidelines for Implementing a Mentoring Program

involving International Students in Higher Education Institutions



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Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria
Голям брат Голяма сестра България



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Opening address

Being a mentor means creating space for others to grow into the best version of themselves. I believe in lifting others as I climb - empowering them to believe in their own potential as I continue to grow alongside them.

– Regillio, NHL Stenden student (Suriname)

This is just one of the notable quotes from a participant of the Bridges by Mentors project. Other testimonials from students on our mentoring program are just as inspiring. They all show deep commitment, empowerment and the fact that mentoring is a two-way street: both mentor and mentee benefit and grow.

In recent years, we have seen that young people in general are finding it harder than ever to reach out to others. The global pandemic, the increasing use of social media and the growing polarisation have certainly not helped to build the social networks and open-mindedness that allow for personal growth in students and young people, resulting in problems such as loneliness and mental health issues. International students often face challenges in building connections with local communities, which can hinder their sense of belonging and intercultural growth. Meanwhile, many young people, particularly in rural areas, have limited opportunities to interact with international people, missing out on enriching global perspectives.

At its core, Bridges by Mentors aims to enhance social inclusion by fostering intercultural understanding, civic engagement, and the development of essential soft skills. This Mentoring Outreach Programme, developed in collaboration with universities and professional organizations across Europe, embodies these principles by providing international students with the opportunity to mentor young locals. Through this mentoring framework, students gain practical experience in navigating cultural diversity, strengthening their interpersonal and leadership skills, and actively contributing to their local communities. It emphasizes that meaningful connections, guided skill-building, and structured mentoring moments are powerful tools for personal and professional growth. For the local youth, the joint activities mean that they develop a broader view of the world and their own position in it. These young people encounter cultural differences in a positive setting, which encourages them to recognise the richness that stems from differences, rather than the polarising effect that they may otherwise experience.

By integrating mentoring into academic programs, universities not only support students' academic journeys but also prepare them for the complexities of a globalized workforce. The values instilled through this approach —citizenship, civic engagement, and social inclusion — help transform students into socially responsible professionals who are ready to meet the evolving demands of society. Bridges by Mentors creates a pathway for students to develop holistically, ensuring that they graduate not just with knowledge but with the skills and connections necessary to thrive in an interconnected world.

Mentoring touches eternity, you never know when the impact ends.

- Betty Bijvoets

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1. Introduction

This Service Delivery Manual is the result of the reflections, contributions, and recommendations from the six partners of the Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships project, **Bridges by Mentors** – ACEEU (Germany), Big Brothers Big Sisters of Bulgaria (Bulgaria), Howest University of Applied Sciences (Belgium), NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), Université Savoie Mont Blanc (France), and University of Nicosia (Cyprus).

The manual aims to provide higher education institutions with the methodological and practical bases for implementing a successful mentoring program, in which international students become mentors to young people beyond academic walls, creating lasting and positive impact on local entities.

1.1. Overview of the manual

The manual is organized around the key stages of designing and running a mentoring program. Each section offers practical guidance and tools that can be adapted to your institution's context:

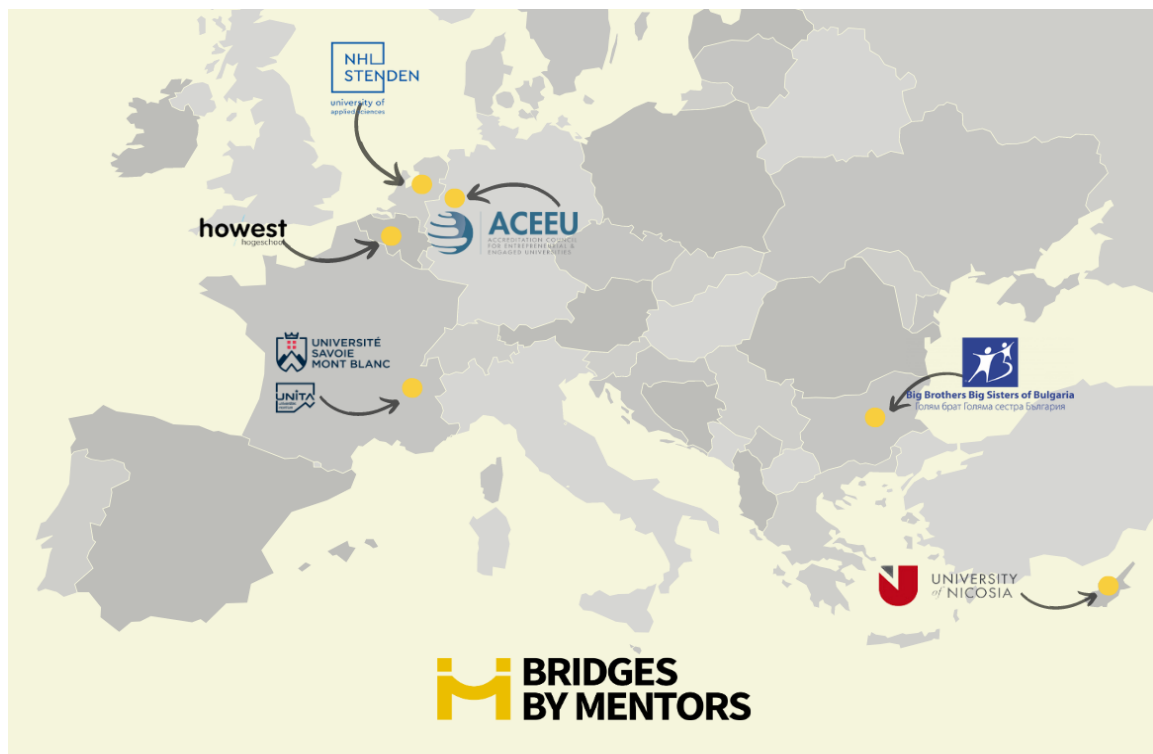
- **Understanding Mentoring** – definitions and core principles of mentoring, and its application to international students and local youth;
- **Added Value of Mentoring** – benefits for international students (integration, skills development), for Higher Education Institutions, and for local communities and civic engagement;
- **Implementing a Mentoring Program** - stakeholder engagement, program design, student recruitment, matching strategies, supervision
- **Communication and Dissemination** – engaging international students, local organisations, and HEI staff, and communicating program impact

1.2. Context: Bridges by Mentors

Bridges by Mentors is a three-year project that aims to contribute to depolarization, foster intercultural understanding, build trust, and enhance the well-being of international students and young people through the concept of "Internationalization at Home" within the region, by creating a bridge between international students and young people in local regions, promoting mentoring as a development tool for international students and local youth and promoting mentoring and civic engagement in higher education institutions (HEIs).

The project aims to:

- Facilitating the integration of international students in the region
- Fostering intercultural encounters for young people
- Promoting participation, civic engagement, social inclusion
- Enhancing soft skills for all participant



The geographical locations of the six partners of Bridges by Mentors

1.3. How This Manual Was Developed

This manual was developed through a structured, multi-stage process grounded in regional collaboration.

At the outset of the project, insights and best practices in youth involvement, mentoring, and civic engagement were gathered across all regions in collaboration with regional stakeholders. This exploration made it possible to identify the needs, expectations, and desired impact of activities within institutions and regional partnerships, and to develop a service delivery manual tailored to HEIs.

The manual was developed through the following steps:

- In each region, focus groups and interviews explored potential key elements for the implementation guidelines. Conducted in multidisciplinary settings involving university staff and regional stakeholders, these sessions used shared templates to guide the collection of relevant information.
- Experts across all regions reviewed a draft of the manual and provided feedback through structured interviews. (*See Appendix A*)
- The Service Delivery Manual was validated by consensus during a Transnational Online Workshop.

2. Mentoring

2.1. Understanding mentoring in the context of this manual

Over the last decades, mentoring has become an increasingly recognized methodology across multiple sectors, including education, youth work, employment, social inclusion, and community development. Within Higher Education Institutions, mentoring has emerged as an effective approach for supporting students, promoting inclusion, facilitating integration, and strengthening soft skills.

Mentoring is generally understood as a supportive relationship in which a mentor voluntarily accompanies, guides, and supports another person over a certain period of time. Unlike purely academic tutoring or coaching, mentoring is fundamentally based on human relationships, trust, empathy, dialogue, and mutual learning.

The mentoring relationship may take many forms depending on the context, objectives, and participants involved. In the context of this manual, **mentoring is understood as a structured relationship through which international students engage with local youth, organizations, or communities in order to promote participation, intercultural understanding, and social inclusion.**

Mentoring is not limited to the transfer of knowledge or technical competences. It also contributes to personal development, confidence-building, social integration, and emotional support. Mentoring relationships evolve progressively and often create meaningful connections between individuals from different cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds.

One of the key strengths of mentoring lies in its flexibility. The needs and objectives of mentoring relationships may vary according to the participants involved. Some mentoring relationships focus on educational support, while others emphasize intercultural exchange, confidence-building, leadership development, or civic engagement.

Mentoring also creates opportunities for reciprocal learning. Mentors themselves develop important competences through their participation, including communication skills, empathy, leadership, adaptability, intercultural awareness, and problem-solving capacities.

2.2. Mentoring involving international students in HEI

2.2.1. Added value for international students

This section explores how mentoring programs create meaningful benefits for international students, from social integration to the development of transferable skills

Integration

International students represent a significant and growing population within European Higher Education Institutions. Their presence contributes to the internationalization of universities and enriches academic and social environments. Nevertheless, international students often face challenges related to integration and participation in their host communities.

One of the most common difficulties concerns social integration beyond the university campus. While international students generally have access to academic support structures, many still experience isolation, limited interaction with local communities, and difficulty accessing volunteering or civic engagement opportunities. Language barriers are frequently cited as a main obstacle, while unfamiliar administrative systems, social norms, and cultural differences can add to the uncertainty and stress of adapting to a new environment. As a result, some international students hesitate to take part in local initiatives, lacking confidence, information, or opportunities to do so.

At the same time, consultations conducted within the Bridges by Mentors project revealed that many international students are eager to volunteer and contribute positively to their host communities. Participants consistently highlighted the strong motivation among international students for civic participation and intercultural exchange.

Mentoring programs can bridge this gap between international students and local communities. Through mentoring, international students are no longer seen only as beneficiaries of mobility programs, but as active contributors who support young people, share their experiences, and foster intercultural dialogue. This shift in perspective matters: it recognizes international students as individuals with valuable competences, stories, and leadership capacity, rather than solely as recipients of support.

Skills development

Participating in a mentoring program is an effective way to build new skills and personal qualities, through several key mechanisms:

1. **Tailored mentoring relationships**

Mentors adapt their support to each mentee's needs and learning style, which calls for strong intercultural and communication skills.

2. **Two-way peer learning**

Mentors and mentees exchange experiences, challenges, and successes. This hands-on approach gives both sides practical knowledge and insight.

3. **Continuous learning and growth.**

Mentors encourage mentees to step outside their comfort zone, set goals, and pursue self-improvement. Regular interaction with mentees likewise supports mentors' own skill development and growth mindset.

4. **Networking opportunities.** By connecting mentors and mentees with local organisations, the Bridges by Mentors program helps both expand their personal and professional networks, opening the door to new opportunities.

The skills and personal qualities developed during mentoring activities are numerous and can be grouped into four broad categories. This is not an exhaustive list.

Communication Skills • Active listening • Giving constructive feedback • Empathy	Interpersonal skills • Building trust and rapport • Respect for others • Leadership • Conflict management
Personal qualities • Adaptability and flexibility • Integrity and authenticity • Personal investment and commitment	Organizational skills • Time management • Aligning goals with expectations • Resourcefulness

2.2.2. Added Value for Higher Education Institutions

Mentoring programs generate a wide range of educational, social, and institutional benefits for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

First, mentoring contributes to student well-being and strengthens social inclusion within the university environment. By collaborating with local organisations, universities can deepen their social responsibility and build stronger, more sustained connections with their surrounding communities.

From an institutional perspective, mentoring programs can also enhance:

- visibility and attractiveness;
- student engagement;
- partnerships with local organisations;
- volunteering opportunities;
- innovation in student services;
- recognition of transversal skills.

Taken together, these benefits support the development of more inclusive and participatory institutional cultures.

2.2.3. Benefits for the Community and Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is an increasingly important dimension of contemporary Higher Education. Universities are recognising their role not only in the academic education of students, but also in preparing them to become active, responsible, and engaged citizens. Mentoring initiatives contribute directly to this mission: through mentoring relationships, participants develop competences such as critical thinking, empathy, communication, collaboration, and social responsibility.

Mentoring also creates opportunities for meaningful encounters between people from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. These encounters help reduce stereotypes, strengthen mutual understanding, and support more inclusive communities.

The involvement of international students in local mentoring activities generates long-term benefits for both participants and local organisations. Local organisations gain access to intercultural perspectives and greater diversity, while international students deepen their understanding of the local context and strengthen their sense of belonging.

As Angélique Guiland, Head of the association *Place aux Possibles* (Chambéry, France), which supports teenagers' self-development, describes it, mentoring from international students could create:

“An opening of paths, possibilities, new perspectives for student development. It is reassuring to be able to speak from young to young, practice languages, improve, meet new cultures and cultivate tolerance.”

3. Implementing a mentoring program

3.1. Phases of a Mentoring Program

Structuring an effective mentoring partnership between local organisations, the young people they support, and international students acting as mentors involves several key phases: identifying organisational goals and mentoring objectives, selecting suitable mentors, and designing a comprehensive training program.

The program should have clear guidelines and expectations, regular feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for personal growth creating a stronger bond between organisations and the participants.

To give higher education institutions a clear understanding of what running a mentoring program involves in practice, the sections that follow describe each of the following phase of the mentoring cycle in detail.

Phase 1: Planning for a Mentoring Program

- Initial planning
- Engaging with local Stakeholders

Phase 2: Preparing for Mentoring

- Recruiting mentors and screening
- Training mentors
- Matching mentors with mentoring opportunities

Phase 3: Implementation & Supervision

- Implementing mentoring activities
- Supervising and supporting mentors

Phase 4: Closing and Evaluation

- Measuring impact
- Recognition for mentors

3.1.1. Planning for a Mentoring Program

This phase covers the groundwork needed to launch a mentoring program, from assembling the right team internally to building relationships with local organisations.

Initial Planning

Launching a mentoring program requires staff dedicated to planning and overseeing all subsequent phases of implementation.

Identifying the program team

Several departments within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) may have the expertise and interest needed to lead a mentoring program, including:

- Department of International Relations
- Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Department of Education
- Student Services
- Professional Insertion / Career Services

Selecting program staff

When assigning staff to the program, HEIs should consider team members with:

- Experience in launching and monitoring projects
- The ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders — international students, local organisations, mentoring experts, HEI colleagues, and decision-makers — through events and communication campaigns
- Cross-cultural awareness and communication skills
- Interest in civic engagement, social work, or related fields
- Sufficient availability to dedicate to the program
- Facilitation and training skills (an asset, though not essential)

The program coordinator

Regardless of the program's size, every mentoring program needs at least one program coordinator: someone with strong leadership and management skills, capable of overseeing the full range of responsibilities involved. The size of the broader program team will scale with the program's overall size and scope.

The program coordinator's responsibilities include:

- Managing the program as a whole
- Developing consistent procedures for recruiting and referring young people
- Overseeing the design and rollout of promotional and educational materials
- Building and maintaining internal and external relationships necessary to sustain the program (e.g., with partner organizations)
- Recruiting, screening, training, and supervising mentors
- Matching mentors with mentoring opportunities
- Developing and maintaining program records, policies, and procedures
- Coordinating mentoring activities
- Checking in regularly with mentors and providing ongoing support
- Developing a plan to recognize program participants
- Developing an evaluation plan, including mechanisms for collecting participant feedback
- Tracking program statistics (budget, hours, participation, etc.)
- Documenting the program's development over time
- Developing the program's financial plan

Developing a financial plan

During the design and planning stage, program staff should develop a financial plan that includes:

- A budget covering both the program's launch and its ongoing sustainability
- A secure and diversified funding strategy, so the program does not depend too heavily on a single source
- A projected timeline for each funding source, allowing new sources to be identified before existing funding runs out
- Controls, auditing requirements, and a system for managing program finances

Securing institutional support

Successful mentoring programs depend on visible support from organizational leaders within the HEI. Leadership backing provides resources, visibility, and endorsement — reinforcing the program's legitimacy and helping to foster an institutional culture that values learning and development.

Engaging with Local organisations

Collaborating with local structures involves identifying and profiling partners willing to host an international student to carry out mentoring activities. Potential local partners take many forms, including:

- NGOs and associations supporting youths and topics of inclusion
- Secondary education institutions
- Sports associations
- Organisations promoting awareness of international mobility

Mentoring needs, possibilities, and expectations vary significantly depending on local context. Many HEIs may have existing relationships with regional organisations — NGOs, educational institutions, community centres, and local associations — which can serve as a starting point for stakeholder engagement.

This diversity of local needs underscores a key principle: flexibility is central to designing a mentoring program that responds effectively to the local context.



3.1.2. Preparing for Mentoring

This phase covers recruiting and screening mentors, training them, and matching them with mentoring opportunities.

Because this is a group mentoring program, mentees are selected in advance by local organisations and stakeholders working with specific target groups, and are assigned to mentor groups accordingly. Careful matching should still account for the compatibility of mentors and mentee groups — considering skills, experience, personality, and goals — to foster effective mentoring relationships.

Across all activities in this phase, program staff should prioritize **diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging**. Successful programs actively seek out diverse perspectives and experiences, and work to create environments where every participant — mentor and mentee alike — feels valued and supported.

After recruiting, screening, and matching, the mentors are ready to get appropriate training. The training for international students to become mentors is thoroughly presented in the accompanying document ***Guidelines for Training International students to Become Mentors***, produced by the consortium of the Bridges by Mentors project. Through training and support activities, mentors are equipped with the skills to build strong, supportive relationships with youth, and help them identify and overcome challenges that could lead to early closure.

Recruiting and Selecting Mentors

Recruiting mentors involves several key steps to ensure they are well-qualified, committed, and aligned with the program's goals.

Here are the main steps of the recruitment process:

Step 1: Define mentor criteria

Specify the desired mentor profile, including requirements (age, gender, residence) and qualifications (experience, skills, personal qualities, commitment).

Step 2: Develop a recruitment plan

Design strategies to attract mentors through word of mouth, professional networks, social media, NGOs, companies, schools, and universities. Recruitment materials should highlight the project's launch, training timetable, themes, objectives, skills to be gained, activity conditions, and the benefits of participating (certification, professional development, skills, networking, etc.). See Appendix B for examples of the recruitment material to be prepared.

Communicating directly with students, through presentations and dedicated events, is one of the most effective ways to reach candidates. As one contributor to this manual noted, recruitment materials should be designed to attract and engage the audiences whose skills and motivations best match the program's goals and structure. Example flyers for local organisations and for international students are provided in the appendix. (See Appendix C)

Step 3: Selection

- *Application process:* Set up an application process to gather candidate information, including an application form and cover letter. Consider using a pre-start expression-of-interest questionnaire covering field of study, passions, prior mentoring experience, expectations, mentoring preferences, availability, willingness to interact with others, and potential obstacles.
- *Selection process:* Review applications, conduct interviews, and check references to confirm that candidates meet the program's criteria.

Step 4: Set up training

Set up training for selected mentors, covering program objectives, mentoring techniques, communication skills, and administrative procedures

Practical considerations and potential obstacles

HEIs should anticipate and prepare for barriers that students may face when entering a mentoring program, including:

- Language barriers between mentors and local populations
- Constraints on time availability of mentors due to academic schedules and responsibilities

Since intrinsic motivation is essential to being an effective role model, HEIs can encourage participation by:

- Emphasizing the benefits to students: training, soft-skills practice, an expanded local network, and greater knowledge of the region
- Establishing a clear implementation plan with a precise timetable, including mentor training from the outset
- Providing a clear infrastructure of participating local organisations and stakeholders working with local youth, such as schools and NGOs

Here are some key aspects to consider when recruiting and selecting international students as mentors:



Training Mentors

Once mentors have been recruited, screened, and matched, they are ready to begin training.

The training framework developed in the *Bridges by Mentors* project for international students was developed by drawing on lessons learned from previous mentoring programs, along with input gathered from partner staff through focus groups and interviews. The full training program is detailed in the ***Guidelines for Training International Students to Become Mentors***, made available by the consortium of the Bridges by Mentors project. The guidelines include:

- The theoretical foundations of mentoring, including its key characteristics, different mentoring types, and the general process and methodology
- A step-by-step guide training guide

The training modules aim to:

- Help international students recognize the potential of their position as students in a foreign country, and how they can use it as a positive force for their environment and community
- Equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to act as role models for others, while also learning from the local young people they mentor, including those from diverse backgrounds
- Train students to design and deliver mentoring activities for groups in the region where they study

Through this training, mentors gain the skills to build strong, supportive relationships with youth and to recognize and address challenges before they lead to an early end of the mentoring relationship.

Matching Mentors with Mentoring Opportunities

Effective matching is a key success factor in group mentoring programmes in which teams of higher education students mentor groups of young people. The matching process should aim to create meaningful learning experiences while ensuring that mentoring activities are feasible and sustainable for all participants.

Three criteria should guide the matching process:

1. Mentoring needs of the mentee group

The objectives set by the local organisations and stakeholders — such as improving language skills, strengthening cultural awareness, promoting peer learning, building self-confidence, developing social skills, or simply creating opportunities for positive social interaction — should guide the choice of mentors and the design of activities. Mentor groups should be matched based on how well their skills, knowledge, or interests align with these outcomes.

2. Mentor preferences and motivation

Student mentors may have particular interest in working with specific groups (e.g., secondary school pupils, young people at community centres, or youth from diverse cultural backgrounds) or in specific types of activities (e.g., sports, cooking, arts, cultural events, educational workshops). Accounting for these preferences increases mentor engagement, commitment, and the overall quality of the mentoring relationship.

3. Practical availability and scheduling

Group mentoring requires coordinating multiple participants, making timetable alignment essential. Local organisations and stakeholders, such as schools, community centres, or NGOs, often integrate mentoring activities into young people's existing schedules. Matching decisions should therefore also account for location, meeting duration, and frequency.

An effective matching strategy balances these three dimensions: mentoring needs, mentor preferences, and practical feasibility. By combining educational objectives with participant motivation and organisational realities, programs can maximise engagement, ensure regular participation, and achieve meaningful outcomes for both mentors and mentees.

Practical tools for the matching process

- **Systematically collecting needs and interest**

Compile a list of local organisations and stakeholders wishing to host an international student mentor, while noting their objectives, internal organization, mentoring frequency, target audience, and location. In parallel, collect expressions of interest from students via a form or survey covering their study sector, level, talents, affinities, and motivations.

- **Drafting a match**

To ensure alignment between the expectations of local organisations and stakeholders and those of international students, prepare a draft match before presenting it to the student and the local organisation. This helps save time if a rematch is later needed.

- **Group matching events**

Organize events where potential mentors and mentee groups can meet, interact, and provide feedback on their preferences.

Size and composition of mentoring groups

Before setting up a group mentoring program, it is important to define limits on group size and composition. The literature reports a wide range of configurations, most commonly one mentor working with 4–10 youth, or two mentors working with 8–12 youth. A ratio of roughly four to five mentees per adult mentor is emerging as a general "sweet spot," for several reasons:

- It is easier for mentors to manage group behaviour and keep youth on task
- It encourages more interpersonal interaction among youth and makes it harder for individuals to disengage or "hide" in the group
- It is easier to build a sense of community and belonging within a smaller unit
- A wider range of activities becomes accessible, since smaller groups require fewer resources, less physical space, and simpler logistical coordination
- Project-based work tends to be more efficient with a smaller group

That said, larger groups can be appropriate in certain contexts — for example, a sports-based program that requires enough participants to field full teams, provided adequate space is available.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer to group size and composition. Programs should carefully weigh both overall group size and the adult-youth ratio against their objectives and the practical realities of their meeting space.

3.1.3. Implementation & Supervision

This phase covers the rollout of mentoring activities and the ongoing supervision needed to keep mentor-mentee groups on track.

Implementing Mentoring Activities

Once matches are confirmed, mentors begin their group mentoring activities with the support of local organisations and stakeholders, who provide the settings, target groups, and logistical context in which mentoring takes place. Program staff remain the central point of contact throughout implementation, ensuring that activities stay aligned with each group's objectives and that any issues are addressed early.

Supervision of the Mentoring Cycle

Supervision is an essential component of every mentoring program and should accompany the entire mentoring cycle, from recruitment and matching to closure and recognition. Its objective is to ensure that mentoring relationships remain supportive, safe, meaningful, and aligned with the objectives of the program.

In the context of mentoring programs involving international students and local organisations and stakeholders, supervision is particularly important because mentoring relationships often involve intercultural communication, emotional dimensions, and collaboration between multiple actors. Effective supervision helps maintain participant engagement, identify challenges at an early stage, and provide continuous support to mentors, mentees, and local organisations and stakeholders.

Preparing the Supervision Framework

Before launching mentoring activities, Higher Education Institutions and local organisations and stakeholders should establish a clear supervision structure. This structure should define:

- who is responsible for supervision;
- communication procedures;
- safeguarding measures;
- monitoring methods;
- documentation procedures;
- escalation mechanisms in case of difficulties.

Each mentoring relationship should have at least one designated coordinator or supervisor responsible for accompanying the process and serving as a contact person for participants.

The supervision framework should remain realistic and accessible in order to avoid excessive administrative burden for mentors and local organisations and stakeholders.

Supporting Mentors Throughout the Process

Supervision should be understood primarily as a supportive and developmental process rather than a control mechanism. International student mentors, especially those participating in mentoring for the first time, may experience uncertainty related to communication, cultural differences, emotional situations, or their role within the mentoring relationship.

Program coordinators should therefore provide mentors with:

- guidance and practical advice;
- emotional support;
- opportunities for reflection;
- conflict management support;
- intercultural mediation when necessary;
- access to additional resources and expertise.

Reflection activities and peer exchange sessions can also help mentors share experiences, discuss challenges, and strengthen their confidence throughout the mentoring cycle.

Monitoring Mentoring Activities

Monitoring mentoring activities helps ensure that mentoring relationships remain active, constructive, and aligned with the objectives of the program.

Monitoring procedures should remain simple and accessible while still providing sufficient information for quality assurance purposes.

Examples of monitoring tools include:

- mentoring logs
- attendance sheets
- reflection forms
- supervision meetings
- feedback questionnaires (See Appendix F)
- mentors journal
- activity reports

Documentation may include information regarding:

- frequency of meetings
- duration of activities
- type of activities implemented
- participant engagement
- challenges encountered
- outcomes observed

Programs should also remain attentive to signs of disengagement or difficulties, such as repeated cancellations, lack of communication, unresolved conflicts, or reduced participation. Early identification of challenges allows coordinators to intervene constructively and support participants before mentoring relationships end prematurely.

Safeguarding and Risk Management

Safeguarding and risk management must be integrated throughout the supervision process. All mentoring programs should establish clear procedures regarding participant safety, confidentiality, respectful communication, and boundaries within mentoring relationships.

Safeguarding policies should address:

- confidentiality and data protection;
- respectful and inclusive behaviour;
- discrimination and harassment prevention;
- reporting concerns;
- emergency procedures;
- participant well-being.

Participants should know whom to contact in case of difficulties or inappropriate situations, and coordinators should be prepared to respond appropriately to interpersonal conflicts, communication breakdowns, or safeguarding concerns.

Regular supervision and structured support contribute significantly to the quality, sustainability, and positive impact of mentoring programs. They help create safe and trusting environments in which participants can engage meaningfully, develop new competences, and strengthen their connection to the local community.

3.1.4. Closing and Evaluation

This phase covers the closure of the mentoring cycle, the evaluation of its impact, and the recognition of mentors' contributions.

Closing the Mentoring Cycle

Closing a mentoring cycle is an important step. Programs should mark this closure through rituals, events, or closing ceremonies that signify the end of the cycle and recognize the value of the mentoring experience for both mentors and mentees. Each group should have the opportunity to acknowledge the personal growth of individual mentees, reflect on their journey as a group, and celebrate what they built together.

Where joint events or activities are not feasible, program staff can design alternatives such as impact days or mentoring award ceremonies to promote mentors and their work. Storytelling can be a particularly powerful tool at this stage, helping participants and local organisations and stakeholders alike see the tangible outcomes of the program.

Every implementation of group mentoring has its own particularities. After closure, program staff should assess what contributed to the program's success and what did not. This evaluation feeds continuous improvement: conclusions drawn at this stage can inform the design of the next mentoring cycle, helping it adapt to changing target groups, improve efficiency, boost productivity, and better meet the needs of future mentors and mentees.

Evaluating Impact on Participants

Mentoring programs can generate significant impacts on mentors, mentees, and local organisations and stakeholders. The evaluation process should therefore seek to capture these multidimensional outcomes as comprehensively as possible, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The assessment of impact should not focus solely on participation numbers or activities implemented, but also on personal development, intercultural learning, community engagement, and collaboration generated through the mentoring experience.

Impact on International Student Mentors

For international student mentors, participation in mentoring activities may contribute to:

- increased confidence and self-esteem;
- stronger intercultural competences;
- leadership development;
- improved communication and relational skills;
- greater civic engagement and social participation;
- stronger connection with the host community;
- improved understanding of local realities and social issues;
- development of empathy, adaptability, and problem-solving capacities.

Mentoring also allows international students to transition from passive beneficiaries of mobility programs to active contributors within their local environment.

Impact on Mentees

For mentees, mentoring relationships may contribute to:

- increased openness toward cultural diversity;
- improved social participation and inclusion;
- enhanced confidence and motivation;
- stronger communication and interpersonal skills;
- exposure to new perspectives and international experiences;
- positive role modelling and inspiration;
- strengthened sense of belonging and participation within the community.

Intercultural mentoring relationships can also help reduce stereotypes and foster mutual understanding between participants from different backgrounds.

Impact on Local Organisations and Stakeholders

For local organisations and stakeholders, mentoring programs may strengthen:

- partnerships and local networks;
- volunteering and civic engagement culture;
- collaboration with universities and international students;
- visibility of local initiatives and activities;
- community participation and outreach activities;

- opportunities for intercultural exchange within their organizations.

Mentoring initiatives may also support local organisations and stakeholders in creating more inclusive, diverse, and internationally connected local environments.

Recognition for Mentors

Recognition of student commitment varies across EU countries and HEIs, but showcasing international students' mentoring commitment is an important part of closing the mentoring cycle, in order to reward students for their time and to formally recognize the skills they acquired during mentor training

Certificates of participation

A certificate of participation is a simple and effective way to attest to a student's involvement in the mentor training program and to promote the skills they gained. It should mention:

- the title of the training;
- the context of the training (in this case, a European project);
- the date;
- the duration;
- the skills acquired.

Beyond formal acknowledgment, such certificates help increase the attractiveness of mentoring commitments and the visibility of the project. Sample certificate templates are available in the appendix. (See Appendix D)

Academic recognition

The most common ways HEIs recognize and valorise student commitment include:

1) Formal integration into the academic curriculum — for example, creating an optional module or a free-standing teaching unit (UEL) that grants students extra points toward a course grade, their overall average, or additional ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. This signals that student engagement carries genuine academic value.

- *Example:* Psychology bachelor's students are often required to complete a set number of practicum hours; students' involvement in the mentoring program can count toward that requirement.
- *Example:* Mentoring hours could count as free credits corresponding to learning outcomes in civic engagement and cultural learning.

2) Rewards within the academic curriculum, such as awarding bonus points toward a student's general average.

3) Recognition of acquired skills

HEIs can also draw on existing European tools to formally document the skills students gain through mentoring:

- **Diploma Supplement**, if used by the HEI, to record mentoring experience alongside academic qualifications.
- **Europass Mobility**, a European Commission document that records the skills and competences gained during a period of learning, training, or volunteering abroad. It is jointly completed by the sending and host organisations and can capture skills such as communication, intercultural competence, and organisational abilities gained through mentoring — making it a useful tool for recognizing an international student's mentoring experience alongside their broader mobility period. More information is available at europass.europa.eu/en/work-europe/mobility.

3.2. Additional Resources on Implementation

The phases of implementing a mentoring program are summarized in the following graphic:



Appendix E is a recommended timeline for the different phases of implementing a mentoring program.

4. Communication and Dissemination

Communication is a key driver of this project's success. Clear, consistent, and engaging communication is what allows international students, local organisations and stakeholders, and HEI staff to understand the mentoring opportunity, get involved, and stay engaged throughout the program.

4.1. Communication Channels and Tools

A range of channels and formats can be used to reach different audiences effectively:

- **Visual materials** — see appendix for templates and examples.
- **Website** — a central, up-to-date reference point for information about the program.
- **LinkedIn account** — useful for reaching students, alumni, and local organisations and stakeholders, and for showcasing program updates and outcomes.

These channels should be used to communicate on two complementary fronts:

- **The mentoring opportunity for students** — what mentoring involves, what students gain from it, and how to get involved.
- **The opportunity for local organisations and stakeholders** to welcome an international student as a mentor — what the partnership involves and what value it brings to their organisation and the young people they work with.

4.2. The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling is a particularly effective tool, both for engaging prospective mentors and for disseminating the program's impact more broadly. Hearing directly from someone who has lived the experience makes the opportunity feel tangible and credible in a way that descriptions alone cannot.

Whenever possible, invite a student with prior mentoring experience to take part in presentations and pilot training sessions. Their first-hand account can help prospective mentors picture themselves in the role and can address questions or hesitations more convincingly than program staff alone.

4.3. Communicating in the Recruitment Process

Communication plays a distinct and critical role during recruitment, where the goal is not only to inform but to actively attract the right candidates.

- **Tailor messaging to what motivates students**
Recruitment communication should clearly convey the concrete benefits of becoming a mentor: skills gained, certification, professional development, networking opportunities, and the chance to make a meaningful impact locally. Emphasizing these benefits helps engage students who may not yet see volunteering as a valuable use of their limited time (see Section 3.1.2. for more on addressing this barrier).

- **Be specific and transparent**
Recruitment materials should clearly state the training timetable, themes, objectives, activity conditions, and expectations, so prospective mentors can make an informed decision before applying.
- **Use multiple entry points**
Combine passive channels (website, LinkedIn, flyers) with active outreach (in-person presentations, word of mouth, partnerships with student networks, NGOs, and professional networks) to reach a wider and more diverse pool of candidates.
- **Reinforce messaging with testimonials**
As noted above, involving former mentors in recruitment communication through short testimonials, quotes, or live presentations significantly increases the credibility and appeal of the opportunity.
- **Favour face-to-face communication**
Opportunities for in-person presentations include: A stand or presentation at the start of the academic year, when students are actively looking for ways to get involved on campus. Welcome seminars and integration events, which offer a natural moment to introduce mentoring to incoming international students.

4.4. Communicating About Impact

Communicating the program's impact serves two purposes: it builds accountability and legitimacy with institutional leadership and local organisations and stakeholders, and it inspires future participation by showing what mentoring can achieve.

- **Ground impact communication in evidence**
Draw on the outcomes tracked during monitoring and evaluation — such as gains in confidence, intercultural competence, or community connection — to ensure that impact communication is credible and specific rather than purely promotional.
- **Tailor the message to the audience**
Institutional leadership may be most interested in metrics tied to strategic goals and return on investment; prospective mentors and the wider public may respond more strongly to stories of personal growth and community impact; local organisations and stakeholders may value evidence of practical benefits to the young people they serve.
- **Use closing events as a communication opportunity**
The rituals, ceremonies, and impact days described are natural moments to showcase outcomes publicly — through short presentations, participant testimonials, or visual recaps — reinforcing the program's value to all stakeholders and helping recruit the next cohort of mentors.
- **Disseminate through the same channels used for recruitment**
The website and LinkedIn account should be regularly updated with impact stories and results, keeping the program visible between recruitment cycles and building a track record that strengthens future communication efforts.

5. CONCLUSION

The project Bridges by Mentors set out to build a bridge between international students and local youth, turning mobility into mutual benefit, and academic experience into civic engagement. This manual has traced that bridge from its foundations to its daily operation: understanding what mentoring means in this context, recognizing the value it creates for students, institutions, and communities alike, and walking step by step through the phases of planning, preparing mentors, implementing activities, and closing each cycle with recognition and reflection.

What emerges from these pages, and from the focus groups, interviews, and pilot experiences of the six partner institutions, is a simple but powerful idea. International students are not only beneficiaries of mobility programs. Given the right structure, training, and support, they become active contributors to the communities that host them, and in doing so, they build confidence, intercultural competence, and a lasting sense of belonging. Local youth, in turn, gain access to new perspectives, role models, and opportunities for growth beyond the classroom. Higher Education Institutions gain stronger community ties, more engaged students, and a tangible expression of their social responsibility.

At the same time, no two HEIs will implement this manual in the same way, nor should they. The needs of local youth, the capacity of local organisations, the profile of incoming international students, and the resources available within each institution all vary widely across regions. A program built for a large urban university with dozens of partner organisations will look different from one built for a smaller institution working with a single NGO. This diversity is not a limitation to overcome; it is a starting condition to design around. The frameworks, tools, and phases described throughout this manual are meant to be adapted, not applied rigidly. What matters is that each institution takes the time to understand its own context, its own stakeholders, and its own students before shaping a program around them.

This work requires a coordination team willing to take ownership of the process, local partners willing to open their doors, students willing to commit their time, and an institution willing to recognize that commitment. The tools in this manual exist to make that work manageable, replicable, and sustainable, whatever the size or resources of the institution implementing it.

HEIs considering this path are encouraged to start where they are, using existing relationships, a small pilot group, or a single willing local partner, rather than waiting for ideal conditions. They should invest real time in preparation, since the quality of recruitment, training, and matching shapes the quality of every mentoring relationship that follows. Evaluation should be treated as part of the program's design, so that the impact of one cycle strengthens the next. And space should always be made for recognition, of mentors' time, of mentees' growth, and of the local organisations that make the program possible.

The six partners of Bridges by Mentors offer this manual as a starting point, not a finished formula. Every region, every institution, and every cohort of students and young people will shape mentoring differently. What remains constant is the opportunity: to turn the presence of international students on campus into a genuine, lasting bridge with the communities around them. We invite HEIs to take up these tools, adapt them to their own context, and begin building that bridge.

Acknowledgements

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We warmly thank the university staff, mentoring experts, local organisations and stakeholders, and international student mentors who took part in focus groups, interviews, and the Transnational Online Workshop, and whose insights and feedback shaped every stage of this manual.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Summary of expert interviews

Feedback Report from Expert Interviews

A review of the “Bridges by Mentors” Service Delivery Manual

Overall message

The Service Delivery Manual is well received and considered highly relevant, but needs to become more practical and easier to use.

Key positive findings

- Strong and logical structure
- Complete overview of mentoring process (design, recruitment, matching, training, monitoring)
- High relevance for HEIs and community partners
- Strong contribution to student integration and intercultural exchange
- Recognition tools (certificates, badges) are appreciated

Main concerns

- Too theoretical and text-heavy in parts
- Not enough practical tools for implementation
- Language is sometimes too academic
- Target users and roles are not always clearly defined

Most important recommendations

- Add practical tools (templates, step-by-step guides, examples, case studies)
- Simplify language and make it more user-friendly
- Provide clearer guidance on matching and recruitment
- Strengthen intercultural training and communication focus
- Develop shorter versions or toolkits for different target groups
- Consider digital tools to support implementation and communication

Core conclusion

The manual has a strong foundation and clear added value, but its impact will significantly increase if it becomes more practical, accessible, and directly applicable in real-life mentoring settings.

Appendix B - Recruitment Package



Recruitment package

Should include:

- ☐ Program overview or fact sheet describing the overall framework and design of the organization
- ☐ Description of responsibilities
- ☐ Application form
- ☐ Mentor matching form
- ☐ Mentor agreement
- ☐ Confidentiality statement
- ☐ Mentor activities policy sheet
- ☐ Eligibility criteria
- ☐ List of mentoring benefits

Appendix C - Example of Mentor Recruitment Poster



The poster is a recruitment tool for the Bridges by Mentors project. It features a yellow and white color scheme with a background of thin, radiating lines. The top left corner displays the 'BRIDGES BY MENTORS' logo. To the right are the logos for 'UNIVERSITÉ SAVOIE MONT BLANC' and 'UNITA'. The main heading, 'International students! Join our project as a MENTOR', is prominently displayed in the upper center. Below this, the 'Overall purpose' is explained, followed by the 'objectives of the project' listed in bullet points. A section for 'Local associations' also lists several partners. The poster then details 'What You'll Be Doing' and 'What's in for you?' with their respective bullet points. On the right side, there is a vertical photograph of several hands of different skin tones being stacked on top of each other, symbolizing support and teamwork. At the bottom right of this photo, a large white number '1' is visible.

BRIDGES BY MENTORS

UNIVERSITÉ SAVOIE MONT BLANC

UNITA

International students!
Join our project as a
MENTOR

Overall purpose :

The **Bridges by Mentors** European project offers the international students the opportunity to become mentors for a young audience in the regional area within local associations.

The objectives of the project are:

- to offer our international students the opportunity to develop hard-skills and soft-skills with mentoring young audiences.
- to raise awareness about interculturality in the region
- to raise awareness about international mobility

Local associations:

- AFEV
- Place aux Possibles
- Chambéry Solidarité Internationale
- European student network

What You'll Be Doing:

- Carry out mentoring activities with young people in the region, according to the themes you prefer

What's in for you?:

- Build confidence
- Meet new people
- Evidence your skills : communication, team work, management, public speaking, problem solving...
- Full training provided

1

Appendix D – Sample Certificates




CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO:

(NAME SURNAME)

In recognition of her/his participation in the Mentoring Outreach Programme 'Bridges by Mentors' with training and mentoring activities with local youth and organisations' between 21 March 2026 and 13 January 2026.

Awarded ECTS: 1

Afke Bruinsma
Project Leader of Bridges by Mentors
NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences
Leeuwarden, 13 January 2026





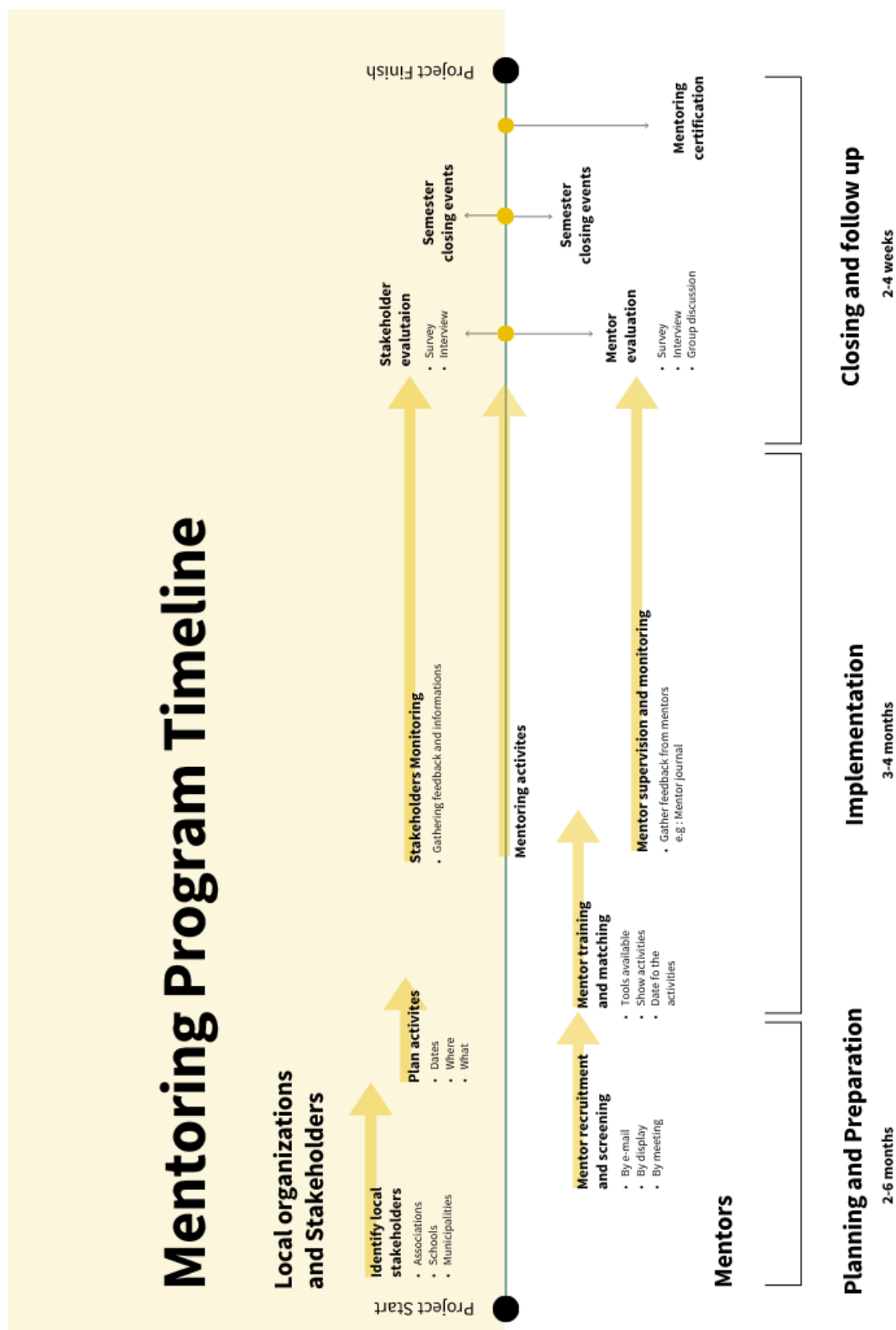






*Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Stichting . Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Appendix E - Mentoring Program Timeline



Appendix F - Example of feedback gathering questions:

- To international students

- How has your relationship with your mentor/mentee changed since the beginning of the program?
- Rate the overall experience on a scale from one to ten.
- What was your favourite thing about the program?
- What do you think are some points for improvement?
- Did the program go the way you imagined it?
- What takeaway points did you learn from your mentees?
- Describe the relationship with your mentees
- What did you do or what did you talk about during your sessions?
- What do you think of the frequency of the meeting? Did you want more or less?

- To local stakeholders:

- Are you satisfied with the collaboration with the university?
- Did you get the support you wanted during the program rollout?
- Are you satisfied with the administrative framework of the collaboration?
- Was the frequency of meetings suitable for your organization?
- Were the activities carried out by the mentors relevant?
- Can you note any skills acquired by your mentees?
- Which activities had the most impact?
- What do you think are the ways to improve these activities?
- Can you advise trainers to develop certain skills during mentor training?
- Are you ready to repeat the experience next semester?
- If so, what would be your advice and wishes?