

**The Centre for
Mentoring
Impact**
A proposal

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Foreword

Mentoring plays a significant role across a wide range of policy and practice areas. At its core, it is a relationship-based process between a mentor and mentee, but it is delivered by different types of mentoring organisations, through different models and approaches, and for different purposes. These purposes range from personal development, education, and employability through to more targeted work focused on prevention, safety, and violence reduction. While practice has continued to develop, the infrastructure supporting learning, evidence, and commercial sustainability has not kept pace with the demands placed on the sector by funders, commissioners, and policymakers. This prospectus sets out the case for establishing a Centre for Mentoring Impact as a practical response to that gap. The Centre is conceived as a place for business development and learning, focused on helping mentoring organisations use evidence from their own delivery more effectively. Its emphasis is not on compliance or reporting, but on improving practice, strengthening delivery, and supporting organisations to secure funding, contracts, and build long-term sustainability. The Centre will be built and managed through collaboration. It will take a coordinated approach to research, evaluation, and learning across different mentoring models, while respecting local context and organisational autonomy. By developing shared evaluation resources, aligning evaluation activity, and focusing on the questions that matter most to practice and commissioning, the Centre aims to reduce duplication and increase the value derived from existing mentoring delivery. The prospectus outlines the Centre's purpose, aims, offer, governance, and development pathway. It is intended for mentoring charities, social enterprises, funders, and partners seeking a more structured, evidence-informed basis for growth, improvement, and collaboration across the mentoring sector.

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July 2026

1. About the Centre for Excellence in Mentoring

The Centre for Mentoring Impact will be a national evaluation, learning, and business development centre for the mentoring sector. Its purpose will be to help mentoring organisations use evidence from their own delivery to improve quality, secure funding and contracts, expand reach, and remain financially sustainable.

The Centre will work with mentoring providers to increase the visibility of mentoring practice, capture and disseminate the innovative practice already emerging across the sector, and use evaluation and applied research to support decisions about delivery and growth. Evidence development and the tools used to generate it will be treated as an operational asset to support improvement and commercial development rather than merely reporting and contract monitoring alone.

Community Impact will initiate and coordinate the Centre, drawing on its experience of supporting charities to build evaluation capacity and use evidence in commissioning, fundraising, and business development. The Centre will operate as a platform for joint evaluation across organisations, sharing learning and encouraging collaboration across different mentoring models and settings.

As the Centre develops, it will first explore becoming an independent incorporated organisation in its own right, after which it will explore applying for membership of the government's What Works Network. What Works Centres are independent organisations that generate, synthesise, and translate evidence on what works in specific policy areas, with the aim of supporting better decision-making in public services. Membership reflects a commitment to methodological rigour, independence, transparency, and practical usefulness, rather than

advocacy or service delivery. Any move towards membership would be pursued incrementally and would be subject to meeting the Network's published criteria.

2. Aims and objectives

The aim of the Centre is to support a network of mentoring organisations to improve practice, strengthen their position across a range of funding, partnership, and commissioning contexts, and increase their ability to secure investment, build influence, and remain sustainable. All of the aims below are framed around the use of evidence from mentoring practice. The aims of the Centre are:

1. To support a sector-wide, coordinated approach to mentoring research and evaluation by aligning activity across organisations around shared priorities, enabling learning to accumulate rather than remain fragmented.
2. To improve the consistency and quality of mentoring data across the sector by developing and promoting joint evaluation resources, tools, guidance, and standards that reduce duplication and raise baseline evaluation practice.
3. To use evidence from mentoring to understand, develop, and scale innovation by identifying existing innovative approaches, examining how they operate in practice, and supporting their adaptation across different contexts.
4. To use evidence from mentoring practice to improve delivery quality by supporting structured reflection, testing assumptions, and incremental refinement of programme design and delivery.

5. To use shared mentoring evidence to enable organisations to do more, and do it better by reducing duplication, increasing collective learning, and making more effective use of limited organisational capacity.
6. To use evidence from mentoring to increase understanding of what works, and how it works by examining the impact of different mentoring approaches across a range of participant groups, delivery models, and areas of practice, with particular attention to mechanisms of change and delivery conditions.
7. To use evidence from mentoring to improve access to funding, partnerships, contracts, and long-term sustainability by enabling clearer articulation of value, stronger market positioning, and more informed business development decisions.

3. The Business Case for a Centre for Excellence in Mentoring

Mentoring organisations operate in an increasingly competitive environment for funding, partnership development, commissioning, and growth. In this context, collaboration through an evidence-led network provides a practical way for organisations to improve position, credibility, and sustainability without acting in isolation. An evidence-led Centre for Mentoring Impact will:

- operate as a shared platform through which organisations collaborate rather than compete in isolation
- pool learning and evidence so that organisations can present stronger, more consistent cases to funders, commissioners, philanthropic partners, corporate supporters, and other stakeholders
- reduce duplication in evaluation, data systems, and development activity, lowering the unit cost of data collection and reporting

- improve market positioning by developing a set of joint outcomes, promoting a common evaluation language, and building more robust evidence of value and impact
- increase confidence in mentoring as a credible and investable form of provision across a range of delivery contexts and application areas
- support coordinated growth by identifying which mentoring models transfer effectively, under what conditions, and with what resource implications
- enable access to opportunities that are difficult to secure individually, including consortium bids, philanthropic investment, employer partnerships, joint commissioning, and engagement with national funders and research programmes

4. The offer

This section sets out the Centre's core offer to members. The Centre's work focuses on supporting mentoring organisations of different types and sizes to learn from practice, strengthen delivery, expand reach, and build long-term sustainability. The Centre's offer will comprise the following interconnected activities:

- **Capacity building: evaluation** – building shared tools and resources that members can use to collect, manage, and use higher-quality data; practical development workshops on outcomes, theories of change, and evaluation methods; and support to use evidence effectively in fundraising, partnership development, commissioning, and business development. It is a core offer to members that their own evaluation can be delivered through the Centre.
- **Standardised outcomes and frameworks** – development of shared frameworks of mentoring outcomes that members can apply across different models, approaches, and areas of practice, supported by common theories of

change and guidance on indicators and data sources, to enable consistency and aggregation while retaining contextual relevance.

- **Joint research and evaluation** – coordination of sector-wide and multi-site research and evaluation activity, enabling larger samples, consistent methods, and shared learning on how different mentoring models work, for whom, and in which contexts.
- **Practice guidance** – development of practical guidance grounded in delivery and evaluation experience across a range of contexts and applications, including education, employability, wellbeing, community-based provision, and violence reduction.

5. Governance

Governance arrangements are designed to support independence, proportionate oversight, and effective decision-making as the Centre develops over time. The model is intentionally phased, reflecting the Centre’s transition from a collaborative network to a formal legal entity.

In **Year 1**, the Centre will operate as a collaborative working network. Strategic oversight will be provided by a small board, with day-to-day coordination and delivery led by an operations lead hosted by Community Impact. Governance in this phase will focus on setting direction, agreeing priorities, and ensuring that activity remains aligned to the Centre’s stated purpose.

From **Year 2**, subject to review, the Centre will incorporate as a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee. The CIC will be overseen by a board comprising a Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. This structure is intended to provide

clear accountability, financial oversight, and separation between governance and delivery. The board will be supported by standing working groups covering key areas of activity, including mentoring practice, research and evaluation, safeguarding, and sector development, with their structure and focus refined over time to reflect the breadth of the mentoring sector and the Centre's evolving priorities. These groups will provide domain-specific input and support the board in maintaining relevance to practice while retaining strategic oversight.

Governance arrangements in **Year 3** will continue on the same basis as Year 2, with refinements made as required to reflect scale, activity, and external relationships. The Chair will be appointed on a three-year cycle aligned to the Centre's three-year strategy, supporting continuity of leadership while allowing for periodic renewal.

6. Next steps

The initial development of the Centre will proceed in three stages:

First, a call for interest will be issued to establish a small founding board. This will focus on securing individuals with relevant sector, delivery, funding, partnership, and research experience to provide early strategic oversight and shape the Centre's initial priorities. Expressions of interest can be sent to Jason Pollard at Community Impact: jason@communityimpactcic.org.

Second, a public call for wider participation will be launched, alongside a formal announcement of the Centre. A jointly branded prospectus, refined from this initial document, will be developed for this stage. This stage will invite mentoring organisations, networks, funders, and strategic partners to engage with the Centre's emerging offer, contribute to shared learning activity, and participate in coordinated research and evaluation work.

Third, an evaluation and business development strategy will be produced, setting out the detailed programme of work for Year 1. This will define priorities, sequencing, and delivery arrangements for capacity building, shared evaluation resources, joint research activity, and partnership development, providing a clear schedule of work for participating organisations.

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