**Academic Support Mentoring: my experience**

Many university students love the idea of getting a part time job for several reasons: something to write on their CV, something to fill their time, or, let’s be honest, something to earn money to pay for all those ‘essential’ student purchases!

But it was none of these reasons that motivated me to apply to be an Academic Support Mentor as part of Warwick’s Widening Participation Team. I wanted to gain experience in teaching (which I want to pursue in the future), confidence in myself, and the chance to inspire younger students from a disadvantaged background through my passion for my subject. Four months on, and I’ve achieved all these goals, and so much more.

Academic Support Mentoring involves leading a weekly one-hour tutoring session to a small group of GCSE/ A level students in a local school. For example, I taught Spanish at Sidney Stringer Academy in Coventry. As mentors, we plan activities for the lessons ourselves, but everything is flexible so we sometimes focus on what particular students want to work on each week, offer revision tips, or just have conversations and Q & As about university life!

There are so many skills that I’ve gained from being a mentor, even in such a short time. Aside from the confidence needed to take charge of a group of students, another important skill I’ve improved is Time management: designing activities to last a whole hour, while also allowing extra time for questions and activities depending on student numbers, is a lot to consider! Patience and Communication have also been really valuable skills I’ve been able to develop - learning how to explain complex concepts in a concise and engaging way will be useful for so many jobs in the future, let alone just teaching!

Of course, the programme hasn’t been without its fair share of challenges. We could never predict how many students were going to turn up to lessons, and frequently we just had one or two students between three Spanish mentors! Nevertheless, this actually turned out to have a large silver lining: we developed skills in Teamwork by organising amongst ourselves which activities we wanted to use, and taking turns to answer students’ questions. We also developed competencies in Adaptability, through making spontaneous changes to lesson plans to focus on students’ specific concerns. At one point, I also volunteered to lead an academic session to some History students due to lack of availability of the current History mentors. As someone who hadn’t opened a History textbook since Year 9, going into a class composed of twelve Year 10s staring at me expectantly was daunting to say the least! However, I’ll never forget how proud I felt after managing to get the students engaged and motivated through some History competitions and games that I’d designed after talking to their current mentors.

Nevertheless, leaving aside the skills gained, the best part of ASM is how rewarding it feels to help students from a disadvantaged background not only improve academically, but also realise their potential to consider Higher Education: something which before the programme they might not have thought possible for them. For Spanish at Sidney Stringer, there was only one student who attended nearly all the sessions, but the impact of listening to him speak in the last session with so much confidence and using the complex grammar and phrases that we had taught him was huge, and something I’ll never forget.😊

Finally, if you are considering going into teaching, ASM is a great experience to include in job applications! Since participating in the programme, I’ve also volunteered to teach English to Ukrainian students as part of Peppo’s English Conversation Club, became a mentor for UniversityGo and secured a position on Teach First’s Taster Programme. Sharing my ASM experience with job organisers definitely helped my applications for these amazing opportunities.😊

Overall, if anyone is considering applying for ASM next year, I would wholeheartedly recommend it. Although I just mentioned the advantages for students specifically pursuing teaching, it also doesn’t matter if you have zero interest in that career. This job gives you the chance to gain a range of soft skills, a chance to get to know students and teachers from a local school, and a chance to make a difference in society by inspiring young people to consider Higher Education. What more could you want!

Thank you for reading!

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