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# Mentoring practices and impact assessment in higher education: good institutional examples from a Hungarian university

## Abstract

This study examines the role of mentoring in higher education and its functions in social responsibility through the example of two institutional mentoring programmes operating at the Ludovika University of Public Service. The research presents the teaching mentor programme, which supports methodological renewal, the strengthening of a learner-centred approach and the development of teaching competences, as well as the Zsuzsanna Lorántffy Mentor Programme, which provides online learning support for disadvantaged young people in specialist child protection care. The results of the impact assessment, conducted using complex quantitative and qualitative methodologies, show that mentoring yields measurable positive changes in both areas: it improves learning motivation, expands the range of teaching methodologies, and enhances collaboration and institutional integration. The study highlights that mentoring is a key tool for excellence in higher education and social inclusion, contributing in the long term to organisational learning and the promotion of equal opportunities.

**Keywords**: social responsibility, mentoring, educational inequalities, learning support, online mentoring, early school leaving

## Introduction

The social role of universities has undergone significant transformation in recent decades: alongside the traditional function of knowledge transfer, the importance of direct responses to social challenges has become increasingly prominent. Mentoring is a well-established practice in this regard. In higher education, mentoring is playing an increasingly key role in supporting professional and personal development, as well as in developing institutional culture. Mentoring in higher education is not merely a form of individual support, but also a tool for organisational development (Gray et al., 2013). Mentoring is a supportive, collaborative learning process in which the mentor helps the mentee to realise their full potential and achieve their future goals, whilst the professional identity and toolkit of both parties develop (Woolhouse – Nicholson, 2020; Rhodes et al., 2004). A mentoring process based on trust and cooperation has a positive impact on both parties (Jones – Blankenship, 2020; Sharp, 2021). Higher education mentoring programmes play a key role in supporting students' academic progress, professional socialisation and teaching excellence. In this study, we present mentoring programmes operating at a Hungarian university, viewing them as examples of good practice. The mentoring programmes presented here demonstrate how an institution can become a learning organisation (Rhodes, et al. 2006, Woolhouse – Nicholson, 2020), whilst also carrying out supportive activities that can be valued in the field of social responsibility. This study presents two elements of the complex mentoring programme run by the Ludovika University of Public Service, which trains staff for the public sector in Hungary. One of the programmes aims to support the learning of young people living in specialist child protection care across the border through online mentoring. The pilot programme, which launched in the 2022/2023 academic year, has since become institutionalised and expanded significantly. The other

programme at the Ludovika University of Public Service targets lecturers, offering methodological, ICT and professional mentoring to support their development.

**The role of mentoring in higher education – teacher mentoring**

Mentoring in higher education is a process that supports both professional and personal development, with the aim of the mentor helping the mentee achieve their individual goals through a relationship based on trust, whilst enriching the professional identity and toolkit of both parties, and the institution as a whole also benefits from the process (Gray et al., 2013). As a form of collaborative learning, mentoring can contribute to the dissemination of equitable higher education practices, with particular regard to communication, professional development, equality, social justice and the role of trust (Woolhouse – Nicholson, 2020). The importance of mentoring in higher education is constantly growing, as it develops lecturers' professional competences, boosts their confidence and motivation, and contributes to improving the quality of teaching. At the organisational level, mentoring facilitates the institutional integration of lecturers, their more conscious professional socialisation, and increases commitment and job satisfaction, playing a stabilising role even during periods of organisational change (Gray et al., 2013). Many authors therefore interpret mentoring as one of the key elements in becoming a learning organisation and a learning community (Rhodes et al., 2004). Mentoring is a concept that is not uniformly defined, a 'sliding' concept (Friedman – Phillips, 2002), which continually adapts to the changing expectations of higher education. A well-designed mentoring system can be effective if it flexibly adapts to the different stages of an academic's career, ensures transparency and accessibility, and consciously promotes a culture of mentoring across the institution. Mentoring is particularly relevant for three target groups: early-career academics with limited teaching experience; highly talented students considering a career in academia or public service; and students who, for objective or subjective reasons, find it more difficult to progress during their studies, including those belonging to vulnerable groups. Support for these target groups is not provided in isolation but is interwoven into the university's operations, where teaching excellence, talent development and reducing dropout rates are mutually reinforcing tasks.

In higher education, mentoring can take many forms: there are formal and informal, individual and group, hierarchical and peer-to-peer, as well as short-term and long-term models. The traditional 'guru model', which relies on an experienced, high-status mentor, is increasingly seen as generally unsustainable (Rocquemore, 2013). More modern approaches tend to focus on networked, multi-source support, where mentoring provides not only professional development but also emotional support, feedback, accountability and access to opportunities. The institutional introduction of mentoring is justified because academic life harbours specific 'institutional labyrinths' in which it is particularly difficult for marginalised or under-represented groups to find their way (Misra et al., 2021). The benefits of informal networks are not equally accessible to everyone; therefore, systematic, transparent mentoring solutions can contribute to increasing equal opportunities and supporting professional advancement.

Mentoring to support the professional development of educators in higher education is a complex process situated at the intersection of multiple supportive and developmental activities. The practice of mentoring naturally overlaps with coaching, counselling and facilitation, as there are no clear-cut boundaries between these roles and tools; rather, a highly permeable methodological repertoire emerges (Clutterbuck, 1991). Historical examples of mentoring – such as the relationships between Socrates and Plato, Freud and Jung, or Haydn

and Beethoven – highlight that the mentor–mentee relationship mutually shapes the professional identity and reputation of both parties (Waugh, 2002).

In an academic setting, mentoring relationships may arise through institutional assignment (*top-down*) or individual choice (*bottom-up*). Appointed mentors are typically associated with a more formal collaboration tied to organisational expectations, whilst the relationship with a chosen mentor often supports professional and personal development within a 'real-life context' (Schoenfeld – Magnan, 1992). Workplace mentoring is typically a *site-based* activity that takes place within the shared organisational reality of a given institution and yields direct individual and organisational benefits: it improves morale, enhances performance and strengthens institutional commitment.

One of the less visible but strategically significant benefits of mentoring is the accumulation of emotional capital. Emotional capital is an intangible organisational resource built upon individuals' emotional experiences, which contributes to the development of a culture of trust, loyalty, patience and support (Deighton, 2017; Froyum, 2010; Eyel – Durmaz, 2019). By catalysing positive emotions and raising awareness of individual motivations and values, the mentoring relationship strengthens organisational well-being and commitment to the university, whilst helping to strike a balance between individual ambitions and organisational goals (Newman, 2009; Gendron, 2004).

From the perspective of organisational fit, mentoring programmes must always be designed in alignment with the institution's strategy, culture and HR processes. The specific characteristics of university autonomy and hierarchy require that, alongside institutional-level frameworks, faculty-level specifications may also apply, guided by consistent principles. The effective functioning of mentoring is aided by the availability of a clear governance model (Earley – Kinder, 1994), an unambiguous set of rules and an accessible mentoring handbook (Deighton, 2017).

Overall, faculty mentoring is not an intervention designed for quick wins, but a long-term, strategically planned organisational learning process. Its sustainability depends on voluntary participation, adequate preparation, organisational commitment and transparent operation. Mentoring can become one of the cornerstones of excellence in higher education if partnership-based cooperation, openness to development and accountability feature among the core values of the organisational culture.

**Mentoring as a field of social responsibility – online learning support**

Mentoring is a key tool for reducing educational inequalities, increasing student success and preventing early school leaving (Rhodes, 2002). It is not merely a problem-solving activity, but one with a developmental focus, in which the mentor–mentee relationship creates a safe, supportive context for emotional, social and cultural development (Kállai, 2015; Russel – Adams, 1997). The process is reciprocal: mentors' social and personal competences also develop (Godó, 2021), whilst a structure built on trust and cooperation has a positive impact on both parties (Jones – Blankenship, 2020; Sharp, 2021). Organised, adult-supervised out-of-school programmes are generally associated with improved learning outcomes and an expanded repertoire of coping strategies (Mahoneyet al., 2005; Juvonen et al., 2013; Pusztai, 2009). In

Hungary, the 'Tanodák'[1] (Kerényi, 2005; Fejes – Szűcs, 2016; Baráth, 2016; Baráth et al., 2019; Németh, 2009) and the 'Tanítsunk Magyarországért' (Let's Teach for Hungary) movement (Andl et al., 2020; Boda – Horváth, 2021; Horváth, 2022, 2023) can be regarded as examples of good practice in institutional and higher education. Both programmes can serve as models for mentoring programmes aimed at social and educational inclusion.

Early school leaving is a central category in the European Union's education policy (Mártonfi, 2014). This includes 18–24-year-olds "who do not have an ISCED-3 level qualification (neither a vocational qualification nor a school-leaving certificate) and who did not participate in education in the four weeks prior to the survey" (Mártonfi, 2014:36). The OECD NEET indicator (Not in Employment, Education or Training) measures young people who are not in education, employment or training. The phenomenon is complex; in recent years, the focus of research has shifted towards exploring individual life trajectories and contexts (Bodonyi, Hegedűs & Fekete, 2015; Fehérvári, 2015; Fehérvári et al., 2018; Lyche, 2010; Rumberger, 2012; Mihályi, 2015). The Europe 2020 Strategy places particular emphasis on changing indicators relating to education and poverty/social exclusion. One of the strategy's objectives was to reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10 per cent. This has been achieved in most EU Member States, though regional rates in Hungary vary considerably. The European Commission's strategy (COM 2010) treats education as a priority area. It also sets out specific targets regarding young people's educational attainment. Subsequently, in 2021, the Commission adopted the new strategy entitled 'Sustainable Europe 2030' (COM2021), which also proposes that Member States achieve certain targets. The identification of these strategic targets also serves as a form of incentive for Member States. The strategy identifies two key areas: one is to increase the proportion of people with higher education qualifications, and the other is to reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10% and 9% respectively. Hungary and Romania do not rank highly according to Eurostat data. Varga (2025) compares the results for early school leavers based on Eurostat data from 2014 and 2023. In 2014, seven Member States had a higher rate of early school leavers than Hungary (where the figure was around 12%); by 2023, only three countries had worse figures. Although Romania (one of the programme's target countries) ranked very poorly on the list in both years, it nevertheless recorded an improvement in percentage terms. In 2014, the school dropout rate was 18%, and in 2023 it was 16%. This is still not the figure recommended by the EU, but it can be regarded as a significant change (cf. Varga 2025, 161).

One of the key factors in escaping poverty and achieving social mobility is academic progress and further education (Boreczky, 2000; Ferge, 2001; Varga, 2015). In addition to family and social background, student performance is also shaped by the school environment (atmosphere, teaching practices) (Cohen et al., 2009; Lannert, 2006; McMahon, Pusztai, 2009; Széll, 2015). A key question arising from the debate sparked by the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) remains relevant to this day: to what extent can schools compensate for initial social differences? According to comparative studies, reducing school segregation increases equality of opportunity; however, educational outcomes are influenced by numerous other factors, and these vary from country to country (Benito et al., 2014). In the Hungarian context, there is a

[1] The 'Tanoda' is a non-formal, community-based educational institution in Hungary that provides after-school support programs for socially disadvantaged, primarily Roma, students.

strong link between family background and academic performance (Andor – Liskó, 2000; Balázsi et al., 2014), and schools may even exacerbate socio-cultural differences (Balázsi & Horváth, 2011). However, good practices do exist: integrated pedagogy (Kézdi – Surányi, 2008), inclusive pedagogy (Varga, 2015) and a supportive school climate (Széll, 2015) have been shown to support student success. Student engagement is a key factor in preventing dropout (Ames, 1992; Imre, 2015). Engagement is determined by emotional, behavioural and cognitive components alike, with motivation playing a prominent role (Buda, 2017; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). The motivational models emphasise supportive interactions within the social environment and the supportive role of teachers (Skinner – Pitzer, 2012).

Participation in extracurricular activities, which is a key area of non-formal learning opportunities, can have a significant impact on student achievement. According to Imre (2015: 76), "the umbrella term 'organised activity' is characterised by structured implementation, adult supervision and a focus on skills development". However, the voluntary and access-dependent nature of these programmes may limit their impact on academic achievement, as participation is not guaranteed for all pupils. Extracurricular activities can take many forms: national or local initiatives, school programmes, and opportunities offered by civil society organisations all fall into this category. Research consistently highlights that this type of participation has a positive impact on young people, contributes to academic achievement, and helps them cope with setbacks (Mahoney et al., 2005; Imre, 2015; Pusztai, 2009; Juvonen et al., 2013).

Another form of personalised learning support is mentoring, which offers an individually tailored opportunity outside the formal curriculum. According to Rhodes (2002), the aim of mentoring is not merely to address problems, but to help young people become successful adults. The key to the process is the development of personal relationships, which create a safe comfort zone and enable a developmental impact to take effect across multiple dimensions, such as emotional well-being, the development of social skills and cultural participation (Kállai, 2015). Mentoring is based on an interpersonal relationship built on trust, through which support can be provided in many areas of the young person's life.

**Context: The Ludovika University of Public Service**

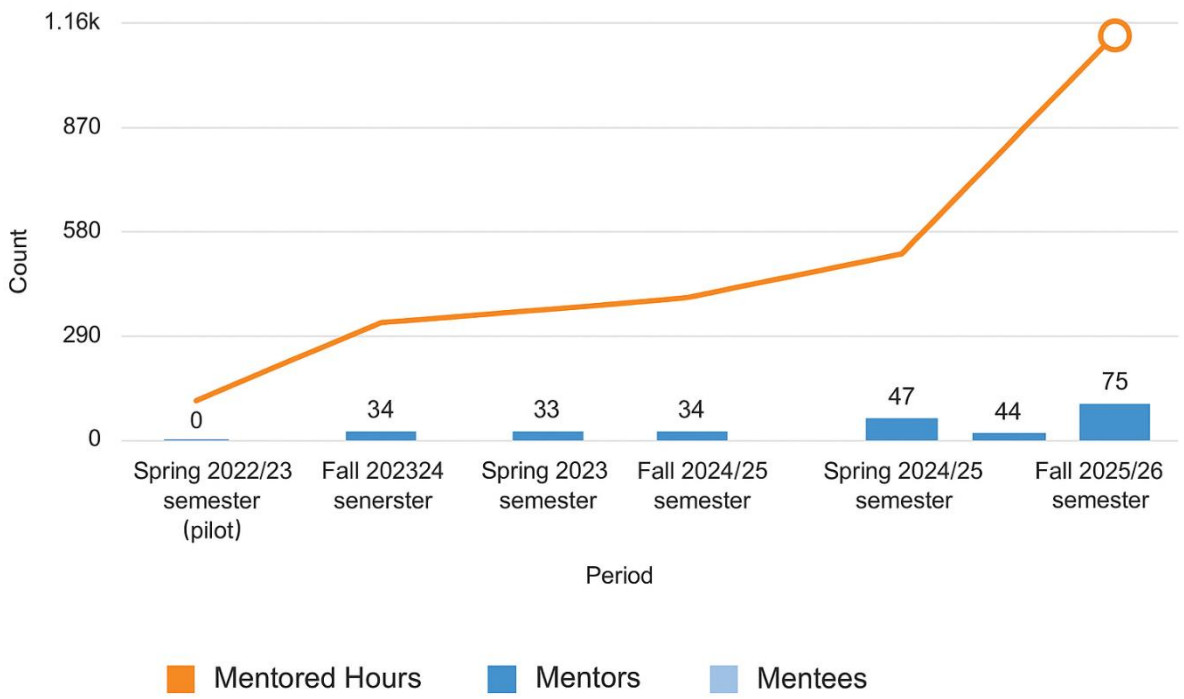
The Ludovika University of Public Service is an educational institution of exceptional standing even by international standards, where the training of various professional groups performing public duties takes place under one roof. The institution's mission is to coordinate the training of civil service professionals, law enforcement and military officers, and water management engineers, thereby promoting effective cooperation between sectors. Teacher training was added to this objective from September 2025. The university was established in early 2012 with the aim of combining the strengths of its predecessors to become a modern, research-focused centre for public administration education in Hungary. A key milestone in its development came in 2017 when the water management education programme based in Baja became part of the university, resulting in the current structure. The institution plays a leading role not only in education but also in the academic sphere: four doctoral schools provide academic training of the highest standard, whilst research work is coordinated by dedicated research centres. Students' professional development is supported by seven different specialist colleges, which

serve as venues for self-directed learning beyond the curriculum. The university's high-quality, modern campuses provide a fitting environment for this complex range of activities.[2]

## The Zsuzsanna Lorántffy Mentoring Programme

The Zsuzsanna Lorántffy Mentoring Programme is an example of the University's social responsibility: it helps disadvantaged young people in their academic and personal development through online mentoring, subject tutoring and confidence-building, resulting in mutual growth. The programme is delivered online, involving student volunteers, lecturers and university staff. Mentoring takes place on a weekly basis, focusing primarily on subject tutoring and support with study methods, but psycho-social support and the provision of positive role models are also key elements (Kram, 1985). The programme was launched in spring 2023 as a six-week pilot in three children's homes run by the Szent Ferenc Foundation in Transylvania. By autumn 2025, the programme had expanded and become institutionalised; currently, around 80 mentor–mentee pairs are participating in the work, whilst the number of partner institutions has risen to 11, covering areas inhabited by Hungarians beyond the country's borders (Biró – Korpics, 2024; Korpics – Biró, 2024). We continuously monitor the programme's operation, using both quantitative and qualitative tools. The intake questionnaires gather expectations and needs, whilst the exit and feedback questionnaires collect data on satisfaction with the programme and any issues that may arise. An online group interview is conducted with the mentors at the end of each semester, and the review of mentoring progress logs on a shared Padlet platform also forms part of the research. Over the past semesters, the programme has been strengthened, and institutional accounting systems related to volunteering (student credits, performance assessment points) have been established. The programme is coordinated and supported by the Ludovika Educational Development Office, which operates under the supervision of the Vice-Rector for Education. Impact assessment is carried out each semester using the same framework, employing both quantitative (short questionnaires, self-assessment scales) and qualitative (mentor reports, focus group interviews, case studies based on guided questions) tools. At the level of organisational learning, continuous reflection is key, serving the purposes of quality assurance and sustainability. The programme's figures also clearly demonstrate its necessity and success (Figure 1.)

[2] https://en.uni-nke.hu/




1. *Figure: Quantitative growth of the mentoring programme*

In the autumn term of the 2025/2026 academic year, the programme was expanded in terms of the institutions supported, providing support to pupils in a total of 12 institutions across Hungarian-populated areas in four countries. The list of subjects covered by the tutoring programme is also evolving, shaped by emerging needs. Currently, tutoring takes place within the framework of the following subjects: Hungarian language and literature, mathematics, English/foreign languages, biology, chemistry, history, speech therapy and geography.

In autumn 2025, the programme was expanded to include further forms of support. An optional student course was announced, within the framework of which we developed the mentoring skills of students applying to become mentors. The course was organised in blocks, with students receiving support across a range of topics. The course covered the significance and basic concepts of mentoring, the fundamentals of developmental psychology in childhood and adolescence, the role and competencies of the mentor and the mentoring process, communication techniques in mentoring, the specific characteristics of children in specialist child protection care, and the use of online mentoring and digital tools. In addition to attending the sessions, students were required to complete two assignments: one involved developing a mentoring case study and project plan, and the other involved presenting and analysing a communication or conflict situation. Twenty-five students attended the course, but fewer completed the assignments, as the two pieces of work only had to be submitted by those who were not present during the session on that topic. The students' commitment is demonstrated by the fact that some students submitted an analysis despite having been present during the training-style session on the topic.

The lecturer mentoring programme was launched a year later, in the spring of 2024, as a pilot scheme involving 11 mentor-mentee pairs, covering four faculties of the university at the time.

Based on the pilot's results and methodology, the programme continued and is currently in its fourth active semester with 52 mentor pairs. The programme operates through a combination of face-to-face and online support. The timetables and progress logs uploaded by the mentors serve not only to document their professional work but also as research data. The final group interviews and written final reflections evaluating the mentoring work serve the same purpose.

**About the research**

As previously indicated, both mentoring programmes are continuously monitored from a quality assurance perspective so that the opinions and suggestions of both participants and mentors can be incorporated into the work of subsequent semesters. During the pilot phase of the teaching mentor programme, input and output questionnaires were completed by the students involved in the programme, whilst the mentor-mentee pairs kept progress diaries and took part in a group interview at the end of the programme. We administered a needs assessment questionnaire and a feedback questionnaire to the students participating in the learning support programme. In addition, for the purposes of the research, we recorded the progress diaries uploaded by the mentors and the responses given during the final group interviews. During the autumn term of the 2025/2026 academic year, students participating in the mentoring programme conducted case studies based on guided questions; we analysed these as part of the qualitative research. We produced one case study for each of the two mentoring programmes, which, interpreted within the context of the literature and the institution, present two areas of the complex mentoring programme at the university under study.

**Communication and support challenges in an online mentoring programme**

Below, we analyse and present the communication and conflict cases. This analysis further refines our methodological toolkit, as we supplement the existing empirical data with the reflections and case presentations of the mentor-students. We asked the mentors to analyse the submitted communication and conflict cases along four main structural points. The first part was the description of the case, the second the identification of the problem, the third 'how could it have been done differently, what would have led to a good solution', and the fourth concerned useful strategies and communication methods. In the case descriptions, we have coded the names of the mentees to preserve anonymity.

*Analytical criteria and methodological framework*

The case studies were analysed using a qualitative, thematic approach. During the content analysis of the students' reports, we examined the cases along four predefined analytical dimensions, which were also supported by the empirical data:

1. Communication and organisational frameworks (scheduling, no-show situations, feedback culture, online protocols).
2. Motivational and self-efficacy factors (task acceptance, dropout, learned helplessness, performance anxiety).
3. Environmental and technical context (use of digital platforms, noisy learning environment, language barriers).
4. Emotional and relational dynamics (experience of being heard, quality of feedback, safety and empathy).

During the analysis, we interpreted each case in light of these aspects, then compared them horizontally to identify recurring problems and successful interventions. Based on the analysis, the cases were grouped around four distinct problem patterns. One of the most frequently occurring difficulties was the lack of a formal framework. In several instances, there were instances of absence without prior notice, lateness, or a lack of focus during online sessions. These situations cannot be attributed solely to the mentee's responsibility: the mentors' reflections also highlighted that the initial lack of clarity regarding shared rules and expectations contributed to the emergence of tensions. The second dominant area was the fragility of motivation and self-efficacy. Several mentees exhibited learned helplessness, a 'I can't do it' or 'it's pointless' narrative, or severe performance anxiety. In these cases, direct accountability or excessive expectations often triggered defensive communication and withdrawal. A third factor was the specific characteristics of the online environment. A noisy physical space, peer influence, and the bilingual context (HU–RO terminology barriers) significantly hindered effective learning. In the digital space, the lack of non-verbal feedback further increased the risk of misunderstandings and rapid dropout. Finally, the cases highlighted the key role of emotional connection and the experience of being heard. In situations where the mentor employed assertive, 'I-message' communication and made space for the mentee's feelings, the relationship stabilised, even if learning outcomes improved only gradually.

Based on the lessons from the case study, three mutually reinforcing areas for development emerge for the mentoring programme. Firstly, there is a need for structural and methodological reinforcement. It is advisable to establish standardised online mentoring protocols (time management, reporting procedures, no-show rules) and to make these clear right from the start of the mentoring relationship. These frameworks are not intended to make the relationship rigid, but to ensure its safe functioning. Secondly, the targeted development of mentoring competencies becomes necessary, with particular regard to creating emotional security, maintaining motivation and differentiation. Student case studies show that progress based on micro-goals, the provision of choices and a step-by-step approach prove to be effective tools. Thirdly, the institutionalisation of quality assurance and reflective learning can be further strengthened. The case studies function not only as a training task but also as a research and feedback tool for the continuous development of the programme. In the longer term, it may be appropriate to incorporate elements of supervision or intervision for student mentors.

The case studies prepared by the mentors clearly indicate that online mentoring is not merely a learning support process, but a complex relational and organisational process. Without the conscious alignment of the triad of framework, relationship and competence, even well-intentioned interventions can become counterproductive. The cases also confirm that analysis based on student mentors' reflections is an effective tool for the sustainable and quality-oriented development of the programme.

The case study highlighted that online mentoring provides personalised, regular support to young people in specialist child protection care, enhances learning motivation and self-efficacy, reduces the risk of dropping out, strengthens emotional security and positive role modelling, yet it also presents numerous challenges, such as technical obstacles, a weak culture of reporting, or fluctuations in motivation.

Based on the mentors' reflections, three areas for development are particularly noteworthy:

1. *Establishing structured online frameworks***:** standardised protocols, reporting procedures, time management.
2. *Mentor competence development***:** maintaining motivation, creating emotional security, differentiated learning support.
3. *An institutionalised reflection system***:** regular feedback, integration of supervision/intervision.

The programme's rapid growth and institutionalisation confirm that the university is capable of responding effectively to social challenges and contributing to the reduction of early school leaving.

**Teacher-mentoring pilot programme**

The aim of the programme was to contribute to improving the quality of teaching through personalised, methodology-focused support, as well as to enhance the student learning experience and engagement. The pilot was coordinated by the Creative Learning Office (KTI) (the predecessor of the Ludovika Educational Development Office), under the professional supervision of the Vice-Rector for Education. A total of 10 mentor-mentee pairs took part in the pilot (12 mentors, 10 mentees), covering all four faculties of the University at the time. Mentoring was primarily conducted using an individual mentoring model, with pair mentoring in two cases. The programme began in the middle of the spring semester of the 2023/2024 academic year and ran until the end of the term. The case study is based on multi-source empirical data generated during the pilot. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data sources used were as follows:

- documents of mentee and mentor SMART goals,
- observation reports and progress logs,
- pre- and post-programme student questionnaires,
- focus group discussions with mentors and mentees.

The questionnaire-based data collection involved a total of approximately 227 students; 67 students completed the pre-course questionnaire and 108 completed the post-course questionnaire. Students evaluated various aspects of the teaching (clarity of the syllabus, pace of the lesson, teacher communication, collaboration, motivation, methods and working styles used).

A comparative analysis of the student questionnaires indicates a clear positive shift in several key areas. Satisfaction with lecturer communication remained high and improved further in several subjects. The assessment of cooperation between students and lecturers also changed in a positive direction, with an overall average increase of 0.3 points on the five-point scale.

Based on the aggregated data from the research, the pilot programme had a demonstrably positive impact:

- the clarity of the curriculum (average: 4.27 → 4.56),
- student motivation (3.89 → 4.20),

- the assessment of lecturer communication (4.75 → 4.82),
- and student–teacher collaboration (4.52 → 4.75).

An analysis of teaching methods and working formats showed that, although lecture-based teaching remains dominant, a measurable shift towards active learning formats occurred during the pilot period. The proportion of discussions, demonstrations, gamification and out-of-class work increased. The proportion of pair work rose by 32%, group work by 20% and individual work by 10% over the course of a month. Qualitative feedback confirmed the quantitative results: mentors reported an increase in student activity, whilst mentees reported that the teaching process could be planned more consciously and that their methodological toolkit had expanded.

Overall, based on the students' opinions, the pilot programme had a demonstrably positive impact on teacher communication, student-teacher collaboration, student engagement, the pace of lessons and the clarity of the curriculum (Figure 2).

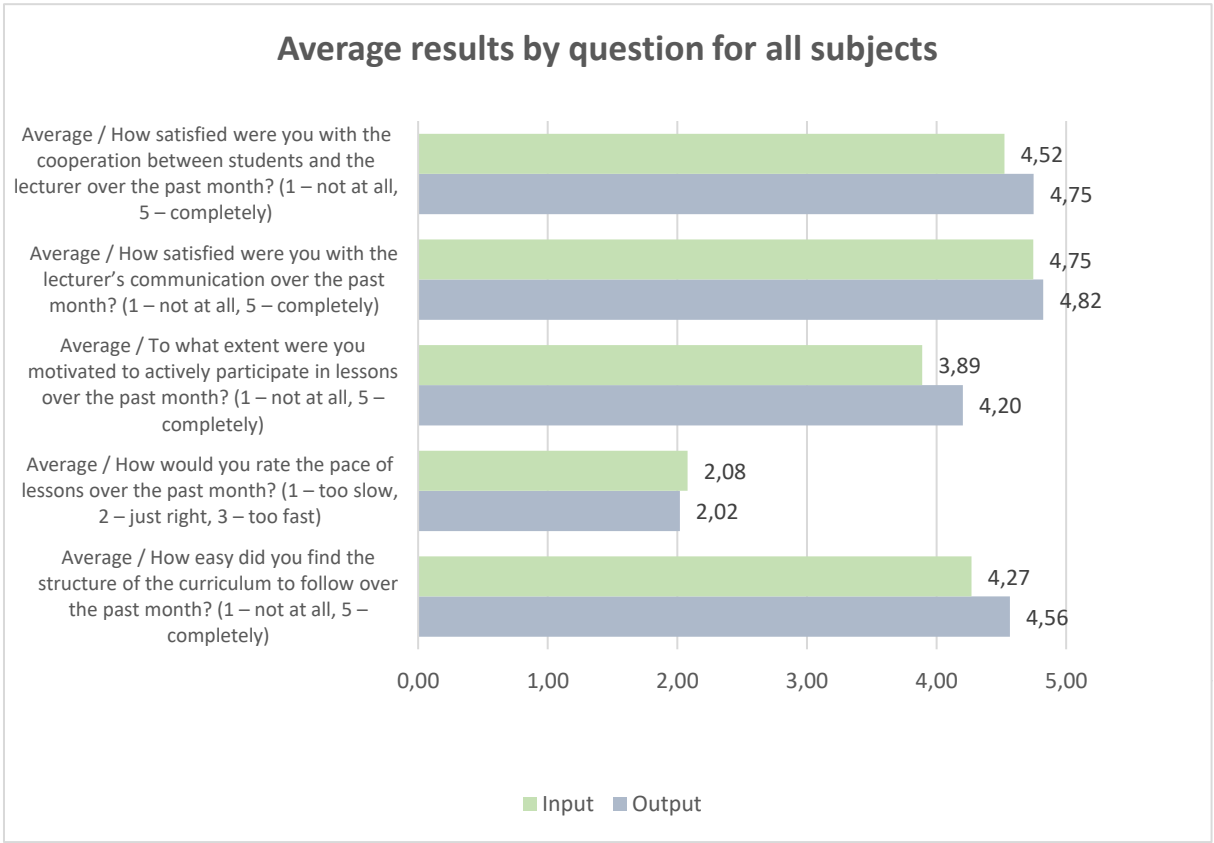



*Figure 2 Average results by question for all subjects.*

Based on the students' responses, a predominance of traditional teaching methods can be observed (lecture, explanation, discussion). A comparison of the input and output results reveals a shift towards active methods, as a quantitative increase in the use of discussion, demonstration, gamification and out-of-class work can be observed over the course of one month (Figure 3).

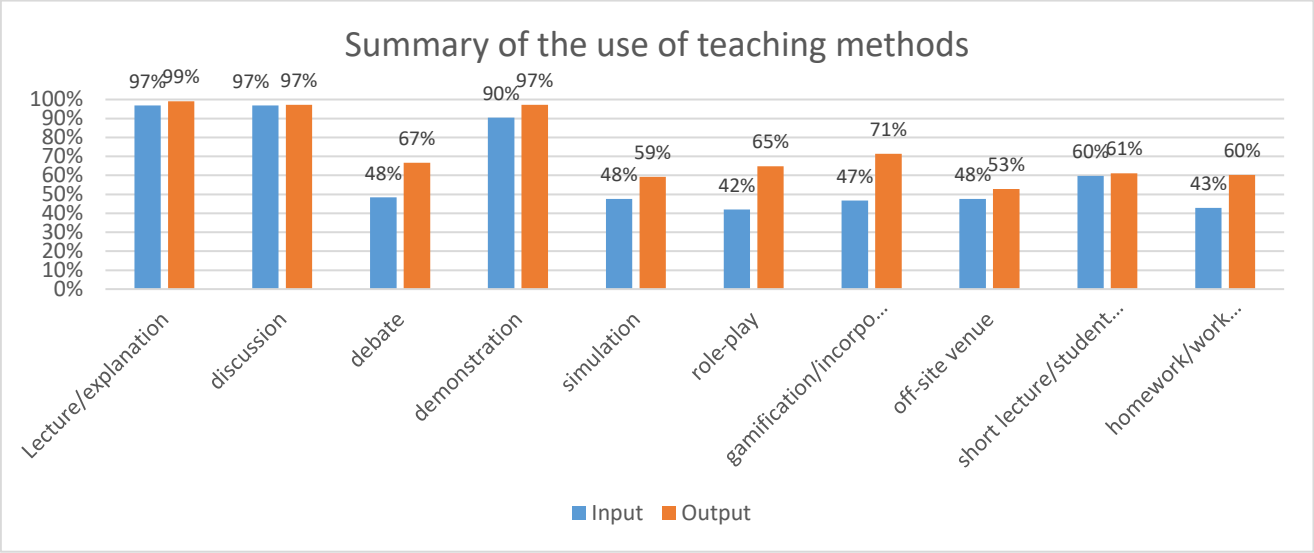



*Figure 3: Comparison of average results from input and output questionnaires regarding the use of teaching methods, taking all courses into account.*

Based on the students' responses, lecture-based teaching was the dominant method. According to the results of the exit survey, over the course of one month, the amount of pair work increased by 32%, group work by 20% and individual work by 10% (Figure 4).

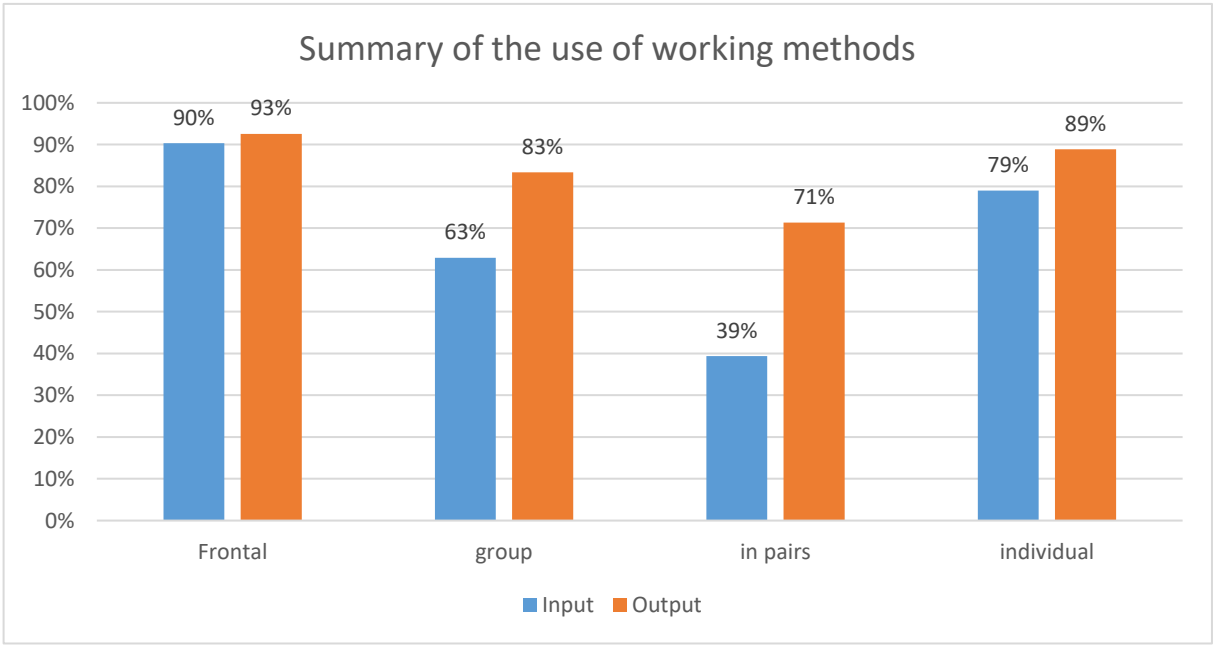



*Figure 4 Comparison of the average results of the pre- and post-course questionnaires regarding the use of teaching methods, taking all courses into account.*

Based on the research findings, three main areas for development emerge. On the one hand, there is a need for the systematic expansion and consistent scheduling of mentoring: participants unanimously indicated that the programme should be launched at the start of the semester and run over a longer period.

Secondly, there is a need for a dual (professional and methodological) mentoring model, which provides both content-related and pedagogical support.
Thirdly, institutional recognition of mentoring work (TÉR points, teaching load allocation) and targeted training for mentors are of key importance.

The case study presented demonstrates that the LUPS's pilot teaching mentoring programme had a demonstrable positive impact on the quality of teaching and student engagement, even within a short period of time. Based on multi-source data collection and analysis supported by figures, mentoring proved to be an effective tool in supporting methodological renewal. The experiences of the pilot lay the foundations for the development of a long-term, sustainable, institutionalised teaching mentor system. The results of the pilot programme showed clearly positive trends: satisfaction with the clarity of the curriculum and with lecturers' communication increased, lecturer–student collaboration strengthened, student motivation and active participation in lessons improved, and the repertoire of methods used (discussion, gamification, group work, demonstration, etc.) expanded measurably.

The data also highlighted that lecturers require:

1. *a longer, stable mentoring process,*
2. *dual support – both professional and methodological,*
3. *institutional recognition and accountability for mentoring work.*

**Discussion**

Based on research presenting the theoretical and empirical background of mentoring, it is clear that mentoring is a key intervention in both higher education and the field of social inclusion. The international literature (Gray et al., 2013; Rhodes, 2002; Woolhouse – Nicholson, 2020) emphasises the dual nature of mentoring: it is both a process of personal relationships and an organisational learning mechanism, based on trust, the accumulation of emotional capital, and reflective and supportive interactions. Research from Hungary (e.g. Kállai, 2015; Fejes – Szűcs, 2016; Imre, 2015; Pusztai, 2009) similarly highlight the impact of mentoring on learning motivation, academic success and social mobility, emphasising in particular the importance of extracurricular and personalised forms of support.

The findings of the two case studies examined – the Zsuzsanna Lorántffy online mentoring programme and the teaching mentor pilot – are strongly consistent with the research findings outlined in the theoretical background, whilst also adding new perspectives to our understanding of how mentoring programmes in Hungarian higher education operate.

**Mentoring as a process of learning and development**

According to Rhodes's (2002) model, the impact of mentoring manifests itself in three key areas: emotional support, social development and cognitive development. The case studies from the Zsuzsanna Lorántffy programme particularly underscore the role of emotional security and relational dynamics: mentees often struggle with performance anxiety, learned helplessness or low motivation, and the mentors' assertive, empathetic communication proved to be an effective response to these issues. This is consistent with the findings of Mahoney et al. (2005) and Juvonen et al. (2013), who demonstrated the positive impact of extracurricular, adult-led learning activities on young people's engagement and well-being.

In the case of the teacher mentoring programme, progress was evident in other dimensions, but the operational logic of mentoring is similar. The expansion of the methodological toolkit, increased awareness of lesson planning, and improved student collaboration are all outcomes that reinforce the role of mentoring in the development of professional identity and competencies (Waugh, 2002; Clutterbuck, 1991). Approaches emphasising the accumulation of emotional capital (Deighton, 2017; Eyel – Durmaz, 2019) can also be interpreted within the context of the teaching programme, as reports from mentored teachers indicate that the supportive professional relationship reduced feelings of uncertainty and increased motivation to try out new methods.

**The role of frameworks, structures and protocols**

The international literature emphasises that mentoring works effectively when accompanied by clear structures, transparent processes and accessible support resources (Earley – Kinder, 1994; Deighton, 2017). The necessity of this is clearly evident in the Lorántffy programme's analyses of communication and conflict management: no-shows, uncertain scheduling, or a lack of communication frequently led to tensions. This indicates that mentoring is not only an interpersonal issue but also an organisational one, requiring the development of standardised protocols.

In contrast, the teacher mentoring programme featured a stronger degree of structure from the outset (SMART objectives, lesson observation reports, progress logs), which contributed significantly to the programme's effectiveness. This is consistent with Misra et al.'s (2021) metaphor of the institutional labyrinth: transparent mentoring embedded within a framework reduces uncertainty and increases the likelihood of equal access.

**The importance of motivation and engagement**

Domestic research (Imre 2015; Buda 2017; Pusztai 2009) consistently emphasises the role of motivation in learning effectiveness. Based on case studies from the Lorántffy programme, low motivation, learned helplessness and performance anxiety are common obstacles – yet these difficulties can be overcome if the mentoring relationship allows for gradual development, micro-goals and positive feedback. This fits well with Skinner and Pitzer's (2012) motivational model, which emphasises the importance of a supportive social environment.

According to the results of the teaching mentoring pilot, an increase in student engagement was observed when lecturers changed their methodology, incorporated more interactive elements, and became more conscious in their communication. This improvement in collaboration thus reinforces the theoretical finding that the impact of mentoring is evident not only in the mentee but also in the wider student community.

**The characteristics of the online environment**

International literature is increasingly examining the dilemmas of online mentoring (digital competences, lack of non-verbal cues, technical barriers). The results of the Lorántffy programme highlight precisely these factors: a noisy environment, language barriers or limited access to devices all influenced the development of relationships. At the same time, the programme's growth shows that the online format is not a barrier, but rather a prerequisite for reaching disadvantaged young people.

**Mentoring as an organisational learning process**

Both case studies confirm the findings of Rhodes et al. (2004) and Rocquemore (2013) that mentoring is a key element in an organisation's learning process. The institutionalisation of the Lorántffy programme, the development of the credit and performance assessment system, and the system of continuous feedback demonstrate that mentoring is not merely a project, but a long-term organisational development initiative. Similarly, the methodological changes initiated by the teacher mentoring programme confirm that mentoring is an effective tool for the renewal of teaching culture.

The findings of the two case studies are fundamentally consistent with the Hungarian and international research presented in the theoretical background, and provide empirical evidence that: mentoring enhances learning motivation, supports the development of professional identity and competencies, increases equality of opportunity, and contributes to organisational learning and the development of institutional culture. At the same time, the programmes examined also highlight that the effectiveness of mentoring depends to a large extent on its structure, the quality of communication, the management of the specific characteristics of the online space, and regular reflection. Based on these experiences, both programmes can lay the foundations for the development of a long-term, sustainable and research-based mentoring system in Hungarian higher education.

## Summary

The aim of this study was to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of mentoring in higher education, particularly in terms of methodological renewal, supporting learning outcomes and social responsibility. Based on the analysis, it is clear that mentoring is a complex support activity that serves the development of students, teachers and the institution alike. Both case studies demonstrate that mentoring in higher education institutions is simultaneously: *a process of personal development, a tool for pedagogical and methodological development, a mechanism for organisational learning, and a practice of social responsibility.*

Based on the research findings, mentoring programmes are sustainable in the long term and can be further developed, contributing to equal opportunities, quality education and excellence in higher education.

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