

# Belonging, Voice and Agency: Co-designing Mentoring with International Students

**Dr Lei Zeng**

Project lead

Lecturer in Fashion Business Technology

[lei.zeng-2@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:lei.zeng-2@manchester.ac.uk)

**Dr Wennie Subramonian**

Project co-lead

Senior Lecturer in Chemical Engineering

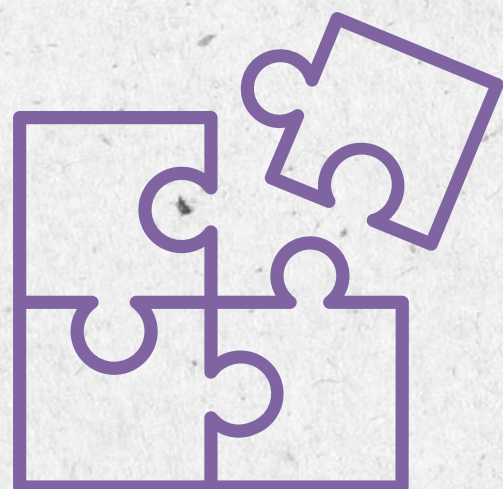
[wennie.subramonian@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:wennie.subramonian@manchester.ac.uk)

**Lalrinzuali Fanai**

Student-partner

M.A Sociology

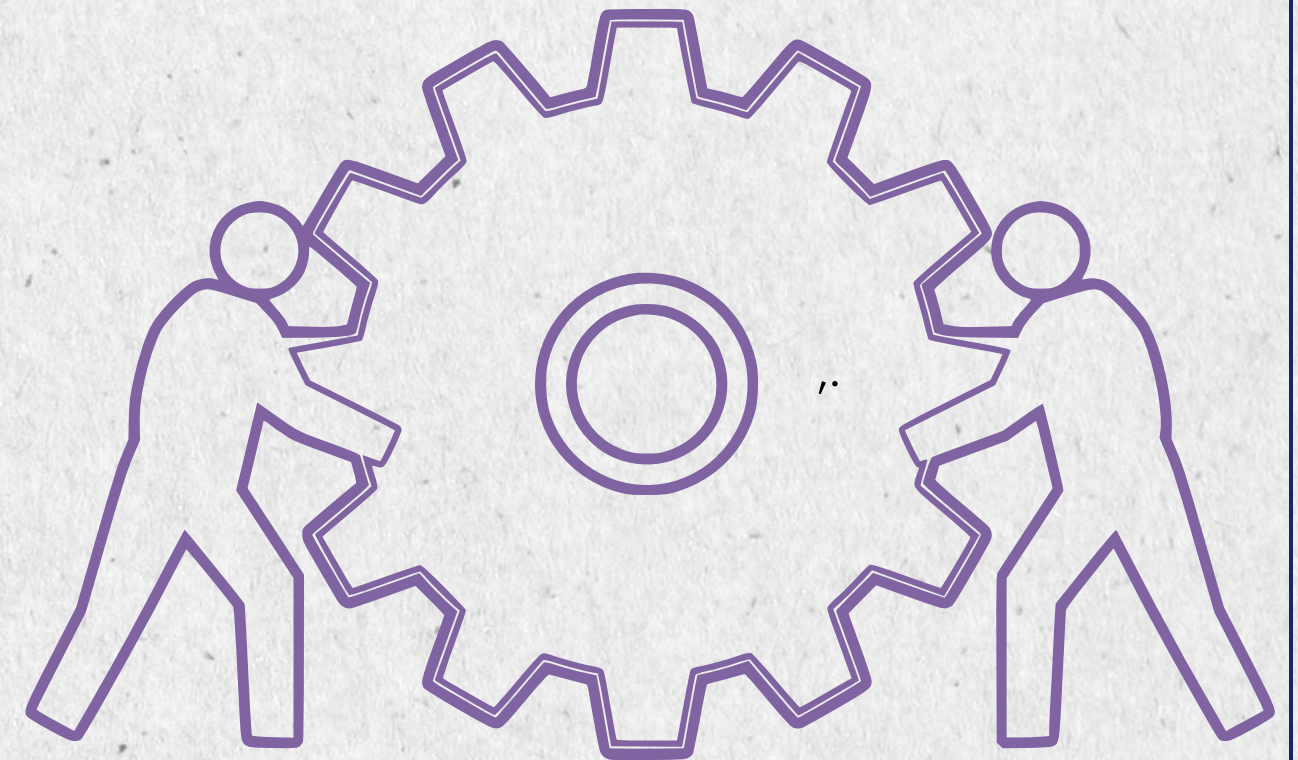
[lalrinzuali.fanai@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:lalrinzuali.fanai@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)



# Project Overview

- ❑ Student-staff partnership
- ❑ Co-designing, training, and peer-mentoring
- ❑ Collaborative project between staff, student-partner, and students

*Aim: strengthen support for international students*



# Starting Point: International Student Guidance (2025)

Guidance developed by 2025 student-partner  
through interviews from international students

Identified gaps in academic, social, language and  
cultural integration

The guidance provided a foundation for 2026  
training materials for peer-mentors

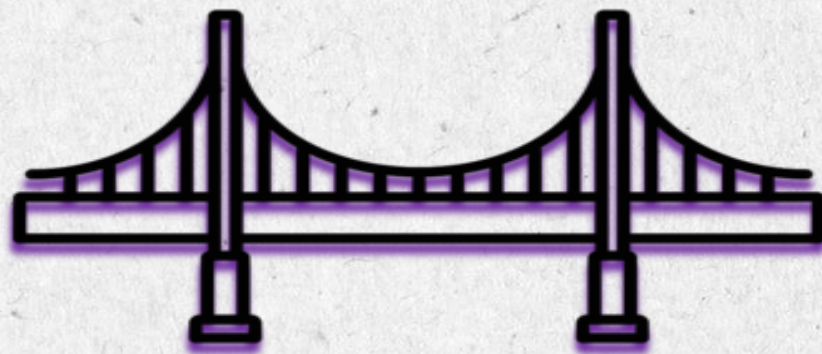


# Co-Designing Materials

International students  
shape content from lived  
experience

Staff supported structure  
and implementation

Co-design ensure  
authenticity and  
relevance

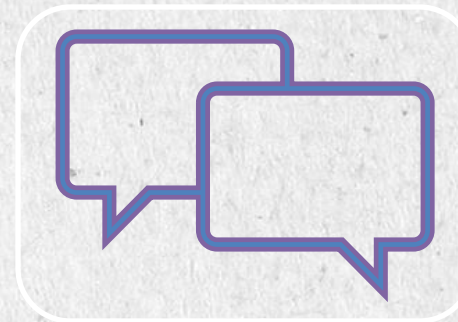


# Developing Mentor Training Materials

- Three main topics based on the International Student Guidance created by previous student-partner along with the staff partner :



**Life in the UK**



**Language and  
Communication**



**Adapting to the UK  
Higher Education  
System**

- Focused on real student experiences
- Prioritize clarity, cultural sensitivity, and practical support

# Expanding the Training Material



Current student-partner and staff partner developing training materials from the International Student Guidance



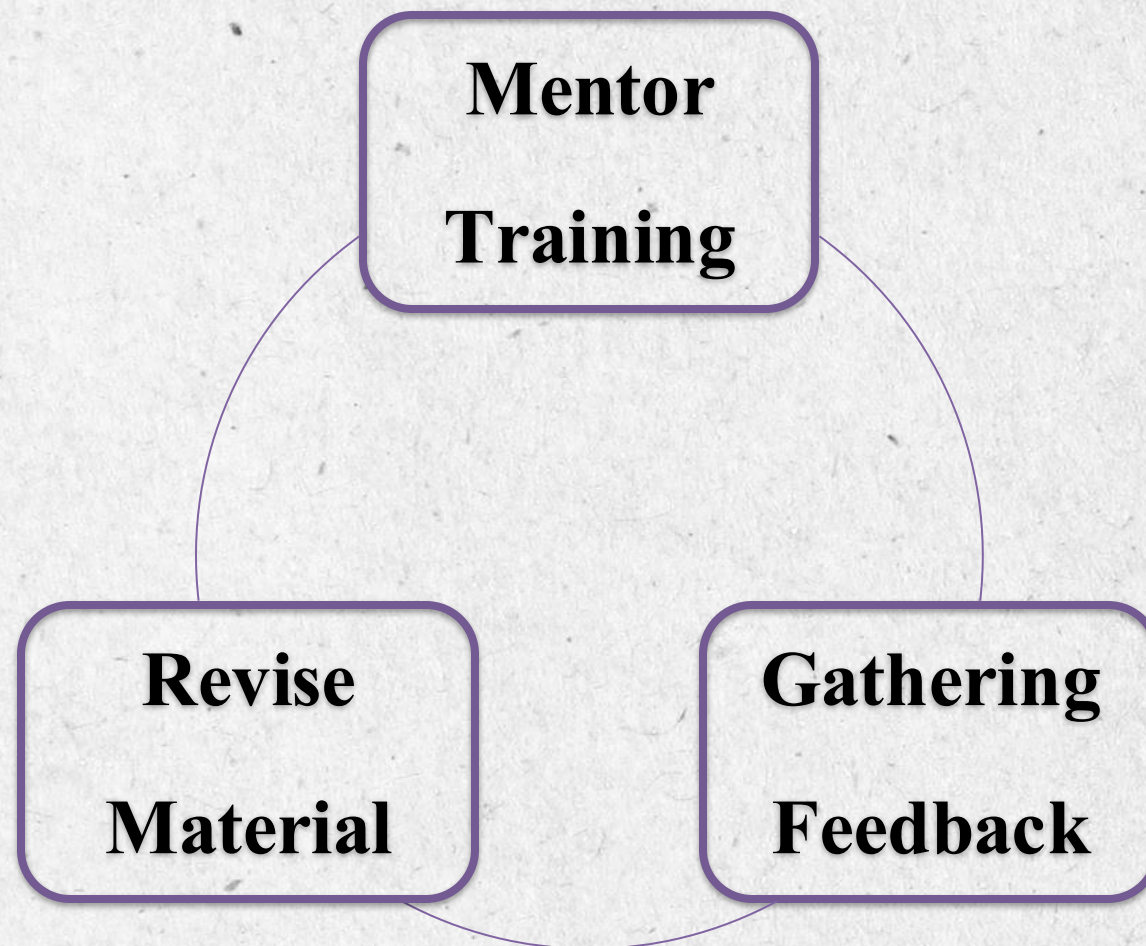
Producing additional training material from issues international students face



Created guidance for mentors to use during the programme



# Peer-Mentoring Programme



- ❑ Mentor training emphasized on signposting, active listening, boundaries, and cultural awareness
- ❑ Mentors prepared to support diverse student needs
- ❑ Mentoring framed as co-creation and co-development

# Peer-Mentoring Timeline

## ☐ March-June 2026 mentor training sessions:

Session 1: Foundations & Co-creation

Session 2: Practice & Skill-Development

## ☐ September 2026:

Assigning mentees to mentors and initiating first contact

## ☐ February 2027 mid-point check-in:

Feedback and Reflection

## ☐ May 2027 end of 1<sup>st</sup> year mentoring programme:

Celebration and Evaluation



# Peer-Mentor Training Material

- ❑ Two in-person and online training sessions each
- ❑ 24 students completed mentor training

| Session 1- Foundations & Co-Creation                                                                     | Session 2- Practice & Skill-Development                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students receive training on the material produced from the International Student Guidance               | Students are provided with cases they are likely to face as mentors and this process allows us to monitor how they respond in real-time to training materials |
| 1.5 hours training                                                                                       | 1.5 hours training                                                                                                                                            |
| Students provide feedback on the training materials and provide other issues international students face | The answers are discussed and given feedback on                                                                                                               |

# Mentor Engagement in Co-Design

## ☐ Mentors' Participation:

Mentors provide feedback on the topic which they received training from as well as other issues they are aware of.

## ☐ Purpose:

To identify gaps, unclear areas, and new issues.

## ☐ Results:

Their feedbacks directly shape revisions to the materials and produce new materials.

# Development of Materials through Training

Training materials created from the  
International Student Guidance (2025):

- ☐ Life in the UK
- ☐ Language and Communication
- ☐ Adapting to UK Higher Education System

Example topics for new resources for  
international students:

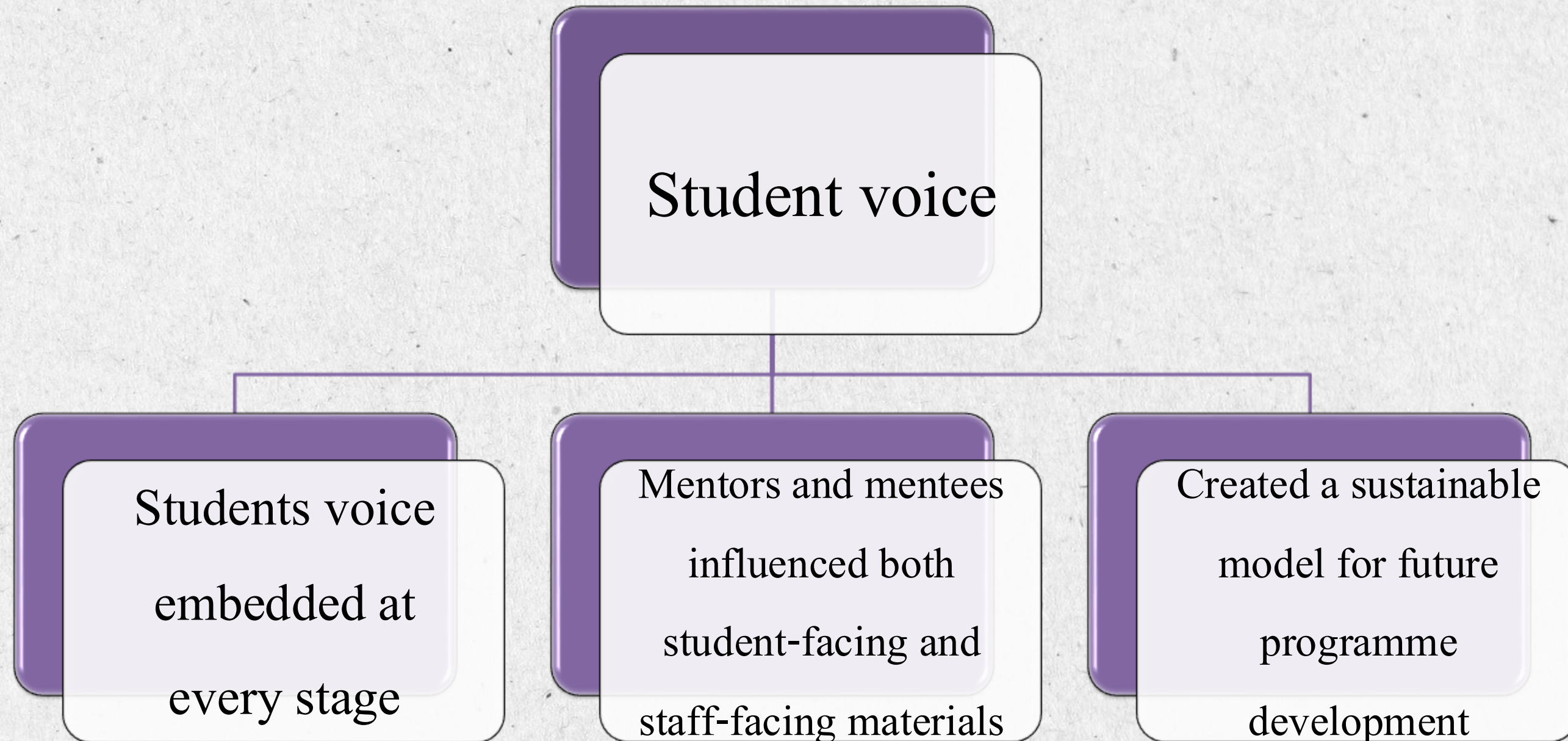
- ☐ Navigating university essentials
- ☐ Travelling guide
- ☐ Speaking Manc
- ☐ Explore Manchester
- ☐ NHS Healthcare Services &  
Emergencies in Manchester

# Impacts of Peer-Mentoring Programme

- ☐ Mentors' feedback are key to developing training materials
- ☐ Mentors become co-creators, not just participants
- ☐ Mentors gain confidence and skills in mentoring
- ☐ The programme aims to create a sense of belonging for mentors and mentees
- ☐ International students will receive more practical support
- ☐ Programme strengthen through shared ownership

# Co-Design Impact:

## Training Materials and Staff Guidance



# Impact on Staff: Staff Guidance

Staff Guidance developing from the feedback of international students collected through interviews

Focus areas include:

- ☐ Academic integration
- ☐ Social belonging
- ☐ Cultural integration



# Conclusion and Next Steps

- ☐ Co-designing and mentoring creating richer, more responsive support system
- ☐ Enriching international students' voice, experiences, and sense of belonging

## Next steps:

- ☐ Start peer-mentoring session in September (target: 20 mentors & 60 mentees)
- ☐ Update the training materials and co-create staff guidance based on mentor-mentee feedback
- ☐ Evaluate and expand the mentoring programme

# Thank you

**We would like to thank the Student as Partners Programme for  
their generous support in providing student partner funding  
and training.**

**International Student Support**