

Growing Opportunities: How Farnborough Students Are Finding Their Future with Local Mentoring

Zurich's Kickstart Programme sees a surge in students as confidence, skills, and career dreams take flight.

When Ben Gogoi-Degens first signed up for a mentoring programme with Zurich during his time at The Sixth Form College Farnborough, he wasn't sure what to expect. At just 16, the idea of stepping into the corporate world was daunting. But thanks to the Kickstart Mentoring Programme, Ben found not only valuable experience — but also the confidence to launch a successful career.

"The programme gave me a great introduction to the corporate world," Ben says. "We spent time at Zurich's Farnborough office, learning about different parts of the business, and even visited places like the Lloyd's of London building and Zurich's headquarters. It was a fun and eye-opening experience, and it really helped develop my confidence."

Today, Ben is undertaking a Level 7 apprenticeship with one of the Big 4 professional services firms, working in finance while studying for a master's degree. He credits the Kickstart Mentoring Programme with giving him the early boost he needed.

"After working with Zurich, I found it much easier to approach recruiters at assessment centres and interviews," he explains. "It gave me the professionalism and self-belief to show what I could do."

The Kickstart Mentoring Programme, run in collaboration between Zurich and The Sixth Form College Farnborough, was first launched three years ago with just 28 students. Since then, word of mouth among teachers and students alike has helped the programme grow to 54 participants this year.

Focused on supporting students who may not otherwise have access to professional networks, the programme provides a vital leveller. To qualify, students typically come from disadvantaged backgrounds; criteria include being in receipt of free school meals or college bursaries, living in areas of deprivation, being a looked-after young person, or arriving as a refugee.

Adam Slade, Lead Tutor at the college, has seen the difference it makes first-hand.

"We've now been part of the Kickstart mentoring programme for three years, as a key part of our effort to provide equal access and address imbalances in opportunities for our students," he explains. "The mentoring experience is truly valuable, with five or six

meetings held throughout the academic year. It creates a safe space where young people can ask questions they might not otherwise feel comfortable raising — whether it's about navigating career choices or overcoming imposter syndrome.

Students work closely with their mentors on activities like CV writing, presentation skills, and networking, all in a supportive and non-judgemental environment. I believe Kickstart plays a vital role in supporting and enhancing the life chances of students, some of whom may face significant challenges. The impact on their confidence and career readiness is clear. We're deeply grateful for the time and effort Zurich's employees dedicate to this initiative."

Each mentor supports a small group of three to four students over a six-month period, building relationships that create impact and support practical guidance. The benefits run both ways, with many mentors saying they find the experience hugely rewarding, developing their own skills in coaching, communication, and supporting young people through transition points in their lives.

For Ben, the programme was about more than gaining practical skills, it was about overcoming personal barriers too. Growing up with fewer professional connections, the opportunity to learn directly from business professionals was invaluable.

"My biggest challenge was taking that leap," he says. "But I remembered the point of the Inspire Programme, which was to give people like me a fair chance. That gave me the courage to ask for the opportunity, and I'm so glad I did."

Today, Ben is passionate about encouraging others to take similar opportunities. "I would urge anyone who gets the chance to join something like Kickstart to do it," he says. "Building your network early is incredibly valuable, it can open doors you didn't even know were there."

Zurich's Kickstart Mentoring Programme continues to offer Farnborough's young people a platform for building skills, growing confidence, and preparing for successful futures, one student, one mentor, and one conversation at a time.

If you are interested in the Kickstart Programme please contact Adam Slade by emailing him on aslade@farnborough.ac.uk .