Mentoring Guide

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Introduction

This guide is aimed at everyone interested in mentoring, whether you are looking for a mentor or want a mentor, or if you are responsible for setting up and overseeing a mentoring programme within your department or institution. Two types of mentoring are addressed:

1. new staff induction mentoring
2. developmental mentoring.

What is a mentor?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary:

Mentor n a. A person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, esp. one who is younger and less experienced. More generally: a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counsellor or friend; a patron, a sponsor.

v trans. To act as a mentor to; to advise or train (a person, esp. a younger and less experienced colleague).

Mentee n A person who has a mentor; the person guided or tutored by a mentor.

What is mentoring about?

Eric Parsloe of the Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring believes mentoring should “support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be.” Clutterbuck Associates see “mentoring as one of the fastest growing methods of developing skills and talent in European organisations. It can be seen as the most intimate of learning approaches. One useful way of describing mentoring is that it is a means of assisting transitions in thinking patterns.”

Types of mentoring

For the purposes of this guide, new staff induction mentoring refers to the guidance required when an employee commences a new contract within the University. The employee will as part of his/her induction require information about where to find people/places/libraries, information about seminars etc on an ad hoc basis, which might usefully be provided by a mentor. In developmental mentoring, emphasis is on learning and development and growth of the mentee. The mentee takes responsibility for his/her own development. It should be a mentee-driven relationship, and to gain maximum benefit from the relationship, both the mentor and in particular the mentee should be committed to the mentoring process.
What is the University's policy on mentoring?

Since 1996 the University has formally required all its institutions to make arrangements for the mentoring of its newly appointed staff. This is particularly relevant to academic, academic-related and contract research staff and applies to existing staff taking up new positions as well as those coming to the University for the first time. Full details of the policy are available at www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/personnel/mentoring

Mentoring is the process whereby an experienced staff member offers support to someone in the early stages of a new appointment, particularly during the probationary period.

The role of mentor is as guide and support, possibly a friend and confidante, as well as source of information. It is envisaged that the need for a mentor will diminish as time goes by and will disappear completely as the new member of staff develops his or her own networks of friends and contacts. Mentors need to be readily accessible and prepared to offer help as the need arises.

Mentoring takes place alongside staff review and development (appraisal) and the assessment of performance in relation to reappointment or confirmation of satisfactory completion of probation. It is, however, a separate process. Staff review and development is intended to be a supportive and creative review of progress and a reviewer might well find him or herself acting in an advisory role during or after a staff review and development discussion. However, it is not intended that a reviewer takes on a longer-term advisory role or has an additional support function.

What sort of advice might a member of staff require from a mentor?

This depends on the type of mentoring relationship. For example, a new member of staff might want information about finding accommodation, childcare facilities, times of departmental seminars and meetings, ordering consumables and equipment, obtaining stationery, academic and social groups etc. Whereas in a developmental mentoring relationship, the mentee might want information about the University and its structure, how to balance research and teaching or other commitments, how to get some teaching practice, involvement with societies bodies or networks, how to become involved with Colleges, etc.

Why have a developmental mentor?

Mentoring is important as it provides individuals with role models and may be a means of providing information about career and training opportunities (internal and external). Importantly, the mentor might provide the inspiration to take these opportunities up. Mentoring also widens the support network, provides motivation and can improve confidence.

Induction mentoring might help, for example, those new to the area or minority groups, gain greater social inclusion faster. Additionally, the mentee may gain access to
networks, colleges, professional bodies etc that might otherwise have been difficult without the help of a mentor.

**Developmental mentors** provide the opportunities for younger/less experienced colleagues to learn from others' mistakes, and might provide information and/or access to professional networks, information about training opportunities, professional exams and qualifications and inside knowledge about career progression.

### How should mentoring work?

Obviously the answer to this question depends on what is expected of the mentoring relationship. If the pairing has been set up as an aid to **induction of a new member of staff**, for example pointing the mentee in the right direction for the seminar room and library, the mentee should feel free to ask questions of the mentor as required. The mentor should therefore be available to offer the appropriate advice (and should have the advice to hand, or know where to access it) as and when required, realising that the frequency of contact with the mentee will fall rapidly as the member of staff “finds his or her feet” within the department. It might be appropriate for the mentor to find the mentee in the first day or two of employment in the department, to introduce themselves perhaps over coffee, and use this time to point out how and where the mentee can find/contact him/her as required.

If the mentoring is to take a **developmental** form, the relationship will take quite a different format. Everything discussed between mentor and mentee should be regarded as confidential. It is important that trust is established within the relationship, especially with respect to confidence. Ideally both the mentor and mentee should have received formal training, although this isn’t always possible. The University’s Staff Development Office runs “Mentoring: Being a good mentor” as a 2 hour course.

The pairings should be considered carefully, or in some cases it might be appropriate for mentees to select their own mentors. A mentor-mentee relationship works best when the individuals have been matched according to interests, and mutual trust and respect is established. However it is important that if the relationship doesn’t work or either party is unhappy with the way it is going, then a “no fault” separation can be instigated.

In both types of mentoring, the relationship will change with time as the needs of the mentee change. There may come a stage where the relationship is no longer required at all.

### Mentors

**Why be a mentor?**

You might have many reasons for wanting to mentor another member of staff or student. The reasons you have for wanting to mentor, together with your work experience to date will determine what sort of mentoring relationship you will be involved in.
All mentors will want to put something back into the institution and want to help others.

Developmental mentors in particular will also
- want to share their experiences, especially with the benefit of hindsight
- want to help others develop to their full potential
- want to develop their own skills (in mentoring/coaching etc)

Are you ready to be a mentor?

If you have some working experience of your department, you feel comfortable working there, and know your way around, you are probably ready for induction mentoring. You will be prepared to help a new member of staff, and be available to talk to especially at the beginning of his/her contract: it’s not much use having a mentor who is going on holiday/sabbatical two days after the new member of staff begins work in the department!

If you wish to be matched in a developmental mentoring relationship, it is not necessary for you to be at the top of the career ladder, but you should have several years’ work experience on which to draw.

You should be prepared and willing to:
- invest time and effort into developing another employee, and want to help him/her achieve success
- share your personal experiences
- challenge your mentee in a constructive manner
- keep matters confidential.

How to be a good mentor

As a mentor for a new member of staff, you should be well acquainted with the department and University, and be willing and available to give advice and information as the new member of staff requires it. Be sure to make your mentee feel that he/she can approach you for information when they require it, either by phone, e-mail or face-to-face. In the very early stages of the relationship, invite your mentee to have coffee/tea or lunch with you once or twice. If the mentee approaches you at a time when you are very busy and can’t deal with the problem there and then, try and arrange a time slot (for 5/15/30 minutes, as appropriate, later in the day or early the next day), and avoid giving out signals that the mentee is getting in the way.

It is the developmental mentor’s role to question and challenge while giving guidance and encouragement.

- Listen actively and without interrupting. Remember that 55% of communication is through body language. For example, consider
  - Eye contact, open body posture, paying attention (not fidgeting, doodling, playing with pen/bits of paper etc), not butting in but questioning appropriately, demonstrating empathy and checking that you understand what you are being told.
In listening well, you will make the mentee feel: valued, understood, positive, empowered, accepted. Otherwise, there is the danger of the mentee feeling: misunderstood, unimportant, alienated, worthless, and that no-one cares.

• Give effective feedback:
  "People rarely struggle with an issue because of the lack of some specific information; often the best help is in facilitating the person to come to a better understanding of their issue(s), how it developed and how they can identify actions to address the issue."
  o Feedback may be positive or negative.
  o Direct feedback on motivation and behaviour, rather than the person.
  o Don't try to control or instruct the mentee but give reminders ("Don't forget to check out that website on...")
  o If you're not sure of the answer, say so, and instead maybe suggest a contact who does know, or offer to "check it out" with a contact before your next meeting.
  o Straightforward and objective
  o Follow up any feedback you give ("How did you get on looking into...?")
  o Create a safe and trusting environment. Avoid being confrontational.

• Things to avoid saying:
  o "Oh I wouldn't get upset about that if I were you"
  o "Don't worry about it. It'll turn out OK"
  o "You think you have a problem? Listen to this..."
  o "You must..."
  o "I'll sort it out for you"
  o "I know what the problem is"
  o "This is where you went wrong"
  o Don't speak/jump in too soon

• Ask open questions (such as "How can I help you?")
• Consider what the mentee wants from you (e.g. advice, support, a listening ear)
• Consider the mentee's view of the problem
• Remember that you can learn from a mentee: it isn't just a one-way process.

(taken from The Watt Club Mentoring Programme, Herriot-Watt University)

Mentees

How to be a good mentee

Some points are common to all types of mentoring:
• Mentees, just like mentors, have a duty to treat all that is exchanged as confidential.
• Consider what questions you have for your mentor before you meet up (perhaps even tell him/her in advance what you'd like to discuss).
• Listen carefully to the suggestions your mentor makes, and clarify any points you do not fully understand.
• Accept suggestions and advice that your mentor gives as a gift, and thank him/her.

If your mentor is there to help your induction in the early days of your contract, find out who your mentor is, and try to arrange to meet them in the first few days.
Tea/coffee time is often a good opportunity. Make sure you find out how you can contact your mentor when you need to: remember that is why he/she is your mentor. However do remember that your mentor also has personal and professional responsibilities: if he/she is busy when you try to contact him, arrange a time later that day when you can ask the questions you have. Don’t expect him/her to be available outside office hours as mentors have other commitments, and if you have arranged a meeting, keep to schedule.

If you have a **developmental mentor**:

- Consider at the outset what you want to get out of the relationship and why you want a mentor. It is easier for both of you if the relationship has some direction right from the start. You can always change direction later on: it is easier to steer a moving ship.
- Consider what questions you have for your mentor before you meet up (perhaps even tell him/her in advance what you’d like to discuss).
- Listen carefully to the suggestions your mentor makes, and clarify any points you do not fully understand.
- Accept suggestions and advice that your mentor gives as a gift, and thank him/her.
- Be open-minded about the suggestions your mentor makes.
- Mentoring is mentee-driven, based on your requirements. It is therefore important to establish a focus and expectations for the relationship. This will in turn influence the frequency you and your mentor meet. All these factors must be agreed between you and your mentor, as well as the boundaries for the relationship.
- Your mentor is there to challenge you, guide you and help you formulate your plans, not to fight your battles or tell you what you have to do. Ultimately you take responsibility for your own development, and onus to move forward is on you.
- Remember your mentor has a career and personal life also: sometimes mentoring can work both ways!

**Managing a mentoring scheme**

It is paramount that the both parties are happy with the way the relationship is going, and that the mentee feels able to ask the questions that are important to him/her. Equally it is important that the mentor feels he/she can answer and advise honestly and realistically.

Whilst being receiving support from a developmental mentor, the mentee should be challenged and stimulated to fulfil his/her potential.

If at any stage this is not the case, there should be a third party that mentor and mentee can discuss the issues with, and if appropriate dissolve the relationship (without laying blame on either side), and a new mentor found for the mentee.

The importance of confidentiality should be emphasised to all parties involved in mentoring relationships.
Setting up mentoring partnerships

Without a doubt, it is easier to set up and manage induction mentoring for new recruits than developmental mentoring. However, in both instances, it is important to pay attention to matching: if a mentor and mentee are well matched, there is much to be gained by both parties, and ultimately also by the institution. In getting it wrong, however, at best the mentor/mentee partnership will be ignored, as if it had never existed. At worst, it might impact negatively, not only on the institution and other’s perception of mentoring, but also on the mentee and his/her career.

Ideally, a developmental mentor should be older or at least more senior in terms of career progression. This need not be the case for induction mentoring of a new recruit, where it is important that the mentor is familiar with the department, University and locality however, in order to provide useful information.

It might be appropriate to match for job role, for example clerical staff mentor new clerical staff, research staff mentor other staff whose role will involve research etc.

It is not necessary for the mentor and mentee to be the same gender, though some staff might wish this to be the case. It is also inappropriate to assign the mentee’s line manager to act as mentor also. Although it is quite possible that an individual line manager might see his or her role to include some degree of mentoring, if a member of staff requests a mentor, a different person should be assigned to avoid conflicts of interest.

Both types of mentoring should be mentee-driven.

Stage 1: Recruitment of mentors
Ideally voluntary mentors are more committed than those who are volunteered. However, where there are insufficient numbers of staff volunteering to mentor, it will be necessary to approach staff. It may be useful to keep a database of staff who are prepared to mentor new staff. It might be appropriate to ask staff at the time of their staff review and development meeting whether they would be prepared to mentor other staff.

Stage 2: Matching
It is important to establish both the mentee’s and mentor’s motivation: is it short-term induction mentoring for a new member of staff or career development mentoring?

Establish what sort of advice the mentor is prepared to provide, and some areas of interest (personal/professional/cultural background). This information will be useful for matching as the most successful relationships will be where there is common ground on both personal and professional terms.
Suggestions for matching:
- experiences
- ethnic/cultural background
- career interests
- hobbies
- future aspirations
logistical issues (especially if split-site department, or if both the mentor and mentee work flexibility, ensure there is some time in the week when they can meet

personal compatibility

If the mentor and mentee know each other already (whether in a professional capacity or otherwise), it might be difficult to discuss certain issues in developmental mentoring.

Admittedly, the matching process is not easy, and you will not always get it right, however hard you try. The importance is then shifted to stage 3.

Stage 3: Support
It is also important that both the mentor and mentee can tell the programme administrator when the relationship isn’t working, for whatever reason. It should then be possible to assign a different mentor.

However such problems will happen less frequently where training has been given to mentors. The University Staff Development Office offers training for mentors. Additionally, it might be appropriate, within a department, to have a meeting for all mentors and/or mentees once or twice a year, to encourage best practice and networking.

Mentors and mentees might contact each other frequently at the start of the mentor’s contract of employment within the department, and the frequency might fall off quickly as the mentee finds his or her feet. However, in developmental mentoring the relationship will usually be longer term and meetings may occur relatively infrequently (perhaps once a term).

Where there are large numbers of new recruits (such as new postgraduate students in October), or indeed if contract research staff turnover is high, it might be appropriate to consider group mentoring. For example, arrange for a group meeting once a term to discuss different matters of interest to the group. Ideas might include career progression, applying for grant funding, applying for fellowships etc and subjects for discussion should ultimately come from the group. Ideally a more senior member of staff (for example, senior research associate for post docs) could lead the forum.

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