Effective Virtual Research Mentoring

As we continue to adapt to the new ways of working, we are keen to ensure that the University's research mentoring scheme remains beneficial to all those involved. We are fortunate that most mentoring activity is based upon one to one interaction between the Mentor and Mentee which in turn means that mentoring relationships can keep moving forward availing of many of the online communication tools at our disposal.

It is appreciated that focus may have changed slightly, goals and objectives might need to be re-thought, you will more than likely have a new daily schedule and many of us now have added pressures when working from home. However, we live in a world where technology has created endless means of contact and we find ourselves in a place where it has never been more important to build on and utilise our 'remote' social connections.

Three Best Practices for Virtual Mentoring

1. Establish Expectations.

If you are moving to a virtual mentoring relationship for the first time or for an interim period, it is a great time to establish or re-establish expectations for the relationship. Find what works with both of your schedules, taking into consideration which tool of communication you'll use and how much availability you'll make for each other.

2. Be Open with Your Needs.

Feel free to take time and speak openly about what both the Mentor and Mentee aspire to achieve by engaging the mentoring process. Make it clear what goals you have and what you are hoping to get out of the relationship and this will help shape conversations during meetings. If you are feeling uneasy with how things are going at work or weighed upon by other matters (your mental health, physical health, or life outside of work) be open with your mentor or mentee about these important contextual issues. Together you can work out an appropriate program of research and determine which research priorities you'll cover in your meetings.

3. Be Accountable to Each Other.

A mentor and mentee relationship revolves around trust. You are often relying on each other to make the situation beneficial for both parties. Follow up on tasks you assigned one another. Establish upcoming projects, steps, or actions for both of you before your next meeting. An update on progress ahead of the next mentoring session may prove beneficial to framing the discussion and getting the most out of the time together.

Tips for your Virtual Meetings

We are all becoming experts on holding and participating in virtual meeting and exchanges. As a result, we are often all too aware of what works well and what is less effective. There are nevertheless some basic thoughts we will leave you with that will hopefully resonate with your experiences:

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1. **Consider having video-on for virtual meetings.** Communication is more effective when non-verbal cues are involved. People respond well to faces. Facial expressions humanise your virtual meetings so using video in your virtual meetings is important where possible and assuming everyone is comfortable with this.

2. **Consider using headsets or earphones as this will give better sound quality.**

3. **Explain what you will do if technology fails!** Have a plan B prepared in advance that will still meet your objectives.

4. **Listen closely.** Not being in the same room means people do not have extra information or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling. Listen to the silence: individuals process information at different rates. In a virtual meeting you need to give people the space to sort the details of what is being shared/asked in their own mind before they can respond effectively. Do not feel the need to jump in and fill the space; time for reflection is very important.

5. **Manners/Etiquette!** Meetings over an hour require a comfort break. Turn off all notifications and make sure your mobile phone is on silent. Make sure you are in a quiet area, as free as possible from unnecessary distractions (be conscious that people are trying their best possibly with the distraction of children).

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