

Aims of Mentoring During Probation

This leaflet provides an overview and information for all parties involved in the mentoring of academic staff during probation¹.

All full time and part time academic members of staff should be allocated a mentor to support them throughout the probationary period.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is often defined as *“off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking”* (Clutterbuck and Megginson 1995¹¹) and in this context its purpose is to provide a source of guidance and advice on aspects of teaching, research and administration, assist new academic colleagues in acclimatising to the University environment, and to support the appointee’s initial professional development.

Note: although the mentor fulfils a different role to the Induction Colleague assigned to all new staff as an initial point of contact before and during early employment, there may be circumstances where the mentor can fulfil both roles.

Head of School Responsibility

Prior to the new academic taking up their post it is the responsibility of the Head of School to appoint an appropriate mentor. Normally, the mentor will retain this role throughout the new member of staff’s probationary period. Due consideration should be taken of the developmental requirements of the new member of staff and the skills and experience of the mentor.

Due to the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship mentoring is not a line management role. It does not include formal supervision of the probationary member of staff and is outside the direct reporting line. Prior to commencement (or if this is not

possible then on the first day of appointment) the Head of School must have informed both mentor and mentee of the arrangement and ensured that the mentor has received the appointee’s start date and contact details.

The mentor should be an experienced member of staff, preferably a more senior colleague, who shares the professional and/or subject expertise of the appointee, can support their development and demonstrates the requisite skills for being an effective mentor. The mentor need not be vastly more experienced however, as a large knowledge or seniority gap between mentor and mentee may be intimidating. A member of staff who has recently been successfully inducted into the institution (within the last 5 years) may in some instances make the most appropriate mentor.

Selection of a mentor should be sensitive to issues of gender and race and guidance can be sought from the Office of the University Secretary.

Other opportunities to benefit from mentoring

- It is also strongly recommended that Line Managers consider mentoring support from more experienced peers for:

- Newly promoted academic staff
- Staff undertaking significantly different role and responsibilities
- For new staff in significant Professional Services roles.

For Mentors

The mentor provides support, guidance and advice to his/her mentee throughout the probationary period and in accordance with the detailed University Guidance on Mentoring in Higher Education for Academic Staff (downloadable at: http://staffdev.ulster.ac.uk/index.php/?/higher_education_practice/induction)

It is the mentor's responsibility to:

- Make contact with the new colleague within the first week of appointment
- Initiate the first meeting to be held within the first week of arrival and thereafter participate in short regular meetings with the appointee. Perhaps fortnightly in the first instance, lengthening to 1 or 2 per semester eventually. Email can also support the process between meetings.
- Respect the importance of trust in the mentoring relationship
- Demonstrate essential mentoring behaviours such as:
 - Giving time and commitment to the process
 - Listening actively and asking open questions
 - Offering suggestions and advice without sounding prescriptive
 - Offering constructive feedback
 - Passing on experience and knowledge
 - Respecting confidentiality.

Academic mentors can also:

- Help in preparing and structuring lectures, observe the mentee's lectures (perhaps act as a PgCHEP Subject Adviser) and provide constructive feedback
- Allow the mentee to observe their lectures, seminars etc.
- Advise on or explain departmental marking conventions
- Offer feedback on the writing of research articles and conference papers; suggest appropriate vehicles for publication.

For New Appointees/Mentees

The mentee is responsible for and expected to:

- Seek support and guidance from his/her mentor
- Prepare for each meeting
- Commit to actions emerging from discussion
- Participate in the review of the mentoring relationship.

Getting Started

The first meeting is critical as it sets the tone for the relationship to come. It is an opportunity to clarify the purposes of the mentoring

support and agree how the mentoring should operate. This will usually include:

- Defining responsibilities, exchanging expectations and how best to work together
- Agreeing a way of calling meetings, frequency, duration, location, methods (face to face/Skype/email) and how to communicate between meetings
- Discussing confidentiality
- Agreeing review mechanisms and how progress and any problems will be addressed
- Mentoring tends to be action oriented and it is recommended that both keep a record of the meetings, noting what has been agreed to support follow up and reflection at the next meeting.

Close the mentoring relationship with a final meeting on completion of the probationary period. However if agreed to by both parties mentoring can continue informally beyond the stipulated period.

Although in general mentoring partnerships work well occasionally a mentor or mentee may experience a difficulty and the Head of School is there for advice and support. Also the Head of School, particularly before completing probationary reports, may wish to discuss the mentoring with both mentor and appointee whilst respecting the confidential nature of the process.

(Endnotes)

- i Further information can be found in:
 - Guidance on mentoring in Higher Education for Academic Staff (revised 2010) and downloadable from: http://staffdev.ulster.ac.uk/index.php?/higher_education_practice/induction
 - Probation documents for Academic Appointments downloadable from: http://www.ulster.ac.uk/hr/employee_relations/Probations/academic.html
 - Professional Development Policy and Codes of Practice downloadable from <http://staffdev.ulster.ac.uk/index.php?/icpd>
- ii Megginson, D., & Clutterbuck, D., (1995) *Mentoring in Action: A Practical Guide for Managers*. London. Kogan Page