Ulster University

Research Mentoring Programme



Mentor Guide

# What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is where the mentor assists another in developing specific skills, behaviours and knowledge that will enhance the mentee’s research professional growth. The mentor is more experienced in the areas within the scope of the mentoring, though not necessarily more senior.

A mentoring relationship is often an informal one where there is trust, openness, even friendship between both parties. The mentoring is semi-structured with a duration of usually **six months**. The mentor and mentee will be from the same faculty but tend not to be in the same reporting structure and may be removed from each other’s immediate work area.

# How the programme will operate?

The aim of the programme is to support staff to build their research capacity and capability through mentorship. As a mentor, key areas of support and guidance you will offer mentee’s will usually fall under the following key research areas:

* Research Outputs
* Research Impact
* Research Funding
* Networking
* Working with Industry – collaboration/ funding
* Public Engagement

It is expected that:

* The mentoring duration is ***six months***
* Mentors and mentees meet a minimum of ***once every two months*** with meetings normally lasting 60/90 minutes.
* The programme will be evaluated and pairs are required to provide feedback.

# What you can offer?

* Ability to understand and relate to their challenges
* Research related guidance, information, advice
* Ability to help mentee think through their choices and decisions
* Researcher experiences – in your career, HE and beyond and skills and knowledge which you can share
* Knowledge and understanding of the University, how it works, etc.
* Ability to listen without judging, encouragement and feedback
* Perspective on real life research related scenarios that are encountered

In addition, mentors often find the experience personally beneficial often gaining satisfaction at the increased success of their mentee, finding it brings additional stimulation and interest as well as learning from your mentee; learning is a two-way process and it is highly likely that your mentee will offer a different perspective too.

# Your role as a mentor

**Mentors carry out a variety of tasks, including:**

* Enabling the mentee to put in place achievable development plans, both for their current research and in the future.
* Acting as a sounding board, allowing the mentee to talk through any issues requiring a decision or action.
* Challenging the mentee to face up to difficult issues and to develop self-awareness.
* Opening doors, facilitating access for the mentee to other people and sources of information to support their research.
* Seeking out opportunities and developmental tasks that enable the mentee to address weaknesses, gaps in their experience and knowledge, or to raise their profile.
* Passing on and enabling understanding, perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, thinking styles and so on, that is associated with effective performance.
* Coaching in relevant skills and competencies.

**What makes a good mentor?**

* Is invested in their mentee’s success – encourages achievement of goals
* Is able to listen and ask open questions
* Shares experiences and learning
* Appreciates his/her differing experience and needs
* Reflects back feelings and opinions he/she observes
* Is willing to debate, challenge and discuss
* Acts as a sounding board for ideas and suggestions in an open and trusted manner
* Makes suggestions/offers advice without sounding prescriptive
* Doesn’t pass judgement, gives constructive, positive feedback
* Has experience/expertise in relevant areas of research
* Provides guidance, but ensures Mentee owns any decisions
* There is mutual trust and respect for confidentiality - not disclosing information without agreement

*It is also important to recognise when it is helpful to bring in or signpost other resources and expertise available in the University e.g. provided by Student Support, Library Services or Inspire.*

# The mentoring structure

1. ***Building Trust and Developing Understanding (First meeting)***

The first meeting is critical and usually face to face as it sets the tone for the relationship to come. It is usually longer than subsequent meetings because it might be the first opportunity you have had to get to know each other i.e. establish rapport and it is where the ground rules are worked out. Mentoring pairs on this programme are encouraged to agree their objectives for the programme.



**Make the first meeting count**

Use this meeting to build rapport and trust and to get to know each other as people. A suggested structure could be:

* Defining roles and responsibilities, exchanging expectations and how best to work together
* Clarify what the mentee hopes to get from the relationship
* Clarify the support you will provide to the mentee
* Discuss your knowledge and areas of expertise
* Emphasise to the mentee it is for them to make their own decisions and problem solve rather than you doing it for them
* Agreeing a way of calling future meetings, frequency, duration, location, face to face/Skype/email and how to communicate between meetings
* Agreeing review mechanisms and how progress and any problems will be addressed
1. ***Direction setting and reviewing progress***

Discussions may focus on a range of topics. It’s important to conclude a mentoring discussion with a couple of agreed actions. These should be summarised at the end by the mentee and followed up by them in a brief email. Reviewing these should form part of the next discussion.

***Review Progress*** – As actions are identified and taken forward it is important to review progress and learning. It is also helpful to review how the mentoring itself is working and perhaps revisit expectations.

See ***appendix 2*** for action plan template.

1. ***Moving On/Closure***

As the final meeting approaches ensure closure is clearly highlighted. A good ending involves:

* A review of the mentoring process
* Learning and achievements
* A celebration

**Generic structure for subsequent meetings**

With the exception of the first meeting subsequent meetings will usually follow this structure:

* Agree objectives for meeting (perhaps agree an agenda if couple of points arise)
* Discussion (include review actions from last meeting)
* Note any actions and summarise actions at end
* Agree date, time and location of next meeting
* ***Optional*** - Review the mentoring meetings (what is working well? What is useful? What would make them even better?

**Expectation of the Mentee**

Within the parameters of this programme the mentee is responsible for and expected to:

* Prepare for each meeting
* Commit to actions emerging from discussion
* Participate in the review of the mentoring relationship
* Be active in their own research development
* Share with the mentor how they feel about the way the relationship is working.

# Underlying principles of mentoring

**Confidential relationship -** Trust each other and develop a safe, non-judgmental relationship where you can both be open and uninhibited in sensitive discussion. You should each continue to respect confidential information, even after the mentoring relationship has formally been completed.

**Supportive Approach -** Development happens best when individuals are listened to, understood, respected and valued and when interpersonal skills are recognised, used and reviewed as effectively as possible. Offer empathy and respect and relate to each other in warm and genuine ways.

**Mentee driven** - Mentoring partnerships exist for the benefit of the mentee (although there are clear benefits for the mentor as well) and should therefore be driven by the needs of the mentee.

**Collaborative venture -** Work together through giving and openly receiving feedback, joint negotiation, decision making and consistent support. Making changes and moving out of comfort zones is stressful, so the supportive yet challenging climate is crucial.

**Voluntary participation** - Mentoring schemes are most effective when both mentees and mentors participate because they want to and not because they have been compelled to.

**Benefits to Mentor**

**Benefits to Mentee**

**Mutual Benefits**

Share knowledge and insight

Fresh perspective

Gain insight, knowledge, ideas and advice

Clarify research ideas

Learn from an experienced researcher

Assistance in research planning

Gain insight, knowledge, ideas and advice

Clarify research ideas

Develop specific skills i.e. leadership skills

Extend your professional / research network

Continued research development

# Using GROW model to structure your mentoring sessions

Coaching approaches and using open questions are very helpful in a mentoring context and using the **GROW** model will help both mentor & mentee structure the session to effectively make use of the time they have allocated for the discussion with a clear goal and a focus on outcomes for the session.

**GROW MODEL**

Asking open questions will help explore and challenge the mentees thinking at each stage of the process and can be helpful in getting straight to the point and establishing facts. Some examples of open questions are listed below:

Goal

What is it that you would like to talk about?

We have X minutes, how do you want to use it?

What would be a good outcome from this conversation?

In the long term what is your goal related to this research? What are your timeframes?

Reality

Tell me about your research

What is your attitude to X?

How do you feel in this research?

What impact has this had on you?

Options

What options do you have?

Make a list of all alternatives; large or small, complete or partial … what else could you do?

What are the advantages or disadvantages of each of these options?

What are the most likely scenarios you can foresee?

Wrap up/ Next Steps

What options most appeal?

What are the next steps?

What do you need to go away and do?

What obstacles may you come across? How will you overcome these?

What support do you need? From me?

them?

# Feedback

It is important that Mentors provide effective feedback. Your approach can be directive or facilitative, or a blend, and there are a few rules of thumb to this skill. These are particularly helpful when the information may not be received positively.

1. Provide opportunity for Mentee to self-assess before you “Tell”
2. Where possible use questions rather than just making statements
3. Be specific – use particular events, observations or examples
4. Be specific in describing impact or consequences. If you find yourself saying “I just don’t think you should…” then it’s time to reassess your purpose in providing this particular feedback. Concentrate on what can be changed or continued.
5. Be aware of your language – own your feedback by using phrases like “I believe…”, “I think...” instead of “You are…” or “You did…”

Less is more – don’t overwhelm!

# Managing challenges in the mentoring relationship

There are some mentoring relationships that falter and come to unplanned ends. This can be for a variety of reasons including:

* The parties can’t communicate and connect with each other
* Logistics mean they can never seem to find a mutually suitable time and location
* The mentee is not being proactive about setting meetings, coming with an agenda and making best use of the mentor’s expertise
* The mentor is telling the mentee what to do and not listening to their issues

Sometimes the match just isn’t right and Mentor and Mentee respectfully agree to part ways because the chemistry is not working or perhaps external factors are making it difficult for them to continue. Wherever possible try and:

* Have a conversation and explicitly agree to finish mentoring. If you have agreed at the beginning to review it after a couple of meetings this makes it easier to raise the subject and reach a conclusion
* Extract the positives
* Review your own contribution and reflect on what you would do differently if you were to take part in mentoring again
* Provide feedback to the scheme coordinator

# Keeping Notes

Even with informal mentoring it can be useful for both parties to keep some reminders of actions agreed upon or undertaken or goals being aimed for to facilitate discussion and/or further reflections.

# Further reading and resources

The resources located on the Academy of Medical Sciences website offer further helpful tips and advice. Click the link then scroll down and select the tab “mentoring resources” to access them:

* <https://acmedsci.ac.uk/grants-and-schemes/mentoring-and-other-schemes/mentoring-programme>
* Dr Amy Everson: 10 things academics often ask about mentoring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0DygmlpuZM>
* Dr Amy Everson : Preparing for your first mentoring meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CnRHzg6VWY&t=10s>

Clutterbuck, D. (1985) *Everyone Needs a Mentor*

London, CIPD

Zachary, L.J. (2000) *The Mentor’s Guide: facilitating effective learning relationships*.

San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

Zeus, P & Skiffington, S. (2002) *The Coaching at Work Toolkit*

North Ryde NSW, McGraw-Hill

***Appendix 1*** – Mentoring Objectives and Goals

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mentor:** |  |
| **Mentee:** |  |
| **Date:** |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Objectives / Actions / Outcomes** |
| *1. What are our goals/ objectives for this mentoring partnership?**2. How will our actions/ progress be captured and success measured?**If you are seeking to continue into a further phase of your mentoring partnership:* *3. How will this new phase add to what has already been achieved?* |
| The **ground rules** for our mentoring partnership are: |
| **Commitment** - As a mentee I will openly discuss my research goals and experiences for the purpose of shared learning and career enhancement. As a mentor I agree to respect my mentee in regard to their independent goals.**Confidentiality -** we agree to maintain the confidentiality of the person and experiences that we share with each other. Furthermore, we understand that we will both uphold the same standard of confidentiality.**Meeting times** – at least **once every two months** for a **period of six months**  |
|  **Reviewing partnership objectives**:*(It is a good idea to review these goals/ objectives at an appropriate time)* |
| We will review this on: |  |



