

## Peer Mentor Handbook



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## What is Peer Mentoring?

Peer mentoring is a process by which one person is supported and enabled by another who assists and enables them to realise their potential and achieve their personal and/or professional goals.

This happens through a series of facilitated conversations where the mentee learns from the mentor's knowledge and experience of similar situations in order to develop their own sense of direction and purpose, whether that is about study, employment or future ambitions.

Many different definitions of 'mentoring' have been offered but the following are commonly occurring features:

- A professional relationship
- Support for professional development
- Personal support and encouragement
- Knowledgeable guide
- A partnership lasting over a pre-determined and fixed time-scale

One way to understand what mentoring is, is to look at what it isn't:

- It is not a tutor/student relationship where the focus is on producing an academic outcome within a prescribed syllabus where the tutor is in control.
- It is not an instructor/trainee relationship focusing on learning skills and techniques to perform a specific function where the instructor is in control of the learning process.
- It is not a manager/employee relationship where the manager controls the outcome of the task.

In this handbook, we are considering peer mentoring process as:

- A relationship orchestrated to provide professional and personal support to a student (mentee) by another student (mentor).
- A process in which the mentor uses their experience in a facilitative manner to support the development of the mentee.
- A relationship which assists individuals at specific times of development or transition and lasts for a defined period of time.
- A relationship which provides an opportunity for both participants to develop and benefit

### The benefits of mentoring

Mentoring should have a clear and positive effect on the personal and professional development of the mentee. It is also intended to benefit the mentors and the organisations they work for.

Your involvement as a Mentor supports an undergraduate by:

- Giving them an insight into your work and experiences
- Assisting them with practical tips on planning work and setting goals
- Developing understanding, skills and problem-solving support
- Encouraging reflection and recognising success
- Identifying areas for development and improve self confidence

Your involvement will benefit you and your institution by allowing you the opportunity to:

- Develop and practise interpersonal skills such as active listening
- Demonstrate your commitment to supporting and enabling others
- Gain insight into diverse perspectives and experiences
- Share the knowledge and experience you have gained at University
- Gain recognition for the work you do in support of others

What our mentees have said with regards to their involvement in the mentoring scheme:



### Key principles

The following principles underpin the peer mentoring process:

- There will be adequate training, preparation and support for mentors
- There should be a shared understanding of, and agreement with the purpose of mentoring
- The process will be constructive and developmental, and should be of mutual benefit to mentor and mentee
- Mentoring is optional and either participant can withdraw at any time if it is felt to be necessary
- There will be a clear understanding of the level of confidentiality that can be expected in the relationship and in what circumstances confidentiality cannot be maintained
- Written records will be limited to summary notes which can be used as a reminder of earlier meetings and key topics; they should be available to both mentor and mentee
- Participants will co-create a time frame both for the frequency of meetings and for the duration of the relationship

### The Mentor's role

The relationship between mentor and mentee is very much mentee-centred – focusing on their educational, professional and personal development. It may include the giving of guidance, information, establishing facts, sign-posting, and encouraging self-appraisal. Whatever the techniques, the emphasis is on enabling and empowering the mentee to take charge of their own learning.

In a mentoring relationship the importance of interpersonal skills is essential. These skills include listening effectively, empathy, understanding a non-judgemental approach and the ability to facilitate through skilled questioning.

The role of the Mentor is to:

- Listen
- Take an interest
- Build rapport and gain trust
- Create a safe and supportive environment

## Widening Access and Student Success

- Share stories and experiences
- Help mentees explore what they would like to achieve over the academic year
- Together explore the range of options for future actions
- Support mentees in planning and setting goals
- Work within the boundaries of the relationship
- Lead by example and act responsibly

And to encourage the Mentee to:

- Listen
- Clarify understanding
- Share thinking
- Review and reflect on oneself
- Change assumptions
- Consider different perspectives
- Develop and manage a career plan
- Take responsibility for their own development
- Make decisions to maximise the outcomes of the mentoring relationship

A peer mentor will also be expected to:

- Attend all training and preparation sessions for the peer mentor role
- Meet with their mentees at the agreed times
- Attend regular support workshops with the coordinator and other peer mentors to review their progress, discuss any issues, share practice and develop their knowledge and skills.
- Be aware of how to signpost students to other forms of support which peer mentoring cannot help with
- Ask for help from the peer mentoring coordinator when necessary
- Report any serious concerns about their mentee to the coordinator
- Help with the recruitment and training of new peer mentors

## Dos and don'ts

It's not possible to anticipate every situation and the appropriate behaviour to apply when one is mentoring. However, here are a few suggestions to use as general guidelines:

### Do:

- Get to know your mentee. Try to really understand how things are for them.
- Be positive, patient, dependable, honest and sincere.
- Be consistent, but flexible. Expect changes in plans.
- Encourage, praise and compliment – even the smallest of accomplishments is important.
- Be an active listener. Use language that's easy to understand.
- Give concrete explanations and real-world examples.
- Share the decision-making.
- Share your knowledge rather than giving advice.
- Be enthusiastic – it's contagious.
- Stress the positive.
- Be firm. Have your mentee assume responsibilities and hold him or her accountable.
- Help your mentee to use mistakes as learning experiences.
- Help identify your mentee's talents, strengths and assets.
- Tell your mentee about yourself, especially what you remember from your own experiences as a student.
- Help them identify the significance for their own lives of the information you are discussing (e.g., possible future profession, similar experiences, etc.) – tell them how they can use the information.
- Learn to appreciate your mentee's cultural and ethnic background. Strive toward cultural reciprocity.
- Be open to what your mentee can teach you or share with you.
- Honour your commitment – this is extremely important!

### Don't:

- Expect to have instant rapport with your mentee.
- Tell them what to do (instead, you should suggest, invite, encourage).
- Share personal problems unless it is to explain your current disposition (e.g. tired or irritable).
- Make promises you can't keep.
- Pry into your mentee's personal life. If a mentee pries into your affairs, it is okay to say that some things in your life are private just as they are in his or her life.
- Be afraid to admit that you do not know an answer or that you have made a mistake. Find the correct answer and learn together. It helps the mentee to see that you are learning too.
- Interpret lack of enthusiasm as a personal rejection or reaction to you.

## Widening Access and Student Success

- Be judgemental or make assumptions.
- Lend money.
- Violate confidences, with the single exception of crisis intervention situations, in which case you must contact your School link person immediately.

### The mentoring relationship

The mentoring relationship can be a very powerful positive experience. It enables and develops a greater sense of confidence by enhancing the professional and personal skills of both parties. To make sure the relationship is a success, a number of factors need to be addressed.

#### Factors for success:

- Clear guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of both parties
- Agreed and shared understanding of the nature and type of support
- Commitment towards the principles and values of the mentoring scheme
- Skills of both the mentor and mentee
- Clear communication in both directions

**Clear communication** is the cornerstone on which all the other factors sit. It is through constructive and empathic dialogue that the relationship can develop allowing both parties to bring forward their ideas, enter discussions and maintain professional development. It is within this environment that both parties can flourish.

#### Strategies for supporting the Mentee:

There are different ways a mentee can be supported, checked, encouraged and given constructive feedback. With each strategy, it is important to be aware of its purpose, appropriateness, the likely impact and its value to the mentee. Mentoring should be an empowering experience for the mentee; it is therefore important that the strategies used encourage the mentee towards autonomy.

#### Strategies can include:

- Offering guidance – offering opportunities to explore future possibilities together
- Giving information – giving information on a specific situation (e.g. finding resources)
- Taking action in support – doing something on the mentee's behalf
- Observing and giving feedback – Observation coupled with constructive feedback is a powerful learning tool (e.g. preparation of a presentation)



- Reviewing – reflection on experience can develop understanding allowing one to consider future needs, explore options and strategies

#### The skill of Active Listening:

Active listening is the ability to listen and internalise what is being said, essentially listening and understanding. You can use your whole self to convey the message of an active listener involved in the discussion, showing interest, gaining trust and respect. This can be achieved by using verbal and non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication has more impact than words alone, so facial expression, eye contact, non-verbal prompts (e.g. head nodding) and body posture (leaning slightly towards the mentee, showing interest) will contribute towards building upon the mentoring relationship and improving discussions. Your surroundings can also be utilised to create a climate appropriate for discussion to occur. The aim is for a quiet, pleasant and relaxed environment where the meeting can take place.

#### **When actively listening, concentrate on these two important aspects:**

##### Being Focused

Keeping the mentee focused on a specific discussion topic by keeping the conversation confined around one area. This can be difficult as mentees in the early stages of mentoring tend to have many questions and move from one to the other without linking or having a structured approach.

##### Using Verbal prompts

Use sounds or key words to encourage the mentee to talk further to clarify a point or extend an idea:

- The use of expressions like 'I see' and 'Go on...' and by using sounds like 'Uh-huh' and 'Yes'.
- Repetition of key words within a discussion e.g. If the mentee says 'I am really concerned...' repeating 'concerned?' may prompt the mentee to expand further and shows the mentor is interested and concentrating on the mentee.

There are of course barriers to active listening which mentors need to be aware of. Awareness of these barriers will allow the mentor to encourage, support, show interest and respect to the mentee.

**Barriers to listening:**

Tuning in and out – on average we think approximately four times faster than we speak, leading to listeners tuning out, using the space to address their own thoughts or concerns rather than staying tuned into the listener.

The glazed look – there are times when an individual will concentrate on the speaker (mentee) rather than on what is being said for whatever reason, bringing on that glazed look on the face of those listening, a look we all recognise.

Becoming heated – certain phrases, words and views may cause mentors to feel as if they should dive in with their own opinions; resulting in the mentee becoming irritated, upset and switching-off. It is OK to give your own view but remember that the discussion is for the mentee and it is their 'arena' with the mentor's primary task being that of the facilitator and listener.

Giving space – during discussions the mentee will have silences and spaces, which will vary in length. Try not to rush in and fill these, as we all have differing periods of reflection and thinking. It is important to allow the mentee time to internalise their thoughts.

**Using the art of questioning:**

Questioning, if used effectively, is a very useful and powerful tool. It allows the mentee– mentor relationship to develop, assisting the mentee in exploring and understanding their experiences with the hope of formulating avenues and actions for the future.

There are many reasons to ask questions, they may be:

- To satisfy curiosity
- To obtain or clarify information
- To assist in exploring an issue
- To look at possible alternatives
- To check understanding
- To challenge contradictions, views etc.
- To direct the discussion

Questions can essentially be broken down into two types, closed or open questions. It is important to select those which are of greater use in the conversation.

### **Open Questions:**

These are questions which require more than just a 'yes' or 'no' response and usually begin with 'How?' 'Where?' 'What?' 'Who?'.

Questions beginning with these can be used to:

Gain information – 'What happened as a result of...?'

Explore personal issues – 'What is your view on...?'

'What are you expecting to achieve?' 'How are you feeling having...?'

Consider and explore avenues – 'What are the possible options for...?' 'What may help when...?'

### **Closed Questions:**

These are questions which evoke a 'yes' or 'no' response and in doing so narrow down the opportunity for the mentee to expand their answer e.g., 'Do you...?'; 'Did you...?'. Continual use of closed questions will restrict the discussion, resulting in the mentee saying less and the mentor asking more and more questions.

There are times when closed questions are useful. They can be used to summarise and confirm a discussion, bringing parties up to speed and to the same level e.g. 'So, you are saying that you don't have an issue with...?'

Avoid asking multiple questions. These are a number of different questions asked within the same sentence. They are unclear, cause confusion and stop both parties from focusing on the meeting.

### **The initial contracting meeting**

The initial meeting is very important to establish the essential parameters of the relationship. It is the time to set, clarify and agree issues, these may include:

- The purpose of mentoring and mentor/mentee expectations
- Issues around time including frequency and duration of meetings
- Review meetings –o review the aims, objectives and consider how the relationship is developing and changing.

Mentors may have concerns, and it is reassuring to know that these concerns are also experienced by the mentees.

Some of these concerns may be:

- Will we get on?
- Will there be enough time for the meetings?
- What am I supposed to do?
- Will I be able to do this?
- Confidentiality?
- What if things go wrong?

You can start to look at these issues at the initial contracting meeting. At the end of the initial contracting meeting both parties need to reach a shared agreement that states clearly what each party expects to give and gain from the relationship. A written version provides a useful reference for both mentor and mentee. An example of a Mentoring Agreement can be found in Appendix I.

### **Future meetings**

Meetings can be in person, online, by telephone or even by e-mail for shorter types of contact. Whatever works for you both. The meetings should have a clear structure and purpose with respect to content and time parameters. These need to be defined and agreed upon during the initial contracting meeting and recorded if required on the mentoring agreement. Giving the meeting a clear structure and process will ensure the time is used effectively.

Meeting topics may include:

*Reviewing experience / Giving feedback / Identify strengths and achievements  
Identify areas for personal or professional development / Exploring options for further study or  
career / Exploring different skills and techniques / Engaging in discussions on educational  
issues / Setting targets for future action / Identifying challenges and/or barriers to success*

Remember the mentee-mentor relationship also needs to be reviewed as the needs and input of both parties may change over time. At some point the relationship will reach a natural end when the mentee has gained all they can from the relationship. When the time is reached, it is important that the relationship finishes on a positive note and that successes are reflected on and celebrated before the final goodbyes are said.

**Appendix 1 – Peer Mentoring Agreement**

**1. Mentor and mentee** have agreed that the main aim(s) of the relationship are:

**2. Mentor:** the support that I will offer during the mentoring relationship will include:

**3. Mentee:** from the mentoring relationship/partnership I hope to gain:

**4. Mentor and mentee have agreed the following:**

- To be punctual for all meetings or to contact the other person at least 24 hours beforehand if unable to make the meeting.
- To work together within the boundaries of the mentoring relationship including being respectful, attentive, non-judgemental and constructive at all times.
- To keep what is discussed between the mentor and mentee (i.e. keep it confidential), unless permission has been given to share the information with others OR unless either party is thought to be at risk or is thought to pose a risk to others. In the case of risk or danger, it is understood that the School mentoring link (or a suitable alternative) will be contacted immediately\*
- To contact the School mentoring link if either party feels the mentoring relationship is not working.

Mentor's Name & Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mentee's Name & Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this agreement should be kept by mentor and mentee for reference.

*\*Other channels of advice and support will be covered during training.*

### **Acknowledgments**

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