Mentoring scheme best practice

Mentoring is 'to 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." Eric Parsloe, The Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring.

The core principles embedded in those definitions: empowerment, effective learning, personal and professional development, trust and respect are found within all successful programmes which give mentees the resources and support they need to achieve their potential.

The elements to consider in a mentoring programme:

Putting the mentee first
An effective mentoring programme ensures that it fully understands the circumstances and specific needs of its clients and delivers a service which is geared to serving their best interests and supporting their individual progress. A statement of the values will signal commitment to providing a service which reflects the mission and vision of the programme and which demonstrates good practice. For example, we aim to:
- be inclusive in relation to ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, gender and sexuality
- provide structured and supported relationships that meet the needs of the mentee and the mentor
- promote caring and supportive relationships
- encourage individuals to develop to their fullest potential
- help individuals develop their own vision for the future

Programme aim
A focused and unambiguous vision statement, or programme aim, written in terms easily understood by the intended audience, will aid clarification of the purpose of the project. It will:
- make clear the reason your project has come into existence
- keep you on track
- help avoid losing sight of the purpose

A vision statement, or programme aim, can be developed by asking a series of probing questions.
- What do we hope to do?
- Why do you think the proposed service is required?
- Can you be more specific about the service you propose and its purpose?
- Why do you want to do that?

Clarity and purpose
Programmes which fail to establish and agree a tightly focused and clear core purpose cannot create a formal structure with clear goals and objectives and are likely to lose direction. Having a defined programme aim will help develop a coherent purpose.

Goals and outcomes

A clearly articulated purpose provides a baseline for developing goals and outcomes. Be realistic about what can be achieved. Avoid the pitfalls of trying to achieve outcomes which are outwith the scope of the service you can reasonably provide. You should aim to achieve:

- clarity of purpose to frame measurable outcomes and outputs
- robust planning
- the development of early success indicators or milestones to demonstrate that the project is on course to meet the longer term outcomes

As a consequence of poor planning many existing programmes are unable to move beyond a pilot stage, or gain any type of funding, lacking the evidence which would demonstrate that the programme has had the desired impact. Outcomes established through the planning process should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound). Although most mentoring programmes in the University will not be linked to PDR, the PDR resources on how to write and develop SMART objectives will help when writing goals and outcomes for your programme.

Communication strategy

A communication strategy should aim to be clear and accessible and convey the desired messages, ideas and information about the programme to the stakeholders. Frequent communication is vital to keep stakeholders in the loop. When creating a communication strategy, consider:

- the most appropriate medium/media for conveying the desired messages about the project
- the best method for listening to and acting on feedback
- accessibility of written, graphic and verbal media e.g. plain English, other languages if required
- the amount of information given – is it adequate
- equality and diversity
- presentation of specialist information in ways which those without expertise in mentoring can understand

Monitoring and evaluation strategy

Establish the strategy for monitoring and evaluating impact during the early design stage and integrate it into the day to day activity. This will provide evidence to guide on-going quality improvement and enhancement.

Monitoring

Monitoring is conducted on an on-going basis as a health check, allowing for early intervention when things go off-plan or to alter aspects of the programme in light of experience. Mentors and mentees should be primary contributors to the process of monitoring and to the final evaluation. Asking them what they found most useful and what they feel needs to change will empower participants and provide valuable evidence about their experience of mentoring.

Methods of gathering monitoring data can include:
- scheduled meetings with mentors and mentees
- methods for collecting on-going feedback (suggestion boxes, mentor supervision sessions)
- written records e.g. meeting logs, action plans which track the mentee's journey (provided this doesn't breach confidentiality)
- input from other stakeholders
- analysis of processes for e.g. re-matching, early intervention for addressing issues within relationships
- early termination of mentoring relationships
- evidence from support and or supervision sessions with mentors

The list of questions in this checklist can be adapted to the particular needs of individual projects:
- Are the short and longer term objectives being met? This includes individual mentees and those of the programme
- Are things going as expected?
- Are the administrative processes working? Does anything need changed?
- Are the processes and systems useful, relevant and easy to understand by all?
- Are the mentors and mentees relationships working well? Do we know? How do we know?
- Are the challenges and issues raised by mentors and mentees being dealt with in time and effectively?
- Have any further training needs identified? If so what steps have been taken to meet those needs?
- What is working well? What is working less well? What needs to be done differently now and in the future?
- Are all relevant stakeholders being kept up to date with the progress of the project?
- How is the evidence recorded?
- What other sources of evidence can we use to find out how well things are going?
- How is the data analysed and evaluated?
- How do we make sense of the findings?
- How can the findings be used to improve things next time?
- Is there a reliable system for managing and storing confidential documentation?

Evaluation
Ensure that the purpose of the evaluation is clear, knowing what to evaluate will help identify where goals have been met and to what extent. Demonstrate and communicate results which show that the programme has made a difference.
The evaluation process should be based on:
- an outcome analysis of the programme and of the mentoring relationships
- the project criteria and statement of purpose
- the information needs of board, funders, other stakeholders

Speak to key stakeholders to find out what evidence they will need in relation to the programme's impact. A common purpose of evaluation is to answer the questions from decision makers and funders about success and viability - should the programme continue, be rolled out or closed down? The evaluation should take account of the:

- intended audience(s) and what they will want to know about the success of the programme
- how the findings and conclusions will be used

Decide the most appropriate methods to use for evaluation taking into account the constraints of:

- budget
- time
- available resources, including staffing

Suggested methods of gathering evaluation data:

- interviews or feedback sessions (singly or as groups) with mentors, mentees and line managers at appropriate intervals
- include exit interviews
- focus groups
- self-report questionnaires from mentors and mentees. Decide how often this is done. This will depend to some extent on the duration of the mentoring activity
- assessment of achieved and missed milestones, goals and outcomes which are identified and recorded through action planning processes against desired outcomes (this could be done jointly by the mentor and mentee and delivered without personal names attached)
- statistical measures (e.g. qualifications /learning objectives achieved, staff turnover, skills acquired)
- changes made (and tracked) to project documents and tools during the life of the programme
- review of administrative files

Accountability

A Steering Group's strategic role is to assist and advise on the delivery of the mentoring programme. Working to a set of objectives will make the group more effective.

Governance objectives and responsibilities include:

- publicising the programme across agencies
- sharing resources, knowledge and skills
- providing advice and recommendations based on their areas of expertise
- identifying any gaps in the mentoring service and contributing to the design of measures to fill the gaps
- helping to make links and form partnerships with other projects and agencies
- requesting and analysing reports e.g. progress, finance

Compliance

To achieve good practice standards the programme should have a coordinator who takes responsibility for ensuring compliance with legal, financial and safety responsibilities. If the

programme has been developed within a wider organisational context it should comply with existing policies, procedures and codes of professional conduct. Some policies or procedures that may be of importance within University programmes are:

- Code of conduct
- HR Policies
- Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy
- Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

Mentee orientation

Provide mentee orientation which makes roles, responsibilities and boundaries clear from the outset. This will reduce the potential for future misunderstandings and conflict. Orientation can take place individually or in a group. In some cases mentees may find it difficult to express concerns in a public forum. Good practice suggests that if group sessions are the chosen option, mentees should know who, when and how they can meet with someone to discuss personal or sensitive issues.

Items from the following list can also serve as the basis for information leaflets and websites to communicate to potential mentees what the mentoring programme can offer. Mentees should have guidance and information which explains clearly:

- the programme overview
- the screening process and selection requirements
- the level of commitment expected
- how a mentor match is found and organised
- how often and for how long meetings will take place
- that they will be signposted to other services if required
- what happens if the mentoring relationship is not working
- who to contact to discuss any concerns. This includes putting in place clear processes for making the contact
- the boundaries of the mentoring relationship
- the protocols and safeguards that are in place for dealing with their personal information
- the type and nature of records that will be kept and levels of confidentiality
- their expected role in contributing to monitoring and evaluation
- the follow up or support they can expect at the end of the mentoring arrangement

Selection criteria

Establish selection criteria which are transparent and aligned with the programme's goals, for both mentors and mentees. Failure to invest time in this process is a major risk factor both to the reputation of the programme and to the safety and wellbeing of participants. Providing a rationale, for acceptance onto the programme or exclusion from participation, based on clearly articulated and robust criteria, provides fairness and equity. Criteria can include identification of skills, level of expertise, current or previous roles and professional experience.

Before deciding selection criteria it would be useful to consider the following questions:

- how flexible will you be?
- how will people be informed that they have been rejected on the basis of the eligibility criteria?
- what would disqualify mentors from continuing with mentoring?
- what would disqualify mentees from continuing in their role?
- how will the process be managed?
- who makes the final decision?

Matching strategy and criteria

The matching process should take into account the preferences, interests and goals expressed in the mentoring application. Mentors should be selected on the following:

- previous experience of mentoring
- role in the programme
- specialist knowledge and skill
- willingness to participate in mentor training
- willingness to abide by guidelines and boundaries of the role
- commitment to timescales
- willingness to contribute to monitoring and evaluation processes.

Mentor training

Mentoring is a challenging and complex activity demanding a set of core competencies not necessarily learned in day to day work. Training is frequently reported as being the single most important factor in the success of mentoring relationships. An informal interactive style of training is generally cited as the most useful approach. It provides participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and examine how those experiences can be drawn on to help them in the role. It provides an early opportunity for potential mentors to self-select out of the project if they decide mentoring is not for them. At the design stage training can be tailored to meet the needs of individual programmes to include specialist knowledge and skills and specified operational requirements.

Examples of the core elements of a mentor training

- programme's vision, mission, goals, purpose and context
- role description
- mentor hopes, fears, concerns
- managing boundaries and expectations - code of practice
- the role of supervision
- preparing for and managing meetings
- managing the relationship
- confidentiality issues

- skills development – effective communication, learning planning, goal setting and reflective practice, giving and receiving feedback
- monitoring and evaluation
- preparing for endings.

You can find more information on mentoring skills and how to manage mentoring relationships on our [online toolkit](#)