

Setting up a Mentoring Scheme

This document aims to provide general guidance on setting up a mentoring scheme, to be used as a foundation in the development of more bespoke schemes that target a specific group. Whether it is experienced consultants mentoring new consultants or junior doctors mentoring medical students, it is almost always advisable to design schemes that are focused on one particular group, rather than the wider workforce. For example, each College faculty may run its own scheme, whilst a large NHS trust would likely require multiple separate schemes.

What is Mentoring?

The concept of mentoring has its roots in ancient Greek mythology. Whilst away fighting in the Trojan War, Odysseus hired his old friend Mentor to watch over his son Telemachus. Goddess Athena then disguised herself within the body of Mentor in order to impart wisdom and knowledge onto Telemachus. By doing this she was able to educate and develop his knowledge over time.



The notion of Mentoring has developed as the process of learning from a more senior or experienced colleague. It should be thought of as a relationship that benefits both the Mentee and the organisation itself. The Mentor supports the individual in addressing career issues, encouraging them to find their own solutions to problems as well as giving advice where appropriate. As a result, the Mentee develops new skills, increases their performance and increases productivity within the wider organisation. Mentoring may last for a number of years and has been shown both to enhance resilience and to reduce the risk of burnout in the Mentee.

The Role of the Mentor

The Mentor should act as a positive role model for the mentee, taking on the responsibility of differentiating between issues to be addressed within the mentoring relationship and those that should be referred to clinical supervision, personal counselling, business or legal advice. They should lead by example in terms of professional behaviour, making the mentee feel confident in conducting themselves in the appropriate manner.

The Mentor should also play a key role in supporting the social development of the mentee within the organisation by introducing them to others and aiding them in

expanding their professional network of contacts. This, in turn, will strengthen their confidence and encourage independent decision making. The Mentor should ensure that they feel encouraged to challenge common assumptions and should provide them with constructive criticism on any actions they do take when they seek advice.

One of the key responsibilities of the mentor is to inspire the mentee to set professional career goals, and to aid their personal and professional development wherever possible. This includes highlighting opportunities when they arise, and providing possible solutions to problems that hinder them.

There are a number of duties that the Mentor must keep in mind in order to sustain reliable support to the mentee. These include attending training sessions, maintaining confidentiality of the relationship, keeping records of meetings and developments and considering their own development and support needs throughout the process. The mentor should always consider the importance of their commitment to an agreed number of mentees, and how this can be met successfully.

The Role of the Mentee

The relationship should always be regarded as a two way process. One of the fundamental imperatives in successful personal and professional development is the Mentee's recognition that ultimately, the responsibility for their own progress lies with themselves. The Mentee will have to be ambitious, proactive and illustrate their willingness to make use of the relationship. They should show respect for the Mentor's time, and be prepared to take an open-minded approach when listening to their advice. Keeping appointments, and being organised in maintaining regular sessions are vital.

Administering a Mentor Scheme

Each scheme should have an identified senior lead that assumes overall responsibility for the scheme. This role includes promotion of the scheme and of the value of mentoring itself, overseeing the recruitment procedure and ensuring standards are maintained. They should also provide a basis of support for all Mentors, identifying and providing suitable training opportunities.

The scheme lead will also require administrative support to safeguard the general running of tasks such as the registration of Mentors and Mentees, the application process, the matching process and the gathering of invaluable feedback on a consistent basis.

Recruitment and Selection

A central tenet in any successful mentoring scheme is the recruitment of its two fundamental components, the Mentors and the Mentees. There should be a strategic plan that drives the targeting and selection of Mentees based on matching their needs with realistic expectations of how the scheme can benefit them. The process requires eligibility screening for both Mentors and Mentees through a formal application and interview process, and in some cases reference and security checks for the Mentors. These eligibility criteria are determined by a fundamental statement of purpose of the scheme.

Developing the Scheme

The initial development of the scheme will require the identification of interested individuals, the reservation of adequate resources, and the provision of training. Thorough evaluation is an imperative for schemes still in their embryonic phase, providing the quality assurance that ensures successful growth through both recognition and organisation.

Training for Mentors is always advisable, though in cases where this is not available or feasible, it should never act as a barrier to getting schemes off the ground. It is likely that senior psychiatrists will already have a number of the necessary skills expected of a Mentor, and can benefit further from training provided in due course.

Matching

In order to meet the wide ranging needs of Mentees, it would be a significant advantage to hold a database of Mentors with a diverse range of skills and expertise. For this reason, maintaining a brief biographical account for each Mentor alongside contact details can be an effective way to improve the effectiveness of the matching process.

In most cases, Mentors will initially be allocated to newly registering Mentees. An introduction to the scheme would be sent to the Mentee, alongside an appointment invitation or contract, and a meeting with their matched Mentor would be arranged. At this first meeting between the Mentor and the Mentee, the Mentor would take the lead in explaining aspects of the scheme to the Mentee and arranging some future meetings. After this first meeting the coordinator of the scheme should contact the Mentee for discussion. It may be that based on this initial meeting, the Mentee decides that they would prefer to opt out or to find a different Mentor for any reason, in which case they would make this known to the coordinator.

The Long Term Relationship

There is no prerequisite for the duration or frequency of the relationship between Mentor and Mentee. In most cases, it would be expected to last at least one year, and often may extend for a number of years or even the length of one's career. It may also be the case that as the Mentee progresses in their professional development they, in turn, opt to find a more experienced Mentor. In the case of a successful Mentoring relationship, the average frequency of meetings would be at least once a month, depending on circumstances. For example, meetings may initially occur every 2-4 weeks for a Mentee in the initial stages of a new professional role, whilst becoming less frequent over time as they become more experienced and independent. Relatively infrequent scheduled meetings can also be supplemented by brief communication as the Mentee seeks a Mentor's advice in between meetings.

For further information, you may also wish to visit the Mentoring and Coaching section on the RCPsych website at www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/mentoringandcoaching.aspx.

For any queries, please contact us at mentoring@rcpsych.ac.uk.

George Fraser, PSS Administrator