

Mentoring circles for Researchers: Information for mentors

Who can be a mentor?

Any experienced researcher/academic can be a mentor. You should be happy to pass on experiences you have had and be interested in developing yourself and others.

Mentors are facilitators who allow their mentees to discover their own direction by offering guidance. A mentor is a source of information and knowledge in addition to being a skilled questioner. Mentors have more expertise than the mentee so the difference between the mentor and mentee is valued because it is mainly the source of learning for the mentee. Mentors also offer 'softer' skills such as listening skills and a genuine commitment to advance their mentees. Mentoring is therefore an all-inclusive description of support for the mentees orientation and professional development.

What can a mentor expect?

To support mentors we are running short briefing sessions for mentors and mentees. This is an opportunity to consider the skills necessary for a mentor, understand the boundaries of the relationship and raise any issues. There is also on-going support from Jennifer Anderson and Laura Hodsdon if required.

What are the benefits of being a mentor?

While the focus of the mentoring relationship is primarily on the development needs and opportunities of the mentee there are also benefits for the mentor including:

- satisfaction of knowing that they can make a difference to someone else
- sharing contacts and increased networking opportunities
- increasing skills and reputation
- an opportunity to share experience and expertise
- enhancing their leadership skills

What should I consider before committing to mentor a mentoring circle?

We need mentors to be able to commit to running a circle until the end 2015. In this time the circles should meet at least 4 times with each meeting lasting at least one hour.

Mentors should attend a mentoring briefing session.

Mentors are responsible for organising meetings, but can delegate the organising of meeting times to mentees.

What is peer mentoring?

The scheme aims to support the development of postdoctoral and early career researchers across the Division by encouraging self-reflection, increasing networking opportunities through peer circles and providing access to senior staff members outside of the researchers' home department.

Mentoring circles will be set up with a group of ~4 mentees to 1 mentor. This mentoring circle format delivery maximises the use of the mentor's time and is also an effective way to utilise informal peer support networking.

The basis of the mentoring scheme is that:

- Participation is on a voluntary basis.
- Mentoring conversations are confidential and private.
- The mentor is outside the mentee's direct line management chain, with greater experience in one or more areas.

Mentoring circles will be set up with a group of ~4 best matched mentees to 1 mentor. This mentoring circle format delivery maximises the use of the mentor's time and is also an effective way to utilise informal peer support networking.

Mentoring circles should run initially for a 12 month period (or for at least four meetings, whichever is the sooner) but the relationship may continue by mutual consent. Face to face meetings should be agreed upon and scheduled at the first meeting. Sessions should be held at a mutually convenient location, which can be the mentor's office and should generally last for at least an hour. Individual meetings will be available at the discretion of the mentor; however, please note that the mentor is not obliged to offer this to their mentees. Mentees in a circle are encouraged to meet more regularly and peer to peer mentoring can also take place between meetings via email to sustain the momentum of the meetings and support each other through any specific concerns. We will provide the mentees with resources to explore different development topics.

Who are mentees?

Mentees are those individuals with a genuine desire for further development. The scheme is limited to research staff in the first instance (students should be referred to the mentoring scheme offered by OxFEST). Mentees must commit to all appointments to sustain the circle.

At the beginning of the scheme mentors should:

- Agree personal ground rules e.g. be non-judgmental, be a role model.
- Agree the scope of the circle, what it is and what it is not e.g. *It is* positive but challenging, *it is not* providing magic answers.
- Ensure everyone agrees to make the relevant time commitments to ensure that all circle members have balanced and mutual support.
- Also agree how you will manage exceptions e.g. Will the mentor and mentee have informal contact between meetings?

If you as a mentor have already had some experience in managing/motivating a team or been an informal/formal mentor you will already have many of the skills necessary for this scheme. The mentor will be able to build trust, rapport and confidence among the group in a non-threatening and friendly space. They will act as an enabler, helping the mentees to realise their potential and uncover

hidden talents/abilities, while mentees must actively engage in a non-judgemental, caring yet challenging manner.

Further information is available here: www.learning.ox.ac.uk/resources/mentoring/ and oxfest.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/mentoring-toolkit.pdf

Protocol for Meetings:

Suggestions for the first meeting:

Discuss your mentoring protocol including ground rules such as confidentiality, honesty and commitment. As soon as possible (by an agreed date, but often easier online) set out the times for forthcoming meetings which need to be planned ahead and in collaborative manner. You might prefer to share a formal mentoring contract to establish your rules. See Appendix 1.

Personal introductions round robin style: Participants will share what each of them wishes to gain from the mentoring process and what each of them can offer the group, as well as another more relaxed question such as what are they most proud of or perhaps their greatest achievement to date. Ideally the participants will be forewarned of these questions, so they can come prepared.

Action learning set (a speed mentoring exercise), which the leader will lead and facilitate to identify mentees short term goals and objectives. E.g. addressing these questions:

1. Where am I now?
2. Where do I want to be?
 - Short Term
 - Medium Term
 - Long Term
3. How will I get there?

Second and Subsequent Meetings

Mentees will take turns to share their respective agreed objective/ goals, ideally both short term & long term with the entire group. Each of the mentees will have the opportunity to delve deeply into each of their defined objectives: this exercise should be timed by the leader so that each mentee has equal time. Time should be set aside for feedback and discussion, so that the other members of the group are able to offer their input and suggestions in a non-judgmental but objective and helpful manner to that specific individual. This will encourage establishment of the peer to peer mentoring model.

As best practice at the beginning of each session, the whole group should quickly state 3 positive aspects in their professional or personal life that have changed/improved since the last meeting— ideally it should be in terms of improvement, but it could also be a challenge they have faced. If someone has some exciting news take time to celebrate!

The mentor should guide the group into creating personal development plans. We recommend setting aside a specific meeting to focus on this. Mentees should be encouraged to keep track of their agreed actions and updates since the first sharing session and map out where they are at now in order to create wider plans for the future.

Further information on being a mentor is available here:

www.learning.ox.ac.uk/resources/mentoring/ and
oxfest.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/mentoringtoolkit.pdf

Appendix 1

Rules of the Mentoring Relationship

1. We will only enquire about each other's personal life by invitation.
2. We will not make excessive demands on the other's time.
3. We will only use the others' names or authority with previous consent.
4. The mentor will assist the mentee in achieving objectives, but will let the mentee do things for him/herself as much as possible.
5. We can end the relationship at any time following discussion with the circle.
6. Our mentoring relationships are confidential both during and after the formal relationship has finished.
7. The mentor will only discuss the mentee with others with the mentee's consent (unless there is a health and safety issue involved, in which case the mentor will advise the mentee of the imminent disclosure).
8. We will meet XX times at mutually agreed venues and communicate with each other as and when necessary (within reason) by telephone or email.
9. We will advise the Divisional Mentoring team of any breakdown of the mentoring relationship.
10. We will agree an action plan at the end of each meeting and monitor progress at the next meeting.

Signed: _____ (Mentor).

Date: _____

Signed: _____ (Mentee).

Date: _____