

BBSRC GUIDANCE ON MENTORING FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We recognise the important contribution that mentoring can make in increasing job performance and satisfaction, as well as supporting the personal development of staff. Some of the benefits of mentoring are set out in Appendix A.

To this end this guidance seeks to:-

- a) provide a framework for mentoring;
- b) identify managers' and staff's responsibilities in managing the mentoring process;
- c) contribute to promoting equality through mentoring people from under-represented and minority groups;
- d) support the ongoing implementation of BBSRC's learning and development strategy.

This guidance does not cover formal mentoring / buddying arrangements used during the induction process of new recruits.

- 1.2 Mentoring is available to all members of staff. However BBSRC recognises that mentoring can play a part in the promotion of equal opportunities and may therefore at times encourage specific groups to take part in a mentoring programme, for example:-
- a) managers and supervisors;
 - b) groups under-represented in certain positions (e.g. women in science);
 - c) new recruits;
 - d) individuals undertaking formal training and development programmes (e.g. management development programmes);
 - e) students.
- 1.3 This guidance is intended to be consistent with the Employment Code policies, particularly those relating to Learning and Development, Induction and Dignity and Diversity at Work.

2. DEFINITIONS

Mentoring is a system whereby employees are supported to understand and learn more comprehensively from their day-to-day experience. It offers a framework within which an individual can be helped to explore how they might achieve their aspirations and fulfil their potential. It is based on the fundamental principle that individuals find the answers to their own issues or problems, facilitated by the mentor. The relationship is one where the mentor and mentee are equal.

Mentee is used to describe the person who is being mentored.

Mentor is used to describe the individual who may have expertise in certain areas or be a role model for others, who will be available to facilitate an objective based discussion that brings about change or achievement of pre-set goals.

3. PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Confidentiality of the issues discussed by the mentor and mentee is something the two partners in the mentoring relationship should discuss and agree at the start of the relationship. Mentors will not be asked to comment or provide feedback in the event of the mentee being subject to capability or disciplinary procedures.
- 3.2 All mentors should undertake training to carry out their responsibilities before undertaking the role.
- 3.3 Mentees should prepare work-related individual objectives setting out what they would like to gain from the mentoring relationship.
- 3.4 Mentors should not be in a direct line management relationship with the mentee.
- 3.5 The mentor and mentee can end the relationship at any time if it is felt not to be working well.

4. WHO CAN BE A MENTOR?

- 4.1 Some people seem to have an innate talent for providing the informal, yet structured support that is most useful to less-experienced colleagues. There are several options regarding who should do the mentoring; each has its own pros and cons.

4.2 **Mentors chosen by head of department**

This is quite a common approach in universities which already implement mentoring. The advantages include that the mentoring is legitimised and may even be duly rewarded in terms of time allocation. Disadvantages include that inevitably some choices are unsatisfactory - not everyone can be a good mentor. Some staff are just too busy to devote enough time to mentoring; some are too judgmental and intimidate their mentees; some never manage to achieve the 'trusted' status, or the 'friend' part of 'critical friend'. Another disadvantage is that mentees can feel that their mentor has been imposed upon them, and is therefore part of the system, making it difficult to achieve an open and informal relationship. A further problem is that some heads of department may place mentoring duties on staff who are underutilised for one reason or another. The most effective mentors are often the hardest-pressed, busiest members of the department!

4.3 **Volunteer mentors**

This can work well, providing the volunteering is done for the best of motives. It is better to have willing mentors than pressed ones. However, it is important that having volunteered, mentors are provided with sufficient insight and training, so that they know what they are taking on, and how to approach fulfilling the mentor role. A disadvantage with this approach can be the lack of suitable volunteers.

4.4 **Mentors chosen by mentees**

This can work well. The word quickly gets around regarding who is a good mentor. There is also the advantage that when mentees choose their mentors, they are probably more willing to take their advice and guidance seriously. However, there can be problems. Those with the reputation as good mentors become seriously overstretched, with everyone wanting them as their mentors. It is the responsibility of these individuals to be realistic regarding how many individuals they choose to mentor.

- 4.5 Individuals who are interested in becoming a mentor should consider whether they have the following skills, which usually characterise a 'good mentor':
- coaching
 - listening
 - questioning
 - counselling
 - facilitating
 - networking
 - good communication skills
 - able to develop others
 - able to encourage and motivate

5. THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

- 5.1 The training session provide guidelines on how to manage the mentoring relationship including contracting for confidentiality, number of sessions, how to end the relationship, as well as theoretical input and the opportunity to practice.
- 5.2 The mentor and the mentee should jointly agree ground rules ('mentoring contract') which should cover the nature of the relationship, define what is and is not included, indicate what is involved in terms of time and access to each other and length of the mentoring relationship. The main responsibilities of each party are set out in Appendix B.
- 5.3 The duration of the mentoring relationship should be discussed at the first meeting and may depend on individual circumstances. In the event that a mentoring relationship does not work out, the parties may wish to discuss this with a representative from HR.

6. APPLICATION AND MATCHING PROCESS

- 6.1 In some cases mentoring may co-ordinated by the local HR Department (e.g. providing mentors for new starters to the organisation). The matching process of mentors and mentees will be undertaken by the HR Manager, in consultation with local managers where appropriate.
- 6.2 If there are insufficient mentors for the number of mentees, the HR Manager may approach suitable employees and ask them to consider being a mentor.

BENEFITS OF MENTORING

Mentoring holds benefits for the person being mentored, the mentor and for the organisation. Below is a list of some of the likely benefits of mentoring.

Benefits to the mentee

- understanding and improving strengths and eliminating weaknesses;
- help in identifying and achieving personal objectives to support chosen goals;
- finding ways of improving performance;
- independent advice and guidance;
- career advice and the benefit of the experience of a competent and experienced figure/role model;
- opportunity to check out ideas and talk through problems in a confidential environment;
- coaching in specific skills (e.g. communications, leadership);
- builds confidence in current role, and for future career aspirations;
- access to networks, senior staff and opportunities.

Benefits to the mentor

- new horizons/challenges brought about by fresh ideas and perspectives;
- opportunity to support staff development, pass on wisdom, etc;
- peer recognition;
- political awareness;
- help organisational development and the development of employees through increased performance of mentee, etc;
- staff development opportunity.

Benefits to the organisation

- accelerate personal and organisational change;
- promote equality by supporting individuals to achieve their potential;
- better motivated staff and improved job performance;
- aid to recruitment and retention - an indication that staff development and career enhancement are taken seriously by the organisation;
- improved communication between staff and the breaking down of conventional barriers and boundaries;
- increased networking;
- personal development of mentors.

APPENDIX B

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTORS

A mentor is sometimes referred to as a non-judgmental friend, counsellor, facilitator, coach or role model, all of which can be true. A mentor can fulfil a wide range of roles, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive and which will vary according to the purpose of the mentorship role and the needs of the mentee. Below are some examples of things a mentor would usually do:-

- act as a sounding board;
- challenge/feed back to mentee;
- provide ideas, opportunities, suggestions;
- assist with personal development objectives;
- provide contacts and access to people and networks;
- pass on know how, knowledge and understanding;
- coach in work skills;
- give career advice;
- facilitate.

Mentors should discuss and agree the boundaries of the mentoring relationship with the mentee in a 'mentoring contract' which both partners should abide by. This includes the issue of confidentiality. Mentoring works best when it is a confidential relationship which gives the mentee the opportunity to speak freely about the concerns they may have.

The mentor's participation in the mentoring relationship should not be detrimental to or in conflict with the line manager relationship with the mentee. The mentee should not be placed in a position where the relationship with the line manager is compromised; the primary relationship will always be with the line manager, to whom the mentee is accountable for effective delivery and day-to-day performance.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTEES

Mentees should also consider what they want from the mentoring relationship and set specific objectives. Below are some examples of what mentees would usually do (the list is not exhaustive):-

- set personal development objectives;
- prepare for each mentoring session;
- openly discuss issues with mentor and ask for feedback;
- complete any tasks or projects the mentor suggests;

Mentees have a responsibility to ensure that their participation in the mentoring relationship is not detrimental to or in conflict with the line manager relationship. The primary relationship will always be with the line manager, to whom the mentee is accountable for effective delivery and day-to-day performance.