Guidelines for the Mentoring of New Academic and Research Staff

Background

Senate agreed on 3 July 1996 that all new members of academic staff, regardless of seniority, should have an appointed mentor to assist in the induction process. The rationale behind this is that even experienced academics need guidance on the procedures of both the School and University. For new lecturers the need for ongoing support on all aspects of academic practice is particularly important.

The Guidelines

The best way to operate a mentoring system will vary from School to School and with each individual new member of staff. This document provides ‘minimum’ guidelines for those Schools that do not have effective research and teaching mentoring in place. Schools that do have such mentoring in place should ensure that their practices meet or exceed these minimum guidelines. The guidelines are built on the experiences of other universities and from feedback from current mentors and new lecturers here.

Mentoring for New Lecturers

The mentor has a central role to play in supporting the new lecturer through the university’s compulsory Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and in developing a research profile. Essentially the role is one of guidance - someone who is able to advise, encourage, support and help to develop an individual’s ability to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own professional development. Ideally teaching and research mentoring should be provided by the same individual. However, in some circumstances (for example, where the primary mentor is not research active) appropriate research mentoring might be better provided by a different individual in the School (or occasionally from a different School). Research only mentors should move to page 3 of these guidelines. Wherever possible, new staff should be informed of their mentor(s) within a month of their start date.

A mentor would not normally act as the Reviewer under the University’s Staff Development Review scheme. However, either the new lecturer or the Head of School may ask for input from the mentor at Staff Development or probation reviews.

Aims of Mentoring New Lecturers

- To provide general induction support.
- To provide a source of help and advice on all aspects of the professional role including teaching, research and administration.
- To support the translation of skills, theories and ideas from the Certificate programme into subject-based application.
- To provide constructive feedback on teaching and research activities.
- To support School based work on subject related teaching and learning issues as a part of the Certificate programme.
- To help in identifying and planning personal development.
- To provide a ‘critical friend’ outside the management framework.
Notes for Mentors

Access
The new lecturer will need to be able to communicate with the mentor and not feel that they are a nuisance or a distraction. A mentor cannot be available every day, but someone who is about to be overseas for an extended period or is on a research term is not likely to be able to give sufficient time. An agreement to have short regular meetings, perhaps fortnightly initially will provide a good framework. The use of email can help to provide a practical mechanism for between meeting queries or ideas. The early agreement of some ground rules or basic expectations on both sides may be helpful.

Induction
There is a centrally provided one day induction course twice each term. Mentors should encourage new lecturers to attend the session closest to their start date. Details are available from the Centre for Staff Training and Development (email cstd@reading.ac.uk). This session does not replace the need for an introduction to the School. A checklist of items which may be relevant is appended. Mentors should take responsibility for ensuring that a reasonable induction to the School is provided. Being personally involved in this will help to create an early relationship between the mentor and the new lecturer. However the framework provided by an induction programme can also be a useful way for the new lecturer to meet and get to know other key members of the School. The best induction programme would probably be one with a written structure giving full names and job titles of all involved and using a mix of mentor and other staff.

In the early days the new lecturer will have lots of minor questions and queries, many of these will be administrative and a mentor may be able to minimise these by spending time on an initial School induction. Administrative and secretarial staff can be invaluable in dealing with many initial queries if the new lecturer is introduced to them promptly. The new lecturer may well feel more comfortable having contacts with the secretarial staff of whom they can ask more functional questions.

The mentor should have the ongoing induction role of explaining how different systems work in theory (and practice) and how the new lecturer relates to any changes in progress. The mentor should act as a point of referral, recommending who to approach in the School or elsewhere for specialist information.

Teaching
The majority of new lecturers will attend the Certificate programme. Mentors play a vital role in helping new staff to get started on their teaching activities and to continually develop and improve. New lecturers will need to discuss issues such as teaching methods, course design, teaching materials, assessment, student support and the compiling of a teaching portfolio which is a component of the Certificate programme. New lecturers may need to experiment with ideas discovered during the Certificate sessions within the specific subject area and adapt them accordingly. Mentors can usefully act as a sounding-board, provide ideas on alternative sources of subject-specific information or suggest other colleagues who may already have experience in the area concerned.

Mentors will also contribute to the structured observation of a variety of teaching activities by the new lecturer. For the Certificate, six observed sessions are required over a two year period. Some of these may be conducted as a part of any School peer observation scheme. Normally the mentor will conduct at least three of the six observation sessions. New lecturers often find the chance to observe their mentor’s teaching activities valuable and wherever possible this should be included in plans.

The Certificate programme is based around a range of experiences which can normally be expected in the work of a new lecturer. Mentors will need to check with new lecturers that their remit covers a suitable range of activities and may occasionally need to arrange for the opportunity for additional experience to be acquired.

Feedback from Schools who currently have a new lecturer on the Certificate programme suggests that the early inclusion of new staff in any regular team or School teaching meetings is very beneficial to the new lecturer. Often the ideas and fresh perspective of the new member of staff are of reciprocal value to the School.
Sometimes new lecturers find managing their time and various commitments problematic and may start to miss Certificate sessions. This is inevitable on some occasions when major School events take priority or conference or sick leave is unavoidable. Mentors have a role to play in asking about any problems with attendance and if an overloaded schedule is the cause, helping new lecturers with their organisational skills or negotiating a reduction in workload with the Head of School. The Centre for Staff Training and Development maintains computerised records of Certificate programme attendance and will alert mentors and Heads to any pattern of absence.

Research
The Head of School, with advice from the School Director of Research, is responsible for selection of the research mentor. It is not sensible to prescribe the length of time over which mentoring should be provided, as this will depend on the progress of the particular member of staff. In general, however, appropriate research mentoring should be provided for at least two or three years (i.e. until the end of the probationary period where this applies), or until the new member of staff shows that they are capable of acting as an independent researcher within the University.

Research mentors need to be experienced active researchers. It is not necessary for them to carry out research in the same specific field as the new appointee, although it is helpful if their own research is in the same general area, so that they will be aware of the national and international context and structures. They should have, and be willing to make available, appropriate time to meet with their ‘mentee’ (at least four times per year in the first year and twice yearly thereafter), and to read draft written work or grant proposals, as appropriate, and to be able to connect the mentee to other colleagues who might help. They should also display the characteristics outlined below as part of the general guidelines.

Carrying out research can be a very lonely process. A primary role of a research mentor is therefore to provide encouragement for, and show an interest in, their mentee’s research plans and activities. It is very easy for new lecturers to spend all, or the vast majority, of their time carrying out teaching (and sometimes administration) related activities, which often involve tight deadlines and prompt feedback. Research often tends to take second place. It is therefore important for research mentors to help new staff members with appropriate time planning and management; suggesting time deadlines for achieving agreed targets and checking that these are met. All new staff should have been set explicit research targets that should be achieved within their first two years in post (e.g. gaining an externally funded research award, publishing two articles, etc). For those undertaking a probationary review, these will have been set as a requirement of the probationary period. In many instances, it may be helpful to break these higher level targets into a number of sub-targets, with agreed deadlines.

Many aspects of mentoring will depend on the particular School and the area of research of the new staff member. However, typical aspects might include:

- helping them to focus on a manageable research agenda
- advising on their publication strategy and suitable outlets for research outputs
- helping to transform research ideas into projects that could attract external research funding, and advising on funding sources
- helping them to plan a longer term research career (i.e. thinking beyond their first grant)
- ensuring new staff members are aware of internal support (both within the School and the wider University) for making grant applications (particularly RES)
- suggesting other appropriate internal and external contacts / potential collaborators
- encouragement to attend key conferences etc in order to gain new research ideas and make new contacts

Keeping Records
A mentor may decide, or a Head of School may request, that brief records of key mentoring meetings be kept. Becoming too worried about paper keeping can detract from the main purposes of mentoring, but an example record (Form B) is provided for those who wish to use or adapt it. New lecturers are advised that some written notes of key discussions with their mentors can make good evidence for their portfolios and the onus is on them to make useful records (see example Form A at the end of these notes). Mentors may wish to take a copy of these.
Potential Benefits for Mentors

These will vary with individuals, someone acting as a mentor for the first time is likely to find most opportunities for personal development, whilst a more experienced mentor will perhaps find personal satisfaction in seeing a colleague develop and flourish at the start of their career. Most people find that some of these aspects result from mentoring:

- Access to fresh ideas and perspectives
- Having the opportunity to discuss professional issues that there would not normally be time or chance to do
- Intellectual stimulation from a challenging relationship
- Gaining additional insights into the processes of teaching and learning
- Reflection on own management and teaching styles
- Enhanced organisational reputation
- Add to personal development
- Satisfaction through involvement in professional development of colleagues
- Career progression
- Opportunity for an active contribution to the development and quality of the School

Support for Mentors

The Centre for Staff Training and Development organises briefing sessions for mentors and will provide advice to Heads of School, mentors and new lecturers on mentoring issues. As a part of the Certificate programme, CSTD will explain to new lecturers the importance of the mentoring system and will encourage them to be proactive in the working relationship.

Notes for New Lecturers

Responsibilities of New Lecturers

You share a major part of the responsibility for making this relationship a productive and rewarding one. As a general point you should always try to be open and honest with your mentor and respect any trust that they show you, just as you would try to do in any professional relationship. Other areas of responsibility are:

- Keeping the mentor informed of progress and any problems
- Asking for help or advice
- Preparing for and participating in meetings with the mentor
- Taking maximum advantage of opportunities to work with the mentor or observe their teaching activities
- Participating in the Certificate programme
- Managing your own development
- Wherever possible, achieving targets and deadlines agreed with the mentor

You will often find that some of your discussions with your mentor will make useful evidence of your development in your teaching role for your portfolio. You may like to use Form A at the end of these notes to write up brief notes on the key points of some of your discussions with your mentor.

Potential Benefits for New Lecturers

Benefits will vary for individuals but it is likely that mentoring will help to achieve at least some of these issues:

- Settling in and developing networks more quickly
- Overcoming feeling of isolation
- Receiving advice and encouragement
- Having access to an informed second opinion
• Help with problem-solving
• Encouragement and support in your research
• Adding a subject-specific and School dimension to the Certificate programme
• Gaining insight into own performance through a ‘critical friend’
• Identifying development needs and opportunities
• Learning from the practices and strategies of the mentor
• Reflection on and examination of principles informing practice

Notes for Head of School

Choice of Mentor

Normally a mentor should not be the Head of School. It is a good idea for the mentor to be outside the direct management line of the new lecturer. A mentor can have a significant role to play before a new member of staff even begins employment. Therefore there needs to be an element of allocating a mentor before the new lecturer arrives in the School. The Head of School would normally make this decision. The final choice will need to attempt to match personalities, research interests, experience and personal style. It might be helpful to consider the following questions about the proposed mentor:

• Are they already so over-burdened that they will not be able to support the new member of staff?
• Do they actually want to do the role?
• Do they have the right kind of approach to their own development to appreciate the importance of development for the new member of staff?
• Are they likely to have some empathy with the problems faced by new members of staff?
• Do they have a balanced view of the importance of each facet of academic practice?
• Do you want them as a role model for your newest member of staff?
• Are there any gender or cultural issues that should be taken into account?

In general terms, a mentor should be able to:
• Listen actively to another’s views
• Ask open questions
• Reflect back feelings
• Make suggestions but avoid being prescriptive
• Summarise the main points of a discussion
• Give constructive, positive and precise feedback

Someone who has been mentored themselves in the recent past will often make a very good mentor. The most careful planning of mentoring pairs cannot take into account clashes of personality. Good practice would be for the Head to review the partnership with both sides after an agreed trial period of say 2 months. If either the new lecturer or mentor feels that the relationship is not productive, they should discuss the matter with the Head of School and if appropriate the new lecturer should be asked to consider which member of the School would be a suitable replacement mentor.

Sometimes a small School may not have one person who is suited to being a mentor for both teaching and research and it may be in the best interests of the new lecturer to have two mentors, one for each area.

Mentoring and School workload models

It is important that School workload models make allowance for the time new staff need to establish their research careers and undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. In addition, models should also make allowance for the time taken to provide effective research and teaching mentoring.
Mentoring for Contract Research Staff

It is often appropriate and beneficial for research mentoring to be provided for Contract Research Staff, in order to enable them to develop into independent researchers. Research mentoring of research staff will involve many of the same activities as mentoring of academic lecturing staff. However, a key aspect will be helping the new researcher to achieve an acceptable balance between meeting the demands of their current post and ensuring that they are doing what they can to develop their career in an appropriate way. The mentoring of research staff should NOT normally be carried out by their direct line manager / supervisor. In some instances, it might be appropriate for research mentoring to be carried out by a senior researcher (rather than member of academic teaching staff).

New Senior Academic Staff

The role of a mentor in the case of new senior staff will be different from that of a new lecturer. There will be a focus on School and university strategies, procedures and challenges. The period of mentoring may be quite brief and a major element of it may be to facilitate introductions to senior members of the university. Nevertheless, the need for some structure and support during the induction period should not be overlooked and some ideas for issues which may need to be covered follow in appendix 1. In many cases, it may make sense for a Head of School to act as the mentor.
Induction Checklist for New Staff

Pre-employment

- Agreement of start date and time, where to come to and who to ask for
- Send details of induction programme
- Send some advance information about the School
- Organise workspace, computer and telephone access, stationery
- Allocate mentor/buddy

First Things

- Welcome - ideally by mentor /buddy and Head of School
- Introduction to School
- Location of toilets
- Location of common room/tea and coffee, restaurants
- How to address people

Work Information

- School’s functions
- Main duties of new member of staff
- Key colleagues and contacts
- Lunch and other breaks
- Standards of work/conduct
- Formal/informal rules eg use of phones etc
- Telephone directory
- Computing information (e.g. email, School software)
- Web page
- School handbooks, course information etc
- Ordering equipment*
- Getting more stationery
- Support services
- Explanation of any dress code

Where and When?

- Entrances to site and building
- Car parking permit*
- Claiming expenses
- Holiday entitlements and who to ask

Who? People and extensions to contact:

- in case of illness or inability to get to work
- in case of problems with salary/tax etc*
- to find out about trade unions*
- queries about pension arrangements*
- for First Aid

Health and Safety

- University policies and rules*
- Area Safety Co-ordinator
- Safety notice board
- Out of hours working
- Local safety information
- Location of fire alarms and fire-fighting equipment
- Location of fire exits and assembly point

Information

- Notice boards
- Bulletin and other newsletters*
- Sports, social, shopping and bank facilities*
- Library*
- Staff training*
- IT Services*
- Medical facilities*

Longer Term

- Procedures for probation or review
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures
- Opportunities for promotion
- Staff Development Review process*
- Conventions about earning money outside the university
- Research and teaching details

*covered in central induction programme

New Senior Academic Staff

(with thanks to the dept of Typography & Graphic Communication for these notes)

Pre-employment

- Invitations to attend:
  - Major School meetings
  - Examiner’s meetings
  - Informal discussions with staff
- Discussion with Head about personal research and teaching plans
- Shadowing staff members for a day
- Provide key School and university documentation
- Tour of School

On appointment

- Appropriate selection from general checklist
Record of Discussion with Mentor

Date:

This record should be completed by the lecturer after a significant discussion with the mentor. Ideally the mentor should comment and sign it. This record may be referred to as evidence in the portfolio.

1. Background / what triggered the discussion?

2. Key Points of the discussion:

3. Action plan as a result of discussion:

4. Your Reflections

5. Comments from mentor

Signed: Lecturer ________________________ Mentor ________________________
### Mentor’s Record of Discussions with New Lecturer

A mentor may choose (or be asked by their Head of School) to keep a record of discussions with a new member of staff. This form may be helpful.

New Lecturer: ____________________  Period covered: ______________

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Signed: ____________________________  (Mentor)