

Mentoring policy

Introduction

Definition

Mentoring is a relationship with a colleague outside the line of management which is confidential in nature. It should enable a new member of staff to familiarise themselves with their role and the wider University, in order to become effective as swiftly as possible. Its focus is on supporting and developing the whole person.

The mentoring scheme within SAGES is overseen by the Head of School with support from the School Administrator. The HoS will appoint mentors in consultation with line managers and the School Administrator will ensure that mentors have completed appropriate training and that mentoring meetings have taken place.

New members of SAGES staff Grade 6 and above will have a mentor assigned to them upon appointment; other staff will be assigned a buddy. The role of the buddy and the mentor are distinct. The buddy provides general support for induction in the first month; the mentor supports all aspects of personal development of the professional role.

Aims and Scope

The mentoring process is most important in the first six months of a new member of staff's contract. For technical and administrative it may not extend beyond six months. However, mentoring for academic staff will continue throughout the probationary period of three years, in the case of new lecturers, or for newly appointed senior staff a mentoring period of perhaps one year may be appropriate. Mentoring for research staff is likely to continue throughout the period of their contract (or at least for the first three years, in the case of junior research staff).

Staff may also request mentoring at key career transition points; for example, in planning for promotion, preparing for a change of role or returning from secondment or career break. Requests for mentoring for career transitions can be made through the SDR process or in consultation with the HoS.

University guidelines for mentoring of academic staff, including those following the Academic Practice Programme, can be consulted at:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/CSTD/professionaldevelopment/ATLS/cstd-mentors.aspx>

You may also wish to consult the useful guide to professional development in research that was developed by VITAE and pioneered at the University of Reading:

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/428241/Vitae-Researcher-Development-Framework.html>

The mentoring process should be a positive and useful support for a new member of staff, and it will often have advantages for the mentor as well. The following guidelines are aimed at equipping the different parties involved with the information necessary for them to conduct a positive mentoring relationship. The responsibility for making the mentoring process work is with the mentor and the new member of staff.

The aims of the process are:

- to provide advice and encouragement on all aspects of a professional role
- to help in identifying and planning personal development (including the APP)

- to provide a ‘sounding board’ for the discussion of:
- the organisational culture and values of the University;
- personal performance issues
- to provide constructive feedback in planning of personal research, teaching and learning and other roles
- to provide access to networks or contacts.

Notes for Mentors

Overall Role:

Apart from enabling the process to achieve the aims set out above, the general role of the mentor is to help the mentee to come to their own conclusions about issues that they are facing. This will involve some discussion of the mentor’s own observations and experiences. The following points suggest the way in which the mentor should conduct discussions with the new member of staff:

- listen actively to the mentee’s views
- ask open questions
- reflect back feelings
- make suggestions but avoid being prescriptive
- within a meeting summarise its main themes
- there is no need to keep a written record but you can keep a confidential aide-memoire if it is agreed by both parties
- give constructive, positive and precise feedback.

Key Issues

Communication

The new member of staff will need to be able to communicate with the mentor and not feel that they are a nuisance or a distraction. An agreement to have short regular meetings, perhaps fortnightly at first, will provide a good framework. At the first meeting it would be useful to agree some ground rules or basic expectations on both sides. It is important that the content of the meetings remains confidential to enable both parties to be open and develop a relationship based on trust.

Induction Support

There is a centrally provided one day induction course twice each term. 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 induction to the school/ department. Line managers should take responsibility for ensuring that a good induction to the department is provided (see SAGES guide to induction). The buddy should meet with the new member of staff in their first week. It is helpful if the buddy checks with the new member of staff that they feel that a suitable induction has been arranged.

During the first month the mentor should meet with the new member of staff and the HoS. The mentor will be made aware of details of the targets agreed for probationary staff in order to support them in achieving their individual targets.

Difficult situations

The role of a mentor is not the same as a line manager, and if the mentee is struggling in their role the mentor should not try to “manage” them. Rather, the mentor should continue to follow the approach described above, enabling the mentee to develop their own strategies to deal with their situation.

In such a situation the mentor may wish to direct the mentee towards other University support services such as Human Resources, the Centre for Staff Training and Development, the Harassment Advisers, and the Employee Assistance Programme

(<https://www.reading.ac.uk/closed/humanresources/workingatreading/humres-EmployeeAssistanceProgramme.aspx>)

The mentor has no role in reporting to the manager of the new member of staff unless it has been specifically discussed and agreed by the mentor and mentee. It is important that the confidentiality of the mentoring relationship is maintained.

In the case where either the mentor or mentee is unhappy with the mentoring relationship and it is not working, they should contact the HoS who will consider reallocating the mentee to a new mentor. Mediation or impartial advice can be sought from Dr Justin Hutchence, Research Staff Development Manager j.j.hutchence@reading.ac.uk

Notes for Mentees

The mentee shares a significant part of the responsibility for making the mentoring relationship productive and rewarding. In general, mentees should always try to be open and honest with their mentor and respect any trust that is shown, as it should be in any professional relationship. The new member of staff should actively pursue the aims of the mentoring scheme through the relationship with the mentor. Within the mentoring relationship the mentee's areas of responsibility are:

- Keeping to agreements made with mentor on regularity of meetings and communication
- Preparing for and participating in meetings with mentor
- Keeping the mentor informed of progress and any problems
- Asking for help or advice

Choice of Mentor

It is essential that the mentor should not be a line manager of the mentee. It is good practice for the mentor, mentee and the HoS to meet in the first month of the mentee's appointment. Therefore the mentor needs to be selected in advance of the start date of the mentee. The HoS will consult with HoDs and line managers to choose the mentor for the new member of staff. As the main purpose of this mentoring scheme is to enable new staff to settle into their jobs and become productive as soon as possible, matching mentor and mentee on the basis of similar or shared tasks may be a significant factor. This would enable the mentee to learn many of the unofficial rules and approaches that would make their job easier to accomplish. Often someone who has recently been mentored will make a very good mentor. Issues such as personality and experience should also be taken into account as well as considering the following questions:

- Are they too busy that they will not have the time to fulfil the role?
- Do they want to be a mentor?
- Will they be able to empathise with the issues faced by new members of staff?
- Do you want them as a role model for the new employee?
- Are there any gender or cultural issues that should be taken into account?

A mentor should have the skills to fulfil the role as set out above. Whilst most of the mentoring will be by people from within the School, on occasion it may be appropriate for a mentor to be drawn from elsewhere.

Evaluation

Following the mentoring process, both parties will be asked to evaluate its effectiveness and to provide feedback on how the scheme may be improved. All feedback will be anonymous.