Mentoring Policy for New Professional and Managerial Staff

1 Introduction

1.1 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. There is an overlap with coaching in some aspects, but in contrast the latter may be carried out by a line manager and its emphasis is on an individual developing specific skills and/or enhancing their performance.

1.2 Aims and Scope
The mentoring process is expected to last for the first six months of a new member of staff’s contract, although it may continue informally after that point. Mentoring will be phased in starting with new staff who are Professional and Managerial Grade 7 and above (previously ALC Grade 3 and above) as well as any on Grade 6 (previously Grade 2s) with a cross University remit. The scheme may be expanded to cover other Professional and Managerial staff if it is successful. These new members of staff will have a mentor assigned to them on appointment. 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 scheme will be evaluated after an initial six month period through feedback from mentors and new members of staff.

These guidelines should be adapted as required, to meet the needs and context of the individuals involved. If there are any questions concerning the guidelines, please contact the mentoring scheme co-ordinator. (Dr Justin Hutchence, ext. 6051, j.j.hutchence@reading.ac.uk)

The aims of the process are:

- to provide general induction support,
- to provide advice and encouragement in a new role,
- to provide a ‘sounding board’ for the discussion of:
the organisational culture and values of the University;
- ideas on good practice in the context of the University
- personal performance issues
  - to provide help in problem solving
  - to help identify development needs and opportunities
  - to provide access to networks or contacts

2 Notes for Mentors

2.1 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;
- give constructive, positive and precise feedback.

2.2 Key Issues

2.2.1 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.

2.2.2 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/faculty office/directororate/department. Line managers should take responsibility for ensuring that a good induction to the department is provided. During the first week it is useful if mentors meet with the new member of staff and the mentoring scheme co-ordinator. It is helpful if the mentor checks with the new member of staff that they feel that a suitable induction has been arranged.

2.2.3 Support for Mentors
As part of this scheme there will be a mentoring scheme co-ordinator who will help to facilitate the first meeting between mentor and new member of staff. The co-ordinator will be available to provide ongoing support.

2.2.4 Difficult situations
The role of a mentor is not the same as a 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 in section 2.1, 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 Personnel, the Centre for Staff Training and Development, Equal Opportunities and Diversity, the Harassment Advisers, and Counselling.

If the mentee appears to be going against University policy, the mentor should advise them of this, and point out the consequences. If the mentee is behaving in a way that is of considerable concern to the mentor, the mentor has a duty to maintain confidentiality, but should be able to discuss matters with the University support services without giving names or details, or with the mentoring scheme co-ordinator. 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. Are there any circumstances under which the mentor should break the confidentiality of the relationship and speak to the manager of the mentee? Developing policy for extreme cases is difficult as they can vary considerably, therefore in a situation where the mentor is unclear as to what they should do, they should consult with the mentoring scheme co-ordinator.
In the case where either the mentor or mentee is unhappy with the mentoring relationship and it is not working, possibly because of a personality clash, they should contact the mentoring scheme co-ordinator who will liaise with the Head of Directorate/School to reallocate the mentee to a new mentor.

3 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 as set out in section 1.2 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.

4 Notes for Head of Directorate/School

4.1 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 mentoring scheme co-ordinator to meet in the first week of the mentee’s appointment. Therefore the mentor needs to be selected in advance of the start date of the mentee. The Head of Directorate/School should 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 in section 2.1. Whilst most of the mentoring of administrative staff will be by people from their home unit, on occasion it may be appropriate for a mentor to be drawn from elsewhere and perhaps for an academic member of staff to act as mentor. This would normally only occur when the mentee will be working extensively with academic staff and would benefit from understanding their perspective. Having mentors based in a different part of campus to their mentee makes consideration of availability of time and opportunity to meet particularly important. Use of the academic’s office hours for mentoring meetings should address this issue.

4.2 Directorate Mentoring Schemes
Heads of Directorate may wish to introduce a mentoring scheme for other staff categories within their directorate. The mentoring scheme co-ordinator will provide general support for such schemes as well as briefing notes and courses.

5 The role of the mentoring scheme co-ordinator
The experience of running the pilot project and the literature indicate that for a mentoring scheme for new administrative staff to be successful it needs central support and co-ordination. The co-ordinator will disseminate information on the scheme, ensure good communication with mentors and mentees, arrange training, and liaise with line managers and Heads of Directorate. The co-ordinator will also be the point of reference for questions about mentoring or if difficulties arise. At the first meeting between the mentor and mentee the co-ordinator will facilitate introductions and give a short briefing to explain the principles of the mentoring policy and answer any questions.