

# Enhancement of Learning Support - "More than Courses"

Using alternative forms of CPD to support practice and development

"Mentoring"



## Section 1

### 1.1 What is mentoring?

The pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with someone less skilled or experienced with the mutually agreed goal of helping the less skilled person to develop their work related skills, knowledge and understanding. The relationship is centred on the development of skills, confidence and competence and is often referred to as a “learning conversation”. A mentor relationship, although very supportive and friendly, is more formal than with a buddy.

### 1.2 What does a mentor do?

Mentoring can include a range of activities, all designed to support the professional development and practice of the person being mentored. This may include:

- Encouraging learners to take control of their own learning and development;
- Demonstrating and sharing effective practice and professional attributes, knowledge and understanding;
- Being a source of motivation and encouragement;
- Providing advice and guidance without interfering or imposing solutions;
- Being an effective questioner and listener, without being judgmental;
- Providing opportunities for the learner to reflect on, refine and review their own practice;
- Working with the mentee to agree professional learning goals to support progression;
- Modelling, articulating, observing and discussing practice to raise awareness;
- Supporting the mentee in reviewing and action planning;
- Observing mentees’ practice and providing practical suggestions for development; and
- May involve acting as assessor, appraiser and contributing to the accreditation of practice where the mentee is working towards a professional qualification. This is common practice in supporting teaching assistants and higher level teaching assistants working in schools to achieve professional qualifications.

### 1.3 Why mentor?

Although little research exists with specific regard to LSAs, research<sup>1</sup> for trainee teachers suggests that mentoring is an important and highly effective form of supporting professional development. The benefits to the person being mentored, the mentor and the organisation include:

- Reduced feelings of isolation in staff new to the role/organisation along with increased confidence and self esteem, professional growth, improved self reflection and problem solving skills;
- Increased retention and stability;
- Positive impact on the personal and professional development of mentors, with mentors reporting increased self reflection or critical reflection of their own practice;
- Effective introduction into a new organisation, and, for staff new to the role, induction to the profession as a whole;
- Support for progression, enabling professional learners to develop their practice;
- An effective mechanism for supporting challenge. Mentoring can be an appropriate response to support an individual to address significant issues that might inhibit progress. Alternatively, it might be used to accelerate the development of a member of staff deemed to have significant potential;
- Support for the achievement of a professional qualification; and
- A cost effective method of training and developing staff, since mentors can carry out their role in conjunction with their normal learning support role, and there is no cost incurred for external training providers or premises.

### 1.4 Who would act as a mentor?

In identifying staff to act as potential mentors, the characteristics that you might be looking for include:

- Experienced colleagues who understand the role and who themselves have a track record of demonstrating high quality practice. This may be a peer, but ideally should not be a line manager;
- Someone who is prepared to share practice and devote time to fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of mentoring;

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<sup>1</sup> Devos, A. *New teachers, mentoring and the discursive formation of professional identity* Teaching and Teacher Education 26 (2010) 1219e1223

- Although the focus of this work is aimed at learning support staff, it is worth noting that initial ELS research indicated that there is very little training available to staff new to the role of managing learning support staff. Mentoring by an experienced manager of learning support staff could be of tremendous benefit here. This would involve establishing reciprocal arrangements with other local providers; and
- Depending on the purpose of the mentoring, it can be helpful if the mentor has the same subject specific knowledge as the mentee.

### **1.5 When can mentoring be used?**

Mentoring can be a very effective tool;

- To support induction into a new organisation, or new role; and
- In response to specific, significant challenges.

The frequency and intensity of support is to be jointly agreed between the mentor and the mentee. However, it is likely that it will need to be at least once a week for the first few months, and may need to be more frequent if the LSA is new to the role, and there is no buddying system in place.

### **1.6 Where might mentoring take place?**

A key advantage of mentoring is that it takes place in the mentee's work place:

- In quiet places, to allow for confidential discussion; and
- In the learning environment/classroom – mentoring might involve the mentee observing the mentor and vice versa, followed by a professional dialogue to reflect on the experience and identify learning.

## Section 2

### How to set up and manage a mentoring scheme

The following guidance is intended to support you in setting up a mentoring scheme in your own organisation.

- Identify existing, experienced learning support staff who demonstrate effective practice and invite them to attend an introductory meeting.
- Provide a simple presentation to introduce them to what is involved – role of a mentor, likely challenges and how to face them, boundaries and issues of confidentiality, active listening and communication skills, the skills and qualities required and a brief outline of the process and expectations. The presentation “Introduction to mentoring” might support you with this.
- Following this, ask for volunteers to sign up to be mentors.
- Identify a small number of staff who would benefit from/like to be mentored. In so doing, consideration will need to be given to your criteria for this (see 3.1) as this is likely to influence the allocation of mentors.
- In allocating mentors, consideration will need to be given to how to pair staff effectively (see 3.2).
- Ensure both parties sign the mentoring agreement and are clear about their responsibilities. The example in the resource section might support you in this.
- Arrange for the mentor and mentee to work together as much as possible.
- Facilitate meeting times for the mentoring activity (see 3.3)
- Use structured paperwork to ensure that the intended learning/development for the mentee is identified, that approaches to support this are agreed and to measure the effectiveness of these on practice. The sample development plan and mentoring log might be useful (see section 4) and should support you in reviewing the mentee’s progress and deciding on next steps- should the mentoring continue, if so, with the same mentor and to what end? Of course, mentors and mentees might identify the need to review this in a shorter period, and the process should be sufficiently flexible to allow it.
- Arrange observations as appropriate, of the mentor by the mentee and vice versa. In undertaking observation of the mentee, the mentor should be careful to provide practical suggestions and strategies to address any identified areas of development. The mentee should have the opportunity to try these before his or her next mentoring observation.
- Evaluate the process – benefits, effectiveness, any issues from both perspectives and the implications for the implementation and extension of mentoring across your organisation. Consider establishing a reporting system for the mentor to report back to his or her line manager about the process and impact. This might

be once a fortnight for the first month, and once a month thereafter. Draw on documents such as the sample mentoring log and development plan in order to support you in critically reviewing the process and impact, from the perspective of both mentor and mentee.

- Amend your process in the light of any feedback and consider how to further embed it within your workforce development strategy, ensuring that sufficient time and resources are allocated to support it.
- You may wish to consider extending the training and development available for mentors, to include, where appropriate, the achievement of relevant accreditation.

## Section 3

### Things to think about?

In order to establish a successful mentoring scheme there are a number of issues you might wish to consider. These include:

#### 3.1 Criteria for being mentored

You will need to agree your criteria for identifying who will receive mentoring support. This might involve:

- Staff who are new to the organisation and / or new to the role and need targeted support to develop skills and understanding in relation to their role;
- Staff who are taking on a new role or challenge and would benefit from support from a more experienced and skilled member of staff with responsibility for performing that role in the organisation;
- Staff who would benefit from targeted support to address specific and significant issues that might inhibit progress. It is however important to ensure that mentoring is seen as something developmental, supportive and professionally valuable, and not as a something which is only provided when there are concerns about performance; and
- Staff who are relatively new to the role but are clearly demonstrating aptitude and have been identified as having significant potential. In this case the role of mentoring might be to accelerate progress so that the member of staff can quickly acquire new skills with a view to taking on additional roles and responsibilities.

#### 3.2 Allocation of mentors

The allocation of mentors is likely to be influenced by a number of factors. Considerations include:

- Compatibility – although a more formal relationship than buddying, it is important that the mentor and mentee are able to develop an effective professional working relationship;
- The purpose of mentoring – all mentors must have professional credibility based on the capacity to demonstrate practice which is of a consistently high standard. However, if a mentee is keen to/needs to develop a particular skill, such as adapting and using resources, you might choose to select staff whose practice is particularly exemplary in this field; and
- Maximising opportunities to meet and learn – if mentees are to maximise the opportunity to learn from their mentor, they will benefit not only from meeting with them, but having the opportunity to work alongside them and observe their practice. This can then form the basis of discussions to support development. This has timetabling and location implications; however well suited a mentor might be

to meeting the identified development needs of an individual, their impact is likely to be less if their only time together is the scheduled meetings.

### **3.3 Facilitating time and space**

- Mentoring is more likely to be effective where mentors are provided with specific time to help them prepare for and undertake the mentoring role. Similarly, if mentees are to benefit from observing the effective practice of their mentor, they will need time to do this, and to discuss their experiences with their mentor after the session.
- Any guidance and protocol around the level and frequency of support will need to take into account the resources (time and the cost of releasing staff) the organisation can commit to the process.

## Section 4

### Resources

The following resources have been developed to support you in introducing a mentoring programmes and are available on

<http://www.natspec.org.uk/enhancement-of-learning-support/regional-activity/west-midlands.html>

They can be downloaded in word format, to ensure they can be adapted to meet the needs of your organisation, purpose and context, and include:

- [Sample Mentoring Agreement](#);
- [Sample Mentoring Log](#);
- [Sample Mentee Development Plan](#): and
- [Introduction to Mentoring](#) (PowerPoint).

In addition, you might find the following site useful:

<http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/moss>

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