

## Supporting and mentoring teachers

### Review meetings

Meetings can be tailored in a variety of ways during a mentoring programme, however typically there will be an initial set up meeting between the mentor and the mentee, and then a series of review meetings during the period of the mentoring itself, followed by a final meeting before deciding if and how there is any follow up. The content of the meetings can be comprehensive and cover a broad range of areas, depending on the focus of the meeting. The meeting should, however, always aim to move things forward and is likely to cover progress to date, a reflection on the present position, with clear indications of future direction.

#### **Preparing for the meeting**

There is no right or wrong way to prepare for the meeting but the most effective meetings are usually prepared for by both the mentor and the mentee. This preparation could take the form of written notes on action plans and areas for development, evidence of feedback from peers or students, as well as discussion about how the mentee feels, and what progress or development has taken place. There should be a feeling of moving forward.

#### **Organise an initial meeting and establish a framework for further meetings during the period of the programme**

The initial meeting is most likely to be exploratory, and, where the mentee is seeking a general mentor for all areas of their work, could include an in-depth discussion and evaluation of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses. In other cases, the mentee may need mentoring in a specific methodological area, such as monitoring and assessing learning or in teaching a new group or level/class. In either case the mentor needs to establish an initial time period for the mentoring process, whether they will be needed for any developmental observation, and set up regular review meetings.

#### **Ensure that logistic needs to enable the meetings to take place are met**

The kind of logistic considerations include looking at the teacher's timetable, room availability and access to quiet, private spaces for meetings. Further considerations include the capacity of the institute to create opportunities for the mentoring to take place, whether it is a busy or quiet time of the year, and the fit with other institutional needs. The mentor may need to check with members of the management team to ensure that no logistic challenges emerge which may interrupt or hinder the mentoring programme. If some or all of the mentoring is to take place at distance or remotely then technical requirements need to be met, for example if there are video uploads then the speed of the internet should be checked, as well as all communication and feedback channels.

#### **How to conduct the meeting**

The mentor or mentee could lead the meeting, and this is a decision that needs to be arrived at, with rationale. The meeting should be as informal as possible, the objective of the meeting is development rather than assessment or examination, and therefore informality is more likely to be conducive to a relaxed atmosphere enabling the mentee to more easily speak freely. There should be parameters to the meeting, usually with an agenda and a time frame to work to. Other factors include timing, both in terms of

how long the meeting will be and also at what time of day, a suitable place to meet and possibly a procedural plan in mind.

## **Feedback approaches**

Feedback approaches vary and they could be a combination of oral/written processes. Usually, though not always, it is more effective to elicit feedback from the mentee. This has the advantage of providing insight into the level of self-awareness of the mentee, the development taking place, and an assessment of how successful the programme is at that point. Timing as well as content should be considered. There may well be points which need to be made to the mentee, however it could be at too early a stage to make these in that particular meeting. Some feedback may well need to be reserved until a later meeting when the mentee is ready for it. Consideration needs to be given in terms of how much to feedback during one particular meeting, an approach which delivers all possible feedback points during one meeting may not be the best.

## **Development or assessment?**

Mentoring is primarily a developmental process. There may be links to assessment, particularly, for example, where a teacher has been under-performing or is subject to criticism by management. However, unless there are exceptional circumstances the mentor should not be the line manager of the teacher. The line manager's duties to assess the teacher will conflict with the spirit of mentoring, which is developmental rather than judgemental.

## **Challenging messages**

There may well be messages which are difficult to get across. These may come as a result of the mentoring itself, and the observations of the mentor regarding changes that need to be made, or they may come from links with the management of the institution. For example there may be legitimate complaints about the teacher which the mentor needs to take account of, and enable the teacher to become aware of what gives rise to these complaints. Whatever the reasons are, if at all possible the teacher should be enabled to develop this insight and awareness for themselves. At the simplest level one example could arise from ineffective classroom management, rather than just telling the teacher ways in which they could manage the classroom, the mentor should ask if, for example, they feel there are any other ways in which to manage their classroom, eliciting areas of development from the mentee.

## **The final meeting**

At some point the mentoring programme will come to a close. This could be for a variety of reasons; there may be a set length to the programme; it may conclude simply because the mentoring was successful; it may cease if it is not working or the teacher no longer wishes to be mentored or there may be institutional changes of direction. If possible there should be a meeting at which the mentoring is concluded. Consideration needs to be given in terms of how the teacher can successfully take responsibility for their own continuing professional development, what access to materials and resources may be needed for this to be enabled, and what their future needs are likely to be. These needs need to relate to institutional requirements and finding the best fit for the teacher in question. The final meeting should ideally be a forum in which the teacher can recognise and articulate the progress they have made as a result of the meetings, with future progression and next steps in mind.

## Reflection

Have you ever mentored or been mentored?

What do you consider were the most and least effective experiences that you had in your meetings as a mentor or a mentee?

If there were any difficulties can you list what you think were the reasons for those difficulties.

Have you ever had a negative experience in terms of negative feedback you have been given at a meeting, if so what were the reasons for this?

Referring to the above question, do you think there is any way that there could have been a more positive outcome?

Make notes on your reflections below.

## Commentary

There can be many reasons for negative experiences in mentoring meetings but nearly all of them relate to one or more of the following:

1. There is lack of clarity within the meetings as to whether they are for developmental or assessment purposes.
2. Lack of trust (often arising from the above), trust is probably the most important element in all mentoring meetings.
3. Ineffective feedback approaches, such as telling the teacher where they are going “wrong”, not eliciting useful insight from the mentee and exploiting top-down rather than bottom-up feedback methods and procedures.

The most effective mentoring meetings are those which are based on trust, and where the mentee feels uninhibited, feels able to open up and articulate freely, and feels that they can rely on complete confidentiality. If there are elements of distrust or the mentee feels that there is a lack of transparency then the meetings are likely to be compromised.