

Working with your colleagues

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3.1 Drawing on my own resources

One of your key forms of support in the job will be your experienced colleagues. They will be the ones who will offer you general support, advice and training. Before you can benefit from what they have to offer, you must consider what it is that you need from them. To do that you will need to be honest with yourself.

Thinking about yourself – a SWOT analysis

You have been appointed because of your professional strengths, but both you and your employer will expect you to develop and grow in the job. First, you need to think carefully about what you will have to do in the job (lecture, assess, support students and so on) and the demands it will make on you. In the light of that, you need to consider your strengths, your weaknesses, what opportunities are open to you, and any possible threats to your success in the job - a so-called SWOT analysis adopted from marketing terminology.

- Strengths – the undoubted professional knowledge and experience you bring with you and your ability to learn actively. Be proud of your achievements and build on them!
- Weaknesses – any gaps in your competences and any areas of the job that you are uncertain about and which you will need help to overcome, either informally or formally.
- Opportunities – the chances to take the initiative and learn, either formally in training courses and from the appraisal process. or informally from colleagues, including a mentor, and indeed from your students.
- Threats – areas of weakness that need to be tackled urgently; the perennial problem of time and other everyday pressures on you.

You will note elsewhere in the cards references to benefiting from feedback, both from colleagues and students, and the importance of keeping a learning diary. The emphasis will be on learning from your experiences and avoiding the repetition of those same experiences over and over again. So do an honest SWOT analysis as an early entry in your learning diary.

A 'Force Field' diagram

You can also draw a force field diagram to illustrate the forces that are driving you towards success and those that are restraining you. To create such a diagram, draw a horizontal line half way down a page. Now draw arrows pointing downwards towards the horizontal line to represent the forces (people and events) that are driving you towards success. Label the arrows and make them different lengths according to their strengths. Similarly, by means of labelled arrows pointing upwards towards the horizontal line, show the forces that are restraining you. The diagram will

display the opposing forces graphically to help you to think clearly about how you can enhance the drivers and convert the restrainers into drivers or otherwise neutralise or cope with them.

3.2 Drawing on the resources of my colleagues

Having analysed the job and your relationship to it in the previous card, now think about all those people who can help you in the job – your key relationships. Draw a diagram to describe the network and add names or job titles to it. You can expect to include people like your line manager, your mentor, other members of teaching staff, administration and support staff, your students – and family and friends! You can then complete a second diagram in which you list those people and relationships, the state of each relationship's present condition and what you have to do about it. By carrying out these activities, you will have made explicit what was formerly implicit. You now need to act on the basis of the output.

Your line manager

Your relationship with your line manager is a key one. You can expect your line manager to:

- personify the institution and its values;
- be your principal link with the institution and keep in touch with you;
- attend to your induction into the job;
- say what is expected of you, what the constraints are, what resources you will have and provide the information you need;
- monitor your performance, give you feedback and help you to develop in the job and to overcome any difficulties;
- help to foster your relationship with other colleagues.

In return your line manager will expect you to:

- be committed to the institution and its values;
- keep in touch and ask for and use the information you need;
- welcome feedback and seek continuous improvement, and discuss your difficulties as they arise;
- contribute to the development of a sense of collegiality.

Your academic colleagues

Your academic colleagues will be an obvious source of support. Cultivate them and share experiences with them. Both parties will have a great deal to gain from such exchanges. A mentoring system (outlined in 3.3) is a case in point. Take opportunities to work with colleagues which will enable you to learn from them, such as joint or team teaching – and ask for feedback.

Your administrative colleagues

Recognise that you depend upon the administration for the delivery of a high quality service to your students – for general information and organisation, for student data and the maintenance of records, for the provision of computing services, for house services and so on. So nurture your relationships with the administration and ensure that such relationships are friendly and productive.

An internal supplier/customer chain

There are separate cards that address your relationships with your students (section 2), your mentor (3.3) and your appraiser (3.8). Meanwhile, think of your network of relationships in the guise of links in an internal supplier/customer chain; and think of the chain as a driver towards high quality outputs.

3.3.1 Working with a mentor

Mentoring is a relationship or partnership between two people in which one person (a mentor) helps another person (a mentee) to develop and grow over time in their work, knowledge, thinking and personal effectiveness within a safe, supportive, but challenging environment. The mentee's wishes, needs and aspirations and the skills and experience of the mentor shape the relationship. A mentor is not a coach or line manager but an unprejudiced supporter, adviser or critical professional friend with experience, influence and time and enthusiasm to commit to the developmental relationship.

The benefits

Mentoring brings benefits to three parties: the mentee, the mentor and the institution:

The mentee

- Ready access to information, practical advice, networking contacts and 'opened doors.'
- Shifts in personal skills, self-awareness and competence through challenge and reflection.
- Enhanced capacity to make sense of and apply learning within the professional and organisational context.
- Enhanced ability to source and integrate new ideas and practices – exposure to new and broader perspectives.
- Encouragement of continuing professional development through challenge and reflection.
- Increased self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance.

The mentor

- Personal learning and reflection; broader perspectives and new insights; more objectivity and questioning of one's own assumptions and stimulus to reflect on one's own role.
- Considerable knowledge exchange.
- Personal satisfaction from enabling the development of both the mentee and the institution.

The institution

- Continuing professional development in action.
- Enhanced capability and satisfaction on the part of the mentee.
- New ideas and ways of working.

The characteristics of an ideal mentor

An ideal mentor is:

- Approachable, constructive and supportive – listens actively and communicates in an open and non-judgemental way, using appropriate language and concepts.
- Willing and able to devote time and commitment to the relationship.
- Skilled and enthusiastic about helping people to develop themselves – able to help the mentee to analyse problems and issues and select appropriate responses.
- Willing to challenge ideas and thinking – creative and innovative, encouraging lateral thinking, experimentation and innovative approaches.

- Trustworthy, objective, patient and assertive – knows when to question, using different styles to elicit information, to enable the mentee to make linkages and reach appropriate conclusions, whilst ensuring that the initiative for achieving outcomes and solutions is owned and retained by the mentee
- Experienced and successful, with good contacts and wide-ranging competence and experience – is able to draw on and reflect on wide experience to assist the mentee to gain insight and make appropriate shifts in perspective.

3.3.2 The mentoring process

There are a number of stages in the mentoring process:

- identify and locate a suitable mentor;
- secure the potential mentor's agreement;
- set up and prepare a first meeting;
- hold a first meeting;
- hold further meetings and develop the relationship;
- conclude the relationship satisfactorily.

An effective relationship will entail:

- mutual liking and respect, and equality of status within the relationship;
- mutual clarity about expectations;
- clear boundaries, including those between the role of line manager and mentor;
- a business-like approach and commitment to outcomes;
- a recognition that the relationship will change over time;
- honesty, trust and confidentiality;
- good interpersonal skills;
- mutual courtesy, consideration for the other party and goodwill.

The mentee's expectations

The mentee might usually expect:

- access to information;
- practical advice, including disclosure of the mentor's own experiences;
- access to networks and contacts;
- challenges to thinking appropriate to the mentee's needs;
- encouragement to reflect;
- support and listening;
- exposure to broader perspectives on relevant issues;
- confidence building, including advice on managing stress, relationships, change and conflicts of values;
- guidance and help with accessing or arranging personal and continuing professional development;
- feedback that will help the mentee to relate learning directly to his or her self-development and role.

Individual responsibilities

Each party has particular responsibilities to make sure the relationship works.

The mentor should:

- have a sincere desire to be personally involved with the mentee to help her or his developmental goals;
- have the ability to communicate with her or him in an open, non-judgemental way;
- empower the mentee by responding to her or his agenda and developmental needs rather than imposing their own;
- provide levels of safety and challenge appropriate to the mentee's needs;
- give feedback that will help the mentee to relate learning directly to her or his self-development and work role.

The mentee should:

- recognise and respect the fact that the mentor is freely giving scarce time to the process;
- be committed to the relationship and be enthusiastic about the opportunities it presents;
- set the agenda for mentoring meetings – be in charge of the learning and development;
- prepare for each meeting, drawing on notes made and agreements reached at previous meetings;
- if possible, have a clear idea of the desired outcomes from each meeting.

3.3.3 Key steps in mentoring

An effective relationship between mentor and mentee is crucial to the benefits of mentoring. There are a number of key steps to getting the relationship right:

- the mentee needs first to decide what type of mentor would be appropriate;
- the mentee (sometimes with others' help) locates a suitable mentor and secures his/her agreement;
- a first meeting is set up, usually at the mentee's initiative;
- both parties prepare for the meeting;
- the first meeting takes place;
- further meetings and the development of the relationship follow.

Securing agreement

A potential mentor will need to consider carefully such factors as the potential commitment and whether this will create any tensions or conflicts of interest with his or her primary role; whether he or she has the necessary skills, knowledge and experience; and whether his or her style and approach will fit that of the mentee. The first meeting provides the opportunity to clarify whether the relationship is potentially viable and the final commitment will normally only be given at that stage.

Managing the relationship

Be clear about the expectations both parties bring to the relationship. Establish clear boundaries between the different roles of line manager, appraiser and mentor to avoid any conflicts of interest or divided loyalties. In the final analysis, the prime

relationship will always be between mentee and line manager, to whom he or she will be accountable for effective day-to-day performance.

Getting started

The first meeting will be about establishing a comfortable working relationship. There are no set rules, but expect the meeting to be about getting to know each other – exchanging information about career histories, roles and responsibilities, interests and specialisms, current studies/development activities and so on. It is very important to establish clearly what each expects from the relationship and to set boundaries – for instance, the extent to which the process will be known about by others.

The 'rules of engagement'

Negotiate and agree a set of 'rules of engagement', such as:

- the frequency and duration of meetings, ideally once a month, and only cancelled as a last resort – and immediately re-arranged if that is the case;
- mutual expectations;
- clearly agreed boundaries (which may of course change over time), including issues of confidentiality and any 'no go' areas;
- a schedule of meeting dates and times and confirmation of the next meeting on each occasion.

3.3.4 Getting the mentoring relationship right

An evolving relationship

The relationship between mentor and mentee will change over time.

- Stage 1 – Initial building of rapport (agreeing what each party seeks from the relationship and establishing mutual trust).
- Stage 2 – Developing the relationship (beginning to progress the mentee's development within the meetings).
- Stage 3 – Achieving a mature relationship (continuing to stimulate both parties to meet the needs of the mentee).
- Stage 4 – Redefining and evaluating (ensuring that, as the relationship matures, it continues to meet the mentee's needs).

Transitions

As in any relationship, expect the mentee to pass through a process of transition, which may include:

- a change from initial dependency in the relationship to a more equal basis;
- a tempering of initial enthusiasm as the realities of the demands, complexities and challenges of achieving personal goals becomes clear;
- self-questioning as recognition emerges of significant gaps in competences
- a growing understanding of – and sophistication about – the scope of the mentoring relationship and how it can be most effectively used.

If things go wrong

There is always the possibility that, despite well-laid plans and good intentions, things go awry. Be alert to, and deal with, the commonest causes:

- poor time management;
- slowing commitment and lack of obvious progress;

- over-caution and avoidance of challenge;
- personality clashes arising from differing interpersonal skills, including asymmetry in the relationship;
- lack of confidence;
- boundary failures.

When mentoring goes well, it is an invaluable, exhilarating, highly rewarding experience and usually tremendous fun. So keep in mind that, if one mentoring relationship does not work out well, the chances are that another one will.

Ending the relationship

The ideal mentoring relationship will meet the needs of the mentee over a period of time and allow the mentor to feel that he or she has made a positive contribution to the mentee's personal and professional development. It will generally be a positive experience for both parties. Nonetheless, there will come a time to move on and end the relationship in a way that satisfies both parties. Signs that signal an ending are when the process seems no longer to meet the mentee's needs, or when the time commitment becomes burdensome. The key to ending the relationship is to ensure that it is a managed process, rather than one that ends by default. The final meeting should consider how well the relationship has fulfilled each party's objectives, whether there are unresolved issues and how these can be dealt with, whether a new mentor is needed and what relationship (if any) the partners will have in the future.

3.3.5 The mentor's 'code of practice'

In working with the mentee:

Do:

- invite joint decision-making;
- give constructive feedback;
- believe in the mentee's abilities and encourage him or her to take on challenges;
- provide positive reinforcement and encourage self-motivation;
- introduce the mentee to new perspectives and share experiences where appropriate;
- listen actively and carefully to the mentee's concerns and problems before responding;
- help the mentee to make the most of opportunities and to find solutions to problems;
- develop action planning but keep the emphasis on the process rather than the task;
- develop a relationship that provides enjoyment;
- maintain a relationship of equality.

Don't:

- tell the mentee what to do or do things *for* him or her;
- attempt to be an expert in everything or create false expectations;
- get too emotionally involved;
- make assumptions or adopt a judgmental attitude;
- involve the mentee in your own problems.

3.4 Being appraised

If you are familiar with appraisal, you will know that it is or can be part of a benign and productive scheme of staff management. What applied to your own work outside teaching will also apply to what you do as a teacher. Every so often you can expect your work to be appraised. An appraisal will make a positive contribution to your professional development, so seek one rather than seek to avoid one. The appraisal, properly conducted, will give you the opportunity to review what you have done since your appointment (or since a previous appraisal), to reflect upon the lessons you have drawn from the experience, and to look ahead to your next round of teaching. The benefits of the appraisal will come both from the preparation you make and from the subsequent discussion with your appraiser.

A table such as the following one will help you to prepare:

Preparing for an appraisal		
Looking back		
My teaching	My thoughts about my teaching	
	<i>What went well/ What went not so well The lessons</i>	Notes from the appraisal
My lecturing		
My face-to-face meetings with students		
My written work		
Looking ahead		

<i>My teaching</i>	The challenges and how I'll meet them	Notes from the appraisal

One or two points stand out from a table of this kind. First, your appraisal will prompt you to recall your teaching, so you can see how the appraisal will draw upon your learning diary. As you recollect what happened – that is, as you look through your diary – you can bring to mind those occasions when things went well and when things did not go well. Reflect upon the events and draw some lessons from them.

Secondly, the point of reflecting upon your teaching in this way is to prepare you for the next round. The second half of the table will help you to look ahead in an organised way. List what you have to do. Think about the challenges and how you think you will meet them, drawing, of course, on your experience and on the experience of others. Now, having reviewed your teaching and having thought about the next round of teaching, you will be well prepared to contribute to your appraisal.

Your institution is likely to have its own appraisal form. However it is structured, it is likely to require you to look back and to look ahead. If the institution does not have a form, then prepare one of your own, along the lines of the table. In any case, talk to your appraiser beforehand about your preparation for the appraisal and your expectation that it will be an opportunity to review and to look ahead.

3.5 Stories

The agreement

'I am now accustomed to working with a colleague as one of a pair of tutors who have responsibility for a group of students', said a Management tutor. 'Both of us are in the room together for the whole-group session, and when the group works in smaller sub-groups we share the facilitation. I am now aware of the benefits of teaching with a colleague, but I had to learn how to work as one of a pair. Fortunately, the first time I did so I was paired with an experienced colleague. The tutor-notes had stressed the need for an agreement with one's pair, and so I was ready for a preparatory conversation with my colleague before the programme began. He led our discussion about what each of us would do during the sessions. I followed his lead, played my part, and all was well. That agreement with my colleague was crucial. We were like a football team. It was important to determine our roles, our contributions.'

Talking

A Business Studies teacher was contracted to teach two two-hour sessions a week during her first term as a part-time lecturer in a college. In the first weeks, she went in to the college on the two days, completed her sessions, usually had a cup of tea in the cafeteria and then went home. Then she struck up a conversation with an IT

teacher who was also working as a part-timer for the first time. They talked about their classes. As a result, they continued to meet. They talked about what had happened and what they planned. For each, it was an opportunity to talk about their work with a colleague, even though it was a colleague who taught a different subject. 'Being able to talk about what I was doing made all the difference', said the Business Studies teacher.