

Guidance for mentors

This guidance is aimed at those acting as mentors for researchers, departmental lecturers and Associate Professors.

Mentors of Associate Professors (APs) in the initial period of office should also refer to the departmental “Notes of Guidance for New Associate Professors” (issued by departments to newly-appointed APs and their mentors), which sets out departmental procedures and criteria for the AP review process. Mentors should ensure that they refer to the correct version of the Notes of Guidance, namely that of the year of appointment of the AP in question.

1. Introduction

Mentoring is usually a planned pairing of a more established person (usually in the same field of work) with a new or less experienced staff member. It is a one-to-one learning intervention provided to enhance the skills, abilities, knowledge and behaviour of the mentee to enable them to reach their career aspirations and goals. (The mentor is not expected to act as a substitute for an adequate departmental induction process or appropriate line management, but it may be helpful for mentors to discuss with new appointees whether the induction process and line management arrangements have been satisfactory.)

2. The role of the mentor

Mentors should:

- Have no line management relationship to the mentee. In the case of those acting as mentors for APs in the initial period of office, the mentor will not be involved in the formal (reappointment) review.
- Provide information and advice to the mentee, and encourage the mentee to proactively make decisions and set objectives in relation to their own development.
- Provide a neutral sounding board, assure total confidentiality, and have no agenda other than assisting their mentees in their development. The mentor should aim to develop the resourcefulness and resilience of the mentee through skillful listening, questioning and challenging, providing support and feedback as appropriate

3. The role of the mentee

Mentees should:

- take responsibility for their own development;
- understand that the role of the mentor is to challenge and encourage but not to provide answers;
- prepare for meetings in advance;
- be willing to learn and be open to suggestions;
- note and implement action points; and
- where appropriate, recognise when the mentoring partnership, having achieved its planned objective/s, has reached its conclusion.

4. Topics for discussion

You should agree with your mentee at your first meeting together the frequency of future meetings; these are usually held once a term. It is also recommended that a brief record of the

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points discussed at the meetings is kept, typically by the mentee (mentees will receive a copy of this guidance).

The following list is a guide to the sorts of issues you might wish to raise with your mentee. The list is not meant to be prescriptive but rather gives examples of topics you might explore together.

Research

- research plans and research projects
- journal(s) to which completed papers might be submitted for publication
- conferences to attend and possible sources of funding
- opportunities to apply for external funding, or for funding internal to Oxford
- managing research alongside other commitments
- making useful research contacts e.g. through visits to other institutions to meet with researchers working in same field, identifying distinguished visitors to invite to Oxford to give seminars, networking at conferences
- how to manage being on a fixed-term contract (if appropriate)
- in particular, for APs, the identification at an early stage of factors that may be inhibiting productivity and consistency of good research (e.g. teaching or administrative loads in college or department, inadequate research resources, insufficient contact with colleagues in this or other universities, failure to identify suitable publications and/or inexperience of the publication process).
- Good practice in research leadership, e.g. how to approach the employment of fixed-term staff (including students) on research grants, etc.
- Impact of the mentee's research outside academia

Teaching

- preparing and delivering tutorials and lectures (e.g. a mentor might wish to offer to attend a lecture given by the mentee, and provide informal feedback).
- teaching methods
- how to manage students (individually or as a group, as appropriate to the mentee's role)
- supporting students' development

Supervising students

- the University has a legal duty of care to its students undertaking fieldwork. It is therefore essential that mentees who are acting as supervisors for students are made aware of their responsibilities with regard to students undertaking fieldwork. An overview of these responsibilities, the specific duties of supervisors, links to relevant university policies and training courses and contact details for the Divisional Safety Office are provided at <https://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/services/research-and-impact/fieldwork/files-1/summary-of-fieldwork-responsibilities-for-supervisors-dec-12.pdf> and <https://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/services/research-and-impact/fieldwork/fieldwork-more-information>
Mentors should ensure that this information is brought to the attention of mentees at an early stage.

Assessment

- assessment methods

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- designing examination papers
- marking standards
- setting questions

Professional development

- balancing duties (research, teaching, administration) and managing workload, including college commitments where relevant. In the case of APs in the initial period of office, the Social Sciences Divisional Board has agreed that individuals should not exceed their university/college teaching stints nor take on onerous administrative offices.
- Prioritizing: research or administrative duties
- support for professional development within the department and beyond (appraisal, training courses, etc.)
- any external roles held (e.g. editorships, committee role, etc) or opportunities for this
- managing relationships with academic colleagues in the department and beyond
- thinking ahead to the next step (particularly for staff on a fixed-term contract) and how they might get there

Administration

- departmental and university procedures
- who to contact for further information or for help

5. Principles of good mentoring practice

- Any matters discussed between the mentor and mentee are confidential
- Both parties take equal responsibility for the progression of the mentoring: the key task for a mentor is to support the mentee in identifying and clarifying their development needs while the mentee's role is to seek to address them
- The mentor does not *act* on behalf of the mentee. It is the mentee's responsibility to take action and, where relevant, the mentor's to assist the mentee in reaching decisions about action and/or reflect upon the consequences of such action
- The mentor and mentee respect each other's time and responsibilities. The frequency and length of, and venue for, meetings are mutually agreed, along with the level and means of contact between meetings
- The partnership lasts for an agreed time period (usually one year in the first instance, or in the case of APs, for the duration of the initial period of office), whereupon it is reviewed and can then be continued or terminated
- Where appropriate, both mentor and mentee share responsibility for the smooth winding down of the partnership once it has achieved its purpose
- Either party may terminate the partnership after discussing the matter with the other first, ensuring mutual respect and understanding of the conclusion

6. The first meeting

It is suggested that, at the first meeting, you discuss and agree how the mentoring will work. The areas to cover are:

- How frequently you will meet (note that it is difficult to build momentum on anything less than three times a year and that, sometimes the meetings will be significantly more frequent, especially early on)

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- What you expect of each other
- Confidentiality
- The extent to which the mentoring is undertaken through email and telephone contact as well as or instead of face-to-face contact
- The venue for face-to-face meetings, which needs to be sufficiently private and a place in which both parties are sufficiently at ease.

7. Further information

Further information about mentoring is available on the Oxford Learning Institute's website: <http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/oli.php?page=368>. Mentoring guidance produced by the Oxford Learning Institute for academics newly appointed to Oxford is also provided at Annex A.

Information about supervisors' responsibilities for students undertaking fieldwork (including links to relevant university policies, training courses and further resources) is provided at <https://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/services/research-and-impact/fieldwork/fieldwork-more-information>

Oxford Learning Institute

Mentoring: an introduction for new appointees

(for academics newly appointed to Oxford, but not necessarily new to academia)

Welcome to Oxford!

New appointees experience a busy and demanding time as they arrive and settle in to their new role as an Oxford academic. Mentoring is one response that many areas within the University already use or are currently developing to assist during this orientation period.

"I know Oxford thinks that Colleges do this kind of thing, and in some ways they do, but plenty of things happen at sub-faculty level which are totally opaque to new colleagues ... so it is an important role."

Mentoring as practised at Oxford generally comprises the allocation of an established Oxford staff member (usually an academic) and often (but not always) in a senior capacity, to serve as a 'sounding board', 'information source', 'critical friend' or even 'career guide'. A mentor is usually appointed on the basis of cognate academic interests. Sometimes, but not always, they may be in the same Department, Faculty or Division; they may even be in the same College as well. Some Colleges have mentoring schemes that complement those at the Faculty or Departmental level, but practice varies.

On the basis of past experience of mentoring at Oxford, and in anticipation of the findings of a new survey still being analysed, three things stand out:

1. Typically, the focus changes through time. Initially, concern is with practical matters, 'how to get things done around here'. Thereafter, the focus is on the research-teaching balance, or even research performance.
2. Of central importance is getting a mentor-mentee relationship started on the right footing. Typically, mentors will initiate the first contact within the first few weeks following the arrival of the mentee at Oxford.

"...it is critical to have someone who "knows the ropes" to guide me through it all..." (mentee, 2006 survey)

"I have supported my colleague in helping them resist requests that they get involved in examining at this early stage." (mentor, 2006 survey)

"a mentor may have a better sense of how much teaching is appropriate and what requests can be turned down." (mentee, 2006 survey)

"younger colleagues [need] to see how to maintain their research careers in the face of heavy teaching and

3. Scoping an appropriate and mutually agreed discussion 'agenda' for the first meeting seems to be central for the longer term success and value of the support that can be gained from a mentoring arrangement.

Some suggestions about how to approach a first meeting follow.

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In preparation for or as part of an initial meeting...

- Establish what existing arrangements for mentoring (e.g. in University, Division, Faculty, School, Department, College, etc) are already in place.
- Consider what you want out of a mentoring relationship, while thinking about the role of the mentor in the context of other sources of information and support in the Faculty, Department or College.
- Think about how often, and in what contexts, you would like meetings to take place. (Some faculties/departments may specify the duration of the relationship.)
- Consider what your priorities are in the first instance. Determining what is important for you, (and what can be excluded, at least for a while anyway) is probably the first objective.
- Seek to identify and separate short-term *urgent* needs (e.g. those that tend to focus on dealing with immediate practical matters) from the longer-term *important* ones (e.g. dealing with teaching, research and teaching-research balance), especially those leading up to completion of probation.

"A mentor was appointed; however it [mentoring relationship] has no importance to me, I prefer to ask different people for different purposes."
(mentee, 2006 survey)

At the initial meeting...

- Discuss your desire for pursuing an ongoing mentoring relationship.
- Clarify that your understanding of existing arrangements for mentoring (e.g. in the University, Division, Faculty, School, Department, College, etc) is correct.
- Talk about your priorities, and establish with your mentor where s/he can be helpful, and where other sources of advice might be appropriate. Don't assume that the mentor will always have the answer, but if s/he does not, then s/he will probably be able to tell you who does.
- Clarify as well the approach to confidentiality that you'd like to see adopted. Generally it is the mentee who should take the initiative in outlining the preferred approach to confidentiality, even when the mentor first raises the issue.
- Clarify with your mentor the overall pattern of engagement. This concerns matters such as: likely overall duration of the relationship; the nature of formality involved; the extent to which the relationship centres on scheduled meetings; how frequently such meetings are needed, and so forth.

In a few cases, it may turn out that a designated mentor-mentee relationship does not work, for whatever reason. In these cases, mentees should approach a senior colleague with a view to finding out how best to request a no-fault termination of the existing arrangement, and possibly explore alternatives.

"Three meetings in the 1st term, thereafter once a term for the first 2 years." (mentee, 2006 survey)

"Ideally there should be opportunities for informal interaction as well as formal meetings."
(mentor, 2006 survey)

"It really depends; in my case we work together on a regular basis on research matters anyway and meet up regularly." (mentee, 2006 survey)

- Explore what else might be useful to consider in your context that you may not have thought of, or been aware of.
- Consider and agree the next step(s) to be tackled together. Is there benefit in agreeing a specific date for the next meeting? If so, when should it be?

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Subsequent to an initial meeting...

- Review how things are settling down. Are you achieving what you need from a mentoring arrangement?
- Remember that there is a range of other potential sources of assistance. Collegial networks extend both within your Department or faculty, and within your College, at the very least.
- Revisit the next step(s) agreed at your initial meeting. Anything missing, or have priorities altered in any way since then?
- Are things in hand now for subsequent meetings? Anything further to attend to at this juncture?

“there is a not unjustifiable assumption that new faculty will be able to ask for help, and my colleagues have been quite helpful though perhaps not “mentors” in the sense of someone consistently giving advice or advocacy”

(mentee, 2006 survey)

“...because the college is a community, advice and help are available all round.”

(mentor, 2006 survey)

Finally, please don't hesitate to examine the full range of programmes offered by the **Oxford Learning Institute** by visiting the website: www.learning.ox.ac.uk

With best wishes for a successful transition and prosperous experience at Oxford!