MENTORING HANDBOOK

Teaching Assistant Mentors

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Table of Contents

Introduction ***2***

Definitions of Mentoring ***2***

Ethics for Mentoring ***3***

Framework for Mentoring ***3***

Skills for Mentoring ***4***

Mentoring Activities and Approaches ***6***

Reflections on Mentoring ***7***

Assessing the Impact of Mentoring ***7***

References ***8***

Introduction

Mentoring involves developing a relationship between two professionals and is a valuable source of support, development and guidance as people progress through their careers.

As a new TA, mentoring supports the development of knowledge, skills and understanding of not only the role of a TA but how to work effectively within the school's culture and context which collectively can have a transformational impact upon the mentee.

It is not only the mentee that benefits from the relationship, but also the mentor, as mentoring has reciprocal benefits.

The benefits of mentoring include:

- career advancement
- improved self-confidence
- increased personal and professional satisfaction and motivation
- increased awareness of workplace expectations and practice
- increased productivity
- development of leadership skills
- enhanced sense of a professional community

(Adapted from Morgan and Rochford, 2017)

This handbook has been designed to support you in your role as a mentor and includes all the key aspects that are at the heart of effective mentoring practice.

Definitions of Mentoring

Definitions of mentoring vary, and this is often dependent upon the discipline within which mentoring is being conducted and the views of the mentee and mentor on what constitutes the process of mentoring (Jones *et al,* 2005).

Here are some definitions that are pertinent to your role as a mentor to new TAs:

"A structured, sustained process for supporting professional learners through significant career transitions" (CUREE, 2005, p.3)

"Being concerned with 'growing an individual', both professionally and personally. It is linked with professional and career development, and is somewhat characterised by an 'expert-novice' relationship" (Lord et al, 2008, p.10)

"Mentoring describes a relationship in which a more experienced colleague shares their greater knowledge to support the development of an inexperienced member of staff" (CIPD, 2021, p.2).

To apply these definitions to your specific role as a mentor:

You, as the mentor, will be the 'expert' and your mentee the 'novice'. Using a structured approach of regular meetings, ongoing support, and modelling, you will support the new TAs as they start their new role at St John's. Your focus will be to support your mentee's personal and professional development across the academic year.

Ethics for Mentoring

Adhering to a code of ethics is important as a mentor to ensure a psychologically safe mentoring relationship. Key aspects to ensure ethical mentoring are:

Integrity – honestly represent your knowledge and experience in an honest way, disclose any conflict of interest, and display and promote conduct and behaviours consistent with professional expectations of education.

Confidentiality – always maintain confidentiality, unless a disclosure is made that may harm the mentee or others. Ensure that any notes of records of mentoring are stored in a manner that protects confidentiality and privacy.

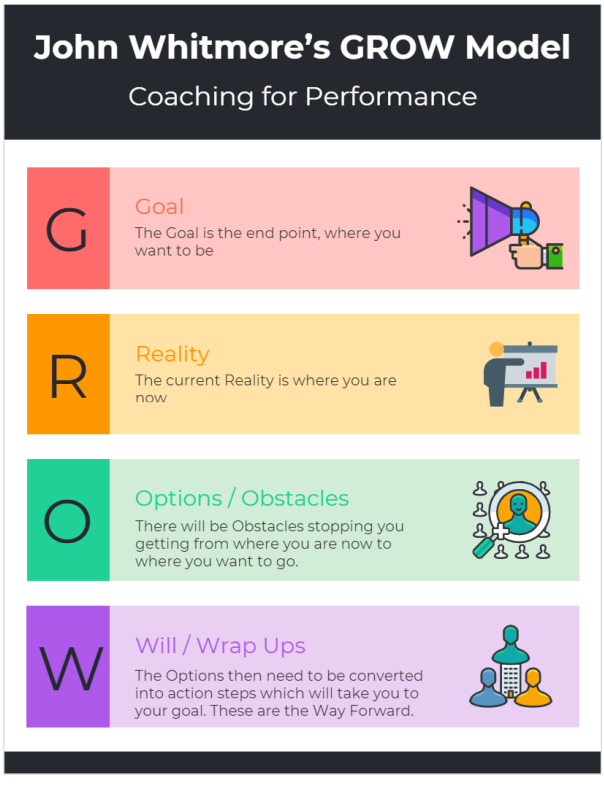
Acting responsibly – be aware of and develop your understanding of unconscious bias and avoid discrimination on any grounds. Ensure that a respectful and inclusive approach is always taken.

Creating boundaries – establish clear professional and mentoring boundaries.

(Adapted from The Global Code of Ethics, 2021)

Framework for Mentoring

There are a variety of models/frameworks for mentoring that help to structure the mentoring process. Below are two models that you can use to shape your mentoring sessions:



GROW Model – John Whitmore

This is a simple 4-step process model. This can be utilised repeatedly within a mentoring process, moving from one goal to the next.

Step 1: Identify a goal – what does the mentee want to achieve?

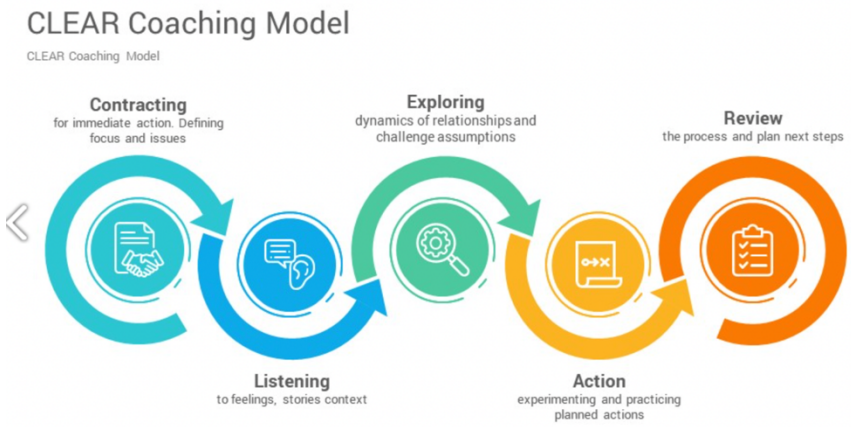
Step 2: Assess the current situation. Where is the mentee now?

Step 3: What are the varying options and approaches that can be employed to achieve

the goal? What are the potential obstacles in achieving the goal? How can these be overcome?

Step 4: Decide on a way forward and commit to these actions. What will the mentee do? How will they do this?

CLEAR Model



This is another goal-focussed model, starting with 'contracting', which involves setting and establishing the goal, but also highlights the importance of listening and exploring, which in effect replaces the 'reality' and 'options' steps of the GROW model.
The action stage is about the mentee undertaking and practising agreed actions.
The additional step here is that of review. Exploring with the mentee how they are progressing towards the agreed goals and how the actions that have been agreed are developing/having impact.

These are both useful models to support your mentoring. One thing to remember though, is that they are not a one off, but a cyclical process whereby actions are reflected upon, reviewed, and evaluated and from this the next steps (or goal) established.

You may want to adapt them to suit you and your mentee – perhaps share with your mentee how you will use your chosen model to structure your meetings.

Skills for Mentoring

To be an effective mentor you need to have specific qualities and skills. These are detailed below:

Active Listening – not only hearing someone but giving undivided attention to the speaker. This requires intense concentration to all that is being communicated – both verbally and non-verbally (Rogers and Farson, 2015). To actively listen you need to:

- Listen to the full meaning of what is being said – meaning and emotion.
- Respond and acknowledge feelings
- Be aware of both verbal and non-verbal cues
- Let the mentee lead – follow the conversation and check back to ensure you have understood what is being said.

Questioning – ensure that you are asking the right questions that enable the mentee to respond appropriately. Thoughtful phrasing of questions is important and can significantly change how the questions are perceived. As part of your planning, you may decide to plan some key questions you want to ask your mentee.

Effective Goal-setting – As part of the mentoring process, you will work with your mentee to set and establish goals. These need to be clear, realistic, relevant and achievable.

Effective Signposting – You are not expected to know everything as a mentor. Be authentic and honest and make it clear to the mentee if you do not know something or are not the best person to talk to about something. Part of your role is to signpost your mentee to resources and people to support their development.

Creating dialogic conversations – dialogic teaching is using the power of talk to engage and stimulate thinking in order to enhance understanding and deepen thinking and ideas (Alexander, 2008). This can be applied to mentoring, whereby a combination of effective questioning, active listening, and focused discussion, come together to enable the mentee to explore ideas at a greater depth, perhaps challenging their own assumptions and knowledge in order to move their learning forwards.

Encouraging mentees to become autonomous – It is not the role of a mentor to create dependency, quite the opposite. A key element of your support is to scaffold the mentee's development working towards sustainable independence and autonomy in their own approach to their role.

(Role) Modelling – You are a role model as a mentor. You need to demonstrate and live the values and professional expectations of the school. This means maintaining professional behaviour, attitudes, and ethics at all times. You also need to model high quality and effective professional practice.

Reflection – as part of your mentoring process, you need to take time to reflect. Reflection is explored in greater depth further on in this handbook.

Mentoring Activities and Approaches

Mentoring relationships work best when they move beyond the directive approach of a senior colleague 'telling it how it is'. An effective mentoring relationship is where there are learning opportunities for both participants, encouraging joint sharing and learning (CIPD, 2022). These are some core activities that will constitute the overall mentoring process.

An initial meeting – Hold an initial meeting to get to know your mentee and their aspirations for the process. This is also your opportunity to establish a structure for mentoring as well as meeting times and duration. Also use this as a chance to highlight the ethics of mentoring, establish boundaries and confidentiality.

Here is an example agenda for the initial meeting:

Mentoring: Initial Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions – *sharing information about each other, experience, background etc. This builds trust (an essential ingredient for effective mentoring)*
2. Establishing Mentoring Logistics – *How mentoring will be structured, regularity and length of sessions, location of sessions. Here you can also highlight how you will monitor the impact of mentoring as well as establishing the key benefits of mentoring. Explore how you will support the sessions with other support e.g., check ins.*
3. Ethics of Mentoring – *Take the opportunity to set out the ethics for mentoring; boundaries and confidentiality…*
4. Mentoring Model – *Introduce the model of mentoring you will be using to frame the mentoring process as well as a reflective framework you will encourage the mentee to use. You may suggest they keep a journal/notebook to collate their mentoring experience.*
5. Questions – *Offer the opportunity for the mentee to ask any questions or raise any concerns.*
6. Set the date and time for the first mentoring meeting – *Ideally this will follow on fairly soon after the initial meeting to maintain momentum.*

Regular mentoring sessions – Using your chosen framework, conduct regular mentor meetings. Termly meetings are appropriate for this mentoring. Each mentoring meeting should last for around 1 hour as this gives time for detailed conversations to take place. Ensure these occur in an appropriate location whereby confidentiality and privacy can be maintained.

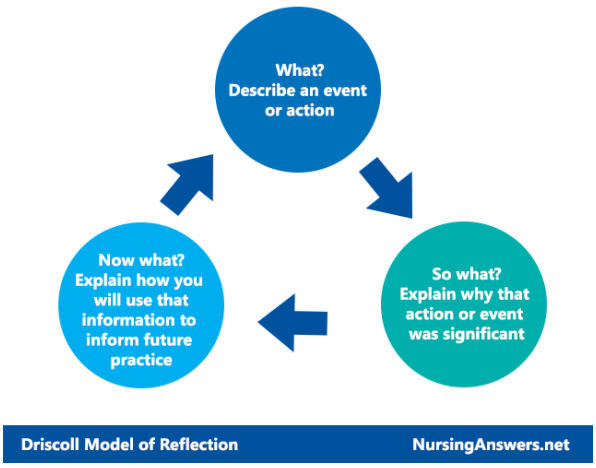
Check-ins and follow-ups – in between mentoring sessions you may want to check-in or follow-up with your mentee to see how they are progressing with the actions identified in your previous meeting. This can be done face to face informally or via email. You may also want to send them additional and useful resources relevant to the work you are undertaking with them. A check-in may focus on how they are feeling too – especially if they have said that they are feeling stressed or lacking confidence…

Observations – To support your mentee you may invite them to observe your practice to exemplify pedagogy and approaches discussed within your mentoring sessions. You may signpost them to observe other colleagues. You may also, with mutual agreement, observe them in order to offer constructive and developmental feedback.

Ad-hoc support – Provide ad-hoc support and guidance as needed, within the established boundaries.

Reflections on Mentoring

As part of the mentoring process it is important that both yourself, as the mentor, and the mentee engage in reflection. Taking time to reflect upon an event or practice is an essential ingredient of professional learning and development.



This can be done in a multitude of ways – however, using a journal style approach is often most impactful.

Using a framework for reflection, such as Driscoll's model helps to structure this process.

It starts with reflecting upon the event e.g. a mentoring session. Then drills down to explore what was significant about the event e.g. the use of questioning and active listening to create dialogic conversation. The, evaluating this. How did you feel? Was it successful? What were the weaknesses?

Finally, what will you do next time e.g. prepare questions in advance.

Such practice should form the foundation of your professional practice and learning.

Assessing the Impact of Mentoring

There is little point in mentoring if it is having no impact! But how do you know if your mentoring is having impact?

There are some simple mechanisms you can use to establish evidence of impact:

Survey – create a simple survey for the mentee to complete at the beginning, middle and end of the mentoring process. This might focus on their confidence, skills, and knowledge. Use the same questions for each of the three surveys.

Post-Session Written and Verbal Feedback – gather written and/or verbal feedback after each session – asking the mentee to share with you an evaluation of the session.

Pre-Session Verbal Feedback – ahead of a session ask the mentee to share the impact that the previous session has had upon their practice, ideally giving concrete examples.

Practice/Performance – Establish how the mentee's performance and practice has improved and developed over the mentoring process.

At the same time as assessing the impact of the mentoring process on your mentee, consider the impact that the process has had upon you in terms of your knowledge, skills, and practice.

We wish you all the very best with your mentoring!

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