

Guidance for mentors

The following notes are intended as a guideline to help you think through your role as a SCONUL mentor. There is no one way of doing this, and SCONUL is not prescriptive in its approach. The main thing is that you should both support and challenge your mentee, and help them to benefit from your experience (including your mistakes and subsequent learning, as well as your successes).

Applying to become a mentor

Think about the role of mentor, and how it differs from that of a line manager, coach, or counsellor. Think about your own previous experience of any of these roles. What approaches and techniques might be useful in your role as mentor? What elements do you want to avoid?

What experiences can you bring to the partnership that might be helpful to your mentee? Think especially about when you moved from one role to another, and the steps along your leadership journey. What helped you to make those moves? Is there anything you might have done differently, in retrospect?

Are you happy to give some of your time to this process? You and your mentee will agree together how frequently, where and over what period of time you want to engage – but you are making a level of commitment by putting yourself forward as a mentor, and you need to feel sure that you can accommodate this appropriately. Once a mentoring partnership has been agreed you will both be responsible for organising the meetings and your own travel, including funding.

Before you complete the online form think about, and possibly type up notes on the following so that you can cut and paste the information into the form:

- Your current role: length of service, key responsibilities & who you report to.
- Previous roles: length of service, key responsibilities & who you report to.
- Mentoring experience: what experience have you had as either a mentee or mentor.
- Your attributes and skills: What experience and skills would you bring to a mentoring partnership.
- Whether you have a preference for the type of mentee you would like to work with.
- Whether you have any geographical preferences for face-to face meetings.

Preparing for your mentoring session

- What do you know about your mentee (their background, previous roles)?
- What have they said about their goals and challenges?
- What have they 'not' said, that you might want to explore with them?
- What do you need to learn more about in order to understand their situation better?

In the session

Remember this is the mentee's time – they should drive the agenda. As well as supporting and challenging them as a mentor, your role is to hold the process, keep track of time, and check that your mentee has had a chance to cover everything they wanted to raise in this conversation.

Think about the questions you might ask to help guide the discussion. You might want to open things up and help your mentee to see a bigger picture, so consider open questions such as:

- Tell me more about ...?
- Are there other ways you might approach ...?
- What else was going on there? How did you feel about ...?
- Why might that be?

At other times you might need to help your mentee to focus, so a different approach might be needed, such as:

- What do you need to focus on right now? Today? This year?
- What is most important for you?
- When do you need to do ...?

Remember to listen – actively – to what your mentee is saying, and check your understanding regularly (e.g. 'so what I think I heard you say is... Is that right?' 'Can you clarify what you mean by...').

Keep your own experiences (current and previous) in mind while listening to your mentee, and bring these in at an appropriate moment if you feel that your mentee might benefit.

Are there practical things you can do to support your mentee, such as put them in contact with people or suggest things they could read? Are you (or your contacts) involved in anything they could join in with and benefit from?

As the mentoring session closes, you should confirm actions and next steps with your mentee, for example:

- What is the mentee going to do / think about / try out after this meeting?
- Are there actions for you?
- Date of next engagement, etc.

4.4 After the session – reflection and review

- How did the mentoring dialogue go? Are there ways you could use your time together more usefully in future (things to focus on, things not to get stuck on)?
- Is there anything you don't understand or feel unsure about? Why might this be?
- Was the balance right (between each of you talking, listening, reflecting)?
- What about actions? If you've ended up with all the actions you might want to re-think.
- Have you been able to help your mentee see things more clearly? Have they made any progress with their original goals and concerns? Have these changed at all?
- Have they gone away with something practical to focus on?

Ending your mentoring partnership

You will have considered at the start of your partnership how frequently you want to meet, and over what period of time; and you may have changed this by mutual agreement at some point along the way. Your mentee should normally take the initiative to indicate when they feel it is time to draw things to a close – this is usually evidence of successful work together, and you should not feel concerned if they are ready to finish. However, you might need to take this initiative yourself if you sense that you have made as much progress as feels reasonable. Let SCONUL know when you have concluded your work together, to assist in record-keeping and monitoring of the scheme.

When you have successfully concluded work with a mentee, you may of course continue
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to be in touch with them, through social media or other informal routes (an occasional coffee for example). This is for you to agree together.

If the partnership is not going well for any reason, you should raise this honestly and openly with your mentee. (It is quite possible that they feel the same, but they may feel more anxious than you about raising the issue.) Ideally you should explore together whether there is anything that either of you might do differently to help the partnership to become more effective. It may also be that one or other of you finds that their circumstances have changed so that they simply cannot honour the original commitment to the mentoring partnership – in which case again this should be raised straightforwardly.

If you feel that you do not wish to continue in a particular partnership for whatever reason, you can recognise this amicably and agree to conclude your work together. Again, please let SCONUL know that your partnership has come to an end, and if appropriate confirm that you are available to work with a new mentee.

And don't forget that you can seek a mentor of your own at any stage, either via the SCONUL scheme or independently. Learning and development are continuing processes.