Guidelines for starting and ending a mentoring relationship

Starting a mentoring relationship

When starting the mentoring it is important to establish that mentor and mentee have the same expectations and how the relationship will work for them. The best way of ensuring this and avoiding potential misunderstandings in the future is to complete a mentoring agreement which will establish the ground rules for the relationship. For this you might want to discuss some (or all) of the following:

- **confidentiality**
  Agree that you will not disclose to anyone else what you discuss during mentoring meetings unless with her/his agreement. Agree how you will describe the partnership to others, including the head of institution if she/he asks.

- **frequency, timing and location of meetings**
  Agree how often and how long you will meet. This could be more frequently at the beginning then at later stages. It can be useful to meet in a space where you won’t be disrupted frequently and could possibly be over lunch or coffee.

- **length of the mentoring relationship**
  Agree when the mentor relationship will end: three months would be a reasonable length of time but it could be shorter (or longer). If both parties are happy with it you can always extend the mentoring relationship.

- **contact arrangements**
  Discuss how and when to get in touch, any 'no-contact' times and how quickly to expect a response.

- **goals/aims**
  Agree a common purpose and goals that will direct the mentoring relationship. Discuss expectations and identify potential issues.

- **honesty**
  Open and honest communication is important for a mentoring relationship. Discuss how you want to give and receive honest feedback to avoid strains to the relationship in the future.

- **privacy**
  It is important to agree what you are prepared to talk other than the topic for which mentoring has been sought in order not to overstep any boundaries.

- **line manager**
  Discussing how the line manager will be involved and how the relationship with him/her will be managed is especially important when mentor, line manager and mentee are in the same department.

- **end**
  Discuss ways to end the relationship that are comfortable for mentor and mentee at the very beginning. This makes it easier at the end.
Some people find it useful to note what is agreed down in form of a very simple written agreement that can be referred to if necessary.

**Ending a mentoring relationship**

If the agreed time period for the relationship has come to an end or you think the time has come for the mentorship to end, tell your mentor/mentee. If you are unsure whether the mentorship should continue, discuss the question.

It is important to discuss from the beginning how you will end the relationship. There can be a variety of reason for ending the relationship:

- The relationship has fulfilled its purpose. Most mentoring relationships are started to help the mentee achieve a particular goal and once this has been achieved another mentor might be more appropriate.
- The mentor and mentee do not really getting on.
- A change of priorities or commitments.

To avoid awkwardness at the end discuss at the beginning how you will end the relationship, e.g. how will one let the other know that they think it is time to end the mentoring relationship.

At the end of the mentoring relationship, look back over the time and discuss what went well and what you might do differently another time. Comment constructively on each other’s handling of the role.