

1. Male, Faculty of Social Sciences

EXPERIENCE

I have thoroughly enjoyed the process of working with my two mentees over the past year. There have been challenges especially in relation to fixed term contracts, my mentee left Sheffield meaning that we had to communicate via Skype. I have also had to adapt to their specific disciplinary backgrounds in order to provide useful advice/feedback. However, this has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the programme too. I have also enjoyed learning more about the career trajectories/ambitions/challenges of my mentees.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I think the programme has helped me enormously in terms of the development of managerial/leadership skills. I have developed greater awareness of the challenges facing ECRs, which has also fed into my support of my own research staff (I manage two Research Associates and a Research Assistant at present). I also feel that I have gained greater confidence in terms of mentoring and appraising staff as a result of this programme.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

As PI, I have worked harder to provide opportunities for my team to get involved in academic activities that will hopefully boost their employability after the project has finished. The feedback I have had from them e.g. through the appraisal process, would suggest that this has also increased their motivation to achieve project targets and strive for academic excellence in terms of publications.

LEARNING & TEACHING

It hasn't directly influenced my learning and teaching – I achieved the Senior Fellowship of the HEA two years ago and have received university awards for my pedagogy in the past. However, I do think that others may see a dividend in terms of their approach towards supervising student projects and motivating students in and outside the classroom.

FUTURE

I definitely recommend this approach. Although I think that mentoring could be given greater recognition in terms of promotion criteria (e.g. Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, SL to Reader/Prof), I have found this process extremely rewarding. The feedback from my mentees has also given me a timely boost over the past 12 months and contributed to my overall job satisfaction.

2. Female, Faculty of Engineering

EXPERIENCE

The mentoring scheme has been an overridingly positive one from my perspective. I have had one challenging session during which we discussed many possibilities for dealing with a certain situation but none were carried through, as I'm not sure my mentee was ready to address the problems head-on. However, in all my other sessions I've been met with enthusiastic mentees who have been really motivated to make changes and work at whichever situation we're discussing. Almost all of the relationships have continued following the formal mentoring period, in many cases as a semi-regular coffee catch-up, or as a friendly face to discuss one-off situations that come up. A particular highlight was one of my mentees requesting me for another term. Knowing I'd made enough of a difference the first time round was really rewarding!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I've certainly grown in confidence throughout my mentoring activities, and this has helped with my duties as personal tutor for our UG and MSc students. When I first began mentoring I had concerns about whether I would be faced with situations I had no experience of and that I couldn't provide any useful support to the mentee. As time has gone on there have been several specific instances where one of my mentees has told me I've managed to open their eyes to a whole new perspective, or even something as simple like their CV is now ten times better after we've been through it. As such I've become more confident in being able to help. What I've learned more than anything is that much of the time simply having someone to talk through ideas with, and to provide a 'critical friend' when necessary is all that's needed – specific knowledge of my mentees' subject areas or disciplines has never been necessary as many of the issues we encounter are the same.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

I think a key benefit of being a mentor is in learning to understand different motivations and concerns, but from an external perspective. I've certainly learned something from each experience, whether that be the difficulties encountered by people with caring and/or parenting responsibilities, or recognising that not everyone has the same certainty regarding which career direction they want to go in. Seeing such a range of issues has made me more aware of the differences between individuals when dealing with staff and students under my line management.

LEARNING & TEACHING

Some aspects of mentoring, and in particular in guiding people to reach their own conclusions rather than simply giving them suggestions, have transferred well into my teaching. I now hold open discussions in my module, whereby I deliberately don't offer up my own opinions and instead encourage the cohort to engage together to reach consensus or to 'agree to disagree' where there is no one correct answer! I plan on applying for Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy within the next year, and will definitely be using my mentoring experience to support my case.

FUTURE

I can't hand on heart say that acting as a mentor has had a major impact on my career progression, but I certainly think it plays a part in showing that you are a team-player and that you are interested in more than your own personal gain. Having said that (and I hope this doesn't sound too clichéd) the personal satisfaction that comes from knowing that a relatively small amount of your time has made a big impact on someone else, makes it something I would certainly recommend. If you've been lucky enough to receive good mentoring yourself (whether formal or through generally caring colleagues) then this is a nice way to pay it forward. Equally, if you've ever wished there was someone to perform that sort of role with you, it's a good way of helping someone else to avoid that situation!

3. Female, Faculty of Science

EXPERIENCE

I've enjoyed participating in the programme, which I've found to be well organised, and I've been paired with mentees with whom I have shared elements of previous experience.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Being involved in the programme has enabled me to reflect on the academic process and consider my approach. I think this has helped me to reflect on my own situation and consider alternative strategies for dealing with challenging situations that may arise.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Being a leader is not something that I feel comes particularly naturally to me. Being involved in this mentoring programme has helped me to develop my leadership skills, which I believe is an area that I need to focus on to ensure success in my academic career. I also believe that practicing these skills as part of this mentoring scheme has helped me to become a better supervisor to my own PhD students.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I think that being a mentor as part of this scheme has helped me to build my skills as an academic supervisor and improves my confidence in being able to steer a research/teaching or an academic administrative project.

FUTURE

I would say that mentoring is a good use of staff time but it is important to be aware that it is not seen as a core activity by academic departments. The time spent being involved in such schemes needs to be appropriate so that time is not taken too heavily from other core activities, e.g. providing excellent UG and PG teaching, applying for grants, writing research articles, academic administration. I'd say that in my department, mentoring is not particularly recognised or rewarded.

4. Female, Faculty of Engineering

EXPERIENCE

Having been mentored early in my career by two amazing ladies, I knew that mentoring was a vital resource for young academic staff. I have enjoyed my experiences of mentoring early career researchers. I have had a selection of female PDRAs, all of which had their own agendas, issues and aims. It has been an incredible experience for me to meet with them and help guide them through the pitfalls of academia, whether it was as a general 'cheerleader' giving them the encouragement and self-belief they could achieve fellowships or signposting them to solutions to their problems or just being a person they could have coffee with and share their problems, independent of their PI and department. I feel blessed to be part of their academic journey. The challenge is always not to put too much of yourself in the situation, but to let them work around it themselves, which at times can be challenging. The best part is watching them grow, apply for fellowships and celebrate successes, large and small.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Taking part as a mentor has allowed me to attend further development courses and workshops on different coaching and mentoring areas, such as 'dealing with stress' and 'thesis mentoring'. This has increased my understanding of what people go through and how to deal with different situation and problems that arises. This in turn has helped me in my role as the deputy head of PGR within the faculty.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Being a mentor has helped me to always look on the positive side of things and try to look for different solutions when problems arise. I have re-examined how I react to certain situations and have taken a different approach to things. I have become much more of an 'encourager' of people, whether in my research group or wider. Often people need that positive voice saying 'yes you can' and it is something that I have found that I can do.

LEARNING & TEACHING

Being involved in mentoring and learning to develop people skills has helped with my interactions with my undergraduate tutor group. It has helped me to support their learning and work around the rigid tutorial set-up we have.

FUTURE

For me encouraging and helping the next generation of engineers is important. I therefore never think of it as a waste of my time, and will always make time for my mentees. I would recommend mentoring to those who want to grow the next generation of research engineers. I don't do mentoring for the recognition, which is a good thing, as it is not really recognized nor rewarded at a department/faculty level.

5. Female, Faculty of Social Sciences

EXPERIENCE

I have been a mentor since starting at Sheffield in 2012. I have particularly enjoyed working with colleagues from other departments and faculties, and getting to know about their specialisms and passions. Memorable moments have been seeing breakthroughs, perhaps a boost in confidence and a 'can do' shift towards tackling a problem, or maybe applying for promotion. It has been particularly rewarding to see colleagues achieving their desired development and career progression (even if this means moving to another university). Mentoring works less well when people bring personal problems or issues and really need some counseling, the programme is set up to signpost to this support.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I enjoy being a mentor in this programme because it keeps me in touch with how colleagues are experiencing changes in the University from different perspectives and career stages. This helps to keep me grounded and aware of how much more challenging it has become to build a career in HE, and the hurdles that have to be cleared. Mentoring skills transfer into how I approach appraisal meetings with junior academic colleagues in my department and help me to keep a focus on their development, and not just on performance.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Being a mentor has developed my awareness of working in teams, helping to motivate people in challenging times, and working with change in the University and in the wider HE environment. It has made me reflect on the things I may have taken for granted – how much I know about the internal workings of the university. Often colleagues have just needed to know how to go about things and to learn more about how the university works (particularly in promotions, career development). It is important for the university to make these processes transparent, especially for those who are not so confident about putting themselves forward.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I use mentoring techniques with my doctoral students, especially as they come towards the end of the doctorate. They often ask for guidance on the next stages, or on their career development.

FUTURE

I would recommend mentoring to other staff. For me mentoring has worked particularly well when mentees have had clear agendas about a particular issue or problem, or use mentoring as a stepping stone to take them to the next stage. The university is undergoing a period of change currently and I hope that senior managers do not lose sight of how change processes impact on colleagues at different career stages. Mentoring deserves to be recognized and rewarded – this work makes a difference to individuals and to the university.

6. Female, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

I find mentoring enjoyable and I think it's a great use of my time as working 1:1 and getting to the real issues, you can see real progress in a small amount of time. I like particularly that I get to see almost immediate progress for a small investment. Over the years, I have learned a huge amount about mentoring. The most important learning point was to recognise that sometimes it just doesn't work – and that's OK. When mentoring didn't work, it was because the mentee hadn't reflected on what they wanted to achieve. If the mentee isn't bought in to the process and ready to work with you then it can't work, it's not for mentors to chase them – it's their development. In that sense, it's different from pushing people to do development courses. You can't hide in mentoring.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I learned through being a mentor that I am actually a good listener and that I enjoy listening to people. One of our mentoring phrases is 'listen to understand, not to reply' – that is something I always try and remember. I find it fulfilling to see that someone else is progressing and it's how I will judge my legacy, by who I have grown and developed. You know have done something right if you have grown a pool of people who have passed through your world.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Mentoring as a style or a skill set is definitely coming into the way I operate with my research group. 'Listening to understand' means we have better and more productive conversations and it motivates people to be curious and explore. I always motivated people to achieve, but maybe in the wrong way – by pushing them quite firmly. I've learned to pull back rather than press forward, not to always push people to do what I think would be good for them, but to let them decide. It's a balance to try to give people the freedom to choose their own career path, and make sure that you are not too distant that you fail to validate them. Sometimes they're just looking to hear from you that they are 'good enough' for academia.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I have implemented mentoring in my Masters course. We train the students to peer mentor and also have an industrial mentoring component where students can work with industry leaders and gain professional skills and new ways of thinking. We wanted to expand the environments the students are exposed to, and the quality of the conversations. We've had really positive feedback from the students and from the external examiners. The students have now taken the idea and developed it e.g. creating a mentor of the year award.

FUTURE

We aren't really rewarded or recognised for our mentoring work, because people don't understand the impact of the initiatives. They don't recognise that this is a specialist skill you have learned and applied – above and beyond just 'advising' junior staff. If your HoD isn't a 'developmental' person they can't recognise the value. And they are the one judging your progression. This may change for the future; I'd like to see this change in the next generation of HoDs.

7. Female, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

I have had five mentee partnerships, and I have found mentoring a largely positive experience. I would struggle to find any negatives, although for one or two of my mentees, I had to fit them around a busier than expected timetable, so I would say it is harder to do it well if you've not got the time. I have tended to stick to only mentoring in Semester 2 when teaching is lighter. I've not drawn on the wider programme (further skills workshops), but I know it's there if I do have an issue I need to resolve, and I feel well supported.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since starting I have undergone promotion myself and I included my mentoring experience on my CV. While it was unlikely to have secured the promotion, I'd like to think that it made a small contribution. Following my promotion, my transition to Senior Lecturer has certainly been helped by being a mentor. Through the process I have gained confidence in seeing myself as a senior colleague, and this helped to consolidate my transition. My HoD has identified me as a key support person for others wanting to gain promotion and, in doing this I've been able to weave together my own promotion experience with my mentoring skills.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Since promotion I have taken on more line management, (very similar to the mentoring role, as the people I line manage aren't in my research team). As a research theme lead, my work involves pulling junior colleagues into collaborations and understanding their skills and strengths is important for this. I have definitely drawn on my mentoring skills as, for this to be successful it needs both the brokering/contracting skills of mentoring, and facilitating interactions between people who may not otherwise work together. It also involves encouraging people to see and take up opportunities and find new ways of presenting themselves.

LEARNING & TEACHING

My teaching involves small groups of Masters students. I started teaching before I started mentoring, but I think there are skills from both sides that you can draw on which are complementary. It's all been about drawing people out to maximize their potential. Mentoring has certainly given me more confidence in supporting students. Another example of using mentoring skills widely and building sustainability is when senior leaders see mentors as a resource for further learning in the dept. For example, I've been asked to present to colleagues at Staff Training Days and Research Days on issues of professional development and workplace learning.

FUTURE

I would definitely recommend mentoring, mainly because it increases confidence. An analogy for me is how, when teaching, you really learn something deeply when you have to teach it to others. In mentoring, it really helps you reflect back on yourself to see the bigger picture of where you fit into the institution. When you are helping people to think about a strategy or career path, you think about your own as well. It helps you define a way forward and gives you space to think about yourself. I think the programme is well recognised and well publicised across the University. However, whether it's rewarded remains to be seen. In my own department we are encouraged to have specific objectives to demonstrate collegial activities and mentoring could be considered one of them. The University as a whole though still mainly recognizes traditional metrics of grant capture and high quality publications so mentoring is not rewarded as widely as it should be.

8. Male, Faculty of Social Sciences

EXPERIENCE

I've mentored four researchers so far. I've not only very much enjoyed the experience, but I have learned a lot myself and grown as a researcher too. Particular moments that stick with me are when one of my mentees got the new job that she wanted and credited the mentoring programme as being important for her in achieving that. It's been challenging not just to give the advice that often I have wanted to give, but to listen and patiently encourage mentees to come to their own decisions. It's been a good experience so far.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since starting the mentoring programme I have been appointed Departmental Director of Research and Innovation. Experience as a mentor has been really helpful for me in performing that job to a higher level, in understanding more about how to help researchers develop themselves and their research. The training received has been very helpful too, in giving me confidence to be able to do that job more effectively than I might have done.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Mentoring has very much enhanced my role as a research leader. The training and practice of being a mentor has enabled me to sit back and listen to what researchers say about their work, and help them to resolve their own issues and to achieve their own breakthroughs. It helps me to develop better relationships with researchers in my department, and to develop more effective research leadership.

LEARNING & TEACHING

It has also impacted on my learning & teaching work particularly in mentoring and teaching PhD students. It's been very helpful in developing a more productive relationship with research students, but also with UG and PGT students when they embark on researching for their dissertations.

FUTURE

I think you learn new skills, and you learn that your experience of the difficulties and challenges that research brings to you are common, and it is great to learn how other people manage to rise to and overcome their challenges. I'm not sure mentoring is appropriately rewarded. It's helpful that successful mentoring examples are communicated to HoDs by the programme leader because my contributions and leadership are then noted. It shows I am a serious researcher and care about research as a core task that we do at our university.

9. Female, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

I've been a mentor for 6 years and the experience has been very positive because the mentees I was paired with were highly engaged and took the relationship seriously. My personal style is that I don't believe in trying to be polite or wasting time by obscuring the facts of the matter. I give honest, evaluation of the realities and options, and with each mentee created a shared understanding of that style and how best to work together. The most positive moments are when you see measurable outcomes, and this can happen quite quickly for example, a new job, publications, or clarity about the future. Often about finding direction for their career is the reason for joining the programme. There have been very few challenges. One was when I felt out of my depth with the mentee's situation. I had to think about what's ethical, and what's practical, and consult the programme manager for guidance.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mentoring affirms your approach to life (through sharing your stories), or, if not and your mentee has a different style and methods, then you get to reflect on the differences and what they mean to you. Mentoring has not directly influenced my career development, but it reaffirmed my approach to my career my own development. Sometimes I say something to a mentee, and I realise it applies to myself as well. It does develop confidence, when you succeed in establishing a good rapport in creating a shared and equal partnership that helps a person achieve. My department has always been supportive of mentoring activity, but never recognised as a 'big thing' – or given weight to it in appraisal. Academia relies heavily on collegial goodwill, but it's not often rewarded.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

There is an unquantifiable gain from mentoring in that you get a broader insight into other people's work lives and understanding of how they operate. This is a base on which you draw in all your work relationships. It makes you think and reflect on your approach, and how to work together. It also helps you think about how you might facilitate someone else's development as a student/staff member.

LEARNING & TEACHING

The HE learning environment is often about mass teaching, and it's hard to connect to 'the person' go beyond the direct learning outcomes, and really encourage broad development as an individual. Encouraging wider development and flourishing of the person can often be overlooked, and through mentoring I'm aware now of the quality of the learning environment in small group or 1:1 settings. More opportunities for small group learning would allow me to bring more of my mentoring skills and practices into the classroom.

FUTURE

Mentoring is about paying forward. Academia is not a silo environment – collaborative development is essential. There is always 'hidden' mentoring going on. Junior staff always need support, academically, emotionally, for their progression, and there are limited opportunities to do this to any great quality. We can best support them with a structured approach to mentoring. Such activities should be rewarded by recognising the mentee experience of mentoring, not just outcomes.

10. Male, Faculty of Science

EXPERIENCE

I've enjoyed meeting with all of my mentees (4 in total). They have had varied academic backgrounds and experience, and they also have had quite different career aspirations/goals. It has been useful to recognise that not all postdoctoral researchers or early career fellows are enthused about the 'traditional academic path' and that other exciting opportunities are out there. Among those people that do want to remain in academia, I sense that there is considerable anxiety about the chances of being able to do so; more so than was the case when I was at their career stage about 15 years ago.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the most useful aspects has been that mentoring has enabled me to think about how I can best provide honest and helpful feedback to other researchers, both in and outside of my research group. I think I'm reasonably empathetic, but the mentoring sessions have helped me to evaluate whether that is the case, and how I can improve as a listener. Interacting with people from other departments and faculties has given me greater insight into how the University operates (there are subtle cultural differences between faculties).

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

For many academics, it's not always easy to find the time to have career-type chats with members of your own group. There is a danger that daily research/teaching/admin priorities push other activities into the background. The mentoring sessions require the mentor/mentee to make time to have this type of conversation, and it's something that I can see as being a useful lesson to use with how I interact with members of my team.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I'm not sure that I was really expecting my mentoring experiences to transfer into these activities much.

FUTURE

I would definitely recommend mentoring to other staff. It provides a useful opportunity to reflect on how one interacts with your own group, and with colleagues. I felt that the mentees genuinely appreciated the opportunity to discuss careers, research, life experiences with people outside of their own work environment. Being a mentor is not a major time burden and the benefits make it well worthwhile. I'm not sure whether mentoring is appropriately rewarded or not. It's an activity I would list on my annual work allocation return, but I have no idea how much 'weighting' it carries. I would imagine, not very much, but I'm ok with that. I see mentoring as something that should be fairly low-cost in time and high-reward in terms feeling like you are making a difference, but it shouldn't be a major part of anybody's time budget. Obviously if mentoring becomes a burden, then the mentor should reflect on whether they should be performing that role.

11. Male, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

I have enjoyed meeting with the mentees I have had so far. One was a new post-doc and the other a new PI. I have got on well with both (I think), though I found it hard not to offer advice and listen, largely as both were really keen to receive it! My first mentee came to me shortly after the Brexit referendum result and there was some uncertainty over their future because their PI was unsure whether they wished to remain in the UK or return to the EU. My 2nd mentee was only a little behind me in their career therefore I felt slightly uneasy as my experience was not much greater than their own. I found it a little disconcerting as it was far removed from my comfort zone of science and numbers and graphs but I really wanted to be helpful as these were people actively seeking mentoring.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The training has made me more aware of some of the good practices I already have, which will help me use them more effectively and has also made me more aware that the problems I face with my own lab are not unique. I've tried to use some of the new techniques I have learnt in my own interactions with my own students and other students I indirectly mentor or encounter in vivas and as an advisor. I hope my engagement in the programme evidences I want to give something back and develop my skills..

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

I think it is helping and improving my confidence. As above, I hope it is reinforcing good practice and diversifying my range of techniques as well as giving me an opportunity to see other approaches by other mentors.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I am hoping it is helping me to become a more rounded individual and more able to help those around me - not just in the work environment. I'm trying to become a better listener all round. I plan to use my mentoring experiences as part of HEA accreditation in the near future.

FUTURE

I would recommend mentoring. Aside from the sense of responsibility it's actually fun to chat to people and see a bit about what makes them tick and hear the challenges they face. It takes up a bit of time but not a huge amount.

12. Male, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

I have been a member of the mentoring program since shortly after it was developed. It has been a thoroughly rewarding experience from the training which was exceptional through to the enriching and challenging encounters with various mentees throughout the years. Over the time that I have been involved in the mentoring program the interactions with mentees have enriched my own understanding of the higher education environment. This environment has become hugely challenging for new career academics and we work with to them to be as supportive as possible.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The programme has been an exceptional way to take time to reflect on how I influence and work with colleagues. The skills and training I've had as a mentor for have enabled me to recognise when others are mentoring me and also to learn to step back and allow people to develop their own careers without interference. This has meant being able to sit back and encourage others to take the initiative, develop new programs, research initiatives and innovations. Allowing others to do this and encouraging them to do so has enriched the interactions in my department.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

As PI my approach to leadership has changed dramatically after listening to the challenges some of my mentees have been confronted with. I am clearer with colleagues about what is expected and much more careful to allow them space to develop their own interests and careers. This means being less interventionist and using the different approaches to mentoring to enable them to develop.

LEARNING & TEACHING

Yes mentoring was part of my application to become a Senior Fellow of the HEA. It is also something I use from time to time during supervision of students at different levels.

FUTURE

I absolutely recommend mentoring, the programme is excellent, worthwhile and very revealing. I feel it is something everyone should do at the University after all we all have benefitted at one time or another from mentoring either officially or unofficially. It isn't necessarily recognized but then I would prefer it to remain something that we just 'do' as part of the job. After all it is more about being there for each other than being there because we might get cake!

13. Male, Faculty of Engineering

EXPERIENCE

I have now been privileged to mentor 8 highly motivated early career researchers through this programme. Each one has brought their own perspectives, excitement and frustrations at the opportunities and challenges of academic life, as they have sought to find the best way to build the next steps in their pathways to success. I have absolutely enjoyed each one of these interactions, as I have tried to help these talented people navigate the murky waters of academic and non-academic career planning.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I have gained a much broader appreciation of how to – and how not to – supervise and train a high-quality postdoctoral researcher, to give them the best opportunity to contribute to a research group while growing in their own careers. Reflecting on other people's journeys and experiences has brought me skills to use in my own research group, particularly in how I can support postdocs and balance their own personal aims with the needs of each research project.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

I hope that my approach to the supervision of my own postdocs has been enhanced by my mentoring experience – but they would be better positioned than I to answer this question! I've certainly gained a better understanding of how to design a project for a postdoc which enables them to get more value from exploring research lines that may be new to both of us.

LEARNING & TEACHING

My mentoring hasn't really focused on learning & teaching issues, I have mostly worked with researchers who were hoping to break into this type of role in future.

FUTURE

I would absolutely recommend the mentor role to other academic staff – it may not be directly compensated in many ways beyond eligibility for 'Outstanding Mentor' awards (although these are a significant boost in a CV or SRDS), and is a time commitment to fulfil, but is certainly very worthwhile both for mentors and mentees.

14. Male, Faculty of Arts & Humanities

EXPERIENCE

I have acted as a mentor on several occasions, and have always enjoyed the role. Mentees have always responded positively to the advice I have offered, and seem to have benefited from the chance to discuss their difficulties and issues with a 'neutral' person, who is not in any authority over them, and who is from outside their discipline and department, and who therefore has a more objective perspective. Sometimes I have felt the university is not treating someone well, and it can be frustrating not to be able to intervene more directly on their behalf.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

I think the process has helped me to understand more about the difficulties facing junior colleagues, and to be more sympathetic to their situation. It has also helped me become aware of how things are run in other parts of the university, and of the differences that disciplinary distinctions can make.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

This experience of mentoring has helped me in understanding mentoring in other roles, such as PhD supervisor or manager at departmental and faculty level.

LEARNING & TEACHING

It has been helpful to try to think of ways of solving problems within the academic context, for example where mentees have had problems with self-confidence, self-presentation, and writing. All these are skills we try to convey to our students in various forms.

FUTURE

Yes, I would certainly encourage colleagues to take part in this scheme. While it is a little time consuming, it is well-organized and feels worthwhile, and has never been a great burden. And it is satisfying to feel that one has helped resolve problems faced by more junior colleagues. It is also nice to be 'commended' by mentees, to get some sense that one is getting things right in these cases.

15. Female, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

A particularly good memory for me was when my mentee realized that there were other options out there than the ones she had struggled so hard to achieve for years without success. She was so fixated on one path forward that everything else was a failure. Helping her open her mind to other avenues was rewarding, and her joy when she got a job she never would have considered applying for was unforgettable.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As leader of an established research team, being a mentor has shown me the importance of good practice when it comes to supporting staff at all levels. It can get lost in the everyday stress of keeping the show on the road. I have become more aware of the needs of the individual members of my team and we discuss career progression and options more frequently.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

I have learned a lot about myself by being a mentor. Through the interactions with my mentees I have had to really think hard about my own views and sometimes change these. I would say that the experience has broadened my horizon in that I have had regular meetings with some very smart people who work outside my immediate area of expertise. Being a mentor has improved my listening skills and my ability to provide a guiding hand when needed rather than provide solutions (however tempting). It has also helped me find new ways of getting the best out of people through improving their confidence to explore new opportunities.

LEARNING & TEACHING

Working with a range of people outside my team has been very beneficial for me, in addition I have increased my skills as a supervisor and group leader through the many courses and training activities offered to mentors. I would not have taken the time to attend these had I not been part of the organized mentoring program, hence my whole team have benefitted. It has made me aware of different approaches to supporting staff/students that have been useful in other roles. As an example I have been instrumental in the introduction of a mentoring system for research fellows supported by a national charity and this has been very well received.

FUTURE

Acting as a mentor is not for everyone – it requires enthusiasm, time, willingness to engage and a good understanding of the many opportunities available for the mentee outside academia. If you enjoy supporting others in their career progression then I would warmly recommend becoming an mentor. Although not really recognized as a valuable activity by the department, it is highly rewarding on a personal level. Good mentors are not particularly valued or rewarded by the 'system' but it is still the right thing to do. I enjoy being a mentor and will carry on supporting others whenever I can.

16. Male, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

Each of my mentoring experiences has been positive. What worked very well for me is that each mentee came along with a well-defined issue to consider and with an openness and a willingness to place their trust at the centre of the process. This meant that sessions were focused and time was used constructively. Agreeing goals to consider or achieve before the next session also helped with progress. A challenge for me has been finding time to take on more mentoring sessions.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The training sessions provided by the programme lead have raised my awareness of the variety of ways in which mentoring can be approached, and provided me with ideas to try out in some of the sessions and more widely beyond. The greatest impact has been that I have become better at listening and at prompting others to reflect on what their issues mean to them.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

The mentoring training has definitely spilled over into my interactions with my PhD and Masters project students, helping me to keep their potential, their goals and their personal and professional development at the centre of our working relationships.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I mainly teach Masters level students, many of whom face significant challenges and barriers to their personal and career development. I have drawn significantly upon my experience of the programme to change my approach to postgraduate and undergraduate personal tutoring, adopting much more of a mentoring approach, and I would say that more of my personal tutees have engaged more positively with the personal and academic tutoring system as a result.

FUTURE

I would strongly encourage colleagues to engage with the programme. I don't think it should be considered from the viewpoint of being rewarded and recognized (though it is nice to be so), it's more about supporting others and developing personally.

17. Female, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health

EXPERIENCE

The mentoring program had provided me with an immense amount of satisfaction and joy. Over the past year with my two mentees the process has been exceptionally rewarding. There have been challenging meetings and difficult situations to discuss with frustrations on both sides when things don't seem to quite move forward in the way which we discussed. However, the most memorable moment was the feeling of accomplishment and happiness when I saw my mentee had recognized me as an outstanding mentor; I realized how much the scheme had meant to me.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The mentoring scheme has made me more confident in dealing with difficult situations I face in my work. It has given me insight into the different ways in which people think and behave; which I have applied to the students and staff I supervise but also to the colleagues I work together with. I can see this has made a difference in the way in which I approach particular situations and generally have led to an increased positive outcome.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

A key skill I have developed since going on the mentoring training is to be able to take a step back and consider things from another perspective and how this might be affected by external influences. This has helped me when developing those staff and students working for me; I have tried to pay particular attention to their perspective and external factors which are important for them. This has helped me in motivating my team and creating an enthusiastic working environment.

LEARNING & TEACHING

I have used some skills from mentoring in my some of my teaching; mainly the one-to-one teaching of postgraduate students. I pay attention to not simply giving suggestions or the answer but to getting someone to find the answer themselves. I am also in the process of an HEA application and am using mentoring as an example.

FUTURE

I would recommend mentoring to other academic staff; it is an example of one of the many things which take up your time and you do not have to do. However, I have found it to be rewarding experience both from a personal and career perspective. Not that I think it has in itself aided my career progression, but it has helped my personal effectiveness which cannot harm career progression.

18. Male, Faculty of Science

EXPERIENCE

I have acted as a mentor for several people, and have enjoyed meeting all of them. The chance to have a discussion with an interested but neutral observer across a range of topics, typically concerning how to deal with the next career step, appears to have been helpful to my mentees. This has usually focused on quite broad issues where we try to consider the whole picture concerning careers and lifestyle. I was very pleased to find out that in one case, our conversations had prompted one of my mentees to take an opportunity that otherwise might have passed him by if he hadn't reflected on his ambitions and been ready for it. The primary motivation I had for joining the scheme was in the hope that my experience would provide a useful source of help to colleagues in the university.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The process has helped me see the challenges faced by junior colleagues, especially at a transitional point where they may not be in control of their destiny. This has reinforced an awareness that individual's aspirations and capabilities cover a broad range, and affects how I interact with my departmental colleagues. It has highlighted the value in providing guidance to my own research group on a broader level than the details of research projects.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

The experience I have gained from meeting people who are often at an early career stage and contemplating their careers has been very useful in considering how to support my own research group. That is a blend of encouragement and realism about the options that are open, and what may be required to take advantage of them.

LEARNING & TEACHING

My mentoring has helped me to see the value in taking a more reflective, directing point of view in relating to students – as opposed to the conceptual problem solving that I am usually engaged in. Helping someone to independently help themselves is a different skill, but a useful one. For most of my mentees, the issues have related to personal choices, and helping them to find a rational way forward.

FUTURE

I would recommend the mentor role; it is satisfying to be helping others navigate problems that you have had to deal with. It is well organized, and the commended quotes are rewarding. I am not sure it is as well recognized and rewarded as it should be – it feels more altruistic, but something that we should do as part of the university community.

19. Female, Faculty of Social Sciences

EXPERIENCE

I have had 4 mentees over the last two years and have been really glad to be able to meet with them, support them to talk through their thoughts and to be able to make a difference to how someone feels about their role here, and what's next. It's my job to make sure they make the right moves for them and their career, and from my external viewpoint, I am ideally placed to do that. Post-docs can often get the raw end of the deal in universities, underutilized, under-recognised and given very little respect as skilled people with a contribution to make.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Having banked some coaching skills has stood me in good stead for all kinds of interactions at work. I remember being quite resistant to the mentor training session, thinking, "why, I already know how to do this" – but I didn't. What I was doing was controlling the conversation, and pushing my opinion, and that has limited effectiveness for decisions that aren't simple. Finding a career path isn't like making a lunch choice, it's far more complex, and requires some more complex thinking. I coach in meetings now rather than leap in and steer things to what I want. It benefits me in the long run as when you coach people to feel confident to make good choices, they take less of your time up in the end.

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

I use this in committees, with my HoD (don't tell her!), and with my own research students. Some of the coaching tools are very like project management tools in fact, all about clarity of purpose and honest communication. Getting people to say what they'll do and mean it! Massively beneficial in the 'real world' outside of the cozy world of the mentoring partnership. It works on challenging people too.

LEARNING & TEACHING

Until you asked I hadn't thought of it, but on reflection I guess I actually do use this with students. A tutorial would be the ideal home for this, or a 1:1 feedback situation, for the reasons above. But small group teaching benefits too, using this style feels way more like treating people like adults – maybe not every student is ready for this approach? It's an option though.

FUTURE

I think it's so important, in fact why isn't it a formal part of how we are taught to teach? If mentoring colleagues was on the workload model would it mean more people were likely to benefit? It would mean that more people felt supported and listened to. Not everyone has the right temperament to do this kind of 'hands off' mentoring though right? Some like the sound of their own voice too much. But I'd like to think I have a skill set that is valuable. Pretty sure my promotion didn't rest on it though as it's not worth any money.

20. Male, Faculty of Arts & Humanities

EXPERIENCE

I've only had two mentees so far and to be honest I found it really challenging. I didn't think I would, I enjoy supervising and working with more junior researchers, and if I'm honest I thought it would be more of the same. It's really different! I know these things come with practice but it makes me really question if what I'm doing is right for the mentee. The non-advice, 'it's not about me' mentoring style is good for this kind of career development activity, but all the usual ways of monitoring whether I'm 'doing a good job' are missing. I am enjoying it though!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As I said above, mentoring has pushed me out of my comfort zone so yes I'm learning something new and developing. When I'm advising my students I am the one who knows more. I give them the 'benefit' of my experience and my lessons learned and they go away with a new piece of info. When I use the mentoring style, it's harder to know if I'm doing a good job of it. It's way more collaborative as I'm always asking, 'is that useful?' 'Is that what you wanted?' so I suppose it's teaching me to be more collaborative and less 'here's a fact now get out of here!'

RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

It's early days for me but I can't see how it wouldn't benefit me as a 'research leader', even though I struggle with that phrase. I'll settle for being a good manager and being the kind of boss who builds good teams.

LEARNING & TEACHING

It would take another leap of faith, to start trying this style in the classroom and let go of the control you gain from keeping talking! So, maybe when I'm confident with it, I will start to use it in my one to one meetings or my tutoring. I can see it would fit there in terms of encouraging individual achievements and dialogue around how students are approaching their studies. It fits with reflective learning.

FUTURE

I would recommend the mentor role but be aware it's a learning curve, not a chance to find a captive audience to talk about yourself! I would strongly encourage the university to guide colleagues towards engaging with mentoring as a skill set (though would this make the programme redundant if all academic staff could coach their own researchers?). The reward for everyone being involved in mentoring would be that we all felt more supported, right? The reward doesn't need to be a public pat on the back, just belonging to a place where this was the norm would be its own reward.