

Case study examples of directive and non-directive approaches to coaching and mentoring

Directive

An example where a more directive approach is appropriate:

“Mary, my Research Leader is fantastic at winning grants. I think she’s got the biggest research income in the Department this year. She’s shown me some of the grant applications that she’s written and explained how she does it. She’s asked me to contribute to the one she’s currently writing – I draft a section, then she sits down with me and goes through it and I have another go!”ⁱ

This example of directive mentoring provides an opportunity for a less experienced researcher to benefit from the knowledge and advice of a successful senior colleague. Insights can be gained from the directive approach that might not be possible, or that might take far longer to reach, using a non-directive approach.

Non-directive

An example of where a non-directive approach could be helpful:

“I was having problems deciding whether I wanted to carry on as a researcher or not. Having those few, regular meetings with Paul from English, was invaluable. He didn’t say much, I seemed to do most of the talking but I’m now much clearer about the direction that I want to take when this contract finishes.”ⁱ

In exploring future career direction an academic member of staff may have little or no experience of alternative careers outside of Higher Education. However, through effective listening and questioning by a mentor or coach a researcher can explore their own values, drivers, commitment and purpose, and whether these align to continuing a career in research or other possible careers.

When the mentor or coach is not directly involved with the management of the researcher, and therefore has no vested interest in the research, the researcher is likely to be more comfortable openly discussing these issues.

ⁱ Adapted from interview data collected as part of the ESRC-funded ‘Managing Research Projects’ project