

Vitae Occasional Paper, Volume 3

C5: The mentoring pipeline: institutional perspectives on mentoring as a development tool

Paper based on a workshop presented at the
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- **A5: Who Shares Wins: A New Model in Doctoral Training**
- **B10: Employing and supporting early career researchers – learning from Italy and Germany**
- **C5: The mentoring pipeline: institutional perspectives on mentoring as a development tool**
- **D2: BaFL: Business as a Foreign Language: How should we speak to PGRs from the Arts and Humanities in order to encourage engagement with enterprise and entrepreneurship education and training?**

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Foreword

Welcome to the third in the series of Vitae Occasional Papers, in this instance based upon work presented at the 2015 Vitae Researcher Development International Conference. The series has now provided a total of 16 papers on a wide range of subjects relating to the development of researchers. It is well worth taking a look at previous editions of the occasional papers if you haven't done so already. A full listing of the papers published so far is available in the annex of this edition.

As in previous years, presenters of workshops or special interest sessions at the conference had the opportunity to subsequently write a paper for the occasional papers series. The four papers included here again reflect the diversity, depth and vibrancy of the conference. This year, four papers were submitted. They are now published as separate papers, which together comprise Volume 3, which is available at www.vitae.ac.uk/occasional

For those already running mentoring programmes for researchers and particularly those wanting to set a programme up, this paper in this occasional series should be essential reading. Susan Brooks, Sam Hopkins, and Kay Pearson, present an informative and practical guide relating to their experiences in setting up and running a range of different mentoring schemes in, 'The mentoring pipeline: institutional perspectives on mentoring as a development tool'. The authors cover a wide range of practical topics from launching schemes through to matching mentors and mentees and training and development support.

In another paper: 'Who Shares Wins: A New Model in Doctoral Training' Rebekah Smith McGloin provides a very valuable and interesting review of policy context in postgraduate research as a pretext to presenting an innovative new model for Doctoral Training. The Doctoral Training Alliance works across some 15 UK universities and offers a model in collaboration. The paper details how the model works including of course reference to the training and development of the researchers involved.

The paper 'Employing and supporting early career researchers – learning from Italy and Germany' by Laurence Hopkins, Hayfa Mohdzaini, and Geoffrey White, provides a fascinating account contrasting early career support and employment for researchers in different European contexts. As the authors state in their paper, 'The two country case studies highlighted in this paper offer different perspectives on the employment of early career researchers which merit consideration by UK HEIs.' The paper is well worth reading for anybody involved in supporting early career researchers in any nation.

In the final paper we get baffled! Jane Nolan and Dawn Weatherston present, 'BaFL: Business as a Foreign Language: How should we speak to PGRs from the Arts and Humanities in order to encourage engagement with enterprise and entrepreneurship education and training?' This is a terrific study of the use and impact of language relating to business in the arts and humanities. The very practical listing of words that 'work' and those that don't in the appendix to the paper I think will be of great help going forward in understanding the different perspectives on language with a view to mutual engagement between business and the arts and humanities.

I do hope you enjoy the latest edition of the occasional papers and I also hope they will at least in part inspire you to make your own contribution to future editions.

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Introduction

Mentors offer three broad forms of support; professional and career development, role modelling and psychological support (Crisp and Cruz 2009). In higher education, the term 'mentoring' is often used to describe the relationship between an academic staff member and a post-graduate student (Jacobi 1991, Budge 2006). In student populations, mentoring has been shown to increase retention rates as well as benefitting mentees in developing skills such as time management, goal achievement and responsibility (Budge 2006). Crisp and Cruz (2009) in their review of the mentoring literature state that overall there is a positive impact of mentoring schemes, and that there are a series of benefits for the mentee in a mentoring relationship. These benefits include practical skills such as time management and an increased sense of responsibility, as well as goal setting, achievement in higher education, and making career choices (for a review see Budge, 2006). Mentoring schemes created for academic staff have also been studied, with reported benefits of support and guidance from senior members of staff (Jackevicius et al 2014), access to a support system during critical stages of mentee development (Donnelly and McSweeney 2011), and increased outputs such as peer reviewed publications (Jackevicius et al 2014). In one study of staff, 94 percent stated that they had benefitted from having a mentor (Kohn 2014). In a meta-analysis considering workplace mentoring, individuals who had been mentored reported more positive career outcomes and were more satisfied with their career than a group that had not had a mentor (Allen et al 2004).

Mentors too are positively affected by the mentoring process. Benefits to the mentor were categorised by Dolan and Johnson (2009) where mentors reported 14 different gains or benefits that were grouped by the authors into five different areas. These areas were termed (1) 'instrumental' covering employability and productivity, (2) 'socioemotional' involving aspects such as confidence, satisfaction and enjoyment, (3) 'interpersonal' consisting of skills such as communication, (4) 'cognitive' covering intellectual growth and (5) 'professional' meaning that mentors understood the workings of the faculty better.

In this paper we review the mentoring 'pipeline' at two institutions: the University of Surrey, where there are several well established mentoring schemes aimed at different mentee groups, and Oxford Brookes University (OBU) who are currently actively developing and expanding researcher mentoring provision.

Overview of mentoring schemes at Surrey

The STARS mentoring programme – post graduate researchers (PGRs) mentoring undergraduate STARS (part of the ‘Surrey’s Top achievers Awarded and Recognised’ (STARS) programme.

The STARS programme is designed to identify the needs of, and offer support to, high achieving second and final year undergraduate students. The mentoring programme is mentee led and not solely about going onto postgraduate study but about anything that the mentee wishes to explore. We started the programme with a pilot scheme in 2013 and are now in our third year of matching. The scheme has grown steadily with 22 pairs in the pilot and 35 matched in the current cohort.

The transitions to research programme – late stage PGRs mentoring new PGRs.

New PGRs are offered a mentor for the first six months of their doctorate, helping them to settle into life as a researcher and into life at Surrey. The programme has been running since October 2014 and it has had 41 pairs complete the scheme so far.

Bespoke mentoring for research staff

Early career researchers (ECRs) have the opportunity to be mentored by a more senior member of academic staff. This programme concentrates on what the mentee wants and offers a development opportunity for ECRs that it is difficult to get in any other way. This programme is relatively new, having started in January 2015, with 18 pairs matched so far.

Employer mentoring scheme – employers mentoring PGRs/ECRs.

The scheme has three aims:

- Career development – raising awareness of different career paths and helping researchers manage the transition from academia to business/industry
- Building connections – with researchers in and outside academia and exploring the scope for collaboration
- Boosting employability – through developing communication skills and time management.

The scheme was piloted in 2015 and has matched 20 pairs so far.

Overview of mentoring schemes at Oxford Brookes University

OBU currently offers a single, integrated mentoring scheme open to all research-active staff, from post-docs and ECRs through to the most senior research-active professors. The scheme is now in its third year and there have been approximately thirty mentor-mentee matches each year, although OBU are currently working to increase take-up through publicising the scheme more intensively. It is very similar in scope to the Surrey bespoke mentoring for research staff scheme. Also under development is a scheme to match high flying final year undergraduate students with PGR student mentors, analogous to the Surrey STARS mentoring programme and it is anticipated that this will launch in 2016-17.

Overview of process – how does a mentoring scheme work?

At Surrey, the process for the STARS and Transitions to Research Scheme are similarly structured. Mentors are trained and then asked to fill out a form with some questions to help with matching. Each intake of new undergraduate or PGR students is sent an email offering them a mentor. Interested mentees are asked to define what they want from a mentor and the matches are made. For the first meeting, a room is booked and they are asked to complete a checklist to ensure that they talk about confidentiality, practical considerations and boundaries. After this first controlled meeting, the mentee drives the process. The scheme co-ordinator sends a checking email after a month.

The process for the Surrey research staff mentoring scheme is more tailored to each mentee. When the mentee applies, they are asked very specifically what they want from their mentor and if they have a particular person in mind. The scheme co-ordinator then works with the mentee to find a member of staff that fits their requirements, which can take time. The mentee then drives the process and loose guidelines are provided about the time commitment and what a mentor can and cannot do.

For all schemes at Surrey there is an online feedback questionnaire form for the end of the scheme that goes to both the mentor and the mentee. The most important question on the mentee form asks what their aims were for the programme and how well the programme met these aims. Both forms also ask some practical questions about how the scheme worked and also the time commitment from both parties. Once a year a report is collated gathering all of the feedback but the forms are monitored as they are received to check for any problems.

In the OBU scheme researchers can apply to join, as mentor, as mentee, or both, at any time, and information about it, including a brief application form and contact details of the scheme co-ordinator are available through the University research webpages. In addition, there is an annual email call for applications in May each year linked to a face-to-face session that introduces the scheme and provides a 'light touch' training in mentoring practice. Attendance at the face-to-face session is not mandatory for mentors and those that join the scheme and choose not to attend are sent written guidance notes. Mentors and mentees are informed of their proposed mentoring partner and it is then the responsibility of the mentee to make contact with the mentor if s/he wishes to pursue the mentoring relationship. Mentors and mentees are guided that they should aim to meet for approximately an hour, around once a month, for no longer than a year, and, critically, with a defined mentee aim in mind. They are provided with a blank contract pro-forma for use at their first meeting to facilitate discussion and agreement of their guidelines and boundaries for the mentoring relationship and to agree aims. OBU recently carried out an evaluation of its scheme by gathering feedback from participants in the first two complete years in which it ran. An email questionnaire was sent to 85 individuals who had acted as mentor, mentee or both in 2013-14 or 2014-15, or both. 22 responses were received, representing a 26% response rate.

Practical considerations in developing and running a mentoring scheme

a) Launching your scheme

Experience at OBU was that an official launch event at the inception of the scheme can be very positive in raising awareness of the scheme and building enthusiasm for it, in addressing any queries or concerns that researchers might have about the scheme and, critically, sourcing a supply of mentors as well as mentees. One aspect of the OBU launch event that was extremely helpful was the co-operation and involvement of researcher developers who had experience of running similar, and successful, schemes elsewhere. Jos Finan (St Andrews University) and Gillian Johnstone (Strathclyde University) shared their institutional experiences and their positivity about the impact of their schemes. This, coupled with their credibility in promoting a model that they had experience of being effective, and their knowledge in being able to skilfully deflect what they referred to as 'frequently raised objections' launched the OBU scheme on a positive and powerful note. Critically, the event was attended by a high proportion of senior staff who were persuaded to sign up as mentors and to encourage their colleagues to do likewise. Critical also to the success of the launch, and to its continued success, is support from senior staff in the University. The Pro Vice Chancellor for Research was, from the start, positive and supportive of the scheme and endorsement at this level guaranteed the subsequent positive influence of other senior staff. In contrast, at Surrey a softer start was used with small pilot schemes building up over the years. This allowed changes to be made in light of feedback gained from participants in the end-of-scheme evaluations to make the scheme as good as it could be and grow the schemes slowly.

b) Where are all the mentors?

At Surrey, the first scheme launched was the STARS scheme and, as the focus was on offering PGRs the opportunity to develop mentoring skills, there were naturally more mentors than mentees in the first year. However, in research staff mentoring schemes, it is a natural consequence of the pyramidal hierarchy of universities, with greater numbers of junior staff at the base funnelling into fewer senior staff at the apex, that there are likely to be a greater number of potential mentees than mentors. The situation is exacerbated by staff even at the most senior level seeking mentoring help from those with more experience than themselves. At OBU, in the first year of the scheme mentees outnumbered mentors by approximately 2:1 meaning that most mentors were assigned two mentees. The problem then naturally resolves because mentors remain on the mentor database, unless they ask to be removed, and each year more mentors join, while the annual number of applications from mentees remains relatively constant. Moreover, mentees remain on the database and can potentially be called on in future as a mentor. At Surrey, mentors are specifically identified and approached when the ECR has identified what they are looking for in a mentor. Mentors are also 'recycled' here, as in the OBU programme, and mentees emerging from the transitions to research scheme are asked to become mentors for the next intake.

There are also specific solutions to a potential shortfall in mentors, or a lack of mentors that can provide specific expertise requested by a mentee. One solution comes from personal contact. If a mentor with a particular skill set is required, existing mentors in the scheme, or even mentees, can be canvassed and asked for suggestions. This is much the way that the Surrey research staff scheme operates. Our experience at both institutions is that if an individual is approached directly by the scheme co-ordinator with a request that they share their valued experience, and that they learn that they have been proposed by peers who recognise that experience, then they are very likely indeed to readily agree. Another solution is to ask the mentee for suggestions of who, ideally, they would like to be partnered with. Again, if directly approached with a request to take part and an endorsement that the individual has been specifically requested, it is our experience that a refusal is extremely unlikely.

c) Matching mentors with mentees

Matching potential mentors with mentees can only be carried out on the basis of the information provided by the individuals on their application form when they join the scheme. The information that is requested here is therefore critical. Experience shows that the best mentoring matches are not between partners from the same discipline or research area. Indeed, mentees report that having the opportunity to talk with someone from outside their immediate circle of colleagues can be liberating and bring a fresh perspective. For example, in feedback, one OBU mentee reported 'I asked for a same sex (female) mentor from a different department, which left me free to ask questions that otherwise would not have been appropriate or easy to air' another commented positively on being able to talk honestly with a 'neutral' person, another that a positive aspect of the scheme was to get 'a perspective from outside my own department'. The OBU scheme finds that mentoring does, however, seem to work best when partners are roughly matched within science and technology disciplines, or within arts, humanities and social sciences but at Surrey we do not find that this is always the case. In our experience, from both institutions, it is helpful in the application form to ask 'how important is it that you are partnered with someone from your own discipline?' and at OBU another critical question is 'how important is it that you are matched with someone of the same gender as yourself?' In the Surrey form we ask what mentees want from their mentor and within their answer mentees will specifically request a mentor of a particular gender if it is important to them. While there is a perception that female mentees, in particular, might prefer a successful female role model as mentor, who potentially might share gender-related issues around institutional practice, work life balance, maternity, and so on, our experience has been that this is rarely the case with only a handful of mentees requesting same-sex mentors. Mentees appear more focussed on being matched with a mentor with experience directly related to their aim from the scheme, regardless of that mentor's gender. The most important question to ask at the application stage is, for mentees, 'what do you want to get out of the scheme?' and for mentors 'what can you offer?' in both cases with the endorsement 'be as specific and detailed as you can, because this will really help in matching you with a suitable partner'.

The logistics of matching mentee with mentor has often been likened by scheme co-ordinators to running a dating agency, and there are obvious parallels. Often the co-ordinator is partnering individuals who s/he doesn't know personally and entirely on the basis of the information provided by the participants in their application forms. However, as the scheme progresses, even when mentors remain as physical strangers to the co-ordinator, they become increasingly familiar in the abstract such that a suitable 'match' often immediately suggests itself when a new mentee application is received

The storage and organisation of mentoring records becomes more complex as the scheme progresses. Most scheme co-ordinators use some combination of computer spreadsheets and ever more bulky paper files, usually customised to the specific needs of the institution and the scheme. In order to address this issue, Jos Finer at St Andrews University has headed a project to develop a bespoke web-based data management system for mentoring and coaching schemes, called SUMAC¹, and this has proved useful to many institutions running mentoring schemes.

d) Training and support for mentors and mentees

At OBU and in the Surrey staff scheme there is no requirement for mentee or mentor to attend training, although it is offered. For those who choose not to attend training, written guidance notes on good mentoring practice are provided. Our experience is that the training is generally well attended by more junior staff and potential mentees who are enthusiastic to get involved but less well attended by the more senior staff who are more likely to be acting as mentors. This may result from a perception that these individuals are offering their wisdom and experience and have experience of, at least, other forms of academic support in other aspects

¹ www.sumac.ac.uk (accessed 11.02.16)

of their role and therefore will not benefit from training, or a feeling that they are simply too busy to attend. Feedback from mentees, in reviews of both the Surrey and OBU schemes described previously, indicates that the vast majority of mentors are viewed as being skilled and competent in that role. At Surrey we insist on training our mentors for the STARS scheme and the transitions to research scheme. This is because the mentors are mentoring students and we want to make the expectations and boundaries of the relationship very explicit as well as providing some useful guidelines for effective mentoring.

Conclusions – (1) Mentoring as a tool to develop a pipeline of research talent

From our institutional experiences and review of our mentoring schemes, described previously, we have seen evidence that mentoring, at different stages in an individual's academic career, can have many positive outcomes, both for mentor and mentee.

(a) Development of interpersonal, coaching and communication skills which equips researchers to work better in teams and with wider stakeholders

Mentors in the STARS scheme reported that one of the reasons that they became mentors was to develop communication and listening skills. In the end of scheme written feedback, mentors broadened this out to encompass problem solving and guidance skills. They wrote of the skill of guiding someone to their own solution rather than giving the answers. These skills are clearly transferable into other aspects of professional and, indeed, personal life.

(b) Support for key transitions

Mentoring has proved especially important in the Surrey STARS mentoring programme where mentees are approaching a transition point where they do not have the cultural capital to make an informed decision. When asked in the feedback at the end of the scheme 50 percent of the first cohort of undergraduate mentees had not met a person with doctoral experience before. At the transition into postgraduate research, this cultural capital is important and the experienced mentor can provide help and reassurance and talk about what to expect when starting a PhD. In the review of the OBU staff mentoring scheme, staff new to the University reported that their transition to a new role, perhaps from a post-doctoral position at a previous institution to new lecturer role, or to a new working environment, was supported by having a mentor experienced at that level, and in that working 'culture'. Similarly, mentees were supported to apply for promotion within the Institution by mentors who had recently successfully negotiated that professional transition point themselves. For some, mentoring support enabled researchers to negotiate the transition from academia to alternative career, or personal, paths. Feedback from the Surrey employer mentoring scheme indicates that contact with mentors from outside academia makes researchers more aware of how business/industry differs from academia and can enable them make an informed decision as to whether to remain in academia or to seek work elsewhere, and to be more prepared for that transition.

(c) A 'safe space' for exploring issues

Feedback from both the OBU and Surrey schemes clearly indicates that mentees appreciate having the opportunity to explore issues that concern them with another, sympathetic, individual who has, potentially, faced similar issues themselves. Critically, too, the mentor is independent and separate from the mentee's usual peer group or line management structure. There is a feeling of freedom to explore sensitive or personal topics in a way that would not be appropriate in other parts of the mentee's professional or academic life, or with closer professional colleagues.

Research staff mentoring, for example, allows mentees to talk to mentors with a shared experience of working part time/raising a family while striving to have a successful academic career. Female mentees may benefit from being partnered with professionally successful female mentors, although, as noted earlier, in our experience, this is requested specifically quite infrequently.

(d) Enhancing cultural awareness

As the research community is becoming more global it is important to be aware of intercultural differences and the training for the transitions to research scheme at Surrey reflects this by including a session on intercultural awareness. Feedback from attendees shows that this one hour session is perceived as one of the most useful training sessions offered as noted in the feedback forms and from personal communications with the participants. Mentors report being stimulated to think about their research from another's perspective as well as how they behave with peers and members of staff. One mentor who was paired with a mentee from a different culture, reported in the end of scheme feedback, that he found it useful to see how his research is viewed through a different culture's eyes. These opportunities are not otherwise often present or noted because PGRs will often network with others from similar backgrounds and offering opportunities where they get to meet researchers from different disciplines and cultures can enhance understanding.

Conclusions – (2) what are the benefits for mentors and mentees?

In the review of the OBU scheme, mentees were asked 'what positive benefits did you get from the mentoring experience?' and reported, as indicated previously, that they valued the opportunity to talk openly and honestly with someone outside their immediate department. Recurring 'themes' included friendly and – importantly – honest advice, constructive criticism and suggestions rooted in the mentor's experience. Some very positive final comments included 'it was a great experience for me', 'I really enjoyed (it) and found it immensely useful', and 'a very positive experience for me which has enabled me to become a serious researcher and has been hugely beneficial to my professional profile both internally and externally'. The only issue to emerge as a barrier to successful mentoring were around two busy people, sometimes situated on different campuses, finding time to meet.

Mentors were asked 'What positive benefits, as mentor, did you get from the mentoring experience?' Common responses included 'enjoyment', and 'satisfaction from being able to give useful advice'. One mentor also commented that while mentoring felt like something that they 'should' be doing to foster and support more junior colleagues and something that they enjoyed, it also was 'good for CV and promotion prospects'. At OBU, engagement in the mentoring scheme is voluntary and some mentors suggested that it should be recognised in workload planning, thus giving it more weight and credibility.

In the Surrey STARS scheme, mentors and mentees are asked, when they finish the scheme, what they got from the programme. The undergraduates who have been mentored overwhelmingly stated that they would recommend the programme to the next cohort, ensuring continued uptake and growth for the programme. Feedback from mentees indicates that having a PGR mentor in their final year of study helped them to better understand the doctorate and thus make more informed decisions about postgraduate study. This could have implications for widening participation at postgraduate level with students having the opportunity to discuss the options and feeling equipped to make an informed choice about further study. They also noted how mentoring helped them to develop key research and transferable skills, important for postgraduate research and for other future careers.

Perhaps an outcome of the Surrey STARS mentoring programme that was less expected was the profound effect having a mentor had on many of the mentees own self-belief, especially considering these were already high-achieving undergraduates. Repeatedly, mentees reported in the end-of-scheme feedback an enhanced self-confidence and renewed determination that they could succeed in their next challenges as they transition from undergraduate to their chosen paths. The mentors in this scheme identified three main areas of benefit, covering development, reflection and a sense of wellbeing. Interestingly, the mentors noted skills they had gained through this process that would be useful for them in the future as well as recognising what was useful to them now. In the end-of-scheme feedback on the Surrey transitions to research scheme, mentees were asked what they had got out of the mentoring relationship. Their comments were largely about feeling supported in the transition to research or the transition to Surrey, increasing their own confidence and also in understanding practical elements of the Surrey and UK systems. Mentors in this scheme noted that it was beneficial to find out about other disciplines and perspectives as well as the sense of wellbeing they got from helping a fellow PGR. However, most responses focussed on the skills that the mentors had developed through the training and practiced whilst being a mentor.

Conclusions – (3) what are the benefits for the institution?

Institutions clearly wish to attract and retain the best people and to support them to achieve at their maximum potential. Prior knowledge that mentoring systems are in place may act to attract candidates to apply to the institution and reassure them of ongoing support to develop their research career in an increasingly competitive market. Moreover, ongoing access to structured mentoring provision throughout the researcher's career, and to support key transition points, will not only act to retain staff but to help ensure that they are supported to achieve for their own and for the institution's benefit. Moreover, increasingly, quality benchmarking measures, such as the HR Excellence in Research Award and Athena SWAN view the provision of mentoring support positively, and, in our institutional experience, rightly so.

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Annex

Previous volumes in the Vitae occasional papers series

Vitae occasional papers volume I: Vitae Researcher Development International Conference 2013*

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Vitae, is an international programme led and managed by CRAC, a not-for-profit registered UK charity dedicated to active career learning and development. Working in the UK since 1968, when we ran our first project to support transitions of doctoral researchers to industry, Vitae has great expertise at enhancing the skills and career impact of researchers locally, within a global context.

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- Empower researchers to make an impact in their careers
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