

Effective peer support: mentoring skills

Supporting fellow students through mentoring skills

Peer mentoring skills may be used by students to share their knowledge and experience. This fact sheet details some of the principles and strategies of mentoring so that you will be prepared to get involved in peer support.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a development relationship between individuals. There is a mutual desire to develop career or educational goals. One of the individuals will usually have more experience and skills, they are the “mentor” and they work with the “mentee”. This will often be found in employment situations where a more experienced worker mentors a new employee. In other situations two individuals may each have their own relative strengths and provide mentoring to each other. The important point to remember is that it is a development relationship between peers. It is not a formal relationship between a worker and their manager, or student and tutor and does not replace formal training, coaching or support.

Mentoring consists of:

- Relationships: it is a non – reporting relationship of mutual support with a peer.
- Knowledge and experience: one, or both, individuals will have knowledge, experience or contacts that will benefit the other.
- Mutual sharing: there is mutual sharing, reflection and feedback.
- Leadership: those being supported lead the process, taking responsibility for their own development.
- Self-development: whereas coaching or training is concerned about short term tasks, mentoring is concerned with developing the person, their behaviours and outlook.

How a mentoring relationship is conducted will depend on the needs and the personalities of the mentor and the mentee. Some people will want a more directive form of mentoring, e.g. to be challenged and stretched. Others will want the opposite and prefer someone to listen and reflect with.

Benefits of peer mentoring

Mentoring has many benefits to those participating:

- Satisfaction from working with fellow students.
- Develop skills that are useful for study and future employment (mentoring is highly valued by employers)
- It is often more comfortable discussing issues with your peers
- Sharing of lots of information, ideas and advice
- Being challenged on perceived wisdom

Mentoring skills and methods

Mentoring is not a job, but rather using your skills to help others. You could use your mentoring skills in one or more of the following ways:

- Sharing: mentoring skills allow students to share their knowledge and experience with others.
- Guiding: some students will have skills that they can use to guide students towards their own problem solving.
- Welcoming: existing students could welcome new students to the university and help them in their first few weeks.
- Inspiring: every student has their own background which will often inspire other students who are in a similar situation.
- Listening: listening to the experiences of other students is important in understanding how we can help, and to learn from their experiences.
- Supporting: students value the support of their peers, and often feel more comfortable talking one to one with another student than with staff or in a group setting.

Using mentoring skills

You can use mentoring skills in your everyday student life. Take some time to consider your learning with your peers. There will probably be someone in your class who you feel could benefit from your help, or who you might like to learn from. Take some time to discuss your learning with them. You might like to think about your learning styles, coping with exam stress, time management, future ambitions, career aims, using online learning resources, or any other aspect of your learning experience.