

## Common Problems

As Student Coordinator of your Peer Mentoring scheme, you may face a few stumbling blocks on the path to mentoring heaven... this is an attempt to identify those persistently tricky areas and suggest a couple of possible solutions!

### Unenthusiastic Mentors

- Make meetings less formal so that mentors are encouraged to attend e.g. at a cafe
- Engage less active mentors – allow them to make some decisions
- Plan meetings in advance so there is some flexibility in changing the date
- Ask the mentors if they are ok and then ask whether they are still interested in taking part in the scheme
- Remind the mentors that the role they have volunteered for goes beyond just responding to individual problems – it's also about getting involved in wider scheme activities!
- If mentors do leave the scheme then reallocate the mentees to other mentors (however be cautious as if this is done too many times then it may just confuse and irritate the mentees)

### Unresponsive Mentors

- Use an alternative method such as Facebook or mobile phone – both of which may be quicker and more convenient for the student
- Remind them of the commitment they have volunteered for
- Ask questions that require answers
- Try and offer them a more engaging scheme related activity to focus their attentions on e.g. arranging a social
- Ask the staff coordinator to send them a friendly message enquiring as to why they are not responding
  
- If the student has stopped communicating altogether then take them off your list of active mentors and reallocate their mentees to another group if possible

### Socials are Poorly Attended

- Are the socials being properly advertised (posters, emails, lecture shout-outs), arranged at a convenient time, and has any interest from the cohort been shown e.g. hands raised in lectures?
- Try different types of social activity e.g. cinema, comedy store (free on the second and last Sunday of every month), skiing, ice skating, bowling, meals. Maybe lunchtimes activities would be preferred to evening ones?
- See if staff members want to be involved so the students gain more from the activity than just the social aspect
- Perhaps consider concentrating on being a support network - e.g. drop-in advice sessions, revision clinics etc - rather than social events.

### **Confidentiality**

- Student contact details should be provided to the mentors/coordinators from the staff from the discipline in which the scheme operates.. Details should not be forwarded outside of the scheme
- Any problems that are raised between a mentee and mentor should remain confidential, but if the problem raised is something that a mentor does not feel competent or qualified to address then they should seek extra advice from a member of staff.

### **Society/Mentor Scheme Clashes**

- Some disciplines have societies that will focus on social activities. Any events that are organised by a mentor scheme may be poorly attended if these are in competition with the society.
- The scheme and the society could work collaboratively, each gaining the benefit of increased publicity. The mentoring scheme has the added benefit of being able to access students on a more personal level, and mentors can use events as a reason to contact mentees to keep them updated as to what is happening within the discipline, as well as a chance to meet up with them on an informal, fun basis.
- It may be worth thinking if the society is more suited to social events the mentoring best focused on pastoral advice?

### **Retaining Mentee Interest**

- Use regular email/Facebook contact to update mentees on upcoming events to retain their interest
- Posters, notice boards, and having staff remind students about the scheme are useful tools
- Remind the students of the benefits of the mentoring scheme and what it actually does - Mentors can be of great use to first years not only in Freshers' Week but throughout the whole year (when looking for accommodation or choosing second year modules, for example)
- Remember that it is easier for the mentor to email the mentee than vice versa - so check that your mentors are keeping in regular contact with their first years
- Response is more likely to be received around transition points such as exams, finding accommodation, coursework etc – so target emails at these key stages in first year.

**You might even be lucky enough to come across a completely new problem! Don't worry though, these are the kinds of things you should approach your Sabbatical about for extra information.**

NB. First years like to be independent, and while interest in the Mentoring scheme may wane after the first few weeks, this is generally not because mentors are not doing performing their role properly; rather it is often because they have already done a great job of helping the first years settle down! Through being on hand and providing regular emails is important so the mentees know there is a support structure there to take advantage of, sometimes the mentees may choose not to engage - which is perfectly acceptable. In this kind of situation, getting involved in other mentor run events may allow mentors another way to access their mentees.