



UPEN Mentoring Programme:

Guidance note 1 – The mentoring relationship

Author: Dr Mark Bennister, Visiting Reader, Queen Mary University of London



UPEN and Mentoring

The University Policy Engagement Network (UPEN) has recognised the importance of mentoring and providing structured support within the policy engagement field. UPEN has so far led three formal mentoring programmes to support and develop capability in the field.

A supported mentoring programme is an integral part of developing professionalisation within the policy engagement field. The programme offers support to match experienced policy engagement professionals with mentees to nurture development and strengthen capabilities.

The UPEN Mentoring Programme is designed to be adaptable to the needs of participants, offering both one-to-one and group mentoring opportunities. It aims to create a supportive environment in which mentors and mentees can build positive, constructive relationships that support learning, development, and professional growth.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a partnership through which one person – a mentor – shares knowledge, experience, skills or information to support the development of someone else – a mentee. Mentors do this through supporting, encouraging, and sometimes challenging mentees.

Together, mentors and mentees in one to one or group sessions, tackle specific issues that the mentee is keen to raise with an experienced mentor. For UPEN mentees, this may be anything from guidance on how to work directly with policymakers, how to navigate relationships with researchers, or how to better manage work-life balance.

“I enjoyed gaining insights from my mentor regarding the policy world (to which I'm still a relative newcomer)”

Anonymous, University of Cambridge

Mentoring provides a confidential and constructive environment in which mentees receive support and positive guidance. There are many ways of understanding what mentoring is. There is no single ‘right’ way of defining it. Different programmes may support peer to peer mentoring, leadership mentoring, formal programmes linked to appraisals and promotions.

The core foundation of the UPEN programme is to provide a helping environment bringing together experienced mentors with mentees seeking guidance and support from beyond their own organisation.



Mentoring is a "helping relationship". Carl Rogers (1961) defined these as "a relationship in which at least one of the parties intends to promote the growth, development, maturity, or improved functioning of the other person."¹

Mentoring is a relationship between two (or more) individuals who are not connected in a line management structure. Mentoring is a learning tool to support personal development. Usually, though not always, the mentor has more experience than the mentee/s (reverse mentoring is when a less experienced mentor supports a more experienced mentee). The relationship is one whereby the mentor actively listens, asks questions, and provides guidance.

"A mentor is not someone who walks ahead of us and tells us how they did it. A mentor is someone who walks alongside us to guide us on what we can do."²

Why become a mentor?

There are a variety of reasons why UPEN members may wish to become mentors including: developing skills, giving something back to the policy engagement community, establish new connections and build networks.

A key additional driver is the desire to learn in a two-way process. Conversations within the mentoring process can often be as helpful to the mentor as the mentee as a shared process of learning.

"What I found most valuable about the programme was building relationships with new colleagues, gaining different insights and perspectives, and having a safe space to talk through challenges."

**Kayleigh Renberg-Fawcett, Head of Knowledge Mobilisation (Place)
UPEN, University of Leeds**

What is the difference between mentoring and coaching?

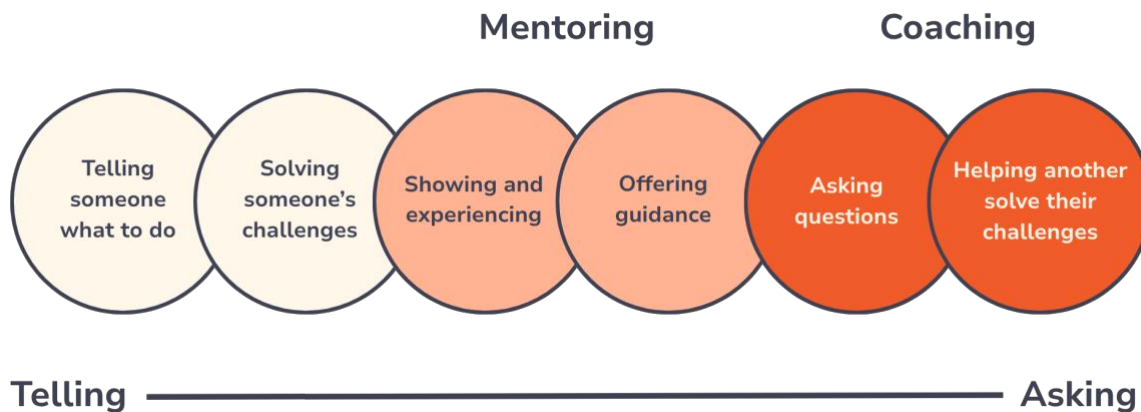
There are many similarities between mentoring and coaching. Each involve building relationships and having conversations. Each involve active listening and confidence

¹ See [the teachers institute](#) and for more on person centred therapy and Carl Rogers see [here](#)

² Simon Sinek in [NHS leadership academy](#)



building. Both are based on confidential and supportive sessions which feed into personal and professional development.



Mentoring and coaching: from telling to asking³

One way of thinking of the difference is on a continuum from telling to asking, whereby teaching or lecturing or indeed the relationship with a line manager involves the more directive telling with imparting of information and knowledge or setting tasks to be achieved.

The other end of the continuum involves an asking relationship often found in coaching which helps to solve specific challenges. Though there is some overlap, mentoring is generally regarded as providing a guidance and supportive relationship that is non-directive but facilitates and empowers the mentee to choose their own path towards progression.

"It was great to be matched with colleagues from other universities to hear about the different structures and roles within different organisations, but to also hear of different ways that each organisation is engaging with policymakers."

**Alexandra Beaumont, Research Impact Officer (Business and Law),
University of Essex**

There are important differences between mentoring programmes and coaching arrangements. The UPEN programme is firmly located on the mentoring side.

Mentoring tends to focus broadly on personal and professional development while coaching may be based on specific work projects or skills development. Mentoring often has a more informal and flexible approach while coaching tends to involve a formal relationship. Coaching is often short-term based around a particular work aspect or project while mentoring can involve a longer-term relationship. Mentors tend to be experienced

³ UPEN reproduction of graphic used in [the leadership academy](https://www.leadershipacademy.co.uk/)



practitioners who lend guidance based on knowledge of the field. This is the case in the UPEN scheme with mentors offering direct experience of policy engagement. Coaches may not have direct experience of the sector and bring a specific set of skills to the arrangement.

Importantly mentoring is not conducted by a line manager whereas coaching can be. Mentoring is also usually conducted by someone external to the mentee's organisation. Perhaps the most important difference is that in mentoring the mentee/s set the agenda while the mentor listens.

Mentoring	Coaching
Focus on career and personal development	Focus on specific work development areas
More informal	Usually structured
Long-term, broader view of the person	Short-term, specific development issues
Mentors are usually more experienced, passing on knowledge	Coaches do not need direct occupational experience
Not performed by a line manager	Can be done by a line manager
Mentee sets the agenda	Coach sets the agenda

What is the mentoring relationship?

It may be tempting to jump in and get on with mentoring; however, mentors need to invest time at the beginning to agree a working arrangement their mentee. This is sometimes described as a contract, though it can be informally agreed or formally written down and agreed by all parties. It lays the foundation for effective working and helps to avoid assumptions, misunderstanding and any confusion. It can also serve to note anything specific as to how sessions should be conducted to allow for any mentor or mentee adaptive requirements (to ensure an inclusive environment).

Throughout the relationship, the contract can be a useful reference point for checking that things are on track and that both parties are doing what they said they would do. Allow time - building this agreement can take more than one session.

"It was great getting to speak to someone with much more experience than you, and they freely shared their time and insight. As someone who finds it hard to ask for help, I found this opportunity so useful."

Anonymous, University of Birmingham



Contracting can help to build trust and support an effective mentoring relationship. It is the working agreement between the two parties, setting out: goals (if appropriate); boundaries (what topics or aspects are off-limits); expectations; working relationships.

Contracting can include setting the **procedure** for sessions including where, when, and how often to meet; how long each session will be; what to do if one or both needs to cancel or reschedule. In addition, it should establish whether contact can happen between sessions; if so, how.

Contracting can also set out the **professional** aspects of the relationship such as key themes to discuss, topics that may be off limits, any desired outcomes or specific work-based topics. Talk about confidentiality early on and agree the boundaries of confidentiality so you both feel comfortable and can be open.

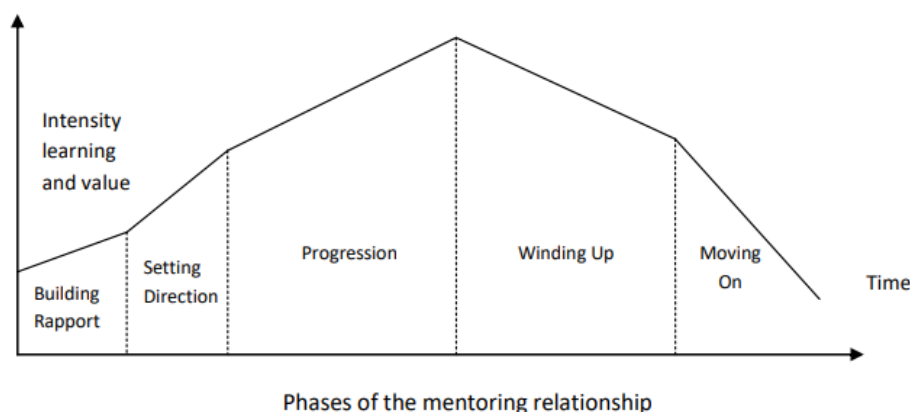
"I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss with others working on setting up policy hubs and engagement strategies at their institutions"

Helen Ackers, Research Impact Manager, University of Warwick

A third aspect of initial relationship building involves the **personal** including what the mentee/s would like from the mentor, style of sessions, potential termination (if things are not working out). This would be the aspect that covers discussion of any adjustments to sessions or declaration of adaptations required.

At the start of each session, it may be helpful to set a 'mini contract', using the following questions: how do you want to use today's session? What topics would you like to prioritise today? What do you want to leave with today? How can I help today as mentor?

The Mentoring Cycle



Clutterbuck & Lane, 2004



The mentoring relationship will have its ups and downs however the trajectory is likely to go through a series of phases. Broadly as illustrated above this can fall into three key phases.

1. **Building rapport and setting direction.** In this initial phase, mentor and mentee/s get to know each other, build trust and agreed practical boundaries and logistical arrangements. They will move on to setting direction in terms of topics, scope and timescales for any objectives.
2. **Progression.** This phase will likely be the central and most intensive phase of the mentoring relationship. In this phase progression against set goals can be discussion, solutions to problems, ways to overcome obstacles, shared issues to be talked through and so on.
3. **Wind up and moving on.** The final phase will be less intense as the mentee puts into practice potential solutions or feel more confident in tackling issues because of the progression phase. This phase can be reflective in terms of considering achievements and setting new goals or objectives. Ensuring that the relationship has a satisfactory end to draw the relationship to a close can avoid open and dependent relationships that are hard to move on from.

The mentoring cycle may not always move so clearly through these phases of intensity. The fluidity and changing demands of the policy engagement landscape can often create bursts of activity that may require discussion at the start or end of the relationship.



Further resources

- ACEVO is the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations and supports CEO development via peer to peer [mentoring schemes](#)
- Biological Sciences Research Council [BBSRC mentoring](#) fellowship scheme
- Clutterbuck, D. and Lane, G. eds., 2004. The situational mentor: An international review of competences and capabilities in mentoring.
- Cowrie Scholarship Foundation Mentoring Scheme [Guidance for Mentors and Mentees](#)
- [The Growth Mindset](#) has a lot of helpful resources
- Dr Amy Iversen, [Preparing for your first mentoring meeting - a webinar](#) [video]
- Andy Lopata, Financial Times, [Top Mentoring Advice That Changed Our Lives: Lessons on Focus, Failure, and Letting Go](#) [video]
- NHS leadership programme, [Effective mentoring a resource and guide for mentors](#)
- [National Mentoring Day](#)
- [OPEN mentoring scheme](#) at University of Oxford, including a UPEN blog on [How Mentoring Matters: Building Bridges, Minds, and Networks](#) by José Rojas Alvarado from OPEN.
- Royal Society has a great video on [Understanding unconscious bias](#) [video]
- UCL [Guide for mentors and mentees](#) is a comprehensive guide

Contact details

Mark Bennister | mark@bennister.com

Joe Armstrong | joe.armstrong@durham.ac.uk



Mentoring checklist: Meeting 1

Introduce yourself as a mentor

- ☐ Give a brief career history, what you enjoy working on and why.
- ☐ Explain your policy engagement experience.
- ☐ Why did you become a mentor?

Discussion points for the mentee

- ☐ Career history, goals and key challenges
- ☐ Why have they joined the programme?
- ☐ Discuss the mentee's main work issues – what is keeping them awake at night? What are they proud of?
- ☐ Their roles and responsibilities

Discuss goals

- ☐ Boundaries – what to discuss and what not to discuss. Discuss confidentiality (and importance in a group setting).
- ☐ What one thing would the mentee/s like to achieve through the mentoring relationship? You could use management tools, like CLEAR or GROW, to help you do this.
- ☐ How can the mentor help the mentee/s with their goal/s? How does the mentee/s feel about being challenged by the mentor? What specific support can the mentor provide?

Tackle practicalities

- ☐ How long will you meet and when, milestone dates and review of the relationship
- ☐ How much communication do you expect between meetings? What will happen if one of you in the group can't make a meeting?
- ☐ Discuss etiquette for online meetings and any inclusion requirements. Should you keep records?

Action points

- ☐ Agree the date of the next meeting