

UK Public Health Network Mentoring Scheme

Best Practice Guidelines for Peer Mentoring

The UK Public Health Network (Network) Mentoring Scheme aims to facilitate personal career development, connect the public health community across the UK and build a wider culture of knowledge sharing across public health organisations.

This document is aimed at both mentors and mentees to explain and set out some mutual expectations in respect of the peer mentoring scheme.

Mentees may seek a mentoring relationship for any number of reasons, and it is essential that aims and expectations are clearly set out at the start. Both mentor and mentee will be giving significant time to the relationship so it is important to establish it as a workable and effective partnership by agreeing clear terms of reference. Does the mentee know what will be provided and what will not? Does the mentor have the appropriate knowledge and experience to help in the desired area?

Therefore, any mentoring relationship needs to have clear parameters and some supporting documentation to inform prospective stakeholders of best practice. Mentors should have the opportunity to receive the knowledge and information they need to be effective. This will include access to the essential protocols of the scheme and may include access to training.

Getting started

Following application to the scheme, the Network will match a mentee with a mentor, aiming to meet as many of the mutual criteria as possible.

The mentor and mentee should then have an informal conversation to establish the scope of the relationship. At this stage both can discuss if they think the pairing is likely to work given the respective interests of both parties.

If they agree to establish a formal mentoring relationship, the **Mentoring Agreement** should be signed by both parties and forwarded to the Network to confirm the relationship and to ensure the mentor is marked as taken.

First Steps

We would recommend the mentor and mentee set up the first meeting soon afterwards and discuss the **First Meeting Checklist** and **Roles and Responsibilities**. Ensure that confidentiality is explicitly discussed as defined on the **Mentoring Agreement**.

Meetings should be arranged at a mutually convenient time through an appropriate medium. The mentee is responsible for setting up meetings and defining the agenda.

Meetings are commonly scheduled for about an hour, monthly for up-to 6 months. At the end of that time the Network will take no part in any subsequent informal relationship that may be agreed between both mentor and mentee.

Making Progress

At the start of each meeting the mentee should define what they would like to focus on. The mentor will act as a facilitator to explore the topic, ask questions to facilitate thinking and listen in a supportive way to understand the issues.

No written documentation is required but you are free to keep your own notes if they are held in a secure and unidentifiable way. Please ensure GDPR regulations are adhered to.

The Network will request feedback from the mentor and mentee at a mid-way point and again at the end of the relationship so that they can continue to improve and evolve the scheme.

Ending the Relationship

After six one-hour meetings we would recommend that the relationship be brought to an end. This allows the mentor to be available to others and allows the mentee to seek an alternative mentor who can offer different perspectives. If you wish to continue this relationship it will be a personal arrangement and fall outside the Network protocols.

If the circumstances change or either party feels the relationship is not working, please discuss this as a pair to see if the issues can be resolved. If not, then notify the Network of your decision to terminate the relationship.

Peer Mentoring

Many people are familiar with a traditional model of mentoring where a more senior or experienced individual supports a more junior or inexperienced colleague. This scheme has been set up specifically to support peers who may have diverse expertise, but who are in an equivalent partnership where both may learn from each other. Therefore, even if the mentor is in a higher-grade role there is no expectation of a hierarchy within the mentoring relationship. Both mentor and mentee may bring different knowledge and expertise, but no seniority is implied or expected by the role of mentor. This may impact how the mentor engages with their role and means that a different approach is required that might move more towards that of informed coach than of mentor. Some of the potential differences are outlined below in terms of the peer mentor role that highlight the alternative mindset that is required.

The peer mentor:

- Seeks to understand, rather than to influence.
- Offers alternative perspectives, rather than solutions.
- Focuses on listening and supporting meaning making, rather than diagnosing.
- Shares their experience, rather than transfers knowledge.
- Is open to possibilities, rather than a fixed route.
- Draws out learning points from mentee experience in everyday situations.
- Encourages reflection and self-evaluation rather than giving feedback.
- Asks open questions to help the mentee to decide on a suitable course of action drawing on their own experiences and relevant to their own context.
- Avoids giving solutions when asked, rather starts by using a coaching approach to help and guide the mentee in finding a solution, not giving it to them.
- Builds on ideas to raise confidence and motivation.
- Helps structure action plans and define achievable targets, without dictating.
- May provide information, advice guidance and support for a mentee in relevant new topics.
- Helps identify barriers to performance and ways to overcome them.