



# Mentoring Handbook of Good Practice



## **Foreword**

This Handbook has been developed thanks to the European project TRIGGER (TRansforming institutions by Gendering Contents and Gaining Equality in Research), a four-year project started in 2014 and involving five countries (Czech Republic, France, Italy, Spain, and the UK); it aims at addressing the imbalance of women's representation in science (and especially in the STEMM sectors, science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine) and driving institutions towards institutional change.

[www.triggerproject.eu](http://www.triggerproject.eu)

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction: what is this Handbook for? .....	1
2. Why mentoring? .....	2
Defining mentoring .....	2
Mentoring as a recipe to counter the “cloning phenomenon”? .....	2
Which type of mentoring and which effects?.....	3
3. The TRIGGER-Athena SWAN mentoring programme .....	4
4. Why should universities set up a mentoring programme? .....	6
Mentoring as a practice to take care of staff development .....	6
The design phase .....	6
Choosing among different types of mentoring.....	7
Promotion and launch .....	8
Running and evaluating .....	9
Best practices.....	9
5. Participating as a mentee .....	11
What does it mean to be a mentee? .....	11
Best practices.....	12
6. Participating as a mentor .....	14
What does it mean to be a mentor?.....	14
Best practices.....	15
7. Conclusion.....	16
8. References .....	17

## 1. Introduction: what is this Handbook for?

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This Handbook aims to set out what is good practice in relation to academic mentoring at universities. It will focus on why mentoring is important, how a mentoring programme typically works, and will present examples of best practice drawn from published papers and reports together with expertise developed in the work within the TRIGGER project. Specifically, the TRIGGER team has designed and run a College-wide mentoring programme, together with Birkbeck's Human Resources Department in the framework of the Athena SWAN Charter<sup>1</sup>. The TRIGGER-Athena SWAN mentoring is an annual one-year long programme. It was first introduced in 2015-16 and is now promoted each academic year. It is focused on academic and research staff, both women and men, across Birkbeck. The work for preparing and running the programme provided the basis for this handbook.

The Handbook is designed to be of use to multiple audiences: institutions and departments willing to design or redesign their programmes, and people involved either as mentees or mentors. For each of these groups, we will focus on best practices and challenges. The objective is to give a full overview on what being involved in a mentoring programme means, by trying to switching between multiple points of view, so as to pave the way for effective mentorships to take place.

The handbook is constituted of the following sections: the first one provides a general introduction to mentoring, its relevance, and evidence of its effectiveness in supporting gender equality and diversity. Next the focus will be on the Birkbeck, University of London, TRIGGER-Athena SWAN mentoring programme. It will provide both an overview of its main features and also of the challenges encountered during the process. Each of the following sections addresses a particular target audience and presents examples of good practices for each of them:

1. Institutions: this focuses on giving insights in relation to designing, promoting, and running mentoring programmes.
2. Mentees: this section focuses on what it means to be a mentee, what mentees can gain from a mentoring programme, what they can do to better manage the mentoring relationship.
3. Mentors: similarly to the previous section, the focus here is on the meaning of mentoring and on good practices, but from the perspective of the mentors.

Finally, the Handbook lists references and additional resources that might be of interest to any of the audiences above.

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<sup>1</sup> Athena SWAN is a charter promoted in the UK and Ireland by the Equality Challenge Unit aimed at making higher education institutions aware of the importance of fostering gender equality through a systematic and continuous work of both monitoring data and implementing new measures supporting career development and diversity of their staff. For more information, [www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters)

## 2. Why mentoring?

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### *Defining mentoring*

Mentoring broadly indicates a relationship where a more expert person - the *mentor* - provides advice to a less expert one - the *mentee*. Daloz (1999), referring to the character of Virgil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, writes that the mentor's role would be that of "engendering trust, issuing a challenge, providing encouragement, and offering a vision for the journey" (Daloz, 1999, p. 30). Actually, there is an aura of mythology around mentoring: the word itself comes from "Mentor", the name of the old sage (personification of the goddess Athena) who took care of the young Telemachus while his father Odysseus was away in the Trojan War.

Today, mentoring can be defined as "off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking" (Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes, & Garret-Harris, 2006, p. 4). This is a relationship focused on personal development. First, in this perspective, the role of the mentor would be that of "challenging the mentee to go beyond the comfort zone" (Schramm, 2004, p. 64), this meaning stimulating her/him to embrace new challenges and look at problems from new and different points of view.

The basic feature of mentoring is the exclusive relationship mentor-mentee: somebody more experienced who provides strategic advice to facilitate the personal and professional development of another, less experienced person. Nowadays, often in the literature the breadth of this definition is considered problematic: as noted by Mullen (2009), the word mentoring is used interchangeably not only with advising and supervising, but, among others, with coaching, leading, teaching, and socializing. This means that, when looking for information and evidence about mentoring, we can be confronted with very different types of initiatives.

### *Mentoring as a recipe to counter the "cloning phenomenon"?*

Mentoring has been applied in very different organisations, and the business sector has been more ready to exploit its potential. Often universities have a "laissez-faire" approach to mentoring. This means that they are not likely to be proactive in supporting mentoring initiatives and underlining the relevance of this instrument (Boyle & Boice, 1998). Among the factors slowing down the uptake of mentoring programmes in academia, scholars list time and inertia (Boice, 1992; Harnish & Wild, 1994); also, because academia is quite an individualistic environment, junior members especially may feel uncomfortable in showing a need for mentoring and can even feel stigmatized for participating in a programme (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). De Janasz and Sullivan (2004) note that in academia the "sink or swim" model still seems to exist and this does not help in creating a culture of mentoring.

Presently mentoring at universities is promoted as an opportunity for junior scholars, women and minorities, and newcomers especially. The rationale behind the need for mentoring for these groups of people is explained by the fact that majorities and people with higher status can usually count on more networking and development opportunities, while others might risk being marginalised and excluded from the channels which help to advance individual's careers. In relation to academia, it seems that there is a bias, with more senior academics favouring those with whom they identify, consequently, men (the majority of the senior academics) may favour other men. Johnson (2007)

refers to this as “the cloning phenomenon”, while van den Brink and Benschop (2014) speak about “homophily”. These dynamics have important implications in relation to diversity, given that the more senior positions are mostly populated by white men.

These considerations have important implications on how formal mentoring programmes for women and minorities should be run. For example, it is more likely that matching mentors and mentees from the same gender and ethnicity will help the relationship to develop because people from the same group feel more comfortable in relating to each other, especially in a relationship involving a newbie with an expert (Chesler & Chesler, 2002; Gibson, 2004). However, there may be fewer mentors available from minority groups. Furthermore, white male mentors may be better networked and better able to provide mentees with the relevant connections and strategies. The study by Ugrin and colleagues (2008) shows that mentees involved in cross-gender and cross-ethnicity dyads were even more productive scientifically, this being a reason for favouring this type of matching. But also, mentoring is not only about scientific productivity but also about personal development, and it should not replicate the same power structures, meaning that it is necessary to pay specific attention to cross-gender and cross-ethnicity dyads. As a consequence, a careful work of analysis of the local context is required when designing a mentoring programme.

#### *Which type of mentoring and which effects?*

Mentoring can be informal or it can be organised along formal programmes in which the mentee’s needs are analysed. On the basis of those, the mentee is matched with a mentor; the development of the mentorship is guided and supported with training and networking opportunities.

The more traditional type of mentoring is constituted by the dyad mentor-mentee, but other forms of mentoring are also possible, among these:

- peer mentoring, i.e. colleagues mentoring one another;
- group mentoring, i.e. a mentor (or more) mentoring several mentees;
- mentoring consortia, i.e. more organisations building a joint mentoring programme.

Research on mentoring tends to underline its positive effects for the mentees in terms of career progression, job satisfaction, motivation, networking (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008). One of the seminal contributions in this area is the work by Kram (1983). She focused on a large public organisation in the US and underlines the outcomes of mentoring for the mentees, distinguishing between career (such as sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, challenging assignments) and psychosocial functions (role modelling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counselling, friendship). Her study showed how mentoring can encompass more domains and be quite complex. Still today, effects of mentoring are often conceptualised following these functions.

Several scholars stress the need for shifting from the traditional one-to-one mentoring model to group mentoring, where mentees are grouped and can rely on several mentors. This model should be better able to address the challenges of academic careers (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). The opportunity for mentees to rely on several mentors could help in an academic world that is increasingly competitive, changing and diverse. Also in this case, a deep knowledge of the local context and needs can help mentoring programme designers understand which types of mentoring are better suited in an institution or how to mix them.

### **3. The TRIGGER-Athena SWAN mentoring programme**

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At Birkbeck, the TRIGGER-Athena SWAN mentoring programme is offered to all academic, research, and teaching staff across the College. The aim is to provide the mentees especially with opportunities to think about their career from a holistic perspective and to network with colleagues from other departments. More specifically, mentees can have a privileged contact with a more expert academic to discuss about their own career and how to deal with their next steps in career progression, but also to reflect on their experiences and learn from them.

TRIGGER team and Human Resources teamed up to work on the mentoring programme in the framework of Athena SWAN: Athena SWAN is a Charter awarding good practices that support gender equality and diversity in universities, with a focus on ensuring fair career progression opportunities. The Charter especially addresses the issue of the underrepresentation of women in STEMM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine) and at the top levels of the academic hierarchy.

The development of the programme has been inspired by a previous pilot run in 2014-15 and by a review of the mentoring offer in the different departments of the College at that time. Also, best practices have been looked for in other universities in the UK. In fact, a College-wide mentoring programme was absent at Birkbeck, and in some departments people did not have any opportunity to have a mentor.

The programme is now launched each academic year, through a call for mentors and mentees to all the College academic, research and teaching staff. The choice to open the call to both women and men is based on the College's willingness to create a more inclusive environment where colleagues can discuss issues and reflect on topics they had not previously considered such as gender equality.

Mentors and mentees are matched depending especially on the mentee's needs. When applying, each mentee is asked to make explicit the reasons for joining the programme and also their expectations and needs. Mentors are asked to say in which areas they feel more comfortable in giving advice. Mentees and mentors come from different departments. This allows for openness in sharing experiences and thoughts.

Mentees and mentors are accompanied throughout their paths. Both the groups participate, separately, to introductory workshops to help them better understand what the programme is about and how to make it work for them. They also collectively participate in a workshop so that everyone gets to know each other. Then, each pair mentor-mentee is asked to manage their own relationship. This means teasing out some objectives and meeting regularly (ideally once per month). At the end of the programme, after approximately 9 months, the groups of mentors and mentees meet together to discuss their achievements and give feedback.

The feedback collected in the academic year 2015-16 was mostly positive. Mentees appreciated the possibility of having a person to rely on for advice on any need and also to network with other mentees. Mentors appreciated the fact of being in touch with the new generation of academics and to learn about their challenges. In general, this mentoring programme allowed people coming from different departments in the College to know and mentor each other, and learn from each other's

different experiences and career trajectories. Creating this space for people to discuss is especially important for building a welcoming environment where people can grow.



## 4. Why should universities set up a mentoring programme?

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### *Mentoring as a practice to take care of staff development*

Nowadays for universities it is particularly recommended to have a mentoring programme since this is a process helping people in their professional and personal development. What is more, research shows that mentoring can have positive impacts in terms of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and even career progression. For example, Bilimoria, Perry, Liang, Palo, Higgins and Taylor (2006) surveyed more than 248 professors from a US university, and they found a strong relationship between mentoring and job satisfaction. Other studies, such as Çetin, Kizil, and Zengin (2013) and Gardiner and colleagues (2007), underline its relevance in relation to progression and organisational commitment. Kirchmeyer (2005) shows that receiving mentoring influences both career progression and salary. Of course many of these findings depend on the specific type of mentoring and institution that is studied, but positive effects are clear.

Setting up a mentoring programme can be especially useful to tackle inequality issues. For example it can provide minorities with an additional and essential resource to work on their development and career progression. For example, mentoring for women academics is widespread in most universities in the UK (Hawkes, 2012), Germany (Gottschall, 2010; Zuber, 2010), and Switzerland (Jäger, 2010). Also the European Commission and the National Science Foundation in US support the creation of mentoring programmes and networks to foster women's careers (Nöbauer & Genetti, 2008; Rosser, 2010). Mentoring for black and ethnic minorities (BME) staff is also spreading in the UK. Increasingly universities have dedicated mentoring programmes (an example is the B-Mentor initiative set up together by University College London, London School of Economics, King's College, and Queen Mary University of London<sup>2</sup>). Even if at the moment it is still quite early to make any conclusions, it is likely that these programmes are helpful in making minorities feel more included and aware of potential career paths.

### *The design phase*

The way a mentoring programme is designed is especially strategic for its success. As stated by de Vries, Webb and Joan (2006, p. 586), "much of the potential strategic impact of mentoring and its capacity to change the organisation can be lost without careful design". Nowadays, it is possible to rely on more guidelines and best practices coming from other universities, such as the one listed in the PRAGES Guidelines (ASDO, 2009). Here some advice and reflections coming from our knowledge and experience is given.

The design of a programme involves considerable resources in terms of time and personnel. It is important in this phase not only to understand what is offered in one's own organisation and in other similar organisations, but also to get a sense of the needs from the group that the mentoring will target. Starting with a small pilot might be a good solution to understand the type of challenges that a specific organisation poses. In fact, TRIGGER-Athena SWAN programme is based on a pilot that ran in 2014-15. This provided many inputs for reflecting and redesigning the 2015-16 edition.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/race/bmentor/index.html>

Choosing a target group is especially important. This depends a lot on what already exists in an institution also on the dimension of the institution itself, and on the presence of specific problems in career progression (for example, is there a disciplinary area in which the phenomenon of the “leaky pipeline” is especially evident?). Many universities devise programmes for minorities only in specific disciplines or target people at a specific career stage (for example, mentoring for junior lecturers).

Designing a programme for minorities can be challenging. Of course, it is recognised that in some conditions minorities benefit from dedicated advice. On the other hand, sometimes it might be challenging to find a big enough pool of mentors, and more programmes for minorities rely on mentors coming from any background (this is also the case of the already mentioned B-Mentor programme). It is especially important to be aware of power dynamics between mentors and mentees, especially in those cases where mentors are recruited from the majority group (usually white men); these relationships could risk replicating paternalistic structures. Interesting insights are provided by the study by Buzzanell and colleagues (2015). They critically analyse the narratives of women of colour in a faculty of engineering, stressing how their experiences of mentoring are often characterised by ambiguity, vulnerability, and suspicion. They argue that mentoring systems, if not well-designed and constantly challenged and evaluated, risk reproducing the narratives of the elite group.

### *Choosing among different types of mentoring*

Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002) underline that mentoring initiatives can vary in relation to their aims, target groups, and specific functioning or design. Aims and target groups can especially impact on the design of the programme. One-to-one mentoring is one of the most well-known options, but also, peer mentoring or group mentoring (one mentor for more mentees), can be good solutions. It is especially recommended to couple mentoring with some form of training for mentors and mentees, to help in them getting the relationship off to a good start. In addition, in one-to-one mentoring programmes it is important to provide opportunities for networking.

It is worth noting that several scholars highlight the need for shifting from the traditional one-to-one mentoring model to group mentoring, where mentees are grouped and can rely on several mentors. This model should be better able to address the challenges of present academic careers. The opportunity for mentees to rely on several mentors could help in an academic world that is increasingly competitive, changing and diverse. Darwin and Palmer (2009) report on a study of a “mentoring circles” programme at the University of Adelaide. In this study, three groups of researchers and academics at different levels met several times over six months to discuss career related issues. This pilot underlines the benefits and limits of group mentoring: benefits are increased opportunities of learning from others, sharing information, and avoiding isolation; challenges are related to time and to unpredictable group dynamics. In fact, some mentees could prefer to have a one-to-one contact with a mentor: this is why mixing different types of mentoring initiatives can constitute a good solution.

In the case of TRIGGER-Athena SWAN programme, because there was not any mentoring offer across the College for academic and research staff, and the opportunities given by individual departments were quite different, it was decided to opt for an inclusive approach, and to leave the programme open to people at different ranks. Ideally the mentee group is composed by early career

researchers, teaching staff, and lecturers, while the mentor group is composed of senior lecturers, readers and professors. However, any person can decide when to join the programme and to volunteer as a mentor or a mentee. During the matching process, the position covered by the mentor and the mentee is carefully considered. Also, this is a programme for both women and men, since an open exchange between the two can help in the path towards gender equality.

Because the issues to consider when designing a programme are so complex, it is essential to know in detail the features of the organisation, possible career paths and the forms of guidance offered. Starting with a small pilot can be a good solution to understand concretely which type of mentoring might work.

### *Promotion and launch*

The promotion phase is very delicate. Once a lot of work has been devoted to design a programme, it is paramount to have a good uptake. It is necessary to ensure everybody in the targeted group, is informed. The “traditional” channels (emails, website, newsletters) are important. It is also essential to make sure that all the newcomers to the organisation know about this opportunity (for example, it might be worth adding a few lines about the mentoring in the induction material each newcomer receives).

Word-of-mouth is especially precious: having people championing the programme in different departments of a university can guarantee a good uptake. In fact, often people flip quite quickly through emails and newsletters and they can easily forget about an initiative they have never heard of before. On the positive side, if a senior academic is talking about that programme during a meeting, or while queuing at the coffee machine, this will grab attention. A champion can help with sponsoring the programme and giving it the attraction, credibility, and authority that often emails cannot provide. In the case of TRIGGER-Athena SWAN, having champions helped.

In this phase, it is worth making sure that all the basic information about the programme is easily available. This should include a brief description of the programme and benefits for mentors and mentees, details on how it works, and, if this is the case, the commitment that is asked in relation to participation in training workshops or networking sessions. Also, the forms for enrolling as a mentee or as a mentor should be available. Forms usually aim to gather contact details and main details of the participant, some short description of the current situation, and reasons for joining. In the case of the mentees, it is important to ask about their needs. In the case of the mentors they should be asked about the areas in which they feel more comfortable to give support. Somebody from the organising team should be promptly available to answer any query.

In the case of TRIGGER-Athena SWAN, the programme is launched at the beginning of each academic year. This facilitates creating among the mentees and mentors a group atmosphere. However, it might be possible to opt for another format and leave to mentors and mentees the possibility to join a programme at any time. This option might be more challenging to manage: it is necessary to make sure that everybody at some point receives some training and can profit from networking opportunities.

### *Running and evaluating*

Once applications are collected, it is necessary for the organising team to get together to go through them and start the matching process. A good matching process should carefully consider both the mentor's and mentee's positions, with a focus on the mentee's needs. In fact, specific needs are better addressed by mentors with a certain profile. In some cases it is left to the mentee to select a mentor. However, as reported in a research by Bell and Treleaven (2011), this approach might not work out well and it is good practice to match mentor and mentee. Bell and Treleaven underline also how the matching process has an impact on the mentee's degree of satisfaction of the mentoring relationship. Because the matching process is so important for starting the relationship, it might be worth in some cases collecting more information about a mentor or a mentee, in order to try satisfy the mentee's needs and match them with the mentor's areas of expertise.

It is always a good idea to start a mentoring programme with training sessions for both mentors and mentees, but better if done separately, so that each group feel more comfortable in asking questions about the process. Also, the two groups have different needs and expectations, so a separate training session might help. On the other hand, it will be worthwhile to provide a networking session where they all meet together; this is a way to welcome everybody into the programme and motivate all the participants to get to know each other and share experiences.

The amount of time people can devote to training sessions is always an issue. In fact, lack of time and time pressures are often a barrier to mentoring (de Vries, et al., 2006). For this reason, it is important to give enough notice (ideally to list dates and times already when promoting the programme). When dealing with small groups especially, a short training session over lunchtime could be a good option to make sure everybody can participate. This was the solution chosen in TRIGGER-Athena SWAN 2016-17.

A mentoring programme is an opportunity for people to learn from each other experience. This means that also those designing and coordinating a programme should learn from it, in order to improve it and maximise its potential. This will help to rethink the programme or even to detect needs justifying the design of a new programme. In this learning process, listening to mentees and mentors is essential, so as to run a short evaluation session at the end of the programme. This might take the form of questionnaires to understand the main points of satisfaction and areas of improvement, or of an informal conversation with mentors and mentees. Often the literature highlights the necessity of a longitudinal perspective. In fact, keeping in touch with mentors and mentees will help to understand the longer term impact of the programme and if it had an impact on carer progression as well.

### *Best practices*

In the sections above some insights into best practices have already been presented. They are summed up below. These practices are meant to work as guidelines for institutions setting up a programme.

- Understand in detail the current situation of the institution and people needs. As a first step, collecting data about career progression is useful to understand if there is a problem (for example groups being underrepresented at some levels of the academic hierarchy). It is

important to understand what is already in place (some departments or research teams might already have mentoring in place). Talking to academics and researchers in different positions is a good strategy to get a sense of what the needs might be.

- Many factors should be considered in the design phase. Do we want a mentoring programme including everyone, or focused on specific groups? A lot depends on what has been found out in the previous step. Also, which type of mentoring is best to support people (is it best to opt for one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring?)
- Each type of mentoring (one-to-one, peer, group) has pros and cons. Providing a mix of different types, or, more typically, providing one-to-one mentoring programme together with networking opportunities, can be beneficial. In fact, this last one brings together the benefits of having one privileged expert to guide the mentee, together with peer and group mentoring.
- Promoting a mentoring programme can be especially effective when relying on champions, i.e. more senior academics or people who have successfully participated in previous mentoring initiatives and can help in stressing the benefits of mentoring.
- It is important to guide mentors and mentees, especially at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, since this is the most delicate phase for them.
- In the matching process is necessary to carefully consider the mentee's position and needs, and the mentor's profile, and try to build pairs where both mentor and mentee can get the most. Often it is possible to do a good matching on the base of the information provided in the application form only. Other times, it might be necessary to look for more information and having a chat with the mentor or the mentee might help to build a potentially successful pair.
- Training sessions are especially useful to guide mentors and mentees, and helping them to make expectations and needs explicit. How training sessions are organised and run depends on the type of mentoring and also of target group. Usually, short sessions (for example, one and a half hours) might be a good compromise in the busy schedule of university staff.
- The first meeting between mentor and mentee might be tricky for them to manage. It might be a good idea to start with a networking session where everybody is present, and each pair has an opportunity to get introduced and to have a chat on how to get organised. To get the discussion more focused, it might be useful to ask mentor and mentee to draft an informal agreement, i.e. a document where they list some objectives and set some guidelines in relation to timing.
- It is necessary for mentors and mentees to rely on a contact person (the person organising/coordinating the programme) to refer to for sorting out any doubt or issue. In case problems arise in the development of a mentoring relationship, it is important to provide help as soon as possible.
- Evaluation is paramount to learn from the programme and reflect on its value. Questionnaires are the best method to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to provide at least a basic feedback. Separate interviews or informal conversations with mentors or mentees constitute an additional source to better delve into opinions and experiences. It might help to redesign the following edition or detect new needs that it would have been impossible to find otherwise. For this reason any feedback should be taken very seriously and inform the subsequent mentoring strategies.

## 5. Participating as a mentee

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Getting a mentorship off to a good start can be very exciting for the mentee, but there might even be some anxiety around it, especially when a person has never participated in a mentoring programme. They might be unsure about how this will work in practice and how to manage the relationship with the mentor. There is not one best recipe. This section will try to explain what the outcomes for a mentee might be and how to get the mentorship relationship off to a good start.

When participating (or considering to participate) in a formal mentoring programme, it is especially important to reflect on needs and expectations (and, if possible to state them when joining the programme). This requires taking some time to reflect on one's own situation and overall aims for the near future. Some questions guiding this process might be: do I feel the need of getting some extra advice in relation to my career and personal development? What are the areas of my professional life in which getting some advice might be helpful? Which kind of advice do I need? From whom? How could the mentoring programme help? Can these needs be answered by this mentoring programme? What is expected from me if I join this programme?

Mentoring could be especially helpful in moments of transition – when starting a new position or aiming at some new role – but in general it might always be worthwhile to join a programme. What it is important to be aware of is that a good mentoring relationship always takes some time – at the beginning, this might seem to be an obstacle. In fact this time investment constitutes a precious space to reflect on one's own path and helps to avoid getting swamped by everyday activities and losing sight of personal deeper or longer term objectives.

### *What does it mean to be a mentee?*

The literature highlights the good outcomes that mentoring can have for a mentee. For example, Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, and Marshall (2007) provide an interesting empirical study on mentoring for women academics. They focus on a formal programme for junior women academics in an Australian university. They distinguish between objective (promotion, grants and publication achievements) and subjective outcomes (participants' perceptions of their careers). This is one of the few longitudinal studies (and for this reason conclusions are especially useful). Data was collected at three points in time, and findings compared with a control group of 46 not-mentored women. The mentored group had more achievements in terms of promotion and research grants even if there were not any significant differences in relation to career and job satisfaction. In general, the mentees showed great satisfaction for having the possibility to receive feedback and guidance, and having somebody to converse with.

Another important aspect of participating in a mentoring programme is that this constitutes an opportunity to talk to other mentees, to broaden one's own network and to learn from each other's experiences and challenges. For this reason participating in training or introductory sessions can be especially rewarding, since these provide a place for doing some "peer mentoring" as well. Our experience coming from running mentoring programmes shows that being in contact with other mentees is often as appreciated as much as having one's own mentor, and these processes are complementary.

## *Best practices*

The most challenging moment of a mentoring relationship is surely represented by its start. In a formal mentoring programme such as TRIGGER-Athena SWAN, the matching process is guided by careful consideration of the mentee needs. In most of the cases the mentees' needs match very well with the mentors' areas of expertise. Once a pair mentor-mentee is formed, mentor and mentee should start getting to know each other. The mentee should make her needs and objectives explicit to the mentor, so that the mentor can better understand her expectations; as underlined by de Vries and colleagues (2006), unclear expectations and goals are often the cause of an unsuccessful relationship. In the TRIGGER-Athena SWAN programme it is advised that an agreement be negotiated whereby the mentor and mentee state some general objectives and think about a timeline. This does not need to be a formal contract: rather, it aims at better guiding the relationship at its start. Since we know that time is precious, it should help to reflect on how much time is possible to dedicate to this activity. Reflecting early on issues such as the regularity and length of meetings or where these meetings will take place, helps to give some shape to the relationship and avoid the risk that this opportunity gets swamped by all the other commitments a person has. Also, making clear each other's expectations might help the relationship to grow.

Below, some best practices are listed. These do not need to be binding, but they are suggestions for getting a mentorship off to a good start and making the mentees especially aware of the potential challenges. As with any relationship, mentoring needs both time and cultivation.

- Try to be as clear as possible with your mentor about your reasons for joining the programme and what you expect. This will help the mentor not only to know you, but also to better address your questions.
- Your objectives for the mentoring can be quite broad, but it is always important to state them explicitly, a mentor can't read one's own mind!
- Sometimes stating objectives might look like a boring, or "tick-the-box", exercise, but remember this is really important to delineate a trajectory for your mentorship, and that one of the reasons of unsuccessful mentorship is exactly the lack of objectives or mismatch in expectations.
- Be proactive in managing the mentoring relationship. Think about some broad objectives, and think about timing. It is very likely you and your mentor will both be quite busy. Discussing as early as possible the regularity of your meetings and their length might help. Also, it might help from the beginning to understand if you wish to be in touch via email, phone, skype, between one meeting and another.
- Be respectful of your mentor's time.
- Give time for your relationship to grow. You cannot address everything during your first meeting. If there are some issues that you cannot discuss during a meeting, make clear there are important topics you wish to discuss during your next meeting, or maybe over the phone. If you have especially important topics you want to address in a meeting, it might be a good idea to write your mentor a few days before and anticipate them; this will help the mentor as well.
- Do not be afraid of sharing with your mentor your thoughts, opinions, and ideas, related to your situation and mentoring needs, this will help the mentor to better advise.

- Remember the role of your mentor is to advise. This advice should ideally inspire your actions or approach to your work and life.
- Be aware that confidentiality is important. You might wish to ask your mentor to keep the information you share as confidential, and vice versa.
- Remember your mentor should be ideally an ally for change, for creating a more including and welcoming culture in the College (or even for challenging obsolete organisational structures and rules), so do not be afraid of sharing experiences and be open to learn from each other.
- Remember that the coordination of the mentoring programme is there for you all along the programme. If you are not sure about any issue, even if this might look trivial, do not hesitate to make a contact. Also, if any problem arises in the development of the mentorship, and you feel you are not able to tackle them adequately, do not hesitate to get in touch with the coordination.



## 6. Participating as a mentor

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In a mentoring relationship, the mentee has in front of them a challenging job in trying to make needs and expectations clear. Mentors are also faced with more challenges. In fact they should engage in a continuous work of listening and understanding needs, and advising, that requires a lot of commitment. They might be expected to solve problems, when their role is that of advising. Being a mentor is a great and unique opportunity to learn from the younger generation of academics and also, of reflecting on one's own trajectory.

Interestingly enough, when going through the literature on mentoring, very often the focus is on the mentee, and little attention is paid on mentors' experiences and needs and what they can get from a mentoring programme. This section tries to go through some of this and provide advice for mentors.

### *What does it mean to be a mentor?*

Being paired with a more junior person represents an opportunity to offer one's own knowledge and experience, and learn from the experiences and challenges that the new academic cohorts are faced with. This provides also the opportunity to further reflect on one's own career path and learn from this. Alean-Kirkpatrick (2011), drawing on her experience as a trainer of mentors reports about mentors' expectations: mentors expect to receive something from the mentorship and to grow professionally and personally.

The mentor is especially expected to carefully listen, being open to the mentee's ideas and opinions when trying to provide advice. Guiding and advising can be especially challenging. Often one wants to provide advice that can be immediately applicable, but also, it is important not to be too prescriptive. Childress Townsend (2002) underlines that the best mentors should be good listeners and problem solvers, approachable, available, and supportive, but without turning the mentorship into favouritism.

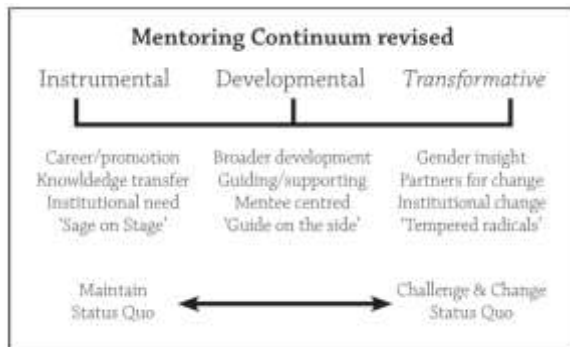
An interesting survey conducted in Europe by Pisimisi and Ioannides (2005) highlights: that social skills are especially important (the mentor should be a charismatic role model), the professional role and status of the mentor, and previous experience and training in mentoring. It is worth noting that this study stresses that, even if a shared disciplinary background might facilitate communication between mentor and mentee), this is not enough for a good mentoring relationship.

When a mentoring programme is run in the framework of activities to promote gender equality and diversity, as it is the case with TRIGGER-Athena SWAN programme, it is especially important that mentors become allies and partners for change. Listening to the mentees' experiences and needs and especially to mentees coming from different departments, can provide mentors with a privileged knowledge of the challenges the more junior academics and researchers are faced with. In fact, mentors are in the position to create new opportunities for the junior staff, or even to challenge obsolete organisational structures, if this is the case.

de Vries, Webb, and Joan (2006) report on the evaluation of a mentoring programme for women in Australia, and they focus on the mentors' perceptions about mentoring (while mentees are women only, mentors are both women and men): in fact, mentors became more aware of the challenges of junior faculty and also, of the relevance of gendering processes, this meaning that mentoring has the

potential to push organisational change. The figure below, adapted from de Vries (2011), exemplifies this process:

Fig. 1: the mentoring continuum



### Best practices

The time and energy required by participating in a mentoring programme represent the main challenge. Managing the mentee's needs and expectations might be challenging but usually it becomes very natural to experienced mentors. Below some advice that can help to manage the mentorship.

- It is especially important to thoroughly understand the mentee's situation, needs and expectations. If one of the needs or expectations sounds especially difficult for you to fulfil, try to be open and discuss it. It is helpful to openly speak about the areas in which you feel more comfortable to give advice. Mentees are recommended to discuss with the mentors about their objectives as early as possible.
- Time is an issue. It is recommended to discuss, during the first meeting, about the regularity and length of your meetings, and trying to be clear on the amount of time both of you can dedicate to this activity. This will help to manage expectations as well.
- Discuss as soon as possible if you wish to keep in touch via email/phone or skype. It might be helpful to have a chat over the phone between two meetings, to briefly talk about any issue to be discussed in the following meeting (or pending from the previous meeting).
- Be respectful of your mentee's time.
- Be open in sharing experiences with your mentee, and, if this is helpful, to introduce her/him to your network or propose some activities.
- Do not spare your advice, but avoid being judgemental. If you feel there is a problem in managing each other's expectations, do not hesitate to discuss this.
- Other mentors can be a precious source to learn how to best manage a mentoring relationship, be open to share your experience with them.
- Confidentiality is important and both mentees and mentors are expected to treat the information shared as confidential.
- If any problem arises in the development of the mentorship, and you feel you are not able to tackle them adequately, or there is some issue you are not sure about, do not hesitate to get in touch with the coordinator of the programme.

## 7. Conclusion

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This Handbook has attempted on the one side, to give an overview on mentoring in academia, its relevance, and the state of the literature; on the other, it has provided a series of guidelines for different target audiences, i.e. institutions, mentors and mentees. These guidelines are based both on the literature and on the experience built during the design and implementation of the TRIGGER Athena SWAN mentoring programme at Birkbeck, University of London.

It has been underlined that mentoring has a strong potential in terms of guiding people's careers, and it can help to tackle gender and diversity issues. When designing a mentoring programme, it is possible to rely on many different types that have been used in academia: one-to-one mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring, for example. Each one of them is better suited to tackle specific needs, and this is why it is always essential to know the local context very well. A one-size-fits-all mentoring strategy does not exist: the advantage of mentoring is that it is a flexible instrument to adapt to different realities.

A lot has been written on mentoring and guidelines have already been drafted; this handbook also wanted to guide the reader through the current literature. The work here cited constitutes a precious source for those interested to go deeper into the process. It is difficult to discuss all the aspects related to academic mentoring, and it is possible that some issues, or some literature, have not been presented here. However, conjugating the literature with the practical experience gained during the TRIGGER-Athena SWAN programme might be especially useful and provide additional sources of insights.

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