



Learning in England ∞ Mentoring

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A mentor is a person who guides and supports a mentee, usually an undergraduate or qualified person. The purpose is not so much to direct the mentee on his or her chosen career, or to provide any form of counselling, but to support his or her thinking about personal attributes, knowledge and skills and how to get started or keep going on that path.

The mentor has considerable experience and professional or business expertise. Many universities now pair former graduates with current students, to provide a free service. Both parties will be given some training. Ideally, they will meet regularly, about once a month, for six months, either face to face, or online. Both parties will be asking questions.

The mentor will help the mentee establish clearly the focus for their meetings:

- > What the mentee wants to do
- > How to write a compelling CV
- > How to present oneself effectively in an interview
- > What to read to support professional development
- > Giving time in the mentor's workplace
- > Enabling the mentee to meet other experts within the same field
- > Helping the mentee to establish goals for each stage.

In some ways a mentor is like a parent: an encourager, available on the end of a 'phone, motivating, inspiring. It is not about the mentee copying or replicating what the mentor did!

"Mentoring has been immensely rewarding," says Felicity. "I have been to Exeter each year to meet a Mentee, each wanting to take a leadership role in a school or most recently pursuing an academic career.

"It has been particularly interesting working with a current second year student, who is studying History and would like to go on to do a Doctorate in the History of the Philosophy of Science. Evidently, he has done very well in recent examinations and has the full support of the History Department.



“We met in Exeter having exchanged a couple of emails outlining what he was interested in. We discussed his third-year options, what he is reading, where he has visited, what has sparked his interest. We also talked about the nature of learning at doctoral level, the development of ‘new knowledge’ and the use of technology. It was apparent that he greatly enjoys writing, so I asked if he had considered blogging or writing for a publication like the Radio Times, in case at some point after his doctorate, he may go on to produce documentaries – the next Mary Beard or Lucy Worsley. He has set himself a number of projects to write short informative and entertaining articles, over the summer holidays. Since Exeter offers a number of one-year courses, for example in languages, I suggested he consider taking advantage of learning Latin or Greek.

“In view of his interest in Science, I mentioned that some Science Museums sponsor doctoral students. So, he has been exploring that now, since sponsorship will not only support the funding of a doctorate, but may also open up opportunities of employment thereafter.”

“I got so much more out of it than I thought I would. When I started the partnership I had secured an internship already, so I thought “I’m already half way there, what can Ian bring me now to help me?”

What he did was help prepare me to go into that internship and make the most of that opportunity, which really gave me confidence going there. Ian helped me to develop a more well-rounded business awareness and to develop an understanding of the quite alien environment I was about to go into. He did this by recommending wider reading and to look at some possible clients. When I started my training, we were given a practice project and one of the clients was Virgin Media, which I had looked at with Ian. For me, that was fantastic and gave me confidence as I already had an awareness of the company.

In terms of securing the job, Ian really helped me to understand the sorts of interview questions to expect, types of projects that I would be going on to do, and how I could be assessed and get feedback.

I feel I have really broadened my perspective and insight into the whole area of consulting. Ian was able to tell me how he got to where he is in consulting, which is different to the route that I am embarking on; this has really broadened my understanding of the people I might meet along the way and the different routes to go along if things don’t go according to plan.

Ian has been not just a mentor, but also a role model for me. It has been such a privilege to be able to ask questions about his career, the highlights, the low-lights, and to gain an understanding which you wouldn’t get from just asking colleagues as this is such a different sort of relationship.

Lastly, one of the main things I really picked up is to not to get too focused on certain things such as work goals, but to put that into perspective with your own personal goals. Ian has really given me confidence to take to my new job and to build on the skills that we looked at. This experience made securing my job so much easier.”¹

¹ http://www.exeter.ac.uk/careers/research/mentor/success_stories/ian-martin/ Kate Cragg undergraduate in Philosophy and Political Economy. Her Mentor is Ian Martin, a Management Consultant
As at February 2022



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How can a mentor be useful for my career?

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It is difficult to really know yourself until you have had some experience of life. As a solicitor I had in mind to be a Family Law specialist. In fact, when I qualified, I found myself in an excellent firm doing Property Law, which was much better suited to the experiences I had had in my training contract, my personality and skills.

Advice I had received in training, from a mentor in the practice, who knew me well, saw how I had worked in each department and asked me questions about the way I had handled different cases. He could see that not only had I enjoyed the Property work but even found satisfaction and fulfilment, in acting efficiently and conclusively on a large number of deals.

Many mentees can testify to the care made by the university or line manager in ensuring a good match with a mentor and the lasting support and friendship that is created.

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