Comparative view of mentoring approaches in Southampton

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Why are we talking about Mentoring?

Mentoring schemes are high on the HE sector agenda.

Recently the university networks, including the EDI team, have been reviewing the mentoring provision, developing and piloting three mentoring programmes:

- Career
- Business
- Diversity
Existing provision

https://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/students/mentoring.page#how_the_programme_works

Mentee handbook (Career Mentoring programme)
Existing provision at University

The mentor-mentee relationships in these schemes are typically **one-to-one**, and the agenda for discussion is typically **not structured**

“*You drive the process.*
You are responsible for driving the mentoring process (not your mentor).
To achieve this, you need to think about
what you want to achieve from your mentoring relationship.
This can then be discussed and agreed with your mentor.”
Existing provision in FEPS

- Offered since 2010
- MSc programmes in Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) and the Optoelectronics Research Centre (ORC).
- Within some other disciplines mentoring is still almost non-existing.
Existing provision in ECS
Existing provision in ECS

Mentor-mentee relationships are **one-to-many**, and the agenda for discussion is structured or **semi-structured**.
What is a mentor? What is it not?

Brainstorm in your tables, and write one word in post-its in as many post-its as you wish
What is a mentor?

Brainstorm in your tables, and write one word in post-its in as many post-its as you wish.

- Help
- Students
- Listening
- Support
- Motivation
- Adoption
- New environment
- Sharing experiences
- Experiences
- Help
- Expert
- Guide
- Basic training
- Feedback
- Interaction
- Guiding them
- Helping them is what I wish I had!
What’s NOT?

Brainstorm in your tables, and write one word in post-its in as many post-its as you wish
What’s NOT covered?

Advice to ECS Mentors

Coursework
Discussions on coursework specifications are OK, but keep academic integrity in mind when providing help. Mentors are not there to solve exercises.

Academic issues
Some guidance with required knowledge or tools is OK but academic issues are best dealt with by academics.

Counselling
You are not a counsellor or therapist (not your role)
What is a mentor then?

- A role model, a facilitator, a bridge.

What is our aim?

- To empower students to become proactive, independent learners, informed of their rights and obligations on the path to success.
What are meetings for?

• Mentors:
  – Gain experience!
  – Protecting time to facilitate dialogue and reflection
  – Role modelling (not for replacing academic tutors)

• Students:
  – Accessing regular pastoral care without losing face
  – Understanding what is expected from a ECS student
  – Scaffolding for peer-support
What is mentoring?*

- A one-to-one relationship between a mentor and a “mentee” where the mentor is an **expert**
- Longer-term
- Guidance
- “How things are done round here”
- Learning
- A stretching, broadening experience for both parties
- Flexible, to meet the needs of both parties
- A positive a trusting relationship
- Open, but confidential

* Extracted from the “Essential Mentoring Skills slides from Elan Coaching (Facilitator Anna Sheather)
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*Remember: PhD students are early career researchers – they are only “expert” MSc students*
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Risk of providing advice beyond their expertise!
But does it work?
We asked mentors:

How would you rate your experience with the mentoring scheme overall?

- 1 (Very Bad): 0
- 2: 0
- 3: 2
- 4: 8
- 5 (Very Good): 5
We asked mentors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helped you improve your interpersonal skills?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped you improve your presentation skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped you develop as a reflective researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped you improve your leadership skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped you improve your networking skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped you develop other academic skills?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 2 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree
We asked mentees:

What was good about the mentoring scheme?

- Experience: 14
- Knowledge: 7
- Settling in: 7
- Issues: 6
- Contact: 5
- Relationship: 4
- Attitude: 3
- Availability: 2
- Meeting Content: 2
- Atmosphere: 1
- Flexibility: 1
- Frequency: 1
- Meeting Times: 1
We asked mentees:

What could have been better?

- Frequency: 10
- Meeting Content: 10
- 1:1 support: 5
- Course Content: 2
- Meeting Times: 2
- Non-Compulsory: 2
- Earlier Start: 2
- Exams: 1
- Flexibility: 1
- Group Size: 1
As perceived by mentees:

Would you say the mentoring scheme...

... helped you with your academic needs?
5 4 7 19 19

... facilitated your progress through the MSc course?
2 6 13 17 16

... provided additional support to that provided by your personal tutor?
5 5 10 16 16

... contributed to your success in your MSc course?
3 8 12 14 16

... facilitated your transition into becoming an independent learner?
2 9 14 12 13

... helped you integrate and network within your cohort?
4 8 15 14 12

... helped you with your pastoral needs?
4 6 14 16 8
Meetings
Success stories

• Good mentors:
  – **Plan** meetings in advance
  – Make meetings **relevant** to students
    • Giving information before it is needed, but also offering support when requested by students
    • Tell mentees the meeting cover, and send a brief email afterwards to summarise
  – **Keep track** of students’ engagement and are organised with their paperwork
  – Are available but **manage** their time well
Meeting advice

- **Always** in English
  - some students may need additional EAP support
- Only meet on individual basis for **personal** issues
  - think about fairness
- Explain coursework and what’s required
  - But do not do it for them!
- Keep track of **attendance**
- Be as professional as possible yet remain approachable.
In practice!
Practicalities: Are you right for the job?

• Requirements:
  – PhD student in FEPS (with an MSc from ECS or ORC)
  – To be confident conducting sessions in English
  – Happy to arrange meetings and support MSc students
  – Willing to undertake teaching training (ITSPG1 and 2)

• In principle this is ONE YEAR appointment – no expectation to continue for longer

• Will be paid at demonstrators rate, so must be able to work in the UK
  – Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
Plan!

Introduce yourself to the tutor of your mentees (email is OK)

Email your mentees for the first meeting but always agree at the end the date and time of the next meeting (preferably on the same venue)

Ideally one group meeting per week (esp. the first few weeks), but later is ok to meet every fortnight (or even monthly in Semester II). Listen to their needs.

Topics! From structured to semi-structured and ad-hoc
Relevant topics!

Introduction to Southampton and university life
Adapting to study in FEPS (Calendar)
Time management and stress
Academic Integrity
Optional theme (report writing, Matlab, Google Scholar...)
...
Exam preparation (strategies, structure, rubrics)
Introduction to Semester II
Marking Systems and preparing for results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session #</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Aim of the session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1         | Introduction to university life            | To give a broad introduction to the course in general and the first semester in particular.  
To advise the students on how to find the required information.  
To make sure that the students are well settled and to answer their queries about life in Southampton.                                                                                       |
| 2         | Adapting to study at ECS                   | To prepare the students for the amount of work they are going to face in ECS in the first semester.  
To make sure the students know about the teaching system in the UK in general and in ECS in particular.                                                                                                                   |
| 3         | Time management and managing workloads     | By this time the students would have received lots of coursework. Most of them will feel stressed about not being able to cope with the work load.  
To share some of the mentor’s experience with the students and advise them on how to manage their time and work.                                                                                                               |
| 4         | Academic Integrity and coursework discussion | To make sure the students know about the University’s policy on plagiarism and the expected standard of the MSc students as well as the adopted procedure to safeguard these standards.  
To answer the students questions about plagiarism, working in a group and how can the group deal with someone who is not doing his/her work  
To make sure the students know how to deal with deadlines.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
## Sessions (II)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session #</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Aim of the session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Coursework discussion (examples)</td>
<td>For this session the mentors can choose any topics based on the students request. To answer the students questions about various coursework specifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To give students a basic tutorial on a programming language if it is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To teach students how to use LATEX and reference manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To teach the students how to read a journal paper or a book effectively and how to cite other peoples’ work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To help the student with their presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Coursework discussion</td>
<td>For this session the mentors dealt with the students questions about their coursework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Coursework discussion</td>
<td>(Optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Coursework discussion</td>
<td>(Optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Exam preparation and what to expect from exams</td>
<td>Talking through rubrics, expectation of assessments and revising strategies.  Looking at past papers may be appropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Sessions (III)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session #</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Aim of the session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Exam preparations and time management.</td>
<td>To encourage the students to use their time wisely during the holiday as most of the students are going to submit 3-4 assignments and have to do 3-4 exams during January. To make sure they know where to study for the exam and how to study effectively. To answer any questions related to the exam such as using a dictionary and getting a university calculator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Exam preparations</td>
<td>To help and advise the students on how to read and analyse exam papers. To tell the students how to use the exam time wisely. To help the studying analysing the exam questions and tell them what to do if they could not answer one of the questions or if they could not understand it. To make sure everyone started studying for the exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Exam preparations</td>
<td>To discuss past papers and make sure students are managing well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who to ask questions?

• Did you ask yourself? :-)
  – Common sense but also “common knowledge”
• An experienced mentor in your area
• Your tutor/supervisor OR Tutor/course leader
• School office (feps-student@soton.ac.uk)
• MSc Mentors Coordinator (me, agw106@ecs.soton.ac.uk)
• Senior Tutor (stutor@ecs.soton.ac.uk)
• MSc Director of Programmes (Maurits de Planque, mdp@ecs.soton.ac.uk)
Potential pedagogic benefits

- Valuable work experience for mentors
- Additional opportunity of discuss topics ("extra processing")
- Deep learning
- Scaffolding to integration
- Peer assisted learning
Contrasting but related schemes

- Supplemental instruction from teaching assistants (PhD students are part of teaching team)
- Peer-Assisted Learning (facilitation but not instruction)
- Peer mentoring (one-to-one)
Conclusions

• Mentoring is good! For mentors, mentees, institution

• Same word, different interpretations

• Uniform provision is tricky but there are potential pedagogic benefits.
Related reading


Thank you! Any questions?