

# **GUIDE FOR MENTORS**



**EUROPE & SCOTLAND**

European Social Fund  
Investing in your Future



**Highlands and Islands Enterprise**  
**Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean**

1. **What is Mentoring?**
2. **Roles in the Mentoring Process**
3. **Before getting started**
4. **During the match**
5. **Challenges and Pitfalls -**
6. **Handy Hints**
7. **Review - After**

## 1. **What is Mentoring?**

Most of us can look back and identify certain special people who have been there for us at critical stages of our lives, helping us to acquire new skills and make the most of opportunities and challenges. This is your opportunity to offer your skill to help someone else, to nurture them, and watch them develop and become truly empowered.

Mentoring is a natural process and can be used for both personal and professional development - it is the process by which one person assists another to grow and learn in a safe and sympathetic relationship.

This guide will not provide you with the skill or training to become a good mentor. However, it aims to guide you through the process and mentoring relationship to help achieve a successful outcome.

### **Who can be a mentor?**

The mentor role is fundamentally different from the business advisor role. Mentors can be seen as a "critical friend", a role model or simply an ally or a "sounding board".

A mentor need not be a qualified trainer and does not need to be highly skilled in the business core activity. He or she may be:

- a business leader with experience of growing businesses;
- a successful entrepreneur, non-executive director of a successful SME or senior management of blue chip corporate;
- representative of a wide range of sectors;
- demonstrative of a highly successful track record and desire to share with growing business.

To make the relationship work, a mentor will need strong communications skills including:

- Listening attentively and not judgementally.
- Giving and receiving feedback.
- Questioning skill to encourage your business to talk and think through issues.
- The ability to challenge constructively.

Mentors bring their own unique experience of life and business combined with a friendly interest in the business's development. Indeed, your business may find you very supportive if you are open about your own development needs as well as strengths.

### **Why get involved with Business Mentoring?**

For mentors, the experience is challenging and stimulating. You may acquire a greater understanding of issues through reflecting on them with your business, this can revitalise your interest in your business. You can develop coaching and counselling skills, which are transferable to our personal and working life.

You will possibly feel considerable personal satisfaction when your business reports success and from the knowledge that you are giving something back.

For businesses, many find that their self-confidence and motivation increases through sharing experiences and receiving one-to-one feedback. From those who took part in the previous programmes, the key benefits were:

- Raising business horizons.
- An external "warts and all" viewpoint.
- Greater self-awareness.
- A more focused approach to developing the Business.

### **2. Roles in the Mentoring Process**

Mentoring relationships can change over time, and may require a change of emphasis in the skills the mentors use. Certain issues may not be dealt with until the business has built up confidence and trust in the mentor.

A vital key to success in mentoring is that each relationship is custom-built by the business and mentor to address their specific needs. This flexibility is the core strength of mentoring.

#### **Mentors**

As a mentor, you act as a sounding board and a trusted "ally" so your business can explore strength and development areas in an encouraging environment, with the opportunity to think through the direction of the business. You may also act as a role model enabling the business to see new ways of thinking and behaving.

Your business's interests are paramount in your mentoring relationship. Your role is to:

- Build an open and honest relationship, and create an atmosphere where your business feels safe to try out different ideas.
- Support and encourage your business's personal development and learning by giving confidential feedback to reinforce what your business already does well, and help in areas where they want to develop.
- Help the business to take increasing initiative for their own development and to take increasing responsibility for managing the mentoring relationship.

How this actually happens will depend on your business's needs, the context of the mentoring and your own personality. Your business may describe recent experiences and you could ask questions to help them see things from a different angle. Or you may act as role model, describing how you handled similar situation in the past and showing what it is possible to achieve.

## **Businesses**

Your business is there to seek development opportunities, self-learning, support and encouragement at a pace, which suits them. Initially your business may not feel very clear about what they want from mentoring. Your role as a mentor is to help define this - although this may change as the mentoring process develops. The business brings issues to the meetings and hopefully in time will benefit from new approaches, behaviours and techniques introduced during these sessions.

## **The Business Mentoring Team**

We will be responsible for the day-to-day management of mentoring relationships and will offer help and support to both mentors and businesses. We will evaluate the mentoring relationships and the programme itself, continually striving to develop and improve.

### **3. Before getting started**

The matching process for mentors wishing to become involved in Business Mentoring will involve an assessment interview which will identify:

- Skills
- Experience
- Business Background
- Personality

The most important element of establishing a mentoring relationship is mutual respect and trust - these elements are important to the success of a mentoring relationship.

## **Matching Mentors and Businesses**

### *Skills*

Businesses will firstly be matched with a mentor who has strengths in the areas in which they have expressed a need.

### *Experience / Business Background*

We will also take into account the industry sector and business background of the mentor. However, it is not crucial for the mentor to come from the same sector as the business.

### *Personality*

The first informal, introductory meeting is a key part of the matching process and allows both parties to identify the chemistry that exists between them, also whether or not an ongoing relationship is likely to work. At this stage there is a "no faults" opt out, should either party feel this is necessary and we will simply start the process again and re-match at the earliest opportunity.

## **Scope and Boundaries of the Relationship**

There are many ways in which you and your business can work together and your style will probably develop over time. However, before you start mentoring, you and your business will need to think about what you want from the mentoring relationship. You should also consider the scope and boundaries of the mentoring relationship, which suits you.

Some things worth considering are:

- The amount of time you are willing to give?
- When are you available for mentoring - during or after working hours?
- Does your time come in one-hour slots or half-day periods?
- Are you contactable by phone or e-mail?
- Do you prefer sessions to be formal or informal?
- Would you prefer the sessions to be structured or open to what emerges on the day?
- How much are you aware of your own style or approach?

## **Confidentiality and Ethics**

Everyone involved in the mentoring relationship shares the responsibility for maintaining an ethical approach. This covers confidentiality to protect sensitive and personal information and the right of businesses to make their own decisions. Other basic values that underpin mentoring include integrity, treating people with respect, honesty, and the importance of being non-judgemental.

All those involved in a mentoring relationship will be expected to sign a "confidentially agreement" to protect both the mentor's and business's interests and information.

## **Who is your Business?**

You will be given as much information as possible about your business before being asked to make a decision about whether or not you would like to mentor them, prior to your first meeting. This detailed information will be obtained from an assessment meeting carried out by Business Mentoring, before any business is accepted onto the programme.

The information will include a brief history of the business, their growth barriers, their short and long-term goals, the skills, experience and background they would ideally like their mentor to possess and equally important the personality they would best relate to in a mentor.

## **Support**

Mentor Awareness and Networking Events are organised to give the Mentors guidance and a greater insight into the Role of the Mentor. However, one to one support can be derived from contacting the Business Mentoring Team.

#### 4. During the match

If you go into a relationship believing that you are going to enjoy and benefit from the time you spend together, then you probably will.

You set the tone for the mentoring relationship from the very first time you meet your business or speak on the phone. You are most likely to build rapport quickly if you are welcoming and your business feels you are listening and are on their wavelength. Your business needs to feel that you understand and respect their circumstances, feelings, priorities and pace.

##### **Your First Formal Meeting**

We suggest a formal meeting is arranged in quick succession following the first informal meeting. This is in order to establish the relationship and agree objectives. At this stage there is still a "no faults" opt out clause should either party feel uncomfortable about proceeding, or doubt whether they would be able to work together and achieve positive results. The most important element in a mentoring relationship is mutual trust and respect and the initial meeting will highlight whether or not you are going to be compatible in this way. Following these initial meetings you should be in agreement as to how you will proceed to achieve the best results during the period of your match.

Practically, this means that before your first meeting you should consider the best venue, check it is going to be quiet, private, and comfortable and that you have allocated sufficient time away from any unnecessary interruptions.

*A suggested agenda for the first formal meeting:*

- Agree in advance how long the first meeting will be and adhere to this.
- Is there any previous experience of mentoring or of being mentored
- If required by the business, briefly describe what you understand your role to be.
- Discuss your business's circumstance, aims and expectations.
- Clarify what both of you have agreed to do before the next meeting.
- Agree date and place of next meeting, and outline "agenda" you want to set.

*What do you want out of the first formal meeting?*

The main outcome you will both want from the first formal meeting is an agreement on the scope and boundaries for the relationship. You will find it helpful if you both come to the meeting having prepared your own thoughts on this. The meeting will allow you to understand what you both want and expect from the mentoring relationship, and to see how this fits together.

At this meeting you should agree commitment and the overall aims and objectives for the relationship and also roles and responsibilities for specific aspects of the relationship so these can be achieved. Your aims need to be discussed at the outset; otherwise your relationship may lack focus and direction. The business needs to think about what you, as a mentor can do to help.

## **Practical Issues**

Together, you and your business need to agree guidelines on the practicalities of meeting and how you will work with each other.

The checklist below sets out some of the things you might wish to consider.

## **Procedural Issues**

- How often will you meet?
- How long are the sessions to be?
- Where will you meet - in or out of work?
- Will you go to your business or vice versa?
- What are the arrangements for cancellations?
- How will you collate and record information so you can feedback your progress to the mentoring programme administration?
- Will there be access to your business by phone or e-mail?
- **Action Planning**

It would be helpful to approach the mentoring relationship in the same way as you do in your business. You may be able to help your business achieve their objectives by adopting the same professional approach relating to objective setting and action planning.

## **5. Challenges and Pitfalls - Handy Hints Is**

### **the relationship ready to finish?**

Your business may prefer the mentoring to gradually reduce, rather than finishing abruptly, to ensure that they have regular opportunities to review progress and indicate a wish whether to continue or not. Sometimes a mentoring relationship will start with an agreement on a particular length of time. Business Mentoring will support your relationship for up to a year, after that it is up both parties whether they want to continue on an informal basis or not, or there may still be outstanding objectives still to be achieved.

### **You may both to be ready to move on when:**

Your business has largely achieved all the aims you originally set.

- Your business now asks more questions than you do.
- Your business cannot think of any significant new topics or aims to cover at present.
- You both sometimes struggle to find new issues to talk about.
- Your business now tackles most situations confidently without needing your help.

- Your business can cope more than adequately if you were to stop meeting.
- Your business can often predict what you will say next.
- You are increasingly using your business as a sounding board for you own issues.
- You appear to be getting too dependent on each other for support.

### **If its not working effectively**

If you and your business have not been able to work together effectively, you may decide to terminate the relationship early. It is important not to assign fault to either side if the relationship fails. Use this as an opportunity to help the business be clear about the type of mentor they would like to work with. Also the business mentoring team may be able to suggest ways to finish together on a positive note to ensure both of you learn from the experience.

All mentors and businesses can experience difficulties particularly in the early stages.

### **Pitfalls and Possible Solutions**

*Roles and responsibilities are unclear:*

- Spend some time in a session clarifying roles.

*You feel vague about what you are meant to be achieving:*

- Established with your business a clear realistic purpose for the mentoring as a whole. Agree an agenda for each session.

*Your business is not contributing much to the sessions and expects you to come up with all the suggestions*

- You may be using a very directive style in which case you will need to re-evaluate your approach as a mentor. A rule of thumb is to listen more than you talk. If you are putting more energy into the relationship than the business, consider sitting back more. Businesses learn more affectively by setting their own agenda, finding their own solutions at their own pace and by making their own mistakes.

*You experience a lack of chemistry between you and the business:*

- Find ways to improve communication and find areas of common interest. No one is to blame if a relationship does not work and your business can use the experience to identify more clearly, exactly what they are looking for in a mentor.

*Your business appears to be dependant on you:*

- At the start you need to give a lot of guidance and support, but aim to reduce this as the mentoring relationship grows and the businesses confidence increases.
- Return business's questions back to them and make clear that you are not an expert on the subject, (unless you are). Encourage them to keep a diary to reflect on what they have learned. Support them to set the agenda and decide their own targets. As your relationship develops, increase the time-span between sessions and encourage them to use resources other than yourself.

*You feel uncomfortable challenging your business:*

- Ideally your mentor's role should include basic feedback skills. Remember to confine feedback to specific observed behaviour and balance positive with negative.

*You feel uncomfortable when your business talks about emotional matters or is franker than is usual in other work relationships:*

- Everyone has their own level of comfort when dealing with emotions. Discuss this with your business, keeping the focus on them. If emotional issues are important for the business, they may need to find another mentor.

*Your business tells you something that you believe has serious implications outside of the mentoring relationship:*

- Discuss this with the Mentoring Team, as in some cases you may be bound by law to take appropriate action.
- This in itself need not be a problem if both parties have agreed boundaries to cover such situations at the start of the relationship.

## **6. Review - After**

Reflection and review are important parts of mentoring which many busy people do not make time for. Build in some time from the beginning for the business to reflect on what they have got from the session, what was useful and what was less useful. You may also like to share what you have gained.

Ask your business whether they are feeling sufficiently challenged, getting into issues sufficiently deeply, or meeting frequently enough. If you agreed stages of achievement or milestones at the outset, you will both know whether you have made measurable progress or not.

### **Reviewing your relationship**

Review with your business, to check that you are both finding the relationship useful, as to learn from your shared experiences are extremely valuable. Reviews can be formal or informal. Aim to create an atmosphere where your business feel comfortable expressing views on all aspects of the mentoring.

- How will you and your business check that everything is going well in the relationship on an ongoing basis?
- What will you both do if things are not going well?
- How will you both end the relationship if either thinks it is not working?
- How do you both think you will finish if everything goes well?

Whatever form your review takes at the end of the relationship, you and your business will benefit from reviewing your original expectations and aims against actual outcomes.

### **Assessing your own effectiveness**

Expect to learn and develop from being a mentor. To get the most benefit you can ask for feedback on your performance from the mentoring team as well as your business. Exchange experiences with other mentors, as long as it is within the bounds set by confidentiality. You will need to allocate time however brief, to assessing the impact of your behaviour, values and beliefs of your mentoring relationship.

**You are probably working effectively when:**

- Your business achieves their aims.

Your business thanks you.

- The colleague of and ex-business asks you to mentor them too.
- Your business wants to proceed to a new stage of development with you as a mentor.
- You are asked to support other mentors.
- Your business admits that you were help even though they did not appreciate it at the time.

**Keeping a Mentors Diary**

A diary helps you reflect on your experiences. You can learn a lot from things that go wrong. You can also learn from things that go well by understanding what you did and applying this learning again in the future.

Your contribution to the mentoring programme is valuable to us and we want your experience as a mentor to be a happy one. So any information you give us that can assist in supporting you and the business community to improve things now and in the future is greatly appreciated. Likewise as we look at making improvement to the programme will keep you informed on a regular basis.