Radcliffe Department of Medicine

Mentoring Scheme

Radcliffe Department of Medicine Mentoring scheme:

Promoting cultural change towards gender equality and increasing retention at all levels via an inclusive Departmental mentoring scheme.

Executive Summary:

This scheme was initiated following a staff survey and our enrolment in the Athena Swan initiative. Launched in 2014, the scheme is open to all staff categories and postgraduate students, and offers one-to-one mentoring partnerships on a wide range of issues (from career progression to work life balance and relationships at work).

What are your goals?

The Radcliffe Department of Medicine (RDM) is a mega department in the University of Oxford Medical Sciences Division, composed of more than 700 staff and postgraduate students. At launch we were aiming for 10% enrolment of RDM for the 1st year, but already reached 20% after just 10 months. We are looking to create a cohesive identity for this large Department, which was established several years ago when other Divisions merged together, to then impact positively on culture change and effectively promote gender equality and achieve better staff retention.

Who was involved:

Two senior members of the Department's Strategic team, Professor Alison Banham Head of NDCLS and a trained Springboard mentor, as well as the current scheme coordinator wrote the handbook and designed the registration and exit forms. Seven committee members were then recruited from different staff groups, ensuring that representation from each of the Divisions of the new Department and gender balance were respected.

Policies, procedures and processes used

Our approach:

•Including postgraduate students, administration & support staff: promoting inclusivity, culture change and retention at all levels

•Mentees and mentors can ask to join at any time (the only requirement is for mentors to have at least 1 year's experience of the University)

•1-to-1 mentoring

•Personal and family-friendly matters are included, not only professional development

•Mentees are asked to rank a set of mentors' biographies before being matched by the Committee

Practicalities:

•Mentor training sessions offered at launch

•Virtual resource library available for scheme members to consult and expand their skills

•Online registration and exit forms (mentor and mentee)

•Matches reviewed by the Committee every 2 months (flexibility offered)

•Mentors' biographies updated annually

•Relationship status checked annually

Systems

Data collection is made via CVS files generated from web-based forms. We analyse everything in Excel. We gather data for both mentors and mentees to enable:

1. Better understanding of current staff issues
2. Enhanced interpersonal skills (positive feedback)
3. CV enhancement

The RDM Mentoring Committee is a key component to the success of our scheme, as the 7 members are very much involved in promoting the benefits to staff and students in their Divisions and/or staff groups. The Head of Department, Professor Hugh Watkins, also promotes the scheme at the annual Departmental Symposium where staff are also available on the day to field any questions about the scheme

1. Membership is for two years (renewable)
2. Gender balanced
3. Mix of administration, research & support roles across RDM

As the scheme coordinator, Michaella Smart is responsible for data gathering and analysis, maintenance and updating, customer service, committee servicing, publicity and strategic planning for sustainability. This post a part-time role additional to the named individual's HR role in RDM.

Challenges:

Enrolling senior staff members can be a challenge. However, by identifying at the start a few senior staff who were genuinely interested in mentoring and letting them promote the scheme to their peers, we managed to enrol more from this specific group. A specific invitation was also emailed to senior staff by the Head of Department.

Often mentees would by default opt to be mentored by much more senior staff. We recognise however that a mentor at the next career stage from the mentee's current position can be more beneficial than a senior mentor. Our rationale is that recently promoted staff will have a more up-to-date understanding of the current funding situations and career routes.

We therefore purposely send biographies from an array of staff at different stages of their careers who might be more relevant to the registered purpose of the mentee's request.

In the longer term, complex data analysis will require a more robust system than our actual Excel-based system. This is something we are still working on. Gathering exit data can also be difficult given that when staff leave the university, it is not their main priority and we would usually lose contact. We are mitigating the risk by regularly checking on mentoring relationship statuses, looking at HR data to identify leavers for staff and using exit interviews to remind staff to complete their exit questionnaires.

Outcome:

April 2017 will be the third anniversary of the scheme. So far, we maintained around 20% participation across the Department (staff and students). We are increasing our students' participation and we have also collaborated with other Departments and with a student society called OxFEST, matching some of our mentors and mentees outside of RDM. By doing so, we are able to respond to niche needs from some mentees, but also, we can guarantee matches to more mentors thus sustaining interest and satisfaction levels from our members.

We are in the process of transferring the web-based content of our scheme to a new system, and we are looking at making the information and support more interactive to enhance the experience. This would include a podcast, some interactive training material and a growing virtual library.

The feedback we have received so far is positive (89% of participants recommend the scheme – 2016 staff survey) and seems to show a real impact on career progression and goal achievements set by the mentees. We are hoping to investigate whether benefits in terms of re-grading and promotion can be objectively linked to staff participation in the scheme.

Supporting Visuals or Quotes:

"*My mentor has been absolutely fantastic, so I can't thank her enough for her time and valuable advice throughout the year. She has helped me expand my network of contacts in other departments, which I am sure will be useful for career progression in the future. Overall, I would give the RDM Mentoring Scheme 10/10. It's a great initiative and I am really thankful to the department for organising it.*"

"*My mentor was really friendly and helpful and I would definitely recommend her as a mentor. I knew I could always ask for her advice and ideas for possible career options after my DPhil and she also put me in touch with people she knows in industry who I could also contact and ask questions, which was extremely useful. I appreciate the effort put in both by my mentor and also the RDM mentoring scheme.*"

"*I have found the mentoring process incredibly useful and beneficial. I was able to explore different career roles, and gained an insight into the role of a Laboratory Manager. My mentor encouraged me to be pro-active in gaining relevant skills. My confidence increased as he encouraged me to approach different people within the university that were also able to offer guidance.*"