BSc (Hons) in Applied Software Engineering

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Mentor Handbook

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Contents

1   Introduction

This handbook provides information and instructions for workplace mentors who will be supporting a student throughout their work-based learning. This handbook is here to help guide mentors through the mentoring process, including choosing a suitable mentor for the student and supporting both the student and mentor. Students will also receive a copy of this document.

2   Mentoring

The word "mentor" originally comes from Greek mythology. Ulysses, before setting out on an epic voyage, entrusted his son to the care and direction of his old and trusted friend, Mentor. During the course of history the word has become linked with "experienced and trusted adviser" (Oxford English Dictionary), friend, teacher and wise person.

A good mentor will:

- Complement the skills of the student in being experienced in areas that the student might not.

- Be a senior supervisor to the student or on equal ground, but aid in steering the student's career through both the good and the challenging times.

- Be seen as a wise, experienced friend, or close contact to the student to provide assistance where required.

- Help the student to see the greater picture and understand the organisation from different perspectives.

Together, the mentor and student will benefit, as mentoring:

- Allows people to learn in a comprehensive, productive and non-threatening manner.

- Is one of the fastest growing approaches to developing a student's skills and is rapidly becoming fundamental to a student's development portfolio.

- Can be a powerful tool for improving motivation and increasing job satisfaction.

- Demonstrates the commitment of the organisation to staff development and retention.

- Maximises academic development and learning within the workplace.

Finally, a good mentoring programme will:

- Provide motivation, encouragement and inspiration for both the student and the mentor.

- Help the student find ways to overcome immediate and prevalent difficulties.

- Help the student to plan a long-term career strategy through assessing progress and setting objectives.

3 Benefits

A mentoring scheme provides a number of benefits for both the student and the mentor:

3.1 For the Mentor

- Improves the mentor's contentment and satisfaction in their employment.

- Helps the mentor and the company to identify the future potential within an individual.

- Helps the mentor develop skills in counselling, coaching and motivating.

- Prompts a review of the mentor's own thoughts of creativity and inspiration.

- Enhances the process for learning and career development within the workplace.

3.2 For the Student

- Helps the student cope with ongoing change and the increasing complexity and challenge of the workplace.

- Broadens the perspectives of the student and their workplace abilities.

- Allows the student simple and formal access to a person with greater experience, who can provide comprehensive assistance.

- Helps improve the student's self-confidence and self-esteem in achieving objectives.

- Gives the student insight into both the formal and informal structure of the company from an alternative viewpoint.

4 Allocating a Mentor

Picking the right person to be a mentor is an important job. The line manager of the student (i.e. the person in the workplace to whom the student reports), in consultation with the human resources manager and the academic tutor, should decide on an appropriate person for mentoring purposes. They will be encouraged to discuss the selection of a work-based mentor with their line manager before the line manager meets with the academic tutor. Ideally, the mentor should have knowledge of the work involved.

Factors in selecting a mentor:

- Superior teacher.

- Strong motivator.

- Responsive to a student's needs and objectives.

Questions which could be asked:

- How does the organisation judge the mentor?

- Is the mentor getting support from higher sources?

- How powerful and active is the mentor?

- Is the mentor secure in providing support in his or her position?

See Appendix 1 for a checklist for choosing a mentor.

5   Training a Mentor

The work-based learning mentor has an important role in improving and enhancing the student's learning experience. The primary function of the mentor is to facilitate the student in making the connection between academic learning and practice in the workplace.

Mentors will undergo induction and training within the roles they are required to undertake. Topics within the mentor training programme include:

- The nature and structure of the course.

- Work-based learning and the role of the mentor in support and guidance.

- The role of the mentor in learner support and motivation.

- The role of the academic tutor as the main point of contact.

- Mentor involvement and input in meetings.

- Assessment strategies and work-based portfolio modules.

- Ethics and health and safety.

Beyond this, the university will monitor the engagement between mentors, students and academic tutors throughout the student's programme of study to ensure quality and consistency of support across the programme.

6   The Mentoring Agreement

A written agreement will exist between the mentor and the student, in order to establish the objectives of the mentoring process. This written agreement (Appendix 2) includes a list of expectations of the student and mentor. This must be signed at the start of the student's programme of study.

A date when the agreement or arrangement should end will be stated; however normally the arrangement should operate and be reviewed after 12 months.

7   Dealing with an Unsuccessful Mentoring Relationship

Should the mentor and student relationship not be successful, the student can request at any stage for the arrangements to be terminated; this should be raised with the human resources manager of the employing organisation. They will review the matter with both the mentor and the student and, where appropriate, identify an alternative mentor.

8   At the First Meeting

At the first meeting the mentor and the student should go through the roles and sign the Mentoring Agreement (Appendix 2).

Discussion points:

- Mentor's experience within the student's work-based learning area.

- The student's expectations of what the mentor should be doing for them.

- Discussion of the activities which form the basis of the work-based portfolio modules.

- Preferred methods of communication between mentor, student and academic tutor.

- Arrange a date for meeting with the academic tutor.

- Frequency of meetings.

- The signing of the Mentoring Agreement.

9   Work-Based Learning Roles

In order to ensure the success of work-based learning, it is important to recognise that each person involved in learner mentoring has an important role to play. The roles and responsibilities of the academic tutors, employer, mentor and student need to be made clear at the start of the mentoring process. This needs to be established at an initial meeting.

9.1   The Student

Unlike traditional classroom-based teaching, where your academic tutor can keep your engagement in the learning activities under constant observation, work-based learning relies on you having the maturity and self-motivation to complete assigned tasks and activities. You have an opportunity to influence the depth of learning that you achieve. It is a clear case of "the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it". Take the opportunity to question your education team (mentor and tutor). Remember, the syllabus is a starting point and is not intended to constrain you.

As your work-based work over the first two years will be in the form of a portfolio of evidence, it is vital that you keep good up-to-date records of your work.

Ensure that you understand the tasks assigned to you. If you are not sure, seek clarification as soon as possible.

If due to unforeseen circumstances it becomes apparent that a task is not achievable, this must be brought to the attention of your mentor and your academic tutor at the earliest opportunity.

You will need to establish a very good working relationship with your mentor.

Your mentor is there to help you achieve your potential. You will need to:

- Listen to the advice given by your mentor.

- Be honest with your mentor – if you are stuck say so.

- Pay attention to the agreements you make regarding your work-based learning activities – do not become side-tracked.

- Keep your mentor informed of your progress.

9.2   The Mentor

The mentor is an employee within the company, and their primary role is to help the student develop their knowledge and skills within the workplace. In general, the mentor's role will be to:

- Ensure suitable supervision is in place whilst the student undertakes work-based learning activities.

- Provide guidance and encouragement to the student.

- Facilitate the procurement of resources required for the work-based learning activities within the organization.

- Liaise with the academic tutor and provide feedback regarding the student's progress.

- Attend mentor training.

9.3   The Employer

It is expected that students will be employed within a wide variety of organisations, from small – even micro – local companies to large multi-national companies. As such, employers will find that they may have a single or several students engaged in the programme at any one time. Larger organisations may have dedicated training/development departments, which may act as the sponsor for the students in which case the employer roles may be spread over several personnel. In smaller companies there may be a single person performing all of the employer roles. However, in all cases, the following employer roles / responsibilities are envisaged:

- To ensure that the student has the opportunity to attend all agreed lectures at the University (this is expected to be one afternoon and evening per week during term time).

- To provide access to the facilities identified and agreed (between the student, mentor and academic tutor) to allow the student time to complete the assigned work-based learning tasks.

- To provide a mentor for each student with the suitable skill levels.

- To allow the mentor:
    - Time for mentor training.
    - Time for supervising and providing feedback to the student.
    - Time and opportunity for providing feedback to the academic tutor.

9.4   The Academic Tutor

The academic tutor will:

- Ensure that a suitable mentor has been assigned for each student.

- Ensure that the mentor receives mentor training.

- Ensure that a contract in the form of a mentor allocation and agreement (Appendices 1 and 2) is in place between the University, employer, mentor and student outlining the scope and requirements of the work-based learning activities.

- Set goals for the mentoring process.

- Ensure that the mentor is fully aware of the expected outcome from the work-based learning activity (i.e. assessment criteria etc.).

- Provide access to any University tools required by the student or mentor.

- Liaise with the mentor on a regular basis (arranging at least two face-to-face meetings per year to review progress and any issues arising).

Appendix 1: Work-Based Learning Contract

This contract must be signed at the start of the programme, and copies will be will be kept by the mentor, the student and the academic tutor.

BSc in Applied Software Engineering
Allocation of Work-Based Learning Mentor

Company Name: _____

Employee's Name: _____

Mentor's Name: _____

Mentor's Tel: _____

Mentor's Email: _____

Mentor Checklist

Questions	Yes	No
The allocated mentor has a professional understanding of the business and how the BSc degree course applies to the business.		
The mentor is aware of the required mentor training as outlined in Section 5 of the Mentor Handbook.		
The employer and mentor are aware of the commitment required of the mentor and the student.		

Signed (Employer): _____   Date: _____

Signed (Mentor): _____   Date: _____

Appendix 2: Mentoring Agreement

This contract must be signed at the start of the programme, and copies will be will be kept by the mentor, the student and the academic tutor.

BSc in Applied Software Engineering
Mentoring Agreement

The Student agrees to:

- Contact the mentor when experiencing problems with either the work-based learning assignments or the actual job.

- Contact the mentor after receiving feedback from tutors about any assessment related to work-based learning, either face-to-face or by email within a week of receiving feedback.

- Respond to any mentor emails within three days of receiving them, except in cases where the student is on leave and the mentor has been made aware of that leave.

- Adhere to the University code of practice for the use of electronic communication.

The Mentor agrees to:

- Respond to any meeting requests from the student within one week, this could be simply to acknowledge the meeting request and give a future date beyond that first week for the meeting to actually occur.

- Provide an initial response to an email communication within one day, and to fully respond to any emails from the student within three to four working days of receiving them, except in cases where the mentor is on leave and the student has been made aware of that leave. Where the leave is longer than two weeks a substitute mentor should be made available to the student.

- Adhere to the University code of practice for the use of electronic communication.

Signed (Student): _____ Date: _____

Signed (Mentor): _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Work-Based Learning Contract

This contract must be signed at the start of the programme, and copies will be will be kept by the mentor, the student and the academic tutor.

BSc in Applied Software Engineering
Work-Based Learning Contract

Work-Based Learing Aim:

The student will demonstrate the relevance of their academic study to their workplace.

To this aim, tasks will be specified for each of the six co-requisite modules (per year) which are relevant to the academic content of the module and applicable to the working environment of the students. For each such module, typically two tasks will be specified and the student will be required to complete one from each module for a total of six per year. The tasks will be varied in nature and could include:

- Reports, for example, evaluating an aspect of the workplace, or proposing a development or project for the workplace; typically ranging between 1000 and 4000 words.

- A practical exercise developing a program, web page, database or the use of other software packages relevant to the student's workplace.

- Mathematical/logical/algorithmic exercises relating to activities carried out in the workplace.

- Case studies relevant to the workplace; typically ranging between 1000 and 4000 words.

The selection of tasks will be made in collaboration with the student, tutor and mentor to ensure that an appropriate balance of assessment types is carried out that is suitably relevant to the student's individual working environment.

The student is expected to complete two tasks over the course of each teaching session. A review session will take place between the student, mentor and tutor at the end of each teaching session to ensure that two tasks have been completed and added to the student's portfolio, and that the student has received formative feedback on their efforts on these tasks.

If this agreement is terminated on the grounds of redundancy, or if for any reason the employer is unable to meet the terms of this agreement, all parties will use their best endeavours using local networks and contracts, to ensure that the apprentice is given the opportunity to transfer to another employer who will be able to provide continuity for the apprentice, to complete his/her learning plan.

Signed (Student): _____   Date: _____

Signed (Mentor): _____   Date: _____

Signed (Academic Tutor): _____   Date: _____

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