



## ***Steps to Success: The SLA Mentoring Scheme***

### **Pre-Support material for mentors**

#### **A) The role of a mentor**

Mentoring can be very challenging as well as rewarding. It will mean a commitment to building a relationship and being responsible for the success of the mentoring process.

The role will entail helping a fellow school librarian by being available as:

- A good listener
- A positive role model
- A catalyst for change in that person's life
- A friend who can offer appropriate criticism where necessary
- An experienced adviser
- Someone who can help the mentee celebrate their successes

You may also find that in order to be a good mentor you will need to hold back on your own opinions and strategies for dealing with issues and help your mentee develop their own answers. Your role can then be to ensure that the answers are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) and will really address the problems that the mentee has identified.

#### **B) Key skills/attributes of a mentor**

A good mentor will need these key skills/attributes:

- The ability to really listen and understand the issues affecting the mentee
- A commitment to confidentiality
- An ability to empathise and really care about the mentee, their growth and development
- A wide range of knowledge and experience that they are prepared to share with the mentee
- An enthusiasm for school libraries and school librarians

- A willingness to challenge another's thinking and assumptions without insisting that their way is the right way to think and act

*Sharing knowledge, experience and insight with an equal is not the same as training, or giving information and advice that leaves the other person dependent, grateful or indebted*

GRAHAM WILLCOCKS and STEVE MORRIS **Developing people through mentoring** Select Knowledge Limited 2001

Take a look at <http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/become-a-coachmentor.aspx>

Try answering the questions in the *Draft Mentor Diagnostic Constructs* by Andrew Gibbons, an article on the mentoring and coaching website

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/information-portal/Articles/ViewArticle.asp?artId=64>

It may help you decide if you have all the skills needed to be an effective mentor. Do not worry if you are unable to answer 'yes' to all the questions – the mentoring process is a learning experience for the mentor as well as the mentee. For a light hearted look at how not to mentor have a look at the *Twelve Habits of the Toxic Mentor* by David Clutterbuck on the same site –

<https://www.davidclutterbuckpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/12-habits-of-a-Toxic-Mentor.pdf>

- it can be very useful as a check to stop any bad habits creeping in. Remember – the perfect mentor does not exist but if you have a real desire to help and the willingness to commit to the process you and your mentee will be able to learn and develop together.

### **C) Active listening**

Active listening is a good skill to have when taking on a mentoring role. To be an active listener you will need to look interested and use different types of questions to encourage your mentee to continue speaking while you ensure you fully understand what they are saying. You will need to hold yourself back from prejudging before you have heard the whole of the message and really understood what your mentee is trying to convey. It can be a good idea when you have heard what you think is the complete story to restate it or paraphrase it and ask if you have got it right. To be a good listener you also need to stay calm and open minded and think about what you have heard before responding

### **D) Asking questions**

You will need a range of questioning techniques to effectively 'draw out' your mentee and get to the heart of what they are saying. When asking questions try to consider whether what you are asking will help your mentee explore their situation in more detail; whether it will help them identify their strengths and weaknesses and help them to increase their personal awareness.

The two main types of questions are open and closed questions:

Closed questions are useful when you want a 'yes/no' answer, to gain factual information or to decide between two alternatives.

Open questions allow the mentee to answer in their own way, encourage feedback and reflection, establish rapport and put people at their ease.

If you want to look at questioning in more depth and explore further techniques try reading E.Parsloe and M.Wray *Coaching and Mentoring – practical methods to improve learning*. Kogan Page, 2000

## **E) Giving feedback**

Good practice in giving feedback is probably the most important part of the whole mentoring process. Giving and receiving honest and constructive feedback is crucial for the relationship between mentor and mentee to develop.

Feedback should always be constructive and should always be helpful to the person receiving it. To be helpful, the person receiving it needs to understand the feedback, accept it, and be able to do something with the information. They should be able to move forward with the new knowledge and be able to act on it, be encouraged by it or have increased confidence because of it.

Positive feedback can have a profound effect on your mentee making them feel valued, increasing their confidence and their motivation. If you make your feedback positive and conditional, i.e. specific about qualities or achievements, you will enable your mentee to recognise their strengths and, by extension, this can also help them see areas where they need to develop further.

Honest feedback does not have to be negative, even when you are pointing out a perceived weakness in someone else, if you make it clear it is the behaviour and not the person which is causing difficulties and you invite the recipient to give their reaction so they can state their case and you have the opportunity to see things from their point of view. You can then decide between you what steps or actions could be taken to help the mentee turn the situation into a positive experience, which will enable them to grow in confidence and self esteem.