

Transition mentoring 2012

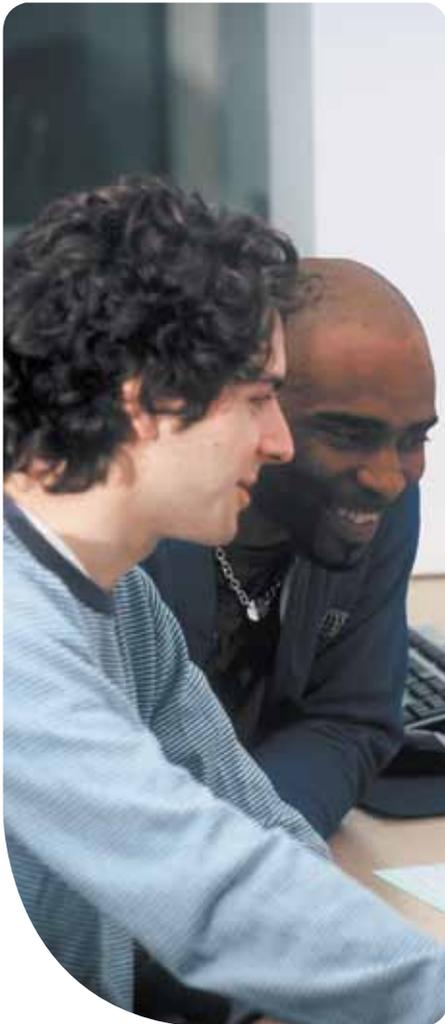
Mentee's Manual





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Why do we need mentors?

Birkbeck is a unique institution allowing people to study part time whilst fulfilling other commitments, such as work, family and social life.

As a result, many students find it difficult to adjust to part time study. Students are at most risk of dropping out of their course during their first year. Many students find it particularly hard to successfully navigate the first few weeks of their course, familiarising themselves with the different learning and teaching approaches, getting used to new people and generally feeling comfortable in the university environment.

Mentors are there to help new undergraduate students ease the transition into the HE environment, allowing them to address their concerns with a fellow student who has progressed into the second year and whose experiences they can learn from.

Mentors are often perceived by new students as a less intimidating, friendly source of information. Do you remember what it was like when you first started at university? The students that you will be working with will have similar fears and misconceptions about life in higher education which relate to some, if not all, of the issues below.

Academic

- » Some students may have been out of education for a long time and therefore feel unfamiliar in the university setting.
- » Students may not know what is expected of them, e.g. essays and exams.
- » Much of university life is now 'virtual' e.g. course information and readings are available online.

For less IT literate students this can be particularly daunting.

- » New students may have difficulty learning independently. Their last education experience may have been at school or sixth form. Studying for a degree is a big transition from this.
- » Many new students will need advice on organisation and time management skills. This is particularly the case when trying to meet the first deadline of the year.

Personal

Due to the nature of studying in the evenings, there are a number of barriers that can affect people's ability to learn:

- » Worries about spending time away from families or children and/or dealing with the simultaneous demands of family and friends
- » Work life may get in the way e.g. an unsupportive employer, shift work or getting time off to study.
- » Financial worries. Fees, study materials and other university related costs can mount, leading to concerns about whether they can carry on.
- » Some students will have physical, mental or learning disabilities. They will need to receive additional support from the disability office.
- » Stress in students' personal life will affect their ability to study.
- » Adjusting to studying having not studied for a long period of time.
- » Worries about not 'belonging'; this is especially true if they are the first in the family, group of friends or community to go to university



- » Disorientation – physical orientation can take some students longer than others.
- » Students may also struggle to get used to the library and IT resources – which are likely to be different to what they have experienced before.

Administrative

- » Learning how to use various systems and getting used to College processes may take a while.
- » Universities rely on students being pro-active for example using email to communicate and to ask questions. Students whose IT skills are not very strong may struggle to begin with.

Benefits of mentoring

For mentors

- » Further develop their communication and interpersonal skills.
- » Improve their own learning and reflect on achievements.
- » Gain personal satisfaction in the knowledge that they have helped a fellow student.
- » Gain insight into alternative perspectives.
- » Share their insights and experiences in a productive way and to benefit others.
- » Further develop their professional network.
- » Impress future employers with taking on extra-curricular responsibilities.

For mentees

- » Getting reassurance that others have struggled at the beginning too but managed to successfully move on.
- » Having an opportunity to ask questions in an informal setting – feeling less exposed when asking ‘minor’ questions.
- » Getting practical and relevant help.
- » Having a contact already in a new (and possibly daunting) environment.
- » Gaining a sense of belonging in the new institution.
- » Gaining a sense of the kind of skills that they will need in order to succeed.
- » Gaining confidence as students.



What will be expected of you as a mentee?

- » If you are asking a question don't expect your mentor to have the answers to everything. They will aim to find out the answer as best as they can.
- » Be willing to engage with the online tutorials of our Get Ahead: Stay Ahead website (www.bbk.ac.uk/get-ahead) which allow you to practise a range of skills.
- » Be reliable. As with all meetings, if you need to cancel, or are running late, remember to let your mentor and peer mentee(s) know.
- » As with any personal or professional relationship, you should treat your fellow mentee(s) and mentor with consideration and respect and you can expect the same from them. You should find that you have some things in common with your mentee(s) and mentor, but do also be sensitive to any differences. Diversity in age, background and experience can be very positive aspects of the mentoring relationship, and whatever your differences, you will find some common ground in the shared "student experience".
- » Please aim to respond to your mentor and fellow mentee(s) who will be in touch at least once a week.
- » If you have established good contacts with the other mentees in your group we would strongly encourage you to stay in touch and work together regularly even after the actual mentoring period has ended. Students who study with their peers tend to be more successful.



What mentors can help with

- » Trying to ensure that the mentee(s) have their most urgent questions addressed – either by answering them or by referring to the relevant experts.
- » Helping to ensure that the mentee(s) are organised at the beginning of term, including time management.
- » Discussing how best to address issues that arose as part of working through the Get Ahead: Stay Ahead tutorials (www.bbk.ac.uk/ahead).

What mentors can't help with

Mentors' role is not to act as a tutor or in a professional support role. As such we would not want them to:

- » Deal with detailed academic enquiries. This will need to be the role of the academic tutor.
- » Take on responsibility for mentee(s)' personal problems. If you struggle with a personal problem or with your course you may want to talk to one of our counsellors in the Birkbeck Students' Union.
- » Do the work for their mentees including the handing out essays or other pieces of coursework that you have written during your first year. Students are helped by talking about their struggles with course work but not by copying. You can practise your academic skills further by either talking to the Learning Support Officer in your School or in the Study Skills team.
- » Report to mentee(s)' tutors about their progress.

How much contact can you expect?

Your mentors have been asked to have at least two group meetings with you: one meeting in the first week and one meeting in the last week of the project. In the interim your mentor will be in

touch once a week via email. We would encourage you where possible to keep in touch with other mentees in your group as well.

Who to contact in case of a problem

If you experience a difficulty with your mentor please contact your mentoring coordinator in the first instance.



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