QUB Mentoring Scheme

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This initiative arose from the Women’s Forum, set up in September 1999 at the request of the Vice-Chancellor, to investigate gender issues at Queen’s.

Aim: To address the issue of gender imbalance at QUB by improving the profile and position of women within the university.
OVERVIEW: the first steps

- 8 seminars in a listening exercise in the course of spring 2000
- The Women’s Forum Report of May 2000
- Appointment of Gender Champion, July 2000
- Setting up of Gender Initiative office, Summer 2000
- QGI implements the findings of the Women’s Forum report and its 12 recommendations, in 3 stages, over 10 years
OVERVIEW: the recommendations of the report

1. Work-life balance
2. Initiatives:
   Ethnicity, Disability
3. Childcare
4. Advancement of all categories of staff
5. Mentoring
6. Networking
7. A voice
8. The culture
9. Equal pay
10. Targets & timetables
11. Resources
12. Publicity and Communications
ACTION: innovations of the Initiative

• Includes all the women in Queen’s

• Wide-ranging, long-lasting, holistic approach

• The listening exercises

• Total package of recommendations

• 23 Subgroups, each with a champion, covering all categories of staff

• Each subgroup produces reports and recommendations
ACTION: innovations of the Initiative

- **Route**: reports submitted to Governing Body through University Operating Board or University Management Board

- **Process**: pilot, evaluate, mainstream and monitor progress in all areas

- Implementing solutions to barriers identified by women

- Continually evolving and developing in new areas
ACTION: mainstreamed and integrated

- Maternity fund
- Paternity fund
- Equal pay audit
- Flexible working arrangements for clerical and technical staff
- Targets and timetables
- Independent staff counselling service
- Summer scheme
- Childcare developmental and advisory service
Strengths

- Support from the top
- Backing from below
- Enthusiasm of the champions
- A clear reporting route
- Not locked into line management
Mentoring Programme for Women at Queen’s University Belfast
Mentoring – Why?

Why?
Demand for mentoring scheme by academic women at Women’s Forum meetings
“Mentoring involves going above and beyond. It is a relationship in which a person with greater expertise and wisdom counsels, teaches, guides and helps another person to develop both personally and professionally.”

Gordon Shea Mentoring
Mentoring of women in H.E.: some examples

- Studying the Effects of Mentoring in Higher Education. HEDSA report (2002) (Damodaran, Gordon and Runcie)
  - Bristol pilot scheme (Hole 1997)
  - ATHENA projects (Universities of Nottingham and Loughborough)
- Imperial College ATHENA Scheme
- Australian National University (1997)
- Work in USA Universities from mid 1990s
Goals of QUB Mentoring Scheme

Establish a formal mechanism to encourage more senior women to provide advice and guidance on developing research ideas, seeking funding, teaching and administration to more junior colleagues.

The mentor may also be able to provide more personal assistance on issues that many women face in terms of decisions about family and children.
Specific mentoring goals

Career management
– help with career planning and goal setting

Self-reliance
– helping you take responsibility for your own career and developing confidence

Support
– encouraging and developing confidence

Learning
– acquiring knowledge, skills and experience.
Organisation of the Scheme

- Under auspices of Queen’s Gender Initiative
- Steering group of six senior academic women & staff developer
- Mentees and mentors matched very carefully
How matched?

**Questionnaire**
Mentees and mentors asked to complete a short questionnaire to establish what mentees wanted and what mentors could offer.

**Follow-up**
Brief, informal follow-up chats with both mentees and potential mentors to help match the pairs as best as possible.

**Matching**
Using questionnaires and follow-up information, matched as best as possible to meet most of the mentees wishes.
Preparation for being a mentor and mentee

• Handbook with ground rules, e.g.
  – number and length of meetings
  – setting agenda and goals
  – giving feedback and fulfilling promises

• Training sessions with consultant
The next steps

First - Training
Training day
Training delivered by Isabel Turnbull

Morning: Mentee training
Lunch: Mentees, mentors and others
Afternoon: Mentor training
The next steps

1. Regular meetings between mentees and mentors
   Venues – whatever suits the pair best

2. Meetings for mentees, mentors and others

3. Separate focus group meetings for mentees and mentors
Mentoring – the meetings

In general the meetings work best if they are structured. The following points are helpful for both parties to consider:

- Always set an agenda and action points.
- Think about what you want to achieve before you meet.
- Be proactive about arranging meetings and making requests.
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions.
- Set a date and time for the next meeting.
- Give feedback!
- Do what you promise to do
We recommend using a form with the following areas:

- Objectives of meeting (What do you hope to achieve? Why are you having the meeting?)
- Agenda (What are you going to discuss? Is there anything that you will need to prepare? Have you done everything you said you would?)
- Action Plan (including by whom and by when)
- Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting
- Feedback - What has gone well in the meeting, is going well in the mentoring eg what are you benefiting from, what do you find useful?
- What would make it even better?
Monitoring and Evaluation

• Informal monitoring by phone and e-mail by Mentoring Champion

• Evaluation process:
  – focus groups of mentees and mentors
  – questionnaires at end of scheme (first group only)

• Formal and informal feedback sessions
Schemes run so far

1. 2001-2002 12 Lecturers Grade B
2. 2002-2003 15 Lecturers Grade B; 13 SL/Reader
3. 2004-2005 13 Research Assistants; 3 Lecturers
4. 2005-2006 2 SLs; 11 lecturers; 1 nurse lecturer; 3 teaching fellows; 2 SRO/RO; 3 RAs
5. 2006-2007 2 SLs; 7 lecturers; 2 nurse lecturers; 1 teaching fellow; 2 RAs
Mainstreaming

- Mainstreaming: Professor (1 day/week) and administrator (0.5 day/week) seconded to mentoring.
- Current scheme was open to all female academics and contract researchers.
- Evolving: Due to demand by other categories of staff new schemes are being developed.
- Ran 1 pilot scheme for clerical/administrative staff 2006-2007, currently being evaluated.
Benefits for Mentees

• Gains in terms of career planning
• Gains in confidence
• Interactions with senior colleagues and with one another
• Got to know more about the workings of the university
• Overall – clear benefits for individual mentees:
  – e.g. promotion or job applications and research funding
Voices: mentees

“Gave me more confidence, less afraid of appearing to be ambitious, greater awareness of the politics of Faculty and insight in another department.”

“Have now mapped out a new career plan, have also started implementing some career moves, feel more confident about standing up for myself in front of senior academics.”

“Given me confidence, made me think critically about what I do, made me confront issues I would normally try to avoid, gave me hope.”
Voices: mentees

“I was lucky to be matched with a very friendly and open-minded mentor with whom I could share personal and professional experience.”

“Whole ethos was very good….Mentor has helped (me) to balance and to learn to say no, that things can wait”

“..feel a real sense of progress in my research and committee management”
Voices (senior mentees)

“My mentor is calm and wise and encouraged me to articulate ways in which... I could refresh parts of my academic life”

“She spent considerable time reading my c.v. and gave me good advice.. She has been very frank with me about her career and about what I need to do with mine”
Benefits for Mentors

• Feeling positive about giving something back and contributing to someone’s future
• Evaluating own career
• Learning how other Schools “work”
• Being valued professionally
• Developing skills (interpersonal, managerial, coaching, facilitating)
• Promoting a sense of community in University
Voices: mentors

“It’s been rewarding to help other colleagues, I feel I’ve also learned more about how QUB works. It has been great to meet other mentors and hear their experience/views of academe.”

“A feeling of giving something back. An insight into how things are done in another Faculty.”

“Has made me re-evaluate my own career strategy. Insight into how other Schools work.”

“The opportunity to reflect more critically about my own career pathway and some of the decisions I take.”
Voices: mentors

“My mentoring is going well and I am able to be a listening ear for someone who is in a difficult situation at the moment and also able to provide support by discussing hard decisions with her.”

“Mentoring has been a very positive experience for this mentor: thought-provoking, wonderful opportunity to make a new friend. I just wish I could actually do more for her”.

Voices: senior mentors

“I feel like a sounding board for issues that she may not want to discuss internally and I think the process is indeed forcing her to think through her own issues and possibilities”

“We found we were both seasoned and experienced QUB employees and therefore that the relationship was not so much one of mentor and mentee but one of mutual support.”
Evaluation - strengths

• Remarkable similarities between mentees’ and mentors’ responses
• Voluntary – women could opt in, outside line management appraisal
• Careful attention to matching
• Not school- or faculty–based
• Flexibility of the programme
• Enthusiasm of programme coordinator
• Impact in terms of networking and organisational climate (beyond benefits for individuals)
Mentees’ views on strengths

“Helps to build profile of women within the university. Forges links between academics at different stages of their careers.”

“Getting to know senior women. Finding how they survived and prospered. Getting inside information and insight into experiences.”

“Flexibility with regard to mentoring relationship, number of meetings, nature of meetings. Good not to have a fixed programme imposed.”
Mentors’ views on strengths

“It’s by women for women, supported by training, regular mentor meetings.”

“Should help to foster an atmosphere of interdependence within the university rather than individualism.”

“It fills a gap... it allows you to do something positive with your experience; opportunities to think critically and positively.”

“The commitment of the mentoring champion.”
Potential areas of concern

• Main difficulty: time constraints
• Concern about “interfering” in Schools?
• Important to distinguish mentoring, appraisal and management roles
• Some misconceptions re scheme in wider university community
• Some concerns about what would happen when the year was over
Reasons for not participating:
(potential mentors and mentees)

Very similar reasons for both junior and senior colleagues

• Time constraints, too busy, heavy workload, away a lot
• Perceived as not relevant
• Did not remember hearing about it
• Already ‘available’ to junior women in School/Faculty
• Attitude of colleagues could be negative
Views of Heads of School

Ranged from very positive to mixed to hostile. Many saw the potential of the scheme

However:

• Underlying purposes of the scheme were not clearly understood by many

• Concerns that it cuts across other forms of support which were felt to be adequate for staff development

• Not applicable because no women in the School
General Conclusions

- Goals were met: career planning, professional and personal support
- Work/life balance important: both groups
- Interviewing a key part of matching process
- Still an information gap and some general misconceptions about the scheme
- Enthusiasm for continuing / developing scheme and including other groups.
Suggested improvements...

- Broaden it to other categories of staff
- Get more senior women to mentor the current mentors
- Extend it – even to include male staff?
- More contact between mentees
- More flexibility about matching including using mentors from other academic institutions, government and business
- Organize a “drop-in” scheme for specific advice
Learning from QUB Scheme

- **Individual** goals of mentees largely met
- Mentors benefited from **reflection** and re-evaluation of their own careers.
- Networking a key strength.
- Matching, training, monitoring are vital
- **Voluntary** nature of programme is crucial.
- Importance of being **outside** of line management structure and appraisal.
- Importance of being a women’s programme?
Conclusion – the contribution to Queen’s

- Fulfils stated needs of women
- Fills a real gap
- Works with (not against) probation, appraisal and school-based mentoring
- Supports staff coming from outside N. Ireland
- Creates interdisciplinary connections in research and teaching
- Possibility of improving the organisational climate
What about women in SET?

- Since academic year 2001-2002, 93 women in SET have been mentors or mentees (58% of participants)

- 34% of these SET women have been promoted compared to 28% not on the scheme.
Awards to Queen’s Gender Initiative

In 2002, the University was awarded a Bronze grade overall in the Opportunity Now benchmarking exercise.

In 2003 Queen's was awarded the first Athena Award for the advancement of women in SET (£12K) and the presentation award (£1K). The University was awarded a Gold grade in the Opportunity Now benchmarking exercise.

In 2004, the University was awarded a Platinum grade overall in the Opportunity Now benchmarking exercise. This was the highest grade awarded to any entrant in the UK Higher Education sector, or to any entrant in Northern Ireland.
In 2005, the University was again awarded a Platinum grade overall in the Opportunity Now benchmarking exercise.

In 2006, the University won the Opportunity Now education sector award for the work of the Gender Initiative in improving the position and profile of women within the University. These national awards recognise employers from the private and public sectors who have made equality and inclusiveness a business imperative.

In 2007, Queen's was awarded an Athena silver SWAN award for excellence in science, engineering and technology employment in higher education.
I believe that our mentoring programme is helping Queen’s women emerge out of the shadows.

I believe that all staff should have the opportunity to join.