

Reverse mentoring in the legal profession

a practical toolkit for kickstarting an inclusive scheme

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 [Visit the project webpage](#)

Foreword

Listening, learning, and leading

The legal sector values expertise, tradition, and attention to detail. But to keep moving forward, we need to welcome new ideas, question old ways of thinking, and learn from people at all career stages. Reverse mentoring provides a unique opportunity to do just that — helping to break down hierarchies, bridge generational gaps, and create a more inclusive legal sector where people feel they belong.

At its core, reverse mentoring is about listening, learning, and leading. It gives senior professionals the chance to gain fresh insights from colleagues with different experiences, creating a workplace where all voices are valued. This isn't just about supporting junior colleagues, it's about recognising that knowledge flows in both directions. The more we engage in these conversations, the greater likelihood we have of moving the dial on creating more inclusive working environments in the legal sector and improving the culture in law.

This toolkit is such a valuable resource, especially for **HR, EDI teams, and senior leaders** looking to build more inclusive,

supportive workplaces. It provides clear, practical advice on how to set up and get the most out of reverse mentoring. By taking part, you're not only investing in your own growth, but you're also helping to shape a more inclusive, dynamic, and forward-thinking legal profession for the future.

Real progress begins with open and honest conversations. Whether you're stepping into the role of a mentor or a mentee, every discussion, insight, and shared experience has the power to challenge perspectives, break down barriers, and create lasting change.

It's important however to recognise that reverse mentoring is not in itself a solution, it should be viewed as a first step towards highlighting issues, identifying priorities and presenting an opportunity to make meaningful progress.

I. Stephanie Boyce,

Former President of the Law Society of England and Wales

Rationale



What is reverse mentoring?

Reverse mentoring has been around for a long time, becoming more popular recently in many fields, including law. Originally, it aimed to help different generations share knowledge about technology, but now it's more often used to explore equity, diversity, and inclusion topics in workplaces and other communities. It is adaptable to various situations and can be used to improve workplace culture, alongside other initiatives.

In more traditional mentoring relationships, a senior person guides a more junior person. **Reverse mentoring flips this approach, often (but not always) by having a more junior employee mentor a more experienced colleague or leader.** This disrupts typical workplace hierarchies and challenges traditional power dynamics. Reverse mentoring can create a more equal organisational environment, better prioritising junior and underrepresented colleagues' voices in decision making, which can lead to positive workplace changes.

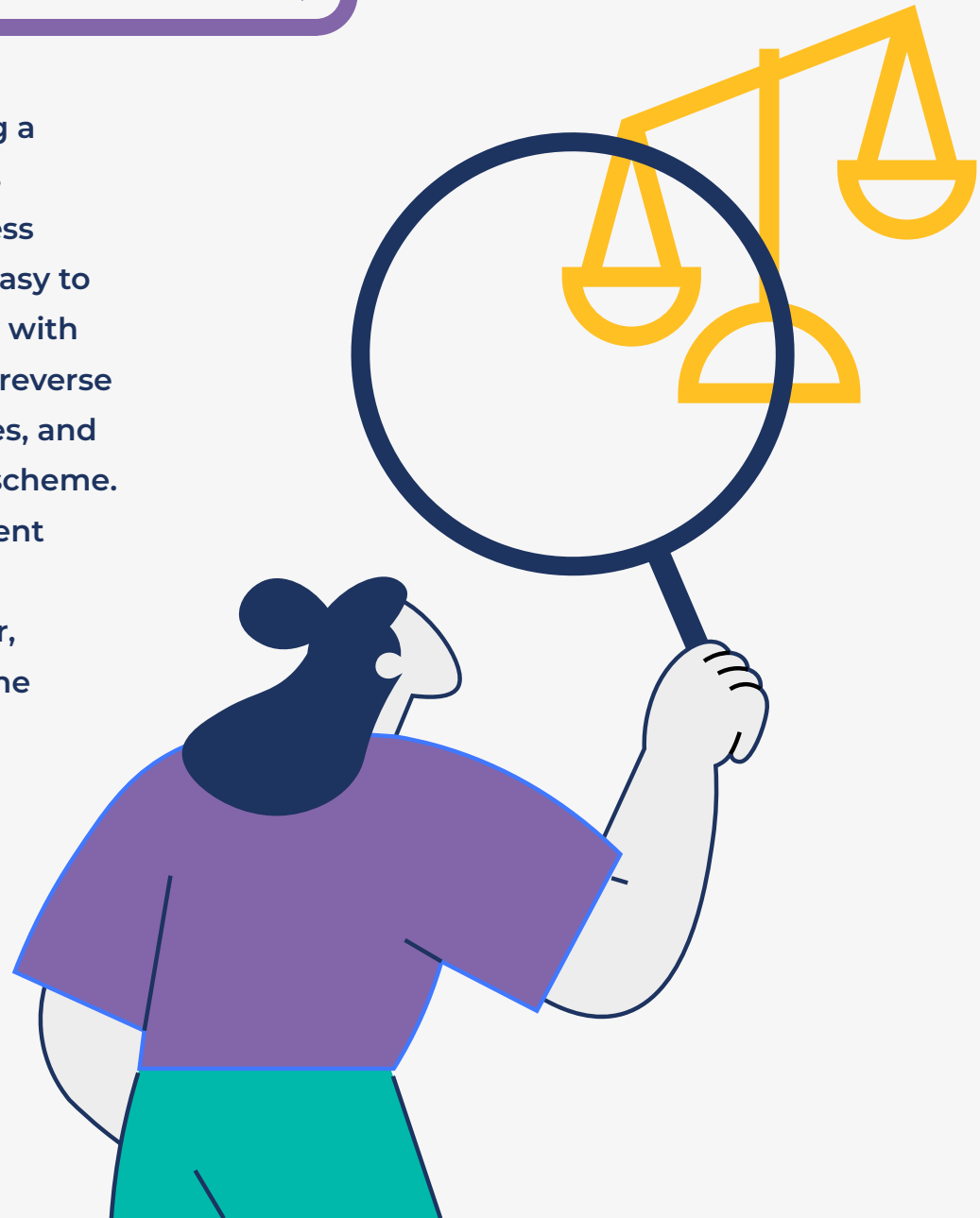
From an EDI perspective, reverse mentoring values and acknowledges lived experience as a form of expertise. Many reverse mentoring projects include mentors who come from

backgrounds which are underrepresented in their sector. Critical to the ability to have these reverse mentoring conversations, and therefore to the success of the concept, is **creating truly safe spaces to talk and share.** Without actively ensuring people feel safe sharing their identities and experiences and do not fear adverse consequences, reverse mentoring will be futile as people may feel unable to participate with full honesty.

Reverse mentoring also risks becoming a tick-box exercise where it is inauthentic and lacks clear purpose. **This toolkit is designed to help you develop a reverse mentoring scheme in your organisation which is thoughtfully and collaboratively designed, with clear goals and a realistic structure.** It also encourages you to see reverse mentoring not as a solution, but as a first step. While there is good evidence that reverse mentoring can be extremely beneficial for individual mentors and mentees, it usually doesn't solve issues on its own; instead, it highlights workplace culture issues and makes addressing them a greater priority for the organisation. This toolkit can also support in determining what the next steps should be after reverse mentoring.

Who is this toolkit for? ↩

We encourage anyone in the legal sector considering a reverse mentoring programme to use this toolkit. It's designed for all types of legal organisations, regardless of size or location, so you should find the resources easy to adapt to your own situation. When planned carefully with the right support and commitment from both sides, reverse mentoring can significantly benefit mentors, mentees, and others, influenced by the insights gained from your scheme. This toolkit aims to help more organisations implement reverse mentoring in a meaningful way, avoiding an inauthentic tick-box approach, promoting a healthier, more collaborative, and supportive environment in the legal sector.



Why do reverse mentoring? ↩

A well planned and structured reverse mentoring scheme can boost workplace satisfaction, wellbeing and commitment by fostering a sense of belonging. People are the most crucial and valuable asset of any business, and regulators and insurers are increasingly aware of the risks involved in unhealthy workplace cultures.

In the solicitors' context, this is reflected in the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) workplace culture thematic review and subsequent rule change. **Both the Law Society of England and Wales and the SRA, among others, recognise reverse mentoring as good practice.**



The benefits

There are potentially huge benefits from running reverse mentoring schemes, not only for individual mentors and mentees, but also from an organisation and sector perspective. Reverse mentoring empowers people to use their voices to contribute towards positive change at work and beyond. It also empowers leaders to make EDI work part of their mission, positioning EDI as something we should all care about and be collectively active in.

Reverse mentoring intentionally puts EDI-related topics on the agenda. **LawCare's Life in the Law 2020/21 research** found that **69%** of participants reported experiencing mental ill-health in the 12 months before completing the survey, but only **56%** had talked about this at work. Data indicated that female, ethnically minoritised and disabled legal professionals scored higher than average for burnout and lower for autonomy and psychological safety at work. This demonstrates the need for more initiatives like reverse mentoring to tackle the prevailing stigma of mental health in the legal sector and consider this together with broader EDI-related topics.

LawCare's 2021 Life in the Law study



69% of participants reported experiencing mental ill-health in the 12 months before completing the survey

Reverse mentoring provides space for a range of voices and experiences to be heard and shared and facilitates learning from diverse lived experiences. By creating dedicated time and space for personalised conversations, individuals can feel more connected and valued within the organisation. This can help improve retention and progression, supporting people to be their authentic selves at work and reducing the effects on their wellbeing of masking.

By creating dedicated time and space for personalised conversations, individuals can feel more connected and valued within the organisation

We know that representation is a crucial part of EDI. Reverse mentoring promotes better representation by centring the voices of marginalised individuals. This not only boosts the self-worth and confidence of those who are mentors but also helps others outside the project feel seen and included at work. Participants can gain new skills and enhance existing ones, such as communication, leadership, networking, relationship-building, critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy, and compassion. They also gain valuable teamworking experience and improve interpersonal skills - all of which are vital for professional development. In reverse mentoring, participants take charge of their own development, learning through their roles as mentors or mentees rather than by instruction from a trainer or third party.

Reverse mentoring can also help mentees improve as leaders, making them more compassionate and informed. This is particularly beneficial for supporting junior team members. By finding common ground with people who have different

backgrounds, all participants can build better relationships with colleagues, peers and clients.

After participating in reverse mentoring, mentors and mentees can contribute to improving the experiences of colleagues, both now and in the future. This can boost commitment, empowerment and satisfaction within the organisation. People who feel underrepresented in a community can often be motivated by a desire to help others. If we can save someone else from a struggle we've experienced, most of us want to do that, while also gaining from the experience ourselves.

Reverse mentoring can also help mentees improve as leaders, making them more compassionate and informed.

Everyone in the sector shares the responsibility for wellbeing and inclusion, not just a select few. By organising or participating in reverse mentoring, you can help move the dial on these important issues within your workplace and the wider sector.

Preparation



Key steps in setting up your Reverse Mentoring Scheme



At a glance

1

2

3

4



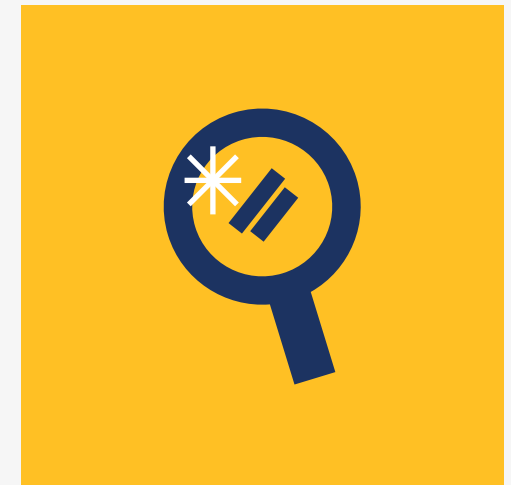
Develop purpose,
aims and objectives
8-12 weeks



Engage mentors
and mentees
3-4 weeks



Launch and run
the scheme
minimum 10 weeks



Reflections
and evaluation
3-4 weeks/ongoing

Key steps in setting up your Reverse Mentoring Scheme



Develop purpose, aims and objectives (8-12 weeks)

- a.** Use the 'Purpose and objective planner' on page 52
- b.** Consult with both internal and external stakeholders at different levels
- c.** Evaluate perspectives and finalise your 'Purpose and Objective planner'



Engage mentors and mentees (3-4 weeks)

- a.** Advertise the scheme widely to support diverse engagement
- b.** Target individuals from underrepresented groups and recruit people who want to support mentors and mentees during the process, internally and externally
- c.** Ask volunteers to answer an interest survey and match people using these responses
- d.** Introduce mentors and mentees and review and sign reverse mentoring agreements



3. Launch and run the scheme (minimum 10 weeks)

- a.** Host a launch event to outline key principles, expectations and support available
- b.** Schedule mentoring meetings and ask for reflections after each meeting
- c.** Host a celebration and feedback event for everyone



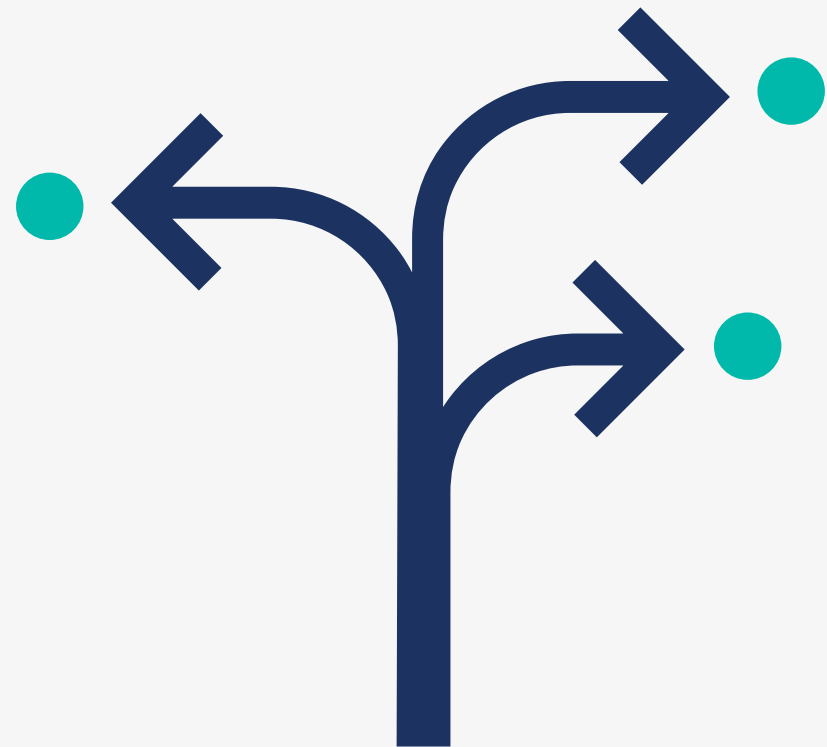
4. Reflections and evaluation (3-4 weeks/ongoing)

- a.** Offer a one-to-one closing conversation to mentors and mentees for feedback
- b.** Ask mentees to make pledges for the future
- c.** Review reflections and actions noted by mentors and mentees
- d.** Encourage mentors and mentees to undertake any follow-up actions
- e.** Review the impact of the reverse mentoring scheme against your purpose, aims and objectives
- f.** Create and share a summary report and consider running workshops to discuss future plans

Determining your purpose and objectives

It is important to set your reverse mentoring scheme's overarching purpose from the start to give it direction and focus. Once you have a clear purpose, you can add more specific aims and objectives. The clearer these are, the easier it will be to measure if the scheme has been successful.

Before consulting with key stakeholders, it is useful to do an initial mapping exercise and think about the high-level issues the scheme may seek to address or begin to unpick. The purpose of the scheme should be relevant and personal to your organisation. For example, if you know there is an ongoing issue in your organisation with retaining junior lawyers or other junior colleagues, the purpose of the scheme could be to better understand and explore what junior lawyers or other junior colleagues want and need from a career in law.



Alongside this broad purpose, some of the aims might be:

- ➔ To understand the challenges junior colleagues face with wellbeing and inclusion in your organisation and gather ideas on how to improve them.
- ➔ To help improve wellbeing, create a sense of belonging, and drive positive change for junior colleagues.
- ➔ To learn about lived experiences and build respect and empathy between senior and junior colleagues.
- ➔ To improve openness, understanding and awareness around wellbeing and inclusion at work.
- ➔ To build an authentic community where everyone in your team is engaged and committed.
- ➔ To have challenging conversations and contribute to a bigger conversation across the legal sector



Smart
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time-bound

To achieve your scheme's purpose and aims, you'll need to set clear, measurable objectives. These should be specific, realistic goals that act as steps toward achieving the scheme's overall aims. Using the **SMART** framework (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-bound) can help ensure clarity. While the scheme's aims may be broad, the objectives should be manageable based on your available resources and the expectations of mentors and mentees. Having clear objectives will also help you decide on discussion topics for the reverse mentoring meetings.

Action



Have a go at filling out the 'Purpose and objective planner' on page 52

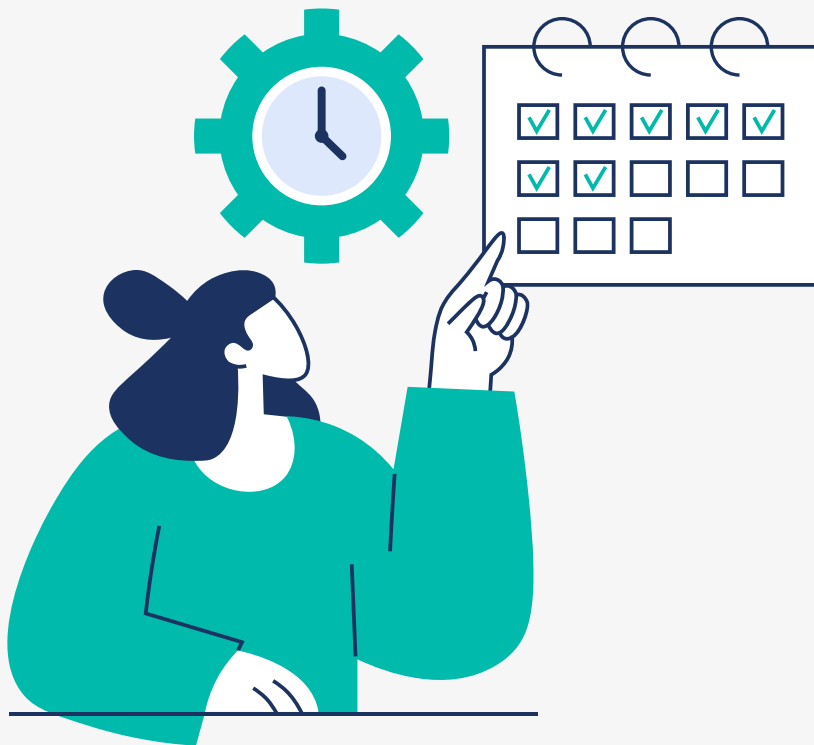


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Collaborate with your community

This toolkit emphasises fairness and inclusivity in project design. It's important to consider whose voices are included when creating your scheme. We encourage you to take time in developing your reverse mentoring scheme, ideally allowing at least a few months before launch so that you can meaningfully consult and design with your community.



Getting started

Before diving into co-design discussions, it's crucial to set the right tone. It can be difficult for people to be involved in designing EDI initiatives, particularly where it links to their lived experiences. We recommend starting with an “ice breaker” or community building activities before getting into the detail of designing reverse mentoring. This may be more or less time intensive, depending on what you are asking from people.

Be clear on the time commitment expected

You might spend an afternoon with your design group, getting to know one another and building connections. Do not overlook this part, always consider the benefits to people for giving their time, not just the outcomes achieved. Be clear on the time commitment expected across the design work so people know what they're signing up for.

Roundtable discussions

We used roundtable discussions to inform design of our reverse mentoring scheme, (see the case study on page 53) bringing people together to discuss a topic of shared interest. A benefit of roundtable discussions or focus groups is engaging many people in a short space of time.

The legal profession has many groups focused on shared characteristics, such as global majority (also referred to as ethnic minority) lawyers, neurodivergent lawyers, and the LGBTQI+ community. While allies are often welcome, there's usually limited opportunity for cross-identity sharing, which may hinder discussions on intersectionality. Engaging diverse voices in conversations about EDI and wellbeing can foster new perspectives and a better understanding of intersectionality.

Start with general discussions about your core topic (for example, junior lawyers' retention) and give people time to share experiences. You might ask specific questions to prompt discussion or allow discussion to free flow on the core topic. Once attendees have warmed into the topic, introduce the

concept of reverse mentoring and gather constructive reflections from attendees about your plan. To support attendees, it is helpful to share your initial project purpose, aims and objectives in advance.

Honesty is inhibited if we are worried about the repercussions of being truthful, this can be particularly risky for more junior colleagues.

What we discuss about creating spaces of safety in reverse mentoring applies equally to the design phase

Make sure you have a person or system for notetaking during discussions so that, as facilitator, you can fully engage. Support people to feel at ease by making clear that general notes capturing e.g. what the "junior lawyers' group" said will be taken, rather than individuals' views. This can help people to feel part of a collective, rather than being singled out for their opinions.

Consultation team or advisory board

Focusing on working with a smaller group of people from different areas of the organisation for a longer time can also be beneficial. This is a more involved process than roundtable discussions or focus groups.

Whilst there is no magic number of people to include, consider the level of organisational representation you want to capture. For example, if you have 10 departments within your organisation, you might ensure there is one person from each department, or a senior and junior person from each department, or a fee-earner and professional services colleague from each department.

Alternatively, if you have five offices, you might recruit two people from each office. You might also consider where your organisation has existing expertise. For example, if your organisation has EDI-related groups, you might engage a representative from each.

Ideally a consultation team will work on co-producing the details of your reverse mentoring scheme over a long period, for example, further developing the scheme's purpose and designing recruitment materials to attract a diverse range of mentors and mentees. They might also decide the topics for discussion during the reverse mentoring conversations and how evaluation will happen, based on what they agree would be most appealing for participants. This group can also play a role in ensuring accountability and next steps actions after reverse mentoring has happened.

Who should be involved?

As well as ensuring representation from both junior and senior voices, existing expert groups, and considering geographical and departmental diversity, we recommend involving people outside your organisation in the design process - particularly aspiring lawyers or employees (especially local students), as well as lawyers and leaders from other firms who are also passionate about EDI. Supportive, constructive external voices enable us to see issues we may have become desensitised to.

Reverse mentoring in the legal sector isn't just about lawyers either. How everyone within the organisation feels treated and represented impacts culture. Ensuring you have non-lawyer representation within design is vital. This could be people leading on EDI, HR representatives, secretarial staff and those in other professional services roles like IT, business development and catering. This co-design work may also facilitate stronger bonds between lawyers and professional services colleagues across the organisation.

REMEMBER



Go back to your 'Purpose and objective planner' and update it following this consultation process.

Header	
Footer	

Mentor and mentee roles

As the basic concept of reverse mentoring is a deliberate flipping of traditional mentoring expectations, you will be looking to recruit some less work experienced members of your organisation as mentors and some more senior colleagues, managers or leaders as mentees. Who these are depends on your project's purpose. Here are some example mentoring models that might work for you or can be adapted to suit your organisation and purpose(s):

1



Pairs (two people): a junior colleague (or junior external person such as a student) mentors a senior colleague/leader.

2



Trios (three people): a junior colleague and external person (or two junior colleagues) mentor a senior colleague/leader during group conversations.

3



Mentoring chains (two pairs): (i) the first pair is an external person (such as an aspiring lawyer) who mentors a junior lawyer, then (ii) the second pair is the same junior lawyer who mentors a senior colleague/leader.

Under model 3, the junior lawyer will be undertaking double the number of meetings as they are both mentor and mentee. This should be considered in terms of time commitment and reward.

Model 2 offers the opportunity for a senior person to be exposed to more than one person's lived experiences e.g. being mentored by both a junior lawyer and an aspiring lawyer. It also provides the opportunity for a meaningful connection to be forged between the co-mentors. Even if the co-mentors' identities differ, their shared experiences of being under-represented fosters mutual support during the mentoring relationship.

Who is a mentor or a mentee?

Consider some of the representation points you noted when designing the scheme. The same considerations apply here. We recommend sharing communications about getting involved in reverse mentoring as widely as possible across your organisation, and externally if you are searching for external partners such as aspiring lawyers, to increase the likelihood of diversity amongst participants. You can find more engagement tips on page 26.

Draw on existing knowledge or data within your organisation or, if you don't have this, draw on data from the wider profession about diversity and representation in the legal sector. Consider if there are identity characteristics that are poorly represented, or even non-existent, within your organisation and how such identities can be prioritised within the reverse mentoring scheme. If any identities are completely unrepresented in your organisation, this will make it particularly important to try and engage external partners.



Guiding principles

The intention should not be for mentors to educate mentees. Instead, it is about amplifying and empowering the voices of junior or underrepresented colleagues which are less often heard in hierarchical institutions. We've set out below some considerations to share with mentors and mentees when considering their respective roles and commitments:

Mentor tips:

- ➔ **Have confidence** – remember the power of your expertise and lived experience.
- ➔ **Be prepared** – the scheme should ensure there is adequate time to plan meetings, allowing for proper preparation (for example, by reviewing the reverse mentoring handbook and personal reflections) and fostering a sense of empowerment.
- ➔ **Take the lead** – this may be difficult at first but should become more natural as the mentoring relationships develop.
- ➔ **Communicate effectively** – be frank and clear about your experiences and feelings. The success of the scheme relies on the honesty and integrity of everyone involved.



Mentee tips:

- ➔ **Be empathetic** - remember how difficult it can be for junior colleagues to navigate hierarchies.
- ➔ **Prepare to be vulnerable** – acknowledge gaps in your knowledge. This can help build relationships and relatability. Avoid directing the sessions and be open to letting the mentor take the lead.
- ➔ **Practise active listening** – hearing and validating each other during meetings is important; the focus should be on understanding rather than immediately jumping into problem solving.
- ➔ **Engage with purpose** – action and change must follow in future, otherwise mentors in particular might feel their efforts are wasted.

Considerations for both mentors and mentees



Consider meeting logistics - ensure the space (whether in-person or virtual) is appropriate in terms of accessibility, comfort and managing roles/dynamics. Mentors and mentees should be arranging meetings directly between themselves, rather than relying on personal assistants for example (unless this is linked to a personal support need).



Show commitment – pay attention during meetings, especially when held online, as checking emails and messages can lead to less genuine participation and engagement.



Flexibility – be prepared to accommodate reasonable requests or changes to arrangements; agree what will happen in the event of urgent situations that can't be avoided, such as client meetings, court engagements or personal emergencies.



Be patient – relationships take time to develop. Trust and confidence may not happen immediately and some meetings, especially in the early stages might feel awkward. This should improve over time as you get to know one another.



Show mutual respect - always treat one another with respect, especially with regards to any cultural, generational or other differences likely to be present in reverse mentoring. Be aware of body language and tone. Aim for positive communication to promote constructive discussion and avoid the temptation to be defensive or judgemental.



Be open minded – try to leave any preconceptions behind and be willing to engage in a different way. Remember it's a partnership - mentors and mentees are equal regardless of their organisational position or status.



Build trust – trust in the process and the safe space you're creating together for authentic conversations and use this to harness trust in one another.



Be authentic – everyone involved needs to be honest about their feelings, thoughts and experiences. Some conversations may be difficult either because they are personal, due to cultural differences or because they are critical of the organisation or legal sector and its practices. Be aware of how these may impact and create space to support your mentoring partner(s) to be their authentic selves.



Have clear objectives – work collaboratively to establish tangible objectives to achieve together which align with and build on the objectives of the overarching scheme.



Confidentiality – it is vital that everyone knows that what is discussed will not be shared without consent. [There are of course exceptions if someone has concerns about someone being at risk of harming themselves or others].



Respect boundaries – if it becomes uncomfortable to discuss a certain topic, acknowledge this and support one another to leave it at present or indefinitely. Check-in with one another after any difficult scenarios like this.



Reflect – it is vital to make time to reflect before and after and not just during meetings to get full value from the process. Consider what is going well and where improvements might be made in the remainder of the mentoring engagement.

See the project webpage for an example reverse mentoring agreement which incorporates many of these role commitments and principles, which can be used and adapted for your project.

Engaging the right people in reverse mentoring

The title of this section is a red herring because there is no right or wrong person for reverse mentoring, just as there is no one correct way of doing reverse mentoring. People often get hung up on the need to engage certain people and give up on reverse mentoring if those individuals won't or can't engage. However, anyone within an organisation can benefit from the experience.

Just because someone in a senior position has faced exclusion, underrepresentation or poor mental health, for example, doesn't mean they automatically understand the experiences of a junior or trainee lawyer or colleague facing such challenges. Although individuals from backgrounds perceived as being more privileged may stand to gain significantly from reverse mentoring, its benefits extend to everyone, regardless of background or identity. In fact, those who are more obvious candidates for reverse mentoring might need some preparation, such as an EDI course, before participating to ensure a positive experience for the mentors.

***Anyone within an organisation
can benefit from the experience
of reverse mentoring***

There is no "one" human experience, so we recommend welcoming everyone interested to take part in or support reverse mentoring rather than targeting specific individuals. This section provides suggestions for encouraging and supporting participation.

Engaging lived experience mentors

If there is significant power distance within an organisation, such as between senior leaders and junior lawyers, it may be challenging to convince junior colleagues they should give their time and energy towards what could be seen as educating senior people. This is where it becomes critical to make reverse mentoring “mentor-centred”, focusing on what mentors are getting out of the experience for their own benefit, rather than solely focusing on improving understanding of senior people (mentees). This might mean you prefer to use another term like reciprocal mentoring for your scheme to emphasise this mutuality.



Be honest about the current situation in your organisation and the sector, based on evidence gathered during the design process and more widely, and recognise the need to tackle the issues known about or highlighted during that process:

- ➔ Be clear about the project’s purpose,
- ➔ Communicate widely about the intention behind it,
- ➔ Explain how the scheme has been designed and who with,
- ➔ Support junior people to see the personal benefits they could gain from taking part and workplace contributions they can make.

Engaging external partners

When looking for external partners to support co-design or participate as mentors/mentees - such as lawyers from other organisations, universities and law schools, client organisations or charitable organisations - social media can be very helpful. Speaking about EDI topics on social media can often lead to building a wider network of people who are also passionate about EDI. Join networks and attend events run by organisations like LawCare where you can meet like-minded, enthusiastic people to collaborate with. Consider discussing reverse mentoring with your clients and with peers in other organisations to raise the profile of the scheme and encourage its embedding as an important part of organisational culture.

How to match people

Once you've designed your reverse mentoring scheme and recruited mentors and mentees, it's time to think about how you will match people. There are many options. Very simply, you could pick names out of a hat and match people randomly. However, we suggest a process with a little more

thought behind it can lead to more fruitful relationships. To really embrace reverse mentoring avoid giving mentees (typically more senior people) choice over who they are mentored by. This reinforces traditional hierarchies and power dynamics which reverse mentoring is designed to disrupt. Focus on matching processes which are fair and inclusive, adopting the mentality that everyone has something to learn from any other person within the organisation.

It is often better to pair or group people who do not have a significant pre-existing relationship, so they start mentoring with a 'clean slate'. For example, not pairing a senior lawyer with a junior lawyer in their team, a trainee they have previously supervised or an external student they have interviewed. Don't be disheartened if creating entirely new partnerships isn't feasible because of the size of your organisation. There are still many ways you can ensure the matching process is as beneficial as possible.

Interest surveys

One of the best ways to get a new relationship off the ground is to have the initial spark of a common interest. We recommend focusing on this during the matching process instead of matching people based on their identity characteristics. For example, ask mentors and mentees about hobbies, passions and values, as well as what they hope to get out of reverse mentoring. See example matching questions on the project webpage, which you can adapt for your own scheme. You can let people know about their shared interests when you introduce them to each other.

These simple connections, for example a shared love of travel, can spark an easy conversation when people first meet, without the pressure of having to come up with 'small talk' topics themselves.



Intro videos or profiles

Once you've matched people, it's natural that participants, particularly mentors who may have less experience or are external to the organisation, may feel nervous about meeting their mentoring partner(s). A good way to calm nerves is to ask participants to record a short intro video or create a written profile with a photo of themselves. Encourage people to share who they are, their role or experience and why they are taking part. This only needs to be a few minutes long (or a few hundred words) to give mentoring partner(s) an idea of what to expect, and further hints of experiences or interests they might share.

Informal meeting

The initial meeting is often the most intimidating part of reverse mentoring, particularly for more junior lawyers or student level/external mentors. Senior people often have better known reputations which may precede them and add pressure or expectations on mentors. Setting up an informal group meeting to facilitate the matching process can help alleviate some of these anxieties.

For example, if you run a project launch event, save time at the end for matches to be announced. Over refreshments, give pairs/groups chance to chat with each other informally (providing some light-hearted topics to get them started) and arrange their first “official” reverse mentoring meeting.

***Trust isn't instantaneous.
It must be earned and built over time***

Even if you decide not to have a full launch event, we suggest at least taking 30 minutes to get all mentors and mentees together to do the matching in-person (or online if you're running the project remotely) to ensure the first time

mentors and mentees meet they are not diving straight into EDI-related topics. As emphasised throughout, safety is vital for successful reverse mentoring and we must build it in at every step.

Action

Review the matching survey template on the project webpage and think about what questions you might ask to match mentors and mentees.

Discuss these ideas with your design team.



Launching your reverse mentoring scheme

Everyone should clearly understand their role within reverse mentoring and have an opportunity to ask questions before the scheme starts. We suggest hosting a launch event. This is an opportunity to provide some basic training to mentors and mentees on what their role will entail and what to expect, as well as the opportunity for people across the scheme to connect. Consider recording the session so that those unable to attend can watch back in their own time.

We suggest inviting everyone involved to the launch event, including mentors, mentees, those who helped design the scheme, your HR team (as they may need to provide support to participants) and any representatives from external organisations who are involved in the scheme, as mentors/mentees or supporters. You might ask colleagues within your organisation leading on EDI or staff training to run this event or you could look into engaging an external mentoring or EDI organisation to deliver the event for you, particularly any training focussed elements.

Incorporate ice-breaker exercises for the group to facilitate discussion and encourage people to engage with one

another. During reverse mentoring sessions participants are likely to have difficult conversations and share personal stories and experiences. It is important to create a safe space for these conversations from the outset so your ice-breaker activities might gently support attendees to begin sharing their experiences and identities with new people.

Action



There are template slides available for you to adapt for your launch event on the toolkit webpage.

Consider what organisation specific content you might want to add, including support for participants.



Meeting practicalities

Some of the best reverse mentoring relationships are those which blossom organically, between people who may have previously felt very divided within an organisation, with few shared interests. However, this doesn't mean that reverse mentoring schemes should be unstructured. Lack of structure and clarity can leave mentors and mentees unsure about what to discuss, how to broach challenging topics, and lead to repeated conversations which may not reach clear outcomes.

If you want your reverse mentoring scheme to contribute to meaningful change, supportive guidance is important

Start by ensuring everyone has a reverse mentoring handbook and has signed a reverse mentoring agreement before their first meeting.

Timing

As with many of the suggestions in this toolkit, there is no magic number when it comes to how many reverse mentoring meetings to have. We have run projects with as many as 12 meetings and as few as four, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. The important thing is to ensure that the timing of meetings gives the project the best potential to meet its purpose. Legal professionals and law students are often very busy and time poor. **Reverse mentoring tends to fall apart where mentor and mentee keep having to reschedule or cancel meetings.**

We have found that the **sweet spot for meeting regularity** tends to be **somewhere between fortnightly and monthly**, with a minimum of four meetings, along with some group events before and after individual meetings. Keep meeting topics manageable so that hour-long meetings feel feasible, although often people tend to run over when they connect deeply. Encourage participants to have time either side of reverse mentoring meetings eg 30 minutes beforehand to refresh themselves on the topic and 30 minutes afterwards to allow for overrunning and reflection.

Conversation themes and topics

Hopefully some initial themes will have been developed as part of your co-design process conversations and be driven by your purpose and objectives. We suggest the following rough structure for one-hour meetings, each to have a clear theme:

The 10 minutes allocated for reflection are particularly vital when considering project impact and next steps and are often forgotten, leading to conversations that don't have a clear conclusion. You can find an outline for a series of meeting topics and prompts on the theme of wellbeing and inclusion starting on page 59 adapted from our case study project.

1	0-10 minutes	Ice-breaker topic discussion.
2	10-15 minutes	Reflection on last meeting (or project launch if meeting 1).
3	15-45 minutes	Discuss up to four prompt topics or questions within the meeting theme.
4	45-55 minutes	Reflection on steps that can be taken in the short, medium and longer term to address issues discussed (at individual, team, organisation and sector levels where relevant) and by who/proposals to be made to others/the project team.
5	55-60 minutes	Discussion/activity and arranging next meeting.



Meeting locations

Embrace the idea of a level playing field, try to take reverse mentoring conversations outside of typical workplace structures. Avoid, for example, holding meetings in the mentee's office as this reinstates the power dynamic of mentee being "in charge".

Avoid spaces where colleagues may be able to hear conversations noting the potential for emotive, personal conversations, are particularly risky in open-plan offices. This is also applicable to external meeting locations such as cafes.

Ideally, **use meeting rooms or private spaces in your organisation** or an **external location with bookable rooms**. Support mentors with a list of potential options in their local area so they feel confident to suggest locations to mentee(s).

It is also important to consider whether your colleagues would prefer to meet in **person, online, or a mixture of both**. Active engagement with potential participants about their preferences and accessibility needs should be part of the matching surveys.

Where mentors/mentees are not geographically close, ensure the scheme meaningfully supports online engagement so that everyone feels fully part of the process. This is especially important if your scheme is hybrid. Avoid people who are engaging online feeling that they are not getting as good an experience. For example, ensuring your launch event takes place in a space where there is good hybrid technology and your ice-breaking activities can be smoothly replicated online.

Action



Review the handbook we used in our reverse mentoring project on the project webpage. What might you use, change or adapt for your own scheme?



Also take a look at the meeting timeline and topics we used in our case study project on page 53. Which of these align with your purpose and objectives? Discuss these with your design team and adapt your own meeting topic schedule for your handbook.

Providing support

Reverse mentoring conversations can often involve discussing sensitive and emotive topics. Additionally, the experience of being in a different power dynamic and hierarchy within the workplace can itself be unsettling. **From the outset make sure you offer a variety of easily accessible support for both mentors and mentees.** It is crucial to have a supportive foundation to protect anyone who may feel vulnerable because of what they have shared or heard.

Prioritise inclusivity at all stages of the project, so that everyone feels welcome and able to participate with their support needs met. Ensure you fully understand and respect mentor and mentee accessibility needs and preferences. This will ensure your project benefits from a diverse range of shared experiences with ultimately greater impact for all involved.

To reach their fullest impact potential, conversations need to be authentic and honest, which will only happen if safe spaces are created for meetings. Following the guiding principles on page 23 helps to support the creation of such spaces. Trust and confidentiality are essential for safety. In this toolkit, we have suggested ways to ensure

everyone involved understands their responsibilities and actively agrees to abide by these commitments through signing agreements and attending a launch event. **Part of your launch session should incorporate suggestions for ways to reflect and decompress after meetings and self-care resources.** These should also be included in your reverse mentoring handbook.

To reach their fullest impact potential, conversations need to be authentic and honest

Clear lines of communication and reporting are also important; **it's vital that everyone knows who to contact and feels they have someone to turn to if they're facing difficulties.** Although confidentiality needs to be respected, this does not prevent mentors and mentees confiding in someone outside the direct mentoring relationship about how they are feeling or how conversations have impacted them personally. They can do this without disclosing private information or details about mentoring partner(s).

An existing wellbeing committee or working group within your organisation might be suitable to be involved. **Assigning an individual with overall responsibility as a point of contact** when people need support on the project can also be helpful.

You may wish to plan whole group get togethers and reflective activities during the scheme to allow peer support opportunities through building relationships beyond the individual mentoring partnerships.

Providing individual support on a one-to-one basis for each mentor and mentee is also vital.

It can also be a great way to bring more people into the project, potentially from external organisations. For example, you could **seek people in the profession beyond your organisation to join the project as support buddies**. You could even **recruit these support buddies from your design team**. These people should be fully briefed on the purpose and objectives of the project and ideally have expertise or passion for the topics covered in your scheme. They can be partnered with one or more mentors and mentees to act as a sounding board and reflective ear at key points throughout the project, perhaps the beginning, middle and end.

Wellbeing and mental health support may also be available on an individual basis if your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme.

LawCare is the mental health charity for the legal sector, offering free, confidential emotional support, peer support, and information to people working in law in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. Contact details can be found at the end of this toolkit and we encourage you to include these details in your reverse mentoring handbook and other supportive materials.

Remember

People involved in designing your project can become an important source of support to mentors and mentees. Aim to keep your project champions involved during the mentoring itself to provide peer support.

Community and network building

Running a reverse mentoring scheme with a group of colleagues, and potentially external partners, provides a great opportunity to develop organisational community, supporting participants to grow their own networks, internally and externally. Here are some suggestions of ways you might facilitate further community and network building in your project.



Whole group get-togethers

As well as your launch event, you might add other whole group events during your project. These can be informal, social get-togethers where mentors and mentees meet other people beyond their immediate mentoring relationship.

In the spirit of supporting people to get to know one another, **it helps to have some structure to these events**, rather than just expecting people to 'network'. We have found concepts like “**speed chatting**” useful in such settings – introducing topics such as ‘my ultimate three-course meal’ or ‘super-power I wish I had’ and getting people to rotate around the room, chatting to a new person for 2-4 minutes about the different topics. This can also be **facilitated online with breakout groups**.

Group reflection and sharing

As well as informal social opportunities, it can be helpful to include group reflections, so mentors and mentees get to share experiences and issues other people may be encountering in the project.

It is important to remind mentors and mentees about their confidentiality commitment to ensure no private conversations are shared in these wider settings, unless express permission has been given by all mentoring partners.

If you have a design team and/or support buddies, it can be beneficial to invite them to sessions like this or run separate sessions for them to consider how they have been impacted by supporting the scheme. They may have their own actions they wish to pursue in their organisations as a result of what they have learned through supporting your scheme and this should be encouraged.

Celebration event

People often give a significant amount of time to reverse mentoring. As well as financial and time rewards and acknowledgment, **hosting a celebration event either within your organisation or externally is a great way for mentors and mentees to feel recognised and to spread the project's impact across the organisation and sector.** It can support those involved to make further connections with like-minded others and may also be a good opportunity to set out more publicly the organisation's commitment to next steps based on lessons learned from reverse mentoring.



Reflection and evaluation

A key concern when it comes to EDI initiatives, including reverse mentoring, is the challenge of knowing whether or not they have worked and measuring any difference created. We suggest seeing reverse mentoring as a vehicle. **It is a starting point. A disruptor. A catalyser.** It is not an answer.

As organisers of reverse mentoring schemes, it's important to acknowledge the responsibility we have to honour the contributions people make and use all of that collaborative knowledge to push for real change and improvements in our own workplaces and the wider sector. Here, we suggest some ways to begin doing that.

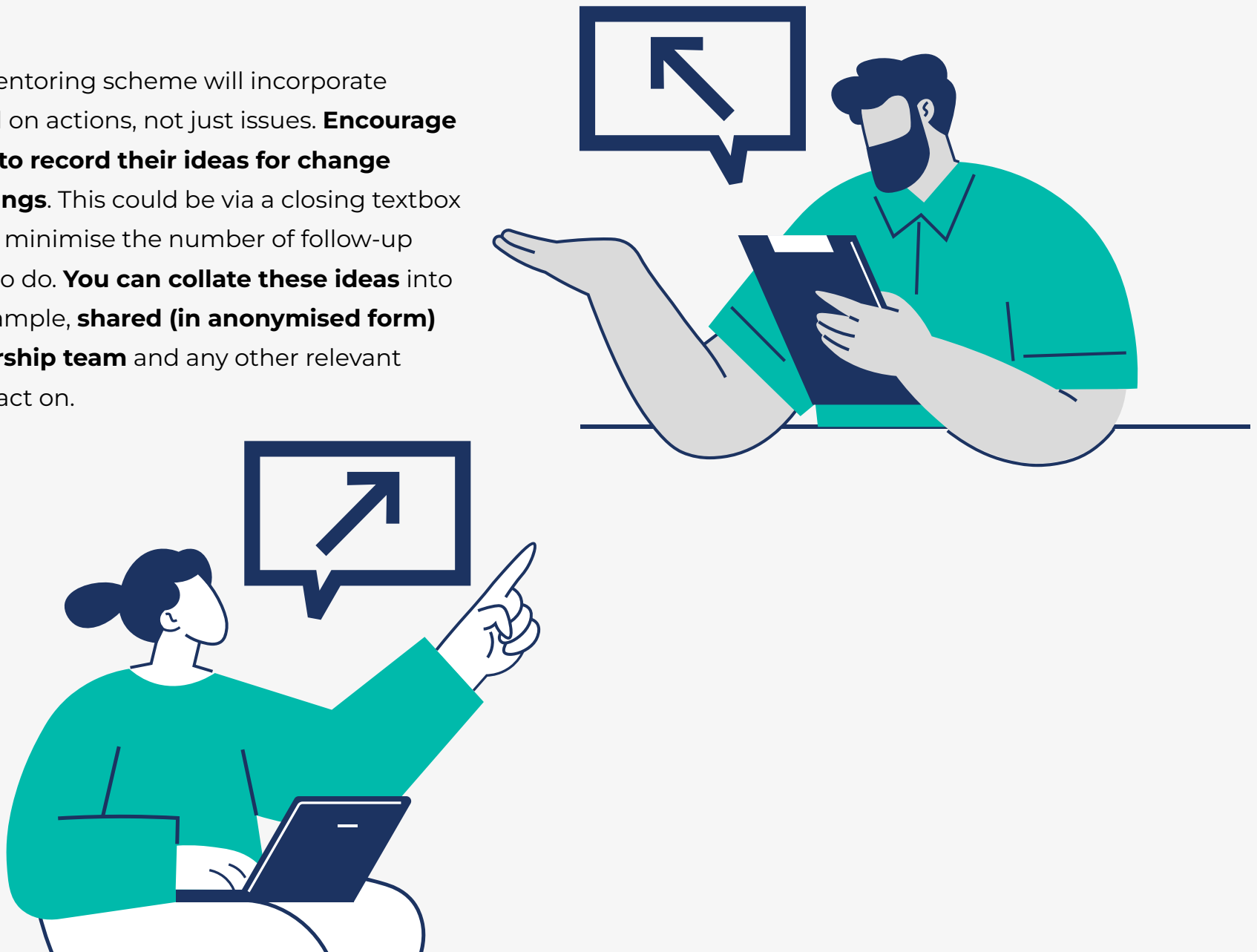
Reflective opportunities

As well as group reflections for community building, a great way to support mentors and mentees to move towards making proposals and advocating for change is to encourage reflection. It is conceivable that busy legal professionals will bounce from a client meeting to a reverse mentoring conversation to a court hearing to a social event in one day and not spend any time reflecting on the reverse mentoring discussion. This limits the impact reverse mentoring can have.

Encourage people to sit down and either write or vocalise their feelings about the conversation, guided by prompt questions; this **may significantly increase the likelihood of people, particularly more senior mentees, taking follow-up actions**. See the project webpage for an example of a reflective diary participants could be asked to complete following meetings. It should be up to participants whether they wish to share these reflections with people leading the project or keep them private, for their own personal reflections.

Action-focused discussions

An impactful reverse mentoring scheme will incorporate discussion time focused on actions, not just issues. **Encourage mentors and mentees to record their ideas for change explored in their meetings.** This could be via a closing textbox in the reflection form to minimise the number of follow-up tasks people are asked to do. **You can collate these ideas** into a report which is, for example, **shared (in anonymised form) with your senior leadership team** and any other relevant parties to consider and act on.



Closing conversations and mutual accountability

It can sometimes be difficult when reverse mentoring projects end and participants are left unsure about what will happen next, particularly for more junior mentors. Offering a closing conversation with each participant can be a **beneficial way of wrapping up the specific project and giving everyone an individual opportunity to share their experience, give constructive feedback and think about what they will do next**. As well as having these conversations with project organisers, it can be beneficial to arrange mutual conversations between participants who were not in a mentoring partnership with one another so they can reflect on their different experiences.

Offering a closing conversation with each participant can be a beneficial way of wrapping up the specific project



For example, two senior partners who have been mentored by different trainees could be paired together for a conversation, guided by prompts, about their experiences, to support one another to consider what they will do next. Go to page 69 for some example prompt questions to facilitate such discussions. As part of these discussions, mentees could be tasked with making pledges which are followed up on at regular intervals by the scheme organisers, for example, one month, six months and one year after the scheme, to ensure accountability in a positive, encouraging and collegiate way.

Reporting on next steps

Often due to the time commitment involved, it will be a relatively small proportion of people who are able to take part in workplace reverse mentoring. However, that should not mean no other colleagues or leaders are impacted. Drawing on all the above - reflections, closing conversations and proposals for actions - **a summary report** could be written up and **discussed and consulted on with colleagues across the organisation** through a series of workshops. Not only does this bring in more voices to further develop ideas, but it also shows a **commitment to making the 'ideal world' conversations that often arise through reverse mentoring a closer reality**. It also ensures that any issues disclosed, such as non-inclusive behaviours and toxic cultures that need urgent attention, are acted upon.

Action

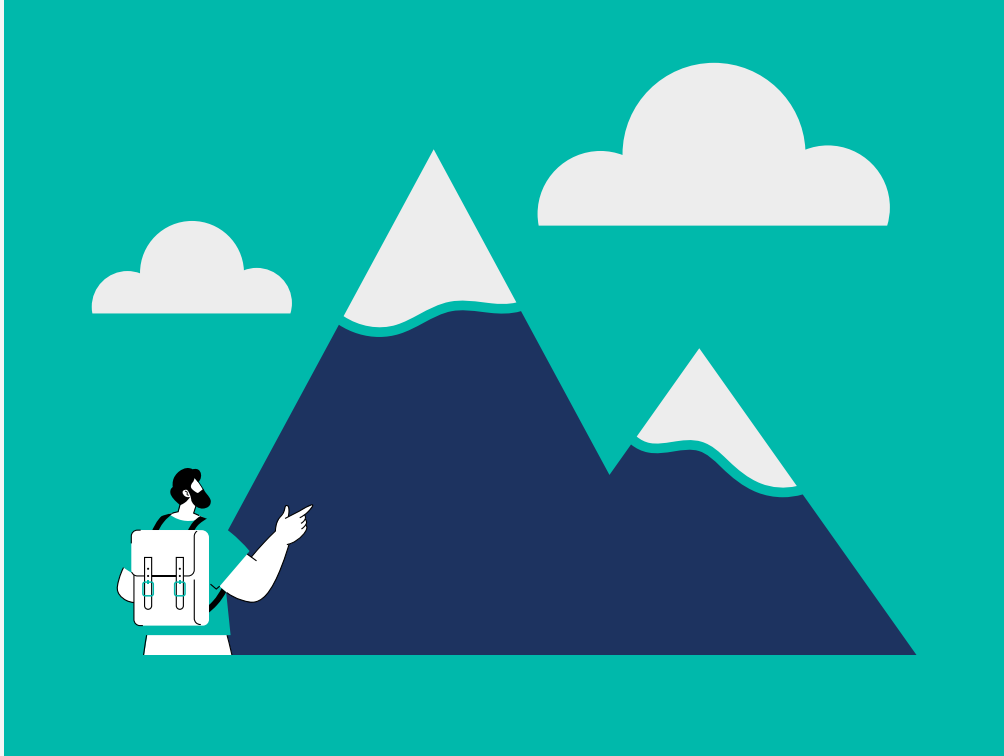


Look through the reflective log template on the project webpage. Put yourself in the shoes of a mentor, and then of a mentee, and consider how you would feel about answering these questions. What might you change or adapt for your own scheme?

Liaise with tech/IT support colleagues to consider what platform might be most effective to use for any reflective writing in your organisation.



Possible challenges



Reverse mentoring is rarely a straightforward process. Bringing together a diverse range of people within your organisation, and externally, will bring challenges and new issues. Here we highlight some of the challenges we encountered in other reverse mentoring schemes to be mindful of.

Time constraints and workload pressures

Balancing demands of day-to-day work with the expectations of mentoring, preparing for meetings and reflecting can be difficult. This is particularly challenging in the legal profession, where billable hours and client targets often make workplace pressure significant.

It's important to ensure any administrative tasks, reflection or discussion requests are kept short and simple

Make sure people giving their energy to the project (design or mentoring) are adequately rewarded. This might involve paying external engagers or providing vouchers (internally and externally), as well as perks such as refreshments during meetings.

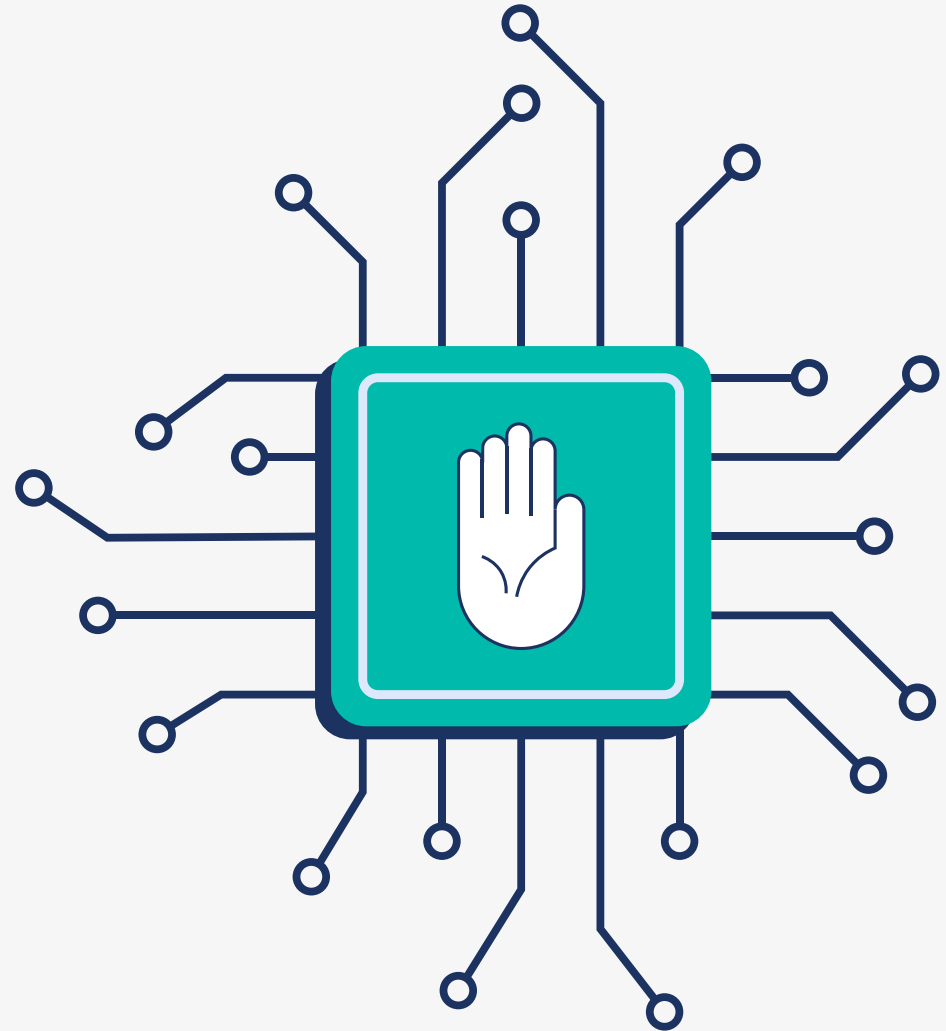
We also recommend providing an internal time code against which this work can be charged and formally recognised, if your organisation uses time recording targets.

Technological barriers

If you are planning to run your scheme virtually, the challenges of building meaningful connections may be amplified, particularly when discussions touch on emotional or personal topics. In-person interactions can often feel more natural for such conversations, as non-verbal cues and a supportive atmosphere can be more readily established, making it perhaps easier to build trust and display empathy.

Virtual meetings are more likely to be hindered by technical issues like poor internet connections if people are working at home or in different spaces. Emotional support can sometimes feel less genuine through screens, which may hinder ability to comfort or engage meaningfully.

That's not to say that reverse mentoring can't be done effectively in virtual spaces. However, being aware of these potential additional challenges and sharing tips to address them with mentors and mentees can support people to be more fully present when engaging online.





Using supportive resources

We recommend providing a supportive handbook to mentors and mentees. However, challenges can arise where such resources are not used by everyone on the project. If one person has reviewed the handbook and comes to the meeting prepared, having considered the topics, while the other person hasn't, it can lead to sessions lacking focus or direction.

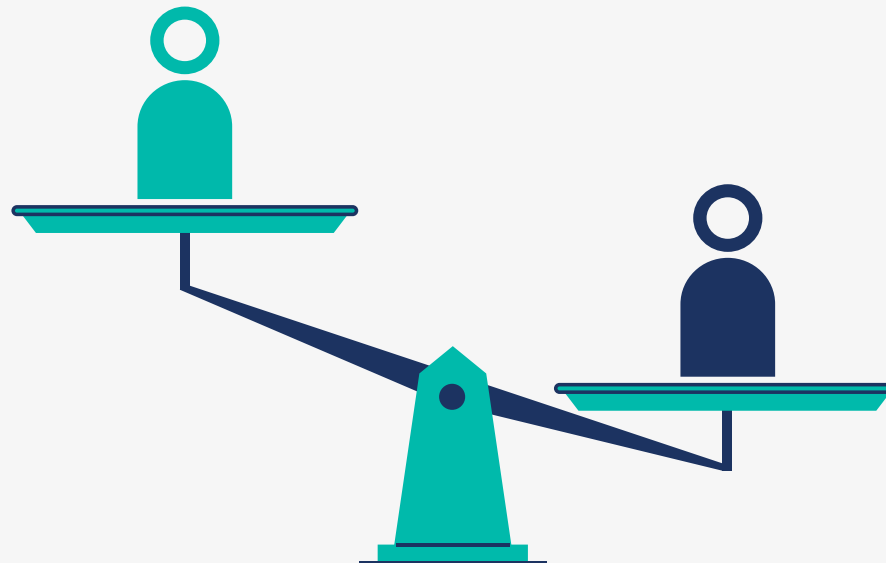
The absence of a structured approach early on can mean meetings become more of a social chat rather than focused discussions which lead to proposals and changes. This makes it difficult to ensure specific topics critical to the scheme's purpose are covered during meetings and makes reflection after meetings more challenging.

Don't assume everyone will remember all the supportive resources and regularly refer to them – people may need reminders and nudges about this (and the benefits of engaging with it). A weekly or fortnightly project email to the team involved, or creating an online space for this such as a MS Teams area or LinkedIn group, with a reminder of the current topics based on your timeline may be particularly helpful.

Role and power dynamics

One of the biggest challenges of reverse mentoring is managing power dynamics and exploring new roles, particularly ensuring mentees don't slip into 'leader' mode which they may often be more comfortable with. Roles can also be particularly difficult in mentoring trios where people may feel their role shifts from mentor to mentee and back again across meetings. In trio setups, conversations may not flow as naturally, emphasising the additional time needed to establish rapport as a three, rather than a pair.

Chain mentoring may also further complicate the experience, particularly for a junior lawyer who is trying to balance the role of mentor to a senior manager and mentee of an aspiring lawyer. Ambiguity over when to adopt a mentor versus mentee role can lead to confusion. Managing and maintaining different power dynamics and roles is complicated so this is where **support for participants is particularly crucial**, and **having a buddy as a sounding board to offer advice** if roles become blurred can be especially beneficial.



Top tips for impactful reverse mentoring

Bringing together everything discussed in this toolkit, here is a shortlist of our key advice for designing and running a reverse mentoring scheme that goes far beyond an EDI tick-box exercise and is instead meaningful, compassionate, mentor-focused, and impactful:

1

Don't rush the design phase – engage with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the design process. The resultant scheme will be better informed, more inclusive and hopefully more attractive to potential mentors and mentees.

2

Demonstrate the 'business case' – draw on existing evidence within your organisation or research within the sector to demonstrate the need for the scheme to those whose backing or permission you may need. This evidence will also help you develop the scheme's purpose.

3

Avoid groupthink – it's easy to assume involving lots of people means diversity of thought. However, we have to be more intentional. Proactively seek out perspectives that challenge and reshape initial ideas, rather than relying on the same voices and people most often heard in your organisation.

4

Build connections first – avoid diving headfirst into asking people to design or take part in reverse mentoring. It can be emotive, challenging and potentially triggering. Focus on the experience of being part of the process and people enjoying that. This is as important as other goals and outcomes.

5

Work on the assumption everyone can benefit from reverse mentoring – we all have gaps in knowledge and understanding. Identify your champions and encourage them to draw others in too.

6

Care, safety and compassion are key underpinning principles – it's not about finding the 'correct' way to do reverse mentoring, but it's important to plan your scheme carefully and take it seriously.

7

Provide supportive information to mentors which empowers them to take charge of meeting logistics eg knowing how to get time in the diary of a senior colleague, providing a list of bookable rooms/ locations for meetings etc.

8

Be realistic about how often and for how long people can meet - the project should be something people look forward to, not something they dread because they don't have time and the scheme places additional burdens or pressures on them.

9

Remember your purpose and frame meeting guidance/topics/prompts so that discussions move towards action and aren't just nice conversations.

10

Carve out time to build informal communities and networks amongst the larger group - many great working relationships and friendships have developed out of reverse mentoring participation.

11

Mark your scheme with a celebration event, supporting people within and beyond the project to feel seen. This also makes sure people know this is the start of a change making process, not the end, whether they participated in the scheme or not.



FINALLY...



**...enjoy the
process**

As someone setting up or running a reverse mentoring scheme, you will also learn a lot and likely change some of your own perspectives too. Even in the face of setbacks or obstacles, stay focused on why you're doing this important work – to improve workplace culture and EDI in your organisation. We really hope you find this toolkit and the template resources within it useful on your journey.

GOOD LUCK

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who was involved in and supported our reverse mentoring project in the legal profession which has underpinned the development of this toolkit. Everyone who attended our roundtables and formed our expert panel, everyone who acted as a support buddy during the scheme and everyone who acted as a mentor or mentee on the project itself. Your contributions were extremely valuable and we hope that your lessons and reflections from the project go on and continue to make a big difference in your own lives and your wider workplaces.

A particularly big thank you to Sedek Abraham and Praewa Tang, our two student research assistants from the University of Leeds, who made a significant contribution to evaluating the project. Thank you also to everyone who attended the event 'Exploring inclusion and wellbeing initiatives in legal education and practice' hosted at the University of Leeds. Your reflections and insights from that event have also supported the development of this toolkit.

Finally, thank you to everyone who reads and uses this toolkit. We hope it supports more informed and meaningful use of reverse mentoring as an EDI initiative across the sector.

If you have any feedback or questions about the toolkit, please get in touch with Rachael O'Connor at the University of Leeds

The remainder of this toolkit includes a case study of our reverse mentoring legal profession project, as well as some template resources for you to use and adapt in your own schemes.

Supplementary documents

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Purpose and objective planner

Reverse mentoring purpose and objectives

You may find it helpful to use a theory of change model to develop the purpose and objectives of your scheme. This model identifies long-term goals and then works back from these to identify the conditions (outcomes or objectives) that must be in place (and how these relate to one another causally) for the goals (or purpose) to occur¹.

The purpose (or long-term goal) of the reverse mentoring scheme is:

The objectives to achieve this purpose are:

→ **Specific**

Make your objectives clear and specific

→ **Measurable**

Ensure the purpose has measurable scheme objectives which everyone can understand

→ **Attainable**

The purpose is challenging, but your objectives for the scheme should be attainable

→ **Relevant**

Verify your objectives are relevant and meaningfully contribute to the overall purpose of the scheme

→ **Timeframe**

Set up a time-based plan with progress milestones for each objective

¹ For more detailed guidance on developing a theory of change to analyse your reverse mentoring scheme, see: What is Theory of Change? - Theory of Change Community <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/> (accessed 24 October 2024)

Legal profession - reverse mentoring project: a case study

The 2023/2024 University of Leeds and LawCare reverse mentoring project funded by the Michael Beverley Innovation Fellowship scheme explored how EDI and wellbeing issues could be better embedded into supervision and support for junior lawyers working in solicitor law firms. This case study provides an overview of the project design, structure, content and a summary of its impact so far on those involved. Note, this project was conducted with ethical approval from the University of Leeds.

Design

Building on reverse mentoring work conducted in the higher education sector and the Life in the Law study, in late 2022, an open call to join a series of roundtable discussions brought together a diverse group of students, junior lawyers, and senior leaders to discuss wellbeing, inclusion, and the role of reverse mentoring in tackling related issues. The project was led by a research team which included an academic, lawyers, law students and LawCare staff.

The aim was to create a structured scheme that promoted inclusion and improved wellbeing, but also sparked cultural change within the legal profession. Insights from the roundtable consultations and attendees' thoughts about a skeleton outline of the project shaped the final version of the reverse mentoring scheme. Many of the roundtable attendees went on to become support buddies to mentors and mentees on the scheme.

A key aspect of the project was the use of structured reflections, with both mentors and mentees completing reflective logs following mentoring conversations. This supported participants to explore their experiences, address issues of underrepresentation, and discuss strategies for fostering a more inclusive work environment. A sample of participants were invited for interviews to share their experiences in greater depth after the project. Participants discussed challenges they encountered and how reverse mentoring contributed to their personal and professional growth. As this was an ethically approved research project, the reflective data has been used anonymously to analyse the impact of the scheme and share insights beyond the project.

To further support participants, everyone was assigned a support buddy at a similar level in the profession to them. There were 17 support buddies in total. This provided an additional layer of support, offering a safe space where mentors and mentees could discuss feelings or delve deeper into their reflections, encouraging open dialogue and emotional wellbeing, as well as providing a further opportunity to make a new contact in the sector.

Structure

Over several months, nine law students, 17 junior lawyers (apprentices, paralegals, trainees and solicitors of two years PQE or less), and 20 managers and partners (with at least five years' supervisory experience) from four law firms engaged in reverse mentoring. This created opportunities for students and junior lawyers to guide conversations with senior lawyers, highlighting their lived experiences and challenges they face as underrepresented individuals within the legal profession or aspiring to join the legal profession. The four law firms were drawn from those who participated in the roundtable discussions.

We used a combination of mentoring models 1 and 2 on page 21 so there was a mix of mentoring pairs and trios.

It was felt at the roundtable discussions that it would be beneficial for student mentors to have the support of a fellow mentor (junior lawyer). Due to participant numbers, this wasn't possible in all cases. As such, the mentoring partnerships included: (i) junior lawyer mentoring senior lawyer/leader; (ii) junior lawyer and law student co-mentoring senior lawyer/leader; and (iii) law student mentoring senior lawyer/leader.

There was a pre-reverse mentoring reflection, where mentors and mentees shared their thoughts on key topics including underrepresentation in the legal profession, their sense of voice and value, wellbeing, and their confidence in discussing and addressing underrepresentation. Participants also completed a short survey about their interests, passions and values which helped the team to match people.

Pre-reverse mentoring reflection

- 1.** The first meeting focused on understanding the concept of reverse mentoring, finding common ground, and exploring what participants hoped to gain from the scheme.
- 2.** The second meeting delved into underrepresentation, examining privilege and intersectionality, and sharing past experiences. Participants discussed challenges related to supervision and recruitment, reflecting on what they had learned about each other so far.
- 3.** In the third meeting, the focus shifted to belonging within the legal profession. Participants explored facilitators and barriers to belonging, impact of biases and stereotyping, and ways to support underrepresented individuals. They reflected on how they might do things differently to promote inclusivity.
- 4.** The fourth meeting centred on the link between inclusion and wellbeing. Participants discussed issues raised in their previous meetings, reflecting on how these conversations impacted their understanding of trainee-supervisor relationships and support.
- 5.** In the fifth meeting, participants began co-creating an action plan based on their mutual learning. They reflected on how they felt about taking steps toward change.
- 6.** The sixth and final meeting involved refining the action plan. Participants further developed the actions they had proposed and reflected on their experiences across the scheme, including how they felt about the proposed actions.

Alongside these mentoring conversations, participants were invited to an introductory launch session, a mid-project group get-together/reflection, and an end of project celebration event. We also created a LinkedIn chat group for all participants. All group sessions were conducted online and many of the mentoring conversations were also conducted online due to geographical distance between mentors and mentees, for example, people working in different offices within the same law firm. Participants were also offered three opportunities for a one-to-one or group chat with their support buddy during the scheme.

Mentors' experience (students and junior lawyers)

Assuming the mentor role presented opportunities and challenges. Taking the lead in discussions with more senior professionals was, for many, an unfamiliar and occasionally uncomfortable task. Mentors initially grappled with navigating new power dynamics and feeling unsure about how to assert themselves with their mentees. Students struggled to broach sensitive topics like race and gender, especially when their mentees came from different cultural backgrounds. However, as the project progressed, mentors found more confidence. As their confidence grew, so did their ability to open up about the sensitive and often personal topics the scheme aimed to explore.

Mentees' experience (supervisors and partners)

Most mentees started with an awareness of underrepresentation but left with a much deeper understanding of the systemic issues at play. For many mentees, the scheme offered an opportunity to reflect on their own behaviour, as well as wider firm culture. The role reversal was not only educational for mentees but also helped foster empathy. They became more attuned to the experiences of underrepresented groups, leading them to think critically about their own roles in perpetuating exclusionary practices.

Shared experiences

Mentors and mentees alike highlighted the value of reverse mentoring as a platform for fostering honest conversations about EDI workplace challenges. These discussions supported the breaking down of barriers and confronting of issues not openly addressed in traditional hierarchical structures. Participants valued the structured format of the scheme, which encouraged regular check-ins and discussions, helping them reflect on their experiences. The project's ability to spark ongoing conversations about change within the legal profession was seen as a significant outcome. Both mentors and mentees expressed their enthusiasm for continuing this positive dialogue and participating in similar programmes in the future.

Impact

The project brought complexities of intersectionality to the forefront. Participants discovered that underrepresentation within the profession is complex, involving characteristics like race, gender, and class, among others. Many realised that fostering inclusivity requires more than surface-level adjustments; it demands a critical look at the structures and practices that shape their work environments. This is challenging, long-term work.

The experience did result in tangible changes being made in some law firms almost immediately, with new initiatives introduced to create more inclusive work environments.

- ➔ One firm implemented 'Partner Trainees' where senior partners provide additional support to junior employees, helping them navigate challenges in transitioning to life as a lawyer.
- ➔ People joined new committees focused on inclusivity, allowing them to directly shape policies that promote EDI and wellbeing.

- ➔ Participants reviewed their hiring practices, such as visa sponsorship, and social policies, such as using accessible venues and reducing alcohol-centred events, recognising that traditional ways of doing things were not conducive to fostering diversity of people or inclusion.
- ➔ Discussions around accessibility, such as adapting working hours for disabled people or for faith related reasons, led to review and consideration of more flexible working policies for some participants. Participants also considered their policies around the reporting of discriminatory incidents at work.
- ➔ Some participants committed to individual change by making an effort to genuinely get to know their colleagues and team members. They discussed with leadership how to take learnings from the project to other firm leaders who did not participate.
- ➔ Many people also looked for opportunities to expand the scheme and promote diversity at work, moving away from a deficit approach and encouraging 360-degree feedback across their team.

Project timeline and topics



Below is an outline of the timings of this project and the discussion topics provided for each meeting. Feel free to use this template and adapt it for your own project, purpose and objectives:

Meeting 1

Sharing stories, setting goals and getting to know one another

- ➔ Focus on humanisation and breaking down hierarchies i.e. getting used to equal footing of reverse mentoring and potential power dynamic reversal
- ➔ Consider starting with an ice breaker – share something for a few minutes each that means something to you.
- ➔ Find common ground to build rapport - talk about general topics like hobbies; favourite places to eat/things to cook; least/most favourite things about law; the area you live in; dogs or cats; family and background; why you study/work in the area you do; favourite TV shows/films etc.
- ➔ Share your pledges with each other from the intro session – what are your mutual expectations?

- ➔ Discuss what you both hope to get out of the project/ experience – what are your aims/goals? Where do you want to develop awareness/knowledge? (there is no right or wrong here)
 - ➔ Consider SMART as a framework for goals:
 - ➔ Specific – clear, unambiguous, focused on deliverables
 - ➔ Measurable – milestones and markers to measure progress
 - ➔ Attainable – realistic but requiring stretch
 - ➔ Relevant – aligned with overarching project goals
 - ➔ Time-based – include a timeframe for achieving each objective
 - ➔ Aim for at least three developmental goals each (mentor and mentee)
 - ➔ Discuss confidentiality and the different requirements of the reverse mentoring agreement – are you both happy with it?
 - ➔ Towards the end of the meeting, share how you're both feeling about the project having had the first meeting. Is there anything you'd like to do differently next meeting to what you've done this time?
 - ➔ Try to agree next meeting, where, how etc. before you finish this meeting

Meeting 2

Wellbeing and stressors in law

Start with an ice breaker – try a gratitude practice. Discuss three things you each feel grateful/thankful for; chat about what you have brought up and how it makes you feel

The focus of this meeting is to explore wellbeing and stressors in the workplace currently or experienced as an aspiring lawyer (e.g. in seeking experience/applying for roles) and culture around wellbeing/mental health in the sector (including micro-cultures within departments) – discussion should be focused around the mentor's sense of under-representation

If you feel comfortable, start to explore the mentor's sense of under-representation (and mentee's if relevant)

- ➔ In what ways do you feel under-represented? How has this impacted your career/studies to date? What has been your journey from growing up to where you are now?
- ➔ You could also discuss privilege – in what ways are both/either of you privileged? How does this intersect with your under-representation, if at all?

- ➔ What do you each already know about the forms of under-representation discussed? Has the mentee had any experience of working with people (particularly juniors/trainees) from a similar background and what did they find/learn through this experience or what questions/issues were they left with?
- ➔ Discuss intersectionality – how do different parts of your identity interact and impact your experiences?

Discuss your previous experiences

- ➔ Consider comparing mentor's current experiences with mentees past experiences as a junior/student and current experiences as a senior lawyer
- ➔ If you could go back to a past experience and change anything in terms of University/jobs, what would it be? What would you do differently?

Consider trainee/junior supervision and/or recruitment specifically

- ➔ What areas of supervision/recruitment do mentor and mentee find challenging in relation to wellbeing, if any?

- ➔ What are the barriers, if any, in accessing/discussing wellbeing support from mentor and mentee's perspectives? What are the commonalities or differences between you?
- ➔ How would you both approach a conversation with a junior lawyer/trainee/applicant about wellbeing?

Try to keep five minutes for a debrief – talk about how you feel, what the conversation has made you think about, any actions you want to take?

End with an ice-breaker – talk about something you're looking forward to for the rest of this week or the weekend

Try to agree next meeting, where, how etc. before you finish this meeting

Meeting 3

Inclusion in the law

Start with an ice-breaker – this can be anything you like. How about: if you could be any animal, what would you be and why? You could talk about animals/pets that you've known in your life (or that you might currently have)

The focus for this meeting is to discuss workplace inclusion or inclusion issues perceived/experienced as an aspiring lawyer (e.g. in recruitment/applications); cover firm culture and department micro-cultures– as before, discussions should focus on the mentor's under-representation

Belonging: discuss what this means to you and why it's important. In what spaces/places do you feel like you belong?

Try this exercise:

- ➔ Mentor starts with 'I feel like I belong when ...
- ➔ Mentee responds with 'I feel like I belong when ...
- ➔ Mentor continues with 'I don't feel I belong when ...
➔ and so on for five minutes to ease you into the topic

Discuss any stereotypes or biases that might be held or have been heard at work or otherwise relating to the mentor's under-representation

Does the mentor feel they face any barriers in progressing professionally or academically due to their under-representation? What have been the implications of this for the mentor?

Meeting 4

The intersections of wellbeing, inclusion and belonging

Start with an icebreaker – try ‘two truths and a lie’. Both mentor and mentee come up with three statements about themselves – two things which are true and one which is a lie and your partner has to guess which is the lie (try to think of things your mentor/mentee doesn’t yet know about you). You could then talk about the things you chose and why afterwards.

The focus of this meeting is about bringing meetings two and three together.

Have a recap of your discussions in meetings two and three – what stood out to you? What have you learned so far? Has anyone taken any action or done anything differently so far as a result?

What ideas does the mentor have about how senior people/trainee supervisors might support and advocate better for different under-represented junior/aspiring lawyers? What does the mentee do already? How does the mentee feel about these suggestions?

Has there been any support the mentor has accessed or anything they have done that has had a positive impact on their feelings of under-representation? What support does the mentee currently recommend to trainees/juniors? Does the mentor’s under-representation have any impact on how they view their future selves and career aspirations and goals?

Has the mentee faced any barriers or challenges in terms of their own progression? What has their journey been to their current position?

End with an ice-breaker – now you’re halfway through the meetings, how do you feel it’s going? Is there anything you’d like to do differently going forward?

Try to agree next meeting, where, how etc. before you finish this meeting

Discuss how wellbeing and inclusion are intertwined – do you see them as connected issues? How do/might they overlap? How does one impact the other? Mentor to share their experiences of this based on their sense of under-representation

➔ How does the mentor's under-representation impact how much they feel they matter as an individual to the firm and how much they feel they belong to different communities within the firm/sector/University?

Has the mentor's sense of under-representation impacted their ability or desire to get involved in University or professional life socially?

What impact does the trainee/supervisor relationship have, if any – do/can they impact the mentor's sense of belonging? What current practice, if any, does the mentee have relating to junior lawyers' sense of belonging?

Has the mentor had opportunity to meet people from a similar background to them? What is the mentor's peer support network like? Could supervisors support with making connections with other junior lawyers? How?

What is the mentor's senior support network like? Does the mentor's sense of under-representation affect their ability to build relationships?

Try to spend at least 10 minutes at the end reflecting together on what you've learned/enjoyed/done so far. Look back at the pledges you set in meeting 1 – have you stuck with them? Did anything change as you went along/get in the way? How do you feel looking back at your intentions from the start of the project before you knew each other?

Meeting 5

Action research

The focus of this meeting is about beginning to develop an action plan to take forward, based on discussions you've had so far. Prior to this meeting, mentors and mentees should spend some time looking at and finding out about the firm's current practices around application, recruitment and support processes for aspiring lawyers, trainees and other junior lawyers in order to critically discuss them in this meeting.

Start with an ice breaker: What is your favourite memory of this year so far? How did you feel at that time? What has challenged you this year? How have you dealt with those challenges?

What we already have/are doing:

- ➔ Discuss what you found out prior to the meeting about application, recruitment and support processes
 - What are the good/helpful parts of existing provision?
 - Are there any issues?
 - What do you think is missing?

Change at the individual level:

- ➔ What key issues have been identified in meetings so far? Which areas does the mentee need to work on most and how?
- ➔ What are you going to do or have you been doing differently as a result of what you have learned from one another so far?

Change beyond the mentoring relationship

- ➔ In your position of influence as mentee, what are you going to try and instigate on a broader scale i.e. supporting colleagues/the firm to do something differently?

- ➔ As a mentor, how might you influence/encourage peers to engage differently with trainee support and supervision?

What ideas have you already discussed about improving support for junior lawyers? Try to distil these ideas down into what you see as the top 3 issues you want to see your firm/the legal profession addressing

- ➔ How, if at all, do the existing resources you discussed above address these issues?

You don't need to explore possible solutions yet, this is next week's focus

Towards the end of the meeting, share how you're both feeling about the "action" part of the project.

Try to agree next meeting, where, how etc. before you finish this meeting

Meeting 6

Wrapping up and agreeing next steps

Start with an ice breaker – share with one another the best and/or closest relationship you have had or currently have with another person at work/at University and what it means to you. What was/is good about that relationship? How does it make you feel? What foundations/principles was/is that relationship built on? How does it influence your other relationships?

Reflecting on all you have explored during the project and the top 3 issues you discussed last week, start to develop an action plan

Think of this like a proposal to your firm and/or to the regulators of the legal profession about how to develop support for aspiring and junior lawyers for more inclusive and wellbeing focused relationships

- ➔ What should be in this plan/proposal from a juniors' perspective?
- ➔ What would you include from a supervisors' perspective?
- ➔ What do you think should be the core principles for inclusive and mindful supervision?
- ➔ Come up with a trainee and supervisor role descriptor to serve as a 'baseline' standard for what supervisor and trainee can expect from each other in all cases

Throughout, think about what you have gained from taking part in reverse mentoring and how this might influence your action plan

This is your final meeting of the project! Try to spend at least 10 minutes at the end reflecting together on the experience and what you've enjoyed/learned from this unique opportunity.

Give yourselves a huge pat on the back for taking part in this project which we really hope will make a tangible difference to wellbeing and inclusion practices in the profession – thank you, as always, for being a part of it!

Matching Questions

Please answer the following questions by [date]
These questions will be used to support us in matching people for the project.

1. What is your name?

2. What are your hobbies/interests outside of your work/studies?

3. What three words would you use to describe yourself and why?

4. What has motivated you to apply to be a mentor/mentee and what do you hope to get out of the experience? (max. 200 words)

5. How would you describe your experiences so far as a [insert relevant roles e.g. junior or senior lawyer] (max. 200 words)

6. What sort of a mentoring relationship do you enjoy (if you have previous mentoring experiences) or would you look for (if you don't have previous mentoring experiences)? (max. 200 words)

**7. Would you prefer to meet online or in person?
(Please note, it may not always be possible to
accommodate this request except where needed
for accessibility reasons)**

**8. Are you happy to be in either a 1-to-1 mentoring
relationship or a group mentoring relationship?
[delete if not relevant to your scheme]**

**9. Do you have an existing working relationship with
anyone who you know is also signed up to this project?
(We ask this Question as we try to pair people who do
not already work closely together)**

**10. Is there any further information you would like to add
in terms of being matched with a mentoring partner?**

Discussion questions for closing reflections with mentors and mentees



Interviewer notes:

The interview is designed to be semi-structured in nature so if a new question arises out of what someone has said which isn't listed below, feel free to ask it.

Don't feel constrained by the "script".

If people are giving very short answers, encourage them with questions like **"Why?"** or **"How?"** or **"Is there anything else you'd like to add?"** etc.

Close the interview by asking if there is anything they want to add which hasn't been covered.

Make sure you let people know what will be done with their responses to the questions and assure them that their anonymity will be protected if any quotes or examples are reported within the workplace or more publicly.

1. What did you enjoy most about your time as a mentor/mentee?
 - a) Have you achieved what you wanted to get out of the project?
2. What did you find challenging, if anything?
 - a) Do you feel you overcame those challenges during the project?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your mentor/mentee?
 - a) Does it differ from other work relationships? If yes, how?
4. What do you think was your most significant learning point or points from the project?
 - a) What do you intend to do in response to that learning?
5. Have you learned anything about yourself during this project?
6. What are the key things you want to action/see actioned in your workplace and/or the wider profession following the reverse mentoring scheme?

Discussion questions for closing reflections with mentors and mentees



Additional questions if time allows:

1. How did you feel about the intro materials, handbook and other support you had during the project?
2. What do you think about reverse mentoring as a concept, now you've tried it out?
3. How do you think the project could have been improved?
4. What skills or attributes do you think you have developed or improved from being involved in the project?
5. What advice would you give to someone else who was considering taking part in reverse mentoring?



Reverse ←
mentoring in the
legal profession

a practical toolkit for
kickstarting an
inclusive scheme