Reverse mentoring in the legal profession

Mentor and mentee handbook for [organisation name] reverse mentoring project

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1. Purpose of this handbook

This handbook is one-stop shop for all your support resources during your time on the reverse mentoring project.

Please browse through the handbook as a follow up to your intro session on [date]. In particular, section 5 will be useful to look at in advance of your meetings as this contains suggested meeting prompts you might like to cover.

We hope you find this a useful resource but if at any point during the project, you have questions which are not obviously answered here, please get in touch with **[insert key contact details]**

2. About the project – purpose and objectives

[summarise the project's purpose and objectives]

Project timeline

Here is a suggested timeline for the project meetings and evaluations. Please try to stick to this when you can although we appreciate this may need to be flexible, dependent on work schedules and intensity, as well as annual leave etc.:

Complete reverse mentoring agreement and matching questionnaire	Prior to meeting 1
Meeting 1 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Meeting 2 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Meeting 3 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Meeting 4 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Meeting 5 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Meeting 6 (followed by short reflection)	By [date]
Optional mid-project group get together	[date]
Optional end of project group debrief	[date]
Complete post-mentoring reflective exercises	By [date]
Celebration event	[date]

3. Key messages for mentors and mentees

Remember the commitments you have made to this project via the reverse mentoring agreement (you can find a copy **here**). You must complete this agreement, if you agree with the statements, before your first meeting with your mentor/mentee. If you have any concerns at any time about not being able to meet these commitments or that your mentor/mentee has broken any of these commitments, please contact [name].

Authenticity and willingness to learn

Bring your whole self, your true self to this project - try to leave preconceptions behind – trying something new, don't let old barriers or hierarchies hold you back in this project.

Trust

Be prepared to trust in the process, in your mentoring partner(s) and that you are in a safe space whenever you are having your conversations. This can be hard when you're meeting someone potentially for the first time but remember the common ground and interest you have in this project and use that to build trust and confidence in one another.

Transparency and no judgement

Listen and share openly and honestly and don't judge your partner(s). We all have our own experiences and thoughts – we are here to learn from one another. Try to think of the process as reciprocal and mutual rather than reverse. This isn't about mentors educating mentees – this is about amplifying the voices of under-represented people to change the deficit narratives surrounding them which we repeatedly see in the legal profession (and beyond). This is about transformation for the benefit of our collective legal community. The more open and honest you are with one another, the more impact we can have.

Having difficult conversations

When we are talking about issues relating to under-representation, there may be difficult or sensitive conversation topics that crop up. Here are some tips you might find useful:

Think about the power dynamic – remember, this is about empowering mentors as much as it is about mentee learning and development – it should be a 2-way street. Try to imagine yourself as a fly on the wall looking in – what would you make of your conversation? Are you being too opinionated or driving your point too hard? Is this resulting in you taking over? Put yourself in the shoes of your mentor/mentee.

Maintaining the power dynamic reversal doesn't mean either person can't propose a change of subject if you feel a discussion is getting too heated or emotional e.g. saying "why don't we park this topic and come back to it next week? I'd really like to hear more about x." This can avoid getting into a rabbit hole or going off topic.

Sharing your experiences openly and mutually can prevent your partner from feeling like they have gone out on a limb and exposed themselves emotionally or personally without a mutual response – that can feel isolating and may make your partner feel annoyed or emotional.

Try to end difficult or emotional conversations with a way forward. Whether you bring the conversation to a close early and suggest meeting up again once you've had chance to think about the discussion or agree to restart the conversation the next day. You could even break for 5 mins then come back together. Try to ensure the decision is made by you both about what to do next. You could always follow up with an email if you leave a meeting feeling unsure about whether you've reached a resolution to any issues that arose.

Confidentiality and safeguarding

If a reverse mentoring relationship is to result in authentic and honest conversations, we need to ensure we create safe spaces for conversations. Key to this is knowing that what is discussed in your meetings will not be shared outside of those meetings, other than with the express consent of both mentor and mentee or confidentially as part of your research project feedback. This is what you are agreeing to with one another.

Please remember the confidentiality commitment you have made in the reverse mentoring agreement. There are legal limits to confidentiality, for example, if a mentee is concerned that a mentor is at risk of harming themselves or others.

Wellbeing and support

Reverse mentoring conversations may result in discussion of difficult, emotive or distressing topics. This applies to both mentors and mentees, no matter their career stage. We want this to be an inspiring and enjoyable experience for everyone – part of that is accessing the support available to you to make the most out of the experience.

See the 'support' section below for key support sources.

4. Communicating during the project

The main way you will be contacted if there is action to be taken or important information during the project is via **[insert method e.g. e-mail]**. If there are any other ways we can support you with more accessible communications, please let **[name]** now.

[insert details of any Teams space or LinkedIn groups etc. people can join]

5. Meeting themes/prompts

Set out below are suggested prompts/themes for your meetings.

You should seek to be open and honest with one another in discussing these topics. Be inquisitive, ask questions, give examples and share your experiences and thoughts together. Each meeting should be around [time e.g. 1 hour] long and can take place either online or in person. Please respect your partner(s) wishes in terms of how they'd like to meet e.g. if they want to meet online for accessibility reasons. Try to avoid having another meeting/commitment immediately before and after where possible so you have some time to prepare beforehand and reflect/relax afterwards:

[detail guidance on themes/topics for each meeting below]

6. Project evaluation

Your reflections during and after your reverse mentoring meetings are a vital part of evaluating the success and impact of this project, as well as supporting you to consider how the experience has impacted you and actions you might want to take as a result. **[explain how you plan to evaluate the scheme and what you plan to do with any data gathered, considering ethics and GDPR etc.]**

All dissemination or sharing of evaluation data gathered from you during the project will be anonymised to try and avoid anyone being identifiable.

Please engage with the reflection activities as whole heartedly as we're sure you'll engage in your conversations with one other.

Reflections

[explain how people will be asked to reflect e.g. using the reflective template, any opportunities for whole group reflection, an end of project conversation and the time commitment of each]

7. Support resources

If you need any help or support at any time during this project, this is the plan of action:

→ Contact **[name]** via **[details]** in the first instance outlining the issue, providing only essential information so as not to unnecessarily break confidentiality;

→ **[name]** will attempt to resolve the issue or support you to contact appropriate support elsewhere such as **[examples]**;

→ If support issues relate to a breakdown in the mentoring relationship, **[name]** will attempt to work with mentor and mentee to repair the relationship. However, where this is not possible, pairs may need to withdraw from the project, unless a reserve mentor or mentee wants to join the project partway through (please note, this cannot be guaranteed).

If as an individual you need or would feel more comfortable with or need different support, please discuss with **[name]**. If at any point during the project you need adjustments to be made for the project to continue being accessible for you, please let **[name]** know.

Everyone should ensure they have completed any compulsory EDI training before your first meeting. [provide relevant links/details here] If you have any questions about this, please ask **[name]**

Peer support

[provide details of any additional support such as support buddies from external organisations here, if relevant]

If you have any questions or need any additional support, please contact **[name]**.

Handbook

This handbook is adapted from various reverse mentoring projects conducted at the University of Leeds.

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8. Checklist

Before you have your first meeting with your mentor/mentee, have you:

→ Reviewed the intro session slides and asked **[name]** any questions?

→ Completed the matching questionnaire?

→ Completed the reverse mentoring agreement?

→ Had e-mail or other contact with your mentor/mentee to agree how/when/where you will meet?

→ Reviewed the prompts/themes for meeting 1 and considered in advance what you want to discuss with/ask of your mentor/mentee?

→ Considered your own goals for the project to share with your mentor/mentee in meeting 1?

→ Considered any support/access needs you have and communicated them to **[name]** and your mentor/mentee?

→ Looked in the mirror and told yourself 'I am awesome'? – because you are and we're very grateful and happy to have you as part of this project – thank you for being a part of it!

9. Useful resources

Here are some short online talks we thought mentors/mentees might find useful. You are not required to look at any of this and it is not a complete list by any means. If there are other talks you'd like to add to this list for other mentors/mentees to see, please let **[name]** know:

Trigger warning: these videos/sources discuss sensitive issues relating to life experiences and under-representation/marginalisation including racism, abuse and sexism

→ **'Why we tell stories'**

→ **'How to have a good conversation'**

→ **The power of sharing your story | LeRon L. Barton**

→ **The language of being human | Poet Ali**

→ **Jamila Lyiscott: 3 ways to speak English | TED**

→ **Get Comfortable Being Uncomfortable – TED talk**

→ **The power of reverse mentoring**

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