GUIDANCE FOR MENTEES

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a highly valuable development activity implemented in many organisations. At the core of the activity is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, where the development of the mentee is the key focus.

The development needs satisfied through the relationship can vary in focus from guidance on settling into a new organisation, performance improvement to career management. The main point with mentoring is that the focus is determined by the mentee. They must lead in identifying issues and, with guidance from the mentor, resolving them. The mentor is not there to provide 'the answers’, but to guide the mentee towards 'the answer’ that is right for them.

The mentoring relationship can be both short and long term. It may develop to focus on a particular issue or it may be one that lasts for years covering a range of issues. Typically the mentor and mentee meet at designated times and places to discuss issues; make plans to resolve and then review. The formal vs. informal nature of the sessions is down to those involved, however each session must have a purpose.

Why mentoring?

Engaging in a mentoring relationship is beneficial for mentor and mentee as well as the MRC as a whole. The specific benefits for the mentee are:

- Opportunity to work through issues with someone who isn’t your line manager
- Greater access to professional networks
- Can aid introduction to a new organisation
- Can help identify and work towards career goals
The benefits the MRC gains from its employees entering into mentoring relationships are:

- Increase in knowledge retention within organisation
- Positive impact on recruitment and retention
- Able to adapt better to changes

**How do I find a mentor?**

If you are considering mentoring, it is important to ensure that you have the right mentor. You need to think carefully about who you are going to approach and how. Below are some pointers to help you identify a suitable match.

- **Experience** – ideally you should be looking for someone more experienced than yourself, perhaps been at the MRC for longer. They don’t necessarily have to be a senior member of staff, sometimes using someone in a much higher position can be inhibiting. It is not recommended that you use your line manager as your mentor.
- **Knowledge of profession** – the mentor needs to have an understanding of the environment you are working in. They don’t necessarily have to have an in-depth understanding of your work, but at least an awareness.
- **Personal Qualities** – not everyone is suited to being a mentor, they must possess certain personal qualities to be effective. When trying to identify a mentor you are looking for someone that you think has good listening skills, can be patient and supportive and most importantly that you trust.
- **Available Time** – a mentoring relationship is a commitment that both you and the mentor will need to put time into. Therefore you need to think carefully whether the person you are thinking of approaching has genuinely got the time available. For example if you now of someone who is already mentoring one or two of your colleagues, taking on another would not be recommended.

If you are struggling to identify someone within the MRC, then there are external networks that may be suitable.

- Coaching and Mentoring Network (http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/Default.htm)
- MentorNet (http://www.mentornet.net/)
- UK Resource Centre for Women (http://www.ukrc4setwomen.org/)
Whomever you decide to approach, you need to remember that they may say ‘no’. If they do then it is best to accept this and try to identify someone else. As mentioned before, the mentoring relationship is an important commitment and if you have a mentor who is not truly committed you won’t gain the benefits you should from them.

Getting Started

Once you have found a mentor, you need to agree with the mentor how the relationship will work. This should ideally be done at the beginning of the first meeting. There is no need to formalise the arrangement by drawing up a contract, but there are key issues that need to be discussed and agreed. Below is a suggested list of the topics to include in the discussion:

- Meetings
  - Frequency and length
  - Location
  - Formal vs. Informal
  - Who and how will outcomes/action plans be recorded?

- How will communication outside of meetings be dealt with; method, turnaround, frequency etc.?

- Are there any issues that will not be discussed?

- Are there any limits on confidentiality? Are the contents of the meetings to be kept confidential or can they be discussed with outside parties?

The 3 Stage Approach

An effective mentoring relationship has been shown to move through 3 stages. Each stage builds on the learning from the previous and within each stage there are responsibilities for both the mentor and mentee.

Stage 1 – Exploration

During this stage your mentor will be using questioning techniques to work through the issue being discussed. You shouldn’t approach the session thinking that the mentor will simply provide the answer. The goal of the process
is development for you, and this will only be achieved by working through the issue to make your own judgements.

To benefit fully from this stage you must be open and honest and prepared to be challenged. You may find that some of the questions relate to for example your attitudes or decisions you have made, which may be uncomfortable. However to grow personally and professionally these are issues that need to be addressed.

**Stage 2 – New Understanding**

Having worked through the first stage, the likelihood is that some ‘new understanding’ will be reached about the issue being discussed. This may be a minor change in viewpoint or a major breakthrough in your thinking processes.

Regardless of the size or significance of the breakthrough, during this stage your mentor will work with you to reflect on what you have learned. This will then have an impact on any potential conclusions that may be reached.

**Stage 3 – Action**

If you have successfully reached a new understanding the next stage is to agree what actions should be taken. Again at this point the mentor will not tell you what you need to do. However they will work with you to identify possible actions that will resolve the issue.

If actions are agreed you must ensure these are recorded and then monitored through regular review.