

The mentoring toolkit: Barriers to delivering a formal mentoring scheme and how to overcome them

This document describes common barriers encountered by organisations when setting up and maintaining formal mentoring schemes, and provides information on how to overcome them.

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This document is part of a toolkit to help organisations set up and run formal mentoring schemes.

Other documents in the toolkit:

- *Setting up a formal mentoring scheme*
- *Mentoring and the attainment gap*

To access these and other resources [visit the toolkit on the GMC website.](#)

Summary

- To create this toolkit, we spoke to a range of mentoring scheme organisers to understand the barriers to **setting up** and **running** sustainable formal mentoring schemes. Many highlighted challenges they had overcome and that they were still facing.
- Several common themes emerged, as well as some innovative ways in which barriers had been tackled.
- This document details the barriers that were described and ways to overcome them. It is provided for the benefit of those who want to **establish** or **improve** a formal mentoring scheme.

Barriers and enablers for formal mentoring schemes

This document covers the main barriers identified by scheme organisers and suggests ways they might be overcome.



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Funding

Funding for formal mentoring schemes is a common challenge.

Many scheme organisers mentioned having to convince senior leaders in their organisations of the benefits of mentoring to access stretched budgets, both in local deaneries and royal colleges.

Most receive funding from medical education or professional support budgets within their organisations, which were noted to be particularly under pressure.

Funding is often needed for the administration of mentoring schemes and for regular promotion among new mentees.

Administrative costs were either salary costs for an employee who devoted part of their time to the scheme, or for the use of a mentoring platform.

The amount of funding needed to run a successful mentoring scheme was seen by organisers as low compared with the potential benefits of mentoring.

For more information on the benefits and costs of different ways to administering a mentoring scheme, see [Setting up a formal mentoring scheme](#).

Three suggestions to help secure funding

1. Influence senior decision makers

- Provide evidence of the benefits of mentoring for mentors, mentees, and organisations – and its contribution to improved patient safety.
- Evidence of mentoring in reducing the attainment gap.
- Real world examples of the benefits of mentoring (including for senior leaders).
- Evidence from evaluation of mentoring schemes.

2. Collaborate with colleagues

- Consider working with other regional or specialty colleagues to share resources.

3. Consider commercial funding partners

- Balance benefits and risks and consider conflicts of interest.

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1. **Convincing senior leaders** to prioritise mentoring will depend on demonstrating its benefit to the organisation:
 - For evidence from the academic literature on the benefits of mentoring in reducing the attainment gap, refer to [Mentoring and the attainment gap](#).
 - Mentoring has been highlighted repeatedly in research across medical and non-medical education and training as part of a package of measures to reduce the attainment gap.
 - An impact evaluation of the mentoring scheme will be helpful when seeking renewed funding. For information about what to consider when evaluating a formal mentoring scheme, see [Setting up a formal mentoring scheme](#).
 2. **Consider collaborating** with other organisations that want to run formal mentoring schemes to share the administrative costs. If your organisation wishes to run several different mentoring schemes, consider pooling resources.
 3. **Commercial funding partners** may be able to provide the funding needed for a formal mentoring scheme and the costs involved are not likely to be significant to a commercial company.

When approaching potential commercial partners, carefully consider any potential conflict of interest and what the expectations of the funding partner will be.

Administration time

The time required for administration was a barrier for many scheme organisers. Schemes that manually matched mentoring pairs said it required a lot of time.

Some schemes responded to this challenge by using software platforms.

As well as reducing administration time, these sometimes provided other useful functions such as the ability to store documents, incorporate training resources, and schedule and host meetings.

Commercial mentoring platforms do come at a cost, and so the ability to use them will depend on funding.

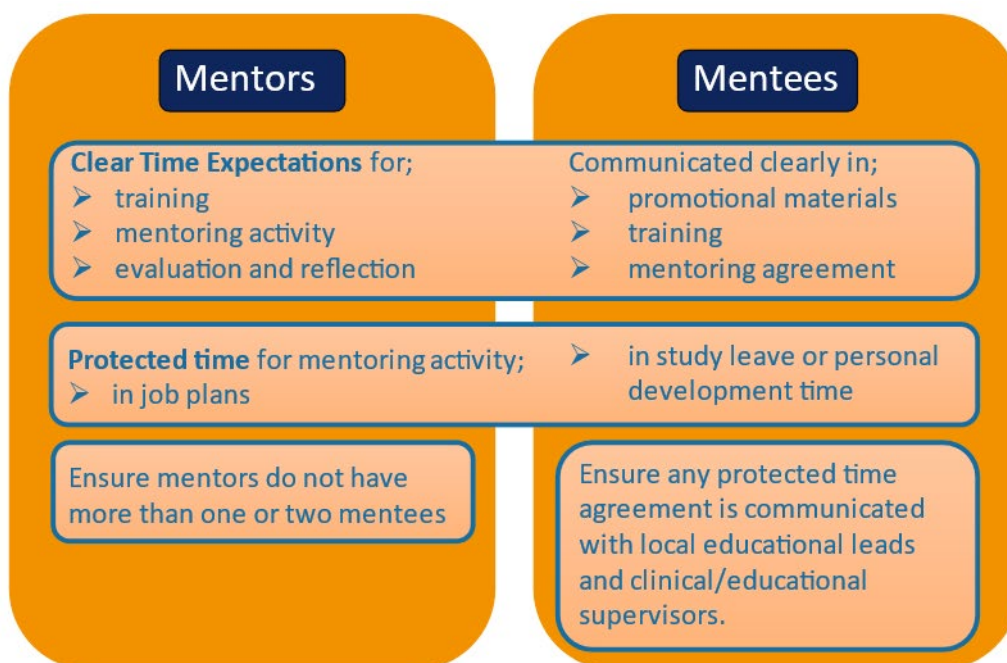
The size of the mentoring scheme may mean that the staff costs of manual administration could exceed the cost of a mentoring platform.

Even with use of a mentoring platform, some administration time will still be required.

For more information on different ways of administering a formal mentoring scheme, and on mentoring platforms, see [Setting up a formal mentoring scheme](#).

Mentor and mentee time

Another significant barrier is the time available that mentors and mentees have available for mentoring. Time is required for training, mentoring activity, evaluation, reflection, and supervision.



Tackling the barrier of mentor and mentee time

Some scheme organisers noticed reduced availability of mentors, and many potential mentors express concern about finding time for mentoring.

Some **suggestions to overcome the barrier of mentor time include:**

- Outlining the time required for mentor training and its frequency.
- Setting clear expectations of the time required for mentoring activities in mentor training and in the mentoring agreement.
 - Mentoring relationships will vary but the commitment is usually an hour meeting every month or two.
- Setting clear expectations of the time required for evaluation and reflection.
- Clearly communicating the time requirements when producing promotional materials or approaching potential mentors.
- Ensuring each mentor does not have more than one or two mentees.
- Achieving buy-in from your organisation to include mentoring commitments in job planning.

Several organisers also noted the issue of limited mentee time, and felt the perceived additional time commitment may be putting off potential mentees.

Some scheme organisers mentioned that many of their mentees were very interested in mentoring but then seemed to struggle to make use of their mentor once matched.

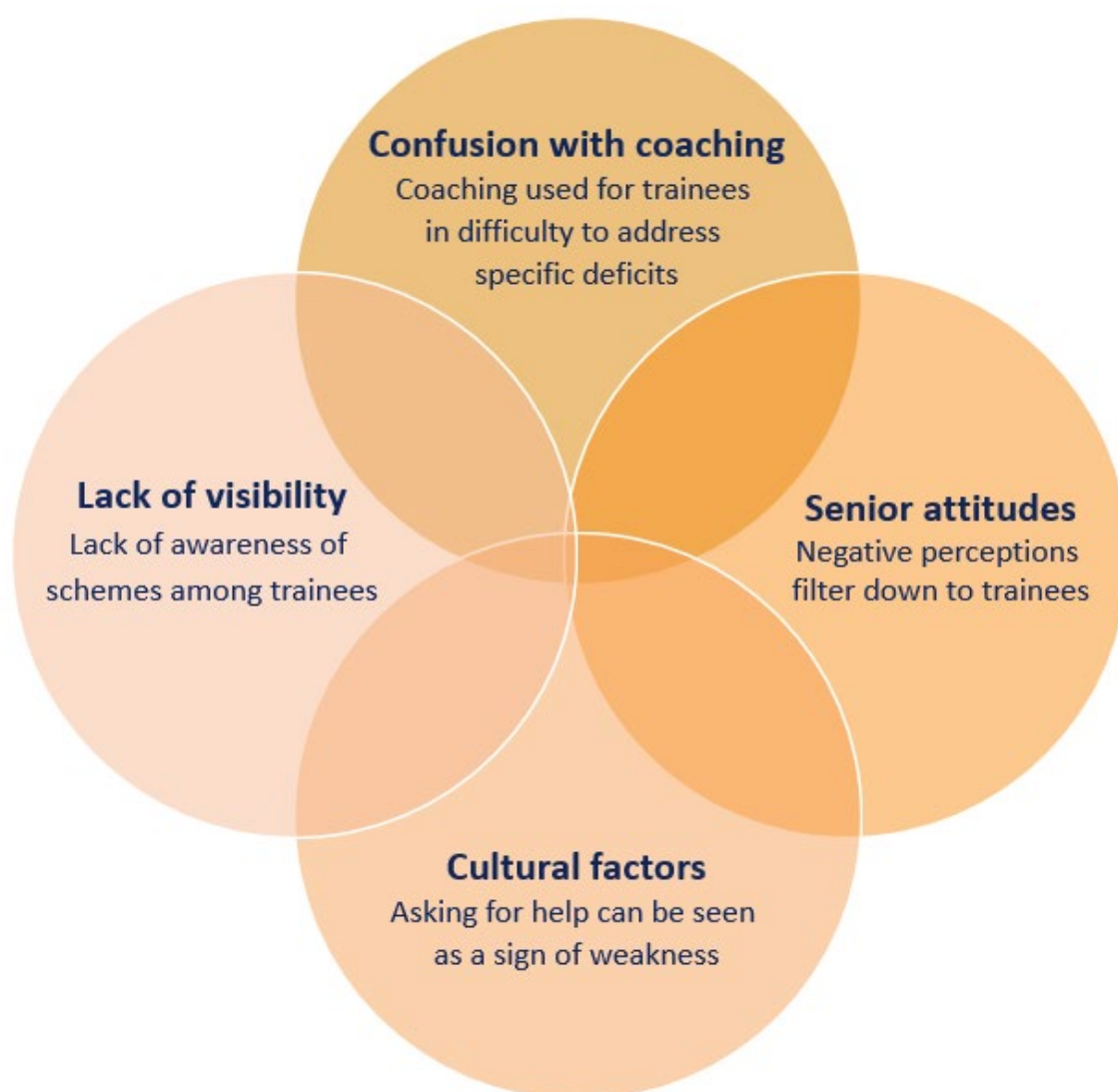
Many of the **suggestions to overcome barriers of mentee time** are similar to those for mentors, and include:

- Outlining the required time for mentee training.
- Setting clear expectations of the time required for mentoring activity in mentee training and the mentoring agreement.
 - Mentoring relationships will vary but the commitment is usually an hour meeting every month or two.
- Setting clear expectations for the time required for evaluation and reflection.
- Clearly communicating the time requirements when producing promotional materials or approaching potential mentees.
- Achieving buy-in from the organisation to allow mentees dedicated time within their working day for mentoring. This could be as part of personal development time or study leave.
 - If able to give protected time, communicate this clearly to mentees and supervisors to ensure mentees feel able to use that time for mentoring.

Negative perceptions

Another barrier may be the perception of mentoring among potential mentees. Several scheme organisers mentioned that their target audience sometimes had negative perceptions of mentoring, feeling it was remedial.

Tackling negative perceptions



Perceptions of mentoring among potential mentees can be improved by focusing on the cause of these perceptions.

- **Confusion between coaching and mentoring.** Lack of clarity between coaching and mentoring may account for some of the negative perceptions. Training organisations may offer coaching for trainees in difficulty, and this is known among potential mentees.

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- Information about the differences between mentoring and coaching could form part of induction processes for doctors starting at an organisation
 - **Negative perceptions among senior leaders** are likely to filter down to potential mentees, so it is important that all leaders understand the benefits of mentoring and have a positive view of those who seek to be involved in it.

Tackling negative perceptions among senior leaders:

- Negative perceptions can be challenged by raising awareness of the benefits of mentoring as part of continuous professional development and by active encouragement of mentoring by organisations.
- [*Good medical practice*](#) makes several mentions of mentoring, particularly in the leadership domain, which states '*you should be willing to offer professional support to colleagues... for example through mentoring*'.
- Promote the benefits of increased morale and retention.
- Although outside the scope of this document, you could consider introducing reverse or reciprocal mentoring to challenge negative cultures.
- **Cultural factors** may contribute to negative perceptions of mentoring among potential mentees, where asking for help may be perceived as a sign of weakness, or there may be increased sensitivity to being seen as needing support.

Some scheme organisers noted that negative perceptions of mentoring were greatest among their international medical graduates.

- Induction for international medical graduates could be used to explain the benefits of mentoring as part of continuous professional development.
Highlight how mentoring can be linked to leadership skills and reflective practice, and can be evidenced on their portfolio.
- Incorporate an element of reverse or reciprocal mentoring into the aims and objectives of the scheme and communicate this clearly.
This may help dispel the perception that mentoring is remedial by highlighting the positive benefits for the mentor as well as the mentee.

Promotion of mentoring schemes was seen as important in informing potential mentees of the benefits and dispelling negative perceptions.

Some examples shared with us included giving the mentoring scheme prominence at a Royal College annual conference, offering taster mentoring sessions, highlighting mentoring in society or specialty publications, and attending local inductions to present on the mentoring offering in the region.

Limited reach

Many scheme organisers expressed concern that mentoring schemes may not be reaching the individuals that would benefit most.

These concerns centred around ensuring equity of access and reaching those who may already be struggling.

Equity of access was an issue for royal college and society mentoring schemes since the majority were funded through membership fees and therefore only accessible to members.

Some Royal College schemes had made the decision to open mentoring to non-members, either as part of equality, diversity, and inclusion work or through innovative funding, making the scheme non reliant on members fees.

These strategies improved access but highlighted that implementation needs to be carefully thought through, including balancing the burden of a lengthy application process with the need to ensure rigorous access requirements are met.

For example, one Royal College scheme aimed at widening participation students and trainees felt the application process necessary for ensuring mentees were from the widening participation demographic was too arduous and was putting off some candidates.

Another concern was that individuals most likely to benefit from mentoring would not have the necessary time to engage with it.

It was felt that individuals who were already having problems at work may feel they have less capacity to take on extra time-consuming activities such as mentoring. Some strategies for overcoming the issue of mentee time are discussed in more detail above, and these may help improve your reach.

Transitioning from pilot to business-as-usual

Many scheme organisers struggled to turn successful pilots into business-as-usual.

Maintaining mentoring schemes beyond the pilot phase was a particularly big challenge for schemes that had been set up and run by a few highly dedicated individuals. Many scheme organisers knew of well-received schemes that were no longer running as the main organiser had moved on to a different job role and momentum had not been maintained.

The reasons for this was due to much of the administration burden being taken by the main organiser of the scheme on a voluntary basis, and that this was not considered when formalising the scheme.

Ad hoc activities of the main organiser (including matching pairs, encouraging mentors to sign up, promoting the scheme to mentees, and day-to-day tasks) were often lost when trying to move the scheme from successful pilot to business-as-usual.

Transition to business-as-usual



Laying the groundwork can help a successful pilot make its way into business-as-usual:

- **Organisational and senior leader buy-in**
 - And plan for ongoing evaluation, so you can demonstrate the scheme's worth.
- **Making sure your BAU plan relies on organisational rather than individual responsibility**
 - This can also be true for pilots but is vital for business-as-usual transition. A formal mentoring scheme should be an offering that continues beyond any individual's involvement or employment. Make sure it has governance.
- **Planning for funding and administration time**
 - Have clear information about the funding and time commitments the scheme requires.
 - Plan how and when you will seek commitment for long-term funding of the scheme to enable purchase of a software mentoring platform or fund staff time.
- **Ongoing recruitment and training of mentors**
 - Who will train mentors and how, and how will training be accessible and consistent.
 - What do you need to do to maintain buy-in from the organisation to encourage and support staff to act as mentors.
- **Regular and ongoing promotion of mentoring to mentees**
 - What information do you need to make available to them, when, and how? For example, could it be included in induction?
 - What do you need to do to maintain buy-in from the organisation to encourage and support potential mentees to take up mentoring opportunities.

Conclusion

This document has highlighted some of the common barriers encountered by mentoring scheme organisers and has offered some potential solutions.

For more information on setting up a mentoring scheme, and how mentoring can form part of a package of measures to tackle the attainment gap, [Setting up a formal mentoring scheme](#) and [Mentoring and the attainment gap](#).

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