RDM Mentoring Scheme

Mentoring Dialogues Pilot Evaluation

Background and Aim

In summer 2019, the RDM Mentoring committee (RDMMC) worked on a pilot proposal for a reverse mentoring scheme in RDM. The fundamental principle of the pilot was to voluntarily invert the typical hierarchical structures of formal mentoring relationships (junior post mentored by senior post), giving senior staff access to the experiences of more junior postholders and to enabling them to re-evaluate their views and understanding of current issues in academia.

Developing the RDM Mentoring Dialogues

After liaising with Dr Judie Gannon (Oxford Brookes) and the People and Organisational Development team (POD, University of Oxford) and assessing potential confidentiality risk factors, the pilot was remodelled into a more fluid and circular structure. Renamed 'Mentoring Dialogues', pairs were matched through their selected topics of interest. These topics were divided into the following:

Topic 1: What it means to belong to the University
Topic 2: Career development and pathways
Topic 3: Support and Wellbeing
Topic 4: What makes a good manager/PI

The mentoring dialogues scheme is fully supported by the RDM Head of Department, who participated in the pilot project.

Participant Recruitment

16 participants that were already known to the RDM Mentoring scheme enrolled onto the pilot and were paired based on their choice of topics. The pilot was officially launched in December 2019, with each pair originally asked to meet across a period of 6 months. Due to the pandemic, most pairs had difficulty continuing their meetings, The pilot was therefore extended by a further 4 months until 30 October 2020, allowing participants to meet and discuss further their chosen topics. Participants completed a self-reflection sheet with their findings and recommendations at their final meeting.

Review of the scheme

The findings and recommendations in the self-reflection sheets have been compiled into a summary document (see scheme outcomes below) and distributed to all participants as well as the RDMMC.

The document was reviewed in a final meeting between participants and the RDMMC on 1 December 2020. 18 individuals were able to attend and discussed the benefits of the pilot and their experiences. Recommendations/findings were advised to the RDM Self-Assessment Team (SAT) for discussion and implementation where possible.

As the pilot was reported by participants as being of value, the RDMMC will consider running a similar venture in future, perhaps with small modifications, for example convening in small groups rather than in pairs, allowing the mentoring topics to be suggested by the participants and opening it up to all in RDM.

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Scheme Outcomes from the Pilot Scheme.
A summary of recommendations made by the participants have been listed under respective topics.

1	What it means to belong to the University
Improve the feeling of belonging for young researchers	
Consider policy and training issues faced in particular by women, ethnic minority groups and foreign graduates in order to pursue an academic career	
Improve how students identify with RDM	
Clarify the terminology used by students and staff	
Support staff with relocation and visa costs	
2	**Career development and pathways**
Publicise the support available to research staff	
Enhance the support to junior scientists beyond their fellowship	
Consider improvements to PDR questions and process	
Investigate a RDM specific fund for Postdocs	
Be transparent about the limitations of the current scientific/academic system	
Increase support for intermediate fellows	
Clarify the career pathways for administrative and academic-support staff	
Clarify opportunities for advancement / promotions	
3	**Support and Wellbeing**
Review communication across RDM with particular reference to how finances within a department are organised	
Consider how social interactions could be promoted	
Look at how funding and training opportunities are announced	
Ensure flexible working opportunities are understood, and information on the website is clear and relevant	
Offer informal advice around childcare and families	
Ensure information around caring responsibilities is clear and disseminated widely	
4	**What makes a good manager/PI**
Improve how we communicate our science across RDM	

Since the pilot concluded:
- This summary report, along with the full list of recommendations have been written up and approved by the RDMMC.
- A subset of the RDMMC have gone through the outcome list above and, where it is within the remit of RDM, marked for further action or investigation.
- Recommendations have been given owners to progress.
- Where a highlighted issue has a solution already in place, we have looked at how we can increase signposting and enhance our communications around the subject.
- Where actions fall outside the remit of RDM (for example looking at the funding of research posts within academia), members of the RDMMC and RDM Strategic will continue to use the information gained to lobby for better conditions.
- Actions have been crossed referenced with the RDM Athena Swan Action plan.

Future Actions
- This document will be uploaded to the RDM website.
- A full list of recommendations, along with comments/progress/outcomes will be added to the RDM website (behind the SSO).

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