

**RTPI**

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## **RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence Guidance Notes for Mentors**

### **Note 1: General Questions and Concerns**

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#### **Introduction to the Mentor Guidance Notes Series**

Free training is available to all mentors through [www.planningmatters.co.uk](http://www.planningmatters.co.uk). This training focuses on the processes of mentoring – getting started, the kinds of things you might need to think about, and dealing with some of the issues that may arise.

These guidance notes are designed to be more specifically focused on mentoring for the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). As such, they should be read alongside, not instead of, the full Guide to the APC, which is available to all parties in the process. Each guidance note has been intentionally restricted to two pages in order to provide manageable briefings for mentors on some of the key elements of their role. They also seek to pose key questions for mentors to address to Licentiates in order to help them to produce their best work.

This note covers an outline of the mentor's role, and some general questions that mentors might be asked by Licentiates. Additional notes in the series specifically cover the APC log book, professional development plan, written submission and assessment criteria. Further notes may be added to the series at a later date, according to need.

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#### **Mentoring for the APC – General Questions**

##### **1. What is the Mentor's role?**

The best description of the mentor role in the APC process is as a critical friend to the Licentiate. As such, the mentor should support the Licentiate in undertaking the APC; but also challenge them to be critically reflective of their own work and progress. Critical reflection on the experience undertaken, drawing out for APC Assessors how the Licentiate has developed his or her professional competence over this period, is the backbone of the APC process.

##### **2. What makes a good mentor?**

Bearing in mind the many different roles and duties a mentor may be expected to perform, the skills and qualities of a mentor may be evident in different degrees at different times. A good mentor should be:

- Committed to the mentoring process, with a strong belief in its benefits;
- Confident of his/her own knowledge, and able to share this knowledge where appropriate;
- Able to give timely, honest feedback in a positive and constructive way;
- Able to offer guidance and advice, without instructing or directing;
- Able to listen patiently;
- Compassionate and understanding of the needs of the Licentiate;
- Encouraging and optimistic;
- Able to inspire confidence and trust;
- Entirely confidential.

##### **3. What kind of support should the mentor supply?**

Each mentoring relationship will be different, but generally speaking the types of support a mentor can provide, and the types of questions a Licentiate may ask, can be divided into three areas:

- Planning-related questions
- General career-related questions
- Questions specifically relating to the APC and its requirements (including professional development planning)

### ***Planning-related questions***

Many planning or work-specific questions will be dealt with by the Licentiate's line manager or other colleagues. However sometimes a fresh perspective on a particular issue can be helpful, perhaps if the Licentiate and mentor work in different work environments, or different disciplines. Both Licentiate and Mentor will need to be guided by the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct in relation to confidentiality during these discussions. This includes being discrete with regard to any personal information discussed, for example in relation to work place problems or aspirations, as well as protecting any professional information relating to the employer or client - for example if Licentiate and mentor work respectively in a local planning authority and a consultancy practice. Any advice or guidance a mentor can offer in this area will be shaped by his or her professional career, experience and influences.

### ***General career-related questions***

Many Licentiates will be giving some thought to how they want to progress their careers, and mentors may be able to provide help with this by giving insight into other areas of planning; recommending avenues to pursue; or maybe even facilitating introductions. Again, with this type of question mentors will be guided by their own personal career histories and experiences.

### ***APC-related questions***

These can be the most frequently asked questions, and also the ones on which mentors feel the most on uncertain ground, particularly as most mentors will not themselves have gone through this process. The guidance notes in this series are designed to help with this, by focusing on specific aspects of the APC. Much of the structure of the APC is built on a foundation of established practices of professional development planning and critical review – processes with which mentors should be familiar from their own careers, appraisals and continuing professional development (CPD) activity. Mentors can therefore certainly draw on this experience when offering advice to Licentiates.

It is worth noting that questions relating to the eligibility of professional experience should, for the avoidance of doubt, always be referred to the Membership Team at the RTPI ([membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk)) as they will have most up-to-date information on the types of experience that are recognised by APC Assessors.

## **4. What do we mean by 'reflection'?**

The concept of 'reflection' or 'critical reflection' underpins the APC process. Used extensively in models of training and professional development planning, the idea of reflection is based on the principle that gaining experience alone is not the most efficient means of developing competence. The APC process, guidance and templates are all designed to provide Licentiates with a framework to take time out from the day-to-day pressures of work in order to consider not only what they have done, but what they have learned from this, and how this might affect their ability to act in the future.

'Being reflective' in the context of the APC therefore involves questioning one's experience rather than just taking it for granted. The kinds of questions a Licentiate will be asking themselves (and there will be many more) include:

- How well did this really go?
- What have I learned from this?
- What would I repeat or do differently next time?
- What do I need to learn more about?
- How will I go about achieving this?
- How has my work and competence progressed over time?
- What additional experience might I need?
- How might I go about obtaining that experience? (thinking about opportunities both inside and outside of day-to-day work, e.g. volunteering for Planning Aid).

Reflection is therefore a personal process, but mentors can greatly assist Licentiates by helping them to pose just these kinds of questions, and providing a fresh perspective or viewpoint on both the questions and responses.