APC ADVICE NOTE: MENTORING

Published March 2015

Table of Contents

1. Mentoring for the APC

1.1 Who is this advice note for?

This advice note is designed to focus on mentoring for the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC), the accredited route to Chartered membership. As such, it should be read alongside, not in the place of the **Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) Guidance – Licentiate guide to RTPI Chartered membership (published March 2015)[1]**, which is available to all parties in the process.

This note explains the role of the mentor and covers issues that mentors might face. It also provides additional details on the APC log book and written submission.

1.2 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 (their mentee). The mentor should support the Licentiate in undertaking the APC, but also challenge them to be critically reflective of their own work and progress.

The concept of '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 and guidance are 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. structured reading).

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

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[1] Licentiates submitting for the first time <u>before</u> November 2015 should refer to the two guidance documents **Becoming a Chartered Town Planner – A guide for Licentiates 2014** and **Preparing your APC Submission - Guidelines 2014**.

1.3 Do you need to register as a mentor with the RTPI?

Mentoring is not a compulsory part of the APC, though it is strongly encouraged. As such, you do not have to register with the RTPI to act as a mentor.

In some instances, Licentiates may struggle to find a mentor of their own and will contact the Institute for assistance in pairing them with a mentor. If you would like to volunteer as a mentor for such candidates, please complete the Mentor Volunteering Form which is available on the 'APC' pages of the RTPI website.

1.4 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; and
- Able to provide an entirely confidential relationship.

Good mentors do not take their responsibility as a mentor lightly. They feel invested in the success of the Licentiate. Usually this requires someone who is knowledgeable, compassionate, and possesses the attributes of a good teacher or trainer. Please see Section 6 of this advice note for further tips on what makes a good mentor.

1.5 Who should be a mentor?

There are no restrictions on who is an appropriate mentor for each Licentiate[2]. Mentors do not need to have been through the APC process or even be a member of the Institute. Many of the questions and concerns that mentors can help with are non-APC specific so, even without first hand experience of the APC, you may be able to offer thoughts and advice on planning and work-related questions, career planning and professional development.

Mentors do, however, need to be very familiar with the APC Guidance and competencies and are encouraged to attend one of the APC events held across the UK and Ireland each year. There are also resources on the 'APC' pages of the RTPI website for candidates, which mentors may find useful.

Ultimately, if you don't feel confident in taking on the mentoring role, you should always feel free to say so.

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[2] Please note that current APC assessors are not able to act as mentors for individual candidates.

1.6 Can a line manager act as a mentor?

As a line manager, you should feel free to act as a mentor to one of your employees if you wish. We do, however, suggest to Licentiates that they try to think beyond their line manager – partly to maximise the support available to them, and partly to minimise possible conflicts. The Licentiate may also be reluctant to be critical of their performance in front of their line manager. At times, a line manager can be too close to offer objectivity on a question or issue, and having a different individual to whom to turn can be helpful.

Perhaps you might suggest that your Licentiate invites another member of the team, to whom they don't report directly, to be their mentor? Alternatively there may be opportunities for a mentor swap with another team – with you acting as mentor to a colleague in another department, and that person's line manager acting as mentor to your employee. If there are no internal options, your Licentiate should look for a mentor through Young Planners groups or by contacting their regional branch or national office.

Ultimately, if you are both happy with the arrangement, then a line manager/employee pairing is acceptable – as long as you have both agreed that this is right for you.

1.7 What kind of support should the mentor provide?

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.** 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. 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, mentors will be guided by their own personal career histories and experiences.

- **Questions specifically relating to the APC and its requirements** (including professional development planning). These can be the most frequently asked questions, and also the ones which mentors feel the most uncertain of, particularly as many mentors will not have gone through this process themselves. This advice note is 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 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 on 020 7929 9462 or at membership@rtpi.org.uk.

2. The APC log book

2.1 What is the log book?

The APC log book is an important and indeed mandatory part of the APC. Although it is not formally assessed it is sent to APC assessors, along with the written submission, in support of the application. A well-constructed log book can provide additional information to assessors which will help them to pass an application rather than asking for further information.

A well-constructed log book is also invaluable to Licentiates when they come to compose their final submission, by providing a portfolio of work which should allow them to select the best examples to demonstrate how they have met the APC competencies.

This note seeks to help mentors to think about the questions they should be asking of Licentiates in order to produce the best possible log book.

2.2 Does the log book give a good overview of the Licentiate's work?

The log book should seek to provide a representative overview of the Licentiate's work, although not all entries might have the same degree of detail. A 'representative overview' could include a summary of development management caseload, indicating the volume of work taken on, or perhaps an overview of how project(s) have progressed.

Providing an overview, to accompany examples in greater detail, is helpful for assessors as it provides them with a better understanding of the Licentiate's workload – were they concerned with just one planning application, for example, which is why they have included only one example, or is one example representative of many, or focused on because it was particularly interesting, challenging or out of the ordinary?

The overview should also help the Licentiate to represent their work in broad terms, before focusing on more specific examples. This is preferable to a log book which is too firmly rooted in trivial elements of day-to-day workplace experiences e.g. completing timesheets, details of Licentiate's break-times etc.

2.3 Does the log book go into sufficient detail on specific examples?

As well as the overview of the Licentiate's work, there should be a focus on some detailed examples of work. This helps to avoid repetitious log book entries.

How the Licentiate chooses to structure this may depend on the nature of their work. Where Licentiates are working on continuous, long-term projects, they will need to think about breaking this down into smaller, more self-contained activities that they have undertaken that month in order to enter this in the 'Nature of work' column. This could include client meetings; site visits; pieces of research; presentations; consultations etc. Having recorded the details of the work in the 'Nature of work' column, Licentiates can then turn to considering what exactly they have learned from the work, how it might improve their ability to act in the future, and whether it has presented new avenues to continue their development.

For planners working on smaller activities, e.g. within development management, particular applications could provide the examples for the 'Nature of work' column, drawing out the circumstances of the particular application, what made it interesting, useful, or challenging and how they tackled it. They will then be able to reflect on the skill and knowledge development, particular to that application, in the remaining columns.

2.4 Are the entries overly repetitious?

If just focused on the **processes** Licentiates are working with, the entries in the log book could become repetitious. However, if Licentiates are encouraged to think less about the process they are following, and more about the particular examples they are dealing with, this should present useful material for the log book.

For example, a planner working in a development management function will be following the same processes in dealing with different planning applications. Entering 'Processed planning applications' into the 'Nature of work' column of the log book, while technically correct, will therefore not provide sufficient information for the Licentiate to draw out knowledge and skill related to a particular case. Such an entry would probably lead to knowledge and understanding in 'planning law', and skills and competence in 'researching applications', 'report writing' or, even more blandly, 'processing planning applications'. Clearly this does not provide useful information either for APC assessors or for the Licentiate when they look back on the log book to chart their progress or to identify the best examples for their written submission.

Conversely, entering more specific details of a particular application (naturally observing any restrictions with regard to disclosure of confidential information) will allow the Licentiate to think in more detail about what made the application interesting or challenging, and how he or she had to act to deal with the application. This then roots the log book entry in a particular example, which helps the Licentiate to draw out, specifically, the knowledge and skill that was required or developed in order to deal with such an application.

Where log books are becoming overly repetitious, or in extreme cases where Licentiates are seeming to cut-and-paste entries from month-to-month, this suggests that the log book is not being completed correctly and that the entries into the 'Nature of work' column are not sufficiently rooted in real, specific examples of the Licentiate's work. This is unhelpful for both the Licentiate and the assessor, as it hides how the Licentiate will have progressed their experience, knowledge and skills over the period of experience.

2.5 Does the log book include technical knowledge and generic skills?

The log book template is set out so that Licentiates are led towards including evidence of the planning and technical knowledge they have developed rather than just focusing on more generic and business skills. Often Licentiates are more successful at drawing out the generic skills they have used, rather than thinking more specifically about their professional planning work. Mentors can help Licentiates to draw this out in their log book, to ensure that it is clearly rooted in their planning work – it should be perfectly clear to anyone reading the log book that the author is engaged in planning employment.

Naturally there is a strong interrelationship between knowledge, understanding, skills and competence. Licentiates who have identified a particular area of development do not need to agonise at length about whether it is entered in the 'right' column, as long as there is logic to the entries and their reflection on their development is recorded.

2.6 Has the Licentiate included examples of CPD activity?

If Licentiates are undertaking CPD activity, in addition to their daily work, this can be a useful addition to their log book. Licentiates should ensure they draw out what they have learned from this experience in the same way as they do for their professional work. Examples of CPD activity could include formal courses; additional reading in their own time; online learning; volunteering, including RTPI activities.

Mentors and Licentiates should also be aware that CPD activity should **not** be recorded at the expense of the Licentiate's professional work. This means that the log book should always be primarily a reflective record of the Licentiate's professional work, rather than just a CPD log. Mentors may be able to help Licentiates to think about whether this applies to their log book.

3. The written submission

3.1 What is the written submission?

The written submission is the document sent to the RTPI describing and reflecting on the Licentiate's experience, and is essentially the application for Chartered membership. The 5,500[3] word written submission consists of three elements:

- Practical Experience Statement (PES)
- Professional Competence Statement (PCS)
- Professional Development Plan (PDP)

Although the log book is sent as a supporting document, the written submission is the only document that is formally assessed, and it is thus essential that Licentiates follow the guidance available to them in order to make a strong application.

Licentiates and mentors should bear in mind that the general presentation of the written submission is also formally assessed. Submissions can and have been deferred if presented in an insufficiently professional fashion as befits an application for professional membership. Proof reading, spelling and grammar checking are therefore paramount, and Licentiates should also ensure that pages and paragraphs are clearly numbered.

It is important to note that the decision whether or not to submit for any given deadline is taken by the Licentiate. Licentiates may seek advice from their mentors – or indeed from others – on whether they feel they are ready, but ultimately the decision whether or not to submit is the Licentiate's own. Similarly, while Licentiates may seek advice on the content of their submissions, they are ultimately solely responsible for the documentation they submit to the RTPI in terms of its content, order and presentation, and ensuring it arrives to meet the appropriate deadline.

All Licentiates are made aware of this responsibility through the APC Guidance but mentors may wish to emphasise this in any advice or guidance they give on the written submission.

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[3] The word limit for Licentiates submitting before November 2015 is 5,000 words.

3.2 Practical Experience Statement (PES)

3.2.1 Introduction to the PES

This section should be approximately 1,000 words. Some key points to keep in mind for the PES:

- It is a factual, chronological, descriptive account of the whole period of experience.

- It covers where the Licentiate was employed, when (accurate dates are very important), which department, and what position was held within the overall organisational structure.

- It includes the Licentiate's main roles and responsibilities.

- It also includes any key projects/areas of work the Licentiate wants to (briefly) describe.

- If the Licentiate has experience over and above the minimum requirement, it is advisable to include all experience in order to demonstrate breadth and depth of experience to assessors.

3.2.2 What else to consider for the PES?

The key test for the PES is whether the Licentiate can demonstrate a full 24 months (including at least 12 months' post-qualification experience as a Licentiate Member) of professional level planning experience. 'Professional level' is broadly defined as exercising independent professional judgement to make decisions or influence outcomes.

The following questions may therefore be helpful in considering whether the Licentiate is yet eligible to apply, and ensuring that the PES is put together correctly. If they are in any doubt over the eligibility of their experience, Licentiates should be directed to the Membership Team.

- **Is the Licentiate's experience all at a suitable *professional* level?**
  Assessors have expressed concern that some Licentiates are rushing to submit applications as soon as they meet the eligibility requirements. In some cases experience gained prior to an accredited degree, particularly if is less than a year in duration, is often administrative, rather than professional, by nature and therefore not eligible for the APC. Licentiates who wish to present experience from prior to their degree should critically examine whether their previous work was at the same professional level as the work undertaken subsequent to it – were they able to operate as a planner without the background knowledge afforded by their degree?

- **Has the Licentiate drawn out the spatial planning elements of his/her work?**

- **Are dates clearly indicated?** Licentiates may be deferred if they submit misleading dates which prevent assessors from making a clear assessment of their work.

- **Is part-time experience clearly indicated?** Part-time experience is certainly eligible towards the APC, but on a pro rata basis, and it should be clearly indicated what proportion of a working week the Licentiate was undertaking so that assessors can make a clear assessment.

3.3 Professional Competence Statement (PCS)

NOTE

The information in this section is specific to candidates submitting from November 2015 onwards, who should be following the APC Guidance – Licentiate guide to RTPI Chartered membership (published March 2015). For candidates submitting for the first time before November 2015, please refer to the guidance Preparing your APC Submission – Guidelines 2014.

3.3.1 Introduction to the PCS

This section should be approximately 3,000 words. Some key points to keep in mind for the PCS:

- It provides a detailed, reflective account of specific examples of the Licentiate's experience (e.g. not just the what, but the how and the why).

- There are 11 APC competencies which must **all** be adequately demonstrated to be successful on this section.

- The competencies should be demonstrated in an integrated way, through the use of one to three case studies.

- The PCS is not simply a repetition or extension of the PES – Licentiates should be critically evaluating their work and demonstrating their competence in this section.

3.3.2 The APC competencies

The PCS is assessed against 11 competencies. Mentors should read Section 7 of the APC Guidance for detailed information on how to demonstrate the competencies.

The competencies are not designed to be specific technical competencies, as we appreciate that Licentiates will be employed in a wide range of planning roles. Instead, the competencies are designed around the notions of context, frameworks and 'professional process' undertaken by all planning professionals regardless of the specificity of their role. The APC competencies are:

- **C1.** Professionalism and the RTPI Code of Conduct (Core)
- **C2.** The spatial planning context (Application)
- **C3.** Identifying and analysing issues (Application)
- **C4.** Gathering appropriate information (Application)
- **C5.** Identifying and evaluating a course of action (Application)
- **C6.** Initiating and implementing a course of action **or**, for academic applications, dissemination and application of knowledge (Application)
- **C7.** The legal framework (Understanding)
- **C8.** Ethical challenges (Understanding)
- **C9.** The political framework (Understanding)
- **C10.** The economic context (Understanding)
- **C11.** Reflection and review (Core)

Relating to their own employment, Licentiates are required to demonstrate that they understand their role and its relation to the wider context; that they can independently identify problems and research these toward the making of recommendations; that they can then take these recommendations forward, all the time mindful of how effective the solutions were. Licentiates will be able to show how undertaking a particular task or project improved their ability to act in the future, and that they operate with professionalism as defined in the Code of Professional Conduct, at all times.

For each competency, Licentiates need to evidence 'Understanding', 'Application' or 'Core'. The APC Guidance explains these in more detail; however, you may want to ask your Licentiate the following questions to ascertain what type of evidence they can provide to demonstrate the competencies:

- Does the Licentiate have a case study where they can demonstrate the competency from a theoretical or observational viewpoint? (Understanding)

- Does the Licentiate have a case study where they have put the competency into practice themselves? (Application)

- Does the Licentiate have a case study where they have applied the competency throughout? In essence, can they demonstrate that the competency is integral to their actions as a planner? (Core)

Licentiates often have difficulty with C.5 ('Identifying and evaluating a course of action'), C.8 ('Ethical challenges') and C.9 ('The political framework'). This may be due to inappropriate selection of case studies; or because candidates have selected too many case studies, thus spending too much time on describing each activity and leaving insufficient space for detailed reflection on what was undertaken.

3.3.3 What else to consider for the PCS?

Mentors may wish to use the following questions to help Licentiates interrogate their work and ensure they put together a strong submission. It can therefore be useful for Licentiates and mentors to meet during the submission drafting stage, before the documentation is finalised and corroborated.

- **Is the Licentiate's own contribution clear?** Assessors are looking for evidence of the Licentiate's specific responsibilities, experience and competence. While it is expected that in many cases Licentiates will be working as part of a team, or reporting to another individual, Licentiates must make clear their **own** contribution to a piece of work, even if they also show the wider context, in order for assessors to accurately assess their work. Assessors cannot work from inference, and in such a situation a submission may be deferred pending further clarification. Licentiates are therefore strongly encouraged to write in the first person active voice ('I wrote… I decided…') rather than passively ('A report was produced…') so that assessors can be clear on their specific contribution.

- **Has the Licentiate selected the best case studies to illustrate his or her experience?** In the PCS, Licentiates need to select one to three case studies of their work that best meet the competencies. Bear in mind that the size, scope or final outcome of the case study is not being assessed – the Licentiate just needs to demonstrate the competencies adequately. Licentiates also often spend a great deal of the word count setting out the context of each case, at the expense of addressing the other competencies. Mentors should help their Licentiates stay focused and only include information that goes towards demonstrating the competencies.

- **Have all the competencies been addressed?** There is detailed information on how to demonstrate the APC competencies, contained within the APC Guidance. It is essential that Licentiates clearly address each one of these within the context of their case studies.

- **Is the PCS reflective rather than merely descriptive?** The PCS should display mature reflection on the Licentiate's experience, highlighting what was learned.

- **Is there a clear difference between the PES and PCS?** These sections each have a different purpose, and should not be a repetition of one another.

- **Is there a clear link between the log book and the written submission?** Log book entries should back up information contained in the written submission, not be contradictory.

- **Has due account been taken of confidentiality issues?** Licentiates must not specifically name colleagues in their submission, whether in a positive or negative light, and should take care to ensure that no sensitive information is disclosed (employers' corroborating submissions will also be mindful of this). Licentiates must also avoid unduly criticising or assigning blame to other colleagues or their employers.

3.4 Professional Development Plan (PDP)

3.4.1 Introduction to the PDP

This section is approximately 1,500 words. Some key points to keep in mind for the PDP:

- It is a forward looking document, which details how the Licentiate will develop professionally as a spatial planner over the two years following submission of the APC.

- There is a set structure for the PDP – Licentiates **must** use the PDP template available on the 'APC' pages of the RTPI website.

- It consists of two parts – (1) a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and (2) a PDP that details the Licentiate's Goals, Objectives and Action Plan.

- It must follow on from the rest of the submission and log book. Weaknesses or areas for development that have been identified should be acknowledged in the SWOT and addressed in the PDP.

Section 8.2 of the APC Guidance provides a checklist for the PDP, which Licentiates will need to follow to be successful.

Licentiate Members are required to keep PDPs throughout the Licentiate period. These PDPs are a great way to review progress and should form the basis of mentor meetings. It is recommended that, rather than reviewing their PDP on an annual basis, Licentiates review their PDP at least every six months.

In the final PDP, submitted as part of the APC submission, assessors will be looking for clear evidence that this is a personal plan, produced by the Licentiate and directly related to his or her own role and experience. Bland, generic or formulaic PDPs will not be successful – the PDP should clearly relate to the Licentiate's own development goals as identified in the log book and other elements of the written submission.

NOTE

Licentiates often leave their PDP to the last minute, treating it as a last minute add-on to the written submission. Mentors should stress the importance of the PDP to their Licentiate. Licentiates can be deferred, or required to enter the Institute's PDP Support Phase, if they produce an inadequate PDP.

3.4.2 Goal and objective setting – common errors

The PDP is a document designed to help Licentiates to drive their own progression as a professional planner. If the same goals are recurring in many consecutive PDPs, this could suggest that the goals are unrealistic or too vague. Licentiates should take time to carefully consider their goals and objectives, as reliance on vague or generalised statements will result in their PDP being deferred. Below are some goals and objectives that Licentiates often list as part of their PDP and should generally be avoided:

- 'To become MRTPI'. This goal is not very meaningful. The whole APC process leads up to this, and once an application is submitted it is essentially out of the Licentiate's hands. It also provides no indication as to how the Licentiate would like to develop professionally in terms of knowledge and skills.

- 'To progress my career'. This goal is too vague to be meaningful. With this kind of goal mentors may be asking in what direction the Licentiate would like to progress, in what time frame, or indeed what they mean by 'progress'?

- 'To gain a promotion'. This goal is, in itself, too vague and would need to be broken down to explain the planning context. What type of promotion is the Licentiate aiming for? What specific knowledge and skills will they need to gain, to be in such a role? This should lead to the setting of other, shorter-term objectives focussed on CPD activity.

3.4.3 Action Plan

The Action Plan for the PDP has to meet the SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based) model.

You may want to consider whether the Licentiate has identified meaningful professional development activities for their Action Plan.

The test of a good Action Plan is if someone else can pick it up and implement it. When Licentiates prepare their Action Plan, there can be a tendency to over-rely on vague activities such 'to shadow or observe other colleagues', or 'to take on more responsibility'. Mentors may want to question Licentiates who rely on such activities to reflect on how they actually intend to learn from them, or to suggest such complimentary activities as structured reading, research, or use of online resources. It may be helpful to bear in mind that simply taking on extra responsibility may not be the best form of professional development – what if the work is too advanced, what will be the effect of this on the Licentiate? Mentors and Licentiates may wish to discuss these kinds of issues.

Licentiates are often deferred on this section because their Action Plan does not contain enough detail to meet the SMART model.

5. Mentoring in practice

5.1 Practicalities to consider

Every mentoring relationship is different. Trying to establish from the outset what each of you hopes to get from and achieve in the process is a great way to begin the mentoring relationship. This will help to establish right from the start whether or not your goals are aligned, therefore limiting the problems that could arise from two individuals approaching mentoring in different ways.

Licentiates and mentors are encouraged to arrange regular meetings to review progress. Please see Section 1.6 of the APC Guidance, for a suggested timeline as to when in the process these meetings might take place.

Some Licentiate/mentor pairings prefer to have a formal agenda for their meeting – for others there is a more informal structure. You're not obliged to base meetings on the APC process or documentation, but in many cases the APC log book and PDP are great places to start and Licentiates may even wish to seek your input on these documents.

5.2 Common mentoring scenarios

Your mentoring experience should be an enjoyable one: one that utilises and develops your listening and coaching skills; one that allows you to build a constructive relationship with a new graduate; one that might lead you to revisit your own career plans and professional development; one that makes you feel good about what you have contributed to an individual's professional development and to the future of the profession.

But what if problems do occur? What might these problems be? The scenarios below consider some of these and provide suggestions for avoiding or resolving problems or conflicts.

You have suggested a course of action to your Licentiate, who is resisting following your advice – what do you do?

These situations raise the question – to what extent is challenging your Licentiate a useful way of supporting them? Could this become intimidating? How do you balance challenging your Licentiate to improve and take new approaches, against supporting them in a chosen course of action?

Do be conscious of not acting as an instructor. You are not there to tell your Licentiate what to do, but may certainly make suggestions of how you think they might improve, which they are free to follow or to reject. If your Licentiate is resisting one of your suggestions, try to understand their point of view and be sensitive to their concerns. Is there an alternative to your original suggestion that you can both agree on? Ultimately, Licentiates are in charge of their own APC progress, so it's not in their interest to reject good advice – perhaps there are background concerns you're not aware of, or perhaps they genuinely don't believe that this is the right course of action to help them?

Whatever is the case, it is useful to engage in open discussion, making clear that you are willing to support your Licentiate to find an appropriate solution.

You are acting as a mentor for a junior colleague in another department. The Licentiate's line manager, who is also mentoring another candidate, suggests getting together to discuss your experiences of mentoring, as it might be a good opportunity for peer exchange. How do you respond?

While peer group discussion as a tool for learning is to be encouraged, be conscious that there are extra sensitivities when it comes to mentoring, particularly when colleagues with whom you might be discussing the process know your Licentiate personally or professionally. You might have useful experiences to share on successfully resolving a question or concern that your Licentiate had – but how can you discuss these without betraying their confidence?

If you do decide that it would be useful to meet with this fellow mentor, it would be worth raising these concerns with them in advance and trying to establish whether there is a way in which you can have a meaningful discussion without betraying any confidence. You might also consider discussing with your Licentiate the fact that you are considering participating in such a session. Ultimately, you may decide that the best course of action is to decline having discussions with colleagues who know your Licentiate.

More broadly speaking – do bear in mind that as a mentor your Licentiate will be speaking with you in confidence and you should respect this, unless you have their permission to disclose or discuss certain information. Be mindful of your professional responsibilities under the Code of Professional Conduct in this regard.

During discussions with your Licentiate, it is becoming apparent that the direction and support they are receiving from their line manager isn't constructive. What do you do?

Naturally, as a mentor anything that appears to restrict your Licentiate's opportunities to gain good quality experience, and thus develop their professional competence, is of concern. But, regardless of whether you are an internal or an external mentor, it is absolutely worth exercising caution in not making any direct criticism of your Licentiate's line manager. While you have no reason to doubt what your Licentiate tells you, remember that you will only ever receive one side of the story.

The most productive way of proceeding in this instance might be to support your Licentiate to approach their line manager themselves. There may be a formal structure in place for doing this, such as an appraisal; alternatively it might be appropriate for them to set up a meeting or informal discussion with their line manager. While accepting that there may be business imperatives that restrict the type of work employers can offer, their employees' success in the APC is also in their interests as an employer. As their mentor, you may be able to suggest helpful and constructive ways of putting their case across.

The log book can be an extremely useful document for Licentiates when discussing their experience with employers, so encouraging your Licentiate to keep their log book up to date, and using it as an evidence base to request more challenging work, is an approach that mentors have reported has worked successfully.

Ultimately, this scenario has a wider application for you as a mentor, in ensuring that if your Licentiate has a complaint or concern about a colleague or their employer that you are circumspect in your response, and avoid criticising the individual or employer. Rather than 'siding' with your Licentiate, it may be more helpful to support them in considering how they might want to resolve their problem or concern – at all times being mindful of the Code of Professional Conduct.

Your Licentiate has gained two years of experience and is eligible to apply for their Chartered membership, but they seem reluctant. How do you respond?

We would always encourage mentors and employers to support their Licentiates on their route to Chartered membership, and to urge them to submit once they become eligible. However, the decision to submit for the APC is always the Licentiate's own, and there is no compulsion to submit as soon as 24 months' experience has been gained - particularly if the Licentiate feels that they would actually like to gain a longer period of experience in order to further develop their professional competence and be more sure of success in the assessment.

You may want to consider working with your Licentiate to consider why it is they don't yet feel confident about submitting, and how this can be shaped into a PDP to help work towards assessment stage. If there are other internal pressures to submit, such as from your Licentiate's line manager, you might also want to help them think of ways of managing this, and encouraging buy-in from their line manager.

Your Licentiate has submitted for Chartered membership against your recommendation. Having not been successful, they could still benefit from some additional support. Do you continue to help them?

Whilst it may be natural to feel that they should have taken your advice, 'I told you so' is not going to help your Licentiate, or your relationship with them. By seeking further support from you they have demonstrated their continued faith in your advice and, arguably, this could be the point at which guidance and reassurance from you will be of most benefit. Assuming you still feel confident to do so, this is therefore a great opportunity to help your Licentiate to take on board the feedback from assessors (all candidates will feedback on their submission) and to identify ways to respond – either to further develop their competence in this area, or to more fully demonstrate it to the assessors.

Your Licentiate has submitted for Chartered membership but they haven't been successful. They are angry that some of the points in their feedback weren't picked up by their mentor. How do you handle this?

There is no doubt that this situation could cause some tension. While the decision to submit, and the responsibility for the submission lies firmly with the Licentiate, it can be human nature to want to blame someone for lack of success.

There is absolutely no question that your Licentiate's lack of success is your fault, so try not to respond defensively. As their mentor, you are not the expert, or there to give them the answers. At the same time, it is natural that your Licentiate will be disappointed not to have been successful, and this could be the most important time for a mentor to reassure and to work with them to address the assessors' concerns, following the feedback given.

20

You are not getting along with your Licentiate, or your Licentiate has approached you saying that they would like to find a new mentor. What do you do?

Initiating a discussion about what you each hope to get from mentoring and what you hope to achieve is a good place to start. It could be that it is not a problem in your relationship, but that the Licentiate doesn't have a commitment to mentoring. We do strongly recommend that Licentiates take advantage of all support available to them, but if your Licentiate wants to 'go it alone' then ultimately that is their decision.

Such circumstances are seldom anyone's fault, so do try to avoid assigning blame. Mentoring is based on a two-way relationship and, as with all relationships, sometimes these don't work out. In the event that you both agree it would be better all round to end the mentoring relationship, this doesn't reflect badly on either of you. Your Licentiate is free to identify an alternative mentor if they wish – and you are free to take on the mentoring role for another candidate.

These circumstances arise only very rarely but, in the event that this happens, do try to reflect on your previous relationship and take some of the experiences forward into your next pairing.

5.3 Help for mentors

Although we hope your mentoring relationship will be straightforward, if there are things that are troubling you in advance or during mentoring, there is support and guidance available to you. Surfacing questions or concerns in advance can be a great way of preparing for that eventuality. If you have questions or worries that aren't answered here, do contact us at membership@rtpi.org.uk.

6. Mentoring tips

6.1 Act as a sounding board

It can be very tempting for a mentor to just jump in and offer advice before your Licentiate has actually asked for it, especially when you've dealt with a similar situation yourself. Being a sounding board for your Licentiate, allowing them to discuss the situation with you, then helping them to think through the situation by asking them questions to draw out the consequences of various actions, is always more empowering for a Licentiate than advising them what to do. It helps them work through the issue and come to their own conclusions. By doing so, you ultimately help them to learn to think through issues themselves and trust their own judgement, both valuable life skills.

Licentiates benefit greatly from the opportunity of having a good mentor listen to them. Allow them to explore their thoughts and ideas openly with you. This will often help them unravel their thinking and gain insights about a situation as they share their concerns with you.

6.2 Provide helpful feedback

Not all feedback is helpful. A good mentor knows this and will deliver feedback in a way that will help their Licentiate gain insight to further develop specific qualities or skills. For example, a good mentor will always ask for permission to give feedback before doing so. Giving unwelcome feedback can be detrimental to any mentoring relationship. Instead, explain what you'd like to talk about first and highlight the benefits of doing this.

6.3 Provide a fresh perspective

One of the benefits of working with a mentor is that a good mentor will often provide their Licentiate with a fresh perspective on an issue. A good mentor will often have the clarity of distance from an issue or problem that's needed to provide objective feedback to their Licentiate. They can also hold up a 'mirror' to the Licentiate to, for example, let the Licentiate see what their behaviour looks like to others.

Highlight for your Licentiate any achievements they might have forgotten, to help build their confidence.

6.4 Ask open questions

Asking your Licentiate open questions will help you as a mentor to identify their real needs, values and passions. It's also a great way to get your Licentiate to think through situations themselves and draw out the consequences of the various choices or courses of action they can take. During these conversations, you can share your wisdom, without making decisions for your Licentiate – that's their job.

6.5 Be a positive role model

Good mentors are respected by their Licentiates. A Licentiate can learn a lot from their mentor simply by watching how their mentor behaves in any particular situation. Good mentors will also look out for experiences, or even create situations in which their Licentiates can become involved to learn new things, for example, providing a look behind the scenes or a glimpse at how other people do things.

6.6 Share your experiences and insights

Share stories that you feel are appropriate and helpful, but do so in a neutral way, without any attachment to how your Licentiate will use this learning. Be open to sharing your mistakes and failures too, as these are often where our biggest lessons are learned. It will also help your Licentiate be aware that challenges will arise, and the way you dealt with the situation might also help them gain insight about how to build resilience.

6.7 Be genuinely interested in your Licentiate as an individual

A mentoring relationship is a very personal one, which is often very important to the Licentiate. As a mentor, you need to get to know your Licentiate personally, about their hopes and dreams, so you can help them in a way that meets their personal best interest.

VOLUNTEER AS A MENTOR

Mentoring can be a great CPD activity to develop coaching, management and communication skills. It is also a great opportunity to learn from your Licentiate in turn. The RTPI is often contacted by Licentiates who are struggling to find their own mentors. If you would like to volunteer as mentor, please complete the Mentor Volunteering Form available on the 'APC' pages of the RTPI website and return it to membership@rtpi.org.uk.