

Peer mentoring and peer learning

Adapted from Clark, R., Andrews, J. and Davies, K. (2011) Peer mentoring works! Institutional manual. Birmingham: Aston University.

The **recommended** model for those institutions wishing to address transition and retention together is **Transition+** Peer Mentoring. This approach captures all new students on an *opt-out* university-wide basis. It is generally centrally managed, but with identified 'Peer Mentoring Coordinators' provided within individual Schools or Faculties.

To what extent have you followed the guidance from Clark et al?

- I. **Pre-Term Allocation of Peer Mentees to Peer Mentors:** Selection and training of peer mentors in the previous academic year enables matching to occur once the students have accepted a place. Early matching enables students to exchange contact details and to communicate electronically. Matching is generally done within disciplines. Early communication between peer mentee and peer mentor helps alleviate some of the concerns new students have before starting university about 'fitting in' and 'belonging'.
- II. **Activity Management:** Small group mentoring is recommended whereby one student peer mentor is allocated between three and five peer mentees. Flexibility needs to be built into the system so that, if required, mentees can 'swap' mentors. The reciprocal nature of the relationship needs to be made known to both parties right from the onset.
- III. **Mentor Preparation:** Recruitment should occur in term 2 and training in term 3. This will allow **Transition+** Peer Mentoring to 'kick off' just before term 1. By recruiting and training the following year's mentors from the current year's mentees, institutions can use existing peer mentors to help train and guide the next cohort. In this way, peer mentoring becomes self-sustaining. Both peer mentors and peer mentees should be offered on-going support, with a member of staff identified as being the individual responsible for the overall management of the programme.
- IV. **Relationship Management:** Matching students on a large scale is difficult; however, it is important to take account of certain cultural or other requirements when matching peer mentor to peer mentees. Peer mentees need to be asked if they have any preference in terms of gender, ethnicity, home-country and religion. Peer mentors can be expected to be more flexible, although exceptions should be made if a prospective peer mentor indicates that they would prefer not to be matched with individuals from a different

gender or religious background. The need for the mentoring relationship to be confidential in nature needs to be stressed to both parties. Peer mentor training should discuss ethics and confidentiality in some depth. In some HEIs students may be asked to sign an 'agreement of understanding' that can cover confidentiality and other relevant issues.

- V. **Reward and Recognition:** Peer mentoring should always be a voluntary activity for both peer mentors and peer mentees. The contribution to peer mentoring made by peer mentors can be recognised in a variety of ways including: formal accreditation of activities (as part of an 'employability module' or 'university certificate'); the awarding of certificates of participation outlining skills gained and activities undertaken: and, celebration events which may include awards for peer mentors nominated by their mentees. Having been accepted as a peer mentor, many students find that the experience enables them to develop transferable employability skills – which they then go onto to use in gaining employment. Within the university itself, peer mentors are often used as University Ambassadors or Guides on open days and during other events.
- VI. **Mentoring Focus:** In **Transition+** Peer Mentoring, the mentoring focus is initially on the 'settling in' period. However, within a few weeks the onus switches to more academic matters – such as using the library or accessing electronic resources. Mentoring training needs to encapsulate both social and academic aspects of the role with peer mentors being made aware of the boundaries placed upon them.