



**Aspects of Mentoring Support Provided on  
Work-based Training Programmes,  
including the Modern Skills Diploma for  
Adults**

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A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales



**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL**  
**INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction	1
2. The evidence base	1
3. Outcomes from inspections: the nature and extent of monitoring activities	1
4. The relationship between mentoring support for learners and high quality outcomes	2
5. Outcomes from the survey returns	3
6. Conclusions	4
7. Recommendations	5
Annex 1 Questionnaire on mentoring sent to training providers	
Annex 2 Examples of good practice in work-based training	
Annex 3 Guidance given by the National Council on mentoring and the role of the mentor in the delivery of Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA) programmes	

## **1. Introduction**

As part of its remit to Estyn for 2002-2003, the Welsh Assembly Government invited Estyn to survey the mentoring support provided on work-based training programmes including the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA). The Welsh Assembly's expectation of mentoring support in work-based training is that it should contribute towards the retention and completion rates of learners. It should also help to ensure that learners obtain maximum benefit from their training programme.

Estyn's remit therefore was to establish how far that expectation is being met on the ground.

## **2. The evidence base**

Inspectors examined Estyn inspection reports of work-based training and New Deal providers carried out during 2001 and 2002. They also included the Estyn review of continuous professional development and work-based training in their analysis. However early results showed difficulty in identifying mentoring in the Welsh Assembly context as providers had clearly interpreted mentoring in different ways. It was therefore decided to take a broader view of mentoring i.e., wherever one-to-one developmental support is provided to the trainee.

In addition to this desk-based review of existing evidence Inspectors also undertook a number of inspection visits to work-based training providers to review their current mentoring support. All work-based training providers contracted to the National Council (170+) were also asked to complete a questionnaire (copy at Annex 1) about their understanding and use of mentoring. In total whilst only 27% of the questionnaires were returned, the inspectors were satisfied, in view of the results of desk-research undertaken, that they provided a representative sample of mentoring activity within training providers delivery of National Council funded training.

## **3. Outcomes from inspections: the nature and extent of mentoring activities**

Both training providers and employers undertook mentoring activities across the whole range of their work-based training provision. This included induction, regular reviews with the learner, assessment and day to day mentoring of the learner as they progressed through their training. Generally this support was of a good quality with the one-to-one basis of support and the good interpersonal skills of the mentor key factors.

Most providers do not have the capacity or resources to employ mentors as an exclusive job role. Therefore mentoring was often found to be an integral part of the role of training providers' staff from advisers and assessors, through to regional managers and operational directors.

On the Modern Apprenticeship or National Trainee schemes, some of the most successful examples of mentoring observed, by the Inspectors, were where the mentor was work-based, alongside the learner, but had himself or herself previously been through a work-based training scheme. As a result, they could support the learner through the process of gathering evidence and suggest ways in which the learner could use current work activity to build their portfolio.

In the small number of observations where mentoring was seen to be poor, mentors showed little genuine interest in the learner and, were unable to engage productively with the learner, to motivate or inspire action. On occasions, they themselves were unclear about aspects of the programme or the issues raised and were unreliable in following up actions on behalf of the learner or in keeping appointments with the learner. In the worst cases, they failed to recognise when individuals were in need of more specialist support and referral.

In the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults programme, some providers expect high levels of achievement regardless of any mentoring support, as the target learners for the programmes are mature, motivated learners at level 3, 4 or 5. However, after starting the mentoring development programme, one provider found that mentoring a Modern Skills Diploma Adult learner helped to deal with issues that were not directly related to the learning, but which were nevertheless restricting the learner's progress. The mentoring support contributed to the successful progress of the learner.

#### **4. The relationship between mentoring support for learners and high quality outcomes**

With the diverse nature of mentoring support and the lack of data regarding the impact of mentoring on outcomes, any relationship between the two is difficult to judge. Therefore any correlation between the grades awarded and the quality of mentoring has to be treated with caution. Grading of training providers for support for learners, may include mentoring of learners along with other means of support.

Nevertheless analysis of Estyn grades, between May 1999 and September 2002, awarded to training providers in respect of this key question demonstrates some correlation between the quality of learning support, provided to learners whilst on their training programme and their subsequent high quality outcomes.

In the 32 training companies inspected during this period, which received an average grade for occupational areas of Grade 2 or above (good features and no important shortcomings), all but six were awarded either a Grade 1 (good with some outstanding features) or a Grade 2 for support for learners. In the 22 poorest performing training companies, none had more than a Grade 3 (good features outweigh shortcomings) for learning support and in one third of these cases the grade awarded for support for learners was a Grade 4 (important shortcomings outweigh good features).

## **5. Outcomes from the survey returns**

There is no consistent approach to mentoring in work-based training that would help to develop the quality of this activity and maximise its use for both the development of staff and learners. However 72% of respondents had participated in the mentoring development programme which has been designed for training staff delivering the Skillbuild and Skillseekers programmes within which mentoring is a key element.

This programme defines mentoring in work-based training as a natural, or planned process to improve achievement, develop skills and promote professional and personal growth, made possible by the exchange of ideas, feedback, experiences and constructive examples within a sustained relationship of mutual trust and respect. The programme is designed to improve the quality, consistency and availability of mentoring. Participants in the programme follow a new mentoring award based on national standards from the training lead body.

The survey found clear evidence of the use of a range of mentoring support in the delivery of work-based training contracted by the National Council. This mentoring worked particularly well where it is accompanied by robust assessment strategies. However there are no formal systems for recording the impact of mentoring support in work-based training.

Work-based training providers have a good understanding of employers' issues and the cost and resource implications of developing mentoring in the workplace. They are keen to work with employers to further develop and promote mentoring in work-based training through, for example, sharing good practice case studies and role models.

Nearly all of the examples of good practice in mentoring support supplied by providers focused on the Skillbuild, Skillseekers and New Deal programmes. Few related to the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults programme. Examples of good practice are at Annex 2.

## 6. Conclusions

It is not possible at this stage to identify the direct impact of mentoring on learners on work-based training programmes. This is because of the lack of a shared definition of mentoring, the lack of specific data, the newness of the mentoring development programme and the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults programme. However, some providers are beginning to develop ways of measuring and evaluating the impact of mentoring on the retention and achievement of learners. This includes comparing outcomes from training programmes where mentoring support is used, with those programmes where there is no mentoring support.

The National Council for Education and Training for Wales (the National Council) currently requires only the deliverers of the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults programme to ensure that they have mentoring support in place. Annex 3 sets out the guidance that they give to providers which requires learners on the programme to have access to:

- qualified workplace mentors from the date that they commence their training; and
- mentors that meet the quality standards specified by the National Council and awarding bodies.

The National Council does encourage providers of other work-based training to provide mentoring support. However, this results in an inconsistent approach to mentoring within the different types of work-based training that are contracted by the National Council.

Nevertheless many training providers do give high levels of support to learners but elements of this are not always formally defined as mentoring. However there is some correlation between the levels of support for learners and their subsequent achievement. Therefore any activity, which enhances this support, has a good chance of leading to improved outcomes.

There would therefore seem to be a case for further developing, in a consistent way the one-to-one support that can be given to learners in work based training, whether it be called mentoring or simply learner support. There are various mentoring training programmes available for work-based training staff to achieve this. The mentoring development programme in particular gives good support to training staff and could usefully be extended. The programme introduced the first formal definition of mentoring in relation to work-based training and, in the process, began to raise awareness and understanding of the principles of adult learning in the sector. What needs to be added to this is the subsequent measurement of the impact that this intervention has.

There will also need to be more involvement of employers in the development of support for trainees in the workplace and this will need to be included in any further development of learner support.

## **7. Recommendations**

In order to extend the benefits deriving from mentoring-type activities, the National Council for Education and Training for Wales should:

- develop, with providers, a consistent approach to the delivery of mentoring support in all work-based training programmes, and consider introducing a contractual requirement that providers of all work-based training programmes have mentors that are trained and qualified to lead body standards;
- ensure that training providers have appropriate numbers of staff trained and qualified as workplace mentors;
- encourage providers to offer continuing professional development to staff, including further development of their knowledge and understanding of the principles of adult learning in work-based training and the value of mentoring;
- ensure that training providers are able to clearly identify and plan the mentoring support offered in all of their training programmes;
- ensure that training providers implement systems to identify the impact of mentoring support provided in work-based training; and
- engage employers more in the development of mentoring.

## Annex 1 Questionnaire on mentoring sent to training providers

Questions included in Estyn survey of mentoring support provided on work-based training programmes, including the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults.

Questionnaire – to be completed by training providers.

**Training company name:**  
**Your name:**  
**Your position in the company:**  
**Date:**

**Please give a brief description of your organisation together with your responsibilities:**

- Q.1 Please give a definition of mentoring as understood by your company:
- Q.2 Is your company participating in the mentoring development programme delivered by Quantum Edge for the National Training Federation?  
Yes No (tick)
- Q.3 If you answered 'No' to question 2, what are the reasons that your company is not involved in the mentoring development programme?
- Q.4 What are the job roles of your staff participating in the mentoring development programme?
- Q.5 If your company delivers mentoring support for trainees outside of the mentoring development programme, what are the job roles of the staff delivering the mentoring?
- Q.6 If your company delivers mentoring support for trainees as part of the mentoring development programme, or outside of this programme, please describe how the mentoring activity works in practice.
- Q.7 What impact (if any) has the mentoring development programme, or mentoring as used by your company, had on the retention and outcomes of trainees following the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA) programme?
- Q.8 How do you measure and evaluate this impact, or how do you plan to measure and evaluate the impact of mentoring on the retention and outcomes of trainees?
- Q.9 How do workplace managers or supervisors evaluate the mentoring activity?
- Q.10 How does mentoring in the workplace differ from the role of the trainer, the assessor, the supervisor, the line manager?
- Q.11 Is mentoring – as defined by your company - used to support trainees in any training programmes other than the MSDA, for example Skillbuild, Modern Apprenticeships? If so, please state which programme(s).  
Yes No (tick)  
Mentoring is used in the following training programmes.....
- Q.12 Briefly describe any examples you have of good practice using mentoring in training programmes. This could include mentoring in on-the-job and off-the-job training, external mentoring with SME's, or others.
- Q.13 What more do you think could be done to promote mentoring in the workplace with employers?
- Q.14 Please add any comments you may have on mentoring in training programmes.

Thank you for your assistance in completing this questionnaire.

## **Annex 2 Examples of good practice in work-based training**

In the training offered by a national chain of travel agents the company employed a number of modern apprentices in their shops across England and Wales. Each learner was allocated a mentor, usually based in the shop where they worked. The mentors were normally at assistant manager level. Many had previously been on the Modern Apprenticeship scheme and had a good understanding of the requirements of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in travel services. The mentors supported their learners well, helping them to build good portfolios and making sure they put enough effort into gaining their qualifications.

In addition, the company had a good package of training materials to develop the learner's underpinning knowledge of the travel industry. The mentors knew the material well and were able to help the learner complete it and effectively link the activities involved to both their NVQ and their work in the travel agency. Separate, independent assessors undertook the assessment of learners and liaised with mentors to make sure learners had the range and variety of experience they needed to complete their qualifications.

In another case, the learners were employed as modern apprentices on the business administration framework by a further education college. The college placed all of the learners in a local aero-engineering company. Whilst in the company, they worked in a variety of departments, including quality assurance, purchasing and customer service. The company had designated an experienced employee as mentor in each department where a learner was placed.

A member of the college staff was based in the company on a part-time basis to carry out assessment and off-the-job training for the learners. The mentors supported the learners on a day-to-day basis, offering advice and guidance on company procedures and general work expectations. They also liaised effectively with the assessor, to make sure learners had many opportunities to gain necessary competence.

### **Mentoring groups**

Mentoring can also be effective outside the working environment. In one college of further education, Association of Accounting Technicians NVQ level 4 learners formed a cohesive group to support each other. The mentor, who was in regular contact with them, encouraged this. Network meetings were established, bringing together learners, mentors, assessors' employers and others from local and national organisations. In response to individual learner requests, the college is now holding group-mentoring sessions alongside the planned individual mentoring sessions.

## **Meeting individual needs**

Effective mentoring can help to encourage learners to progress and provide a foundation for further learning. In one case, a learner with behavioural problems was mentored through basic skills literacy training. He progressed successfully to Information Technology key skills training, and eventually attained an NVQ at level 1. He used these experiences to help gain employment, moved on into training at NVQ level 2 and is now an in-house trainer for his employer.

## **Mentoring in New Deal**

Mentoring plays a large part in the successful delivery of the New Deal, although it is rarely formally defined as such. Most providers of the New Deal options place clients in work placements related to the option route the client is following. In almost all of these placements, a designated member of the placement staff is given responsibility for working alongside the client and helping them develop the skills and attitudes necessary to sustain employment.

Inspections of the New Deal Environmental Task Force and New Deal 25 Plus show many examples where clients have gone on to secure permanent employment as a result of their experience whilst on the New Deal. Often, those who undertake the mentoring role have a natural empathy for the clients and quickly earn their respect. However, the role of the mentor in such situations is rarely recognised formally and few complete any form of training.

Where the mentoring role is formally recognised, for example in one New Deal provider in the community voluntary sector, mentoring support was well defined with formal mentoring training available through OCN units at level 2. Mentoring was introduced to learners during induction. An in-house video available in English and Welsh, introduced new learners to the benefits of mentoring.

The provider's literature stressed that mentoring is a confidential, one-to-one activity with volunteer staff that are not directly linked to provider staff and can be used to discuss any topics. Examples of issues that may prevent learners progressing are listed as family problems, depression, homelessness, domestic violence, court cases and debt. Mentors are also able to assist with practical issues and can accompany learners in accessing services provided by other agencies.

## **Annex 3 Guidance given by the National Council on mentoring and the role of the mentor in the delivery of Modern Skills Diploma for Adults programmes**

The Mentoring Development Programme introduced the first formal definition of mentoring in work-based training: 'A natural, or planned process to improve achievement, develop skills and promote professional and personal growth, made possible by the exchange of ideas, feedback, experiences and constructive example within a sustained relationship of mutual trust and respect'.

As a result, the National Council now uses the following definitions of the principles of mentoring support, the process of mentoring and the role of the mentor in the delivery of the MSDA programmes:

### **Principles of mentoring**

- to support and empower learners to develop their knowledge and skills;
- to provide counseling and guidance to the participant and the employer on the learning process;
- to facilitate the completion of the learner's learning plan by the provision assistance and encouragement to learners and employers; and
- to assist learners who do not complete the extended initial assessment within MSDA to decide on their future plans.

### **Process of mentoring**

The delivery of the MSDA programme will include a mentoring process that is based on the guidelines of:

- different individuals should undertake the mentoring role and the assessing role;
- either the employer, the provider or sub-contractor can deliver mentoring support;
- mentoring support should primarily be focused on the learning process; and
- outcomes from the mentoring process must be fed into the review process.

## **Role of the mentor**

The prime aim of the mentor is to maintain and increase retention and completion rates of learners and ensures they benefit fully from the programmed. The mentor is expected to establish a strong rapport with the learner and employer. Throughout the period of extended initial assessment and during the consequent learning programmed, the mentor will be expected to:

- reinforce the MSDA framework and what is required of the learner and the employer;
- provide encouragement and support to the learner;
- assist the learner in overcoming any barriers to learning;
- take account of the learner's preferred styles and methods of learning;
- assess the learner's capability and aptitude in relation to the MSDA programme;
- assist the learner in assessing and balancing work and family commitments with learning;
- make sure the learner is able to devote sufficient time to effectively participate in the MSDA programme; and
- assess the motivation and commitment of the learner to the programme of learning.