

Finding the Right Mentor

It's often best to approach people you already have some relationship with, rather than reaching out to someone new for the first time. If you know someone who has a mentor, ask them for suggestions to help you find the right mentee-mentor match.

In order to find a mentor, it's key to have a good understanding of what you're looking for and to be able to articulate this to a potential mentor. Reflecting on the areas outlined in the career mobility checklist can be a good place to start (Appendix 1), alongside making sure that reflective practice is a regular feature of your working life (Appendix 2).

It is important to start by defining your goals and identifying individuals who may have the skills and experience you are looking for, then reach out to them to initiate informal conversations to gauge compatibility and potential mentorship.

Here's a more detailed approach:

1. Define our Goals and Needs

- What do you want to achieve? Clearly outline your aspirations, the skills or knowledge you want to develop and the kind of guidance you're seeking.
- What qualities do you value in a mentor? Consider factors like experience, communication style, and shared values.
- Is gender a consideration?
- Are family or caring responsibilities important to you?
- What kind of support do you need? Are you looking for someone to guide your career path or are you looking for more specific technical advice?

2. Explore Your Network

- Start with your existing connections: talk to friends, family, colleagues, and former mentors to see if they know anyone who might be a good fit.
- Expand your search: consider attending industry events, joining professional organisations, and using platforms like LinkedIn to connect with potential mentors.

- Look for people who inspire you: identify individuals whose work, skills, and career trajectory you admire.

3. Research and Identify Potential Mentors

- Look for people with relevant experience: focus on individuals who have achieved the goals you're striving for or possess the skills you want to develop.
- Consider their communication style and values: choose someone whose approach to mentorship aligns with your own learning style and values.
- Don't be afraid to reach out to strangers: if you admire someone's work or experience, don't hesitate to connect with them on LinkedIn or through other channels.

4. Initiate Informal Conversations

- Start with a casual introduction: instead of immediately asking someone to be your mentor, aim to build a relationship and gauge their interest in mentoring.
- Ask for their insights and advice: engage in conversations about your goals and seek their perspectives on your career path.
- Observe their communication style and willingness to help: pay attention to how they respond to your questions and whether they seem genuinely interested in supporting your growth.

5. Evaluate and Choose a Mentor

- Consider your initial impressions: choose someone who you feel comfortable and confident in, and who you believe can provide valuable guidance.
- Don't settle for a "one-size-fits-all" mentor: you may need different mentors for different aspects of your career development.
- Be prepared to invest time and effort: mentoring is a two-way street, and you need to be willing to actively participate in the relationship.

Appendix 1 - Career mobility checklist

Advance HE published the results of their [5 year Longitudinal Study](#) last year tracking career aspirations of colleagues working in Higher Education. The following 'career self-management checklist' has 12 questions relating to career mobility and owning your own development which increase chances of furthering your career.

How many of these do you do on a regular basis?

- 1. I make myself visible to people who could help me in my career**
- 2. I seek opportunities to be mentored or coached**
- 3. I seek opportunities to mentor or coach others**
- 4. I set myself goals for career progression**
- 5. I seek opportunities to develop skills I need for my career**
- 6. I proactively seek out job opportunities**
- 7. I take the time to maintain my existing work contacts**
- 8. I seek out new work contacts**
- 9. I use social media to build and maintain my profile**
- 10. I keep my CV up to date**
- 11. I ask people for feedback about me and my career prospects**
- 12. I volunteer for tasks that will get me better known**

Appendix 2 – Reflective Practice Guide

Research shows that our experiences are the most effective development interventions, but only if we take the time to process the learning from them. Every day we are presented with opportunities to learn, we just need to take advantage of them. The original definition (Schön, 1983) defined reflective practice as thoughtfully considering your own experiences in applying knowledge to practice.

You may be thinking, that's all well and good but who has the time? If you do any of the following, you are already spending some time reflecting:

- Using the journey to and from your workplace to reflect
- Talking with a trusted and honest colleague over lunch
- A group discussion with colleagues at the beginning or end of the week
- Jotting down notes in a journal to reflect on when you have time later in the week

Now it's about putting a bit more structure around it so you capture the learning and put it into practice.

Benefits of reflective practice

Reflective practice can spark significant changes when it comes to personal and professional growth. At its core, reflective practice is about taking a moment to think deeply about what we've done, learning from it, and planning to do better next time. Regular reflective practice keeps you sharp and ahead of the curve, improves how you approach work, builds resilience, better prepares you for changes, and ultimately has the potential to increase your competence and confidence.

Reflective areas

There are three areas you may want to reflect on.

Reflective questions – Events

- What happened before and after those standout moments?
- What did you do specifically, and how did it turn out?
- Could you have handled it differently?

If you consider the event in detail, you may pick up on aspects of the situation you did not consider at the time. These details could have affected your response or the responses of other people and may help you when you consider how you would approach the situation if it arose again. It is important to reflect on a situation objectively; that is, you need to take a step back and consider what the situation would have looked like to an outside observer.

Reflective questions - Skills and Knowledge

- Did you identify any skills you found difficult to master this week? What could you do to improve your skills?
- What feedback did you receive this week? What did you think/feel about the feedback?
- What are you going to do differently?

Reflective questions – Feelings

Your feelings influence how you handle situations more than you might think.

- Why was this situation/event important to you?
- What were you feeling when things were happening?
- Could your emotional state have impacted the outcome?

How to reflect and then put it into practice

- Schedule 15-30 mins per week
- Select at least one event from your week that you feel you learned from, or it could be an upcoming event you would like to reflect on
- Choose some reflective questions to help you capture your learning
- Note your learning in a journal – this could be online or on paper
- If there are any actions you can take, plan them
- Once a month, go back over your journal to refresh yourself of your learning and see how your development is progressing

Different types of reflective practice

Reflective practice enables you to analyse an event and evaluate how a different response might have brought about a different outcome. There are three main ways of doing this:

1. **Retrospective Reflection:** this is thinking things over after they've happened. It's good for unbiased, clear-headed reviews.
2. **Reflection in Action:** this is in-the-moment thinking when you're right in the middle of things, adjusting your approach as you go.
3. **Prospective Reflection:** this is thinking about how to handle upcoming situations before they happen and considering what you could do to improve your response.

Lead by example

If you're in a leadership role, show your team how it's done. Don't just talk about the benefits of reflective practice—actively do it, and share your experiences. For example, include learning points from your reflective practice in 1:1s or during team meetings. This helps to create a culture where everyone is learning and improving continuously.

Please refer to Talent and Development's Mentoring Webpage for the full guide to Reflective Practice. This contains more detail around the areas highlighted here, and includes a wider list of prompt questions.