

Specialist Mentoring for Students with Mental Health Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Contents

Understanding Mentoring	Practical information for Students
What is mentoring?	How do I access mentoring?
Mentoring is not...	What can I expect from my mentor?
Who is mentoring for?	What is expected of me?
	What if I do not want to continue with mentoring?

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is specialist individual support. It aims to develop effective study strategies and deepen understanding of the impact of a mental health condition or autistic spectrum disorder on study at Oxford

It is designed to help students keep on track with their work whilst negotiating the many competing academic and personal demands they will encounter, within the context of managing themselves and their illness.

Mentoring is tailored to the individual but can, for example, include things like

- coping with stress
- concentration difficulties
- motivation and goal-setting
- procrastination
- organisation and planning work
- managing self-imposed expectations
- maintaining realistic study patterns.

Case Study Examples

Anna analysed how her anxiety disorder affected her approach to work and was able to adopt a new approach to handing in work and receiving feedback.

Leo, who has an Asperger's diagnosis, received coaching and support to overcome relationship difficulties with his tutorial partners. He was able to develop strategies to make it easier to adapt to changes in routine and key shifts in the study year.

A psychotic episode meant Simon lost his view of himself as a successful student, which affected his approach to work. His mentor helped him develop new, more realistic study patterns in light of his new medication.

Following a period of in-patient treatment for an eating disorder, Seema's mentor helped her reflect on former patterns of behaviour in relation to food to overcome the risk of them being repeated in relation to study.

Mentoring is not:

- **Mental health care** – mentoring is not a substitute for counselling, therapy, or input from statutory services; mentors and disability advisors can advise on how to investigate other available support. However, when accessing the mentoring service students will not normally be simultaneously offered counselling at the University because of the potential for duplication in the work.
- **Study skills tuition** - mentors can help improve study efficiency but are not qualified tutors.
- **Advocacy** – mentors cannot communicate on behalf of students but they can explore with them the best to approach a difficult situation. Occasionally, they might accompany students to meetings in College or Department but in a supportive capacity only.

Who is mentoring for?

- Students with long-term mental health difficulties which have a substantial effect on daily activities and studies.
- Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, who need support to manage the impact on study.
- Students whose conditions have a significant psychological component or consequences (e.g. chronic fatigue syndrome/M.E. or ADHD) and who wish to take a psychological approach to managing the impact of their difficulties on study.

How do I access mentoring?

1. Talk to the Disability Advisory Service and complete a registration form:
www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/DAS%20Registration%20%26%20Study%20Support%20Form.doc
2. Provide supporting medical documentation that confirms the nature of your disability. The document must: include any diagnosis, note the length of time over which you have had difficulties, describe the impact on your daily activities and study and any relevant details of past/current treatment or other support you have received.
3. Apply for funding – your Disability Advisor will guide you through all the steps. Please be aware this process can take some time so you are advised to begin as soon as possible.

Once your funding is approved a mentor will contact you directly to arrange a first meeting. You will be allocated a fixed number of mentoring hours for the academic year, informed by your circumstances and funding body policy.

What can I expect from the mentor?

All our mentors are appropriately qualified professionals. They have knowledge and experience of your particular disability and will understand the demands of study in higher education. They are skilled in using a range of study-focussed interventions drawn from relevant theories that are appropriate to the individual student's need.

Confidentiality:

- All records and data we keep are in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- With your permission, we can inform your College and Department that you are receiving mentoring (e.g. via a note in your Student Support Plan). However, the detail and content of your mentoring sessions remains confidential within Student Welfare and Support Services (SWSS), unless you have given permission to share information with a named third party.
- The only exception would be if there were concerns about a significant and imminent risk to your own or someone else's health and wellbeing, where we might need to consult with others, for example a College Doctor or Welfare Officer.

Meetings and communication:

- Students usually see their Mentor on a regular basis, but with flexibility around frequency and timing depending on your personal circumstances and mutual availability.
- Your Mentor will tell you how you can contact them outside session times. They will not be available to answer all calls or emails immediately, but will explain when they are contactable and the likely timeframe for response.

- Your Mentor will always try to give you at least 24-hours' notice if they need to reschedule an appointment. In situations when this is not possible (e.g. due to sudden illness) you will be notified as soon as possible.

Feedback and review:

- At the end of each term, your Mentor will review with you how things are going and establish any goals for future mentoring work. They will provide a summary of this review to your Disability Adviser. However, you can still speak to your Mentor or Disability Adviser at any point if you wish to discuss your support provision.

Monitoring funding

- Your Mentor will monitor how many hours of support have been provided to ensure that the funding approved is not exceeded.

What is expected of me?

Mentoring is a collaborative process between student and mentor. We ask that you:

- attend all scheduled sessions on time and engage actively in the mentoring process
- create a Support Plan with your Mentor, regularly review progress, and inform your Mentor if any aspect of this agreement needs to change
- sign sessional and monthly timesheets to confirm what support has taken place
- give at least 24-hours' notice if you need to cancel or reschedule a session; for any cancellation with less than 24-hours' notice, notify your Mentor as soon as possible, and sign a timesheet so that your mentor can be paid for their time.

Please be aware that any sessions cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice without good reason will be deducted from your annual mentoring allowance. If you fail to attend or cancel session two sessions with less than 24-hours' notice in any given term, your Mentor and Disability Advisor will review with you whether it is feasible to continue with the support.

What if I do not want to continue with mentoring or I have any concerns about the support?

There is no obligation to continue with mentoring if you no longer require it or are not finding the sessions useful. Please raise your concerns with your mentor in the first instance so that they can try and work through any problems and explore whether a different meeting arrangement or approach to the sessions might be helpful.

Alternatively, you can talk to your Disability Advisor at any time if you are concerned about the support. The formal complaints procedure is available from https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Complaints%20procedure.pdf.