

Evaluation of the University (pilot) Reverse Mentoring programme (Nov 2022)

Reverse mentoring is when a worker in a senior position is mentored typically by someone in a more junior position than themselves (Murphy 2012). Staff and students with a Global Majority background were targeted as reverse mentors within this WLT funded project, as they had more experience than the mentee/senior manager of being within a marginalised group.

The aims of the pilot reverse mentoring programme were connected to the REC Action Plan (action 33) and the APP Operational plan in respect of:

- Promoting awareness of and drive equality, inclusion and cultural humility.
- Facilitating discussions to better understand the lived experience of our staff and students.
- Facilitating purposeful conversations about racism, sexism and other marginalisation in order to reverse and disrupt traditional deficit models and power structures which cause disadvantage.
- Addressing systemic discriminatory cultures in an organisation through one to one interactions.
- Promoting confidence within mentors by recognising the skills and capabilities they have and allowing them to 'speak their truth'.
- Calling on mentees to make more considered decisions to take action and answer the question, "What do I need to do about what I have discovered for me as an individual and to support the University in my role."
- Allowing mentors an opportunity to network with senior leaders/mentees and benefit from this exposure.
- Reducing unconscious biases and incubate a diverse pipeline of talent leading long term to changes in the protected characteristics of senior leaders

Training and reflection/peer sessions were facilitated by Stacy Johnson (University of Nottingham) through her reverse mentoring practice, trading as The ReMEDI Project Limited. The launch was delayed but started in March 2022. Our intention was to recruit 10 staff pairings and 10 student/staff pairings (with students as mentors). Although we took time to speak to the SU, working with the Liberation Reps and advertising the scheme at the Student Ambassador meetings, we were not able to recruit as many students as we would have liked. As a result, we started with 16 mentoring pairs in total: 12 staff pairs and 4 staff/student pairs.

The intention was that they met 6 times over a 6 month period, however the average number of meetings held were between 3-4, as senior manager/mentees were involved in the transformational change, over the summer period and some mentors left at the end of the semester, plus clashes in the summer holidays.

At the end of the mentoring programme, feedback was requested and received in 3 different ways:

- During on-line reflection sessions with Stacy (5/9/22) with 8 mentors (including 2 students) and 4 mentees
- From a follow up face-to-face interview (14/9/22) with 1 student mentor
- Through a questionnaire (Oct 2022) completed by 8 mentors and 8 mentees (completed by 1 student, 11 academic staff and 4 professional services staff)

So in total, 17 mentors and 12 mentees were involved in sharing feedback, but some will have contributed to more than one feedback opportunity, as there were only 16 mentoring pairs in total.

A summary of the feedback from these 3 different approaches can be found in the Appendices attached.

As can be seen by the Appendices, the majority of those involved, as either mentor or mentee, were satisfied with their mentoring experiences. They felt they had received some good training, and that their mentoring meetings were productive and positive. Mentors seemed surprised at how open and honest their mentees were. Both parties shared their learning as part of the feedback sessions, with a particular emphasis on sharing different opinions, different perspectives and different experiences; with a number of participants noticing that although their lives were similar in some respects; working parents, children at school, living in multi-cultural environments, their worlds and the challenges within them are very different.

Both parties also discussed how they had applied their learning back into the workplace, with comments made about decolonising the curriculum, reviewing location/classrooms, how relationships are built with students, recruitment, roles and responsibilities etc. Some shared how the mentoring had encouraged them to reflect outside of the workplace too. An abridged version of one of the questions showing the impact;

The focus of the reverse mentoring programme was to 'promote awareness of and drive equality, inclusion and cultural humility' - how far do you think this has been achieved?

Mentors	Mentees
I think the programme in and of itself has raised awareness and is helping to achieve this aim	Personally, this has been fully achieved... now need to push forward on implementation into the faculty
I think it's the early foundations which can be built on	I am certainly more aware of the impact of the cultural divide at the individual level. I am more aware of black history and culture than previously.
To a reasonable degree given the open response/ willingness (with planned approaches) to apply suggested strategies	Looking at things through different eyes, I will actively seek out to include the thoughts of more people, especially around recruitment to reach equality aims.
The journey started well	Yes - it has opened my eyes to things I was not aware of
I promoted awareness of equality and diversity to my mentee by challenging, educating and sharing my lived experiences as a black woman, I believe	It has moved this a very long way because it gave me the opportunity to talk at length and in depth with someone who challenged everything I thought
The duration and nature of the programme was useful and suitable in gaining a holistic picture of the issues stated here.	I think it was interesting and useful experience that has led to some practical changes in approach and outlook that I've been able to also cascade within a wider team. I don't know that I feel that it has changed me in any way, but has given some helpful focus on unpicking some challenges around equality and inclusion within my team.

It is important to note that not all mentees/mentors were satisfied with their experience and this was mostly attributed to mentees wanting but not having a student mentor, the mentor not being effective (needed more training/support), and lack of time/too busy meaning that not enough mentoring sessions were held.

The feedback shared a number of aspects to consider for the next group, moving forward:

- Consider timing; when it starts (ideally start of Sem 1/2), how long it lasts (must be 6 meetings?)
- Offer more training for mentors: expectations, commitment, emotional aspects, agenda, structure
- Offer more support to mentors and mentees: regular check ins, separate mentee and mentor groups
- Encourage more student involvement: in training, videos to 'sell' scheme, more student mentors
- Manage expectations for both parties re time commitment/outcomes expected
- Widen mentees to middle managers but also widen mentors to other disadvantaged groups

NEXT STEPS: celebration event, deliver train the trainer, start in Sem 2 early, current mentors to join again?

APPENDIX – SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK GAINED FROM 3 DIFFERENT APPROACHES

(I have tried to use their direct words throughout, where possible.)

1. Feedback from the reflection sessions with mentors/mentees (Note: mostly mentors sharing) Sept 2022

Summary of feedback received from 8 mentors (including 2 students) and 4 mentees during on-line reflection sessions with Stacy (5/9/22)

Mentors and **mentees** reflections;

Positive	Less positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt it went well • Found it very productive • Built a friendship • Our meetings were progressive • Meetings felt very honest • Mentee was both respectful and powerful • Glad I've done it • Mentee was as anxious as me, at the start • Shared experiences that were not positive and mentee was supportive of experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could have asked more open questions • Unsure of the next steps (only met twice) • Finished relationship early • Only met few times; not had a chance to talk about bigger issues • Not feel that the relationship has been that bumpy or challenging; feel need a few more sessions • Time allocated is too short • Expected it to be more challenging • Mentor now left the organisation
LEARNING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar ideas about wanting students feedback and looking at the impact of what they/we do • Wanted to know more about the culture • Surprised as we were brought up in similar multicultural locations, but just not had the same experiences (now better understanding of where they come from/can understand better) • Talked about making recruitment more accessible to the Global Majority (not clear if happening yet) • Learnt some personal and professional aspects • Learnt how important my lived experience was • Looked at decolonising the curriculum; the setting and location of the campus, how personal relationships are built with the students (talked about student tone, student fears), looked at courses available (training and how people feel), importance of intersectionality • Looked at the role and responsibilities of Black Professors (some don't want to be role models; puts disproportionate burden/added pressure on them) • Helped me with my own way of thinking • Shared experiences of kids at school, sometimes felt like a parallel universe bringing up a black child in comparison to a white child • A lot of our discussions were about how we see the world differently. Assumptions were made on both sides. Different stories but same world • We need to reverse the deficit model; take a strength-based view • Sometimes the disaffected community don't speak up. Their confidence levels are eroded over time, so don't speak up; how can we get people together to get their voices heard? 	

2. Feedback from the mentor interview (student) Sept 2022

Summary of comments made by a (student) mentor in a face-to-face interview (14/9/22).

Mentoring relationship started in March 2022, ended in September 2022 – had 7 meetings.

The 3 key words used to describe their mentoring experience

Humbling; listening to others opinions with an open mind, to make assumptions, not pre-judge

Inspirational; how relayed thoughts, role model, build confidence, mentee worked hard, two-way

Privileged; to be part of this unique project, to hear different viewpoints, to be able to challenge senior people

Surprised; thought it would be tokenism (it wasn't, mentee worked v hard), thought mentee would be less open, but they were very open.

Mentee benefits

- Seeing things differently through a different lens; similar family aspects but different experiences
- Sees his privilege and how that plays out for his work, family etc.; affects need to parent differently
- Looked at B.A.M.E/Global Majority gap here and what steps needed to get there
- Looked at staffing; Anglo-Saxon workforce asking why do you think it's like this?
- Looked at systems and their contribution to indirect discrimination e.g. rooms
- Now EDI Committee in this Faculty to expand this review further
- More celebration of all students strengths/awards

Mentor benefits

- Unique opportunity to be involved
- Liked having the open/frank conversations
- Happy to have senior leader access to get an insight
- Created increased reflections on own experiences and how they contrast
- How best to navigate self through
- Mentee been offering mentor networks for support e.g. attended conference/events together
- Worked on project with mentee and others school; building profile and great experience
- Invited to share experience at internal and external events

How can we get more students involved as mentors?

- We need a clear platform in the university for EDI; we need more inclusive events, then students will start to go to them and can recruit from there
- We need to ask other students to cascade for us, at other student events linked to diversity projects
- Need to better relay the benefits to students as it is quite a commitment; sell using students who have been mentors, using video. Make clear the personal development aspects
- Not agree about paying students as they may join for the wrong reason. Reward at the end with certificate/micro-credentials/digital badges/celebratory event etc.

- Offer students to be part of the ‘train the trainer’ event so they can come back and be a larger part of the scheme

Ideas for the future/discussion points for future programmes

- After one session, felt sorry for self. Needed someone to talk to. Offer additional one to one support for mentors?
- Could have added emotional aspects to training; used to/more comfortable talking/explaining within my own circle, sometimes felt embarrassed to share how feeling/felt was exposing myself
- Catch up reflective sessions worked well. Could have had more support; one to one and as a group of mentors
- Need to pre-train students in building confidence to mentor, and be careful with matching
- Be good for mentors to have some structure at the start re topics to start with
- Widen to broader under-represented groups with protected characteristics next time; where should we target; Black/Asian males?

3. Feedback from the questionnaire (October 2022)

Summary of the feedback from 8 mentors and 8 mentees through a follow up questionnaire (replies from 1 student, 11 academic staff and 4 professional services staff).

Satisfaction levels: 10/16 satisfied/somewhat satisfied. Rest neither/nor, plus 1 very dissatisfied (mentee*).

The 3 key words used to describe their mentoring experiences:

Mentor	Mentee
Networking, time, two-way	Rewarding, learning, positive
Personal, exploratory and insightful	Enlightening, thought-provoking, educational
Partial, indecisive, unconvinced	Discovery, reflection, friends
New-experience, and thoughtful	Disappointing, uninspiring, unproductive*
Good, slow, interesting	Inspiring, energising, thought provoking
Interesting, honest, helpful	Enlightening, challenging, rewarding
Transforming, interesting and life changing.	Educational, interesting, unfinished
Insightful, reflective, empowering	Interesting, (a bit) confusing, reassuring

Comments on training (mentors): Facilitators were excellent, helpful, comprehensive training

Comments on training (mentees): Training was excellent, felt prepared, liked/disliked loose agenda

Comments on peer support sessions (mentors): good to meet other mentors, useful but hard to find time

Comments on peer support sessions (mentees): safe space but difficulty to find time to attend/short notice

“I really enjoyed the programme”. – mentor

“This was a brilliant opportunity and I have learned so much from it.” - mentee

What did they like the most?

Mentors – liked the most	Mentees – liked the most
<p>The opportunity to meet somebody at a senior level in the organisation, who I would not necessarily have the opportunity to meet, and talk about what each of us does.</p> <p>Being open and sharing feelings and emotions</p> <p>Feedback and discussions from the peer support sessions</p> <p>Opportunity to do something different</p> <p>Sharing</p> <p>Listening to other mentors and having the continual support from the trainers</p> <p>When I invited my mentee to our church conference, and it was his first time being among black people. He thoroughly enjoyed this experience</p> <p>Access to senior management/introduction to behind the scenes</p>	<p>My mentor was brilliant and helped enormously. She was very knowledgeable and able to convert my reflections on issues and place this in the context of the body of knowledge on EDI. We have worked to make as much impact as possible from our discussions and plan to continue this</p> <p>Generating a new perspective point for me</p> <p>The opportunity/introduction to a colleague that would not normally work with me.</p> <p>The training with Stacy as I learnt something.</p> <p>The open and honest conversation</p> <p>Meeting my mentor, being so absolutely challenged, gaining a deeper understanding of the personal and institutional issues of representation and racism</p> <p>Hearing directly from a student about their lived experience</p> <p>My mentor, who was absolutely brilliant.</p>

What did they like the least?

Mentors – liked the least	Mentees – liked the least
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unproductive meetings with mentee • The mentee was a little cold and detached sometimes • I didn't feel comfortable talking about personal or sensitive issues around discrimination when the person you're telling my story to had no involvement in those circumstances, or can't help with these situations • Lack of attendance by mentees at catch up meetings • Attending catch up meetings with colleague that work directly with, as also a mentor • Timing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming to an end • Odd occasion when felt in catch up sessions that others had an 'axe to grind' • Short lived • 2 sessions not productive • Matching delays meant only 2 meetings • Lack of time • Confusion over aims

“I was very excited at this programme and that's why I wanted to take part. It did not go as well as I thought it could of for me, but I do feel other colleagues may have achieved a lot more out of the programme. I still think programmes like this should continue to be implemented because it's not about the big impacts the programme can have but the very small changes in attitudes and behaviours which make a difference.” - mentor

“I think it was a difficult time for my mentor, which meant that they didn't have the time needed to commit to the role.” - mentee

What helped and hindered the reverse mentoring relationships?

Helping factors – mentor view	Helping factors – mentee view	Hindering – mentor view	Hindering – mentees view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training x2 • Regular check ins x2 • Seeing how white British sees Black British • Participating • Positive mentor • My diverse personal experience and work in this field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to speak plainly and openly x2 • Got on well with mentor x2 • Knowledgeable mentor x2 • A great mentor, who was positive, fun, knowledgeable and super confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time x4 • Senior managers should only commit if they have the time x2 • Staffing issues/current restructure got in the way of meetings and building the relationship • 6 months not long enough (as only met 3-4 times) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time – not enough time to meet up x6 • Mentor cancelled my session • 6 months not long enough (as only met 3-4 times)

Learning taken away and applied in the workplace?

Mentors learning

Although I am very open about my own experiences both in the workplace and outside, this programme made me reflect on the variety of experiences I know other people have and how they can be shared. Also, how those stories can help people understand the role of equality and diversity, and that this is done in a way that people do not see diversity is not a burden or a way to “punish” one group in order to reward another. Instead, diversity can be a way of helping everyone succeed.

I try to be more open to discuss race and religion

Injustice and Inequalities are structured in organisations and policies or discussions and meetings are tick box exercises. I just have to raise above it all and keep my values and believes that equality is for all and not those that are privileged.

Questioning my approach towards enabling a diversity of staff/ colleagues to the next level

Racism is rife but ignorance is no excuse

Not applied yet

The ability to understand how to successfully embed the concept of intersectionality into learning programmes

Mentees learning

That the challenges faced by our Global Majority staff are far more complex and require a much more nuanced approach - they are not a homogenous group but individual people with their own life stories

To consider that my perspective on a situation is not the only one, and to think more carefully about how my actions may be interpreted and experienced by others

Reach out, no harm in a second and maybe different opinion

To attend any further workshops that are delivered by Stacy. Or maybe ask to be considered again with a different mentor

Keep talking and listening

That institutional barriers to representation are deep and complex and we must continue to understand them and put in place effective, long term and meaningful strategies to overcome them and commit to doing that now

That the challenges faced by our global majority staff are far more complex and require a much more nuanced approach - they are not a homogenous group but individual people with their own life stories

To consider that my perspective on a situation is not the only one, and to think more carefully about how my actions may be interpreted and experienced by others

No learning from this experience, I'm afraid. Wanted a student mentor. Actual mentor very busy/cancelled meetings/not know what she was doing. Mentor didn't feel I could improve my practice.

The focus of the reverse mentoring programme was to 'promote awareness of and drive equality, inclusion and cultural humility' - how far do you think this has been achieved?

Mentors	Mentees
I don't think my interaction has had much impact, but I think the programme in and of itself has raised awareness and is helping to achieve this aim	Personally, this has been fully achieved... now need to push forward on implementation into the faculty
I think it's the early foundations which can be built on	I am certainly more aware of the impact of the cultural divide at the individual level. I am more aware of black history and culture than previously.
No comments	Looking at things through different eyes, I will actively seek out to include the thoughts of more people, especially around recruitment to reach equality aims.
To a reasonable degree given the open response/ willingness (with planned approaches) to apply suggested strategies	My mentor didn't feel that I could improve my practice.
Not achieved	Yes - it has opened my eyes to things I was not aware of
The journey started well although what happened at the university did have an impact on the continuation of the programme	It has moved this a very long way because it gave me the opportunity to talk at length and in depth with someone who challenged everything I thought
I promoted awareness of equality and diversity to my mentee by challenging, educating and sharing my lived experiences as a black woman, I believe	I don't know that I fully understand what that actually means. I think it was interesting and useful experience that has led to some practical changes in approach and outlook that I've been able to also cascade within a wider team. I don't know that I feel that it has changed me in any way, but has given some helpful focus on unpicking some challenges around equality and inclusion within my team.
The duration and nature of the programme was useful and suitable in gaining a holistic picture of the issues stated here.	

"I feel there's a lot more work that needs to be done around awareness raising for disabled and LGBT+ people" - mentor

"This is not the end of my reverse mentoring journey, but what I see as the beginning of a friendship or at least an excellent working relationship where the other person will give me advice and an honest opinion." - mentee

Ideas for the future/discussion points for future programmes

- Suggest aim at middle managers for mentees next x6 (Heads of School/Directors) but keep REC positive action link with protected characteristics for mentors, including disability.
- Need to recruit more student mentors. Create videos (at the celebration event?) of students sharing experiences to role model/sell the opportunity by students to students
- Add to staff workload hours to show university commitment to this programme and also protect time
- Review training and share more ideas on what to do with mentees/clear agenda/templates for meetings (handbook?). Need more direction for mentors.
- Offer one to one emotional support for mentors as may be some emotional support needed after sharing
- Ensure regular check ins; offer smaller more regular peer catch-ups (create small peer groups. Not expect altogether)
- Ask both parties to keep a reflective journal
- Longer timescale (beyond 6 months or just ensure 6 meetings?)
- Ensure senior managers/managers as mentees expectations are managed re time commitment