

## Supporting Mentors in Adult Learning Environments

### Introduction

The need for improvements in teacher training for all sectors has been identified as a priority by the reform agenda Success for All (DfES 2002) which introduced staged changes for initial teacher training. Those training for primary, secondary positions have already benefited from these improvements and the next stage is the life long learning and skills sector which includes further, higher and adult education, voluntary, community and work based providers. One of the improvements identified is mentoring support for those undergoing initial teacher training.

The benefits of mentoring for the person being mentored, the mentor and the employer are covered in more detail in the Handbook provided and are very persuasive. However, mentoring support for teachers in the life long learning sector brings with it additional challenges. Whereas in schools, colleges and universities there are many opportunities for mentoring using a range of processes, in the life long learning sector there is often not the same opportunities due to the geographical dispersion, availability of subject specialist personnel and generally the additional cost of providing the same types of support whilst not in a location based organisation.

This project has looked at how a mentoring scheme could be provided which is flexible enough to be used by life long learning providers. A flexible structure for mentoring arrangements has been identified as follows:-

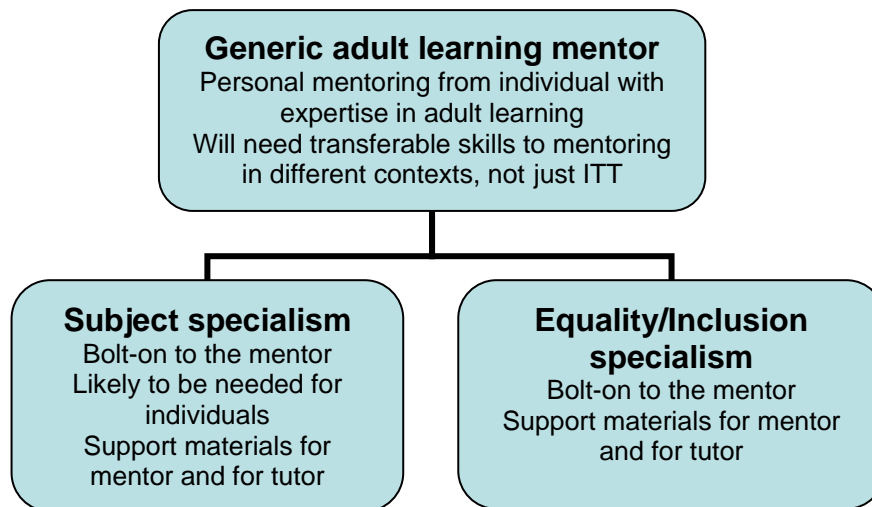
### Mentoring Structure

In Adult Learning, geography and staffing structures make generic mentoring the only effective and economic method of providing individual support to staff. Individuals trained as mentors for one particular type of activity are likely to be expected to perform mentoring roles in other contexts.

Mentoring for initial teacher training will require specialist input on teaching and learning, subject specialism and diversity/inclusivity. The latter is especially important in Adult and Community learning environments.

Mentors need to draw on significant levels of support materials for themselves and for recommendation to their mentees.

Resources for mentors must relate to both the specialist area and teaching methodologies; they must be materials for enhancing teaching and learning not just materials for extending the mentees.



## Research

Research undertaken by the Royal Artillery for Centre for Personal Development on behalf of the SWitch Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training in November 2007 identified that there was existing mentoring practice in further and higher education providers but this was rare in adult education, work based and voluntary and community providers. Further research was undertaken from the partner organisation for this project and a review of the initial research and the additional research undertaken is contained in a report Mentoring Models for Adult Learning Providers.

## Activity

Subject specialist and other participants were drawn from across the South West and included inclusivity, e-learning and subject specialist (arts and crafts) advisers as well as Curriculum Area Leaders (MFL, Business, Arts/Crafts) and mentoring and ITT experience. Considering the mentoring structure as identified, the group worked on developing the existing best practice available and developing the resources to produce a training package to provide a framework for mentoring in adult education and it is hoped that the key factors, guidelines and resources will create a base for mentoring in many different types of organisations. The project aims and the timescales involved did not enable any pilot of these guidelines and therefore it is expected that this mentoring structure will require further development.

## Subsequent Pilot of Training Package

SWitch has subsequently made Mentor Support Grants available to organisations to develop their mentoring support and a large number of the resources produced by the SMILE project have been used very successfully in the Setting up of Mentoring Schemes, training of mentors and the provision of additional support resources.

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