

Enhancing mentoring to support teaching in HE

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Background and rationale

- Mentoring has been used to support the teaching development of staff in two ways:
 - Formal mentoring - for new staff as part their journey to achieving HEA status. Typically lasts 1 year.
 - Informal mentoring – provided by experienced colleagues to colleagues. Invisible process.
- Mentoring is poorly understood and recognised
- Previous research on academics' induction experiences suggested:
 - effective mentoring as central to their induction to teaching.
 - experiences of being mentored were uneven across different disciplines.

Background and rationale

Project

- experienced mentors from different disciplines have come together share ideas/opinions/experiences on approaches adopted in their area.

Aims

- To understand of the perceptions of mentoring amongst staff
- To identify contradictions in mentoring across Northumbria
- use this as the basis for proposing changes to improve mentoring.

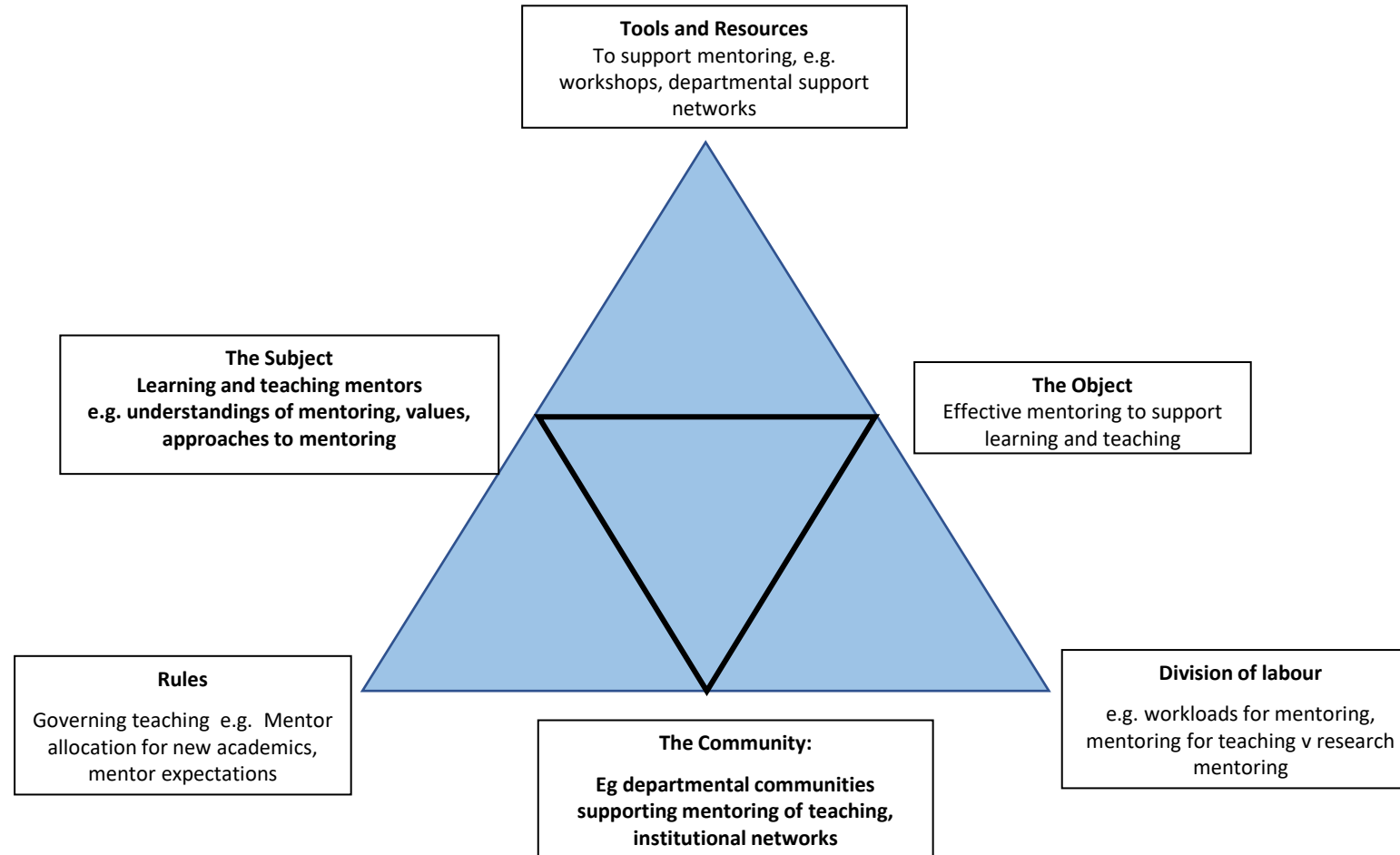
Approach:

- Chat
- Vignettes
- Mentor survey
- Reflections from mentoring team

The CHAT approach

- CHAT used to investigate multiple educational challenges in HE (Bligh and Flood, 2015; Englund and Price, 2018; Mathieson et al. 2023; Smith et al., 2020)
- Focus on socially situated learning through engaging in everyday tasks in 'activity systems' (Engestrom 2001, 2014)
- 'Activity systems' defined through 6 interconnected elements:
 - the 'subject' (mentor), who engages in
 - an 'object' of activity (mentoring colleagues)
 - mediated by various 'tools' and 'resources'
 - within a 'community' (department/subject group)
 - drawing on 'rules' defining the 'activity', and
 - the 'division of labour' within which the 'activity' takes place
- Focus on contradictions that surface within and between different elements of the 'activity system' and with related activity systems, as sources for change

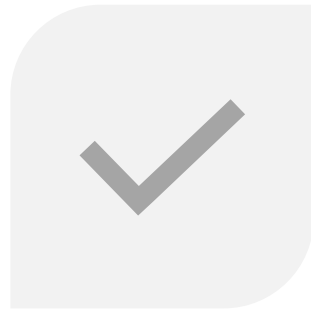
Activity System for Learning and Teaching Mentoring



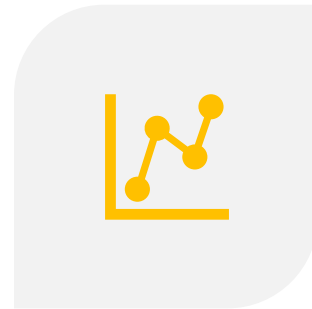
Vignettes & JISC (Online Survey) data.



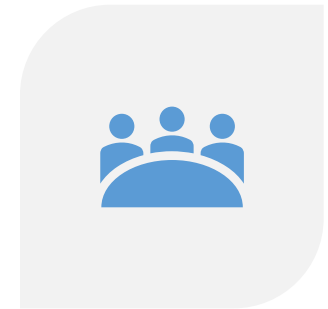
11 VIGNETTES WRITTEN BY RESEARCH COLLABORATORS OF MENTORING ACROSS DEPARTMENTS STRUCTURED AROUND CHAT ELEMENTS



OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE BY MENTEES ACROSS DEPARTMENTS USING CHAT ELEMENTS – 22 QUESTIONNAIRES ACROSS 4 DEPARTMENTS CAPTURED SO FAR



INITIAL ANALYSIS OF VIGNETTES AND QUESTIONNAIRES HAS HIGHLIGHTED KEY CONTRADICTIONS FOR DISCUSSION BY THE RESEARCH COLLABORATORS



THESE DISCUSSIONS WILL INFORM OUR PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING MENTORING

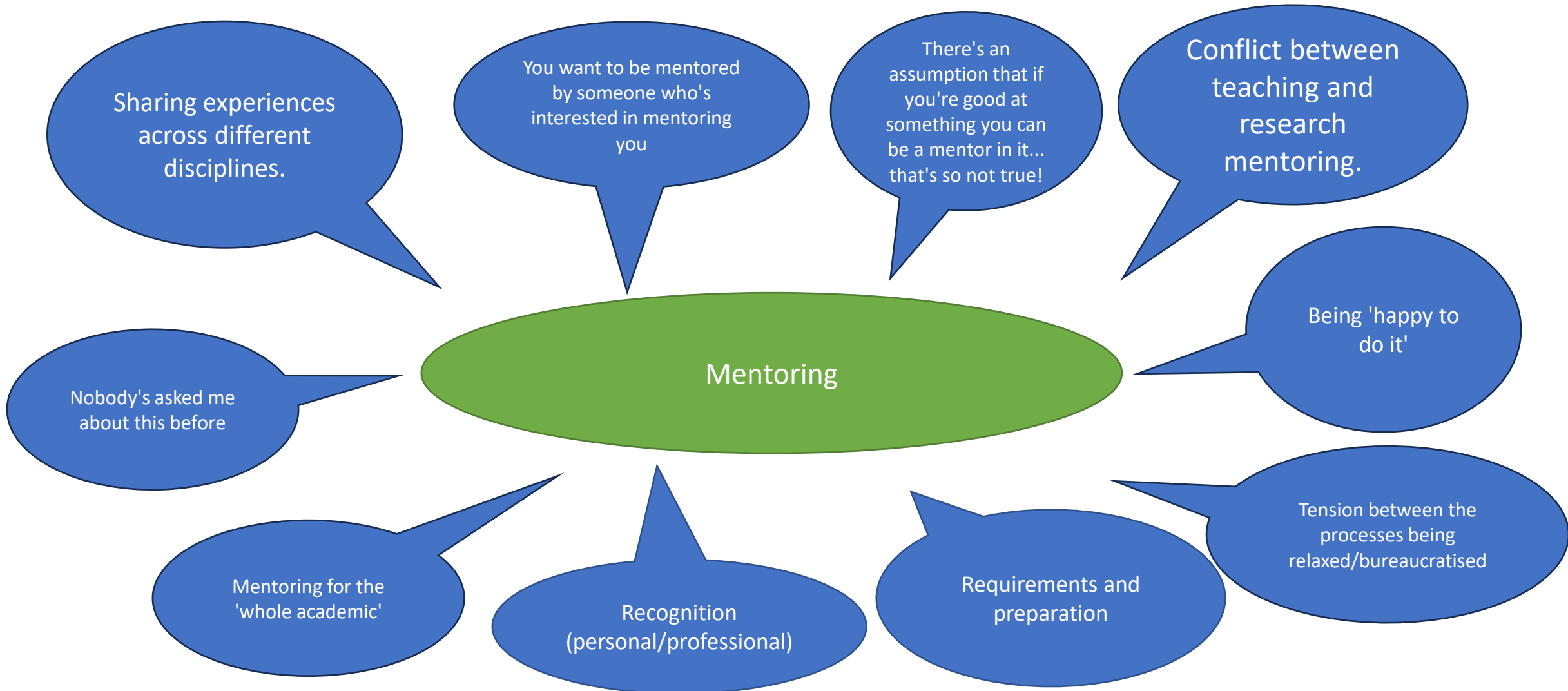
Survey Questions

2. Could you tell me about your journey into being a teaching mentor in higher education?
3. What were the motivations for you to be a mentor?
4. Could you tell me about your journey into teaching in higher education, and the values that guide you in your approach to teaching?
5. What roles have you had as a teaching mentor at Northumbria, as a formal mentor for new colleagues, and/or informally?
6. How were you prepared and how have you been supported as a mentor at Northumbria, and in your discipline group/department
7. How have your mentees engaged with their teaching role and with you as their mentor?
8. How has this shaped your approach to mentoring?
9. How do you think being a teaching mentor differs from research mentoring?
10. Which groups of people have been most significant for you in understanding your role as a teaching mentor here? How?

Survey Questions cont.

11. What resources have helped you to understand your role as a teaching mentor?
12. As a mentor for learning and teaching, do you believe your contributions are valued?
13. What rules have shaped your role as a teaching mentor at Northumbria, and how were these communicated to you?
14. How have you been identified as a teaching mentor?
15. Have you been allocated a workload for mentoring?
17. Are there ways that you would like it to be recognized or rewarded?
18. What benefits have you experienced from mentoring?
19. What have been the most difficult aspects of being a learning and teaching mentor and what would you most like to change?
20. How have you changed through being a learning and teaching mentor at Northumbria?

Survey outcomes and reflections from the team



Potential Ways Forward

- One academic mentor rather than distinct and standalone teaching and research mentors (mentoring for the whole academic)
- Research needs to inform teaching – gives us authenticity as academics (regional working group on teaching development mentoring - ripe area for publication, workforce development events etc)
- Greater recognition, embedment and reward in formal promotional, appraisal and fellowship criteria (annual institutional prize, awarding of finances for professional development, research etc))
- What type of mentoring (colleagues applying for fellowship? preparing to work in practice? "different strokes for different folks"?)

Potential Ways Forward

- Lobbying to increase mentor workloads (reliance on professional generosity and going over and beyond for high-quality work that often goes unseen?)
- Benefits of reciprocal mentoring (to learn from and understand issues from the perspective of each other, regardless of status and experience e.g., digital literacy)
- Re-thinking of mentee and mentor pairings (self-determined? discipline or cross-discipline specific? cross institutional?)

Bibliography

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