

SUPPORTING KEY MENTORING PROGRAMMES AT OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY



Mentoring session at Oxford Brookes University

OVERVIEW

A persistent challenge within University undergraduate programmes is ensuring students are adequately prepared for their graduate careers.

The Oxford School of Hospitality Management and the Accounting, Finance and Economics departments at Oxford Brookes University looked to improve transitions for students from University into industry, by setting up mentoring schemes for their students.

Both departments decided to use the online mentoring system, MentorNet, to help administer the programmes and deal with some of the challenges faced by many such mentoring programmes. Both schemes are run independently of each other but on the same platform – one of the key benefits of MentorNet is being able to run different mentoring schemes on the same system, while keeping each separate from the other.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

- Online mentoring solution, MentorNet

CHALLENGES

- Paper-based solution
- Labour intensive to maintain
- Key information distributed in various place
- Data protection concerns

BENEFITS

- Reduced the time taken to administer the scheme
- Improved efficiencies by keeping everything in one place
- Facilitated communications through a secure online communications system
- Provided easy access for mentors, mentees and administrators
- Reduced amount of resources required to run the programme

MENTORNET BENEFITS

- Improves communication
- Reduces administration
- Ensures regulatory compliance
- Encourages networking & peer learning
- Increases ownership of the mentoring process
- Allows advanced reporting & analysis

CHALLENGES

In order to develop alumni engagement and to facilitate relations and contacts within industry, a mentoring programme was set up in 2008 and ran for some years at the University.

It was a challenging learning journey however, as the time needed to administer the scheme, liaise with mentors and mentees, and deal with enquiries grew beyond initial expectations.

Additionally, the paper-based system which was being used was inefficient. The administrators had information, such as profiles and mentor/mentee details, on paper which could easily get lost. The manual process of matching mentees to mentors was also complex and involved lots of paper spread out on office floors.

The method of communication was by email or LinkedIn groups, but the process was sporadic and the information was not held together in one place.

Issues of data protection had prevented 'external' mentors being allowed to access the University virtual learning environment and so this could not be used as a way to administer and manage communication across scheme members.

"We therefore purchased an online mentoring tool, MentorNet," commented Dr Judie Gannon. "This has substantially professionalised the mentoring experiences of all concerned and accrued considerable benefits to the scheme."

"MentorNet has substantially professionalised the mentoring experiences of all concerned and accrued considerable benefits to the scheme."

Dr Judie Gannon, Oxford Brookes University



IMPROVING ADMINISTRATION AND EFFICIENCIES THROUGH MENTORNET

Online software of course never removes the need for human intervention, but the system has automated many of the tasks that needed to be done manually before. MentorNet now has everything in one place, whereas before there were emails, paper and different social media groups. In a nutshell, the software helps reduce the amount of administration time needed to run the programmes.

Mentors and mentees are able to upload their profiles onto MentorNet. Mentees are then asked to search the mentor database and select up to 5 mentors, and finally the administrator approves one of the requested matches.

This provides an ideal balance of allowing mentees to influence mentor selection, while also allowing the administrator to have a view of the wider picture.

Mentors and mentees can then communicate using the private messaging facility within MentorNet and they can record Activity Logs to document key phases of their mentoring relationship. The Activity Logs are then used by the administrators to monitor each relationship and to know if and when to provide support. Organisers and administrators can also easily send out an email to everyone in the system and communicate as and when is needed.

"We used to have a paper-based system, with lots of paper, emails and LinkedIn groups, but they were all separate. Now we have MentorNet, everything is in one place and it is so much easier."

Jane King, Senior Lecturer, Accounting and Finance

IMPROVING THE SECURITY OF COMMUNICATION THROUGH MENTORNET

Data security is a key concern for any university, and ensuring mentors and mentees can communicate in a safe and secure environment has been fundamental in ensuring the success of the scheme.

Mentees can upload documents, such as CVs or applications, and can discuss them with their mentor – again all in a safe and confidential environment. The two can send messages to one another and information is shared, secure in the knowledge that the data is accessible only to those who are authorised to see it.

The fact that the security structure within MentorNet is highly configurable gave Oxford Brookes University confidence that only suitably authorised people could have access to personal data, and that MentorNet would comply with all the requirements of the Data Protection Legislation.

Additionally, the schemes' administrators can send out secure 'group' communications to different groups of users, for example publicising an upcoming training event.

The screenshot shows the Oxford Brookes University MentorNet interface. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Help, Messages, News, and TestMentor. The left sidebar contains a search bar and a list of users under 'MENTORS' and 'MENTEES'. The main content area displays the profile of 'David Mentor', including a photo, a quote 'To live life to the full and to give something back!', and a 'Contact Info...' button. Below the profile, there is a 'User Profile' section with fields for Emergency Contact, TwitterAddress, and Company. A 'Mentoring Profile' section follows, containing a 'Current Role' description, a 'Career Summary', and a 'Career Highlight'.

The screenshot shows the 'Activity Report' form in the MentorNet interface. The form is titled 'Activity Report' and includes a 'Save' button. It contains several input fields: 'Input by' (David Mentor), 'About' (Linda Mentee), 'DateCreated' (08/01/2016), and 'Activity' (Second Meeting - Objective Setting). The 'Observations' field is a large text area containing the text: 'Reviewed CV. Reviewed career plans. Offered interview practice, insight and work experience around new developments, and specifically front of house training plans. Suggested dates for next meeting. Relationship building positively'. The form also includes a table with columns for 'Activity Ref.', 'Date', 'Location', 'Activity', 'Time Taken (hh:mm)', and 'Input By', showing a single entry for 'Meeting1' on '14/01/2016'.

WHAT OXFORD BROOKES SAY ABOUT MENTORNET

"At the very outset, the team at MentorNet was keen to get to know our mentoring schemes and how they worked, so they could provide the best possible support."

"From the first demonstrations, through explanations of the technical aspects and communicating system updates, the team at MentorNet have been focused on our schemes' needs so we have always been confident that our mentoring programme is in safe hands."

"They are great partners in this transition to a professional mentoring system."

*Angela Maher,
Programme Lead*

To find out more about how sfG Software's MentorNet can streamline your mentoring process, phone us on **+44 (0)1463 630200** or email **info@sfgmentornet.com**



sfG MentorNet

sfG MentorNet Ltd. The Green House, Beechwood
Business Park, Inverness IV2 3BL
t: **01463 630200** e: **info@sfgmentornet.com**
www.sfgmentornet.com

Registered in Scotland No. SC712421 Registered Office: 36 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5PR UK