Association of Chairs



Your guide to being a mentor

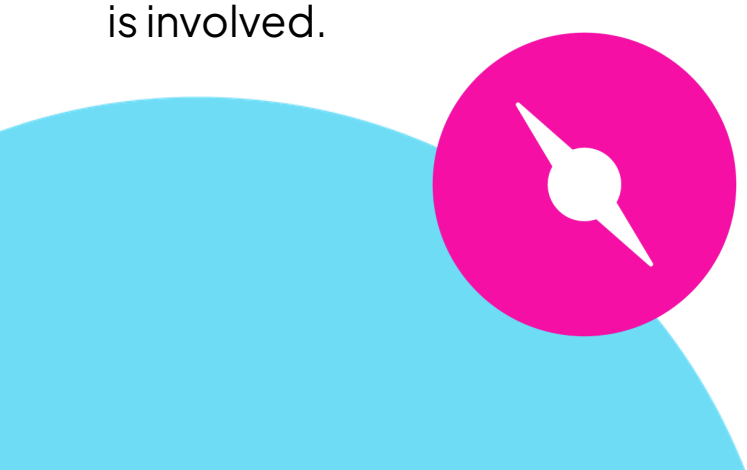
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Welcome

Welcome to the Association of Chairs Mentoring programme. Thank you for being willing to share your insights to help another chair - we're delighted to have you involved.

As a mentor, you can expect to be matched with a first-time chair who is in the process of finding their feet, learning what is involved with the role and putting it into practice.

Our first-time chairs will be keen to learn from mentors' experience. Some may have quite specific chair-related challenges they want to talk to you about, for others it may focus more on building up confidence in the role and educating themselves on all that is involved.



Our mentees have found that being able to vocalise their challenges to an experienced, sympathetic ear gives them a new and fresh perspective that really helps them progress.

Being a mentor is a beneficial and rewarding role. Mentors consistently tell us that they get just as much out of the process as their mentee.

This handbook lays out our approach to mentoring, and provides guidance for mentors on everything from how to approach your first meeting to how to handle the end of a mentoring relationship. These are guidelines, rather than rules, but we hope they help you make the most of your mentoring relationship.

Thanks so much for being part of our mentoring programme. We look forward to hearing how things go – please don't hesitate to get in touch with any questions or comments.

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Keep in touch

Feel free to get in touch at any time with Lally Pearson if you have any questions or problems at any point during the process. We always welcome your feedback and will support you in your role as mentor as best we can.

Lally Pearson
Associate (Mentoring and Peer Support)
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Overview – in a nutshell, how it all works

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a partnership through which one person shares knowledge, experience, skills or information to support the development of someone else. We match first-time chairs with more experienced chairs in mentoring relationships to help them find their feet and learn the ropes for being a chair. AoC mentors are volunteers who kindly give their time to support and encourage participants.

How we make a match

The mentoring scheme is a personal matching service. Mentee applicants fill out an online form with information on their chair role and career experience and what they're looking to get out of the scheme. We then review our list of mentors to find an appropriate match.

Defining how it's going to work

Once we've made a mentoring match, an intro email is sent to mentor and mentee, so you can arrange your first meeting. This is a chance to get to know each other, talk about the mentee's objectives, let the mentee know how you feel you might be able to help as a mentor and assess if it feels like a good match.

We provide you with a check-list of what to go through on your first meeting.

Mentors are generally asked to meet with their mentee online, every 4-6 weeks over a 6-month period. We ask for a minimum commitment of 6 x 1-hour sessions, unless it's mutually agreed to end the sessions sooner. There is flexibility to carry on the mentoring for longer also, if both parties would like to do so.

Keep reviewing how it's going

We suggest reviewing how things are going after a few sessions. We will also check in with you both from time to time to see how you're getting on. We also provide guidelines on how to keep on track with your mentee's objectives.

Any problems, let us know

Feel free to get in touch any time with our mentoring manager, Lally Pearson (lally.pearson@associationofchairs.co.uk) if you have any questions or problems. We always welcome your feedback and will support you in your role as a mentor as best we can.

Key tips for mentoring

Active listening

Remember to really listen. Active listening is a key skill with mentoring. It's important not to go into 'solution mode' but to actively listen to your mentee which will help them feel heard, valued and understood. Having someone to talk freely to, who understands the role of chair, is extremely helpful in itself. Often, your mentee will already know what they want to do to solve a problem or move forward, they just need to be able to vocalise it with someone who will listen, has some understanding of where they are coming from and gives them the opportunity to talk it through.

Try reflecting and avoid problem solving

You don't need to have an answer to every question, or solution to every problem. Encourage your mentee to find their own solutions by reflecting back what they say, asking questions and sharing your experiences.

Your mentee's goals

The GROW approach can be really helpful for setting goals:



Goal: Outline and agree the goal of the session.



Reality: Discuss, actively listen and understand your mentee's present situation.



Options: What are all the different ways in which they could approach this issue?



Will: Which option, or options, would your mentee choose? What commitment, on a scale of one to 10, do they have to take these agreed actions?

Encourage your mentee to keep a journal

This can be a really helpful practice to help your mentee organise their thoughts, recognise their skills and notice feelings and issues that come up. It can also give them a focus point to report back on in your meetings. It's a great way to self-reflect and bring focus to challenges they're experiencing.

Your first mentoring meeting

The first meeting

Your first meeting is a great opportunity to get to know each other and what you'd like to get out of the mentoring relationship. It's also about defining your framework – setting some goals, talking about confidentiality and discussing the practicalities of when and where you're going to meet.

Prepare to meet

Read over your mentee's application form, which we will share with you, to get an understanding of where they are at in their role as chair and what they're looking to get out of the mentoring scheme. It can also be helpful to connect on LinkedIn.

Be ready to introduce yourself, your background, your mentoring style, and your experiences and challenges as a chair.

Clarify that you both have a common understanding of the mentoring relationship

Knowing if a mentoring relationship is going to work is a lot about instinct. Use this first meeting to get to know each other by asking open questions and listening to one another. It's important to have an open discussion about what you are both looking to get out of the mentoring scheme.

This will ensure that expectations are met and there is no misunderstanding about roles and responsibilities. Identify goals. Ask your mentee how they'd like to use your sessions together and what they'd like to achieve.

Identify goals

Ask your mentee how they'd like to use your sessions together and what they'd like to achieve.

Set boundaries – discuss confidentiality

The nature of a mentoring relationship means that issues of a confidential nature are often discussed. It's important that you both agree to keep such information confidential at all times. It's a good idea to acknowledge this in your first meeting. Have a broad discussion about what you might be covering in your discussions and what you'd like to remain private between you as mentor and mentee. For example, your mentee may be talking about relationships with the board or specific work relating to their role as chair that they'd like to remain private.

Discuss practicalities

Our mentoring programme is structured on a 6 month time-frame and we suggest meeting monthly for around 1-2 hours for each meeting. These are gentle guidelines from us and there is flexibility for you to adapt these timings to suit the mentoring relationship.

Allow time in your first meeting to discuss things like how often you will meet, how long for and where, and put some dates in the diary (ideally your next three meetings).

Follow up and feedback

Follow up with each other after the first meeting (and future meetings). Sum up what was discussed, clarify what you would both like to bring to the mentoring meetings and confirm dates for your next three meetings if possible. Follow-up emails are also a really good opportunity to feed back about what was particularly helpful for you and what didn't work so well during the meeting. Try to be sensitive and constructive with feedback. You will both be learning from each other continually through the process.

Keep in touch with each other

Try to keep connected during the mentoring relationship time-frame, so you're aware of any changes that might happen for each other and communication stays alive. It's important you both retain a good energy to keep the mentoring going in order for it to succeed. It shouldn't be driven by only one participant and one party should not feel they are having to chase the other.



Keeping the mentoring relationship going

Set a brief agenda before each meeting

Before meeting it can be helpful to check in with each other and encourage your mentee to send a few bullet points on what they might like to discuss and focus in on in your meeting. This helps set the scene for you, so you know what to expect. It also helps focus your mentee's mind, so that you can both make the most out of the meeting.

Keep focused – do a brief review together before the meeting ends



What are the key areas that you focused on?



Reflect - how did the session go?



What are the action points from today's session?

These points can then be repeated in a follow-up email after the meeting.

Share ideas and contacts

Email your mentee details of useful books, events, blogs or forums. If you know people they might be interested to meet, and you feel it's appropriate, put them in touch with your contacts and colleagues.

Mentors don't provide official advice or instruction

Please note that mentors don't provide official advice or instruction. You are not responsible for any decisions or actions taken as a result of the mentoring.

Review after 3 sessions

We suggest a 6 month time-frame for the mentoring relationship, with a maximum of 6 mentoring meetings in total - but in some cases, you may find that less sessions are needed. So we advise having a review after 3 sessions with your mentee to agree whether they want/need to continue for another 3 sessions.

Ending your mentoring relationship

AoC will contact you as you approach the end

We will be in touch with you both as you approach the 6 month time-frame of the mentoring relationship, so that you can think about where you're at and if you're ready to close the mentoring relationship. We will also send you an evaluation form to complete about your experience.

Checklist of what to discuss in your final session

- ☐ What were your goals when you started working together?
- ☐ How have you developed or changed?
- ☐ What did you find useful about the mentoring?
- ☐ What wasn't so useful?
- ☐ What have you learned?
- ☐ Will you keep in touch?

If you need to finish the mentoring relationship early / before 6 months

If you need to draw the mentoring relationship to a close earlier than the 6 month time-frame (perhaps your circumstances have changed professionally or personally), please keep in contact with your mentee about this and also notify us, so all parties are aware.

If you want to continue the mentoring for longer than 6 months

If you'd like to continue the mentoring relationship for longer, this is absolutely fine. We will still require an evaluation form to be completed after 6 months and your mentoring relationship will then be operating outside of the AoC's official programme.

As part of our overall monitoring of this programme, we will ask you to report on the broad outcomes of the mentoring relationship. We will not ask for specifics of the issues you discuss – these are confidential between you and your mentee. We will also ask you for feedback to help us develop the programme. We'll do this informally when we check in with you, and more formally as part of our evaluation and learning.

We will also look to connect you with other mentors via our online community, subject to your agreement.

After the final meeting

Please contact Lally Pearson lally.pearson@associationofchairs.co.uk to confirm you've had your final session. We welcome all feedback.

Problems that may arise during mentoring

Please get in touch with us at any point if you feel uncomfortable or unsure about any aspect of your mentoring relationship. For example:

You're unsure about your mentoring match

If you feel like you are matched with the wrong mentee, do let us know. You may already have a connection which makes it difficult to maintain confidentiality or be objective, or feel you are not going to work well together for some reason. It is important you feel comfortable about the match.

Communication breaks down

If communication breaks down, your mentee stops responding to emails, or meetings keep getting cancelled, let us know and we will support you to make a plan to move forward.

Boundaries get blurred

Remember you are a mentor, not a therapist or a best friend. Don't feel pressured into going into areas you don't feel comfortable with or aren't qualified to tackle. If you feel at any point your mentee's needs outstrip what could reasonably be expected from a mentoring relationship, please do let us know and we can help to manage the next steps.

You may find it helpful to refer your mentee to the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy if you think they may benefit from counselling from a qualified professional.

Inappropriate behaviour from your mentee

Please get in touch if you are experiencing any kind of behaviour that can be perceived as bullying or makes you feel uncomfortable.

Confidentiality issues to be aware of

During the course of a mentoring relationship, issues of a confidential nature are often discussed, and we ask mentors to keep such information confidential. However, in very rare circumstances, you may feel the need to disclose the content of sessions - for example if your mentee indicated involvement in something illegal or appears to pose a risk to themselves or others or there is any concern about safety. Please contact Lally Pearson if you have any concerns of this nature.

What you can expect from us and what we expect from you

We really appreciate you volunteering with us and will do the best we can to make your experience enjoyable and rewarding. Your role as volunteer mentor is to support AoC as part of our mentoring scheme for first-time chairs.

We will need you to sign an agreement that commits you to act within AoC's policies and procedures and standards for volunteers. We will go through this with you directly after you apply. Here is some information on what is involved in the mentor agreement.

AoC commits itself to the following:

- To provide you with appropriate induction on the work of AoC and its staff, your volunteering role and the induction you need to carry it out.

Induction and support

- To explain the standards we expect for volunteer mentors supporting us as part of our mentoring programme and to encourage and support you to achieve and maintain them.

- To provide a named person who will meet with you regularly (or as appropriate) to discuss your volunteering and any successes or problems you may have.

Health and safety and safeguarding

- To provide adequate induction in our health and safety and safeguarding procedures.

Insurance

- To provide adequate insurance cover for volunteers whilst undertaking voluntary work approved and authorised by us.



Any problems or difficulties

- To try to resolve fairly any problems or difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us.

What we ask for from you as volunteer mentor:

- To perform your volunteer mentor role to the best of your ability.

- To follow the organisation's policies, procedures and standards, in relation to its staff, volunteers, members and other stakeholders, including those relating to safeguarding and protecting people, dignity at work, and privacy and data protection.

- To meet time commitments and standards agreed to, and to give reasonable notice when this is not possible so that other arrangements can be made.

- To provide referees for us to contact, as agreed.

