GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Prepared for: Women's Scholars Network, International Association for History of Religion

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Guidance for: Mentoring Scheme

Introduction

This document offers guidance on a Women's Mentoring Scheme based on the British Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion Study Group's Socrel Mentoring Scheme for women (http://Socrel.org.uk/mentoring-scheme).

The Socrel Mentoring Scheme emerged out of a recommendation made by the recent report, *Gender and Career Progression in Theology and Religious Studies* (Guest, Sharma and Song 2013). It proposed a mentoring scheme for women in academia who because of issues related to gender – that also intersect with race and class – continue to confront challenges related to career advancement. This however is not only an issue in Theology and Religious Studies, but in other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, along with STEM subjects (Beebee 2013; Bostock 2014; Mirza 2009).

The mentoring scheme facilitated by Socrel aims to promote good practice in relation to issues of equality and diversity and women's career progression. This guidance document sets out how this can be implemented by other disciplinary associations and organisations.

Issues of gender in higher education

The academy has traditionally been a male space, but since the expansion of higher education in the 1980s, women have come to outnumber men on several university courses and in some academic disciplines (Cotterill et al. 2007). Many women are attracted to a career in higher education because of its autonomy, collaboration and intellectual rewards, but universities have been slow to institutionalize gender equality. Some of the themes that research on gender in higher education addresses are juggling academic and family life, staying or leaving academia and aspects of career progression. More so, and now more than ever, obtaining a job and career advancement within academia in the UK is highly competitive and pressurized due to recent measures of evaluation related to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Maintaining a level of competence and confidence is demanded in addition to achieving academic goals such as publications, funding for research and positive teaching evaluations (Guest, Sharma and Song 2013). This can be difficult to do, especially in academic cultures, which depending on institution and department can be predominantly male and emphasize forms of collegiality that are really about "male sociability" (Malone 1999: 224). One recommendation that aims to support women who are confronting these challenges, and has shown to demonstrate results, is mentoring.

Mentoring in higher education

Mentoring is typically understood as "a process that supports personal and professional development and a relationship in which objectivity, credibility, honesty, trustworthiness

and confidentiality are all critical" (Hawkes 2010: 4). As described by Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP), "Mentoring is a key mechanism by which women can gain valuable skills, advice, perspective, and experience that will help them to realise their potential and develop their academic careers." Evidence shows that men have benefited from 'informal' mentoring in male-dominated fields for a long time (Kanter 1977 in Hawkes 2010), while women have reported difficulty in finding mentors in this way and in these environments (Sambunjak et al. 2006). More so, women of colour are even less likely to find mentors, given that there are so few women of colour in senior and professorial positions (Lewellen-Williams et al. 2006; Mirza 2009). Grove reported in *Times Higher Education* that only 85 of the UK's 18, 500 professors are black and only 17 are black women (2014: 30).

One response to addressing forms of inequality is formal mentoring schemes. These have been introduced to address the underrepresentation of women in academia. A study conducted in Australia at Flinders University found that in comparison to those staff who had not received mentoring, those that did were more likely to stay in higher education, achieve promotion and obtain research grants and publications (Gardiner et al. 2007). Fried et al. (1996) on the underrepresentation of women in senior positions in medicine found that mentoring contributed to more junior women advancing to associate professor over five years. And Wasserstein et al. (2007) reported that mentoring is strongly linked to overall job satisfaction.

More so, Sambunjak et al. (2009) found that mentor/mentee matches based on gender, race and ethnicity were not necessarily essential. However, they did find that these aspects could be vital to a mentoring relationship especially in considerations around maternity leave, work-family life balance and support around issues such as gendered racism and harassment. As stated above, several studies have revealed the benefits of mentoring for women in higher education. In response, UK higher education institutions have begun to implement such schemes. While these have largely been welcomed, institutionalised schemes can lack aspects of confidentiality and academics can be paired with a mentor from outside their discipline, which can be both positive and negative. Assigned mentoring relationships can sometimes ignore interpersonal aspects, such as a 'good fit' and as a result feel 'forced'. The process of mentors and mentees as both willing partners in the relationship is found to "be beneficial, allowing a more comfortable and effective relationship to develop" (Sambunjak et al. 2009: 74). As learned from discussion with SWIP, a key to their successful mentoring scheme has been finding a balance between mentoring as both formal and informal – a formal agreement made between two people, which allows flexibility to negotiate their relationship and to navigate goals and outcomes.

A mentoring scheme facilitated by disciplinary associations and organisations - some guiding questions:

What would be the benefit of the mentoring scheme to mentees, mentors and to the academic discipline(s)?

Some overlapping suggestions:
Advantages to mentees:
- An increase in competence and confidence
- Receive support and advice to navigate institutional systems and promotion

Advantages to mentors:
- Provide women space and opportunities to discuss the difficulties they confront
- Assist and shape the professional and personal development of women

Advantages to academic disciplines:
- Reduction of isolation of women in disciplines that continue to be in many places male-dominated
- Encourage more women to continue in academia and to progress to senior positions
- Raise the profile of women in various subject areas and in processes of appointment
- Promotion of good practice across disciplines related to issues of equality and diversity

Who would be able join the scheme?
- Is it envisioned that a mentoring scheme would benefit women from first year PhD to Senior Lecturer/Reader level?
- Will it be open to women who are generally studying and researching for example history?
- Will it include women who are employed on teaching and/or research contracts (including zero and fractional contracts) in universities in the UK and Ireland?
- Will it be open to early career researchers who are in between posts or PhD graduates attempting to secure their first academic job?
- Will it include mentoring to women who are at more senior levels? Navigating progression and promotion can be difficult and bullying was a noted factor that coincided with these transitions to senior positions (Guest, Sharma and Song 2013).

Something to think about: While PhD students may be offered similar opportunities and counsel by their doctoral supervisors, there are many women students who experience isolation and a lack of affirmation and advice on how to best continue in their academic careers given their desires and/or circumstances related to caring responsibilities. Advice on PhD work would <u>not</u> be part of the mentoring agreement, as this is the responsibility of PhD supervisors (SWIP 2014).

How would the application process to the mentoring scheme work?
- Will it be a private or open process of application? It is suggested that applying to scheme is a confidential process for both mentors and mentees.
- Who will be matched with whom? In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, mentees are matched with a more senior mentor, for example, a PhD student with a Postdoctoral Researcher or Lecturer, and a Senior Lecturer with a Professor.
- Who will make the matches? In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, a Mentoring Coordinator does their best to make suitable matches.
- What will determine the matches? Matches are most likely be made in line with scholarly interests and geographic location.
- What will the application ask in order to make the best match? The application form asks mentees to state their academic research interests, current situation and the guidance and goals they are seeking to accomplish.
- What about applications for mentors? Mentors are asked similar questions.

- How is it decided what mentees and mentors will work on? Once a mentor and mentee have been assigned they will make a mentoring agreement, which is decided between them.
- What can the mentoring agreement include? This can include for example the number and length of meetings, along with how the meeting takes place, such as face-to-face by Skype or in person. If communicating by email, it is important to be clear about types of exchanges and the anticipated speed of response. Clear goals and expectations are important, along with the time frame in which these expectations are achieved. For example, writing and receiving feedback on a cover letter for a job application or devising a personal development plan related to research and publications.

Some of the goals that mentoring agreements can address are:
- Presentation of one's CV and cover letter(s)
- Advice for applying for jobs (e.g. application process to interviews)
- Assistance in identifying areas for performance development and improvement
- Assistance in identifying skills and training opportunities
- Setting goals and receiving advice in relation to publications and funding bids
- Tips for presenting and networking at conferences

In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, agreements are normally for one year. Both mentee and mentor can terminate their relationship, should they feel it is not working. Likewise, they can also extend their agreement, if it is mutual.

After reviewing several academic articles written about mentoring Sambunjak and colleagues found that "mentoring is a complex relationship based on mutual interests, both professional and personal," and one in which "mentees should take an active role in its formation and development." They found that "good mentors should be sincere in their dealings with mentees, be able to listen actively and understand mentees needs, and have a well-established position within the academic community … Mentoring was found to develop mentees' academic growth and/or personal growth" (2009: 72).

Potential issues that can negatively affect the mentoring relationship are: lack of time; grouped with one's workload; incompatibility and a lack of interest and commitment by both (Hawkes 2010). Aspects that contribute to a positive experience of mentoring are: well-defined and communicated goals and expectations; realistic ideas about the outcomes of mentoring and it is voluntary for both mentors and mentees (Hawkes 2010).

What if it doesn't work out?
In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, the relationship is voluntary for both mentors and mentees and they can withdraw from the scheme at any time with no negative consequences. This would not prevent them from participating in the scheme again. A mentee can apply again for a mentor. It may also be the case that mentees return to the scheme after some time in order to address new goals.

Who would act as mentors and mentees?
In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, most women have an awareness of issues of gender and equality in academic life. Women have been canvassed from amongst the study

group to act as mentors. Most mentors are in academic posts or are post-PhD and have experience of academic life. In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, in order to be a mentee, it is expected that mentees and mentors have an up-to-date disciplinary association membership.

What about feedback and evaluation?

Feedback and evaluation can take various forms, such as informal and formal ways. The aim of this process is to enhance the success of the scheme and to continue to promote good practice in relation to issues of equality and diversity.

- Informal: after 6-months an informal check-in by email.
- Formal: completion of a feedback form done together by mentor and mentee at the end of one year.

Who would coordinate the scheme and what is involved in doing this?

In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, a Mentoring Coordinator is responsible for implementing and promoting the scheme. Initially this may be for 2-years. The aim is to report progress and ensure good practice.

In the case of the Socrel Mentoring Scheme, the responsibilities involved are:

- Devise an application form for both mentors and mentees to complete
- Devise a Mentoring Agreement form
- Work with the Internet Officer to design a webpage for information and application process
- Recruit for the scheme amongst disciplinary members
- Facilitate and make mentor/mentee matches
- Maintain an ethics of confidentiality and respect for mentors and mentees
- Monitor the progress and success of the scheme and report to disciplinary association committee and AGM
- Report and promote it to wider membership and academic community through annual newsletter and list serves

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