Guidelines for Good Practice
in Peer Mentor Programs in Higher Education

Revised January 2015

In early 2014, members of the ANZSSA committee suggested that the 2009 guidelines be reviewed and updated. A small working party of four practitioners in Peer Mentor Programs was convened to consult with ANZSSA members through the 2014 ISANA/ANZSSA national and state conferences, and more broadly, other stakeholders and interested parties including practitioners and researchers in higher education institutions.

Broadly, Peer Mentor Programs are those in which experienced students take on a role mentoring more inexperienced students. Student Mentors add value to the student experience by providing the student perspective. These programs are in operation across many post-secondary institutions in Australia and New Zealand. They are widely acknowledged in the literature to be immensely valuable experiences for both mentors and mentees, and to make positive contributions to the quality of student life, and institutional strategies around engagement, effectiveness and ultimately retention.

ANZSSA recognises that there are now a number of great resources for practitioners in peer mentoring both in Australia and overseas. Furthermore, these guidelines are designed to provide guidance for good practice but practitioners should be aware that institutional culture, context and understanding of peer support play a major factor in the creation of quite varied and unique peer programs right across Australia and New Zealand. Peer mentor practitioners may also find value in a range of resources including volunteer programs, community mentoring programs, legal frameworks and Acts.

The aim of these guidelines is to provide a good practice approach to implementing Peer Mentor Programs based upon the collaboration and expertise amongst Australian and New Zealand Higher education staff. These guidelines are intended to help higher education institutions seeking to implement such programs, or to enhance the quality of those existing currently.

ANZSSA endorses the following guidelines as minimum standards for Peer Mentor Programs.

1. Program aims and objectives
Programs should articulate aims and objectives, for both the participants and the institution, and where possible these should be measurable so that programs can demonstrate return on investment (ROI), impact and success through evaluation.

1.1. Duty of Care to program participants

1.1.1. The institution has a responsibility to retain appropriately trained professional staff and student mentors must not be seen as abrogating an institution's responsibility to retain appropriately trained professional staff in any capacity.

1.1.2. There should be a clear program statement of the value and benefit for student participants (mentees and mentors) of their involvement in the program.

1.1.3.   The role of mentor must be sufficiently limited so that the required tasks do not place the mentor's study, well-being and personal life balance in jeopardy and should be included in the training curriculum.

1.2. Risk management

1.2.1.   Risk management policies & procedures should be built into all programs to oversee the safety of all participants.

1.2.2.   All necessary legislated checks for mentors, such as working with children, should be undertaken as relevant for the State or Territory.

1.2.3.   Institutional policies like the following should be considered:
- Photo consent for all program participants, particularly in relation to social media and program events
- Insurance and volunteer or affiliated staff coverage
- Bullying and harassment

NOTE: Does a Peer Support Community of Practice or equivalent exist at the local level? This may provide easy access to develop knowledge of the institutional procedures and policies.

1.3. Complaints, concerns and grievances

1.3.1.   Program participants should be made aware of the channels through which complaints, concerns and grievances may be addressed through the program and through the larger institutional processes as appropriate.

1.4. Established time boundaries for the role of mentor

1.4.1.   The time limits of the mentor-mentee relationship should be clearly established so that participants are aware of when the relationship begins and ends. Where possible, further avenues for ongoing support should be provided.

1.5. Matching of mentors and mentees

1.5.1.   Where appropriate, consideration should be taken to match mentors and mentees including considerations of gender, discipline area, faculty or course area, interests, culture, availability and location.

1.5.2.   Where appropriate, contracts for mentees and mentors should be utilised to support relationships, and to outline the clear responsibilities and boundaries. The circumstances under which a mentor's role may be terminated, or under which a mentee may be asked to leave the program, shall be made clear to all participants.

1.5.3.   There should be clear information (and processes) on how to change mentors if the mentee wishes to do so, without any stigma, discrimination or penalty. This should be handled with sensitivity to program participants and training or support should be offered if appropriate.

1.5.4.   There should be clear processes for mentors who wish to withdraw from the role, including opportunities to join the program again at a later date.

1.6. Roles of coordinating staff

1.6.1.   It is highly desirable that there be continuity of staff involved in mentor programs, although it is recognised that many programs' reliance on external funding sources impacts on staff retention.

1.6.2.   Staff coordinating the program must retain information, which allows them to make contact with mentors and mentees quickly and easily.

1.6.3.   Ideally, Peer Mentor Program staff should identify senior program champions in faculties/departments who may or may not be academic staff. This is important in

raising the program profile, ensuring long-term funding and appropriate resource allocation.

1.6.4. Coordinating staff may participate in such activities as:

- Assisting with recruiting mentors
- Participating in the training program – especially with the course specific information
- Active involvement in the Orientation program (aligning with faculty programs)
- Assigning mentees to mentors
- Organising regular meetings (or otherwise have regular contact) with mentors
- Gathering evaluation data from mentors and mentees

1.6.5. Being available to advise mentors throughout the program

1.7. Recognition & incentives

1.7.1. There should be recognition of mentors commensurate with the demands of the role.

1.7.2. Recognition may take the form of payment, class credit, recognition on the student record, certificates of participation, official thank you ceremony, invitations of ongoing professional development or similar.

1.7.3. Certificates, where possible, should also articulate graduate learning outcomes, skills or attributes related to the roles of the mentor or the learning experience.

1.8. Student leadership opportunities within the program

1.8.1. Students may take on student leadership roles within the program in a variety of capacities to support new mentors and mentees if relevant to program aims and objectives. This may include providing support to mentors, program operations, coordinating events or providing ongoing feedback to the program from a student perspective. These roles should also have access to appropriately trained staff for support.

1.8.2. Where appropriate, student mentors should be offered special paid opportunities in other areas of the university first, before others are offered the same position or wider publicity is undertaken, as a reward for service.

2. Program resources

Peer Mentor programs should have adequate administrative support and resources to achieve the program objectives.

2.1. Recruitment

2.1.1. Where possible, recruitment should be defined for different types of mentoring programs such that social Peer Mentor Programs may have different criteria for selection compared to academic Peer Mentor Programs.

2.1.2. Potential participants (mentors and mentees) must be provided with clear information on their role within the Peer Mentor program. This will include information on:

- Benefits for the participants in being involved in the program, and application of skills learnt
- Time and length commitment
- Task expectations
- Role boundaries
- Training required including ongoing training or re-training where appropriate
- Recognition of participation including outcomes, provision of incentives and remuneration for mentors (voluntary or paid)
- Performance monitoring and supervision including feedback mechanisms and possible academic performance monitoring

2.1.3.   Where possible, recruitment processes must be fair and equitable and should provide students with an experience of a 'real-world' recruitment process. This could include formal written applications with selection criteria, interview stages, and referee and grade checking.

2.1.4.   Staff should practice due diligence in selecting mentors as appropriate – recruitment may be targeted to students but all applicants must follow an application process, where possible.

2.1.5.   Where appropriate, mentors with high risk mentoring duties (refer to risk section above) should be vetted and staff should ensure appropriate checks are undertaken during the recruitment process, such as working with underage students.

2.1.6.   Where possible, the recruitment process should build in options if a student is unsuccessful in becoming a mentor. This could include a waitlist system, an invitation to apply again in the future, or perhaps some additional training or preparation – this is aligned with the philosophy of building student capacity and engagement.

2.2. Training for mentors

2.2.1.   Mentors should be provided with appropriate resources such as a handbook, resource pack or similar, and any equipment necessary to perform the role. This may include access to internet, phones, or any other equipment as needed.

2.2.2.   Training should be appropriate to the delivery of the mentoring program such that online mentoring should have an online training component.

2.2.3.   It is acceptable for delivery of the training or preparation program to occur in a variety of alternative ways such as, in groups, individually, or on-line so that students with different modes of study have access to the training and potentially across time appropriate to program design.

2.3. Content of training for mentors

2.3.1.   There must be a training or preparation program commensurate with the demands of the role. This program should address issues such as:

- Clear understanding of the culture of the University which may include the institutional Student Charter, Department/Faculty strategic plans and strategic aims of the program. This might also include some information or profile of the students that are likely to be mentored and equity and diversity issues;

- Mentors should have clear information about program expectations, including important program processes and contact information of staff throughout the program;

- Understanding of the student lifecycle, student development and transition, and the theory behind providing mentoring as a form of support with the student as the focus of activity, within the program parameters;

- Understanding of the concept of mentoring generally and how it may differ across different cultures;

- Personal and academic boundaries of the role and when to make referrals to other areas of the Institution, as well as consideration of self-care;

- Information about key Support Services available to all students, both mentors and mentees, at any time during the program;

- Concepts such as risk management and conflict of interest, including examples of how these may impact on the role of mentoring and the stages of the mentor relationship related to program length (for example, can you be friends once the program ends);

- Evaluation processes of the program and the value of continuous quality improvement through ongoing participant contribution to feedback. and

- University Policies relevant to the program such as those related to privacy, Occupational Health and Safety, and social media.

2.3.2.   Where possible, training should provide opportunities for past mentors to share their experiences with new mentors, look at case-study examples and/or role play exercises, and engage in question and answer type discussion. Training might also include academic and program champions or other staff relevant to the program's expectations and role of the mentor.

2.3.3.   Other areas to consider for training might be information about cultural diversity and learning styles, good communication skills including intercultural competence, team work and group facilitation skills as appropriate.

2.3.4.   Mentors should also be made aware through the course of the training the value of this training and mentoring practice to their own development of graduate learning outcomes, attributes and skills.

2.4. Information provided to mentees

2.4.1.   Information should be provided to mentees about all aspects of the mentor program. Induction programs for mentees may be delivered in various ways that assist in explaining program expectations, roles and contact information.

2.4.2.   The program coordinator should take particular care to ensure that mentees are provided with clear information about the boundaries of mentors and role of the mentor/mentee relationship.

2.4.3.   Participation by mentees should be optional although it is acceptable to establish an 'opt out' process. This should be built into program expectations of mentees.

2.4.4.   Students who access their studies remotely (for example, online) should have access to peer mentoring of an equivalent standard to that received by on campus students, albeit via different delivery methods, including e-mentoring where possible.

3.   Program evaluation
Continuous improvement based on evaluation should be central to Peer Mentor Programs. Formal evaluation will be embedded in the program and linked to program vision, aims or objectives wherever possible.

3.1. Evaluation should be sought from mentors, mentees and coordinating staff and any other stakeholders where possible, including academic staff and senior program champions.

3.2. When possible, evaluation should be qualitative, quantitative and longitudinal. Satisfaction, opinion and objective indicators can be used. Some examples of good practice evaluation or measures many include:
- Retention rates
- Pre and post engagement or participation surveying (with or without incentives)
- Shared survey links on social media (more effective than phone surveys)
- Smart phone survey platforms or apps
- Multi-faceted, multi-platform approach, formal/informal
- Tick & flick surveys, just tick answers without engaging
- Focus groups while still engaged
- Include evaluation (a limited number of questions) in overarching institutional surveys where possible

3.3. Feedback should be used to improve the program processes, aims or objectives and where possible, program participants will be informed of how feedback will be used.

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