



Vice-Chancellor's Mentoring Programme Best practice case studies

Introduction and overview

The Vice-Chancellor's Mentoring Programme was launched in 2017 as part of the University of Nottingham's activities to develop an inclusive culture. It signalled a personal commitment from Vice-Chancellor Professor Shearer West CBE to support senior leaders with protected characteristics more fully.

An annual programme open to senior leaders across all job roles in the university, it combines personal 1:1 mentoring meetings with the Vice-Chancellor; shadowing a minimum of two senior university meetings – one of these being a University Executive Board meeting; Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessments; and connecting together as a mentee group.

Now in its third year, 26 individuals have been mentored personally by the Vice-Chancellor. 57 unsuccessful applicants have also been matched to alternative Executive Board and other senior leader mentors, demonstrating the university's continued commitment to supporting and developing the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) agenda through personal connections.

This case study provides an insight into the experiences of one of the VC's mentees, their reasons for applying for the programme, and what they gained from the experience.

For further information about the University of Nottingham's Vice-Chancellor's Mentoring Programme, contact Carol Steed, Leadership and Management Director.
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Dr Holly Blake, Associate Professor of Health Sciences.
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Q. Why did you apply for the Vice-Chancellor's Mentoring Programme?

A. I have worked at the University of Nottingham since the age of 17 and have studied for two degrees here. During this time, capacity building has been a personal focus, and I have mentored and supported vast numbers of students and staff, set up services to support student and staff health and wellbeing, and contributed heavily to the delivery of personal and career development programmes within the university and in our local communities. In doing this, I've become increasingly aware of the differences in people's journeys into higher education, their experiences of work and studies and the differences in career progression between those with one set of life circumstances, compared to another. I have supported many others through these challenges but have never taken the time to seek guidance or support myself. This led to a period of self-reflection during which I recognised that my experiences and circumstances are not comparable with those around me but influence every decision I make.

Q. Are there specific challenges you believe you faced that you thought this programme could help you overcome or deal with more effectively?

A. There are a multitude of life factors, beyond my control, that needed to be overcome to reach the position I have now and flourish in my career moving forwards. With a focus on equality, diversion and inclusion, this programme offered an opportunity to discuss these challenges with leadership at the highest level.

Q. What has been the biggest impact for you that you have gained from your engagement with the programme?

A. On a conceptual level, the greatest impact has been an increased understanding of intersectionality and the impact of this on my career – how multiple factors combine to create different modes of discrimination or privilege, and how these factors are incorporated into a wider EDI agenda.

Q. Has engaging with this had any impact on your career, and if so, how?

A. Yes – perhaps not tangible to others (yet), but through the process of self-reflection I have gained confidence in my personal resilience and the knowledge that I am able to experience success alongside persistent challenging circumstances. The programme most certainly widened my understanding of university-level processes and procedures. The opportunity to shadow the VC brought me into contact with numerous senior leaders with whom I have been able to connect, not only with relation to my own work interests but to identify opportunities to contribute to the university's EDI agenda and further support the staff and student body. Most notable, the key impact is an understanding that progression is possible no matter your circumstances.

Q. Are there any specific elements of learning that you have found useful, and have you been able to apply these into your workplace/working practices?

A. I have taken on board advice in a range of areas, but most of all:

- Ways of working
- Reflection
- Leadership approaches
- Team management
- EDI advocacy

Q. What advice would you give to others who might be considering getting involved in a mentoring programme?

A. Do not hesitate! I had not previously sought out a mentor as I didn't want to impact on a busy person's time. The tendency in academia towards imposter syndrome is a contributing factor to pushing through alone. This programme offered a tremendously valuable experience that will have lasting implications for my own career, and that of others I support for whom I will adopt the supportive strategies used here.

Q. Are there any other insights or thoughts that you wish to share?

A. It is a privilege in itself that this programme is offered by our institution. I remain astounded at the capacity of the VC to support so many staff members on an individual basis, alongside the VC role. It is highly valued, and I would recommend it to others. The mentoring contact with the VC was one of the most valuable experiences I have ever had. However, it is important to also recognise the time and input of the Leadership and Management Team for coordinating this well-organised innovation.