

## **Mentoring in learning development**

### **Silvina Bishopp-Martin**

Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

### **Ursula Canton**

Glasgow Caledonian University, UK

### **Jane McKay**

Glasgow Caledonian University, UK

### **Chenée Psaros**

Queen Mary University of London, UK

### **Alicja Syska**

University of Plymouth, UK

### **Sam Thomas**

Arden University, UK

## ***Presentation abstract***

Learning Development is still a relatively young field (Syska and Buckley, 2022), and despite a growing body of research, it remains strongly practice-oriented. This means that experience, in this case of individual Learning Developers, takes an even more central place than it does in more established fields, and sharing this experience through mentoring takes on a central role. This is why the mentoring working group has developed a Learning Development focused ALDinHE Mentoring Scheme, together with a Certified Mentor recognition that helps experienced mentors be recognised for their contribution to growing and sharing LD knowledge. This mini keynote briefly introduced the Mentoring Scheme and the CeM recognition before exploring the role mentoring can play in the professional development of Learning Developers with the audience.

The questions we asked were:

- What benefits would you expect for mentees?
- What benefits would you expect for mentors?
- What kind of experience can be best shared through mentoring?

**Figure 1: Mentoring questions.**


MINI KEYNOTE  
CHENÉE PSAROS  
JANE MCKAY

# Mentoring

## Questions

1. What skills or knowledge would you share with your younger professional self?
2. What qualities would you value in a mentor/mentee?
3. How do you think a scheme like this would benefit learning development as an emerging academic discipline?

**Keywords:** mentoring; peer support; professional development; values-based LD; professional recognition; sharing practice.

### ***Community response***

This mini keynote attracted a lot of attention, with broad acknowledgement of the importance of mentorship both within and beyond this scheme. One member of the community drew on their experience of mentorship in support of their conference contribution:

I did not attend this session, but I have used the ALDinHE mentoring programme to help develop my abstract for ALDCon23. I found the process straightforward and beneficial and went on to have my abstract accepted for the conference.

The process involved an online meeting with one of the mentors where we went through my ideas. The meeting was arranged fairly rapidly, which was very useful. It was more of a sounding board than a meeting. The advice provided was very practical and to the point. It helped me to focus my ideas on something impactful and interesting to others. A follow-up meeting was offered, but I didn't feel that it was necessary, and I just got some written feedback on my draft abstract. Due to the mentoring process, I now feel confident to submit abstracts independently in the

future. Overall, there was a very flexible and personal feeling to the mentoring scheme.

The above contribution represents the broad endorsement of mentorship within the community, and this was further expanded by many contributors. The keynote's discussion afforded participants the opportunity to draw on their experience of mentoring more broadly, framed around the above questions. Contributors used this as an opportunity to reflect on how mentorship has a positive impact on their career:

On a wider theme of the mentoring process, having engaged with mentoring schemes both as a mentor and a mentee, I think the overall purpose of mentoring is to build confidence in the mentee. But this also leads to an increase in confidence for the mentor. Ideally, both parties can walk away from a mentoring session thinking, 'Actually, I do know what I'm talking about'.

However, mentoring only works, when it is done correctly. There is a requirement to set out a clear focus in the mentor-mentee relationship, and this is essential for a useful and successful relationship.

I think the most effective kind of mentoring is when it is for a specific purpose. This makes the roles clearer for mentees and mentors. I have been mentored for 'career progression'; however, without a specific goal/job role in mind, it was difficult to maintain focus in the sessions. Maybe our experiences were too different. Maybe we weren't a good fit. The mentor/mentee relationship is important but does not always occur naturally.

One final contribution considered an interesting angle to mentoring within Learning Development.

Mentoring may have an important role in Learning Development, as a profession without a recognised qualification or solidly defined route into the profession. Mentoring affords the opportunity for new and novice practitioners to learn from established Learning Developers working in the field. This is certainly a potentially effective way of inducting people into Learning Development – but may be a symptom of a broader problem. There will always be a role for mentoring within

professions, but perhaps a clearer route into the profession is required first. For Learning Development to mean something, and be open to all, experienced practitioners cannot be the gatekeepers of practice.

This contribution links into core narratives around what Learning Development is, and how it is defined. This is not an easy topic – and is clearly something ALDinHE needs to continue to develop. It is fair to say this contribution raises questions about the values-based approach to defining Learning Development (ALDinHE, 2023).

### ***Editorial comment***

As Editors, we feel this mini keynote focused on an important topic, and something with much potential in both the field of Learning Development and in the ALDinHE as an organisation. As Learning Developers, we are all mentors to our students and therefore have a wide range of mentoring skills. So as a profession, it seems a natural step to mentor our peers and colleagues as well. Perhaps this is why the ALDinHE community has such a welcoming and supportive ethos.

Many of the sessions delivered at this year's conference were based on supporting Learning Developers to excel in their work, and many of these sessions suggest further potential for mentoring within Learning Development. Examples include:

- Buckley and Holley's discussion session 'Higher recognition for Learning Developers - NTF and PFHEA'.
- Kukhareva and Buckley's session 'Why and how you matter: learning development as everyday leadership'.
- Grayson and Malone's session 'Moving through the Third Space: Being, becoming and progressing as a Learning Developer'.

These sessions demonstrate a core focus on development within our profession and suggest plenty of opportunities for mentorship to play a leading role in supporting this.

## **Next steps and additional questions**

ALDinHE offers mentoring to support members who want to apply for recognition or disseminate their work to the wider LD community. If you would like to receive support, please visit the [Mentor and Reviewer Directory](#), where you can view profiles of mentors/reviewers and request support directly, using the contact details provided. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, you can find out more about the scheme on the ALDinHE website: [Become an ALDinHE reviewer](#).

## ***Authors' reflection***

The session allowed us to not only provide a snapshot of the mentoring scheme and the CeM recognition process, but to explore the advantages of mentoring among our professional community. Prospective mentors and mentees attended and there was agreement that the scheme offered a valuable opportunity to build connection and community. Indeed, this was discussed with a sense of appreciation amongst those who were relatively new to the field and those who had remote positions within their institutions.

The discussion around qualities valued in mentors and mentees chimed with the scheme's guiding principles, with participants highlighting the importance of trust and good 'chemistry' between mentors and mentees, as identified in one of the community response quotes. The importance of partnership was a key discussion point and there was agreement that power differentials, as may occur in traditional mentoring, should be avoided. As reflected in another quote and the scheme's principles, mentoring was viewed as a space for mentees and mentors to enhance their knowledge and skills. Overall, this aspect of the discussion provided reassurance of the underpinning philosophy on which we built the scheme.

The anecdotal discussions of how Learning Developers came to the role highlighted the importance of why a mentoring scheme could support people in their work and ultimately grow the discipline. It was discussed that often the multi-disciplinary knowledge needed to perform the job well can be overwhelming, having a network of volunteers in place to be able to respond to any questions was positively received at the table.

There was wide recognition of the benefits of the scheme to the profession, with discussion acknowledging the rich knowledge source of the Learning Development community and potential for professional development. Through its potential to catalyse the development of new Learning Development talent and provide another opportunity for professional recognition, the scheme was viewed as supporting Learning Development as an emerging academic discipline. Overall, it was heartening to have our thinking behind the scheme endorsed, and to gain some new recruits!

## ***Acknowledgements***

Thanks are extended to all members of the community who have engaged with the conference or these proceedings in some way. Thank you to the following community members for their contributions to this particular paper: Lee Fallin (University of Hull) and Amy May (University of Nottingham).

The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

## ***References***

ALDinHE (2023) *About ALDinHE, Association for Learning Development in Higher Education*. Available online: <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/about-aldinhe/> (Accessed: 8 September 2023).

Syska, A. and Buckley, C (2022) 'Writing as liberatory practice: unlocking knowledge to locate an academic field', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(2), pp.439-454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2114337>.

## ***Author details***

Silvina Bishopp-Martin has been a Learning Developer at Canterbury Christ Church University since joining the institution in 2012. She is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and an ALDinHE Certified Leading Practitioner. She has worked on the

development of online learning materials, peer-mentoring schemes and embedding academic literacies in academic courses. She has research experience in academic literacies, critical EAP, critical pedagogies, collaborative writing and Learning Development scholarship, professionalism and identity.

Ursula Canton is part of ALDinHE's mentoring working group and has taken a leading role in developing the new Mentoring Scheme and Certified Mentor (CeM) accreditation.

Jane McKay is a Senior Lecturer and Learning Developer at Glasgow Caledonian University. Her PhD and early career as a sport psychologist explored the need to support athletes as people rather than performers, a theme she now brings to working with students through nurturing self-understanding and developing learning in holistic ways. Her research and practice interests include understanding psychological barriers to student success (most notably perfectionism), and how these can be addressed. Jane is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE and an ALDinHE Certified Lead Practitioner.

Chenée Psaros is a learning developer, an artist, and a walker. She uses creative approaches in her teaching and is always looking to innovate her practice. Her primary interests lie in learning beyond the campus and exploring how walking fosters creativity. She has an MSc in Digital Education from the University of Edinburgh. She is currently a member of the ALDinHE Mentoring Working Group. She is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE and a reviewer for the Collaborative Award in Teaching Excellence for Advance HE.

Alicja Syska is a hybrid academic, combining the roles of Learning Development Advisor with lecturing posts in Education and History at the University of Plymouth. She sits on the Steering Group for the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), serves as Co-Lead Editor for the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE), and is a co-host of the Learning Development Project podcast. Alicja has a Ph.D. in American Studies from Saint Louis University, USA, is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE, and an ALDinHE Certified Leading Practitioner.

Sam Thomas is a Senior Academic Skills Tutor at Arden University. Prior to this she worked at the University of Northampton as a Learning Development Tutor and Mentor Manager. She is a Fellow of Advance HE, an ALDinHE Certified Practitioner and an active member of ALDinHE. Her focus is to provide support and services to those with additional

needs, including improving the accessibility of online resources, and supporting the needs of non-traditional and distance learners.

## ***Licence***

©2023 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).