



Leadership Mentoring & Support

- a COBIS Service

Guidance Notes
(Frequently Asked Questions)

Introduction to the Service

COBIS supports the view that the role of Heads and school Leaders is fundamental in establishing and developing a high quality school – one that would meet the quality standards for COBIS membership. COBIS has a declared aim to serve, support and represent its member schools and is responding to requests from those member schools to provide a framework and structure for Mentoring and Supporting Heads.

COBIS itself does not provide Mentoring and does not employ Mentors themselves but provides an introduction and the overall framework for its members to select appropriate Mentors from the list that it maintains. In addition, COBIS is keen to ensure that there is quality and value. COBIS maintains a confidential list of Mentors who can offer support to Heads and School Leaders - firstly administering the processes of selecting Mentors and secondly, assisting in the allocation/confirmation of Mentors once a leader seeks support.

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Why has COBIS developed a framework for Mentoring?

COBIS has responded to feedback from its member schools through Heads who have asked for Mentoring support. Heads regularly identify that it would be most helpful to have a structured opportunity to learn from others who are experiencing and/or have experienced similar professional challenges in the international school environment.

2. Why is COBIS committed to Mentoring?

COBIS believes that the person receiving support should be known as the **Mentee**, and the person offering support as the **Mentor**. These titles are used throughout the framework.

In addition COBIS believes that:

- 2.1 Mentoring is a relationship based process that enables individuals (the Mentee) to achieve their full potential as leaders.
- 2.2 Mentoring enables an individual to follow in the path of a more experienced colleague who can pass on knowledge and experience.
- 2.3 A Mentor is a person who is able to ask the questions that Mentees cannot ask of themselves, provides the services of a confidential critical friend and offers direction and guidance to the Mentee as 'the voice of experience' in face-to-face sessions as well as via electronic communication.

3. What does COBIS believe is the main purpose of Mentoring?

Ultimately, the purpose of mentoring in schools is to improve teaching and learning so that children in COBIS member schools can achieve and progress as well as they can. The purpose is therefore, to develop the individual school leader, not only for the current situation, but also for the future so that they can become increasingly effective in developing excellence in learning for all in their school.

4. What does COBIS believe about the process of Mentoring?

COBIS believes that it is vital that the Mentor provides a safe environment where the Mentee shares whatever issues affect his or her professional and personal success. This may include things such as; achieving a work/life balance, developing self-confidence, enhancing self-perception, developing understanding of how the personal influences the professional.

To be successful, Mentoring requires time (typically 12 to 18 months) in which both the Mentee and Mentor can build a climate of trust that creates an environment in which the Mentee feels secure in sharing the real issues that impact his or her success.

COBIS expects that Mentors make their own arrangements for travel and public liability insurance.

5. What are the issues relating to confidentiality in mentoring situations?

A key aspect of quality assurance for COBIS is confidentiality, believing that it is an essential requirement for underpinning trusting professional relationships. Maintaining confidentiality within the network of COBIS member schools is vital. It is an expectation that Mentors working in COBIS schools do not discuss the Mentee's development with other colleagues or COBIS members: what is discussed in the school with the Mentee, stays in the school. COBIS believes that permission for the Mentor to speak with any other colleagues - should it be deemed relevant – must be given by the Mentee in writing.

An additional aspect of maintaining confidentiality is particularly relevant in relation to the role that the Mentee's school-based colleagues might play in the process. Although they are not directly involved in Mentoring sessions, their perceptions and observations can provide a very useful contextualization for the Mentor. It is advised that in the face-to-face meetings in schools, Mentors may wish to use some of their time meeting with the Mentee's colleagues, gathering useful information about the school and the issues that are being considered in the Mentoring sessions themselves. This helps the Mentor pose the most appropriate questions and devise the most effective strategies for the development of the Mentee. In this case, absolute confidentiality is fundamental in maintaining the Mentoring relationship's integrity.

In the documentation for requesting and accepting Mentoring support, a statement is included that requires both Mentee and Mentor to agree, in writing, to maintain confidentiality.

6. Who are COBIS Mentors?

COBIS Mentors are colleagues who meet all three of the following criteria:

6.1 Have a proven, successful track record of professional work in British International School leadership in roles and at least two years experience as Heads.

6.2 Are either currently school leaders or have maintained current and relevant knowledge of international school leadership

6.3 Can offer total confidentiality.

7. How do people become Mentors?

7.1 By application to the COBIS executive. COBIS has an ongoing open invitation to invite experienced colleagues who meet the three criteria listed above to apply to COBIS to be registered as a Mentor.

7.2 COBIS expects that all colleagues who become Mentors regularly update their skills in this area and demonstrate this through a return to COBIS that they have done so every two years.

7.3 Mentors would be expected to attend a seminar on Mentoring best practice and the understanding of the framework itself organised by COBIS in order to maintain their registration on the list.

7.4 COBIS Mentors would be expected to undertake Mentoring of colleagues when requested and within a reasonable timeframe and where relevant, must have secured the permission from their own employer in writing to enable them to have the time to engage with the process. A copy of the permission must be forwarded to the COBIS executive.

7.5 COBIS reserves the right not to register a colleague as a Mentor if it believes that the applicant is insufficiently experienced, or if further mentors are not currently required.

8. How do recently retired Heads become Mentors?

COBIS celebrates the fact that Heads who are about to retire or who have very recently retired have a wealth of useful and valuable experience to share with Headteacher colleagues and could do so within the COBIS mentoring framework. Some recently retired Heads may have considered establishing themselves as independent educational consultants and may already work within COBISs consultancy framework. Other Heads may wish to apply to become COBIS mentors without taking on any other form of consultancy.

It should be pointed out that a recently retired Head must, like all Mentors, be able to demonstrate that they have appropriate public liability insurance so that in the event that they take on work, billed at the agreed COBIS rate, and within the COBIS framework for mentoring, they are adequately covered by their own insurance.

9. Who plans and makes the arrangements for a Mentoring day?

COBIS expects that the Mentee makes all necessary 'on-the-ground' arrangements which include; appropriate refreshments/lunch, a place to work and a room for discussions. Where conversations with school based stakeholders are part of the Mentoring day, the Mentee is expected to have ensured that people can be easily approached by the Mentor and that they understand the confidential nature of any conversations.

The only time a Mentor might believe that there is a need to break confidentiality is when a child or member of the school community discloses a matter relating to the safeguarding/child protection of children. In a case such as this, the Mentor would normally inform the Head, child protection officer, or Chair as appropriate and pass the matter across to them immediately. In addition, the Mentor is expected to record with the COBIS executive that they have passed on a matter of child protection to the school whilst visiting the school in the role of Mentor.

10. How do people stop being Mentors?

10.1 Mentors are able to withdraw from the list of registered Mentors at anytime but must do so in writing to the COBIS Executive Director.

10.2 COBIS assumes that unless a Mentor states in writing that they wish to withdraw from the list of registered Mentors, they wish to remain active.

10.3 If a Mentor leaves a COBIS school and takes up a post in another COBIS school they must gain the permission of the Chair/Owner in writing to continue. A copy must be forwarded to the COBIS executive.

11. What do COBIS Mentors do?

COBIS Mentors typically:

11.1 Work with a Mentor across a 12-18month period.

11.2 Facilitate conversations using questioning techniques where the Mentee explores their own needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes in order to identify effective solutions and actions rather than the Mentor taking a wholly directional approach.

- 11.3** Support the Mentee in setting appropriate goals and methods of assessing progress in relation to these goals.
- 11.4** Observe, listen and ask questions to understand the Mentee's situation.
- 11.5** Encourage a commitment to action and the development of lasting personal growth & change.
- 11.6** Maintain an unconditional positive regard for the Mentee, where the Mentor is at all times supportive and non-judgemental of the Mentee, their views, lifestyle and aspirations.
- 11.7** Work to avoid the development of an unhealthy dependency on the Mentoring relationship.
- 11.8** Evaluate the outcomes of the process, using objective measures wherever possible to ensure the relationship is successful and the Mentee is achieving their personal goals.
- 11.9** Possess relevant qualifications and experience in the areas that Mentoring is requested and offered.
- 11.10** Manage the relationship to ensure the Mentee receives the appropriate level of service over an agreed length of time.

12. What are the key elements of a successful Mentoring experience?

Successful Mentoring typically includes:

Developmental activities, which are designed to suit the Mentee's personal needs and learning preferences, e.g. (*learning walks, review of documentation, structured interviews, goal setting, budget planning*).

- 12.1** Work that helps to develop the Mentee's sense of self-efficacy as well as their skills and understanding of leadership.
- 12.2** A focus on organizational, managerial and interpersonal skills.
- 12.3** Providing the Mentee with contacts and networks to assist in achieving their goals.
- 12.4** Face to face communication in the 'live' environment as well as via technological communication methods.
- 12.5** A focus on the Mentee's own learning, goal setting and action planning, rather than doing the job for them.

13. What are the circumstances that might lead to a colleague to request a COBIS Mentor?

- 13.1** When a colleague has been recently appointed to a role as Head or senior leader of a COBIS school in any category of membership.
- 13.2** When a colleague is seeking to develop himself or herself as part of their own school succession planning (which could be in the lead up-to retirement).

13.3 When a colleague is in need of support within a specific period of their contract or tenure and where the issues that need to be worked on cannot be supported from within their own school organisation.

14. How does a Mentee choose a Mentor? Can the Mentor decline?

On receipt of the completed application from for Mentoring, the COBIS executive will propose the names of up to three appropriate Mentors, also bearing in mind geography and likely travel costs, from which the Mentee can select a possible Mentor or Mentors.

Offering more than one Mentor is sensible and helps COBIS to make balanced connections around its network. It is only when the Mentee has made the selection that COBIS will contact the Mentor and once agreement is confirmed, contact the Mentee. In other words, once the initial choice has been made, COBIS contacts the Mentor by phone to ask if they are available and willing to continue. If the answer is yes, COBIS informs the Mentee. In the rare case of a Mentor being unable, or deeming it a potentially unwise situation for Mentoring, COBIS will, in absolute confidence, invite the Mentee to re-select from the COBIS list.

15. What are the financial costs of Mentoring?

COBIS expects that the Mentee school will cover the costs of:

15.1 A recommended daily rate (currently £495.00 or equivalent - the rate can be above or below this level and is set by the Mentor in agreement with the Mentee) for the services of the Mentor - paid to the Mentor (or her/his employer) for each Mentoring day or parts of days undertaken pro rata.

15.2 A fixed rate cost of £150 (pounds sterling) paid to COBIS to cover their administration costs and maintenance of the list of Mentors

15.3 The Mentors travel and accommodation expenses at the most reasonable and effective level

16. What are the issues relating to the liability of accepting advice from a Mentor?

COBIS believes that any advice offered to a Mentee by the Mentor is given with the best professional intentions, for the betterment and benefit of the Mentee and their school. Excellent Mentoring is about holding an unconditional positive regard for the Mentee. Advice is offered by mentors with the best of intentions and professional knowledge and is accepted or rejected with equally good intentions and professional knowledge. As with any learning activity that might include for example, reading a document, attending a course, listening to a podcast, reading a journal or simply talking with a colleague at conference, the decision to implement an idea, plan or strategy rests with the implementer.

Mentees should not feel under pressure to implement aspects of professional work that they do not believe are in their own or school's best interest. In effective Mentoring, the working relationship is based on trust and understanding where the Mentor's key role is to support the Mentee in working out for themselves, the best strategies and plans for their school or themselves as leaders. The decision to take and act on advice and the responsibility of the consequences or leave the advice rests with the Mentee.

17. How do we evaluate whether the Mentoring is proving to be effective?

COBIS expects that the both Mentee and Mentor will complete an evaluation form after each face-to-face visit and phone conversation, using the forms provided as a way of recording the

work undertaken and as a way of reflection on professional learning. COBIS requires a mid point evaluation from the Mentor and Mentee (by phone) and an end of process written evaluation form (one from the Mentee and one from the Mentor). The COBIS evaluation proforma can be used for all events within the process.

18. What happens if, after an initial visit it is clear that the relationship between Mentee and Mentor is not going to work?

In the unusual case that this happens, COBIS executive would be able to offer advice and support to both the Mentor and Mentee. If issues cannot be resolved, COBIS would advise that the relationship is ended by mutual agreement. COBIS retains the right to end a Mentoring arrangement if it believes that the good name and reputation of COBIS is in jeopardy.

19. How does COBIS ensure that quality is assured?

The above answers help to clarify many aspects of quality assurance.

In addition, it is helpful to be reminded that Mentors themselves are drawn from Executive and Member schools, or have been otherwise approved by COBIS. By definition, these leaders and managers have already proven that they have the skills and expertise to lead a high quality organisation. It is an expectation of COBIS that colleagues in these positions would, by the nature of their work, be experienced in Mentoring staff. Some COBIS Mentors will have professional qualifications in Mentoring.

COBIS seeks to maintain an active list of Mentors who meet all of the criteria set out earlier in these FAQs. COBIS reserves the right not to add someone to the list if the executive believe that doing so would not be in the best interest of COBIS itself, and also holds the right to remove a colleague from the list if it believes that it is in the best interest of COBIS to do so.

COBIS holds the right to ask for feedback on the effectiveness of Mentoring from the Mentee at anytime during the process if it deems that it is necessary to do so.

If you wish to discuss an aspect of the Leadership Mentoring & Support Service please contact a member of the COBIS team on +44 203 8267 190 or email mentoring@cobis.org.uk