Plymouth Marjon University Research Mentoring Policy

1. Background

Marjon's Research Mentoring Policy and Implementation Guidelines have been developed through an extensive university-wide pilot project, and they are underpinned by the University's values of humanity, ambition, curiosity and independence. This policy sets out Marjon's aim to establish a research mentoring culture for all existing and new academic staff with research as one of their main pathways. Several of Marjon's Professors, Associate Professors and senior researchers, along with volunteer mentees, have participated in a Research Mentoring Working Group and, through sharing their expertise, experience and ideas, we have co-created this policy and its related implementation guidance. At Marjon we consider the potential benefits for the mentor to be as important as those for the mentee and the implementation of research mentoring at Marjon is explicitly aligned to the needs of our own individual organisation and its research and knowledge exchange strategy and ambitions. Research mentoring contributes to the development of wider institutional research culture, interdisciplinary collaboration, and participation in research and knowledge exchange communities, groups and networks across the University.

2. Aims of research mentoring

Following consultation and piloting of one-to-one and group-based mentoring (mentoring circles) models, the purpose/aims of research mentoring at Marjon can be summarised as follows:

2.1 Research skills and career development - To provide mentees/circle members with an opportunity to discuss and share different perspectives on the skills needed to be research active; how to develop a research profile; and to engage in discussions about research as a key component of academic career progression.

2.2 Research culture - To provide a supportive environment to help grow Marjon's research community and help mentees/circle members build confidence and a sense of belonging in research.

2.3 Collaborative research networks - To facilitate connections within and between mentees and mentoring circle groups, to promote peer support networks, cross-disciplinary communication, and sustained research collaboration across the university.

3. Scope of research mentoring

Research mentoring is an inclusive activity at Marjon and aims to meet the mentoring needs of academics with research as one of their main pathways (full-time and part-time) at various stages of their career, for example:

3.1 Academics in the early stages (approximately first 3 years) following a PhD/Professional Doctorate qualification who want to develop their postdoctoral research plans and activities.

3.2 Academics with no doctoral qualification, but some experience of doing research, who want to further develop their research profile, which may or may not include considering undertaking a doctoral qualification.

3.3 Academics who have completed a PhD/Professional Doctorate several years ago and have not developed a postdoctoral research plan or undertaken any further research activities since their doctoral work.

Practitioner academics and others with no research experience at all will usually be supported through coaching/capacity building activities before undertaking formal research mentoring.

4. Research mentoring good practice guidelines

This policy aims to ensure mentoring operates according to consistent principles, by specifying and implementing good practice guidelines across the organisation. Whilst the guidance in the table below is primarily targeted towards one-to-one mentoring, the values and principles also apply to group-based mentoring circles. The term ‘mentor’ can also refer to group facilitator and ‘mentee’ to group member.

Research mentoring at Marjon provides a supportive and developmental space focused on research growth, confidence and career development. Mentoring relationships are distinct from formal line management, appraisal or performance management processes, and are intended to promote reflection, collegial support and research self-efficacy within a non-judgemental environment.

	Guidelines for good mentoring practice	Marjon values and mentoring principles
1	Mentors and mentees are matched as far as possible, and either party may opt out if the combination doesn't work.	***Humanity – we create human connections and community.*** The mentor/mentee relationship is non-judgemental, based on mutual respect, and both parties will be cognisant of other relationships (e.g. line manager, PhD supervisor).
2	The mentor or mentee is not the other's line manager or anyone else in a position of perceived authority and/or power over them.	
3	Mentor and mentee mutually agree acceptable practical arrangements, to facilitate engagement of both parties.	
4	Mentoring is focused on agreed research related objectives/goals, which are mentee-led and provide appropriate challenge.	***Ambition – we empower people to be the best they can.*** Mentoring is driven by agreed objectives/goals and progress against their completion will be monitored by the mentor and mentee, who will set mutually agreed new objectives/goals where appropriate.
5	Mentor supports the mentee to develop an action plan and regular reviews of progress against agreed objectives/goals are undertaken at mutually agreed timepoints.	
6	Mentors and mentees agree an informal contract and keep a confidential shared record of meetings (dates, main points of discussion, agreed actions).	
7	Mentor encourages mentee to reach their personal and career potential related to research.	***Curiosity – we encourage potential and possibility.*** Mentoring encourages growth and development of the mentee, promotes mentor development, and takes into consideration both parties' overall teaching, administration and other workload and personal circumstances.
8	Objectives/goals are adjusted when reached or circumstances change, with agreement of mentor and mentee.	
9	Mentoring nurtures mentee research self-efficacy, helps challenge individual and systemic barriers, and supports the development of the mentee's identity as a researcher.	***Independence - we nurture self-belief, independence, and wellbeing.*** Mentoring facilitates reflection and promotes mentee empowerment and self-efficacy, whilst utilising the expertise and experience of the mentor to the full.
10	Mentor listens actively and uses coaching conversations as well as direct guidance and advice where appropriate.	

5. Mentor recruitment and training

This policy focuses on the needs of mentors, as well as mentees, and successful policy implementation will depend on mentors' engagement and commitment.

5.1 Marjon's style of research mentoring will be underpinned by a coaching conversation approach, alongside advice and guidance from mentors who are experienced and successful in research.

5.2 It is an expectation that Marjon's Professors and Associate Professors who have research as their main strand of activity, along with other senior researchers, will be research mentors and/or mentoring circle facilitators. Enhancing our research culture requires our most experienced researchers to view the development of others as a key part of their role.

5.3 Identifying mentor development needs was placed at the heart of Marjon's pilot project, and it is expected that mentors will undergo online training, which is available in the form of a canvas module. New mentors will be offered an opportunity to shadow a more experienced mentor as appropriate.

6. Mentee recruitment and responsibilities

This policy ensures that all existing and new academic staff on a research pathway will be given the opportunity to have an individual mentor and/or join a mentoring circle, according to their needs and preferences.

6.1 Research Mentoring Policy Implementation Guidelines give further details about the process for mentor allocation and joining a mentoring circle.

6.2 Mentees are expected to actively engage with the process of mentoring, whether on a one-to-one or group basis, including setting goals/objectives and undertaking any agreed activities outside of meetings.

6.3 Mentees will have an initial meeting with an allocated mentor and may request a different mentor if the combination isn't working.

7. Mentor/mentee matching

This policy acknowledges that, in a small university like Marjon, it will not always be possible to match mentees and mentors by subject discipline or specific research interests.

7.1 The matching process will require mentees to set out what they want to achieve from research mentoring, and this will be used to guide the choice of available mentor.

7.2 In some cases mentees may request a specific mentor already known to them and this will be facilitated where appropriate.

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