



**Asking the questions that leaders need to hear themselves answering:
Middlesex University Reverse Mentoring Framework**

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Mentoring is a process where a more experienced person supports the learning of a less experienced person. It is not a teaching or instructional relationship, but rather is one in which the mentor helps the mentee reflect on their ideas, experiences and issues at work, and supports them in finding a pathway to progress. The mentoring relationship relies on high levels of trust so that anything relevant can be discussed including anxieties, aspirations, problems and potential solutions. While discussing the day-to-day experience of work can be important, it is also important to focus at a higher level, thinking about the future and bigger goals.

Reverse mentoring has the same ethos, but reverses one crucial element. Rather than a more senior person mentoring a more junior mentee, the colleague who is more junior mentors the mentee who is more senior. The reason for this is that the senior person will be less experienced than the junior colleague in something they crucially need to understand.

Equity, diversity and inclusion is an area in which it is particularly important for leaders to learn from colleagues who have different life experiences, and who experience the organisation in a different way to leaders who have perceived positional status. Challenges with positions of perceived status include that the people who occupy them can become insulated from the experience of most people, information can be filtered and it can be difficult for colleagues to express what they really think. Reverse mentoring creates a safe space for the mentors to explain to the senior mentee what is really going on in their experience, and it is a safe space for the mentor to discuss and listen about things they don't know and are uncertain about. It is an opportunity for the mentee to try to see organisational life through the eyes of others and to take action as a result.

Step One: Practicalities

- Set up regular meetings – normally an hour monthly.
- Agree the ground rules – complete confidentiality for both sides and the mentee supporting the mentors in saying anything that needs to be said, including criticism and questioning.
- Get a good match – being aware of differences and complementarities in learning styles and personal interaction approaches.

Step Two: Mentoring Meetings

- Establish a shared sense of purpose – supporting learning and action on matters which need insight and reflection for the mentee and enabling an authentic expression of under-represented voices.
- Use questioning to help define and understand problems or issues with greater clarity.
- Discuss alternative ways of framing and understanding issues – express alternative viewpoints.
- Develop clear action steps.

- Review the practicality of the action steps, for example, identifying what resources may be needed or what the organisational history and politics may need to be overcome or understood.
- At the next meeting review how actions went and what learning can be extracted from steps forwards, backwards and sideways.

Race and Reverse Mentoring

In Middlesex University, in the region of 29% of staff come from minority ethnic backgrounds, around 16% of professors and senior staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds, there are members of the Board of Governors from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the University Executive is not ethnically diverse. We aspire to increasing diversity and inclusion at all levels in the University and a priority is to ensure that the University Executive are listening, learning and acting. Reverse mentoring is part of this process.

Reverse mentoring for understanding and action on racial discrimination and prejudice includes:

- Learn how to talk about race: practice and receive feedback in a safe place, then build and amplify the voice.
- Prioritise anti-racism: proactively uphold the idea of racial equality and promote changes in practices, procedures and systems to support racial equality.
- Raise awareness of racial discrimination and prejudice: make it overt that leaders need and want to learn and change.
- Change the organisational culture: build the skills and understanding and clearly state the values that will be applied in systems such as recruitment and promotion.
- Galvanise change around the Race Equality Charter.