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Guidance Note

Mentoring and Learning Support

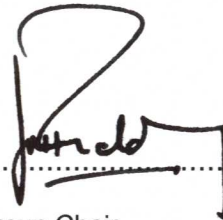
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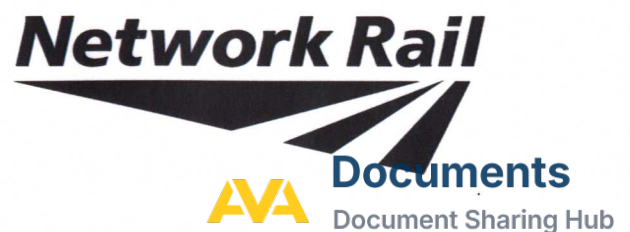
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1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide general guidance relating to the support of learning in Network Rail and to prepare Line Managers and other employees undertaking mentoring activities in the support of colleagues in order that newly acquired knowledge and/or skills may be more effectively integrated into the workplace.

The document is also intended as guidance for Line Managers and for those undertaking mentoring activity concerning the types of activity and behaviour that would most effectively support a colleague with newly acquired knowledge and/or skills.

2 Scope

This Guidance Note contains advice on the selection of the appropriate person, recommendations on their ideal personal attributes and advice on the technical competence requirements of those undertaking mentoring activity.

It applies and can be adapted to all areas of the business for any situation where a learner would benefit from support whether or not the knowledge or skills were acquired during formal training, through coaching or via other forms of learning and whether or not Assessment in The Line processes apply.

3 Introduction

In the workplace 'mentoring' describes a relationship and an activity by which a more experienced colleague uses their greater knowledge and understanding of the work, tasks or range of activities to support the development of a less experienced colleague.

Mentoring provides an individual with the opportunity to practice newly acquired skills in the workplace with the support and under the guidance of a more experienced person.

Workforce Development, in Network Rail, entails continuous learning and the updating of knowledge and skills *in the workplace*. The overall *purpose* of the activity of workplace mentoring may be described as:

To help and support people to manage their own learning, develop their skills and improve their performance and their safety.

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4 Mentoring and Learning Support

The use of the word 'mentor' within this document does *not* indicate a job/role title or a formal position; rather it is a description of a number of activities and behaviours that support the process of learning and the achievement of competence. Similarly the use of the term 'coach' or 'coaching' within this document does not suggest that the mentor carries out duties normally associated with the learners Line Manager or those associated with performance management.

4.1 Benefits

The major benefits of the mentoring approach to Network Rail are increased efficiency, better engagement and improved safety of the learner and their colleagues. This is achieved through better enabling the appropriate application of skills and knowledge and supporting the learner during the post-training phase.

The learner gains from increased confidence and self awareness which helps improve performance and overall contribution. The learner also benefits from having a sounding board for technical problems, ideas and issues and access to an experienced, objective and credible source of advice and information providing support that enables quicker, improved confidence levels.

Mentors themselves benefit from the satisfaction of developing their colleagues, better enabling and encouraging safe-working for all and of passing on their knowledge, skills and expertise.

In summary the shared benefits of learning support through mentoring are:

- improved safety of a colleague and their team;
- increased motivation and sense of achievement;
- better interpersonal and communication skills;
- greater understanding of the business.

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4.2 Selection and Nomination

The learner's Line Manager will select an appropriate mentor to support the learner. If mentoring activity is to take place following formal training the selection should take place prior to the training taking place and will leave sufficient time to communicate with the proposed mentor and the learner and to have an appropriate conversation explaining the aims and expectations of the mentoring process and the tasks and activities associated it.

The learner's Line Manager should have a discussion with the nominated mentor and brief them regarding the expectations of mentoring activity including:

- the learner;
- the Training objectives;
- timescales for initial observations and a flexible plan;
- observation Sheets and logbooks;
- providing feedback and recommendations.

People undertaking mentoring activity should not undertake activities that should normally take place during formal training programmes or that fall within the remit of the Workforce Development Specialist or the Line Manager. Nor should they impose learning programmes.

4.2.1 Occupational Competence

The selection of an appropriate mentor falls within the remit of the Line Manager of the Learner. The most appropriate person to carry out the activity need not always be the most technically proficient but the mentor should have appropriate occupational and technical competence to support and mentor the learner.

NOTE: If mentoring activity is associated with achieving competence via Assessment in The Line the person undertaking mentoring activity shall be assessed to Level 4 of that competence – as mandated in NR/L3/CTM/122.

Ideally the mentor will be perceived by the learner as:

- Experienced;
- successful at their job;
- a good role model;
- a non-judgemental advisor.

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4.2.2 Interpersonal Skills

The essential skills and attributes for Learning Support are listening, questioning and feedback. They need to be:

- a good listener;
- open and honest;
- non-judgemental;
- a motivator;
- empathetic;
- patient;
- reliable.

A balance of interpersonal skills and occupational competence will be required. A very experienced and highly technically competent individual may not be as effective in providing support as a less experienced, technically competent colleague with good communication skills.

The mentor should be willing to share knowledge with the individual and assist if necessary, sharing their experiences and good ideas with the learner.

4.2.3 The Workforce Development Specialist as a mentor

The Workforce Development Specialist (WDS) should normally support the mentoring process by providing persons undertaking mentoring activity and/or Line Managers with suggested areas for follow-up or reinforcement or learning following attendance on a training course via a post course report.

In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to nominate a mentor with directly relevant occupational/technical competence from within the learner's team or where additional mentoring support would benefit the process it may be appropriate for the learner's Line Manager to negotiate with the Training Delivery Manager to appoint a Workforce Development Specialist (WDS) to undertake mentoring or learning support activity. Ideally the WDS identified to provide this support would be the individual who delivered the training to the learner that is to be supported with mentoring activity.