



## **Guidelines for Mentors**

### **Aberystwyth University Mentoring Welsh Learners Scheme**

#### **Centre for Welsh Language Services**

##### **Introduction**

The University is committed to providing practical support to staff who are learning Welsh according to the terms of the Welsh Language Scheme 2003 (clause 6.7) and the Revised Language Scheme refers to mentoring as an important part of implementing the Bilingual Skills Strategy.

The development of this scheme to mentor Welsh learners aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. improve the oral skills of Welsh learners and increase their confidence
- ii. encourage the use of Welsh in the workplace
- iii. demonstrate to Welsh learners that the University acknowledges the effort they are making to learn Welsh
- iv. create opportunities for fluent speakers to practice their communication skills and to create a feeling of satisfaction by helping a colleague to achieve their goal
- v. demonstrate to Welsh speakers that the University acknowledges the fact that they possess a valuable skill
- vi. promote the feeling of being part of the University community (by meeting people from other departments)
- vii. promote the Welsh language in the University in a non-threatening manner.

##### **What is the mentoring scheme?**

The purpose of the mentoring scheme is to provide Welsh learners with the opportunity to practice what they have learnt with a friendly and patient person who is willing to give them a specific amount of time every week/fortnight to listen and chat with them in an informal atmosphere. For more advanced learners it is an opportunity for them to gain experience of different accents and to hear Welsh being spoken 'naturally'.

Other workplaces in Wales also run mentoring Welsh learners schemes e.g. Cymal, the Welsh Assembly Government, Bangor University Library.

##### **Who are the mentors?**

Members of staff who speak Welsh fluently. They may be first language speakers or very experienced learners.

##### **Why should I be a mentor?**

The experience of mentoring in the workplace is considered to be a special skill which is acknowledged on staff development programmes. Mentoring Welsh learners includes many of the skills that are used by mentors in general e.g. communication skills are developed as well as leadership and counselling skills and this experience can be included on your CV. Mentoring makes you more aware of other people's needs, and enables you to see a different viewpoint, that of the mentee. You may

also experience personal satisfaction as you help someone to achieve their goals. Mentoring can be an opportunity to compare notes with someone working in a different department and to find out how different departments/teams in the University work. Mentoring is also a chance to make new friends!

### **What skills do I need to be a mentor?**

Patience mostly! Be prepared to listen and offer encouragement. You don't need to know about grammar or mutation rules, rather you are giving the mentee the opportunity to say what he or she wants to say in Welsh.

### **How will you pair a mentor with a mentee?**

Perhaps a mentee who already knows you will suggest your name. Otherwise we will look for someone who works on the same campus, and we will avoid placing line managers with members of their staff. We will ask the mentee if they would prefer to have a male or female mentor, or whether they don't mind. If you feel that the mentoring relationship is not working with a particular individual, get in touch with us and we will try to find someone else for them, or do an exchange.

### **How often should we meet?**

In order for the mentoring scheme to work it needs to be flexible. You will discuss with the mentee to see what time is convenient for both of you. If you can't manage it on one occasion consider contacting your mentee by phone or e-mailing them in Welsh – this will also help them. If the mentee e-mails you in Welsh don't send a corrected version back to them – the aim of the exercise is to understand and respond. If you feel that time is a problem and you can't continue with the mentoring, contact us so that we can try and find another mentor for the mentee.

### **What activities can I and the mentee do?**

This will depend to a large extent on the individual. We suggest that you spend the first session discussing the mentee's needs and what s/he expects of you. It's possible that some just want the chance to have a simple conversation in Welsh over a cup of tea, but others may want to discuss in detail what they have just learned in class. Perhaps they will want to go over the lesson with you, or discuss homework. Follow the mentee's lead.

### **Should I correct the mentee's mistakes?**

The aim of mentoring is to nurture the confidence of the mentee and too much correcting can easily undermine the confidence of a learner. We suggest that you avoid correcting on the whole – leave that to the tutor in class! If you have understood what the mentee has said then the mentee has succeeded in communicating in Welsh and there is no need to correct, just continue with the conversation. But if the mentee asks e.g. 'am I saying this correctly?' then by all means correct them if necessary. Perhaps the learner will ask you to correct him/her frequently, and this is something for you to discuss together, but on the whole mentoring schemes recommend that you avoid correcting grammar.

### **Points to remember**

- Speak slowly without shouting.
- Don't laugh at the mentee when they make mistakes.
- Don't finish the mentee's sentences. The mentee speaks slowly because they need time to think.
- Mentees are taught to speak colloquial Welsh to begin with. Don't tell him/her that they have been taught incorrectly.

- Please contact the Centre for Welsh Language Services ([canolfangymraeg@aber.ac.uk](mailto:canolfangymraeg@aber.ac.uk); 01970 622045) if you wish to discuss any aspect of being a mentor.