

# ***Inquiry-based Learning Design Overview***

History of English Mentoring Scheme



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## ***1. The students and the curriculum***

Level: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year mentors (with 1<sup>st</sup> years as mentees)

Number: 15 student mentors (with around 100 mentees)

## ***2. The teaching and learning aims***

Project aims:

- a) Mentees develop information literacy skills
- b) Mentees able to use bibliographical system
- c) Mentees reflect on information literacy skills
- d) Mentors further develop information literacy skills

## ***3. The inquiry/ inquiries***

This project placed the development of research skills at the centre of the student learning experience, exposing students to the research process as one that requires the use and refinement of a set of problem-solving skills. Students therefore pursued inquiry processes in the same way as researchers do when engaged in producing a research paper:

- review of previous research;
- proposal of research questions;
- presentation of results.

The mentors guided students through the first of these stages, concentrating on developing information literacy. The mentors and their groups worked collaboratively to analyse a research area and choose appropriate resources for addressing it. As they moved beyond this stage, students continued to be confronted with inquiry-based exercises, which required them to work with primary sources in printed format, and to use electronic resources.

## ***4. The assessment***

The module is assessed through:

1. An annotated bibliography focused around a research area.

2. A research proposal outlining and refining a research question within the area.
3. A short paper addressing the topic developed and defined in 1 and 2.
4. A take-home examination assessing skills and topics covered during the course.

#### 5. *The 'process support'*

Since the bulk of the module focused on developing students' information literacy capabilities, the majority of resources and activities related to this issue. Resources and activities were provided for mentors and mentees.

- **Skills development** content delivery by module conveners was deferred to week 3 onwards to create a focus on skills development in the first three weeks.
- **Information literacy** skills development was underpinned by a series of activities:
  - **Training and support for mentors.** The mentors were asked to undertake revision using electronic resources prior to briefing and training for the mentoring task.
  - **Information search tasks for mentees.**
  - **Annotated bibliography.** This task was assessed and contributed to the overall mark for the module. The fact that the task was assessed increased student engagement.
  - **Lectures on research skills and information literacy**
  - **Tasks requiring engagement with information prior to workshops.** These tasks formed the backbone of the entire module.
  - Both mentors and mentees were provided with **online resources** to help them with the information literacy task.

#### 6. *The information resources and strategies*

- Lectures were delivered on research skills and information literacy.
- A guide to information resources for mentees was provided in the course of formal instruction.
- A resource pack was provided for mentors. This included a learning contract, which mentors were advised to use with their mentees.
- The departmental handbook repeated basic course information.

#### 7. *The tutoring/facilitation approach*

- **Lectures** were given on research skills and information literacy;
- Module conveners made themselves available to students for **individual support sessions**;
- A postgraduate '**super-mentor**' was appointed, and proved invaluable to the module conveners in the day-to-day running of the scheme;
- The **mentoring scheme**:
  - **Timetabled mentor-mentee sessions.**
    - Mentors worked **collaboratively** with **small groups** of students in both **formal (workshop)** and **informal** settings on research projects.
    - **Electronic resources** were investigated and **library-based research skills** were developed to investigate of topics across their courses.
    - A **learning contract** was agreed between mentor and mentee in order to encourage good working practices.

### 8. *The learning technology*

Mentors familiarised themselves with electronic research resources in advance of the start of teaching. The mentees were then introduced to the same resources in the course of small-group collaborative sessions and content lectures.

### 9. *The learning spaces*

Lectures and workshops took place in ordinary lecture and seminar rooms. More flexible, large-scale space would have been very welcome, but nothing on the scale necessary exists.

### 10. *What really worked*

The programme seems to have had a beneficial effect on the mentees. They now seem better prepared for university-level work than previous intakes have. Several points merit particular attention:

- The **information search tasks** for mentees seem to have benefited the standard of written work they produced. Mentee questionnaires suggest that they felt confident in undertaking such tasks, with most respondents characterising themselves as 'confident' or 'very confident'.
- The tasks requiring **engagement with information prior to workshops** were valued by students; especially the tasks on place-names and on lexical innovation.
- The focus on skills development at the start of the course succeeded in providing **accelerated skills development**.
- The impact on mentors is harder to gauge, given the smaller number of mentors. Nevertheless, they seem to have enjoyed the process. Mentors claim to have benefited in terms of their own **academic and personal development**.

### 11. *Things to build on and/or do differently next time around*

We learnt a lot from doing this project and would modify some aspects of the module next time around (2008).

- **Super-mentor**. The mentors did not regard the super-mentor as fulfilling a valuable role, although she was invaluable to the module convenors. The role of super-mentor will not exist in next year's mentoring scheme.
- **Training and support for mentors**. The mentors in the focus group felt that the training for their role could have been more structured. A mentoring module will be developed, which will provide mentors with a more substantial programme of training, as well as a more substantial role. This will also allow mentors to receive direct academic credit for this activity.
- Mentors considered the **learning contract** to be 'inflexible' and potentially intimidating for the mentees. The mentees also viewed the contacts ambiguously. Contacts will not be employed in future.
- A more **integrated approach to skills development** is planned in future, instead of focusing on this issue at the start of the module.
- Feedback indicates that the informal contacts – organized on an *ad hoc* basis between themselves – were often more valued by participants than formal meetings.

More generally, we plan to improve the programme by providing more structured, less informal mentoring on the one hand and orientation to the module's content for both mentors and mentees in the form of a textbook.

*12. Advice to others doing a similar project*

Try to find out whether or not your potential mentors actually have the skills you would like them to promote.

Creating a credit-bearing scheme seems to have made a lot of difference to the mentors' level of engagement with the process.

*13. Further comments*