



Sharing what works for women in academia: career coaching – a video and a protocol

The School of Biological Science (SBS) at the University of Edinburgh has a much higher proportion of women at PhD and post-doctoral level (50%) than at professorial level (25%). Focus group discussions within SBS indicated that women at post-doctoral level and in the early stage of an independent academic career find it particularly difficult to balance the demands of their career and their family life. To support women's career development, SBS launched an annual career coaching programme in 2015 offering five individual coaching sessions to twelve coachees per year.

Initially piloted as a "women-only" programme, in partnership with Equate Scotland, the scheme was subsequently open to everyone. However, there is a majority of female applicants, suggesting that this scheme is addressing a specific need.

The career coaching programme has proven to be effective for an individual's continuing professional development and for the development of cultural change within departments, focusing on inclusivity.

Materials

- Money
- Coach(es) who know academia
- Staff member open to being coached
- Supportive line manager
- Independent person to make decisions

Methods

Programme initiation

- Decide on your budget.
- Decide on your criteria for selection of coachees. Data collected for Athena SWAN submission can help you determine which cohorts of staff you would like to support e.g. women only, certain grades, academic and/or professional services staff.
- Contact coaches with experience of work in academia.
- Carefully set-up the application process to identify which applicants would benefit most from coaching.
- Choose an administrator for the programme.

Launch event

- Make sure the date does not coincide with school holidays or regular lunchtime seminar series.
- Invite Head of Department or Chair of your Equality and Diversity committee to introduce the event and show support for the programme.
- Email your cohort of potential applicants/coaches with a link to a sign up form.
- Compile a document presenting the coaches: a photo of each coach and blurb describing who they are, what their experience is and how they work is useful. Invite the coaches to present themselves at the launch event.
- Invite a previous coachee to talk about their experience of coaching.
- Organise a networking lunch immediately after the presentations so that prospective applicants can chat to the coaches and previous coachees.



Application process

- Set up a web based application form for applicants to submit online: the main question should help determine why the applicant would like a place on the programme. Also ask which coach they would like to be matched with.
- State that accepting a place on the programme is dependent on confirmation that they will complete a feedback survey on completion of their coaching.
- Match successful applicants to coach taking into account the coachee's preference.
- Agree a start and end date for the coaching process.

Coaching phase

- Email each coach with the names and contact details of their allocated coachees. It is up to the coach to contact the individual and set up the initial and subsequent meetings.
- Each coach invoices the department's finance team.
- Contact the coaches after 3 months to ensure process is running smoothly.

Feedback

- Set up a web based survey to obtain feedback from the coachees. *Ask e.g. if their objectives on starting the programme have been met; have there been any positive outcomes and can they link these to the programme; any planned next steps; how they think the department has benefitted from their coaching; the coaching's overall usefulness to them.*
- Coaches meet to discuss any themes that have arisen during the programme – a theme is a matter that has been mentioned by at least 3 coachees. They produce a short report on the programme that includes any themes that have arisen and their recommendations.

Results

- Evaluate the programme's effectiveness from the coachee survey and the coaches report.
- Discuss the themes and the evaluation report with the department's Management Team.
- Keep a lessons learned log.

Our career coaching programme has been a resounding success: feedback from the coachees indicate that 90% feel more confident about their skills and qualities, 80% are more confident about their career and 60% have already engaged in new career development activities. The coaches gave feedback to our management team giving insight to department-wide issues to be addressed.

Tips

- Ask an independent person to make decisions on who will be allocated a place on the programme – e.g. ask an E&D lead in another department.
- You may want to change criteria annually to target different groups of staff.



Annex

Example of programme for career coaching launch event

Head of Department	Welcome and introduction of coaches	5 minutes
Academic lead for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)	Introduction to coaching programme	5 minutes
Coach 1	Coach	10 minutes
Coach 2	Coach	10 minutes
Coach 3	Coach	10 minutes
Coachee	Personal experience of coaching	10 minutes
EDI administrator	Application procedure	5 minutes
All	Networking lunch	45 minutes