

PERCEPTIONS OF MENTORING: EXPECTATIONS OF A KEY RESOURCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In the context of higher education, the role of mentoring new staff is variously established, though often informal. It is sometimes associated with research supervision, but more recently the increasing sophistication of the roles of staff has seen the introduction of 'mentoring' to manage induction. In South Africa, a strong motivation for investigating the role of mentor is to facilitate the induction and retention of equity appointees.

This paper explores the perceptions of the role of mentor held by a sample of higher education practitioners with a view to identifying the expectations that higher education practitioners have of this role. The analysis reveals broad agreement with the literature, but strong emphasis on the importance of placing the interests of the protégé at the heart of the relationship, and recognizing that the responsibility of the mentor is to maintain a critical perspective and not merely to attempt to get the protégé to conform to the institution.

The authors critically review the perceptions and conclude that the mentoring relationship is affected when the mentor is assigned to the protégé. In such situations, expectations need to be clearly articulated if the relationship is to succeed. In addition, recommendations are made about the choice of mentors, the importance of focusing on the realization of the potential of the protégé, the focus that is needed in a module to train mentors, the practical difficulties associated with mentoring, and models for mentoring.