

Analysis Function mutual mentoring programme

The Analysis Function (AF) vision for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is to create a truly diverse and inclusive analysis community that is reflective of the UK society we serve. To support this, this time last year we published our [D&I Strategy for 2021-24](#), which outlines the function we want to create and how we will achieve this.

This week the AF is launching a key commitment within the strategy; a Mutual Mentoring programme. Mutual mentoring is a partnership. By combining 'traditional' mentoring with reverse mentoring, the programme's key objectives are twofold:

- To support more senior analysts to increase their understanding of the diverse experiences of, and barriers faced by, AF members, enabling them to consider how to make their own leadership and teams more inclusive.
- To empower more junior analysts to discuss their experiences with their seniors, whilst also benefitting from meaningful career discussions and opportunities.

"I am delighted to have taken on the role of Senior Sponsor for Diversity & Inclusion within the Analysis Function (AF) and am committed to supporting the AF to create a truly diverse and inclusive analysis community that is reflective of the UK society we serve.

As a function of roughly 17,000, we must all take full advantage of the opportunity this offers to expand our networks across departments and professions. The AF Mutual Mentoring programme is a brilliant opportunity to learn from each other. As leaders, we must listen and create safe spaces for colleagues to share their lived experiences, and we must be open to reflecting on our own leadership behaviours and trying something different. This programme will support us to build more inclusive teams within our function and, in turn, will enable our senior leaders to support more junior analysts by offering valuable guidance on development and career progression."

How will it work?

Mentoring partnerships will be formed between a Senior Civil Servant (SCS) analyst and an analyst who is Grade 6 or below. Both partners will experience being both a mentor and a mentee, with sessions split into two halves to include a reverse mentoring-style discussion about D&I followed by a more traditional mentoring discussion.

Arranging matches outside of your department and core profession, the programme will be a great cross-government networking opportunity. There will also be informal opportunities to meet other programme participants, discuss your experiences and share learning.

Who can take part?

For those Grade 6 and below, the programme is open for AF members who consider there to be barriers placed on their career progression in relation to the [protected characteristics](#), and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The programme is open to all Senior Civil Service analysts.

Will there be training?

Training sessions will be held online in March 2022. The sessions will introduce mutual mentoring and will outline expectations of both members in the partnership.

Both members will be asked to sign a mentoring agreement. This will establish agreed ground rules and confidentiality within mentoring partnerships.

What is the time commitment?

Mentoring partnerships will be expected to meet once a month between April and September 2022.

How do I sign up?

If you are interested in taking part, please send a short expression of interest email to Analysis.Function@ons.gov.uk by 5pm on Friday 11 March 2022. To enable us to make matches, in your email please include:

- Department
- Profession (don't worry if you aren't registered to a particular analytical profession, just let us know your main area of work instead)
- Grade
- 100-word Expression of Interest (EOI) statement. Please outline your motivations for joining the programme, what you hope to gain from the experience, and what you can offer to a partnership.

Please note, we will endeavour to match all interested members with a partner. However, in the case of significant interest, the 100-word EOI will be used to select participants.

Want to know a bit more?

If you have any questions, please contact Analysis.Function@ons.gov.uk.

The Government Statistical Service's (GSS) reverse mentoring scheme informed the approach to the AF Mutual Mentoring programme, we hear from some past participants who tell us about their experience and why they would recommend signing up for this exciting programme.

Adriana and John's experience

The GSS reverse mentoring scheme was launched in October 2020, John Bates and Adriana Castaldo were amongst the first cohort of people to sign up. They discussed what they had learned from the scheme and agreed it had been a positive and worthwhile experience. They have written this joint blog to tell us about it.

John: "As someone in my first Deputy Director role I was really keen to sign up for the reverse mentoring scheme. As a leader I recognise that not everyone feels fully at ease with our workplaces and the way we usually interact with each other in the office. I wanted to do what I could to hear different perspectives from my mentor and to understand what I could do to be sensitive to different world views and to create a more inclusive environment in teams I lead."

Adriana: "I joined the scheme because I had mostly always been a mentee and wanted to try how it was to be on the other side. I wanted to gain more confidence when talking to colleagues of higher grades than me and feel that we could both learn from each other. I also wanted to explore the challenges of aspiring to be a "leader" and role model for others, while keeping being me and feel accepted for who I am."

John: "Adriana has been brilliant to work with, and I feel we've learned a huge amount from each other. We committed to a principle of confidentiality, so I'm not going to say a huge amount about the detail, but Adriana really took the lead as my mentor. We explored some sensitive issues about how challenging some work situations can be and how issues and events outside work can have an impact too. I know more about what I can do to support people to feel welcomed, supported and safe."

Adriana: "Working with John has been great. He was very open and listening to everything that I had to say in a very engaging and respectful way. I got some great tips on how to manage life and work. One thing that really stuck with me is when he told me "I think there is no way you can be happy (at work) if you try to be someone else". I found it very empowering that he asked my views and opinions on issues that sometimes he faces as a manager and senior leader. Being a mentor of someone of a higher grade than me has definitely made me feel more comfortable with facing senior leaders and most importantly see beyond grades."

John and Adriana: "We would really recommend reverse mentoring or mutual mentoring schemes. We've both really enjoyed the experience and even though the formal scheme has ended we are still meeting to discuss issues and learn more."

Richard and Sophie's experience

From a Senior Civil Servant perspective...

I'm delighted that the Government Statistical Service reverse mentoring programme has had positive outcomes. I've mentored several people over the

years, and I've found myself learning more and more from the person I've been mentoring, so the experience has felt mutually supportive ('traditional' mentoring can sometimes feel slightly elitist and hierarchical).

So, when I heard about this reverse mentoring scheme I was intrigued. I was keen to understand in practice how reverse mentoring could work, and to explore two questions that seemed particularly salient to the reverse mentoring approach – I wanted

- To understand the perspectives (such as drivers, and aspirations) of junior analysts, to help me in my leadership/management role.
- To identify areas where I might be inflexible and need to change, or where my skill set needs to develop

Between November 2000 and April 2021 Sophie and I met (virtually) eight times. Our main focus was on the 'flexibility' objective, but we also talked about other topics, reflecting Sophie's interests. I would send over material in advance of the meetings to help Sophie prepare – for example, we spent three meetings discussing a series of questions about different aspects of flexibility, like the last time I took a risk at work, did something completely new at work, or solved a difficult problem at work.

I found the exercise enjoyable and thought-provoking, and pretty reassuring. I was reminded that some newer staff assume senior staff have all the answers and a perfect master plan. This is sadly not the case, so changes in direction or priorities need careful communication about the need for change, however much pressure you're under, and building coalitions of support for change can be vital. Also, that in tricky staffing situations it's good to draw on HR resources about 'having difficult conversations' – you're not alone. And that people's desire for feedback varies – I have my own approach (as does everyone, of course), so it's helpful to make sure people understand this so they're not surprised by your approach.

From the mentor's perspective...

When I caught sight of this scheme, I was intrigued to see how this would work in practice as I couldn't understand how a senior member of staff could learn much from myself. This lends itself to the biggest lesson I learnt from this experience, there is always space for anyone to learn regardless of their position.

This exercise was as beneficial for myself as it was for Richard. In depth discussions and debates opened my mind to think in ways I have not done previously. Furthermore, new ideas were brought to the table that I had not previously considered.

For each session planned, I organised a theme of discussion based on what Richard's objectives were. For example, we hosted sessions on topics ranging from wellbeing of staff to how to make the most out of feedback. We both brought to the table our views and experience and I felt comfortable enough to challenge Richard's ideas and help him see a situation from a junior member of staff's perspective. This experience was invaluable, and I truly believe

this is a fantastic opportunity to take part in.

Here are a few ways in which we think you could make the scheme successful:

- Agree ground rules at the outset (mutual respect, confidentiality, both having the right to withdraw from the exercise).
- The more honest and open you are, the more insightful your discussions will be.
- Ensure both of you outline what you want to get out of the experience. The more specific your objectives, the better.
- The alignment of objectives with the experience/knowledge of the mentor is important – there's no point asking someone junior for advice on performing well at Executive-level boards, for example.
- Circulating discussion material in advance gives the mentor time to prepare. (And the act of preparing discussion material makes the mentee focus on what they want to explore).
- But – it's a relationship, so it's about personalities, so there's an element of luck in 'hitting it off'.

Many blog posts end with a 'call for action', and this one is no different. Our call for action is to encourage senior staff to consider applying for the scheme – perhaps in the first instance discussing the idea with your manager, and your senior reports, to get a range of perspectives. The experience is also mutually beneficial for the mentor as an opportunity to develop in ways not normally offered on a day-to-day role. And do bear in mind that this is a relatively small time commitment, spread over several months – the potential return on investment is considerable!