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# The benefits of buddying



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## WHY WE DID IT

In June 2009, a meeting was held with Marishona Ortega (Academic Subject Librarian), Philippa Dyson and Lys Ann Reiners (Deputy Librarians) to discuss the principles of developing a mentoring system within the library at the University of Lincoln. During discussions we felt it important to develop something new that would create an ethos of mutual support within the department

and this is where we felt buddying would be a step forward.

So what is buddying? The National Council for Voluntary Organisations defines it as 'a system for enabling peers to support each other by sharing experiences, offering advice and providing a sounding board for ideas and problems. Buddying is different from mentoring, which is a more formal and structured relationship where the mentor is typically in a more senior role than the mentee.'<sup>1</sup> The strength of buddying is that it takes the view that both partners can offer each support and opportunities to learn whatever role they fulfil.

The buddying relationship need not and possibly should not be a permanent arrangement. Ideally, staff should change buddies regularly to ensure a broad range of perspectives is achieved as per the recommendations of Urquhart et al<sup>2</sup> and Cunningham.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT WE DID

We conducted preliminary research on how a system of buddying could be introduced and the potential benefits it could bring to the department. An outline proposal was taken to the university's library management group which included some questions:

- What was to be the nature/scope of the buddying relationship – was it to share experience on a two-way basis; was it task/project oriented; was it to provide opportunities for work shadowing
- Should it be formal/informal – should staff select their own buddy or should they be formally paired up with another member of staff by their line manager/supervisor
- Should there be a buddying agreement, which is reviewed on a regular basis, setting out the expectations of what each partner would like to get out of the relationship, how often they would meet, etc.
- Could buddying be linked with other developmental processes such as the university's new competency framework

It was agreed that the department's staff development group should investigate and develop the proposal for introducing a pilot buddying scheme for at least one semester with a small group of volunteers from each team. The volunteers would then be able to provide feedback and offer suggestions for improvement.

## HOW WE DID IT

One of our first challenges was to attempt to understand the difference between buddying and other similar staff development schemes, e.g. work shadowing and mentoring. We looked at what literature there was on this subject. We also put out a request on LIS-LINK for information from experienced users of a buddy scheme. One response was particularly helpful, providing examples of guidelines and proformas that had been used successfully for some time. We used this as a starting point for planning our pilot buddying project.

At the initial meeting of the pilot project group we discussed how buddy partnerships should be identified and initiated. We decided the best way, in order to avoid potential buddies being inundated with requests, was for any staff member wishing to be buddied to approach their line manager who would approach the buddy's line manager. We drafted proformas of a buddying agreement, a meeting log form as well as guidance sheets for both buddies and their line managers. These contained our recommendations about the types of buddy partnerships which could prove fruitful, with examples, and the minimum and maximum time we would recommend a buddy partnership should operate. Finally we drafted an evaluation proforma. We agreed a timescale of 6 months for the pilot project, to allow enough time for buddying agreements to run their course, and a limit of six buddy partnerships during the pilot project so that we wouldn't be overwhelmed.

## HOW WE SOLD IT TO STAFF

We encouraged staff to participate in the scheme by offering them the opportunity to gain an insight into the role of others in the library and to understand how their role fits into the library service. We also wanted it to be inclusive, allowing any member of staff to buddy or be a buddy. This reinforces the idea that both parties can offer each other support and opportunities to learn, whatever role they fulfil.

The 'buy in' is based on personal development and knowledge sharing as well as the opportunity for participating staff to increase their awareness and gain experience of other roles and responsibilities. We wanted buddying to be a rewarding and fulfilling developmental experience for both parties. We asked staff to consider the softer side of the developmental experience through self

reflection and to think about what they do and why they do it.

## EVALUATION

The draft evaluation form contained four areas for completion: objectives met/not met, positive and negative aspects as well as suggestions for further activity if needed. In addition, the project group had drafted a number of standard questions to be asked in the evaluations of participants in the pilot project, with the aim of identifying issues before live rollout.

We included in the invitations to pilot project evaluation meetings the assurance that anything discussed therein would remain confidential to the pilot project group and would only be used to inform development of the buddying scheme. Generic information about the scheme, rather than feedback on individual issues would be collated by the pilot project group and passed to the departmental senior management team as non-attributable.

All of the feedback we received at the pilot project evaluation meetings was positive in terms of the experience of buddying. All participants said that they felt they had learned from their experience. One buddy said she had re-evaluated her role because she had had the opportunity to "step outside" and see her role as others see it.

One issue that arose was that the project group needed to make clear the intended destination of the documentation.

### **Carole Bee: recipient of buddying**

The buddying pilot was an ideal opportunity to increase my knowledge and understanding of a particular area of the wider library environment, in support of both day-to-day work activities and in studying towards a library qualification. The weekly sessions were very interesting and enjoyable, providing useful practical knowledge and an improved awareness of the cataloguing discipline. Overall this was a valuable, productive and beneficial exercise, improving communication and understanding between colleagues in addition to the increased knowledge in a key area of library work.

### **Bev Jones: provider of buddying**

I jumped at the chance to buddy; I don't get many opportunities to talk about cataloguing to people who have volunteered for the experience. I soon realised it was going to be difficult. I can train,

and I can chat; buddying is somewhere between the two. The objectives became really important for keeping the process on course. I tried to find examples relevant to both our job roles to explore the common ground between them. I found it difficult establishing the buddying relationship, preparing the material and finding the time but I'd love to do it again, from either side!

#### **THE FUTURE**

After the success of the pilot and the feedback from our participants it is evident that members of staff who have participated in the buddying scheme have benefitted from the experience. As the university library undergoes service enhancements, staff will need to embrace changes in service delivery, develop new skills as well as expand their knowledge. We hope to assist in the development of our staff by encouraging them to join the buddying scheme in the future and to share and offer insight into changing roles within the department.

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