



WOMEN IN PORTS MENTORING PROGRAMME

ADVICE TO MENTORS

Women in Ports – A joint initiative by the British Ports Association, Port Skills and Safety, and the UK Major Ports Group

The role of the mentor

Every mentoring relationship is unique – shaped by the individual needs, goals, and circumstances of the mentee. As a mentor, your role is to support, guide, and encourage someone navigating their career journey, offering perspective and experience that can help them grow.

Early on, it's helpful to have a conversation about the kind of support your mentee is looking for. You might find yourself taking on one or more of the following roles:

Guide: Share your knowledge and experiences. Help the mentee understand how things work in your area of the ports sector and offer insights into the skills and behaviours that support success.

Ally: Be a sounding board. Provide honest, constructive feedback, helping the mentee test out ideas, challenge assumptions, and work through tricky situations.

Catalyst: Encourage fresh thinking. Ask open questions that inspire new approaches, unlock creativity, and build confidence in decision-making.

Savvy insider: Help the mentee understand the bigger picture. Share your understanding of how organisations and the wider industry operate – and introduce them to people or networks that could help.

Advocate / champion: Where appropriate, speak positively about your mentee's strengths and support their development. That could mean highlighting opportunities or offering encouragement when they're thinking about the next step.

Role model: By sharing how you've approached a particular challenge or navigated your career, you can offer real-life examples for others to learn from.

Advisor: Offer advice when it's needed – whether that's on a specific issue, career development, or understanding the sector.

Being a mentor isn't about having all the answers – it's about sharing experience, listening, and offering support. Often, it's the start of a relationship built on trust and mutual respect that can last well beyond the formal programme...

FIRST MEETING – CONVERSATION STARTERS

Use these questions to spark an open and honest first conversation between mentor and mentee:

- *What past roles or projects have challenged or motivated you the most – and why?*
- *What's an achievement you're especially proud of?*
- *What are your core values? Which are being met (or not met) at work?*
- *What makes you unique – skills, interests, style, strengths?*
- *What education or work experience has shaped your journey most so far?*
- *What have you done to manage your career so far – and where could I support you?*
- *What have you learned from both successes and setbacks?*
- *What's your biggest challenge in balancing work and personal life?*
- *How would you like us to work together – preferred style and frequency of contact?*

Tips for getting off to a great start

- Make the first meeting online; to make it easier to schedule and so you can get to know each other / agree next steps
- Be honest about expectations, time, and boundaries.
- Take notes so you can track progress and reflect.
- Keep things flexible – mentoring should evolve with your needs.
- Be respectful of each other's time and commitments.
- Confidentiality builds trust – agree early on how you'll handle sensitive conversations.

This first meeting sets the tone – take time to get to know each other, and let the partnership develop naturally.

Best practices for a strong mentoring relationship

Keep these simple tips in mind to get the most out of your mentoring experience:

- **Value goes both ways** – you each bring something unique to the partnership.
- **Build trust** – it takes time and consistency to grow mutual respect.
- **Be positive, dependable, honest and sincere** – authenticity matters.
- **Stay consistent, but flexible** – life happens, so adapt as needed.
- **Celebrate wins** – even small steps forward are worth recognising.
- **Ask for what you need** – clear communication is key.
- **It's okay not to have all the answers** – be open and curious.
- **Follow through** – honour the time and commitment you've agreed on.

- **Enjoy the process** – mentoring can be inspiring, energising, and even fun.

The best mentoring relationships are built on openness, respect, and a shared commitment to growth.

Bringing your mentoring relationship to a close

When the formal mentoring period ends, it's important to wrap up well:

- **Talk about the end** – don't let the relationship simply fade out. Be open about whether it's time to close or shift the dynamic.
- **Agree how to close** – will it end now or taper off gradually? Will you stay in touch occasionally?
- **Review next steps** – what's still to be done and how will the mentee take it forward?
- **Reflect together** – share your thoughts on what worked, what you learned, and what you'd do differently.
- **Share programme feedback** – provide feedback to the organisers on your experience, what you liked, what could be done better / differently next time
- **Say thank you** – express appreciation for the time, support, and insight shared.
- **Celebrate progress** – acknowledge the growth, achievements, and confidence gained.

Many mentoring relationships continue informally after the official end – built on trust, mutual respect, and shared experience.