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"Learning the ropes" through a new approach to mentoring

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Abstract

A student's sense of identification with their peers is important to their success (Haythornthwaite, 2008). Eggens, van der Werf & Bosker (2007) note that personal networks affect student attainment and Clifton *et al.*, (2004) observes how peers give an individual the sense of coping and hence perceived control over academic progress. Tinto (2009) highlights peer mentoring as a key way in which support, one of four factors for student success, can be effectively embedded.

Students make intensive use of social media and evidence suggests on-line networking now forms part of the 'social glue' which helps students settle into University life (Cheng & Vassileva, 2006; Madge *et al.*, 2009). In a recent UK report, Clark *et al.* (2010) found that over 80 UK institutions operate some form of peer mentoring. However, content analysis indicates that virtual based schemes are a rarity. Only nine institutions appeared to be using some form of virtual support, the majority of which supplemented face to face sessions by email contact. Therefore could an online model be more beneficial in a peer mentoring context?

This series of lightning talks will examine four different perspectives in relation to the introduction of peer mentoring in a virtual form. The individuals will succinctly link their experiences to the idiomatic expressions below and pose their own questions as the starting point for what is anticipated to be a lively discussion topic.

Talk 1: "As keen as mustard" by Emma Lejk, Programme Leader for BSc (Hons) Computer Science, Northumbria University, who will focus on experiences with a peer mentoring pilot scheme.

Talk 2: "You can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink" by Wendy Beautyman, Lecturer at Northumbria University and Peer Mentoring supervisor and trainer.

Talk 3: "A man's home is his castle" by Jenna Tudor, Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering and Product Design Technology focussing on student response to a virtual peer mentoring scheme

Talk 4: "Bridge the gap" by Joanne Smailes, Teacher Fellow and Programme Director for Staff and Student Enhancement, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University who will outline student response to a virtual mentoring scheme.

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Presenters

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