

5.0 SUPPLY - ISSUES AND FINDINGS

5.1. Mentoring in Wales - The Welsh situation

Building on the LEED Unit's existing knowledge, a comprehensive review of literature on mentoring programmes in Wales was undertaken. In line with the terms of reference, the focus is on mentoring programmes for people in employment.

A recent report by the WMC²⁴ clearly shows that mentoring in Wales is "patchy, frail and not well understood." Mentoring takes many different forms in Wales including; publicly funded mentoring programmes, mentoring used within organisations (large and small) as part of staff and career development, private consultants offering mentoring support and training, informal mentoring between colleagues, and business advice networks in which mentoring plays a part.²⁵

On the supply side there are a number of publicly funded mentoring programmes in Wales. The main mentoring programmes for businesses in Wales are the DEIN's (formerly WDA's) programme 'Mentor Wales', and the 'High Growth' programme - funded by the WDA (now DEIN) and managed by private sector provider Entrepreneur Action. Both target businesses with growth potential, but the latter focuses on start-up businesses, or businesses less than 12 months old. They both provide a combination of mentoring and specialist business advice. In addition to these programmes the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) designed and delivered a mentoring programme (funded by ELWa, now DELLS) targeted at individuals working in the voluntary sector. The Magic of Mentoring programme focuses on using mentoring as a method/tool to increase management skills. In conjunction with a consultant they developed a comprehensive handbook to support the programme. 10 mentors and 10 mentees were recruited onto this programme. As this was a pilot programme, focused on supporting individuals from the voluntary sector whose management needs are distinct from other sectors²⁶ the programme was not included in Figure 2 detailing programmes supporting private sector SMEs. However, the consultation with WCVA and the support material they supplied provided valuable insights into programme design.

From our own research²⁷ there are a multitude of private sector organisations in Wales offering mentoring to small businesses as part of their portfolio of services. A not-for-profit organisation, Coaching and Mentoring Wales (CAMW), has recently been set up. The aims of CAMW are to develop, co-ordinate and promote the provision of coaching and mentoring services in Wales. CAMW is a growing network of those providing and using coaching and mentoring services in Wales. CAMW offers: advice and guidance on coaching and mentoring issues, promotion and monitoring of professional standards, collation and dissemination of best practice, networking opportunities, and professional support for practising coaches and mentors.

As with any service provider, one would expect huge variation in the quality and level of services available. This was reinforced in the focus group held with SME managers, where there was a combination of good and bad experiences of mentoring from the private and public sectors. Understandably, those who had a negative experience of mentoring are unlikely to pursue it again. **This raises the important issue of the need for quality standards for mentoring to be introduced to Wales in a coherent manner.**

5.2. Examples of mentoring programmes

There are a multitude of organisations that provide mentoring on an ad hoc basis or informally as part of their day-to-day jobs such as Design Wales (Government funded design advisory service). Our own research²⁸ revealed that there are a number of private sector organisations who provide mentoring services but not as part of an integrated programme. This has been combined with other research including the Cyfenter report and the WMC report 'Mentoring in Wales' (a list of these types of organisations can be found in Appendix 2). Mentoring also takes place informally in the work-place, but this is much harder to measure.

Based on the broad definition of mentoring outlined in chapter 3 of this report, we identified 14 mentoring programmes to research in greater detail, 4 of which are based in Wales. The desk research also revealed a number of international examples of best practice in mentoring, some of which can be found in the Wales European Centre's publication, Mentoring for Business: Review of EU and International Practice²⁹.

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed for the 14 mentoring programmes. The results of the questionnaire are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Mentoring Programmes in Wales and abroad.

WALES

Providers	Enterprise Agencies & others (funded by DEIN & DELLS)	DEIN (formerly WDA)
Programme Name	General Services to Business (formerly GBAS)**	Mentor Wales
How do you recruit Mentees	Own Network, Business Eye	Own Marketing, Business Eye, Enterprise Agencies
Cost to Mentee	FOC state aid restrictions apply	First 3 meeting FOC, £250 per day
Qualifying Levels	In business for 3 months with potential to grow	Growth potential
Number of Mentees per year	Not known	124 since 1998
Number of active mentors	Approximately 300	12 East Wales 4 West Wales 6 Mid Wales 5 North Wales
Geographical Scope	Wales	Wales
Pairing Process	Programme managers allocates individual projects	Programme manager matches based on a diagnostic review
Programme length	1 – 3 years	2 years
Hours Allocated	6 – 72 hours approx	1 day per month
Frequency of visits	On a need basis	½ day twice a month
% of projects completed	Not known	Not known
Qualifications of Mentors	Business experience. Ideally NVQ 4 in Business Advice	Must be experienced business leaders, ideally should have run their own business
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	Not known	Training organised by programme manager
Supervision and quality monitoring	Individual visit records	Regular mentors meeting and feedback from mentees
Mentee Training	None	Programme manager gives advice at initial meeting
Project Measures	Economic	Economic and feedback from mentees
Administration of the Programme	Not known	1 full-time programme manager

*FOC = free of charge

**GSB is a general business advisory service and was not designed to provide a mentoring service. However, interviewees reported that they can provide mentoring support

WALES Cont'd

Providers	Entrepreneur Action	Finance Wales
Programme Name	High Growth Programme	Wales Spinout Programme
How do you recruit Mentees	Own network, Business Eye, DEIN	Own Network, Universities, Business Eye
Cost to Mentee	£5,000 paid in stages over 3 years	FOC
Qualifying Levels	Must have potential to grow to £1m within 3 years	Start-ups
Number of Mentees per year	17 SMEs at November 05 Target 38 per year	Target 28 per year
Number of active mentors	40	7 Spinout Managers
Geographical Scope	Wales	Wales
Pairing Process	Not known	Geographical
Programme length	3 years	1 year
Hours Allocated	360 (equivalent to £40k)	On a needs basis
Frequency of visits	Not known	On a needs basis
% of projects completed	Not known	14.4% success rate
Qualifications of Mentors	Vast range of experience, many have run their own businesses	Business, banking experience required
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	Not known	None, unless identified by mentor
Supervision and quality monitoring	Not known	Not known
Mentee Training	Not known	None
Project Measures	Economic	Economic
Administration of the Programme	Not known - they run a number of other business support programmes	7 spinout managers and 1 liaison officer
Other Comments	Companies can also access specialist advice – legal, etc as part of the programme	Within this programme they also provide incubation accommodation

*FOC = free of charge

SCOTLAND

Providers	Business Gateway	Business Gateway	Business Gateway
Programme Name	Womens one to one Mentoring	Women's Group Mentoring	Growth Mentoring
How do you recruit Mentees	General marketing, project executives	General marketing, Project executives	General marketing, Project executives
Cost to Mentee	FOC	FOC	FOC
Qualifying Levels	Turnover: £70 - £250k	Turnover: £20k - £70k	Turnover £250k+ with growth potential
Number of Mentees per year	500 between this programme and Growth mentoring programme	90 – 120	500 between this and Women's One-to-One programme
Number of active mentors	400 – 500 across the 3 programmes		
Geographical Scope	Scotland	Scotland	Scotland
Pairing Process	Computerised dating	Computerised dating	Computerised dating
Programme length	9 - 12 months	9 - 12 months	9 - 12 months
Hours Allocated	0.5 days per month	0.5 days per month	0.5 days per month
Frequency of visits	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
% of projects completed	80 - 85%	80 - 85%	80 - 85%
Qualifications of Mentors	Business experience	Business experience	Business experience
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	Regular mentor training every quarter	Regular mentor training every quarter	Regular mentor training every quarter
Supervision and quality monitoring	At training events, reports by mentee and mentor	At training events, reports by mentee and mentor	At training events, reports by mentee and mentor
Mentee Training	At initial meeting (1 - 2 hours)	At initial meeting (1 - 2 hours)	At initial meeting (1 - 2 hours)
Project Measures	Both soft and hard measures	Both soft and hard measures	Both soft and hard measures
Administration of the Programme	6 Project executives 7 Administrators	6 Project executives 7 Administrators	6 Project executives 7 Administrators

*FOC = free of charge

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Providers	Enterprise Ireland	Business in the Community	Invest Northern Ireland
Programme Name	Mentor Network	Business to Business Bridge	North Star
How do you recruit Mentees	General marketing	Encourage large companies to work with SMEs	General marketing
Cost to Mentee	FOC – Mentee receives a grant to cover cost €1,500	None, however they are asked to contribute to the cost of marketing	£450 from the mentee, Invest NI pays mentors fees
Qualifying Levels	Approved by Enterprise Ireland	10 – 100 employees	Invest Northern Ireland Clients
Number of Mentees per year	360	Over 1000 bridges have been facilitated	Information not supplied
Number of active mentors	Nationwide group quantity Not known	Not known	Not known
Geographical Scope	Southern Ireland	Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland
Pairing Process	A regional co-ordinator puts forward 3 best matches, mentee then selects	Programme manager selects - sometimes sectoral	Programme manager matches mentor with most suitable skills
Programme length	10 visits usually over 1 year	Variable - 1 meeting to 2 years	Not known
Hours Allocated	Approximately 20 hours	Depends on needs	Not known
Frequency of visits	Monthly	Depends on needs	Not known
% of projects completed	Approximately 95%	Not known	Not known
Qualifications of Mentors	Own business experience, sector specific experience	Experienced managers within larger companies	Experienced business managers
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	None at present, looking at best practice soon	Not known	Not known
Supervision and quality monitoring	None at moment, as per above	Not known	Not known
Mentee Training	Advice provided by programme managers	None	Not known
Project Measures	Monitoring of mentees feedback	Economic and strategic	Not known
Administration of the Programme	3 programme managers, 2 administrators	Not known	Not known

*FOC = free of charge

ENGLAND

Providers	Business Link Somerset	Various Business Links/ Enterprise Agencies	Business West
Programme Name	Business Volunteer Mentors	Business Volunteer Mentor	Coaching Programme
How do you recruit Mentees	Own networks Business Link Networks	Via the Business Link	Own networks Business Link Networks
Cost to Mentee	FOC	FOC	£100 per hour, clients are then able to reclaim 50%
Qualifying Levels	Any SME	SMEs may vary from region to region	Any SME
Number of Mentees per year	98	14,000 since programme inception	72
Number of active mentors	20 - 25	1196 mentors (40 contractors)	26
Geographical Scope	Somerset	England	Bristol and Avon
Pairing Process	Project manager pairs according to match	Via the regional providers – method Not known	Diagnostic, pairing based on perceived needs (difficult process).
Programme length	Up to 2 years	Various	Various
Hours Allocated	1 – 1.5 hour sessions (3 – 26 meetings)	Each mentor is asked to contribute 12 days per year	Various, depends on relationship
Frequency of visits	4 – 6 weeks	Not known	On a needs basis
% of projects completed	90% of projects will receive more than 3 sessions	Not known	97% expected to complete the programme
Qualifications of Mentors	Must have business experience, many run their own businesses	2 years business experience	Experienced professional coaches
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	Mentors must attend induction training sessions	Induction and basic training	Induction training provided
Supervision and quality monitoring	Via the project manager	Not known – vary from region to region	Close liaison with programme manager
Mentee Training	None on the mentoring process	Not known	Programme manager advises clients
Project Measures	Questionnaires are sent out every 6 – 9 months	Economic and softer management measures	They are undertaking research at 4 levels within this programme. Due March 06
Administration of the Programme	1 programme manager	Programme manager employed by each business link/ enterprise agency	1 full-time manager

*FOC = free of charge

NEW ZEALAND

Providers	Business in the Community NZ
Programme Name	Business Mentors New Zealand
How do you recruit Mentees	Advertising – Television, radio, newspaper, magazine, through 14 agencies, word of mouth and website
Cost to Mentee	FOC
Qualifying Levels	Companies must be trading for more than 6 months and less than 25 staff
Number of Mentees per year	Approx 3000 businesses per year
Number of active mentors	1263 throughout NZ
Geographical Scope	New Zealand
Pairing Process	Mentees apply on line, detailing requirements
Programme length	Open
Hours Allocated	Varied, most sessions last between one and two hours.
Frequency of visits	Varied. This is determined by the Mentor and client based on agreed requirements.
% of projects completed	Not known
Qualifications of Mentors	Experienced business leaders
Mentor Training (training on the mentoring process)	Professional Development Programme which involves Mentors attending 3 free half day seminars over 12 months. The seminars are facilitated.
Supervision and quality monitoring	Not known
Mentee Training	The Agency Manager explains to the client prior to assigning a mentor, the rules of engagement, roles, responsibilities of client, mentor and agency.
Project Measures	Client Satisfaction Survey – feedback monitored and results measured by KPMG.
Administration of the Programme	3 National Office Staff, 1 part-time website manager, 14 Agency programme Managers

*FOC = free of charge

5.3. Features of Mentoring Programmes

The vast majority of providers offer a package of business support programmes to SMEs, such as Business Link. These include private sector Enterprise Agencies who are subcontracted to deliver business support to local businesses by their relevant government agency, i.e. DTI. Some, such as Mentor Wales, are managed in-house by DEIN staff.

Programme names

It was interesting to note that, with the exception of the Business Link Coaching Programme and the GBAS, every other programme is either referred to as a 'mentoring programme' or is marketed as a mentoring programme on promotional material. Two telephone respondents from the enterprise agencies referred to GBAS as a mentoring programme, however the marketing clearly indicates that it is very much a general business advice service.

Recruitment of mentees

All organisations researched are funded directly or indirectly by the public purse. They provide various programmes aimed at supporting economic development within their regional areas. Each organisation communicates their support packages using various forms of marketing tools and attending networking events. In Wales, SMEs are also directed towards these providers by organisations such as Business Eye.

Cost of service to the mentee

The majority of the programmes outside of Wales are free of charge to the mentees. The service is provided free of charge, sometimes through the mentors volunteering their services. Alternatively, mentors' services are paid for by the various Enterprise Agencies (a combination of employed and self-employed staff). However, for those programmes that do charge SMEs, the prices are variable and are still partially subsidised by the public purse. For example, the Business Link Coaching programme provides a service at £100 per hour; the client is then able to apply for a 50% rebate. Entrepreneur Action's High Growth Programme charges the client £5,000 over 3 years for 360 hours. Mentor Wales charge clients £250 per day. Enterprise Ireland provides a €1,500 grant to allow the SMEs to access a package of 10 mentoring sessions over a 1 year period.

Qualifying levels for the mentoring service

The identified mentoring programmes target SMEs at different stages of growth. Some programmes specify levels of turnover and/or employment as qualifying criteria, whilst others require the SMEs to have 'growth potential'. Where turnover has been used this varies from a minimum of £20,000-£250,000. The mentoring programme in New Zealand provides mentoring to companies with less than 25 employees. In Wales the High Growth programme requires evidence that the company has the potential to increase the turnover to in excess of £1 million within 3 years. The DEIN's Mentor Wales programme also requires that established SMEs (generally more than 2 years old) have a potential for growth. Other SMEs in Wales that do not meet the above mentioned growth criteria are unable to access a free mentoring programme/government supported programme other than the DEIN's/DELLS' General Business Advisory Service which provides general business advice.

Number of mentees going through the programmes

The One to One Women's mentoring programme and the Growth Mentoring programmes in Scotland attract approximately 500 SMEs per year between them. In England it is claimed that more than 14,000 businesses have been supported via the Business Volunteer Mentor Programme (over an unknown time scale). Business in the Community in Northern Ireland claim that they have facilitated over 1000 relationships between large and small companies. These relationships vary from single meetings to long term mentoring relationships.

Our primary research shows that within Wales the number of SMEs receiving mentoring support is significantly lower than any other region of the UK, with only 34 reported to be receiving publicly-funded support a year.

Number of mentors

Business in the Community in New Zealand has access to 1284 volunteer mentors who provide the mentoring service to local companies. The Business Volunteer Mentor programme in England provides the service using 1196 volunteer mentors via regional Enterprise organisations throughout England. The Scottish programmes provide mentoring across their 3 programmes using the services of 400-500 active volunteer mentors. The 3 main mentoring programmes in Wales (Mentor Wales, Spinout Programme and High Growth programme) have access to approximately 74 mentors who are either self-employed or employed by the enterprise agency. The number of advisors'/mentors' available through the GBAS was estimated at 300.

Geographical scope

All programmes we researched are delivered on a regional basis, for example, the Business Volunteer programme is delivered via a network of 40 Enterprise Agencies based throughout England. Each agency is responsible for a specific area, which is determined by post codes throughout England.

The 4 Welsh programmes are available throughout Wales. The General Services to Business (GSB) is delivered by various enterprise agencies and others who are awarded contracts on a regional basis, i.e. South East Wales, West Wales etc.

Pairing process

Programmes adopt different approaches to matching up the mentor with the mentee. Some programmes match on an ad-hoc basis, whilst others, such as Business Gateway in Scotland, use an interactive software package to select mentors with the desired skills. The programme managers undertake an assessment of the mentees needs, and then input that information into the software programme. A short list of 4 or 5 suitable mentors is then presented to the mentee, who will then make the final decision. If, after a few meetings, the mentee or the mentor feels the relationship or rapport is not right they have a 'no fault' separation policy. The programme manager will again undertake the pairing process until both parties are happy with the relationship. The programme in New Zealand uses a similar web-based questionnaire to determine the individual needs of the mentee.

The programme managers at Enterprise Ireland, Mentor Wales and the Business Link Programmes carry out a simple company diagnostic review. Using a combination of geographical location, a skills matrix and the programme manager's knowledge of individual characters, they either allocate a mentor or provide a short list of mentors for the mentee to select.

Programme length

As one would expect, the length of each mentoring relationship varies, and the programmes are designed to accommodate this. The majority of programmes are encouraged to run for one year. However, a number of relationships within the voluntary programmes have continued for more than 2 years. The High Growth programme in Wales runs for a maximum of 3 years.

Hours allocated and frequency of visits

A number of the programmes allocate a set amount of hours or visits from the outset. Enterprise Ireland's programme provides 10 mentoring sessions over a 1 year period. The voluntary programmes in Scotland allocate half a day per month over a 9 to 12 month period. The Mentor Wales programme suggests a maximum of 1 day per month or 2 half days per month over a 2 year period. The High Growth programme provides up to 360 hours of specialist support. This can be a combination of general business support (mentoring) or the more specialist support such as legal or financial advice. However, the majority of the programmes are flexible and work with the clients on a needs basis such as the High Growth programme and Finance Wales Spinout programme. This typically might involve several visits over a short period of time and then no visits for a few months. Other programmes such as the voluntary programmes are restricted due to the available time of the mentor; they suggest 1 meeting per month.

Percentage of completed projects

Most programme managers questioned did not know or were not willing to release information about how successful their programmes have been. This highlights the importance for the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills of developing clear success indicators.

Programme managers primarily defined the success of their programmes based on individual projects using different criterion including; (i) the number of relationships that lasted the required duration, (ii) personal development for mentees, and (iii) an economic impact on the business.

Enterprise Ireland reported a 95% success rate of their programme. Business Gateway in Scotland indicated that 80%-85% of the relationships formed provided a successful outcome for the mentees. The programmes in Bristol and Somerset reported a 90-97% success rate. In Wales, the Spinout Programme reported a very low success rate of 14.4%. However, their success criteria is different to the other programmes in that they measure success by the number of companies who take-up the spin-out loan, rather than the mentoring relationship.

Qualifications of mentors

In the vast majority of the programmes mentors are required to have business experience (ideally mentors should have either run their own business or have high level managerial experience). Interestingly, none of the programmes require the mentors to have previous mentoring experience with the exception of the coaching programme in Bristol. This programme works with a network of experienced freelance mentors/coaches and places more emphasis on the mentoring/coaching element rather than the business experience of the mentor/coach.

Mentor training

Surprisingly, the majority of mentoring programmes do not support mentors by providing training on the mentoring process. However, Mentor Wales and the 3 Business Gateway programmes in Scotland *do* provide ongoing training to mentors. The other programmes rely on the mentor's business experience. Enterprise Ireland has very recently recognised the need for mentor training and is in the process of implementing a programme based on best practice. The Business Link programmes in England provide a one-off induction training course to communicate the ground rules with each mentor. Very little attention is given to the mentoring process itself.

Supervision and quality

Information relating to quality control aspects of individual programmes was difficult to obtain. Mentors/coaches on the Coaching programme in Bristol are supervised by the programme manager who regularly contacts mentees to gauge their satisfaction. Mentors on the Scottish programmes are provided with regular training sessions which include group supervision sessions with a mentoring expert. The Mentor Wales programme manager monitors quality via regular face to face/telephone conversations with mentees. Information regarding the quality of the mentoring service on the other programmes delivered in Wales was not available.

Mentee training

None of the programmes appear to provide structured training to the mentee on the mentoring process. A number of programme managers mentioned that they make mentees aware of the process, usually at the initial meeting. A few programme managers commented that they manage mentees' expectations at this first meeting by explaining the role of the mentor.

Project Measures

The vast majority of programmes are measured using a combination of economic data such as jobs created, increased turnover, profit, etc. The programme manager on the Voluntary Mentoring Programme in Somerset measures the success of each individual project by sending mentees a questionnaire every 6 – 9 months. The Scottish programmes also attempts to measure the softer managerial issues (subjective), such as the ability to delegate and strategic direction.

Administration of the programme

It would appear that the majority of programme managers also have other responsibilities in addition to these mentoring programmes. The only known exceptions to this are the Mentor Wales programme and the Business Link coaching programme that both have a dedicated full-time programme manager. The English Business Volunteer Mentor programme is delivered through a network of 40 Enterprise Agencies (Business Links). Each agency is believed to employ a minimum of one programme manager to deliver the programme. The Scottish programmes are delivered by 6 project executives and 7 administrators who work on a regional basis. In Wales, the Spinout Programme employs 7 spinout managers and 1 liaison officer. For the remaining Welsh programmes a combination of employed and self-employed staff are used to deliver the programmes.

5.4. Summary of mentoring programmes

There are a great many mentoring, coaching and business advice programmes available to SMEs throughout the UK and further afield. There are also a number of programmes which include mentoring as part of a wider programme. Many different groups of people have benefited from mentoring. Wide-ranging programmes exist from student mentoring programmes, social enterprise programmes and industry and sector specific programmes. The more popular programmes tended to be funded by regional economic development agencies or enterprise agencies, via Government grants or subsidised by European funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

For the purposes of this study we focused on what we considered to be the more successful programmes within different regions of the UK. In addition to this a number of international programmes were also identified.

The first key observation was the success and popularity of the voluntary mentoring programmes. These programmes are designed to work with both existing experienced business leaders (mentors) and the less experienced SME managers (mentees). The number of companies receiving mentoring support was very impressive; for example, in New Zealand, the voluntary mentoring programme provided mentoring assistance to around 3000 SMEs per year, and the Scottish programmes provides assistance to over 500 SMEs.

All of the voluntary programme managers were extremely enthusiastic about the benefits to the mentees, the mentors and the local economy and were very happy to share their findings. According to the programme managers, recruiting volunteer mentors from the local business community was not a particularly difficult task. A significant number of successful and experienced SME owner managers and departmental managers were keen to pass on their knowledge and experience to the less experienced managers. The mentors gained a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that they were able to 'give something back' and make a difference.

The second main observation was the clear lack of training and supervision provided to both mentor and mentee. The majority of programmes relied on the business experience of the mentor, and offered very little in the way of mentor training, i.e. the mentoring processes and techniques. Induction sessions were provided by all programme managers but they concentrated more on the administrative procedures rather than the mentoring skills and techniques. A small number of the programme managers provided training, but the majority still felt this area of their programme could be significantly improved. However, in a number of cases the lack of training was constrained by resources.

The remaining, non-voluntary programmes either charged mentees for the mentoring service and/or provided a subsidy. The size and popularity of these programmes varied greatly.

Mentoring in Wales

As the research progressed it became very apparent that the various programmes in Wales were not providing the same level of coverage as the other programmes throughout the UK. Mentor Wales and Entrepreneur Action programmes provide support and assistance to an average of 17 companies each per year, compared to 360 in the Republic of Ireland and 72 in the Bristol area alone. The Business Volunteer Mentor programme has provided assistance to an estimated 14,000 SMEs across England. The GBAS programme which provides business advice throughout Wales is currently assisting a great many companies (figure unknown). However, the programme is not designed to offer mentoring and is geared more towards companies who require general business advice on a specific element of their business.

Based on this research, Wales appears to differ from the rest of the UK in that the main business support programmes focus on 'business *advice*' as a development tool, with very little emphasis placed on mentoring per se. In England and Scotland the reverse is true: the balance would appear to more heavily weighted towards mentoring as a mechanism for developing businesses.

We would argue that, whilst business advice offers an important service to SMEs, if the Welsh Assembly Government really wants to develop a 'learning culture' and empower SMEs to sustain and grow their businesses, more emphasis should be placed on promoting the concept of mentoring as a development tool to the Welsh market.