



**Tools**  
for managing a  
blended mentoring relationship

# **Recommendations for Career Guidance Services**



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



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## Background

The project EMPIRE

EMPIRE stands for 'Empowerment through Mentoring to Promote the Importance of Real Work Experience'. The project was set up to test the effectiveness of a range of blended mentoring and e-learning approaches to enhance career guidance and development. Several test pilots in Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain were tailored to provide appropriate support to particular target groups. This approach was in direct response to concerns highlighted by the European Commission that either occupational information or the traditional matching of people and jobs were not enough to ensure positive outcomes. Each of the pilot projects has taken an innovative route in an attempt to achieve an ideal balance between direct and indirect interactions between mentors and mentees. Mentoring exchanges were also facilitated through a virtual learning platform (VLP) or social networks like NING along with more traditional face-to-face options.

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## Goals

The primary goal of the proposed recommendation is to help organizations dealing with career counselling and development to adopt blended-mentoring in their ordinary practice and avoid potential pitfalls.

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## Scope

Based on the observations of a range of blended-mentoring pilots run during the past year, we have compiled the following tips and recommendations. They are a quick reference guide for advice workers, mentors, trainers and "linked professionals" working in career guidance agencies, chambers of commerce and enterprises.

## Definitions

Throughout the recommendations, we use the phrase ‘blended mentoring’ to refer to a form of blended learning where the interaction between mentors and mentees is through a combination of direct, face-to-face contact and indirect contact, typically via email, web forums, and/or text messaging (excluding telephone communications as an extension of direct contact).

The term ‘mentee’ is used to describe the person who benefits from having a mentor. In the context of EMPIRE we planned to combine face-to-face mentoring with e-mentoring and other learning methods.

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## Structure

In part one you will find the reported benefits of “blended mentoring”. Part two indicates the learning points and manager recommendations for all career guidance services interested in blended mentoring. The recommendations emerge from the findings of the project evaluation report, observations in the field and extensive interviews with pilot participants, mentors and mentees.

## Part One: the benefits of blended-guidance for career guidance services

All programme managers involved in the EMPIRE blended-guidance pilots confirmed that this methodology IS highly relevant for organisations offering careers guidance services. We used their direct feedback to highlight the different advantages:

### Advantage: individually tailored solutions

‘Our pilot programme has provided tailor-made assistance to people that do need specific guidance and support. In general terms professional guidance does offer a “one size fits all strategy”. But in many cases job seekers are in special situations that need tailor-made, adapted responses. A blended mentoring programme can provide all these.’ (Spain)

‘Professional guidance is enriched by blended mentoring because it helps to tailor the assisted provided to personal needs. I would suggest this approach to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship as well as for the over 45s who are searching for jobs.’ (Italy)

To be supported by mentors sets an excellent (and free!) possibility for the mentees to analyse their vocational intentions and plans and to consciously realise the abroad acquired vocational experiences and key skills as well as to integrate them into their vocational short and long-term planning. (Germany)

### Advantage: deeper engagement with clients

‘In the case of mentoring the relationship is less formal and more human. It definitely adds something else, a human touch, to the regular career guidance paths. The guidance professionals cannot deliver a specialist service when they have the same procedure for everyone. It is possible to implement different tools but the work they develop is limited. Blended mentoring does provide a holistic “lifelong learning” approach to career guidance.’ (Spain)

‘In many career development services the guidance process is made by professional counsellors but is not specific to a particular field of the labour market. To enable an unemployed person to have a mentor who is a professional in their field of interest is an enormous added value. For example, if I’d like to work as a journalist, for me it would be great to have a real and/or famous journalist who would support me in my career path.’ (Italy)

With the sophisticated Mentoring Kit developed by the project partners (profiling documents) the mentors have the necessary tool to learn detailed data concerning the mentees` vocational background, technical skills and personal abilities and by this they are able to develop an individual mentoring concept. Thus the mentors have a good basis to support and advance the mentees` long-term objective purposefully. (Germany)

### **Advantage: “initiate’ complete newcomers to computing**

‘The project showed that inhibitions towards new technology and communication channels can be overcome. Moodle, webcam, links to MicroSoft Outlook and calendar functions can support blended mentoring.’ (Germany)

‘We focused on the courses for immigrants in how to use ICT and the mentors met their mentees in the computer rooms. The mentors provided support for the mentees to use ICT for different purposes (e.g. from sending an email to their family, to sending a CV online). If career guidance professionals used this approach, then they would motivate their clients to use ICT.’ (Spain)

In summary, we find blended mentoring profitable in any case and it makes sense to involve new methods of career counselling. It is also quite clear - and we expect that this is quite representative- that the people involved, including the mentors of our test group – have not very much to do with e-learning, the platform was used a bit cumbersome initially. Sometimes we had the impression that the initial technical problems were a good excuse to feel confirmed in all their prejudices against the platform. Nevertheless at the end of the pilot phase the most came to the conclusion that it actually made sense to deal with this new form of communication. (Germany)

### **Advantage: more qualified career guidance practitioners**

‘The use of the Mentoring Kit, the use of the online learning platform and variety of communication methods with clients promotes professional development’. (Germany)

‘By planning and implementing a pilot like ours, career guidance professionals would have learnt a lot about the needs and constraints of immigrants. In general, they notice the language problems and maybe (not always) the cultural differences... the mentoring would provide them with a lot more information to help people that need specific assistance. It would “open their mind” giving them the chance to better understand the profile of the people and adapt the delivery of the service to their needs.’ (Spain) ‘It helps a lot to understand that a professional counsellor cannot be a mentor for, say, a graphic designer. It would broaden their range of competencies to work with or to counsel their clients to find a mentor from their specific field of interest.’ (Italy)

## Advantage: improve employability of weaker labour force

'The improvement in self-assessment and the clarification of vocational aims certainly produced a positive impact on the mentees' employability'. (Germany)

'Blended mentoring is an innovative approach to promote employability and by networking and making it accessible to other organisations and careers services we are contributing to improvements in employability from a bottom-up perspective..... Even though finding a job was not a key performance indicator, two of the mentees were employed and they said that the mentoring programme was the reason.' (Spain)

'In the pilot programme mentees increased their knowledge of the labour market through advice received from people already working in their field of interest. Mentees gained access to a network of people employed in their field through their mentor and the stakeholders' group.' (Italy)

## Advantage: prevent loss of expertise in enterprises

by transforming blended mentoring into a mainstream tool for accomplishing important future human resources or staff development goals, including individual career development and knowledge retention.

'In our network there are many partners who want to use the Mentoring kit. Using the detailed guidelines they will know how to use blended mentoring methods.' (Germany)

'FiL will use mentoring for its clients. Safety officers and the trade unions involved will promote mentoring. The University of Architecture will use the Mentoring Kit with other students. The tax consultant mentors will use blended mentoring in their professional association.' (Italy)

'We will propose further projects and actions (at EU and local level) built on the success of our pilot.' (Spain)

## Part Two: good practice in blended mentoring – recommendations

The following section indicates the learning points emerging from the pilot project as identified by programme managers combined with the main elements of a blended-mentoring programme. Together they form a blueprint for careers guidance services and others wanting to set up blended mentoring programmes to support people wanting to enter and progress within the European labour market.

Feature of the mentoring programme	Generic blended mentoring recommendations Things you should DO	EMPIRE programme manager recommendations Things you should DO
<b>1. Setting up a blended mentoring scheme</b>		
Pre-planning	Make sure that there is a real need for a blended mentoring scheme where the benefits outweigh the costs	Decide that mentees will all come from the same client group, as this makes the scheme more manageable Ensure a minimum group size of 20 mentees for cost effectiveness. Do not to under-estimate the additional costs associated with blended mentoring as opposed to purely face-to-face mentoring: in addition to a project/programme manager, the platform required a moderator to facilitate online interactions and the use of the tools of the learning platform.
	Think through whether blended mentoring is the best solution for the client group	Allow flexibility for mentors and mentees to agree the optimum blend between face-to-face, direct contact and indirect contact
	Consider how mentors and mentees will be able to access the technology that is needed for blended mentoring	Consider reducing the cost of blended mentoring through the use of Open Source software, existing learning platforms and Skype Ensure that learning platforms are easy for mentors and mentees to use
Aims and objectives	Conduct focus groups to check out the real and felt needs of the client group	
	Identify broad scheme aims in three categories: psycho-social; career development; and academic or vocational development	
	Ensure that objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and targeted)	

Stakeholders	Ensure that the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders to support the programme are written down Set up a steering group including key stakeholders to advise the programme managers and to provide accountability	
Resourcing	Make sure that there are adequate resources to fund and staff the blended mentoring programme	
	Construct a draft budget before setting up the programme to identify all costs and income	
<b>2. Managing a blended mentoring programme</b>		
Project manager	Ensure that each blended mentoring programme has a minimum of one project manager	Appoint a project manager to look after the whole mentoring process from matching to support Appoint an administrator for the learning platform to support the project manager.
Blended mentoring handbook	Put together a handbook with all the forms and guidance needed to run the blended mentoring programme	Assemble a Mentoring Kit of various tools that can help the programme, especially a learning agreement, a tool for setting objectives, and mentor and mentee diaries.
Mentor recruitment & screening	Ensure that mentors have the skills to use online tools as well as face-to-face mentoring Put in place procedures for screening out mentors who lack the skills for the role	Define the set of personal traits you are looking for in a mentor and use this to guide recruitment Check out the ICT skills and motivations of mentors at an initial interview
	Ensure that mentors have up-to-date of the labour market and their vocational/professional area	
Mentee induction	Make sure that mentees are committed volunteers and that they understand the role of mentor and how to get the most from the learning platform	Check out the ICT skills of mentees at an initial interview Ensure that mentees are ready to learn and open to change Invest time and resources to make sure that mentees fully understand the programme
		Provide training for mentees so that they are confident in using the various functions in the learning platform

Mentor training	Identify the competencies required by mentors and check out existing skills before developing customised mentor training	Keep the training practical with as little theory as possible
		Include a session on the agreement of initial learning goals, and other goals and targets
		Provide some training in intercultural understanding when mentees and mentors are drawn from different communities
		Give mentors an opportunity to try out tools on the learning platform and written tool to be used during the programme in their training
Matching	Try to ensure that mentees and mentors have some say in the matching process	Try a social event (such as speed dating/networking) where mentees and mentors can all meet each other and then have some say in the match
<b>3. Managing the relationship</b>		
Blended mentoring	Ensure that the 80/20 rule applies, i.e. contact must be at least 20% indirect or 20% direct to be blended mentoring	Do ensure that there are initial face-to-face meetings as this helps later online communication
	Do make sure that mentors and mentees get to know each other and then explore expectations and goals	Encourage the exchange of home and family photographs as this helps the rapport building and informs the project manager
	Do insist that mentors and mentees identify prior learning as part of the process of needs analysis	Provide webcams for mentors and mentees to aid online interaction by allowing for body language and visual cues to be used
	Draft checklists and instrument that will be useful for mentoring pairs	
	Identify tasks and activities that mentors and mentees can undertake together	Make sure that project managers, mentors and mentees agree the subject of face-to-face meetings
	Consider how mentors and mentees will keep a record of their contacts, experiences and outcomes	
<b>4. Supervision and support</b>		
Supervision	Make sure that the project manager makes regular contact at the start of the mentoring relationship to make sure things are on track	Make sure that mentors and mentees know that the project manager is there to support them and to intervene if necessary to solve any difficulties

	Offer ongoing support to mentors and mentees through meetings and online methods	Use active listening and interview techniques to speak to mentors and mentees separately to identify any problems, make solution-oriented proposals and create win-win situations
		Contact mentors and mentees regularly and continue with short checks via e-mail, telephone, chat or in person if everything is going well
<b>5. End phase and exit</b>		
Endings	Ensure that there is an exit strategy including a final face-to-face meeting and possibly a celebratory event	Allow a final meeting where mentors can check whether expectations and goals were met
		Bring everyone together at the end to celebrate and reward participation and to ensure that all relationships ended positively
<b>6. Monitoring and evaluation</b>		
Monitoring	Set up procedures for monitoring the face-to-face meetings and indirect communications between mentors and mentees	Make sure that you follow up on any issues arising from the monitoring process
Evaluation	Identify key performance indicators with soft and hard targets to judge the success of the blended mentoring programme	Plan the evaluation carefully

## EMPIRE - List of recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** Organisations setting up blended mentoring programmes should take into account the good practice recommendations arising from the reflections of programme managers on the EMPIRE programme.

**Recommendation 2:** Organisations with responsibilities for delivering adult guidance services should consider piloting mentoring programmes to support their clients' progression into specific occupational sectors, job and professions.

**Recommendation 3:** Organisations with responsibility for delivering careers guidance services should facilitate the use of blended learning through the development of blended mentoring programmes that have user-friendly learning platforms.

**Recommendation 4:** In developing blended mentoring programmes organisations with responsibility for delivering careers guidance should use a set of tools, as found in the Mentoring Kit tested in EMPIRE.

**Recommendation 5:** Regional government and other funding organisations should consider the positive benefits of blended mentoring for unemployed migrants can have on inter-cultural understanding and community cohesion.

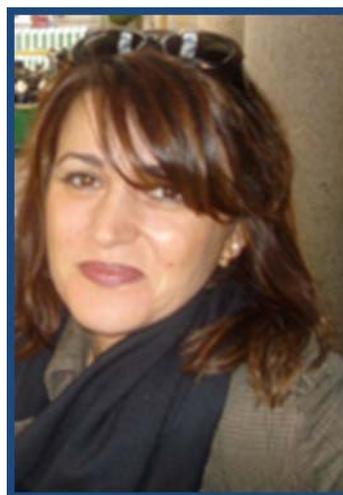
**Recommendation 6:** Regional government and other funding organisations should consider the positive benefits blended mentoring for unemployed people can have on their employability through access to the employment networks provided by mentors from particular occupational sectors.

**Recommendation 7:** Stakeholder organisations and partners involved in EMPIRE should build on the lessons of the pilot and roll out similar projects involving at least 20 mentee participants.

## Part Three: Case studies

In this section you can find a description of what took place in the blended mentoring programme and what the main outcomes were in the words of mentors and mentees. Here are an examples of mentorships from Germany, Italy and Spain. The descriptions is based on end-of-programme interviews with mentors and mentees. Names have been changed or first names only have been used to provide some anonymity.

### Juan and Katrin



Juan, the mentee, is a young Spaniard, who came to Germany for the purpose of a work placement in the commercial sector. He is a trained translator, and a wholesale and foreign trade clerk. His mentor, Katrin, is an ethnologist and educator; she has lived in many other countries (in Africa) and speaks a great number of languages. She is very experienced with participants on many levels and wanted to use the opportunity as a mentor- in addition to her normal responsibilities for participants (socio-cultural programme, language course, finding the work placement) - to refine the vocational profile a little more with the mentee and to develop further prospects.

Juan's initial objective was to stay in Germany after the work placement and get a job, to adjust his applications corresponding to the specifications of the work offers and to initiate whatever is needed. During the mentoring process and the process of profiling - documents, applications and searches it turned out, however, that Juan, despite his training, in fact did not really know what career path he wants to follow. His objective was redefined in order to ascertain exactly what kind of professional life he would like. Juan felt very much supported by his mentor in implementing his objectives: "I was able to concentrate on my wishes, interests and capability, my mentor has always listened to me. I could identify my strengths and experiences. We were able to disentangle the clutter, organise and prioritise." Juan finally departed for Spain two weeks before the end of the pilot phase, he took part in the remaining meetings via chat or phone and is still in contact with his mentor.

Katrin emphasised the following in her evaluation interview: "Especially in problem-oriented discussions it is helpful for me to get as many references as possible from the mentee (body language, tone, pauses, facial expressions), particularly when the communication is also hampered by the use of a bridge language, which for both is not the mother tongue... ..writing in a foreign language also provides an additional hurdle, since it is even more difficult than the verbal communication and contains additional inhibitions

against faulty expressions. It would be good if you could dock a webcam connected to the telephone to the platform."

## Giacinto and Silvano



Giacinto is 34 and lives in Prato. He has been working as textile technician for the last 10 years, often travelling to Eastern Europe for his company. He has many experiences in professional and personal life and his main goal was to rationalize his personal and professional resources and to optimize them in a specific field. In this period of economic crisis he is on measures called 'social mobility', because the company where he has been working is closing. He has started a Fil course in administration and tax consultancy to try to start a professional path.

Silvano is a tax consultant with his own office, and offered to join EMPIRE as a mentor to test the blended mentoring for the tax consultants' association, one of the EMPIRE stakeholders.

At the very beginning they did not know about mentoring, and the match seemed strange. Giacinto is very friendly person and not at all 'formal'. Silvano, in contrast, appears very formal, elegantly dressed and a person who can come across as a bit distant. However, when they were matched they were both happy and it worked from the beginning. Silvano used a lot of tools from the EMPIRE Mentoring kit. The mentoring relationship started in January and finished in June 2009. The mix was mainly 30% online and 70% face-to-face meetings.

Through the mentoring relationship, Giacinto explored many things, especially his personal and professional resources, and also the possibilities of the labour market in tax consultancy. Through mentoring he got great results, especially to change his view of the labour market, and changing his 'culture of labour' from dependent to autonomous. In fact, he is also considering starting a new business. He developed a 'multi-task strategy' and a 'multi-competencies identity', without feeling uncomfortable about it. He also considered developing his personal passion as a musician. The mentoring relationship was really effective in supporting him to 'realize' what he could do and how to do it. After finishing the course, he has realised the goals of his professional life and has started to work with some of Silvano's clients. He is also working as a musician and some work promoting new textile products. Giacinto said 'thanks to my mentor I realised that I could 'be' a multi-tasking and multi-competencies man, thanks to EMPIRE.'

## Clara and Sophie



During the recruitment process Alicia Hitos from IMFE interviewed a potential mentor, Clara. She is an entrepreneur of Mexican origin with a degree in Economics. She started a business supplying special roofs and was very interested in helping someone to become an entrepreneur.

We feared that she would be disappointed if we did not match her with someone that would like to start a business venture. Finally, we decided to match Clara with Sophie, a French mentee. Our decision was based on a high level of education of the mentee (even though we were aware that she had to improve her language skills a lot). The speed networking session also helped to confirm our decision to match them with each other: it seemed to work.

As you can see in the picture from the first mentoring session, there was good rapport from the outset. Sophie, who gained her degree in France in Special Education, talked about the possibility of starting a business offering schools her services, but she was reluctant to take this idea forward because of her limited Spanish (Sophie's husband is also French and they speak French at home).

After some mentoring sessions in which the problems with the exchange of information were located in communication and language skills, Sophie decided to open a costume jewellery shop ("Cuentas y Pico", shown in the picture). Clara helped a lot concluding all the necessary bureaucracy (permissions, banks, etc) and Sophie opened the shop only four months into the mentoring relationship! Sophie said: "I would have never thought of this without Clara's support in the frame of this mentoring programme. Thank you!"

We cannot say that this was completely unexpected, but we can say that we were very surprised that such a great result was achieved in so little time! We can now state that skilled and motivated mentors matched with the right mentees can do a lot to promote entrepreneurship.