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WORKING BEST WITH A MENTOR

RELEVANT TO ALL ACCA QUALIFICATION STUDENTS

YOUR MENTOR IS POTENTIALLY A VERY USEFUL SOURCE OF SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE IN THE PREPARATION OF A SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS PROJECT (RAP).

The points outlined in this article should help you to get the most from your mentor.

PLANNING AND PREPARING YOUR RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS PROJECT (RAP)

Some of you will be allocated a mentor by your college or tuition provider. Others will have to find a mentor, who may be either an ACCA member or your employer or line manager. The points outlined below should help you to get the most from your mentor and thus give you a much better chance of attaining a good pass.

Understanding roles and responsibilities

A mentor is an experienced adviser who provides guidance and support while you are engaged in the process of planning, preparing and submitting your RAP. In addition, a mentor will provide Oxford Brookes University Business School with confirmation that:

- ▣ they have acted as your mentor
- ▣ the submitted project is your own work
- ▣ you participated in the required three meetings (normally lasting around 30 minutes each), provided a progress report on your Research Report, and delivered a presentation on your Research Report.

Your mentor is not required to have specialist knowledge of your chosen project topic, but should be aware of the guidance available to students. It is therefore in your own interests to ensure that your mentor has access to the guidance provided in the *Information Pack*, available on the ACCA website.

You should also note that your mentor is not involved in the assessment of your RAP. Your mentor is not your tutor, and it is not part of the mentor's role to coach you in 'how to pass your RAP'. You should not expect to receive detailed advice on the structure and content of your Research Report, the Skills and Learning Statement, or on the assessment criteria. All of this is available to you in the *Information Pack* and it is your role, as the student, to be fully aware of all this information, as it is designed to help you compile your RAP.

Your mentor will encourage you to think about what you are planning to do, and will ask probing and challenging questions, which will both test your understanding of what is required, and explore how you propose to meet your project objectives. Your mentor will also give you constructive feedback on what you have done or are proposing to do. In addition, your mentor will encourage you to consider your own strengths and weaknesses, as well as to reflect on the process of undertaking the RAP and on what you have learned as a result. You should look carefully at the attributes of an effective project mentor detailed in the *Information Pack*, and take them into account if you have to find a project mentor.

Understanding the requirements of the RAP

The *Information Pack* details all the requirements of the RAP. You should read it carefully and make sure that your mentor has had an opportunity to read it before you meet.

A MENTOR PROVIDES GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT WHILE YOU ARE ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS OF PLANNING, PREPARING AND SUBMITTING YOUR RAP.

THE RAP REQUIRES YOU TO REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AND HOW YOU DID IT, THEREBY DERIVING THE BENEFIT OF LEARNING FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES.

In the UK, graduates in applied accounting are required to demonstrate both technical capabilities and appropriate personal and transferable skills. The ACCA Fundamentals level examinations fulfil the required technical aspects. However, the professional examinations do not meet all the requirements regarding the personal and transferable skills; skills which a graduate would be expected to have on completion of a degree programme.

These transferable skills are those of:

- ▣ problem-solving, analysis and evaluation
- ▣ effective written and oral communication
- ▣ self-managed learning
- ▣ the ability to complete an independent research project
- ▣ information gathering and referencing of information sources
- ▣ using information technology
- ▣ reflecting on learning and its impact on future professional development and employment roles.

YOUR MENTOR WILL ENCOURAGE YOU TO THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE PLANNING TO DO, AND WILL ASK PROBING AND CHALLENGING QUESTIONS, WHICH WILL BOTH TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS REQUIRED, AND EXPLORE HOW YOU PROPOSE TO MEET YOUR PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

The OBU RAP, consisting of a Research Report and a Skills and Learning Statement, has been developed to bridge this gap between the outcomes of a professional programme of study and an undergraduate programme of study. Successful completion of the RAP will mean that you have demonstrated that you possess the requisite personal and transferable skills. Thus, on successful completion of the ACCA Fundamentals levels, the Professional Ethics Module, and the OBU RAP, you will be awarded the BSc Honours degree in Applied Accounting.

You should be able to explain this to your mentor. The OBU RAP is a form of guided enquiry; the learner (you) chooses a topic from an approved list, and benefits from the guidance contained in the *Information Pack* and that received from the mentor. The RAP requires you to reflect on what you have done and how you did it, thereby deriving the benefit of learning from your experiences. In this process, the mentor both encourages and supports your initiative while ensuring that the overall responsibility for learning remains with you. On successful completion of the RAP, you should be a more reflective and thoughtful practitioner, better equipped to meet your future professional development needs.

IN THIS PROCESS, THE MENTOR BOTH ENCOURAGES AND SUPPORTS YOUR INITIATIVE WHILE ENSURING THAT THE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING REMAINS WITH YOU.

THE MENTORING PROCESS CAN BE REWARDING FOR BOTH MENTOR AND STUDENT. GIVEN THE PRESSURES OF BUSY WORKLOADS, AND THE DEMANDS OF OTHER COMMITMENTS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU TAKE ALL THE NECESSARY STEPS TO ENSURE THAT YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH YOUR MENTOR ARE PRODUCTIVE AND SATISFYING.

Recognise and acknowledge the benefits of mentoring

As the student, you can derive a number of important benefits from the mentoring process. It can help you to improve your skills in critical thinking, as you have to explain, and justify if questioned, what you are doing or proposing to do and why. It can also assist you in developing reflective skills, as you will need to think about each meeting with your mentor and reflect on what went well, what didn't and why. The support and guidance provided by your mentor can help you to sustain both the interest and motivation required to do well in your RAP, plus you have the opportunity to develop independent learning skills in a supportive environment.

It may help you to think about the potential benefits of mentoring for the mentor. The mentoring process is increasingly one which is used by managers as a form of staff development, and thus the experience of mentoring may be useful to the mentor in terms of personal and career development.

The mentoring process develops communication and interpersonal skills, and assists in the development of skills used in monitoring and giving feedback on the work of others, which are very useful for those who have responsibilities for managing staff. Mentors usually find that there is a great deal which they can learn from the process, and knowing that this is the case may also help you to learn more effectively from your mentor.

Prepare and plan

The old sayings 'if you fail to prepare, then prepare to fail' and 'poor planning and preparation produces poor performance' are both true. Your starting point should be to read, and make sure you understand, the information provided in the *Information Pack* (and make sure that it is the latest version).

You should also check to see whether your mentor has a copy of this information, and either let them know where it can be obtained or provide a copy.

The OBU process model is a useful planning tool which you might want to use. You can assign dates or times to activities and establish a timeline for your project work, including dates of meetings with your mentor, which you will need to agree with your mentor in advance. You should think carefully about your choice of project topic, and of the reasons for your choice; your mentor is likely to ask you about this at your first meeting.

It will also help if you set an agenda for each mentor meeting, and set objectives so that you know what you want to achieve. You should also be prepared to take notes at your mentor meetings, and try to identify what went well or badly afterwards, and reflect on this. If you do use this 'learning diary' approach when working on your RAP, it will be of great assistance when you are writing up your Skills and Learning Statement.

The mentoring process can be, and usually is, rewarding for both mentor and student. Given the pressures of busy workloads, and the demands of other commitments, it is important that you take all the necessary steps to ensure that your interactions with your mentor are productive and satisfying for both of you. Taking due note of the points outlined will help you to gain the benefits from the mentoring process.

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