



British International School Riyadh

The art of mentoring

If university is proving to be the best time of your life, mentoring schoolchildren is a way to help other young people share your joy. By becoming a mentor, you can give something back to your institution, and offer living proof that the advantages of a university [education](#) far outweigh any worries over debt.

Alternatively, if you find student life miserable, have no friends, have a tutor who ignores you, and have pawned the television in order to eat, mentoring can be a way of finding at least a few people who still think you're worth listening to, even if they're only 13. Also, you usually get paid.

Unfortunately, if you fit into the second category your use as a mentor will be limited. This is because enthusiasm is one of a mentor's most important qualities. Being able to communicate the sense that you genuinely love every moment of student life is likely to prove far more inspiring than a detailed cost-benefit analysis.

On the other hand, enthusiasm isn't enough. You will also need to know what you are talking about, particularly when it comes to finance. In a mentoring or student ambassador role, you may find yourself communicating not only with schoolchildren but also with parents and teachers, too, and will need to be able to cope with a variety of questions - many of them to do with money.

If you have no idea how much your student loan and/or grant is worth, wildly over- or underestimate your weekly expenses, and don't have a clue what fees will be charged next year, you won't inspire confidence.

This is where you may need help. Your university will have all this kind of information and is likely to offer its mentors lots of other support, too, so don't try to go it alone. Always take up any offers of training, which will look good on a CV, and make sure you are not being overworked or underpaid. It can be hard to sing the praises of an institution when you feel it is exploiting you. Getting together with other mentors to discuss your experiences and compare notes on the stupidity of today's pupils can also be helpful.

Also, make sure you know exactly what your role is supposed to be. Are you promoting the idea of university education generally? The excellence of your particular institution? A particular course? A particular module of a particular course at a particular campus of your particular university?

Don't get so carried away with your promotional role that you take it as a personal slight if a pupil doesn't apply there and then to study exactly the same thing as you. While it is important to be able to establish a rapport with pupils, you need to see them as individuals rather than younger versions of yourself.

And while you may need to simplify your language and avoid showing off your recently acquired knowledge of astrophysics, don't feel you have to be down with the kids either. You don't need to describe a professor as "sick innit" to get across the point that his research is

Nor should you try to be cool. While an air of detached indifference and a slim book of poetry may go down well in the student bar, as a mentor you'll need to be friendly and approachable.

Soon, you may begin to enjoy being gazed at by a class of admiring teenagers more than struggling alone through a tricky assignment, but don't neglect your studies. Your enthusiasm for university will carry less weight if you never actually complete a degree.