



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London



Guidance for mentors and PCMs supporting international trainees

Juliette Claro
Lecturer in Education St Mary's University (2025)

Introduction

Mentoring trainee teachers is a rewarding and vital role in building the next generation of great teachers. Mentors are experienced teachers who capture the enthusiasm of trainee teachers and build the trainees’ pedagogical confidence through modelling, coaching and providing expert feedback. St Mary’s vision for teacher training is school partners, including mentors’ experience, excellent professional learning, and development opportunities.

With an increasing number of trainee teachers coming from all over the globe to gain qualified teacher status, there is inevitably a necessity to adapt our mentoring practice to allow international trainees to adjust and thrive.

Here are some areas to explore when mentoring international trainees:

1. Building relationships

Considering each individual story: The WHY

International trainees come with a breadth of experience in other educational settings, some may be teaching for decades in International schools which will be an asset to your team. Others will bring their own personal experiences in their training programme.

Each trainee has their own story as to why they are going into teaching. With your support, these personal experiences and motivations will shape their professional identity.

When do you ask your trainee(s) about their WHY?

- Tell me what made you want to teach in the UK?
- Have you always wanted to be a teacher or has this manifested later on in your life?

When do you get to know them?

- Where they live currently; if they are happy in their current setting;
- If they have family or relatives close by or at home;
- If they miss their family; If they are homesick;
- If they have hobbies, pastimes (gauging their well-being);
- Do they travel far to come to school?
- You may wish to share yours with them too!

When do they have opportunities to network with colleagues?

- Do they tend to stay in one place in your school (one classroom or office base)?
- When can they meet other members of staff to exchange?
- Who in your body of staff would be a great buddy to support them, or another trainee?
- Are there social events, community events they would benefit from taking part in?

2. Consolidating professional attributes

Moving from another country can be a very intense experience. Adding the layers of a PGCE and learning how schools’ protocols and expectations work can be overwhelming. It is important that they know that it is normal to adjust, and you are there to support them.

Considering gentleness in high expectations:

When does your trainee get to understand protocols around:

- Dress code
- Directed time
- School calendar events and their expectations to attend them
- Meetings
- Safeguarding
- Behaviour management
- What you expect from them in your meetings and prior to the meetings

Consider going through the school calendar with your trainee and help them clarify anything they are not sure about.

Consider exchange on school protocols in the educational settings they are familiar with. This may help you understand where they are coming from.

“International trainees come with a breadth of experience in other education settings ... which will be an asset to your team”



3. Fine-tuning pedagogical approaches and classroom practice

Trainees bring new perspectives to our practice with new ideas, resources and approaches. It can be even more enriching when they bring their international personal experiences to the classroom.

As a mentor, the relationship you have with your trainee will enable them to teach more confidently within a new curriculum landscape they may not be very familiar with.

Considering low stake classroom coaching:

- When do you offer a chance for your trainee to co-teach with you?
- When do you allow your trainee to observe other expert colleagues in your subject and beyond to get a wider understanding of the curriculum?
- When do you offer live coaching in the classroom to support them if needed?
- When do you allow them to observe ECTs to help them see where they can be in 12 months?
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Considering gentle support with classroom language:

Your trainee may have an accent or intonation that affects students’ understanding and progress or they may need help with clarity in with their instructions.

- When do they have an opportunity to observe other expert colleagues who may help them with classroom language (consider colleagues who they can relate to professionally)?
- How do you correct pronunciation mistakes? (With discretion, humour and a smile is often the best way!)
- When do you offer live coaching in the lesson to support them?
- When do you rehearse classroom instructions or classroom language with your trainee?

4. Navigating unconscious bias

Quoting Emberton (2021), “Unconscious Bias is Human Condition” and it is only by self-reflection and understanding our own unconscious biases that we can move forward. Echoing this, [Duncan \(2021\)](#) refers to “Nine types of Unconscious Bias in the Workplace” (page 4).

9 TYPES OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

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|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Affinity Bias | 4. Attribution Bias | 7. Authority Bias |
| 2. Appearance Bias | 5. Gender Bias | 8. The Halo Effect |
| 3. Confirmation Bias | 6. Age Bias | 9. The Horn Effect |

Affinity bias

Gravitating towards people who have similar backgrounds, opinions, or even appearances.

Appearance bias

Judging unconsciously others based on their looks, weight, height.

Confirmation bias

The tendency to seek out and interpret new information in a way that confirms what we already believe.

Attribution bias

Correlates people’s actions to unrelated (or even untrue) characteristics (e.g., someone is late: it is because they are lazy without considering that they may have other issues to manage).

Gender bias

Unintentional associations based on a person’s gender, often stemming from traditions, values, social norms, or culture.

Age bias

Make judgments about individuals solely based on their age.

Authority bias

Tendency to place more weight on the opinion or idea of an authority figure.

The Halo effect

Tendency to perceive people in a positive way based on first impression or previous positive experiences.

The Horn effect

Tendency to perceive people in a negative way based on first impression or previous negative experiences.

As a mentor or PCM, you may consider your own unconscious bias and how you can support your trainee(s) in your setting:

- Where are your unconscious biases?
- Are there any you can identify that your trainee(s) may be victim of in your setting?
- How can we make sure they are fully supported and integrated within the school community?

5. Support with future employment

In order to work in the UK, international trainees will require a visa. Navigating visa applications and administration on top of filling application forms can be daunting. St Mary's offers support for schools willing to employ international ECTs on how to navigate sponsorship and visas. See our partnership portal for more information.

As a mentor or PCM, your support with employability and careers is vital.

- When do you offer support with interviews?
- When do you offer support on what your school expects to see in your application forms?
- When do you offer to proof read their letter of application?
- Who do you need speak to in order to employ your international trainee as an ECT?
- How do you know if they are confident with the process with visas and sponsorship?



Conclusion

Every trainee is different, and support from mentors and PCMs may vary. International trainees are extremely resilient and determined to complete their course and become a qualified teacher in the UK.

Mentors are the pillars of their journey in UK education. Supporting them in navigating changes in educational systems, culture and protocols relies on building powerful professional relationships.

“Mentors are the pillars of the trainees’ journey in UK education.”

References

Duncan K. (2021) *Identifying 9 Types of Unconscious Bias at Work*. Available at [Identifying-9-Types-of-Unconscious-Bias-at-Work.pdf \(spottsfain.com\)](#)

Emberton M. *Unconscious Bias Is a Human Condition*. Perm J. 2021 May;25:20.199. doi: 10.7812/TPP/20.199. PMID: 33970098; PMCID: PMC8784036. Available at [Unconscious Bias Is a Human Condition | The Permanente Journal](#)

Department for Education 2018. [International teacher recruitment: understanding the attitudes and experiences of school leaders and teachers \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

St Mary's subject specific support with international trainees:

Supporting International MFL trainees: Claro. J, (2024) *Supporting International MFL Trainees* Language Show.

Supporting International trainees in Science.

International trainees' quotes 2024

Our areas of strengths:

- Being multilingual means we have more cognitive empathy.
- We have built-in resilience as we have to learn not only about the curriculum but also how to adjust to new culture and protocols in and outside of school.
- We are open-minded to new pedagogical approaches.
- From a neuroscience perspective, multilingualism brings higher cognitive control allowing us higher levels of task-switching, flexibility and planning skills.
- We take attention to details in understanding the curriculum and exams because they are new to us.
- In MFL we have subject expertise as native speakers.
- We bring new perspectives and expertise to our subject.



Areas where we need support in schools:

- Understanding how to build relationships “the English way” to manage behaviour and expectations: not too strict but firm and smiling. This is different from what we are used to.
- Adjusting to new policies and protocols with safeguarding and health & safety.
- Adjusting to new curriculum and exam specifications and planning lessons with the criteria in mind.
- Adjusting to the life of the school: meetings, working hours, dress code.



What helps use in schools:

- Modelling expert practice through observations of lessons, clubs, duties.
- Talking us through the policies and protocols (behaviour, safeguarding, code of conduct, health & safety).
- Building relationships with us to understand what we may struggle with outside schools (finance, accommodation, health, childcare).
- Direct us to expert colleagues who can support us with specific questions as we are not always sure who does what in UK schools.
- Talk us through the curriculum and why it is designed or sequenced the way it is so we can connect with National Curriculum requirements or exam specifications as it is not always obvious to us.
- Talking and socialising with other colleagues.



“
When the school ends, I don’t want to go home; my mentor is like my second mum! She really helps me to understand how the school works. She checks on me and answers all the questions I have. She has so much knowledge and patience!
”



Recruitment and retention: sponsoring overseas students and Early Career Teachers

Recruiting overseas ECTs why it matters?

- Increasing numbers of teacher trainees are International, particularly Science, Maths and MFL.
- Some have significant experience of teaching in their home countries.
- Routes to employ them:
 - » **Graduate Route** – You do not need to sponsor. No extra paperwork. Employment contract can only be for two years. After two years, they can apply for Highly Skilled Worker Visa.
 - » **Sponsor as a Skilled Worker** – You need to be a registered Sponsor. You need to do paperwork and pay fees. You can then employ them on a permanent contract.

Costs as of 2025

- **Fee for licence** £536
- **Each certificate** £239
- **Immigration skills charge** – not payable if swapping from student visa to skilled worker visa.
- **Visa application fee:** up to three years – £827 per person. More than three years – £1,500 per person (for shortage occupations the fees are lower).
- **Health Surcharge:** £1,035 per year.
- Total cost: £2,637 (or £775 if you get the student to pay the health surcharge and visa application fee).

Recruitment costs through agencies versus visas

In England, the cost of recruiting a teacher through an agency can vary. Typically, agencies charge between 15% and 20% of the teacher's first-year salary.

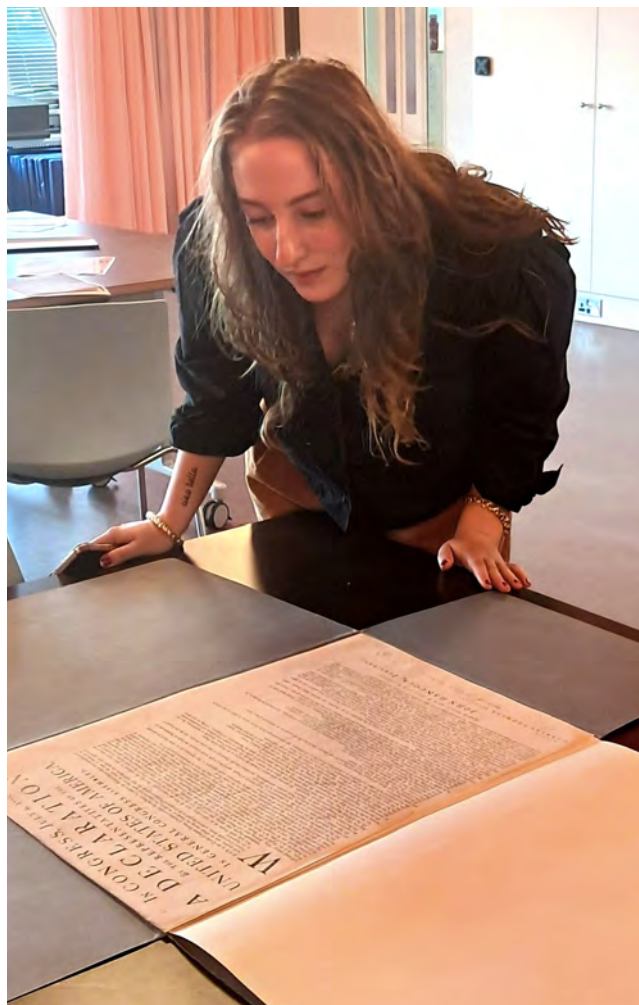
For example, if a teacher's annual salary is £30,000, the recruitment fee could range from £4,500 to £6,000.

Additionally, temporary agency worker as permanent employee, may be added a "finder's fee" which can be up to 20% of the teacher's salary for the school to pay.

How to navigate the sponsorship?

1. Apply to get a licence to sponsor. Someone needs to read all the guidance and submit the forms (less paperwork required for schools). Roles need to be allocated to put monitoring processes in place (mostly already in place, such as staff attendance monitoring, keeping records which will be in Single Central Record).
2. Apply for certificate/s. This is a fairly simple process (applying online).
3. Make a job offer. Check passport and monitor attendance at work.

History in the UK is a combination of the substantive, disciplinary, chronological, thematic and skills, which includes both facts and sources. Revisiting the spiral curriculum is essential using chronology usually helps.



American History trainee looking at the American Declaration of Independence on the History PGCE visit to The National Archives

References and useful links

- www.gov.uk/guidance/recruit-teachers-from-overseas
- www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers
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Visa information for recruiting teachers from abroad

There are two visa routes available to our new teachers from abroad when they are seeking school posts.

Always check the links to Government UK Visa sites for up to date information as this is liable to change.

1. The Skilled Worker Route

Students must be sponsored by an employer on the Skilled Worker “register of licensed sponsors”. Check with your Local Authority first – it is likely that they are a licensed sponsor and you can piggy back onto theirs.

To be eligible for the skilled worker visa:

- The job must have a particular skill level and **a teacher** is on this list of eligible job titles
- The specified Skilled Worker rate of £41,700 applies to teachers in England, according to the national pay scales
- This visa type can be extended and is a route to settlement
- When switching from the Student visa, they would (normally) be considered a ‘new entrant’ and hence the school does not have to pay Immigration Skills Charge for recruits switching from the student visa (**cost to employer** is the sponsor licence application and the certificate of sponsorship = **£1,715** i.e. £2,715 – the immigration skills charge of £1,000)
- The applicant has a fee to pay + Immigration Health Surcharge + proof of money in bank (**cost to the applicant is £7,605**)
- They can only be a ‘new entrant’ for up to 4 years of permission under Skilled Worker, including any Graduate Immigration Route permission (e.g. 2 years under GIR + 2 years under Skilled Worker, OR 4 under Skilled Worker if they do not use the GIR)

2. The Graduate Visa Route

Applicants must:

- Be in the UK at the time of application
- Have been awarded their degree, i.e. successfully completed their course within the original visa period, after studying in the UK (**this will be awarded mid-July**)
- UG and PGT visa issued for 2 years (to be potentially reviewed to 18 months)
- Application fee + 2 yrs Immigration Health Surcharge must be paid at the time of applying (**cost to the applicant is £2,950**)
- Applicant can work while application is being processed, as long as they apply before their student visa ends
- This is not a route to Settlement

Culturally sensitive mentoring and coaching

Mentoring and coaching across cultures



Understand that different cultures have different approaches to communication, trust, time management, hierarchy or perceptions of power, motivational orientations, attitudes towards rules or change and disagreements



Develop self-awareness to navigate cultural differences and leverage them to enhance coaching outcomes.

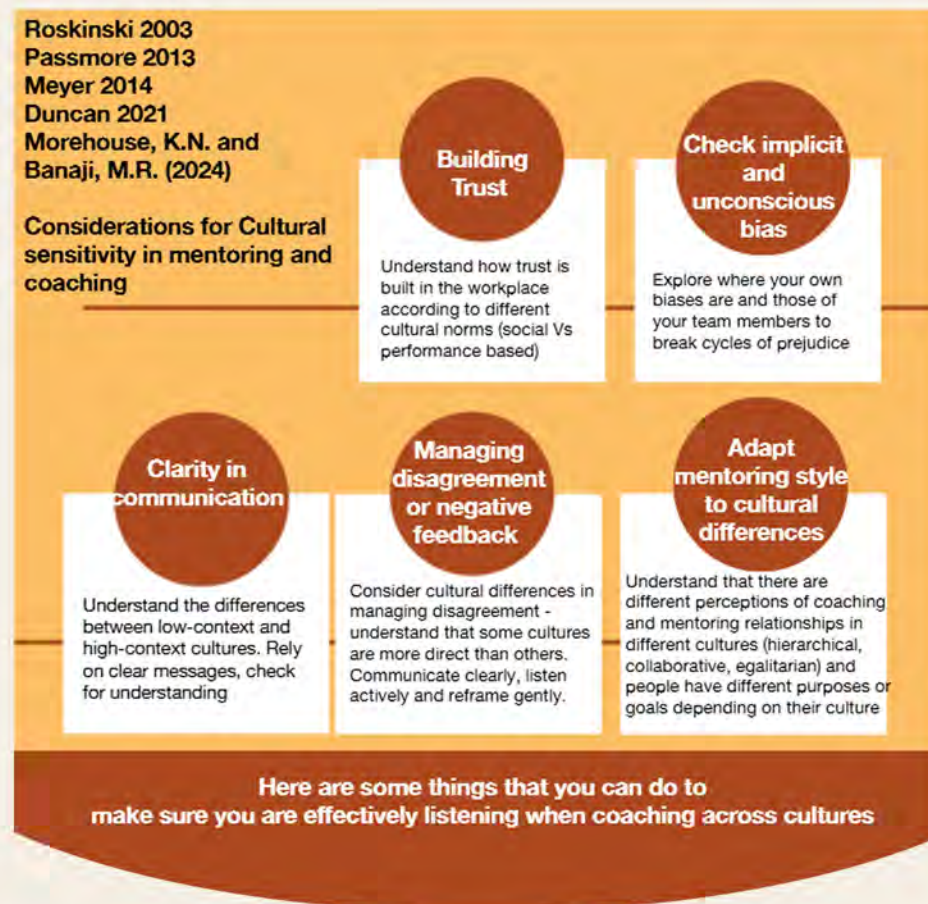


Develop effective listening skills. Take the time to learn about the cultural norms, values, and communication styles of your mentee/ coachee to help in building rapport and trust



Be flexible and open minded: adapt communication and feedback to cultural differences. Develop explicit mentoring habits, seek clarity, check for understanding regularly to avoid miscommunication. Reframe expectations as needed with empathy and cultural sensitivity.





References

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St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

St Mary's University
Waldegrave Road
Strawberry Hill
Twickenham TW1 4SX

www.stmarys.ac.uk

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St Mary's University Twickenham