



## The JP editor mentoring scheme

Taking up a new editor's chair is one of the most exciting moments in your career, but with it comes a whole raft of responsibilities which can be daunting and possibly intimidating.

Here at Johnston Press we aim to give all the support a new editor needs and with that in mind we have set up a mentoring scheme for all newly-appointed editors.

Mentoring is far more than a shoulder to cry – although that might be important. It is a formally structured relationship undertaken to enhance professional practice, personal knowledge and confidence and organisational development.

Our mentoring scheme ensures the following:

- ❖ You and your mentor will have a formal face-to-face meeting each month.
- ❖ The mentor will be a friendly voice at the end of the phone should the need arise, no matter how small the issue.
- ❖ The mentor will provide help as and when required on practical editorial matters like design and content.
- ❖ The mentor will provide quarterly reports on any training needs (if any). This will be fed back to both your manager and the JP Editorial Review Group.
- ❖ The mentor will conduct a sign-off meeting after 18 months – six months after the last formal monthly meeting.

The mentor will also ensure that the editor is fully informed on several key areas: These include:

- ❖ The Editor's Handbook: An A-Z Guide.
- ❖ The Johnston Press Editors' home page.
- ❖ The JP Editorial Review Group.
- ❖ The Blue Book (JP policy guidelines).
- ❖ Correct procedures for obtaining legal advice.
- ❖ Training needs.
- ❖ Trainee recruitment.

We hope that by putting this mentoring scheme in place you will start your new role with increased confidence, knowing that there is a support system in place to take you through any initial difficult moments. Your progress and continuing development are a key part of the company's plans and we believe that this scheme will give you all the support you need as you start to make your mark.



## The role of mentor

Taking up a new editor's chair is one of the most exciting moments in the career of any journalist, but with it comes a whole raft of responsibilities which can be daunting and possibly intimidating.

Because of this Johnston Press has set up a mentoring scheme for all newly-appointed editors. Mentoring is far more than just a shoulder to cry on or someone to whom the new editor can have a moan – although that might be important. It is a formally structured relationship undertaken to enhance professional practice, personal knowledge and confidence and organisational development.

Johnston Press policy is that group managing directors should inform the Editorial Review Group whenever a new editor is appointed so that an appropriate mentor can be put in place.

The main principles are as follows:

- ❖ The editor should be mentored by a senior colleague on an on-going basis for the first year of appointment. The mentor should normally be from within the editor's own division but not the person he or she reports to.
- ❖ The mentor and editor should have a formal face-to-face meeting each month.
- ❖ The mentor will be a friendly voice at the end of the phone should the need arise, no matter how small the issue.
- ❖ The mentor should be a sounding board and provide feedback on any changes planned.
- ❖ The mentor can provide help as and when required on practical editorial matters like design and content.
- ❖ The mentor will provide quarterly reports on any training needs (if any). This will be fed back to both manager and review group.
- ❖ The mentor will conduct a sign-off meeting after 18 months – six months after the last formal monthly meeting.

## Key areas to cover

Many newly appointed editors experience that defining moment when they face a completely new experience and ask: "What on earth do I do with this?" Sometimes it's just a question of knowing where to look for advice – but far too often in the past there's been no-one on hand to point them in the right direction. Hopefully the mentor will be able to fill the breach and, with this in mind, there are several key areas which will be covered during the course of the formal meetings.

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The role of mentor  
Johnston Press editorial development



The mentor will ensure the following key areas are covered:

- ❖ **The Editor's Handbook: An A-Z Guide.** The booklet is designed to serve as a guide for new editors and will be a vital aid in the first months in the job. Copies can be downloaded from the JP Editors' home page on <http://jptemp/StorySearch/Editors%20Desk/default.aspx>.
- ❖ **The Johnston Press Editors' home page** (see link above) provides a wealth of information which could be valuable to a new editor. Latest legal updates, Freedom of Information news, useful contacts and a list of all JP editors can be found on the site. Mentors might like to check this and occasionally introduce a conversation by referring to latest updates and items which could be of interest.
- ❖ **Editorial Review Group:** The Editorial Review Group was set up to safeguard editorial independence, review editorial policy and promote best practice and quality. It is made up of experienced editors, the editorial development executive and a divisional managing director. Its minutes can be found on the JP Editors' home page and new editors should be made aware of where to find them.
- ❖ **The Blue Book:** The mentor should ensure that the new editor has been introduced to the Blue Book, the JP policy guidelines. In the past many editors have pleaded ignorance on the contents of the book or have never had sight of it – the mentor should ensure that the new editor is fully acquainted with its importance early in his or her tenure.
- ❖ **Legal advice:** Mentors may well find that this is an area where they can offer sound advice to new editors. The first legal threat is always an uncomfortable moment, but the mentor may well be able to use their experience to calm nerves and point the new editor in the right direction. Advice on low risk issues can be taken from the legal department at the Newspaper Society – head of department Santha Rasiah (020 7632 7400). Where issues carry a high risk of action, advice must be sought from a group-approved libel lawyer. These include Farrer & Co (London), Hay & Kilner (Newcastle), Dibb Lupton & Allsop (Leeds), Foot Anstey Sargent (Plymouth) or Bannatyne Kirkwood & France (Scotland). Detailed advice on dealing with legal claims can be found in the Blue Book held by all managing directors. In general terms, serious legal issues should immediately be referred to an appropriate legal representative.
- ❖ **Training needs:** The mentor should acquaint the new editor with the importance of the training needs analysis and its key role in ensuring the development of staff.
- ❖ **Trainee recruitment:** Mentors need to ensure that new editors fully understand the JP policy on trainee journalists and the NCE. Editors should employ trainees who have already attained Part One NCTJ qualifications and new recruits should only sit the NCE on the exam date nearest their second anniversary with the company (or the second anniversary of starting work as a journalist with another newspaper). In exceptional circumstances editors can

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The role of mentor  
Johnston Press editorial development



enter trainees at an earlier date after liaison with the editorial training centre teams. All trainees must attend the NCE introduction, NCE workshop and NCE refreshers before taking the exam and trainees must be given a minimum of two half-days study time in the period immediately before the exam. All centres should fund two attempts at the exam and pay for examination failure reports. After this period the trainee should pay exam fees unless there are exceptional circumstances.

- ❖ **Editors' Forums:** The mentor should encourage the new editor to play his or her part in the regional Editors' Forums. The mentor should furnish the new editor with the key contact for the forum and, where applicable, accompany them to the first forum meeting.
- ❖ **Internet:** The mentor should stress the importance now placed on internet development within Johnston Press. Mentors should introduce new editors to the JP Digital Publishing home page (<http://jptemp/StorySearch/Website/default.aspx>) where a bank of valuable information and statistics can be found, including the latest performance of individual websites and useful guides to best practice.
- ❖ **Interactive content monitoring:** The new editor should be introduced to the content interactivity monitoring matrix and encouraged to use it to enhance control of editorial issues in the paper and website

## Mentoring techniques

This may be the first time you have taken on a mentoring role. If that's the case, or even if you've filled the role in the past, it's best to establish a few ground rules as you seek to be as supportive and helpful as you can to the new editor. One thing is clear – they need to make their own decisions, so beware of trying to do their job for them. You are there as a supportive friend, not a Mr or Mrs Fixit who will take all their burdens on your back.

Think of it this way – you're going to help them explore their needs, motivations, skills and thought processes as they seek to make real and lasting changes of their own.

With that in mind, here are some key tips to help you make the most of your role – and help your editor the most.

- ❖ Use questioning techniques to help the editor's own thought processes in order to identify solutions and actions of their own. You're not there to beat them over the head with a big stick when things go wrong – but by going through their thought processes and approach to certain problems you may well be able to guide them on the right path or identify training needs. Remember, you're a supportive friend who needs to gain the editor's confidence.

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The role of mentor  
Johnston Press editorial development



- ❖ Support the editor in setting appropriate goals and have methods of assessing progress in relation to these goals. Keep a record of your meetings and be prepared to check back so progress can be identified.
- ❖ Be prepared to listen a lot. The two skills that are essential for successful mentoring are (1) in-depth listening, that is, suspending judgment, listening for understanding and providing an accepting and supportive atmosphere; and (2) asking powerful questions, that is, questions that are challenging in a friendly way and questions that help the other person talk about what is important to them.
- ❖ Maintain unconditional positive regard for the editor, which means that you are at all times supportive and non-judgmental.
- ❖ Ensure that the editor is making progress and developing skills and is not developing unhealthy dependencies on the mentoring relationship.
- ❖ Evaluate the outcomes of the mentoring process, using objective measures wherever possible to ensure the relationship is successful and the editor is achieving his or her personal goals.
- ❖ Remember that key stages in the mentoring process are developing action steps and also providing opportunity for reflection and learning. Over the course of the 12 months – and certainly at the 18-month final meeting – it should be possible to look back and see where progress has been made and how a platform has been built for the future.

## What you must do

To do the mentoring job you must be organised – so here's a simple checklist to follow:

1. Make early contact when you are appointed as mentor. It's important the new editor feels supported from the word go.
2. Hold consistent and scheduled meetings. Don't regularly postpone at the last minute as that suggests the meetings aren't important – they are.
3. Keep records of your meetings to help with training needs and provide a quarterly update.
4. Keep a record of any problems and any action taken.

## The meetings

Prepare well for your first meeting: Make a list of things that you would have wanted to know when you were in the position of the person you will be meeting with.

Identify items for an agenda. List a few and then ask the editor if they have any items they would like to add. Remember that you have some key areas to cover – but nothing is more important than listening to the editor.

Plan for your next meeting – ask your editor if there are any particular areas they want

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The role of mentor  
Johnston Press editorial development



to cover next time. Help to make it their meeting, not just one where you bombard them with material.

Mentors have been described as a resource, catalyst, facilitator, idea generator, net worker, and problem-solver, and you may well find you can be all these things, but you are not the person with all the answers. You have experience, but the mentor role should not be one in which you "tell" another person what to do or how to do it. Use the meetings to share what you have done or learned but encourage your editor to make their own decisions.

## Privacy, honesty and integrity

There will be aspects of these meetings which need to be recorded, eg training needs and development, but there will be aspects that akin to a confessional. It is vital that you respect the privacy, honesty and integrity of your editor. They need to have complete faith and trust in you at a crucial time in their working life and there must be a clear understanding that some of what is said "stays in this room".



## Editor mentoring checklist

Please note that this checklist is to ensure that the editor mentoring process is carried out. Issues discussed may be private and confidential and, as a result, need not be recorded in this document. Please complete and return to David Rowell.

Name of editor .....

Name of mentor.....

Key discussion tasks	Completed
Introduction to editors A-Z guide	
Introduction to editors intranet site	
Introduction to membership and work of editorial review group and membership and attendance of divisional editor forums	
Introduction to 'Blue book' policy and procedure guidelines	
Familiarisation of JP pre/post publication legal advice guidelines	
Explanation of training needs analysis procedures and training programmes	
Explanation of JP trainee recruitment policy and NCE training procedures	
Introduction to website policy and procedures, including digital interaction policy guide	
Training issues identified	
Comments/issues raised in connection with the above	
Other issues	

**Actions agreed:**

**Signed:** ..... **Editor** ..... **Mentor**