**These exemplars are short extracts from the most recent submissions for RPEL (and will give you a flavour).**

**Exemplar 1**

The most rewarding mentoring sessions I underwent are definitely part of the practice I now implement, whilst the coercive ‘you will be my mentor’ approach is one I steer away from. It is only in recent years as a strategic leader myself that I have observed first-hand how much wider and complex mentoring is and that any mentor does not have to be in a position of authority or line management. Having worked alongside both trainee teachers and groups of Aspiring Leaders I have facilitated regular workshops on ‘Effective Mentoring’ and entrusted much of the input to come from such colleagues themselves. Given the processes and intricacies of mentoring are so diverse, my assignment just focuses on the practical realities of what XXX was covering. Numerous authors on the mentoring topic refer to how the relationship can be formal, informal, short-term or long-term. As a learning partnership it is one of the most effective ways to transfer skills and offer people the opportunity to learn needed skills that allow them to function at a more senior level. Reference is also made to how mentoring provides workplace learning in a less stressful environment.

Initial sessions at school centred around devising a framework of what constitutes an effective mentor. Cited examples include –

* Shows empathy
* Is often a role model
* Creates trust
* Is knowledgeable
* Asks questions, but invites talk
* Is non-judgemental
* Is accessible

Whilst such adjectives and characteristics of a mentor may seem straightforward, the definition of effective mentoring is vigourously debated. Darwin (2000) and Clutterbuck (2005) refer to the complex, elusive and dimensional nature of mentoring. My personal preference is for the simplistic statement made by Daresh (2004) which says “A mentor is a teacher, guide, counsellor, positive role model, wise and experienced supervisor”. The QIA ‘Skills for Life’ Improvement Programme states “A well conceived mentoring programme contributes to a culture of learning in an organisation and supports broad-based leadership and high levels of professional quality in staff. Such a programme for staff new to an institution helps them to develop into dynamic and resourceful leaders who can respond to the diverse academic and social needs of their colleagues and/or learners. Research also shows that mentoring programmes have the potential to decrease the number of staff who leave an organisation in their first year of practice”.

**Exemplar 2**

I would like to reflect on my own skills in relation to the skills required and identify my areas of strength and areas for development. I will reflect on and evaluate my own skills under the same headings.

**Building and Maintaining Relationships**

In my practice, I have always placed importance in establishing a relationship with my mentees. On initial thinking, I felt that this was an area of strength and was confident in my ability to build mentoring relationships. I have a good understanding of myself, an interest in developing others and mentees have commented on my ability to make them feel comfortable. However, on reading Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) and Zachary’s (2012) comments about the importance of maintaining the mentoring relationship, I now realise that building a longer term professional mentoring relationship requires more input. I have primarily been focused on the establishment of a good mentor/mentee relationship but hadn’t considered the importance of maintaining it or even developing it. In future practice, I will consider the use of a framework mentoring contract as suggested by Brockbank and McGill (2006), but one which is negotiated between me and the mentee. I feel that a contract that is constructed together by mentor and mentee, may not only maintain the relationship but could enable it to continue to develop.

Another point of interest for me was Zachary’s suggestion that mentors should undertake deep reflection as to their motivation to become mentors. In my most recent experience of mentoring, I had the motivation to mentor, as I had a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) for Schools Direct and ITT in which I was fully engaged. However much of my experience of mentoring in schools (prior to holding a specific responsibility for mentoring) is far from Zachary’s (2012) ideal. Many schools do not have a person, dedicated to mentoring. In most cases, it is the Deputy Head Teacher (DHT) or other member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) ‘bestowed’ with the responsibility and often the mentoring of students is received as another task and falls low down their list of priorities. In such cases the prospective mentors do not get the opportunity to explore their motivation for becoming a mentor or have even made a conscious decision to mentor. From my reading I realise how essential the initial commitment of the mentor is in establishing and maintaining and effective mentoring relationship. I believe that there should be an identified mentor in school and that they are given adequate time to prepare for their initial meeting with their mentee. In future practice, I would consider using some or all of the statements in Zachary’s (2012) ‘Mentoring Motivation Checklist’ as a framework to assess motivation. In my experience, motivation for many things can dip when in the midst of the term or year, as other priorities jostle for position. The statements are a tangible reminder of why the mentor chose to mentor and I think that regular reference to these statements would be a helpful ‘keep-motivator’ or re-motivator.

I had not thought of the act of listening as a skill, I have always made time to ‘listen’ to my mentees and considered myself to be attentive to their needs but had not taken account of how I was listening. However, from my reading of the (CTI’s) (2012) description of the three levels of listening I realise now that in most of my interactions with mentees I was listening at Level 1 and Level 2. I would often listen to hear what was being said and when something registered as a point for discussion, I would be thinking about how to address that point, which firmly fits with Level 1 listening. There have been times when I have been able to engage in Level 2 listening, for example when a mentee has come with a problem. However I realise now that effective listening needs to be with complete attention to the mentee and without interference from my own thoughts. Effective listening is an area I need to concentrate on and my aim is to move my listening from Levels 1 and 2 to Levels 2 and 3.

Body language is also something which I will now consider carefully. Until Session 3 of this module, I had thought of body language being natural and not something to be concentrated on. However after discussion on how small gestures can be perceived, I realise now that body language has the power to set a positive tone or a negative tone. I found Egan’s (1990) mnemonic SOLER useful and will keep this in mind in my future practice.

**Exemplar 3:**

**Professional Expertise**

Zachary (2012, p.103) suggests that ‘mentors must be familiar with the path so that they can prepare mentees for what lies ahead’. A mentor to a beginning teacher must therefore have the experience and knowledge base of what is required.

I have always been an advocate of modelling practice and in any role I have held, I have been keen to demonstrate that I will do what I ask of others and lead by example. However Zachary (2012, p. 104) points out that good mentors should ‘model good feedback practices and ask for feedback on (their) own feedback’. This led me to consider that being a successful mentor is not just about modelling good teaching, it is also about modelling the mentoring process. This links again with the establishment of a cycle of learning and the value placed on the process by the mentor.

With reference to *The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching* (2015) recommendation that a mentor should be able to use evidence from practice and research to guide the mentee, I believe a strength of mine is my experience and knowledge but also my willingness to gain experience and new knowledge. I am fully committed to my own professional development and see myself as a teacher but also a learner.

Many teachers are proficient in the setting of clear, achievable goals and this is something I do routinely in my current practice and I have always thought of this as an area of strength. I ensure that I have a clear understanding what is required of the mentee in relation to the standards. However on reading Zachary (2012) points on involving the mentee in goal setting, I now need to consider involving the mentees in the process and allowing them to take more control of their own learning.