

# **Mentoring**

## **for traditional arts organisations**



Photo: Jenny Sterling with SMG singers

**Report for the Traditional Music Forum**

**Jo Miller, June 2014**

## **Contents:**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. The Pilot Project**
- 3. Monitoring & Evaluation**
- 4. Findings from the pilot**
- 5. Conclusion**
- 6. Recommendations**

**Appendix 1 – timeline of project**

**Appendix 2 – meeting log template**

**Appendix 3 – data template**

**Appendix 4 – feedback template**

## **Abbreviations:**

**SMG** Scots Music Group

**SMN** Scottish Mentoring Network

**TMF** Traditional Music Forum

**TRACS** Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland

## **1. Introduction**

Many traditional arts organisations rely heavily on both paid staff and volunteers, who give a great deal of time and energy to the running of their group. However, it can be challenging to create space to reflect individually and collectively and to identify opportunities for development which may help practitioners and the organisation flourish. For tutors, who are often self-employed, the lack of a professional career structure and associated support can lead to individuals feeling isolated and having limited possibilities for connecting with other practitioners, sharing and providing mutual support. Not least, for those working in participatory settings,

regular reflection is crucial not only for the effectiveness of organisations, but also ultimately key to nurturing the best experience for participants and artists alike.

Mentoring provides a context for artists, administrators, volunteers and others to talk *in confidence* about issues which concern them, and explore ways of addressing these. Topics may range from specific matters such as dealing with a teaching-related subject, or weekly time-management, to communication with colleagues, or longer term career choices. Mentees choose how *they* want to use the time available, and this in itself encourages skills in prioritising tasks, goal-setting and taking responsibility.

ArtWorks Scotland<sup>1</sup> found that a majority of artists working in participatory settings wanted to be able to access mentoring, and ArtWorks' Action Plan sets out to "develop models for organisation based mentoring and sectoral knowledge exchange"<sup>2</sup>. The pilot project reported on here was established in partnership with Artworks, and the evaluation below, incorporates data which will contribute to a wider pool of understanding of how mentoring could work for the cultural sector as a whole.

## **2. The pilot project**

This project took place over 11 months from August 2013-June 2014, and involved The Scots Music Group (SMG) in Edinburgh<sup>3</sup>. SMG started in 1991 as a small initiative within the Adult Learning Project, an adult education organisation in Edinburgh. It is now a charity with a strong ethos of community-building, using traditional music, song and dance to bring people together, actively supporting and encouraging participants to gain the skills and confidence to take their music back into their own communities.

SMG was invited to host the pilot mentoring project as it is a well-established and relatively large organisation of its kind, currently involving around 30

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<sup>1</sup> *Artworks Scotland* <http://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/major-projects/creative-learning-and-young-people/artworks-scotland>

<sup>2</sup> *Artworks Scotland Action Plan* March 2014

<sup>3</sup> *Scots Music Group* <http://www.scotsmusic.org/>

tutors and 512 members in 2013-14. Also, SMG's activities are fairly representative of community-based traditional arts organisations in Scotland: delivering classes, developing performance groups, employing tutors and other staff, staging events, raising funds, leading projects and co-ordinating volunteers. SMG offered a useful environment in which to test the impact of mentoring and explore its potential for this and other traditional arts groups working along similar lines.

### **Aims**

- To offer mentoring to a community-based traditional music organisation
- To deliver mentoring in 1-1 meetings and also meet as a group
- To evaluate its impact for individuals and the Scots Music Group
- To report on the project
- To recommend ways of developing mentoring for the traditional arts sector more widely

### **Mentor and Mentees**

As mentor for the project, the author was responsible for helping to develop the proposal, designing the project, delivering the mentoring, creating formats for monitoring and evaluation of the project, attending meetings with others in the cultural sector, evaluating and reporting on the project. A timeline of the activities is in Appendix 1.

Jo Miller had previous experience as a mentor, including working with a young traditional music tutor with the support of Creative Scotland's mentoring fund in 2011-12. She and David Francis of the Traditional Music Forum<sup>4</sup> attended cross art form meetings hosted by ArtWorks to consider mentoring for the cultural sector. Both also took part in mentoring training led by the Scottish Mentoring Network<sup>5</sup> (SMN) and TED Training & Enterprise Development, and Jo completed the SQA unit on mentoring (DN3K 34).

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<sup>4</sup> *Traditional Music Forum* <http://www.traditionalmusicforum.org/>

<sup>5</sup> *Scottish Mentoring Network* <http://www.scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk>

SMG invited its tutors to participate in the pilot. 8 mentees took part in the project: 6 tutors, 1 administrator and 1 development worker.

### **Format**

At a planning meeting in August 2013, Jo Miller, David Francis (TMF) and Steve Byrne (SMG) considered the goals of the project for those involved, funding, lines of communication, timescale and evaluation. It was agreed that SMG would support those taking part in the project by reimbursing them for time and expenses. 9 tutors initially expressed interest, almost one third of the total employed by SMG.

A meeting in October 2013 was attended by 6 SMG tutors, the administrator and development worker, Jo Miller and David Francis, in order to introduce the function of mentoring, recruit mentees, outline the aims of the project, and discuss the timing and location of mentoring sessions.

Jo Miller then contacted the 8 mentees by email to arrange 1-1 meetings. 6 of these subsequently took place in Edinburgh cafes, and 2 in Stirling, at the mentor's home. A series of individual meetings lasting 1-1.5 hours were held between October and December 2013. A second series ran from January-February 2014. Mentees were told that they could also contact the mentor between meetings, and some did, by phone and email.

In April 2014, a second group meeting took place to conclude the mentoring element of the project. Mentees were asked to provide feedback in advance of this, which Jo Miller collated and summarized for the meeting. This final group meeting was intended to generate discussion between the mentees about the value of the project for SMG as a whole, and possibilities for continuing access to mentoring. An audio recording was made of the meeting to assist in documenting the discussion. The comments quoted in this document are drawn from the recording and from written feedback, and are used with permission of the participants.

Jo Miller gave a short presentation on the pilot project at an SMN/ArtWorks-organised cultural thematic mentoring network in June 2014. One SMG mentee, Jenny Sterling, also spoke at this event, summing up her experience as "what questions should I be asking myself?"

### 3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Appendix 2 shows the log which was used to record 1-1 meetings between mentor and mentees. Completed during the meeting, and signed by both, this acted both as a record of the first meeting and as a starting point for the second. In discussion, some mentees said it would have been useful to have an electronic version of the log, while others liked having a hard copy that had been signed by mentor and mentee, symbolising a commitment to the relationship.

*“There was something very nice about getting that in the post. It sort of meant more than the 27,000 emails sitting in my inbox”*

Forms used to collect feedback from mentees at the end of the project (displayed as both quantitative and qualitative results) are appendices 3 and 4. These were created drawing on existing formats for reporting on mentoring projects. The aim was to design clear, concise tools for monitoring progress during and after a mentoring relationship, and be something which could be easily used or adapted by organisations’ own mentoring co-ordinators. The evidence gathered from the pilot illustrates mentees’ experience, and is summarised below.

### 4. Findings from the pilot project (see appendix 3)

Mentees were evenly divided between early and mid-career or established practitioners:

Emerging (young people or students)	0
Early (recent graduates or early career)	4
Middle (mid-career)	3
Established	1

The data shows that mentees strongly agreed that they were comfortable with the mentor and felt supported by SMG. They agreed that mentoring was a good investment in their development, had helped clarify personal goals, improved other aspects of their work, and that they would be interested in further opportunities for mentoring. Neutral views were expressed

regarding expectations of mentoring, and progress between sessions. This last was partly explained by only having two 1-1 meetings in the pilot. One mentee said she made more progress after the first meeting because the second was in place as a goal to work towards.

I had clear expectations of the purpose of the mentoring process	3
The mentoring sessions were a good investment in my professional development	4
I felt comfortable with my mentor	5
Mentoring meetings have helped me to clarify personal goals	4
I felt I made progress with my goals between mentoring meetings	3
Taking part in the mentoring project has had a positive impact on my work for the Scots Music Group	4
Taking part in the mentoring project has improved other aspects of my work	4
I felt supported by SMG in taking part in the mentoring project	5
I would be interested in further opportunities to access a mentor	4

Scale: 1=not at all, 2=to some degree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

### Personal benefits for mentees

Benefits of the mentoring process for mentees themselves included having an opportunity to express how they felt about their work: the experience was described as “cathartic”, a “confidence boost” and “the first chance to discuss my work in a 1-1 setting since 1992!” It also gave mentees an overview of their current practice: there was “time to reflect”; they were “not confined to discussing SMG”; and “thinking about my career beyond SMG”. One described the relationship as “business-like”, and valued the structured aspect of the project. Some thought it important that the process was confidential, and valued having “a listening ear”. For others, there were direct outcomes for their teaching with SMG, as they “worked on improving teaching methods”, gained “more ideas for sources of repertoire to teach” and “got advice on challenges from someone with experience”.

*“Just somebody to say ‘how are you getting on with that’ and ‘this is where I’m at’...”*

## Benefits for the Scots Music Group

Benefits of the mentoring process for working with SMG encompassed organisational matters: “it encouraged me to refocus on planning”; “It helped get clarity re workload”; “helped in identifying and planning projects”; “planning ahead to overcome problems” and “helped in setting regular meeting with colleagues”.

*“I made up sheets for the tuning for the class, and now I’m not having to come half an hour early”*

*“[mentoring] was helpful in terms of thinking of different ways, within class, that I could make them more independent, so that they’re then able to go and do things without me”*

Teaching ideas were explored: mentees “worked on dealing with differing needs of learners”; “devolving more responsibility to classes” and “new ideas to try”. For SMG, mentees noted that mentoring had helped in “dealing with office frustrations “ and that they “liked knowing [after group meeting] that other tutors are interested in working more together”.

## Examples of change

Mentees were asked to give examples of personal or professional changes they had made as a result of the mentoring experience. Examples of these were: “improved communication with colleagues” and “prioritising regular meetings with colleagues”. Class-related applications included working on “ways to conserve energy while still being an effective teacher”, “teaching my class to do their own tuning”, and “challenging students more...I probably wouldn't have pushed them to do it had I not discussed this kind of approach in my mentoring sessions”.

Sarah Northcott, SMG tutor





## Frequency of mentoring sessions

Asked about the frequency of mentoring sessions during the project, opinions were evenly divided between those who thought the number was “about right”,

“once a term is *minimum*”, and “once a term plus ‘nudges’ ideal”, and others who felt “more would have been better”, and that “6 sessions [over 6 months] would have made a huge difference”.

*“I kind of struggled to put some of the changes in place and really spend time thinking about it...if I’d had to pop back in between, even if it was just an email if I knew I’d be there at a certain time, that would have helped me prioritise”*

*“I enjoyed coming out to Stirling: the train journey was a chance to think through what I would do...”*

**Venues for meetings** were found to be better if venue was less noisy/busy. In some cases mentees said they enjoyed getting away from their usual haunts. For others, time was more limited and they preferred venues closer to home or work.

**Skills of the mentor** were described as “well organised” and “managed the focus of the meeting well”. It was important that the mentor was a “skilled listener” and that mentees found it “easy to open up and talk”. Some thought the mentor’s “prior experience helpful” and that sessions were “encouraging”.

*“Meeting in a café made it really relaxed ...if there’s someone sitting on the other side of the desk there seems to be a difference in power”*

**Suggestions for the format of future mentoring programmes** given by mentees said the one-to-one relationship was central to the mentoring process, but could be in the form of: “one-to-one plus online support” or “regular phone contact plus occasional one-to-one meetings“. The group

discussed other means of mentoring such as via Skype, although some had found the online connection for this unreliable, that it might be intimidating for less technologically skilled mentees, or that other computer functions such as email might potentially be distracting during a mentoring session. Access to support between meetings was felt to be important, and that the pilot had “enough structure in the project for there to be continuity between meetings”. Finally, for organisations, some group meetings are “helpful to share ideas and experiences”.

*“Sitting in on someone else’s class would be useful in learning a few more tricks to have up my sleeve”*

### **Peer-to-peer mentoring for those working in the traditional arts**

This was discussed at the evaluation meetings and also in individual feedback from tutors. Considering how this might work in existing groups, mentees felt training for mentors was important and

that “time is an issue”, but that it was “practical and achievable for groups like SMG” and could save administration time. Established tutors could use peer-to-peer mentoring “to develop their practice” and as an “opportunity for mutual sharing”. For new tutors, it was suggested that new and established tutors could be paired up, and that “buddying” doesn’t require full-on mentoring. However, all agreed there should be a clear distinction made between mentoring and other forms of support such as buddying or coaching.

*“Mentoring gave me a sense of security that I am not sure I would have had if it was from another tutor within the organisation”*

### **The potential of mentoring to enhance the quality of artists’ work in participatory settings**

Mentees thought mentoring could help with the organisation of their work, bringing “a more cohesive, thought-through approach, to teaching”, and “encourage a more structured teaching plan over the session”. It could be “an

accessible way of improving skills without formal study”, “give confidence and highlight skills needed”, generate new ideas and “assist reflection on practice”. However, it was noted that the process required “committed mentees and suitable mentor” but that it “helps with figuring out where we can improve, and having the support of someone who can help”.

## 5. Conclusion: What mentoring can offer traditional arts organisations

The experience of the pilot project has shown that mentees felt they benefited from both one-to-one and group meetings, found mentoring to be an accessible way of improving skills, and that it could help with communication within their organisation, and strengthen the development of a community of reflective practitioners in and beyond it.

*“Many of us feel overwhelmed by the number of groups and networks we’re signed up to”*

Creating a sustainable mentoring programme requires long term commitment by organisation but has many potential benefits. One SMG tutor described the experience as “pressing the pause button” in an otherwise busy schedule. Regional and local networks should be encouraged to see mentoring as an investment in the maintenance and development of their organisation, small or large, in the work of individuals who serve it; tutors, administrators, development workers, volunteers and others.

## 6. Recommendations

- Create a short video and/or other materials about the SMG pilot to promote the benefits of mentoring to traditional arts organisations, politicians, funders and others
- TRACS<sup>6</sup> to appoint mentoring coordinator who would be first point of contact for advice, training and support
- Use existing resources and support (e.g. Scottish Mentoring Network)

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tracscotland.org/>

- Consider what mentoring resources tailored specifically to the traditional arts may be needed, how these will be created, and made available online where possible
- Develop clear guidance for peer-peer mentoring
- Regional networks to be encouraged to identify potential mentors for local groups. These need not be many, initially; “a small number of effective, high quality learning relationships has much more power to change the culture than a large number of marginally effective, low quality ones”<sup>7</sup>
- Traditional arts groups to be encouraged to select mentoring co-ordinators who will lead on mentoring for their organisations
- Develop guidance on what aspects of mentoring are best offered 1-1, in groups, online or by phone, and combinations of these
- TRACS to set up training for potential mentors and mentoring co-ordinators, possibly in collaboration with SMN/TED, and encourage mentors to complete SQA module
- Develop generic monitoring and evaluation tools, possibly in collaboration with SMN thematic network for culture
- Evaluation information to be sent to TRACS and SMN to collate data on impact of mentoring
- Traditional arts organisations setting up mentoring programmes to join SMN thematic network for culture

*Thanks* to the Scots Music Group, Traditional Music Forum, ArtWorks and the Scottish Mentoring Network, all of whom contributed to information and ideas included in this report.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Timeline of TMF’s involvement in mentoring to date**

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<sup>7</sup> Clutterbuck, David *After the Pilot: Issues in Rolling-Out a Mentoring Programme* (2007)

**2013** Informal discussions with TMF about trialling mentoring with traditional arts organisations

**2013**

May & June – JM & DF attend mentor training sessions organised by Artworks and SMN

June – TMF is awarded grant by Artworks for pilot project

July – JM completes SQA unit on mentoring (DN3K 34)

August – meeting with SMG development worker to prepare for project

October – JM & DF attend launch of SMN's thematic network for culture

October – introductory (group) meeting with SMG staff to meet mentor and discuss aims and format of project

October-December 1-1 meetings with mentees

**2014**

January-February 1-1 meetings with mentees

February – JM attended Artworks workshop on evaluation

March – JM spoke at SMG AGM about the mentoring project

March-April – collating monitoring & evaluation data

April – Group meeting with SMG participants and DF to reflect on and evaluate pilot project

May – JM attends networking meeting for academics working with the participatory arts

June – JM gave presentation on pilot project, with SMG tutor Jenny Sterling, to SMN/Artworks thematic network event

June – report on pilot project submitted to TMF and Artworks

**Appendix 2**

**Mentor/Mentee Meeting Log**

**(Scots Music Group/Traditional Music Forum pilot project)**

**Date:**

**Meeting number:**

<b>Mentee</b>	<b>Mentor</b>
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<b>Achievements since last meeting (or notes if initial meeting)</b> Establish purpose of meetings, Review ground rules, Establish priorities, Explore & record initial goals	<b>Today's focus/challenges/concerns</b>
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<b>Mentee's next steps</b>	<b>Mentor's action points</b>
<b>Resource requirements?</b>	

**Signed:**

<b>Mentee</b>	<b>Mentor</b>
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**Next meeting:**

**Copies to be retained by mentee & mentor**

### Appendix 3

#### Mentoring for traditional arts practitioners

##### End-of-project data (mentees)

**On a scale of 1-5,**

(1=not at all, 2=to some degree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree),

**please indicate:**

I had clear expectations of the purpose of the mentoring process	
The mentoring sessions were a good investment in my professional development	
I felt comfortable with my mentor	
Mentoring meetings have helped me to clarify personal goals	
I felt I made progress with my goals between mentoring meetings	
Taking part in the mentoring project has had a positive impact on my work for the Scots Music Group	
Taking part in the mentoring project has improved other aspects of my work	
I felt supported by SMG in taking part in the mentoring project	
I would be interested in further opportunities to access a mentor	

JM April 2014



## Appendix 4

### Feedback form for mentees

What have been the benefits of the mentoring process

For yourself	a) b)
For your work with SMG	a) b)

Give one example of a change - personal or professional - you have made as a result of the mentoring experience

Please comment on:

Frequency of mentoring sessions	
Venues for meetings	
Skills of mentor	

If you were able to access mentoring support again, what format would be most useful?

What potential do you see for peer-to-peer mentoring for those working in the traditional arts (e.g. between tutors)?

How do you think mentoring can enhance the quality of work we do as artists in participatory settings?

Please add any other comments or suggestions:

**Name:**

**Career Stage:**

Emerging (young people or students)	
Early (recent graduates or early career)	
Middle (mid career)	
Established	

(please indicate which category you are in)

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