



ASSOCIATION  
for **CULTURAL**  
**ENTERPRISES**

# **CULTURAL ENTERPRISES MENTORING PROGRAMME**

## **Prospectus 2026**

Written by Tom Dawson, Interim COO, Association for Cultural Enterprises  
v1.0

## Introduction

The Cultural Enterprises Mentoring programme facilitates **professional and personal development** for both mentors and mentees in management positions in the cultural sector.

The programme presents a mixture of **mentoring and coaching techniques** for up to six mentees and six mentors over a twelve month period.

Key features:

- Entirely **free** to members of the Association for Cultural Enterprises
- Delivered online allowing for the greatest accessibility for members across the UK, split across several sessions to support attendance
- **Training provided to both mentors and mentees**
- Subsidised travel for the Mentee to enable one in-person meeting
- Mentees and Mentors are matched using a proven technique to find the best compatibility, rather than based on paper applications or job titles
- Designed bespoke entirely with cultural enterprise professionals in mind
- Delivered by a qualified coach with the Coaching for Performance (CfPAC) qualification, accredited by the Institute of Learning Management (ILM)

## When?

All sessions are mandatory to participate in the programme

Mentees:

Introduction & Matching Days

**Tuesday 15th Sept 9.30am - 1.00pm**  
**Wednesday 16th Sept 9.30am - 1.00pm**

Mentee Training Session

**Tuesday 22nd Sept 11.00am - 1.00pm**

Mentors:

Introduction & Matching Days

**Tuesday 15th Sept 9.30am - 1.00pm**  
**Wednesday 16th Sept 9.30am - 1.00pm**

Mentor Training Session

**Thursday 24th Sept 9.30am - 12.00pm**

## Key aims - what will I learn?

The programme teaches vital skills in both the workplace and wider life for all participants.

### For Mentees:

- Help mentees identify key areas in their professional development, and work toward them with a mentor
- How to identify what's important to you in a professional and/or personal setting
- How to set and achieve actions, working toward your overall goals
- Improved confidence, communication skills, and personal impact
- Strategic thinking and greater articulation
- Feedback skills, both giving and receiving
- Increase opportunities for people to meet peers from organisations across the UK, and broaden their horizons
- Research shows that mentoring can prove to be one of the most valuable experiences in a mentee's professional and personal development by allowing a person a unique space to first clarify what's important to them, and then work toward a goal or goals with support

### For Mentors:

- Improve emotional intelligence, listening, and management skills
- Improve networking among senior leaders
- A stronger understanding of their own management and leadership style
- Coaching skills developed in your own personal style
- The immense satisfaction of supporting a mentee through their own professional and personal development
- Feedback skills, both giving and receiving
- Develop valuable interpersonal skills in a unique environment away from the day-to-day job
- Increase opportunities for people to meet peers from organisations across the UK, and broaden their horizons
- Don't underestimate how much a mentor can learn, not just about themselves through the process, but from their mentee

## Why take part in mentoring?

- **Management Excellence:** 93% of UK employers state that managers perform better after completing formal leadership development and mentoring training (*ILM/City & Guilds*).
- **Organisational Health:** 60% of UK businesses attribute improvements in employee wellbeing and cultural cohesion to active mentoring frameworks (*Association of Business Mentors, 2025*).

- **Refined Communication:** Mentors frequently report strengthened communication and feedback skills, leading to more effective and inclusive management within their own internal teams (*CIPD, 2025*).
- **Strategic Leadership:** The CIPD identifies mentoring as a "turbo-charge" for leadership; 94% of participants report being significantly better equipped to advance their strategic contribution to their organisation (*CIPD Trust, 2025*)
- **Senior Leadership:** 84% of CEOs in formal mentoring programs stated that mentors helped them avoid costly mistakes and become proficient in their role (*Forbes, 2025*).

No prior experience of mentoring or coaching is necessary.

You can use the above information to help support any application with a manager or senior leader. **The benefits of being part of a mentoring programme extend not just to the individual, but to the organisation as a whole.**

### What the programme is not

- Designed to provide specific expertise or training - you can find these in the Association for Cultural Enterprises' learning resources and events
- For people looking for role-specific advice. For example, if you are a retail manager and you want to write a retail strategy, you will not necessarily be matched with a senior leader with retail experience
- Designed to test mentors or mentees - there is no testing element, the programme is there to give techniques and space to explore areas of professional and personal development and how to tackle them

### Eligibility and criteria - How are participants chosen?

You must be an employee of a member of the Association for Cultural Enterprises to apply.

Participation is by application. Both mentees and mentors must complete a short application form, available on the Association for Cultural Enterprises website.

Places are allocated based on:

#### Mentees:

- Clear development goal or goals and a desire to progress their careers
- Motivation to take charge of their personal development
- Those who are managing or delivering a main aspect of their

#### Mentors:

- Clear desire to support the next generation of cultural leaders
- Experience managing and leading individuals in their careers
- An interest in a career in the arts, culture, and heritage sector
- Motivation to devote at least one

- job unsupported
- An interest in a career in the arts, culture, and heritage sector
- hour per week to mentee sessions
- Ability to commit to the introduction and training sessions

Where applications are high, prospective mentors and mentees with little or no previous experience of mentoring or coaching will be prioritised. Places are usually heavily oversubscribed so we are not able to offer every applicant a position on the programme.

### **How the programme works**

The programme is delivered online via Zoom, and features the following:

1. An Introduction to Mentoring & Coaching and Matching session (Two half days)
2. Training for Mentees (two hours)
3. Training for Mentors (two and a half hours)
4. Two check-ins during the year via online calls with fellow mentees/mentors
5. Subsidised travel for mentees to visit their mentors once during the year

More details are shared with participants once places are confirmed.

### **Mentoring vs Coaching**

*"I cannot teach anybody anything - I can only make them think" Socrates*

Mentoring and coaching are two terms used frequently and often interchangeably. But what do they really mean, and what's the difference? Definitions are wide and varied, but one simple approach to take is to think of:

*"A coach has some great questions for your answers; a mentor has some great answers for your questions"*

Coaches are focused on asking questions, and encouraging the mentee/coachee to develop their own solutions, while mentors are more likely to guide their mentee/coachee offering up their own experiences.

Both exist on a continuum, and this programme takes a holistic approach taking in elements of both mentoring and coaching. Being a mentor that uses coaching techniques is now a common and widely accepted practice.



Source: *Coaching Culture at Work - the difference between coaching and mentoring*

We have chosen the terms ‘mentoring’, ‘mentor’, and ‘mentee’ as we believe these are the most widely recognised terms, even if the techniques in this programme bring in coaching techniques.

During the programme both mentoring and coaching theory and techniques are explored in full. Those who wish to explore ‘pure’ coaching or mentoring can do so in further training and education.

### About the trainer

The Cultural Enterprises Mentoring programme has been created by Tom Dawson, Interim COO, Association for Cultural Enterprises. Tom created the inaugural programme for the Association in 2020, seeing over 70 mentees and mentors successfully through the programme.

Initially using an external trainer, Tom now delivers the training as well as writing this refreshed programme. Tom has an ILM accreditation as a coach with the CfPAC (Coaching for Performance) qualification.



# Email Template: Mentee Application (Line Manager Endorsement)

**Subject:** Professional Development: Cultural Enterprises Mentoring Programme

Dear [Name],

I am pleased to inform you that, following a highly competitive selection process, I have secured a place on the **Cultural Enterprises Mentoring Programme 2026-27**.

As a key benefit of our membership with the Association for Cultural Enterprises, this 12-month programme is provided entirely free of charge. It is designed to drive strategic leadership and is delivered personally by the Association's COO, a qualified coach with ILM accreditation (CfPAC).

Securing this spot provides significant value to our team. Formal mentoring is a proven driver of organisational performance in the UK, with research highlighting the following ROI:

- **Performance Impact:** 66% of UK businesses report a direct positive impact on overall business performance through formal mentoring (*Association of Business Mentors, 2025*).
- **Strategic Leadership:** The CIPD identifies mentoring as a "turbo-charge" for leadership; 94% of participants report being significantly better equipped to advance their strategic contribution to their organisation (*CIPD Trust, 2025*).
- **Operational Efficiency:** 66% of UK organisations credit mentoring with significantly boosting employee engagement and internal talent development (*Startups Magazine/ABM, 2025*).
- **Senior Leadership:** 84% of CEOs in formal mentoring programs stated that mentors helped them avoid costly mistakes and become proficient in their role (*Forbes, 2025*).

**Programme Commitment:** To ensure we get the full value from this member benefit, I will be dedicating:

- Two half-days for the online Introduction and Matching sessions.
- One two-hour training workshop.
- Approximately two hours per month of work time for mentoring sessions and peer check-ins.

I am confident that the strategic insights and advanced problem-solving skills I gain will directly enhance my current projects and our wider objectives. I look forward to your support as I begin the programme.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

# Email Template: Mentor Application (Senior Management Endorsement)

**Subject:** Senior Leadership Development: Cultural Enterprises Mentoring Programme

Dear [Name],

I am writing to confirm my participation as a volunteer mentor for the **Cultural Enterprises Mentoring Programme 2026-27**. This is an entirely free member benefit provided by the Association for Cultural Enterprises, delivered by their COO and qualified ILM coach.

This role is a high-level professional development opportunity that allows me to refine my leadership and coaching capabilities while supporting the professional standards of the wider sector. The benefits of senior staff engaging in mentoring are well-documented within the UK:

- **Management Excellence:** 93% of UK employers state that managers perform better after completing formal leadership development and mentoring training (*ILM/City & Guilds*).
- **Organisational Health:** 60% of UK businesses attribute improvements in employee wellbeing and cultural cohesion to active mentoring frameworks (*Association of Business Mentors, 2025*).
- **Refined Communication:** Mentors frequently report strengthened communication and feedback skills, leading to more effective and inclusive management within their own internal teams (*CIPD, 2025*).
- **Senior Leadership:** 84% of CEOs in formal mentoring programs stated that mentors helped them avoid costly mistakes and become proficient in their role (*Forbes, 2025*).

**Programme Commitment:** The schedule is designed to minimise disruption, with all sessions delivered via Zoom. The requirements are:

- Two half-days for the Introduction and Matching session and an additional three-hour training session for mentors.
- A commitment of roughly two hours per month for mentee sessions and peer calls.

This engagement allows me to bring advanced coaching techniques and fresh sector perspectives back into my leadership role here at no cost to the organisation. I look forward to your confirmation of support for this commitment.

Best regards,

[Your Name]