

Mentor handbook

– for mentors supporting students in higher education



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*Being a mentor is enjoyable
– it's a way of helping someone else.
It's particularly enjoyable when you see
the results! At the same time, it's also
a source of self-development.*

KIM, MENTOR

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Foreword

For many students, mentoring support in connection with university studies can be essential in order for them to be able to complete the studies they have begun. With this handbook, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) and Stockholm University aim to provide further support for this initiative, by providing practical advice on mentorship.

SPSM works to ensure that children, young people and adults have the right conditions to achieve the objectives of their education, regardless of their functional ability. This is done by providing special needs education advice and by encouraging or producing teaching material, running special schools and allocating government grants as basic support or for operational development.

Stockholm University has been specifically commissioned by the Swedish Government to allocate national funding to universities and university colleges to provide special pedagogical support for students, i.e. personal pedagogical support with the aim of removing obstacles or overcoming disabilities in studies. One essential condition for Stockholm University's commission in this matter is cooperation with other universities and university colleges and with other authorities and organisations.

This handbook has evolved from a popular handbook for mentors produced at Lund University, commissioned by coordinator Christel Berg. The handbook provides practical advice for mentors, drawing on the experiences of both researchers and mentors. This advice relates to preparing for the role

of mentor, beginning mentorship, setting boundaries and practical implementation, as well as how to follow up on and conclude mentorship. There is suggested reading for those wanting to examine in further depth ideas and theories about mentorship that have been tried and tested within industry and the public sector. There are also practical materials to use in mentorship.

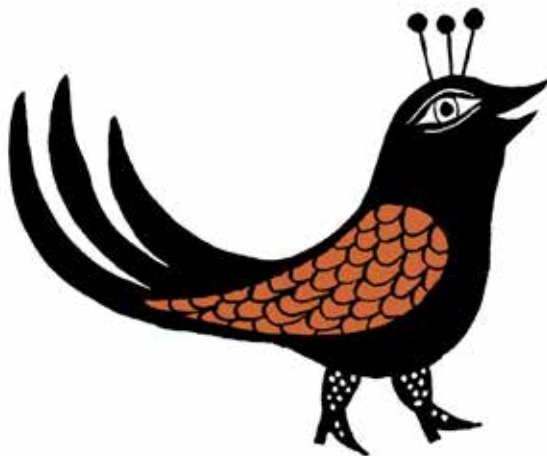
With this book, we aim to provide further support for what is now extensive mentorship offered to students at universities and university colleges. Mentorship is described by both students and mentors as valuable, rewarding and essential.

The writer responsible for this handbook was Johan Lundberg from Psykologifabriken. A special working party was set up for the work involved, consisting of Eva Mogren, Anna Larsson and Leif Näfver from SPSM, together with Monica Svalfors from Stockholm University, Monica Barsch, coordinator at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Janna Nordström, mentor at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and Ida Henrysson, mentor at Linnaeus University.

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Välkommen
som Mentor!



Welcome to mentoring!

“ Being a mentor is extremely enjoyable – it’s a way of helping someone else. It’s particularly enjoyable when you see the results! At the same time, it’s also a source of self-development...”

KIM, MENTOR

“ Without mentorship, I probably wouldn’t have completed my studies...”

ROBIN, STUDENT

Congratulations on choosing to become a mentor! This is a stimulating and rewarding role. Mentoring is an important part of the work involved in giving all students access to higher education. In the spring semester of 2013 alone, more than 350 students in Sweden received mentoring support financed by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools. Mentoring support is also provided through other sources of funding, resulting in a large number of students in Sweden receiving mentoring support every semester.

There are a variety of different reasons why students are offered mentoring support. Most often, this relates to disabilities while studying, for example in the form of difficulties planning and structuring studies.

As you are no doubt aware, no two cases of mentorship are identical. Students have different needs, and you and the student will build your own mentoring relationship with your own structure.

Although there are many differences, there are also intrinsic similarities in all cases of mentorship. This handbook will centre on these similarities.

For example, you can read about the best way of beginning mentorship, how to support the student’s autonomy as a mentor, and how you can evaluate your work. Some sections have exercises that you can carry out as you read, in order to get a clearer picture of the content of the section. There are also materials at the end of the handbook that you can use together with the student during the mentorship.

If you are interested in reading more about specific disabilities and studying, SPSM has produced a series of publications titled “Att göra studiesituationen tillgänglig för vuxna” (“Making studies accessible for adults”).

When you read this handbook, it’s important to remember that behind the impersonal term “student” lies a person with goals, strengths and weaknesses – just like you.

Good luck!

What is mentorship?

“It’s more important for the mentor to have an understanding of the disability and the problem than to know the subject.”

ROBIN, STUDENT

“I think it’s important to think about the role you’re taking on, what it means to be a mentor. It’s about understanding your task...”

FATIMA, MENTOR

Mentorship can be described as a conscious combination of two people, where one has more experience and expertise than the other, and where the goal is that the less experienced person should learn and develop in accordance with his or her own needs. (Translated from Sandberg 2007.)

It therefore involves you working together to develop skills that the student needs. Bear in mind that you should act as an advisor and a discussion partner; as a mentor, you are not a friend, a substitute teacher or a therapist. The competence consists largely of your external perspective of the student’s studies.



Written words: motivate, listening.

Today, mentoring programmes are common within academia. Mentorship has been shown to have positive effects, including by improving students’ study results (Larose et al., 2011) and reducing the number of students dropping out (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & Dubois, 2008). This handbook is intended to give you the support you need in your role as a mentor. You should also make use of the support available from coordinators or study counsellors at your institution.

As a mentor, you may sometimes find yourself doubting your own ability. Things may not go as



well for the student as you had hoped, or you may not feel completely confident in your role as a mentor. However, studies have shown that students who act as mentors usually understand other students' problems better than lecturers and teaching staff do (Monte, Sleeman & Hein, 2007). Mentoring support is based on the student actively seeking support himself or herself. As a mentor, you are therefore wanted. Furthermore, in a Swedish study, 96 percent of students with a mentor said that mentoring was – to a high or very high degree – an essential requirement in order for them to be able to achieve their study goals

(ALL 2011/11). It can be reassuring to bear this in mind if the work proves a little difficult at times.

There is another important aspect of mentorship to note: mentorship is also rewarding and stimulating for the mentor. For example, studies have shown that mentors are more likely to succeed in their own studies (Yuen & Chow, 2007).

Hopefully, mentorship will also be an opportunity for you to learn and develop.

Things to bear in mind before you get started

“ Think about why you want to work as a mentor. Think about how it can make a positive contribution, but also about how it can hold you back. Think about the role you have as a mentor...”

FATIMA, MENTOR

It's important you think about your own role as a mentor before getting started. Mentorship is a relationship between two people with different ideas, expectations, goals and ways of working.

One initial question to think about is why you chose to become a mentor. There are different reasons for becoming a mentor (Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2010). You might become a mentor because you want to help someone who has difficulties, or simply because it's a good thing to have on your CV. Whatever your reasons, you should be aware of your own motivations and how they can affect your work as a mentor.

You should also think about what you will be bringing to the mentorship. What are you like as a person? For example, do you think everything should be perfect, or do you think passing the exam is enough? What are your learning and teaching styles like? How do you reward yourself when you are satisfied with your study efforts?

Consider your own study technique and the challenges you yourself have encountered as a student. For example, have you had difficulties getting to grips with tasks, getting an overview of your studies or

setting the scope of a project? Issues such as these can affect how you are as a mentor and the things you notice in your student.

You should also think about how you deal with any of your own weaknesses in connection with the role of mentor. At the same time, remember the useful experiences you bring to the role. Perhaps you have acted as a mentor before, had a relevant summer job or worked as a sports trainer?

There are also practical matters that are worth thinking about before embarking on mentorship. How flexible are you regarding mentorship times? When will you have time to prepare for mentor meetings? Studies have shown that the time available for mentoring work is crucial to the success of mentorship (Lennox Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Quite simply, you and your student need to be able to coordinate your timetables so that you can meet together.

If any problems arise in the mentorship, do you know who to contact or where to find support? What are your expectations of the mentorship? What form do you think it should take, and how do you think it should work? As mentioned above, no two cases of mentorship are identical.



Written words: flexible, meaningful, qualification, patience, positive, time, informative, experience, good, study technique.

Thinking through these questions before meeting your student for the first time will create a good starting point for discussing the form your cooperation should take. At the same time, you must also be aware that your mentoring role will evolve as the student's needs change. Sometimes you may need to contribute structure, while at other times you should simply provide encouragement from the sidelines.

It's worth pointing out once again that your role as a mentor does not involve being a friend or a substitute teacher. Your role is to give suggestions based on your own experiences and to act as a sounding board. Your role involves motivating and supporting the student, based on the student's own situation and level. The student should carry out his or her own studies. You should be there to provide support.

EXERCISE

Write down your expectations of the mentorship.

Write down your experiences that may be useful within the mentorship.

Getting started

“You shouldn’t start working right away. Instead, the first meeting should be all about getting to know each other a bit, and having personal contact. Then you can start talking about how to structure the work and what your objectives will be...”

KIM, MENTOR

“I want to find out who the person is before beginning our cooperation. It’s important to me to feel secure and comfortable. And I think it’s important for the mentor to know who I am, too, more than simply the fact that I need help with my studies...”

ALEXIS, STUDENT

One tip is to start your first one-to-one meeting by talking about yourselves. Mentorship is based on mutual trust, so take your time getting to know each other. It’s important that you should both feel secure, and that the student should feel he or she can be honest with you.

Talk about your expectations and what you can both bring to the mentorship. Have either of you been a mentor or had a mentor before? Which study methods does the student like – colourful pieces of paper or bullet point lists? What motivates the student? This could also involve more personal things like competing in synchronised swimming, which means that you are not available in the evenings. Here, it will be helpful to you as a mentor to have thought through the questions listed in the previous section.

The most important thing of all is what the student wants to learn or achieve. This is the starting point for your work.

How will your work be structured? How will you get in touch with each other or meet up? Different types of communication offer different opportunities. For example, you can check how things are going by

email or text message, and meet up for meetings where you can work together more actively.

How often should you meet? Will you have scheduled meetings or decide on a time on a week-by-week basis? What counts as a delay, and how will you get in touch in the event of a delay?

It’s important to discuss these issues in order to reach an agreement. It’s better to take your time than to rush into things and risk running into problems later on.

What is the current situation? During your first meeting, it’s also worth getting a joint overview of the student’s study situation. What are the course plan and timetable like? Are there any exams that haven’t been passed? Are there any other activities that could affect the work? Does the student receive any support other than mentoring support?

Once you have gained an overview, it’s time to set objectives for the mentoring work.

MATERIALS

Checklist for your first one-to-one meeting.

Setting boundaries

“It’s important to establish the boundaries straight away. And to talk about them openly, and not take anything for granted. You can’t assume that the student understands when, where and how to get in touch...”

ROBIN, STUDENT

“The boundaries have provided a sense of security for me. If they have been crossed, I can always go back and refer to them.”

KIM, MENTOR

In order for mentorship to work in the best way, it’s important to set limits and rules for your work. In this handbook, this is referred to as setting boundaries.

What do you do – and not do – as mentor and student? You reached certain agreements when beginning your cooperation. These, together with the guidelines issued by your institution, guide your tasks as a mentor. As mentioned below, you must also consider as a mentor what assistance the student actually needs in order to develop. You must keep within the boundaries for this, even if you can – and perhaps want to – do a lot more.

In the same way, it’s important to think about what you as a mentor do and don’t need to know in order to carry out your work.

How do you talk about your student and what the student has said or done? Mentorship is a relationship of trust, and it’s worth discussing what you can and cannot tell other people. What can you tell your friends, and what can you tell the coordinator? Look at it like having a kind of duty of confidentiality. Always ask if it’s alright to tell the coordinator something, for example. You should also discuss what to

do if you happen to bump into each other. Should you greet each other?

Your mentorship should never have a negative impact on your studies. Mentorship is an additional job. It’s easy to feel a sense of commitment to the student or to value the additional money over your own studies. Once again, it’s important to remember the boundaries of your work.

You should also pay attention to what you stress signals are. If you notice any of these signals, consider your situation. Is there anything you can change that would reduce your stress? In the worst case, there is always the option of terminating the mentorship.

Boundaries provide security when they are maintained. You know what should be done, and what you can expect from the student. It’s important to maintain these boundaries in a positive and respectful manner. If you need to remind the student about the boundaries, you must clearly show how they link to the agreement you have reached. If you do not come to an agreement, contact a coordinator or study counsellor who can help you to move on.

Creating objectives

” It worked well with objectives. We took it one thing at a time, which ensured that the semester went well.”

ALEXIS, STUDENT

” We spend a lot of time working to set objectives. I need objectives in order to see where I’m heading and why.”

ROBIN, STUDENT

Without objectives, there’s no way of knowing whether or not you’ve succeeded in your work. It’s important that these objectives are realistic and clear, since they will be easier to work towards and it also will be easier to evaluate your work later on. Focus on both the short-term and the long-term aspects of these objectives. One tip is to set subsidiary objectives that lead to one or more end objectives.

One method for setting clear, motivating targets is called SMART. SMART stands for objectives that are specific, measurable, adapted, relevant and time-bound. Objectives should therefore be sufficiently *specific* that the student knows exactly what they consist of. “*Measurable*” means that you agree on how you will measure whether or not an objective has been achieved, and you should be able to answer this with a yes or a no. For example, submitting

assignments or passing courses are good measuring points. “*Adapted*” means that objectives are adapted according to the student’s abilities. They should be achievable without being too easy. “*Relevant*” means that objectives should be relevant to the student’s development in his or her studies. Finally, objectives should also be “*time-bound*” – in other words, they should have a deadline.

An example of an objective that does not meet the SMART criteria is: “I will complete a perfect home exam next week!”

Although this is a fairly time-bound and possibly relevant objective, it is not specific, measurable or adapted to suit the student. It is unclear what exactly constitutes a perfect home exam, and we do not



know how the objective will be measured. A perfect home exam is also probably too high an objective. It is important that the student can achieve the objective so that he or she is motivated to continue working.

A SMART objective could instead be formulated as follows: "I will have completed my home exam by 5 May. This means that I will have answered all the questions and used at least two examples for each question."

This objective is specific, measurable and time-bound, and is probably also adapted and relevant.

While it's important to set concrete objectives for your work, it's also important to be open to the possibility of amending objectives if need be.

Don't take setbacks personally. There will always be difficulties along the way. What are the consequences of the setback, and how will you deal with them? The main thing is that you learn something and try again. And remember that you can always contact a coordinator or study counsellor.

EXERCISE

Create SMART objectives for yourself, either for your own studies or in connection with mentorship.

MATERIALS

Objectives form.

Encouraging the **positive**

“ The effect is that she has actually progressed further in her work. She has found more focus and structure, which is infectious.”

KIM, MENTOR

As mentioned above, it is the student who should carry out his or her own studies. Your work is to support and assist his or her development. Mentorship involves a development process, in which the student tries out new ways of working with your support. It is essential that you encourage the student's positive attempts and changes, in order for these to be confirmed and for the challenges to be reduced.

In order to be able to encourage these attempts and changes, it is easiest to regard them as behaviours.

A behaviour is something concrete, an individual action. Studying involves a number of different behaviours: reading, writing assignments, listening to a lecturer, drinking coffee. Going to a lecture involves carrying out a whole range of behaviours, such as signing the attendance list, listening to the lecturer, texting a friend and making notes.

A behaviour always takes place for a reason. This reason could be, for example, that you're tired, that the lecture is mandatory or that you have a deadline, and therefore precedes a behaviour.

Something that plays an even bigger part in determining which behaviours you exhibit, for example whether you really do participate in all seminars, is what happens after having exhibited the behaviour – the consequence of the behaviour. If you receive praise or see that you have passed the test, you are more likely to go to seminars in the future. If on the other hand you notice that you can simply go through the motions at seminars, you probably won't attend all seminars in the future. What happens after a behaviour, as a result of the behaviour, is called the consequence of a behaviour.

This is normally described within learning psychology as the ABC model.

The ABC model



The model describes how our behaviour is affected by different antecedents, and our behaviour results in consequences. The consequences then influence our future behaviours.

EXAMPLE

- A** There's a group seminar tomorrow. There's a compendium to read, but the text doesn't make for easy reading and I don't understand everything. The lecturer has said that we need to read through the compendium in advance in order to keep up.
- B** OK, so I'll read the compendium then.
- C** During the seminar, I was able to keep up and learnt a lot. In fact, it was fun. I will certainly read through the compendiums before the seminars on the next course.

Your task as a mentor is to try to identify or illustrate the “C” that will help the student to achieve his or her objectives.

One important principle is that the closer in time the consequence comes to the behaviour, the greater its effect. A consequence that comes immediately after the behaviour, for example rewarding yourself with a sweet after having read a chapter, the greater the effect than a similar consequence that doesn't come until the following day. More frequent, smaller everyday rewards are therefore better than infrequent, large rewards after having passed key milestones. It's also important to reward your efforts, not just your performance.

EXERCISE

Try using the ABC model on yourself. Create consequences that mean you carry out a desired behaviour more often.

Supporting **autonomy**

“ I have to do it myself, even if it takes time. If everything comes served on a plate, it’s hard to take it all in. The mentor should support you in doing things rather than doing it for you.”

ROBIN, STUDENT

You won’t always be there for the student. You might be replaced by someone else, or the student may simply no longer need any help. Your work as a mentor should be a constant endeavour to support and develop the student’s autonomy.

As a mentor, it’s easy to get too involved. It might sound strange, but this is actually one of the most common pitfalls in mentorship. You will often be closely involved in your student’s successes and setbacks. Quite simply, you’ll want everything to go as well as possible. The risk then arises that the mentor will help the student so much that the student finds it hard to cope on his or her own. The student may need more support at the beginning of your work together, but remember always to give the student plenty of his or her own responsibility. Doing this paves the way for the student to cope well in the future.

One of the most important building blocks in the student’s autonomy is his or her own motivation. As people, we are motivated by different things. However, there are some common aspects. For example, we need to see how our efforts lead us towards our objectives. The student may sometimes need to be reminded that studying is about more than just passing the next test – it’s also a small step on the road towards a degree and the student’s future working life.

Self-confidence is important if the student is to succeed in his or her studies. Some students with

disabilities lose their self-confidence when it comes to their studies. Lots of positive feedback is therefore needed (Margolis, 2005). One useful principle is the 3:1 principle. According to this, you should give roughly three times as much positive feedback as constructive feedback. Positive feedback means giving praise for something concrete the student has done. Constructive feedback, on the other hand, involves the mentor suggesting an improvement to what the student has done, sometimes combined with praise. The difference between positive feedback and constructive feedback is “Well done Robin for taking notes during the lecture. It seems that it was much easier to read the book now.” compared with “I saw that you read up before the seminar. It probably would have been better to check the web lecture instead.”

Constructive feedback comes naturally to most people, as it is how we are used to giving and receiving feedback. Giving so much positive feedback is therefore often a challenge to begin with, but it soon becomes much easier.

EXERCISE

Try giving three times as much positive feedback as constructive feedback in a situation. See if you get any particular reaction.

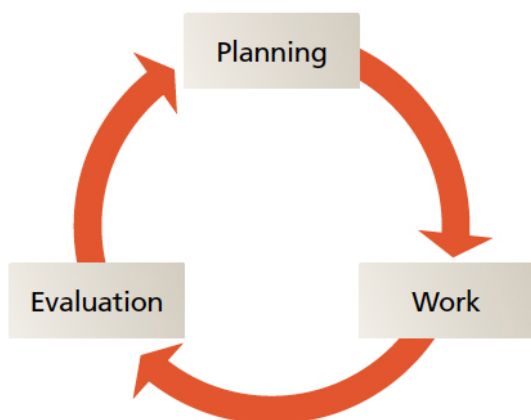
Evaluating your work

“ We evaluate our contact, whether it helps her and what she needs more of. It’s good, because it tells us where we stand and that we’re heading in the same direction. I also find out whether I’m doing the right thing or what I should do differently.”

KIM, MENTOR

In order for mentorship to be as effective as possible and to provide the greatest possible benefit for the student, it’s important to evaluate your work on an ongoing basis. The support will change as the student develops his or her skills. In order to adapt the mentorship accordingly and to address any new challenges that arise, you constantly need to think about what can be developed, both in your cooperation and in the student’s own work.

The following circle illustrates one way of thinking about evaluation and development:



All work begins with a planning phase, for example when you plan your cooperation. You then get started with the work. Once the work has been underway for a while, it’s important to carry out an

evaluation to see whether you’re working in the best way and sticking to the planning.

This could be done after the end of an exam period or every month, for example. The planning should then be updated or carried out again as the basis for the ongoing work. Putting it simply: planning, work, evaluation, new planning, work, new evaluation, etc.

Questions to ask yourself include:

- What has worked well?
- What could have worked better?
- Are the objectives still realistic, or do they need to be adjusted?

The evaluation is not only of benefit for the current work, it can also be useful for both of you after your mentorship has come to an end. When you will end your mentorship, take the opportunity to sit down and evaluate the mentorship as a whole. Find out more about this in the next section!

MATERIALS

Ongoing evaluation form.

Concluding the mentorship

” There were mixed feelings. Sadness, because after such a long time we’d gotten to know each other pretty well. At the same time, there was a sense of pride that we’d succeeded so well together.”

FATIMA, MENTOR



Sooner or later, your mentorship will come to an end. Your mentorship will no doubt have involved a great deal of hard work, which hopefully will have developed both of you. You should have evaluated your work on an ongoing basis, but the time has now come for the summary and concluding evaluation.

Instead of just thanking each other and saying goodbye, it's important to illustrate what you've done, what has worked and what could have been done differently. This ensures that you can take this knowledge with you and benefit from it in the future. At the back of this handbook you will find a worksheet that deals with the conclusion and how you can illustrate what you have learnt during the mentorship. Do use it!

MATERIALS

Concluding evaluation form.

Written words: fun, better and better, thank you, appreciated.

Date: _____

Checklist for your first one-to-one meeting

Tick the box when you've finished with the point!

During the first one-to-one meeting, you should go through the following points:

☐ **Presentation of ourselves and our expectations.**

☐ **How we will meet and get in touch.**

Notes:

☐ **When and how often we will meet. Any regular meetings.**

Notes:

☐ **The boundaries for our contact. Evenings. Delays. Means of communication.**

Notes:

☐ **The student's current situation. What the student wants help with.**

Notes:

☐ **Subsidiary objectives and end objectives.**

See separate materials.

☐ **Duty of confidentiality.**

Date: _____

Objectives form

Use this form to create the student's objectives. You may need more than one form if you have more than one objective. Save these for later evaluations.

End objectives:

Reward yourself with a tick in the box once the subsidiary objective has been completed!

☐ **Subsidiary objective 1:**

☐ **Subsidiary objective 2:**

☐ **Subsidiary objective 3:**

☐ **Subsidiary objective 4:**

Are the subsidiary objectives and the end objective SMART?

- ☐ **S** Specific.
- ☐ **M** Measurable.
- ☐ **A** Adapted.
- ☐ **R** Relevant.
- ☐ **T** Time-bound.

Date: _____

Ongoing evaluation form

Have you stuck to all deadlines for the objectives?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

Do any objectives need to be amended?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, complete a new form for the objective.

How has the work gone since the last evaluation?

Answer on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very badly and 10 is very well.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What was good?

What needs to be done differently?

How will you do things instead?

Other comments.

Date of next evaluation: _____

Date: _____

Concluding evaluation form

Print a form for yourself and one for the student.

Which end objectives have been achieved?

What made you succeed?

What has worked well?

What could have been done differently?

What have you learnt?

What can you work on in future?

Suggestions for going into further depth

Literature

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Online lectures

Matt Cutts: Try something new for 30 days. www.ted.com – search for Matt Cutts.

Websites

www.mentornet.net

www.studeramedfunktionshinder.nu

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For many students, obtaining mentoring support in connection with university studies can be essential in order for them to be able to complete the studies they have begun. With this handbook, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools and Stockholm University aim to support you as a mentor by providing practical advice on mentorship.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) works to ensure that children, young people and adults have the right conditions to achieve the objectives of their education, regardless of their functional ability. We do this through special needs education support, teaching at special schools, accessible teaching material and government grants. The expertise we offer complements municipalities' and schools' own resources.

Stockholm University has been specifically commissioned by the Swedish Government to allocate national funding to universities and university colleges to provide special pedagogical support for students, i.e. personal pedagogical support with the aim of removing obstacles or overcoming disabilities in studies.

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