

## DSN – Buddy scheme for managers

The DSN is looking to establish a buddy scheme between DSN members and managers and leaders in the University.

We know that sometimes managers can feel underprepared or out of their comfort zone when having conversations with disabled staff; whether this is just about their day to day working, understanding the nature of their disability, or more formal discussions about reasonable adjustments, there isn't much guidance out there for managers to draw on. And whatever guidance there is, is quite formal, and rarely written by the people with real life lived experience of disability.

The benefits of peer mentoring are well known, and we think that establishing connections between disabled staff and managers could have a really positive impact.

### **How will the scheme work?**

We have recruited a pool of potential buddies/mentors from amongst the DSN membership.

They will be available to talk to managers who need some advice. What pitfalls to avoid, the best language to use, whether online or in person would be better for meetings (and why) – these are just some of the things they can help a manager talk through and understand. Our volunteers are not experts on policy or equality law – the scheme is much more about the personal experience and how sharing this can help managers feel more prepared and confident.

All of our volunteers have identified themselves as having experience of one (or more) of the following –

- Specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia and dyspraxia)
- Physical/mobility impairments
- Sensory impairments
- Mental health conditions
- Long term health conditions (e.g. cancer, chronic fatigue, auto-immune conditions, diabetes)
- Neurodiversity
- Experience of requesting and working with reasonable adjustments
- Experience as a manager of staff, including implementing reasonable adjustments

To be matched with a mentor/buddy, please email Helen Williams (DSN Committee member and co-ordinator of the scheme) at [hw407@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hw407@cam.ac.uk) and give an indication of which category/specialization would be most relevant for you.

For example, if you have a member of staff requesting reasonable adjustments related to diabetes, you could indicate that you are interested in meeting a buddy/mentor who has experience of long term health conditions and/or requesting and working with reasonable adjustments. **You do not need to disclose anyone's personal or confidential information (including specific conditions) when requesting a match with a mentor/buddy.**

On receipt of the request, the scheme co-ordinator will check the database of volunteers and reply with the contact details of one or two potential matches. Contacting the DSN member will then be the responsibility of the manager.

We very much hope that this will then lead to a positive and rewarding buddy/mentoring relationship, but please note that the scheme relies on volunteers – all of whom are living with disabilities, and so may have to ration their time and commitments accordingly.