

I represent the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (CTCRM) which is part of the Royal Navy (RN). The primary purpose of CTCRM is to:

‘Deliver initial, career and specialist training for Royal Marines and attached personnel, whilst supporting assisting and advising frontline units in order to contribute to the operational capability of the fleet’.

It is a reasonably large organisation that has approximately 1100 students and 500 trainers and support staff. It is situated near Exmouth on the Exe estuary, Devon. Whilst CTCRM has a relatively small campus it conducts training across the world making use of the extremes of climate and topography.

My main role within CTCRM is to run and manage the education provision for all 1600 personnel at CTCRM. As part of that role I act as a liaison between University of Plymouth (UoP) and CTCRM and I am a tutor for 4 part-time Cert Ed/PGCE Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) cohorts geographically spread across the south west of England.

The Cert Ed/PGCE course delivered at CTCRM is part time, delivered on-site in six, four day blocks over 14-16 months. This is supplemented with on-line support, tutor visits and additional directed tasks. It has proved to be very successful and popular way to deliver initial teacher training. Students and the RN/RM are very happy with this mode of delivery as it suits the preferred study method of the students and the business needs of the RN/RM. As it is runs over the weekend the impact upon mainstream RN/RM training delivery is minimal. It should also be noted that the Ministry of Defence is not required to have all its instructors qualified to Cert Ed/PGCE level. However, all instructors are qualified to the new CTTLS level within 3 months of taking up an instructional role. Therefore, those undertaking the full teacher training course are considered to be volunteers.

Rather than use what would be considered a typical trainee teacher for this case study I have opted to examine what would be considered an atypical one. This is to highlight that different approaches, based upon the needs of the student and the organisation that can be taken and still be successful. However, this student or the pragmatic approaches adopted would not be considered unusual within the RN/RM environment.

The student chosen is a science graduate and Corporal Royal Marine physical training instructor (PTI); he is also a specialised Remedial Instructor (RI). RI's work with injured recruits with the aim to return them to training fully fit. But, inline with the rest of the RM he is a soldier first and these skills are regularly tested and implemented. Moreover, every member of the RM is expected to be able to teach basic soldiering skills to new recruits. This ensures that when a Commando Unit is deployed scarce resources and manpower can be used effectively and flexibly.

He had been an instructor in the PTI branch for about 3 years prior to starting his PGCE. As a PTI instructor he will have passed a 13 week long course which includes a strong emphasis on instructional ability albeit in a relatively narrow field. He is due to complete his PGCE Jun 08.

Over the course of his study he has made full use of me, his tutor as he was initially an under-confident student. This brings out my first point of this case study:

- Despite students' previous qualifications and experiences embarking upon a qualification such as this is a very daunting prospect and this needs to be managed very carefully by the tutor and the employer. This can be achieved by good employer engagement and supporting the named mentor.

Undoubtedly, having his tutor geographically collocated has been of enormous benefit but it is not essential as other RN/RM cohorts have managed to gain the qualification with me at a significant distance. This brings me to the second point:

- Having good direct communication between tutor and student, be it email, wiki space, telephone and post is essential and it needs to be synchronous where possible.

As he has progressed through the qualification his confidence in teaching and his ability to tackle the academic work has grown enormously. This is typified by his desire to engage critically with all aspects of his teaching and subject matter rather than do the required minimum to pass the course.

At the start of the course his named mentor was his immediate line manager as he felt that he was best placed to discuss the technical and pedagogical aspects of his subject with. It quickly became apparent that the Mentor/mentee relationship was quickly overshadowed by the employee/line manager one. Thus he felt he was not getting a lot from the relationship. This brings me onto the third point:

- The mentor/mentee relationship should be free from hierarchical constraints unless the relationship is such that each party can remain objective and be able to separate the two relationships.

As he progressed through the course I was being used less as a tutor and more as a mentor. We were frequently discussing career aspirations and opportunities for personal development and growth. Whilst I felt that I was pursuing a tutor/student relationship, he saw me as his mentor. Therefore can a tutor fulfil the role of mentor as well? In this case It certainly worked but it would not be applicable to all my students but it should be considered as a possibility. This brings me onto the fourth point:

- Imposing a mentor upon a student is less likely to work than one where the mentee seeks out the mentor. It is generally acknowledged that institutionally imposed mentor schemes are not that successful.

He is very happy with the support he has received from the University of Plymouth and its tutors and support services and has recommended the course to several colleagues. Throughout his time as a student he has maintained a teaching commitment of about 32 hrs per week both classroom and gym based. He has been given sufficient study leave to attend the taught sessions of the PGCE and has carried out his study during any time-table breaks and in his own time. Also during this time he has attended professional updating courses to maintain his own level of vocational expertise. Not all organisations have an on-site tutor and CTCRM is in a very enviable position when compared with other organisations. But neither do the other RN sites in the Portsmouth area and they still achieve under similar circumstances. This brings me onto the fifth point:

- Despite a very busy teaching schedule with good support and motivation, students are able to cope with and overcome the pressures associated with study at this level.

The RN/RM personnel are usually in a teaching role for 2 years before they move on to a different job, usually an operational one. This has advantages as well as some significant disadvantages. The main advantage is that teachers remain up to date with subject knowledge both theoretical and more importantly practical. This is then brought back to the teaching environment and passed on. The down side is a constant turn-over of staff which does not allow for any continuity especially important on long-term projects or specialist knowledge outside of the mainstream specialisations. Therefore, CTCRM is not in a position to provide each student with a mentor. They have adopted a mentor panel approach utilising a central team of in-house trainers who are also skilled in coaching and mentoring and this is supplemented with ex Cert Ed/PGCE students around the various departments. This central team has been set up and whilst there is turnover of staff it is a lot slower and means specialist subject pedagogy knowledge is retained and more importantly is disseminated to other members of the team. This ensures that all students have access to a variety of suitable mentors and so far this approach has worked well. It is acknowledged that being a military organisation with a binding ethos this is easier to implement and manage but it is an approach

that could be adapted in other institutions certainly within the uniformed public sector (Police, Ambulance, NHS etc)

The cost of support to the organisation is difficult to gauge as most activities are undertaken as additional duties and as part of an overall organisational commitment to 'Teach, Coach, Mentor'. The only real auditable costs have been for developmental courses for staff which have been met with Peninsular CETT allocation of funds.

As a runner-up in the recent Employer of the Year awards it can be seen that the RN/RM are committed to the concept of Lifelong learning. The success of the Cert Ed/PGCE at CTCRM can be attributed to a strong organisational commitment to develop its personnel, not just in teaching but in all aspects. This brings me on to the final point:

- Strong organisational support and recognition is vital if the programme is to be successful. Whilst CTCRM would not consider itself a learning organisation in the pure sense, it displays many of the characteristics and traits of one. It is an aspiration of CTCRM to be considered a learning organisation and is working very hard towards that goal through its Teach, Coach, Mentor philosophy.

Note: The views in this case study are those of the author(s).