



## CHIEF CORONER

### GUIDANCE No.19

#### MENTORS FOR CORONERS

1. The purpose of this guidance is to put into place a scheme to provide mentoring for coroners when required.<sup>1</sup>
2. Mentors will be senior coroners or other coroners of considerable experience who agree to take on this role. The Chief Coroner's office will maintain a list of volunteer mentors who are approved by the Chief Coroner.
3. When required mentors should be available to support, advise and assist coroners on a confidential basis.
4. Mentoring will most often be required in one of the following circumstances:
  - (1) where a coroner (usually an assistant coroner) requests mentoring assistance,
  - (2) where the Chief Coroner or a senior coroner believes that mentoring would assist a coroner,
  - (3) where, following a complaint to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office being upheld, the Lord Chief Justice requests the Chief Coroner to assist.
5. Mentors will not be automatically available for all newly appointed or other coroners but on an as-and-when required basis. Newly appointed assistant coroners will be informed by the Chief Coroner's office that mentoring is available on request.
6. A coroner seeking assistance will contact the Chief Coroner's office. The coroner will be assigned a mentor by the Chief Coroner's office from the approved list (with the mentor's consent). The reason for the request will remain confidential (and therefore not be known by the Chief Coroner's office) if the coroner so wishes.
7. The allocation of a mentor may depend on the nature of the assistance required. Senior coroners will of course always be available to advise and support coroners in their team, particularly newly appointed area coroners and assistant coroners: see Chief Coroner's Guidance No.20 *Core Competencies for Assistant Coroners*. Mentoring is intended to provide an additional layer of advice and support.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Louise Hunt, senior coroner for Birmingham and Solihull, and the Judicial College for their valuable input into this Guidance.

8. The nature and extent of the mentoring will depend on the circumstances. Normally, mentoring will last for no longer than 12 months.
9. Mentors should be willing to give sufficient time (but not disproportionate time) to the process and to make arrangements, where appropriate, for the coroner to increase his/her experience with training at other coroner offices and courts.
10. Mentors should listen without being judgmental. They should be constructive and positive, and should ask questions so as to allow the coroner where possible to reach his/her own acceptable conclusions.
11. Mentoring is intended to be a supportive process and should not be seen in any circumstances as punitive.
12. When providing mentoring assistance the mentor will set out the parameters of the assistance which may be given. Apart from the request to the Chief Coroner's office for mentoring, the nature and extent of the assistance given will be confidential and will not be shared with others without the agreement of both parties.
13. Coroners being mentored should understand that occasionally circumstances may arise in which the mentor cannot sustain confidentiality, for example where the mentor learns of a matter which may provide grounds for removal from office for incapacity or misbehaviour. If that arises the mentor should discuss the matter with the coroner and, where appropriate, refer the matter to the Chief Coroner. Examples of such matters include taking drugs or drinking heavily, criminal offences, serious professional misconduct, obvious racial or other serious prejudice, mental or physical illness affecting ability to perform the role of coroner, bankruptcy or anything which may bring the role of coroner into serious disrepute.
14. Welfare issues may also be raised by coroners seeking assistance from local authority HR teams. These teams should be able to provide confidential advice and referral. The service provided by the HR Team at the Judicial Office, which provides support for judges, is not available to coroners, although the Judicial Helpline (0800 021 7821) is now available free of charge to all coroners: see the Chief Coroner's letter to all coroners (29 July 2015).
15. It is hoped that in due course the Judicial College will provide training for coroner mentors.
16. Existing coroner mentoring arrangements should now lapse (unless there is a continuing need for them).

**HH JUDGE PETER THORNTON QC  
CHIEF CORONER**

**19 October 2015**