

Writing catch-up Development Reports

The article on improving mentoring progress mentioned typical blocks to progress, one of which is delayed Development Reports. Experience shows that this can create a really debilitating blockage as both trainees and mentors can find it difficult to work out a pragmatic solution.

Once trainees have allowed their Development Reports to fall behind schedule, several factors can come into play. There may be:

- Underlying causes in need of resolution
- Fear of failure
- Trainee's apprehension about a task that's increasing in size with time
- Mentor's flexibility (or lack of) in dealing with a non-standard situation

The mentoring conversations should explore these and other areas; here are some tips.

Underlying causes

Experience shows that some trainees, especially in the early stages of training, can struggle to develop the content of their reports. Companies tend not to provide a template and prefer the graduate to develop their own style. Consider having a conversation about the content to help them develop this. Mentors often prefer certain styles of report to help them process the information. So this conversation can be really powerful in developing mutual understanding. You might find our Development Report Template a useful document to prompt discussion.

Other underlying causes may also create blockages and these are covered in the article on developing progress.

Fear of failure

Some trainees, being intent on producing excellent work, can become fearful about quality. It has been known for reports to be delayed by months whilst they are being tweaked to perfection. The knock-on effect is to delay remaining reports and the trainee can lose sight of the fact that they are now not recording more significant experience.

Trainee's apprehension about task size

As report-stagnant time continues trainees often tend to perceive an escalating challenge. This can be really de-motivating and is a common factor in the halting of progress. There's no single fix for this and a careful mentoring conversation can explore the trainee's

perception and help them to recalibrate it. Revisiting the core purpose of the reports and their content can be helpful here.

Mentor flexibility

How understanding and accommodating a mentor will be can have significant bearing on solving this problem. If the mentor insists on receiving a series of backdated, quarterly, reports the trainee may conclude that the task is too large.

That's not to say that the mentor should drop standards and be prepared to scrutinise poor work. However, reviewing the core purpose of reports can help to identify the mentors "red-line" that shouldn't be crossed.

The "Line-in-the-Sand" report

As mentioned previously, there is a risk that trainees will miss recording more extensive learning should they delay the process or get hung-up on earlier experience. That's why it may be worth agreeing to a temporary cessation to quarterly reports and writing what we call the "Line-in-the-Sand" report. This doesn't mean it has to be written on a beach; rather that it is intended to resolve and conclude the recording of previous learning!

It may also be that a small series of project-based reports will be the most effective – it's up to the trainee and mentor to agree through dialogue. So let's have a look at the key, most valuable, features of a report:

Feature	Comments
Factual information	The project, the trainee's role and responsibilities – all necessary for their future CVs!
Critical learning	Why is the trainee a different engineer today that they were at the time? What do they know now that they didn't? Why are they more competent as a result?
Attributes	Which of the ICE's Attributes have been achieved and at what level (Knowledge/Experience/Ability)?
Development Action Plan	How has the experience map to the trainee's previously Development Action Plan and how should this be modified? What are the gaps in the profile of Attributes and how can they be filled?

Ultimately the report(s) contents will depend on the agreed intent and be influenced by how far the learner is through their Attributes. To learn more, contact us!