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**Girlguiding**

# Notes for Commissioner Mentors

## Guidance for Mentors of new District and Division Commissioners

Thank you for agreeing to mentor a new designate Commissioner. The role of a Commissioner is to enable positive and effective guiding to take place by building and supporting her team and helping the adults in her local area to develop and use their talents.

As a Commissioner Mentor, you have an important part to play in supporting the Commissioner as she takes on her new responsibilities and develops the knowledge and skills she needs to succeed. As her Mentor, you can best support the new designate Commissioner by being open, welcoming, interested, sympathetic and warm.

### Being a Mentor

A Commissioner Mentor is someone who has been selected for having a good understanding, usually through previous experience, of what is required to be a successful Commissioner. Each Mentor is expected to bring her own approach, experience and attributes to the role. To be a Commissioner Mentor you must also:

- have a copy of the *The Commissioner Handbook*
- have up-to-date knowledge of guiding
- be a member of Girlguiding
- be a good listener and communicator
- understand the importance of keeping discussions confidential when necessary
- be flexible and open-minded
- be aware and accepting of the fact that everyone is an individual
- suggest possibilities and options rather than attempting to impose ideas and methods on a new designate Commissioner
- know when and where to get help.

You may be supporting designate Commissioners working in a job-share, or even a team who are sharing the role of Commissioner. As a Mentor, it is important to support whatever model fits the local area best and to encourage flexibility.

The task of supporting a new designate Commissioner through her first few months is a voluntary, two-way arrangement. If for any reason the relationship does not work, do not hesitate to contact the County Commissioner.

We recommend the following to help you make the most of your role.

- Where available, attend and participate in a Commissioner Mentor support group and Mentor training.
- Keep up to date with changes in Girlguiding and to the Commissioner role by regularly consulting *guiding* magazine, the Girlguiding members' area on the Girlguiding website and other appropriate resources. Even

though you may not be a Commissioner at the time of mentoring, attending Commissioner trainings from time to time will also be helpful.

- Ensure you are kept up to date with County matters through County newsletters, copies of the Executive minutes and other local networks. Ask to be included in all official communications sent to the new designate Commissioner so you are aware of any arising County matters that she may need assistance in dealing with.

## Responsibilities of the Commissioner Mentor

Below is a list of responsibilities you can expect in your role as Commissioner Mentor. They are listed in roughly chronological order to help you as you support the new designate Commissioner. Please do not feel that the order is prescriptive - work with the new Commissioner to fulfil each responsibility as and when required.

- Build a rapport with the new designate Commissioner and encourage her to tell you about her District or Division.
- Help the new designate Commissioner to understand her role and what is expected of her.
- Help her to understand the importance of supporting her team, and work with her to develop her communication and team-building skills.
- Ensure she has a copy of *The Commissioner Handbook*.
- Commissioners come to the role with differing knowledge, skills and experience - help your new designate Commissioner to evaluate her development needs, taking into consideration all her relevant experience from both within and outside guiding.
- If you are mentoring a District/Division team or a job-share, ensure a record is kept of each individual's achievements.
- Prepare an action plan with the new designate Commissioner and help her progress through the plan within a reasonable time frame (six months or two terms is suggested). This action plan should be based around her day-to-day responsibilities and should reflect her local situation. It is important to be flexible and take into account any constraints, such as getting around in a large rural area or having limited resources in a small urban District.
- Be available as a sounding board and give constructive feedback. Listen and talk through situations concerning people in the District or Division and support her in developing positive people-management skills.
- Ensure the new designate Commissioner knows what help is available and where to find it. Don't worry if you don't know the answer to a question, but point her in the direction of someone who does.
- Ensure the new designate Commissioner is aware of her specific responsibilities, such as administrative and financial matters and the membership system tools (for example Go! and Join Us). Discuss together how some tasks can be delegated to give her more time for the important task of supporting the adult volunteers in her District or Division.
- Ensure that the new designate Commissioner is aware of the importance of *The Guiding Manual* and the dangers of creating or reinforcing local by-laws, however well intentioned.
- Help her to understand that she will learn gradually as she undertakes the various responsibilities of being a Commissioner.
- Liaise with the new designate Commissioner's Commissioner (usually the Division or County Commissioner) and let her know of any concerns that arise.
- At the end of the six-month designate period, or when you and the designate Commissioner feel she is ready to fully commence the role of Commissioner, let the County Commissioner know. By this time the new Commissioner will be feeling more confident in her role, but will also know that there are still things to learn. Encourage her to look ahead to her continuing development.

## Working with the designate Commissioner

Once you know who you will be mentoring, try to arrange an introductory meeting with her as soon as possible so that you can:

- reassure her in her new role
- establish what you are offering
- find out what she feels she needs.

The aim of your introductory meeting is to build a good relationship with the new designate Commissioner and to introduce her to the Commissioner role. A practical task, such as sorting out a District box she has inherited, discussing what should be kept and what should be discarded and checking that all information is up to date, can serve as a good icebreaker.

Keep in regular contact with the designate Commissioner. Establish the most convenient means of communication (you need not always meet face to face - writing, emailing or telephoning can be just as good), as well as days and times when it is best for both of you to communicate - and when, except in emergencies, neither of you wish to be contacted.

If possible, try not to arrange your meetings with the designate Commissioner immediately before or in between other appointments, as you will both find yourselves clock-watching.

*The Commissioner Handbook* is designed to help all Commissioners understand their role. Your designate Commissioner may identify areas that she feels the need to explore in more depth. The action plan on page 4 provides an opportunity to work out how she would do this.

Remind the designate Commissioner to be herself rather than attempt to be like her predecessor. She should be encouraged to create a team or local support structure that works for her and the local area.

## Helping the designate Commissioner with her action plan

Depending on the designate Commissioner's needs, her action plan might include:

- what she needs to do to understand her role
- how she will do this based on her day-to-day responsibilities
- realistic target dates, being flexible and adjusting timescales according to circumstance
- where she may get support - people, support materials and training (give her details of any relevant trainings available in the County or Country/Region).

As her personal targets are met, help the designate Commissioner to review and evaluate. What went well? What would she do differently next time? What extra knowledge did she gain from the experience? Did she discover any hidden talent in her team?

The plan will be an ongoing 'to do list'. It is not possible to always achieve the required outcome, and your support in helping the designate Commissioner to understand and accept this is important.

## Commissioner Action Plan

Tasks	Action required	Time frame	Date completed