



# Postgraduate Research Mentoring Scheme Handbook



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This handbook is intended as an on-going reference for both mentors and mentees.

## Background

MASTS & SUPER seek to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to develop both personal and professional skills and attributes. Whilst we provide access to group training and learning activities, sometimes an individual's needs are very specific and are best supported through bespoke activities such as mentoring. As such, the introduction of this scheme aims to contribute towards a culture of support across our partnership and in the research environment, with specific benefits for different groups.

We aim to deliver mentoring for our PGRs through two routes:

1. Within PGR-to-Staff mentoring partnerships
2. Supporting PGR mentoring and other skills development and early-stage PGR transitions, via Peer-To-Peer mentoring where later stage PGRs mentor early stage PGRs.

Thus, mentoring is provided by a more experienced PGR or member of the MASTS & SUPER researcher community. This scheme will complement the wider professional development support offered at the Grad School Retreat, Annual Science Meeting (ASM), workshops and other events and support activities, and will provide bespoke support for personal and professional development, in-line with the aspirations of UKRI.

Following an annual invitation for applications for the mentoring scheme, individuals who register as mentors and mentees will attend a training workshop in May. The mentoring partnerships would be confirmed in June and the relationship established on a formal basis, with an agreed time boundary (up to 1 year), and first meeting dates.

Mentoring meetings are informal, allowing for a trusting and confidential mentor-mentee relationship to be established. The discussions would work towards achieving objectives identified by the mentee and recorded in a simple 'agreement' approved by both parties. The process is driven by the mentee but requires engagement from both parties to be successful.

## What is Mentoring?

Mentoring (Figure 1) can describe a number of very different relationships – e.g. from a traditional teacher/learner relationship to more informal peer/peer collaborations. However, the following definition holds true across different relationships:

*'Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be.'* Eric Parsloe (previous Director of the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring)



Figure 1: What is mentoring?

## What Makes a Good Mentor?

Mentoring and mentors can come from all sorts of backgrounds and disciplines, bringing with them a diverse set of experiences and skills. The list below gives some of the skills, qualities and attributes that good mentors possess.

- They have expertise and knowledge
- They have an enthusiasm for sharing and supporting the learning of others
- They are respectful, value difference and are non-judgmental
- They are eager to invest in the development of others and to promote their success
- They are analytical and able to give honest feedback, in a direct and constructive manner, without undermining their mentee
- They are reflective, active listeners, who show empathy and compassion
- They are willing to be a sponsor for their mentee, without creating dependence.

## Benefits of Mentoring

The benefits of mentoring are significant for both mentors and mentees and broadly include the development of interpersonal, communication and relationship skills, broadly related to the development of leadership capability and personal effectiveness.

### For the Mentee

- Support for career and development, enhancing communication, intellectual skills, critical thinking and other specific personal and professional skills
- Gaining practical advice, encouragement, support and feedback
- Helps with setting and achieving academic goals and future career planning, establishing a sense of meaning and direction
- Increases confidence, raises expectations and aspirations
- Empowers individuals to find solutions, make decisions and develops resilience
- Exemplifies values and their relationship to personal and professional life
- Supports an understanding of research culture and professional practice
- Enhanced networking

### For the Mentor

- Development of communication, interpersonal, coaching and support skills
- Opportunity to reflect on one's own knowledge and practice
- Increased self-awareness, confidence and motivation
- Builds leadership skills and attributes
- PGCert RPD eligible activity (for peer-to-peer mentors)
- Supports wider networking and engagement across MASTS/ SUPER
- Recognition of impact on self and wider community, enhancing CV and employability
- Building a sense of contribution to the development of others, fulfilment and satisfaction
- Improves understanding of research culture and operation in individual institutional and broader settings

## Wider Benefits of a PGR Mentoring Scheme

In bringing forward this scheme, we recognise the potential to:

- Promote a supportive, cohesive research environment and culture for all researchers
- Recognise and value PGRs as individuals and as an integral part of our research community
- Create a stronger learning environment and safe spaces for PGRs to explore challenges, foster a growth mindset and develop resilience
- Share knowledge and experience and enhance research performance, productivity and excellence
- Support high-quality graduate transitions
- Build a sense of belonging, identity, commitment to the MASTS/SUPER communities
- Highlights areas for future development and training for PGRs
- Aligned to UKRI aspiration to offer mentoring within DTP programmes.

## How does the Mentoring Scheme work?

The mentoring scheme seeks to address four specific goals:

1. Sharing of knowledge and experience across our community
2. Supporting research achievement and longer-term career development
3. Encouraging responsibility for self, for personal and professional development
4. Enhanced networking across our research community

As mentoring relationships form and progress, it is likely that partnerships will formulate their own additional and specific goals.

There is flexibility for mentoring partnerships to develop a relationship that suits their particular needs. Objectives are driven by the mentee and early meetings should clarify specific objectives, expectations and ideas.

The pathway in Figure 2 is proposed for guidance, with meetings of approximately 45 mins normally taking place via Microsoft Teams, or by other means as agreed. Partnerships can establish their own rules in terms of the commitment, frequency of meetings, methods of communication, meeting duration and the type of mentoring. It is helpful to keep written records of meetings and an agreement and meetings record proforma are provided for guidance (see Appendix 1).

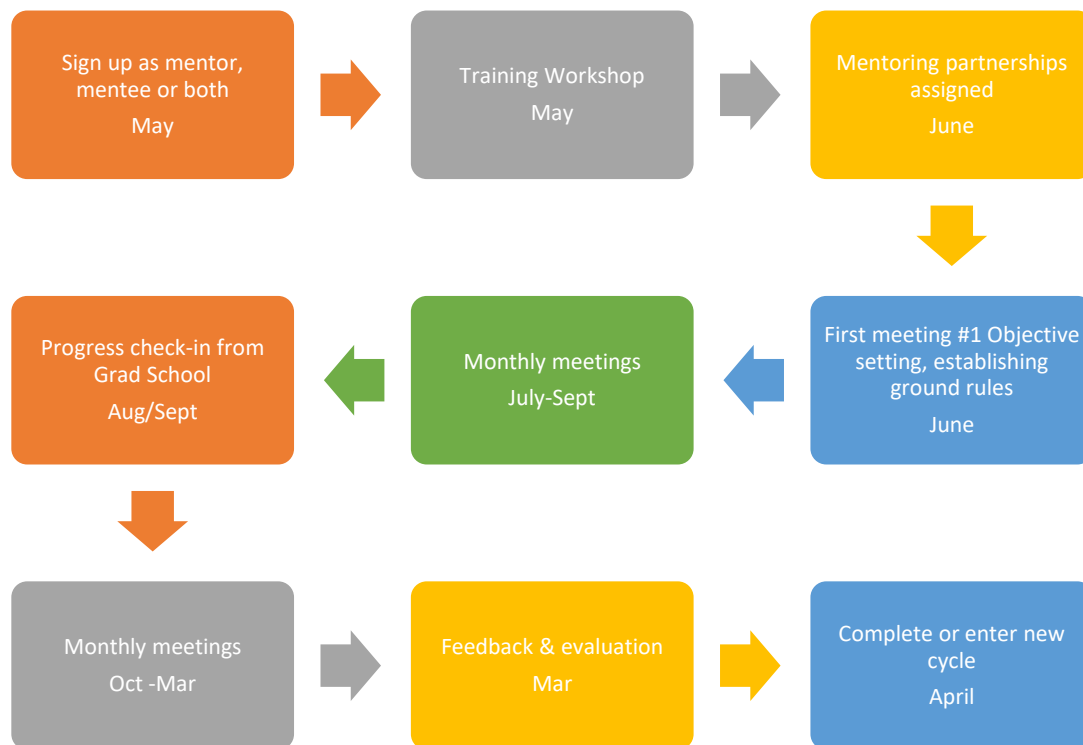


Figure 2: Example of a mentoring pathway

## How do I get Involved?

Following a call for expressions of interest, those wishing to be mentors and mentees will complete a short registration form.

A training workshop will take place in May for both mentors and mentees, to support all parties to make the most of the scheme. The topics covered will include:

- Underlying principle of mentoring
- Benefits
- Mentoring models
- Establishing roles
- Setting objectives
- Listening
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Keeping records
- Potential pitfalls to avoid

There will also be time to share practical experiences and for questions and answers. Further information is also provided in this handbook.

## Principles of Mentoring

### **Each individual is responsible for themselves in the mentoring process**

This means setting high expectations of yourself in relation to what you can contribute to the meeting, rather than having such expectations of the other person. If you create expectations for yourself and work on achieving them, you allow the other person to develop and set their own expectations instead of having to react to yours.

### **Mentoring is collaborative**

This means that the mentor and mentee will seek to work together through giving and openly receiving feedback, joint negotiation, decision making and consistent support. Making changes and moving out of comfort zones will always be stressful, so the supportive yet challenging climate created by the mentor will be crucial in determining the value of the process. Growth and development occurs best within nurturing and supportive conditions and relationships.

### **The mentoring relationship is confidential**

You must be able to trust each other and to develop a safe, non-judgemental relationship where you can both be open. Mentoring relationships have little value if they are not based on truth. This may be difficult if, for example, you are discussing difficulties with other people at work. But unless you are sure about confidentiality your partner will feel inhibited about explaining all the details of a situation. You should each continue to respect confidential information, even after the mentoring relationship has formally been completed.

### **Meetings allow time for discussion and reflection**

One of the special benefits of mentoring is the luxury of uninterrupted time to focus on development issues. The meetings provide the opportunity to tease out difficult issues and think creatively about solving problems. You can focus on the details, reflect on the situation and plan for the future. Criticism must be couched in a constructive manner. Perhaps the mentee's targets will be clear, but there will be times when neither of you will know the mentee's full potential and will need to be alert to possibilities and opportunities.

### **A holistic mindset is essential**

Progress and development in one area of professional life and work is likely to impact positively on other parts. It is therefore sensible to focus more on areas of potential development and enhancement. While the mentoring meeting provides an opportunity to air frustrations and positive and negative feelings, it is important also to focus on actions and results.

### **Underpinning all people development is a supportive approach**

This helps to ensure that individuals are listened to, understood, respected and valued and that interpersonal skills are recognised, used and reviewed as effectively as possible. We believe that people develop and learn best when consistently offered the core conditions of empathy and respect and when they are related to in warm and genuine ways.

### **The scheme can benefit both mentees and mentors**



Mentoring is essentially about learning – identifying, facilitating, supporting and celebrating learning. The roles of both mentor and mentee can benefit from the mentoring process in terms of personal and professional development.

## Models of Mentoring

There are many different ways in which mentoring can take place: one-to-one, group, peer-to-peer, reverse, virtual, etc. The role of the mentor, and how the mentee (or learner) uses a mentor can be complex. Often the mentor role will have many facets – presented below in four clusters:

- ❖ Teach, evaluate, demonstrate, act as a role model
- ❖ Counsel, advise, empower
- ❖ Nurture, encourage growth, challenge
- ❖ Protect, support, sponsor, advocate

One way of describing the relationship is to consider how a mentor might assist their mentee with a problem. The mentee begins by identifying and analysing the problem, and the mentor probes the understanding of the complexities involved.

The mentor can then challenge their mentee to use a different perspective and to redefine the problem in new ways, which may reveal options the mentee was not previously aware of and make the problem easier to tackle.

### **Mentee's task**

- ❖ Defining the problem
- ❖ Reframing the problem
- ❖ Managing the problem

### **Mentor's task**

- ❖ Understanding/Analysing
- ❖ Challenging
- ❖ Supporting

Another model shows the mentee expecting the mentor to contribute the expertise of a master craftsman or an experienced professional. However, the relationship is not primarily a showcase for the mentor's abilities. The mentor also has the task of eliciting the best from their mentee. This can be achieved by giving confidence and encouragement as well as demonstrating practice.

### **Mentor puts in**

- ❖ Skills
- ❖ Knowledge
- ❖ Experience

### **Mentor pulls out**

- ❖ Potential
- ❖ Commitment
- ❖ Expertise

The interaction between mentor and mentee is transactional, with a continuous flow of information between the mentor and mentee. Aspects occur before, during and after the actual meeting. The mentee may take time to reflect post-meeting and sometimes it is then that insights occur.

	<b>Mentee</b>	<b>Mentor</b>
<b>Before</b>	Submits information by agreed time, asks specific questions	Reads information, makes notes
<b>During</b>	Discuss general and specific points, identify changes and areas for development, create actions	
<b>After</b>	Revises information, notes general learning points	Asks about progress, responds to queries

With experience, mentors will be available to help support all participants in forming mentoring relationships.

## Meetings

### Arranging the First Meeting

Consider where and when you want to meet. It is particularly important that you both feel comfortable with virtual meetings or chosen venue. You need to be somewhere where you will not be interrupted and that is conducive to positive discussion.

Most meetings will take about 45 minutes, but some may be more, others less. You may plan to meet every month, but this may vary, as might the means of communication. A phone call or remote message asking for timely advice can work well. A discussion by e-mail can be quick and productive. Be creative and responsive to need.

The mentoring relationship is progressive and developmental, so each meeting builds on the previous ones. At the first meeting you should discuss and approve your agreement and you may want to write this down (see Appendix 1). Always allow some time to review the process and discuss the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.

You may also want to maintain a record of your meetings. You may decide that one or both of you will keep a record of key points, plans for the mentee, and for the mentor. This can provide a useful starting point for the next meeting. These records are private and remain confidential to the two of you.

Sample forms for the mentoring agreement are given in Appendix 1 of this handbook. Whilst creating an agreement is good practice and can foster shared understanding, other templates or documents can be used. Mentoring is about providing support and facilitating professional development, not about filling in forms.

### The Introductory Stage

This should include any necessary explanations, clarifying mutual expectations and setting clear time boundaries. In addition, you will want to clarify the purpose of the meeting, explain the stages you will go through, and to outline the anticipated value of the process to both of you. Remind each other that the concluding stage will involve reviewing and, if necessary, updating targets and action plans.

It is also important to set the tone of your relationship. Spend time clarifying the agenda and the time you will take.

Spend some time getting to know each other at a personal level. Ask about hobbies and interests, but do not pry into sensitive areas. Then progress onto the work related or course related issues.

Use first names and create a friendly supportive climate but the exchange must be more than a cosy chat.

Normally the mentee should do most of the talking. The discussions should be deep and challenging but must remain focused.

### Body language

Body language is an important communicator. Read the signals and be aware of the messages you are sending. But above all be honest and natural in your communication and do not spend all your energy trying to "look interested" or use the "correct" expression.

### The Meeting Focus

It is good practice to clarify the focus of each meeting. This could include the mentee outlining their current and future objectives/goals in relation to their work and/or personal lives. If there are many, it may be helpful to select which to reasonably cover in the meeting.

### The Main Stage

Together, you should review what is going well and to plan and discuss what the mentee is pleased and satisfied with so far, celebrating successes.

You should then do the same for any areas which are not going to plan and are causing frustration, concern or lack of progress. Explore these areas of concern and look at ways of improving the situation.

The mentor should then offer constructive feedback to their mentee, and may challenge the mentee to think, act or respond differently, to use different perspectives and creatively find solutions to their issues. The mentor should check to see how this feedback is being received.

The mentor should ask whether there are any other issues the mentee would like to raise at this point and decide whether these should be worked on now or at a later meeting.

## Concluding Stage

Any adjusted or confirmed plans should be summarised and agreed. This stage should also include a brief review of key learning from the meeting in relation to both process and product, and agreement to act on this learning, together with any actions. This ensures the mentee is committed to their agreed actions and will be able to report back on progress at future mentoring meetings. A private record of the mentoring meeting can be documented and agreed, if desired, (this is a good practice to ensure shared understanding) and a date for the next meeting should be arranged.

## The On-going Relationship

The mentor-mentee relationship develops over time and often goes through several stages. Together you will need to consider how best to initiate and establish the relationship, then consolidate and maintain it, then when it has run its course, withdraw from it. You may also find it valuable to discuss and analyse these change processes.

## Transitions

At the start, you may be highly motivated and excited but also anxious and uncertain. Once into the relationship, the mentee usually gains confidence but may also experience "mid-term blues" or frustration. Towards the end, the mentee may feel relief, a sense of achievement, and concern about what happens next.

## Giving Feedback

Giving feedback will probably be one of the most important parts of mentoring. Remember to:

- ❖ Give positive feedback before negative comments
- ❖ Give feedback as soon as possible after the event
- ❖ Build on your partner's strengths
- ❖ Be specific and detailed
- ❖ Focus on things that can be changed
- ❖ Help your partner accept the feedback and see it with a growth mindset, what can be learned, changed, improved.
- ❖ Find constructive ways to tackle problems
- ❖ Suggest ways to improve
- ❖ Use words, tone of voice and body language sensitively

## Receiving Feedback

Talk to your partner about how to receive and use your feedback, regardless of your role. Consider trying the following:

- ❖ Ask for feedback about specific points
- ❖ Clarify the details to ensure you understand
- ❖ Look for specific ways to improve
- ❖ Listen to feedback without being defensive
- ❖ Adopt a growth mindset, finding learning in feedback, even if it's negative
- ❖ Ask for advice and support

## Active Listening

You should aim to develop the skills of active listening which involves the following:

### *Concentration*

Hear what is said by the mentee; watch what they do; think about what is happening.

### *Using your body language effectively*

Smile or nod to encourage; do not fidget; maintain eye contact but do not stare, be comfortable and natural and create a safe environment for discussion.

### *Using questions*

To check your understanding; to explore options; to clarify the communication, using open questions to encourage the mentee to bring their own thinking forward.

### *Consideration*

Of the content of what is being discussed; the process of the interaction; the structure (scene-setting, exploring issues, summarising, concluding).

### *Avoid*

Imposing your values; being judgemental; blocking emotions; making decisions for your partner; trying to find a quick and easy solution.

## Setting Goals

Between mentoring meetings, mentees may wish to set goals to work towards. Goal setting can be a great way to keep you motivated and moving in the right direction. These can be discussed in meetings, with an evaluation of progress, barriers to achievement and creatively examining different perspectives to uncover new options for goal achievement.

Goals can be either task-related (e.g., update my CV) or developmental (e.g., improve my assertiveness skills). The key is to set goals that are sensible and using the acronym 'SMART' to set goals and objectives can help.

<b>S</b>	Goals should be <b>specific</b> . What <i>exactly</i> is to be done: what to reduce, increase, begin, cease?
<b>M</b>	Goals should be <b>measurable</b> . How is the change or improvement to be measured (time, quality, ability, money, a product etc). If it can't be measured, can it be described? – now vs future
<b>A</b>	Goals should be <b>achievable</b> . Can the thing be done – with ease? With difficulty?
<b>R</b>	Goals should be <b>relevant</b> . Is it worth doing – does it improve your performance, add value, reduce problems, promote progression? Is it related to research work now or a future career aspiration?
<b>T</b>	Goals should be <b>time-bound</b> . By when is it to be achieved? What is a realistic time scale?

## Important versus Urgent

Academics are busy people. There will always be issues with mentees and mentors making time to meet, and to progress objectives.

Leadership guru, Stephen Covey, discusses the Eisenhower Matrix for time management in his book (the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'). He sets out an interesting way to prioritise, or let go, of tasks:

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Quadrant I Crises, deadlines, meetings/ appointments, resolving problems <b>DO</b>	Quadrant II Relationship building, strategic planning, personal development <b>PLAN</b>
Not Important	Quadrant III Interruptions, email, phone calls, other people's priorities <b>DELEGATE</b>	Quadrant IV Trivia, distractions, work avoidance, social media/ web surfing <b>ELIMINATE</b>

Covey (1990) argues that much of our time is spent in quadrants I, III and IV at the expense of quadrant II. He argues that focusing on quadrant II tasks (including mentoring and networking) can pay dividends in terms of improving our effectiveness. Whilst these activities may not be urgent, they are certainly important and worth taking (and protecting) time for.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How was my partner allocated to me?

We gathered some basic information from the application form submitted by each of the scheme's participants and after a lot of discussion we then suggested potential matches for each of the mentors.

In doing so we did our very best to:

- ❖ comply with applicants wishes
- ❖ find commonality between research interests
- ❖ create matches where the mentor can provide new perspectives, but similar enough to provide common ground and build mutual understanding
- ❖ meet any other specific criteria identified by mentees in their application

We accept that this process is far from perfect, and there will be some partners who don't get on together or who discover that they want different things from the scheme. When this happens, we will support both participants as much as we can and do our best to provide another match if desired.

### **How much of my time will this take?**

This very much depends on the individual partnership. It is entirely your choice how frequently you meet and for how often. We recommend that you discuss this and set down some guidelines at your first meeting. However, as a rough guide we'd predict that partnerships may want to meet for around 45 mins every month or so, and there will be additional time for support between meetings as agreed by the mentoring partners.

### **What happens if we don't get on?**

There is a chance that some of the suggested pairings will not work in practice, and this will probably be apparent quite quickly. We expect this, and will do our very best to provide an alternative partner when this happens. It is worth bearing in mind that a mentoring relationship is designed to challenge you and make you think differently about yourself and your approach to things. As a result, there could well be points during your meetings where you feel moved outside your comfort zone. In retrospect, this could well be when you gain the most from the scheme. However, if there is a more permanent and fundamental 'mis-match' please let someone in Graduate School know.

### **How confidential is all this?**

What you discuss with your mentor/mentee is strictly confidential between the two of you, and you must maintain this confidentiality even after your relationship has ended. You will never be asked for details of what you discuss at your meetings. The information you submitted in your application form is stored securely by the scheme administrators. It will only be used in the matching process and for communicating with you about the scheme.

### **I missed the training workshop. Can I still take part in the scheme?**

Absolutely. However, we like to at least meet with each of the participants in the scheme, so if you have been unable to attend any of the scheduled sessions, we will contact you to make alternative arrangements.

### **My mentor is from a different discipline/research field to me.**

Your mentor may not work in the same field as the mentee and may not be familiar with specific research techniques. However, it is likely that they are familiar with the research landscape, funding opportunities, and will have networks of colleagues across different disciplines. This can bring both challenges and unexpected advantages. The mentor can help mentees develop new, broad and diverse support networks. In addition, a fresh perspective from someone outside of your working environment or institution can be illuminating and may bring new perspectives. Sometimes they can get the mentee thinking about things in a whole new way. Furthermore, often mentees need help with more generic issues (e.g., career management, setting goals, personal development, etc.) on which subject area has little relevance.

### **My mentor is from the same university department as me.**

This can have both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side your mentor will be familiar with the research, people and politics in your environment and may have valuable advice to share. On the downside you may feel more inhibited in what you talk about. It's important to raise these issues when you draft your mentoring agreement (see Appendix 1) and agree confidentiality.

### **I want to talk about work issues, but I don't want to talk about personal issues.**

Often the two are closely linked – what happens at work can affect your personal life and vice versa. However, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to. You should discuss your boundaries with your partner at the first meeting when you both draw up your mentoring agreement (see Appendix 1).

### **I want to withdraw from the scheme.**

Ok. This isn't a problem. However, we do ask that you let one of the scheme co-ordinators know why you want to withdraw. If you've run into problems, can we help you overcome them? Sometimes mentoring relationships aren't easy, and you may be pushed beyond your 'comfort zone', but often this can lead to real insights and gains being made.

### **It's 6 weeks in and I've heard nothing from my mentor/mentee, what should I do?**

We ask that mentees take responsibility for making the first contact with their mentor and arranging a meeting. If you have made contact but then hear nothing, let one of the scheme co-ordinators know and we can follow up.

### **I've lost touch with my mentor and I feel awkward about getting in touch after so long.**

These things happen, although we do ask that you are committed to the mentoring scheme. You will have to *take* time for mentoring meetings otherwise other activities will take over. Your mentor will most likely understand about time pressures and your lack of contact – they've very likely been in your shoes before! If you'd rather one of the scheme coordinators break the ice on your behalf, just let us know.

### **How long will this scheme last for?**

This cycle of the scheme is expected to run until March 2023. We will be evaluating the success of the scheme at regular points between now and then.

Mentoring relationships are not open-ended. If you set some key objectives when you first meet, you should be working towards them over the course of the scheme. We anticipate that most relationships will run for about 9-10 months.

Some partnerships may wish to continue their relationship beyond this time if it is mutually desired. Alternatively, some pairings may wish to terminate their relationship sooner if both parties have achieved their objectives from the scheme. You can apply to re-enter the scheme with a different mentor.

### **Do I have to attend the networking session at the Annual Science Meeting?**

Attendance is voluntary. However, we think that this meeting could provide a highly valuable opportunity for PGRs and staff to meet each other, form networks, ask questions and discuss topics.

### **Can I claim for my travel expenses to meet face-to-face?**

Unfortunately, we cannot reimburse participants for travel costs. There is a chance you could claim any travel costs from your individual project budget. Please discuss this with your supervisors/ employer.



### **I'm a mentor and feel like I'm out of my depth.**

Being a mentor is not about solving problems for other people, but to act as listener and offer insight to your partner, or to challenge them to think about issues in a different way. If you are in a position where you feel that you are not equipped to deal with the topics your mentee is raising, please seek help from the Graduate School. If the issues are more serious, we can signpost you and/or your partner to sources of additional help and support.

If you find that you don't feel you have the necessary experience to act as a mentor, it could be that a peer-mentoring relationship could be more fruitful for you. Please indicate this in your response to the invitation for expressions of interest.

### **I have a suggestion to improve the scheme.**

We would love to hear any suggestions for improvements or changes! Send them directly to a member of the Graduate School team.

### **Will I be asked to be involved in the evaluation of the scheme?**

We will use a variety of methods to evaluate the scheme including questionnaires and some interviews. However, the evaluation will focus on the process and outcome of the scheme itself, and at no point will you be asked about what you have discussed in your mentoring relationship.

## Mentoring Dilemmas

Here are some common mentoring dilemmas, with suggested responses.

### **The mentee or mentor uses the sessions to talk about personal problems.**

The personal problems may be so overwhelming that they will inhibit any meaningful discussion about work issues. A mentor is not a trained counsellor, so it may be appropriate to suggest that they refer themselves to their university counselling or similar service, or a GP, etc. If a mentor is uncertain, the Graduate School team can help identify services available for referral, without breaching confidentiality.

### **The mentor or mentee does not complete the agreed action plans.**

Explore if the plans were unrealistic. Identify the reasons why the plans have not been completed. If this recurs, does it indicate a lack of commitment from either/both of the parties?

### **The mentee and mentor have very different styles of working.**

Recognise that different approaches may be equally valid. Mentors should not impose, and mentees should not copy, work styles.

### **The mentor is aware of problems that the mentee has not mentioned.**

It is ok for the mentor to raise the issue, but they must allow the mentee the right not to talk about it. The mentee may wish to return to the issue in the future.

**The mentee/mentor thinks their partner has breached confidentiality.**

Perhaps this should be raised, but there may be implications for trust to be damaged in the relationship. If the relationship has broken down, contact one of the Graduate School Team.

**The mentor is supportive but not challenging so the relationship is too cosy.**

Mentoring is meant to be developmental and to encourage growth, so challenge within a supportive environment is good. The onus here is on the mentor to ensure an appropriate balance of challenge and support, to help the mentee see different perspectives and new opportunities/solutions.

**The mentee keeps asking for support out with the agreed mentoring meetings.**

Expectations regarding support between meetings should be clarified at the outset and recorded in the mentoring agreement. Revisit the mentoring agreement and clarify your expectations. The mentor may be able to accommodate a higher level of support for specific activities or tasks over a short timescale, as mutually agreed. The mentor can encourage the mentee to develop a wide support network and to use different sources of support, which will benefit the mentee in the longer term.

**The mentor is too keen to offer solutions and advice.**

Encouraging mentees to work out their own solutions will prove a better long-term strategy. Try to ask open questions which encourage the mentee to seek their own solutions. If you do offer advice, why not offer a range of solutions, encouraging the mentees to think of their own, and discuss the merits and consequences of each?

**One partner suggests a joint work project.**

Would this enhance or damage the mentoring relationship? What happens to the project if the relationship falters? What happens to the relationship if the project goes badly? Give serious consideration to such a situation and it may be that the mentoring relationship must change or end to suit new circumstances.

**The mentee or mentor gives their partner a small gift.**

This might depend on the nature and value of the gift and the stage in the relationship. Would refusing a gift make you feel comfortable and uncompromised? Or would it seem to your partner like rejection? Both parties should consider the longer-term consequences for the relationship, and the mentor must think whether this would compromise their ability to provide feedback.

## Mentoring Agreements

One of the first things we recommend you do when you meet your partner is to create a mentoring agreement. This clarifies what each of you hopes to gain from the relationship, how much time and effort you are prepared to invest and the logistics of how your relationship will work.

We are keen that the scheme does not involve form-filling, but as an exception would encourage you to put your agreement in writing, so that you can refer to it over the course of your relationship and use it to help clarify any misunderstandings or changes to the partnership.

When designing your mentoring agreement, it is important to think about what you want to gain from the scheme. Some people may be seeking help with very specific goals (e.g. secure research funding, publish a paper, plan the next stage in their career), others may have a particular issue they'd like help working through (e.g. handling a difficult colleague, dealing with equipment failures), others may have less specific goals (e.g. thinking about moving away from academia, not sure what to do next).

Making time to formulate these objectives at the beginning of the relationship is very important as it will define and focus work for the course of the relationship and help to give a sense of progress and achievement from the mentoring partnership. It may also be helpful to review the mentoring agreement at least once during the partnership, to ensure common understanding and a focus on the issues that the mentee wants to address.

A template of such an agreement is provided below:

## Appendix 1

<b>PGR Mentoring Agreement</b>
<b>Purpose</b> (Expectations, roles, anticipated tasks)
<b>Meetings</b> (Duration, frequency, venue)
<b>Ground Rules</b> (Confidentiality, 'No go' areas, Responsibilities, Record keeping)
<b>Criteria for Success</b> (Monitoring progress, Relationship, Communication, Feelings, Achievement)
<b>Any other information helpful for the mentoring partnership</b>
Signed (Mentee)/ Date:
Signed (Mentor)/ Date:

## Further Reading & Resources

There are many texts on mentoring, as well as websites with useful information, including those of many of our partner universities. A few suggestions for additional reading are given here:

Covey, S (1990) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: restoring the character ethic*. Simon and Schuster.

Guccione K. & Hutchinson S. (2021). *Coaching and Mentoring for Academic Development (Surviving and Thriving in Academia)*. Emerald Publishing.

Parsloe, E. & Leedham M. Newall D. (editor) (2022). *Coaching and Mentoring: Practical Techniques for Developing Learning and Performance*. Kogan Page Ltd.

Starr, J. (2021) *The Mentoring Manual: Your Step-by-step Guide to Being a Better Mentor*.

## Contacts

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