

Mentoring circles: Information for mentees

Why should you join this mentoring scheme?

The mentoring scheme is an opportunity for you to take the time to reflect on issues that matter to you, and take actions to address them, supported by your mentor and your mentoring group. There might be a particular issue you're having at work, you may be wondering how to progress in your career (inside or outside academia), be struggling with work-life balance, or it could be anything else that's important to you.

Who can be a mentee?

The scheme aims to support the development of postdoctoral and early career researchers across the Division by encouraging self-reflection, increasing networking opportunities through peer circles and providing access to senior staff members outside of the researchers' home department.

What is peer mentoring?

Mentoring circles will be set up with a group of ~4 mentees to 1 mentor. This mentoring circle format delivery maximises the use of the mentor's time and is also an effective way to utilise informal peer support networking.

The basis of the mentoring scheme is that:

- Participation is on a voluntary basis.
- Mentoring conversations are confidential and private.
- The mentor is outside the mentee's direct line management chain, with greater experience in one or more areas.

Mentoring circles should run initially for a 12 month period (or for at least four meetings, whichever is sooner) but the relationship may continue by mutual consent. Face to face meetings should be agreed upon and scheduled at the first meeting. Sessions should be held at a mutually convenient location, which can be the mentor's office and should generally last for at least an hour. Individual meetings will be available at the discretion of the mentor; however, please note that the mentor is not obliged to offer this to their mentees. Mentees in a circle are encouraged to meet more regularly and peer to peer mentoring can also take place between meetings via email to sustain the momentum of the meetings and support each other through any specific concerns. We will provide the mentees with resources to explore different development topics.

Once you're enrolled on the scheme, you will be invited to an initial workshop with all other participating mentees. This is an opportunity to consider the commitment you will make as a mentee, understand the boundaries of the mentoring relationship and raise any issues; you will also be able to hone in on some of the things you would like to address through mentoring, if you are unclear. There is also on-going support from Jennifer Anderson and Laura Hodsdon if required.

Why use peer mentoring circles rather than 1:1 mentoring?

The perspectives that can be offered by a small group of your peers, especially those that have experienced a different part of the University, can be extremely valuable.

Your fellow mentees will (wherever possible) not be from the same department as you and may not even be at the same career stage, but they are a valuable sounding board and their different experiences could be very valuable in offering you an outside perspective.

Mentees must commit to all appointments to sustain the circle and to regular contact with the other mentees in their circle. By the end of the mentoring process you should have taken active steps towards your goals.

Those who have participated in the first round of this scheme have told us that they benefitted from having more than one perspective, as well as the opportunity to meet others from different places in the University.

“Great to have ‘neutral’ feedback from people in a similar situation. Often it is surprisingly useful to simply describe a problem and (with advice) arrive at a series of possible actions.”

“Meeting people from other departments and hearing both new perspectives on my situation and hearing similar concerns to mine makes me feel less alone.”

“It has given me some accountability i.e. made me be proactive about things that develop me professionally and enhance my CV.”

“It was useful to have time away from work, and in a supportive environment to reflect on personal and career goals.”

“The mentor has been a wonderful facilitator and resource person.”

Who are the mentors?

Your mentor will be a more senior colleague who will be able to draw where appropriate on their own experience and provide some insights and thoughts from their own career, acting as a facilitator to allow you to discover your own direction,. However, they are not expected to offer solutions nor to undertake the work of development on your behalf. Getting the most out of mentoring requires you to be proactive and to bring your own ideas and self-reflection: this is about you generating actions, not about your mentor telling you what they think you should or could do.

What kinds of things should we discuss?

The meetings are for your benefit and so you and your fellow mentees should discuss whatever topics are most useful for you. However, some of the most common themes arising from the current mentees include:

- Finding and applying for funding
- Teaching – how to find opportunities and what to do when you get them
- Managing your supervisor and saying ‘no’
- Managing your time
- Work-life balance

At the beginning of the scheme mentees should:

- Agree personal ground rules with their mentor and fellow mentees e.g. confidentiality.
- Agree the scope of the circle, what it is and what it is not e.g. *It is positive but challenging, it is not providing magic answers.*
- Ensure everyone agrees to make the relevant time commitments so that all circle members have balanced and mutual support.
- Also agree how you will manage exceptions e.g. will the mentor and mentee have informal contact between meetings?

Further information is available here: www.learning.ox.ac.uk/resources/mentoring/ and oxfest.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/mentoring-toolkit.pdf

Appendix 1

Rules of the Mentoring Relationship

1. We will only enquire about each other's personal life by invitation.
2. We will not make excessive demands on the other's time.
3. We will only use the others' names or authority with previous consent.
4. The mentor will assist the mentee in achieving objectives, but will let the mentee do things for him/herself as much as possible.
5. We can end the relationship at any time following discussion with the circle.
6. Our mentoring relationships are confidential both during and after the formal relationship has finished.
7. The mentor will only discuss the mentee with others with the mentee's consent (unless there is a health and safety issue involved, in which case the mentor will advise the mentee of the imminent disclosure).
8. We will meet XX times at mutually agreed venues and communicate with each other as and when necessary (within reason) by telephone or email.
9. We will advise the Divisional Mentoring team of any breakdown of the mentoring relationship.
10. We will agree an action plan at the end of each meeting and monitor progress at the next meeting.

Signed: _____ (Mentor).

Date: _____

Signed: _____ (Mentee).

Date: _____