

Wolfson *Mentor Connect* Programme Guidelines

1. Introduction

Overview of the Mentoring Scheme:

Transitioning from PhD to the next professional role can be challenging for many early-career researchers. The first years post-PhD are essential in defining one's research agenda and navigating the job market. This period often involves short-term contracts, unsuccessful grant applications, and relocating between countries, cities, or institutions. It is also a period of discovery. You may be questioning whether the academy is for you or how to balance work with other interests and commitments.

Colleagues can often offer sound advice on how to succeed in your department or discipline. As a College, Wolfson is well-placed to provide mentorship in a more relaxed and informal environment, removed from workplace pressures and departmental hierarchies. With this in mind, *Mentor Connect* offers engagement outside of your immediate discipline to help early-career researchers speak openly about the challenges they face, consider alternatives, and solutions and plan next steps.

Who is Involved?

- **Mentor:** A mentor is a Fellow or member of Wolfson College with normally at least 5 years of professional experience who based on their lived experience, career journey and expertise, provides guidance, support, and advice to a mentee.
- **Mentee:** A mentee is a Junior Research Fellow (JRF), Research Fellow (RF), or other post-doctoral affiliate (e.g., postdoctoral researcher member of the Common Room) seeking guidance, support, and advice from a mentor. Mentees typically have less professional experience than their mentors and are looking to develop their skills, identify career opportunities, or reflect on career transitions.

What it is not?

The programme aims to offer guidance and support for professional and personal development, empowering mentees to address challenges, make informed decisions, and foster growth. It is not intended to resolve personal or professional problems, provide direct solutions or make decisions on behalf of the mentee. As your mentor will likely be outside your discipline, the programme cannot replace the kind of field-based advice only your disciplinary colleagues can provide.

2. Aim and Objectives

The Wolfson Mentor Connect Programme aims to promote the career development Junior Research Fellows (JRFs) or Research Fellows (RFs), considering both their professional and personal aspirations.

Objectives:

1. Create a support network for JRF or RF transitioning between professional roles.

- a. Assist in planning next career steps through discussions that focus on identifying challenges, potential solutions, and areas for skill development.
 - b. Explore professional options where research skills may be valuable.
 - c. Provide a safe space to discuss professional concerns that may not be appropriate for discussion with departmental managers (e.g., moving between sectors, changing disciplines, or leaving academia).
2. Promote engagement between junior and senior members of the College, encouraging a collaborative environment.
 3. Valorise the wealth of expertise, experiences, and cultural diversity of the members of the College.

3. Possible Outcomes

The mentoring relationship is built on trust and mutual respect, with individual goals and outcomes decided between mentor and mentee. While each mentoring relationship is unique, the following are possible outcomes:

- **Career and Skill Development:** Mentees may gain greater clarity on their career goals, receive guidance on professional transitions, and identify opportunities to enhance leadership, communication, and management skills, including time management and tasks prioritization.
- **Personal Growth and Work-life Balance:** Mentees may gain insights into their strengths, weaknesses, and personal values, fostering self-awareness. They can also develop strategies for balancing professional responsibilities with personal life and setting boundaries to maintain productivity.
- **Resilience and Adaptability:** Mentees may build resilience and adaptability, developing a positive mindset to manage challenges, cope with setbacks, and handle pressure more effectively.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Mentor Responsibilities:

- Provide guidance, support, and encouragement.
- Share knowledge, experience, and insights.
- Help the mentee set and achieve their goals.
- Maintain confidentiality and professionalism.
- Attend scheduled meetings with the mentee

Mentee Responsibilities:

- Take the initiative in contacting the mentor and scheduling meetings.
- Be proactive in setting goals and seeking guidance.
- Prepare for and actively participate in meetings.
- Respect the mentor's time and expertise.
- Follow through on agreed actions and feedback.

- Maintain confidentiality and professionalism.
- Attend meetings as agreed with the mentor.

5. Mentor/Mentee matching

At the start of Michaelmas term, College members will receive a form to express their interest in participating in the mentoring programme. This form will collect personal information and preferences for mentors. The scheme coordinators will match mentors and mentees based on these preferences and availability.

Priority for Mentee Selection: Priority will be given to mentees within the final 6-12 months of their current University contract, as they approach a critical phase of career transition and development.

6. Mentorship Sessions

The scheme coordinators will facilitate the initial contact between mentors and mentees. Following this introduction, the mentee is responsible for scheduling future meetings. This ensures the mentoring relationship remains focused on the mentee's needs and goals.

Frequency and Duration: We recommend at least one session per term, with a maximum of six sessions per academic year (October to June). Each session should last approximately one hour, although this can be adjusted by agreement between mentor and mentee.

Session content: Mentees should prepare a list of specific questions and topics to discuss with the mentor. Common goals for these sessions could include: clarifying career ambitions, navigating transitions, and identifying professional opportunities where research skills are valued.

7. Communication and Interaction

Preferred Communication Methods. Once assigned, mentees should contact their mentor via email. Meetings can be held either online (via Teams) or face-to-face, depending on mutual agreement.

At the first meeting, both parts should agree the mean and terms of communication.

8. Confidentiality

As part of the mentoring relationship, both the mentor and mentee agree to maintain the confidentiality of all discussions, communications, and shared information. This includes, but is not limited to, personal experiences, career goals, professional challenges, and any sensitive information disclosed during mentoring sessions.

Both parties acknowledge that:

- ✓ Confidentiality is crucial for fostering an environment of trust and openness. Any information shared during mentoring sessions should not be disclosed to third parties without explicit permission from the other party.
- ✓ Exceptions to confidentiality may occur only when required by law or when there is a significant risk of harm to the mentee or others. In such cases, the mentor may be obligated to disclose certain information to appropriate authorities.
- ✓ Breach of confidentiality will result in a review of the mentoring relationship and could lead to termination of participation in the mentoring program.

- ✓ By participating in the mentoring program, both the mentor and mentee agree to uphold these confidentiality standards.

9. Harassment Policy

We are committed to providing a respectful and safe environment for mentors and mentees. In the event of any harassment or discriminatory behaviour, we will adhere strictly to the Wolfson College's established policies (<https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/policies-procedures/>). All reported incidents will be handled in accordance with these guidelines to ensure a fair and thorough investigation. If you experience or witness harassment, please report it immediately to the appropriate College authorities.

10. Cancellation Policy

Mentors and mentees are encouraged to give each other at least 24 hours' notice for cancelling or rescheduling a session, though they may agree on a different arrangement within their group. Repeated cancellations without valid reason could lead to removal from the programme.

11. Mentor/Mentee Reassignment Policy

We understand that sometimes the mentee and mentor may not forge a strong connection or may feel uncomfortable with the pairing. This is perfectly normal and is not anyone's fault. If you find the initial match isn't working out, you may request a reassignment, provided there are available mentors/mentees. Please note that reassignments are permitted only once per academic year and should be based on reasonable grounds. To request a reassignment, please contact the scheme coordinators

12. Evaluation and Feedback

Ongoing Feedback: Both mentors and mentees are encouraged to provide feedback throughout the mentoring relationship.

Final Review: We suggest conducting a final review at the end of the mentoring period to evaluate the progress made and identify areas for improvement.

13. Commitment to Adhere to Guidelines

Both parties agree to uphold and adhere to the rules and procedures outlined in the mentoring guidelines. By participating in this program and signing the initial agreement, each party commits to following these established rules and contributing to a positive and effective mentoring relationship.

14. Volunteer Effort and Feedback

This programme is organised on a voluntary basis by the College's JRFs and RFs. While we are committed to providing support, we appreciate your understanding of the time constraints imposed by our own professional and personal responsibilities.

Please keep in mind that all mentors generously volunteer their personal time to support and guide the mentees.

If you have any suggestions or feedback on how we can improve the mentoring experience, please do not hesitate to share them with us. Your input is valuable and will help us enhance the program for everyone involved. Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Contact Information:

For queries or concerns, please contact the coordinators at mentor.connect@wolfson.ox.ac.uk.

Additional resources:

- <https://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/> (Career Support)
- <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/connecting-other-researchers/mentoring>