

# Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Career Pathways Mentoring Programme

## Contents:

- Programme Overview
- Overarching aims of the Career Pathways Mentoring (CPM) Scheme
- What and who is involved with the programme?
- The mentoring partnership
- The process for mentoring
- Feedback from mentors and mentees

## Programme Overview

This programme seeks to support the career development of current PhD researchers by working with PhD alumni who have completed their PhD and gone on to work out with academia. The programme aims to build current PhD students' sector knowledge and their understanding of the skills that they need to develop, as well as the skills that they can bring to organisations out with academia.

## Overarching aims of the Career Pathways Mentoring (CPM) Programme

- To enable current PhD researchers to understand the drivers and culture of a sector that they are interested in out with academia (public, private or third sector);
- To enable current PhD researchers to understand the skills, knowledge or experiences required to succeed on a career pathway out with academia;
- To define a mentoring skill set and build a culture of ethical professional practice in mentoring for the PhD alumni community;
- **It should be noted that each mentee will have the opportunity to set and work towards their own objectives for mentoring.**

## What and who is involved with the CPM Programme?

Mentoring is a learning relationship that includes elements of listening, advising, planning, challenge, support and sharing experience. It is more than an 'advisory' relationship and to be impactful mentoring should balance advice-giving with challenging the mentee to seek their own solutions, and solve their own problems.

In this programme mentoring can be understood as: *"A confidential active learning process whereby an experienced, empathic person (the mentor) facilitates the development of another individual (the mentee) via raising their awareness of new horizons, cultures and perspectives, and through enabling the re-examination of their own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development in line with this new learning."*

**The programme lasts for 6 months (January – July). The total time commitment is expected to be 8 hours for mentors and mentees.** This includes commitments to the Welcome Workshop and Launch Event (2 hours), the mentoring meetings (4h on a one-to-one basis), plus self-reflection and development on the programme for mentors and mentees through guided sessions (1 hour), and all associated paperwork (1 hour).

**The Mentees:** Mentees are in the second or final year of their PhD and are selected via an online application form. Mentees are proactive partners in that they drive the learning through the mentoring partnership: they set objectives for their own learning, lead the agenda for the one-to-one sessions and decide how best to use their time.

The general anticipated benefits to mentees are:

1. An opportunity to learn how different organisations work, the research they do, and the people they recruit, along with gaining an understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities role types within a sector;
2. Dedicated time to focus on career options and planning with access to a knowledgeable sounding board for testing out ideas;
3. Increased professional networks and points of contact via the mentor, and/or the other mentees in the programme cohort;
4. Increased self-awareness, awareness of the transferability of research skills, and confidence in joining new work environments.

**The Mentors:** All alumni mentors are PhD graduates. They either work within the private, public and third sectors, or work within academia and have experience building partnerships with those sectors. They therefore have direct experience of both academic and private, public or third sector career pathways and environments.

Mentors guide the mentee through an exploration process, helping them to recognise their skills and strengths, learn from past experiences, seek new experiences, and create a personalised action plan for their career development. The best mentors are those who seek to listen to the needs of their mentee and allow the mentee to steer the direction of the partnership, drawing on their experiences as appropriate.

Both mentee and mentor will benefit from the learning partnership. Some anticipated positive outcomes for mentors include:

1. Management and leadership development: self-awareness, active listening, challenging, motivating others, building commitment to action, coaching.
2. Increased professional networks, via the mentee and/or the other mentors in the programme cohort.
3. Appreciation of the skills and experiences of PhD researchers and the benefit they can bring to private, public and third sector organisations.
4. Satisfaction of helping others who are transitioning from academic research into other sectors and/or research opportunities.

The future employers of researchers will also benefit by helping highly skilled researchers understand their organisation's key drivers and challenges from a first-hand source. We hope this will help researchers make more strategic career decisions and find employers whose values match closely to their own.

## The mentoring partnership

Mentors and mentees will complete a short application form detailing career experiences, aspirations, and objectives for mentoring which will be reviewed to create complementary match for each mentee.

Once pairs are matched, the programme will start with a Welcome Workshop and Launch Event for all participants. After this initial event, mentoring proceeds as a series of confidential conversations, which focus on the objectives that mentees set for themselves. Formats are likely to include: email exchanges; one-to-one meetings; invited observations of workplace meetings; and networking opportunities.

Activities and conversational topics should be selected according to mentee objectives, and a range of ideas will be presented in the Mentoring Welcome Pack. To get the most from mentoring, it is important that confidentiality is respected on both sides to enable open conversations and begin to build trust.

The mentor role is designed to be a developmental partnership which complements other key figures in postgraduate support (e.g., supervisors, advisors, mentors) and existing support structures and points of contact. It does not replace or compensate for any of these existing relationships.

### Some activities that are *not* expected of mentors are:

- Advice or guidance on the content of the mentee's PhD studies, or the PhD Thesis;
- Act on the mentee's behalf, solve problems for them, or take action to contact the mentee's colleague(s) or university department(s) to advocate for the mentee;
- Providing work experience, internships or placements;
- Offering a job, offering to 'put a good word in', or offering to influence a selection panel;
- Sponsorship to study, or to attend conferences, training, or meetings, etc;
- Provide a counselling or therapy service.

Alumni mentoring is not explicitly linked to monitoring or evaluation processes for PhD researchers. The role of the mentor is separate to that of the supervisor and the mentor will not advise on the content of the mentee's PhD studies, or the PhD Thesis. Although students may be asked about their progress as part of the Training Needs Analysis process that SGSSS completes with ESRC-funded students every year, this is intended to record professional development only, and will not be used to assess, grade, or monitor performance.

## The process for mentoring

1. Mentees and mentors apply to join by completing an Application Form – mentors [here](#), mentees [here](#).
2. Matches are announced and mentors/mentees introductions are made via email.
3. All participants attend a 2 hour SGSSS Mentoring Programmes Launch Event. The Launch Event will take place in person at the Royal Society of Edinburgh – details to be confirmed closer to the time.
4. Mentoring proceeds for 4x1h meetings over 6 months. Timing agreed by each pair, to suit the participants' schedules.
5. At 3 months: separate self-reflection and cohort building sessions for the mentors and mentees respectively.
6. End of Programme evaluation via Online Surveys.

## The process for mentoring

SGSSS asks mentees and mentors to provide feedback at the end of each programme. All mentors involved with the 2021/22 programme reported that they would recommend the mentoring programme to others. Mentors highlighted the sense of satisfaction that they gained through helping PhD researchers, and all agreed that the scheme helped them to appreciate the skills that PhD students could bring to their workplace.

Mentees on the 2021/22 scheme reported that the scheme supported them to develop their understanding of their next career steps with a knowledgeable sounding board. All mentees stated that they would recommend the scheme to other PhD students. We are still collecting feedback from the 2022/23 programme, but you can see a couple of case studies of the 2022/23 student experience [here](#).

*The Career Pathways Mentoring Programme was designed in 2019/20 in collaboration with Dr. Kay Guccione, the SGSSS Alumni Community, and with current postgraduate researchers in the SGSSS. We are grateful to Charlotte Bonner-Evans of the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network for her work developing our resources for mentors in 2022/23.*