

## The RSE Mentoring Programme

### Guidance for Mentees and Mentors

#### 1. Programme Overview

This programme seeks to support talented PhD researchers to develop their potential and explore the different directions their research can take. The Scottish Graduate School of Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS) works with the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) to match current ESRC funded PhD researchers with members of the RSE network. We aim to prompt learning across different disciplines, and to in turn enhance the knowledge and skills for ESRC funded PhD students to undertake interdisciplinary work.

#### Overarching aims of the RSE Mentoring Programme

- To enable PhD students to understand how different disciplines operate, and in turn the interdisciplinary appeal of their own research;
- To increase PhD students' understanding of research impact and career pathways;
- To define a mentoring skill set and build a culture of collaborative, supportive practice between RSE Fellows and the next generation of research leaders;
- **It should be noted that each mentee will have the opportunity to set and work towards their own objectives for mentoring.**

#### 2. What and who is involved with the RSE Mentoring 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. 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 is designed to run for 9-12 months and the total time commitment is expected to be 8 hours for mentors and mentees.** This includes commitments to the in-person Welcome Workshop and Launch Event (2 hours), the mentoring meetings (around 4h on a one-to-one basis), plus feedback and all associated paperwork (1 hour).

**The Mentees:** This programme is open to ESRC-funded students in the second or third year of their PhD study. Mentees will be selected through an online application form. Mentees are proactive partners in that they drive the learning that derives from 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 build their knowledge about the interdisciplinary potential within their own research and research community;
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 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:** Each mentor will be a current [Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh](#) or a member of the [Young Academy of Scotland](#).

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. Appreciation of the skills and experiences of social science PhD researchers, and the benefits that they can bring to other disciplines;
3. Satisfaction of helping others who are building their academic careers and exploring different interdisciplinary research opportunities.

### 3. The mentoring partnership

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. Mentors will volunteer to participate in the programme and will complete a short Expression of Interest Form.

Together, these forms will enable SGSSS and the RSE to identify suitable pairings. Please note: to encourage interdisciplinarity, mentors and mentees will be matched with someone from a different discipline. All mentees will be social scientists.

Once pairs are matched, the programme will start with an in person Launch Event for all participants. This Launch Event, which will take place at the RSE building in Edinburgh, provides a space to discuss best practice in mentoring and for mentors and mentees to meet one another in person for the first time. Hereon, the mentoring proceeds as a series of confidential conversations, which focus on the objectives that mentees set for themselves.

The majority of mentoring one-to-ones are likely to take place online, via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. However, mentors and mentees may choose to meet in person, if it is convenient for them to do so.

Activities and conversation topics should be selected according to mentee objectives, and a range of ideas will be presented after the Launch Event as part of the RSE 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.

This mentoring programme 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 Development 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.

**4. Process for the RSE Mentoring Scheme**

1. Mentees and mentors apply to join: mentors complete this [Expression of Interest Form](#), mentees complete this [Application Form](#);
2. Matches are announced and mentor/mentee introductions are made via email by SGSSS;
3. All participants attend an in person Launch Event – this will take place in January at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The event should last roughly 2 hours;
4. Mentoring proceeds for 4-6 1h meetings. Timing agreed by each pair, to suit the participants’ schedules;
5. Mentees will be offered a self-reflection and cohort building session. Mentors will be offered the opportunity to provide feedback and discuss mentoring practice;
6. End of Programme evaluation via Online Surveys.

## 5. Case Study

The original pilot programme for the RSE Mentoring Scheme was completed by a small number of interdisciplinary PhD students. You can see a case study by Timothy McGowan, a PhD researcher at the University of Strathclyde, [online here](#).