

The RSE-SGSSS Mentoring Programme

Mentee Guidance

Through this programme, you will be matched with an experienced mentor who is a current Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh or a member of the Young Academy of Scotland.

You can see a list of current fellows here: <https://www.rse.org.uk/fellows/>.

And current YAS members here:

<https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-members/>

This document outlines:

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If you have any questions about the mentoring programme, you can contact us on team@sgss.ac.uk and we will be happy to help.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) are both committed to supporting excellent research to thrive. We want to support talented researchers to develop their potential and explore the different directions their research could take, and to promote learning and collaboration across different disciplines.

Interdisciplinary research, which combines approaches from more than one discipline, is an increasingly important and vibrant part of academic life. However, it's not always clear to researchers at an early stage of their career what relevance their research can have beyond their immediate discipline, or the best way of maximising the potential of the research.

The SGSSS and RSE started collaborating on a pilot mentoring programme with interdisciplinary PhD students in 2019. The programme matches students with an experienced mentor in the RSE who specialise in a different discipline to the students. Further to positive feedback, we expanded the programme to make it available to all ESRC-funded Scottish social science researchers from 2020/21.

Through the mentoring programme, we hope that you will be able to:

- Explore the value of interdisciplinarity for your research and research culture more broadly.
- Increase your understanding of research impact, potential networks, and careers advice)
- Lead your own professional development by deciding what to discuss with your mentor when, and how best to use your sessions

It is likely that every mentee engaging with the programme will be looking for something slightly different, as you will all be working on very different projects and will be at different stages of your research journey. The programme is designed to be flexible and light-touch, so that you can use the time with your mentor as best suits you.

1.2. Principles

The mentoring programme is designed to be a reciprocal conversation which is led by mentees. By engaging with the programme, both mentor and mentee agree to approach each other with mutual respect and to prioritise the mentoring sessions even when their other commitments are busy.

As the mentee, it is **your responsibility** to make this mentoring programme productive and to decide what you would like to cover in the mentoring sessions. We hope that you will enjoy using this time and space to focus on your professional development and develop new insights to your research.

Dr Kay Guccione, a Senior Lecturer in Academic Development at Glasgow Caledonian University, outlines some key principles for mentoring in her excellent [blog about the mentor-mentee relationship](#). Her overview places emphasis on a mentor engaging carefully with the needs of the mentee, listening to their challenges, and then supporting them to develop their own thinking on this topic. Although this guidance is aimed in particular at the mentor, it demonstrates the expectations that are applicable for both mentor and mentee throughout the RSE Mentoring Programme.

Figure 1: Kay Guccione ++ mentoring principles



1.3 Timeline

The RSE Mentoring Programme is designed to be flexible: we know that you and your mentor will be fitting the sessions in around multiple commitments.

- Wednesday 12 January 2022, 17.00-18.30:** Mentoring Programme Launch Event. This event will be an opportunity for you to learn more about the outcomes of the programme, hear from other mentors and mentees, and meet your mentor for the first time. It is planned to take place online, and is a mandatory.
- January 2022 – December 2022:** We advise that you have up to four meetings with your mentor over the course of the year. You can decide with your mentor how and when these meetings take place.

We'll be regularly in touch to hear how your experience is going and help to make it even better through the following mechanisms:

- check-in email, after the first 3 months

- social virtual event after, 6 months
- informal focus groups, after 9 months
- programme evaluation survey, at the end of the programme

1.4 Contacts

Flaminia Raiteri - SGSSS Employability and Partnerships Manager – team@sgsss.ac.uk.
If the meetings aren't going well or you decide not to continue with the programme, please let Flaminia know straight away.

2. Guidance for mentoring

2.1 Advice for new mentees

As described above, the mentoring programme is designed to be a reciprocal conversation which is led by mentees. It is easy to think about mentoring as an opportunity for the mentee to sit down and get advice from their mentor, but good mentoring should have a balance between receiving advice and talking through any problems or challenges that you are experiencing to develop your own thinking on this topic. It is likely that your mentor will ask many more questions than they will make statements, and that the mentee will be talking for the majority of the time in the session.

Here is some key advice for making your meetings with your mentor productive, based on Joanne Kamens' article ['Mentoring for Scientists: I Have a Mentor, What Now?'](#):

- Set expectations clearly by discussing logistics in your first meeting: How often will you meet? How does the Mentor prefer to communicate between meetings (email, phone, etc.)?
- Make agendas for your meetings and share these with your mentor beforehand.
- To consolidate the discussions, make informal minutes on what was covered and learned during your meeting, especially noting action items that are identified.
- Keep a journal to record topics, plans, findings, and progress over the course of an ongoing mentoring relationship (in a book or online).
- Suggest an activity to start discussion, particularly in the early sessions when you are getting to know each other.

There are some useful resources here:

- [Think Ahead Blog](#): A series of blog posts by Kay Guccione, based on her experience running a mentoring programme at the University of Sheffield. There is a good variety of content and advice on this blog, and it will be particularly useful to learn more about the mentor's perspective and to understand the kind of support you can expect from a mentor.
- [Doctors of Mentoring Podcasts](#): If you are interested in learning more about the theory of mentoring, and different models for mentoring programmes. This podcast has been put together by the STAMINA mentoring network at Oxford Brookes University. It is aimed principally at the co-ordinators of mentoring programmes.
- [Tips for Mentees](#): If you are interested in some further advice on setting up a good mentoring relationship. This document was set up by Harvard University for their Harvard Graduate Women in Science and Engineering Programme, and some elements of the document are therefore specific to that programme.

2.2 Provisional Agendas

The aim of this programme is not to get specific advice about the development of your research project, or to provide contacts for you within your own field, but rather to enhance your understanding of how different disciplines can work together, collaboration, and impact.

We advise that your meetings cover the below topics. These should be personalised to make the conversations valuable for you and your research. For example, Meeting 3 could focus on the notion of impact (impact within a university, impact within a research field, and impact in the wider world) or on a particular impact project that you are working on and would like advice with.

1. Introduction to yourself, your research, and your areas of focus for the mentoring programme (Meeting 1)
2. Sharing experiences across research traditions (Meeting 2)
3. Impact of research. This meeting could focus on the notion of impact, (Meeting 3)
4. Career opportunities and future planning (meeting 4)

2.3 Case Study

The pilot programme 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](#).