

The Co-production Network's Mentoring Scheme

The purpose of mentoring

Effective mentoring supports researchers in conducting Co-production research by leveraging the experience of the mentor to help the mentee to develop and grow, for example, understanding the methodologies, opportunities, and challenges of the co-produced approach. It empowers mentors to share their wisdom with their mentees to support their work. Mentees will gain invaluable insights and guidance; the process should be rewarding and mutually beneficial for both parties, as well as helping to develop the coproduction network at Leeds.

FOR THE MENTEE:

Mentoring is a two-way relationship. Adopting an active role and taking ownership of your research development will ensure you get the most value out of the relationship. It will be helpful to set out at the start what you want to get from mentoring (or at least work to understand what you want) and come to meetings with an agenda to discuss.

FOR THE MENTOR:

The challenge for a mentor is to involve the mentee in the process by asking questions and prompting the mentee to engage and take ownership of their own decisions. Keep in mind that your level of engagement and enthusiasm is as valuable as your knowledge and experience.

Expectations, commitment, and responsibility

Setting transparent expectations and boundaries from the start and ensuring that both the mentor and mentee make realistic commitments is helpful at the outset. To establish a productive mentoring relationship, finding a mutually agreeable time is crucial. Allocating approximately 30 minutes for each meeting can be a useful guideline, provided this time is genuinely beneficial rather than just a formality. It is vital to tailor this time allocation to suit specific requirements, ensuring that mentoring endeavours are meaningful and efficient.

How to plan your mentoring time/practicalities

While some mentoring relationships have regular back-and-forth emails, others might rely on just a few meetings. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Mentors/mentees are expected to meet three times during the period of mentoring, and for a minimum of 30 minutes per meeting.
- Meetings can be more or less formal and in-person or via a Teams call. The informal arrangements such as getting lunch or coffee together, will help to develop a more personal connection.
- Make sure your meetings happen in places where you both feel safe and comfortable and consider if the location allows you to maintain confidentiality if required.

Once you have arranged your first meeting, some planning and preparation for the mentee will make the meeting more fruitful. As a mentee, you should ask yourself:

- What do you want to get out of the mentoring?
- What outcomes would tell you that the mentoring has been successful?

As a mentor, you should be attentive and consider how you can contribute to the aims set out by the mentee. In the initial meeting, you should focus on these points, as well as your expectation,

boundaries, and level of commitment. It is also essential to recognise that mentoring does not have to be purely professional, indeed having some personal connection is a healthy and positive component of the mentoring which will help you establish trust and good rapport.

Once you have established your relationship, you may benefit from using a structured approach to guide your meetings. You could try **Review and ToGROW**.

Review Progress

- How have you got on with your previous actions?
- What has gone well/badly and what have you learned?

Topic

- What do you want to discuss?
- What do you need to discuss?

Goal

- What is your goal for this meeting?
- What are your goals moving forwards?

Reality

- Where do you currently stand in relation to your goals?
- Where are you now with your goal?
- What challenges do you face?
- What additional resources / support / development do you need?

Options

- What could you do now that would move you one step closer to achieving your goal?
- What is missing?

Way Forward

- Which option will take you closer to your goal?
- Who, what, why, and how?
- Is your plan realistic?

Within this framework, much of the role of the mentor is to guide the mentee through this process of self-questioning.

Asking and listening, bringing value to conversation

Both parties must take an active role in asking, listening, and bringing value to the conversation.

FOR THE MENTOR:

- **Demonstrate Active Listening:** Show your mentee that you are fully engaged in the conversation by actively listening. Offer your honest opinions and advice, while also respecting your mentee's choices and decisions.
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Be cautious not to make commitments you cannot fulfil. Clear communication and managing expectations will sustain a trusting and productive relationship.
- **Provide Constructive Challenges:** Occasionally, challenge your mentee with tasks or questions that encourage them to think critically, expand their horizons, and develop problem-solving skills. This can stimulate personal and professional growth.
- **Share Personal Experiences:** Offer anecdotes or insights from your own career journey to provide practical context for your mentee. These personal stories can be invaluable learning tools.

FOR THE MENTEE:

- **Engage in Self-Reflection:** Be open to self-assessment, acknowledging your strengths and weaknesses. Willingness to receive constructive criticism is essential for personal and professional growth.
- **Follow Through:** Once a mutually agreed-upon path with your mentor is established, take action accordingly. If you disagree with your mentor, communicate this openly. Consistency between words and actions is vital to maintain a healthy and effective mentoring relationship.
- **Initiate Discussions:** Don't hesitate to bring up topics or questions that you feel are important for your growth and development. Proactive engagement demonstrates your commitment to the relationship.
- **Implement Feedback:** Act on the feedback provided by your mentor. Show that you value their input by making genuine efforts to integrate their suggestions and advice into your actions and decisions.