

MENTORING SCHEME HANDBOOK



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1.0 Prostate Cancer UK's role

1.1 Why do we have a mentoring scheme?

We recognise that to grow and develop within the prostate cancer research community, researchers need a way to seek and gain support from their peers. In setting up our mentoring scheme we'll act as facilitators, matching mentors and mentees, providing guidance and support where appropriate.



Mentoring means you have an independent person, separate from your work and your institute, who you can have a confidential conversation with and who's experiences you can draw on.

Dr Adam Sharp, Mentor

1.2 What is our definition of mentoring?

Mentoring is a development partnership based on peer support – where researchers further along in their careers share their knowledge and experience with those at earlier stages, or with those seeking to develop in specific areas – with opportunities for mutual learning.

- Prostate Cancer UK will match mentors with mentees and monitor the initial progress of the mentoring relationship.
- Mentors offer career development/ progression support.
- Mentees have clear development objectives and seek support achieving them.

1.3 How do we make a match?

We ask potential mentors and mentees to fill out an [online form](#) with basic details including areas of expertise (for mentors) and areas for development (for mentees). Based on this information we will make matches. We will approach mentors and mentees individually with the potential match. Once both parties agree, we will share contact details.

1.4 How will we monitor the partnerships?

We'll send both members of the partnership an initial short survey after four weeks, to check that everything is up and running smoothly. After a further six months, we'll send you both a follow-up survey to gather feedback on your experience so far. The purpose of the surveys is to ensure the partnership is working and that both parties are finding it useful. If either party has a concern, we will support where we can. After the second survey, you can agree to continue the partnership together, or stop if it has come to a natural conclusion.



2.0 Mentors

2.1 What is a mentor?

As a mentor, you're an experienced researcher with valuable insight into the academic world and want to help less experienced researchers with career-related problems, questions, or goals. As someone often just a step or two further along in your research career, you may have recent experience of the challenges your mentee is facing.

2.2 How to be a good mentor



Be clear about your experience from the first meeting.



Be honest with your mentee about whether you can help with their goals and objectives.



Encourage the mentee to lead the conversation, but be ready to steer the discussion if required to ensure the goals set by the mentee remain the focus of your meetings.



Be available for regular meetings. How regular your meetings are will depend on what your mentee's goals are – following the initial meeting, we suggest at least every three months to begin with, but recognise every mentoring relationship will be different.



Be open to the benefits of mentoring for both you and your mentee.



My mentor went above and beyond, sharing her experiences and giving me practical advice to help me move forward with my own career.

Dr Demi Pritchard, Mentee

2.3 Active listening

As a mentor it's really useful to practise active listening when meeting with your mentee. It's likely your mentee will already have a solution in mind for their problem but may need your support and expertise to help them commit to their decision.

We can't provide training on active listening, but listed below are some resources on how to be an effective active listener:

- [CharityComms: The art of great conversation: active listening and how it can empower others](#)
- [Mindtools guide to active listening](#)
- [British Heart Foundations 10 tips for active listening](#)

2.4 Safeguarding

We recognise that mentoring relationships can often include more personal discussions. However, if you become seriously concerned about the welfare of your mentoring partner, your first port of call should be the safeguarding lead at your institution. Where possible, you should get the consent of your mentoring partner before you do this.



3.0 Mentees

3.1 What is a mentee?

As a mentee, you're a researcher seeking support to develop in specific areas of your career. Through the mentoring scheme, you'll be able to think through challenges or goals, with the support and guidance of an experienced researcher with relevant experience.

3.2 How to be a good mentee

- Be clear with your career progression and personal development goals.
- Be able to identify areas of support and what you hope to gain from your mentoring partnership.
- Be receptive to advice on career progression.
- Be punctual and available to meet regularly with your mentor, based on the schedule you decide upon.
- Be committed to the process.



At the end of each session, I gave my mentee something to work on ahead of our next meeting. This gave us a natural starter for eaching meeting, and our conversation developed from there.

Dr Emma Scott, Mentor

3.3 How to set an objective

A mentoring objective should focus on your personal development and how you can build on the skills needed to advance your career. Your mentor may have experienced similar challenges and will try to guide you to put actions in place to further your progress.

Avoid objectives that are too specific (e.g. I want to learn a specific technique) or too vague (e.g. I want to be a better researcher).

There are several approaches you can use to help you – it's important to pick one that's the best fit for you.

You might consider using the **SMART** method. SMART objectives are:

**SPECIFIC,
MEASURABLE,
ACHIEVABLE,
REALISTIC AND
TIMED.**

Or you might find the **GROW** approach more suitable. This is where you:

outline a **GOAL**,
consider the **REALITY**
discuss **OPTIONS** and
use your **WILL** to determine the best
next steps.



I had a clear goal for mentoring, and so I discussed this with my mentor ahead of the meeting and we settled on some questions I could think about in advance. This meant when we met, we were able to jump straight in, and made our limited time more useful.

Dr Rebecca Garnham, Mentee

3.0 Mentees

3.4 SMART example

Your objective may be to become more confident when talking about your work at an upcoming meeting. With your mentor, or ahead of your first meeting, you could try to define this as a **SMART** objective.

SPECIFIC

I want to be more confident when speaking about my work to other researchers who don't specialise in the same area as me.

MEASURABLE

I will be prepared and confident when I deliver my talk.

ACHIEVABLES

I've made a start by practising with colleagues in my own team so I'm confident I can get there with a bit of help.

REALISTIC

I have already been invited to speak at an event for other researchers. I know all the details of the work and have time to prepare.

TIMED

There is a meeting coming up in three months where I can present my work.

3.5 GROW example

Or you may prefer to use the **GROW** method to explore an objective focused on your academic writing.

GOAL

Identify a goal you'd like to achieve.

e.g. In this session I'd like to explore techniques for improving my written work.

REALITY

What are you currently doing to achieve this goal

e.g. I'm writing at the end of the day when all my experiments/lab commitments have been met.

OPTIONS

What are all the different ways in which you could approach this issue?

e.g. Could you block time in your calendar to write early in the day? Could you take a break from research to write in the middle of the day?

WILL

Discuss your options with your mentor — do they have any extra advice? Is there an option you can trial? What commitment, on a scale of 1 to 10, do you have to take the agreed action forward?

e.g. You will try to manage your own calendar before asking for more support and are able to prioritise this with a level 10 commitment before the next session.



4.0 How to structure your first meeting

We suggest that the **mentee** takes the lead in organising mentoring meetings and prioritising areas for discussion – recognising that each partnership may choose to work in a way that suits them.

4.1 Introductions

Give brief career histories, what you enjoy working on and why. Keep this brief and succinct.

4.2 Discuss the objective

Talk about the mentee's career development objective, how your time together can be used to help achieve the objective and agree a timeframe. Discuss how the objective fits into long-term goals and how you can work towards these together. If you like, you could set milestones and organise your meetings around those milestones.

4.3 Establish learning goals

Identify what the mentee hopes to gain from the relationship and what support to expect from the mentor.

4.4 Establish some ground rules

Discuss how often you will meet, for how long and in what format. Following the initial meeting, we suggest meeting at least every three months, for up to an hour, but this will depend on the objective and goals you have established. Will you meet virtually, or over the phone? Would you like to plan an in-person get together?

4.5 Confidentiality

For the partnership to be most effective you may need to discuss private or controversial work issues. Agree in your first meeting to keep everything you discuss confidential, unless there is a safeguarding concern (see section 2.4).



Our first meeting was informal and relaxed. My mentor discussed his career, interests and work, and I discussed my PhD, and from this we identified ways we could work together to help me achieve my goals.

Dr Emma Lishman-Walker, Mentee

4.6 Managing your partnership

To maintain momentum and ensure smooth communication, agree how you will organise your meetings and work together. This might include deciding who will arrange the next meeting, how you will capture key discussion points or next steps, and any agreed actions for each member of the partnership between meetings.

5.0 Top tips to keep the mentor-mentee relationship going

Now that you have been matched, and the first meeting has taken place, we have created some top tips on how to maintain a fruitful mentor-mentee relationship.



1

Be respectful of each other's time – attend meetings on time.



2

Be attentive in scheduled meetings and prepare beforehand.



3

Be honest with what you'd like to achieve in this process.



4

Be reflective on what you have achieved with this relationship.



5

Be clear about your objectives.



6

Be flexible to each other's commitments.



7

Be open to feedback.



8

Be able to provide equal contribution.

6.0 Ending your mentorship

The ending of your mentorship is an important step towards putting what you've learnt during this process into action at work.

6.1 Six-month review

After six months, we will send you both a survey to review the impact of the partnership. At this point you can agree to continue the partnership for as long as you feel it's beneficial, meeting at a frequency that suits you. Alternatively, if the objective has been met, or discussions have come to a natural conclusion, you can choose to close the partnership.

6.2 The final meeting

If you decide to end the partnership, here are some ideas to help tailor your final meeting:

Reflect on the goals/objectives set during the first meeting and how these goals have been met.

Discuss future objectives with the mentee and make suggestions for further support where necessary.



My mentee had a specific goal which she has achieved. She may wish to look for another mentor to help with the next step. It's important to know it's OK to end a mentorship relationship that's achieved its aims.

Dr Eileen Parkes, Mentor

6.3 After the final meeting

Now that you have come to the end of the mentorship, we would like to find out if the scheme has been useful. Your insight is vital so that we can continue to learn how to support the research community and ensure the mentoring scheme is beneficial.

Please keep an eye on your inbox for our survey email. We really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts and will put any comments to good use.

6.4 What's next?

Your mentoring experience doesn't have to end after your first partnership. If you'd like to take part in a future round of the mentoring scheme, as a mentor, a mentee, or both, please let us know:

research@prostatecanceruk.org

6.5 Any problems, let us know

If you have any concerns and need to get in touch with us, then please email us:

research@prostatecanceruk.org

Voices from the scheme

Some of our current **mentees** share how they are benefitting from the scheme:



I needed support in writing my next funding application to secure an independent position. As a result of the help that I received, I was awarded a 4-year grant and a tenure track position.



I received valuable advice on building a strong CV and how to feel more confident applying for roles, which helped me gain a position as a medical school lecturer.



I had help with grant writing and had a grant funded which has allowed me to expand my independent research group.



My mentor and I have a very positive relationship which enables us to both be open and honest about my potential future opportunities and what is best for me and my development.



My mentor has provided me with valuable guidance, including how to manage a difficult working relationship, and how to better organise my time and achieve a healthier work-life balance.



It's an excellent scheme for establishing connections in your field of research and it creates opportunities for potential future collaborations which is exciting.



It's reassuring to have someone to help me navigate challenges, so I don't feel isolated with my own issues.



One of the most invaluable things for my career to date. And it's not just the conversation, it's the opportunities that you get from it.



I successfully achieved a fellowship with the help and guidance of my mentor, which was my career development objective.

Voices from the scheme

Mentors also find their experience in the scheme rewarding and gain valuable insights:



It's increased my awareness of what issues can occur for ECRs, and what is important to them which will improve my own leadership skills.



We have long, open conversations and we are both benefitting.



I've become more familiar with new research areas as being pursued by a strong up-and-coming prostate cancer researchers.



I feel like I am making genuine differences to young leaders...to ensure they succeed and thrive, which is beneficial for the prostate cancer research community.



I feel that I am part of the wider prostate cancer community through Prostate Cancer UK [mentoring] which I had lost a little over the years.



As [a mentor] only a step ahead on the career ladder, [my mentee] finds it easier using me as a sounding board to have more open discussions about the next steps?