



Department of Physics Mentoring Handbook

(PostDoc Mentoring)

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Introduction

This guidance sets out the detail of the Physics Department's mentoring programme to support PostDoctoral staff. You can find out about the scheme objectives & operation and the benefits for mentors and mentees. One strand of our scheme makes use of an online platform, MentorNet to facilitate and coordinate mentoring across the Department. Further resources, guidance, training and a practical toolkit to support participants on their mentoring journey are also signposted.

What is Mentoring?

Mentoring can be a powerful tool to assist staff in developing their roles, professional life and careers. It can help mentees develop their skills, knowledge and capability and fulfil their potential. It is a voluntary arrangement through which an experienced individual, outside the normal reporting line, holds regular discussions with and takes a personal interest in guiding and supporting the development of a (usually) less experienced person.

A mentor may be a sounding board, someone to help work through a mentee's ideas and throw light on their path. The value of mentoring is that it allows an individual to work on an objective with an impartial "thinking partner" who will enable them to focus on the important issues and to arrive at self-generated solutions. It is a confidential, non-judgmental and constructive partnership.

Mentoring is not a replacement for line management, supervision, one-to-ones, appraisal or PDR, performance management or support in cases of harassment or grievance. Neither is mentoring counselling or therapy - although the mentor may help the mentee to access more specialised support if it becomes apparent that this is needed. The mentor does not act on behalf of the mentee. It is the mentee's responsibility to take action and, where relevant, the mentor's to assist the mentee in reaching decisions about action and/or reflect upon the consequences of such action.

The Physics Department's PostDoc Mentoring scheme consists of two strands, both of which aim to match a person with relevant experience with an individual who wishes to benefit from such a partnership.

1. The first, informal, strand matches incoming PostDocs with more experienced peers, at the time of their arrival in the Department, to assist them in becoming established here. Mentors and mentees will usually be from the same sub-Department, with matches being suggested by sub-Department line managers and administrators in discussion with the scheme coordinator.
2. The second, more formal, strand matches PostDocs with staff from across the Department, both academic and with other functions, to discuss topics such as career development, research problems and work-life balance, and to help develop plans of action to address these. This is supported by MentorNet software, which enables PostDocs to select potential mentors using keywords based on the topics they wish to explore.

The scheme provides support for both mentees and mentors, through training and resource materials, to maximise the benefits of their mentoring partnership.

What type of mentoring is available for PostDocs in Physics?

A mentor is usually, but not always, someone who is working at a more senior role. Peer mentoring, by people at a similar career stage but with different experiences and perspectives can also be valuable. The Physics scheme provides opportunities for a mentee to access both peer and senior mentors. The matching process aims to provide the most suitable mentor available.

We promote a non-directive or 'facilitative' style of mentoring akin to coaching. Mentoring is not necessarily or primarily an advisory role; it often works best when, rather than offering advice, the mentor actively listens to the mentee and encourages them to take responsibility for their own development.

Aims and objectives of the scheme

The Physics Department's overall aim is to assist mentees to achieve personal and professional growth through a mentoring relationship that provides support as they progress and develop in their role. The scheme also offers benefits to the mentor and to the University.

The objectives of this scheme are:

- To provide networking and collaboration opportunities for individuals both within their sub-Department and across Physics;
- To help mentees to access support from experienced/more senior colleagues;
- To improve peer to peer support for colleagues;
- To challenge individuals and help them understand their strengths, potential and development opportunities;
- To help mentees in planning their approach to these opportunities and in advancing in their professional life and careers;
- To equip mentees with knowledge and skills to develop and fulfil their potential;
- To enhance personal effectiveness, commitment, motivation and engagement;
- To broaden awareness and knowledge of the wider Department, helping individuals to add value and contribute effectively.

Information for prospective mentees

Why have a mentor?

A mentor can be a useful resource at any point in your career – for example when new to the University; to extend influence or improve effectiveness in an existing role; to ease transition between roles; to progress a career or change direction; to help 'hit the ground running' when starting in a new role.

A mentor can:

- Act as an impartial sounding board, creating valuable time and space for a mentee to take a step back and reflect on where they are now, where they might want to be, and how they might get there;
- Contribute independent and objective advice, information and viewpoints based on their own knowledge, experience and expertise;
- Assist in achieving change and/or specific goals.

The benefits for a mentee

There are many potential benefits for the mentee to gain from the mentoring relationship including:

- Building a **network** of expertise to draw on;
- Providing support, encouragement and building **confidence and self-awareness**;
- Providing a **sounding board** outside the usual work area;
- Gaining independent constructive **feedback** e.g. to enhance performance;
- Providing support to find **solutions** to challenges and problems;
- Developing a **greater understanding of the University** and an insight into what is needed to grow professionally within it;
- Benefit of advice, information and viewpoints based on the **mentor's knowledge, experience** and expertise;
- Helping to achieve **change and/or specific goals**;
- Acquiring **knowledge** and developing **skills** e.g. interpersonal communication;
- Providing personal **contact and connection** promoting feeling part of the Department, the University and its community;
- Encouraging **collaboration** and sharing of ideas and best practice.

What can a mentee expect?

To get the most out of mentoring, a mentee will need to be clear about what they would like to achieve from a mentoring relationship and take responsibility for making things happen. The success of a mentoring relationship depends very much on the mentee's approach.

A mentor may not always be able to help a mentee with all their objectives. In some cases it may be appropriate for a mentee to have a further mentor (with different skills and expertise) following the conclusion of a first mentoring relationship.

The role of the mentee

Mentoring is a two-way process. The mentee is expected to drive the relationship forward and to be proactive about setting objectives for the relationship, scheduling meetings and maintaining a record of agreed tasks and goals.

A mentee is expected to be:

- Willing to enter the relationship either with, or with the intent to develop, a clear set of objectives;
- Honest and transparent when sharing information;
- Committed, for example attending planned sessions and taking actions/completing tasks agreed with their mentor;
- Willing to learn and to challenge their own views, behaviours, assumptions and ways of working (e.g. prepared to step out of their comfort zone and consider new ways of doing things);
- Able to ask for and receive feedback;
- Willing to provide feedback to the mentor (e.g. what you find most and least useful) and discuss issues as openly and honestly as possible;

- Professional in their relationship with a mentor, for example respecting agreed ground rules and being punctual, being sensitive to the individual - culture, gender etc.;
- Committed to reflecting on own practice, learning and progress (what went well, what could have been done differently etc.).

How to apply to be a mentee

If you wish to be a mentee in this formal process please register your interest by emailing the mentoring coordinator at mentoring@physics.ox.ac.uk. You will then be sent a quick start guide to using MentorNet and a link to register on the platform.

Further detail about the registration process is available in 'The Process' section of this guidance.

Information for prospective mentors

Why be a mentor?

A common motivation for individuals volunteering to be mentors is a desire to 'give something back' especially where they believe their experiences can be of use to the progress of less experienced colleagues. Mentors often find satisfaction in helping others progress and succeed.

Mentoring also provides the opportunity for a mentor to develop their own skills in areas such as interpersonal communication, active listening, providing constructive feedback, coaching, problem solving, leadership and motivating others. The skills required to be an effective mentor transfer well to a wide range of contexts and can also assist a mentor with their own professional and career development.

The benefits for a mentor

While the focus of the mentoring relationship is primarily on the development needs and opportunities of the mentee, there are also many benefits for the mentor including:

- Encourages self-reflection and **refreshes own view** of work/knowledge (reflection on own practice providing new perspectives and ideas);
- Enhances **satisfaction** e.g. helping others develop/fulfil their potential;
- Enhances **peer recognition** (e.g. raises professional profile) and professional relationships;
- Provides an opportunity to **give something back**;
- Expands **networks** and contacts within the Department;
- Enhanced **skills** including communication, interpersonal, leadership, people development, active listening, feedback and coaching;
- Enriched **CV/Portfolio**;
- Allows **sharing of good practice, experience and knowledge** with another member of staff.

What can a mentor expect?

Mentors from all Physics roles, across all grades, are encouraged to share professional experience and contribute to the development of others.

A mentor will be an experienced member of staff (not necessarily more senior) who will take on the role of guiding, advising and facilitating defined aspects of the professional

development of a mentee. They will provide support to the mentee to enable them to try out new ideas and may constructively challenge a mentee where appropriate. A mentor is not expected to take direct action on behalf of a mentee.

The mentoring relationship should provide a supportive environment in which the mentee feels able and willing to express any concerns as well as their ideas and aspirations. The mentor should be comfortable with holding such conversations and respectful of confidentiality where appropriate.

Mentors will be provided with training, support and guidance during the mentoring relationship: further details of this are provided below.

The role of the Mentor

During a mentoring relationship a mentor is likely take on a number of different roles involving a range of skills. These will vary according to the needs of the mentee, the particular situation, and the mentor’s areas of expertise. Examples of some common mentor roles are provided below.

Mentor roles	Example
Sounding board	Someone to test ideas and suggestions
Facilitator	Point to potential opportunities, arrange introductions and access key people
Adviser	Provide objective advice on a range of issues, including career opportunities
Coach	Assist the learner to improve a specific skill
Expert	Be a source of technical/professional knowledge
Organisational knowledge	Explain and clarify Departmental policies, culture and values
Role model	Promote and encourage positive behaviours in others
Source of feedback	Provide objective and constructive feedback on development
Confidant	Listen to fears and concerns
Motivator	Encourage and motivate the mentee to achieve their goals, and boost moral
Challenger	Play devil’s advocate, challenge assumptions, encourage different ways of thinking

The attributes of a mentor

A mentor will be an experienced member of staff with a good understanding of the Department. It is expected that a mentor will:

- Have volunteered to act as a mentor and be committed to the process;
- Be in a position to dedicate appropriate time to making the mentoring relationship a success (usually about one hour per month);
- Act as a confidential and non-judgemental sounding board;
- Listen well, question constructively and offer supportive challenge when needed;

- Encourage reflection, and independent and creative thinking;
- Give constructive feedback and provide new insights;
- Be prepared to share experience, knowledge, advice and expertise to help develop others;
- Have a genuine interest in developing potential in others;
- Be encouraging and supportive and recognise achievements;
- Have an enthusiastic and positive attitude towards their own work, other people and the University;
- Understand the importance of trust and respect in the mentoring relationship and be sensitive to the mentee - culture, gender etc.

The mentor is not expected to be an expert on every subject they are asked about. Mentors are not expected to solve mentee's problems for them, but part of the role is to act as a sounding board for discussion of problems identified by the mentee. Through a process of active listening, reflecting back feelings and opinions observed from the mentee and asking appropriate open questions, mentors can help mentees reflect upon their own progress, clarify issues and help them towards resolving their problems and/or reaching their objectives.

Whilst the Physics mentoring scheme has no formal reporting requirements, other than logging through MentorNet that a meeting took place, mentor and mentee may find it helpful to keep a brief record, noting what has been discussed and agreed, and the objectives for the next meeting.

Each potential mentor will be asked to provide a brief biography (no more than 250 words) and select keywords on their MentorNet profile in order enable good matches to be made.

Mentor training and support

The Physics Mentoring Scheme provides training and support for mentors. Mentoring workshops, individual mentor briefings and assistance with general queries about the scheme can be provided by the coordinator, whilst more structured training can be provided through POD and the Division. Please contact mentoring@physics.ox.ac.uk for further details.

The toolkit section of this guidance signposts you to additional information, suggestions for further reading and templates for your use.

The Process

Registration

If you wish to volunteer as a mentor or mentee please register your interest by emailing the mentoring coordinator mentoring@physics.ox.ac.uk. You will then be sent a quick start guide to using MentorNet and a link to register on the platform by completing an online form.

The form asks prospective **mentees** what they hope to gain from being mentored, what sort of mentor they are looking for (e.g. a peer or a more senior person? A mentor with a particular skill or experience?). The form also asks for basic information such as job title and length of time in post etc.

The form asks prospective **mentors** what they can offer a mentee in terms of their experience and skills and about their mentoring preferences e.g. preference for career stage of mentee and time and frequency of meetings.

The mentoring coordinator can be contacted with queries related to the scheme and the MentorNet online platform if you are unable to find the answer to your question in this guidance.

Existing formal mentoring partnerships within Physics can be registered on the MentorNet platform if the mentor and mentee wish, so that their contribution can be recognised under the scheme. Please email mentoring@physics.ox.ac.uk for further information about how to register an existing partnership.

The matching process

Matching the mentoring partnership is a critical part of the mentoring process. The mentor and mentee matching will be made on the basis of the information provided at registration via the MentorNet platform. Skills and experiences offered by prospective mentors will be held on the system and the specific areas in which a mentee is seeking support can be matched against those recorded for prospective mentors.

Once a mentee has registered on MentorNet, they will be able to search through available mentors' biographies and rank these by order of preference/affinity. We would recommend not selecting more than 4 at one time, and searching by keyword and areas of expertise. The mentee should identify any of these potential mentors with whom they have an existing personal or professional relationship that could compromise the mentor's ability to provide impartial advice. The scheme coordinator will oversee the matching process. The key determinant of matches will be the skills and experiences offered and sought by mentors and mentees. The mentor availability, duration of relationship, frequency, timing and type of mentoring sought will also be important considerations.

If either party does not believe the proposed match will lead to a productive mentoring partnership they should inform the mentoring coordinator so that consideration for a further matching exercise can be made.

The role of the mentoring coordinator and sub-Departments

The mentoring coordinator, reporting to the AHoD for ED&I, has overall responsibility for the scheme. They provide day-to-day support for the programme activities and are responsible for development, promotion, coordination and evaluation.

Working with the sub-Department Administrators, and advised by HosDs where required, the coordinator oversees the recruitment and training of mentors, matching mentors and mentees, and monitoring the effectiveness of the scheme by seeking regular feedback and evaluation from participants.

Mentoring timescales and trajectory

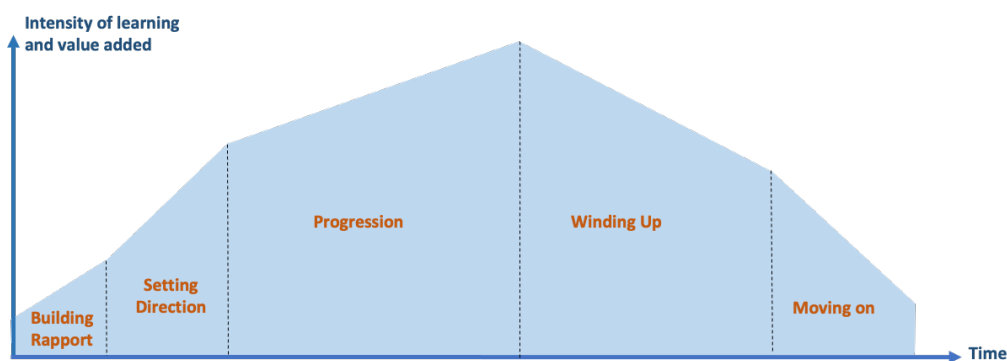
Mentees and mentors can register to join the scheme at any time. The matching process can take place provided there are a sufficient number of mentors and mentees registered on MentorNet.

The frequency and method of contact will be agreed within each individual mentoring partnership. The mentee should be the driver behind the mentoring relationship (e.g. it is their responsibility to make contact with their mentor and organise follow up meetings).

The length of mentoring partnership will vary in each case. A typical, traditional mentoring relationship may involve approximately 1 hour per month for 6 to 12 months and the relationship will come to an end when the mentor and mentee feel that they have achieved their goals.

The relationship will pass through distinct phases.

Phases of the mentoring relationship



The Initial Meeting

At the first meeting, mentor and mentee should discuss what they expect from their partnership and agree aims (a Mentoring Agreement Template is available for you to record these together and to agree the confidentiality of your relationship). Developing this shared understanding is crucial to overall success of the match. It is suggested that an hour session is provided: 15 minutes for personal introduction, then 45 minutes focussing on shaping objectives and structure for the ongoing discussions. You may like to consider:

- any common ground/experiences/values;
- relevant career history;
- purpose of the mentoring partnership and objectives/goals;
- practical arrangements including expectations (mentee and mentor), how you will reflect, clarify and answer questions after the meeting, how you will agree actions and set the agenda for the next meeting, how you will work together, arrangements for future meetings

Record Keeping

Whilst no written records of meetings will be required by the Department, you are encouraged to follow up the first and future meetings with a shared note of any agreed actions. However, it is important for our records, in part so that mentors' participation can be acknowledged, that the mentee **records in MentorNet the occasion when each meeting happened.**

Before each mentoring meeting

Before a mentoring meeting it may be useful for the mentee (and mentor) to set aside some time to reflect on the last conversation. It may also be helpful for the mentee to send a short

summary of what they would like to discuss at the next meeting in advance so that the mentor has time to consider it and carry out any research if required.

Ongoing meetings

The structure and content of follow-on sessions will be based on the individual relationships; however as a guideline it may be useful to structure each meeting in a simple format to stay on track, for example:

- Referring to the action notes, start with a discussion of what you have achieved since the last meeting, any new challenges you have faced and your reflection on any issues previously discussed.;
- Develop the discussion further, perhaps guided by one of the thinking frameworks;
- Make a plan setting any new or ongoing actions for you to undertake before the next meeting.

Examples of areas for discussion include: reflection on professional progress, identification and exploration of professional concerns or barriers, identification and exploration of development needs, identification of information needed and ways of acquiring it, review of progress against mentoring objectives, provision of feedback and action planning.

The end of the mentoring partnership

Over time, the mentee should develop a firm plan for achieving their personal goals and the mentoring relationship will reach a natural conclusion. It is good practice to 'round up' with a final meeting. In this it will be useful for the mentee to reflect on what you have considered and learnt with their mentor throughout the partnership. If appropriate, the mentor may help the mentee set further goals and action plans for the longer term.

Support for mentors and mentees

The mentoring coordinator is available to mentors and mentees to provide support and to discuss any questions or concerns either party may have.

Evaluation

Both the mentor and mentee will be asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire to feedback their experience, which enables the success of the scheme to be monitored and to facilitate future improvements and developments.

Further information, resources and toolkit

A toolkit of resources is available to support the scheme. You can access this on MentorNet under Resources in the left hand margin. The resources include:

- Physics Process diagram
- Goalsetting worksheet
- GROW model structure worksheet
- Powerful questions for mentoring conversations
- Active listening skills
- Online training materials

You can find further guidance on mentoring and details of other internal mentoring schemes on the POD website <https://pod.admin.ox.ac.uk/mentoring>.

