

Short Guide for Peer Mentors

Thank you for taking on the role of Peer Mentor within the Physics Department. Your contribution is invaluable for helping new PostDocs find their feet and start to become established here. It is most likely that you will be matched with a new arrival from another research group within your own sub-Department to help them build wider connections. If you would like further guidance or information as you undertake this role, please do contact the programme coordinator, Jenny Woods, through mentoring@physics.ox.ac.uk

Expectations of Peer Mentors

You should arrange to have an initial meeting with your mentee soon after their arrival. This will most likely be a very informal discussion to introduce yourselves to each other and for you to pass on any orientation information you feel is appropriate for your sub-Department.

Ideally, you would then meet with your mentee once a month – in-person if circumstances allow. Keep channels of communication open so that, if they have a need to discuss something at other times, it is easy for them to approach you. Remember, unless agreed otherwise with your mentee, the content of your conversations should remain confidential¹.

Talk to them about their progress and determine whether there are any sticking points with which they may need assistance. Likely discussion topics may be around approaches to research, publications, presentations, programming, outreach, next steps in career development, etc. Be guided by the mentee on the level of formality they would like in these discussions - if either of you would find it useful to put a formal structure on these conversations, then you could look at some of the thinking models suggested in the mentoring programme library.

To help your mentee build their personal networks, you can act as a route to wider engagement by passing on information about sub-Department and Departmental activities. If you, as a peer mentor, see an opportunity for developing new activities to support this, then do contact your sub-Department administrator or the mentoring coordinator – ideas for enhancing PostDoc support and networking across the Department will be welcomed.

Over time, as your mentee becomes more established in their role, then their requirement for your support will diminish. When it feels natural to do so, you can both agree the end of the mentoring relationship. At this point, should you like to take on another mentee, then do let your sub-Dept administrator and the mentoring coordinator know.

Support beyond Mentoring

If your mentee requires more structured training or support, then it is likely suitable resources can be found within the wider Department, Division and University. As a first source of information consult the document accompanying this note or the programme coordinator if you cannot find what's needed.

As a peer mentor you are not required to provide any support beyond the above expectations of this role; for example, mental health advice or conflict resolution are not expected to be in your remit. If at any point you feel you are in a situation which places unreasonable demands on you, or with which you are not comfortable, you or your mentee can contact an appropriately trained advisor: contacts are given in the accompanying resource document. You may also speak in confidence to the mentoring coordinator for advice in seeking support.

¹ In exceptional circumstances, e.g. when there is a risk of harm to the mentee or another – it may be necessary to breach confidentiality. It would normally be appropriate for the mentor to seek consent. Guidance on particular issues related to confidentiality may be sought from the Department's AHoD for ED&I, Sonia Antoranz Contera.