

## Research Staff Mentoring Guidance 2019-2020

### Introduction

The School expects all research staff and particularly those in the early stages of a research career at the School to receive constructive advice on career development from senior colleagues. In this context, the role of the mentor is considered to be of vital significance.

The School has in place two approaches to structuring career development conversations for research staff:

- A [Mentoring scheme](#) for Research Officers, Research Fellows and Assistant Professorial Research Fellows.
- A [Research Staff Career Development Review \(CDR\) scheme](#) which is designed for all research staff throughout their LSE career.

Both aim to give Research Staff guidance on how to make most effective use of their career within LSE both for their own development and to ensure their contribution to the School as a whole. The Mentoring Scheme is distinct from the Research Staff Career Development Review (CDR) scheme. Mentors give **informal** advice and provide a listening ear throughout the year, whereas formal CDR meetings take place annually or bi-annually for certain staff groups and are normally conducted by the Head of Department (HOD)/Research Centre Director (RCD) or their nominee

To gain from mentoring, mentees have to grasp the lessons and encouragement which the mentor can offer; therefore the relationship must be a positive and trusting one. The HOD/RCD should be mindful of this need when allocating new mentors. Any matter discussed remains confidential unless the mentee reports to the HOD/RCD that the relationship is not a productive one. In this case, the HOD/RCD must seek to assign a different mentor if possible, although it is not expected that for any one individual this change will be necessary more than once. Equally importantly for the mentoring relationship to work, mentees must not place unrealistic expectations on their mentor and must not over-burden them with demands.

### Who should have a mentor?

The following groups of staff, regardless of the length of contract, should be assigned a mentor by their HOD/RCD, in discussion with the Principal Investigator (PI) for the project.

- Research Officers
- Research Fellows
- Assistant Professorial Research Fellows

Other research staff may request a mentor via the PI or HOD/RCD.

If the employee is 0.2FTE or less, mentoring is optional. A discussion should be held with the employee about whether or not they would like to be allocated a mentor.

At the start of the academic year, HR will send all departments and centres a list of staff who should be allocated a mentor that session. The Department or Centre should review the list and ensure that it is correct and provide HR with the name of the mentor for each member of staff. Mid-year, HR will also send departments/centres a list

of new starters who should be assigned a mentor *Note: Departments and Centres may also wish to assign mentors for Band 5 Research Assistants, but are not required to send this information to HR*

### **Who should be a mentor?**

The mentor will normally be a senior researcher or member of academic staff with a similar research background within the researcher's Department/Centre. The mentor may also be from a related Department/Research Centre.

***Note: Neither the member of staff conducting the CDR meeting with a researcher nor the (PI) should not be the mentor.***

The mentor will assume responsibility for regularly discussing the researcher's development in their career and provide advice on possible avenues for further development. (NB: Staff on any form of leave should not be appointed as mentors.)

For new research staff, allocating a mentor should take place within one month of the researcher's appointment and the HOD/RCD will notify Human Resources that this has been done. The VCAC will receive a regular report on research staff and assigned mentors and follow up instances where a mentor has not been allocated to a researcher.

### **Frequency of meetings**

All mentors are expected to arrange with new colleagues allocated to them dates and times for discussions throughout the year. For the first two years, meetings should normally be taking place at least once per term, after which they can take place as and when needed, although not less than once annually. However, given the informal nature of mentoring it is expected that the majority of the mentoring may well take place outside of specifically scheduled meetings.

### **The substance of the mentoring relationship**

The role of the mentor is three-fold:

- to assist the mentee in developing a good understanding of the expectations placed upon them as researchers within the department/centre and the School;
- to provide a sounding board and informal guidance
- to act as an advocate for the mentee (e.g. if their workload allocation appears over-extended, or if they face difficulties with colleagues).

The duties of a mentor include checking that the researcher has a well-framed programme on which progress is being made, and ensuring that their programme offers good scope for the development of research interests and techniques, whilst not being so time and energy consuming as to leave too little opportunity for further study, research and writing. The matters which fall within the scope of mentoring will depend on the specific case.

Without wishing to be too prescriptive, matters **may** include:

- methodology of research and structure of programme
- methods of addressing research problems and improving quality of outcomes
- personal relationships with colleagues
- administrative responsibilities and work balance
- individual staff development needs
- how to publish successfully
- where to go for further support, advice and information

In addition, mentors/mentees are strongly encouraged to discuss issues related to **continuity of employment** during mentoring sessions. That is, because most research staff posts depend on external funding, it is crucial to consider well in advance what steps can be taken to avoid an undesired termination of employment due to the end of funding. Mentors should be able to give constructive advice on managing this issue, e.g. about how to balance current work obligations in the School with the need to apply for additional research funding from external sources. Mentees who have concerns about continuity of employment issues are strongly encouraged to raise these with their mentors (as well as with their HOD/RCD/PI), so that as much advice as possible can be available to the researcher.

When the mentor is providing a listening ear/acting as advocate, other possible issues that **may** arise could include:

- Achieving appropriate balance between the different elements of the research role.
- Issues arising from writing/research approach/analysis/dealing with journals and publishers etc.
- Reading and commenting on draft papers/chapters and offering guidance on publication outlets (mentees must be aware that mentors can only do so for a small number of writings).
- Challenges from teaching (where applicable).
- Upset arising from and ideas on constructive response to challenging feedback from colleagues.
- Managing administrative load.
- Work/life balance.
- Adapting to LSE and its environment.

To some extent, the mentor relationship has similarities to coaching. It is important that the relationship is kept professional. It is also important for both parties to ensure that they do not over-reach reasonable bounds in terms of professional expertise and for the mentor where necessary to seek guidance/advice from others (e.g. if concerned about the mentee's health/well-being). In some cases, it may be appropriate for the mentor to advise the mentee to discuss detailed matters with other colleagues in the department/centre and/or to contact colleagues elsewhere in the School (e.g. Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Research Division or the Careers Service)). Note that all departments have a [HR Partner](#) from whom staff can seek advice should it be necessary (e.g. for guidance related to disability, flexible working, caring responsibilities), and that many academic staff are members of the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU). There is also a [staff counselling service available at the School](#).

The School offers support for new and existing mentors, such as mentoring development sessions. Further information is available [here](#). The mentor should feel able to offer criticism and advice which the mentee, whilst encouraged to listen carefully, is not obliged to take.

### **What the mentor is NOT responsible for**

The mentor is very much a 'guide on the side'. It is not their role to 'line manage' the mentee, and the mentor is not responsible for the mentee's career success within the School.

### **The role of documentary materials in the mentoring relationship**

There are no written requirements related to mentoring, or any necessity for the mentor or mentee to share documents. However, if both are agreeable and have time, there may be benefits from sharing:

- Research papers (including reviewer feedback and how this is handled)
- A brief email log of matters discussed.

**Some helpful tips**

The School has also developed some helpful tips for mentors and mentees – available [here](#).

**Additional Links:**

[CDR guidance and form](#)

[Research staff professional development support](#)

[LSE Careers Service support for research staff](#)

[Research and Innovation support for research staff](#)

[Additional support for mentors/mentees – some helpful tips](#)