

ACE Mentoring Scheme and Sign-up

Overview: The Adapting to Changing Environments (ACE) center at the University of Edinburgh is offering a mentorship scheme that takes advantage of its interdisciplinary membership and early career network to provide ongoing mentoring support, opportunities, and training to researchers. The scheme will offer both 1:1 (“on your tod”) and group (“with your pod”) mentoring options that include participants across a wide range of career stages and disciplines: it will include PhDs, postdocs, and PIs spanning the sciences (natural, physical, social) and humanities.

By including a wide breadth of participant research backgrounds and career stages, the scheme aims to i) promote diversity in the content discussed during mentoring relationships, ii) increase flexibility for mentees to choose a mentor that is a peer, near career, or more experienced researcher, and ii) enables late-stage PhDs or postdocs to gain mentoring experience. Overall, this mentorship scheme aspires to strengthen research connections and promote early career development in the ACE network by matching mentees to mentors in different disciplines that provide support, advice, and share experiences on career and professional development, time management, work-life balance, etc.

Signing up and next steps: This is an ongoing opt-in scheme; you can apply to become a mentor and/or mentee at any time using the sign-up form below. The form requires you to fill in some personal information about yourself, which topics you are able or want to discuss, whether you prefer a 1:1 or group arrangement, and preferences for peer, near career, or far career mentors. We are looking for mentors at all career stages, including late-stage PhDs and postdocs, as near career mentoring relationships provide valuable perspectives and promote mentoring experience. Please read our general guidelines below before signing up to the scheme.

Once you have completed the form, mentees will be contacted by an ACE Early Career Network mentoring officer with possible mentor options (i.e., mentors who have confirmed they are available) and should then indicate whether they are happy to be assigned to one of the possible mentors. Mentees should feel positive and comfortable about the mentor they choose and can request other mentor options if they are unsure about the suggestions. It is important that mentors are not someone who is already working closely with the mentee or who could be involved in any meaningful form of professional evaluation of their work (e.g., line managers or program organisers).

As the scheme aims to offer diverse mentoring options to mentees, it may be difficult in some cases to provide matches that combine all the mentee’s first preferences. Therefore, the closest options available will be offered and the mentee will have the choice of whether they would like to sign up for a less preferred option (e.g., group instead of 1:1 mentoring, postdoc instead of early PI mentor) or wait until a more suitable arrangement is available. Once mentees have agreed to a mentor, the mentorship officer will put the mentee(s) in touch with their mentor so that they can arrange a first meeting (see guidelines below).

[Sign-up form](#)

ACE Mentoring Guidelines

The ACE mentoring scheme bases the below guidelines on existing materials offered through the University of Edinburgh including the School of Biological Sciences (SBS) postdoc mentoring scheme and the Institute of Academic Development's (IAD) mentoring resources:

[Information on SBS postdoc mentoring scheme](#)

[IAD's mentoring resources](#)

What is a mentor: A mentor is someone who provides support and guidance to a colleague by providing an opportunity to have positive conversations about topics related to their colleague's career and professional development, offering advice and experiences where appropriate. Mentoring can be performed effectively in different ways and can be adaptable to specific relationships and contexts. Our scheme encourages postdocs and late-stage PhDs to sign up as mentors to gain experience in guidance and coaching roles; we will provide occasional training sessions for newer mentors to increase their confidence in these roles. Mentors are not a therapist, counselor, life coach, or replacement for an absent supervisor. If discussions deviate into areas where advice from a professional is needed mentees are encouraged to seek this support from outside the scheme.

The first meeting: After mentees approve and are introduced to their matched mentors, mentees should organize a first meeting as soon as possible. The first meeting should be approached as a trial to get to know each other, to set the groundwork for the relationship, and determine whether both mentor and mentee(s) are happy with the arrangement. We recommend discussing what both parties see as the main aims of the mentoring, what topics the mentee(s) would like to cover, how often meetings would occur, and an agreement to keep discussions confidential. At the end of the first meeting, if both parties agree, a follow-up meeting should be arranged.

The mentee should contact the mentorship officer to confirm whether both parties are willing to proceed with the mentoring arrangement, whether the participant prefers to be reassigned, or prefers a different arrangement. Choosing to end mentoring relationships that are not beneficial earlier rather than later is important for both parties and the success of the scheme. It is not anyone's fault if mentoring relationships are not compatible or can't be maintained alongside other commitments, and in fact, we are expecting this to occur occasionally.

The second meeting: Once participants have approved their mentoring arrangements, we suggest mentees arrange a second meeting within a few weeks. To guide mentoring discussions, the mentees should come up with a list of professional challenges or topics they wish to discuss with their mentors and rank them in order of priority. Mentees should email this list to their mentors ahead of the second meeting.

During the second meeting, we strongly recommend that mentors and mentees collectively decide on a 'mentoring agreement' that establishes:

- i) Boundaries and expectations of both mentor and mentee(s)
- ii) Current professional goals and objectives of mentee(s)
- iii) Form of communication and how often meetings will occur
- iv) An agreement for confidentiality of content discussed during meetings

Mentoring relationships are ongoing and can evolve as mentees progress in their careers, so this contract should be reviewed and modified periodically. It would be useful to continuously reflect on mentee goals, their professional progression, and to identify new goals or objectives that arise as the mentoring relationship continues.

We suggest mentoring relationships meet between 4-6 times for a year duration in a meeting format that best suits the arrangement (in person, online, hybrid). After a year (or if a mentoring arrangement is not working out), participants can choose to re-enter the scheme for a new match or extend their mentoring arrangement with their current match. Mentoring officers will organise initial matching of mentors with mentees but then will take a hands-off role in how mentoring relationships progress. We want to emphasise that these are only guidelines and the nature of the mentorship can differ to what is suggested here, and should ultimately be decided and agreed upon by matched mentors and mentees.

How to get the most out of being a mentee: Mentees should take an active role in steering content discussed in mentoring meetings. We suggest mentees lead mentoring discussions and arrive to meetings with an agenda of topics they would like to discuss. Ideally, this agenda could be emailed to mentors ahead of the meeting.

Mentees should try to be as open and honest as possible so that mentors are informed to provide the best guidance and advice for the context being discussed. A main goal of mentoring is to promote the progression of the mentee and, to this end, mentees should be open to hearing and engaging with feedback from their mentors to better understand how they can reach their goals. Please see the IAD's "Being a mentee" resource for further information and recommendations.

[IAD's "Being a mentee" resource](#)

How to get the most out of being a mentor: Mentors can support colleagues by drawing upon and sharing their (positive and negative) learned experiences on a certain topic; they can discuss what worked for them or didn't when tackling a specific professional challenge. However, it is important for mentors to be open-minded, effective listeners and keep the focus of discussions on the mentee(s). Mentors can use open or leading questions during discussions to help steer a mentee's thinking and allow them to explore possible choices, outcomes, and solutions to address challenges or reach goals. Please see the IAD's "Being a mentor" resource for further recommendations and possible strategies to use during meetings.

[IAD's "Being a mentor" resource](#)

Peer or group mentoring: Participants involved in peer or group mentoring arrangements could follow the general guidelines above with the additional suggestions below.

For peer mentoring arrangements, participants will act as both a mentor and mentee, and we recommend participants take turns in each role. During the first meeting it will be important to discuss how participants envision the peer mentoring relationship working; for example, peers could alternate roles during the same or different meetings. A mentoring agreement can be formed in the same way as described, but both participants should establish their boundaries and expectations in respect to both mentor and mentee roles. To guide mentoring discussions ahead of meetings, both participants should come up with a list of discussion topics as mentees and exchange them with each other by email.

For group mentoring arrangements, a few mentees of a similar career stage will meet with a single mentor. This arrangement could take several forms and this should be discussed at the first meeting

together. For example, i) each mentee in the group could take turns to independently prepare an agenda to discuss with their mentor at alternating meetings or ii) mentees could collectively decide on an agenda to discuss with their mentor ahead of meetings. Regardless of who prepares the agenda, all mentees can participate in discussions during each meeting. Mentoring agreements can be established similarly during the second meeting, but these agreements will require mentees to agree collectively on the terms of the arrangement. Each mentee can share their goals and objectives with their group as a part of the mentoring arrangement, and should revisit these individual goals together as a group as the mentoring progresses; this would facilitate learning from other mentee perspectives, experiences, and successes, and would be a major benefit of this arrangement.

Want to give us feedback or have suggestions on how this scheme could be improved?

Please fill in our anonymous feedback form or contact an ACE mentoring officer directly:
ace_ecr_mentoring[at]ed.ac.uk

[Anonymous feedback form](#)

Is this mentoring scheme not the right fit for you?

There are several other mentorship schemes available through different schools and institutes at the University. Let us know if we could add yours to this list!

- Institute of Academic Development: Postdoc Circles and other mentoring schemes
- School of Biological Sciences: Postdoc Mentorship Scheme
- Easter Bush Research Mentoring Programme: Contact Jayne.Hope[at]roslin.ed.ac.uk
- Institute of Molecular Plant Sciences mentoring for PhDs: Contact Lindsay.williams[at]ed.ac.uk