What is the mentoring scheme?

As part of this scheme, mentors provide support to new early career Research Fellows, sharing their experiences and advice on career progression, research and funding.

Mentoring partnerships are available during the first year of a Research Fellowship. Pairs meet up or contact each other several times in the year to discuss issues such as:

- How to develop a more independent role in your research;
- Gaining confidence in negotiations with your department;
- Building and managing a research group;
- Career planning/tracking to ensure you are proceeding as required for your goals; and
- Understanding the funding landscape and knowing when and where to look for additional funding.

First year University Research Fellows, Dorothy Hodgkin Fellows and Sir Henry Dale Fellows can request to take part. Royal Society Research Fellow alumni, Wolfson Research Merit Award Holders and Fellows of the Royal Society are invited to become mentors.

“Talking to a good mentor can help you develop ground-breaking ideas.”

Gavin Morley
University Research Fellow, University of Warwick.
What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a relationship of support. Mentors use their own experience to act as a sounding board or advise on situations mentees encounter.

Below are some of the areas your mentor could offer support and guidance in:

Career advice
• Identifying career goals
• Career choices post research Fellowship

Research advice
• Generating grants
• Publication strategy
• Establishing independence

Social capital
• Developing confident networking skills
• Building effective relationships

Managing
• Building and managing a research group
• Relationships with host institutions and senior colleagues

Work-life balance
• Balancing family life with a career in research

Your mentoring relationship, while informal, is of a professional nature and should focus on the mentee’s research Fellowship. Neither of you should talk about anything you feel uncomfortable with.

“My mentor has been very helpful, sharing some of her experiences about being a principal investigator and giving hints about how to approach some of the problems I have encountered.”

Gloria Lopez-Castejon
Sir Henry Dale Fellow, University of Manchester, current mentee.
“Mentoring is a fantastic learning experience all round – I’ve learnt easily as much as I’ve been able to pass on”

Claire Spottiswoode
Former Dorothy Hodgkin Fellow.

The benefits of mentoring

A Royal Society early career Fellowship marks the start of a move towards an independent research career.

Research Fellows may experience some challenges and go through a form of ‘transition curve’ as part of this, especially at the start as they adjust to the changes. A mentor will be able to help and may have gone through similar situations themselves.

A version of the transition curve can be found below and reflects some of the experiences a researcher may encounter on receiving a Fellowship. These can affect confidence and experiences vary from surprise at being chosen for the award (1), to doubts about their ability to achieve the high standards expected (2), to adapting to new circumstances (3), and acknowledging the task at hand and getting on with it (4).

Not everyone will experience these but mentoring can provide an opportunity for reflection on some of the issues researchers face when planning and establishing their careers.


Transition curve
Your mentoring relationship

There are no rules or requirements, you should discuss how you will meet and how often.

Some mentoring pairs have face to face meetings, others use e-mail and Skype to keep in touch. We suggest that the mentoring last for a year at first but you can discuss how long it will be useful for the mentee.

What happens next
Set up a first face to face meeting and use the following points to get your mentoring relationship started, cover the basics, set boundaries and discuss what will work best for you both to maintain this relationship.

• Tell your story – share your background and current research.
• Discuss where the mentee might want support and what areas are most important at this point.
• Discuss what you both expect in terms of frequency of communication, time commitment and who will initiate contact.
• Decide how and when you are going to meet, and how often.
• Ask each other questions.

To get your mentoring relationship started, here are some questions you might want to ask.

Questions for mentors to mentees
- What are you enjoying most about your Fellowship?
- What has surprised you the most?
- What are you finding difficult?
- Do you have any concerns about your Fellowship?
- Are there any particular areas that you would like help with, such as applying for grants?

Questions for mentees to mentors
- What did you find difficult during the early stages of your Fellowship?
- What did you enjoy most?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- What do you wish you had known then, that you know now?
- How did you balance work and family?
Workshops

Workshops are a chance for you to get guidance on mentoring, network with other participants and meet our trainer Professor Dorothy Griffiths.

Attending these meetings is highly recommended.

For details on when the next workshop will be held, visit royalsociety.org.

“The training workshop was very valuable and having the opportunity to use my experiences (both positive and negative) to help Research Fellows navigate through the early stages of their independent careers has been extremely rewarding.”

Maddy Parsons
Former University Research Fellow
Maddy has been a mentor twice as part of the mentoring scheme.
The Royal Society
The Royal Society is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world’s most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society’s fundamental purpose, reflected in its founding Charters of the 1660s, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.

The Society’s strategic priorities are:
• Promoting science and its benefits
• Recognising excellence in science
• Supporting outstanding science
• Providing scientific advice for policy
• Fostering international and global cooperation
• Education and public engagement

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The Skaergaard Intrusion, east Greenland, photo by Madeleine Humphreys University Research Fellow, University of Durham.