



Mentoring Scheme General Information and Mentoring Guide



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Mentoring Scheme General Information

Goals:

1. Sharing knowledge and expertise across ranks of the Association.
2. Increasing cross-institutional networking and mentoring in the discipline.
3. Supporting members mentored with goal setting and career management.
4. Supporting those mentored in taking responsibility for their own skills and career development.

Membership:

Early career (>2 years post-doctoral award) and mid-career (>8 years post-doctoral award) members of the association can request guidance and support from a senior AHGBI mentor. All applications, from potential mentors and mentees, are on a voluntary and self-nominated basis. The Association will support up to 15 pairings annually.

Financial support:

Each mentoring pair will be able to claim up to £100 per year towards supporting visits.

Application process:

Applicants should fill in the relevant form (**Form 1** for those requesting mentoring or **Form 2** for those wishing to volunteer as mentors) and email it to the scheme's Director, Dr Miguel García-López (miguel.garcialopez@bristol.ac.uk) by one of the two annual deadlines: in 2025/2026 these will be 19 December 2025 and 19 June 2026. The Director will match mentees with mentors, enrolling both in the scheme.

Participants should be willing to commit for an initial period of 12 months. Where both parties agree, it will be possible to request an extension for a further 12 months, up to a maximum total of 24 months.

Mentees will have the opportunity to suggest potential mentors and to state preferences about their profile; they will have the final say on appointment of their mentor. Following formalization of the mentoring agreement between mentor and applicant, mentees will still have the chance to request a different mentor if the relationship is not fruitful. Mentees may also terminate the mentoring 'contract' at any point during the period. Mentors who agree to providing mentoring support must be prepared to commit for a minimum of 12 months.

Underlying principles of the scheme:

Each individual is responsible for themselves in the mentoring process.

This means setting high expectations of yourself in relation to what you can contribute to the meeting, rather than having such expectations of the other person. If you create expectations for yourself and work on achieving them, you allow the other person to develop and set their own expectations instead of having to react to yours.

Mentoring is a venture in collaboration.

This means that the mentor and mentee will seek to work together through giving and openly receiving feedback, joint negotiation, decision making and consistent support. Making changes and moving out of comfort zones will always be stressful, so the supportive yet challenging climate created by the mentor will be crucial in determining the value of the process. Growth and development occur best within nurturing and supportive conditions and relationships.

The mentoring relationship is confidential.

You must be able to trust each other and to develop a safe, non-judgemental relationship where you can both be open. Mentoring relationships have little value if they are not based on truth. This may be difficult if, for example, you are discussing difficulties with people known to the mentor. But unless you are sure about confidentiality your partner will feel inhibited about explaining all the details of a situation. You should each continue to respect confidential information, even after the mentoring relationship has formally been completed.

The AHGBI Mentoring Scheme

Whilst mentoring is available in most institutions, it may be conducted in the framework of appraisal or in the context of personal improvement as a management tool. The AHGBI mentoring scheme is not conducted in a work setting nor does it have institutional goals at its heart. It is intended to enable focus on an individual and their personal goals.

How should the mentoring be conducted?

Face-to-face meetings allow time for discussion and reflection.

One of the special benefits of mentoring is the luxury of uninterrupted time to focus on development issues. Face-to-face meetings, where possible, provide the opportunity to tease out difficult issues and think creatively about solving problems. You can focus on the details, reflect on the situation and plan for the future. Criticism must be couched in a constructive manner. Perhaps the mentee's targets will be clear, but there will be times when neither of you will know the applicant's full potential and will need to be alert to possibilities and opportunities in order to develop them.

A holistic mindset is essential.

Progress and development in one area of professional life and work is likely to impact positively on other parts and it is therefore sensible to focus more on areas of potential development and enhancement. While the mentoring meeting provides an opportunity to air frustrations and positive and negative feelings, it is important also to focus on actions and results.

Underpinning any development of individuals is a supportive approach.

This helps to ensure that individuals are listened to, understood, respected and valued and that interpersonal skills are recognised, used and reviewed as effectively as possible. The AHGBI considers that people develop best when consistently offered the core conditions of empathy and respect and when they are related to in warm and genuine ways.

The AHGBI scheme can benefit both mentees and mentors.

Mentoring is essentially about learning: identifying, facilitating, supporting and celebrating learning. The roles of both mentor and mentee can benefit from the mentoring process in terms of personal and professional development.

The AHGBI scheme has a time-limited approach.

Mentoring should focus on a particular set of goals. Time-limit on the mentor's time encourages best use of the opportunity available and realistic goal setting.

Models of Mentoring

The role of the mentor is complex and will often have many facets; some of these are presented below:

- Guide, evaluate, demonstrate, act as a role model.
- Counsel, advise, empower.
- Nurture, encourage growth, challenge.
- Protect, support, sponsor, advocate.

Every pair will have its own dynamics and approaches. Below are two examples:

Issue-focussed approach:

The mentee may begin by identifying and analysing the problem, and the mentor probes the understanding of the complexities involved. The mentor can then challenge their mentee to use a different perspective and to redefine the problem in a different way, which may make it easier for them to tackle. Thus, in such a case, respective tasks would be as follows:

The Mentee's tasks

- Defining the problem
- Redefining the problem
- Managing the problem

The Mentor's tasks

- Understanding
- Challenging
- Supporting

Knowledge and experience-based approach:

The mentee may expect the mentor to contribute the expertise of a master craftsman or an experienced professional; however, the relationship is not primarily a showcase for the mentor's abilities and s/he has the task of eliciting the best from their mentee. This can be done by giving confidence and encouragement as well as demonstrating practice.

The Mentor puts in

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Experience

The Mentee pulls out

- Potential
- Commitment
- Expertise

Planning

The interactions between mentor and mentee take place before, during and after each actual meeting/mentoring session.

	Mentor	Mentee
<i>Before</i>	Reads information, makes notes	Submits information by agreed period. Is responsible for setting up meetings and for setting their targets.
<i>During</i>	Discusses general points, areas for development. Asks questions	Discusses general points, areas for development. Responds to challenges to thinking
<i>After</i>	Asks about progress, follows up	Revises information

Frequently Asked Questions

How was my mentor allocated to me?

The Scheme Director gathered some basic information from the application form submitted by each of the scheme's participants and then suggested a potential match for your application.

In doing so, the Director does their very best to:

- comply with applicants' wishes about some basic tenets and concepts that the mentee has about their mentor;
- find a good match between subject areas and research interests, matching partners within the broad groupings of expertise and research area.

Where possible the Scheme will:

- create matches where the mentor is working in an area different enough to provide new perspectives, but similar enough to provide common ground and build mutual understanding
- meet any other specific criteria identified by applicants in their application

The AHGBI accepts that this process is far from perfect and success is not guaranteed. There will be some pairs who do not get on together or who discover that they want different things from the Scheme. When this happens, the Scheme Director should be contacted; they will support both participants as much as possible and will do their

best to provide another match if desired. The final decision on whether to stay with a mentor lies with the mentee.

How much of my time will this take?

This very much depends on the individual pairs. It is entirely your choice how frequently you meet and for how often. We recommend that you discuss this and set down some guidelines at your first meeting. However, as a rough guide AHGBI expects that pairs may want to meet twice a year for 60-90 minutes. Meetings may be supplemented by Skype/Blackboard Collaborate meetings or telephone conversations. Meetings should not be more frequent than monthly but frequency is ultimately for the partners in each pair to determine.

Is this the same as probationary mentoring?

No. Staff will often be assigned mentors when they are on probation, and this Scheme is not designed to replace those mentors. AHGBI mentees are always matched with someone who is not in their home institution or research team, and this is intended to bring several advantages to both partners.

What happens if we do not get on?

There is a chance that some of the pairings will not work in practice and this will probably be apparent quickly. The AHGBI will do its very best to provide an alternative partner when this happens. It is worth bearing in mind that a mentoring relationship is designed to challenge you and encourage you to think differently about yourself and your approach to things. As a result, there could well be points during your meetings where you feel moved outside your comfort zone. In retrospect, this could well be when you gain the most from the Scheme. However, if there is a more permanent and fundamental 'mis-match' please let the Scheme Director know.

My mentor is from a different research field.

This can bring both challenges and unexpected advantages. As your mentor may not be directly working in the same field as you, they may not be familiar with specific research techniques, funding opportunities, approaches taken by your sector of the discipline. The AHGBI does aim to match applicants with someone broadly from their field, however, this may not be possible in all cases. Even so, a fresh perspective from someone outside of your working environment can be illuminating. Sometimes they can get applicants thinking about issues and practices in a whole new way. Furthermore, often applicants need help with more generic issues (e.g. career management, setting goals, personal development, progression), on which subject area has little relevance.

How confidential is all this?

Discussions between mentor and mentee are strictly confidential and you must maintain this confidentiality even after your relationship has ended. Participants will never be asked for details of what is being discussed at their meetings. The information you submitted in your application form will only be used in the matching process and for communicating with you about the Scheme.

I want to talk about work issues, but I do not want to talk about personal issues.

Often the two are closely linked; what happens at work can affect your personal life and vice versa. However, you do not have to talk about anything unless you are comfortable doing so. Mentees should discuss their boundaries with their mentor at the first meeting, when you should set out what you are going to discuss and what your targets are. Participants in the Scheme are encouraged to set out a contract at the outset as this can help both mentors and mentees to keep within clear boundaries.

I want to withdraw from the Scheme.

This is not a problem. However, the AHGBI Scheme Director asks that you let him/her know why you want to withdraw. If you have run into problems, is there anything Director can do to help you overcome them? Sometimes mentoring relationships are not easy and you may be pushed beyond your 'comfort zone', but often this can lead to real insights and gains being made.

It's 6 weeks in and I've heard nothing from my mentor/applicant; what should I do?

We ask that mentees take responsibility for making the first contact with their mentor and for arranging a meeting. If you have made initial contact with your partner but then hear nothing let the AHGBI Scheme Director know and we can do some investigating.

I've lost touch with my mentor and I feel awkward about getting in touch after so long.

These things happen, although AHGBI does ask that you are committed to the mentoring scheme as a starting point, not least since places are strictly limited. You will have to make time for mentoring meetings, otherwise other activities will take over. Your mentor will most likely understand about time pressures and your lack of contact – they've very likely been in your shoes before! If you'd rather the Scheme Director break the ice on your behalf after a long gap, just let them know.

How long will this scheme last for?

The scheme supports partnerships for 12 months with the possibility of a further 12 extension. We will contact you towards the end of the 12 months to check on progress and to encourage you to make arrangements to conclude your partnership. If you set some key objectives and goals when you first met, you should be working towards these over the course of the agreed period.

What if we want to finish our partnership before the 12-month period?

This is fine. If you and your partner agree to end the mentoring relationship early, for whatever reason, then please just let the Director know.

Some pairs may wish to continue their relationship beyond this time if it is mutually desired. Alternatively, some pairings may wish to terminate their relationship before the 12-month period if both parties have achieved their objectives from the scheme.

I have to travel to meet my mentor. Can I claim for my travel expenses?

The AHGBI has allocated a small amount of funding to support travel costs. Each pair can apply for up to £100 per year towards travel costs.

I'm a mentor and feel like I'm out of my depth.

Being a mentor is not about solving other people's problems for them: it is about helping them to resolve problems by offering insight and guidance, as well as challenging them to think about issues in a different way. If you are in a position where you feel that you are not equipped to deal with the topics the person you are mentoring raises, please seek help. You can contact the Scheme Director.

I have a suggestion to improve the scheme.

We would love to hear any suggestions for improvements or changes! Send them directly to the Scheme Director.

Should I set up my own mentoring relationship with my preferred mentor?

No. It is important that you apply on the form and that your preferred mentor is approached by the Scheme Director who has an overview of commitments. This is to avoid embarrassment to mentors who may otherwise be approached by a number of applicants.

Will my form be sent in its present state to the mentor?

No, your form is for the operation of the Scheme only and will not be forwarded on. This is because it contains personal information and also your mentor preferences.

Is mentoring the same as coaching?

No. The table below may assist both mentors and mentees in understanding their own role under this Scheme.

Coaching	Mentoring
Coaches need not have first-hand experience of the line of work of the person coached and their subject area. The coach can be an independent external professional with expertise in coaching, or a qualified internal coach.	Mentoring is customarily a planned pairing of a more skilled or experienced person (usually in the same broad field of work) with a less experienced person.
Coaching	Mentoring

Coaches will ask 'powerful' questions and not offer or give advice.	Mentors will often provide direction and advice and should 'open organisational doors' for mentees.
A number of both internal and external coaches are available with a variety of backgrounds and expertise and the services they provide tie in with the organisation's objectives.	Mentors can provide a neutral 'sounding board', assure total confidentiality, and have no agenda other than assisting their mentees in their development and to reach their goals.
Effective coaching is intended to help you to learn rather than by "teaching" you. By engaging with an experienced coach, the coachee will develop insights leading to enhanced effectiveness.	Mentoring involves helping mentees to develop their career, skills and expertise often drawing upon the experiences of the mentor in the process.

Some Mentoring Dilemmas

Here are some common mentoring dilemmas, with suggested responses:

The mentor/mentee uses the sessions to talk about personal problems.

The personal problems may be so overwhelming that they will inhibit any meaningful discussion about work issues. It is not appropriate for mentors to bring their own issues to the discussions with their mentees. Similarly, mentees need to bear in mind that a mentor is not a trained counsellor. Where this situation emerges, it be appropriate to suggest that their partner refer themselves to Occupational Health, counselling service, GP, etc.

The mentor/mentee does not complete the agreed action plans.

Explore whether the plans were unrealistic. Identify the reasons why the plans have not been completed. If this recurs, does it indicate a lack of commitment from either/both of the parties?

The mentee and the mentor have very different styles of working.

Recognise that different approaches may be equally valid and explore their relative advantages.

The mentor is aware of problems that the mentee has not mentioned.

The mentor may wish to raise the issue, but they must allow the mentee the right not to talk about it. The mentee may wish to return to the issue in the future.

The mentor/mentee thinks their partner has breached confidentiality.

Perhaps this should be raised, but there may be implications for trust to be damaged in the relationship. If the relationship has broken down, contact the Scheme Director.

The mentor is supportive but not challenging so the relationship is too cosy.

Mentoring is meant to be developmental and to encourage growth, so challenge within a supportive environment is good. The onus here is on the mentor to ensure an appropriate balance of challenge and support.

The mentee being mentored keeps asking for support outside the agreed mentoring meetings.

Revisit the mentoring contract set out at the start of the relationship and clarify your expectations. The mentor can encourage the member to develop a wide support network and to use different sources of support.

The mentor is too keen to offer solutions and advice.

Encouraging the person being mentored to work out their own solutions may prove a better long-term strategy. If you are offering advice, why not offer a range of solutions and discuss the consequences of each?

One partner suggests a joint work project.

Consider how this would affect your current relationship. Would this enhance or damage the mentoring relationship? What happens to the project if the relationship falters? What happens to the mentoring relationship if the project goes badly?

The mentee or the mentor gives their partner a small gift.

This might depend on the nature and value of the gift and the stage in the relationship. Would refusing a gift make you feel comfortable and uncompromised? Or would it seem to your partner like rejection?