

## **SEPnet and the Graduate Network (GRADnet) Mentoring Scheme**

### **GUIDANCE FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES**

SEPnet (South East Physics Network) strongly supports employer mentoring as a tool for developing students' potential and enhancing career opportunities. SEPnet, through its Graduate Network (GRADnet), offers mentoring opportunities with employers for physics postgraduate research students (PGRs) across the 9 partners institutions.

#### **What it is**

At the core of the activity is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee where the development of the mentee is the key focus. The development needs satisfied through the relationship can vary in focus and this focus should be determined by the mentee. The mentee must lead in identifying issues and, with guidance from the mentor, resolving them. The mentor is not there to provide 'the answers', but to guide the mentee towards 'the answer' that is right for him or her.

#### **Types of Mentoring**

The mentoring relationship can be both short and long term. It may focus on a particular issue or it may cover a range of issues. Employers might offer one-off mentoring, for example, providing advice and guidance on a CV or offering interview practice, or the relationship might be ongoing over a number of years and focus on the student's career plans and development.

Mentoring relationships can take place by email (e-mentoring), by telephone, Skype or face to face. Typically the mentor and mentee meet at designated times and places to discuss issues, make plans to resolve and then review. The formal vs informal nature of the sessions is down to those involved. However each session must have a purpose.

#### **Role of a Mentor**

As a mentor you will be viewed as a more experienced individual who is willing and able to pass on the benefit of that experience. You can't solve all the mentee's problems but you can refer or signpost him or her to others who can help. You can't do the mentee's work or give detailed academic advice but you can encourage him/her to become a successful independent learner by helping with time management, setting targets, giving study or research tips, listening to ideas and helping to interpret feedback.

Your role is not to 'tell' the mentee what to do but to act as a sounding board and:

- provide non-judgemental support
- clarify the goals of the mentee
- build rapport
- listen and accurately ascertain meaning
- ask questions and encourage the mentee to explore issues
- structure conversations
- encourage and allow the mentee to take the initiative
- provide feedback that is both challenging and empathetic
- offer knowledge and advice with care
- offer fresh perspectives
- maintain professional boundaries and confidentiality
- commit sufficient time and mental energy to the mentoring relationship.

#### **Benefits to the Mentor**

Engaging in a mentoring relationship is beneficial for mentor and mentee. The benefits to becoming a SEPnet mentor include:

- broadening your own skills, knowledge and personal development;
- increasing personal and professional networks;
- seeing others develop through your guidance and experience(s);
- the opportunity to support students and make a valuable contribution to education, skills development and society;
- becoming part of the SEPnet network and attending networking events with academics, students and industry;
- developing links with 9 leading university physics departments in the South East to share knowledge.

### **Skills and Qualities of a Mentor**

The decision to become a mentor is not one that should be taken lightly. Being a mentor is a rewarding and valuable role. However, before agreeing you should understand the skills and qualities required to be a mentor and what the role entails. It is important that those who agree to become mentors have the skills and qualities to make the relationship work. Please see below a list to review and evaluate yourself against before agreeing to become a mentor.

- Do you have the time? Mentoring will require a time commitment so look at your existing time commitments and truly evaluate whether you can spare the time. You may prefer to offer one-off mentoring sessions in the first instance;
- Do you have the appropriate knowledge and skills? Can you provide guidance on the area the mentee needs to develop?
- Listening skills – are you able to actively listen to others, not interrupting but listening and reflecting back what the mentee is saying?
- Patient and supportive – as the relationship is led by the mentee you will need to be prepared to support mentees towards achieving their goals. You need to let them reach conclusions at their own pace and not impose your views or suggestions.
- Discretion – the issues discussed during mentoring sessions must be treated in the strictest of confidence and therefore mentees need to believe that they can trust you.

### **Practicalities of being a Mentor**

How you choose to mentor will depend very much on what the mentee needs and what you are able/comfortable to commit to. There are several ways to make it work in practice:

- face to face meetings
- telephone or Skype mentoring
- e-mentoring – either informally or using a formalised online mentoring tool.

The length of the mentoring relationship will also depend on each unique situation. Sometimes a one-off intervention may be all that is required or it could last for the course of an academic year. We would recommend reviewing an ongoing mentoring relationship after one year to see if you wish to continue. You should be clear what your commitment will be and manage the mentee's expectations.

### **Role of the Mentee**

The purpose of mentoring is for you to work on your professional development. Don't expect the mentor to solve your problems or provide quick fixes. As a mentee you can expect to:

- Own and take responsibility for the content of the sessions;

- Be open to developing your self-awareness and to making changes;
- Be open to what the mentor has to say and to his/her advice; this does not mean you have to agree with it. You should however receive it, reflect upon it and decide later whether to act on it;
- Reflect between sessions on what has been discussed;
- Take the action agreed.

### **Benefits to the Mentee**

Benefits for the mentee include:

- help with developing your career path or an understanding of the requirements to get into a field of interest;
- advice on how to stand out and improve employability; help with tailoring your CV so that it stands out or develop and practise your interviewing skills;
- an opportunity for knowledge transfer;
- gaining from the knowledge, experience and expertise of someone about a specialist career area or industry field;
- increased confidence and self-awareness;
- expanding your professional and personal networks;
- developing skills;
- gaining support while you study.

### **Confidentiality**

- Your discussions are confidential and information should only be disclosed with the mentee's consent or in exceptional circumstances where safety and wellbeing or the safety of others is a concern;
- If you are finding something difficult to handle or think that you are being asked to do something outside your role, please get in touch with your SEPnet Employer Engagement Officer.

### **Recording**

- Keep a record of your meetings. Note any further action you may need to take or resources you may need, also make a note of any progress and of positive comments you receive for your own development as mentee or mentor.

### **Withdrawal**

- Agree that in case of any difficulties with the relationship your SEPnet Employer Engagement Officer should be informed before either party withdraws from the scheme.

### **YOUR THE FIRST MEETING**

1. Negotiate when, where and how long the meetings will be. If meeting face to face, the meeting should take place in a public place, for example, on the university campus, on company premises, at a professional institution or in a hotel foyer where both parties are comfortable. It will be up to both of you to decide how to allocate the sessions.
2. Agree a method of contact. It is a good idea to confirm the details of a meeting shortly before it is due to take place. Discuss the importance of punctuality and agree what to do if one of you has to cancel a meeting. Keep copies of your emails.
3. Make sure that both of you know what the purpose of your relationship is and discuss what you can and can't do.

**MENTOR CONTACT DIARY – to be completed by the mentee after each meeting**

Mentee \_\_\_\_\_

Date:	Place:
Topic:	
Comment:	
Date:	Place:
Topic:	
Comment:	
Date:	Place:
Topic:	
Comment:	

## MENTORING INTRODUCTORY CHECKLIST

To be completed by the mentee at your first meeting and returned to [veronica.benson@sepnet.ac.uk](mailto:veronica.benson@sepnet.ac.uk). You will both then receive a copy.

Mentee: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of first meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

We have discussed:

- When, where and how long our meetings will be
- What we need to do if one of us can't make a meeting
- The role of the mentor and what a mentor can and can't do
- Confidentiality
- What to do if there are difficulties

Other things we discussed:

Topics for future meetings:

Date of next meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

Mentee: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_