

Guidance for mentees

The following notes are intended as a guideline to help you think through your role as a SCONUL mentee. There is no one way of doing this, and SCONUL is not prescriptive in its approach. The main thing is that you should make the most of your opportunity to spend time with someone whose professional experience can benefit you, and whose constructive support and challenge can help you see your own situation more clearly.

Applying for mentoring

Think about what you want to achieve, and whether mentoring is right for you at this time. What support (or otherwise) are you getting from your line manager or other colleagues? Can you clearly articulate your goals? What are your expectations of this relationship – what is it that you need from your mentor? Does this tell you anything about the kind of person (and maybe their background) that you want to work with?

Are you happy to give the necessary time to make your mentoring partnership work for you? Your mentor will be making a commitment to you for whatever period of time and pattern of engagements you agree between you, and you want to ensure you can make the most of this. Once a mentoring partnership has been agreed you will both be responsible for organising the meetings and your own travel, including funding.

Preparing for your mentoring session

Try to set out clearly what it is you want to achieve in your mentoring partnership, and your leadership development goals. Don't worry if it feels a bit foggy to begin with, as your mentor will be able to help you clarify these questions.

- What do you want to achieve specifically in this meeting? How will you know that you've succeeded?
- What does your mentor need to know about you? What career highlights (or lowlights) might be relevant to your situation today? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Would others who work with you agree?
- What has been going on for you recently? What has happened / what have you thought about since your last meeting?

In the meeting

Remember that this is your meeting (or phone call, or Skype session). Your mentor will want to understand your purpose in seeking mentoring, and will be doing what they can to help you make progress, so it's up to you to drive the agenda.

Your mentor will ask questions. Do your best to answer honestly, and to keep an open mind if something is said that you find uncomfortable. Why might this be? Take some time to reflect, to check your understanding of their question, and to ask questions of your own. You don't have to agree with everything your mentor says – but you do need to try and understand and reflect on it.

Ask for what you need – but remember your mentor doesn't have all the answers. They may have had similar experiences and can describe what they did (or didn't do) and what did (or didn't) work for them. You can learn from their mistakes as well as their successes.

Your mentor may also be able to put you in touch with other people or organisations who could help you move forward, or suggest activities that you could become involved with.

After the session – reflection and review

- How did your mentoring dialogue go? Are there ways you could use your time together more usefully in future (things to focus on, things not to get stuck on)?
- Is there anything you don't understand or feel unsure about? Why might this be?
- Was the balance right (between each of you talking, listening, reflecting)?
- What will you do as a result of this engagement?
- What do you need to think about / reflect on?
- Where are you with your original goals / concerns? Have you made progress? Have the goals changed?

Ending your mentoring partnership

You will have considered at the start of your partnership how frequently you want to engage with your mentor, and over what period of time; and you may have changed this by mutual agreement at some point along the way. You should be ready to indicate to your mentor when you feel it is time to draw things to a close – this is usually evidence of successful work together, and your mentor should not feel concerned if you are ready to finish. Let SCONUL know when you have concluded your work together, to assist in record-keeping and monitoring of the scheme.

When you have successfully concluded work with a mentor, you may of course continue to be in touch with them, through social media or other informal routes (an occasional coffee for example). This is for you to agree together.

If the partnership is not going well for any reason, you should raise this honestly and openly with your mentor. (It is quite possible that they feel the same, and in any case they should be prepared for a partnership not to work on occasion.) Ideally you should explore together whether there is anything that either of you might do differently to help the partnership to become more effective. It may also be that one or other of you finds that their circumstances have changed so that they simply cannot honour the original commitment to the mentoring partnership – in which case again this should be raised straightforwardly.

If you feel that you do not wish to continue in a particular partnership for whatever reason, you can recognise this amicably and agree to conclude your work together. Again, please let SCONUL know that your partnership has come to an end, and you will be supported in identifying an alternative mentor.

As a final step, why not consider becoming a mentor yourself? This might be formally through SCONUL, or perhaps your workplace has a scheme, or just reflect on how your mentor has helped you, and think about whether you know people who might benefit from your support in a similar role.