

## MATHEMATICAL INSTITUTE

### Mentoring Scheme for Graduate Research Students – information for students

#### Outline and aims of the scheme

The scheme has been set up with the intention that each graduate research student who wishes to should have a mentor. The aim of the scheme is to support students' career and personal development. A more experienced person (the mentor) assists the student (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance their career and/or personal growth.

The mentoring relationship is entirely distinct from the relationship with the student's supervisor, who will be their primary source of information and guidance in the course of their research project here. The mentor's role is intended to complement that of the supervisor. Mentors are not expected to be directly involved in the student's work in any way. A student may wish to choose a mentor from a similar research area, or may feel that this is not necessary. Students should choose mentors who are more senior than them – often an early career researcher, but potentially a member of faculty, a retired member of faculty, or a more senior graduate student.

Some Research Groups make clear that the Head of the Research Group, or another designated faculty member, is there to act as an advisor to students. This scheme does not intend to supplant that, rather to provide students with a further source of support if they wish it. The mentor may be closer in the level of their experience to the student – for example an early career researcher or another graduate student rather than a faculty member – and they might be in a different research area.

Before they arrive, each graduate research student is also assigned a 'buddy' – a peer whose role is to help with their initial arrival and induction to Oxford. The mentoring relationship is intended to be a longer-term one, with someone who has more experience than the student, to support them once they have settled into Oxford and begin looking to the future. It is therefore suggested that students find a mentor during their second and third terms here.

#### The mentor's role:

This list summarises what can normally be expected of a mentor whose role is to support a mentee in this way:

- Structuring the mentoring sessions, while encouraging the mentee to take responsibility for the content
- Clarifying that the sessions are confidential, and agreeing any other ground rules

- Taking appropriate approaches such as robustly challenging a mentee who is not sufficiently focussed or sympathising in the event of bad experiences while encouraging the mentee to take ownership and respond appropriately
- Helping the mentee to see the bigger and longer term picture if they are concerned only about the present and the short term future
- Helping a mentee to reframe how they view something, or to consider a different perspective

### **The mentee's role:**

Within such a developmental mentoring relationship, a mentee is expected to be:

- In control of the agenda, taking responsibility for their development, rather than expecting 'quick fixes' from a mentor
- Committed, for example to attending planned sessions, taking the actions planned with the mentor
- Prepared to be challenged when the mentor feels that this, rather than perhaps sympathy, will be of benefit
- Professional in the relationship with the mentor, for example being punctual, respecting agreed ground rules, and talking openly and honestly with the mentor

### **Practicalities and further guidance**

#### *Establishing mentoring pairings*

**Graduate students should contact potential mentors:** this might be an early career researcher, or possibly a member of faculty, a retired member of faculty, or a more senior graduate student.

Research Groups will play an important role in supporting the allocation of mentors, so if you are unsure of who to approach then contact the member of faculty in your Research Group with responsibility for graduate students on course (details at <https://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/members/students/postgraduate-courses/doctor-philosophy/mentoring> ), or talk to your supervisor.

If you have found a mentor and both parties are happy to go ahead an email should be sent to [catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk) to notify of the pairing.

Graduate students who experience any difficulty in finding a mentor in this way should contact [catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk) . **Our aim is that all graduate students who wish so should have a mentor assigned by the end of their first year here.**

#### *Mentorship meetings*

Mentors and mentees are free to determine between themselves the manner and frequency of their contacts, and this will vary. As a guide, it is usually found that face-to-face meetings are well suited to the mentoring relationship, but the frequency will depend on individual circumstances. Participants will want to meet somewhere where they can discuss matters confidentially, but may wish to opt for a 'walking' meeting or a meeting in a neutral place, rather than just meeting in an office. Following an initial exploratory meeting it might be helpful if mentees and mentors agree a series of meeting dates, to ensure that these are scheduled in – but this can be kept under review. Both parties should ensure that contact is

maintained. Either party should feel able to end the mentoring relationship at any time for any reason. Again – please keep [catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk) informed.

Mentors should agree any ground-rules – to include confidentiality – at the beginning. Participants may want to keep a record of discussions, which will also need to be treated confidentially.

Mentors and mentees should ideally evaluate their partnership at various points, to assess whether any changes are necessary, or if the partnership has come to a natural end. If the process does come to an end you can close the process by reviewing and celebrating the progress and achievements made, and considering how the mentee is going to continue to work on their development.

If the mentor or mentee consider that the mentee may benefit from more professional support there are a number of further resources available within the University, see:

<https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/aad/swss/>

Colleges also play a key role in supporting students, and the student's College Advisor, Senior Tutor, Tutor for Graduates, or other officer, may be contacted.

Further advice on sources of support for students is available from the Academic Administrator, Charlotte Turner-Smith ([charlotte.turner-smith@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.turner-smith@maths.ox.ac.uk) / AWB room S0.33 / phone (6)15203).

For further guidance on mentoring in practice see '[Mentoring in practice: advice for mentors and mentees](#)' written by Alison Trinder of the MPLS Division for the Oxford Learning Institute.

If mentees or mentors would appreciate further advice at any stage, or have any questions, they should contact Catherine Goodwin ([catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.goodwin@maths.ox.ac.uk) / AWB room S0.19 / phone (2)83873).