

# Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Mentoring Programme in partnership with the Royal Society of Edinburgh

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## 1. Programme Overview

This programme seeks to support Social Science PhD students in Scotland to develop their potential and explore the different directions their research and career can take. Mentors made up of Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Social Science PhD alumni are matched with current PhD students from within the SGSSS network, who are in the later stages of their PhD programme.

## 2. Overarching aims of the SGSSS Mentoring Programme

For 2025/26, the programme has three main aims:

- **Considering career options and “demystifying” career culture**
  - Mentors can help mentees explore what types of careers are available to them after completion of the PhD;
  - A key benefit of mentorship is providing insight into the unspoken aspects of professional life, whether in academia or other sectors;
  - Mentors can share personal experiences and practical tips about the ethos, culture, and norms of their sector, insights that are often not available in formal training or documents.
- **Supporting mentees with understanding how to network**
  - Mentors can share best practice in network building;
  - Mentors can work with the mentee to develop a plan of contacts/networks to connect with;
  - Where appropriate and available, mentors can offer access to their professional networks.
- **Recognising and Translating Transferable Skills**
  - Because mentors are more removed from the mentee’s immediate academic context, they are well placed to offer holistic feedback on transferable skills;
  - By sharing their own career trajectories, mentors can help students understand how their training can be applied across a wide range of industries, improving employability within and beyond academia.

### 3. What is Mentoring, and who can be involved with the SGSSS Mentoring Programme?

Mentoring is a shared learning relationship that includes elements of listening, advising, planning, challenge, support and sharing experience. It is more than an 'advisory' relationship and to be impactful mentoring should balance advice-giving with challenging the mentee to seek their own solutions and solve their own problems.

In this programme, mentoring can be understood as:

**“A confidential active learning process whereby an experienced, empathetic person (the mentor) facilitates the development of another individual (the mentee) via raising their awareness of new horizons, cultures and perspectives, and through enabling the re-examination of their own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development in line with this new learning.”**

The programme is designed to run for **up to 12 months** (January 2026 onwards) and the total time commitment is expected to be c. eight hours for mentors and mentees. This includes commitments to the Launch Event (two hours), the mentoring meetings (four one-hour meetings on a one-to-one basis), plus self-reflection and development on the programme for mentors and mentees through self-led resources (one hour), and all associated paperwork (one hour).

**The Mentees:** For 2025/26, this programme is focused on PGRs who are in the **later stages of the PhD i.e., in approximately their third year (or part time equivalent)**. Mentees are proactive partners in that they drive the learning through the mentoring partnership: they set objectives for their own learning, lead the agenda for the one-to-one sessions and decide how best to use their time.

Building on the aims of the programme detailed above, the anticipated benefits to mentees are:

1. An opportunity to build their knowledge about the interdisciplinary potential within their own research and research community;
2. Dedicated time to focus on career options and planning with access to a knowledgeable sounding board for testing out ideas;
3. Increased understanding of how professional networks can be developed;
4. Increased self-awareness, awareness of the transferability of research skills, and confidence in joining new work environments.

**The Mentors:** All mentors are PhD graduates. They have direct experience of academic and/or private, public or third sector career pathways and environments. RSE mentors will be a current [Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh](#) or members of the [Young Academy of Scotland](#); other mentors will be SGSSS alumni.

Mentors guide the mentee through an exploration process, helping them to recognise their skills and strengths, learn from past experiences, seek new experiences, and create a personalised action plan for their career development. The best mentors are those who listen to the needs of their mentee and allow the mentee to steer the direction of the partnership, drawing on their own experiences as appropriate.

Both mentee and mentor will benefit from the learning partnership. Anticipated positive outcomes for mentors include:

1. Management and leadership development: self-awareness, active listening, challenging, motivating others, building commitment to action, coaching.
2. Increased professional networks, via the mentee and/or the other mentors in the programme cohort.
3. Appreciation of the skills and experiences of PhD researchers and the benefit they can bring to interdisciplinary research, private, public and third sector organisations.
4. Satisfaction of helping others who are transitioning from academic research into the next stage of their careers.

The future employers of researchers will also benefit by helping highly skilled researchers understand their organisation's key drivers and challenges from a first-hand source. We hope this will help researchers make more strategic career decisions and find employers whose values match closely to their own.

#### 4. The Mentoring Partnership

Mentors and mentees will complete a short application form detailing career experiences, aspirations, and objectives for mentoring. Together, these forms will enable SGSSS and the RSE to identify a complementary match for each mentee. All mentees will be social science PhDs from an SGSSS partner university.

Once pairs are matched, the programme will start with a Launch Event for all participants. After this initial event, mentoring proceeds as a series of confidential conversations, which focus on the objectives that mentees set for themselves. Formats are likely to include email exchanges, one-to-one meetings, invited observations of workplace meetings and networking opportunities.

Activities and conversational topics should be selected according to mentee objectives, and a range of ideas will be presented in the Mentoring Welcome Pack. To get the most from mentoring, it is important that confidentiality is respected on both sides to enable open conversations and begin to build trust.

The mentor role is designed to be a developmental partnership which complements other key figures in postgraduate support (e.g., supervisors, advisors, mentors) and existing support structures and points of contact. It does not replace or compensate for any of these existing relationships.

Some activities that are **not expected** of mentors are:

- Provide advice or guidance on the content of the mentee's PhD studies, or the PhD Thesis;
- Act on the mentee's behalf, solve problems for them, or take action to contact the mentee's colleague(s) or university department(s) to advocate for the mentee;
- Provide work experience, internships or placements;
- Offer a job, put in a 'good word', or influence a selection panel;
- Sponsor the mentee to study, or to attend conferences, training, or meetings, etc;
- Provide a counselling or therapy service.

Mentoring is not explicitly linked to monitoring or evaluation processes for PhD researchers. The role of the mentor is separate to that of the supervisor and the mentor will not advise on the content of the mentee's PhD studies, or the PhD Thesis.

## 5. The process for mentoring

- Mentees and mentors apply to join by completing an Application Form – mentors [here](#), mentees [here](#).
- Matches are announced and mentors/mentee's introductions are made via email.
- All participants attend a two-hour SGSSS Mentoring Programmes Launch Event in January 2026. The Launch Event will take place in person at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The event will be a short celebration of the programme with time for informal networking so mentees and mentors can meet.
- Training materials will be made available for mentors and mentees new to the programme, dependent on the needs of our mentors and mentee population. Details will be confirmed following matching.
- Mentor and mentee complete and sign a mentoring agreement together.
- Mentoring proceeds for four, one-hour meetings over up to 12 months. Timing agreed by each pair, to suit the participants' schedules.
- Mentor and mentee complete an End of Programme evaluation via Online Surveys.

SGSSS asks mentees and mentors to provide feedback at the end of each programme. All mentors and mentees, involved with the 2024/25 programme reported that they would recommend the mentoring programme to others. Mentors highlighted the sense of satisfaction that they gained through helping PhD researchers, and all agreed that the programme helped them to appreciate the skills that PhD students could bring to their workplace.

Mentees reported that the programme supported them to develop their understanding of their next career steps with a knowledgeable sounding board. All mentees stated that they would recommend the programme to other PhD students. You can see case studies of mentee's experience on our mentoring webpage [here](#).

The original SGSSS Career Pathways Mentoring Programme was designed in 2019/20 in collaboration with Dr. Kay Guccione, the SGSSS Alumni Community, and with current postgraduate researchers in the SGSSS. We are grateful to Charlotte Bonner-Evans of the Future Leaders Fellows Development Network for her work developing our resources for mentors in 2022/23 and 2023/24.