



Doctoral Training Alliance

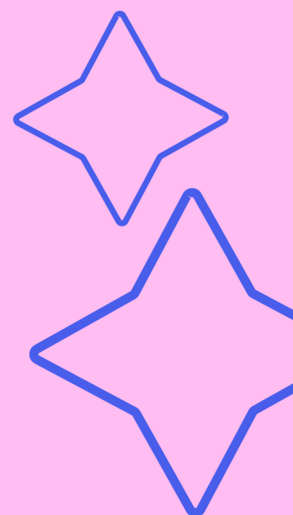
MENTORSHIP FOR DTA RESEARCHERS





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Introduction

There are a wide range of free resources available to help you set up a mentoring relationship. This document draws on these to provide specific advice to support DTA researchers to make the most of their networks in order to recruit and work with a mentor – use this alongside the accompanying resources available to download on the [DTA website](#). We highly recommend looking at the following two resources linked below yourself, in order to develop your understanding of what mentorship means, and what it can offer you.



[Mentoring
resources from
the ACCELERATE
programme at
UCL](#)



[‘Choosing,
Recruiting and
Working with a
Mentor’](#) by Dr Kay
Guccione



*A mentor is someone with whom you can have a good quality conversation, that focuses on your personal and professional development – **Kay Guccione***



How mentoring can support your development during your PhD

A mentor is not another supervisor. Even though they may well provide advice and feedback to support your wider academic or professional development, your supervisor is primarily interested in supporting you to complete your thesis. A mentor may be able to offer academic or professional development guidance which is more impartial – i.e. not primarily aiming for thesis completion, but supporting your career aims more generally.

Additionally if you are interested in career paths beyond academia, it may be helpful to have a mentor who has experience in the area you want to move into. **Having someone to talk things through with supports good decision making about your professional development and career path.** It can also offer the opportunity to make interpersonal connections and to enhance the development profile of underrepresented groups in universities and research.

Types of support that mentoring can offer:

- Intellectual, contextual/professional, psychological or skills development
- Informed advice to test out career ideas
- Introductions to new networks
- Challenge from a critical friend
- Space to share concerns and experiences with an empathetic ally

Key steps for effective mentoring

- To establish an effective mentoring relationship, it is important for both parties to have clear expectations about what you want to achieve. Set measurable objectives with timescales using the templates on the following pages.
- Mentoring works best when mentees take the leading role, set the agenda, take responsibility for any actions arising from the mentoring sessions, and help to shape the sessions to suit their preferences by giving feedback.
- The mentee should prepare for each meeting by considering: what topics you want to cover, what planning you need to do, what problem you want to solve or what decision you want to make.
- Be prepared to speak openly and be open minded to suggestions. You can decide afterwards how to proceed, and whether to act on any advice.





Finding and recruiting a mentor

It is important that a mentor is someone who is not already part of your day-to-day activities. This will help you to establish with them a space for the impartial, open exchange of ideas.

However, considering your existing network might be a good place to start – for example, those with connections to the DTA, to your current department, or to organisations or universities where you have previously been based. This could include alumni, or other academic or professional collaborators. LinkedIn can be a useful place to find out more about an individual's background to understand whether they have suitable experiences and skills to act as a mentor for you. Make sure you connect with the [DTA Researchers and Alumni](#) profile to stay up to date with the DTA community on LinkedIn.

You may also want to reach out to others within your network (for example, a supervisor) in order to ask for suggestions for suitable mentors. Give them some brief information about the attributes, background or professional/academic field of your ideal mentor, and how you want to benefit from a mentoring relationship. You can also send an email to Jennie, Rabia or Emma – we may be able to suggest individuals from the DTA network who you can approach.



Check out these videos from Kay Guccione on [‘How to choose a mentor’](#) and [‘How to ask someone to mentor you’](#).



Use the planning template available to download on the [DTA website](#) to reflect on how mentorship could support you to achieve your professional development goals.



Contacting potential mentors

Your first email to a potential mentor should be concise, with the following essential information:

Who you are – what's your background, what motivates you/your passions

Where you're heading in your career – what ideas are you currently considering for life after your PhD?

Upcoming priorities for your development – these could be psychological (for example, developing self-confidence, combatting imposter syndrome), skills-based (for example, public speaking, communication or leadership) or contextual (from example, growing your network or strengthening your research profile). Have a look at [Vitae's Researcher Development Framework](#), as well as the **DTA Training themes below**, to get ideas about areas you may want to develop.

How mentoring with them will help you get there – what is it about their experience, skills and attributes that you think will support your priorities? Suggest meeting for an informal chat to discuss how they could support you.

What you want your mentoring to look like – for example, following an introductory chat, 3 x 1hr meetings per month for 3 months. You can always prolong the period later if you would both like to. Tell them you will take an active role in managing your relationship – you will schedule and set up your meetings, set the agenda and report back on progress on your objectives.

Don't be disheartened if they say no – mentoring is voluntary work. If this is the case, thank them for their response, and start researching alternative recruits!

DTA training themes

Professional & research development

Plan, prepare for and navigate the wide range of open to doctoral graduates, including those within academy, industry and entrepreneurship.

Learn about new methodologies and approaches and broaden your research horizons by drawing on the interdisciplinary of the DTA community.

Vitae RDF Sub-domain B3: Professional and career development.
Vitae RDF Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities.

Thesis and viva prep

The key skills that a researcher needs to complete a doctoral thesis, for example:

- i. thesis writing
- ii. viva / oral examination
- iii. funding opportunities

Vitae RDF Sub-domain A1: Knowledge base, B2 Self-management, C1: Professional conduct, C3: Finance, funding and resources, D2: Communication and dissemination.

Communication, dissemination & impact

Skills training for effective communication and networking (such as blog writing and presentation skills) and DTA events and activities to put these skills into action (DTA Researcher blog series and DTA community networking events).
Effectively disseminate research (including through publication) and collaborate with institutions and public in order to ensure the wide impact of your research.

Vitae RDF Domain D: Engagement, influence, and impact

Wellbeing & support

Foster a balanced mindset that supports your wellbeing while effectively navigating the mental and emotional challenges of completing a PhD in order to ensure that you become the best researcher you can be.

Vitae RDF Domain: Personal effectiveness



Maintaining your mentoring relationship

To prepare for your first meeting with a potential mentor, we highly recommend making use of Kay Guccione's '[Mentoring Agreement Template](#)', available to download on the DTA programme hub. This will support you to establish clear expectations with your mentor and to set realistic objectives to achieve.

Going forward, remember that you are the one managing the relationship. This means you should contact your mentor to **schedule meetings, share an agenda** with them in advance of meetings to let them know what you would like to discuss, and **come prepared to each meeting with updates** on your progress.

You should also **be open with feedback** to let your mentor know how the relationship is supporting you. Guccione suggests the following prompts to craft your feedback:

- Your key learning from the mentoring session, and why you feel it added value
- What you have put into practice since meeting and how it went
- What you would like to focus on in the next mentoring session and anything you would like to move away from.





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