

Case Study 2 –Mentoring for ECRs

The Doctoral College runs two mentor schemes for ECRs. These pair them with a member of the University of Surrey community (academic & professional services staff), or an employer from a different sector. We nurture life-long links with doctoral alumni, and these make up a good proportion of the 70+ employer mentors we have available to both ECRs and PGRs. Through this scheme, all members of research staff have the opportunity of mentoring from within or outside of academia, or both. Bespoke mentor-mentee pairing is key to these mentoring schemes. Mentees are asked what they would like to gain from the mentoring programme and this is matched specifically with the skills or experience the mentor has identified themselves as having. Furthermore, the pair's preferred methods of communicating are identified and supported, including the possibility of e-mentoring if either the researcher or the mentor is based outside the area. Throughout the process, Doctoral College staff conduct regular checks on the pair and are available to support any difficulties. To date we have paired 93 ECRs with mentors. Having access to an employer mentor can be particularly beneficial to our ECRs in terms of:

- Gaining an 'external' perspective
- Discussing the potential differences between academia and the commercial world
- Finding out about specific work areas and the day-to-day reality of different job roles
- Developing future contacts, whether for collaboration or job-hunting purposes
- Be supported in the transition from academia to business, industry, or the not-for-profit sector

We are currently collecting specific employer mentoring case studies to encourage researcher participation in this opportunity and making these available on our University VLE.

Below are some quotations from the ECR case studies about in the scheme.

As I am contemplating what to do next in my career, I thought it would be beneficial to speak to someone outside of academia as they would offer a different perspective of what to do next and possible future career paths.

The key benefits for me having an employer mentor were to be able to discuss ideas and potential futures with someone outside the organisation. My mentor, Sarah, allowed me to think about different ways I could use my skills. She encouraged me to explore different options, but never put any pressure on me. During the first session we did an exercise to explore what my dream job would be if there weren't any limitations. This provided a really nice starting point in revealing what I find important in a job and what I will be looking for in the next step of my career.

I really enjoy writing and have been wanting to write a blog or book for a very long time. During my sessions with Sarah we explored what was holding me back in 'just writing'. I have come to realise that, as my academic writing has been scrutinized and marked for the past decade I have really lost touch with the joy of writing. A major breakthrough for me was being able to start writing for pleasure again – and a nice bonus is that writing is a great transferable skill.

I found it very useful because I was looking to hear from someone who had an industry-based experience and academia-based experience. All of my experience has been in academia, so it was quite useful to hear from industry-based experience. The mentor was very relevant for me as we share the same research field. It was a good chance to talk about the field and our current research activities and to get feedback. Also, the mentor had international experience and he did his PhD at Surrey, so he knew the atmosphere and it was interesting to hear from him.

I found the mentoring pairing with my mentor the most useful and enriching personal and professional development experience I had in Surrey