

# Career Coaching & Mentoring for Researchers

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HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

# Coach vs Mentor (Euraxess)

- A **coach** is defined as a personal guide providing one-to-one counselling and guidance to researchers on how to plan and manage their career development.
- There are many models used for coaching but it is commonly considered that the coach *guides* learning rather than teaching directly.
- A **mentor** is defined as an experienced *adviser* in a particular area (for example career development) who can explain key details to those with less experience.

# Coaching vs. Mentoring (Vitae UK)

COACHING	MENTORING
Relationship generally has a set duration	Ongoing relationship that can last for a long period of time
Generally more structured in nature and meetings are scheduled on a regular basis	Can be more informal and meetings can take place as and when the mentee needs some advice, guidance or support
Short-term (sometimes time-bounded) and focused on specific development areas/issues	More long-term and takes a broader view of the person
Coaching is generally not performed on the basis that the coach needs to have direct experience of their client's formal occupational role, unless the coaching is specific and skill-focused	Mentor is usually more experienced and qualified than the 'mentee'. Often a senior person in the organisation who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities
Focus is generally on development/issues at work	Focus is on career and personal development
The agenda is focused on achieving specific, immediate goals	Agenda is set by the mentee, with the mentor providing support and guidance to prepare them for future roles
Coaching revolves more around specific development areas/issues	Mentoring revolves more around developing the mentee as a professional



- A professional and interpersonal relationship.
- A specific professional or academic goal desired by the candidate.
- Focus is on the advancement and development of a specific issue relating to the PhD candidate's career.
- Requires tailoring the content and style of coaching based on the needs and experiences of the candidate (i.e. culture, gender, ethnicity, etc).
- Coaching is aimed to help the candidate develop or refine a specific-job related skill. The purpose is normally to improve job performance or acquire specific skills needed for career development.
- The structure is set by the coach, who drives the process forward and is usually has a shorter, well-defined timeline.
- This professional relationship should be built on trust and openness, like that of a mentor, however it may also require the coach to possess a specific skill set or expertise and professional competencies.



- Research mentoring is an interactive process that supports individuals to develop and maintain their research profile and activities.
- The ultimate goal of mentor is to establish the mentee as an independent researcher.
- Mentors serve as professional advisors and role models who invest in the long term development of a researcher and the growth of their career.
- Mentoring responsibilities include sharing knowledge and skills, overseeing the mentee's work, assisting them in expanding their professional network and encouraging professional development opportunities.
- The mentorship relationship may focus on career and personal development over a longer period of time with informal or as-needed meetings.
- Since a strong mentoring partnership is rooted in trust and openness, and both the mentor and the mentee drive the mentoring process, it is highly recommended that a mentee's manager not serve as their mentor. This could be a deterrent for growth or even a conflict of interest.

# Qualities of a good coach or mentor

- Willingness to share skills and expertise.
- Demonstrates a positive attitude towards the candidate, the project and the institution.
- Takes a personal and positive interest in the PhD candidate.
- Provides constructive feedback.
- Stays on task and on schedule.
- Reliable and responsive.
- Models professional responsibility.
- Values the opinions and initiatives of others.
- Motivates others by setting a good example.
- Encourages effective use of time.

# Why is coaching important?

- **Guiding principle of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers!**
- **PhD candidates today are more likely to develop a career outside of academia, than within a university. We need to help prepare them for a successful research career.**
- Coaching is helpful for researchers at all levels of their career (early, mid and experienced researchers) as they need to identify and develop new skills as they progress through their career.
- A sustainable career in research requires interdisciplinary and transferable skills and a broad and diverse network.
- Constructive feedback allows for growth and development.
- Experiences and expertise of the coaches builds up the capacities of the candidates, who will share these lessons with others.
- Setting goals and achieving results in an important skill for a researcher to learn- inside and outside the classroom.
- Coaching can help candidates overcome obstacles and can improve the research experience.
- Candidates are better equipped to handle future issues alone when they are aware of the supports and resources in place.
- Candidates will better identify road blocks, allowing them to be proactive and not reactive.
- The networks to which their coach may direct them may improve their prospects of securing a professional placement (inside or outside academia).
- Having a coach who is committed to their personal development can lower stress and build confidence.
- Identifying issues early on can help a candidate stay on course and not be deterred by a lengthy or challenging PhD experience. It could also ensure a candidate defends their thesis in an appropriate amount of time.

# Who can be a mentor?

Any person with an expertise in a specific area can support researchers as a coach. Different mentors can offer different insights and may be beneficial at different stages of a researcher's career.

- A senior colleague in the same unit can offer insights into the candidate's context, including details about personnel, institutional background and departmental issues that surround the researcher on a day-to-day basis.
- A senior colleague in the same institution may be well-versed in the candidate's context and be in a good position to give a big picture overview. They may also be able to offer insights into institutional strategies and issues.
- A disciplinary colleague outside the candidate's institution who is familiar with the candidate's discipline but is not influenced by the particulars of the institution.
- A peer-mentor may offer a close perspective and understand the candidate's struggles. They can draw directly on recent experiences and offer insights on the issues at hand.



# Types of mentoring

- Classical mentoring (one-to-one)
- Group mentoring (one mentor-to-many mentees)
- Multiple mentoring (many mentors-to-one mentee)
- Team mentoring/Mentor circles (many-to-many)
- Peer mentoring (peer-to-peer)
- Reverse mentoring
- Triad mentoring (one-to-two; two-to-one)
- e-mentoring (online)

# Important topics for researchers to consider...

- Career advice
- Setting career goals and strategies for achieving them
- Help with networking and expanding a professional network
- Understanding the research landscape and how to raise a research profile
- Insights into a particular area or specialty
- Perspectives on ways of achieving a work-home balance
- Team dynamics and team management (managing up)
- Improvement of particular skills, such as communication management or time management skills

# Preparing the mentee

- Setting expectations from the beginning is very important!
- When coaching, the candidate should have a specific idea of what they want to improve and what they want to work on. Someone looking for longer term mentoring may need more guidance developing a plan.
- Establish ground rules for the professional relationship:
  - Trust & Respect
  - Communication & Confidentiality

# Preparation ideas

- Sometimes a candidate might come with several issues and areas that need work.
- Have them do a «brain dump » and list all the issues that they are currently facing. This will help them get it all out on paper. The action of writing down the issues, can be very helpful when establishing priorities and understanding the big picture when setting goals.
- Prioritize the list:
  - 30-60-90 days
  - 3-6-9 months
  - Red-Yellow-Green
  - Start – Stop- Continue

# Meeting framework

*The first meeting may take a little longer, but ensure that you develop an action plan that is clear, concise and has precise benchmarks for each month.*

- Set the ground rules
  - How often will you meet?
  - How long will each meeting last?
  - What is the preferred method of communication? (email, phone)
  - List any other expectations that the coach and the candidate might have at the very beginning.
- Use trackable and measurable goals:
  - SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**greed upon, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-based

# Development tools

- **VIPS: Values, Interests, Personality traits, Skills**
  - **Values:** What principles or priorities guide you? What are your beliefs about what you must have to make your life valuable?
  - **Interests:** What do you enjoy doing? What topics are you passionate about?
  - **Personality:** What is your style? What are your preferences?
  - **Skills:** What do you do well? What are your talents and strengths?
- **Skill inventory: Myers Briggs or Clifton Strengths Quests**

# Institutional support

Institutions can offer support for the coaching partnerships in several ways.

- Create a list of potential coaches from among the faculty, staff and administration
- Offer training for the coaches (like this seminar!)
- Offer different kinds of coaching (one time sessions, group coaching, topic specific coaching, etc)
- Promote available resources widely and often
- Ensure supervisors are supportive of their PhD candidates receiving coaching and normalize the process.
- Recognise and communicate success stories
- Track and assess the programme *each year*

# Further reading & resources

- Establishing Mentoring in Europe: Strategies for the promotion of women academics and researchers  
<http://www.eument-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Establishing-Mentoring-in-Europe.pdf>
- European Centre for Evidence-based Mentoring: March 2019 meeting summary  
<https://www.ecebmentoring.eu/>
- Vitae UK Mentoring and coaching <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/leadership-development-for-principal-investigators-pis/developing-individual-researchers/mentoring-and-coaching-researchers>
- Podcasts from The Chronicle of Evidence-based Mentoring:  
<https://www.evidencebasedmentoring.org/category/mentoring-podcast/>
- Example of Researcher Development Programmes – University of Glasgow, UK  
<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/research/development/#/>



# Further reading & resources

- The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) Code of Ethics  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/142-private-act--2.pdf>
- Mentoring Early-Career Faculty Researchers is important- but first « train the trainer » - article from the Association of American Medical Colleges (Dec 2016)  
[https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2016/12000/Mentoring\\_Early\\_Career\\_Faculty\\_Researchers\\_Is.12.aspx#pdf-link](https://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2016/12000/Mentoring_Early_Career_Faculty_Researchers_Is.12.aspx#pdf-link)
- Mentoring: a review of early career researcher studies (Frontline Learning Research, 3(3):64-76 (Sept 2015)  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305115040\\_Mentoring\\_a\\_review\\_of\\_early\\_career\\_researcher\\_studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305115040_Mentoring_a_review_of_early_career_researcher_studies)
- PI videos on mentoring research staff: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/engagement-influence-and-impact/coaching-and-mentoring-schemes-for-researchers/doing-research/pis-on-mentoring-research-staff>
- A brief guide to career conversations with research staff: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/guides-briefings-and-information/a-brief-guide-to-career-conversations-with-research-staff-2015-not-editable.pdf/@@download/file/A-brief-guide-to-career-conversations-with-research-staff-2015-not-editable%20.pdf>