

Merton Society Mentoring Programme – Outline Plan

Background

1. The Merton Society ran a pilot mentoring scheme, which offered mentoring to 2020 and 2021 undergraduate leavers. The pilot started in the summer of 2022 and concluded in March 2023. The pilot is described here [[Merton Society Mentoring Programme Pilot](#)]. At the end of the pilot, participants were asked for feedback and a report summarising responses is here [[Merton Society Mentoring Programme Pilot Survey Report](#)].
2. In light of the generally enthusiastic response to the pilot, and with the support of Merton College, the Merton Society Council has decided to extend the mentoring scheme, taking account of the feedback from the pilot. This will be the “mentoring programme” described in this document.

Aims of the Mentoring Programme

3. Mentoring is “the practice of helping and advising a less experienced person over a period of time” (OED). The mentoring programme aims to provide a confidential and safe space for mentees to enable them to discuss matters of concern or interest with their mentor with a view to assisting mentees with their personal and professional development.
4. The mentoring programme will include mandatory training for mentors and mentees. The College will remain closely involved and support will be provided to mentors and mentees throughout their engagement with the mentoring programme. Feedback on the programme (but not on the content of discussions, which will remain confidential) will be sought from mentor and mentee at the end of the mentoring relationship and the programme’s design will be kept under review.
5. The mentoring programme is a bespoke programme developed by the Merton Society for Mertonians. It will be implemented and overseen by the Merton Society supported by the Merton Development and Alumni Relations Office (“DO”). Chelsea Chisholm, Alumni Relations Officer, will take the lead for the DO and will be the point of contact day to day: Mentoring@merton.ox.ac.uk. The Merton

Society Council has delegated the detailed planning to a Mentoring Working Party (see Appendix 1).

Implementation of the Mentoring Programme

6. This document sets out the planned scope of and steps towards implementation of the mentoring programme.

Phase 1 – Build

7. The mentoring programme will be hosted on the Merton College website. A public page will contain the basics of the mentoring programme including training materials, application forms and other key documents. A separate and secure (password-protected) page will contain details of the mentors.

Phase 2 – Mentor recruitment

8. The DO and the Merton Society will seek to recruit mentors. This will involve reaching out in a variety of ways. The aim is to recruit mentors from as diverse a range of backgrounds, ages and specialisms as possible. It is hoped this will occur over the summer of 2023.

Phase 3 – Programme launch

9. Once sufficient mentors are in place, the mentoring programme will open to new mentees. The plan is to roll out the mentoring in stages.

Stage 1: undergraduate leavers from 2022 and 2023. The pilot extended to two years of undergraduate leavers (2020 and 2021), out of whom a total of 43 mentees were matched with a mentor. We will assume a similar take-up from the Stage 1 cohort, say 40-50 mentees.

Stage 2: other undergraduate leavers in the last 5 years. The 2019 undergraduate leavers were not within the pilot. The 2020-2021 leavers have already been offered mentoring as part of the pilot but some who did not apply before may now wish to do so; others who were mentees in the pilot may wish to come back for more (the 2022 and 2023 undergraduate leavers are already in the programme as part of stage 1). We will assume 20-30 additional mentees from this group.

Stage 3: current or recent post-graduates. Post-graduate students are likely to share many of the same needs and concerns as the

undergraduate leavers and this group too could benefit from mentoring by a Mertonian. Stage 3 will extend to those who have completed their post-graduate studies at Merton in the last 5 years (2019-2023 inclusive) as well as those who are currently undertaking post-graduate studies at the College.

Stage 4: all Mertonians, whenever they concluded their undergraduate or graduate studies at Merton, as well as current post-graduate students.

1. The Merton Society has decided that current undergraduate students should not be included in the programme because they are already well supported by the College and the University.
2. There was considerable interest amongst those who participated in the pilot (as mentors and mentees) in the idea of partnering with a College or school in a deprived area to offer mentoring to a wider range of students. But concerns were expressed by mentors, mentees and others associated with the pilot about whether the Merton Society was equipped to extend the mentoring offering in that way. Having considered the issue with care, the Merton Society Council has concluded that the priority should be to offer the mentoring programme to Mertonians, many of whom themselves come from under-privileged or non-traditional backgrounds; we encourage any Mertonian who chooses to participate in the mentoring programme, whether as mentor or mentee, to consider offering their time to an outside organisation which works with under-privileged young people, some of which are listed for information at Appendix 2; the Merton Society will keep under review the possibility of extending the mentoring programme to others, not just Mertonians, in the longer term but does not consider this to be an appropriate step at the moment.

Becoming a Mentor

3. The DO will issue an invitation to alumni to become volunteer mentors. The first recruitment wave will take place over the summer of 2023. After that, and for as long as the programme remains in place, the recruitment of mentors should occur on a rolling basis.
4. A Mertonian willing to be a mentor will be asked to fill in a form with basic details, similar to the form mentors filled in to participate in the pilot programme (broadly: name, contact details, academic qualifications, career profile and previous experience of mentoring; a photograph should be provided if possible). That person will be invited to watch a training video and agree to the [Code of Conduct](#) and to confirm both by ticking a box in their application form. After

they have applied, they will be sent a copy of the PDF training guide, which will also be available on the public part of the website.

5. Mentors will be invited to adopt a coaching style in their mentoring conversations, working towards goals which will have been agreed with the mentee.
6. Optional training/support sessions for mentors will take place online at regular intervals throughout the year (currently planned every three or four months, to be hosted by members of the Mentoring Working Party).
7. The mentor's form will be uploaded to the secure page on the College website and will from that moment be available for mentees to view. If a mentee selects or is matched to that mentor, the DO will contact the mentor and, assuming the mentor is willing, put the pair in touch with each other.
8. Once a mentor has been put in contact with a mentee, the DO will ask that mentor whether they wish their details to remain on the secure webpage for viewing by other mentees or to be removed for the time-being.

Mentor's Commitment

9. A mentor should be willing to offer a mentee the opportunity of **six sessions**, each lasting **30-60 minutes**, over a period of around **six months**. At the end of that period, the mentoring relationship will ordinarily come to an end.
10. It remains open to the mentor and the mentee to agree something different from the "rule of six" outlined above. The feedback from the pilot suggested that some participants felt that they did not need six sessions (many said that four seemed sufficient), others felt that they would have benefited from more than six sessions; some thought that six months was too long, others wanted to carry on beyond that timeframe. These are all options open to a mentor and mentee to agree between themselves, but the Merton Society considers it important to make clear what is being asked of prospective mentors, and mentors need to know at the point of application that the commitment is not open-ended.
11. A mentor will be required to keep the content of their mentoring discussions, and any documents generated in the course of those discussions, entirely confidential. There are exceptions, to be covered in the Code of Conduct, but the principle of confidentiality of

mentoring discussions is very important to the success of the programme.

Becoming a Mentee

12. The DO will invite applications from prospective mentees according to the stages outlined above. A mentee will fill in an application form (broadly: name, contact details, academic qualifications, reasons for wanting a mentor, and, if relevant, the type of mentor they are looking for). A mentee will be required to watch a training video and agree to the Code of Conduct and will confirm both things by ticking a box on the application form. A mentee will be sent a copy of the PDF training guide once they have applied; it will also be available on the public part of the website.
13. The fact of a mentee's application for a mentor will be confidential to the DO and others from the Mentoring Working Party who may from time to time need to know, at the discretion of the DO.
14. Experience shows that mentees have a range of reasons for wanting mentoring. Some want some assistance in devising career paths or career goals, including making applications for jobs or promotions; others want help with personal development, for example, with confidence issues or "managing up" in the workplace. The mentoring programme is flexible enough to accommodate the full range of expectations, but the choice of a mentor is crucial to the success of the partnership.
15. There are two ways in which a mentee can be matched to a mentor after the prospective mentee has submitted an application form. The mentee will either:
 - a. **choose their own mentor**, by going onto the secure area of the website to view the profiles of available mentors. A mentee will be given the password once they have completed their application form. Once they have chosen, they will inform the DO, and the DO will contact that mentor and, all being well, will put the pair in touch with each other (sending the mentor the mentee's completed form); or
 - b. **ask the DO to match them to a prospective mentor**, in which case the DO will suggest a match and, if the mentee is content, the DO will get in touch with that mentor and the process will be the same as already outlined.
16. Once a mentor has been identified in either of these ways, and that mentor has confirmed a willingness to meet the mentee, the mentor and mentee will have a "**chemistry session**" which is a preliminary chat to see if the mentor and mentee think they are well suited to

each other and will work well together. There is no commitment at this stage, and it is very important that the mentee really thinks about whether the fit is a good one. Equally, it is important that the mentor questions the mentee on what they are expecting from this pairing to ensure that the mentor feels comfortable if the pairing progresses.

Mentee's Commitment

17. Mentors are busy people who are giving up their own time to help; that time is given willingly, but the goodwill of mentors should not be abused. It is important that every mentee understands the expectations on them if they wish to participate in the mentoring programme:
18. A mentee should be willing to engage openly and honestly with their mentor during their discussions.
19. If the mentor has asked the mentee to do some preparation for the sessions, the mentee should prioritise completing that preparation for the session.
20. A mentee should check their inbox frequently and respond quickly to emails about mentoring from the DO and their mentor.
21. A mentee should arrange all meetings with their mentor (unless the mentor agrees a different arrangement with the mentee).
22. A mentee should at all times be respectful towards their mentor.
23. If a prospective mentee does not feel able to commit in these ways, they should not apply for a mentor within this programme. If a mentee does not meet these expectations, they are likely to be removed from the mentoring programme.
24. Meetings with mentors should usually be arranged online (using Zoom or equivalent). Mentees and mentors can agree to meet in person if that is their preference.

The Mentoring Sessions

25. Once matched, the sequence of events will be:
 - a. Mentee contacts mentor and arranges an online meeting (the "chemistry session" referred to above) so that the pair can have a preliminary chat to see that they are comfortable with each other. At this stage there is no commitment either way. Ideally, the pair should discuss the mentee's form and expectations from the mentoring.
 - b. If the mentee wishes to proceed, they should ask the DO to investigate with the mentor whether the mentor is willing.
 - c. If the mentor is willing, the mentee sets up the mentoring meetings in liaison with the mentor and at times to suit the

mentor. At the first session, the pair should settle on the goals for the mentoring relationship over the next six months.

- d. If the mentee does not wish to proceed with that mentor, or if that mentor is not willing, the process starts again.
- e. If at any stage the mentoring does not seem to be working well or either party feels uncomfortable in any way, that party should email the other or the DO to say so. It may be that the problem can be resolved but if it cannot, either party can walk away from the mentoring relationship. If that occurs, the DO should be involved and the mentoring should be formally ended by the DO if that is appropriate.

26. The DO will keep a record of all matched pairs.

Support for Participants in the Programme

- 27. The DO will be in touch with mentors once the mentoring discussions are underway, to check all is well.
- 28. Participants should get in contact with the DO if they have concerns or questions.
- 29. Optional sessions for mentors will take place online throughout the year. (These sorts of sessions proved to be a useful source of information and support during the pilot.)
- 30. A support group will remain on hand to deal with any concerns that arise during the currency of the pilot, whether raised by a mentor or a mentee. The support group will include the President of the Merton Society (Philippa Whipple) and the Alumni Relations Officer from the DO (Chelsea Chisholm), as well as others asked to assist as needed. Any mentor or mentee with concerns should contact the DO in the first instance.
- 31. If a mentor has concerns about the wellbeing of the mentee, then that mentor should raise the issue with the support group via the DO. The support group is likely to try to sign-post available sources of help, and to give information which the mentor can pass on to the mentee at their discretion. Mentees will not have access to Merton's welfare services which are only available to current students at the College.

May 2023

Appendix 1

Members of the Mentoring Working Party (unless otherwise stated, all sit on the Council of the Merton Society):

Philippa Whipple (President of Merton Society and Chair of Working Party)

Mark Davison (Chair of Merton Society)

Nick Allard

Meriel Cowan

Emily Capstick (up to June 2023)

Daniel Schaffer

Nick Weller

Teni Onabanjo

Simon Jones (up to December 2022)

Co-opted: Ankur Gupta

Sam Whipple

Appendix 2

Third party organisations offering support to under-privileged students:

- Zero Gravity - <https://www.zerogravity.co.uk>
- Social Mobility Foundation - <https://www.socialmobility.org.uk>
- Project Access - <https://projectaccess.org>
- IntoUniversity - <https://intouniversity.org>
- UpReach - <https://upreach.org.uk>