

# Mentor FAQ

## Would you like to become a Mentor?

Mentoring is an opportunity to help students or alumni, by sharing your experiences and expertise. The specific shape of the relationship is up to you and can range from exploring job roles and sectors to helping someone decide on future career direction, reviewing a CV/ LinkedIn profile or interview strategy to practicing professional communication and networking. It is a rewarding experience that generally results in personal growth for the mentor as well as the mentee.

## Who can mentor?

We would encourage all alumni to consider becoming a mentor, regardless of age or experience. Your support can be valuable to students/alumni at any point in your career. For example:

- **If you only graduated a few years ago** – you can share your insight into finding a first job, applications and interviews, making the most of time at university, and how to successfully transition to working life.
- **If you are further into your career** – you likely have a deep knowledge of the industry sector you work in, and possibly other sectors as well. You are also well-equipped to help students/alumni with longer-term career planning and goal-setting, and to help them build confidence and resilience.
- **If you are self-employed** – Trinity has many entrepreneurial students who are keen to start their own businesses. These students would greatly value your advice on the challenges and rewards of self-employment.
- **If you are a postgraduate researcher or an academic** – the many students/alumni who consider academic careers can benefit from your experience of academia and of winning research positions and funding.

## What level of commitment is there?

You decide exactly how much you feel comfortable offering. When volunteering as a mentor you choose from a list of mentor 'services' that range from taking a few questions over email through to offering work shadowing/experience opportunity. You may also be asked to respond to an evaluation of the programme. You stay in control, being able to modify your offered services at any time.

## Is it worthwhile meeting with my mentees?

E-mentoring is perfectly possible and can work very well particularly where there are restrictions on geographical location. If there are no restrictions, then meeting your mentee(s) in person can feel more authentic since both of you are present and focused. If your mentee is a student, then, as a guideline aim for about three meetings of about an

hour's duration each over the academic year in addition to replying to any e-mails/questions/concerns.

## **How many students/alumni should I mentor?**

A mentor can decide how many mentees s/he wishes to accept. For those who are new to mentoring, it may be appropriate to engage with just one or two to begin with, monitor progress with them, and take on others as and when you feel comfortable to do so.

## **How do I respond to mentoring requests?**

If you have just received a mentoring request from a student/ alumni, these quick tips are for you.

- **Be realistic about your time commitment**

Mentoring can be time-consuming; be realistic about how much time you have for the student/ alumni before accepting them.

- **Ask for more information if you need it**

If you are not sure what this student/alumni wants from their mentor or do not know enough about them, you can send a response to the student/ alumni before considering them as a mentee.

- **Manage their expectations**

If your time is limited, tell them that – and give them a realistic idea of how quickly they will hear back from you.

- **Tell them about yourself**

If you agree to mentor them, try to tell them a little more about yourself and your interests. This will make them more comfortable and help to get your conversation started.

- **Consider how you could help**

Your mentee may be able to learn a lot from you even if they are not currently interested in following your career path.

- **Thank the student/alumni for their interest**

Approaching a mentor takes time and thought and can be nerve-wracking, so a kind response will definitely be appreciated.

- **Report anything you are uncomfortable with**

Please report any problems to the Careers Advisory Service ([careers@tcd.ie](mailto:careers@tcd.ie)). This is important, not just for your benefit but for all other mentors the student/alumni may come into contact with.

## **Should I include an invitation to my place of work or for workplace experience?**

This is entirely up to you and you can decide to offer a work experience invitation to someone whom you were initially mentoring over the phone or where you have had one or two formal meetings. There are no hard and fast rules as to how the relationship should progress. As a volunteer though, you are giving your time freely and there is no agreement to provide job opportunities, review business venture proposals, interview mentees or recruit them for open positions at your place of employment.

## **Are there tips for being a great mentor?**

Your style of mentoring should reflect your own personality, interests and abilities, as well as those of your mentee. There is no template for being a great mentor. However, you may find the advice on this page useful as you craft your own mentoring approach.

- **Let the mentee take the lead**

We expect students/alumni to take the initiative and drive the mentoring relationship themselves, so encourage your mentee to do that. Ask them what they want from mentoring and what they hope to achieve. Be a guide, not a supervisor.

You should not have to chase your mentee nor put in more effort than them to maintain contact. Let them share responsibility for making your mentoring relationship a success.

- **Set objectives together**

Mentoring is usually more effective when it has a clear set of goals that it can be directed towards, especially early in the relationship. Work together with your mentee at the beginning of your contact to define some SMART (Specific, Measurable, Assignable Realistic, Time-related) objectives. Encourage them to make a simple plan for working towards those objectives.

If you do define objectives, make sure you review them together (ideally within 3–6 months). Be sure to acknowledge what you have achieved together and what the next steps should be.

- **Encourage them to reflect**

Often a mentee thinks they need specific, practical help towards a predetermined goal, but really would benefit from revisiting their assumptions and thinking more about the 'big picture' of their life.

Encourage your mentee to be open-minded and to reflect on their more basic preconceptions about their future:

- What do they really want from their career?
- What do they want their daily life to be like?
- Why do they want what they want?

- **Be a critical friend**

A key part of mentoring is being a 'critical friend' – being able to tactfully but honestly talk to your mentee about an issue, such as unrealistic expectations or changes that need to be made.

We encourage you to address issues with your mentee as a critical friend, but do so in a tactful and constructive way. For example, if their career plans are unrealistic, openly discuss the challenges they face rather than directly telling them they 'can't' do what they planned.

Do not worry if you feel uncomfortable addressing an issue with your student mentee. In such cases, direct them to the Careers Advisory Service [www.tcd.ie/careers](http://www.tcd.ie/careers) or [careers@tcd.ie](mailto:careers@tcd.ie) so that a careers professional can work with the student.

- **Encourage them to access more help**

You do not need to be an endless source of information and guidance for your mentee. All Trinity students have access to their careers consultant as well as other issues such as finance, personal counselling and disability related issues. Please encourage them to ask for help if they need it. The Careers Advisory Service can help connecting them with other student services.

## **How can the College support me?**

Where career or personal development advice is sought outside your specialist area, you should refer back to the Careers Advisory Service ([careers@tcd.ie](mailto:careers@tcd.ie)).