



# Radcliffe Department of Medicine

## RDM Mentoring Scheme

### Evaluation report



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# RDM Mentoring Scheme Overview

## Background and Aim

The Radcliffe Department of Medicine (RDM) was created in 2012 by bringing together 5 academic units from various existing departments, which specialised in related themes. In 2013, a departmental survey was completed. From it emerged a demand from staff and students to access mentoring opportunities in their new department. During the Trinity and Michaelmas 2013 terms, RDM designed a mentoring Scheme focused on concerns and requirements from staff and students highlighted in the survey:

- Support for new staff and students
- Difficulties at work
- Work life balance
- Career progression
- Teaching opportunities in colleges
- Handling your DPhil effectively
- Managing your time

RDM researched established literature on mentoring from organisations such as the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (ECMC) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) as well as existing resources within the University of Oxford (e.g. previous mentoring/coaching programs such as *Ad Feminam* and *Springboard*).

From the outset, the RDM Mentoring Scheme (RDMMS)'s overall aim has been to assist mentees to achieve personal and professional growth through a mentoring relationship that provides support as they progress and develop within the University. Equally, the scheme also offers benefits to the mentor and to the Department:

1. By offering an inclusive in-house mentoring scheme, it was anticipated that RDM would promote gender equality in a Medical Sciences Division (MSD) department, and assist individuals with challenges they may face in the workplace and beyond (childcare, career breaks, work/life balance).
2. The scheme is also designed to help mentors (traditionally more senior staff) reflect on their understanding of others' experience of the department and current academic career prospects by being exposed to different management practices across the department and beyond.

From the start, the RDMMS has been an important feature of RDM's Athena Swan (AS) action plans (Bronze and Silver) as a valuable tool at transition points; balancing work and family life and returning after a career break<sup>1</sup>.

## Features

The RDMMS has a dedicated committee with a co-ordinator reporting to the RDM AS Self-Assessment Team (SAT).

All staff and graduate students can register to be mentored.

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<sup>1</sup> RDM staff survey 2018

All staff and graduate students with at least 12 months experience in the RDM or University of Oxford can register to be a mentor. The Scheme will accept mentees and mentors from outside RDM on an ad hoc basis to:

- help other departments in urgent needs of mentoring provision for specific staff members and students
- ensure all our mentors have the opportunity to be matched and offer their support to others
- find a mentor with specialised experience for a RDM mentee (e.g. bioinformatics, central finance, research services, communications).

The RDMMS is self-driven. This means it relies on mentees to be proactive and take responsibility for their own learning and development through a mentoring relationship.

Matches are made across the calendar year via matching rounds (usually 4 to 5 a year) so that mentees don't have to wait a full academic year to access mentors.

## Objectives

Mentoring-like relationships are likely to exist within the Department outside of the formal RDMMS. Such relationships are valuable and should continue where it works for both individuals. However, informal mentoring can present problems where, for example, the different parties start with different expectations of the relationship. In addition, informal mentoring puts the onus very much on the individual seeking a mentor to find one. It is expected that having a departmental scheme opens up the opportunity for mentoring to a much larger group of staff.

Making matches across the divisional boundaries within the RDM allows the RDMMS to contribute towards better coordination, communication and networking of the individual divisions within RDM. For some staff it may be preferable to match with mentors outside RDM entirely and the RDMMS will endeavour to facilitate inter-departmental matches where they are perceived to be beneficial.

The RDMMS forms part of the Department's commitment to improving opportunities for all staff by supporting them in realizing their full potential. The main objectives are:

- To help to build a framework of support for both mentees and mentors
- To facilitate career and personal development planning via mentoring
- To enhance personal effectiveness and motivation
- To improve communication, interpersonal skills and networking within RDM
- To give mentees and mentors time for reflection on current practices
- To challenge pre-conceived ideas held by either the mentee or mentor
- To improve the quality and commitment of the community within RDM

Mentoring is believed to be a fast impact initiative to promote cultural alignment within a complex organisation. Embedding mentoring culture in the workplace translates into ownership and accountability, shared responsibility towards the same strategic agenda, cultural and knowledge integration, openness to learning and supportive outlook on others' experiences and maximisation of internal resources in times of budgetary constraints.<sup>2</sup> Through its in-house mentoring scheme, RDM

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<sup>2</sup> Zachary, L.J. (2006), "Creating a Mentoring Culture: The Organization's Guide", Development and Learning in Organizations

aims to effectively and durably enhance the notion of a departmental and cohesive culture. The RDMMS is designed to give staff and students the tools and strategies to actively create and promote a supportive community with peers and colleagues, line managers and specialists. We anticipated that:

- personal experience of the workplace would be improved for both mentees and mentors
- a sense of belonging to an institution like the University of Oxford would be eased to reconcile one's self-identity with one's professional representation (such as work-life balance, imposter syndrome<sup>3</sup>, institutional versus individual frameshift<sup>4</sup>)
- career development would be further facilitated via guidance (mentor role) and ownership (mentee responsibility), whilst career path changes would be potentially identified (with the mentor) and acted upon (by the mentee). The allocation of development opportunities and collaborations tends to occur informally, and as such it may increase the risk of inequality in terms of access, race and gender. By integrating these opportunities in a mentoring programme open to all, RDM effectively addresses the issue of inequalities<sup>5</sup>.

The RDMMS matches mentors with mentees to not only share experiences, but also initiate a dialogue where perspectives could be challenged, even transformed, enabling questioning, problem-solving and empathy. This creates a forum where individuals feel connected and aware of other practices outside of their immediate (peer or work) group. This in turn gives each person an awareness of best practice but also a sense of what could be improved in the institution. As a collective, the RDMMS members and their committee can then feedback to the RDM SAT, and further improve the cultural environment of the department.

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3 Bothello, J. and Roulet, T.J. (2019), The Imposter Syndrome, or the Mis-Representation of Self in Academic Life. *J. Manage. Stud.*, 56: 854-861. doi:10.1111/joms.12344

<sup>4</sup> Goffman, Erving (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Chandler, C. (1996). Mentoring and Women in Academia: Reevaluating the Traditional Model. *NWSA Journal*, 8(3), 79-100. Retrieved November 3, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316462>

## Developing the Mentoring Scheme

### Launch of the Scheme

In January 2014, RDM identified individuals with an interest in staff development and mentoring to establish a Mentoring Committee, and introduce/operate an in-house programme for all staff and postgraduate students in RDM. Prof Alison Banham, who was then actively involved in the Springboard Mentorship program at Oxford, was elected Chair of the Committee. A coordinator was also identified (HR administrator in NDCLS, Michaela Smart). A Mentoring Handbook outlining the RDMMS' aims and structure as well as mentors and mentees expectations and responsibilities, was finalised with the help from the RDM Strategic team alongside registration forms, a mentoring agreement template, a mentor biography example and exit questionnaires.

On 3 February 2014, RDM officially launched its mentoring scheme.

On 21 and 26 March 2014, two introductory sessions were delivered to discuss best mentoring practices and recruit scheme members. 55 individuals registered immediately (30 mentees, 37 mentors, 14 with dual registration).

By the end of 2014, 59 matches were made.

### Committee membership

The RDM Mentoring Committee (RDMMC) comprises representatives of all the RDM's academic divisions and has staff from a variety of functions at different career stages as well as a student representative. All members of the Committee share a common interest in improving staff development opportunities in RDM.

The RDMMC is responsible for the recruitment and training of mentors, matching mentors and mentees across the RDM, the effective dissemination of the availability and benefits of the Scheme to all staff, and monitoring the effectiveness of the RDMMS by seeking regular feedback from mentors and mentees.

The membership is reviewed every two years, to allow current members to stand down if they wish, thus allowing other staff and students in RDM to actively participate in the running and structure of the programme.

The current committee membership is:

- James Brown (Chair) – CVMed
- Alison Banham – NDCLS
- Lynn Clee – RDM Strategic
- Ruth Coleman – OCDEM
- Vanessa Ferreira – CVMed
- Rosie Munday – NDCLS (student rep)
- Jan Rehwinkel – IMD/WIMM
- Charlotte Smith – RDM Strategic
- Michaela Smart – NDCLS (coordinator until 31.12.2020)
- Charlotte Rush – CVMed (coordinator from 01.01.2021)

## Participants recruitment

The RDMMS is open to all staff categories (support, professional, technician, research, clinical and academic) as well as all RDM postgraduate students. The rationale for opening to such a wide range of group is based on a strategic departmental decision to create a cohesive RDM culture by enabling equal access to development opportunities such as mentoring. These groups provided suitable numbers for the launch of the scheme, as well as representing the appropriate mix of staff located on multiple sites (Churchill, John Radcliffe and Old Road), and disciplines. Prior to the original participant recruitment, two workshops (including a brief training session focused on mentors' skills) were tailored to suit the needs of RDM, and delivered in March 2014 with the help of Alison Trinder (MPLS Professional Development Officer).

In the first 3 years of the scheme, the number of "live" relationships more than trebled from 21 in April 2014, to 67 in April 2017. As of 8 December 2020, 195 mentoring matches have been made. Of the current mentees 66% are female, exceeding the 53% female proportion in RDM's current population.

Fig.1.1 mentee numbers in April 2014

Mentees	Female	Male	Total
Research	14	14	28
Student	5	2	7
Professional & Support	7	2	9
Total	26	18	44

Fig.1.2. mentee numbers in December 2020

Mentees	Female	Male	Total
Research	34	16	50
Student	13	4	17
Professional & support	3	2	5
Total	50	22	72

Fig.2.1 mentor numbers in April 2014

Mentors	Women	Men	Total
Research	15	16	31
Student	0	0	0
Professional & support	10	3	13
Total	25	19	44

Fig.2.2. mentor numbers in December 2020

Mentors	Women	Men	Total
Research	30	35	65



<b>Student</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Professional &amp; support</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>82</b>

## Administration of the Scheme

The RDMMS Coordinator is the key individual who provides day-to-day support to the Department's mentoring activities. This includes servicing the RDMMC, liaising with the MentorNet service provider (sfG Software Ltd) for troubleshooting and management of the platform, and actively communicating with RDMMS members to resolve any queries or issues. The coordinator is also responsible for the sustainable development and promotion of the scheme, representation across the University of Oxford, and liaison work with external collaborators (e.g. [STAMINa mentoring network](#)).

The coordinator liaises with mentees and mentors if their registered profile is incomplete (e.g. a mentee's key requirements have not been registered, a mentor's short biography is missing or skills have not been selected), prior to authorising their account on MentorNet. An automated email to all new registered members promotes a set of training resources, some specifically aimed at mentors or mentees to ensure that they receive suitable support to start their mentoring partnerships.

**Recommendation:** Coordinators for mentoring programmes often report a feeling of isolation and lack of available support from their institution to discuss mentoring programme management issues and problem solving<sup>6</sup>. It would be wise to build such network within Oxford University by actively liaising with Sophie Brotherston (UAS) who coordinates the mentoring pilot for the PSS network. It is worth noting a similar network exists outside the university within the STAMINa network. The RDMMS is a founding member of the STAMINa network.

## Promotion

RDMMS information stands are present at the annual RDM Symposium where the vast majority of the audience is research-based. Informal meet-and-greet opportunities with current mentors and mentees are also offered at the same event to recruit prospective RDMMS members.

Mentoring is part of the induction process in RDM, for all new staff and students, as well as in staff annual PDRs and at EFTC meetings with local HR teams.

Mentoring news items are communicated via the MentorNet platform, the RDM weekly bulletin and RDM newsletter.

**Recommendation:** As students have annual reviews, mentoring should be mentioned as an additional support tool at each of these students' review meetings with their local DGS.

## The matching process

The RDMMS is based on mentees identifying key areas on which they wish to focus from a set list, with added keywords to match mentors with relevant skills and expertise. At registration, mentees have the opportunity to share further specifics outside of the listed areas to assist with the matching process. Mentees can also specify their preferences in terms of meeting frequency and place, length of mentorship, mentor's seniority level and unit affiliation.

The key areas are:

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<sup>6</sup> Gannon, J. M. & Washington, R. (2019) *Many things to Many People: Formal Mentoring Schemes and their Management: a report 2019*, Oxford Brookes University. p.33-35

- Career progression and planning
- Support for staff new to the University
- Balancing work and family life
- Returning to work after a career break
- Difficulties at work
- Management/Administration roles
- Roles in Oxford colleges

Because the mentoring partnership is focused primarily on the needs and objectives registered by the mentee, the mentee is encouraged to take responsibility for driving the mentoring relationship, including arranging meetings and negotiating with the mentor the type of support they require i.e. how they would like to be assisted.

A critical part of the mentoring process is the match, which must be well thought-out to achieve a productive partnership. The mentor and mentee are matched on the basis of the information provided when they register with the RDMMS. Skills and experiences offered by RDMMS mentors are searchable via criteria and keywords on their MentorNet profiles, allowing mentees seeking support in specific areas to match those needs against our mentors' expertise.

Once a mentee has registered on MentorNet and their account is authorised by the coordinator, they are able to search through available mentors' biographies and rank their choices by order of preference/affinity. The RDMMC recommends not selecting more than four at one time, and searching by keyword and areas of expertise. The mentee should identify (and ideally exclude) any of these potential mentors with whom they have an existing personal or professional relationship that could compromise the mentor's ability to provide impartial advice. The coordinator presents the matches selected by each mentee to the RDMMC, who then reviews these at meetings generally held every 3 months. Occasionally a mentee may request a specific mentor but the RDMMC would consider an alternative match (e.g. mentor already matched to another mentee, better-suited mentor identified by the RDMMC or potential conflict of interest with chosen mentor highlighted during the meeting). Occasionally, a mentoring relationship is created outside the RDMMS, but subsequently officially recorded within our programme.

Matches are made across the whole range of RDM's activities and mentees will not necessarily be matched to a mentor in their division of RDM (indeed this may give greater confidentiality and also promote cross talk between Divisions). The key determinant of matches will be the skills and experiences offered and sought by mentees and mentors, but preferences registered against duration of relationship, frequency, timing and location of meetings are also considered.

If mentor and mentee believe the proposed match will not lead to a productive mentoring relationship, after having had their first meeting, they are asked to contact the coordinator and the relationship is closed. A further matching exercise will then take place.

**Recommendation:** A '*fast track*' option should be added to the registration system for mentees. Students in their last year and staff on short-term contracts or coming to the end of their contracts, have only a few months to meet and work with a mentor on their career options etc. MentorNet is able to add a '*fast track*' tick option with a comment box for the mentee to select and add some background information. Although at present MentorNet would be unable to generate an automated

alert for the Coordinator to receive, a simple report listing all the people who have ticked the fast-track box can be generated, for the coordinator to review the data from time to time, and implement the fast track route outside of the normal matching rounds.

### On-going support

Support is available to mentors and mentees internally from both the coordinator and the RDMMC. The coordinator is also there to discuss any concerns either party may have at any stage of their membership. Additionally, a set of documents, tools and training links are available to both mentors and mentees to help them navigate their mentoring relationships. These resources are reviewed and further developed by the coordinator, publicised via the MentorNet News and Email feeds as well as through the RDM Bulletin and Mentoring Handbook updates.

3 months after the initial matching is confirmed, the coordinator contacts both the mentor and mentee for a quick update. After 12 months, the coordinator messages the mentor and mentee to check whether the relationship is still live, and requests an exit questionnaire from each partner, in the event of a closed relationship.

### At the end of the mentoring relationship

As most mentoring relationships exceed a 12-month period, the coordinator should be notified by mentors and/or mentees when a mentoring relationship concludes beyond the 1-year checkpoint (see point above). Both mentor and mentee are asked to complete a brief evaluation called an exit questionnaire to feedback their experience. The mentoring relationship is then closed on the MentorNet system. Mentees have the option to request a new mentor should they wish to, and/or register as a mentor themselves. Many relationships end when staff leave the University and the RDMMC advise the coordinator when they become aware that a mentor or mentee has left the University so that they can investigate whether the relationship is still live.

## Ongoing review and development

The RDMMC regularly discusses the structure and development of the scheme whilst looking at membership level, promotion of the scheme in RDM at events and through local associations/focus groups. The committee is also involved in reviewing proposals from the coordinator on how to sustain and grow the scheme. Pilot projects such as the Mentoring Dialogues have stemmed from these discussions. The coordinator's role includes seeking ways to improve and sustain the scheme going forward. This would include looking at external mentoring programmes and research literature on mentoring practice, as well as utilising existing support networks such as STAMINa or other university mentoring/coaching training providers and programmes.

### Mentoring Dialogues Pilot

In Summer 2019, the committee worked on a pilot proposal for reverse mentoring in RDM. The fundamental principle of the pilot was to voluntarily invert the typical hierarchical structures of formal mentoring relationships (junior post mentored by senior post) in order to enable senior staff to access first-hand experience of more junior postholders and re-evaluate their views and understanding of current issues in academia.

After liaising with Dr Judie Gannon (Oxford Brookes), POD (University of Oxford) and the committee who assessed potential confidentiality risk factors, the pilot was remodelled into a more fluid and circular structure named 'Mentoring Dialogues', where pairs were matched through their selected

topics of interest divided into 4 different themes (Belonging to the University, Career development and pathways, Support and wellbeing, What makes a good manager/PI).

16 participants enrolled and were paired based on their choice of topics. The pilot was launched in December 2019. Each pair was originally asked to meet across a period of 6 months, then to complete a self-reflection sheet with their recommendations or findings. Due to the pandemic, most pairs have had difficulties continuing their meetings, thus the RDMMC decided to extend the pilot from June 2020 to until 30 October 2020, allowing our participants to meet and further discuss their chosen topics together. The feedback sent in on the completed self-reflection sheets were compiled into a summary document and distributed to all participants and the RDMMC. Three main areas were identified: communication, career development and policy & finance. The RDMMC will work with the RDM SAT to work on the recommendations/findings to advise implementation where possible.

On 1st December 2020, a concluding meeting took place with the pilot participants and the RDMMC. 18 individuals were able to attend and discussed the benefits of the pilot and their experiences. Recommendations/findings will be reported to the RDM AS SAT for discussion and implementation where possible.

**Recommendation:** As the pilot has been reported by participants as being of value, the committee will consider rerunning it with an even more fluid and transparent format on topics/themes pertinent to the AS plan and RDM staff and students (proposals included small groups vs pair, topics to be identified by participants, opening to all in RDM).

#### [RDMMMS alumni](#)

In the past, the mentoring committee considered whether an alumni programme would be beneficial to the sustainability of the Scheme, allowing people to remain affiliated to the Scheme and thus RDM on an informal but more communitarian basis. This could potentially normalise the '*mentoring culture*' in and beyond the Department by allowing people to tap in a wider network through the alumni community. Several mentors have asked to remain within the RDMMMS after leaving RDM, which in our view demonstrates the value they place upon the Scheme.

**Recommendation:** MentorNet suggested they would be happy to host such an alumni programme within our licence user count without extra costs to trial the operation. Alternatively, MentorNet forums might be another way to expand and accelerate communication between scheme members by sharing tips and listing discussion topics (even FAQs).

## Resources

#### [MentorNet platform](#)

From the launch in February 2014 to May 2017, the scheme was run using Excel spreadsheets and MS Word documents to record and analyse data, and emails to communicate with Scheme members and the Committee. As the membership reached the equivalent of 24% of the department's staff and student number, RDM explored different ways to efficiently manage the mentoring provision whilst allowing more complex data analysis (Excel documents tend to give limited opportunity for trend analysis) and secure data management in line with the then upcoming GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 legislation. In May 2017, together with the Oxford Learning Institute (now People Organisation Development), RDM invested in a MentorNet licence for 600 users, of which 200 are ring-fenced for the RDM Mentoring Scheme.

In September 2019, a MentorNet upgrade was completed to further enhance the experience of the users (including url links in emails to exit questionnaires, simpler workflow to close relationships, users can edit their profiles after registration and before authorisation, unavailable mentors greyed out in search function).

**Recommendation:** The MentorNet development team is currently working on a mobile application, which could be piloted by our members, should the RDMMC feel there would be a benefit for users.

### Networking

Although organisations specialised in mentoring and coaching training offer resources to their members, there are few free support networks available to mentoring programme managers and coordinators. Soon after the launch of the RDMMS, the coordinator took on the role of promoting mentoring programmes across the University of Oxford and its colleges. On 12 April 2016, the coordinator delivered a presentation on the RDMMS at the UAS conference. Following this, solicitations from other departments, divisions and a college to discuss the establishment of local mentoring programmes in their areas are regularly received.

To date, we have met with and advised the following: Faculty of Music, Department of Geography, Kellogg College, Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford Finance Division, Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health, Department of Engineering Science, and the University Administration Services. In November 2017, one RDM mentee and one RDM mentor gave short presentations at the launch of GEMS, the Department of Geography's in-house mentoring programme. In January 2020, the coordinator together with a committee member delivered a presentation on the RDMMS and the benefits of mentoring to the Nuffield Department of Women's & Reproductive Health. In February 2020, the coordinator delivered a presentation on mentoring programme structures and management to the Finance Division. Most recently, the RDMMS coordinator worked with Sophie Brotherton from UAS, who in October 2020 launched their Professional Services mentoring scheme pilot, based on the RDMMS structure.

The STAMINa Mentoring Network (**SusTAInable MentorINg Network**) is an unrestricted support group for mentoring scheme leads, coordinators, administrators and mentoring champions. The network's mission is to share good practice across mentoring schemes and support their sustainability: The network is based upon a project funded by the University of Oxford's ESRC Impact Acceleration Award in 2016/17. The original Chair of the mentoring committee Prof Alison Banham and the original coordinator Michaela Smart were both founding members of the STAMINa network, and presented on Principles of Sustainable Mentoring schemes (with RDMMS as a case study) at a STAMINa workshop in April 2017.

This project builds upon expertise and research interests of the team across three local Universities (Oxford, Oxford Brookes and Reading) and further through a Programme for Enhancement of the Student Experience (PESE) project at Oxford Brookes University on developing sustainable mentoring schemes (Gannon & Maher, 2012; Gannon, 2016; University Alliance, 2013), the Radcliffe Department of Medicine Mentoring Scheme (RDMMS) at Oxford University and The University Mentoring Project at Reading University.

The central tenet of the project is to share good practice in developing mentoring schemes across disciplines and contexts. There are three main issues that mentoring schemes typically face as they grow and develop within the HE setting. These issues are sustainability, effective transitions for

administrative systems and practices for reporting on impact and these same issues are recorded to a greater or lesser extent across different settings in the wider mentoring research<sup>7 8</sup>.

**Recommendation:** The next RDMMS coordinator and the committee should continue to regularly liaise with Dr Judie Gannon, who heads the STAMINa network, to contribute to and develop such national support network, to gain access to best practice across sectors.

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<sup>7</sup> Clutterbuck, D., Whitaker, C. and Lucas, M. (2016) Coaching Supervision. A Practical Guide for Supervisees. London: Routledge

<sup>8</sup> Karallis, T. and Sandelands, E. (2009), "Making mentoring stick: a case study", Education + Training, Vol. 51 No. 3, pp. 203-209.

## Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of the RDMMS aims to look at the proposed and implemented structure of the programme so far, the feedback received from members on their experience and perceived benefits and difficulties, and any recommended alterations to the Scheme to address any identified issues or deviations from the original goals of the mentoring programme. However, this should also include reviewing these original goals and, if needs be, considering adapting the scheme to present needs of members and the wider RDM community by extension to ensure relevant mentoring provision.

Data is routinely gathered at two key stages of the mentoring experience: at registration in the RDMMS (profile creation and mentor request) and when a relationship is officially closed (exit questionnaire). To date, the exit questionnaires have constituted the principal way to collect satisfaction levels, users' feedback (including on future improvements and developments) and illustrative quotes. Additionally, the RDMMC designed and launched the first mentoring survey for the scheme in Autumn 2020.

### Exit questionnaires

The structure of the exit questionnaires mirrors the areas of expertise and skills required by mentees and listed by mentors at the registration stage. Free text fields are also available to describe examples of how the mentoring relationship benefitted the individual completing the form as well as any feedback for improvement on the mentoring scheme management and structure. Mentors and mentees can choose to opt for their commentaries to be anonymised and used in publicity material.

In 2018, a supplementary section was added to both the registration and exit forms to allow mentors and mentees to evaluate any perceived improvement on their personal skills (e.g. active listening, open-mindedness and academic independence). These are not compulsory but it is hoped they would give an idea of the scheme's impact and feedback on the administration on an individual level from the users directly.

However, the return rate of the exit questionnaires has continuously been too poor to confidently interpret the gathered feedback as a representative view of our members' mentoring experience. The coordinator has worked with MentorNet to rewrite the internal communication checkpoints (at registration, after matching and when a relationship is closed) and emphasise the need to complete the exit questionnaires. The coordinator is also pursuing these separately with individuals via email or through the MentorNet messaging facility. The return rate remains poor. This is not helped by the lack of forwarding contact details when an individual leaves the University, which is an institution-wide problem.

**Recommendation:** The necessity to communicate mentoring relationship closure to the scheme coordinator could be consistently highlighted in HR processes in all RDM units (e.g. PDR, EFTC alerts and exit interviews when staff are leaving). Similarly, students finishing their PhD or transferring to a different department should be reminded of the need to contact the coordinator before leaving RDM.

### Mentoring survey design

A 28-question survey was designed with 4 distinct parts to assess:

- **Experience of the RDMMS:** functionality and user satisfaction of the mentoring platform and scheme structure (inc. communication)
- **Experience as a mentor:** including mentors' perceived benefits and feedback on improvements

- **Experience as a mentee:** including mentees' perceived benefits and feedback on improvements
- **Evaluation of the RDMMS:** volunteer recruitment to participate to this report's case studies

The survey was launched on 11<sup>th</sup> September and closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. It was open to all scheme members, who were contacted via the MentorNet platform, emails and via the RDM weekly bulletin.

### Participants

40 individuals completed the survey, some of whom have dual registration (mentor/mentee): 26% of registered mentees (19 of 72) and 40% of registered mentors (33 of 82).

### Case studies

16 individuals agreed to be contacted further, of which 3 mentees, 3 mentors and 3 committee members were selected from a variety of roles and career stages to form the case studies: 3 mentors, 3 mentees and 3 committee members.

## Mentoring survey

The RDM Mentoring Survey was our first dedicated survey since the launch of the RDMMS in 2014. The 28 questions (closed and open) were designed to assess the key values mentees and mentors developed through the mentoring scheme, as well as the reception to the MentorNet platform introduced in 2018 and the areas of improvement going forward.

### Experience of the RDMMS

The first part of the survey focuses on the functionality and user satisfaction of the MentorNet platform, as well as assessing the perception of the scheme structure (including communication with the coordinator and the relevance of the available resources).

#### **Most valued aspects:**

What our members value most about the Mentoring Scheme are the bespoke nature of the programme, the ability to connect to others and grow their support network, the knowledge that the support is here if and when they need it, and provision of career advice. 87% of respondents would recommend the Scheme to colleagues and friends.

***Quote 1: The scheme makes me feel heard and valued as a member of the University. Having a mentor has helped me with career progression, I hope to do the same for a future mentee.***

***Quote 2: [I gained] insight into the experiences and feelings of colleagues leads one to reflect on one's own experiences and brings new perspective. My mentoring relationships have so far enriched my working life.***

#### **Communication and resources:**

100% of respondents who used the MentorNet platform liked it, and all who contacted the coordinator were happy with the level of communication. However we should look at making the website more readable and easy to navigate, which could be a review of the whole RDM website structure, so that mentoring is visible and accessible to all, including students who often don't realise some resources located under the staff portlets are in fact available to them as well.



***Quote: It gives you opportunity to match mentors and mentees profile and cover a good range of mentoring topics. Also, the scheme is very well coordinated and executed.***

The RDMMS publishes a set of resources, which are regularly updated. The scheme handbook outlines the structure of the mentoring programme and the expectations/responsibilities of its members. Quick start guides for mentors and mentees were introduced to accompany the launch of the MentorNet platform. In 2019, a toolkit brochure was published, describing key skills and techniques (e.g. active listening, OSCAR model, rapport building) as well as training module links to further help mentors and mentees get the most of their relationships. All are available on the MentorNet platform, and advertised via automated emails at key points (e.g. registration, match, enquiry with coordinator).

***Quote: Fairly good match up with mentor and mentee. Background resources good to help me get going and as a reference***

69% of the respondents have read/used the Handbook, 20% did not use it, and 10% were not aware of its existence. Training resources recommended by our scheme encompass mentor and mentee training as well as articles and podcasts on mentoring in an academic setting. With a 75% satisfaction rate, the resources are clearly relevant to our members' needs. It should be highlighted that 22.5% did not use these, as many of our mentors have previous experience of mentoring students and junior colleagues. Nonetheless, these resources should be reviewed and improved upon regularly to ensure best support for our members.

#### **Improvements going forward:**

We asked our mentors and mentees for suggestions on improving the scheme. Whilst most felt the RDMMS works well as it is, the most pressing issues were:

1. getting more senior staff to join the mentoring scheme
2. publishing case studies as examples of mentoring success stories on the website, thus publicising the RDMMS more widely
3. facilitating a priority/fast tracking system for staff and students who have little time left in their post/project and wish to find a mentor
4. routine reminders from MentorNet for mentors and mentees to meet/communicate and keep the relationship active.

**Recommendation:** Most of these fall under communication either within the MentorNet system, which should be discussed with the platform developers, or through RDM's communications channels (including website, HR processes and adverts in bulletins). Casual repeated presentations on mentoring benefits in RDM and a Twitter presence could also help in raising awareness amongst some of our staff and students.

#### **Experience as a mentor**

##### **Support and training:**

77.5% of the respondents declared being registered as a mentor in the RDMMS, of which 42% had prior experience of mentoring. As part of the registration process, new mentors and mentees will receive an email outlining the recommended training links to enhance their mentoring experience. These are also highlighted in News items within the MentorNet platform and in the published support resources. 100% of those who completed the UDEMY Mentor for Impact training were satisfied with

the content and relevance of the module. 58% of respondents reported not being aware of the UDEMY Mentor for Impact training, which we highlight for new mentors. This may be due to the fact that the training was only introduced as part of the training resources development in March 2018. Previously, the RDMMC considered offering face-to-face training to incoming mentors, but the nature of our ongoing enrolment meant that we never got enough individuals to justify enough attendants for one session at a time. Given the optional nature of the training, we can only anticipate a slight increase in completion of mentoring training.

#### **Satisfaction of being a mentor:**

95% of matched mentors have enjoyed their roles, with 51.6% feeling they were able to mentor effectively, and 100% having enjoyed their relationship with their mentees. No mentor identified the need for additional support. Mentors described the most satisfying facets of their role as being able to support others and give back, helping solving problems, feeling useful, widening others' perspectives, seeing their mentees develop and change and helping colleagues achieve their goals.

For mentors, the key identified areas were:

- Understanding issues facing others (80%)
- Active listening (75%)
- Empathy, building relationships, giving constructive feedback and open-mindedness (all at 71%)

#### **Most difficult aspects of mentorship:**

Mentors reported the most difficult parts of being a mentor as the lack of closure, the inability to resolve some issues faced by individuals, remaining detached, handling difficult conversations and not knowing if your advice is helpful, or whether you are effective as a mentor.

**Recommendation:** A lot of these aspects can be addressed with adequate support from the published resources, access to training as well as directing mentees towards other RDM support services as needed such as the Harassment Advisors and Mental Health First Aiders. It may be useful for the RDMMC to review the current mentoring resources and add these networks in the published RDMMC documents, as well as further highlight the resources documents to mentors for them to use and refer to during their relationships.

#### [Experience as a mentee](#)

##### **Support and training:**

47.5% of respondents declared being registered as mentees in the RDMMS, of which 73.7% had no experience of mentoring prior to joining the scheme. A mentee commented on the need for guidance on scheduling meetings effectively to get the most out of their mentor, about not knowing how to get the most out of my mentor-mentee relationship: *"I feel like it may be a waste of my mentor's time to arrange a meeting without a clear objective"*. Another mentee wanted *"a more defined explanation on what is the exact use and role of a Mentor and a Mentee and what we should expect out of [as] it would greatly help to see how this system can become more effective"*.

**Recommendation:** The Mentoring toolkit document covers all aspects of a mentoring relationship, including the expected timeline, building rapport, power imbalance, scheduling meetings and identifying achievable goals. The toolkit is advertised to new members on registration, and in the News

feed in MentorNet. Maybe a targeted email campaign to mentees to further advertise the toolkit alongside recommended external resources such as the ***Your Digital Mentor Podcast*** episodes on imposter's syndrome and mentoring your mentor.

### **Benefits from mentoring:**

94% felt their mentor has been effective, and 100% reported good communication with their mentor. Mentees reported their mentors helped them with career advice, handling difficult conversations, their confidence levels, career progression requirements and practical skills. They most valued their mentors' impartial support, the personal help and guidance, being able to talk through ideas, being encouraged and meeting new people outside of their current groups and network.

Mentees reported the following as the most improved skills:

- Learning about themselves and self-confidence (68%)
- Using initiative (63%)
- Open-mindedness (53%)

**Quote 1: My mentor changed my perspective on what I thought I could achieve. It put me on a different career path altogether.**

**Quote 2: When I needed to make a decision about a job to apply for, the mentor gave me confidence in my abilities.**

**Quote 3: It quickly became a 2-way relationship, where we supported each other. Although we ended the mentoring relationship, we have remained friends and are still in touch.**

### **Most difficult aspects of mentorship:**

Mentees reported a range of issues, such as making sure to keep momentum between meetings and implement the discussed actions, identifying what can be actioned realistically, realising when and how to stop the mentoring relationship, fear around confidentiality if your mentor is in the same RDM Division. These can again be addressed by discussing concerns with their mentor and clarifying the mentoring relationship boundaries from the start, scheduling meetings with clear agendas and follow-ups, contacting the coordinator for advice. All these are covered in the Mentoring toolkit and the training resources we produce and recommend (see *Recommendation* section under *Training and Support* section).

### **Conclusions**

Our evaluation demonstrates that both our mentors and mentees highly value mentoring provision in RDM, and that careful planning of a mentoring scheme is likely to be helpful in ensuring success and benefit from the intervention. This must include clarification of boundaries and roles, training for both mentors and mentees and ongoing support of both mentor and mentee addressing expectations, building rapport and logistics. Communication is key for all stakeholders: between RDMMC and scheme members, between mentors and mentees, within the RDM communication channels (including DGS and HR), so that information is readily available and easily accessible and individuals inform themselves with the necessary skills and strategies to benefit the most from their mentoring experience. The MentorNet platform can offer growth in communication channels (e.g. mobile app and forums), which should increase traffic to the platform itself, and facilitate easier access to existing resources by familiarising people with the potential of sharing documents and resources but also dynamically connecting with others in the scheme.

## Mentor Case Studies

### Mentor case study 1 – Dr Ruth McCaffrey

**1. Why is mentoring important in your opinion and how did you get involved with the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

Mentoring is a great way of sharing your experience and expertise with other members of the department. You can support a more junior colleague as they progress in their role. It is a wonderful way to give something back.

Working in RDM Strategic, I was very aware of the establishment of the RDM mentoring scheme and got involved as soon as I could.

**2. Do you need previous experience of mentoring others to be a RDM Mentor? Is there good support for mentors through the Scheme?**

You needed no experience of mentoring others to be an RDM Mentor. All you needed was the desire to share what you have learnt with others, enabling them to make informed decisions and feel supported as they progress in their roles.

However, I did undertake the training provided by the RDM mentoring scheme back in 2014 and found it very helpful.

There is excellent support for mentors available through the scheme.

**3. What is your overall experience of the Mentoring Scheme?**

Really positive! The individuals I have mentored have all been looking for different things and needed someone to talk to and bounce ideas off. It has been a privilege to mentor them it is very empowering to feel that your experience can benefit others and make a difference to them.

**4. What are the most satisfying aspects of mentoring in your opinion?**

- Seeing your mentee progress
- Realising the wealth of experience that you have accumulated during your career
- Feeling like you are making a difference and really helping someone.

**5. Do you think the RDM Mentoring Scheme is beneficial for staff and students in RDM?**

Yes! I think it is a brilliant scheme that both mentor and mentee benefit from. I know it is highly regarded and I think it is one of the flagship programmes in RDM.

### Mentor case study 2 – Associate Professor Masliza Mahmud

**1. Why is mentoring important in your opinion and how did you get involved with the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

In my experience mentoring is important especially in academia. The key to success in my career has been having a mentor who has given me inspiration, and helped to shape my career progression. I saw RDM Mentoring Scheme through emails circulated.

**2. Do you need previous experience of mentoring others to be a RDM Mentor? Is there good support for mentors through the Scheme?**

I have already had extensive experience mentoring others prior to joining therefore I have found it easy to integrate into the Scheme. Yes, there is good support provided.

**3. What is your overall experience of the Mentoring Scheme?**

As I have had prior experience mentoring, I find the experience is rewarding. I feel I have contributed something useful to the Scheme. I do not find it particularly stressful or pressured.

**4. What are the most satisfying aspects of mentoring in your opinion?**

Being chosen by a Mentee and having had a fruitful discussion.

**5. Do you think the RDM Mentoring Scheme is beneficial for staff and students in RDM?**

*Absolutely*

**Mentor case study 3 – Professor Svetlana Reilly**

**1. Why is mentoring important in your opinion and how did you get involved with the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

It helps junior colleagues to gain confidence, avoid frustration and get information on which potential direction one could take to achieve their goals.

**2. Do you need previous experience of mentoring others to be a RDM Mentor? Is there good support for mentors through the Scheme?**

I am unsure about that, as I did not get much support as a mentor apart from a general guidance that does not necessarily help with all the issues discussed between mentor and mentee.

**3. What is your overall experience of the Mentoring Scheme?**

It has been satisfactory, perhaps more as a mentor than being a mentee in the past.

**4. What are the most satisfying aspects of mentoring in your opinion?**

To help mentee to see the light at the end of the tunnel, as most of the mentees come with issues and concerns rather than success stories.

**5. Do you think the RDM Mentoring Scheme is beneficial for staff and students in RDM?**

It is for staff (not sure about students), though there are aspects that need to be improved to get the best out of the scheme.

**Mentee Case studies**

**Mentee case study 1 - Professor Anne Goriely**

**1. How did you hear about the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

I heard of the mentoring scheme almost from its inception, as it was being thought through in early 2014. The scheme was mentioned to me by a colleague who thought I could benefit from it. At the time I was in a situation from which I could not see a way out, or more precisely, a way forward – having been in the same position as a post-doc and fairly productive researcher in the lab for ~14 years.

We started a random conversation about 'life' in general and the lack of defined career options for senior post-docs in the UK, especially for women with family responsibilities. I felt that this discussion and the sharing of a common experience was extremely helpful. This person mentioned that if I wanted to continue this dialogue on a more regular basis, the mentoring scheme would provide an ideal platform, as clearly this type of situation is not uncommon, but they are all unique – hence to approach this, some 'creative' thinking and personalised solutions are required. I embraced this idea and applied the following day through the newly created RDM mentoring web platform, asking specifically to be paired with this colleague who became my mentor. I think we were the first match to go through. From the onset, we drew a mentoring agreement, in the form of a contract, defining the purpose, rhythm and practicalities of our meetings. Paradoxically perhaps, this formal contract gave me more freedom and easier access to my mentor. It also helped me focused on its purpose and not to feel guilty about using someone's precious time. Discussing the contract also revealed that there were mutual benefits and helped me defined the specific goals to be achieved – this

was done with the support of my mentor and, interestingly it turned out, my mentor was more ambitious for me and the goals to be achieved than I was allowing myself to be.

We met on a monthly basis over a period of 18-24 months and covered a lot of grounds, building a relationship of trust and support that spanned academia but also aspects of life/work balance, and was coloured by personal anecdotes and experiences. Although we dissolved our official mentoring relationship after ~2 years, we are still in contact and keep in touch – this has been an incredibly supportive and important relationship for me that has allowed me to re-think my career and how I view myself as an academic.

## **2. What did you hope to achieve through mentoring?**

I had very modest expectations to start with, I was interested in talking to someone who could explain to me how the university worked and what was reasonable for someone in my situation to expect from the institution. I had been working for the university for ~20 years already, but only as a post-doc within 2 specific labs and had had very limited contact with other academics outside my department (I would even say, outside my floor!). I was attracted by the idea of having someone to talk to who would take the time to listen and could understand the complexities of my situation; someone who was able to help me navigate my way through the intricate and multi-layered structures of the university and the academic world – as well as able to recognise the root of my feelings of inadequacy in this alien environment. For those of us who did not study in the UK, Oxford is a difficult place, where rules are often unwritten and difficult to decipher.

I had not appreciated how important this “formal informal” contact was going to be and the power of a one-to-one supportive relationship. UP to this point, I had never had anyone offering to take a careful look at my career, encourage me to make changes and move on.

The key ingredient that made this work for me is that together we were able to define small and relatively simple actionable tasks/ideas that allowed me to make myself more visible and to see my position from a different viewpoint. Little by little, through some of these small achievements, changes started to happen... even if at first it was not noticeable.

## **3. What did you learn about yourself through mentoring?**

Where should I start? I learned a lot about the university, departmental structures, other people's interest and point of view, but clearly also about myself.

The main shift that happened after several months of mentoring was that I progressively understood that my situation could change, although this was not going to happen overnight. This may sound pretty obvious but one of the problems of feeling stuck for a long time, is that I thought the only way forward was through drastic changes – i.e. leave the lab and start somewhere else, or simply switch career – not through small steps.

However, little by little, we jointly developed a strategy where some small changes - such as becoming part of a committee, putting myself forward to give talks and seminars, volunteering to organise meetings, talking to academic colleagues and letting them know I am available and willing to perform supervision, administrative roles... - laid the ground for some more transformative changes.

Progressively, through these small challenges, I think my colleagues started seeing me through different eyes both within the department and the wider research community... and as a result my own perception of myself and the roles I was able to play, started shifting too.

Through our monthly meetings, I was able to acknowledge these changes and improvements and reflect on their significance, small as they may have been at the time. This was important to gain confidence in myself and the impact that these choices and challenges can have on the situation.

## **4. Do you feel the scheme impacted on your life and if so how?**

The scheme, or more precisely my specific mentoring relationship, has been very important and has allowed me within a few years to start a journey that I had not anticipated would ever be possible and eventually to become an independent PI.

**5. Would you recommend the RDM Mentoring Scheme to others?**

Definitely - and I have done so on many occasions. Having benefited from the scheme, I have also wanted to help and support others and share my experience. I been an active mentor within the scheme for the last 7 years. This has been a fulfilling role. To my mind, the key to a successful mentoring relationship is the ability to listen and adapt to the demands of a one-to-one relationship. I think it is also important to accept that not all mentoring relationships will be productive, sometimes the match is not right – as indeed it is important to listen but also to be able to relate to someone's else experiences. I believe that it is important to acknowledge this inevitable and, in this case, it may be best to consider changing the mentor-mentee pair and asking for a re-match.

**Mentee case study 2 – Female Postdoctoral Research Assistant**

**1. How did you hear about the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

I have heard about the RDM mentoring scheme from my local HR team and email updates about the scheme.

**2. What did you hope to achieve through mentoring?**

I hoped to have a support for my career planning, work difficulties and job transitions. I am very happy to have received immense support through my mentor in these areas. The RDM Mentoring Scheme is very well coordinated, hassle free, and very well outlined.

**3. What did you learn about yourself through mentoring?**

I learned that I should feel more confident about sharing my thoughts and concerns with others.

**4. Do you feel the scheme impacted on your life and if so how?**

The scheme has definitely impacted my life. I have more connections now and feel more confident about talking to people about my concerns and doubts. Also, I am more clear about my career planning now.

**5. Would you recommend the RDM Mentoring Scheme to others?**

I strongly recommend the RDM Mentoring Scheme to others.

**Mentee case study 3 – Dr Stuart Faulkner**

**1. How did you hear about the RDM Mentoring Scheme?**

Through both a colleague and internal RDM e-mails

**2. What did you hope to achieve through mentoring?**

I hoped to achieve several things:

- To learn more about my own approaches to work and carer. I had not had a formal mentor before, even during my PhD or post doc. I felt that now was a pivotal time in my career and hoped to gain some insight from others how to manage this and explore avenues to progress this.
- I wanted to understand better work-life balance and how to integrate this better into my working week.
- I wanted to build connections and networks both with my mentor and understand what other avenues there were to build networks within the university – not just academic but other meaningful networks. I had been in Oxford for a while and still knew relatively little of life outside my immediate bubble.

**3. What did you learn about yourself through mentoring?**

I learnt that my approach to work life balance wasn't optimal and it could change and that there were ways in which I could approach things differently – both through day to day practises and additional Oxford training opportunities.



I learnt that I was missing an independent sounding board for my ideas, concerns and aspirations and that these could be explored more openly with my mentor. This was a valuable gain to the relationship.

**4. Do you feel the scheme impacted on your life and if so how?**

I learnt that many of the questions I had about myself and my career were quite normal and although answers weren't necessarily immediately forthcoming - which is not the basis of the mentoring relationship – that the mentoring relationship helped me to accept that and to explore possible options and actions moving forward. I was able to create , review and reflect upon actions in a safe environment.

**5. Would you recommend the RDM Mentoring Scheme to others?**

Yes I would recommend it. It is of bilateral benefit to both parties in learning about oneself and how to listen, support and accept others in a relationship that is non-judgemental and not work related, providing a supportive framework for participants to progress in many ways.

## Committee Member Case Studies

### Committee member case study 1 – Professor Jan Rehwinkel

**1. How and why did you get involved with the mentoring scheme committee?**

I was approached by the department at the time when the scheme was established and was asked to join the newly formed committee. I agreed because at the time I did not serve on any departmental, RDM-wide committee and felt this might be a good way to contribute to the department as a whole, rather than just to my division/unit/building (as I was doing already on other committees).

**2. How much of your time does it require?**

Very little, probably on average one hour per month.

**3. What does the RDM Mentoring Committee do and why is mentoring important?**

The committee oversees mentoring in RDM. Its main responsibilities are to match mentees and mentors, to maintain a pool of mentors, to facilitate the relationships, and to collect feedback. Mentees benefit by discussing a topic of importance to them with another, independent and non-conflicted member of the department with the relevant experience. Mentors often enjoy being able to help others by sharing their advice. For both mentees and mentors, meeting someone new in the department, often from a different division, is an added bonus.

**4. Would you recommend the role of Mentoring Committee member to others?**

Yes, certainly, it is in my view a good opportunity to make a positive impact on the culture in the department!

### Committee member case study 2 – Dr James Brown (Chair)

**1. How and why did you get involved with the mentoring scheme committee?**

From the start, the RDM Mentoring Committee included members from across the various Divisions of RDM and I was invited to join as a representative of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine. I was delighted to accept, believing that mentoring could and should be an integral part of a supportive work culture.



**2. How much of your time does it require?**

So far, it has required just a few hours per term; about an hour for a termly meeting and then a little time spent on emails, looking over matches and so on. I've also supported the RDMMS Coordinator in an outreach visit to explain how our scheme works and the benefits it brings. It's certainly not an onerous role. Going forwards, my time commitment may increase since I took on the role of Committee Chair this summer. I'm anticipating to be a little more involved in supporting the Coordinator in maintaining and developing the scheme.

**3. What does the RDM Mentoring Committee do and why is mentoring important?**

The main business of the Committee is to look over, discuss and approve the matches between mentee and mentor. Although matching is usually straightforward, there can be aspects requiring further consideration; having a cross-section of RDM colleagues on the Committee provides insight and facilitates discussion, enabling us to (hopefully) make informed decisions to benefit our mentees and our mentors. The committee also discusses the administration and make-up of our scheme, new initiatives in mentoring and how best we can publicise our scheme, communicate its values and recruit further mentors and mentees.

RDM has always promoted a supportive working environment and mentoring is a central aspect of that culture. Mentoring provides a safe, trusted space for mentees to discuss personal and professional issues with a dedicated mentor who can listen and provide useful, practical advice based on their own experiences. It helps mentees to navigate their way through career developments and difficulties or through changes in personal circumstances. There are advantages for mentors too, from developing listening skills to learning *via* reflecting on their own experiences. We're very proud that most of the feedback we receive for the RDMMS is very positive from both mentors and mentees.

**4. Would you recommend the role of Mentoring Committee member to others?**

Yes, very much so. It's a small, friendly committee, which has always been lucky to have a driven, enthusiastic and very capable coordinator at its heart. The meetings are convivial and I enjoy being part of an RDM-wide initiative, getting to know colleagues who I perhaps otherwise wouldn't have crossed paths with.

**Committee member case study 3 – Dr Ruth Coleman**

**1. How and why did you get involved with the mentoring scheme committee?**

I was approached in 2017 by the outgoing OCDEM representative and asked if I would replace them. As someone who'd signed up to (and benefitted from) the scheme, I was happy to take on the position.

**2. How much of your time does it require?**

Approximately an hour a month.

**3. What does the RDM Mentoring Committee do and why is mentoring important?**

There are representatives from all RDM divisions on the committee so we can ensure the mentor-mentee matches are those best suited to achieve a mentee's goals. They have introduced the MentorNet system to facilitate the process and are constantly looking for ways to improve the outcomes of the scheme. The committee also helps increase awareness of the RDM mentoring scheme by attending various RDM events (eg RDM symposium).

Mentoring can make an incredible difference to an individual in progressing their career. Having someone to talk to who has already experienced and overcome obstacles being faced by a mentee such as obtaining grants/fellowships or becoming a PI is a valuable resource. Mentors have signed up to volunteer their time unlike supervisors/line managers who can be elusive. Knowing there is someone willing to support you and your goals is reassuring, especially in times of uncertainty.

**4. Would you recommend the role of Mentoring Committee member to others?**

Yes. I've very much enjoyed being on the committee for the last three years. It's showed me that the wellbeing of RDM staff is being supported and I value the opportunity to contribute to this.

## Conclusion

In March 2021, the RDMMS will be 7 years old. The longest withstanding departmental mentoring scheme in the University of Oxford, RDMMS continues to be valued by its members for its bespoke nature, their ability to connect with others beyond their direct network, and the knowledge that the support is there if they need it.

One mentor wrote this about their mentoring experience: *“exactly the support I felt I needed early in my career, glad to offer it to others”*. A student stated this was a *“chance to discuss things informally with someone who has been through a DPhil very recently”*.

The scheme was originally introduced:

- to help to build a framework of support for both mentees and mentors
- to facilitate career and personal development planning via mentoring
- to enhance personal effectiveness and motivation
- to improve communication, interpersonal skills and networking within RDM
- to give mentees and mentors time for reflection on current practices
- to challenge pre-conceived ideas held by either the mentee or mentor
- to improve the quality and commitment of the community within RDM

Overall, our mentors and mentees described feeling well supported by the scheme structure. Most mentees reported being able to plan (and act) on career progression thanks to their mentoring relationships. Both mentors and mentees reported enhanced open mindedness. Mentors improved their awareness of issues facing others and their empathy, whilst mentees felt their self-confidence and initiative increased. Both mentors and mentees commented on the feeling of a community within RDM through the mentoring scheme.

**Quote 1: I particularly like the opportunity the scheme offers to engage with colleagues outside of my normal work contacts. It helps to make our department feel more 'together'.**

**Quote 2: [The Mentoring Scheme] gives another perspective on what someone may be struggling with and allows people to share differences in experiences, career progression and knowledge.**

The administration of the scheme is overall received positively. Committee members feel valued and enjoy their role and work (*see case studies*). The coordinator currently works closely with the RDM AS Coordinator and the Chair of the RDMMC to continue develop the scheme through initiatives like the Mentoring Dialogues pilot and software upgrades with MentorNet. It is important that going forward, the next RDMMS coordinator continues to benefit from the established network support via STAMINA and other mentoring programmes in the University of Oxford by actively communicating with these.

The report contains recommendations from the current coordinator to address issues, which have been highlighted by the survey and through the assessment of the current system and structure in place. These recommendations have been compiled in a shorter document for ease of read.

Clearer and stronger communication are at the heart of most resolutions to our members' requests for improvement. Information, training and support resources required by our mentees and mentors on managing their relationships and expectations already exist, yet some reported not knowing their existence. It would be wise to reassess the communication channels across RDM in the local areas as well as reviewing the website presence of the mentoring scheme to further enhance the awareness of our RDMMS existence to all staff and students, with a potential focus on longstanding staff.

Going forward the RDMMS should continue to promote mentoring culture within and outside traditional and official mentoring relationships through projects like the Mentoring Dialogues pilot. By practicing mindful mentoring approaches in daily interactions, RDM staff and students will normalise these, which in turn should enable the next generation of managers to embed mentoring skills in everyday duties and interpersonal tasks.

Overall, the RDMMS is much appreciated by our staff and students, and remains a success thanks to the dedication of its mentors and mentees. A testimony of this is the willingness from scheme members to remain as active mentors even after they leave RDM or the University of Oxford (60% - *source: mentoring survey 2020*).

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to our mentees and mentors who took the time to complete the mentoring survey and share their experiences and views on the development of the RDMMS.

The RDMMS has remained successful thanks to its dedicated committee, composed of passionate individuals who genuinely care about mentoring and others, as well as the strong and continued support from the Head of Department Prof Hugh Watkins, the Head of Administration Mrs Lynn Clee and the RDM AS Coordinator Charlotte Smith.

Our thanks to the POD team (University of Oxford) for their advice, our collaborator Dr Judie Gannon (Oxford Brookes University) for her sustained support, and the MentorNet team led by David Garvie.

## Resources & Glossary

AS	Athena Swan
DGS	Departmental Graduate Studies
EFTC	End of Fixed Term Contract
MSD	Medical Sciences Division
PDR	Personal Development Review
POD	People & Organisation Development
PSS	Professional and Support Staff
RDM	Radcliffe Department of Medicine
RDMMC	Radcliffe Department of Medicine Mentoring Committee
RDMMS	Radcliffe Department of Medicine Mentoring Scheme
SAT	Self-Assessment Team
STAMINa	Sustainable Mentoring Network
UAS	University Administration Services

## Appendix – Summary of recommendations

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### Administration of the scheme

Coordinators for mentoring programmes often report a feeling of isolation and lack of available support from their institution to discuss mentoring programme management issues and problem solving.

It would be wise to build such network within Oxford University by actively liaising with Sophie Brotherston (UAS) who coordinates the mentoring pilot for the PSS network.

It is worth noting a similar network exists outside the university within the STAMINa network. The RDMMS is a founding member of the STAMINa network.

### Promotion

Mentees and mentors have reported being surprised that peers are not aware of the existence of our mentoring scheme. Students are still in low number amongst our mentees, and we currently have no students amongst our mentors.

As students have annual reviews, mentoring should be mentioned as an additional support tool at each of these students' review meetings with local DGSs.

### Matching process

Students in their last year and staff on short term contracts or coming to the end of their contracts, have only a few months to meet and work with a mentor on topics such as career options or network connections.

To ensure individuals are not waiting for a mentor in these crucial times, a '*fast track*' option should be added to the registration system for mentees. MentorNet is able to add a 'fast track' tick option with a comment box for the mentee to select and add some background information.

Although at present MentorNet would be unable to generate automated alert for the Coordinator to receive, a simple report listing all the people who have ticked the fast-track box can be generated, for the coordinator to review the data from time to time, and implement the fast track route outside of the normal matching rounds.

## Ongoing review and development

### Mentoring pilot

The participants described the pilot as being of value. The RDMMC should consider rerunning the pilot with a more fluid and transparent format on topics/themes pertinent to the AS plan and to RDM staff and students. Proposals included small groups vs pair, topics to be identified by participants, and opening to all in RDM through a recruitment campaign.

### MentorNet RDM community

To ensure the mentoring culture flows naturally in the institution, it would be useful to explore a more informal community setting. MentorNet stated they would be happy to host such alumni programme within our licence user count without extra costs to trial the operation. Alternatively, MentorNet forums might be another way to expand and accelerate communication between scheme members by sharing tips and listing discussion topics (even FAQs).

## Resources

### *MentorNet platform*

The MentorNet development team is currently working on a mobile application. If communication could flow more actively between mentors and mentees using an app, it could parenthetically improve return rates of exit questionnaires by assimilating the MentorNet landscape to these communications. The app could be piloted by our members, if the RDMMC agrees.

### *Networking*

Networking and researching mentoring outside of academia has been vital to the development of the mentoring scheme thus far. The next RDMMMS coordinator and the committee should continue to liaise with Dr Judie Gannon, who heads the STAMINa network, to contribute to and develop a national support network for coordinators, and gain access to best practice across sectors.

## Evaluation methodology

### *Exit questionnaires*

The necessity to communicate mentoring relationship closure to the scheme coordinator remains sporadic and returns are poor.

The necessity to report the end of a mentoring relationship could be consistently highlighted in HR processes in all RDM units (e.g. PDR, EFTC alerts and exit interviews when staff are leaving).

Similarly, students finishing their DPhil/PhD or transferring to a different department should be reminded of the need to contact the coordinator before leaving RDM.

## Mentoring survey

### *System improvements*

Most of the requests for improvement registered by survey respondents fall under communication either within the MentorNet system (which should be discussed with the platform developer) or through RDM's communications channels (including website, HR processes and adverts in bulletins).

Casual repeated presentations on mentoring benefits in RDM and a Twitter presence could also help in raising awareness amongst some of our staff and students.

### *Mentor experience improvements*

Most of the issues reported by mentors can be addressed with adequate support from the existing published resources, more access to training as well as directing mentees towards other RDM support services as needed such as the Harassment Advisors and Mental Health First Aiders.

It may be useful for the RDMMC to review the current mentoring resources and add these networks in the published RDMMC documents, as well as further highlight the resources documents to mentors for them to use and refer to during their relationships.

### *Mentee experience improvements*

The Mentoring toolkit document covers all aspects of a mentoring relationship, including the expected timeline, building rapport, power imbalance, scheduling meetings and identifying achievable goals. The toolkit is advertised to new members on registration, and in the News feed in MentorNet. Maybe a targeted email campaign to mentees to further advertise the toolkit alongside our recommended external training and support resources such as the *Your Digital Mentor Podcast* episodes on imposter's syndrome and mentoring your mentor.