

UKCRF NETWORK

Reciprocal Mentoring Guidelines

Version 1.0 – March 2026



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UKCRF Network Reciprocal Mentoring: Guidelines and Checklist

Version 1.0 (March 2026)

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Intended audience

This guidance has been designed for the UKCRF Network workforce but is applicable to all clinical research staff.

Disclaimer

These guidelines are provided to support reciprocal mentoring within the UKCRF Network. Participation is voluntary, and mentors are not formally accredited. The Network does not accept responsibility for the content of mentoring discussions or outcomes. Participants are responsible for arranging and managing their own mentoring relationships.

To enquire about this document please email ukcrf.network@nihr.ac.uk

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Introduction

These guidelines are designed to help you take part in a mentoring relationship that is informal, supportive, and two-way, where both participants can learn from each other.

You do **not** need formal mentor training to take part in reciprocal mentoring. Reciprocal (or peer) mentoring focuses on creating a safe and respectful space to share experiences, reflect, and grow together. Both individuals bring valuable perspectives, whether you have similar roles or completely different professional backgrounds.

This document will help you

- Understand what reciprocal mentoring is and how it works
- Find a mentoring partner
- Structure your conversations using a simple checklist
- Reflect on your progress and development.

At the end of your mentoring period, you can complete an evaluation form to receive a certificate as a record of your participation and contribution.

Other opportunities

Please note there are also opportunities provided by NHS Trusts, NHS England, and NIHR for formal coaching and mentoring outside of the UKCRF Network, including:

- [NIHR Mentoring Programme](#)
- [NHS Leadership Academy: Coaching and Mentoring](#)

You may also be interested in the [UKCRF Network's Guidance for Line Managers and Staff: Using continued professional development \(CPD\)](#) opportunities to further develop clinical research teams.

What is Reciprocal Mentoring?

Reciprocal (or peer) mentoring is a partnership where both people support each other's development. Unlike traditional mentoring, where one person is primarily the guide, reciprocal mentoring is a mutual exchange of learning and support.

Through regular conversations, both individuals:

- Share their experiences and challenges,
- Offer different perspectives and constructive feedback,
- Gain new insights to apply to their roles,
- Build confidence and skills through reflection.

Reciprocal mentoring encourages connection across differences, recognising that varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives strengthen the mentoring relationship. Inclusivity is key to creating a space where both participants feel heard, respected, and empowered to learn.

How to find a peer mentor within the UKCRF Network

While these guidelines may be useful to staff across the wider research infrastructure, the options below relate specifically to opportunities available to CRF staff within the UKCRF Network.

There are several ways to connect with a potential mentoring partner within the UKCRF Network. Consider the options below and choose what works best for you:

1. Online

- Access the [UKCRF Network Reciprocal Mentor Directory](#).
- Browse profiles to identify potential partners based on experience, role, or areas of interest.
- Contact individuals directly using the details provided to explore whether reciprocal mentoring would be a good fit.
- If a potential mentor is no longer available, please contact another individual listed in the directory. We will aim to keep the directory up to date and indicate where mentors are known to be unavailable.

2. Work Groups / Meetings

- If you are a member of a **work group**:
 - Raise your interest during online or in-person meetings.
 - Use the group distribution list to invite expressions of interest.
 - Ask the Chair to circulate a request on your behalf.
- If you are not part of a work group:
 - Ask a CRF colleague who is a member to raise your request at a meeting or share it with the group.

3. Events & Webinars

- **UKCRF Network Conference**:
 - Use breaks and parallel sessions to start conversations with peers.
 - If there is a positive connection, ask whether they would be open to continuing the conversation outside the conference to discuss shared topics, experiences, or challenges.
 - If those discussions are helpful, explore together whether reciprocal mentoring would be a good fit.

- **Leadership Programme:**
 - Delegates will be paired with a fellow participant as part of the programme (from April 2026).
- **Monthly Drop-in Sessions:**
 - Attend the **UKCRF Network's monthly drop-in sessions**, which focus on different topics. Listen for experiences, challenges, or perspectives that resonate with you.
 - All staff from across the UK and Ireland CRF workforce are welcome ([request the meeting link here](#)).
 - If something shared feels relevant, use the chat function or speak during the session to express your interest in discussing further.
 - Follow up after the session to explore whether reciprocal mentoring could be helpful.

4. CRF Manager Support

- Ask your CRF Manager to circulate your request to the wider CRF Manager group.
- Provide a short summary of what you are looking for (e.g. role, experience, focus areas) to help identify a suitable match.

Tips for Finding a Mentor:

- Your mentor doesn't need to be from the same staff group or professional background, gaining insight from someone outside your area can be very valuable.
- Don't be discouraged if someone is unavailable or declines, people's schedules and commitments vary.
- Try to find a mentor using the routes above. If you need extra support, contact the Operations Team (ukcrf.network@nih.ac.uk) explaining who you've already approached and the type of support you're looking for.

How to Be a Good Mentor / Mentee

As a Mentor:

- Listen actively and without judgment.
- Use questions to help your partner reflect on their experiences, rather than trying to solve problems for them.
- Share your own experiences where helpful, recognising that mentoring is a two-way exchange.
- Be reliable and respectful of agreed meeting times.
- Maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries.

As a Mentee:

- Be open about your goals and challenges.
- Ask questions and seek feedback.
- Reflect on learning between meetings.
- Take responsibility for agreed actions.
- Respect your mentor's time and availability.

Remember:

- You do not need prior mentoring or coaching experience to take part.
- In reciprocal mentoring, the balance may shift depending on the topic, this is normal. You do not need to have all the answers.
- Listening, reflecting, and sharing experiences are valuable contributions.
- Approach the relationship with curiosity, openness, and generosity.

Mentoring Principles / Guidelines

- **Mutual Benefit:** Aim for learning and development for both participants.
- **Respect and Trust:** Maintain confidentiality and show consideration for each other's perspectives.
- **Flexibility:** Relationships evolve; one person may lead at different times depending on topic or experience.
- **Clarity:** Set objectives at the start and review them periodically.
- **Commitment:** The time commitment for mentoring should be agreed between both participants, based on their goals and availability. While there is no fixed duration, a longer timeframe can support deeper reflection and a more impactful mentoring experience.
- **Reflection:** Take time to consider learning points and how to apply them.
- **Active Listening and Feedback:** Ask open-ended questions and give constructive feedback.
- **Ending the Relationship:** Discuss closure respectfully; agree whether to maintain occasional contact or reconnect in the future.

Additional Mentoring Resources

For further guidance on mentoring and professional development, the NIHR provides resources for both mentors and mentees:

- [NIHR: Beginning the mentoring relationship](#)
- [NIHR Leadership Academy: Effective mentoring resource](#) (PDF)

Getting Started: First Meeting

Before you commit to working together, arrange a first meeting to check if it's a good fit. This is sometimes called a chemistry meeting. It's simply a chance to see if you feel comfortable and aligned in what you want from the relationship.

During this first conversation, you may want to:

- Discuss what you each hope to gain from mentoring
- Share any boundaries or preferences (e.g., preferred communication style)
- Decide whether to continue together or try a different match
- Agree on the frequency and format of your meetings

If either person decides not to proceed after the first meeting, this decision should be respected. Mentoring relationships should be mutually beneficial, and it's important that both participants feel comfortable and aligned in their expectations. A respectful and open approach helps maintain trust and professionalism.

Checklist for Mentoring Conversations

Use this checklist to help structure your mentoring journey. You can complete it digitally or print it out and tick as you go.

Step	Task
1. Preparation	Read these guidelines and confirm understanding
2. Finding a Mentor	Identify and connect with a mentoring partner
3. First Meeting	Discuss expectations and agree on format
4. Set Objectives	Define 1–3 goals for your mentoring period
5. Schedule Meetings	The time commitment for mentoring should be agreed between both participants, based on your goals and availability
6. Reflect After Each Meeting	Note key takeaways and actions
7. Review Progress	Reflect on achievements and challenges together
8. Complete Evaluation Form	Submit the evaluation form to receive a certificate

Reflective Questions

Use these questions to guide your thinking during and after mentoring conversations.

At the Start:

- What do I hope to gain from this mentoring relationship?
- What skills, knowledge, or perspective can I share with my partner?
- How will I know if this mentoring is successful?

After Each Meeting:

- What did I learn from this conversation?
- What actions will I take before our next meeting?
- How did our discussion challenge or change my thinking?

At the End:

- What have I achieved through this mentoring relationship?
- How will I continue my learning and development?
- Would I like to continue meeting informally?

Summary

Reciprocal mentoring is a valuable way to connect, share, and grow within the UKCRF Network.

By following these simple steps, finding a partner, setting clear goals, and reflecting progress, you can build a supportive relationship that benefits both participants.

Remember mentoring doesn't have to be formal to be meaningful. Even a few structured conversations can spark lasting professional development and insight.

Appendix 1: Acknowledgements

This guide was shaped, refined, and reviewed through collaborative input from the individuals listed below.

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