
GW4-Clinical Academic Training Programme Mentor and Mentee Guidance

We have produced this guidance in the form of FAQs for Mentors and Mentees to clarify the Wellcome Trust funded GW4-CAT Programme and how we aim to offer the best support for our research training fellows during their PhD and into their clinical academic careers. The universities of Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter are the institutions involved and fellows on the Programme are medics, dentists and vets.

1. Background

How is the fellow appointed? Medics, dentists and vets with research experience and a competitive CV apply to the funding call. After a shortlisting exercise (in line with WT and MRC processes), applicants are interviewed by a panel of GW4-CAT Board Members representing the universities of Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter and an external member. Applicants are not expected to have a fully formed PhD idea at interview as they will be encouraged to 'think outside the box' and to push themselves out of their comfort zone. Up to 5 places are available each year. We appoint on excellence and potential for a future clinical academic career, rather than clinical discipline or choice of home institution.

What is the process of preparing a PhD Project outline? Appointed fellows participate in the introductory week and have several months to prepare a PhD project outline. The lead supervisor, co-supervisors and any collaborators will be identified during this time and the fellow will work closely with the supervisors, a GW4-CAT Director and Programme Manager, to prepare a PhD project outline. This includes the preparation of a project budget. The fellow is interviewed on the project outline by the GW4-CAT directors prior to registration and start date.

2. What is a Clinical Mentor?

What does a mentor do?

The mentor gives their time and listens; they are there to support, encourage and challenge ideas and plans, to provide a framework, examine the options and to understand implications and how to plan the next stage and future action. A mentor will share experiences where relevant and if asked will signpost to information and resources including people and networks. Over the course of a mentor/mentee relationship, the requirements and needs will vary, and often a mentor/mentee relationship will last for several years.

What doesn't a mentor do?

A mentor does not collaborate on research or apply jointly for grant funding and they should not be a research collaborator. A mentor should not get involved in matters relating to status, promotion or payments and would not normally provide references or directly act on behalf of a mentee. The mentor should not have to justify the actions the mentee takes.

3. What does a mentee need to know?

What considerations are there for the mentee?

Are there any difficulties in arranging meetings with the mentor? e.g geographical location or will Skype/telephone be used to mitigate this?

What time commitments on both sides should be considered?

What if we don't get on and can I change a mentor?

When should the fellow identify a Clinical Mentor? The fellow may already have a mentor who has been guiding and advising their career up to now and in which case, we would encourage that this relationship continues. If not, we encourage fellows to approach clinical academics that they feel would be useful mentors. Mentors do not have to be in one of the GW4 universities and it is likely that they work within the same speciality as the fellow. Ideally a mentor would be identified at the start of the PhD, but we appreciate that sometimes it takes a while to build a relationship that might work.

How often should the mentor and mentee meet? The requirements will vary throughout the duration of the PhD training period and depends on the relationship that develops. A crucial time for a medic, dentist or vet will be when they prepare to take the next step in their postdoctoral career – either back into part-time academic work and part-time clinical, or straight into a clinical lectureship post or intermediate fellowship.

4. Additional guidance:

Are there any guidance documents available for further information? We have taken some of the recommendations from the Academy of Medical Sciences mentoring scheme for postdoctoral clinical academics (link below). As yet, there isn't an equivalent scheme for vets, although members of the GW4-CAT Management Board are involved in developing this soon.

Is there any training that helps us to understand the Mentor/Mentee relationship?

The Academy of Medical Sciences have a mentor scheme (<https://acmedsci.ac.uk/grants-and-schemes/mentoring-and-other-schemes/mentoring-programme>) and also organise training workshops.

For any further information about the GW4-CAT Programme, please email GW4-CAT@bristol.ac.uk, or visit our website GW4-CAT.ac.uk.

Please follow us on Twitter @GW4_cat