

STEP-UP mentoring scheme Code of Conduct

Purpose

This Code of Conduct sets out the expectations for all participants in the STEP-UP Mentoring Scheme. We aim to create a respectful, inclusive, and professional environment that supports the development of digital Research Technical Professionals (dRTPs) across London and the South East.

Core principles

All participants agree to:

- Act with respect: treat others with courtesy, professionalism, and empathy.
- Foster inclusion: embrace diversity in background, identity, and experience.
- Maintain confidentiality: keep all mentoring discussions private, including any intellectual property (IP), proprietary information, or unpublished work shared during sessions.
- Engage professionally: communicate constructively and avoid disruptive, discriminatory, or harassing behaviour.
- Be accountable: honour commitments and respond promptly to communications.

Expected behaviour

We expect participants will:

- Commit to the scheme for six months
- Attend monthly one-hour meetings (online or in person) unless a different frequency is agreed between mentor and mentee.
- Prepare for and actively engage in mentoring sessions.
- Use inclusive, welcoming language and respect differing viewpoints.
- Avoid offensive jokes, excessive swearing, or exclusionary behaviour.
- Immediately stop any behaviour if asked to do so.

Ending the mentoring relationship early

The mentoring relationship can end before 6 months if:

- The mentor or mentee is moving to a new role, or has significant upheaval in their personal life, so they do not have the capacity to continue.
- Either party finds the mentoring relationship unproductive.
- Unacceptable behaviour occurs, see below.

Unacceptable behaviour

The following are strictly prohibited:

- Harassment, including offensive comments related to gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or physical appearance.
- Intimidation, stalking, or unwanted contact.
- Sharing confidential or proprietary information without consent, either within the mentoring discussions or beyond them.
- Using mentoring sessions to solicit employment, legal, HR, or mental health advice.
- Disrespecting boundaries or dominating conversations.

Confidentiality and intellectual property

In general, all information shared in mentoring sessions must be treated as confidential. This includes personal experiences and career plans; technical discussions involving unpublished work or proprietary methods; and any intellectual property disclosed during mentoring.

Participants must not record, reproduce, or share any part of the mentoring conversations without explicit written consent from the other party.

The only situation in which disclosure is permitted is if an issue arises which may result in the safety/wellbeing of the mentee, mentor and/or the employing institutions being compromised or harmed.

Mentoring scope

In scope:

- Career planning and networking,
- Technical skills development, e.g. emerging technologies,
- Professional skills development, e.g. presenting, leadership, communication.
- Navigating dRTP-focused workplace culture at UK-based research performing organisations,
- Cross-organisational learning,
- Personal growth (e.g. building confidence, work-life balance),
- Support and encouragement.

Out of scope:

- Mental health support,
- HR or legal advice,
- Coaching to achieve specific goals,
- Performance management (acting as a substitute for a line manager),
- Discussing non-professional topics,
- Advice on workplace culture at non-UK-based employers,
- Sharing confidential or proprietary information,
- Recruitment and job hunting.

Reporting and resolution

If you experience or witness a breach of this Code, contact the STEP-UP team immediately via info@step-up.ac.uk, jeremy.cohen@imperial.ac.uk or i.von-holstein@imperial.ac.uk. All reports will be handled confidentially and sensitively. Actions may include:

- Clarification of expectations.
- Reassignment or removal from the programme.
- Escalation to institutional authorities if necessary.

STEP-UP does not offer mediation to resolve disagreements.

Agreement

All mentors and mentees must agree to this Code of Conduct upon joining the scheme. A separate mentoring agreement will be signed at the first meeting to confirm mutual expectations between mentor and mentee.