School of
Public Policy

SPP Alumni Support Scheme

Alumni and Student Mentorship Guide

Content

Last edited by Hannah Shearer (SPP Alumni Engagement Officer); 8.8.2024

School of Public Policy

1. Introduction

Thank you for taking part in our alumni support scheme. This scheme is designed to pair our alumni with students: providing students with a sounding board to support them and give them further insight into the world of work and their chosen sectors. This guide will cover some key areas to support you in this partnership.

What can students/alumni get out of the programme?

Alumni	**Students**
• A chance to reflect on own achievements and career development. • An opportunity to develop interpersonal skills in supporting students. • Satisfaction from helping students increase their confidence and progress with their career goals.	• Personal growth, development, and increased confidence. • Insights into particular sectors, professional life, and/or further study. • Support and advice on developing employability skills (eg. interview and networking skills). • A source of guidance that may not otherwise have been possible.

• A chance to build strong links with future policy professionals, as well as with the SPP itself.	

2. Expectations, Roles, and Responsibilities

This is not a formal mentorship programme following a particular established model. Instead this is an informal support system, where alumni provide professional guidance and encouragement for the student to take charge of their own development, as well as answering questions based on their own experience. Alumni are not expected to be experts in all areas: neither are they expected to provide opportunities for work shadowing, internships, or other such professional opportunities. As such, while alumni and students may choose to set particular goals for the students over the course of this relationship, it is not a requirement of the programme.

Once students and alumni have been paired, it is the student's responsibility to be proactive in driving the connection process by taking the lead in scheduling meetings and working out the content for the conversations. Meanwhile it is the alumni's responsibility to maintain the process (eg. by ensuring conversations stay focused and boundaries are upheld.)

It is recommended that alumni and students discuss their boundaries and expectations during their first meeting, to ensure that neither has unrealistic views of what the relationship will involve. Students should be open about what they want to get out of the programme, and alumni should be clear on what they can and cannot help with.

Crucially, while this is an informal programme, for the informality to work the boundaries between students and alumni should be respected. Both parties should respect each other's time (and therefore let the other party know if the expect to be unavailable for contact for a prolonged period of time) and should respect each other's communication preferences.

2a. Expectations for participants:

Students should:

- Commit to organising and attending meetings (including setting the agenda for conversations).
- Be clear, open and realistic in defining what is sought from this partnership.
- Respond to communications promptly and regularly check emails.
- Communicate using professional language.
- Ensure the content of communications is career-related.
- **Be mindful that the alumnus is giving up their time to help them**.

Students should not:

- Ask their alumni partner to do more than is agreed, or make regular requests for assistance beyond the agreed parameters of the relationship.
- Ask alumni to look at their academic work.
- Make direct approaches relating to work shadowing, job opportunities or internships unless

opportunities are raised by the alumnus.
• Introduce/refer the alumnus to other students without the alumnus' permission.

Alumni should:

- Encourage students to take charge of their own learning and professional development.
- Be clear in explaining if there is anything they do not feel able to help with.
- Provide relevant advice, feedback and professional insights based on their own knowledge and experience.
- Make suggestions for further career exploration or professional development.
- Have a non-judgmental approach, giving feedback and encouragement.

Alumni should not:

- Give students financial aid, legal, or immigration advice.
- Complete work or make decisions behalf of the student.
- Feel obligated to provide students with work opportunities (e.g. work experience).
- Act as a counsellor for personal issues (if you have any concerns, please contact the SPP).
- Take the place of an academic mentor.

As with any working relationship within the LSE, all participants within the SPP Student Support Scheme are expected to conduct their relationship respectfully, and without discrimination, harassment, or bullying. To find out more about LSE's anti-harassment policies, please check online: https://info.lse.ac.uk/Making-a-choice/LSE-policies-and-information

All participants are expected to maintain prompt communication with each other and with the scheme administrator throughout the. If either participant is unable to carry on with programme mid-way through year, it is expected that they let both the other participant and the scheme administrator know as soon as possible. Please remember that we cannot address problems within the programme unless you let us know promptly.

Please note: Students who have to be chased three times across the year about communicating with their mentor will be unable to continue with the programme, and their mentor will be matched with someone else.

3. Structure of the programme

Alumni and students are advised to follow the structure of the scheme, in order to create a mutually beneficial partnership.

3a. Timeline

October	*Applications and joining the programme* Participants apply to the programme and are matched by the scheme administrator according to shared interests and needs. At some point in October a virtual Q&A session

	will be held for both mentors and mentees as an introduction to the programme. We ask that all participants either join or review the recording of the event so you know what is expected of you in the programme.
November	*Introductions* Scheme administrator introduces students and alumni to each other via email. Students then contact alumni via email to introduce themselves and arrange the first meeting.
November - December	*First meeting* We recommend that the first meeting take place prior to the end-of-year holidays. This meeting should begin with establishing the contact moving forward, as well as expectations from both alumni and student.
January - April	*Second and third meeting* Alumni and students meet another two times – we suggest that the second meeting takes place around February, and the third before the beginning of May so as to not clash with student workloads. However this is flexible depending on the needs of the participants. Alumni and students are advised to keep in touch via email between meetings, and the scheme administrator will check in to make sure that everything is running smoothly.
May	*Feedback* At the end of the scheme, alumni and students will be contacted by the scheme administrator and invited to give feedback to support the scheme's development.

3b. Matching process:

We match students to alumni who are best placed to give them general support in their professional ambitions. As such, we will always try to match students' interests and career ambitions with alumni's knowledge and experience **– but please do be aware that this may not always be possible.**

Students are encouraged to not be disappointed if they do not match with an alumnus who shares their precise interests. All our alumni have a wealth of experience to offer and are eager to support our students, so even if you do not get matched with an alumni working in your preferred sector, you will still receive plenty of valuable support!

3c. Contact:

As above, it is expected that alumni and students will meet three times across the academic year (either virtually or in person) for around 30-45 minutes, and will have some email contact between meetings. Any contact beyond this is very welcome, but is at the discretion of the alumnus.

3d. Length of the programme:

Officially the programme lasts from November until the end of April, but this can be flexible depending on the needs of the participants. Some relationships may last beyond the scheme, for example, if an alumni and student agree to continue their partnership after the programme has ended.

4. Meetings

Meetings can take place via videocall or in-person; in-person meetings should take place in a public place (eg. LSE campus, a coffee shop or coworking space) and never in the student or alumni's home. As previously mentioned, they should only meet in person if *both* alumni and student feel comfortable to do so. Any COVID guidelines in place at the time of meting should be adhered to.

We also advise that before each meeting the student and alumni briefly exchange emails to establish what they will be discussing, in order to stay on track when you do meet.

4a. Preparation for Meeting One:

Students are to contact alumni to introduce themselves and arrange an initial meeting. (It is also a good idea for students and alumni to exchange a short introductory paragraph about each other at this point.) We suggest that the students draft some objectives for the scheme for discussion at their first meeting, and alumni think about what they can offer the students and how they can support them.

Suggested topics for this meeting include:-

Student	**Alumni**
• Education and work experience to date • Career aspirations • Any volunteer experience or society involvement • Interests	• Career to date • Education experience • Professional qualifications to date and planned • Current role/day-to-day work

• Achievements • Learning style	• Skills required and used • Industry overview

Students should also discuss and confirm their objectives for the scheme with alumni: this should direct topics for discussion at subsequent meetings, and help the alumni and students judge how successful the partnership has been.

At the first meeting, students and alumni also should discuss the contact they will have moving forward - for example:

a. How and when they will meet
b. The amount of email contact they will have between meetings (eg. whether the alumnus is willing to provide advice or answers to questions over email in addition to the meetings, or if they would prefer to keep these discussions solely to the three meetings. Any additional support outside the three meetings should be at the alumnus' discretion.)
c. Any busy periods (eg. exams, high workload) where it may not be possible to meet.
d. If an alumnus feels able to provide more contact than mentioned above – please be specific when discussing this, in order to manage student expectations.

4b. Possible topics for discussion

What is discussed in your meetings should be determined by the objectives of the student, and what the alumni feels able to help with. The table below provides some examples of potential topics.

Topic	**Example discussion areas**
Alumni's career	• Alumni's career path • Tips for career decision making • Further study • Is there anything the alumni wishes they had known? Is there anything they would have done differently?
Sector Knowledge	• Alumni's job • Other jobs in the sector • Professional bodies related to the sector • A typical day for the alumnus • Progression within the sector
Networking	• Networking skills • Making the most of LinkedIn

	• Gaining and maintaining a network • **Possible activity:** student to gain 20 relevant contacts on LinkedIn between now and the next meeting
Job Search	• Job search skills • Where to look for jobs • Moving from internships to permanent roles • How the mentor found their job
CVs and applications	• What makes a good CV/application? • Student's transferable skills • Other application processes (eg. aptitude tests)
Interviews	• Preparing for an interview • How to structure answers to interview questions • Other interview activities (eg. presentations)

LSE Careers has also provided a series of recommended questions for interviews as a resource that can also be used to shape discussions between alumni and students. You can find this here.

5. Support

In October there will be separate Q&A sessions held online for both alumni and students as an introduction to the programme: in these events a brief overview of the programme will be provided, as well as an introduction to the expectations of participants. Participants will have the opportunity to ask any questions of the administrator. We ask that all participants either attend or review a recording of the session, so you are fully aware of how the programme works.

The scheme administrator (Hannah Shearer – spp.alumni @lse.ac.uk) will be in touch over the course of the scheme to ensure everything is running smoothly, and will also be available for any questions and general support. When contacted, it is important that both alumni and students provide an update on how things are going.

We hope the scheme will be a positive one, but if any participants encounter any challenges or concerns, they should in the first instance contact the scheme administrator (for example, if a considerable length of time has passed and a student/alumnus has not replied over email). In serious cases/if required, issues related to the scheme will be dealt with in accordance with wider LSE policies (Policies and procedures (lse.ac.uk) and in extreme circumstances such as misconduct, the mentoring may be terminated.

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5a. Confidentiality

Students and alumni are both responsible for ensuring their conversations are treated confidentially. This applies both within and outside the London School of Economics and Political Science unless: a) the student/alumnus specifically authorises for information to be shared, b) there is a legal requirement to share information, c) it is in the vital interests of the student, alumnus or a third party to share the data (e.g., if someone is in danger) or d) the mentor/mentee needs to disclose a problem in the relationship in a confidential conversation with the scheme administrator.

Alumni and students should contact the scheme administrator if there are concerns about the student/alumnus' or a third parties' wellbeing, and should contact the emergency services if the student/alumnus or a third party is in immediate danger.

6. Appendices

6a. Objective setting - student

Before embarking on meetings with an alumnus, students are advised to consider the following:

Where do I want my career to go?

What knowledge could help me make an informed decision?

What don't I know about my preferred sectors?

What is holding me back in my career planning? What resources could help me overcome these barriers?

What are my strengths?

What are my personal development areas?

What are my concerns about applying for jobs?

Where do I want to be one year after graduation?

Where do I want to be five years after graduation?

6b. Setting boundaries and providing support – alumni

Before embarking on meetings with a student, alumni are advised to consider the following:

What advice can I offer a student?

How have my experiences shaped my personal and professional development?

What important lessons have I learnt, and how can these help the student?

Are there any professional skills I don't feel happy supporting a student with?

What forms of assistance am I willing to offer, and which am I not?

How and when can I be contacted?