

My mentor and me

Initially conceived in 1999 and considerably developed in 2002 as an online community, the LSE Alumni Professional Mentoring Network scheme is a true success story. Mentors and mentees explain how it works.

The Alumni Professional Mentoring Network was created eight years ago to offer a one to one relationship, helping recent graduates and those with less experience with their careers or professional development. It has now developed considerably.

How many people are involved?

In 2002, as an online community, the network registered approximately 100 new joiners. In 2006 over 400 new mentors or mentees registered for the scheme. The network currently has around 450 active mentors and 1,350 mentees in 75 countries and in more than 35 different professions and sectors.

What do they gain from it?

All mentors are LSE alumni with a few years of professional experience. What they all have in common is the desire to give something back to the School and to help others in the LSE community by sharing their skills, knowledge and experience.

The mentees are all LSE alumni who are looking for extra valuable tips to progress in their professional fields. Many of the current mentors have also become mentees looking for advice on professional

development from other mentors! Mentees still use the LSE Careers Service or LSE Jobs but this is a unique network for those in the LSE alumni community, and can be an extremely powerful tool.

How does it work?

The mentoring network is self-regulated by its users and is organised through the LSE alumni web pages (www.lse.ac.uk/alumni). Those wishing to volunteer their time as alumni mentors, and those seeking help or advice, will have to make an online application to the LSE Alumni Relations Office (at www.lse.ac.uk/alumni/mentoring) explaining why they want to get involved. Alumni mentors with a few years of work experience will have their chosen details listed on the Alumni Mentoring web pages. Mentees will email the mentors who seem to provide the most suitable advice in a specific profession or field of experience. Once contact has been established, it is up to both parties to develop their mentoring relationship, delineating the purpose and boundaries of the network. The Alumni Relations Office provides full guidance and support for everyone involved in the Mentoring Network.

AS: After I graduated with a degree in International Politics in 2005 (intercollegiate between LSE and the School of Oriental and African Studies), I felt it would be good to get some advice and support for starting my professional career. I also wanted to keep in touch with the School. So I went through the LSE Alumni Mentoring Network looking for someone working in media. I contacted Dirk and after we had exchanged the first couple of emails I felt that it might lead towards a resourceful mentoring relationship.

How do you keep in touch?

DR: Either by email, telephone or face to face. I now mentor people from all over the world. If I am in their country and they want to meet up, we do so. When I went to Berlin for the LSE European Alumni Group Leaders Forum, I was able to meet Andrea.

AS: We keep in touch via email. I really appreciate it that Dirk usually responds to my emails on the same day, no matter whether he is in the UK, US, New Zealand or India. Meeting in Berlin last November was also a great opportunity to discuss things face to face.

What makes it work?

DR: Properly thought out advice and guidance. Not just some generic speech with a mentoring theme.

If I were a mentee, I would expect a mentor to listen to me and to understand where I am coming from and what I feel should, or could, be unfolding in my professional future. The aim is delivering something which is of use and of which I can be proud. It is a two way process.

AS: The mentoring scheme is great support along the way. Dirk as a mentor never tries to push me in a certain direction, it's rather about being able to rely on his advice and experience in the background when making my own decisions and choices. It's basically an ongoing dialogue, characterised by sharing experiences. Sometimes it's also very useful to have someone looking at things from a distance. I would definitely recommend the mentoring scheme to other graduates and I will, most certainly, become a mentor one day myself.

What do you get out of it as a mentor?

DR: LSE, for many different reasons, represents a pivotal role in my life. The mentoring has actually come to be one of the most important things I do. You get out what you put in. I put a lot in, I get tremendous satisfaction seeing people of quality settle, focus and start to perform to the level that, deep down, they know they are capable of. Many of the mentees completely outstrip me for competence, knowledge, academic prowess and potential. And doing well and performing to the very best of your ability is a habit – a good one and one which I am proud to make a contribution to, under the auspices of what, for me, is quite simply the finest higher education institution in the world.

What have been the benefits from the mentoring scheme for you, as a mentee?

AS: To me the mentoring scheme is about support and advice along the way. Dirk is very supportive and encouraging. Most importantly, Dirk provided me with some practical insight into the working culture of the world of media and a few unwritten laws of the industry, which has been very valuable to me and helped me a lot to make a start and create opportunities and networks for myself. After graduation I interned at CNN International and Reuters. At the moment I'm working in the communications division of the UN World Food Programme in Berlin. I'm still working towards my goal of becoming a journalist, partly also because I would like to give something back of all the opportunities I had at LSE to make a contribution to society. Overall, the mentoring scheme has helped me to develop a good feel for what I'm capable of, where I would like to be and possible ways to achieve this.

Sanjay Mazumder (BSc Economics 1996, MSc Economics 1998), director of IMAZ Ltd – mentor

I have been a mentor since January 2003. To date I have mentored five LSE alumni. It has been an extremely interesting and personally rewarding experience. I have tended to mentor LSE candidates that have chosen not to go down the traditional investment banking, academic or blue chip consulting routes. This is probably due to the fact that I myself took an unconventional career path out of LSE – I went to work for Asda on their graduate scheme – and then progressed through other companies to run my own consulting business, IMAZ Limited.

The best part of the experience has been about helping three individuals in particular who were clearly very bright and talented but were being pooled in with the other resources when applying for consulting positions. I enjoyed thinking things through with them and acting as their sounding board. It was a delight to hear when each of them landed their foot in the door of a company they might otherwise have struggled to impress, given their backgrounds. I am also eagerly awaiting some more news from a female mentee who is looking to expand her own business.



Melissa Hagemann (MSc International History 1992), programme manager with the Open Society Institute – mentor

I have enjoyed being a mentor since I joined the network over four years ago but always wish I could do more to help those who contact me.

I work for the Soros foundations/Open Society Institute (OSI) and many graduates seem interested in working in philanthropy. I find that many of those who contact me are recent graduates and have been looking for work for several months. I was in the same position and can share with them my own frustrations of my job search, but reassure them that eventually everything usually does work out.

The most useful thing I have been able to do is to share job postings from within our foundation, which have helped one or two graduates find jobs at OSI (actually one even married a close friend of mine, so maybe this could be considered a double placement!).

I realise that the world of philanthropy is quite different from the financial sector and it is difficult to hold job fairs or such to help those interested in this field find employment, thus I believe the LSE Mentoring Network is probably the best way to make contacts with those within foundations and NGOs.



Iris Lapinski (née Gundermann) (MSc Human Rights 2003), consultant with Orum Ltd – mentee

I first searched the mentoring network by industry and background as, after I finished my MSc, I was interested in working in the non-profit sector. I contacted three or four people and I found Jayanti

Durai (BSc Econ 1991) on the network. We first met in December 2003 and explored what kind of career I was looking for. We discussed the pros and cons of working for NGOs and how to identify the right type of role and organisation. I then went to Mexico and, when I came back, I started working in the same area that Jayanti had moved to, corporate responsibility and socially responsible investment.

The network was very helpful as I gained advice on practical things such as corporate responsibility networking and email group communication. I am still in touch with Jayanti, but the relationship has evolved over time. We have both had a number of job changes since we first met but we keep in touch with what is happening in our fields of work. The mentoring has developed into information exchange and interesting conversations. It also turns out that we have friends in common so we socialise together and bump into each other at events. It is now more like a friendship where we discuss our different career choices.

When I have some more professional experience, I plan to become a mentor too, as I would like to contribute back to the alumni network. ■



Dirk Robertson (BSc Sociology 1987), actor and writer and Andrea Schuessler (intercollegiate with SOAS 2005), communications assistant with the UN World Food Programme

How did it all start?

DR: I had been wanting to make a contribution to the School in some shape or form since I graduated in 1987, as my attendance at LSE was a life changing experience. After a series of exchanges with the School, looking at what would work, I became a mentor. I was staggered at the volume of people who got in touch with me, asking for very specific advice, in most cases.



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