

Activate Mentoring Programme, 2023-24 Annual Report



Background to Activate

- As part of the College's £5 million commitment to scholarships for minority and underrepresented students from the UK, the Imperial **Presidential Scholarship** supports one Master's and one undergraduate student of Black Heritage (Home fee status) from each Faculty.
- The first recipients of the award were selected in the academic year 2022.
- As part of this scholarship, mentoring advice and guidance is available through the Activate Mentoring Programme: [Activate Student Mentoring Programme | Imperial students | Imperial College London](#)
- In addition, Imperial has taken action to improve the representation, progression and success of Minority Ethnic staff and students within higher education, through its **Race Equality Charter Action Plan**. Through the action plan, Imperial has committed to establishing a cross-departmental mentoring scheme, Activate, to support Minority Ethnic PhD students from minority ethnic groups, with any fee status.



Objectives of Activate

Activate is a mentoring programme dedicated to supporting under-represented groups at Imperial.

It seeks to:

- **improve experiences**
- **increase retention**
- **develop a peer community**
- **support career development**
- **create a deeper sense of belonging**

Activate matches mentees with mentors (who are Imperial staff, Phd students and alumni) who have insight and understanding of the educational experience of under-represented groups of students, the challenges they face within education and navigating Imperial life.

Activate mentees and mentors are expected to meet for a minimum of 6 mentoring meetings between November and June each year.

Activate Mentor/Mentee Training

It is a mandatory requirement that all **Activate Mentors** complete training in:

- Unconscious Bias
- Safeguarding
- Introduction to Mentoring, for Mentors
- Safe conversations

It is also recommended that mentors complete the Union Black online course, provided by the Santander Universities Platform.

It is a mandatory requirement that all **Activate Mentees** complete

- Introduction to Mentoring, for Mentees

Activate mentees are also supported through optional additional cohort activities throughout the year.

Mentees and Mentors are also invited to attend an end of year celebration each year.



Mentors 2023-24

Faculty	No. Mentors (alumni)	No. Mentors (staff)	No. Mentors (PhD students)
Business	1	2	0
Natural Sciences	3	0	8
Engineering	5	3	14
Medicine	0	3	14
Non-Faculty	0	1	0
Total	9	9	36
Grand total = 54 mentors			

Mentees 2023-24

26 Matches

Faculty	No. UG Mentees	No. PGT Mentees	No. PhD Mentees
Business	0	0	0
Natural Sciences	1	1	4
Engineering	0	1	5
Medicine	0	1	13
Non-Faculty	0	0	0
Total	1	3	22
Grand total = 26 mentees			

Mentor Training Evaluation: Introduction to Mentoring for Mentors

This course outlines a structure for mentoring, the skills to be an effective mentor and introduces the “**Aligning Expectations document**” which is used at the first meeting between the mentor and mentee to establish how their partnership will work.

Mentors who completed this course highlighted some of the benefits within their course evaluation:

- “the common issues and solutions”, “navigating challenging situations” “setting expectations and managing boundaries”.
- “Scenarios about challenges that can be faced, techniques and methods to get through challenging situations, good examples of ways to make mentoring beneficial for the mentor as well as the mentee”

Mentors also requested more example videos and case studies which we have actioned for 24/25.

Learning outcomes I feel better able to:	% agree and strongly agree
Outline the role of a mentor and mentee	96 %
Define key stages of mentoring	100 %
Identify skills and practice for effective mentoring	100 %
Explore resources for signposting	91 %
Tailor the Chemistry Meeting Document	100 %
Percentage who recommend course	100%

Mentor Training Evaluation: Safe conversations

This course supports mentors to feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics with mentees around assumptions, bias, power and race.

Mentors who completed this course commented on key points they will take forward as a result:

- “Will review the material and self-reflection, be conscious of my own biases and take action to counteract them”
- “Navigating power dynamics in the relationship and creating a safe space”
- “Make sure expectations are aligned”, “seek to understandand avoid assumptions”
- “Improve my listening power, engage in active listening”

Mentors also requested more case studies and further reading which we have actioned for 24/25

Learning outcomes I feel better able to:	% agree and strongly agree
Discuss and manage potential biases	100
Identify how power dynamics and views on race may influence open discussion	100
Percentage who recommend course	95

Mentee Training Evaluation: Introduction to Mentoring for Mentees

This course outlines a structure for mentoring, the skills to be used in effective mentoring relationships, highlighting that the role of the mentee is not passive. It also introduces the Aligning Expectations document.

Mentees who completed the course liked:

- “clarity of text presentation, Questions section”

Completion of this training was not monitored during 2023/24 and only one mentee completed the evaluation. A key priority for 24/25 will be to improve the completion rate.

Learning outcomes I feel better able to:	% agree and strongly agree
Outline the role of a mentor and mentee	100 %
Define key stages of mentoring	100 %
Identify skills and practice for effective mentoring	100 %
Explore resources for signposting	100 %
Tailor the aligning expectations meeting document	100 %
Percentage who recommend course	100%

Overall Programme Mentor Feedback

9
respondents

	Excellent	Very Good
Overall, how would you describe the quality of your experience as a mentor in the programme?	56%	44%

	Very clear	Moderately
How clearly defined were your mentor responsibilities?	67%	33%

	Very good	Good	N/A
How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?	78%	11%	11%

Overall Programme Mentor Feedback

We asked mentors, **“If you encountered any challenges with your mentoring partnership, please describe these.”**

- It would be nicer to meet in person but as we are on different campuses, only online was possible.
- At the beginning I was concerned about the purpose of the sessions. What were the goals, but this evolved depending upon what the mentee needed - work advice, sounding board for dealing with tutors, project advice. This worked out I think well in the end.
- I very much enjoyed the mentoring sessions and would have liked to continue with a few more.

We asked mentors to **“tell us about how the Activate Mentoring Programme has impacted positively on you.”**

- I enjoy being able to coach and mentor someone else more junior and help them to reflect on their strengths and also tackle obstacles, which is very rewarding. Our relationship also helps me to reflect on my own work and working style and think about what works well, what could work better etc.
- It has been very positive for me to pass on knowledge based on my personal life experiences to others who are interested and can benefit from it. As an alumnus, it is satisfying to give something back to the College. I too have learnt things from the students.
- I learnt more about the needs of neurodiverse students.
- I learned how to be a good mentor, the expectations of mentorship, how to set goals and follow -up on them.
- The training prior to beginning mentoring was very useful and the cohort activities during the programme gave a lot of useful advice for the mentoring process.
- I feel more confident taking on more mentees going forward. It has added another dimension to my supervisory teaching which is valuable.
- The programme has had a profoundly positive impact on me. I very much enjoyed the sessions with my mentees, we had great discussions, shared past experiences from our studies, cultures and countries

Overall Programme Mentor Feedback

Mentors were asked, “**are there any improvements which could be made to the programme which would enhance the overall experience for future cohorts?**”

- It would be nice if people on the same campus/nearby campus could be matched to increase the chance of in person interaction? Its hard to get over to SK for events too.
- The programme has been run very well, so no specific suggestions for improvement. I'm glad to hear that that next year's cohort will include disabled students too.
- Finalise pairings before meetings.
- Perhaps more insights into the actual conversations people have had during the mentorship. Anonymous of course.
- We would have enjoyed more sessions

	Excellent	Very Good	N/A
Overall, how would you rate the Activate Mentoring Programme?	33%	56%	11%

Final comments from mentors.....

- It is a great programme and strongly encourage Imperial to continue it.
- i would like to join the next mentoring cohort and actually practice what i have learnt

Overall Programme Mentee Feedback

10
respondents

Mentees were asked, “overall, how well did you think Activate met its objectives?”

Improved your experience at Imperial	80%
To feel part of the Activate peer community	60%
Activate supported my career development	80%
Activate contributed towards my deeper sense of belonging at Imperial	60%

Overall Programme Mentee Feedback

We asked mentees to “**describe how Activate has positively impacted you:**”

- I met people with shared experience and background as me, allowing me to realise that the difficulties I am facing are not single to me, but reflective of a wider issue experienced by many others.
- I developed a great relationship with my mentor which we will be continuing after the end of the program
- Having a mentor from a minority group felt more relatable. He also was ideal for the advice I was seeking. The speakers at the events were also very good and some of their words have stuck with me. Also nice to meet other mentees and mentors, it was a comfortable space to talk and felt like a community.
- Gave me an outlet to discuss challenges, such as workload, belonging, friendships, I've faced at Imperial so far and how to manage them.
- I had regular meetings with my mentor during the programme. She is very nice and caring. Our regular meetings made me feel supported and valued at Imperial. I appreciate the opportunity Activate has offered to help students develop connections at Imperial and feel the support from community.
- Encouraged me to apply explore career options and apply for internships to gain experience and confidence in the application processes, specifically interviews. It also helped me learn how to navigate my disabilities.
- By interacting with a senior PhD student, I solved many of the problems I encountered in my PhD life. Her experience has enlightened me and this experience of being able to interact with people outside the department has enriched my life.
- The mentor has helped me achieve my goals that I set during my year at Imperial and also helped me on how to organise my outlook for the future.
- I could share all my worries about my PhD life and I got a lot of advises for time management, communication with my supervisor and how to overcome frustration.

Overall Programme Mentee Feedback

Mentees were asked to “**describe how we could improve the Activate in the future?**”

- More variety in age range and experience, felt there were a limited range of mentors who had graduated or completed their masters/PhD.:
- Including more years (first, second years) to make the cohort feel more inclusive
- The programme is really well designed. It would be great if there are any gathering events for mentees and mentors respectively to share their experiences and ideas about their roles in this programme.
- This is partly my disorganisation, but it became quite easy to forget I was in the program - maybe there is a way to attract more interest in people to feel more part of the activate community.
- maybe have some event organised in the white city campus.
- I would say expanding Activate to wider background of mentees and mentorship to include disability, bursary, estranged, socioeconomic deprived students. This alongside a broader range(of backgrounds and professions)of speakers would make the programme even better.
- It will be nice to have some instructions to focus all goals in our future professional career

	Very satisfied	Satisfied
Overall, how satisfied were you with your mentoring partnership?	80%	20%

Overall Programme Mentee Feedback

We asked mentees to “**tell us more about your experience, positive or negative.....**”

- I found it very positive, but my mentor and I matched really well. I think it was great that the platform allowed for the mentor and mentee to select each other, whereas in other forms of mentoring you don't always get a choice to vet if you think you will get along or have a good understanding of each other. My mentor was amazing and helping me feel seen and as though my experiences are valid. They helped me work through some of the challenges of being a PhD student and of being a black woman in academia.
- Very nice mentor - Provide excellent advice and ensured all our meetings were structured. We met at good intervals, every 3-4 months and decided this early in the process.
- My mentor was very responsive and even though we are not in the same faculty she always aimed to give me the very best, tailored help I needed.
- My experience was good, the somewhat satisfied choice is very linked to the lack of attachment I had to the mentoring program due to personal things. It was nice to have a mentor that was also diagnosed with autism, which was very relevant to me being diagnosed at the start of the mentoring. I sometimes wish there was more structure for people like me who struggle to know what I want to from the experience sometimes.
- It was really good until my mentor became unresponsive which is understandable as they may have gotten busy, they were very helpful initially
- I met monthly with my mentee over the 6 months and they were excellent at giving me advice on how to overcome hardships such as heavy workload and how to prepare myself for the world of the work. They suggested particular activities related to my degree to help me stand out and I have effectively developed a great relationship with my mentor!
- Really good experience, we matched from the very beginning and she not only helped me with her own experience but also with mainly facts that happen in PhD life.

Overall Programme Mentee Feedback

Final comments from mentees.....

- I appreciate that the administrators did not push or obligate us to join all the events, as I was happy to just meet with my mentor as we clicked well. I'd like to say I really appreciated it, and that the emails in generally had a nice tone that felt welcoming, and not obligatory.
- I hope to stay in contact with my mentor so the programme was a success!

	Excellent	Very Good	Good
Overall, how would you rate the Activate Mentoring Programme?	60%	30%	10%

Activate Mentoring Programme Action Plan

Overall feedback for the three training courses was very positive but the programme team will take the following actions to improve the programme for future years:

1. In course evaluations, some individuals asked for more examples, case studies and materials, in response to this:
 - we are adapting Safe conversations to include a resource pack and activities around a case study
 - we are providing further links to materials and a new student support poster
 - The new course Mentoring Students with Disabilities has many scenarios which will be helpful for any mentor
2. We are updating all Activate course materials to improve the accessibility of graphics and cartoons.
3. The Activate Programme Manual and Handbook will be circulated to mentors/mentees in advance so that dates for training can be secured in diaries.
4. To help mentors with logistics and signposting we are:
 - circulating the Activate Programme Handbook in advance of their training
 - Including a new student support poster and Training Manual in trainings
5. To ensure that we can respond to feedback, the Activate online courses will be mandated this year and completion monitored.

Moving into 2024-25

- The programme team were delighted to receive funding in 2024 from the Research England Culture Fund to enable the development of a new stream of activate which will support disabled students.
- Up to 82 mentoring places will be available to support students next academic session:
 - 8 places for recipients of the Presidential Scholarships for Black heritage taught students
 - Up to 50 places for Minority Ethnic PhD students
 - 4 places for recipients of Imperial's Master's Scholarships for disabled students
 - Up to 20 places for disabled PhD students

