The SGSSS and Royal Society of Edinburgh mentoring scheme

Why did you decide to participate in the mentoring scheme?

Undertaking a PhD provides a vast array of opportunities for learning, as well as personal and professional development. When beginning my studies, I made a decision to grasp as many of these opportunities as was reasonably viable whilst still progressing with my own research. I believed the opportunity for interdisciplinary mentoring with a Fellow of the RSE would allow me to develop my understanding of research beyond my own lab, department, and field.

What have the main benefits been for you?

The opportunity for mentoring with a fellow of the RSE has allowed me to further investigate the growing interdisciplinary nature of research (a key aspect of my own PhD), as well as consider the relationship between universities and the private sector. Having worked in both the private (as a management consultant) and public (as a secondary school teacher) sectors, I was keen to learn about this relationship in academia, and how it can be fostered to further research at large, and individual career goals. Discussions with my mentor have allowed me to explore these avenues in addition to other topical themes in research, including impact, networking and collaboration.

How frequent were your meetings with your mentor?

On average I have met my mentor every 3 months. These meetings have taken place via telephone, in person at my mentor's offices, and (as is currently the fashion due to Covid-19) via video call. Having our meetings at such intervals has also allowed us to discuss my own progress and the directions I have taken my research.

What topics did you discuss in the sessions?

We utilised our first session to introduce ourselves and discuss the nature of our future relationship, the second session to discuss our own experiences in research, our third session to look at ‘impact’ in research, and in our fourth session (which is scheduled to take place in a couple of months) we will focus on career options. Within each of these sessions I had pre-planned discussion areas in which I hoped to gain my mentor’s insights, but at the same time I wanted the meeting to be organic and follow a natural, and at times spontaneous, course. Initially in our meetings I favoured the organic discussion-based approach, but as the year progressed I found I gained more from the mentoring sessions if I had spent time in advance reflecting in detail on the topics we were due to discuss. Using this philosophy, I found the meetings to be both focused yet also adaptable and flexible, allowing for more in-depth and meaningful conversations to develop along paths that felt most relevant to both mentor and mentee.