

# Big Panda / Wee Panda: A mentoring programme in Physics & Astronomy for all students

## What

**PANDA** is a near-peer mentoring programme for all students in the School of **Physics and Astronomy**. In this scheme, current students from Level 2 or above are matched up to new students to mentor, buddy-up with, or otherwise provide an additional layer of pastoral support to them. All new students who are either entering 1st/2nd year (undergraduates taking any of Physics 1, Astronomy 1, Physics 2, or Astronomy 2) or entering one of the School's MSc (PGT, taught postgraduate) degree programmes are welcome to join.

New students (mentees, a.k.a. Wee Pandas) must be enrolled on:

- Either an undergraduate degree programme, and in one of Physics 1 (PHYS1001), Astronomy 1 (ASTRO1001), Physics 2 (PHYS2001), or Astronomy 2 (ASTRO2001),
- Or a taught postgraduate programme among
  - MSc in Advanced Functional Materials
  - MSc in Astrophysics
  - MSc in Nuclear and Environmental Physics
  - MSc in Quantum Technology
  - MSc in Sensor and Imaging Systems
  - MSc in Theoretical Physics

Mentors (a.k.a. Big Pandas) must be enrolled on any Physics & Astronomy UG programme and have completed at least one year of education in the School of Physics & Astronomy.

## Why

### Benefits for mentors

A mentoring scheme will help mentors develop their communication, coaching and leadership skills and self-confidence – all important personal assets for employability. Mentors may build long-lasting networks with other mentors and mentees.

### Benefits for mentees

A mentoring scheme will help mentees in their transition to studying Physics & Astronomy at the University of Glasgow and develop their self-confidence. It helps to alleviate stress and fears, increase the sense of belonging to our community, and build relationships.

### Benefits for the School

A mentoring scheme will foster a sense of belonging in our School, enhance the development of a solid community spirit, facilitate sharing knowledge and experience across academic years, and strengthen the mental wellbeing of our students.

## How

Matching will depend in part on how many students want to join the scheme.

- Final year MSci mentors will be matched as priority with PGT students mentees.
- It is likely that each mentor will have more than one mentee.
- If we have more mentors than mentees (unlikely), not all mentors are guaranteed to have a mentee allocated to them.

Mentors and mentees will be asked to fill in a [form](#) and sign it. The form (on Microsoft Forms) contains essential points about the scheme, what can be expected from mentors and mentees, who to contact if something goes wrong. No application will be accepted other than by submitting a completed form.

## Example activities

- Regular contacts between mentors and mentees – at least once per semester, although it is hoped that more engagement will come naturally and will result in more interactions.
- Tour of the Kelvin Building / main campus (when possible)
- Ice-breaker activities via Teams or face-to-face when possible – see example activities at <https://symondsresearch.com/icebreakers-for-online-teaching/>
- Setting up / connecting with the wider cohort of mentors / mentees each year via messaging and social media platforms (e.g. MS Teams, Facebook pages / groups). Social media use is to supplement and connect with students more informally and highlight activities beyond the academic.

## Staff

After the initial setup, the scheme will be for students and led by students. An academic member of staff ([Dr Nicolas Labrosse](#)) will act as scheme coordinator and staff contact point for any enquiry.

Initial setup will comprise a one-hour session with mentors to discuss their duties and responsibilities. Two students (one among mentees and one among mentors) will be elected as scheme coordinators for the duration of the academic year. These students will be responsible for supporting the scheme successfully in the current academic year, and to take the scheme forward in the following year by

- Encouraging interactions between mentors and mentees, share tips, set up global communication channels,
- Organising the call for new mentors,
- Inviting new students to join the PANDA scheme and be matched with a mentor,
- Hand over to the next year's coordinators.

At any point in the duration of the scheme, any student who feel uncomfortable or unsure of what to do in a situation may contact the student or staff coordinators. The Equality & Diversity Officers, and the Convenor of Learning & Teaching, are also available to provide advice/support as necessary.

## Roles and responsibilities

It must be clear to all parties that the mentor's role is not the same as that of a counsellor or a doctor. If the mentee needs help with an issue of this nature, they should be directed to the Students Support Services. The mentor is not qualified to aid in these cases. For serious problems, mentors do not need to be told about the details of the problem, and should not ask.

Mentees may discuss with their mentors any areas of concern to do with university life in general. However it is not the role of the mentor to provide academic support to the new students, although they should be willing to point them in the right direction to find the help they need. For academic help, the student should contact their advisor of studies, class head, or course lecturer. For mental health, the student should contact the Counselling and Psychological Services.

- All should retain copies of their communications with mentor / mentees until the end of the academic year.
- All students must be treated equally and fairly.
- No student should be, or feel they are, victims of discrimination. If a student feels they are a victim of, or know others that are victims of, discrimination, this should be brought to the attention of the scheme coordinator immediately.

## Confidentiality

A solid partnership between mentors and mentees can only be based on trust and confidentiality. This means that anything discussed between them is private, and the content and nature of any discussion or question should not be revealed to other people. There are several exceptions to this however:

- If both agree that the mentor / mentee can speak to a third party about an issue or problem.
- If the mentor / mentee believes that there is a risk of harm to the other student or any other person, based on something that was said, or that a crime has been, or is going to be, committed. In any of these cases, students will be obliged to report the issue to the scheme coordinator, or if appropriate directly to Security.
- In some circumstances, advice may be sought anonymously.

Conversations will be confidential unless what is said falls under the above categories/exceptions. It will be emphasised that some issues that are discussed might have to be discussed anonymously with another person in order to gain clarity or further information.

In the first year of this new mentoring programme, all participating students will be asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the year, and to take part in a focus group discussion on a voluntary basis.

All students participating in the programme are encouraged to keep a reflective diary of their experience.

## Practicalities

The dates shown in red in column 1 of the table below are tentative and ideally will be moved forward in future years. As this is the first year the scheme is set up, all efforts will be made to make these things happen as quickly and early as possible, but there may be some deviations from the suggested timeline.

Two student coordinators, one Big Panda and one Wee Panda, will be elected by all Pandas. Their role will be to support other Wee/Big Pandas, encourage interactions between Wee and Big Pandas, share tips. They will also liaise with the School team organising the School-wide induction event in Week 0, and will be in touch with the scheme coordinator and other staff as appropriate to reach out and recruit new Wee and Big Pandas for the new academic year.

Early September	Call to recruit Big Pandas and Wee Pandas
By end of Week 1	Confirmation of Big Pandas by Coordinator
Week 2	Coordinator and Big Pandas to discuss mentoring scheme. New Teams site set up for Coordinator and Big Pandas. <b>This year only:</b> election of two student coordinators by other Pandas
Week 3	Matching of Wee Pandas with Big Pandas completed. Big Pandas set up communication channels with their Wee Pandas
Week 4	Coordinator / student coordinators to check that all Big Pandas have sent an email to reach out to their Wee Pandas
November	Coordinator to check with all Big and Wee Pandas how mentoring scheme is working
February	Coordinator / student coordinators to check that all Big Pandas have sent an email to reach out to their Wee Pandas
June	All Pandas to complete an evaluation form. Election of two new student coordinators by all Pandas
July	Hand-over between past and new student coordinators
August	Student coordinators liaise with staff to prepare School induction and communications to recruit new Wee and Big Pandas