

Looking to the future

TRINITY'S NEW STUDENT MENTORING SCHEME

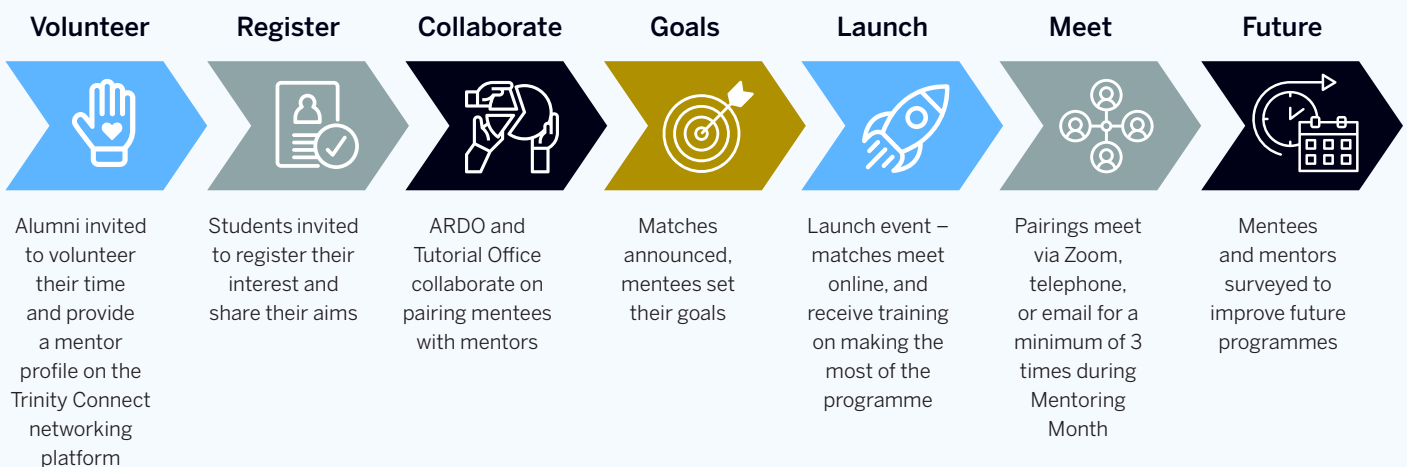
The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing effects left many students feeling a little adrift and uncertain about their futures.

For many months, our undergraduates had limited opportunities to interact with alumni and benefit from their friendship and guidance via the usual route of Alumni Association events and other activities.

To address this gap and provide support, the Alumni Relations and Development Office (ARDO), in collaboration with the Trinity Women's Network and the Trinity Business and City Association, launched

the College's first Mentoring Month in March 2023, designed to connect students with the alumni community and create a safe space where they could explore the areas students wanted help with, whether career related or general life skills. We were delighted to match 28 second-year undergraduates with 28 alumni volunteer mentors and are grateful to all participants for their commitment to this project.

How Mentoring Month works



Our alumni have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share to help students set their future paths. Our hope is that having benefited from this expertise, our current mentees will be helping mentor generations of Trinity students in the years to come."

Professor Catherine Barnard, Senior Tutor



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We asked one of our pairings to share their experience of Mentoring Month and what they gained from their collaboration.

Olivia Bouton (2021)

Second year English student and tutor

🕒 Why did you want to participate in the scheme and what did you hope to gain from the experience?

I am (and always have been) at a loss as to how to spend my career – as a child I had fresh schemes every week, spanning from dentist to cheese expert. It was all very well to thoroughly like my subject at school and university, but things beyond the cliff-edge of graduation felt very murky.

🕒 How did you both decide to structure your sessions?

Victoria was fantastic, and reached out soon after the programme was established on the Trinity Connect platform. We set up an initial meeting over Zoom after a few quick emails in which I vaguely detailed where I stood in relation to my plans and prospects. She was completely unfazed by my ambivalence, and fired back a comprehensive email with resources for a broad assortment of things I might like to do, from literary festivals, to publishing sites, to internships managing social media, to competitions.

On the call, she discussed her personal experience of writing, the publishing industry, acquisitions, and positions of the likes of literary agents. Writing was a part of her life that occurred after an industrious legal career; her words were comforting as she affirmed the normality of career changeability. She checked in with me a few times during the month, and since then has warmly offered an open door, should I wish to get in touch



again. Following this, she connected me to her friend and colleague on the Board of the Crime Writers' Association for summer work opportunities. Vanessa has been exceptional, offering me several avenues, including writing and editing work on her award-winning writing resources website (Writing.ie), and assisting her in June at Ireland's International Crime Writing Festival. I am unbelievably grateful to both of them for their assistance and initiative.

🕒 What did you most enjoy about mentoring month and what was the best piece of advice Victoria gave you?

Victoria and Vanessa acted as real-life heralds of the life I'd like to lead, with several projects occurring at one time – perfect for my limited attention span. They both undercut the unsubstantiated (and frankly, old-fashioned) idea that your initial line of work or position is where you will remain for the rest of your dull days!

🕒 What would you say to students wondering whether to take up the opportunity?

There's literally nothing to lose – if it so happens that your mentor isn't a perfect match, or you find yourself unengaged with their particular line of work, it's extremely likely that they'll be able to connect you with someone they know who might be better able to assist you.

Victoria Dowd (1990)

Victoria is the award-winning author of the bestselling Smart Woman's Mystery series. Her debut novel, *The Smart Woman's Guide to Murder*, won The People's Book Prize for Fiction 2021. She is the author of the Adapting Agatha series, and with her co-author and daughter, Delilah Dowd, she has been shortlisted for the 2023 Crime Writers' Association Short Story Dagger for the story *The Tears of Venus*. Originally from Yorkshire, Victoria was a criminal defence barrister for many years and is now head of the London Crime Writers' Association.

Q Why did you want to participate in the scheme?

Over the years, I have had help and advice from so many different people, and it has been invaluable. I always promised myself that I would do the same for others if I was ever in the position to do so.

Q How did you prepare for each of your sessions and decide what to focus on?

I wanted to give Liv a real breadth of opportunities to consider using a wide range of resources that I've found useful over the years. I was keen to ensure she came away feeling that there's a wealth of options out there for her. I started with books and publications I'd recommend and websites I found invaluable. I also gathered a range of possible places to consider as areas she might like to work in. I began with a blanket approach. We then focused in on what would be useful in terms of internships, giving Liv the chance to gain real life experience and



see an area of the publishing and writing world in action.

Q What did you gain from the experience and what did Liv teach you?

A huge amount. It was incredibly valuable to see someone so keen and vibrant at the point where they are thinking about future careers. She was a wonderful person to mentor as she was completely open-minded at the same time as being very focused on maintaining her creativity. It was fantastic to see that she had embraced the idea that there are many avenues open to her and she won't need to sacrifice her passions and inventiveness when she enters the world of work.

Q What would you say to fellow alumni wondering if they could be a mentor?

Go for it! There are so many ways you can help, even if it's just giving someone the opportunity to explore different ideas. I found it very inspiring to see someone at the beginning of their career and the positivity and enthusiasm they exude.

Trinity Connect – Volunteering to mentor

The Trinity Law Association has run a successful student mentoring scheme for a number of years. Our new scheme builds on their success, and has been managed through Trinity Connect, our bespoke online platform that enables you to network with alumni of all ages around the world. Join the 2000+ members who have already signed up, set up your own profile and sign up to receive news on upcoming mentoring opportunities.

You can also search the members' directory to get in touch with other alumni and ask for advice, offer others your help and expertise, and join our interest and regional groups – visit trincam.aluminate.net.

Want to know more?

To discover more about mentoring and how you could be involved, contact us at alumni@trin.cam.ac.uk.