

The vocational mentorship programme

HANDBOOK FOR MENTORS AND MENTEES
2025-2026



THE VOCATIONAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

CAE NAVITAS

Mentorship is a mutually inspiring relationship, where the mentor usually has more knowledge and experience than their mentees, and based on this experience can advise and guide them in their professional and personal development. The word 'mentor' originates from The Odyssey, where Odysseus entrusts the upbringing and guidance of his only child to his close friend Mentor before setting out for Troy.

CONTENTS

The vocational mentorship programme.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Dates.....	5
Your role as a mentor.....	6
Your role as a mentee	7
Matching of mentors and mentees	9
Start up meeting.....	10
Cooperation agreement.....	11
Developing the relationship.....	12
Log book.....	13
Ending the mentor and mentee relation.....	13
Calendar for 2025-2026.....	15
Addition: Input from past mentors and mentees	16
Contact information.....	19



Campus Navitas, AU Foto

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is written for participating mentors and mentees — as well as those considering to become one. The handbook describes what it means to be a mentor or a mentee and provides an overview of the annual cycle of the programme. It also includes a number of practical tips and ideas for the mentoring process, as well as a meeting calendar.

The Vocational Mentorship Programme for students at the Department of Civil and Architectural Engineering gives participating students (mentees) the opportunity to consult with a qualified engineer (mentor).

The mentor can offer their mentees insight into the daily life and career opportunities of an engineer — something that can be difficult for students to access otherwise. With a mentor as a guide and sparring partner, mentees also get the chance to reflect on their own goals, opportunities, and choices related to their studies and future careers.

The purpose of the programme is to help create a positive study environment and maintain student motivation. We also aim to prepare students for working life as engineers and to best equip them to handle the transition from study to employment.

The team behind the programme consists of:

Project Managers:

Pil Brix Purup, pil@cae.au.dk
Kristina Hoffmann, ks@cae.au.dk

Dates 2025-2026



YOUR ROLE AS A MENTOR

In the mentor/mentee relationship, the mentor is a qualified engineer who acts as a role model, sparring partner, and advisor for less experienced students. Although the mentor has more experience, it is an equal relationship in which both parties can learn from one another. The mentor does not set the agenda or decide what the mentees should do. Instead, the mentor contributes with their knowledge and experience, while the focus of the relationship remains on the mentees and their development.

Why be a mentor?

Many mentors highlight the joy of making a difference for their mentees and helping them along in their personal and professional development.

In addition, as a mentor, you can:

- Develop personally in the mentor role — for example, by improving your communication skills.
- Expand your personal and professional network.
- Get the opportunity to reflect on your own career path and gain new perspectives on it.

- Be challenged on your assumptions and values.

Mentor Qualifications

It is important that the mentor starts from the mentee's wishes and needs. The mentor should be a trustworthy and honest conversation partner, ready to listen, ask questions, offer advice, and guide. It is also important that the mentor is willing to open their network and help the mentee build their own, for example, by taking the mentee to visit their workplace or similar opportunities.

To be a good mentor, you should:

- First and foremost, have the desire to engage in a mentor/mentee relationship and contribute to the mentee's development.
- Be able to share relevant knowledge and experience so that mentees gain a better understanding of an engineer's professional life and are better equipped to navigate the opportunities available to them.
- Have strong communication skills, be a good listener, provide constructive feedback, and engage with your mentees openly and honestly.

YOUR ROLE AS A MENTEE

Why be a mentee?

As a student, it is often difficult to imagine what you will be doing as a qualified engineer. As a mentee, you can get help from a mentor that can provide information and guidance.

Through this they can help you with the following:

- Getting a more accurate picture of an engineer's professional life.
- Clarifying your career goals.
- Making career-related decisions during your studies.
- Building contacts and establishing a professional network.
- Managing the transition from study to employment.

It is also important to highlight that a mentor is a neutral and equal conversation partner. This creates a safe space to discuss topics that you might not want to bring up with a teacher who will assess you for exams, or with family and friends who may already have opinions on what you should do.

The role of the mentee in the relation between mentor and mentee

As a mentee, you must be ready to engage in the relationship with your mentor and take joint responsibility for making the relationship work well. You should be willing to reflect on your future as an engineer and be open to new knowledge and perspectives throughout the process.

The focus of the relationship is on the mentee's development and needs, but this also means that it is the mentee's responsibility to take the initiative to meet. The mentee should take the lead in determining which topics and questions should be addressed during the process.

The schedule for the programme is seen on page 5.

Foto: AU Foto

MATCHING of mentors and mentees

MATCHING

If the Matching is Not Optimal

All mentees in the programme are asked to fill out an application form with information about themselves and any preferences for a mentor profile. This serves as the starting point for the process of finding mentors and forming the groups.

The project manager matches mentors and mentees based on their professional interests. This settles the groups with one mentor and four to five mentees. The project manager also organises the groups into pairs, so that we have larger groups of 8-10 people that consist of two smaller groups. This allows for cross-group meetings if both mentors and mentees wish to do so.

What can the large groups be used for?

The benefit for mentors may be that they have a co-mentor to confer with, and that they can support each other during periods with a substantial workload. The benefit for mentees may be that with two mentors, they have the opportunity to gain insight into different companies and career paths. However, as mentioned, it is up to the groups themselves to decide whether they want to take advantage of this opportunity.

We always strive to make the best possible match between mentors and mentees, but the students' preferences for a mentor profile cannot always be accommodated.

The project managers may in some cases face a dilemma — should they choose to establish a mentoring relationship even if the students' preferences are not fulfilled?

In this situation, we generally choose to establish the relationship, as our experience shows that many mentees still gain a lot from it. However, it can happen that a group feels they don't quite fit together — either from the start or later in the process. In such cases, participants should contact one of the project managers.

START UP MEETING

Preparation for the Start-up Meeting

Before the start-up meeting, there are separate meetings for mentors and mentees, where you will be prepared for the start and get ready for your first meeting. You may have different needs within the mentee group, so it's a good idea to reflect on your own desires and write them down before the meeting. That way you can use these notes as a starting point without being too influenced by the wishes of others.

The Start-up Meeting

At the start-up meeting mentors and mentees meet for the first time. This is a great opportunity to discuss your expectations and wishes for the collaboration and to plan the first meetings.

It may be helpful to base your discussion on the bullet points below. Be realistic about possibilities and limitations you see in the relationship — consider both time and energy. Any decisions regarding these and/or other points you choose to address should be written down, so you can refer back to them later.

- What expectations do the mentees and mentor have for the relationship?
- What are the wishes of both parties?
- What level of engagement and effort do you mutually expect?

- Define your limitations/boundaries. E.g. should the relationship be strictly professional, or can it also be social?
- Should the mentee visit the mentor's company or other companies together with the mentor?
- What will you do if one party does not fulfill their part of the agreement, e.g., in terms of communication?

It is also important to agree on how you will proceed and set dates for the next meetings. Additionally, it is a good idea to agree on the communication framework. Do you use email, Facebook, or similar platforms? Remember, all communication between the parties is confidential!

We recommend that the group members commit to meeting in person and agree on dates for the first 2-3 meetings. We have found that dialogue and personal meetings are crucial for the success of the programme, and we assess that it is important that communication does not happen solely via email or similar methods. However, emails can certainly serve as a supplement to meetings during periods with less frequent meetings.

COOPERATION AGREEMENT

Formal/Informal Collaboration Agreement

There may be different opinions about whether the expectations should be formalised into a more official written agreement. Some may find it too formal, while others may see it as a good way to commit. If the cooperation agreement is used as a formal document, it should be signed by all parties. The most important thing for us is that you thoroughly discuss the framework, wishes, and expectations during the start-up phase to avoid misunderstandings later on that could damage the relationship.



Dialogue and meeting in person is important for the success of the programme. We advise that you plan the first 2-3 meetings at the very beginning.

Foto: AU Foto

Developing the relationship

After the start-up meeting you'll continue the collaboration as you see fit and agree upon within the group.

Suggestions for topics:

- What the mentor's work specifically involves.
- The mentor's future perspectives and subjective experience of work and career.
- Job search: Applications, CVs, job interviews, networking, and the transition from study to employment.
- The balance between work and personal/family life.
- Unwritten rules in the workplace or more generally in the field.
- The mentee's academic interests, experiences, and competences from their studies and extracurricular activities.
- The mentee's career wishes and goals.
- The mentee's academic choices throughout their studies.
- Depending on time and interest, it can also be valuable to participate in other activities together, such as professional meetings or visit the mentor's workplace.

Evaluation of the relationship

It's a good idea to regularly evaluate the relationship between mentor and mentee.

It helps maintain focus within the group if you occasionally take a step back and discuss:

- Have your initial expectations been met?
- Have your expectations changed?
- Have external circumstances affected the relationship?
- Should you make adjustments to the relationship moving forward?

If you have a formal cooperation agreement it makes sense to look at this one.

LOG BOOK

A mentoring process often leads to many new thoughts and realisations, but even the most important ones can be forgotten quickly. Therefore, a log book can be a useful tool for the mentee (and perhaps also for the mentor) to capture thoughts, ideas, and reflections throughout the process. The log book is individual, and it is up to each person how much they wish to write down. However, it can be an important support in achieving the goals that have been set or will be set along the way.



ENDING THE MENTOR/MENTEE RELATION

The programme formally runs from the start-up meeting in September to the last meeting in April. After this, it is up to the individual mentors and mentees to decide if they wish to continue the relationship more informally.

Experience shows that some groups achieve their goals during the fall and then only communicate via email until the final meeting in April. Others choose to continue meeting in the spring. It is entirely up to the you.

If the mentor-mentee relationship is terminated prematurely, e.g. before the midterm evaluation meeting, a project manager must be informed. This can happen for a number of reasons: unrealistic expectations, "bad chemistry," lack of time, and prioritisation issues. If one of the parties wants to end the relationship, it is important to do so in a way that is respectful to both the mentor and the mentee. This means that you should explain to your mentor/mentee why you wish to end the relationship and, at the same time, inform the project managers that the relationship has been terminated.



*We evaluate the programme each year
to help ensure a successful outcome of
the programme.*

Foto: AU Foto

Calendar for 2025-2026

ACTIVITY	DATE	TIME
Separate meeting with mentees	9. September 2025	16 - 18
Separate meeting with mentors	11. September 2025	17 - 19
Joint start-up meeting for mentors and mentees	17. September 2025	17 - ca. 20.30
Midterm evaluation meeting	5. Februar 2026	17 - ca. 20.30
Electronical evaluation	April 2026	
Last meeting	10. April 2026	17 - ca. 20.30

ADDITION

Input from past mentors and mentees:

Ideas for topics:

Work life and career path for mentors

- The mentor's professional experience and education, based on the mentor's CV.
- The mentor's reflections on their time as a student and their career path, including the choices they have made along the way.
- Daily life as an engineer and the types of tasks you typically handle in that capacity.
- An example of a typical workday from start to finish.
- Examples of projects the mentor has worked on.
- Balancing family life and career.

Options in the field of engineering

- Learning about what other engineers in the mentor's network do – the engineering profession from many different perspectives.
- Industry-related activities, such as trade fairs.
- Public vs. private sector employment.

Job search

- Feedback on the student's CV and job application.
- How to approach a job interview.
- Salary and salary negotiation.
- LinkedIn and networking – how to use them effectively?
- What matters most when applying for a job: grades? Student jobs? Hobbies?
- Workplace expectations for recent graduates.
- Personality tests/development tools used by companies.

The study days

- Exchange.
- Internships.

Balance between studies and jobs

- Elective courses/specialisations and their significance for future careers.
- Consequences of choices: electives, internships, master's degree.
- What are the subjects actually used for in real life? How are the courses applied when "on the job"?
- Differences in everyday life – student life vs. working life.

Academic topics

- E.g. requirements in documentation, new technologies, etc.

Ideas for activities:

- Company visits arranged in collaboration between several groups, so participants can see a variety of companies or experience different job functions.
- Company visits in small groups worked really well – there's a better chance to experience something hands-on when it's just a handful of people.
- Excursion to a construction site or completed project for civil engineering students.
- Experience the workflow in a company – e.g., attend a project meeting.
- Break the ice with an informal gathering such as brunch at someone's place, a visit to a board game café, pool and beer, communal dining, or just coffee and lemon cake.
- "Our mentor involved some of their colleagues in the company visit, which gave us insight into different job functions."
- "We enjoyed meeting in different settings: at the university, at a café, at the company."
- "We met with a master's student together with the mentor – this gave us a really great understanding of the master's program – more than expected."
- "We had a current intern come and talk about their internship. It was very informative and gave us a good understanding of the tasks you can get as an intern in a consulting engineering firm."
- "Students presented their semester projects to the mentor at the university."

Additional advice:

- Get off to a good start – plan a series of meetings already at the initial meeting. Consider setting a fixed meeting time.
- Align expectations within the group in terms of outcome and activities. Even if you're not sure exactly what you want to achieve from the beginning, you'll figure out something valuable through discussion.
- Talk about it and specify what you want to gain from a company visit.
- Take initiative as mentees to bring up the topics you're most interested in discussing.
- Create a safe environment where there's room for all the "silly" questions – fe.g., by talking about everyday topics or through informal activities.
- Choose the topics for the next meeting in advance so everyone can prepare and reflect on questions.
- Make sure to hold some meetings in the small group – it encourages more personal questions.
- Make agreements while everyone is present – it's difficult to arrange things over email.
- Plan the next meetings when the group is gathered.
- Create a Facebook group with your mentor – it makes communication easier.
- Keep it cozy – e.g., with coffee and cake.



Fotos: AU Foto



CONTACT

Keep the project manager informed about changes.

If you have any questions, comments, or similar, you are always welcome to contact one of the project managers either by email or in person. Also, keep the project managers informed about major changes in the relationship.

We hope that this small handbook helps you feel prepared for the programme.

Enjoy.

Pil Brix Purup, Pil@cae.au.dk
Kristina Hoffmann, ksj@cae.au.dk