## Guidelines for Prosper Coaches

**Welcome**

These guidelines are given to everyone who coaches for Prosper to inform them about the history of the project and our approach to career transition and development coaching.

At Prosper, our mission is to provide postdocs with the opportunity to break through limitations, enabling them to change their thinking so that they can alter their outcomes in their careers and lives.

**Prosper – An introduction**

Prosper is an innovative, holistic model for postdoc career development across the UK. Prosper empowers postdocs to take control of their careers, furnishing them with the information, tools and resources they need to thrive across multiple career pathways, both within and beyond academia.

Funded by Research England and four years in the making, Prosper's model is freely accessible to all within the UK Higher Education and Research spaces. Since 2019, Prosper has been working to create a new and transformative approach to postdoc career development, for rollout across the whole of the UK Higher Education sector. In the four years, we have worked closely with two cohorts of over 120 postdocs along with 100 employers, PIs and other stakeholders to craft a holistic and comprehensive programme of career development resources aimed at postdocs. As well as resources for postdocs themselves, Prosper offers support for Managers of Researchers looking to boost their postdocs' career development, as well as guidance and materials for institutions looking to implement Prosper locally within their own organisations.

**Prosper group-based career coaching**

Through the Prosper Pilot cohorts, we have seen that group-based career coaching allows postdocs to increase their **sense of agency** (the feeling that they have ownership of their lives); their **self-esteem** to express and share who they are; their **relatedness** (the degree to which they feel connected and supported); and, the **possibility** they see in their future.

These attitudinal and mind-set shifts lead to significant and long-lasting behavioural change that can transform people’s lives.

**Key guiding principles of group-based career coaching for postdocs**

**Community**

* We encourage postdoc groups to build, develop and sustain a supportive community based on authenticity and appreciation, in which everyone in the group contributes and is open to contribution.
* We create groups with clear boundaries, we are rigorous and compassionate about facilitating a robust and connected community.

**Possibility:**

* See beyond predictable or stereotypical views of postdocs/disciplines/ and actively enable postdocs to seek out new possibilities where there may appear to be none.
* We support all postdocs in defining their career aspiration (whether academic or not), and committing to the development and realisation of their own potential.

**Enabling career progression for all:**

For postdocs who aspire to an academic career, our coaching acts as an accelerator. Helping them to identify the next step, such as a fellowship, new collaboration or lectureship, and enabling them to get there faster.

For postdocs who want to move beyond academia, we help them to understand what they want and how to navigate a career transition.

We do this by:

* Holding all participants in unconditional positive regard
* Role modelling growth mindset
* Being aware of structural barriers (and how you respond to them – for example, don’t reinforce inequality!)
* Being open-minded about what we can learn from participants (such as having your perception of discipline or research working practises and environments expanded).

**Reflective practice**:

Commit to enabling the participants to develop the self-awareness to communicate flexibly, honestly and with compassion.

**Specific issues for postdocs**

**Stress produced by their role**

The combination of long hours, fixed-term contracts, and or competitive/bullying culture can create a lot of personal stress for postdocs. When surveyed about their jobs the main concerns are:

* The relationship with PI or line manager
* Workload/hours
* Unhealthy/toxic working culture

This can produce fear, obligation and guilt, so it is particularly important at the start of coaching programs to help postdocs to get in touch with, and look clearly at their career situation without pushing them to make changes (which can add more stress when they already feel overwhelmed).

They may not be ready to set career goals because they do not have enough clarity about what they want or need. So the postdocs may need to explore the what, and how and why for some time first.

**Professional identity crisis**

Like many other professions (doctor, athlete) where people only have one type of professional role throughout a career, the thought of trying to change careers can create a sense of identity crisis. In coaching this can manifest as a lack of confidence or a defeatist attitude: ‘it is how it is’.

It is important to be persistent and encouraging with people who appear not to engage deeply, because their avoidance or defence mechanism that they have built up may take time to shift.

More info: See [Reflect > Pivoting: how to handle identity crisis](https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/postdoc-resources/reflect/pivoter-profiles/)

**Social skills and group work**

Postdocs do not tend to have engaged in this sort of group work before. So it is important to spend time building trust and gently warming them up to the idea of disclosure.

The whole group will benefit from:

* Listening exercises
* Principles about open questions.
* Description of Non-judgemental, non-directive

**Trust and participation**

Always give the participants choices about privacy and sharing, for example, do you want me [the coach] to be part of that conversation or would you prefer to break out?

Debrief activities and ask for feedback about how easy/difficult they found the sharing, adapt to the groups feedback (this varies a lot in groups).

Invite the group to suggest topics for coaching conversations, don’t be surprised if nobody volunteers anything for a few months! They often take a while to get focused on concrete action.

**Group coaching in practice**

There are various coaching practices, models, and activities that can be used successfully within groups such as the GROUP model, peer-to-peer coaching, laser coaching, and having participants pair up to discuss insights in smaller groups.

In practice, a coach needs to be familiar with various structures and to be tactical about which strategy to apply to the group, as well as meeting the integral need to involve the group in driving the agenda and content, by describing the rationale for the content and activity and asking them if they think it would meet their needs or not.

The following points are an overview of group coaching in comparison to 1-2-1 coaching:

**Contracting**

* It is best practice to meet your participants individually before the start of the group program to learn more about them and their needs. Typically, this might consist of a 30-minute contracting meeting.
* This is an opportunity to explain what coaching is and how the program will work, to find out what they want to gain by joining the program, and allow them to allay any fears they have about the process.
* Simple questions to ask at this stage are:
  + What led you to join this program?
  + What would you like to get out of it?
  + What are your primary career development/transition needs?
  + What should I know about how you learn best?
  + How do you feel about being in the group?

**Templates for developing group coaching sessions**

Not all coaches will need a detailed outline, depending on where they sit along the coaching continuum, they may focus more on using coaching skills to respond flexibly to a group.

In practice, many of the coaches who took part in the Prosper pilot cohorts found it useful to have a detailed road map of how sessions looked at the start of a coaching program, but as the participants and coach become more comfortable and confident with the process, found it easier to enable a purer (less content-driven) coaching approach.

A general a template approach to structure group coaching sessions:

1. Check-in: Each participant says how they are feeling, and progress on the goal or anything that has happened in relation to career development/transition (depending on their goal).
2. Topic name (This can be source from the check-in, or elicited directly from the group or provided by the coach)
3. The main points of the topic/learning points/content;
4. Activities/coaching questions;
5. Debrief: What have you learned from this activity and how will you apply it.
6. Check-out: Each participant sets an action or intention to further their goal.

**Signposting for support**

Issues requiring support beyond coaching can arise. Below is a list of non-institution based resources and institution specific support for staff.

### **Non-institution based resources**

* [NHS England: Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/). An online resource to help inform and build resilience. Signposts to online talking therapies in England, as well as interactive videos on self-care.
* For support with financial issues caused by Corona virus, the following links may be of use: Guidance from the [Financial Conduct Authority](https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/mortgages-coronavirus-consumers) and the [Money Helper](https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en).
* [Samaritans – UK wide](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/), have a 24/7 phone line (free to call: 116 123). You can also get in touch via email.
* [The CALM zone](https://www.thecalmzone.net/) is a charity that helps prevent male suicide phoneline open 5 pm – midnight 0800 58 58 58, also has webchat function
* [Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/) has a phone line (0300 123 3393) and [a web page if you need urgent help with your mental health](https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/).
* [Hub of Hope](https://hubofhope.co.uk/) is an app that finds local mental health services close to you, so you can find support exactly when you need it.
* [Switchboard](https://switchboard.lgbt/) if you identify as LGBT+, call, live chat, or email (reply in working 3 days) phone 0300 330 0630 (open 10:00 to 22:00 every day), email [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt)
* [Women’s Aid](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/) (for those who identify as women): A charity that focuses on protecting women and young children. Support is available for women who are experiencing domestic abuse through a variety of platforms such as instant messaging.

### **If your life is at risk right now**

* If you feel like you might attempt suicide, or may have seriously harmed yourself, you need urgent medical help. Please:
* call 999 for an ambulance
* go straight to A&E, if you can
* or call your local crisis team, if you have their number.
* If you can’t do this by yourself, ask someone to help you.
* Mental health emergencies are serious. You’re not wasting anyone’s time.

**Support for staff at your institution**

[You need to provide your local staff support offerings here].