

# Postdoc mentoring

KU Leuven - YouReCa Career Center  
Nicole Wedell-von Leupoldt



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- ❑ Why mentoring for postdocs
- ❑ Evolution of this programme
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# YouReCa Career Center

## Conscious Career Decisions

The YouReCa Career Center aims to support early-career researchers (PhDs, postdocs, and tenure track professors) with information, inspiration, motivation and guidance to empower them to make their own conscious career decisions.

Featured event and inspiration





*Nicole Wedell von Leupoldt*

## Nicole Wedell von Leupoldt

Empowering to make Conscious Career Decisions || Connector || Business Development Manager || Moderator || Clown at heart

Leuven, Flemish Region, Belgium · [Contact info](#)

[KU Leuven Career Center](#) 

# Why mentoring for postdocs





# Objectives 2020

- Inspiring relationship to support professional careers and personal growth
- New perspectives, connections and advice
- Intergenerational and intersectoral networking



# Why mentee

- Sounding board
- Neutral / outsiders' perspective
- Being challenged & being supported
- Role model
- Learning from experience
- Unsure about staying in academia
- An opportunity for self-reflection
- Insight in unwritten rules of a career/organisation
- Positioning oneself for the job search
- Feel more engaged with society
- Insight into other domains & disciplines
- Building a network
- Want to write a book that anyone enjoys reading

# Why mentor

- Giving back
- Mentor mindset
- Changing the world one person at a time
- Sharing experiences
- Learning from new perspectives
- Reflection and training of leadership & coaching skills
- Satisfaction of watching others grow
- Reflection on own professional trajectory
- Building new networks



# Evolution of this programme



# 2020 - Who can be a mentee

**Postdoctoral researchers** in the broad field of  
**Humanities & Social Sciences**

Are you curious about career opportunities **outside the academic world?**



# 2020 - Who can be a mentor

A **professional PhD** from a STEMM, social sciences or humanities discipline and working in industry, government, in the third sector ...

Or teach us wrong!



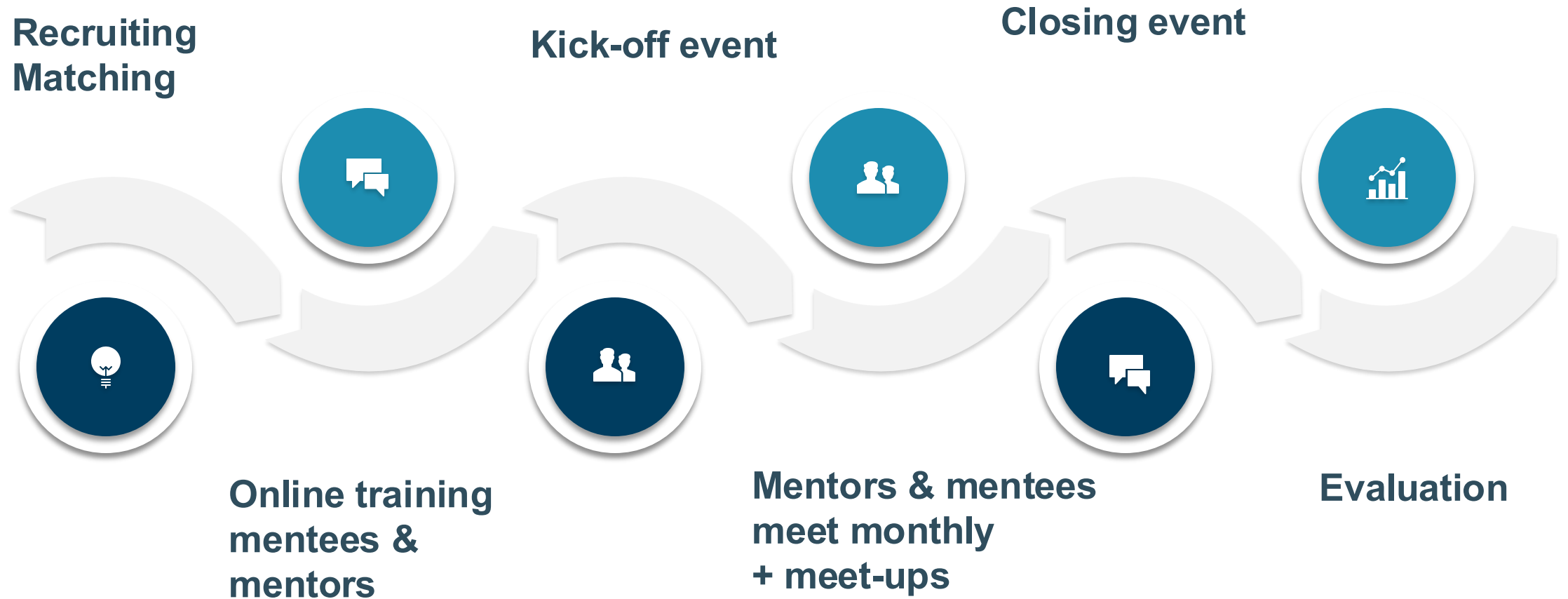


# 2020 - External mentors

- Schepen/ politician
- Chief editor
- Senior Policy Officer
- Adviseur Sociale Zaken
- Good Cause Account Management
- Research Director
- Teamchef Governmental institution
- Senior management advisor | Experienced CIO & ICT director
- Freelance Research Consultant
- Founder and Consultant
- Expert at consultancy



# Timeline 2020



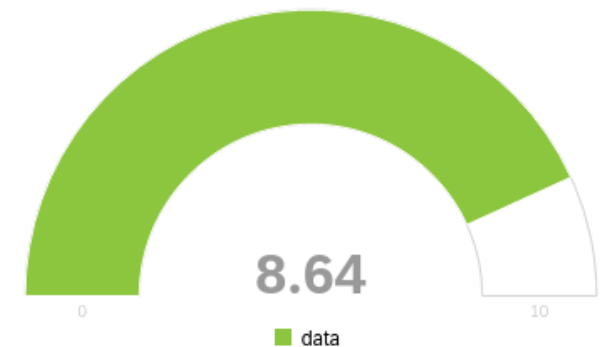


# The Mentees 2020

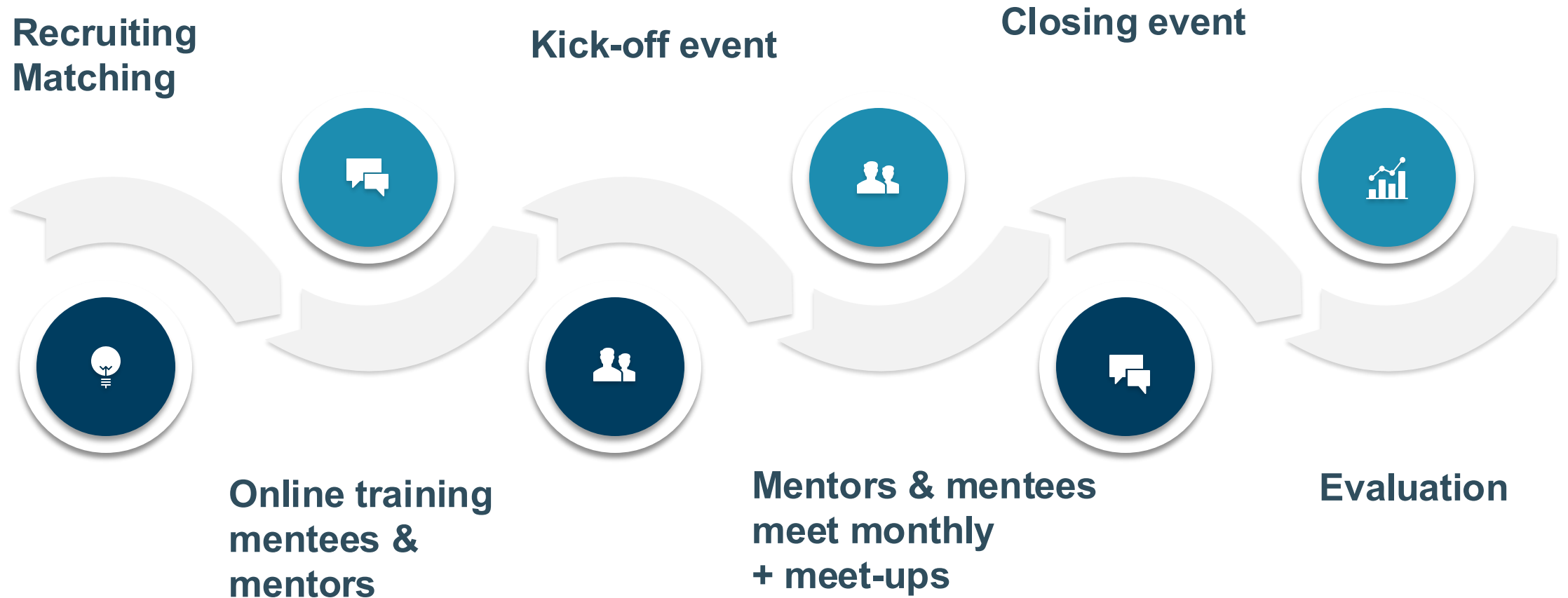
**Every post-doc should have a mentor** (permanent) in my opinion :-). ... as a post-doc you have often far less people in the same position than you in your near environment and you are given new roles without much guidance in most cases and you often have to balance between project outputs and keeping track of your future career goals. Therefore, I would see great value in a mentor for each post-doc. ...

I think **the time investment can be kept to a feasible** level for both parties (eg in busier times, you meet a bit less), and the **well-being and output of the post-docs will only be positively influenced, which is a win for all PIs involved :-)**

- More exchange with other mentees
- More guidance in preparing conversations
- Mentor within KU Leuven with industry contacts



# Timeline 2020-2024



# Participants 2023/2024

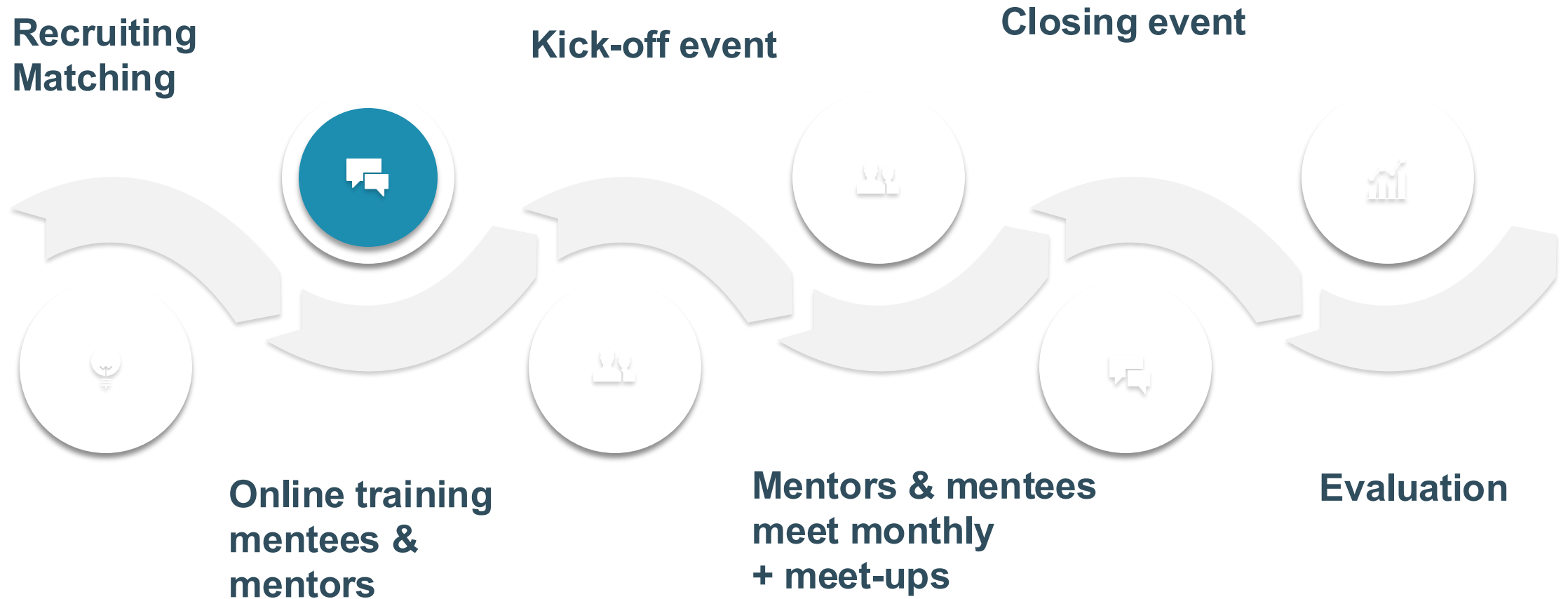
## 59 postdoc applicants

- 15 senior researcher
- 29 non-academisch
- 14 no-preference
- 1 non-academic within KU Leuven

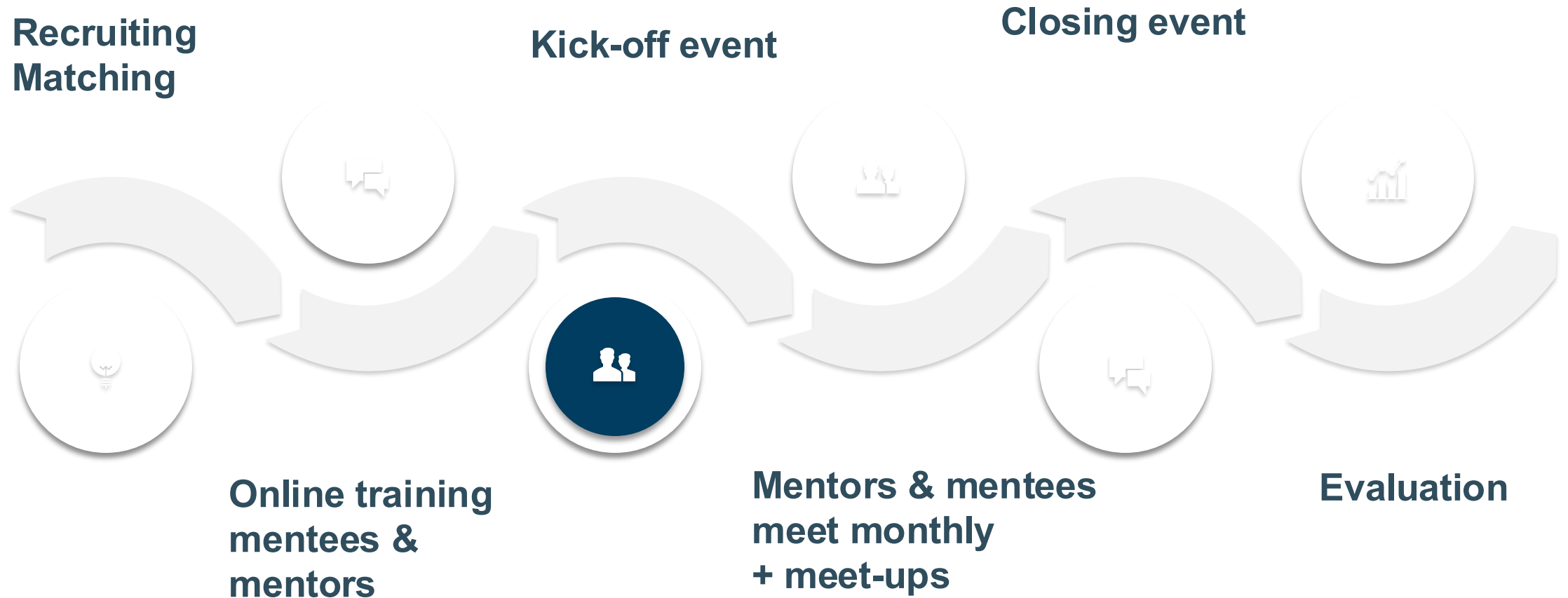
## 74 mentor applicants:

- 42 external (most with PhD from KU Leuven)
- 4 KU Leuven non-academic staff
- 28 KU Leuven academic staff

# Timeline 2020-2024

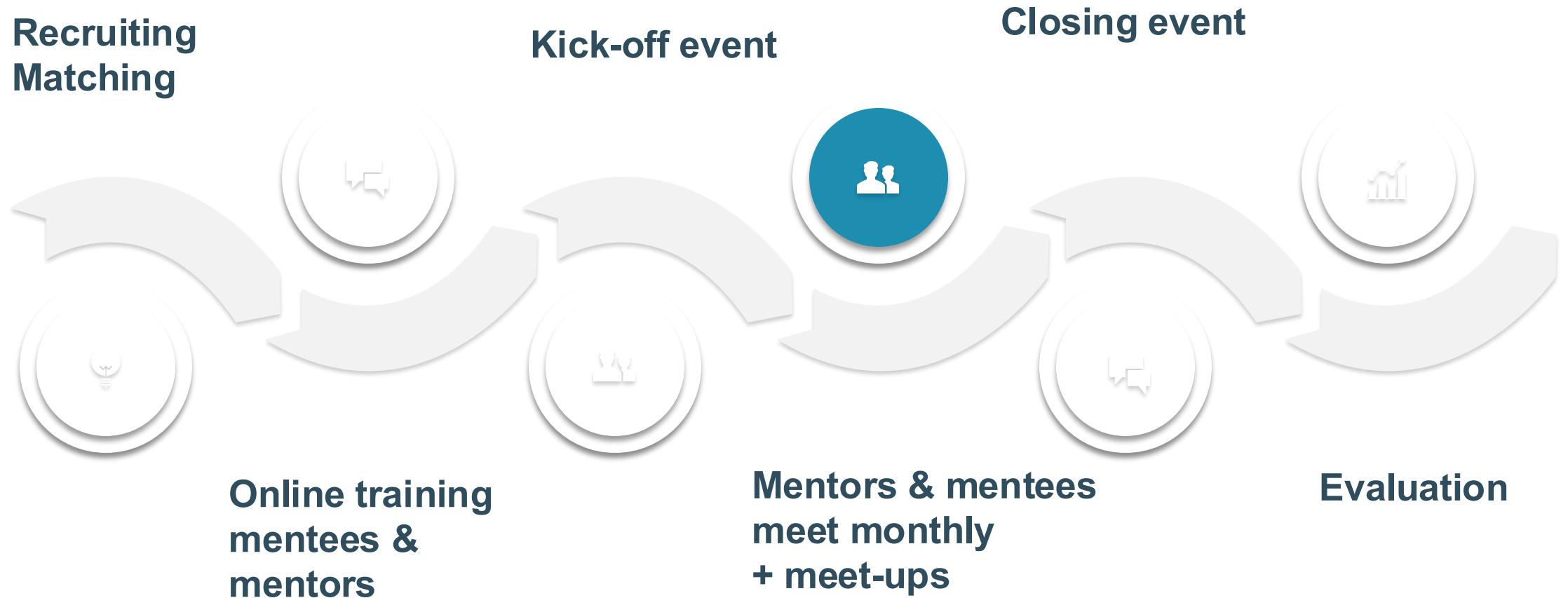


# Timeline 2020-2024

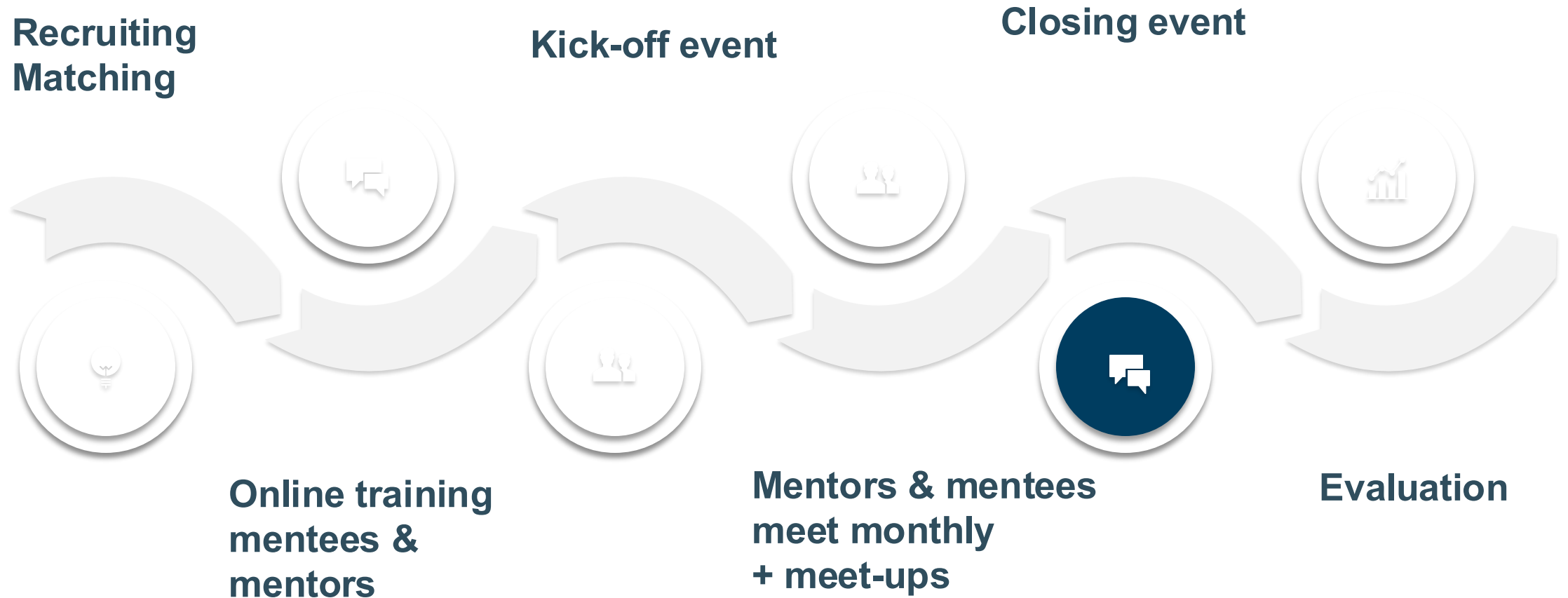




# Timeline 2020-2024



# Timeline 2020-2024





Erik De Bom • 1st

Adviseur Sociale Zaken @UNIZO |Geboeid door politieke theorie|Passie voor...

1h •

Grote dank aan mijn Alma Mater [KU Leuven](#) voor deze zeer fijne attentie. Ik mocht als mentor deelnemen aan het Professional Development Mentorship Programme.

...see more

[See translation](#)



KU LEUVEN



## CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

With gratitude, we award

*KARL VAN DEN BROEK*

this certificate for being a mentor at the Professional Development  
Mentorship Programme 2020/ 2021.

Signature

Prof. Ortwin de Graef

Director Doctoral School for  
Humanities & Social Sciences

May 2021

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KU LEUVEN

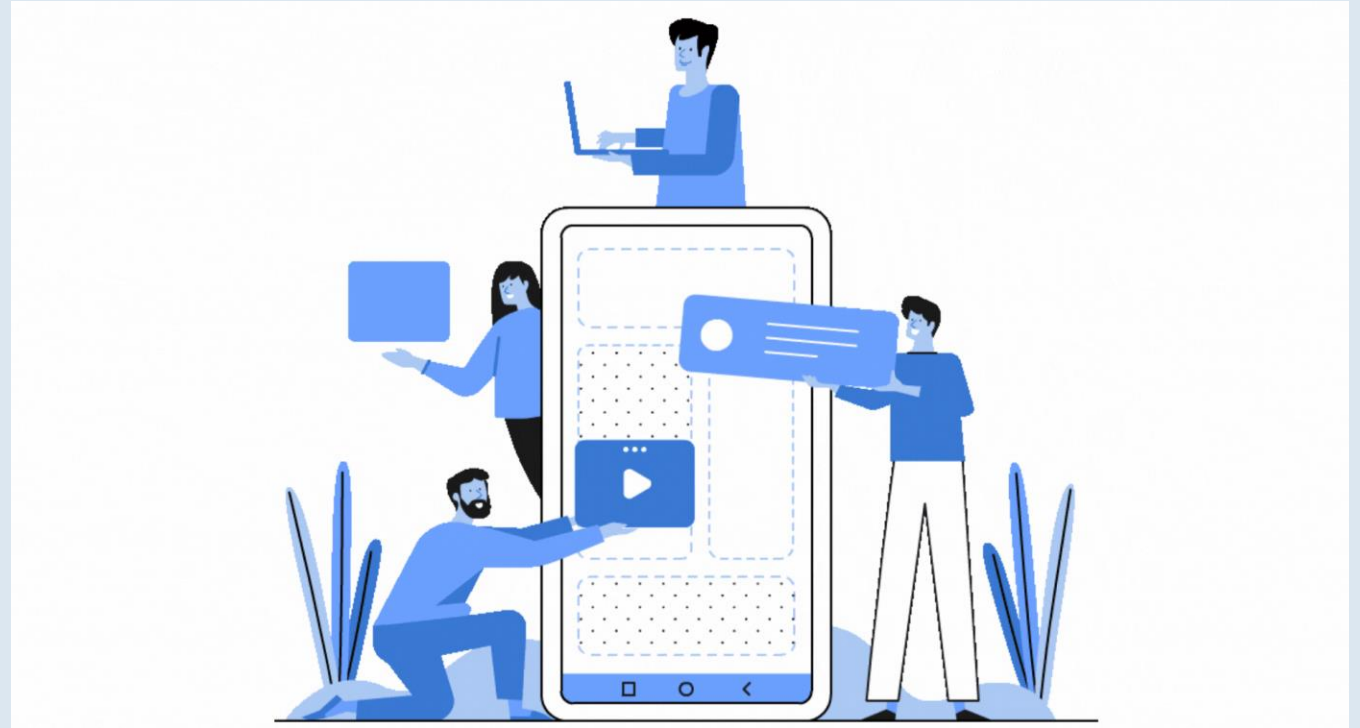
**ELDERS®**



**IMAGINE TOMORROW.  
TAKE ACTION TODAY.**



# Evaluation





# Unsolicited feedback mentee



I knew I wanted my career to continue involving science but, **prior to this mentoring programme, the roles I was aware of didn't fully appeal to me.** After learning more about Clio's role, (research manager) it felt like **there were positions out there that did align more with my interests.** Consequently, I was able to refine job searches and, earlier this year, **I was offered a new role which I have since accepted.**

# Mentee evaluation

Only 16 answers

Question: *to what extent does the following apply to your mentoring trajectory:*

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I have gained a more objective prospective on possibilities on labour marked

I have received valuable feedback for my professional development

I have gained a cleare prespective on the steps/skills required to reach m...

This mentoring encouraged me to take steps forward in my career development

I feel more confident in my capacities as a professional

I have broadened my network

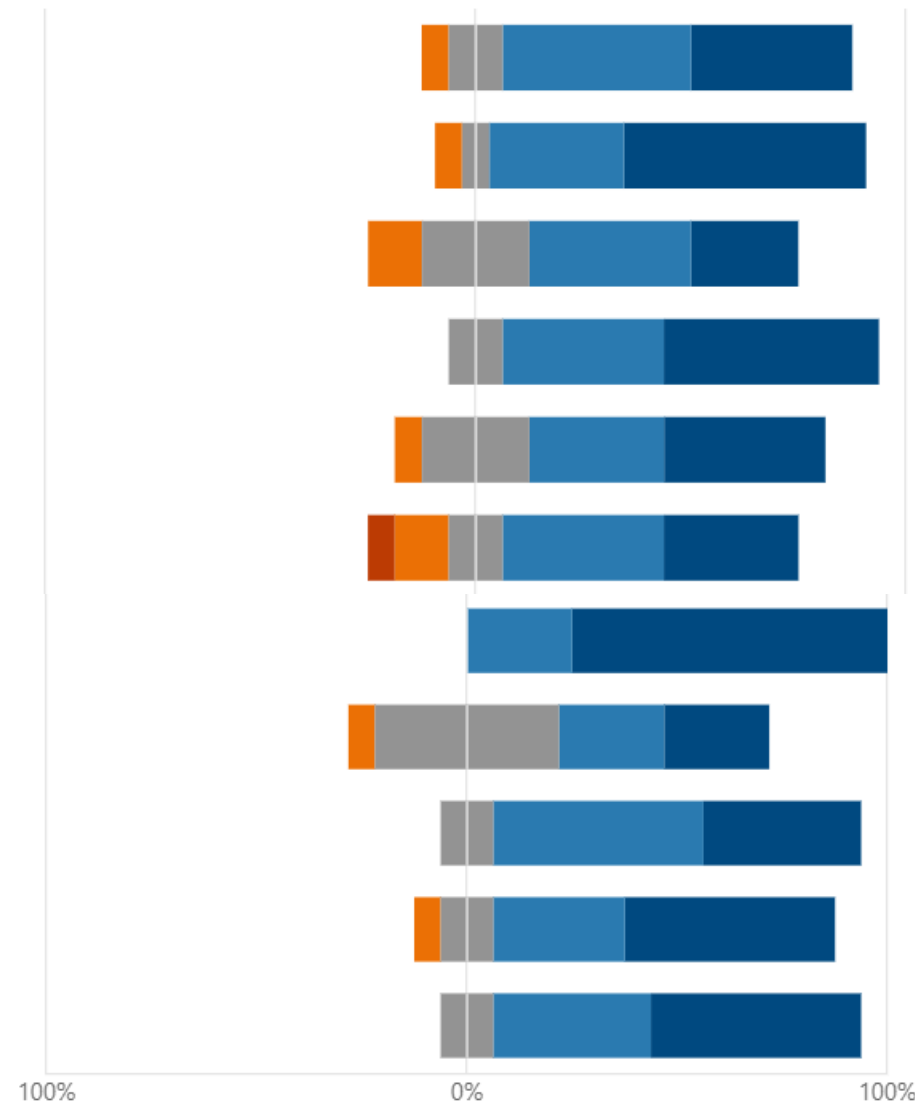
I would recommend other postdoctoral researchers to join the programme

In the future I will search for an (informal) mentor myself

I found it easy to prepare the mentoring conversations

I feel I have grown as a person

I feel I have evolved in my career(vision)

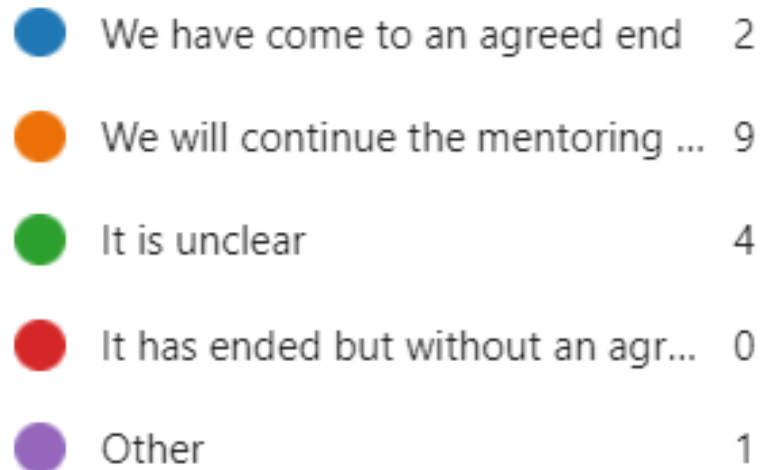


# Mentee evaluatie

## 4. What is the current status of your mentoring trajectory?

[More Details](#)

 Insights



# Unsolicited feedback mentor



- The programme is also very interesting! Once again, congratulations – I think this is a brilliant initiative.
- Thank you for your support in setting up the programme. I really enjoyed the experience.
- Personally, I found the mentoring programme to be very successful.
- I had another meeting with my mentee last week. We've agreed to stay in touch. Hanne has found peace of mind and told me that our conversations had contributed to that.

# Mentor evaluatie

## 10 answers

Match and trajectory with your mentee How many meetings did you have with your mentee?

1	anonymous	3 or 4, relationship was discontinued by mentee
2	anonymous	4
3	anonymous	6 or 7
4	anonymous	3, she found a job quite quickly (within the academic ecosystem) so could not contribute as much.
5	anonymous	4
6	anonymous	4. All in the beginning and then it faded out, the mentee did not reach out any more to request a new meeting
7	anonymous	Approx. 1 meeting per month, initially in person and later primarily virtual
8	anonymous	5 so far (the 6th one is planned for the 2nd half of June)
9	anonymous	6 meetings
10	anonymous	4



## 7. Mentoring experience

To what extent does the following apply to your mentoring experience:

[More Details](#)

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

I believe we had meaningful conversations and I could provide guidance

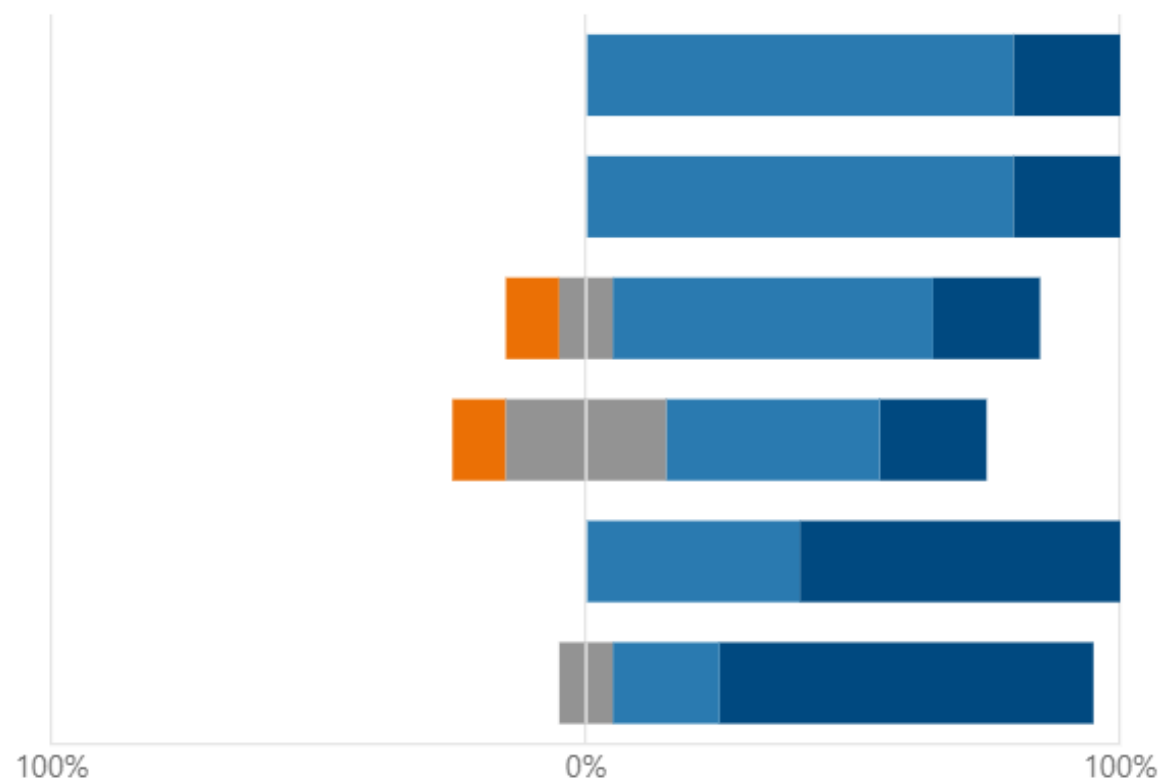
I believe my mentee has gained insides/skills valuable for their career development

I believe my mentee has taken steps forward in their professional development

As a mentor I have gained insights/skills valuable for my own professional development

I enjoyed exchanging with a postdoctoral researcher

I would consider being a mentor again in the future





mentoring-programme

# Mentoring for postdocs 2025/2026





# Objectives 2025

- Support postdoctoral researchers in their further professional and personal development, both towards an academic and non-academic career.
- Facilitate networking.
- Offer new perspectives, connections, and advice.
- Encourage an inclusive feedback culture in the workplace.



# Timeline 2025-2026

**Recruiting  
AI based Matching**

**Mentors & mentees  
meet monthly**

**Closing mentee  
meet-up**



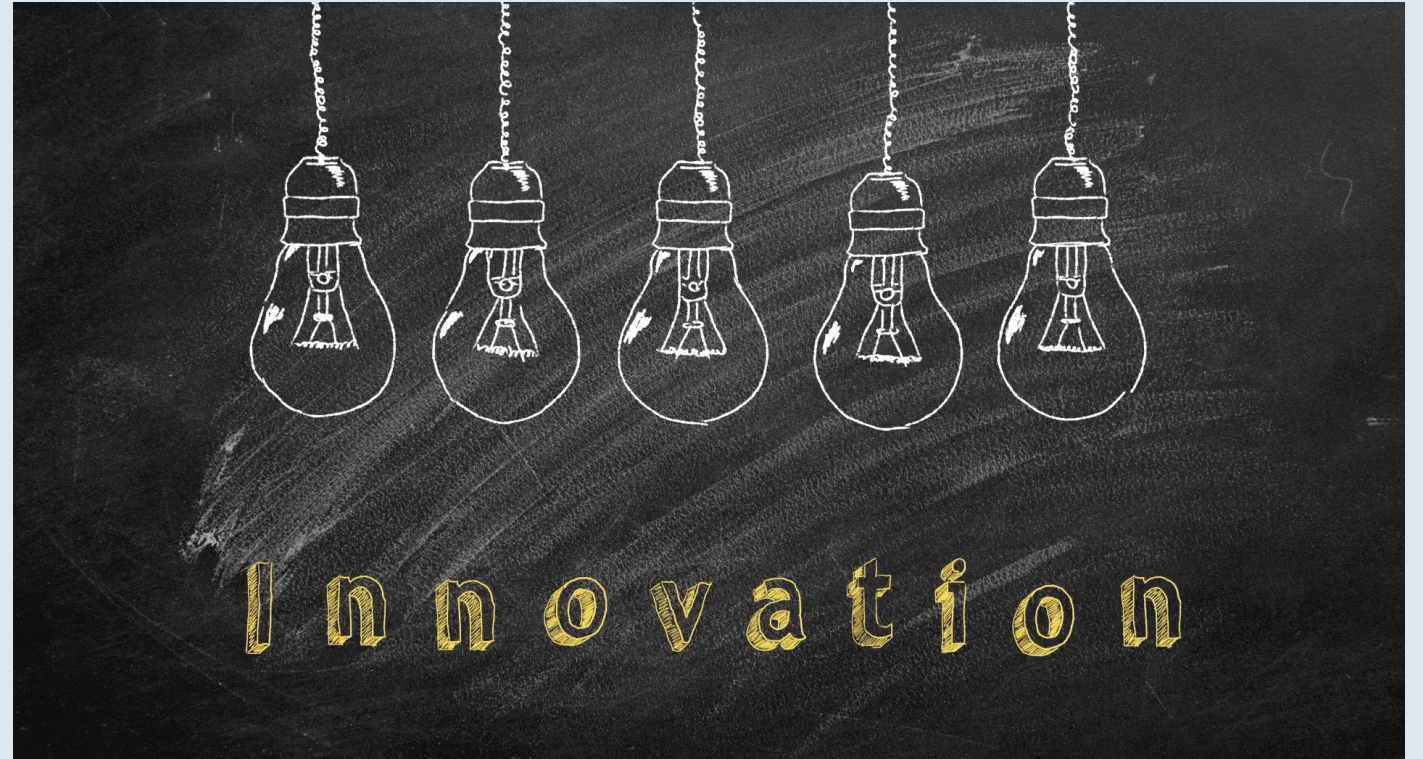
**Kick-off event  
based on  
E-learning module**

**New Year's reception**

**Deeper evaluation**



# The matching



# Mentee application – we need text for the LLM

- Personal data, faculty...
- Motivation
- Topics one would like to discuss, specific challenges
- Preferred mentor: specific name, seniority, academic vs non-academic
- Giving back



# Mentor application – we need text for the LLM

- Personal data, faculty...
- Motivation
- Topics one would like to discuss
- What skills and experiences they bring as a mentor
- Ideal mentee




# The preparation of mentees and mentors






# E-learning to enhance the trajectory

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Chapter 1: Mentee and Mentor Roles




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Chapter 2: The Mentoring Trajectory




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Chapter 3: For Mentors: Skills and Strategies




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Chapter 4: For Mentees: Defining Goals, Questions and Receiving Feedback



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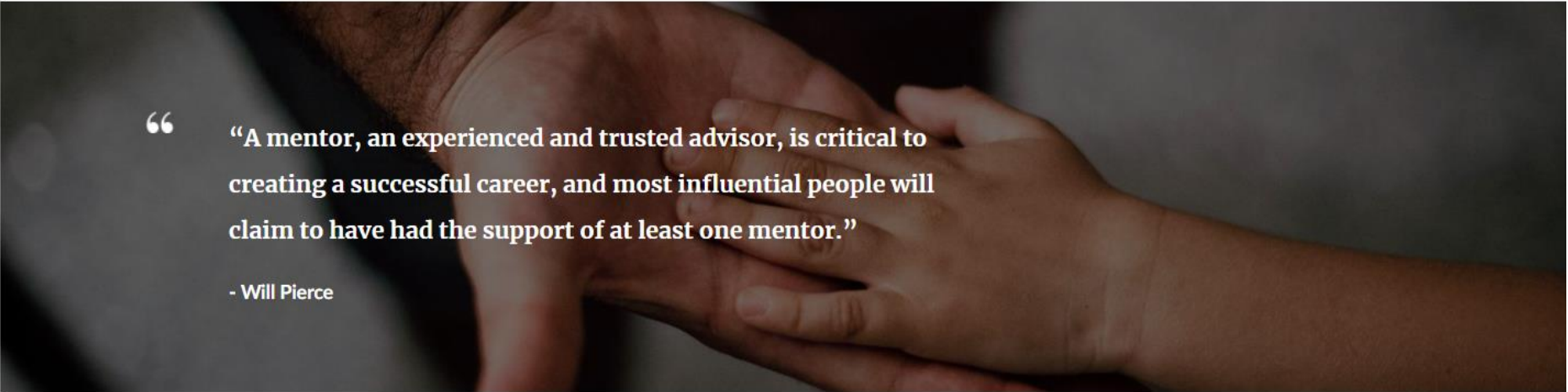
Chapter 5: Additional Resources



Lesson 1 of 5

## Chapter 1: Mentee and Mentor Roles

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“

A mentor, an experienced and trusted advisor, is critical to creating a successful career, and most influential people will claim to have had the support of at least one mentor.”

- Will Pierce


”

# Chapter 2: The mentoring trajectory

- ☐ **The Different Stages of a Mentoring Trajectory:** mentoring as a process in time, each stage has its purpose
- ☐ **Principles for an Effective Mentoring Meeting:** broad tips for the mentoring trajectory
- ☐ **Preparing for the first meeting**
  - As a mentor
  - As a mentee
- ☐ **How to structure the following meetings**
  - The three stages of a mentoring session:
  - The **GROW model** to structure your mentoring sessions
- ☐ **How to conclude your individual mentoring trajectory**







# Chapter 3: For mentors: Skills and strategies







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 Chapter 1: Mentee and Mentor Roles 

 Chapter 2: The Mentoring Trajectory 

 **Chapter 3: For Mentors: Skills and Strategies** 

 Chapter 4: For Mentees: Defining Goals, Questions and Receiving Feedback 

 Chapter 5: Additional Resources 



## Strategies

- ☐ Building trust
- ☐ Exploring the multiple hats of a mentor

## Skills



- ☐ Active empathic listening
- ☐ Asking questions - powerful questions
- ☐ Reframing
- ☐ Giving feedback



# Chapter 4: For mentees







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 Chapter 1: Mentee and Mentor Roles 

 Chapter 2: The Mentoring Trajectory 

 Chapter 3: For Mentors: Skills and Strategies 

 Chapter 4: For Mentees: Defining Goals, Questions and Receiving Feedback 

 Chapter 5: Additional Resources 

In this section, we focus on methods that help you sharpen goals and questions for the mentoring. Below you can find several exercises, choose the one that suits you best!



## Defining goals

- Success criteria for mentoring
- Scaling question
- Out-of-the-box exercise



## Defining questions

- Individual development plan
- Other topics relevant for mentees
- Feedforward



## Receiving feedback

# E-learning to enhance the trajectory

The screenshot displays the 'Mentoring @KU LEUVEN' e-learning platform. On the left, an orange sidebar contains the course title and a progress indicator showing '0% COMPLETE'. Below this, a list of chapters is shown, with 'Chapter 5: Additional Resources' highlighted. The main content area on the right is titled 'Chapter 5: Additional Resources' and includes a sub-header 'Lesson 5 of 5'. The text asks if the user is looking for more resources to support their mentoring trajectory. It then recommends three materials: a podcast 'The three C's of feedback' by prof. Elad N. Sherf, a podcast 'Asking Powerful Questions With David Clutterbuck' available on Spotify and YouTube, and a webinar 'Preparing for your first mentoring meeting' by dr. Amy Iversen for the Academy of Medical Sciences.

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- Chapter 1: Mentee and Mentor Roles
- Chapter 2: The Mentoring Trajectory
- Chapter 3: For Mentors: Skills and Strategies
- Chapter 4: For Mentees: Defining Goals, Questions and Receiving Feedback
- Chapter 5: Additional Resources**

Lesson 5 of 5

## Chapter 5: Additional Resources

Are you looking for more resources to support you in your mentoring trajectory, or would you simply like to learn more about mentoring?

We recommend the following materials:

- Podcast [The three C's of feedback](#) by prof. Elad N. Sherf
- Podcast Asking Powerful Questions With David Clutterbuck available on [spotify](#) and [youtube](#)
- Webinar [Preparing for your first mentoring meeting](#) by dr. Amy Iversen for the Academy of Medical Sciences



[mentoring-programme](#)



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