

ENGLISH

MENTORING - PROGRAMME *for Female Postdocs*

Mentoring Handbook



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THE MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR FEMALE POSTDOCS WITHIN THE HALLE – JENA – LEIPZIG UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

Creating internationally competitive framework conditions to attract and provide excellent support to highly-qualified young academics is of particular importance in the context of ensuring the German higher education and research system's ability to compete and its viability for the future.

In this context, the equal participation of women in all areas and at all levels of the higher education system is a decisive factor. Providing targeted support for young female researchers in the pursuit of their academic careers and ensuring their sustainable integration in the academic system is therefore a major factor for universities in developing and safeguarding both their quality and their role as a location for science.

The mentoring programme for female Postdocs is an inter-university initiative by the universities of Halle-Wittenberg, Jena and Leipzig.

It aims to enable high-achieving female researchers pursuing a career in science with the ultimate aim of a professorship to access guidance and personal support from experienced mentors who provide the knowledge, key competencies and contacts required for the Postdocs to plan and pursue their professional career in an effective manner.

Moreover, the nature of cross-mentoring in the university alliance offers all participants the opportunity to gain interdisciplinary and inter-university insights and contacts in a range of specialist areas, institutional structures and disciplines within the three partner universities.

The mentoring process extends over a period of one year. It is possible to extend the process for a further year if the mentee, mentor and programme coordinators all agree to this. Two cohorts comprising up to 48 Postdocs are actively engaged in the programme with their mentors at any one time.

The core element of the programme is one-to-one mentoring, in which an experienced professor from one of the two other partner universities stands ready to assist the Postdoc for the duration of the programme. Face-to-face meetings should be held (at least) once per semester. The number and duration of the mentoring duo and peer groups' meetings, and the intervals between them, are personally agreed by the participants.

The mentoring is complemented by selected training courses on key career-related skills, as well as by services that promote integration in an interdisciplinary peer network providing long-term support.

The Postdocs are prepared for participation in the programme and the mentoring relationship, in particular in terms of their associated expectations and aims as well as their role and responsibilities.

The programme rounds begin and end in June each year with a collective event (opening, interim and concluding event). As part of this, the new participants are welcomed to the programme, while those who have elected to extend their participation for a further year can come together and take stock. Those ending their participation say an official farewell to the programme at the event. In addition, the event provides formats to enable different groups of mentees and mentors to exchange experiences and make new contacts.

The programme is jointly led and coordinated by the three universities (see Chapter 7). Mentees and mentors should direct any queries to the respective coordination centres at their university.



The objective of the mentoring relationship is to motivate, advise and equip the mentee with the skills to plan and develop their career in academia, as well as to convey knowledge of structures, processes and the 'rules of the game' involved in professional academic operations. The experienced mentors provide assistance in career planning, explain the leadership requirements of a professorship and facilitate access to important academic networks.

Participation in a mentoring process should by no means replace formal, specialist support for the Postdocs; rather, the focus in the process on interdisciplinary and informal knowledge and related skills, conveyed in a structure free of hierarchical restrictions and dependences, should serve as a valuable complement to assist female Postdocs. In this respect, though experienced professors act as mentors in the programme, and most of them deal with related fields, they work in research and teaching at one of the other alliance universities.

Mentoring involves:

- an exchange of experience and informal knowledge on (career-) related aspects and the 'rules of the game' in the academic and higher education system and the specialist area
- collective reflection on the mentee's strengths, weaknesses and objectives as well as discussion of the specific requirements and opportunities both within and beyond the mentoring process
- development of individually appropriate career prospects and a career strategy
- individual advice and feedback in preparing for and taking specific career steps
- support in building and expanding a network within the academic community.

3.1 Objectives and requirements for mentees

Mentoring can support the mentee in realizing the following objectives:

- reinforcement of self-competencies (empowerment)
- insight into different university structures and disciplines
- sound career decisions on the basis of an analysis of the Postdoc's personal potential and objectives, as well as comprehensive reflection on academia as a professional career
- obtaining formal and informal career-related knowledge of structures, processes and 'rules of the game' involved in professional academic operations
- contemplation of gender-specific factors in academic career paths
- development of an individual career strategy
- support in planning specific projects and career steps
- building an academic profile
- development of career-related knowledge and required key competencies in areas relevant to the academic field
- integration in the international, subject-specific scientific community
- inter-institutional (peer) networking
- development of strategies to reconcile a career in academia with family life and dual-career partnership



The mentee should fulfil the following requirements for a successful mentoring relationship:

Clear expectations and objectives

In the initial phase of the mentoring relationship, the mentee formulates clear expectations and objectives for themselves and agrees these with the mentor. The more specific and tangible the mentee's formulation of their aims and objectives, the better their mentor will be able to support them in attaining their objectives.

Professional prospects

The mentees reflect on their interests and opportunities and, in the course of the mentoring process, compile prospects for their own academic career and strategies by which to realize them.

Active role

The mentees undertake the active role in the collaboration. As they are the party asking questions and learning from the relationship, they actively introduce their interests. In so doing, they apply their personal skills and knowledge creatively and with dedication, bear responsibility for their development and make their own decisions.

Keep in contact

The mentees keep in contact with their mentors and inform them regularly of the progress of their development. If both parties agree, the mentee may also get in touch outside of the agreed meeting schedule for urgent questions, such as by telephone or by email.

Openness

The mentees are open and honest towards the mentors, and must be prepared to share their experiences with them. This makes it possible to identify the causes of mistakes or difficult situations. The mentees should be ready to take on board the mentor's support and advice.

Self-critical observation

The mentees analyse and apply their own skills, are prepared to critically scrutinize themselves, identify their own strengths and weaknesses and work to improve these.

3.2 Objectives and requirements for mentors

The mentors make a committed contribution to support for young academics and equal opportunities in science. In so doing, they are visible both as proficient specialists in their discipline and accomplished leaders dedicated to supporting young members of staff. The role of mentor, though primarily motivated by personal ideals, enhances the mentor's standing both in public and academic spheres while simultaneously underlining their professional character.

Commitment to the role of mentor offers the chance

- to reinforce the mentor's own leadership skills, work with young academics and mentoring activities
- to gain new impetus, perspectives and feedback from the mentees
- to expand the mentor's own network of contacts and opportunities for cooperation

Taking on the role of mentor also means committing to the following tasks:

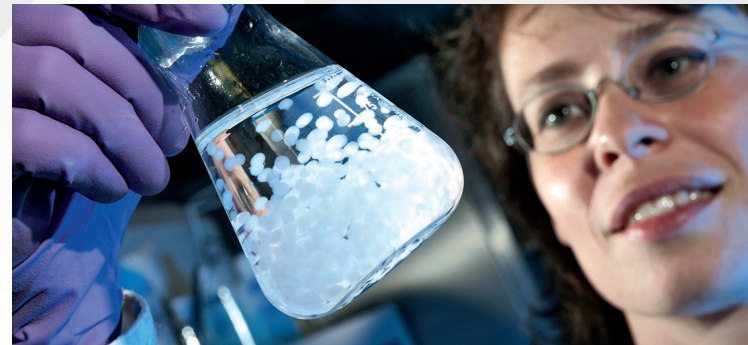
Mentors are experienced, professional academics who advise the less experienced mentees on their professional development, inform them of key 'rules of the game' and aspects of working cultures, and introduce them to relevant spheres of an academic career.

Providing advice and sharing knowledge

Mentors stand ready to advise and encourage their mentees, and help them to reflect on their current professional situation, opportunities and prospects, define objectives, develop strategies to achieve these and specific steps to pursue them.

Providing guidance and strategies

Possible approaches to solve complex problems can be presented in a neutral, independent manner. Potential for development is made visible, promising potential approaches are uncovered, and help and encouragement is given for unconventional, promising methods.



Supporting

Mentors share their own professional experiences with the mentees. They reveal realistic career objectives and methods to achieve them.

Networking

The mentor raises the mentee's awareness of the nexus between career paths, networking and collaboration, and opens up their own cross-hierarchical networks in the scientific community.



Key principles for a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee are mutual openness and honesty, the ability to be critical and accept criticism, dedication, respect, trust and discretion.

Openness

Both sides have an interest in creating an open exchange, as topics will often be discussed that are not addressed in other settings. The mentee should be able to disclose mistakes and weaknesses without fear of negative impacts on their professional career.

Trust and discretion

The mentoring process includes a very personal exchange about research activities, informal knowledge, professional experience, conduct, etc. Trust is a precondition for this exchange, as both sides must feel certain that matters discussed will not be passed on to others – or only following the explicit agreement of both parties.

No hierarchical allocation

Mentoring is not a hierarchical relationship and does not afford the mentor the authority to issue instructions. Instead, it is an advisory and exchange-based collaboration between two people with varying horizons of experience.

Voluntariness

Mentoring is based on personal interests and individual commitment afforded in addition to daily professional responsibilities.

Reciprocity

Mentoring is a reciprocal process of giving and taking in which both parties can learn from each other.

Regularity and commitment

Mentoring means accompanying the development of a person over a set period of time. This presupposes that both parties are aware of which topics they are currently focused on; this can only be achieved through regular contact and mutual information which can, in turn, lead to a sense of connectedness. In past experience, connectedness also leads to commitment.

For the first meeting, it is recommended that the participants clarify the fundamentals of the mentoring relationship. This includes agreements on the framework conditions as well as on each participant's specific objectives and expectations for the mentoring relationship and for each other. Clarifying these aspects helps to avoid any misunderstandings and structure the mentoring process.

5.1 Clarifying the framework conditions

In order to structure the mentoring process to the satisfaction of both parties and avoid any confusion, it is recommended that mentors and mentees make clear arrangements on the following aspects in the first meeting:

Confidentiality of meetings

A profitable mentoring relationship requires a candid and trusting exchange between the participants. It is recommended that mentee and mentor come to an understanding and commit to keep the contents of their meetings confidential and only to discuss the topics and contents of the mentoring partnership with third parties when they have explicitly agreed this in advance. This agreement should also apply beyond the end of the mentoring relationship.

Frequency, form and organization of contact

At least one meeting should be held in person each semester as part of the mentoring partnership. It is advisable to discuss whether, beyond this, further face-to-face meetings and/or email and telephone contact is possible and desirable, and how and when such contact should be structured and prepared.

Meeting locations and dates; preparatory information for the meeting

The programme intends for the meeting to be held at the mentor's location, and reimburses the mentee's travel costs accordingly.

The mentee is responsible for organizing the meeting: it is their role to arrange a date for the meeting. Moreover, it is recommended that, before each meeting, the mentee sends a brief record of the last meeting as well as an overview of the planned topics for discussion and objectives for the upcoming meeting.

This should provide continuity in the dialogue process and aid preparations for the next meeting. The content and scheduling of the meeting are the responsibility of the participants, and should be personally arranged and agreed.

Duration of the mentoring relationship

The duration of the mentoring relationship is limited to participation in the programme, and initially amounts to a period of 12 months. Shortly before this period expires, both participants are asked by the programme coordinators whether they would consider extending the mentoring relationship for a further year. Both parties are asked to send their responses to the programme coordinators independent of one another.

It can even be discussed in the first meeting whether the mentor and mentee should reach an agreement on this issue in advance – without the need to determine the substance of such an agreement. The mentoring relationship officially ends after two years. A decision on whether contact should also be maintained in future should only be taken after 24 months as part of the concluding meeting. If the mentee or mentor should leave the university, the mentoring relationship also ends officially.



Handling emerging problems

Mentees and mentors are informed that the project coordinators at their location are available at any times as a point of contact to respond to queries and to provide support in resolving any ambiguities, problems or conflicts. The contact details for the three universities' coordination centres are listed under Chapter 7.

5.2 Clarifying participants' respective expectations and objectives

The results of evaluations and experiences from numerous mentoring programmes show that the efficacy of a mentoring process and the satisfaction of its participants is highest when the mentee and their mentor discuss, at the start of the mentoring relationship,

- which topics and objectives they wish to pursue in the context of the mentoring relationship,
- what expectations they have of their role and that of their counterpart.

A potential basis for this discussion is for the mentee to present their professional situation, their career to date and their ambitions, as well as what they might consider 'works in progress', and thereby derive topics, objectives and expectations for the mentoring. This also enables the mentor to position themselves in the relationship.

Topics and objectives can also be defined in writing – including with a view to conducting a joint overall evaluation on conclusion of the mentoring relationship. Such agreements should take into consideration that topics, objectives, expectations and support requirements are not fixed quantities; instead, they may change or develop over the course of the mentoring process. Regular mutual reflection and transparency in relation to these aspects facilitates the mentoring process.

There are no further provisions for the mentoring meetings: the content of the meetings is dependent on the wishes and requirements of mentee and mentor. In order to ensure that the meeting is effective and profitable, it is advisable that the mentee clearly agrees such issues with the mentor and thoroughly organizes and prepares the content of the meeting.

At the beginning of a mentoring relationship, participants could also consider concluding a mentoring agreement. Such an agreement enables both participants to reflect on their objectives, conceptions and expectations and to clarify the relationship's structure from the outset. In this context, it should be considered that the topics and objectives identified at the beginning of the mentoring relationship may develop and change continuously in a course of the dynamic process.

The central points for discussion and components of a mentoring agreement are:

Organization and schedule

- Duration and schedule
- Number of meetings
- Initiatives for making contact
- Meetings, appointments, joint participation in events

Contents

- Description of expectations
- Objectives
- Topics

Trust

- Rules for the mentoring relationship
- Rules for conflicts
- Rules for feedback

Reviews and conclusion

- Rules for termination/continuation of the mentoring relationship
- Conclusions of work

EXAMPLE OF A MENTORING AGREEMENT



Mentoring Agreement

Name (Mentor) _____

and

Name (Mentee) _____

1) hereby express their willingness to achieve the following objectives as part of the mentoring programme:

2) declare that, for the duration of the mentoring project:

- the mentor and mentee shall bear equal responsibility for the success of the mentoring partnership;
 - they shall keep confidential the information they receive in the meetings;
 - they shall strive to be proactive in shaping the mentoring relationship;
 - they shall confront any conflicts which may arise and work together to find a viable solution and/or request support from the project coordinator;
 - they are prepared to provide open and honest feedback;
 - they shall attempt to facilitate regular meetings, and that
 - they agree to contact each other at any time (including at home) / only at the workplace.
- (Please delete as applicable)

3) Mentoring topics

The following points have been agreed by the mentor and the mentee as topics for the mentoring relationship:

Other agreements in the first mentoring meeting e.g.:

- the key objective for the mentoring relationship,
- configurations of the mentoring relationship
- meetings to be held in mentor’s office or in private area, etc.

Termination of the mentoring relationship

If there are reasons for early termination of the mentoring partnership, the project coordinator must be informed of these. The confidentiality requirement remains unaffected by this.

Date, place: _____

Mentor signature

Mentee signature

The programme is jointly coordinated by the three universities. The contact persons for all participants in relation to applications and any queries which may arise are the coordinators at the respective 'home' university.

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