

Mentoring Guide

of the
COMETiN program

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1. Mentoring*

network construction & expansion

individual advice & feedback

exchange informal knowledge

exchange of experience

1.1 What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a proven and effective instrument for the targeted promotion of young talent and management development. It aims to support professional and personal development and is based on the informal transfer of experience and knowledge and the individual support of a junior scientist (mentee) by an experienced professional or manager (mentor). Thus, mentoring does not replace the formal professional support of emerging female scientists, because the focus is on the transfer of interdisciplinary and informal knowledge. Within the framework of the protected relationship, the mentors accompany and advise their respective mentees in their professional self-discovery process and in life and career planning, and provide constructive feedback on their achievements and abilities. By providing practical insights into the working world, the mentors transfer important knowledge about leadership requirements, structures and processes in science and business, explain unwritten "rules of the game" and facilitate access to career-relevant networks by introducing their mentee to the scientific or working community.

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1.2 Characteristics of Mentoring

- **Voluntary:** Mentee and mentor enter into a mentoring relationship voluntarily.
- **Freedom from hierarchy:** There is no direct relationship of dependency between mentee and mentor.
- **Defined time frame:** The mentoring relationship exists for a defined period of time and can be continued beyond this by individual agreement.
- **Commitment:** A binding, reliable approach to appointments and agreements is a fundamental base requirement for a successful mentoring relationship.
- **Confidentiality:** The mentoring discussions take place in a protected setting and are strictly confidential.
- **Direct personal contact:** Personal contact is of high importance already at the beginning of the cooperation. This can be supplemented by mail correspondence, (Skype) phone calls or other forms of communication.

*For the following explanations, the [mentoring guidelines of the University of Oldenburg](#) as well as the mentor [guidelines of the Mentors of the Mentoring Program for Postdocs of the University Association Halle-Jena-Leipzig](#) are essential sources for the following statements

- **Exchange:** Mentoring is a two-way process of giving and taking. Mentors can also benefit for their personal and professional development.

Mentoring is not a professional consultation and cannot replace it!

1.3 Mentees: Requirements & Opportunities

The focus of mentoring is the learning and development process of the mentee, which is why the mentee herself bears responsibility for what they learn within the framework of the mentoring relationship. The successful conception of the mentoring process not only requires certain competencies, but also places concrete **demands** on the mentees:

- **Clear objectives:** At the beginning of the mentoring process, the mentee defines precise expectations and objectives for herself, from which she develops concrete wishes for support, and discusses these with her mentor. Only when the personal goals are clearly defined and transparent can collaboration on the implementation take place.
- **Career perspectives:** Within the framework of mentoring, the mentee examines her interests and opportunities and develops perspectives for her own career planning and strategies for implementing them.
- **Maintaining contact:** The mentee is responsible for maintaining contact and informing her mentor about her state of development according to agreements made.
- **Being active:** The mentee takes on the active role in the tandem relationship, i.e. she initiates the mentoring meetings and takes over the preparation and follow-up in terms of content. She does not expect any prepared solutions, but shapes her own further development with the help of the mentor's suggestions, takes responsibility for herself, and makes her own decisions. Protocols during the discussions can be an important support for achieving the goals set.
- **Openness:** Mentoring is all the more beneficial the more the mentee is willing to be open with her mentor and to share her experiences and ideas with him/her. She is willing to seek support and advice as well as constructive criticism and to talk openly about difficulties and weaknesses.
- **Critical self-reflection:** The desire for personal development and the development of professional perspectives and strategies for their implementation should be given. This also requires the willingness to self-reflection and critical faculties.

If these requirements are observed, mentoring offers many opportunities for mentees to grow professionally and personally:

- Empowerment or strengthening of self-competence
- Development of an individual career strategy
- Reflection on gender-specific factors of academic careers
- Insight into different university structures and subject cultures
- Acquisition of career-relevant formal and informal knowledge about structures, processes and rules of the academic world
- Support in planning concrete projects and career steps
- Scientific Profile Building
- Integration into the scientific/working community
- Peer Networking across universities
- Development of strategies to combine career and family or dual-career partnership

1.4 Mentors: Tasks & Opportunities

A mentor can fulfil various roles: advisor, knowledge intermediary, supporter, door opener, and contact person.

These activities can include the following **tasks**:

- Strengthening competencies of a mentee and contributing to her development
- Passing on professional and life experience: providing insights into professional fields and activities and explaining one's own working style
- Passing on knowledge about informal structures and rules of the scientific enterprise or a branch of industry
- Use of own network and contacts for the mentee
- Advice on career and life planning and support in finding self-determined solutions

Numerous opportunities suggest a commitment as a mentor:

- **Passing on experiences and values** to an interested and appreciative listener
- Encouraging **self-reflection** on one's own professional biography and working style
- **Gaining knowledge** through confrontation with new ideas, views and behaviours and conscious examination of certain topics
- Open and confidential **feedback** on one's own image and work style
- Professional and personal **exchange** with junior employees

- **Realistic insights** into the current problems and issues of emerging female scientists
- Strengthening and expanding one's own **leadership and consulting skills**
- **Influence on personnel development** and support of a gender-sensitive promotion of emerging scientists
- Expansion of own **contact networks**
- **Strengthening of the image** as a good leader

1.5 Matching the tandem pairs

Already during the application phase, the future mentees are encouraged to think about career-relevant topics and, against this background, to consider which person they would like to acquire as a mentor.

Several aspects foster a successful tandem relationship:

- Consideration of the needs of mentee and mentor
- Mentors have more professional experience than their mentees
- The career and horizon of experience of the mentor correspond to the areas in which the mentee is occupied or in which she perceives her professional future to be.

Only a mentoring relationship based on mutual trust, respect and honesty, but also on sympathy, has a chance of success. As a result, there are always mentoring relationships that do not work out perfectly despite all efforts. The participants of the program are professionally supported and accompanied from the beginning by the program coordination as well as within the framework of the various modules in the selection of the mentor and in the creation of the mentoring relationship. The program management also provides assistance in the case of difficulties and is approachable with questions, problems and suggestions.

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1.6 Ways of creating the mentoring relationship

The first meeting provides an opportunity for mentees and mentors to get to know each other and is generally used to determine expectations, content and goals for the mentoring relationship together.

Possible mentoring **topics** may include:

- Guidance for early career and professional planning
- Insight into the work of the mentor
- Identifying the possibilities of an academic career

- Development of career goals
- Discussion of current projects of the mentee
- Introduction to networks, joint participation in conferences
- If necessary: arrangement of internships

Regular meetings, that are arranged individually between mentor and mentee, are recommended. The time required is at the discretion of the mentee. In principle, the mentee contacts the mentor to arrange a meeting. However, especially at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, it can help if the mentors take the first step toward their mentee in order to reduce possible inhibitions about making initial contact.

1.7 Mentoring agreement

The expectations, content, and goals of the mentoring relationship can be defined in a mentoring agreement. The first meeting serves to clarify and set down in writing essential questions about the content and structure of the tandem relationship. Important questions are:

- What expectations do mentee and mentor have of the mentoring relationship?
- Which topics are of particular interest for the mentee?
- How much time can both mentee and mentor invest in the mentoring relationship?
- How is contact established?
- Where do the conversations take place?
- What are the goals of the mentoring relationship?

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The mentoring agreement is negotiated collaboratively by both tandem partners and serves as a kind of "roadmap" for the coming period, although it is possible to deviate from it if new issues and problems arise. At the same time, the mentoring relationship becomes more binding through this written agreement. Mentor and mentee also specify in the mentoring agreement that they:

- Take an appreciative attitude toward the mentoring relationship
- Commit to regular meetings
- Respect each other's privacy
- Keep all information confidential
- Contact the project coordinator if they have any questions, comments, or problems

2. Contact person

If you have any questions, suggestions or need support, please do not hesitate to contact the project coordinator or the contact persons listed below.

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3. Literature and links (selection)

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<http://forum-Mentoring.de/>

Forum Mentoring e.V. is an association of over 120 mentoring programs at German universities.

<https://www.eument-net.eu/>

EU-MentNet is the European umbrella organization for mentoring in science.

https://uol.de/fileadmin/user_upload/oltech/Mentoring/Mentoring_Leitfaden_2020_deutsch.pdf

Mentoring Guide of the University of Oldenburg

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Guidelines for Mentors of the Mentoring Program for Postdocs of the University Association Halle-Jena-Leipzig