

The Leibniz Mentoring Programme - A Guideline

Supporting junior academics and safeguarding equal opportunities are key concerns of the Leibniz Association. With these goals in mind, the mentoring programme has become an established tool for training our personnel. The Leibniz Mentoring Programme pursues an approach which is tailored to the strengths of the individual scholars: Due to the specialised training of interdisciplinary skills (e.g. dialogue management techniques) and profession-specific skills (e.g. funding applications), it offers participants an anchor for professional advancement.

What is mentoring?

As they become part of a mentor/mentee tandem, mentoring allows junior academics to identify their own abilities and skills, to develop them and to use them in a targeted manner while planning their individual academic careers and personal paths. The tandems are structured across hierarchies and generations: as a general rule, an experienced, established female or male manager (mentor) supports an oftentimes younger, less experienced junior female scholar (mentee) in formulating her professional goals and systematically developing her career. In the process, the mentees expand their professional contacts and subject-specific networks.

For their part, mentors receive the opportunity to further expand their strengths by reflecting on the development of their own professional identity, personal working style and professional experiences. The exchange with the mentee allows for feedback on the mentor's conduct during discussions and their approach to their managerial role. They receive insight into the current developments in the research of junior academics, and they enlarge their own network with contacts from their mentee and the other mentors participating in the Leibniz Mentoring Programme. Furthermore, the Leibniz Association invites the mentors to also participate in coaching programmes, leading to additional skills.

Mentoring tandem

At the heart of the mentoring programme is the personal contact between the mentee and the mentor. A good and lasting tandem relationship requires mutual trust, respect, appreciation and transparency. To avoid any dependencies, the Leibniz Mentoring Programme takes a cross-mentoring approach and mentees are therefore advised to find a mentor outside of their own institute. A good tandem is also characterised by precise communication of the shared goals, expectations and

wishes. This is why the frequency of the meetings, the type of communication as well as the topics and goals should be firmly agreed upon between both parties at the start of the mentoring year already.

Matching

No centralised matching process is performed as part of the Leibniz Mentoring Programme as it is assumed that the mentees are in the best position to judge which potential mentors would be suitable for a constructive and fruitful relationship. Therefore, they should look for their mentor themselves and take the first step towards active networking within the framework of the programme. As researchers, they will often find themselves in a situation where they have to win people over to projects and sometimes have to deal with rejections. The selection can be guided by subject-specific considerations or may focus on the mentor's function as a role-model. Mentors can be selected from within the entire sphere of academic sciences in Germany and abroad. Mentors should have leadership experience, access to professionally relevant networks, be familiar with the informal knowledge of their discipline and institution, be willing to provide open feedback and personal willingness to learn, and be willing to invest time and energy in the partnership.

The preparatory workshop is a central tool for helping mentees find a mentor. It offers the mentees an initial introduction into the programme as a whole and the mentoring aspect of it. During the workshop, the participants clarify their career objectives and use them to develop their ideal mentor profile. The participants use this profile and criteria that the group draws up together to select a mentor. This must be completed in good time before the first joint seminar (kick-off) involving mentees and mentors. In addition, the programme coordinator will contact former mentees, if required, so that participants can receive peer advice on finding a mentor.

The experience of many participants has shown that meeting in person is particularly useful. Whenever possible, mentors should also participate in the seminars that accompany the mentoring process. Those are usually held in Berlin at the start of the programme, at the half-way point and towards the end of the mentoring year.

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Mentors

Mentors provide the mentees with support in planning their careers. The tasks and roles of the mentors can be broad in scope and vary from tandem to tandem. As role models, advisers, "sparring partners" or idea-givers, they can support, encourage, strengthen or critically accompany their mentees in finding individual solutions appropriate to their own situation. Giving constructive feedback, conveying views and ideas, exploring managerial requirements, sharing knowledge of processes and structures, highlighting informal rules of conduct and opening doors to networks — these are just some of the options the mentors have for engaging with the tandem.

The Leibniz Programme offers mentors the opportunity to expand their profile, to network and to swap experiences in the company of other leading academics. With the coaching sessions that accompany the mentoring process and take place in Berlin (start, half-way point, end), the Leibniz Association offers mentors the opportunity to obtain an additional interdisciplinary professional qualification in the key skills of management and communication, which provides them with active support in their managerial role in everyday academic life beyond the mentor/mentee relationship.

Mentees

Shaping the tandem relationship requires the commitment and the initiative of the mentee in particular. It is she who must formulate and decide, in coordination with the mentor, which topics are important to her and her career and should thus be pursued in the mentoring partnership. Essential prerequisites here are the courage to make changes and being open to feedback and alternative solutions. The more active the partnership is, the more lasting and successful it can be. It is the responsibility of the mentee to prepare the meetings. She must initiate discussion of the topics that are important to her and report to her mentor at regular intervals concerning her progress.

Completion of the mentoring programme

Mentoring programmes, and by extension mentoring-based relationships, are commonly limited in duration. The Leibniz Mentoring Programme runs for 12 months. This fixed period serves to encourage the tandem to work together in a focused

way. The mentoring tandems should use the official end of the mentoring programme to review the tandem in terms of goals met or missed, of how satisfied both parties are with what has been achieved, of any outstanding issues, etc. A relationship of trust that has been established throughout the mentoring process often endures when the programme has already ended. It thus represents an enrichment to everyday professional life for both partners in the tandem.



Contact

Alexandra Schweiger, the project's coordinator, is available to mentees and mentors for any questions, comments and support:

Dr Alexandra Schweiger
 The Leibniz Association
schweiger@leibniz-gemeinschaft.de
 Chausseestraße 111
 D-10115 Berlin
 Telephone: +49 30/ 20 60 49 - 65
www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/mentoring

I also wish to sincerely thank you and the coaches for the two interesting days we spent in Berlin! I was surprised that it was not just enriching for the mentoring itself but that the sessions with the mentors also offered free training in team leadership and managerial tasks.

(Mentor, Professor of Linguistics)