

Mentoring – An Instrument to Promote Equality at Universities: Status Quo, New Developments, and Challenges

Abstract / Call for Contributions

Mentoring programmes have been one of the central measures used to promote equal opportunities for men and women at universities for many years (Nöbauer, Genetti 2008). Such programmes usually address several goals at the same time: they help scientists and academics to get started on an academic career, raise awareness in universities of hidden discrimination against women during career entry, and provide mentors with a support structure to assist them in their own support activities.

A range of information is already available regarding the acceptance and implementation of mentoring programmes for women in universities and the associated challenges and levels of target achievement. Individual projects targeted at scientists and academics have been evaluated and subsequently adapted and/or enhanced based on the findings obtained (e.g. the mentoring programmes at the University of Vienna, the Medical University of Vienna or the University of Graz).

In recent years, mentoring has also been provided at universities or universities of applied sciences for other target groups like students with disabilities (e.g. the “be able” programme at Vienna University of Economics and Business) or students from underprivileged backgrounds or disadvantaged groups in society (e.g. the “Volunteering@WU” programme at Vienna University of Economics and Business). At the FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences in Graz, mentoring is offered to first-semester students on the midwifery course, while the Johannes Kepler University Linz has a mentoring programme in place for students studying for a technical or science degree.

In the equal opportunities context – both in academia and in business – the development of mentoring into sponsorship (and the distinction between the two) is currently under debate (e.g. de Vries 2011; Brink, Stobbe 2014).

In Austria, the Amendment to the Universities Act 2002 (*Universitätsgesetz 2002*) has also prompted the development and advancement of equal opportunities policies for men and women into more far-reaching diversity policies. This raises the question of how – and to what extent – additional diversity elements can be integrated into existing measures.

Against this background, experiences with mentoring programmes to date and new challenges and possibilities for enhancing existing instrument(s) will form the topic of discussion at an upcoming one-day conference. In concrete terms, this conference will address the following questions:

- What challenges for the development and progression of mentoring programmes for scientists and academics can be identified from experiences with such programmes to date?
- What potential does sponsorship as a progression from mentoring for scientists and academics offer? What risks are involved?
- How would existing mentoring programmes for scientists and academics need to be adapted to systematically integrate further diversity elements?

- What experiences have been made with mentoring programmes – including such programmes outside science and academia – which focus on additional diversity elements (e.g. disability, migration background, social origins)? To what extent are these experiences useful and applicable for mentoring programmes in a scientific and academic context?

These questions will form the focus of a one-day conference to be held on 8 May 2015 at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) in Vienna. The event will be hosted by the Institute's Department for Sociology in cooperation with the Austrian Universities Gender Platform (*Plattform der Einrichtungen für Frauenförderung und Geschlechterforschung an den Österreichischen Universitäten*).

Contributions are invited which deal with the above-mentioned questions either from a conception, implementation or evaluation of mentoring programmes perspective or from a gender or equal opportunities theory perspective.

To initiate the discussion, the individual contributions will be introduced and commented by a panellist. We also plan to document the event in the form of an IAS Series publication. For this purpose, contributors are requested to submit a written version of their contributions (length: 30,000 - 40,000 characters) by 20 April 2015.

We cordially invite interested colleagues to submit an **abstract of no more than 500 words by 15 February 2015** to office.soz@ias.ac.at. Notification of the acceptance of an abstract will be sent to the contributor by 28 February 2015.

References:

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Gerhardt, Gabriele; Grasenick, Karin (2009), *Follow-up Evaluierung des Mentoring-Programms für Nachwuchswissenschaftlerinnen an der Universität Wien*, Studie im Auftrag des Referats Frauenförderung und Gleichstellung, Dienstleistungseinrichtung Personalwesen und Frauenförderung der Universität Wien, Graz.

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