
MENTORING PROGRAMME AT UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

A proposal from the HUMFAK/SAMFAK Future Faculty team
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Rationale and benefits

Early career researchers are under substantial pressure. Short-term contracts, competition, difficulties in combining work with other commitments and the uncertainty about the individual future in academia all make career planning a difficult task. Navigating in the complex and continuously changing academic system poses challenges also because it requires strategic decisions that need to be planned ahead. The information necessary to make the right strategic choices is often provided informally and not all young researchers have equal access to it.

Umeå University offers different support measures for early career researchers, including:

- Introduction programme for new employees at UmU organised once per semester by the HR Department and covering practical aspects for settling down in Umeå;
- Research and leadership programme (ReaL) covering career planning and research project management for future research leaders (this programme will end in 2022);
- Help and advice on grant applications offered by the Research Support and Collaboration Office.

In addition, early career researchers often – although this is by no means a rule – benefit from informal advice provided by the principal investigators of projects financing their employment and from departmental senior staff.

The Mentoring Programme proposed here complements the aforementioned measures:

- The key idea is to create matched pairs between early career scholars (=mentees) and senior researchers (=mentors) so that mentees can receive individualised, tailored advice and coaching. As opposed to the aforementioned support measures already available at UmU, this mentoring would help achieving specific plans and goals of a mentee, instead of providing a general advice aimed at a larger group. This support would also take the form of continuous communication instead of meetings planned in larger time intervals.
- The mentoring would be focused on topics related to academic career planning, e.g.:

- Which areas of competences of a mentee need to be developed in order for him/her to achieve their career goals? How to develop these competences, what actions need to be taken? What contacts need to be made?
- How to allocate time between different types of activities, such as research, teaching, grants application, communication within and outside of academia?
- What types of mobility and networking could help achieving career goals of a mentee?
- A contact with a mentor could help to overcome potential conflicts of interests which may arise when an early career researcher collaborates with his/her PI or receives advice within his/her department.
- The Mentoring Programme prioritises the groups of early career researchers who are relatively more disadvantaged when it comes to the access to strategic information. For example, female researchers and international postdocs are examples of groups that are typically less embedded in local academic networks and have less access to tacit knowledge or experiences that are valued specifically in the Swedish academic context.

Plans for implementation

1. Selection of programme mentees.

- The selection of mentees is based on written applications submitted to the Future Faculty team at SAMFAK/HUMFAK upon the call for application to be announced in February 2021. The applications shall include a short letter of motivation and a CV, the **deadline for applications is 15 March 2021**.
- The programme is oriented towards early career researchers with the job positions such as: postdocs, researchers and assistant professors (*första forskningsassistent*).
- The priority shall be given to applicants who:
 - Have clearly explained their expected goals of participation in the programme in their letter of motivation, and their goals match the aims of the programme.
 - Have less than 5 years of academic experience after defence of doctoral thesis
 - Have the profile underrepresented amongst professorship positions at HUMFAK/SAMFAK (this includes women and researchers who obtained their doctoral education outside of Sweden).
 - Are not participants of other mentoring programmes.
- The announcement of the programme planned for academic year 2021 will be advertised on SAMFAK and HUMFAK Aurora websites and through direct communication with heads of departments at these two faculties.

- In the round of the programme for academic year 2021, the plan is to select the group of maximum 15 mentees. Final mentee selection decisions are made by the Future Faculty team at SAMFAK/HUMFAK in March 2021.

2. Administrating the process of matching mentees with mentors

- The programme starts with an Introductory Meeting for mentees organised by the Future Faculty in April 2021. In the round of the programme planned for academic year 2021, this will be an online meeting, in future rounds this will hopefully take place as a Career Retreat meeting outside of the campus.
 - On the occasion of the Introductory Meeting, each mentee has the possibility to reflect and discuss the mentoring needs and objectives. At this point, mentees have the occasion to exchange the ideas for choosing their mentors.
- Mentees play an active and self-directed role in the whole process, which starts with indicating the potential mentor to the program coordinator.
- Mentors should have the position of professor, emeriti professor or hold the title docent (or equivalency in systems outside of UmU). They do not have to come from the same research field or discipline as mentees. The mentoring relationship should be situated outside subordinate relationships. The mentor can be affiliated with institutions other than the mentee's, within or outside Sweden. While the choice of external mentors may bring advantages of expanding mentees networks, mentors connected to Umeå University may have a better understanding of the local academic environment.
- The administrator of the program is Sara Franke-Wikberg at SAMFAK. The administrator is responsible for contacting the potential mentor and setting up the first contact between the mentee and the mentor.
 - If the mentor agrees to participate in the programme, the mentee will contact the mentor.
 - The administrator of the program provides mentors with a document explaining both a mentor's and a mentee's role and obligations in the process, so that both sides have clear ideas and expectations regarding the programme (see "Guideline for the cooperation between mentee and mentor" in the Appendix).
 - During the first meeting, the mentee and mentor define their mentoring partnership and goals, and the form and frequency of their exchanges in a written mentoring agreement.
 - After the first meeting, the mentee and her mentor will draw up a mentoring agreement, a copy of which is sent to the coordinator for information.
 - The mentoring agreement defines common objectives and also the mode of contact. Experience from mentorship programmes implemented at other universities shows that at least 1-3 personal meetings are advisable, and they

can take place (i) at the workplace of the mentor (ii) during a conference, or (iii) digitally via Zoom/Skype. For the programme round 2021, given pandemic situation we strongly recommend digital meetings.

- Each mentee and her mentor are jointly responsible for the way in which they implement and conduct their relationship. The mentee prepares each meeting by formulating questions/topics and sending them to the mentor in advance. For each meeting, 1-2 hours should be dedicated.

- These meetings between mentor and mentee can be continued after the programme if both parties have the wish to continue such contacts.
- Problems may arise in any mentoring relationship and despite mutual agreements, in which case it is advisable to address them promptly. The coordinator should be contacted in the event of disagreements or non-compliance with the agreement. Should a conflict prove to be irresolvable, the coordinator and the two partners in the mentoring tandem may agree to terminate the mentoring agreement before the end of the programme.
- The mentoring programme ends with a meeting organised in December 2021 by the Future Faculty team for all mentees to discuss the individual benefits from the programme and how they matched initial expectations, and to exchange feedback on possible future improvements of the mentoring programme.

3. Rewarding mentors

- Mentors do not receive any material rewards for their meetings with mentees, in the form of payments or paid working time.
- The deans of SAMFAK and HUMFAK provide mentors with dedicated letters thanking for involvement in programme. These letters are sent CC to the head of the department in order to improve recognition and acknowledgements of involvement of senior scholars in supporting early career researchers at Umea University.
- For mentors within SAMFAK and HUMFAK at Umea University, participation in the programme will be regarded as a merit and achievement, and can be discussed as such on occasions such as annual *medarbetarsamtal*.

Appendix 1

Guideline for the cooperation between mentee and mentor

The goals to be achieved through a mentoring partnership are defined by the mentee's needs and objectives, and the mentor's possibilities. Focus should be on aspects of the mentee's career:

- The mentee should gain knowledge and skills which allow her to plan her/his career strategically. The mentee should clarify her/his goals and be able to stand up for them in a self-confident way. Her/his self-image and identity as a scientist should be strengthened.
- Mentors are expected to provide mentees with opportunities for self-reflection regarding own career goals and preferences, and strategic advice regarding pursuing these goals.
- The mentor may pose the mentee the "right questions", so that she can identify her goals and strengths, or she/he can provide insight into the reconciliation of family and career, balancing the time involvement in different areas strengthening different types of competences etc.
- Mentors can offer suggestions regarding mentees' involvement in different areas that foster mentee's career, such as: making new contacts and extending research networks and collaborations, improving teaching qualifications and obtaining additional teaching experience, advancing skills in supervision of younger researchers, gaining experiences in administration and management, etc. However, **it is the responsibility of a mentee** that these involvements are agreed on with the relevant persons (such as the PI of a research project employing a mentee or the head of the department employing a mentee).
- The mentee may be provided support upon reaching her next career step, for example when submitting a research project, or when requiring an introduction or publication opportunity. However, **it is not mentors' role** to supervise mentees in their research or provide feedback on research articles or grant applications.
- The mentor may provide insights into his or her own career and work experience.
- Mentoring means "guiding by the side". For the mentoring cooperation to be successful, realistic balance should be achieved between objectives and duration.

Guidelines for a successful mentoring partnership:

- Readiness to receive and give feedback
- Mutual confidence and trust
- Voluntariness of the relationship
- Keeping in mind the goals defined in the mentoring agreement
- Establishment of a relationship based on equality
- Tolerance for different points of view

For further suggestions, see: Lee, A., Dennis, C. & Campbell, P. *Nature's* guide for mentors. *Nature* 447, 791–797 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1038/447791a>

Appendix 2

Mentoring agreement - TEMPLATE

1. Parties

Name of the Mentor: _____

Name of the Mentee: _____

agree upon a mentoring partnership for the duration of: (month/2021) _____ until 12/2021

2. Goals of the mentoring partnership

Please keep in mind the following points:

- Do the goals include professional and personal goals of the mentee?
- Can the goals be reached during the mentoring partnership?
- Are the goals concrete?
- Is the mentor the right person for the selected topics?
- What would the mentor like to contribute?

Goal / Topic 1:

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Indicators for the achievement of this goal:

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Goal / Topic 2:

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Indicators for the achievement of this goal:

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Goal / Topic 3:

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Indicators for the achievement of this goal:

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3. Personal contact and meetings

Dates for the first two meetings (if already known):

1) Date, time, location: _____

2) Date, time, location: _____

Frequency of the meetings: _____

Duration of the meetings: _____

We agree that, in between personal meetings, we may contact each other by:

Telephone E - MMail Skype/Zoom

Timeout

Are there times, during which one of you can spend less time on mentoring (because of exams, stays abroad, sabbaticals, etc.)?

If yes, please specify:

4. Confidentiality

We will respect each other's privacy. We undertake to treat the content of our talks and conversations in strictest confidence, even beyond the duration of our mentoring partnership. We will only discuss topics and contents of our mentoring partnership with third parties upon mutual and explicit agreement to do so.

5. Premature termination of the agreement

In the event of disagreements or non-compliance with the agreement the coordinator should be contacted. Particular circumstances may require this mentoring partnership to be terminated prematurely, in which case we will inform the coordinator.

Signature Mentee (Date, name):

Signature Mentor (Date, name):

Please make the agreement in duplicate (one each for the mentee and mentor) and send a scanned copy to the Programme Coordinator via e-mail: Sara Franke-Wikberg, sara.franke-wikberg@umu.se