

Prepare and facilitate transition into career

What

Prepare and facilitate the transition into future career through discussing future strategies, encouragement to seek career advice, and continuous support.

Why? – Gender perspective

PhD students often are not clear about their future career and what is needed to successfully pursue a career. This is even more true for young female researchers.

From contexts and experiences in the FESTA-project

One professor conducts yearly meetings about career planning, which are separated from yearly meetings on the progress as a PhD student. He sees a necessity to prepare transition because you need to have some merits if you want to apply for a new job. He says that this is important for both academic and non-academic positions. During the PhD it is possible to work on individual strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendations for good practice

Encourage student to seek career counselling:

Although it is very important for PhD students to know what to do after PhD, this issue is easily forgotten amidst everyday work. In some institutes of RWTH Aachen University, yearly meetings are in place, which also include the topic of career planning. It is important that PhD supervisors instruct their students about career planning, so that they will start to think about their future plans.

In many universities there are training courses on career planning, where professionals guide the students to find their path. In some universities mentoring programmes exist, in particular for female researchers. It is good if the supervisor knows about these services and distributes information about it openly, stresses the importance and supports the students to attend these trainings.

Looking for career counselling is especially important if PhD students head to a non-academic position and the supervisor has less personal experience of working in industry.

Administration/unions: Informing PhD students via e-mails or other up-to-date communication about new courses helps to spread information on the training available. At RWTH Aachen University, PhD students have the right to attend courses on personnel development. This entitlement acknowledges the importance of trainings.

Discuss strategies for the future with your student:

As supervisor and senior staff, you are not only an expert in the field, but have also profound knowledge about how to navigate the academic system after the PhD. Moreover, you probably know your PhD student well and might be able to give specific advice due to the students' research interests and specific context.

As a supervisor, you might

- Reflect together with your student upon what kind of choices and decisions might be important for a future career
- Show an active interest in your students' plans for the future and encourage a future academic career
- Together with your student, problematize pros and cons of an academic career
- Give concrete support by letters of recommendations etc.

Strategies for a future career might also be supported on an institutional level. Thus, at Uppsala University, the faculty of Science and Technology offers the postgraduate course "Exit from PhD studies", which includes topics such as thesis publishing, different career options at the university, in the private sector and in governmental authorities, the importance of pedagogical and teaching documentation, how to write a research grant application and where to apply for money, what is important when applying for a post-doc position and planning a post-doc period.

[\(http://www.teknat.uu.se/utbildning/forskarniva/kurser/fakultetsgemensamma/\)](http://www.teknat.uu.se/utbildning/forskarniva/kurser/fakultetsgemensamma/)

Provide continuous support:

Many supervisors stay in touch with their former PhD students and continue to support them in their academic career. As a supervisor, you might for example

- Support your former student, particularly during the first period after the PhD, by writing letters of recommendation; provide feedback on applications for grants and / or academic positions etc.
- Recommend your former student for different academic tasks such as being a reviewer, a key note speaker, a journal editor etc.
- Facilitate access to scientific networks and / or arrange contacts to key persons

Gradually, the former student – supervisor relationship will probably become more and more equal; both parts might continue to support each other in their continuous, separate, academic careers.

From literature and other sources

Many junior researchers are in a phase where changes in job orientation are quite common. Over half of researchers have no clear focus of their aims or what is needed to reach the target (Briedis et al. 2013). Female researchers do less career planning than male researcher (Dever et al. 2008).

During this phase of orientation advisors' support is needed, in particular for those with no clear career planning. Research shows that "advice about careers and postdoctoral positions [is] clearly important, as [are] letters of recommendation and help with networking." (De Welde and Laursen 2008: 54).

There is some evidence that female PhD students are "less likely to be engaged with their professional community. In particular, female graduates were significantly less likely than male graduates to interact with professionals outside academia and with visiting scholars during the course of their PhD studies." (Dever et al. (2008), p. i) At the same time PostDocs say that "those characteristics that they had acquired during their PhD" were "important in developing their career at work." (ibid, p. ii).

Kolja Briedis/Steffen Jaksztat/Julia Schneider/Anke Schwarzer/Mathias Winde (2013): Personalentwicklung für den wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchs. Bedarf, Angebote und Perspektiven – eine empirische Bestandsaufnahme (Personnel development for young researchers. Demand, supply, and perspectives – an empirical survey), HIS:Projektbericht Juni 2013, online:

http://www.dzhw.eu/pdf/22/projektbericht_personalentwicklung.pdf

Dever et al. (2008): Gender Differences in Early Post-PhD Employment in Australian Universities. The influence of PhD Experience on Women's Academic Careers. Final report, online:

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Gender-differences-in-early-post-PhD-employment.pdf>

Kristine De Welde/Sandra L Laursen (2008): The 'Ideal Type' advisor: How Advisors Help STEM Graduate Students Find Their 'Scientific Feet', in: *The Open Education Journal*, 2008, 1, 49-61.

Other useful resources

FESTA's guide to Career counselling guides academics and researchers at all career stages to make strategic decisions to advance their careers. It is particularly useful for early-career academics, at PhD stage.

<http://proisis.lero.ie/festa/App/Consult>