

Benefits and Prospects: Mentoring in the Bologna Process

Dr. Sibylle Drack, Gender Equality Section, University of Bern

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Abstract

In recent years, mentoring programmes in Switzerland, but also in Germany, have been developed for the promotion of women in academia. Evaluations prove them to be an effective means for fixing the “leaky pipeline” by encouraging women to pursue an academic career. The difficulty of universities to maintain promising junior researchers in academia, the so called “brain drain”, is one of the reasons why doctoral studies are presently under reform. While the benefit for women is being emphasized, the question arises whether mentoring could also be introduced as a means in general for supporting researchers at an early point in their career. Helping to fix a leaky pipeline, mentoring seems to present itself as a worthwhile remedy for stopping the brain drain.

Among the goals listed on the agenda for reforming doctoral studies are transparency of supervision and assessment, the development of transferable skills useable for a wider employment market and increasing the number of doctoral candidates. While mentoring programmes in general foster the participants’ career development and integration in the professional scientific community, mentoring for women in particular serves to achieve gender equality and an increasing number of women academics. By looking at the latest developments in the Bologna process and the present tendency towards structured doctoral programmes in Switzerland and in Europe, this paper explores the future of mentoring and the possibility of mentoring programmes becoming an integral part of the third cycle in the Bologna process.

Introduction

Mentoring is important for a career

“It is important to start talking early about what is needed for an academic career” states one of the mentors of the Swiss-German Mentoring Programme (Mentoring Deutschschweiz). His mentee adds that, quite unlike in common university practice, she received from her mentor an independent feedback on her skills. (in Probst / Willen: *Wissenschaftlerinnen gewinnen durch Mentoring: Porträts aus drei Programmen*).

Brain drain

In recent years, mentoring programmes have been developed in Switzerland, but also in Germany, aimed at promoting women in academia. Evaluations prove them to be an effective means of fixing the “leaky pipeline” by encouraging women to pursue an academic career. Mentoring plays a crucial role when it comes to pursuing any career, even more so when it comes to pursuing an academic career. The difficulty of universities to keep promising junior researchers in academia, the so called “brain drain”, is one of the reasons why doctoral studies are presently under reform. Since the benefit of mentoring for women is evident, the question arises whether mentoring could also be introduced as a more general means of supporting researchers at an early point in their career. Helping to fix a leaky pipeline, mentoring presents itself as a remedy now for stopping the brain drain.

Mentoring for men and women

Thus, our mentor in Mentoring Deutschschweiz, is not the only one to state that „men sometimes need mentoring more than women do.“ In fact, according to half of the mentors asked in the *Case Studies* presented by Maya Widmer, “mentoring should be offered equally to men and women” (Müller / Bachmann / Spreyermann / Rothmayr: *Mentoring - Projekte: Fallstudien*, 2007, p. 50).

Focus of this paper

The implementation of successful mentoring programmes for women as effective means for supporting early career researchers has been an important point on today's agenda. In Switzerland most of these programmes are still waiting for long term funding. Yet, with the Bologna process tackling doctoral studies, also referred to as the third cycle in the Bologna process, mentoring is focused on more and more. Maybe the future of academic mentoring programmes also lies with reformed doctoral studies. In fact, the Bologna reform might offer a great opportunity for implementing mentoring programmes for women Europe wide. Mentoring has proved to be such a strong and efficient means of promoting early career researchers that the Bologna process at this stage can only gain by taking the effectiveness of mentoring programmes into account. I am convinced that doctoral studies in general have as much to gain from mentoring as women already do. I would therefore like to take this European conference as an opportunity to explore the future of mentoring and the possibility of mentoring programmes becoming an integral part of the third cycle in the Bologna process.

Structure of this paper

I will start this exploration by first presenting the aims and the latest developments of the Bologna process with regards to the third cycle, the doctoral studies. Secondly I will look at the Bologna process and mentoring as a tool for supporting early stage researchers in their career. And finally I turn to the issue of gender equality and discuss mentoring as a means for promoting women in the Bologna process.

With this presentation I would like to give those in the audience who are primarily engaged with mentoring at a local level, e.g. as coordinators of mentoring programmes, an idea of what is going on at a European level concerning the reform of doctoral studies. On the other hand, I also wish to show our colleagues and participants from abroad how we are presently dealing with the Bologna reform in Switzerland. And eventually I hope to be able to give those who are in charge of implementing the reform of the third cycle an idea of what mentoring programmes could contribute to doctoral studies.

The main source that I have consulted about the latest developments in the Bologna Process concerning the third cycle in Switzerland is a study by Michael Groneberg on doctoral students in Switzerland, a portrait of the year 2006 which was published last November. My knowledge on mentoring programmes for women stems from the three programmes we run at the University of Bern which you find presented in the before mentioned publication with portraits of mentees and mentors and from having been a member of the steering committee of the Federal Programme of Equal Opportunities (FP) from 2004 until 2007. Furthermore I am familiar with the situation of doctoral students at the University of Bern from counselling and from giving workshops for women who consider doing a PhD and for women who encounter an obstacle in the process of completing their thesis.

1. The latest developments in the Bologna process

Doctoral studies and the Bologna process in the EU

The overarching aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international cooperation and academic exchange that is attractive to European students and staff as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world. The range of the participants in the Bologna Process is extremely wide, involving ministers in charge of higher education, representatives of higher education institutions, students, staff and employers as well as the European University Association, European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES. The process as such is carried on by means of regular European seminars and communiqués.

Doctoral candidates as early stage researchers

It is important to note that, although it is within the Bologna process that doctoral studies are now being addressed, endeavours to reform doctoral studies had already been made before. First aims for a reform had been formulated in 2000 in the Lisbon strategy where the importance of research as economic factor was stressed. In this context doctoral candidates are considered as independent researchers.

The term “early stage researcher” for doctoral candidates was coined at the Bologna Seminar on “Doctoral Programmes for the European knowledge society” in 2005 where the 10 Salzburg Principles were formulated.

These principles concern:

1. original research as a core component of doctoral training
2. institutional strategies for doctoral programmes and professional career development opportunities
3. diversity of programmes
4. doctoral candidates as early stage researchers
5. transparency of supervision and assessment
6. achieving critical mass
7. duration of studies (3-4 years full-time as a rule)
8. interdisciplinarity and development of transferable skills
9. increasing mobility
10. ensure appropriate and sustainable funding

(in Groneberg 2007, Annex A)

The Salzburg principles have now become an integral part of the ongoing reform discussion. The trend to consider doctoral candidates as researchers and employees has been taken up by the European Commission and resulted in *The European Charter for Researchers* and *The Code of Conduct for their Recruitment*.

Standardization and harmonization in the Bologna process

Another trend follows the line the Bologna process has taken for bachelor and master studies and aims to achieve standardization and a European Framework of comparable and compatible qualifications also at the doctoral level. As a means for achieving standardization structured doctoral programmes come to the fore. Yet, overregulation is incompatible with innovation and original research. Therefore harmonization rather than standardization of doctoral studies is envisaged.

Nevertheless harmonization and the advancement of knowledge through original research are contradictory in terms. The question arises how doctoral programmes can meet all these conflicting demands and expectations.

Despite these conflicting interests the reform is proceeding and the need for structured doctoral programmes is high on the agenda of the reformers. European Ministers responsible for Higher Education consider doctoral programmes a means for stopping the brain drain. Even though in many subjects the individual doctorate is the predominant form especially in Switzerland and Germany, there is a strong tendency towards and a considerable increase in structured programmes. In accordance with the Salzburg Principles and present recommendations in the London communiqué of 2007 doctoral programmes are to aim at providing „transparent access arrangements, supervision and assessment procedures, the development of transferable skills and ways of enhancing employability“. Such programmes require appropriate funding and an average duration of 3-4 years full time is to be expected.

Doctoral studies and the Bologna process in Switzerland

In Switzerland the reform of the third cycle in the Bologna process is part of the strategic planning to the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS) for the years 2008-2011. 30 million Swiss Francs will to be invested in the creation of structured doctoral programmes. In terms of harmonization, the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities has been discussing minimal standards for all doctoral programmes at Swiss universities. It seems, however, very difficult to find a common denominator for all the different faculty cultures. Moreover, long term funding of doctoral programmes and doctoral students is yet to be found. This leaves us in Switzerland, for the present, with the knowledge that structured doctoral programmes are increasing, but also with the uncertainty whether they will be the predominant form of doctoral studies in the future. Minimal standards or best practice recommendations, in any case, are not available yet.

2. Mentoring in the Bologna process

Let me now look at the Bologna process from the point of view of mentoring as a tool for supporting early stage researchers in their career.

Mentoring versus supervision

Mentoring as such is hardly ever mentioned in documents concerning the Bologna process. The Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, however, considers "the creation of an environment that fosters interaction and exchange among doctoral students and experienced researchers, including mentoring for the phase after the doctorate" as one of the criteria for structured doctoral programmes (Groneberg, 2007, p.42). As we have heard today, interaction and exchange among doctoral students and experienced researchers and networking are core elements of mentoring programmes. As the previous presentation of *Case Studies* by Maya Widmer has shown, positive effects of mentoring involve the participants' acquisition of strategic competences for developing their career and their integration in the professional scientific community ((Müller / Bachmann / Spreyermann / Rothmayr: *Mentoring - Projekte: Fallstudien*, 2007).

In its chapter on supervision, the study on doctoral students in Switzerland 2006 elaborates on how mentoring might be introduced. Looking across the Atlantic, Groneberg follows the US tradition and proposes the introduction of a second supervisor or adviser, who in addition will continue advising doctoral students after the completion of their doctorate. This is an interesting idea and the promotion of multiple supervision arrangements, also from the point of view of gender equality, is to be welcomed, as it goes against the dependent relationship that single supervision establishes between supervisor and doctoral candidate. The term mentor in the sense of an additional advisor, by the way, is also to be found in structured doctoral programmes already run in Switzerland, such as the graduate school for Cellular and Biomedical Sciences. It is important to note, however, that this is quite a different notion of mentoring and quite unlike to what we have been talking about today in terms of mentoring programmes today. We therefore have to be very careful that these two different notions do not get confused.

Mentoring for career development

Mentoring programmes, we have heard, foster the participants' career development and integration in the professional scientific community. By paying special attention to status passages, the programmes often reach beyond one single cycle within the Bologna process. At the University of Bern e.g. one of the programmes for women addresses master students as mentees and matches them with PhD-students. A second programme matches MA and PhD-students to mentors inside as well as outside the academic market, depending on the career expectations of the mentees. And a third programme addresses doctoral students as well as postdoctoral students and thus enables an additional exchange between researchers who are at different stages in their academic career. These early stage researchers are matched to professors at Swiss universities or abroad. All three programmes intend to accompany and support the mentee in taking the next step in her career. If mentoring already starts before the doctoral phase, such programmes help to increase the number of doctoral students. Mentees who attended a mentoring programme during their doctoral studies report that because of mentoring they finished their thesis faster and were more focused when taking up a habilitation project.

It is quite likely that structured doctoral programmes offer more opportunities for networking than individual doctorates do and thus also improve the integration of the doctoral candidate in the professional scientific community. I would argue, however, that mentoring is able to provide a wider range of career oriented possibilities for researchers. Moreover I would argue that it is the relevancy for career development that renders mentoring programmes an indispensable tool for achieving the set goals for the third cycle in the Bologna process.

Mentoring concepts have been developed that prove themselves a worthy tool for supporting early stage researchers in their career. Whether mentoring programmes should be offered as an integral part of doctoral programmes or as programmes complementing doctoral studies at a faculty, university or national level, depends very much on the subject and on geographical and cultural aspects. In the past mentoring programmes were designed to work in quite differing contexts. The variety of programmes we have today shows that it is feasible to adapt mentoring to the needs of different doctoral programmes. I would therefore welcome any initiative to implement mentoring programmes alongside structured doctoral programmes as part of universities' policies for the promotion of early stage researchers.

3. Gender equality and the promotion of women in the Bologna Process

With my third focus I now turn to the issue of gender equality and the promotion of women in academia within the Bologna process.

Gender equality

In seminars and communiqués concerning the Bologna process, gender equality is generally dealt with under the heading of “social dimension”, which means making quality higher education equally accessible to all. Thus the Bergen Communiqué stresses the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. It is rare that gender and the promotion of women in academia are explicitly addressed in these seminars or communiqués. In Switzerland, however, Bologna guidelines contain specific measures to ensure gender equality in the Bologna process and it is monitored on a national level especially with regard to gender. The *Checklist* “Assurance and Promotion of Equal Opportunity within the Framework of the Bologna Reforms” lists as one of the fundamental goals the decrease of vertical segregation in order to assure that gender proportions remain the same on all academic levels, .i.e. the proportion of women in master studies should be maintained at the level of doctoral studies. Moreover, the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities has agreed on promoting gender equality in the Bologna process on a European level. The checklist is available in German, French and English.

Furthermore the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities decided in 2005 to value *The European Charter for Researchers* and *The Code of Conduct for their Recruitment* as a useful tool for the career development of researchers. It is here, in the *Charter and Code* that the promotion of women is explicitly addressed: "Europe must dramatically improve its attractiveness to researchers and strengthen the participation of women researchers by helping to create the necessary conditions for more sustainable and appealing careers for them in research and development. Employers and/or funders ... should aim to provide working conditions which allow both women and men researchers to combine family and work, children and career. Moreover it requires employers to achieve a gender balance." The *Charter* refers all researchers including doctoral candidates. It follows that where *Charter and Code* are being ratified, gender equality must be taken into account when reforming doctoral studies.

From Groneberg's analysis of the present situation of doctoral students in Switzerland the conclusion can be drawn that doctoral students in general and women in particular may gain through structured doctoral programmes, especially if programmes ensure transparency of recruitment and assessment, multiple supervision and opportunities for networking as well as career planning. According to Groneberg, combining doctoral studies and family will remain a difficult challenge for both women and men. Our own experience with students and early stage researchers shows that it is much more often the women who make concessions to their career because of children and family. Therefore problems are anticipated, especially for women, with regard to age limits and the reduction of study length. Moreover, since assessment committees largely consist of men, a gendered bias resulting from a male dominated notion of excellence threatens to affect recruitment, assessment and promotion to the disadvantage of women.

Mentoring as a tool for the advancement of women

The mentoring programmes presented today are not only an instrument for career development in higher education, they are also a means for the advancement of women in academia. The majority of the programmes has been introduced to promote women in higher education, in order to fix the leaky pipeline. They thus address the special situation of women researchers. The mentees realize that some of the barriers they encounter are due to structures that are in favour of men. Together they develop strategies for coping with this situation and with structural barriers that they, as women, encounter. Thus they strengthen their perception of themselves as researchers and members of the scientific community and are, e.g. more determined and self-confident when applying for grants and junior professorships. Mentoring for women therefore works towards gender equality and to increase the number of women academics.

Structures, however, are slow to change and any reform threatens to cause new and unforeseen difficulties. A male dominated notion of excellence is likely to determine access to future doctoral programmes and the assessment of doctoral students. Mentoring programmes in comparison are based on voluntary participation and the resulting independence of early stage researchers might help counteract the damaging potential of such a biased notion of excellence. To prevent the third cycle of the Bologna process from leading to a back lash in terms of gender equality, I would therefore highly recommend the implementation of mentoring programmes especially for women alongside any doctoral programme. I urge universities and people responsible for doctoral programmes to think early of how they can encourage women to join their programmes and to consider mentoring as a worthy instrument to win them over. Funding therefore should be provided for doctoral programmes and accompanying mentoring programmes in general, but even more so for mentoring programmes designed for women. Special programmes for women need to be maintained for a sufficiently long time in order to effect a structural change.

Conclusion

I have started this presentation with reference to leaky pipeline and brain drain. The Bologna process, we have seen, tries to stop the brain drain by introducing structured doctoral programmes. Mentoring programmes on the other hand are complementing such programmes with regard to career development. As to the leaky pipeline and the advancement of women in higher education, it can be said that doctoral programmes bear chances as well as risks. Since the process is still very open, it is extremely difficult to say how the reform is going to affect gender equality. And it is equally difficult to decide what measures need to be taken to ensure that men and women benefit from the reform. What we know, however, is that mentoring programmes have proved to be a valuable tool for fixing the leaky pipeline and are likely to do so in the future. We also have a basis in the *European Charter and Code* and, in Switzerland, we have the *Checklist* on the “Assurance of Equal Opportunity in the Bologna process” to insist on the implementation of these programmes. We thus might say that the tools are there, but we need to ensure that ministers in charge of higher education use these tools with a lasting effect.

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About the author

Dr. Sibylle Drack studied English and sociology at the University of Berne. She worked as an assistant at the English Department from 1996 to 2001. She has several years of work experience in academic teaching, did research at the Universities of Berne (CH) and Lancaster (GB) and received her Ph.D. in 2000. She has been working for the Gender Equality Department of the University of Berne since 2000. Until 2004, she was responsible for the development and the implementation of “Mentoring Swiss German” (Mentoring Deutschschweiz), a programme that supports the academic career of women scientists. Since May 2004, Sibylle Drack has been head of the Gender Equality Department of the University of Berne. As Gender Equality Commissioner she participates in faculty appointment procedures and is active at various university levels promoting women in academia. She is a member of the Conference of the Equal Opportunities Officers at Swiss Universities and a representative member in the Swiss Bologna Network.

Dr. Sibylle Drack, Abteilungsleiterin
Universität Bern
Abteilung für die Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern
Hochschulstrasse 4
CH-3012 Bern

sibylle.drack@afg.unibe.ch
www.gleichstellung.unibe.ch