D07.1 - FINAL REPORT ON THE ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

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CONCEPT

The Arqus Mentoring Programme for Early-Stage Researchers (ESRs) is intended to support doctoral and early postdoctoral researchers at the beginning of their academic careers. Mentees are matched with established researchers at one of the other Arqus universities to provide an additional international perspective. The role of the mentor is to offer feedback and advice on career choices, strategic planning, publications and conferences, and any other issues related to academic life. However, a mentor does not take on the role of a second supervisor. Mentoring is a valuable resource for ESRs because it provides them with a person to confide in who is not directly involved in their research or employment. As per the Grant Agreement, the Arqus Mentoring Programme is intended for 20 mentees, two from each Arqus university and two from the associate partner university Kyiv Mohyla Academy. In the last round this number was increased to three participants per University, thus 30 mentees in total. The programme is accompanied by a professional facilitator with experience in working with researchers and grant applications.

The Arqus Mentoring Programme for Early-Stage Researchers builds on previous iterations organised under Arqus I, which were held completely online due to restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current three rounds from 2023-2026 include an in-person Kick-Off Workshop for the mentees, online training sessions, and meetings between mentee and mentor, either online or in-person.

We have omitted the names of mentees and mentors from this report but chose to reflect their research fields.

ROUND 1: 2023-2024

CALL

The first call included a description of the programme, its main goals and the dates and topics of the in-person and online meetings (see Appendix 1a for the call text). It was published on the Arqus Website on April 25th 2023 and was initially open until May 15th 2023. It was also published on the University Websites and spread through email and social media at each university. Due to low application numbers at some universities, the call was opened for another week, and in the case of Minho, until two mentees had been found. This process revealed major discrepancies in how easily the universities are able to reach their Early-Stage Researchers (e.g. through official email lists).

In the application form, participants were asked about their research field and why they want to participate in the programme. They were also given the option to name a particular researcher whom they would like as a mentor (see Appendix 2 for the registration form).

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

All applications were collected via e-mail at doctoral-academy@uni-graz.at, where they were checked for completeness. In case parts were missing, participants were given the chance to complete their application within the next few days. All applicants except one took this chance. This was feasible due to the number of applications. In total, 79 people across 9 universities applied for the Mentoring Programme, of which 12 were postdocs. Applications were then sent to the WG07 members at the respective university, i.e. each university got to choose their own nominees. Selection procedures differed between

universities, many had local selection committees composed of several people. During the selection, it was taken into consideration

- how far the applicants were progressed in their research projects, giving PhD researchers in the later stages of their studies priority
- the arguments and reasons applicants gave for why they needed mentoring support - some applications read like job applications highlighting their achievements instead of describing why they would like to receive mentorship
- whether applicants had already received a lot of Arqus funding, giving priority to those who had not yet had the chance to participate in Arqus activities (in some cases).

Each university got to nominate 2 mentees, ideally 1 PhD and 1 Postdoctoral Researcher, and add a waiting list in case nominees would not accept their place in the programme. As the table below shows, there were considerable differences in the number of applicants per university. As Maynooth had only joined the Alliance at the beginning of the year, there was no designated WG member yet and it proved difficult to spread the call at Maynooth University. The call was also made available to the Arqus associate partner Kyiv Mohyla Academy, however we received no applications from them.

Table 1: Number of applications across universities

University	# total applicants	# female	# male	# non-binary	# postdocs
Granada	26	12	13	1	0
Graz	13	11	2	0	4
Leipzig	3	2	1	0	0
Lyon	6	5	1	0	1
Maynooth	1	1	0	0	0
Minho	2	2	0	0	0
Padua	7	3	4	0	3
Vilnius	14	7	7	0	2
Wrocław	7	4	3	0	2
TOTAL	**79**	**47**	**31**	**1**	**12**

There were 47 women and 31 men who applied for the programme (a 59% to 41% split) as well as one person identifying as non-binary. This led to a selection of 19 mentees of which 14 were women and 5 were men (a 74% to 26% split). This difference in gender proportion between applicants and mentees is due to the fact that some universities did not have any male applicants and thus chose 100% women. The main criterion was always the quality of the application and how well applicants argued their need for mentorship. After discussing with the DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Task Force within Arqus, it was not seen as an issue to provide the offer to more women, as they still face systemic barriers with regards to pursuing an academic career. Initially, it was planned that each university would nominate one pre- and

one postdoc, but some did not receive any applications from postdocs and thus chose two PhD researchers.

The organising team agreed that in order to have a big enough peer group for the postdoctoral researchers, two universities who had high-quality PostDoc applications, Graz and Wrocław, would get to nominate one additional PostDoc mentee, using the spots that were open because Maynooth had only one applicant and Mohyla Academy had none.

One mentee dropped out in September of 2023 before the start of the programme, after having been matched with two mentors, stating that he had misinterpreted the goal of the mentoring programme and would rather leave the spot to someone who needed it more. A mentee from the waiting list was given the opportunity to join instead, and he took the position.

MATCHING PROCESS

Of the selected mentees, 10 had used the option to suggest a researcher at another Arqus university that they would like to work with. Others had noted preferences for specific universities, e.g. an applicant from Leipzig in the field of Spanish Linguistics who would like to have a mentor from the University of Granada. We tried to the best of our abilities to make these wishes come to fruition. Mentors were contacted by the WG07 members at their local universities, or, in the case of Maynooth who had not yet designated a WG member, by the co-leads in Graz.

The work package had a “Matching Meeting” where they discussed all chosen mentees, looked at the key aspects of their application, what they were looking for in a mentor, who would contact their desired mentor, and above all collect suggestions for mentors for those mentees who had not named one themselves. This meeting was on 6 June 2023 and lasted for 2 hours.

Mentors were then contacted by the co-leads, and if they were willing to participate in the programme, their contact information was given to the mentee to reach out to them for an initial meeting. They both had the option to decline working with each other after this first meeting. In total, the team contacted 37 researchers to find the 19 mentors. In 14 cases, the first person contacted was willing to participate, however, it was particularly difficult to find mentors for two mentees. Reasons given for declining to be part of the programme were lack of time/excessive workload, lack of financial incentives, the feeling that they could not contribute to the mentees’ projects or needs, being in the process of retiring or on academic leave. Some researchers never responded. Unfortunately, when the programme started in October 2023, three mentees still remained without a confirmed mentor, as either many researchers had declined or, in one case, the mentee had only joined the programme early in October. For the next round, the call will be launched earlier in the year, to give more time to find mentors and avoid the summer break, as email communication proved difficult and slow during July and August. The last matches were confirmed in November 2023 and it was agreed that the pair would continue their mentoring relationship for the full nine months beyond the official end of the programme.

In the final matched pairs, there are mentors from each Arqus University except Minho. Imbalances in the number of mentors are partly due to the wishes from the mentees, (e.g. many researchers in Granada were named as desired mentors) and the research fields (e.g. the University of Lyon 1 does not have a Social Sciences department). There are 12 female and 7 male mentors in the programme. See the tables below for further information on their research fields and distribution among universities.

SELECTED PARTICIPANTS AND MATCHED MENTORS

#	University Mentee	PhD/ Postdoc	G	Field/Subject	University Mentor	G	Field
1	Granada	PhD	f	English Literature	Graz	m	Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies
2	Granada	PhD	m	Pharmacology and Neuroscience	Lyon	m	Research Director NeuroPain at CRNL (Lyon Neuroscience Research Centre)
3	Graz	PhD	f	Cognitive Psychology	Wrocław	f	Institute of Psychology, Department of Psychology of Creativity
4	Graz	PostDoc	f	Human Geography	Padua	f	Associate Professor in Sociology of Economics and Work
5	Graz	PostDoc	f	Experimental Physics	Padua	f	Full Professor at the Department of Physics and Astronomy
6	Leipzig	PhD	f	History of Science	Padua	f	Associate Professor of History of Science
7	Leipzig	PhD	m	Spanish Linguistics	Granada	m	Associate Professor of the Department of Spanish
8	Lyon	PhD	f	Information and Communication Studies	Wrocław	m	Assistant Professor at the Institute of Scientific Information and Librarianship
9	Lyon	PostDoc	f	Neuroscience	Vilnius	f	Deputy Director and Research Professor at the Life Sciences Center
10	Maynooth	PhD	f	Business and Management/ Marketing	Granada	m	Professor at the Department of Marketing and Market Research
11	Minho	PhD	f	Psychology, Human Cognition	Padua	f	Associate Professor at the Department of General Psychology
12	Minho	PhD	f	Social Psychology, Work Psychology	Leipzig	f	Junior Professor in the Study of Religion
13	Padua	PhD	m	Computer Science	Granada	m	Assistant Professor at the Department of Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence
14	Padua	PostDoc	f	Family and Childhood Studies	Vilnius	f	Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy
15	Vilnius	PhD	f	International Relations	Graz	m	Director of the Centre for Southeast European Studies and Professor of Southeast European History and Politics
16	Vilnius	PostDoc	m	Astrophysics	Granada	m	Department of Theoretical and Cosmological Physics
17	Wrocław	PhD	m	Political Science	Graz	f	Researcher at the Centre for Southeast European Studies
18	Wrocław	PostDoc	f	Performing Arts	Maynooth	f	Centre for European and Eurasian Studies, Professor of Anthropology
19	Wrocław	PostDoc	f	Financial Regulation and Banking Technologies	Maynooth	f	Assistant Professor at the School of Law and Criminology

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTEES

Email communication was initially only carried out by the co-leads in Graz, to have a designated contact person for the participants. Mentees were first sent an email confirming their status in the mentoring programme, receiving either information regarding their acceptance, position on the waiting list, or rejection. This email included the key aspects of the programme and the next steps. After a mentor match was found for them, mentees received an email with the mentor's contact information and the instruction to contact the mentor for an initial, informal meeting to see if they are a good fit and would like to pursue the programme together. They were also sent two documents, Guidelines for the Mentoring Relationship and a Mentoring Agreement form to be signed by both parties, which included a confidentiality clause. There was a lot of email communication with mentees whose mentor had not responded to them or those for whom finding a match proved more difficult.

Mentees then received information about the Kick-Off event, the location and duration, as well as contacts at their university to help them with the organisation and funding of the trip. A registration form was sent out to confirm the number of participants and any special needs. The co-leads in Graz were always open for questions and supported some mentees in their organisation (e.g. with invitation letters, forms to be signed etc.) They were also asked about the status of their mentoring relationship (i.e. whether they had had a meeting with the mentor and want to continue together). Before the event, information about the workshop and additional programme were sent out as well.

After the workshop, the co-lead from Lyon sent a link to the photos taken during the event, as well as information about upcoming events. The facilitator then sent the photo-protocol of the workshop and a link to the feedback survey.

MOODLE PLATFORM

In October 2023, an "Arqus Mentoring Programme for ESRs" Moodle course was created, hosted on the University of Graz Moodle platform. This was done to bundle all materials and information in one place and to make it more accessible and findable for the participants. The platform includes the key documents such as the Mentoring Guidelines and Mentoring Agreement, an overview of and links to all the online sessions, presentations from the kick-off and online sessions, photos from the kick-off workshop, as well as the opportunity to exchange in an online forum. This platform was generally perceived positively by the participants, however it was infrequently used and some participants never accessed it at all. They had to be provided with new usernames and passwords to access the platform and we hope that an Arqus single sign-on will improve the situation for upcoming rounds of the mentoring programme.

IN-PERSON KICK-OFF WORKSHOP

Following the feedback from previous instalments of the Arqus Mentoring Programme within Arqus I, an in-person meeting was envisioned for this and the following rounds, to allow mentees to connect with each other at the beginning of the programme. The main aims of this meeting were:

- To allow mentees to get to know each other and build a group rapport to facilitate personal exchange in the following online peer sessions
- To clarify roles of the mentoring relationship (e.g. how a mentor is different from a supervisor)
- To explore topics that could be addressed in the mentoring process
- To give mentees space to discuss their needs and ideas

The workshop was planned by the WG07 co-leads in Graz and Lyon together with Dr. Yasmin Dolak-Struss, a Vienna-based certified coach and facilitator, who has previously worked in supporting researchers with their applications for international research grants at a major research support institution in Austria. Dr. Dolak-Struss facilitated the workshop, with some support from the co-leads.

The organising team had considered inviting mentors to the meeting as well, but discarded the idea, as it was deemed improbable that many researchers would take the time to travel to Graz for a few days at the beginning of the academic year, especially given that there is no designated budget within the work package for mobilities, and other funding sources can be difficult to organise. We decided that we would not want to only have a small part of the mentors present because that could create uncomfortable situations for those mentees whose mentor was unable to attend the in-person meeting.

The meeting was held from October 5th to 6th 2023 at the University of Graz. Some mentees arrived earlier to meet with their local mentors or to visit other facilities at the UG. For these early arrivals, the WG07 team in Graz organised a welcome meeting at the Doctoral Academy and a tour of the university campus and library.

An online registration form was sent out before the meeting, asking about dietary requirements, if any assistance for physical impairments was needed, if participants had already met with their mentors, and if they wanted to participate in the optional city tour.

- Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss, external certified facilitator
- Dr Gerald Lind, Doctoral Academy Graz, Arqus WG07
- Laura Bousquet, University of Lyon1, co-lead WG07
- Luzia Strasser, University of Graz, co-lead WG07

Overview of Attendees at the Kick-Off Workshop 2023

	Gender	University	PhD/PostDoc
1	f	Granada	PhD
2	m	Granada	PhD
3	f	Graz	PhD
4	f	Graz	PostDoc
5	f	Graz	PostDoc
6	f	Leipzig	PhD
7	m	Leipzig	PhD
8	f	Lyon	PostDoc
9	f	Lyon	PhD
10	f	Maynooth	PhD
11	f	Minho	PhD
12	f	Padua	PostDoc
13	f	Vinius	PhD

14	m	Wrocław	PhD
15	f	Wrocław	PostDoc

Programme

The Programme lasted from 9am on Thursday to noon on Friday. It included a dinner on Thursday evening to allow mentees to connect and exchange in a more relaxed setting, as well as an optional city tour through the historical centre of Graz on Friday afternoon. There was a welcome desk hosted by the local Arqus officers, and the official welcome speech given by Gerald Lind, co-lead of the Doctoral Academy, adviser to WG07 and former co-lead of Action Line 6 in Arqus I.

Following a participatory approach, focus was placed on group work, peer exchange and joint development of results. For some activities PhDs and PostDocs worked together, for others they worked separately when it made more sense to have the shared experience of their career stage. Many activities involved creative aspects. Sessions in the programme included:

- Getting to know each other through joint work on a poster
- Mentoring roles and definitions
- How to get the most out of the mentoring programme, including Dos and Don'ts
- Navigating your research career, a self-reflection as preparation for the mentoring
- Personal topics for the mentoring programme, collected in the group
- Structuring successful communication

The programme was kept flexible and some things were adapted ad hoc when the situation called for it. For example, we realised that the energy was spent at the end of the first day and omitted the feedback round at the end of Day 1. As long as the main goals were kept in focus, it was not seen as an issue to spontaneously change scheduling points.

Feedback

Mentees were given the opportunity to give feedback directly at the end of the second day. Responses were generally positive, most were appreciative of the chance to meet in person and praised the organisation.

Praise	**Critique and Suggestions**
It was good that the timetable contained enough time to breathe, i.e. breaks, and the overall time of the workshop was good (1,5 days)	Possibly having the mentors present at the Kick-Off Workshop as well
Mentees left the workshop feeling connected and uplifted	Mentees would have liked to be more aware of what the Mentors had been told
It was good to get more input on possible topics to discuss with the mentor	It would be helpful to meet the mentors shortly after the kick-off, maybe this could be organised collectively as well
There was a good balance in terms of activities (presentations, group work, plenary sessions, creative exercises)	Send more email reminders and practicalities regarding the programme and the Kick-Off Workshop

It was key to receive input on the mentoring roles and topics	Sending out a picture of the organising team before or having an online meeting to get to know each other after the selection
The choice of catering and restaurant was praised.	Keep creative activities limited
	Give more time for personal brainstorming, go more in depth for some activities (e.g. on goals, expectations, possible topics for the mentoring)

The facilitator then also sent out an online survey to give anonymous feedback some days after the event. The organising team also had a short debriefing session at the end of the first and second day, discussing in particular the observation to include more in-depth and personal work.

FIRST ONLINE SESSION: MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The first online session took place on 8 November 2023. The focus topic was "Mental Health and Well-Being + Work/Life Balance in Academia", which was led by Ângela da Costa Maia, professor at the Department of Applied Psychology at the University of Minho and Director of the Doctoral College in Minho. Yasmin Dolak-Struss, with support from Gerald Lind, facilitated the session. 16 of 19 mentees were present at this session, with some being unable to join due to work commitments.

In the beginning, there was a check-in about the programme itself. Mentees were sent to breakout rooms to exchange about the current state of the mentoring relationship, if there are any issues or other things they would like to discuss with the group.

The main session about Mental Health in Academia was interactive as well, mentees were encouraged to share and discuss their own experiences. Prof. da Costa Maia gave some input on the concepts of mental health, well being and mental disorders, as well as about the concepts of vulnerability and resilience. This was followed by small group discussions about personal stressors and work stressors in academia and the main resources to achieve a better life balance. The session concluded with a final discussion on how to preserve a healthy work-life balance and personal well-being while pursuing a career in academia.

SECOND ONLINE SESSION: SECRETS OF ACADEMIA

The second online session took place on 17 January 2024. The focus topic was "Secrets of Academia: The hidden social dimension of research", led by Dr Gerald Lind of the Doctoral Academy at the University of Graz. Twelve mentees took part in this session. At the beginning of the session, mentees were asked about the current state of their mentoring relationship, how many meetings they had had (most had had 1-2, some had 5 or more), whether they felt comfortable with the mentor and which topics they had discussed during the mentoring meetings.

Dr Lind then gave a presentation about the challenges of succeeding with your own research and retaining your passion as a researcher, when the academic system has its own rigid structures and (unwritten) rules. He talked about neoliberalisation and economisation of research, glass ceilings and insider connections and how to navigate crises of meanings. The rest of the session was left to give space for questions and discussion about the topics addressed.

THIRD ONLINE SESSION: PEER GROUP EXCHANGE

The third online session took place on 6 March 2024 and was dedicated to a group check-in. Nine mentees took part in this session. As a warm-up, mentees were asked to share one research highlight in the

upcoming months that they were looking forward to. They were then instructed to collect highlights, challenges, learnings and insights from the mentoring so far on a shared online Padlet, which was followed by a discussion. The next exercise was revisiting the "career ride" images that the mentees had created during the kick-off workshop. Mentees who had not been at the workshop were asked to just choose one group to join. In breakout rooms, mentees discussed whether these images still represented them, how their academic journey had changed, and what new goals they might have. Results were presented in the plenary. At the end of the online session, mentees were asked to think of one specific goal for the next phase of the mentoring relationship and one step they could/would take towards achieving this goal, thinking also about how the mentor could support them in this. The session ended with an outlook of the next session on EU funding.

FOURTH ONLINE SESSION: INTERNATIONAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The fourth online session for mentees was held on 16 May 2024. Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss hosted the session on International Funding Opportunities for Early-Stage Researchers. She provided the group with some general information about academic funding and different forms of funding before diving deeper into Horizon Europe funding opportunities. Specifically, the ERC grant and the Marie-Skłodowska-Curie actions were addressed. Dr. Dolak-Struss then gave some advice on successful proposal writing, based on her years of experience in the area. The session was concluded with a wrap-up where the mentees discussed their most important takeaways regarding funding.

FINAL ONLINE SESSION: CONCLUDING THE PROGRAMME

The fifth and final online session took place on June 18th 2024 and was intended as a final check-in and wrap-up of the programme. Nine mentees attended this session. The facilitator gave some input on how to positively conclude the mentoring process, emphasising that the role of initiating a possible continuation of the relationship would lie with the mentor. Mentees were asked to share some highlights and challenges of their mentoring journey. Most of the mentees present were happy with their experiences, however it could be that those with more negative experiences did not feel motivated to join the meeting.

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTORS

FIRST MENTORS' LOUNGE

For the first Mentors' Lounge, two dates were offered, to allow more researchers to take part in this initial meeting. On Thursday, 21 September 2023, from 15:30-16:30 CET, 6 mentors joined the session and on Friday, 29 September 2023, from 11:30-12:30 5 researchers participated. The meeting was opened by the co-lead from Graz Luzia Strasser and subsequently led by facilitator Yasmin Dolak-Struss.

After an introduction round where the mentors stated their name, university, position at the university and research field, the facilitator asked several questions to get an impression of the group:

- Have you already had experience as a mentor before? (either in a formalised or informal way)
- Have you yourself had a mentor at some point in your career?

The group talked about the state of the relationship with their mentees. Contact had varied from person to person, but all had already had at least one meeting and were confident about their match. The

facilitator talked about some responsibilities as a mentor and the differentiation between a mentor, a supervisor, a sponsor, and above all, a therapist.

In one session, a mentor brought up an issue she had had, where she was critical of the research approach the mentee was pursuing, which was being pushed by the mentee's supervisor. The group discussed this potential conflict and ways to approach it, clarifying once more the roles of a mentor with regard to the mentee's research project.

SECOND MENTORS' LOUNGE

The second Mentors' Lounge took place on 27 November 2023. Six mentors participated, after some had to cancel due to illness. It was hosted by Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss. Two new mentors joined in this meeting. All of them reported that they have good relationships with their mentees. However, a common challenge was the differentiation between the role as a mentor and the role as a supervisor, especially when it came to concerns of research approach and methodology. The mentors said that they perceived the exchange among peers as a positive experience.

THIRD MENTORS' LOUNGE

The third mentors' lounge was set for 5 March 2024. Four mentors took part in this meeting, which is quite a small number. It reflected who had been very motivated to be a mentor in the programme. Mentors were asked to share (within limits of confidentiality) what topics they were discussing in their sessions. Some of the responses were:

- Procedures, time schedules and other problems
- Career planning
- Balance between work and private life
- How to build a curriculum
- How to write a grant proposal
- Dealing with perfectionism
- Simulating the recruitment process for a research position
- Structural challenges in the career path
- Getting established in research networks
- Evaluating proposals
- How to deal with visa requirements for stays abroad
- How to deal with judgement from colleagues

One mentor described their role as "I'm not here to improve your work, I'm here to help you along."

The mentors also gave their feedback on the running of the programme and made some suggestions, which is included below in "Feedback from Mentors".

FOURTH MENTORS' LOUNGE

The fourth and final mentors lounge on 5 June 2024. Seven mentors attended this final meeting. It was dedicated to collecting experiences and reflecting on the progress during the programme. The facilitator also gave some input on how to conclude a mentoring relationship. Some more topics that mentors and mentees discussed were:

- Personal growth
- Supervision responsibilities
- Future academic career concerns

- Methodological data analysis
- Practical problems with research approach
- How to become a recognized member of the science community
- Job application materials: CV and cover letter
- Challenges of living in another country and system, dealing with a language barrier

Two mentors reported seeds of lasting collaboration: one mentor and mentee were planning on collaborating on a paper, another invited the mentee to their university for a stay. Mentors also shared some achievements their mentee had made in their academic career during the programme, e.g. one mentee submitted a project proposal for the first time. Overall, mentors said that they saw more effect of the programme and changes within the mentee than they had anticipated.

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

FEEDBACK FROM MENTEES

Feedback from the mentees was collected via online form. Although stated from the beginning as a prerequisite for the completion of the programme, only 15 out of the 19 mentees responded. As the survey was anonymous, it was not possible to individually contact missing respondents. After several reminders, the poll was closed in October 2024. Mentees were asked about their mentoring relationship, their experience of the kick-off event (if they attended) and about the online sessions.

Overall, the experiences with the mentoring programme were very positive, although there were mixed responses to the online sessions and some mentees apparently were unlucky with their mentor.

Responding to the question “How satisfied were you with your mentor match?” 6 participants gave a 10/10 (perfect match) rating. The lowest rating was a 6, the average 8.4 and the median 9.

The average number of meetings between mentor and mentee was 3.7, the median number 4. This shows that a significant number of pairs did not meet for the intended four times, some only met once or twice, which really is not the intent of the programme. Others met six or 7 times. When asked whether they think the number of meetings was sufficient the majority of those who had four or more meetings said it was sufficient but only half of those who had three or fewer meetings were satisfied.

Only three mentees (of the ones who responded to the survey) were able to meet their mentor in person during the programme, some of them doing so during the kick-off workshop in Graz. One is still planning a meeting after the programme. For 6/11 lack of funding was a preventative issue, for 2/11 there was no need or desire for a visit. Other hindering factors were visa issues, the mentor being out of the country for a research visit or it being too time consuming for the mentee.

Responding to the question “To what extent was your mentor able to support you in the way you had hoped for?”, the responses were mixed, leading to an average of 7.4 and a median of 8.

1 (not at all)	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10 (completely)**
1	-	-	2	-	2	1	2	3	4

It is very unfortunate that some mentees seemed to not receive the support they wished for, unfortunately, we were not made aware of it during the programme.

Key topics or issues that the mentees discussed with their mentor were:

- Possible next career steps (10 responses)
- Applying for academic positions (7 responses)
- Time management (5 responses)
- Grant writing (5 responses)
- Publication processes (5 responses)
- Stays abroad (4 responses)
- Family planning and careers (2 responses)
- Mental health and work-life balance
- Thesis structuring
- Networking strategies
- Planning and conducting field work
- Conferences and research visits in other institutions
- Research feedback sessions
- Possible project involvement at the mentor's university
- Improving one's academic profile
- Dealing with co-workers

When asked whether there had been any difficulties with their mentor, mentees responded in the following way:

- Finding times to meet (6 responses)
- They took a long time to respond to emails (3 responses)
- Academic differences (2 responses)
- Cultural differences
- Communication difficulties during meetings

One mentee said they wished for a female mentor for an additional gender perspective on research careers, but overall was happy with their mentor.

Twelve out of the fifteen respondents are planning to keep in touch with their mentor, although the level of contact is quite varied. For some it means planned collaboration or a research visit, for others it means "the mentor said I can write to them again if I ever need anything".

Twelve out of the fifteen respondents also took part in the in-person kick-off meeting in Graz in September 2023. They felt that they could have been better prepared for the workshop and were not sure what exactly to expect. Satisfaction with the event was very high, participants appreciated exchanging with other mentees and the skilled facilitation as well as the varied exercises.

FEEDBACK FROM MENTORS

Feedback from mentors was collected during the Mentors' Lounges, and of course the option of providing email feedback was offered.

Positive Experiences	**Challenges**
Many found it to be a useful experience overall	Mentors wished for more instructions before the beginning of the programme
Helpful if mentee is structured and plans for meetings	More in-person meetings would be great
Used mentoring materials in another context	Finding time to meet with the mentee

with another candidate	
Fascinating to see how the relationship was developing over the months: depth of questions grew, the type of confidence, intimacy and knowledge evolved	Different disciplinary backgrounds required creative thinking on both parts
An opportunity for both sides	Tension with academic supervisor of mentee; different perspectives on research, research approaches, data analysis, type of writing etc.
Quite different to usual mentoring experiences with supervision, less formal, reminded him of informal support, reminder that there is also life	Challenging where to put oneself, not to intervene too much, but not let the mentee make wrong scientific decisions etc.
	Critical reflection of own position, co-supervision
	Gender dimensions that are relevant, wish that she had the chance to talk to a little bit more senior colleagues to get a perspective on how to find their way around

REFLECTIONS FOR THE NEXT ROUND

Overall, the feedback and the atmosphere of the programme were very encouraging. It is always a shame when someone does not have a positive experience with an offer provided, however sometimes there is also little influence the organisers can have. For the mentoring programme, the match with the mentor is essential for the success of the programme, and the organisers cannot control whether people get along, are reliable, or can offer the support that's needed, especially when they are not asked for help during the programme.

However, there are of course some aspects that can be improved for the upcoming rounds of the programme.

- How to reach more PhD students overall
- How to reach more Postdoctoral Researchers, and have PostDoc applications from more Arqus universities
- Clarify the call and the purpose of the mentoring, i.e. it is not about scientific support or second supervision, but about academic career mentoring
- Send more reminders and don't hesitate to send information twice
- Provide more information and guidance to the mentors at the beginning of the programme
- If possible, use an Arqus single sign-on space for the online platform
- Give more time at the kick-off for individual reflection and preparation for the mentoring process
- Start earlier with the call to avoid the summer holidays for the matching
- Organise the workshop in September, to avoid the semester start in October at some universities
- Have an initial online meeting or some presentation of the team beforehand

SECOND ROUND: 2024-2025

CALL

The call for the second round of the Arqus Mentoring Programme in this funding period was launched on 14 February 2024 and remained open until 10 March, with an extension for some universities in order to reach more early-stage researchers. In the application form, it was further specified to highlight in the statement of motivation why the applicant needed mentoring to advance in their academic career, and applicants were asked to attach their CV. After discussion with the PhD Advisory Board and within WG07, the option to name a specific mentor was removed in this round, as the focus should not be on academic topic-based mentoring but rather about topics related to academic careers in the broader sense.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

The applications were collected by the co-lead in Graz via online form. We received 64 applications from all partner universities, but the distribution was very uneven. Although we had shared the call with contacts at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, we did not receive any applications from our Ukrainian associate partner. The distribution between male and female applicants was quite even (44% to 52%). We did receive 15 applications from PostDocs, however these very only from three universities: Graz, Lyon and Padua.

University	# total applicants	# female	# male	# other	# postdocs
Granada	13	5	8	0	0
Graz	13	9	3	1	3
Leipzig	2	0	1	1	0
Lyon	5	4	1	0	3
Maynooth	3	2	1	0	0
Minho	2	2	0	0	0
Padua	15	6	8	1	9
Vilnius	5	3	2	0	0
Wrocław	6	3	3	0	0
TOTAL	**64**	**33**	**28**	**3**	**15**

The co-leads shared each university's applications with the respective partners and participants were chosen in local selection committees, who were asked to give a ranked choice list of their top 4-5 candidates.

Instructions given to the team were:

- Conduct an eligibility check (are they employed/enrolled at your university)
- Give priority to more advanced students/researchers (beyond 1st year)
- Main Selection Criterium: How well does the applicant voice their need for mentorship? Be aware that this time, the mentoring is NOT about research content/collaboration – we want to support mentees who desire advice with academic career planning, exploring possibilities for their future,

preparing for academic life beyond the PhD, how to become a successful researcher in their field; topics such as work/life balance, project management, academic grants and applications, what it's like to work in international/interdisciplinary teams, etc.

- In this case, we do want to support people who want to remain in academia but do not yet have great support networks, who are promising Early-Stage Researchers but not too well connected already
- If you are undecided between two equally qualified applicants of different genders, in line with Arqus DEI guidelines, please give preference to the female or non-binary applicant

After receiving all ranked candidates, the co-lead in Graz contacted the top choices to confirm their participation in the programme. Participants on the waiting list and rejected participants were also notified about the outcome of the selection process.

All in all, 20 mentees were selected, of which 5 are PostDocs. There are 11 female and 9 male researchers in this round of the mentoring programme, a 55% to 45% split. However, only 17 mentees remained at the end of the programme, as one dropped out due to language barriers, one because of mental health reasons and one for other personal reasons.

MATCHING PROCESS

The co-leads created short matching profiles based on the applications of the selected mentees and WG07 members met for an online matching meeting to collect suggestions for potential mentors. Subsequently, WG members were kept informed about the matching progress and asked to research and contact more potential mentors if needed. In total, 38 researchers (directly or through department heads) were contacted, in order to end up with 20 mentors.

SELECTED PARTICIPANTS AND MATCHED MENTORS

#	University Mentee	PhD/ Postdoc	G	Field/Subject	University Mentor	G	Field
1	Granada	PhD	f	Criminology and Gender, MENA region	Wrocław	f	Assistant Professor at the Incubator of Scientific Excellence
2	Granada	PhD	m	Neurodegenerative Biomarkers, Fitness & Health	Padua	m	Professor at the Department of Biomedical Sciences
3	Graz	PhD	m	Engineering & Artificial Intelligence	Wrocław	m	Assistant Professor at the Institute of Computer Science
4	Graz	PostDoc	m	Physical Geography	Granada	f	Professor at the Department of Mineralogy and Petrology
5	Graz	PostDoc	m	Political Metaphorology, Philosophy	Padua	m	Professor of Political Philosophy at the Institute for Political, Legal and International Studies
6	Graz	PhD	f	Political Science, Gendering EU Enlargement	Wrocław	f	Department of Conflict and Political Violence Research
7	Leipzig	PhD	m	Sociology of Borders	Graz	f	Centre for Southeast European Studies
8	Lyon	PostDoc	f	Neuroscience, Narcolepsy	Padua	f	Assistant Professor of Neurology at the Department of Neurosciences
9	Lyon	PostDoc	f	Cignition, Computation, Neurophysiology	Vilnius	f	Vice-Director of the Institute of Biosciences, Life Sciences Center

#	University Mentee	PhD/ Postdoc	G	Field/Subject	University Mentor	G	Field
10	Lyon	PhD	f	Sport Science, Sociology	Maynooth	f	Professor of Sociology at the Centre for European and Eurasian Studies
11	Maynooth	PhD	f	Environmental Psychology	Minho	f	Assistant Professor at the Department of Applied Psychology
12	Maynooth	PhD	m	Military History and Strategic Studies	Padua	m	Associate Professor at the Department of Historical and Geographical Sciences and the Ancient World
13	Minho	PhD	f	Sociology, Medicalization of Childbirth	Maynooth	m	Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Sociology
14	Minho	PhD	m	American Poetry	Left the programme after the Kick-Off		
15	Padua	PhD	m	Environmental Geomechanics	Lyon	f	Professor at the Faculty of Earth Sciences
16	Padua	PostDoc	f	Theoretical Philosophy, Posthumanism, Hegel	Graz	f	Professor for the History of Philosophy
17	Vilnius	PhD	m	Sustainable Consumption, Sociology	Graz	m	Professor at the Department of Sociology, Head of Center for Social Research
18	Vilnius	PhD	f	Psychology, Chronic Pain	Granada	m	Professor at the Department of Personality, Evaluation and Psychological Treatment
19	Wrocław	PhD	f	History, 16th-18th Century	Padua	f	Associate Professor at the Department of Historical and Geographical Sciences and the Ancient World
20	Wrocław	PhD	m	Intercultural Communication, Migration Studies	Graz	f	Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTEES

MOODLE PLATFORM

As the Moodle platform from the last round showed that only a small number of participants had accessed it (possibly due to the need for external accounts and passwords), the organising team decided not to use it again this time. Ideally, the Arqus LMS would be used for this purpose, but it was still in development at this point. Materials were distributed via email after the online sessions.

ONLINE ONBOARDING MEETING

On 17th June 2024, the co-leads and the facilitator hosted an onboarding meeting for mentees and already selected mentors, to inform them about the mentoring programme and the start in autumn. Last round, we noticed that after the matching procedure, there was a lot of enthusiasm to begin the mentoring right away, however, the official start of the programme is in late September/early October (in order to organise the Kick-Off event and ensure continuity, as many Arqus universities are on summer break in July or August). To communicate about this, we organised this onboarding meeting.

IN-PERSON KICK-OFF WORKSHOP

The Kick-Off Workshop took place at the University of Lyon 1 from Tuesday, 24 September to Wednesday, 25 September 2024 and lasted from 9am on the first day to noon on the second day. Only 12 of the 20 selected mentees were able to attend the kick-off workshop. This was due primarily because of the unavailability of travel and accommodation funding, and partly due to other obligations such as work, teaching or care duties. Eight of the participants were male and four female. While the gender balance of selected mentees overall is quite even, unfortunately at the kick-off workshop it was noticeably skewed.

	Gender	University
1	m	Granada
2	m	Granada
3	m	Graz
4	m	Graz
5	m	Leipzig
6	f	Lyon 1
7	m	Minho
8	m	Padua
9	m	Vilnius
10	f	Vilnius
11	f	Wrocław
12	f	Wrocław

Organising Team

- Yasmin Dolak-Struss, external professional facilitator
- Laura Bousquet, University of Lyon 1, co-lead WG07
- Luzia Strasser, University of Graz, co-lead WG07
- For the workshop on European funding opportunities in Humanities and Social Sciences: Candice Carron (ABILITY, Lyon 1), Claire Joncheray (ABILITY, Lyon 2) and Laure-Patricia Balep (ABILITY, Lyon 2)

In developing the programme, feedback from the first round was taken into account. As a result, the workshop was more focused on individual reflection (although group activities were included) and the mentoring itself, with a session and Dos and Don'ts, a brainstorming on the topics to address with the mentor and in-person testimonials of 2 from the previous year's participants (1 PhD candidate and 1 PostDoc). Especially the exchange on topics for the mentoring programme, reflecting many of the challenges early-stage researchers face in academia, was very successful.

The University of Lyon 1 offered an additional programme for those mentees who arrived earlier or stayed longer. As well as a city tour and tours of some of the university's facilities, there was a workshop titled 'How to get my postdoctoral research funded by Europe? Focus on Social Sciences and Humanities", organised in cooperation with the ABILITY project, in which Lyon 1 is involved. On Thursday, local PhD candidates and postdocs joined five Arqus participants to find out about European funding and the criteria for obtaining it. The organisers took a participatory and practical approach, involving activities such as CV workshops and reflection on ways to demonstrate the societal impact of their work. Thanks to this workshop, we explored the possibility of Arqus developing events on applications for research funding, especially targeted at postdocs.

FIRST ONLINE SESSION: SECRETS OF ACADEMIA

The first online session for mentees took place on 6 November 2024. As it received good feedback in the last round, Dr Gerald Lind from the Doctoral Academy at the University of Graz was invited to speak again. He gave a short presentation on "The Secrets of Academia" i.e. unspoken social rules and hidden assumptions in academia, followed by a discussion of the mentee's own experiences with these issues. The session was facilitated by Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss, 13 mentees took part.

SECOND ONLINE SESSION: INTERNATIONAL FUNDING LANDSCAPES

The second online session took place on 13 February 2025 from 14:00-15:30. Due to illness of the planned speaker, the organising team decided to move Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss' session forward and she gave her presentation on "International Funding Landscapes", notably Marie-Sklodowska-Curie fellowships. Eight mentees attended this session. As this is an often-requested topic among early-stage researchers, we decided to keep this session in the programme again.

THIRD ONLINE SESSION: AI IN ACADEMIA

The third online session on "AI in Academia" took place on 9 April 2025 and unfortunately the speaker had to cancel on a very short notice due to illness as well. We decided to still hold the session in a changed format, opting for a peer group exchange on the topic instead of postponing or cancelling the session entirely. The facilitator Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss had prepared an interactive document on which the mentees could answer several questions regarding their experience with AI tools. There was a lot of exchange about the use of different tools, how they can be helpful, which tasks can be eased with the

help of AI, but also what the risks of relying on AI could be, as well as other ethical concerns regarding the use of AI. Seven mentees took part in this session.

FOURTH ONLINE SESSION: PRESENTING YOUR RESEARCH ONLINE

The fourth online session was held on 1 June 2025. Dr Hildrun Walter from the University of Graz gave input on "Presenting Your Research Online", discussing different online platforms and their uses for researchers (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok), giving insight into communication strategies and considerations. The mentees were given a practical exercise to analyse and discuss different presentation techniques across different Social Media platforms. The immediate feedback on this session was very positive. Seven mentees participated in this session.

FINAL ONLINE SESSION: CONCLUDING THE PROGRAMME

The final online session took place on 18 June 2025. It was a wrap-up of the programme, giving the mentees space to reflect on their mentoring journey and provide some feedback. Six mentees attended this meeting. They discussed their experiences and looked back on their development in the past nine months in breakout sessions and then shared their thoughts with the organisers and the rest of the group. The experiences and feedback were very positive, several mentees highlighted that they had gained a lot of confidence with the help of the mentor.

Some quotes from the mentees:

- "I know more about myself and I'm much more confident in the academic world".
- "The interaction with the mentors really helped us to feel more confident."
- "Even though it was only for one year, the lessons we learned will last for our entire careers."

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTORS

WG07 members were asked to establish initial contact with their local mentors and ask them about participating in the mentoring programme. If they received a positive response, the co-lead in Graz sent an official welcome mail to the mentor that included some more information about the programme and next steps. Mentors were also invited to the online onboarding meeting on 17 June 2024.

Subsequent email communication with mentors was conducted by the co-lead in Graz and the professional facilitator leading the programme.

FIRST MENTORS' LOUNGE

A first doodle poll for a first meeting in October or November got very few responses, so co-leads decided to host the first Mentors' Lounge at a later date. A new poll was sent in October, with dates for early December. The date for the first Mentors' Lounge was then set for 2 December 2024. Five mentors attended this session.

SECOND MENTORS' LOUNGE

Another doodle was sent out in late February, and while five mentors participated in the poll, only two showed up for the meeting on 8 April 2025. As a result, the meeting was very short. Overall, it is very difficult to change this low turnout, as it depends on the motivation and availability of the mentors. Meetings are doodled well in advance, and availability is taken into account and reminders are sent the morning of.

THIRD MENTORS' LOUNGE

A third and final mentors' lounge was set for 23 June 2025. Once again only two mentors participated. One of them had already had the final meeting with her mentee, while the other asked for advice on how to conclude the relationship positively but decidedly.

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

FEEDBACK FROM MENTEES

Feedback from mentees was collected via an online survey, to which 14 mentees responded. Participants were asked about their mentoring relationship, their experience of the kick-off event (if attended), and the online sessions. Overall, experiences with the mentoring programme and of the kick-off event were very positive. Due to a technical mistake in the online form, the online sessions could only be evaluated in this second round.

In response to the question, "How satisfied were you with your mentor match?", 5 out of 14 respondents rated their match as 10/10 (a perfect match). The lowest rating given was 7, with an average score of 8.85 and a median of 9, indicating a high level of overall satisfaction.

The average number of meetings between mentors and mentees was 4.2. Four respondents were able to meet their mentor in person during the programme. For 8 out of 14 mentees, a lack of funding prevented in-person meetings. Another factor mentioned was geographical distance, although several respondents noted that online meetings worked well despite being in different countries.

When asked, "To what extent was your mentor able to support you in the way you had hoped for?", responses were again very positive, resulting in an average score of 9.1 and a median of 9.5.

1 (not at all)	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10 (completely)**
-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	2	7

Key topics discussed between mentees and mentors included:

- Possible next career steps (10 responses)
- Applying for academic positions (9 responses)
- Grant writing (5 responses)
- Mental health and work–life balance (5 responses)
- Time management (4 responses)
- Publication processes (4 responses)
- Family planning and academic careers (4 responses)
- Stays abroad (2 responses)
- Conferences,
- Maintaining collaborations,
- Ethical uses of AI, and
- Research ethics

When asked whether they had experienced any difficulties with their mentor, mentees reported the following issues:

- Finding suitable times to meet (3 responses)
- Delayed email responses (2 responses)
- Academic differences (1 response)

Despite these minor challenges, 13 out of the 14 respondents indicated that they plan to remain in contact with their mentor after the programme.

Seven of the fourteen respondents also participated in the in-person kick-off meeting in Lyon in September 2024. Particularly valuable aspects of this meeting included sharing personal academic journeys, getting to know other mentees, engaging in self-reflection on mentoring themes, clarifying mentor and mentee roles, and discussing effective and ineffective communication.

General feedback highlighted a strong desire for increased interaction among mentees. Many participants suggested group discussions, informal online meetups, or dedicated platforms to exchange experiences and provide mutual support. Mentees felt that greater peer interaction would further enrich learning, strengthen relationships, and help normalise shared challenges in academia. Workshops, structured support, continuous monitoring, and exposure to diverse perspectives were also seen as highly beneficial. Although the programme was perceived as time-consuming, it was widely regarded as a worthwhile investment that enhanced confidence, motivation, and professional development. Overall, the most valued aspects of the programme were the guidance provided by experienced mentors, opportunities to discuss future career plans, and the receipt of honest, constructive feedback.

FEEDBACK FROM MENTORS

Feedback from Mentors was collected in the last Mentors' Lounge and via email, however very little response was received. Some comments from mentors were:

- Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the programme, which was an extremely valuable experience for me!
- For me it was a very positive experience, and I will certainly stay in contact with [my mentee] even after the end of the Arqus program.
- It was with no doubt a very positive and fruitful experience. I met both online and in person with my mentee, and I was very happy with the meetings.

There are also several mentors who voiced their willingness to participate in future rounds of the programme.

REFLECTIONS FOR THE NEXT ROUND

Interestingly, in this round we had more issues with commitment and retention of both mentees and mentors, even though the programme was conducted in the same way.

Learnings are:

- How to ensure language proficiency of mentees is sufficient
- How to avoid applications done with ChatGPT
- Revisit the online sessions and the mentors' lounges (low participation numbers)
- Find means to allow more mentees to join Kick-Off Workshop, as it showed that those who participated in the Kick-Off were overall more involved in the Programme and attended more online sessions
- Strengthen commitment to the programme from both mentees and mentors

THIRD ROUND: 2025-2026

CALL

The call for the third round of the Arqus Mentoring Programme was launched on 6 March 2025 and was initially open until 31 March, but this deadline was extended for some partner universities. The call was published on the Arqus website and subsequently spread throughout the universities via different channels.

This year's application procedure differed in that applicants had to agree to a disclaimer about the use of AI tools, upload an academic CV, and were informed that they would be invited to a short interview if they were shortlisted.

APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

We received 145 complete applications for this round. However, the distribution among universities remains highly uneven. Of the total applicants, 31 were postdoctoral researchers, coming from six different universities. In terms of gender, 78 women, 63 men and one non-binary person applied, as well as one person identifying as transmasculine. Two applicants selected 'I would rather not say' when asked about their gender.

University	# total applicants	# female	# male	# other	# postdocs
Granada	82	49	32	1	9
Graz	11	6	4	1	3
Leipzig	3	1	2	-	2
Lyon	2	-	1	1	1
Maynooth	7	3	4	-	-
Minho	4	2	2	-	-
Padua	24	12	11	1	14
Vilnius	1	1	-	-	-
Wrocław	7	3	4	-	-
Kyiv	4	1	3	-	2
TOTAL	**145**	**78**	**63**	**4**	**31**

The goal this year was to increase participation, so each university was able to nominate three people for the programme.

Local selection committees reviewed the applications and compiled a shortlist, which they sent to the co-leads. The co-leads then contacted the top three candidates for a brief interview. The 20–30 minute interviews were intended to: a) verify the applicants' English skills; b) reinforce the purpose and

expectations of the programme; and c) give the applicants the opportunity to share more about themselves and their mentoring needs with the co-leads.

All of the shortlisted applicants were accepted into the programme. As not all universities were able to nominate three participants, additional places were offered to other universities and those ranked next on the list were invited to interview and subsequently selected. The interviews went very well and were concluded by 3 June.

MATCHING PROCESS

Seven Arqus partners, including Durham University, had launched calls of interest for mentors earlier in the year and from these responses a database was created.

University	**Female Volunteer Mentors**	**Male Volunteer Mentors**
Wrocław	26	19
Padova	23	20
Maynooth	2	-
Lyon 1	12	8
Durham	9	10
Granada	29	29
Vilnius	1	1
Total	**102**	**87**
	54%	46%

Fourteen matches were made through the database. The rest of the mentors were suggested by the working group and contacted by the co-leads. A total of 56 researchers were contacted until the 29 matches were found. The mentor and mentee were then asked to arrange an initial meeting to confirm their commitment to continuing in the programme together. In one case, a mentee rejected a mentor after the initial introductory meeting because her area of expertise was too different from his area of interest and he felt she lacked commitment. The mentor accepted the mentee's decision. Fortunately, a replacement was quickly found.

SELECTED PARTICIPANTS AND MATCHED MENTORS

#	University Mentee	PhD/ Postdoc	G	Field/Subject	University Mentor	G	Field/Position
1	Granada	PhD	m	English Studies	Vilnius	m	Associate Professor of Stylistics
2	Granada	PhD	f	Education Sciences	Vilnius	f	Professor at the Institute of Education
3	Graz	PhD	f	Psychology	Minho	f	Researcher at the School of Psychology
4	Graz	PhD	m	Sustainable Mobility	Durham	m	Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship
5	Graz	PostDoc	f	Psychology	Padua	f	Professor at the Department of Psychology
6	Graz	PostDoc	f	Linguistics	Leipzig	f	Junior Research Group leader `Grammatical Strength in Prosodic Morphology: Typology and Theory'
7	Leipzig	PhD	m	Information Systems	Padua	m	Assistant Professor at the Department of Mathematics
8	Leipzig	PostDoc	f	African Studies	Graz	f	Professor at the Department of Sociology
9	Leipzig	PostDoc	m	Political Science	Graz	m	Full Professor at the Department of Religious Studies
10	Lyon 1	PhD	o	Information and Communication Science	Graz	m	Professor at the Department of American Studies
11	Maynooth	PhD	m	Electronic Engineering	Durham	f	Assistant Professor in Engineering
12	Maynooth	PhD	f	Education Sciences	Granada	f	Professor at the Faculty of Education
13	Maynooth	PhD	f	Education Sciences	Padua	f	Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy and Applied Psychology
14	Maynooth	PhD	m	Physics	Padua	f	Professor at the Physics and Astronomy Department
15	Minho	PhD	m	Structural Engineering	Padua	m	Associate Professor at the Department of Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering
16	Minho	PhD	f	Material Engineering	Padua	m	Assistant Professor at the Physics and Astronomy Department

#	University Mentee	PhD/ Postdoc	G	Field/Subject	University Mentor	G	Field/Position
17	Minho	PhD	f	Education Sciences	Vilnius	f	Professor at the Institute for Literature, Culture and Translation Research
18	Padua	PhD	m	Biomedical Sciences	Lyon	f	Professor and Deputy Director at SFR Biosciences
19	Padua	PhD	f	Biomedical Sciences	Granada	m	Researcher at the Department of Physiology
20	Padua	PostDoc	f	Oncological and Gastroenterological Surgical Science	Maynooth	f	Associate Professor at the Human Health Institute
21	Padua	PostDoc	m	Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World	Maynooth	m	Full Professor of History
22	Vilnius	PhD	f	Social Policy	Wroclaw	f	Head of the Public Administration Department
23	Wrocław	PhD	f	Earth Sciences	Granada	f	Full Professor at the Department of Mineralogy and Petrology
24	Wrocław	PhD	m	Digital Sociology	Leipzig	m	Professor and Chair at/of the Department of Communication and Media Studies
25	Wrocław	PhD	f	History	Padua	f	Associate Professor at the Department of Early Modern History
26	Wrocław	PhD	m	History	Leipzig	f	Full Professor of 'Old Testament: History and Religious History of Israel and its Environment'
27	Kyiv	PostDoc	m	Archaeology	Granada	f	Professor at the Department of Prehistoria y Arqueología
28	Kyiv	PostDoc	m	Computer Science	Lyon	m	Professor at the Department of Computer Science
29	Kyiv	PostDoc	f	Public and Business Partnerships	Maynooth	f	Associate Professor at the School of Business

One mentee had to leave the programme before its end after four months, as this mentee was changing job roles and could no longer complete the mentoring programme.

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTEES

Communication with the mentees was conducted via the phd-pursuit@arqus-alliance.eu email address so that all co-leads could respond to messages and previous communications would be accessible for new co-leads. Regarding the online sessions, the topics remained the same as last round, due to good online feedback and the overall relevance of the issues.

MOODLE PLATFORM

With the launch of the Arqus LMS, it was possible to create a Moodle Course for the mentees to collect all the materials and links in one place. This was an improvement to the previous Moodle as the participants were able to use their own university sign-in, making the process much easier. The Moodle platform was moderated by the facilitator and the co-leads.

ONLINE ONBOARDING SESSION

As in the previous round, an onboarding session was offered, but this time it was only for the mentees. The main objectives were for the mentees to meet the group, get to know the facilitator, and receive more information about the Kick-Off Workshop in Graz. The purpose of this session was to strengthen commitment to the programme, inform everyone about the summer break, and give them the opportunity to ask questions about the Kick-Off. Seventeen mentees joined the session; two had excused themselves beforehand.

IN-PERSON KICK-OFF WORKSHOP

The Kick-Off Workshop took place at the University of Graz once again. It was scheduled to take place from 2 to 3 October 2025. A date in September was not possible due to the availability of suitable rooms and the facilitator's schedule. The local organisation was handled by the co-lead in Graz, and the programme was developed jointly with the facilitator.

Participation of the NaUKMA mentees was made possible through a strategic partnership grant provided by the University of Graz.

In total, 21 out of 29 mentees were able to attend the in-person workshop. Absences were partly due to other commitments (family or work), visa issues, or concurrent research stays abroad.

	Gender	University
1	m	Granada
2	f	Granada
3	m	Graz
4	f	Graz
5	f	Graz
6	f	Leipzig
7	m	Leipzig
8	m	Lyon 1

	Gender	University
9	m	Maynooth
10	m	Maynooth
11	f	Maynooth
12	f	Maynooth
13	f	Padua
14	m	Padua
15	f	Vilnius
16	f	Wroclaw
17	f	Wroclaw
18	m	Wroclaw
19	f	Kyiv
20	m	Kyiv
21	m	Kyiv

Organising Team

- Yasmin Dolak-Struss, external professional facilitator
- Luzia Strasser, University of Graz, co-lead WG07
- Maria Heinemann, University of Graz, interim co-lead WG07

Day 1 of the workshop began at 09:30 and finished at 16:00. After the co-lead's welcome address and an overview of the day's programme, the mentees took part in a sociometric activity. They were asked to stand in a way that visualised the diversity of the group in response to three questions:

- Where are you currently working/living?
- What stage of your research career are you at?
- Which is your research field (Formal/Natural Sciences, Life Sciences, Arts and Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences, Other Research Fields)

A significant part of the day involved sharing experiences. The first main exercise, “Your Career Path”, involved the mentees coming together in small groups to reflect on their previous experiences in academia and consider their vision for the future, including their goals, the challenges they might face, and the support they would need. The resulting flipcharts were then presented and discussed in the plenary session. After lunch and having the group photo taken, the second exercise, “Brilliant Moments”, took place. This was a pair exercise designed to practise listening and communication skills by sharing a positive experience in academia and providing feedback. Participants found this exercise challenging yet rewarding, saying that it was encouraging to exchange ideas with someone they knew little about. This was followed by a coffee break and an exercise on 'How to get the most out of mentoring', in which the group discussed commitment, preparation for mentoring sessions, goal setting, and managing expectations. There was also a discussion about the extent to which personal topics should be shared with the mentor. The day concluded with testimonials and a Q&A session with two mentees from Graz who had participated in previous rounds. The current mentees found this very valuable.

In the evening, an informal dinner was held at 7 pm at a local restaurant.

Day 2 of the workshop began at 09:30 and concluded at 13:00. After a warm-up exercise, the first session involved collecting personal topics for mentoring over the next nine months. This was done first individually, and then the topics were shared and discussed with the group. This exercise is intended to generate new ideas and help structure meetings with the mentor. The final exercise of the day was a peer consultation session, in which mentees offered each other feedback and advice on current issues. The day concluded with a closing round and a feedback form. This was followed by lunch and an optional city tour.

Immediate feedback on the event was overwhelmingly positive. Participants were highly satisfied with the mix of methods, the participatory nature, the competent facilitation and the overall organisation of the event.

FIRST ONLINE SESSION: SECRETS OF ACADEMIA

The first online session for mentees in the third round took place on 27 November 2025. Having received positive feedback in the previous two rounds, Dr Gerald Lind from the Research Careers Campus at the University of Graz was invited to speak again. He gave a short presentation on 'The Secrets of Academia', i.e. the unspoken social rules and hidden assumptions of academia. This was followed by a discussion of the mentees' own experiences with these issues. Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss facilitated the session, which 24 mentees took part in. There was a great deal of interest in this topic, as evidenced by the mentees' numerous questions and the fruitful discussion that took place.

SECOND ONLINE SESSION: ONLINE PRESENCE OF RESEARCHERS

The second online session took place on 27 January 2026. Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss gave a presentation on 'Your Online Presence as a Researcher'. Three of the mentees then shared their insights and experiences of using different types of online media for their professional research careers. This was followed by an interesting group discussion in which mentees could ask more experienced colleagues about their experiences and how they had achieved success. Participants engaged actively in the discussion and showed a great deal of interest in the session. 19 mentees participated in this session.

THIRD ONLINE SESSION: AI IN RESEARCH

The third online session took place on 9 March 2026. Cyprien Caraco from Lyon 1 shared his insights on 'Practical and Ethical Concerns of AI Use in Research'. In his talk, Mr Caraco introduced the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and provided information on various AI tools. He also gave examples of AI use in research and offered input on practical and ethical concerns regarding AI use. He also addressed institutional, publisher and journal guidelines for the use of AI. The presentation was considered very valuable for the group. 14 mentees participated in this session.

FOURTH ONLINE SESSION: INTERNATIONAL FUNDING LANDSCAPES

The fourth online session took place on 6 May 2026 and covered a topic that is often requested by early-stage researchers. Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss gave a presentation on 'International Funding Landscapes'. She provided the group with general information about academic funding and before diving deeper into Horizon Europe funding opportunities. Specifically, the ERC grant and the Marie-Skłodowska-Curie actions were addressed. Dr. Dolak-Struss then gave some advice on successful proposal writing, based on her years of experience in the area. In the end, the mentees had the opportunity to ask their own questions and get advice from Dr Dolak-Struss. One topic of interest was the impact of Artificial Intelligence in

proposal writing and the resulting surge in numbers of proposals on their chances of receiving funding. 15 mentees attended this session.

FINAL ONLINE SESSION: CONCLUDING THE PROGRAMME

The fifth and final online session took place on 17 June 2026 and was intended as a final check-in and wrap-up of the programme. The facilitator gave some input on how to positively conclude the mentoring process, emphasising that the role of initiating a possible continuation of the relationship would lie with the mentor. Mentees were asked to share some highlights and challenges of their mentoring journey. Most of the mentees present were happy with their experiences; more detailed feedback was asked from them in an anonymous survey. The results can be found in the Feedback and Evaluation section. 15 mentees attended this session.

ACTIVITIES FOR MENTORS

FIRST MENTORS' LOUNGE

All mentors were invited to an initial online meeting to meet their fellow mentors and the programme facilitator, Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss. Dr Dolak-Struss provided information about the programme and answered questions. Two identical online sessions were offered, one on Thursday, 16 October from 15:00 to 16:00 CET, and one on Monday, 20 October from 15:00 to 16:00 CET.

After an introduction round where the mentors stated their name, university, position at the university and research field, the facilitator asked several questions to get an impression of the group:

- Have you already had experience as a mentor before? (either in a formalised or informal way)
- Have you yourself had a mentor at some point in your career?

The group discussed the state of their relationships with their mentees. Contact varies from person to person. The facilitator emphasised some of the responsibilities of a mentor, as well as the differences between a mentor, a supervisor, a sponsor and, above all, a therapist. Almost 20 mentors attended one of the first Mentor Lounges.

SECOND MENTORS' LOUNGE

The second Mentors' Lounge took place on 9 January 2026. Nine mentors participated, after some had excused themselves. The event was hosted by Dr Yasmin Dolak-Struss. One new mentor joined the meeting for the first time. Almost all of the mentors reported having good relationships with their mentees and meeting them regularly. Topics discussed included career development, securing funding for travel and applying for research grants. Depending on how closely related their research fields are, they sometimes also discuss research questions. One mentor reported having a very demanding mentee, and it was agreed that the organisation team would support her in setting boundaries, as her mentee's expectations of her were quite high.

THIRD MENTORS' LOUNGE

The third Mentors' Lounge was scheduled for 7 April 2026. Five mentors took part in this meeting, which was rather low attendance. The mentors were asked to share whether their relationship with their mentee had gone well and if anything surprising had happened. The following points were raised in some of the responses:

- It was surprising how close the relationship became, even though there had mainly been online meetings so far.
- The relationship was so positive that personal meetings are planned for the future.
- Another unexpected outcome is that one of the mentors will attend the thesis defense of her mentee as an external reviewer. This will also be a very interesting experience for the mentor.

One mentor, during the meeting, highlighted the significant value of acquiring experience as a non-supervisory mentor to international early-stage researchers.

FOURTH MENTORS' LOUNGE

The final mentors lounge took place on 12 June 2026 and was mainly concerned with bringing the mentoring relationship to a close and sharing experiences. Multiple mentors expressed their willingness to participate in the next programme as well. Additionally, the mentors gave their feedback on the running of the programme and made some suggestions, which is included below in "Feedback from Mentors".

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

FEEDBACK FROM MENTEES

Feedback from mentees was collected via an online survey, to which 17 mentees responded. Participants were asked about their mentoring relationship, their experience of the kick-off event (if attended), and the online sessions. Overall, experiences with the mentoring programme and of the kick-off event were very positive with a satisfaction rate of 8,35/10.

The average rating of satisfaction with the mentor match was 7,94. Most mentees rated their satisfaction between 8 and 10, however, this year, there were also a few that only gave 4 out of 10.

In the written response, most mentees left positive and appreciative feedback, such as "They were able to connect me to great resources", "They had the type of profile I aspire to have" or "We had a very good personal rapport from early on". However, some mentees had mixed responses such as "She was very helpful initially, so I profited a lot from her insights, yet our personalities didn't really vibe" or "Matching field, but also very formal and not super flexible".

Most mentees had 3-6 meetings with their mentors, some only one or two and some even seven or eight. 88% were satisfied with their number of meetings. Again, only a minority was able to visit their mentor and meet them personally. The reasons for this were no need or no time. Positively, no one mentioned the lack of funding as the programme could offer some funding for travel expenses this year.

When asked, "To what extent was your mentor able to support you in the way you had hoped for?", responses were again positive, resulting in an average score of 7,65.

1 (not at all)	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10 (completely)**
-	-	1	2	1	-	1	5	3	4

Key topics discussed between mentees and mentors included:

- Possible next career steps (82%)
- Applying for academic positions (64%)
- Publication processes (58%)
- Grant writing (47%)
- Mental health and work–life balance (41%)
- Time management (41%)
- Stays abroad (35%)

The biggest difficulties with the mentors that the mentees reported were the following:

- Finding suitable times to meet (33%)
- Academic differences (33%)
- Communication difficulties (16%)

Despite these minor challenges, two thirds of the respondents indicated that they plan to remain in contact with their mentor after the programme.

The satisfaction rates with the online sessions were similarly high with 4,33/5 for “Secrets of Academia”, 4,29/5 for “Presenting Your Research Online”, 3,86/5 for “Use of AI in Academia” and 4,25/5 for “International Funding Landscapes”.

88% of the participants also attended the kick-off workshop in Graz, out of which 60% felt that the time for the workshop (1,5 days) was sufficient, 13% wanted it a little longer and 26% much longer. The most useful content of the workshop was:

- Getting to know the other mentees (86%)
- Clarifying the roles of the mentor (73%)
- Sharing personal academic journeys (73%)
- Self- reflection on themes for mentoring (60%)

As in previous years, this year’s feedback once again indicates that the mentees also value the interaction within their group greatly. Peer exchange and interaction with each other was mentioned multiple times as particularly valuable.

Finally, we want to share some direct quotes from the mentees:

- I’ve had the opportunity to meet my mentor in person at [their] University and build a closer personal connection. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Arqus team for this opportunity!
- I would very much like to sign up as a mentor for new PhD students in the programme’s next intake – one of the greatest benefits of this mentoring programme for me was realising that I had already gained a great deal of experience and can share it with others.
- Thank you very much for all the work you've done and the effort you put into this programme. It is hugely valuable and immensely valued.

FEEDBACK FROM MENTORS

Feedback from mentors was collected mainly at the last Mentors' Lounge, via email and via an anonymous tool in case someone was more comfortable sharing their experience without a name attached. No one used this feedback format, all mentors shared their comments personally.

- Mentors and mentees mostly discussed questions about the future and not the PhD projects, this aspect is well-liked by the mentors and also the most relevant
- Some were frustrated that they felt they could not help the mentees as much as they would like.
- One mentor was invited to become an examiner in the mentee's PhD defense (this is an outcome that the mentoring programme initially did not invite).
- Mentors suggested that it would also be good to have a seminar for the mentors, maybe even in-person as a kick-off.
- Mentors appreciate a lot if the mentees can come visit them.
- The experience was seen as successful and showed the mentors that early stage researchers need support, including mental support.

Some impactful quotes from the feedback:

- "I've gained valuable experience in my role as a mentor. In particular, the international context was exciting. My mentee is brilliant and we plan to stay in touch."
- "It is ok that you have ups and downs in your process. It is important to understand as a mentor that sometimes, the mentee just needs someone to tell them, 'Everything will be okay.'"
- "I want to add that participating in the program also makes one better as a supervisor for other theses, not just the ones in the program. I noticed I pay more attention in supervising other dissertations and MA theses regarding the topics touched upon in Arqus."

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

After three mentoring programmes with 68 mentees, these particularly relevant aspects of the programme can be highlighted:

- The mentoring programme is very rewarding overall, offering great support to early-stage researchers to be able to better handle their tasks at the university and pursue their career plans
- From the second round onwards, it was very well understood that it is about career mentoring
- Interviews before the kick-off event with the mentees selected were very helpful in fostering connection and commitment
- It is necessary to provide funding to allow mentees to travel to the Kick-Off meeting as it was obvious that those who participated in the in-person workshop were more involved and committed throughout the nine months - some participants are ineligible for available funding schemes at their universities (e.g. Erasmus+)
- The Kick-Off meetings were really valuable in connecting the participants and encouraging them in their academic journeys
- Mentees in all three rounds had voiced their strong desire for a concluding in-person meeting as well
- Mentors also have expressed the desire to meet in person
- While we will never be able to have a 100% satisfaction rate, it is clear that some mentoring relationships resulted in further fruitful academic activities, e.g. one mentor joined the mentee's PhD defense as an examiner, and one mentor offered to support the mentee with a MSCA application.

- Thus, some of the established personal networks with the Arqus alliance have been and will be used as a platform for further collaborations or career steps
- The establishment of mentoring relationships between experienced researchers and Early-Stage Researchers from different EU countries strengthens the coherence of the European Higher Education Area.

Notes for the future

- Let mentees nominate their mentors - either they find an adequate mentor in a to-be-developed Arqus Mentors Database or they find a mentor of interest (regarding their research) on their own while researching distinguished researchers from the Arqus partner universities
- Enable the mentor and mentee to meet in person at least once, be able to provide funding for it or actively help with funding sources
- There is a limit of how many participants are feasible within one round, in terms of interviewing, matching and, of course, funding the in-person visit - if the programme should be expanded, it will have to be significantly altered
- Some universities have very few applications and this needs to be actively addressed in the future

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