D07.4 - REPORT ON PHD ADVISORY BOARD ACTIVITY

August 2026

Work Package: 07 – Arqus PhD Pursuit

Arqus II - Arqus Erasmus + Work Plan 2022-2026

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CONCEPT

The aim of establishing a PhD Advisory Board consisting of representatives of Arqus university leaders, PIs/doctoral supervisors and researcher development managers is to provide feedback and help modify the work of WG07 "PhD Pursuit". It was also envisaged that the board would include early-stage researchers (doctoral or postdoctoral) to provide a broader range of perspectives. The board's role includes advising WG07 on how to accomplish its tasks to the highest possible standard and facilitating long-term collaboration in ESR development.

On the one hand, the board can provide expert advice and insight into developments at the Arqus partner universities, helping to improve the quality and ambition of our work package. On the other hand, it ensures that key representatives are aware of the current Arqus offers for ESRs, as well as the work achieved by WG07 and the barriers and challenges it has encountered.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ARQUS PHD ADVISORY BOARD

Setting up the Arqus PhD Advisory Board was the first milestone of WG07 in M03 (December 2023). The following framework was developed by WG07 at the end of 2023:

What the Arqus PhD Advisory Board is:

- A board providing the WG07 co-leads and, if deemed necessary, additional WG07 members with constructive support and critical advice on WG activities in the planning, development and implementation phase as well as on potential further activities in the field of early-stage researcher support.
- A board providing WG07 with advice and support on identifying and establishing links and collaborations with other WGs that also support early-stage researchers (WG02 - Arqus Living Lab, WG03 - Communities of Practice, WG10 - Arqus Inclusion & Diversity Hub, etc.)

What the Arqus PhD Advisory Board <u>is not</u>:

- A decision-making body
- A body developing a position paper or recommendations

Guidelines and general principles:

- All Arqus partners universities have to be represented in the PhD Advisory Board.
- Arqus associated academic partners are also invited to nominate a representative.
- To fulfil its function effectively, the PhD Advisory Board should have a reasonable size. Thus, each partner university may appoint a maximum of two members.
- Diversity of profiles is a key principle of the board: positions, fields of expertise, experience levels and backgrounds of the board members should represent the full scope of actors in doctoral education.
- The PhD Advisory Board has to be gender-balanced.

Examples of potential profiles: PhD candidate, Postdoctoral researcher, Professors/Doctoral Supervisors, Vice-Rectors or Deans of Doctoral Studies, PhD/PostDoc/Graduate Academy Offices Staff, Career Services Staff, Research Offices Staff, etc.

Form of collaboration within the PhD Advisory Board

- Number of meetings to be determined (proposal by co-leads: twice a year)
- A regular meeting has a duration of up to two hours; depending on the activities to be discussed, shorter or longer meetings are also possible
- The regular meetings take place online, and requested in-person meetings are possible
- Ad hoc requests from co-leads / WG07 members for advice on a particular activity are possible
- The PhD Advisory Board Members read the documents provided by the WG07 in advance of meetings and give their feedback during the meeting
- The WG07 co-leads and possible additional members are responsible for collecting the information provided by the Advisory Board and deriving feasible measures from it

Timeline

- Step 1: questions discussed during the first constitutional WG meeting (09/11/2022)
- Step 2: guidelines to be agreed on by WG07 members (17/11/2022)
- Step 3: validation of the guidelines by the Steering Committee (21/11/2022)
- Step 4: nomination of the members (15/12/2022)
- Step 5: constitutional meeting (01/03/2023)

CONSTITUTION OF THE BOARD

University	Name	Position/Role	Duration
Granada	Antonio García Casco	Full Professor Department of Mineralogy and Petrology, and Director of the Doctoral School in Science, Technology and Engineering (EDCTI)	2022-2024
Granada	Esthr Puertas	Director of the Department of Structural Mechanics and Hydraulic Engineering	2024-2026
Granada	Encarnación Garrido Treviño	Head of Section of the International School for Postgraduate Studies (EIP)	2022-2026
Graz	Mireille van Poppel	Vice-Rector for Internationalisation	2022-2026

		and Equal Opportunities and also responsible for the Doctoral Academy Graz	
Graz	Astrid Veronig	Professor of Solar and Heliospheric Physics, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Vice-Dean of Research	2022-2026
Leipzig	Kornelia Ehrlich	Managing director of the Graduate Academy Leipzig	2022-2026
Leipzig	Johannes Schmidt	Post-doc in Geography	2022-2026
Lyon 1	Stéphane Daniele	Director of the Chemistry Graduate School	2022-2026
Lyon 1	Manuella El-Haber	PhD Candidate in Chemistry	Until Feb 2025
Lyon 1	Krenare Bruqi	PhD Candidate in Neuroscience	From Feb 2025
Maynooth	Robert Elmes	Science and Engineering Associate Dean of Research	From May 2024
Minho	Fernanda Isabel Santos	Secretary of the Doctoral College UMinho	2022-2026
Minho	Tiago da Silva Braga Farinha	Student in the PhD Programme in Management, speciality of Business Administration.	2022-2026
Padua	Roberta Rasa	Head, Academics and Training Division	2022-2026
Padua	Massimiliano Zattin	Vice Rector for Postgraduate and Doctorate Programmes	2022-2026
Vilnius	Vida Lapinskaitė	Director of the Department for Research and Innovation	2022-2026
Wroclaw	Robert Klementowski	Professor of History and Anthropology	2022-2026
Wroclaw	Emilia Wilanowska	Head of Arqus Office	From 2024

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

During the inaugural meeting, it was agreed that the board would convene one to two times a year, once in winter and once in summer. All the meetings of the Advisory Board were held online.

FIRST MEETING - 03/2023

The constitutional meeting of the Arqus PhD Advisory Board took place on 1 March 2023. The meeting was chaired by the co-leads Laura Bousquet (Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1) and Gerald Lind (University of Graz), who represented Luzia Strasser. Twelve participants attended the meeting, representing all Arqus partner universities except Maynooth.

OPENING AND CONTEXT

The meeting was formally opened by the co-leads. Following a short round of introductions, participants received an overview of the Arqus Alliance and Work Package 7 (WG07), entitled “Arqus PhD Pursuit.” The objectives, organisational structure, and working modalities of the Arqus PhD Advisory Board were presented and discussed.

ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

The Advisory Board discussed the most appropriate approach to matching mentors and mentees, weighing up the pros and cons of discipline-specific and interdisciplinary models. Although interdisciplinary mentoring was recognised as a way of broadening perspectives, the Board generally agreed that matching mentees with mentors from the same discipline tends to be more beneficial. Evidence from previous Arqus mentoring initiatives showed that matching mentees with mentors from the same discipline had led to tangible results, such as invitations to teach, guest lectures and joint publications. It was agreed that the mentoring programme should focus primarily on career development and planning, rather than research-specific content. Planned mentee mobilities were encouraged, with the clarification that Erasmus+ funding requires visits of at least five days. These mobilities could include exchanges involving predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers within the mentor’s research group. At this stage, it was not recommended to make a specific differentiation between PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers.

MULTI-DAY EVENTS FOR ESRS ON CAREERS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA & TRAIN THE TRAINERS WORKSHOPS

The concept and draft programme for Career Week in Granada, which has been scheduled for May 2023, were presented to the board. Feedback was largely positive. Responsibility for disseminating the call for trainers was assigned to the individual partner universities, while the host institution, the University of Granada, was tasked with selecting participants, with advisory input from the WG co-leads. The selection criteria agreed will prioritise PhD candidates in the final phase of their doctoral studies, early-stage postdoctoral researchers, and applicants who can clearly articulate their motivation.

ARQUS EARLY-STAGE RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT WEB RESOURCE CENTRE

The Advisory Board agreed that the proposed resource centre should provide ESRs with clear, up-to-date information on forthcoming Arqus events. They considered it desirable to include interactive elements, such as forums linked to specific events. These forums could serve multiple purposes, including hosting testimonials from past participants and collecting feedback on Arqus activities. Integration into the future Arqus Plaza intranet was identified as a potential long-term goal. To ensure the resource centre meets user needs, the Board proposed distributing a short questionnaire to early-stage researchers to identify

preferred functionalities and suitable technical solutions. They emphasised that the resource centre should include funding opportunities, but only those that are internationally accessible — excluding purely national calls. Clear responsibility for administration, updating, and long-term maintenance was identified as a prerequisite for launching the platform.

SECOND MEETING - 06/2023

The second meeting of the Advisory Board took place on 27 June 2023. In advance, preparatory documentation outlining activities and proposed discussion questions was circulated. Nine representatives from seven Arqus partner universities attended the meeting. Key agenda items included the Mentoring Programme, the Development Resource Centre and an update on Career Week in Granada.

To encourage interaction among participants, a new meeting format incorporating breakout group discussions was introduced. After the welcome and agenda overview, the board members took part in a brief introduction round.

ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

The co-leads presented an overview of the mentoring programme, including application numbers by university, selection procedures, and the composition of the mentee cohort. Two key challenges were highlighted: recruiting a sufficient number of mentors and effectively reaching potential applicants at some partner institutions. The importance of mentees setting clear goals at the beginning of the mentoring relationship was emphasised during the breakout discussions. It was agreed that expectations and limitations needed to be clarified early on to prevent misunderstandings. One particular risk identified was unrealistically high expectations among mentees, such as expecting immediate career solutions or joint publications. The Board reaffirmed that mentoring should focus on career development, particularly when transitioning from doctoral studies to a first postdoctoral position. Mentors were recognised as playing a valuable role in helping mentees develop a medium-term career outlook spanning two to three years, as well as guiding them towards additional sources of information. To facilitate effective mentoring, organisers should provide structured tools, templates and exercises. The benefits of participation for mentors were also emphasised, and Mentors' Lounges were confirmed as a valuable format for peer exchange. The distinction between mentoring and supervision was discussed extensively. It was confirmed that the programme's primary aim was to support the development of transferable skills, career decisions and work–life balance, rather than to provide a form of additional research supervision. Confidentiality, particularly with regard to research data, was identified as an area requiring emphasis.

MULTI-DAY EVENTS FOR ESRS ON CAREERS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA & TRAIN THE TRAINERS WORKSHOPS

The co-leads presented the lessons learned from Career Week in Granada and proposed improvements for future editions. Agreed improvements included the increased use of interactive formats, a stronger focus on non-academic job market skills, more structured programmes and refined participant selection procedures. Planning for the next Career Week will take place between April and July 2024, and the host university will be identified by October 2023.

ARQUS EARLY-STAGE RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT WEB RESOURCE CENTRE

The Board discussed the strategic direction of the resource centre, emphasising the need for it to be attractive, sustainable and relevant. Recommended content areas included mobility and training opportunities, courses, funding opportunities, job advertisements, and access to research methods and facilities. Information on doctoral supervision for supervisors could be made available on a different web space. The introduction of Arqus PhD Discussion Forums for Arqus PhD candidates was also proposed.

THIRD MEETING - 01/2024

The third meeting of the Advisory Board took place on 30 January 2024. In advance, preparatory documentation outlining the main topics and discussion points was circulated. Eight board members representing five Arqus partner universities participated. Key agenda items included the Mentoring Programme, the Development Resource Centre, Career Week and the Visiting Scholar Scheme for postdoctoral researchers.

ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

The co-leads introduced a set of strategic questions regarding the future design of the Mentoring Programme. The Advisory Board agreed that the programme should focus on personal development and career pathways rather than acting as a substitute for thesis supervision. They considered a clear separation between mentoring and doctoral supervision to be essential, and this should be explicitly communicated in programme calls and guidelines. To minimise potential conflicts relating to research advice, the Board suggested that mentors should not come from the same research discipline as their mentees. This clearer emphasis on non-research-related mentoring was also expected to attract participants seeking guidance on career and personal development, rather than academic supervision. Support for identifying thesis supervisors or research advisors within the Arqus Alliance could be offered as a separate, distinct activity.

Recruiting mentors was identified as an increasing challenge due to the limited disciplinary coverage within the alliance. To incentivise participation, the Board recommended offering dedicated training opportunities, such as supervision or leadership training, potentially in an in-person format. In addition, the Board considered it important to formally recognise mentoring activities. The introduction of an Arqus Mentoring Certificate was proposed to officially acknowledge mentor engagement.

ARQUS EARLY-STAGE RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT WEB RESOURCE CENTRE

The co-leads presented the concept of an Arqus PhD Café, inspired by the Arqus Language Café. This would be an informal online space where PhD candidates from across the alliance could exchange ideas. The Board discussed positioning the PhD Café as an opportunity to practise English and network informally, particularly for young researchers planning to undertake international mobility. Two main formats were considered suitable. The first consists of short, 15–30 minute lunch-break talks focusing on informal exchange. The second format involved crowd-solving problem-based sessions, in which a short presentation of a problem would be followed by a moderated group discussion. Additional topic-based sessions were also suggested, for example, on science communication.

VISITING SCHOLAR SCHEME DESIGN

The co-leads presented the task of developing a Visiting Scholar Scheme for postdoctoral researchers, inviting strategic input from the Advisory Board in the process. They identified limited visibility of the Arqus Alliance among researchers as a major challenge. To enhance its attractiveness and reputation, the Board emphasised the importance of showcasing the research strengths and internationally recognised fields of partner universities, as well as communicating a clearly defined research portfolio for the alliance. The proposed Visiting Scholar Scheme was seen as particularly beneficial for underfunded research fields, where Arqus funding could have a significant impact. The Board considered a simple application process, short processing times and, ideally, a rolling call to be essential characteristics of the scheme. The Board also supported the idea of allowing shorter stays of one to four months in order to accommodate teaching, administrative and care responsibilities. Strategically, the scheme was seen as a foundation on which early-stage postdoctoral researchers could build international research networks, while offering

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more advanced postdoctoral researchers improved access to cross-border and international funding opportunities. Arqus was regarded as a trusted framework for addressing confidentiality concerns and fostering collaboration across institutions. The Arqus EuRep Infrastructure Database was identified as a potential tool for advertising access to research equipment. Long-term, sustainable funding was strongly preferred to one-off sponsorship models. While private funding was not excluded, it was recommended that potential sponsors operate at the European level and have a presence in multiple Arqus countries. Mixed funding models combining public and private sources were considered attractive. While the idea of introducing an annual Arqus Postdoctoral Visiting Scholar Award was discussed, it was considered a minimal fallback option that would not generate sustained collaboration.

FOURTH MEETING - 06/2024

The fourth meeting of the Advisory Board took place on 19 June 2024. Before the meeting, a document summarising the current state of activities was circulated. Six board members representing five Arqus partner universities were attending. Topics discussed included the Mentoring Programme, multi-day events for Early Stage Researchers focusing on careers outside academia, and the Visiting Scholar Scheme.

ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

The co-leads raised several operational and strategic issues relating to the ongoing mentoring programme. There were reports of recurring scheduling difficulties between mentors and mentees. To address these, the Advisory Board recommended involving local Arqus officers and Advisory Board members, where appropriate, to support communication with mentors who are less responsive. It was also suggested that local colleagues use alternative communication channels where necessary. To monitor progress and identify potential issues early on, the Board recommended distributing a short check-in questionnaire to mentees approximately two months after the programme started. Concerns were also raised about the potential use of AI tools for writing applications, as this could result in submissions that are polished but impersonal and inconsistent with the mentee's spoken language skills. The Board recommended introducing short, ten-minute, individual online interviews as part of the selection process to avoid bias, with these interviews applied uniformly to all applicants. Application forms should explicitly state that proficiency in spoken English is required, and clearer guidelines are recommended for both applicants and selection committees.

MULTI-DAY EVENTS FOR ESRS ON CAREERS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA & TRAIN THE TRAINERS WORKSHOPS

One of the key issues discussed was the number of participants dropping out during multi-day events. The Board agreed that funding conditions and attendance requirements must be communicated clearly in advance. Full reimbursement of travel costs should be conditional upon active participation throughout the entire event. However, partial or non-reimbursement was considered acceptable in cases of early departure without valid justification. The programme for the Career Week, which will be hosted by the University of Wrocław from 10 to 14 June 2024, was presented. This event will focus on participatory formats and workshops, involving six trainers from Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon and Wrocław. The Advisory Board raised no additional feedback or requests.

VISITING SCHOLAR SCHEME DESIGN

A draft framework for funding one-semester mobilities for postdoctoral researchers and tenure-track position holders was presented. Board members advised clarifying the eligibility criteria, particularly for postdoctoral researchers whose contracts are coming to an end, and requested more detailed budget calculations. Governance structures, decision-making processes and assumptions regarding travel costs were also identified as areas requiring further clarification.

Fifth meeting - 02/2025

The fifth meeting of the Advisory Board was held on 4 February 2025. This meeting was shorter than previous sessions and focused primarily on the outcome of the Mid-Term Review. No major strategic decisions were discussed during this meeting.

Sixth meeting – 11/2025

The sixth meeting of the Advisory Board took place on 5 November 2025. Due to changes in the structure of Work Package 07 and developments related to the next funding application, the meeting has been postponed until after the summer break.

NEW WG07 CO-LEADS

The newly appointed WG07 co-leads were formally introduced. The co-leads from the University of Graz are Maria Heinemann and Gerald Lind, while the co-leads from Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1 are Alison Roux-Bédéjus and Romain Thinon.

MULTI-DAY EVENTS FOR ESRS ON CAREERS OUTSIDE ACADEMIA

A draft programme for PhD Week on Careers Beyond Academia, which is due to take place in Maynooth, was presented via a video recording prepared by Stephen Carroll, who was unable to attend the meeting due to being on holiday. The Advisory Board assessed the programme content as well-designed and highly relevant for PhD candidates transitioning to industry or other non-research careers, as well as for those remaining in academia in various professional capacities. Some ambiguity was noted regarding two sessions on the ethical use of AI in career searches, which were scheduled for the first day. Clarification was recommended to avoid redundancy. The overall schedule was considered very dense. The proposed application period of ten to fourteen days was considered too short. A minimum application window of one month was recommended, in line with previous calls. Although the proposed two-week selection period was considered too short, it was deemed sufficient to allow participants adequate time for logistical planning if results were communicated in January. To enhance inclusivity and diversity, the Board recommended inviting a broader range of professionals from the social sciences and humanities, NGOs, museums, and other non-profit or cultural sectors, as well as from technology and industry.

INFORMATION POINT ON ARQUS BRIDGE FUNDING APPLICATION

The co-leads presented an overview of planned activities for the bridge funding period from October 2026 to September 2028. Future Work Package 06 will be led by the Universities of Graz, Leipzig, and Padua and will consist of four tasks: Arqus Doctoral Schools, Careers Outside Academia, Careers Inside Academia, and Knowledge Transfer and Commercial Exploitation.

The meeting concluded with general support for the proposed directions and acknowledgement of the need for further clarification and coordination during the next implementation phase.

Seventh meeting – 06/2026

The last board meeting took place on 30 June 2026 and was moderated by the co-leads from Graz. The agenda included presentations on the Mentoring Programme, the Career Week, the Arqus Bridge Funding activities and feedback on the work of the Advisory Board. The board members were asked for their feedback on the work of the board and for a reflection on successes and challenges of the work package activities to inform future programs.

MENTORING PROGRAMME ROUND 3

Round 3 of the mentoring programme was summarised for the board. 20 PhD researchers and 9 postdoctoral researchers were mentored by 29 advanced academics in the third round. In total, all rounds of the mentoring programme received 288 applications from mentees, of which 68 mentees were selected (from all partner universities). Board members asked about the distribution of the applications, which was answered by sharing a table that showed that most applications came from Granada, while some other partners struggled to even find 2 mentees. This led to a discussion of the different dissemination channels at each Arqus partner university, particularly for postdocs. Additionally, the merits of the programme for pre- vs. postdocs were discussed, as the postdoctoral mentees come in with a completely different skillset and experience level. Therefore, it was crucial to make the online mentoring sessions helpful for both groups.

PHD WEEK: CAREERS BEYOND ACADEMIA IN MAYNOOTH

Next, the PhD Career Week in Maynooth was recapped, for which the board members had given multiple suggestions and advice regarding the programme and application process in the last meeting. From 8-12 June, Maynooth University hosted the joint Arqus PhD Career Week, which was held in conjunction with the Summer School 2026 of the Research Ireland Centre for Research Training in Advanced Networks for Sustainable Societies (ADVANCE CRT). It supported postgraduate researchers exploring career paths beyond academia through talks, workshops, roundtable discussions on skills, job applications, interview skills and research careers. The benefits of hosting a joint career week were clear: More PhD students benefited from the offer, and more resources could be used in the programme, as multiple institutions were part of the organisation. The board members commended another success of this career week: For the first time, there were attendees from all Arqus partners.

OUTLOOK: BRIDGE FUNDING 2026-28

The four main planned activities of the Arqus Bridge period were presented: Joint doctoral schools, careers inside academia, careers outside academia and the Arqus business incubation alliance. The board members were asked for suggestions of experienced Arqus researchers for the planned online lecture series “How to survive in Research”. The joint doctoral schools were discussed in greater detail. Also, the merits of on-site vs. online career training were discussed. The prevalent opinion was that a career week is not the same online as in-person, as its benefits are not only the training, but also the networking aspect. However, to fulfil the increasing demand for online offers, the online lecture series was created. The board members appreciated the presentation for staying informed on future activities, but had no further comments.

FEEDBACK ON THE WORK OF THE ADVISORY BOARD

As this meeting was the final meeting of the Arqus PhD Advisory Board, the members were thanked for their participation in the past four years and asked for feedback on the work of the board. The goal was to evaluate and reflect on the board’s work of the past four years and the benefits and challenges. The benefits for the board members were to stay in the loop of the Arqus activities, which was also helpful for their positions in their institutions. The co-leads also benefited from the different perspectives the board members could give, from Vice Rectors to PhD candidates. Details on the specific advice can be found in the Impact section below. Regarding the challenges, the board members had the impression that they had no clear task description as board members and sometimes not enough information and context. One felt that they were not part of the decisions and processes; they only got comments after the activities were finished. Another board member suggested the board should meet in person and have longer meetings or strategy days. Overall, it all depends on the goals and tasks that the advisory board has.

IMPACT ON DOCTORAL STUDIES AND ESR CAREERS AT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES AND BEYOND

Throughout the Arqus II project lifecycle, the PhD Advisory Board provided strategic, stakeholder-focused guidance and direct input on the implementation of work package activities. The board's efforts and guidance have therefore had a positive impact on key aspects of the PhD Pursuit work package.

ARQUS PHD PURSUIT MENTORING PROGRAMME

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
When matching mentors and mentees, it should be reflected that they do not have to come from the same research field, but should share at least a related scientific branch.	When matching mentees with potential mentors, care was taken to identify mentors from a related scientific field who could still contribute new perspectives.	Researchers are more willing to mentor mentees from a similar academic field. This approach also reduced the time required to identify suitable mentors.
Personal meetings between mentors and mentees should be supported.	WG co-leads applied for additional funding to enable mobility grants for mentees to visit their mentors.	Some mentees were able to meet their mentors in person, which further enhanced their mentoring experience.
Mentees should have clear goals for the mentoring process.	An expert on mentoring provided mentees, during a kick-off meeting, with tools to help them define and focus their goals.	Because mentees' goals were clearly defined, time and meetings were used more efficiently.
Mentees and mentors should be clear about their expectations.	An expert on mentoring provided mentees (in a kick-off meeting) and mentors (in an introductory session) with information on what they can and should expect from the mentoring relationship.	This helped improve the mentoring relationship, as mismatched expectations can endanger a positive process.
Mentors should not act as additional supervisors.	During the mentee kick-off meeting and the mentor introduction session, it was clearly stated that this role is not foreseen in the programme, even if it might be possible from an expertise perspective.	This led to a better understanding of the mentoring relationship.
The mentoring relationship should also focus on the mentee's career development.	During the mentee kick-off meeting and the mentor introduction session, it was emphasised that career development is an expected topic throughout the mentoring programme.	This resulted in a better understanding of academic career opportunities among participating mentees.
Mentors should be supported throughout the process.	Mentors received information materials and participated in an introduction session on the mentoring process. In addition, mentor lounges were organised regularly, allowing mentors to ask questions to the mentoring	Professional support improved the overall quality of the mentoring process and increased mentor satisfaction, as mentoring was not perceived as a one-sided activity.

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
	expert and exchange experiences.	
An Arqus Mentoring Certificate should be offered to mentors.	Mentors received a certificate after completing a programme round.	This allows especially early-career mentors to demonstrate gained mentoring experience and helps maintain mentor motivation. Moreover, it reinforces that mentoring is not a one-sided contribution from mentor to mentee.
Mentees' English proficiency should be assessed.	As this was a challenge in the first rounds, the selection process was adapted to include short interviews with promising applicants to assess their English skills.	This helped select candidates who could fully benefit from the mentoring relationship and actively participate in kick-off meetings. It also reduced frustration among mentors caused by communication difficulties.

Multi-Day Events For ERSs on Careers Outside Academia

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
Selection criteria should be transparent and comprehensible to ensure a fair and equitable process for all candidates.	Input on selection criteria was incorporated at an early stage; therefore, no subsequent changes or improvements were required.	This initiated a constructive discussion within the work package group, leading to selection criteria that were jointly agreed upon and accepted by all partner universities.
The application timeline should be reasonable.	Organisers allowed applicants at least six weeks to apply for the events.	A longer timeline gave all interested candidates sufficient time to apply and facilitated the organisation of international events.
Representatives from different sectors outside academia should be invited as speakers.	Talks and meetings with representatives from various non-academic sectors were integrated into the programmes.	This increased the attractiveness of the programmes for ESRs from diverse academic backgrounds.

"Train The Trainers" Workshops

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
The selection of trainers should be based on fair and transparent criteria.	Input on trainer selection was provided at an early stage; therefore, no further changes or adjustments were required.	This prompted a constructive discussion within the work package group on the selection of trainers from the partner universities, leading to a shared understanding and broad acceptance of the approach.

Arqus Early-Stage Researcher Development Web Resource Centre

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
Early-stage researchers (ESRs) should be consulted when setting up the resource center to identify their interests and needs.	WG co-leads consulted ESRs before the setup of the resource center.	This improved the user-friendliness of the platform and ensured that it effectively addressed the needs of the target group.
Upcoming events relevant to ESRs should be announced on the resource center, making it a single point of information.	The Arqus ESR Development Web Resource Centre was deployed in two complementary formats: a section on the Arqus website for more static content (e.g. PhD offers) and a LinkedIn account for dynamic content such as events, news, and announcements.	The LinkedIn account enables the timely dissemination of current and upcoming events of interest to ESRs.
Alumni of Arqus ESR programmes should be encouraged to stay connected with the alliance.	A LinkedIn account was established as part of the Arqus ESR Development Web Resource Centre.	This allows alumni of Arqus ESR programmes to remain connected to the alliance and stay informed about new activities and opportunities.
Information on funding calls should be available in the resource centre, limited to those accessible to international students; funding restricted to individual universities should not be included.	Information on relevant international funding opportunities was published via the resource centre.	ESRs received tailored information on international funding opportunities in support of their academic career development.
A clear plan for the administration and maintenance of the resource centre should be established.	A communication plan was developed, ensuring the publication of at least one news item per week.	Regular updates kept the resource centre active, visible, and engaging for ESRs.
In addition to the web resource centre, discussion and networking opportunities should be considered.	WG co-leads launched an additional event series titled "Arqus PhD Cafés."	The PhD Cafés provide a space for Arqus ESRs to network, exchange experiences, and

		connect with peers across the alliance.

VISITING SCHOLAR SCHEME DESIGN

Advisory Input	Resulting Change	Impact
A targeted information campaign, potentially including a research portfolio, should highlight the research strengths of partner universities.	While a dedicated research portfolio or information campaign has not yet been launched, researchers and academics from all member universities present their current research topics through formats such as the Arqus Knowledge Pills.	Arqus knowledge-transfer formats enable ESRs to gain insights into research areas and expertise at partner universities.
The application process should be straightforward and non-bureaucratic.	The framework for the Arqus Postdoc Visiting Scholar Scheme explicitly foresees a simple, transparent, and user-friendly application process.	If launched, ESRs will benefit from a significantly less complex application process compared to many other international or European funding schemes.
Shorter stays should be offered, as postdocs often have teaching commitments or caregiving responsibilities that limit long-term mobility.	The framework for the Arqus Postdoc Visiting Scholar Scheme specifies flexible mobility periods, with short stays ranging from one to six months.	This flexibility enables postdocs to combine research mobility with other responsibilities such as teaching, administrative duties, and caregiving.
The scholarship scheme must provide sufficient funding to be attractive.	The framework defines attractive funding conditions, covering living costs during the stay and offering access to additional support for research-related activities and collaborative projects emerging from the network developed during the visit.	If launched, the scheme will offer competitive funding conditions, increasing its attractiveness to ESRs and postdocs across the alliance.

CONCLUSION

Establishing the PhD Advisory Board was based on a discourse-driven approach to collecting perspectives and insights from a wide variety of actors in the field of ESR support to constantly reflect and modify the ongoing activities as well as the broader researcher development strategies of the WG. The PhD Advisory Board fulfilled this function and provided the WG co-leads with a forum for open discussion as well as with suggestions for improvement.

However, a critical reflection on the board's four-year tenure points to an imbalance between efforts and outcomes: The preparation of the Board meetings and the detailed presentation of the WG's activities were time-consuming for the WG leads. Still, it proved sometimes difficult to inform the Board members so comprehensively about the contexts and current state of each activity that they could contribute in a

significant way to shaping the WG's activities and long-term strategies. Unfortunately, resources (time resources of the Board members, financial resources for mobilities, etc.) did not allow for twice-a-year in-person meetings of at least a full day, which might have offered the opportunity for more in-depth exchanges based on the Board members' expertise. Based on this conclusion, the PhD Advisory Board will not continue during the Bridge Funding period.

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