

Academy of Finland's and Council of Finnish Academies' mentoring programme for researchers 2017–2019

Background

Discussions between the Council of Finnish Academies, the Academy of Finland and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture have revealed that Finland lacks suitable mentoring support targeted at early-career researchers. Since the Academy's 2017 budget authority contains an appropriation of an additional 30 million euros to be used to support early-career researchers, the three organisations together decided to launch a mentoring programme that had been planned for some time. The idea was to target the mentoring programme at successful early-career researchers whose careers had advanced rapidly. The chosen target group was researchers who had received their first Academy Project funding from the Academy of Finland within the Academy's September 2016 call. These researchers head their first extensive research project (Academy Project) and are younger than Academy Project principal investigators on average.

What is the goal of the mentoring programme?

Mentoring generally refers to a situation where an experienced professional (a mentor) and a person striving to move forward (a mentee) engage in close collaboration to support professional growth and independent development. Research is a complex job that requires many different skills. This poses a variety of challenges for researchers. The mentoring programme will offer prospective mentees an opportunity to team up with some of the best and most experienced researchers in Finland. The mentors will share their professional experiences with the mentees, including hard-to-reach tacit knowledge. Mentors will in turn get a glimpse into the worlds of early-career researchers, preferably from fields other than the mentors' own fields. A successful mentor-mentee relationship can thus enrich both parties' mindsets and experiences. At its best, it can provide new insights into the work of a researcher beyond the confines of a researcher's own research field and across several sectors. Mentoring can also help in achieving professional goals.

Why is the programme organised by the Council of Finnish Academies and the Academy of Finland?

The Council of Finnish Academies is a cooperative body for the four science academies in Finland (Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Finnish Academy of Technology and Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences in Finland). The science academies represent highly esteemed Finnish researchers from a broad range of fields. This makes it safe to assume that the best mentors can be found from among the members of the science academies. The Academy of Finland, in turn, is the prime funding agency for basic research in Finland. The Academy's funding decisions are based on international peer review and transparent review processes. This makes the Academy a good, independent body that can identify the most talented early-career researchers. The collaboration between the Council of Finnish Academies and the Academy of Finland will effectively contribute to finding suitable mentees and the best possible mentors across Finland.

Agreement and responsibilities

The Council of Finnish Academies and the Academy of Finland signed an agreement on the joint mentoring programme on 17 May 2017. The responsibilities were divided as follows:

The Council of Finnish Academies will

- assemble a pool of potential mentors for the programme (together with the science academies it represents)
- organise preliminary training for mentors (together with the science academies)
- receive applications from prospective mentees and keep a register of mentees
- suggest suitable mentor-mentee pairs (together with the science academies).

The Academy of Finland will

- inform early-career researchers who have received their first Academy Project funding about the programme and provide them with guidelines on how to apply
- organise an initial meeting for mentees and mentors as well as interim and final meetings during the programme
- mentees can use their Academy Project funding to cover reasonable costs for their one-on-one meetings with mentors (e.g. travel expenses and serving of food or drinks).

Steering group and contact persons

The mentoring programme is a pilot project that is supported by a steering group composed of both researchers and administrative staff.

The members of the steering group are:

- Olavi Nevanlinna, Council of Finnish Academies, Chair
- Carl Gahmberg, Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, Member and Permanent Secretary
- Pekka Aula, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Secretary General
- Riitta Maijala, Academy of Finland, Vice President for Research
- Meri Vannas, Academy of Finland, Legal Adviser
- Sanna Marjavaara, Academy of Finland, Science Adviser.

The programme's ex officio contact persons are Secretary General Päivi Tikka from the Council of Finnish Academies and Senior Science Adviser Hannele Lahtinen from the Academy of Finland.

Programme duration and schedule

The mentoring programme was announced on 21 June 2017 with a joint press release by the Academy of Finland and the Council of Finnish Academies. The press release is available on both organisations' websites. The programme will run through to the end of 2019 and will be evaluated upon completion. The aim is to monitor the progress of the mentees even after the end of the programme, to get a more comprehensive picture of the programme's long-term impacts.

Applications for the mentoring programme are invited as of August 2017. A training session for mentors will be held in September 2017. As a rule, the funding period of the new Academy Projects will start on 1 September 2017. The mentoring programme's kick-off meeting for mentees, mentors and the steering group will be held on 30 October 2017 at 12.00–16.30 at the House of Science and Letters in Helsinki. A second meeting has been scheduled for autumn 2018, and the programme will end and be evaluated in late 2019.



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