



The whole is more than the sum of its parts: Added value from a Graduate School as a structuring element within the wider field of early and pre-career support

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Structured postgraduate programs are a relatively new feature at German Higher Educational Institutions, mainly fostered in the 90ies by the funding programs of the German Science Foundation (Research Training Groups) and the Max-Planck-Association (International Max Planck Research Schools). Since then, funding opportunities for postgraduate programs have equally been set up by the Helmholtz and Leibniz Associations as well as the Excellence Initiative. Today, doctoral candidates can chose from a wide range of training programs to earn a doctoral degree within a structured framework under excellent research conditions. In consequence, the percentage of PhD students in natural sciences that follow a PhD within a structured program has been continuously increasing.

Graduate Schools provide a roof under which different curricula can be accommodated. They offer a comprehensive training program, foster interdisciplinary thinking and are a key instrument for quality assurance by providing rules relevant and equal to all doctoral candidates regardless of funding or affiliation. With more and more Graduate Schools becoming a permanent feature in the training of doctoral candidates, universities and research institutions are provided with a tool to create added value for the whole range of early career scientists and beyond.

The Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) is currently developing a comprehensive strategy for early and pre-career support with the aim to provide a continuous support chain from high school students to Postdocs. Included are also the apprentices that get a vocational training at AWI as laboratory assistants, office clerks or qualified IT specialists.

AWI aims at establishing a solid training network between these groups (apprentices, high school students, Bc and Ms students, internships, doctoral candidates, and Postdocs) across biographic borders. This network serves more than the classical transition phases from high school to university student, from Master to PhD students or from PhD student to Postdoc. Apprentices are integrated in research projects and supervised by PhD students. The former get a hands-on training in sample processing under realistic conditions, while the latter get support in mastering large sample sets. AWI's high school cooperation HIGHSEA offers a playground to gain teaching and supervising experience for PhD students and Postdocs (see talk by S. Gatti, same session). Within this career development network, AWI's Graduate School POLMAR acts as a nodal point to serve the interconnections, be it alongside the biographical chain or cross-sectoral in nature. POLMAR facilitates the networking and provides a structure in which partnerships with doctoral candidates can be carried out.

To conclude, Graduate Schools can do more than improving the situation of doctoral candidates. In the best case, they become an integral part of an institute's career strategy and represent a point where new connections between biographical status groups get established for the benefit of all.