Summary minutes

12th Round Table for the Advancement of Junior Scholars at TU Berlin, 14 May, 2020

Topic: Completing doctoral and postdoctoral work under difficult conditions

Together with the TU-DOC Office for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Services, Vice President for Strategic Development, Junior Scholars and Teacher Education, Professor Dr. Angela Ittel regularly holds round tables to address topics relevant to junior scholars.

The round tables are part of the Strategy for the Advancement of Junior Scholars at TU Berlin passed by the Academic Senate in July 2018. The objective of the round tables is to open a dialog between junior scholars and target groups involved in the advancement of junior scholars at TU Berlin for the discussion and development of ideas and measures in this area.

The round tables in the summer semester 2020 accompanied the implementation of the Action Plan for the Advancement of Junior Scholars 2019/21 passed by the Academic Senate in July 2019, which contains measures for the advancement of junior scholars which are to be implemented in 2019-2021.

The 12th round table on May 14th 2020, which was conducted via ZOOM, focused on:

Completing doctoral and postdoctoral work under difficult conditions

All participants contributed to an intensive and lively discussion of the topic and their contributions are reported in the following summary:

- The participants raised the question of the extension of third-party funded contracts due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their scientific work:
  - The extension depends on the regulations of the respective funding agencies
  - The university is in discussion with the major donors of third-party funds
  - Currently there is no binding information that applies equally to all
  - It is suggested that the respective supervisors contact the funding agencies in writing and inform Prof. Ittel, so that the university can continue to approach the donors of third-party funds together, if necessary. The university management would like to support this further and remains in discussion here.
  - The possibility of extension of the contracts of employed Academic Assistants on an internal budget is currently under discussion in multiple forums at TU Berlin (Governance Board, Academic Senate and Faculties).

- The YAN - Young Academics Network for junior research group leaders and junior professors also raised the question of the extension of contracts:
  - The legal possibility for an extension has just now been created (WissZeitVG – the German Act on Temporary Scientific Contracts), extension for currently six months beyond the time limit of 6 years is possible (not mandatory), but financing is not (yet) regulated

- Participants report uncertainties, especially those who cannot meet their deadlines for third-party funding:
  - The fact that laboratories are closed means that no research results can be conducted
  - But the crisis also affects doctoral students who do not depend on laboratories:
    - Unclear when fieldwork (international) can be carried out again
    - It is suggested that the doctoral students concerned, some of whom are organized in doctoral programs, submit their questions together in writing so that this can be used as a basis for argumentation vis-à-vis donors of third-party funds
  - Especially junior scholars who are also parents are under heavy stress due to the lockdown of schools and childcare facilities, and within this lies a problematic gender
bias, as apparently female junior scholars take over more of the childcare and homeschooling than male junior scholars.

- **Topic Online Disputations:**
  - Further information: The faculties have established regulations regarding the possibility of holding academic disputations online or in partial presence in urgent cases. The relevant service centers of the faculty need to be contacted for information on the specific modalities.
  - In addition, the TU-DOC office will be happy to advise you on all other questions regarding your doctoral procedure at info@tudoc.tu-berlin.de or +49 30 314-29622.
  - Some of the participants also report positive aspects: they have more time to read and write and can work undisturbed on their publications.
  - Current changes (more use of digital media in the organization of research and support measures) are helpful for external doctoral students and persons with restrictions, e.g. regarding their mobility, and should be retained as an option in the future.

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**Collection of links**

**TU Berlin Family services**

*Organizational aspects for everyday life:*  

*Tips for a fun time:*  
- https://www.personalabteilung.tu-berlin.de/familie/menue/coronavirus_umgang_mit_der_aktuellen_situation/tipps_fuer_eine_abwechslungsreiche_zeit_zu_hause/

**Studies / Media reports (selection)**

*General research productivity:*  

*Measures regarding the prolongation of contracts:*  
- https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/bundesregierung-aendert-wegen-corona-pandemie-wisszeitvg-2683/

*Women's research productivity:*  
- https://www.faz.net/aktuell/karriere-hochschule/corona-bedoht-die-karrieren-junger-forscherinnen-16759399.html
- https://www.zeit.de/2020/20/wissenschaftler-ungleichheit-geschlechter-bewertung-coronakrise
- https://www.boeckler.de/depressemitteilungen-2675-23628.htm
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