

Oldenburg Model of Competences: Personnel development with responsibility for early-career researchers

Outline

Introduction (page 2)

Responsible personnel development (page 2)

- Ensure recruitment transparency
- Provide career transition guidance
- Allow different career paths
- Reinforce a responsible management culture

Comprehensive competence development (page 4)

- Professional competence
- Management competence
- Personal competence
- Social competence

Institutional framework conditions (page 6)

- Personnel law and contractual periods
- Quality assurance in the doctoral phase
- Equal opportunities and work-life balance

Competence development measures at the University of Oldenburg (page 7)

Brief introduction to the individual organisational units (page 12)

- Personnel and organisational development (PE/OE)
- Research funding in the Research and Transfer department
- Graduate Academy and Graduate Schools (GA/GS)
- Teaching in Higher Education (HS Didaktik)
- International units
- Founding and Innovation Centre (GIZ)

Conclusion (page 14)

Introduction

The University of Oldenburg promotes academic excellence in research and teaching and continuously strives to optimise the working conditions of its academic staff by creating transparent and fair framework conditions and optimising the accompanying support measures. Key to this aim is ensuring ideal research conditions for early-career researchers in the various research groups and institutes of the University. In cooperation with the faculties and the University management, the University promotes responsible interaction with all early-career researchers, i.e. from fast-track students to doctoral candidates, postdocs and junior professors. The University wishes to help its early-career researchers prepare for a wide range of career options within or outside academia, to enable career decisions to be made in a timely fashion, and to facilitate an optimal planning of career paths.

In autumn 2013, a process was initiated under the leadership of the Presidential Chair together with representatives of the faculties, central University institutions and early-career researchers to consider and combine measures regarding the promotion and development of the University's academic staff, and to further develop these throughout the University. In 2015, this resulted in a personnel development concept which prepares the University's academic staff in five areas for specialist and leadership tasks in science and industry as well as for newly emerging professional fields through targeted, high-quality offerings: Qualification opportunities for early-career researchers, personnel and organisational development for staff, teaching in higher education, supporting start-up initiatives, interaction with the regional economy.

Continuous optimisation of the personnel development concept under the leadership of the Vice President of Early Career Researchers and International Affairs led to the development in 2017 of the Oldenburg Model of Competences, which places the University's responsibility for early-career researchers at the centre of the personnel development concept. The model is based on four areas of competence aimed at the targeted promotion of early-career researchers within their individual profiles: Professional competence, management competence, personal competence and social competence.

The University firmly believes that these areas of competence are not only key to successful academic work but also play a central role in various career paths within and outside the University. It is particularly important for early-career researchers to be able to "translate" their acquired competences in terms of their respective career paths and employers, while benefiting from the support of various offerings and measures of the University.

Responsible personnel development

The Oldenburg Model of Competences seeks to foster responsibility among academic staff with regard to developing their personal career portfolios, and provides structured support services to this end. At the same time, targeted measures should be taken to promote an understanding of leadership among supervisors, which in the long term will lead to a cultural change within the University in dealing with early-career researchers, and have an impact that extends beyond Oldenburg.

The personnel development concept pursues four main goals:

Recruitment transparency

The University's primary aim is to attract the best brains for each position at all career levels. To achieve this, transparent recruitment measures must be designed and implemented. Based on quality-assured, professionally supported procedures, promising early-career researchers are identified by the University of Oldenburg, recruited to the University and subsequently actively promoted.

Career transition guidance

The University of Oldenburg wishes to provide optimum bridges between qualifications and enable transparent, goal-oriented career decisions through the best possible framework conditions. Promising students with an affinity for research and scholarship should be specifically promoted and helped to build an academic career. By developing models for *fast-track* doctorates by shortening the Master's phase, the University has created regulations that make the transition from a degree programme to a doctorate more flexible. The critical phase between the doctorate and the first three postdoctoral years in particular should be used for the strategic career development of early-career researchers. Furthermore, attention must be paid to equal opportunities and the balance between work and family life during what is often a defining stage of life.

Enabling different career paths

Academic careers are difficult to plan, and only a small proportion of postdoctoral students go on to obtain a professorship (cf. Consortium for the National Report on Junior Scholars (2017): 2017 National Report on Junior Scholars. Statistical Data and Research Findings on Doctoral Students and Doctorate Holders in Germany (BuWiN). Nevertheless, this group consists of highly qualified men and women who can and should make an important contribution to society as a whole, both within academia and in the economic, cultural and social spheres. For this reason, the University of Oldenburg seeks to identify and promote equal career opportunities in science and related fields such as science management, as well as in areas outside the University, such as business, cultural and public institutions and start-ups.

Fostering a culture of responsible management

The Oldenburg Model of Competences focuses not only on early-career researchers but also on their direct superiors, the professors, who can empower their staff with activities and information and actively support them in the development of their careers. The implementation of a new management culture of responsibility is intended to further consolidate the transparent and fair treatment of early-career researchers with regard to career prospects and planning.

These four goals form the basis of the many and wide-ranging measures that the University has already implemented or will be implementing to promote early-career researchers (see the table below from p. 8). The university is convinced that a successful personnel development concept not only benefits early-career researchers themselves, by contributing to their personal development and qualifying them for leadership positions, but that the University as a whole stands to benefit from outstanding, high-quality research and teaching, is in a position to attract the best brains and can strengthen its profile as a centre of science in the north-west of Germany.

Comprehensive competence development

The Model of Competences is based on the conviction that, in the phases between the Master's degree, doctorate and postdoc period, in addition to academic expertise, early-career researchers contribute to, acquire and develop a broad portfolio of competences which can be promoted by various University support facilities. Thus equipped, early-career researchers can develop optimally, successfully apply their acquired competences in their transition to various career paths within and outside academia and, above all, apply them in an appropriate and targeted manner to the chosen career option.

The Oldenburg Model of Competences centres on four areas of competence that are fundamentally relevant to the various career paths:

Professional competence

The focus of this competence area is primarily on the specialist knowledge required for the individual's own subject area or research. This includes theoretical and practical methodological knowledge, dealing with data and specialist literature, foreign language skills, and the ability to apply this expertise in an academic context – in other words, mastery of the specific “language” of the subject area. In addition to the guidelines on good scientific practice, a knowledge of occupational health and safety, ethical aspects of research, the sustainable use of resources and data protection can also be relevant, depending on the discipline. Furthermore, scientific activity promotes cognitive skills such as analysis and evaluation, problem-solving and reasoning abilities as well as critical thinking, and stimulates creativity, innovative capacity, curiosity and a willingness to take risks in an academic context.

Management competence

Academic work in the context of a university requires a wide range of management skills, which are constantly further professionalised during the doctoral and postdoc phases. Through their work, early-career researchers acquire a sound knowledge of project management and learn how to develop and implement a research strategy. Depending on the research area, they gain experience in process organisation and in the management and supervision of staff. In addition, they learn how to acquire third-party funds, handle research funds and become familiar with the administration of funds and resources in general.

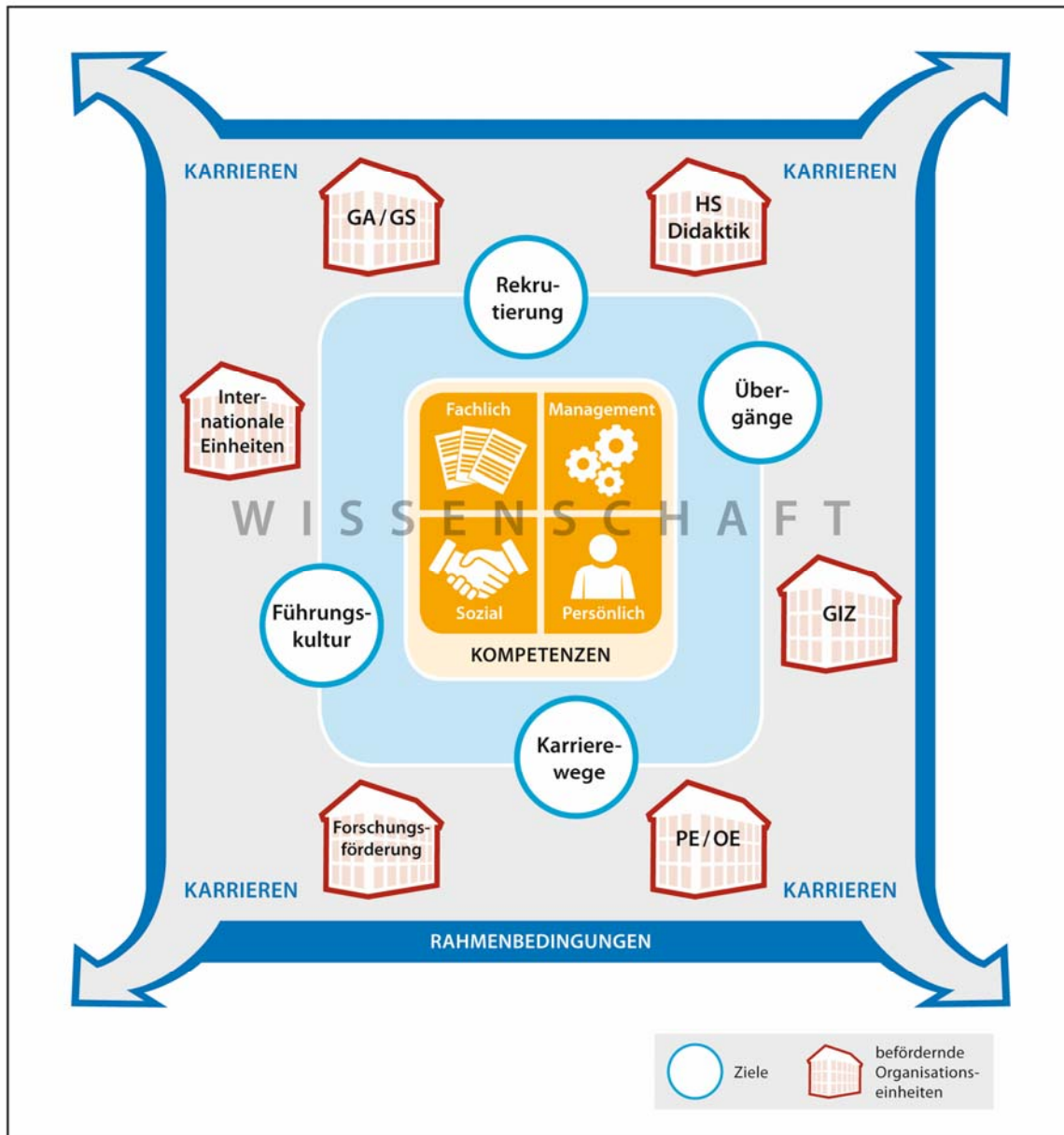


Figure 1: The Oldenburg Model of Competences

Personal competence

Successful early-career researchers draw on strong personal enthusiasm for a topic, on the perseverance to apply themselves to the topic in depth and on a sense of responsibility when handling data and research results. At the same time, they need a healthy dose of commitment and stamina and must be able to organise and motivate themselves, set priorities and find a good balance between research and private life. To plan their careers successfully, early-career researchers must take an active and responsible approach to organising themselves, for example, through networking at conferences and in expert committees or through purposeful participation in further training.

Social competence

Through commitment to teaching as well as the active transfer of knowledge in the public sphere, early-career researchers acquire a wide range of social skills which they can ap-

ply not only to generate knowledge but also to convey it to different audiences. They consolidate and develop their written and oral communication skills in order to apply them in situations both within and outside the University context. At the same time, competences such as teamwork, collegial cooperation, student mentoring and leadership, as well as an awareness of gender equality and diversity issues, are promoted.

Institutional framework

The Oldenburg Model of Competences is embedded in framework conditions that promote outstanding scientific work while providing a reliable and transparent basis for the further personal and career-related development of early-career researchers. The University is aware that widely varying constructions exist regarding funding and positions in the phases between doctorate and postdoc, and always aims to create the best possible conditions for early-career researchers at each stage of their career stages and paths.

Personnel law and contractual periods

The University of Oldenburg aims to achieve a good balance between temporary and permanent positions. To this end, as many junior academic positions should be created as possible, and permanent positions are to be established specifically where, for example, it is not possible to continuously ensure high-quality teaching with junior academic positions.

Permanent contract options have long been systematically reviewed and implemented at the University. Since the amendment to the Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz (WissZeitVG, German Academic Fixed-Term Contract Act), the main concern regarding fixed-term funding contracts has been to develop an in-house practice that does not contradict the intention of the extended terms, but allows for the flexible deployment of human resources where legitimate and legally feasible. Current practice is aimed at basing both the doctoral phase and the post-doctoral qualification on contracts of at least three years, which correspond to the formal qualification objectives. Shorter periods are offered for subgoals of the formal qualification objectives, such as that of the “junior professorship vocational qualification”, as a rule as a two-year phase, which can be shortened if the appropriate level of development has been reached.

Quality assurance in the doctoral phase

The University of Oldenburg sees the continuous quality assurance of scientific education as vital. This is evident, for example, from the University’s successful track record of acquiring coordinated doctoral programmes across all subjects and specialisations, enabling it to achieve a leading position in Lower Saxony. In addition to external assessment of the many structured doctoral programmes by independent, scientific organisations, quality assurance mechanisms are integrated into the model doctoral regulations, which serve as the basis for the school doctoral regulations. The conclusion of a supervision agreement and early acceptance should also formally confirm the status of the doctoral candidate and enable structured and mutually binding supervision. Early acceptance gives the faculties and the University as a whole information about the precise number of doctoral candidates, allowing for more tailored offers within the framework of the Oldenburg Competence Model.

Equal opportunities and work-life balance

The University of Oldenburg has pioneered the implementation of equal opportunity measures for a significant period of time. According to the 2014 DFG University Report, the University of Oldenburg is one of four universities in Germany with the highest percentage of female professors. With a quota of 29.6% female professors, and on account of its implementation of DFG research-orientated equal opportunity standards, the University of Oldenburg was also rated as a leading university in Germany in the 2015 CEWS “Center of Excellence Women in Science” ranking.

To maintain and continue to increase the quota of female staff at all career levels in the long term, the University of Oldenburg is focusing particularly on support strategies during transitional phases and on targeted support for postdocs. For instance, two Helene Lange colleges in the humanities were set up competitively with the University's own funds, alongside the Federal Government's Programme for Women Professors, to provide targeted support for female doctoral candidates. For the past two years, the University of Oldenburg has awarded the Carl von Ossietzky Young Researchers' Fellowship to fund postdoctoral research positions for outstanding female researchers working towards a professorship. This concept will be extended to a new postdoctoral programme for women and will involve early identification of talented female researchers during their doctoral phase.

Since 2016, the University of Oldenburg has been one of three universities in Germany to have a “Women Professors Forum” founded by female professors. This network, which is open to all female professors and university lecturers, aims to increase the public visibility of successful female scientists, to promote networking among members, and to provide targeted support for junior female academics. Special networking events take place twice per semester, which regularly feature external speakers. In addition, the forum is devoted to promoting awareness of events specifically for women.

The University has a long history of providing reliable support to all University staff with family obligations. This enabled the University to receive the ‘Familiengerechte Hochschule’ (family-friendly university audit) certificate for the fifth time in 2017. Additionally, the University has pledged its support for the “Family and University Charter” of the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (Centre for Higher Education Development) since 2014.

Family support services are provided at the University of Oldenburg by the Family Service, which publishes target-group-specific information and, if required, provides advice on issues regarding family and professional life. In addition, it organises various childcare services to provide a degree of flexibility for scientists with children. There are nappy-changing and play facilities available as well as a parent-child room, which can also be used to arrange childcare during a conference, for instance.

Competence development measures at the University of Oldenburg

Competence development is promoted in a targeted manner through measures implemented by various organisational units of the University in accordance with the Oldenburg Model of Competences. These measures support the professional and interdisciplinary competence development of early-career researchers, which takes place in the various institutes and research groups of the University. These offers are open to all academic staff, although some measures are differentiated according to career level. The measures are continuously developed and optimised in accordance with the goals of the Oldenburg Model of Competences,

through regular evaluation of the individual offerings, constant mutual exchange and a cross-organisational unit working group on human resources development in science.

Measure	Brief description	Organisational unit	Objectives promoted
Transparent recruitment process	Attracting promising early-career researchers through quality-assured, professionally supported procedures	University-wide task	Recruitment Career transitions
<i>Active recruiting</i>	Reinforcement of <i>active recruiting</i> to bring suitable vacancies to the attention of early-career researchers Also used as a targeted instrument to achieve gender equality	University-wide task	Recruitment Career transitions
Leadership competences of professors	Reinforcing leadership competences of professors as an important qualification regarding responsibility for early-career researchers; Assessment through links to performance agreements; Greater consideration for the calling and appointment of professors	University-wide task	Recruitment Responsible leadership culture
Practical phase during doctorate	Development of a concept enabling doctoral students to spend several months following practical training with a non-university employer during the doctoral phase	University-wide task	Career transitions Career paths
Negotiating the funding jungle	Organisation of information events on funding formats geared to doctoral students and postdocs	Research funding	Career transitions Career paths
Individual advice and support with applications	Comprehensive support during the application process: from the research concept and funding line to drawing up the application and the assessment.	Research funding	Career transitions Career paths
Targeted career development	Identification of suitable funding opportunities, awards and events; Targeted nomination of early-career researchers for national and international academic/scientific awards	Research funding	Career transitions Career paths
Event formats geared to junior professors and junior group leaders	Regular “round table” sessions with the Vice President for Research and Transfer to promote networking and information exchange	Research funding	Career transitions Career paths

Measure	Brief description	Organisa-tional unit	Objectives pro-moted
Guideline-based interim evaluation of junior profes-sors	Implementation of transparent, quality-assured procedures for the interim evaluation of junior profes-sors Individual consultations with the Vice President for Research and Transfer	Research funding	Career transitions
Research pro-gramme budget	Internal incentive system for start-up funding of junior research groups	Research funding	Career transitions Career paths
Support for inter-nationalisation of postdoctoral early-career re-searchers	Implementation of funding instru-ments to promote the mobility of <i>incoming and outgoing</i> early-career researchers.	Research funding	Career paths
Guidelines for regular discus-sions with aca-demic staff	Development of guidelines for structured discussions between supervisors and early-career re-searchers to allow for timely feed-back on performance in research, teaching and prospects for an aca-demic future; Such interviews should take place no later than halfway through the contract period	Personnel and organisational develop-ment	Career transitions Career paths
Leadership sup-port for newly appointed pro-fessors	Implementation of a compact in-formation and advisory service re-garding essential regulations, pro-cedures and personnel manage-ment tools	Personnel and organisational develop-ment	Leadership culture
“Academic Lead-ership” frame-work programme	Offers exchange and interdiscipli-nary networking among professors on topics such as professional leadership and cooperation, staff development and motivation, deal-ing with conflicts within a team and staff selection criteria	Personnel and organisational develop-ment	Leadership culture
Subject-related and interdiscipli-nary workshops for early-career researchers	Workshops based on the Olden-burg Model of Competences on topics such as academic publish-ing, research methodology, career design, management competenc-es, communication, self-promotion and leadership	Graduate Academy, Graduate Schools, 3GO, Oltech	Career transitions Career paths
Peer coaching programmes for postdocs	Implementation of two target-group-specific programme lines for early-career researchers; (1) in the transition between the doctoral and postdoc phases and (2) for estab-lished postdocs, junior research group leaders and junior professors	Graduate Academy	Career transitions Career paths Leadership culture

Measure	Brief description	Organisa-tional unit	Objectives pro-moted
Coaching format for early-career researchers	Development of a coaching format that supports doctoral and post-doctoral students in developing and presenting their interdisciplinary competences for the non-university labour market	Graduate Academy	Career transitions and career paths
Cooperation with the regional economy	Strengthening non-university career paths through joint workshops with early-career researchers and junior managers from the regional economy.	Graduate Academy Graduate Schools, 3GO, Oltech	Career transitions and career paths
Short higher-education teaching events	Short courses on teaching and learning in the field of higher education; particular emphasis on digitisation and the use of modern communication tools	Teaching in higher education	Career paths
Personal consultation for teaching staff	Promotion of the development of teaching style and method through individual consultation	Teaching in higher education	Career paths
Provisions geared to junior research group leaders, junior professors and newly appointed professors	Mediation of customised higher-education teaching competences Enhancing of eligibility for appointment	Teaching in higher education	Career transitions Career paths
Promoting visits from international early-career researchers	Scholarships for visiting international doctoral candidates at the University of Oldenburg via the DAAD Scholarship and Supervision Programme (STIBET)	International Units, Graduate Academy, Graduate Schools, 3GO, Oltech	Career paths
Funding opportunities for stays abroad	Support for early-career researchers for customised opportunities for individual career phases and career development	International Units, Graduate Schools, 3GO, Oltech	Career paths
Funding schemes for stays abroad for postdocs	Development of funding schemes to increase the international mobility of early-career researchers	Research funding, Graduate Academy	Career paths
Personal foundation consultations	Support with the preparation of business plans, funding possibilities and patent exploitation	Founding and Innovation Centre	Career paths
Entrepreneurship Schools	Several-day workshops for those interested in setting up a company with a specific business concept	Founding and Innovation Centre	Career paths

Measure	Brief description	Organisa-tional unit	Objectives pro-moted
Networking events	Networking events aimed at bringing founders into contact with potential business partners	Founding and Innovation Centre	Career paths
Collaboration between the universities of Oldenburg and Bremen: "Zukunft[s]unternehmen Nord-west" (Future[s] Enterprise Northwest).	Consolidating exchange between early-career researchers and regional employers within the framework of a series of events with varying topics	Founding and Innovation Centre	Career paths

Brief introduction to the individual organisational units

The University of Oldenburg is committed to structured personnel development for its academic staff. The organisational units involved are usually established on a permanent basis, both financially and in terms of personnel, and most of the measures are funded from the University's budgetary resources.

Professional development/organisational development (PE/OE)

Since 2004, the University of Oldenburg has been committed to continuous personnel and organisational development as a component of the University management. The aim here is to attract committed and qualified staff members and to maintain and further develop the performance of staff members and promote their potential. A wide range of measures are offered and designed for individual groups of staff. In addition to a central further education programme for University staff that changes every six months, there is also the possibility to participate in further education programmes at other universities or to take advantage of individually tailored personnel development measures or coaching. There is a central health management system offering targeted health promotion programmes for all staff. Professional development/organisational development currently employs 5.25 FTEs from budget funds.

Research funding in the Research and Transfer department

Through the targeted establishment of professional structures in the field of national and international research funding, the University laid the foundations at an early stage to support academics in the successful acquisition of research projects from a wide range of funding sources. This is of particular benefit to early-career researchers at the University, who are systematically promoted in their career development through individual counselling, complementary services, the University's own incentive system and a specific address and nomination system. Established in 1992 with the establishment of the EU University Office, research funding is accommodated within the Research and Transfer Department, which was founded in 2013 and is assigned to the portfolio of the Vice President for Research and Transfer. Research funding currently employs 4.0 FTEs on a permanent basis and 1.0 FTEs on a temporary basis from budget funds.

Graduate Academy and Graduate Schools (GA/GS)

The central Graduate Academy, which reports to the Vice President for Early Career Researchers and International Affairs, has been supporting early-career researchers with interdisciplinary qualifications since 2011 from the doctorate to the postdoc and then junior professorship stage. In addition to imparting interdisciplinary *transferable skills*, the Graduate Academy provides impulses for career orientation and for the “translation” of competences into a wide range of career paths either within or outside the University.

The Graduate Academy encompasses two permanent Graduate Schools, which are supported by the University’s faculties: The Graduate School of Science, Medicine and Technology (OLTECH, founded in 2009) and the Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities (3GO, founded in 2011) provide the framework for the structured promotion of doctorates at the University of Oldenburg. The Graduate Schools support early-career researchers by offering courses that are more closely tailored to the specific requirements of their field. Funding is provided across faculties and disciplines, with a focus on courses which are transdisciplinary and internationally oriented. The Graduate Schools create space for cooperation, exchange and joint activities among different graduate programmes. The Graduate Academy and the Graduate Schools currently employ 3.25 FTEs on a permanent basis from budget funds.

Didactics in Higher Education (HS Didaktik)

For over a decade, the University of Oldenburg, in cooperation with the universities of Bremen and Osnabrück and the Competence Center University Didactics for Lower Saxony at TU Braunschweig, has been offering the “University Didactic Qualification” certificate programme to promote social skills among scientists with regard to imparting knowledge and ensuring a high standard of teaching. The programme, which comprises 200 hours, is accredited by the German Association for Didactics in Higher Education (dghd). Apart from imparting teaching skills, individuals are asked to reflect on their own role and the transfer of the skills acquired into their teaching practice. Depending on individual focuses and interests, events can also be attended individually. Didactics in Higher Education at the University of Oldenburg attaches great importance to the use of digital and other modern communication tools, which are not only used in an academic context but also in non-academic career areas and thus promote a “translation” of the acquired competences (e.g. Lego Serious Play®). Didactics in Higher Education currently employs 1.12 FTEs on a permanent basis and 1.6 FTEs on a temporary basis from budget funds.

International units

Various permanent units, such as the International Student Office (ISO), the International Relations Office (IRO) and the EU Office, support students, doctoral candidates and academic staff as a whole in expanding their individual international profiles, while enhancing the welcoming culture and international allure of the University. International experience is vitally important for both professional and personal competence development as well as for the development of careers both academic and non-academic. The first step here is to make early-career researchers more aware of their own mobility. For instance, doctoral and post-doctoral students need to understand the importance of international experience and networking for their own research, the expansion of their own competences and for potential

career paths. 9.0 FTEs are currently permanently employed from budget funds in the international units.

Founding and Innovation Centre (GIZ)

The University of Oldenburg is one of Germany's six outstanding founding universities: this certificate was awarded to the University in 2011 by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy (BMWi) as part of the "EXIST-Gründungskultur - Die Gründerhochschule" competition; an achievement that enables the University to continue developing its existing approaches to promoting start-ups. The University of Oldenburg's Founding and Innovation Centre (GIZ), which is assigned to the Vice President of Research and Transfer and his department, was launched in April 2012 and serves as a central contact point for students, staff, academics and alumni of the regional universities who are interested in the subject of business start-ups. It offers those interested in founding a company professional advice on subsidies, coaching and qualification as well as mentoring during the foundation process. The GIZ currently employs 3 FTEs on a fixed-term basis and is funded by a combination of third-party and budget funds.

Conclusion

Personnel development regarding academic staff, and particularly the promotion of early-career researchers, is an integral part of the University management's strategic development of the University, and as the Oldenburg Competence Model illustrates, is jointly supported by numerous University actors. The University of Oldenburg regards the structured promotion of academic career paths as a management task and is convinced that good framework conditions also lead to good work and are therefore conducive to excellent research and teaching.

By constantly optimising the framework conditions and expanding the range of support services regarding recruitment, career transitions, career paths and management culture, the University aims to attract the most promising early-career researchers to an academic career, while providing timely and transparent information on development opportunities and career options for all early-career researchers. At the same time, the Oldenburg Model of Competences emphasises the responsibility of the early-career researchers to orient themselves professionally, optimise their portfolio and make the best possible use of the critical phase during and after the doctorate to set their own professional course.