

Evaluation: Momentum Programme II (2019-20)

Background

Momentum is UiBs flagship career development programme for promising and ambitious early stage researchers (ESR: postdoc, forsker and Førsteamanuensis/associate professor) who wish to pursue an academic career. The first cohort (2017-8) included 16 ESRs from a variety of disciplines and comprised 3 core components:

- Workshop training – 3 x 2 day seminars in Bergen region, and 1 x 3 day seminar in Brussels
- Mentoring programme – supporting participants to find an international mentor to support their career development
- Career development stipend – 100,000 NOK to support career development activity

Momentum I workshops 1-3 focused on two key thematic areas: **career development** and **research funding**. Career development content was developed and delivered by external consultancy Mobilize. Research funding content was developed and delivered by UiB: FIA. The 4th workshop was held at UiB Brussels office and focused on **internationalization**.

Evaluation of Momentum I found that whilst the three core thematic areas were found to be relevant, career development content was deemed too general for a number of participants. On the basis of this feedback, design and delivery of Momentum content was brought in-house.

In 2019, a Momentum Programme Committee coordinated at FIA and comprising representatives from FIA, KA and HR developed a new Momentum Programme (II). Following a second round of recruitment (55 applications) 13 participants were nominated to form the second Momentum cohort.

The programme was due to run from September 2019 – April 2020, with the same 4 seminar format as Momentum I. Whilst 3 of 4 seminars were successfully delivered and evaluated, the outbreak of Covid-19 led to the postponement of the 4th seminar, due to be held at UiB Brussels Office. This will be rescheduled to run at UiB Brussels when it is once again safe to travel.

The modular programme was delivered by a range of in-house experts from FIA, HR, KA, Øko, IT, Bibliotek, Rectorate and members of UiBs research base. The module: *design thinking for innovation* was sub-contracted to an external consultant.

Whilst the core themes **research funding** and **career development** continued to underpin programme content, seminars were re-designed around four key themes: excellence; impact; implementation and internationalization. As per FU recommendation; content around CV and career development was adapted to better meet the specific needs and contexts of participants and additional modules around self-management (prioritization; time management; work-life balance) and team-building were developed. Content on research funding and proposal development was extended to include project economy and project management. A practical module on research communication, held at Media City Bergen, was also added to the programme.

Seminars 1-3 were evaluated via online questionnaire. Programme committee members also monitored each module and seminar and provided feedback for ongoing development from a trainer perspective. A full evaluation, including seminar 4 (internationalization) and a final overall evaluation are due when the programme is completed.

The following evaluation and recommendations for Momentum III thus focus on feedback from seminars 1-3 (excellence; impact; implementation).

Evaluation: seminars 1-3

Seminar 1: Excellence

- All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they found seminar one useful; knew more about the subjects covered having attended; felt confident that they would apply what they had learned; and were satisfied with the course materials and trainers.
- Respondents identified a wide range of *most useful* information. Of notable interest were sessions on SDGs in a research perspective and Academic CV and Gap Analysis. This indicates that whilst all topics were perceived to be of value, not all topics were perceived to be of equal value to all participants, thus addresses the critique from Momentum I, that content was not sufficiently broad or targeted to the diverse needs of the momentum audience.
- Respondents appreciated a thematic modular approach, allowing trainers to cover a number of relevant sub-topics per overarching theme. However, they indicated that going into some content in greater depth would be beneficial. It was suggested that this might be facilitated by providing moderate pre-work assignments (e.g. reading/reflection on upcoming themes) to create space for more in-depth training and more small-group/plenary activity when in session.
- Respondents noted that case-study approaches to certain topics (eg. career development; CV and track record building) could have made content more immediately relevant and relatable.
- Respondents noted that more general information pertaining to programme content - including topics for training and details of the mentoring scheme and stipend - could be provided before the first session then clarified with a short presentation and Q&A in the introductory session on day one.

Seminar 2: Impact

- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed that they found seminar two useful; knew more about the subjects covered having attended; felt confident that they would apply what they had learned; and were satisfied with the course materials and trainers.
- Respondents identified sessions on preparing for a media interview; camera training and impact in research processes and applications as particularly useful.
- Respondents recommended that their media pitch could be prepared beforehand leaving more time for further training around eg the art of storytelling in science; social media training and/or science writing. Some participants were unsure of how the info-session on EU decision making bodies in R&I complemented the seminar theme of impact and felt this information was 'out of place' in terms of addressing the seminar's core theme.

Seminar 3: Implementation

- All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they found seminar three useful; knew more about the subjects covered having attended; felt confident that they would apply what they had learned; and were satisfied with the course materials and trainers.
- Respondents identified a wide range of *most useful* information. Of notable interest were sessions on proposal writing: implementation; research leadership; personal management & prioritizing; time management; project management and bibliometrics.
- A number of respondents recommended that more time be allocated to sessions around leadership (self- and team-) and that practical areas such as recruitment could usefully be added to future seminars.

General feedback

- Many respondents commented on the value and significance of participating in the Momentum Programme

“This is the most valuable and significant experience I had since I arrived in Bergen. I love the intensity of each conversation/session”

- Many respondents commented on the value of being part of a cohort – meeting and getting to know researchers from across the disciplinary spectrum. The introduction of candlelight lectures facilitated this process, and supported productive conversations not only around potential crossover and collaboration but also around shared experiences of working as an ESR. This engendered a level of trusting peer support and honesty which significantly deepened plenary discussions in session.

“I am very happy with the Momentum Programme and find this to be perhaps the best that has happened to me in my career so far - the opportunity to learn a lot about relevant topics and to connect to other researchers at the University”.

- Respondents commented on the value of meeting experts from across the university: FIA, HR, Øko, KA, Bibliotek and also speakers from the Rectorate and the research base. Respondents also commented on the value of being introduced to UiB resources at Media City Bergen.

“A truly inspirational part of the Momentum programme is the unique opportunity to meet with the wonderful admin team at UiB and to get to know the other participants of the programme. I think this will be a great source of support for future work and collaboration”.

- Respondents experienced some seminars as content/information heavy, making knowledge retention and continued engagement challenging. Conversely, respondents commented that sessions where a time-limited amount of pre-work had been set (e.g. reading/reflection) facilitated a more interactive and engaging session.

“I think the most efficient sessions are the ones where we have been asked to reflect in advance, like in this case for the session on 'data management plans'. I would suggest for future sessions to give the candidates some (probably not too much) material to read in advance of the sessions. It does not have to be a lot, and in many cases just a weblink or similar to relevant information would do. “

- Respondents commented that whilst the programme offers a great deal of positive and useful information, it does not tackle a number of issues core to the experience of many ESRs; namely the competition for permanent positions; work life balance; challenges incumbent on individuals working on fixed term contracts and a publish or perish culture which prioritises some research activities over others.

“I think there could be more consideration given to the fact that most present do not have permanent jobs - there was some discussion of this amongst the researchers in private. It is all very well applying for an ERC grant, but what if you don't get paid while you wait for the answer, for example? You have to use research time to write ERC grants; then you are not spending time developing publications to make employment more likely. This is a pressing issue for many”.

Recommendations for Momentum III

Structure: Evaluation data suggest that the structure of delivering content in two key areas: research funding and career development, via a series of modular, thematic seminars focusing on excellence; impact; innovation and internationalization respectively has worked successfully, and should continue as the basis for provision.

Content: Based on evaluation data currently to hand, it is suggested that the Programme Committee adapt programme content in two ways:

- **General:**
 - Seminar modules will, where relevant, provide pre-work in the form of time bound activities (e.g. reading/reflection on upcoming content) in order to provide scope for more in depth content delivery and interaction during workshops
 - Seminar modules will, where appropriate, develop core and supplementary content per module to ensure flexibility of delivery and provide scope for trainers to discuss/digress/reflect with the group as appropriate
 - Seminar modules will deliver supplementary content online via Teams where appropriate to facilitate greater interactivity and discussion around core issues in session
 - Momentum III seminars will be structured to blend personal reflection, small-group work and plenary discussion alongside content training, facilitating a greater level of interactivity
 - Momentum III seminars will, where relevant, employ case-study approaches and invite more guest speakers from UiB research base to share their experiences with the cohort

- **Per module:**
 - The Programme Committee has evaluated each module individually and provided detailed feedback to trainers to facilitate more relevant, directed content in Momentum III (see attached Programme document).
 - The Programme Committee has designed some new content for 2020-1, based on evaluation data (highlighted as **NEW FOR 2020-1** in the Programme document)
 - The Programme Committee has restructured the order of workshops to facilitate a more logical flow of knowledge

Coordination:

The following resources will be introduced in Momentum III:

- Comprehensive online guide containing programme overview and detailed information on each seminar and workshop; including pre-work, further reading, course materials and additional resources. This will be made available on Teams in advance of Seminar 1 (29 Sept 2020).
- Review and improve material for, and communication with, participants relating to the Momentum stipend, including admin processes and guidance on what the stipend can be used for.
- Develop resources for faculties outlining how to support researchers to find an appropriate mentor; guidelines for expenditure of the 50,000NOK allocated to mentoring; and a guidance for mentees and mentors on what mentoring entails and how to make the most of a mentoring relationship.