

Family and career in Cluster of Excellence UniCat

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Findings of two studies

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The need for childcare in UniCat:

Results of a standardized survey of UniCat-Members

In cooperation with Gender-Coordinator of the cluster Claudia Nasrallah the Department Methods of Social Research at the TU Berlin (N. Baur) conducts a standardized online survey to inquire the needs for childcare in UniCat. For this purpose an investigation was made to determine how many UniCat-members have children or plan to have family in the next years and what kind of support they expected from UniCat in this regard. This helps to develop concrete measures to support childcare and to create prospective structures to improve the balance between family and career.

A total of 182 out of 256 UniCat members participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 71%. 122 people (about two-thirds of the respondents) have children or see possibilities for building a family in the next years. More than half of them want UniCat to provide childcare for their employees. 56% support the idea of getting organized childcare. Most of these respondents (37 people) therefore prefer a regular form of childcare. Simultaneously, about 60% in this category ask for a financial support, with four out of five people (39 respondents) account a maximum of 300 € per month as sufficient.

The situation of young scientists:

Results of qualitative interviews with selected UniCat-Members

In a second study of the Department Methods of Social Research, the object of our inquiries was the situation of young researchers in the postdoctoral phase with own working groups. The aim of this study was primarily to evaluate the situation of young researchers in UniCat. The focus was put on the integration of this specific group within UniCat (their collaborations and research

activities), as well as specific problems and opportunities for their own research and careers arising from the UniCat junior-researchers program. Therefore young group leaders, as well as junior-professors of the UniCat, cluster were interviewed. We almost interviewed the whole of this group. In addition to this, expert interviews were conducted with representatives of the Executive Board and the Chair.

Our study suggests that UniCat provides both opportunities and threats. The respondents see advantages regarding the infrastructure (rooms, materials, secretariats), which is made available to them and accelerates the process of setting up a working group for their own research. The scientific exchange with and support from an experienced scientist is also mentioned positively in respect to handling the new tasks while establishing in the scientific community. Furthermore was the networking due to the various meetings provided by UniCat (such as area meetings, BIG-NSE lectures, colloquia) was perceived as extremely helpful concerning the career. At these meetings new networks of cooperation and an overview of various topics arise. The contact to new potential cooperation partners and collaborators is facilitated in these contexts. For the respondents the outcome of this is a variety of opportunities for exchange of know-how and materials needed for research as well as joint collaborations with other researchers.

These positive aspects are very ambiguous, because they also implicate disadvantages. Additional to the general demands on young scientists and researchers (such as assistance to PhD students and the demonstration of scientific autonomy) there are further ones on the young researchers in UniCat. Beside the positive consequences of the various meetings and events of the cluster, they result in a considerable amount of time and communication.

Beyond their own job the interviewed scientists also barely have their own (human and material) resources. Their abilities to build up an own working group are

very limited. Therefore their dependence on an established scientist or other collaborations for using infrastructure (such as laboratories) is potentially high. Another special problem refers to the general lack of space. We can see that the integration of young scientists in research activities, networks and infrastructures of UniCat plays a central role for their academic careers. The described dependence on established scientists is sometimes the reason for a problem in the confirmation of scientific independence through the discipline, which can have negative effects on the scientific career. UniCat is perceived from the outside as a chemical cluster and some members of other disciplines anticipate problems for their specific academic careers.

Paradoxically this problem of dependence (on an established researcher in particular or from integration in the cluster in general) arise foremost junior research positions designed for women. This is partly caused by the recruitment patterns. In order to attract the cluster to a broad quantity of women, these jobs were advertised thematically open. Just the fact they were attached less systematic to existing working groups than other junior research positions, was in some cases the reason why required infrastructure could not always be guaranteed. Also it means there were only little chances to ensure an overlapping in regard of content between the young researchers and experienced members of the cluster. Researchers with subjects that had little linkage to the existing activities in the cluster, often did not get the opportunity to affiliate themselves to an existing working group and to use its infrastructure (including laboratories).

In contrast the thematic linkage could also be too wide. When research subjects were close to topics of already established working groups, the young scientists were not able to affiliate to the obvious teams. Otherwise their scientific independence would have been questioned. Consequently, just through the efforts of the cluster to encourage careers of women, particularly the young females of the interviewed group had more problems with the cooperation than their male counterparts. Apart from the problem mentioned above, that their research subjects were usually not seen in the core of the cluster, the spatial conditions also involved difficulties. Because of the thematic "distance" they were placed in other buildings of the university, which in return had an impact on the interaction and communication opportunities. Also the positive aspects of the UniCat colloquia were reduced as most presentations did not fit to their own research topic and thus decreased the likelihood of possible cooperation.

In summary we can emphasize: UniCat has succeeded in recent years to increase the proportion of women in the cluster significantly. The challenge for the next few years will be to improve the systematic integration of these women.

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