



Needs analysis

survey to support young scholars

at Osnabrück University

Report on findings

»Summary«

Foreword



Dear Sir or Madam,

Academic training and the systematic development of young scholars constitute some of the core tasks of our university. Young scholars make a considerable contribution to the acquisition of scientific knowledge, innovations in research, high quality standards in teaching, and academic autonomy at Osnabrück University.

Development of young scholars is regarded as a shared responsibility of the university, its schools and the individuals involved. „Development of young scholars“ refers to supervision of young scholars in the qualification phases and the creation of the best possible framework conditions as well as multidisciplinary training and advice with regard to subsequent career phases both within the academic system and outside it. Osnabrück University’s central concern is to align development of young scholars and academic human resource development to the needs of the young scholars without losing sight of educational policy requirements.

Against this background Osnabrück University initiated a university-wide needs analysis survey to support young scholars. The participants were young scholars as well as professors, and it was very well received. Various needs were expressed by the participants and many constructive proposals have been put forward concerning how further improvements in the situation of young scholars could be made. At the same time the survey results reveal young scholars’ overall high level of satisfaction with collaboration in an academic context, support and supervision during the qualification phases, how family-friendly the university is as well as with advisory and training services at Osnabrück University.

We are delighted about these findings, and feel encouraged by them. They substantiate the success of Osnabrück University in its commitment to the development of young scholars so far. Nonetheless, the proposals made on how to improve the work of young scholars incentivise us to keep working on the framework conditions. The survey findings consequently form the central basis for the development of the »Concept for development of young scholars of Osnabrück University« which is currently being established within the scope of the 2020 strategy process. This concept will be used to systematically advance the development of young scholars at Osnabrück University.

I would like to thank all of you who participated in this comprehensive survey, for your commitment and valuable contributions.

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Menzel', written in a cursive style.

Prof.in Dr. Susanne Menzel
Vice President for Research and Advancement of Young Scholars at Osnabrück University

Introduction

The university-wide needs analysis survey to support young scholars at Osnabrück University was carried out as an anonymised online survey from June to August 2017. The results of the needs analysis survey will be used for the development of the »*Concept for development of young scholars of Osnabrück University*«, which is currently being established within the scope of the university-wide strategy process. The topics covered ranged from the general level of satisfaction about working conditions through to qualification and advisory services.

A total of 231 young scholars from various qualification stages (156 doctoral candidates, 62 postdocs and 12 junior professors) as well as 51 professors took part in the survey.

The survey results reveal young scholars' overall high level of satisfaction with collaboration in an academic context, advancement of young scholars, and academic human resource development at Osnabrück University. Although we are pleased about the predominantly positive results of the survey, the aim was to use the findings to derive potential means of further developing and advancing young scholars. The desiderata of scholars and staff at our university are given particular attention in this report; even though these desiderata - as reflected by the positive results - have not proven to be decisive in the situation of our young scholars.

The results of the needs analysis survey form the central basis for further development of the advancement of young scholars and academic human resource development at Osnabrück University. The results collected about needs as well as the proposals made, under consideration of structural framework conditions and stipulations, form the key action points for the further development of the advancement of young scholars and are reflected in the »*Concept for development of young scholars*«. Stakeholders at the central level of the university as well as in the schools are responsible for the implementation of the proposals.

Appointing to positions and welcoming culture

A desire was expressed for more transparency in the context of the appointment process. In connection with first commencing in a position, young scholars communicated the desire for specific contact partners in the schools, and for detailed information on processes at the central level as well as within the schools. The need for an information pack for new employees was also expressed by professors. Furthermore, the need for support with non-academic matters when taking up a position - especially for international academics - was underlined. The need for support in non-academic matters was also communicated by young scholars who are not international academics.

In terms of the selection procedure for their position, 71% of the young scholars who have a position at the university reported that they were »very satisfied« or »satisfied« with the support received as an applicant during the selection procedure (Figure 1).

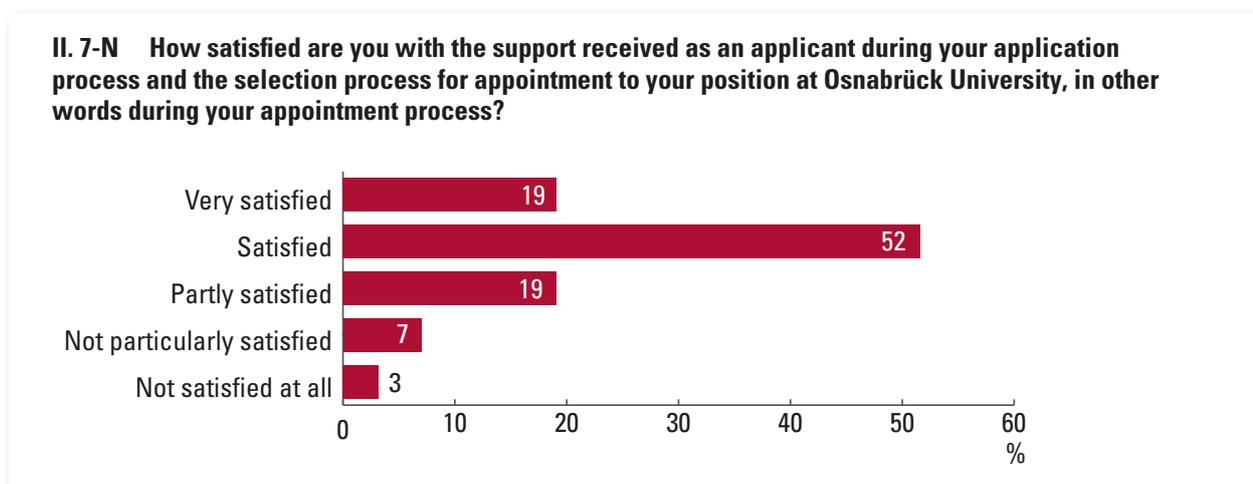


Figure 1. Satisfaction with the selection process in the procedure for appointing to positions
(Percentage of young scholars, n=157)

Working conditions in research and teaching

Taking into account the particular requirements of employment in the scientific context, Osnabrück University introduced trust-based working hours in 2017. The flexible working conditions required in research are supported by this policy.

Flexible working conditions are regarded by young scholars as well as professors as an important basis for creative research. A »home office« and support from graduate assistants are, in many cases, regarded as helpful measures to ensure the required level of flexibility. In addition to time-related flexibility concerning research and teaching, all groups surveyed emphasised the importance of regular consultations and target agreements as well as the provision of financial resources for young scholars. Junior professors, in this connection, communicated the need for an increase in human resources and funding. Doctoral candidates and postdocs expressed a desire for their own budget for networking activities and material resources. Similarly, with regard to the planning capability for career paths, the need was expressed for longer contractual periods and the establishment of permanent positions. Collective planning of the course topics was cited by young scholars as well as professors as an important condition for teaching and development of a teaching profile. Other needs cited included a higher regard for teaching, support from tutors and graduate assistants, an improvement in the sharing of information between colleagues and mutual support amongst the teaching staff within the schools. Professors also cited the clarification of expectations as well as feedback discussions concerning teaching as further criteria. In this connection, professors also communicated the need for continuing education opportunities to improve their leadership skills.

With regard to teaching, 70% of young scholars stated that they are »very satisfied« or »satisfied« with the framework conditions for their teaching (Figure 2).

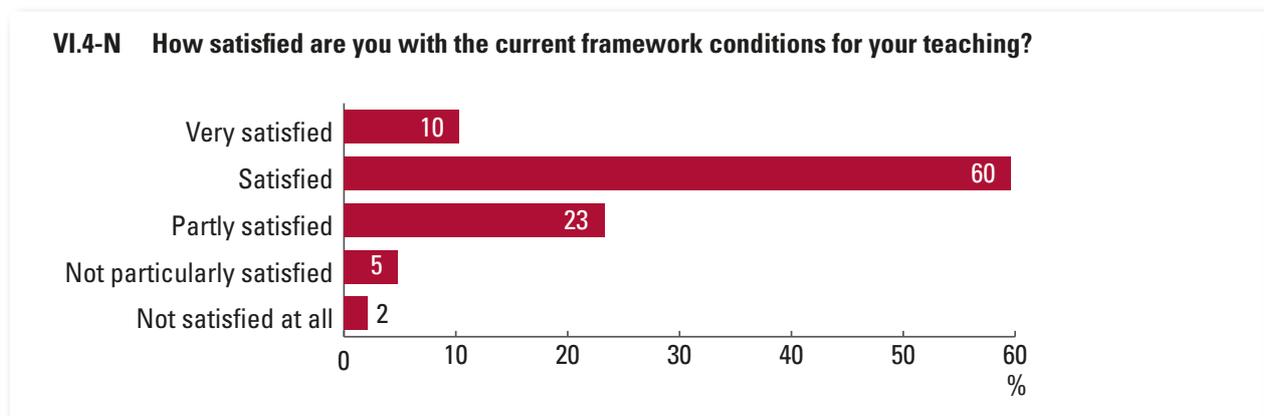


Figure 2. Satisfaction with framework conditions for teaching
(Percentage of young scholars, n=146)

Ability to combine family and an academic career

To support combining an academic career and family, young scholars as well as professors communicated the desire for broad and flexible childcare services as well as family-friendly times for meetings, committees and conferences. In this context both participant groups also expressed the need for permanent positions and longer contractual periods in order to be able to combine family and an academic career on a long-term basis. Young scholars also expressed a desire for broader acceptance of parents working part-time in the qualification phases.

Regarding current satisfaction with the level of family-friendliness at Osnabrück University, 66% of young scholars responded that they were »very satisfied« or »satisfied« (Figure 3).

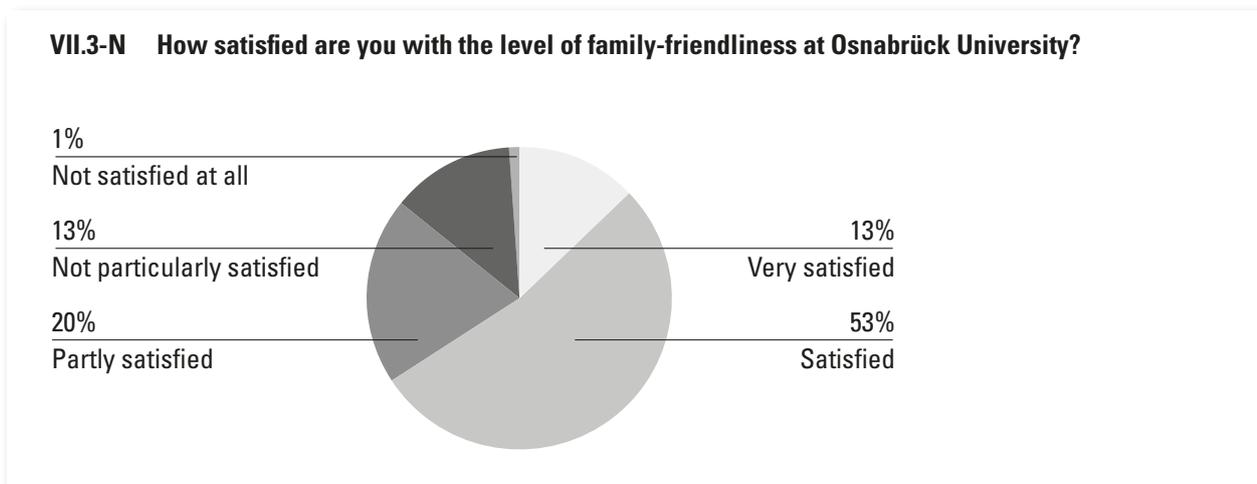


Figure 3. Satisfaction with the level of family-friendliness at Osnabrück University
(Percentage of young scholars, n=78)

Support and supervision in the doctoral phase

Doctoral candidates expressed the need for regular and structured supervision. Specifically in terms of the »Individual Development Plan for PhD Studies« (IDP), many of the doctoral candidates surveyed expressed the desire for the IDP to be more binding, for it to be used as a basis for supervision discussions and, consequently, to be updated. Professors highlighted, in addition to status discussions, sharing of knowledge between doctoral candidates as well as networking within the scope of conferences and within the institute as important aspects during the doctoral phase.

Overall, doctoral candidates confirmed a high level of satisfaction with PhD support at Osnabrück University, with 28% of doctoral candidates reporting they are »very satisfied« and 45% »satisfied« with the discussions on their IPD. A similar finding ensued with regard to the status discussions for support purposes during the doctoral phase and the discussions on career progression between doctoral candidates and supervisors.

Support and supervision in the postdoc phase

The majority of postdocs expressed the need for discussions to clarify mutual expectations when taking up a position as well as supervision discussions with chairholders on their research profile and career progression. Feedback discussions on individual achievements in the postdoc phase were also regarded as important, also as a means of assessing their eligibility for a professorship. Professors fundamentally confirmed the benefits of such supervision discussions. Regulations or rigid guidelines concerning the discussions were viewed sceptically. Sharing of contacts within the academic discipline as well as support with developing publication strategies were also identified as needs in the postdoc phase.

52% of postdocs stated that when taking up their position a discussion was held with chairholders to clarify mutual expectations. Over 50% of postdocs also confirmed that they hold regular feedback or career discussions with their chairholders. A high level of satisfaction with these discussions for supervision purposes during the qualification phase was reported by postdocs.

Subject-related training and networking

With regard to subject-related networking, young scholars as well as professors expressed a desire for support of international networking opportunities as well as the strengthening of disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration between young scholars within Osnabrück University. Topics such as higher education didactics, environment and gender were preferred by young scholars for interdisciplinary collaboration at the university level. Regarding specialist topic training opportunities, professors as well as young scholars from all subject groups generally expressed a need for qualification and support services relating to quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Young scholars stated that they take part in subject-specific exchange and networking opportunities within the schools and on a cross-school basis, and specialist conferences (national and international). The findings of the survey reveal, however, that there are considerable variations in the extent to which doctoral candidates, postdocs as well as junior professors make use of these networking opportunities. The majority of young scholars also stated that they were fundamentally »satisfied« or »very satisfied« with the current subject-related exchange opportunities.

Multidisciplinary training and networking

Doctoral candidates and postdocs primarily expressed the need for further opportunities to strengthen methodical competencies. Postdocs would like a stronger emphasis on subject-specialisation in terms of higher education didactics opportunities and, in the context of career development, they expressed the desire for a greater focus on professional fields outside academia. Young scholars as well as professors also stated that they would like more training seminars in English and target group-specific support in writing German and English academic texts. Professors also expressed the desire for the mentoring programme to be opened up to young male scholars. The seminars offered on multidisciplinary training and the mentoring program for young female scholars are generally well known within the university. 60-80% of young scholars stated that they are aware of these opportunities. In contrast, opportunities aimed at smaller target groups, such as the »Career direct« program, which is targeted at young female scholars in career transition phases, are not so well known.

Evaluations of multidisciplinary training and networking opportunities were extremely positive. Over 80% of young scholars stated that they are »very satisfied« or »satisfied« with the majority of opportunities.

Advisory services

Osnabrück University offers a broad range of target group and topic-specific advisory services for young scholars which are made available by the PhD/Postdoc Career Center (ZePrOs), research funding advisors and the Equal Opportunity Office. The results of the needs analysis survey proved that many young scholars are not familiar with this differentiated range of advisory services.

Young scholars who had made use of the advisory services reported a high level of satisfaction. For nine out of eleven advisory services, 80% of the survey participants stated that they were »very satisfied« or »satisfied« with them.

Opportunities relating to financial support for young scholars

With regard to instruments of financial support for young scholars, a general need for funding emerged. Doctoral completion scholarships for men, in particular, were proposed by all groups. Furthermore, young scholars as well as professors expressed a need for funding for periods of study abroad, travel to conferences, summer schools, guest speakers, etc. Whilst postdocs would like their own budget to administer in this connection, professors proposed a budget at the central level. Regarding the female promotion pool, some respondents were critical of the restriction to gender research as defined in the funding guidelines, and would like the eligibility criteria to be expanded.

The majority of young scholars who have taken advantage of the support via the research pool or the female promotion pool (83% and 63% respectively) stated that they were »very satisfied« or »satisfied« with these opportunities.

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