

Mentoring for Germany's women journalists



Mentoring Programme for Women Journalists

In brief

The Journalistinnenbund, an association for women journalists in Germany with around 500 members, exists to support women journalists and improve their career opportunities and working conditions. In 2001 it launched a mentoring programme, which has so far run through seven cycles and mentored more than 70 women. The programme is targeted at younger women, although there is no formal age ceiling. It is particularly attractive to freelance journalists, who have no other sources of professional support.

The methodology aims to build a bridge between journalists of different generations, and conceives the mentoring relationship as a relationship between two people which provides support and companionship on the career path. The main qualifications for mentors and mentees alike are reliability, openness, confidentiality and honesty. Only women mentors take part.

'Tandems' of mentor and mentee are matched on the basis of questionnaires they fill in and also with the help of telephone interviews. Each cycle of mentoring opens at the association's annual meeting, and closes at the following annual meeting, at which each tandem makes a presentation describing how the year has gone.

The programme is unique in Germany for woman journalists, and is over-subscribed. Though it had ministry support for the first two years, it is now funded from membership subscriptions.

The slow road to equality

In Germany a significant gender gap still exists in the media – both in the representation of women within media organisations and in content. Women lack access to expression and decision-making since they do not get into positions which facilitate this. The great majority of decision-makers in media organisations are still men. The majority of top positions are still taken by men, while women are found on the secondary hierarchical level. There are hardly any female editors-in-chief, especially in newspapers. In recent years it has become evident that if there is a vacant position within a media organisation, it is filled by a man. And if a man gives up his job, it is another man that follows. Thanks to the last Gender Media Monitoring Project (GMMP 2010) we have learned that if the catching-up process proceeds at its current rate, it will take another 43 years until 50:50 equality between men and women in media organisations is achieved. The organisation Pro Quote declares that a percentage of 30% women in decision-making positions in the media sector is a good goal. Their aim is to reach this 30% quota within the next five years – a very, if not too ambitious aim.

Not only in the media sector, but also in all the big companies, the decision-makers are still men. An important reason why women are still underprivileged within media organisations lies, in fact, in the structure of the labour market in Germany in general, but also in the characteristics of the media sector in particular, since both are still male-dominated.

The Journalistinnenbund (Women Journalists' Alliance) was founded in 1987 and has some 500 members. It is a good example of a framework that enables and promotes networking among women. In Germany, there are a lot more female students in higher-level media and communication studies. A lot more female than male trainees are hired. This shows that women have the better education and have more work experience. German public broadcasting has engaged in a rethink and is now focusing on male trainees.

The Journalistinnenbund's mission is precisely to support women journalists and improve their career opportunities and working conditions. It runs several projects dealing with the gender gap and gender equality, such as a project to promote gender democracy in the media. One of these projects is the mentoring programme for women journalists.

Mentoring is particularly appreciated by freelancers

The mentoring programme was launched in 2001, and to date has run seven intakes comprising more than 70 mentees. Its global objective is to support women journalists, so as to improve their careers and their access to expression and decision-making in journalism. Its specific objective is to provide 'advice, company and coaching' from older and more experienced women journalists to freelancers and to those who already had experience in journalism and want to pursue a career in the field.

It is not anchored within institutions: though it had ministry support for its first two years to start the programme. Since then the Journalistinnenbund has had to rely on volunteers to continue it, and funds the opening and closing events from its own resources. Nevertheless, editorial departments in news media organisations advertise and recommend the scheme to their younger staff, thus contributing to ever-increasing numbers of applicants.

The mentoring programme is not a general service to all female journalists, but only members of the Journalistinnenbund can take part as mentees (however not all the mentors are members). There is no formal age limit for mentees, but it is meant for younger women.

Mentoring focuses on the relationship between two people and is conceived as support and companionship on the career path. The programme aims to 'build a bridge between the generations and secure the exchange of knowledge and experiences for younger colleagues to benefit from'.

The mentoring year

The mentoring is especially valuable to freelancers, who rarely obtain the support they need. And they provide a knock-on effect. They can in turn transfer the skills they learn to the organisations they work for, thus producing permanent changes in favour of women. Most importantly, the mentees can advise and coach other women working with them, even in an informal way.

The main qualifications for mentors are reliability, openness, confidentiality, honesty, free time and taking pleasure in helping a less professionally experienced colleague. Mentees require a willingness to learn and participate, reliability, openness, confidentiality and honesty. There is no age limit for mentees, and women returning to work or taking up journalism after a career change are welcome.

The content of the mentoring meetings specifically addresses issues of gender in the media: as stated by the interviewee, 'we wanted to provide young women journalists with a full awareness about gender equality, because not all of them were familiar with feminism and gender equality'. Mentors are journalists from the Journalistinnenbund itself, and therefore have specific competences in addressing gender issues within news media organisations, or they are external journalists directly chosen by the Journalistinnenbund.

A method that works

A very detailed evaluation of the first two years of the programme has been made, as mentors and mentees were asked to fill in a questionnaire. This shows that the gender equality objectives initially set for the intervention have been achieved. Many female journalists working as freelancers, who had already had journalism experience and wanted to pursue a career in the field, declared that the programme had met their initial expectations and that they had received the support and advice they needed. They had the chance to discuss their career, and gained self-confidence in negotiating with editors-in-chief and in dealing with colleagues. The Journalistinnenbund, too, gained from the bridge that was built between different generations of women journalists, thus enabling its members to exchange their knowledge and experiences.

One mentor-mentee 'tandem' gave the following appraisal:

Patricia: I got very tangible benefits from mentoring: I discussed topics with Ina and she opened doors for me and arranged contacts. So I got more texts written than before! In addition, Ina was for me also a mirror: she has already survived the battles I am now fighting.

Ina: It was fun, even though I did not always have an immediate idea of how I could help. Mentoring is also an excellent way to stand back and look at your own work, and reflect on your own goals and expectations.

The mentoring was preceded by an assessment of gender equality needs. Its results have been achieved at reasonable cost, both as regards the financial cost to the Journalistinnenbund) and the human resources involved – a special mentoring team of 5-7 members of the Journalistinnenbund was founded to cope with the organisation and the conduct the actual mentoring.

The programme would additionally benefit from more external funding and support from authorities and institutions competent for media and communication, from governmental bodies and from gender equality bodies.

A unique service

The programme contributes to the Journalistinnenbund's wider policy objectives, which are to improve women's access to expression and decision-making in journalism. A significant increase in gender equality beyond the immediate reach of the initiative results from the action: even though it is difficult to assess long-run changes, it can be argued that mentees have had a greater opportunity to express themselves and make decisions as a result of the advice and support they received during the mentoring programme. The programme has also affected the wider environment by facilitating the creation of female journalists' networks – which are very rare in comparison to those of men or those that are male-dominated.

The factors of the programme's success are that it provides a service that many female journalists, especially freelancers, do not have the chance to receive elsewhere. It benefits from a high degree of commitment from the mentors and members of the Journalistinnenbund, which ensures its effectiveness and continuity. Special care is taken in matching mentees and mentors, and a good match between the two sides is ensured through questionnaires which both sides fill in prior to joining the programme. The organisations that are members of the Journalistinnenbund publicise the programme among their members (who are potential mentees) and search for women interested in volunteering as mentors.

The main obstacle it faces is a lack of external funding. The mentoring team has therefore started a fundraising campaign. Using the slogan *Starkes Doppel – Werde Schirmfrau* it aims to encourage established journalistic authorities and members to support the work of the mentoring team financially. One of the first *Schirmfrauen* is Dagmar Reimer, chairwoman of the public-law broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb).

The mentoring programme, compared to other methods, is very easy to handle and very fruitful when one compares the voluntary effort involved and the productivity of its outcomes. For these reasons, a mentoring programme is very easy to implement in media organisations.

It teaches the lessons that it is important to foster an exchange of knowledge and experience between women from different generations in order to empower the younger ones and contribute, in the long term, to redressing gender imbalances in journalism and in the media sector more widely. It is also important to make young women journalists aware of gender equality issues and how gender patterns affect their careers. High-level commitment is essential to bring about change within media organisations.

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Further information

[Mentoring programme](#)



[Pro Quote](#)



[The Global Media Monitoring Project \(GMMP\)](#)



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Logo and photo from Journalistinnenbund's website:

<https://www.journalistinnen.de/journalistinnenbund/projekte/mentoring.html>

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