

Project title: Berlin Economics Research Associates (BERA)

Project number: K196/2015

Executive Summary

Under the umbrella of the Berlin Economics Research Associates Program (BERA), seven research institutes/universities/schools had the unique opportunity to promote postdoctoral research careers. BERA established a structured program that enabled the participating institutions to further raise their research quality, to increase their shares of female researchers and to strengthen the researchers' access to professional networks.

BERA created a formal network at the postdoctoral career stage and established an all-encompassing cooperation between the Berlin research institutions in the field of economics. The cooperation included:

- coordination of recruitment among the seven institutions, which contributed to each institution's strategic goals of hiring more excellent researchers on an international basis. The joint recruitment activities were very successful in the annual Economics job market and some of the best international postdoctoral researchers were recruited for the Berlin network.
- personal mentoring of postdoctoral researchers by senior faculty. Mentor – mentee pairs were matched with an algorithm considering individual preferences of the mentees, as well as professional fit to achieve the best possible outcome. A rule set and a formal procedure for the meetings were defined and the mentees were regularly asked to give feedback on the usefulness and their satisfaction with the mentoring. In total about 65 pairs were matched.
- financial support of scientific activities (see table 1) like event funds for workshops and conferences, a visitor program covering travel costs for guests, an associates program providing support for travel costs and conference fees for BERA associates, female support which was geared towards career development training for female BERA associates and a program for other funds covering submission fees, language editing as well as data and software purchases.
- provision of access to skills courses and other career and placement support which were organised on a regular basis to equip the BERA associates with the best possible career opportunities. The BERA program offered courses such as presentation skills, academic writing and publication strategies run by renowned experts in the field. BERA also takes pride in the successes of their associates and helped placing associates in more than 30 job positions nationally and internationally.

1. Achievement of objectives and milestones

The Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW Berlin) together with the economics departments of Humboldt-Universität, Technische Universität and Freie Universität, the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), the European School of Management and Technology and the Hertie School of Governance (the BERA Institutions) cooperated successfully to offer a structured career development program. The affiliated postdocs, the so called associates, are the core of the BERA program and its activities (see figure 1).

This career development program is the flagship initiative of the BERA program and consisted of a number of hand-curated activities for its members to foster postdoc careers in economics. On an operational level the BERA Institutions provided jointly career development offers which were tailored towards the specific needs of the associates. The associates were asked to

participate in a survey stating their individual needs and expectations. Their responses were the starting point for the BERA activities such as fashioning skills courses and organizing different formats for regular exchange, both within the group of postdocs but most importantly between postdocs and senior faculty. The challenge with this was to offer a relevant and useful program that went beyond the standard considering the heterogeneous backgrounds and career goals of the associates. This was accounted for by providing a solid basis of skills training and close-knit mentoring which gave room to unique and highly individual career planning. Mentees did not only find a mentor and sparring partner in their mentor but could also tap into their networks helping them to establish invaluable connections of their own. This combination proved particularly successful as more than 30 associates were placed in positions within and outside of academia during the course of the BERA program.

, organized a mentoring program for their junior colleagues, and combined their recruitment processes on the postdoctoral level to act jointly as recruiters on national and international levels. On the postdoc level the BERA program was able to establish a strong network of young researchers, fostered cooperation and exchange, enabled the exposure of their Associates to the leading researchers in their field and provided individual guidance, mentoring and career advice on a scale which did not exist before.

2. Activities and obstacles

BERA program actively promoted postdoctoral careers in the five key areas. The key areas' content and structure were organized by different project partners and headed by Area Directors from partner institutions. Each area's purpose and activities are described below.

1. Area A: Recruitment and Placement

Through the BERA Area Recruiting, BERA institutions cooperated in a joint postdoctoral recruiting process. The recruiting process, which was administered by BERA staff, is synchronized with the international economics job market and follows its procedural conventions. Every year, a BERA team attended international conferences, especially the American Economic Association Meetings such as the ASSA Conference in Chicago in 2017 and the ASSA Conference in Philadelphia in 2018, for pre-selection interviews. The pre-selected candidates then gave research presentations in Berlin which were attended by members of the BERA Committee and other senior faculty from the different BERA partner institutions. In addition to this yearly effort, the BERA Area Recruiting participated in recruiting activities for positions with timelines that are incompatible with the annual international market.

The director of the BERA Area Recruiting was Peter Haan (DIW Berlin and FU Berlin).

2. Area B: Research

The BERA Area Research supported strong research output by BERA Associates, who could apply for support to expand their research-related activities in Berlin and abroad. BERA supported Associates' travel to conferences and invited seminars outside of Berlin, and supports Associates in organizing conferences, workshops and seminars in Berlin or to invite guests to Berlin (see table 1). Moreover, together with senior faculty from BERA institutions Associates organized annual BERA Workshops in the areas of applied economics, macroeconomics and microeconomics. The most challenging part of this Area was to design a fair and transparent application procedure while offering research support for relevant activities which helped Associates to develop their own profiles.

The director of the BERA Area Research was Mathias Trabandt (FU Berlin).

3. Area C: Networks

Building and maintaining contacts and networks is a central part of successful career development in academia and in policy-related research. The BERA Area Networks supported Associates in expanding their local, national and international networks. The

development of networks included establishing contact with academic researchers, policy makers and policy advisors. The growth of networks was encouraged by increasing Associates' visibility on the BERA website, through informal meetings with other Associates and by providing formal settings, such as BERA Soirées, an annual event featuring discourse with accomplished researchers and policy advisers. In 2017 BERA was fortunate to welcome Prof. Claudia Buch as the featured visitor for that year's Soirée. Prof. Buch has spent her career at the intersection of conducting and managing research, policy advice and policy making. At the Soirée 2018 the renowned Prof. Martin Hellwig who had an exceptionally successful international career as economist and as head of the German Monopolkommission was the featured visitor. The BERA program was able to establish a strong network, fostered cooperation and exchange and enabled the exposure of their Associates to the leading researchers in their field.

The director of the BERA Area Networks was Bernd Fitzenberger (HU Berlin).

4. Area D: Guidance

The core of the BERA Area Guidance was the BERA mentoring program. Upon admission to BERA, each Associate was matched with a mentor using a specially designed algorithm. The mentor could not be the Associate's supervisor and was . Members of the BERA Committee and other senior professors based at BERA institutions served as mentors. Mentor-mentee pairs met regularly and created an individual career development plan based on the mentee's interests and objectives. Matching mentors and mentees from different BERA institutions ensured that the Associates could closely connect to the other research institutions in Berlin and their senior faculty. In this way the BERA institutions committed to engage in each other's postdoctoral career development.

The director of the BERA Area Guidance was Georg Weizsäcker (DIW Berlin and HU Berlin).

5. Area E: Skills

The BERA Area Skills and Placement supported Associates in acquiring further skills necessary to pursue their careers and supported them when going to the job market. Associates had access to skills programs, some offered by BERA Institutions and others organized by the Area Skills and Placement. By choosing specific offers from the set of available programs Associates could focus on acquiring skills required for their envisioned career path. Skills programs include, e.g., academic writing, publication strategies, teaching techniques, and presentation skills. A special emphasis is placed on supporting the careers of female Associates. Moreover, Associates were supported when going to the job market through preparatory meetings, mock presentations and placement activities.

The director of the BERA Area Skills was Steffen Huck (WZB and University College London).

3. Results and successes

Apart from the numbers of Associates who have been successfully recruited throughout the program and who have been successfully supported with their next career steps and started attractive new positions, establishing and implementing the first ever structured postdoctoral program in Economics can be considered as the core achievement of the BERA program. The postdoctoral phase is characterized by a large degree of insecurity which stifles effective career progress. This weakness in the academic system was effectively addressed by the BERA structure and the multilayered activities organized.

4. Equal opportunities, career development and internationalisation

The main purpose of the entire program focused strongly on career development for postdoctoral researchers (the specific activities have already been described above). However, an important goal of the BERA program, in line with objectives of the Leibniz Association, was to increase the share of female researchers in economics. BERA's joint

recruitment activities provided a unique opportunity to create a balanced gender mix at the postdoctoral career stage. The BERA team was particularly gender-sensitive and many activities a) from recruiting through pooling of open positions to ensure a gender balance, b) over mentoring that acknowledges gender-related challenges to c) a funding scheme that reserved funds specifically for the promotion of female researchers were geared towards supporting women at the postdoctoral stage of their careers. Other BERA activities also supported our postdoctoral researchers in achieving a proper work-family balance. The criterion of internationalisation was also addressed by offering access to a national and international network and by supporting our associates to participate in international workshops, conferences and research stays.

5. Structures and collaboration

BERA was fortunate enough to build on existing cooperation in Economics which has already been established amongst the Berlin Institutions. The collaboration mainly included joint research activities, joint research seminar series' and joint teaching at the PhD level.

The main innovation of the BERA program was that it went beyond the existing cooperational ties and harmonized all the efforts of individual institutions at the postdoctoral level. With the initiation of BERA the entire postdoctoral phase was organized under the umbrella of the BERA program offering its Associates a structured and highly supportive environment in which they could develop their individual interests and skills and which proved particularly effective in accelerating their career development. The program has been carried out as planned.

6. Quality assurance

BERA was supervised by the Supervisory Board comprising the Presidents and Deans of the BERA Institutions. The members of the Supervisory Board met yearly to advise the BERA Committee and to oversee the quality and effectiveness of the BERA activities. The Supervisory Board served in an advisory role to the Program Director and the BERA Committee and appointed both, the Program Director and the BERA Committee members. As members of the BERA Supervisory Board the following persons were appointed: Jutta Allmendinger (WZB), Jörg Rocholl (ESMT), Hendrik Enderlein (HSG), Rüdiger Zarnekow (TU Berlin), Dieter Nautz (FU Berlin), Daniel Klapper (HU Berlin), Angelica Röhr and Peter Haan (both DIW Berlin). This feature in the management structure was important to ensure reliability and constant advancement of the program.

Furthermore, the BERA program aimed at defining rules which were as clear as possible offering a fair and transparent rule set for its Associates. The rules were formalized in the -BERA statutes and the BERA funding scheme.

7. Additional resources

The BERA program was supported by several resources made available by DIW Berlin. From an organizational point of view a service partner from the HR department helped in the recruiting process every year and a project coordinator helped with project planning, coordination of the budget and with the processing of the Associates' funding applications on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, BERA could rely on the support of the DIW event management team, as well the IT team if needed. Two offices and a workstation for guests were made available for the BERA program.

The partner institutions also supported the BERA program with own resources by providing free conference rooms, by organizing workshops with their in-house teams and by helping with travel planning for guests and workshop participants.

8. Outlook

This report will be published. If, in order to protect the legitimate interests of the grantee or third parties, or for other objective reasons, certain details of the report are to be treated as confidential (e.g., protection of the priority of applications for industrial property rights), this must be expressly stated here.

The BERA program aimed at improving career development and career support mechanisms at the postdoctoral stage in Economics. It was particularly focused on the specific needs of its Associates and offered one-of-kind opportunities for career planning and development. The main purpose of the program was not to address research questions but to develop effective and hands-on activities for professional development. The recruitment success with about 30 new admissions as BERA Associates and the placement success with more than 30 Associates starting new positions nationally and internationally confirmed the multi-layered approach of BERA. The foundation which was laid throughout the BERA program was further developed and continued as the BSE INSIGHTS program led by WZB.

ANNEX – List of Tables and Figures

Table 1: The BERA funding scheme for Associates

	Event funds	Travel funds for guests	Travel funds for associates	Other funds	Female support
What can you apply for?	Workshop and conference support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel funds for speakers who are invited to an event by an associate Accommodation for speaker (without breakfast) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train or air fare to an event / host institution Accommodation for up to 2 nights (without breakfast) Conference fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submission Fees Language Editing Data Purchase Software Purchase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support of the participation of female Associates in female career development programs (e.g. Mentoring, workshops, Gender-sensitive teaching)
Who is eligible?	Associates who are involved in the organization of an event	Associates who are involved in the organization of an event	Associates who can demonstrate an active engagement (e.g. talk, presentation, lecture etc.)	Every Associate	Female Associates only
Which supporting documents are required?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application letter Program List of participants Breakdown of expected costs Support letter of your head of department/chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application letter Breakdown of expected costs Support letter of your head of department/chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application letter Breakdown of expected costs Support letter of your head of department/chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application letter Breakdown of expected costs Support letter of your head of department/chair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application letter (specifying the gender-related focus) Breakdown of expected costs Support letter of your head of department/chair



Figure 1 The BERA organization chart