



## What is VetMENT?

VetMENT is a mentoring programme open for ALL early-stage researchers at the Vetsuisse Faculty at the University of Bern. Participants hand in an application letter, attend a kick-off workshop and develop goals for their mentoring relationship. The programme is financed by the Vetsuisse Faculty and supported by the Commission for Equal Rights for Women and Men at the University of Bern. The project coordinator is Nora Gassner.

VetMENT is an instrument to individually support early-stage researchers and has four main goals:

- To actively support excellent early-stage researchers at the Vetsuisse Faculty in their research careers.
- To enable young scientists to get into contact with excellent national and international scientists in order to enlarge their network and to help them build their own network.
- To strengthen their competences in workshop trainings and to prepare them for their academic careers.
- To give early-stage researchers an informal platform to get together and exchange information and experiences.

First implemented in the United States and nowadays broadly used in science as well as in the private sector, mentoring is a method to promote young people, especially women, for certain high ranking, leading positions. The most important goal in VetMENT is that mentees understand their possibilities and their chances. In regular meetings with their mentors, mentees will be motivated to further pursue their academic career and be enabled to actively shape their career in science. The mentors will be providing “unwritten” knowledge about academic life to the mentee. VetMENT provides mentees with a framework in order to reflect about their career options. The advantages and disadvantages of an academic career are part of the discussions, as well as the most important rules, challenges, and consequences young scientists need to deal with. In the centre of the discussions between the mentees and mentors is counselling regarding the qualification profile of the mentees and her/his professional orientation. Another very important point is to put her/him into contact with existing projects and to provide her/him with access to the wide and excellent personal networks of their mentors.

## How does VetMENT work?

VetMENT has three important components:

- (1) The mentoring duo (a mentee and a mentor) – the so called “one-to-one-mentoring”**
- (2) A framework programme with workshops especially organized for the needs of the group**
- (3) Peer-mentoring with informal regular lunches to share information with the peers**

The project coordinator supports the mentees to find matching mentors and assists with any kind of administrative questions. The success of the meetings and discussions however is in the responsibility of the mentees and mentors themselves. The collaboration between the mentees and mentors and the goals they want to achieve are discussed and written down after the first meeting. Both parties agree to go along with these rules.

## Guideline for a successful collaboration

Mentoring is a relationship system between a professionally experienced, older person (mentor) and a less experienced, younger person (mentee). The mentor supports, provides advice, opens his/her personal networks to the mentees and helps them to understand unwritten mechanisms within an organisation. Mentoring is not a relationship between a supervisor and an assistant, but rather a relationship in which both partners are learning from each other. The mentee is interested in his/her mentors experiences and in his/her organisation and system of knowledge. During the meetings, mentors share experiences and knowledge with their mentees, answer pressing questions and support their mentees in their ongoing careers and with her/his further goals and aims. For every meeting the mentees write down in advance for the mentor, what the content of the next meeting should be. This way, there are goals both partners want to reach together. It is important that these goals are realistic.

The mentee has decided to meet with a specific person as her/his mentor. Therefore she/he has very specifically chosen this person to address certain current, personally important issues. This is a very important fact for the mentor to recognize. If you have agreed to act as a mentor within VetMENT, the mentee will contact you for a first meeting. This first meeting is important in order to get to know your mentee and to discuss their goals, aims, motivations and also talk about the expectations both of you have. It is also important that you decide on the following questions in this first meeting: How often will you meet? How will you meet when the mentee cannot take part in a meeting in person? Are phone calls or skype/zoom meetings an option? We also recommend that the mentees write down short protocols after every contact with their mentors.

The mentee prepares every meeting or phone call, and she/he will tell their mentor in advance, what she/he wants to talk about. Important information for a successful meeting should be sent to the mentor in advance. It is very important that the mentors make sure that they can meet with their mentee as previously agreed. Mentors need to reserve time to prepare for the meetings as well. If the possibility occurs, it can make sense to introduce your mentee to the staff of your research group before or after one of the meetings. The official duration of the VetMENT programme is 18 months, starting on 24 October 2023 and ending in March 2025.

### **Rules for a successful collaboration between you and your mentee:**

- Two-way trust and confidentiality
- Voluntariness of the relationship
- Abidance by the goals and aims
- Tolerance for different points of view
- Willingness to give constructive feedback and to accept feedback
- Regular meetings (as planned and discussed)
- Dependability of agreements
- Talking about the success and aimed goals (reflection of what has been talked about and what has been achieved)

If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to contact the project coordinator Nora Gassner ([nora.gassner@unibe.ch](mailto:nora.gassner@unibe.ch)). Please note, that VetMENT mentoring relationships can be terminated anytime in cases, where a continuation of the relationship is no longer in the interest of the mentee and/or mentor.

### **Effort and compensation**

To be a mentor means that you share some of your valuable time, your personal network and your knowhow with a young and ambitious early-stage researcher. Unfortunately, VetMENT cannot provide you with a financial reward for your efforts. We are however confident, that the exchange of experiences and the insights into the challenges, questions and aims of a young scientist, will be a rewarding experience for the mentors as well. Travel expenses of the mentees, in order to meet with you at the university, will be paid by VetMENT.

Nora Gassner, Vetsuisse, University of Berne, Switzerland, August 2023

