Proposal for the establishment of an Accompanying Programme in the Doctoral School*.*

"Action 26 — Sponsorship programme" arises as part of the strategy HR in view of the need to promote integration and initial support for new doctoral students from the University of Leon in administrative, socio-cultural or training subjects.

As part of the action plan of the University of Leon for the maintenance of the *HR Excellence* Label, a committee is set up to propose the establishment of a sponsorship programme. This committee consists of Professors Miguel Ángel Ferrero García (CU and Director of the Doctoral School), responsible for the proposed action, Mr Elías Rodríguez Olivera (OCT), who acts as coordinator of the proposed actions of the Committee, Ms. Tania Fernández Villa (PAD), Luis Miguel Ramos Martínez (A) and Ms. Alba Marcos Delgado (AY)

If the proposal is accepted, it must be implemented as a real action by the competent bodies of the University of Leon: To this end, these bodies must implement the appropriate IT platforms, publicise the action plan, legislate at the level of our university on the various actions to be carried out and create the support for interactions between doctoral students and the various university levels. This interaction will be based on (i) the receipt of applications from the accompanied person (s), (ii) the allocation of mentors, (iii) the resolution of potential conflicts during the course of the programme and (iv) the organisation of regular meetings, and in particular at the end of the actions, for the monitoring and improvement of the programme. The University will also assign a specific committee for coordination of actions, conflict resolution, evaluation and improvement of the programme and the drafting of an annual report with the results of the programme, suggesting relevant changes in the event of shortcomings in the organisation of the programme or potential improvements to it.

1. **Purpose of the accompanying action**

This programme was launched with a final objective of supporting and providing guidance to new doctoral students at the University of Leon. However, there are other secondary objectives that can be acquired throughout the programme:

•   To promote the personal and professional development of new doctoral students from the University of León through the guidance of doctoral students from recent years (mentors).

•   Stimulate and enrich relations between those starting their career/research career by starting their doctoral thesis and those with more experience.

•   Sharing experience not only in the administrative, academic or educational sphere, but this programme is intended to be enriching in order to share socio-

cultural experiences developed in the city of Leon or in the university itself.

The need for this scheme focuses on the lack of knowledge, to a greater or lesser extent based on the characteristics of each doctoral student in particular, of the actions to be carried out or the way in which they are carried out by students starting in doctoral studies. In addition to this, the situation of students who will undertake doctoral studies at our university coming from other geographical locations, another university in our autonomous community, from another university in the national territory or even students from foreign backgrounds, not only need guidance on the particular procedures and uses of our university, but probably need help for integration into our campus, our city and our province.

In support of these new doctoral students, it is proposed to create a system of mentoring by students who are finalising their doctoral studies at our university. These *senior* students have already faced the problem of starting their doctoral activities and can guide and mentor new students, facilitating their integration into their doctoral studies and into our community, if they are not already integrated into it.

2. Programme figures

On the basis of the above, the actors with the most immediate involvement, i.e. novel students from any doctoral programme and *senior* doctoral students who will act as mentors, will analyse their characteristics as well as the needs of one and the other.

Students starting their doctoral studies:

Novel students enrolled in doctoral programmes at the University of León who seek to be guided by other PhD students with more experience in administrative, training or socio-cultural actions.

As recipients and users of the proposed action, the different types and specific needs of these students will be analysed. Thus, in general, we can identify three different types of *Naif* students when starting doctoral studies:

1. *Students starting their activities for the completion of a Doctoral Thesis who have completed their previous studies at our university.* These students already have knowledge of our city, have knowledge of and have access to various levels of support set up by our university, such as the ULE Housing Programme, access to the cultural activities programmes promoted by our university, etc. Similarly, it can be expected that issues such as health coverage by SACYL will not currently be a problem for this type of student. This group of pupils have, as needs to be observed by the education programme, support and guidance in carrying out the specific administrative formalities for the studies to be undertaken. On the other hand, if the *senior* student belongs to the same or a related doctoral programme, he or she can even guide the new student in employment and the formalities for

accessing various *facilities* and services of our own university (for example, in the doctoral programmes for Health Sciencies and Biomedicine, the instrumentation and the formalities to be carried out in the Laboratory of Instrumental Technics at our university) and introduce the student to research groups in our university.

2.   *Students who start their doctoral studies at our university, but who come from another national university where they have completed the previous studies*. In this case, in addition to the requirements of the previous group of students, these students find it difficult to ignore our city. In this case, *senior* students must be able to guide newcomers in terms of the geographical distribution of the various branches of our university, the access points to our city (bus station, railway, airport, etc.) and urban transport systems to access both the campuses of our university, the rectorate building (Albéitar) and the various bodies of the public administration (Municipal Council, Diputación, Headquarters of the Regional Government of Castile-Leon, Subdelegación de Gobierno, local and national Police Offices and others).

Similarly, it is possible that certain formalities, such as health care procedures, are a problem for newly arrived pupils (for example, in the case of having to process a temporary health insurance card for workers), in which it would also be desirable for pupils to have some help. Access to housing is another point where newcomers can be tutorised by targeting the use of the Housing Programme of our University, the "Albéitar Hostel", the "San Isidoro Lodging" or others. On the other hand, and from a recreational point of view, the orientation of newcomers towards monuments, museums, sports facilities and leisure areas would also be desirable, with a view to social integration in our community.

3.   *Foreign doctoral students starting their studies at our university and foreign doctoral students pursuing part of their doctoral studies at our university under a mentor from our university*. In addition to requiring the relevant assistance covered by the two previous cases, these students' case studies have their own and relatively more complex aspects. Firstly, we must assume that these students do not have a command of our vehicular language, Spanish or, at best, that they know it, but it is assumed that their handling is limited. In this respect, the mentoring of these pupils requires the use of a common language for the correct understanding between the new student and the 'padrino' student. We must also take on board the religious and social specificities of foreign students and make it easier for them to fulfil them while integrating them into our society. On the other hand, from an administrative point of view, these students may also require

different regulatory paperwork, such as obtaining a residence permit for studies, medical insurance or the opening of a bank account. To this end, the student acting as a mentor must have access to and collaboration with the International Relations Area of our university in order to be able to resolve these problems.

The participation of these students in the programme implies a commitment to maintain contacts with their mentors throughout the academic year.

In turn, your involvement as a passionate will allow you to gain experience to engage altruism to collaborate as a mentors of new students in the future.

Pupils of doctorate *senior* acting as mentors: "Padrinos/madrinas".

Doctoral students who will have to act as mentors of newcomers will have to meet a number of requirements, some of which must be promoted or favoured by the members of our university. First, mentor pupils should be students who are at the end of their doctoral studies; in based on this, these students will have the necessary experience to identify and deal with specific problems of a novel doctorate and, at the same time, will also have the maturity needed to face the challenge of mentoring a newcomer.

On the other hand, the actions of these pupils will have to be entirely voluntary, based on their *bona fide*. due to the characteristics of these students and the requirements of guardianship, it should not be considered a mandatory action, but the voluntary nature of that action must arise from the abilities and willingness of individuals, considered individually, to do so.

On the other hand, "padrino/madrina" students commit to addressing the concerns of the beautiful and sharing their experiences and knowledge altruism. The "padrino" or the "madrina" shall be responsible for motivating, guiding, guiding and advising new students on doctoral programmes in administrative, educational or socio-cultural tasks.

Both aspects considered should be taken into account by the student who proposes himself/herself as a potential mentor, since this action as a tutor will require them to be available time at a very specific time in their training careers: they will be students in their last year of doctoral thesis, thus finding themselves performing the latest research tasks, possibly combining their time with the drafting of their memories of Doctoral Thesis. In this scenario, mentoring students will have to be aware that guardianship will take away effective time, sometimes more or less unexpectedly. Therefore, mentor pupils must have the organisational capacity and willingness to cooperate so as to enable them to make the commitment established with their newcomers and at the same time this commitment is not detrimental to their work to obtain a doctorate degree at our university.

On the other hand, consideration should be given to the possibility that, due to

the specific requirements of completing the doctoral thesis or other problems that may arise, the mentor pupil is exceeded by the requirements of his mentoring. In that case, also because of the voluntary nature of the action, consideration should be given to the possibility of replacing the mentoring pupil during the action, for the benefit of the new student and in order to avoid the detriment of the mentor student.

In addition, our university will have to develop a form of recognition of the work carried out by mentors in such a way as to reward mentors' actions and dedication. We propose that this recognition be carried out in such a way as to constitute an *addenda* curricular, a mention of recognition by the university, but at the same time, it can have an impact on your professional future, as it can be considered outside our own university.

However, these considerations mentioned so far must be balanced and balanced against each other. On the one hand, the commitment of those voluntarily proposed as mentors must be considered and, at the same time, it must be balanced with our university's curriculum recognition of this action. The members of our university must consider this recognition in such a way as to satisfy the voluntary nature of mentors, but to avoid the call of opportunistic people who, by increasing their *curricula*, do not have a firm and real will to deal with the tasks to which they may be called upon.

In addition, mentoring pupils must undertake not to present any kind of bias as to the new pupils they will mentor, so that there is no action against the dignity of the various elements of the action, whether mentoring or mentoring, for reasons of sex, race, religious beliefs or any other kind. This will have to be confirmed by students who commit to these actions by signing a letter to be written by the competent elements of our university.

Consideration should also be given to the need to provide training support for the performance of the tasks as mentors of volunteer pupils, so our university will have to organise training days to indicate the action procedures and the limits of these to which mentors will be confronted. This involves the organisation of these training days by different levels of our university ("Vicerrectorado de Alumnos", Institutional Relations, International Relations, etc.). It would also be desirable to set up a support body to which mentor pupils could turn to any time of doubt as to how to deal with a one-off problem.

With regard to the academic compatibility of the mentor/student, it would be desirable for the institution to establish the coordination between students from the same doctoral programme or related programmes, since, in addition to solving various bureaucratic or social problems, the mentor could direct the new student to use different *facilities* and resources provided by our university directly related to the studies to be developed by the new student.

Furthermore, and linked to the latter point, it would be desirable for the mentor had one or more meetings with the incoming student's academic guardian, in

order to inform and exchange views on the new student's personal idiosyncrasy. This would intrinsically imply greater interaction between the new student and his mentor, as the potential needs of the new student are brought to the attention of the mentor. This interaction will also be facilitated if the mentor pupil belongs to the same or a related doctoral programme, as the student mentor and the academic guardian are likely to have interacted beforehand.

3. Our university acts as an agent and intermediary in the interaction between student mentor and novel student.

In the light of what has been said so far, our university is a key player in the work carried out to date. On the one hand, both mentor and newcomer are pupils of our university and therefore administratively dependent on it. On the other hand, our university must provide various elements to foster interaction and monitor the suitability of mentors' actions.

On the one hand, our university must provide the information corresponding to the action, both for young students and to foster interaction with potential mentoring students. To this end, in addition to the relevant information, in the form of *PDF* documents, information videos or any other relevant system, our university will have to implement two relational platforms: one aimed at the registration and application by young students and the other to register the potential mentor pupils. Both platforms should, through private surveys, covered by the guidelines of the Data Protection Act, provide information on the needs and idiosyncrasy of young students and on the skills for mentor students to interact and solve specific problems. The interrelationship of the two platforms should facilitate the creation of the most efficient binomies. As an example of the binomial "pairing" system to be assessed by interpolating the two relational databases, we could consider a new student from outside Spain, with a vehicular language other than Spanish. In this case, one of the first relationships that the interaction between the two platforms should consider would be the existence of a common language between new student and student mentor for the correct interaction between them and the mediation of the mentoring student between the new student and the various social elements with which they have to interact. Similarly, it would be desirable that the process of pairing the binomies would benefit from belonging to the same doctoral programme or a related programme, and to take account of the preferences/needs/skills established by both the qualified students and the "Padrinos/Madrines" in the registration processes on the platforms set up by our university.

On the other hand, our university should not be a purely relational system between elements of this binomium, but should also have tools to monitor and evaluate the performance and interaction between the student binomio. To this end, a system should be put in place to enable any of the students in the binomium, throughout the interaction, to consult and report on doubts about the performance of the binomium or the ability to interact with it. In addition, interviews between the student mentor and the academic guardian of the new student should be documented and informed to the regulatory system of the

apported process to also monitor the actions. On the other hand, either of the two students in the binomio should have the possibility to report any potential abuse by any of the elements involved in the action. Finally, at the end of the sponsorship, both students should provide our university with an independent report on the actions carried out during the qualifying period. All of this must be favoured, supervised and evaluated by the relevant bodies of our university and the results of these actions must be proportionate to the Doctoral School so that, on the basis of these results, the system of scrubbing over time can be improved and optimised.

Another action point directly under the responsibility of our university is the training and preparation of volunteer mentors for proper action in the roles for which they are responsible. To this end, the university should set up documentation and guidance days for these students. Due to the fact that enrolment in doctoral programmes at our university is continuous throughout the teaching period, without a time limit for the registration, the days should take place throughout the teaching season. Unfortunately, from a logistical point of view, this is totally unfeasible, and it is therefore proposed as a possible solution to establish a better two registration seasons for volunteer mentor students (one at the beginning of the academic year and one in the middle of the academic year) and the organisation of an information day session to the end of each of the registration seasons. From databases generated after registration, enrolment of students new mentors will be developed according to their needs throughout the teaching period. Consideration should also be given to making attendance at these days mandatory for self-proposers in order to be maintained in the system.

Another possible action by our university that would greatly facilitate action would be the drafting of a manual and guide on this action, and also about the organisation of our university, the distribution and locations in our city and province and the community environment and the various campuses of the universities of our community. In order to carry out this type of action, our university's interaction with other universities of our region, the municipality of León, the "Diputación de León" local authority and the regional government of Castile and Leon would be highly desirable.

The guide would thus set out the rights and duties of doctoral students at our university; the systems implemented for the action, the organisation chart of our university; the characteristics of the Doctoral School and the various doctoral programmes offered, the services offered by our university for access to housing, cultural activities, *facilities*, libraries and bibliographic data, etc.; access routes and communications in our city, including a street map, the location of government in our city (location of the municipality, post offices, headquarters of the "Diputación de León" and of the "Junta de Castilla y León", police stations, etc.); the location of other campuses in our university and those of the universities of our community, as well as the existence of training systems and

collaboration between them and how to formalise this type of action; any other type of information considered relevant.

It would also be desirable for such a guide not only to exist as a *PDF* file on one of the university's platforms, but, in order to increase its efficiency, to be physically provided in paper form to doctoral students at the time of enrolment to a doctoral programme and to mentors during the training day process for the action.

4. Assessment of the suitability of the Programme

As proof of concept and analysis of the appropriateness of the action, assessing the points to be improved in the action, it is proposed that a pilot test be carried out, as the first edition of the programme, in the academic year following acceptance, if any, of the programme proposed here. This involves the publicity of the programme, the design and implementation of the IT platforms for student registration, the management the pairing of the members and the preparation of the orientation days, as well as the supporting documentation for the implementation of the actions. Once this first edition has been completed, the persons responsible for implementing it will draw up a report on the evaluation of the process, from the technical and administrative point of view, and the data obtained during the actions. To this end, the design of (i) questionnaires on the accessibility and comfort of registration platforms will be used as evaluation tools; (II) questionnaires on the satisfaction and achievement of the objectives set; and (iii) qualitative assessment of the opinions received by each binomium.

On this basis, a report shall be issued using as indicators of the quality and adequacy of the system:

• Number of applications received.

• Number of acceptances to participate in the programme.

• Number of waivers of binomium to continue in the programme.

• Number of meetings between members of each binomium.

• Satisfaction with the programme.

• Percentage of achievement of initially proposed milestones and targets.

5. Conclusions

The establishment of a system of mentoring among newcomers will bring an inherent benefit to the integration of new doctoral students into our university and thus into the generation of knowledge.

Actions in which appetite is sought:

• Advice at the administrative level relating to the doctorate.

• Local/national administrative advice as a result of integration in the city and university.

• Advice on accommodation search.

• Advice on the various facilities of the University of Leon.

• Advice on the socio-cultural activities in the city and/or from the University of Leon.

Organisation of the programme:

The university will act as a mediator, manager and monitoring of the interaction between young students and volunteer students at the end of their doctoral studies as agents of the interaction. To this end, the university will have to put in place different platforms and systems to facilitate the creation and interaction between new pupils with different and different idiosyncratic needs, students with experience in the requirements of a doctoral plan and the maturity needed to deal with the problems of the beautiful pupils. The university will also have to ensure the suitability and optimisation of the relationships established between these students. As a summary of the actions to be taken in the targeted programme, we can consider:

• The programme, as well as registration for doctoral studies at the University of León, will be open on a continuous basis.

• Each academic year will carry out activities to disseminate and provide information on the programme both for new pupils and for possible mentors.

• At the start of the programme, each binomium formed (new pupil— mentor) will establish an action plan of targets and milestones to be achieved and a calendar of meetings.

• The mentor will meet with the academic tutor of the new pupil to learn about the specific characteristics of the student tutorised and to find possible solutions to the problems raised from the point of view of the start of doctoral work.

• The coordination team shall monitor established couples in order to ascertain their proper functioning or resolve conflicts that may arise.

• Any problem arising from the relationship of established couples must be reported to the secretariat of the Doctoral School by e-mail (sec.doctorado@unileon.es) indicating the problem encountered and, if possible, a proposal for a solution. Within a period not exceeding two weeks, the coordination team shall contact the binomium to try to solve the problem.

• All relevant information will be available on the *website* of the University of Leon and at the School of Doctorate according to the Data Protection Act.

For all these reasons, we propose the ideas set out in this memo as a blueprint for the implementation of the relevant actions.

In order to establish this, we sign as responsible authors:

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