

# Mentors meet mentees

In 2023, several LCSB members participated in the ADVANCE mentoring pilot programme initiated by the Gender Equality Office of the university. The objective: facilitating career development through conversations between a mentor and a mentee, and offering training to support women and other underrepresented groups in academia. For both the principal investigators who shared their knowledge and the post-doctoral researchers who received guidance, the experience was eye-opening.

“It was my first time as an official mentor, but I have some experience with this type of interaction,” explains Prof. Anne Grünewald, head of the Molecular & Functional Neurobiology group at the LCSB. “I have myself somebody who acts as a sort of advisor and who I turn to when I make big career decisions, so I know how important this can be.” Along with Prof. Emma Schymanski, head of the

Environmental Cheminformatics group, she was one of the two LCSB principal investigators who took part in the programme. As mentors, their main role was to have regular one-on-one discussions with their mentees. “We covered different questions, from the pros and cons of a career in academia to how to deal with the non-scientific part of the job such as conflict resolution,” details Prof. Grünewald. “For me, it was interesting to get some insight into the mind of the younger generation and their outlook on their career and, for mentees, it is of course crucial to consider all these aspects when choosing their next steps.”

Dr Charlotte De Rudder, the post-doctoral researcher in the Systems Ecology group, who was paired with Prof. Grünewald agrees: “These discussions gave me the opportunity to explore different career options. I now have some insights into what it means to be a team leader in academia but also to work in other positions as Anne put me in contact with people she knows in different sectors. As a result, I have a much clearer picture of what I would like to do next.” In addition to the one-on-one sessions, the programme includes workshops for the mentees, allowing them to meet young researchers from all disciplines and to build a network of peers. “We were able to share our experiences and struggles, and it gave participants a welcome boost of confidence,” explains Dr De Rudder.

Another LCSB mentee, Dr Carmen Venegas Maldonado, post-doctoral researcher in the Molecular & Functional Neurobiology group, concurs. She mentions how she stayed in touch with the people she met during a workshop on leadership in science focusing on female researchers. “These two intensive days of presentations and practical exercises were a highlight. Along with the CV writing training, they complemented the mentoring sessions really nicely,” she says. Another strength of the programme according to her: the organisation team whose availability and flexibility helped her navigate the different activities.

With such positive reviews, no doubt the ADVANCE programme has a bright future ahead, just like the mentees it empowers. Hopefully, it will contribute to bring or keep many young women on the path of a successful career in science, at the LCSB and elsewhere. ■



From left to right: Dr Carmen Venegas Maldonado, Dr Charlotte De Rudder, Prof. Emma Schymanski and Prof. Anne Grünewald.