

Call for Early Stage Researchers (ESR)

The **NEOLAiA Early Stage Researchers Mentorship Programme** brings together motivated young researchers and experienced academic mentors across the Alliance, to support structured career development, international networking, and professional growth within and beyond academia.

We now open the invitation to participate in the 2nd round of the NEOLAiA ESR Mentorship Programme.

About the NEOLAiA ESR Mentorship Programme

The NEOLAiA ESR Mentorship Programme is designed to support career development, strengthen cross-institutional and interdisciplinary networks, and foster long-term mentoring relationships across NEOLAiA universities. The Programme combines mandatory online workshops, regular mentor–mentee meetings, peer exchange among ESRs, and a funded international mobility visit.

Programme Objectives

The ESR Mentorship Programme aims to support Early Stage Researchers by:

- enhancing networking skills and international collaboration,
- providing expert career guidance within and outside academia,
- supporting publication, presentation, and research development,
- strengthening transferable and soft skills (e.g. communication, time management),
- enabling individualised development plans (IDPs); and
- offering psychosocial support during early career stages.

Mentors – experienced researchers from NEOLAiA universities or associated partners – contribute their expertise, experience, and perspective to guide ESRs in achieving these objectives.

Nomination of mentees (Early Stage Researchers)

Eligibility: PhD students or Post Docs (a researcher who has not yet attained the academic rank of professor (including W1) or an equivalent position).

Each NEOLAiA university is invited to nominate one ESR to participate as a mentee. Selection and nomination procedures are handled by each university and should align with NEOLAiA's core values of diversity and inclusion.

If accepted for the NEOLAiA ESR Programme, the mentee commits to:

- Participation in all Programme workshops (13 in total).
- Monthly mentor–mentee online meetings (minimum frequency) during Modules II and III.
- Completion of one funded mobility visit to the mentor’s institution during Modules II–III.
- Active engagement in Programme activities to be eligible for certification.

Programme Structure

Programme period: 1 April 2026 – 30 September 2027

The ESR Mentorship programme is structured in three 6-month modules, for a duration of 18 months in total. Mentor–mentee matching takes place during Module I and is coordinated by the ESR Team. Further details are provided during the first Programme workshop.

Module I – Orientation, Networking, and Career Perspectives (1 April 2026 – 30 September 2026)

	Workshop 1 – Welcome, Networking, and Interdisciplinary Research	Workshop 2 – Career Pathways and Societal Engagement
Topics and focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome to the NEOLAiA ESR Mentorship Programme • The Benefits of an International Network • Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academia as a Foundation for a Career Outside Academia • Engaging with Society as a Researcher

Module II – Mentoring in Practice and Well-being (1 October 2026 – 31 March 2027)

	Workshop 3 – Mentoring Roundtable: Experiences and Expectations	Workshop 4 – Stress Management and Psychosocial Support
Topics and focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roundtable Discussion with Mentors and Mentees • Separate Workshops for Mentees and Mentors to Discuss Experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress factors in early research careers • Practical strategies for resilience and work–life balance • Mentoring as a support mechanism

Module III – Research Integrity, Funding, and Programme Closure (1 April 2027 – 30 September 2027)

	Workshop 5 – Research Ethics, Integrity, and Funding Applications	Workshop 6 – Joint Reflection and Programme Closure (September 2027)
Topics and focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Ethics and Integrity • How to Write Funding Applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint reflection on the mentoring journey • Key lessons learned and outcomes achieved • Evaluation of the Programme • Closing and next steps

Mobility

A mandatory mobility visit is included for each mentee. This takes place during Modules II or III and involves a visit to the mentor's institution. The mobility is funded by the NEOLAiA project.

Certification

Mentees who complete all mandatory elements (workshops, mentor meetings, and mobility) will receive an official NEOLAiA digital badge, confirming successful completion of the Programme.

Application Procedure:

Only candidates from NEOLAiA Alliance universities who are ESRs are eligible. ESRs are PhD students or Post Docs (a researcher who has not yet attained the academic rank of professor (including W1) or an equivalent position). Selection will be based on the quality of applications and alignment with the programme's objectives.

If you are interested in becoming a mentee in this 2nd round, please send your application to the following e-mail address: ida_marie.altheide@uni-bielefeld.de. Your application must include the following documents:

1. CV
2. motivation letter stating why you wish to participate (max. 1 page)
3. short description of your current PhD/research project (max. 0,5 page)
4. last relevant study certificate (Master degree or PhD certificate)
5. one recommendation letter from a member of staff at Bielefeld University

The application **deadline** is **February 08, 2026**.

Please contact Dr. Annika Merk (annika.merk@uni-bielefeld.de) in case of any questions.

We look forward to your application and your commitment to the NEOLAiA ESR Mentorship Programme