

Career Development of the Academic Staff of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

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Abstract: The major aim of this paper is to present the results of a study of the career development of the academic staff members at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. “Career development” means here the process of obtaining academic degrees and academic ranks. Two types of information are used in our research – the archive containing names and ranks of the academic lecturers and the data obtained by the representative sample survey. We found out that in general nearly 40 per cent of all members of the academic staff are promoted in the five year time interval. The hardest step in career development of the academic staff of Sofia University is the habilitation – obtaining associate professor position. The differences in career development are mainly between individuals, not between faculties. The career development of the academic staff of Sofia University is a product of individual motivation and efforts of its members. The groups with different motivation advance at substantially different academic speed.

1. Introduction

The major aim of this paper is to present the results of a study of the career development of the academic staff members at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. “Career development” means here the process of obtaining academic degrees and academic ranks. In Bulgaria there are two academic degrees – Doctor (which is equivalent to the PhD degree) and Doctor of science (which is equivalent to the Doctor or Habilitated Doctor). The academic ranks are five – assistant professor, senior assistant professor, chief assistant professor, associate professor and professor. The “natural” sequence of obtaining of both the academic degrees and academic ranks is: assistant professor, senior assistant professor, PhD, chief assistant professor, associate professor, doctor of science, professor. The career development will be considered in this sequence.

2. Data

The intention of the research team was to draw a representative sample of all academic lecturers who form the studied “general population”. For this purpose a complete list containing names and ranks was necessary. However, it was found that

the list itself is an information source of an additional value. So, two types of information are used in our research – the list itself and the data obtained by the sample.

The collection of the information is restricted by the temporary constrains. We have used “standard” five years interval which is the longest span for an attestation procedure. (The used interval is June 2003 – June 2008.)

3. Method

The object of the research determines the method – calculation and comparison of mean ages and standard deviations. The results obtained by the application of the first method give us understanding of the so called pace of academic advancement while the second – understanding of the homogeneity or diversity of career tracks.

4. Results

4.1. Results obtained by the list of the academic lecturer.

The complete lists with names and ranks of the academic lecturers towards June 2003 and June 2007 provide a possibility for receiving the percentage distribution of the members of the academic staff by ranks (Table 1).

Table 1
Distributions of the members of the academic staff by ranks (per cent)

Academic rank	June 2003	June 2008
Assistant professor	10,9	7,9
Senior assistant professor	11,7	11,5
Chief assistant professor	28,7	29,3
Associate professor	37,3	37,6
Professor	11,4	13,6
Total	100,0	100,0

It looks like that there is no (or little) change in the two distributions between June 2003 and June 2008. However, there are some members of the senior academic staff who were retired during the examined period and some members of the junior academic staff who were newly appointed. So, the real dynamics could be revealed if only the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole interval June 2003 – June 2008, are examined.

The percentage distribution of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by ranks, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by ranks (per cent)

Academic rank	June 2003	June 2008
Assistant professor	11,1	1,4
Senior assistant professor	12,4	8,5
Chief assistant professor	30,8	31,3
Associate professor	37,2	43,2
Professor	8,4	15,5
Total	100,0	100,0

The results presented in Table 2 suggest some conclusions:

First, the distribution toward June 2008 is quite visibly pulled up to the highest ranks.

Second, different ranks are altered at different levels. While the percentage of the chief assistant professors is almost the same, the share of the professors increases almost twice and the share of the assistant professors decreases eight times. In the same time the percentage of the senior assistant professors decreases by four percentage points and the percentage of the associate professors increases by sixteen points.

We could suspect that, in contrast of the widespread myths, the difficulties of academic advancement are not increased parallel with the career development. If, for the five years period, it is more probable to become professor than to become associate professor then, obviously, the attainment of the associate professor rank – habilitation – is serious obstacle and we have to understand why.

However, let us, first, investigate how career dynamics concerns each academic rank (Table 3).

Table 3

Dynamics of the academic ranks of the members of the academic staff who have worked in the Sofia University during the whole period (per cent)

Academic ranks toward June 2003	Academic ranks toward June 2008					
	Assistant professor	Senior assistant professor	Chief assistant professor	Associate professor	Professor	Total
Assistant professor	12,8	50,4	35,5	1,4		100,0
Senior assistant professor		23,6	71,3	5,1		100,0
Chief assistant professor			60,0	40,0		100,0
Associate professor				80,9	19,1	100,0
Professor					100,0	100,0

Table 2 shows that:

First, the assistant professors and senior assistant professors develop most quickly. Only 12.3 per cent of the assistant professors have preserved their ranks, 50.4 per cent are promoted to the senior assistant professor rank, 35.5 per cent are promoted to the chief assistant professor rank, and 1.4 per cent (two persons) are promoted to the associate professor rank. However, each type of promotion has different reasons (prerequisites):

- For the promotion from assistant professor rank to the senior assistant professor rank it is completely sufficient to work two years in Sofia University. This is quite possible in our five years time interval;

- For the promotion from assistant professor rank to chief assistant professor rank it is necessary to have earned either a PhD degree or seven years work in Sofia University. Since we investigate five years time interval, we could claim with certainty that almost 35.5 per cent of assistant professors have obtained PhD degree during the period June 2003 – June 2008.

- The promotion from assistant rank to associate professor rank is evidence that this 1.4 per cent is really extraordinary. (In this case 1.4 per cent represents two persons.)

Second, 23.6 per cent of senior assistant professors have preserved their ranks during the five years time interval, 71.3 per cent are promoted to chief assistant professor rank and 5.1 per cent are promoted to the associate professor rank. The

highest percentage of change from senior assistant professor rank to the chief assistant professor rank could be explained by two reasons – for the promotion from senior assistant rank to the upper rank it is necessary either a PhD degree or five years work in Sofia University. Since we investigate five years time interval, we could not determine the pure influence of each reason.

Third, 60.0 per cent of chief assistant professors have preserved their ranks, and 40.0 per cent are promoted to the associate professor rank.

Fourth, 80.9 per cent of associate professors have preserved their ranks, and 19.1 per cent are promoted to the professor rank.

Fifth, in general nearly 40 (38.7) per cent of all members of the academic staff are promoted in the five year time interval.

However, despite the positive fact that a great share of the members of the academic staff is promoted, we have to direct our intention to the irregularity of the career development.

4.2. Results obtained by the sample

Above we examined five academic ranks. They are related to the five events:

- obtaining assistant professor position;
- obtaining senior assistant professor position;
- obtaining chief assistant professor position;
- obtaining associate professor position;
- obtaining professor position.

In the list with names and ranks the information about the academic degrees is not present. However, there is such information in the CVs, but in the CVs the information about the intermediate assistant professor ranks (senior assistant professor and chief assistant professor) is weak. For that reason when we studied CVs we again traced out only five events, but these five events are different ones:

- joining the Sofia University;
- obtaining PhD degree;
- obtaining associate professor position;
- obtaining Doctor of science degree;
- obtaining professor position.

For each of these events we have calculated mean age and standard deviation by ages – Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 4

Mean ages of joining the Sofia University of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the University in the whole period, by faculties (years) (sorted by standard deviation)

Faculties	Mean age	Standard deviation	Count
Faculty of Theology	35,78	11,39	9
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	35,18	9,87	17
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication	35,94	9,86	17
Faculty of Education	33,00	8,57	15
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics	32,48	6,96	58
Faculty of Philosophy	31,12	6,75	68
Faculty of Biology	33,20	6,73	50
Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education	34,19	6,37	36
Faculty of Slavic Studies	31,21	5,52	61
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology	29,89	5,28	81
Faculty of Physics	32,22	5,14	59
Faculty of Chemistry	29,71	4,97	38
Faculty of History	30,28	4,43	32
Faculty of Geology and Geography	31,79	4,23	39
Faculty of Law	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Faculty of Medicine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	31,86	6,44	580

When we interpret the mean ages and the standard deviations we have to render an account of one recommendation: we suppose that the mean ages of joining Sofia University are overestimated because they are calculated by the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the period June 2003 – June 2008. We suppose that there are new appointed assistants whose ages are lower and they would decrease mean ages.

Table 4 shows that mean age of joining the Sofia University is 32 years. The fluctuations between the faculties are negligible.

In addition the ratio of the variation between the faculties to the variation within the faculties¹ could be calculated. This ratio is 1:14 which means that the differences between the faculties are fourteen times smaller than the differences within the faculties.

On the other hand the standard deviations are different between the different faculties. The difference between the least homogenous and the most homogenous faculty is almost three times.

¹ I.e. the ratio of between group sum of squares to the within group sum of squares.

The next event is obtaining PhD degree.

Table 5

Mean ages of obtaining PhD degree of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by faculties (years) (sorted by standard deviation)

Faculties	Mean age	Standard deviation	Count
Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education	37,04	6,88	28
Faculty of Chemistry	35,32	6,55	37
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication	36,07	6,50	14
Faculty of Biology	35,56	6,10	41
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology	36,50	5,96	46
Faculty of Slavic Studies	35,02	5,51	48
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	33,54	5,25	13
Faculty of History	33,64	5,12	28
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics	32,54	4,93	37
Faculty of Geology and Geography	34,77	4,83	31
Faculty of Physics	33,85	4,63	54
Faculty of Education	33,08	3,59	13
Faculty of Philosophy	33,22	3,48	55
Faculty of Theology	39,00	0,00	1
Faculty of Law	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Faculty of Medicine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	34,64	5,46	446

Again:

- The mean age of obtaining PhD degree is 35 years;
- The differences between the faculties are fifteen times smaller than the differences within the faculties;
- The difference between the least homogenous and the most homogenous faculty is almost two times.

The next event is obtaining associate professor position.

Table 6

Mean ages of obtaining associate professor position of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by faculties (years) (sorted by standard deviation)

Faculties	Mean age	Standard deviation	Count
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	40,89	7,54	9
Faculty of Chemistry	43,38	6,96	24
Faculty of Biology	47,58	6,48	26
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology	44,58	6,01	31
Faculty of Physics	42,98	5,40	45
Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education	44,28	5,28	25
Faculty of Slavic Studies	43,17	5,10	35
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication	44,50	5,05	14
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics	41,00	4,96	35
Faculty of History	42,57	4,28	21
Faculty of Philosophy	40,30	4,27	47
Faculty of Education	42,18	4,12	11
Faculty of Geology and Geography	43,77	3,70	26
Faculty of Theology	44,50	2,12	2
Faculty of Law	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Faculty of Medicine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	43,07	5,52	351

And again:

- The mean age of obtaining associate professor position is 43 years;
- The differences between the faculties are eight times smaller than the differences within the faculties;
- The difference between the least homogenous and the most homogenous faculty is almost three times.

The next event is obtaining Doctor of science degree.

Table 7

Mean ages of obtaining Doctor of science degree of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by faculties (years) (sorted by standard deviation)

Faculties	Mean age	Standard deviation	Count
Faculty of Biology	55,00	12,17	3
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics	48,00	9,70	5
Faculty of Physics	50,77	8,78	13
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication	53,50	7,78	2
Faculty of Chemistry	51,62	7,72	13
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology	51,88	7,40	8
Faculty of Philosophy	45,63	5,72	19
Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education	48,00	5,57	3
Faculty of Slavic Studies	49,80	4,73	10
Faculty of Education	50,67	4,73	3
Faculty of Theology	46,00	2,83	2
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	45,00	2,83	2
Faculty of Geology and Geography	60,00	1,41	2
Faculty of History	46,00	1,41	5
Faculty of Law	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Faculty of Medicine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	49,46	7,17	90

And again:

- The mean age of obtaining Doctor of science degree is 49 years;
- The differences between the faculties are four times smaller than the differences within the faculties;
- The difference between the least homogenous and the most homogenous faculty is almost nine times.

The next event is obtaining professor position.

Table 8

Mean ages of obtaining professor position of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by faculties (years) (sorted by standard deviation)

Faculties	Mean age	Standard deviation	Count
Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics	55,50	9,93	6
Faculty of Biology	58,25	8,85	4
Faculty of Preschool and Primary School Education	51,00	7,78	5
Faculty of Physics	55,11	7,25	9
Faculty of Chemistry	53,45	7,03	11
Faculty of History	51,33	7,00	6
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology	52,17	6,68	6
Faculty of Education	54,33	6,11	3
Faculty of Slavic Studies	51,90	5,84	10
Faculty of Philosophy	47,88	5,54	16
Faculty of Geology and Geography	57,25	5,19	4
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication	55,00	4,97	4
Faculty of Theology	60,00	1,41	2
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	45,00	0,00	1
Faculty of Law	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Faculty of Medicine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total	52,74	7,04	87

And again:

- The mean age of obtaining professor position is 53 years;
- The differences between the faculties are four times smaller than the differences within the faculties;
- The difference between the least homogenous and the most homogenous faculty is almost seven times.

Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 show common situations – **the differences between the faculties are several times smaller than the differences within the faculties**. This fact suggests the main hypothesis of the study:

Large differences within the faculties compared to small differences between the faculties suggest that the career development is completely personal care of the members of the academic staff. Their efforts have not any significant institutional support.

At the same time the abovementioned fact is the first argument for the truthfulness of the main hypothesis.

If we draw in graph the total mean ages and total standard deviations of each event we will receive Figure 1:

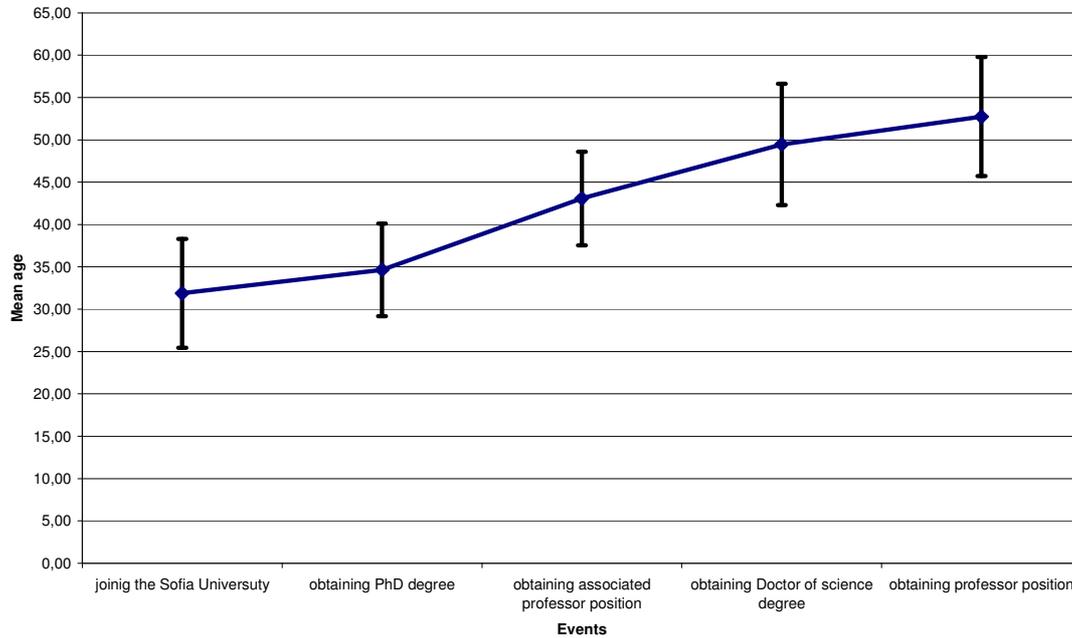


Figure 1. Total mean ages and total standard deviations of events important for career development

This figure allows us to test two opposite auxiliary hypotheses. Both auxiliary hypotheses are based on the well known physics law:

(1) $Distance = Speed \times Time$

The first auxiliary hypothesis is that the distances between consecutive events are the same. Then, from Equation 1 it follows that the speed is reciprocal to the time. In the other words:

Large time between two events = Low speed

Figure 1 shows that after the obtaining PhD degree the members of the academic staff decrease the speed and them career development slows up. However, after obtaining associate professor position the career development speeds up and it accelerates again after obtaining the Doctor of science degree.

But another auxiliary hypothesis exists. The second auxiliary hypothesis is that the speed is the same. Then, from Equation 1 it follows that the distances between two consecutive events are proportional to the time. In the other words:

Large time between two events = Long distance

For illustration of the second auxiliary hypothesis we have to straighten out the broken line of Figure 1. The new line is shown in Figure 2:

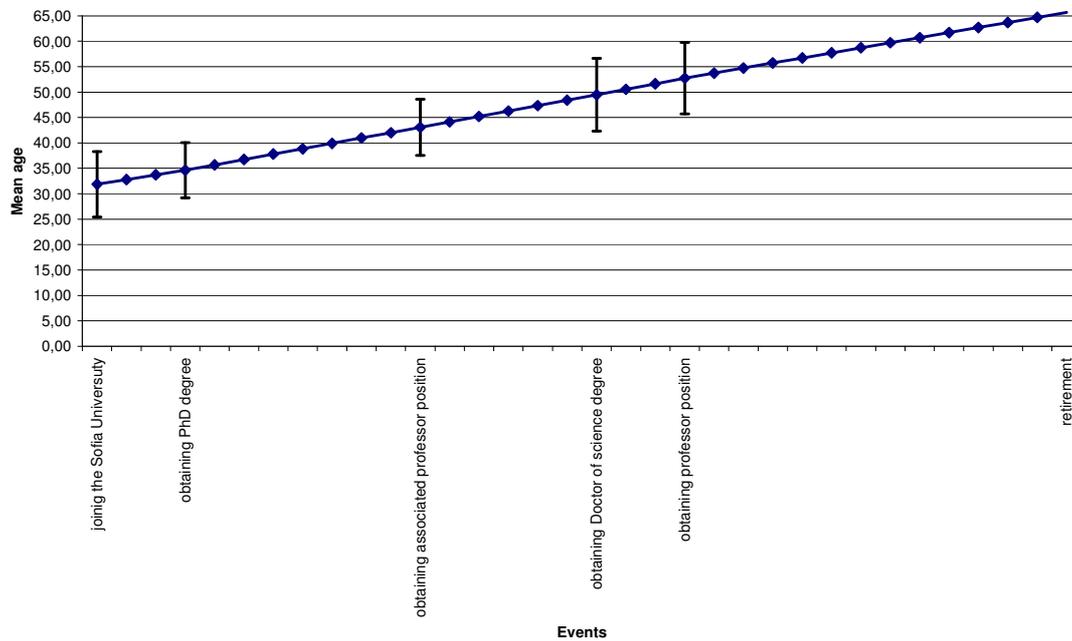


Figure 2. Total mean ages and total standard deviations of events important for career development

Figure 2 shows that the longest distance is between obtaining PhD degree and obtaining associate professor position followed by the distance between obtaining associate professor position and obtaining Doctor of science degree. All other distances are substantially shorter.

So, which hypothesis is true?

Since the first auxiliary hypothesis does not explain the delay of career development after the obtaining PhD degree and its acceleration after obtaining the associate professor position, we could put a heavier emphasis on the second auxiliary hypothesis. Basically the first hypothesis highlights the decisive role of individual motivation and efforts (and, hence, presents the career advancement as dependant on personal qualities mainly), the second hypothesis prioritizes the institutional barriers at different levels of advancement.

The acceptance of the second auxiliary hypothesis is another argument about the truth of the main hypothesis of the study – may be the path from PhD degree to the associate professor position is strewn with obstacles and since the members of the academic staff do not receives institutional support, the time between these two events

is largest. (This statement by no means nullifies the fact that both the habilitation and the acquisition of Doctor of science degree require a specific profound research work (a published or forthcoming monograph of a renowned academic input). It is even more important to pay notice to the fact that the chief assistant professors comprise the bigger bulk of the teaching stuff, i.e. it is them who do a pretty sizeable share of teaching. In other words at the time when assistant professors are overloaded with teaching they are supposed to produce most important research results.)

So forth we gave two arguments supporting the main hypothesis of the study. One more argument could be provided. If we suppose that the career development is a product of the individual motivation and efforts then it would mean that the more developed academic lecturers are more motivated and they have made more efforts. And, therefore, their mean ages of each event will be lower than the less developed academic lecturers. For that reason the mean ages and standard deviations of each events are calculated again but this time the calculation is divided by groups – Table 9 and Figure 3.

Table 9

Total mean ages and standard deviations of events important for career development of the members of the academic staff, who have worked in the Sofia University in the whole period, by groups (years)

Events		Groups				All groups
		PhD	Associate professors	Doctor of sciences	Professors	
Joining the Sofia University	Mean	32,29	32,78	33,52	34,85	31,86
	Std.dev.	6,54	7,11	8,25	9,00	6,44
	Count	446	351	90	87	580
Obtaining PhD degree	Mean		34,51	33,06	33,16	34,64
	Std.dev.		5,36	4,23	4,00	5,46
	Count		340	83	79	446
Obtaining associate professor position	Mean			40,05	40,35	43,07
	Std.dev.			4,20	3,94	5,52
	Count			87	84	351
Obtaining Doctor of science degree	Mean				49,09	49,46
	Std.dev.				7,07	7,17
	Count				74	90
Obtaining professor position	Mean					52,74
	Std.dev.					7,04
	Count					87

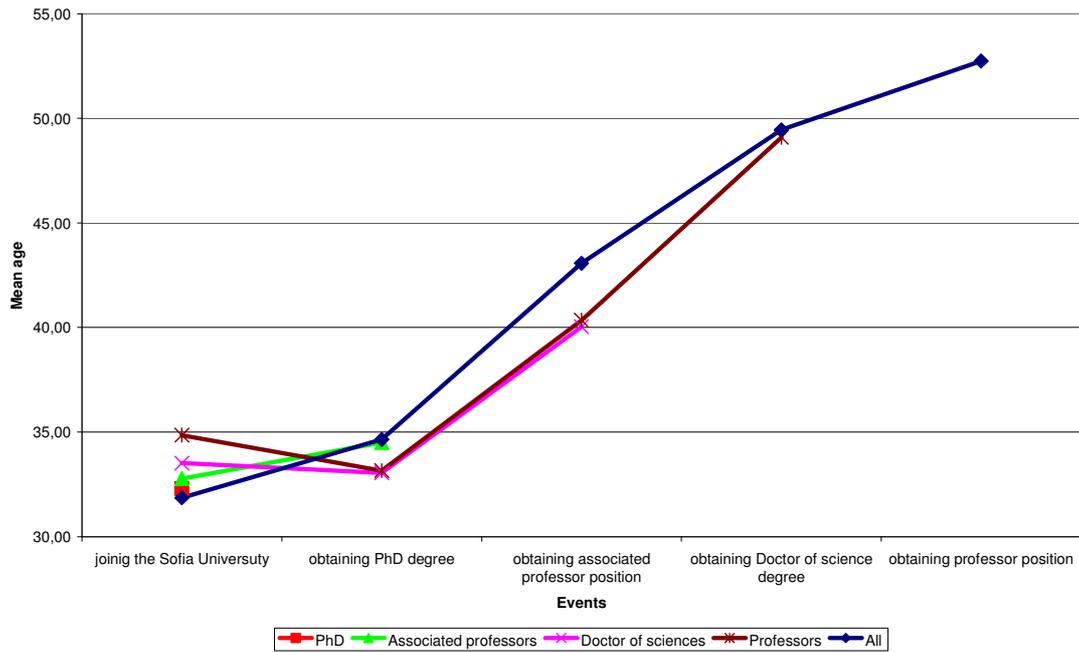


Figure 3. Total mean ages of events important for career development by groups

Table 9 and Figure 3 show that there are two groups with different motivation. The more motivated group is the group containing professors and Doctors of sciences. They have joined the University later but have gone through the steep chase earlier in their lives. PhDs and associate professors practically have the same strength of motivation that does not actually differentiate their career tracks.

The presence of groups with different motivation and, therefore, different rate of career development is the last argument about the truth of the main hypothesis of the study – more personal efforts and stronger motivation is needed in order to overcome the institutional difficulties of mid-career track.

5. Conclusions

5.1. The differences in career development are mainly between individuals, not between faculties, i.e. there is a standard pattern of career development that is common for all faculties – an universal pattern for the university.

5.2. The career development of the academic staff of Sofia University is mainly a product of individual motivation and efforts of its members. The groups with different motivation advance at substantially different academic speed.

5.3. The hardest step in career development of the academic staff of Sofia University is the habilitation – obtaining an associate professor position since at that

point of their career advancement the lecturers face a heavier institutional burden while having to achieve a high research attainment.