



PhDnet – General Meeting

8-10 November, Mainz

Minutes

Day 1: 08.11.2017

Session 1: Annual report by Steering Group

Leonard Borchert, 2017 Spokesperson of the PhDnet, opened the General Meeting with an annual report. He presented the following topics related to the agenda 2017:

- 1) **Building and expand networks:** Internally, 74 institutes count with an external PhD representatives, another edition of the Visions in Science conference took place and several Offspring articles have been published. Externally, Max Planck PhDnet funded with the PhD associations of Helmholtz and Leibniz N², a network of networks, which among other activities organized a Science Communication conference. PhDnet collaborated with other German and European organizations.
- 2) **Equal Opportunities and healthy work practices:** PhDnet was part of several committees within the General Administration related to equal opportunities and the need of a corporate health management within the Max Planck Society (MPS).
- 3) **Career Opportunities:** A Career Fair event was held before the Vision in Science conference. More than 200 people attended this event.
- 4) **Compensation and contracts:** Max Planck PhDnet kept working with the General Administration to increase the amount of holidays in support contracts (Fördervertrag). This year it failed in the federal "GWK"-committee even though it was requested by the Max Planck general administration.

Additionally he presented our new website and the media coverage that we got in different interviews in the German press.

Session 2: Talk of the president of the Max Planck Society, Prof. Dr. Stratmann

This year the president of the MPS Prof. Dr. Stratmann gave for the first time a talk at the general meeting and answered several questions of the PhD representatives.

- He used the chance to outline the development of the financial and overall constitution of Max Planck.
- He highlighted the increasing amount of women in all positions within the society. In the last 10 years the percentage of female directors raised from 5 to 15%, which is a remarkable development.

- He also announced the establishment of three Max Planck-schools where the cooperation in some subjects of special interest is supposed to be intensified: <https://www.mpg.de/11462351/first-max-planck-schools-selected>
- Moreover, he mentioned the creation of a new Human Resources department within the General Administration which will be responsible of Equal Opportunities, Career development and working conditions. This department should work on improving doctoral researchers' conditions.
- He advertised as well the establishment of the DIOSCURI centers in Poland in cooperation with the National Science Centre Poland, which aims at promoting science and research in Eastern Europe: <https://www.mpg.de/dioscuri>
- Additionally, he highlighted, that next year there will be a Max Planck day on the 20th of September (100th anniversary of Max Planck's Nobel Prize). Prof. Stratmann encouraged all of doctoral researchers to think about ways to contribute to this event (contact: mpgday@gv.mpg.de).
- During the discussion he ensured support for many of PhDnet initiatives, for example the striving for 30 holidays and financial support for doctoral researchers which are willing to become parents during their PhD. However, many of these activities finally depend on the decision of a federal committee, so he could not promise quick progress.
- He was asked about the possibility to increase the minimum payment of support contracts (*Förderverträge*) to 65% of the TvöD levels. However, he mentioned that this measurement is not currently possible and depends on a federal committee.

Prof. Stratmann closed the discussion with an insistent call especially to all non-German doctoral researchers to be aware of the chances within local job market. With the current low unemployment rates and with respect to the demographic trend here in Germany, there are many opportunities for young scientist from abroad to find good jobs after their graduation. Therefore, he insisted on those willing to stay to intensify their efforts in learning German.

Session 3: Talk of Ilka Schiessler-Gäbler (General Administration of the MPS)

Ilka Schiessler-Gäbler initially presented the General Administration's program concerning career support for doctoral researchers. Since not all researchers will find permanent positions in academia, they should be encouraged to make decisions about prospective career paths already during their PhD time. The MPS's career service will include a career fair and the provision of career specific soft skill seminars.

Another program aims at supporting junior researchers with childcare. This program covers the first 12 months. An extension of this initiative is likely, but requires additional input with experiences from the trial period.

Day 2: 09.11.2017

Session 1: PhDnet survey

The second day of the meeting started with a presentation of the results of this year's PhDnet survey, the first official one since 2012. The survey was sent to more than 4500 doctoral researchers and a high participation quota of almost 50% was achieved. The complete report will be published early 2018.

- Compared to 2012 the percentage of German doctoral researchers lowered from 60% to 48%, coinciding mainly with an increase from other EU countries and Asia.
- Doctoral researchers are mostly satisfied with their working conditions, but concerning salary and holidays there is a high level of unsatisfaction. The average working hours per week are 47 and there is a general trend of increasing working hours throughout the years.
- Less frequent meetings with the supervisor result in lower satisfaction rates and in a higher likelihood to consider quitting the PhD project.
- 52% of the doctoral researchers would like to continue a career in public research. Unfortunately only 37% expect to find an attractive job in this field.
- The move from stipends to contracts is progressing, since 78% of doctoral researchers are now working under a contract.
- Mental health is a growing concern amongst doctoral researchers. 6% were already diagnosed with mental health issues and two third report suffering at least one symptom related to health problems.
- 20% of the doctoral researchers don't feel free to take all their holidays, with workload and supervisor pressure being the predominant reasons.

Session 2: Self-management workshop by Dr. Julia Krampitz

Dr. Julia Krampitz gave a workshop on self-management during the PhD time. The attendees received training on self-analysis of stress, its sources and identification of potential strategies to face it in order to improve the overall psychological state.

Session 3: General works council presentation by Lambert Rasche

Lambert Rasche from the general works council (*Gesamtbetriebsrat*) of the MPS gave a presentation. He offered support to take PhD related issues directly to the respective managing directors and heads of administration. He presented several ideas to cooperate with PhDnet including health management, improvements of the supervision and holidays transfer between different years. The general works council encourages doctoral researchers to candidate for their local work council although there is a 4 year election period that can be a burden.

Session 4: N²

Konstantin Kuhne from Helmholtz Juniors and Jan-Lucas Schanze from Leibniz PhD Network as members of the N² (Network of Networks) board gave a presentation about the new organization and their objectives. N² is the result of the cooperation of PhDnet with PhD organizations of Helmholtz and Leibniz institutes to persuade common (political) goals. The central agenda consists of working conditions, career development, supervision, equal opportunities and payment. They also pursue to incorporate Fraunhofer institutes into the network. A political statement letter was released this year. It includes several topics like strengthening mobility and diversity and guaranteeing financial security for scientists. It also mentions the need of encouraging multifaceted career pathways and enforcing agile management for science. N² organized a very successful first big event in Berlin this year, focussing on science communication.

Session 4: Network for good work in science (NGAWiss) talk

NGAWiss gave another talk about this organization which works on improving working conditions of early career researchers. They pointed that 74% of these scientists work under temporary contracts in Germany, compared to only 30% in France, the United States or the U.K. The network aims to connect several individual local groups at German universities, to increase wages and social security and introduce departmental structures (permanent lecturer positions), rather than the current focus on professorships.

Session 5: Max Planck Alumni Association (MPAA) by Birgit Adam

The MPAA is the association of Max Planck alumni. It regards itself as an international association and a career network. One of its missions is trying to raise competencies and contacts among former and current MPS scientists. They informed that registration is already possible during the PhD time. In order to develop career perspectives of current doctoral researchers they have started a new mentoring program, which currently undergoes a trial period at the Munich based MPAs. The MPAA will organize their annual symposium in September 2018 and offers help to initiate local alumni groups at individual MPAs.

Session 6: Capgemini Consulting talk

Dr. David Alich, a Max Planck PhD alumnus, gave a talk about his work in Capgemini Consulting. The company offers job opportunities for scientists, as they include analytical and mathematical approaches into their consulting activities. They also provide a trainee program aimed especially at scientists.

Session 7: Formation of the new working groups

The new working groups were formed. For the Seminar group, the focus was changed in order to include career development. Here is the description of the different working groups:

- Survey group: they will wrap up the data from the recent survey and organize the work for future surveys. They will also coordinate a joint survey with the other network in the N².
- General meeting group: they will organize the next year General Meeting probably in Tübingen or another place in the area of Stuttgart.
- Equal opportunities group: they will evaluate the data from the survey, try to promote support for children and especially work on seminar/approaches for stress and mental health prevention and treatment.
- Secretary Working group: they will organize the elections of external PhD representatives trying to reach the missing institutes and support the steering group in their work.
- Web group: they will continue updating the homepage (phdnet.mpg.de), further improve some functions like including a list of successful seminars.
- Offspring: they will continue writing articles about science and community in Max Planck for the blog as well as for the magazine.
- Seminar/Career group: this group was founded this year after a successful motion presented by the Spokesperson. The objective of this group is to offer information concerning seminars and career fairs in order to improve career qualifications and offer alternative career pathways outside academia. Additionally they want to enlarge exchange with the Max Planck Alumni network and try to induce formation of more local Alumni networks, to enable mentoring programs and Alumni talks.
- Scientific events/Visions in Science group: they will continue organizing Visions in Science, the interdisciplinary conference of the PhDnet.

Session 8: Hub meeting dinner

During the dinner, sponsored by Capgemini Consulting, the different Hubs talked about the new possibilities for 2018 and elected the new Hub coordinators. Additionally, a new Hub, Heidelberg Hub, was formed. Full hub information can be found in the website: <https://www.phdnet.mpg.de/5975/Local-hubs>

Day 3: 10.11.2017

Session 1: Institute-specific challenges for PhDnet

- Open discussion about Institute specific problems.

Session 2: New Steering Group – Presentations and elections

- Presentation of candidates running for the Steering group:
 - **Spokesperson:** Jana and Johannes present their candidature. Jana mentions her knowledge as CPT section representative during 2017. Johannes says that he has been part of the 2017 survey group.
 - **BM section representative:** Ezgi, Mohammed and Tarryn present their candidature. Ezgi wants to focus on two main points: 1) workshops and seminars on mental health and self-management. 2) support of international students, especially incorporating this topic to the EO group. Mohammed would like to improve science policy by promoting open access, reducing competitive environment and engaging the doctoral researchers in this process. Tarryn wants to facilitate conferences and connections to build networks and scientific and personal exchanges including the integration of PhDnet into EU PhD networks in order to ask funding agencies for a minimum wage/funding.
 - **Humanities** section representative: Julia and Angela present their candidature. Julia would like to improve transparency in director power, Max Planck regulations and country law. Angela wants to increase awareness and involvement on part of the students as well as provide her legal and negotiation skills as part of the steering group.
 - **CPT section representative:** Julian, Viswanadh, Felix and Severin present their candidature. Julian wants to address institute-specific problems, engages missing MPIs and promotes mental health. Viswanadh has no specific agenda. Severin mentions his experience on organizing scientific events. He would like to enforce the best practice guidelines for equipment procurement in the CPT section. Felix would like to improve connection between students and Max Planck Society and use the data and results from the survey to benefit the students.
 - **Financial Officer:** Marlon, Greta and Viswanadh present their candidature. Greta mentions her experience as treasurer of the local PhD money. Viswanadh presents his candidature after the CPT representative election.
 - **General Secretary:** Peter, Felix, Johannes, Angela, Mohammed, Nina and Lars present their candidatures. Felix, Johannes, Angela and Mohammed present their candidatures after the corresponding CPT representative, Spokesperson, Humanities representative and BM representative elections.

- The voting procedure is by ballot voting. All external representatives (or delegates in the corresponding case) vote for three positions: Spokesperson, Financial Officer and General Secretary. For Section Representatives, external representatives (or delegates) only vote for the section they belong to.
- Summary:

Position	Candidate	Votes	
Spokesperson total vote: 66/67	Jana	60	
	Johannes	6	
Section Rep. – BM total votes: 24/24	Ezgi	15	
	Mohammed	7	
	Tarryn	2	
Section Rep. – Humanities total votes: 18/18	Angela	8	
	Julia	10	
Section Rep. – CPT total votes: 25/25	Severin	13	
	Julian	5	
	Felix	5	
	Viswanadh	2	
Financial Officer total votes: 66/67	Greta	34	
	Marlon	18	
	Viswanadh	14	
General Secretary total votes 1 st round: 67/67 total votes 2 nd round: 66/66	Mohammed	18	36
	Felix	14	30
	Peter	6	
	Johannes	4	
	Angela	13	
	Nina	4	
	Lars	8	

New steering group composition:

Spokesperson: Jana Lasser, MPI for Dynamics and Self-Organization

BM Section representative and Deputy Spokesperson: Ezgi Bulca, MPI for Psychiatry

Humanities Section representative: Julia Misersky, MPI for Psycholinguistics

CPT Section representative: Severin Daiß, MPI for Quantum Optics

Financial Officer: Greta Giljan, MPI for Marine Microbiology

General Secretary: Mohammed El-Brolosy, MPI for Heart and Lung Research

Session 3: New Steering Group Questions & Answers Session

Salaries

There is a need for general guidelines and information related to recruitment bonus ("Gewinnungszulage")

- Topic contract vs stipends should be finalized by granting only contracts
- Promote recruitment bonus to supplement 50% salaries
- Holidays - keep working to pass 30 days in GWK 2018

Communication

Jana asks what is a useful way to access information. Possibilities: wiki, data handout, webpage.

- For new doctoral researchers: there is the external representative contact info of every institute in the website. New applicants could contact them there. It is suggested that during the interview weeks/selection processes representatives should try to contact the applicants and inform them about working conditions.
- There should be a standard procedure about the way jobs are advertised: it must be necessary to include certain information (e.g. salary, start date...) in the job offer even before application
- All this information should be stored in an online cloud.
- It is pointed out that the Organisations Hand Buch (OHB) is a reliable source of information about contracts and legal stuff for external representatives
- PhDnet mailing list - External representatives should make sure students who are interested sign up. A section mailing list is also proposed. Humanities has already one.
- There will be a future Max Planck intranet where the PhDnet will have a page.

Equal Opportunities (EO) perspectives

The plan is to expand beyond gender equality and include support for all minority groups and mental health workshops.

- It is asked how it is going to be addressed the current gender bias of 2 of the 3 sections that the survey reports. It is proposed to develop activities with the EO officers at institutes.

Mental health conditions

What is the plan for the future?

- Measures in preparation:
 1. In 2018 a new 24hr crisis hotline should start. It will provide phone counselling and crisis management.
 2. Workshops for doctoral researchers and Postdocs that educate stress and self-management. They will probably be organized regionally.
 3. There is the intention to bring up mandatory leadership training for newly appointed directors to the president in spring 2018.
 4. Techniker Krankenkasse is required to spend 5% budget on preventative measures. Because of collaboration with MPG, this can be used for preventative measures on an institute basis - yoga, stress management etc. Each institute needs a mental healthcare plan which can include such measures
- Are these measures available outside of germany? Phone counselling yes, workshops perhaps, insurance money availability must be investigated
- It is proposed to organize a specific mental health survey to strengthen arguments for better mental healthcare
- Ezgi mentions the need to remove taboo on talking about mental health. Workshops must be organised and there is a need to educate group leaders on how to recognise and tackle such issues in their students
- However, there is a problem in some institutes where these workshops have been organized and many participants did not attend. It is suggested that these mental health workshops could be used as course credit as an incentive to join although this is

not applicable to every institute/graduate school. A penalty for registering but not attending is also proposed.

- It is pointed out that survey only asked about mental conditions diagnosed since the start of PhD and not about pre-existing conditions

Working conditions & career perspectives in Humanities section – This needs still a big improvement.

Childcare

- It is suggested to extend childcare provision to Master students and for children older than 12months.
- It is proposed that it should be possible to apply for this funding before pregnancy as a method of family planning
- It is mentioned that it is not just about money but also the need to create an atmosphere of acceptance (top down)
- It is discussed the importance of extending childcare funding. The general administration is looking for input on how to extend this funding and make it more successful.

Election of new directors

This process is often not very transparent.

- Some external representatives ask for guidelines on change of directors from Ilka
 - Leo mentions that the contact to general administration should go through the steering group to make the answering process manageable for the general administration.
- Should student representatives get a vote in this process?
 - Students have a vote through the Scientific Representative of the institute.

Max Planck Society Guidelines

The Max Planck Society Guidelines are many times not fulfilled, without a response from the General Administration. People ask for mechanism to check that the guidelines are fulfilled by the responsible people.

Career Perspectives

Mentoring and career advice is proposed as a new initiative for next year. They should target both academia and industry and work together with the MPAA, which can provide mentoring programs

Networking of Networks

It is accepted that we need to maintain and expand this networking. A possible way would be to include at the Hub level Helmholtz and Leibniz institutes.

Survey

Current Survey

It is discussed how the survey should be published:

- Presentation from Survey group (9/11/17) will be sent to the general administration and External Representatives. Administration have agreed to make a modified version of the survey results public
- Specific sections will be presented to relevant committees (EO committee, Safety Officers...)
- It is suggested that external representative can use the survey results to address directors and PhD coordinators. There could be an external and an internal version. In the internal version more sensitive information can be included. A small publication (eLife) to make results open to general public is also proposed
- For the reported individual cases of discrimination reported PhDnet can only take action if a student makes a direct request to steering group.
- It is also mentioned the need to store all this data securely with limited access so we have a continuity between survey. It is planned to store it in an MPS-Owncloud.
- It is proposed that an email to the participants could be sent thanking for their participation and suggesting that people who experience problem contact representative of the steering group if they want to address them.

New survey

It is discussed about the importance of a new survey either focused on a specific issue or a simplified version of the general survey. Another option is to reanalyse the current data since a new survey implies a lot of work. It is mentioned that an annual survey allows continuity in expertise and to monitor progression of the issues at the institutes. The synchronization of the survey with other networks (N²) is also commented.

Proposals for a new survey

- Focus on supervision – using the current guidelines of best practices for supervision
- Focus on mental health
- Survey individual institutes and departments
- Include information about quality of diet, social events, integration (German fluency, engagement in sports...)

There is room for improvement in some fields like the exact phrasing of the questions and the balance between subjective/objective questions. It is proposed to implement control questions (questions which appear twice in order to check consistency). A survey to the directors is proposed but technically and politically will be difficult to implement.

Miscellaneous

- Promote administrative support for international students looking for housing
- Offer incentives for good supervision

End of the General Meeting of the PhDnet