

PhDnet Steering Group Annual Report 2022

With the excitement of PhDnet General Meeting in Cologne behind us, we looked back to this challenging yet fruitful year. We are satisfied with the achievements PhDnet has accomplished, as a result of deep involvement of its members, support from general administration and other staff, and inspirations from doctoral researchers (DRs) who compassionately communicated with us. On behalf of the Max Planck PhDnet, we are proud to present the achievements and summarize the activities from year 2022. Our agenda encompassed five major points: **Improving Working Conditions, Enhanced Support Structures, Enhancing Connections, Survey, and N² achievements.**

Improving working conditions:

Knowing that the duration of doctoral research can be longer than three years from our survey result, and the unstable financial situation of those who are supported by third-party funding, we initiated the investigation towards short-term contracts and external stipend holders. Carrying the results from investigation and the PhDnet survey results, we advocated the change of doctoral support contract duration from three years to four years, in hope of covering most DRs' stay and reduce the extra instability caused by multiple contract extensions. In May, we met with President Prof. Stratmann and General Secretary Dr. Schwantz, and exchanged our opinions of contract duration and support on external-stipend holders. As follow-up, we did deeper investigation and analysis, composed a letter toward Prof. Stratmann. Later, we wrote another letter and addressed similar consideration to Prof. Cramer, the designated President in 2023. As the PhDnet survey result showed the low usage of holidays, we encouraged DRs on taking holidays in the mid of the year. We also mediated some cases regarding contract extension and communicated the situation with general administration.

Enhanced support structures:

The thesis advisory committee (TAC) project has been established in the last years. After some exchange meetings with General Administration and Vice President Professor Ulman Lindenberger, we were able to finalize the recommendation, including the concept of supervision agreement in order to offer better support and prevent power abuse, and presented those recommendations to General Administration. Career development has always been one of our focuses, this year we tightly collaborated with Career Evolution team, worked together on the Web Series, Games Week, and Career Evolution Hub, to enable sufficient support for DRs' career options, as well as working in the Planck Academy Sounding Board to provided feedback on the Planck Academy platform such as content promotion and the course approval system. We also took part in the Presidential Commission on Equal Opportunities to offer our ideas. In the topic of



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mental health, we further built the “Safer Space” project, and initiated it in several institutes. At the same time, we collaborated with the Occupational Health Management (Betriebliches Gesundheitsmanagement) and promoted the usage of Employee and Manager Assistance Program (EMAP) within our network. At the local level, we presented the knowledge on mental health awareness and power abuse prevention at some institutes.

Communication:

In order to strengthen the communication between DRs, especially at the transition to the end of pandemic, we held the 2021 online winter party, established the social media workgroup and provided information exchange in various social media platforms. Several section meetings were successfully held this year, especially the connection of HS section representatives has been tightened. In October, we were able to convene the hybrid General Meeting in Cologne, and gather representatives from over 70 institutes to join the meeting. On a regular basis, we also met the General Administration of Max Planck Society (MPS), and reflected the situations of DRs in local institutes. By organizing workshops in the specific needs of steering group and work groups, we were able to keep professionalizing the network.

Externally, we value the scientific communication. The Offspring work group consistently produces the podcast with vast subscriptions across several platforms, inspiring the both scientific and non-scientific audience with state-of-the-art science stories. Open Science Group organized the 4th Open Science Ambassadors conference in collaboration with Max Planck Digital Library, to inspire the open science practices among early career researchers.

2021 PhDnet survey:

Survey 2021 has been harmonized with the Network of Doctoral Researcher Networks (N²), where the analysis framework has been established and streamlined to ensure the comparison of results with last harmonized survey in 2019 and between institutions.

In December, the PhDnet survey report 2021 and executive summary were released. In the survey, we found out that the raise of doctoral support contract payment to 65% TVöD E13 level has not only improved the living conditions of DRs, but also efficiently eliminated the pay gap between genders and sections. However, similar to last years, our concern of more stipend holders in HS section, and their lack of social security remains. MPS offers many extension possibilities after the standard three year support contract, yet the extension rules are not clear for everyone. After three years, only 20% DRs expect to finish their doctoral thesis, and only around 50% DRs can finish their thesis after four years.



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Supervision keeps being an vital theme in the survey. We found that support structures such as TAC and supervision agreement are not implemented for around 40% of DRs. Certain aspects of supervision such as having clear and strict requirement, and having good leadership skills could be improved, which in return illustrates the importance of the support structures. Since being launched from 2019, EMAP has provided consultancy service to employees, despite, 66% of DRs have never heard of it.

N^o achievement:

In the beginning of the year, when the invasion of Russia to Ukraine has started, we addressed the importance of funding crisis assistance to our President, not only for the ongoing situation, but also for scientists who would undergo crisis in the future.

The second evaluation of Law on Fixed-Term Employment Contracts in the Science and Research Sector (“Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz,” henceforth WissZeitVG) was completed this year. We were invited by Federal Ministry of Education and Research to attend the WissZeitVG stakeholder conference. Followed by that, Alina Fahrenwaldt was invited to the Commission for Education, Research and Technical Consequences Assessment of the German parliament, to express our opinions towards diversity in research and the amendment of WissZeitVG. In exchange of the working conditions of doctoral researchers and opinions on WissZeitVG, we met with Education and Science Workers' Union (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft) in Berlin.

To exchange the information with other networks, we had regular meetings with the doctoral representatives from Technical University of Munich and Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg. As representatives of DRs in MPS, we attended the German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training (GAUT) annual meeting in Erlangen. In addition, meetings with Robert Koch Doktorandenkolleg enabled our possible collaboration on the survey.

In conclusion, we look back to a very fruitful and successful year and want to thank all members of the PhDnet and collaborating partners for their work and contribution.

We look forward to what 2023 will bring with our new 2023 Steering Group:

Spokesperson: Muhammad Osama Iqbal, MPI for the Study of Societies
Deputy Spokesperson: Elizaveta Bobkova, MPI for Terrestrial Microbiology
General Secretary: Franziska Schulz, MPI for Psycholinguistics
BM section rep: Maria Elisa Almeida Goes, MPI for Heart and Lung Research
CPT section rep: Jaswanth Subramanyam, MPI for Radio Astronomy
HS section rep: Alicia Haripershad, MPI for Legal History and Legal Theory



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We want to thank those that elected us to this position. It has been a unique year and we are grateful for the opportunity to lead, represent, and serve the Doctoral Researchers of the Max Planck Society.

Sincerely,

the 2022 PhDnet Steering Group

Hang Liu (Spokesperson), Alina Fahrenwaldt (Deputy Spokesperson), Anna-Dorothea Heller (General Secretary), Maria-Bianca Leonte (BM Section Representative), Jonas Sinjan (CPT Section Representative), and Danielle Pullan (HS Section Representative)