



## 5<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of the Max Planck PhDNet

### Introduction

The spokesperson Franziska Korb and the section representatives David Alich (humanities section (Hum)), Verena Conrad (biomedical section (BM)), Konrad Tristam (chemistry physics & technology section (CPT)) were opening the 5<sup>th</sup> general meeting of the Max Planck PhD network (PhDNet) and welcoming the PhD students from the different institutes attending the meeting. A member of the meeting group, Dieter Lukas, was asked to give a short overview over the history of the PhDNet. He mentioned that the network was initiated by PhD students realizing that problems occurring at three institutes were general problems in the Max Planck society (MPS). These were especially problems concerning the equal payment between foreigners and Germans and the supervision of the students. As a result of this first initiative the MPS legal directives were changed and the directors are now able to decide on their own what kind of contract they hand out to their students, furthermore every student can decide to have a PhD advisory committee (PAC) for the supervision of his thesis. Additionally, the PhDNet became a part of the MPS by giving itself a statute at the 4<sup>th</sup> PhDNet general meeting.

After this short overview over the history of the PhDNet, Franziska Korb started her presentation. She explained what the PhDNet is and what its functions are. The PhDNet consists of the representatives of every Max Planck Institute (MPI) and aims to provide a network for the PhD students within the MPS and represent their interests in front of the MPS. The PhDNet tries to improve the situation of the students during their PhD, i.e. by providing students with soft skill seminars. Franziska briefly explained the structure of the PhD Net (figure 1), which consists of the general assembly of all PhD representatives, which elect the spokesperson and the section representatives and appoint members to the working groups and form new group due to recent developments.

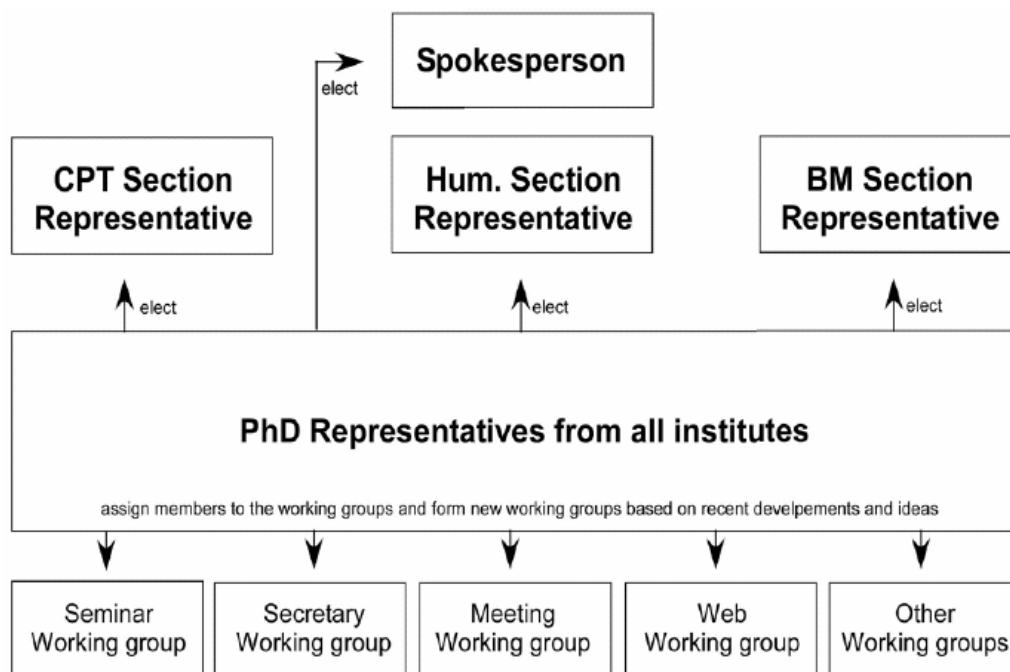


Figure 1: The structure of the PhD Net

The aim of the general assembly is to report internal and external actions of the PhDNet, discuss administrative problems, address the President directly and create new working groups.



She briefly summarized the actions of the obligatory working groups (Seminar, Secretary, Meeting, Web). The offered seminars were mentioned as well as the people involved in the organisation of the meeting in Leipzig. The layout of the website was presented and about the upcoming welcome booklet was briefly introduced. She proceeded by reporting about meetings of the steering group (section representatives & spokesperson) in Leipzig (January 2006) and Heidelberg (August 2006).

The section representatives gave a short overview over their activities during the year including the supervision of the different working groups & collecting information about the payment situation and teaching obligations at the MPIs. Franziska Korb further mentioned different articles published about the PhDNet in Nature jobs and Max Planck intern. She introduced a guest from the Helmholtz Juniors, the PhD network of the Helmholtz society, which was allowed to attend the internal discussion of the PhD Net with the vice-president, by simple majority of the assembly (Hand sign).

### **General discussion and discussion of the PhD representatives from the different sections**

The first introduction round was followed by a short discussion about general administrative issues covering the following questions:

Do we have to report to the MPS?

- We are not obliged to, but we of course try to cooperate with the MPS.

Do we have an overview over the costs for this year?

- Not available at the meeting as Dominik Bauer responsible for this task was not present and could not be reached beforehand.

Remark about the communication between the steering group and the PhD representatives.

- Problem of defining the own position after the last meeting.

- It was suggested to work on a "How to" for the steering groups and working groups

How to get the Offspring?

– Last year it was available online and as a printed version. The distribution this year will take place by the general administration, but the PhD representatives will be informed, when this will take place and should care about the distribution to the students at their institute.

The session was followed by internal discussion rounds between all representatives from the different sections to identify problems and political aims that should be discussed with the vice president of the MPS, Prof. Herbert Jäckle. After the internal discussion of the section members within the representative body, the following issues were set to be discussed with Prof Jäckle:

- Need for an uniform and secure regulation for PhD students for the time between handing in the thesis and getting the result. In some cases, payment ended strictly after three, sometimes even two years, forcing especially the foreign students without access to the german social system into a financially very difficult regulation. A regulation granting three plus half a year should be introduced and made available for all PhD students.
- Social insurance for parents with children in case of stipend-receiving PhD students
- Compensation of additional financial demands for stipend receivers caused by the fact that the spouse of a PhD student may not receive a work permit (outside the MPS) when coming to germany.
- Enquiry about teaching regulations for PhD students at the MPS which vary strongly locally



- Enquiry whether there are any guidelines concerning the minimal number of publications that are required to avail the degree.
- Imbalance between IMPRS and non-IMPRS students when it comes to supervision and general treatment
- Does the MPS undertake any efforts to prepare PhD student for a career in the industries? How can the situation be improved?
- Request to the general administration to support the establishment of a alumni network
- Comments about the information flow within the MPS
  1. Results of salary regulation, according to which the salary date should be shifted from the middle to the end of a month has not been communicated to the PhD students
  2. "Rundschreiben" - public letters - should be accessible to PhD students, also by being written in english
- Dissertation regulations – will there be a shift from the "American" to the "German" system?
- Political position of the MPS regarding public access to scientific data
- The installation of a local coordinator for (also non-IMPRS) PhD students was proposed

### Discussion with Prof. Herbert Jäckle

Prior to discussing the political issues with the students, Prof. Jäckle gave a general introduction to the MPS in facts and numbers. The discussion was also attended by Ilka Schiessler from the general administration (GA) of the MPS.

The MPS was refounded as the successor of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in 1948. The motto of both institutes was to "pick minds, not fields" to focus on basic research complementary to research at the universities. The MPS consists of 176 departments hosting 168 research groups and 54 independent junior groups. It has 12200 employees (4200 scientists) and 9600 junior scientists (PhD students and postdocs).

The MPS has an annual budget of 1.3 billion Euros, which is 2% of the taxpayer's money invested in science in Germany. The money is provided by the state and by the federal country in which the MPIs are hosted in a relationship of 1:1. The MPS has the legal form of an "eingetragener Verein", political decisions have to be agreed to by the central government and all federal governments according to the "Königssteiner Abkommen" - this fact makes it very hard to perform political changes.

The MPS is split into three sections: Chemistry/Physics/Informatics (CPI, 50% of employees), Biomedical (38% of employees) and Humanities (12% of employees).

The organization of the MPS was introduced (see <http://www.mpg.de/english/aboutTheSociety/aboutUs/organization/index.html> for details)

A very important fact is that every institute is autonomous, e.g. it chooses its own research topics, structure, recruits own personnel and manages its own budget.

In the recent year, the MPS has published 11000 publications. The share of all German publications was 31% in Nature, 36% in Science, 35% in Cell and 25% in Phys.Rev.Lett.

Compared to first-class research institutes like Stanford and Yale in 2005, the MPS had a budget of 1.052 Billion Euros (Stanford 1.7 Bio., Yale 1.2 Bio. ) but had 7.471 citations (Stanford 4.128, Yale 3.065), 48 articles in Nature (Stanford 29, Yale 14), 31 articles in Science (Stanford 30, Yale 21) and 8 articles in Cell (Stanford 12, Yale 6) . The MPS has produced 16 Nobel Prize Laureates since 1948.



In a survey conducted by the Stifterverband der Deutschen Wirtschaft in 2005, 75% of all German citizens know the MPS, 83% of which associate it with innovation. 71% think that funding the MPS is an excellent investment of taxpayer's money, whereas only less than 1% think that investment of money into the MPS is not necessary.

Concerning applied sciences, the MP Innovation GmbH (formerly Garching Innovation) was founded in 1979 to facilitate the market entry of patents elaborated within the MPS. 2225 patents and 1486 licences were filed up to now, leading to an annual income of 180 million Euros by patent and license fees. 60 Start-up companies were founded from 170 patents, providing employment for 2800 people.

The percentage of non-German citizens among the total MPS staff is 13%, 27% of staff scientists, 29% of directors and 46% of PhD students are non-German. Gender distribution within the MPS staff is still a problem, thus only 5% of directors are female, 23% of research group leaders and 24% of independent junior group leaders.

Career prospects within the MPS include the first step as a research group leader with PI status of an associate professorship (tenured) with limited but ample resources. Alternatively, the position as an independent junior group leader offers another career opportunity for young researchers. Independent junior group leaders are appointed for 5 years with the possibility of a two times two year prolongation. Appointment as a scientific member ("director") guarantees generous resources until retirement, currently in the age of 65 years. As a director, low scientific performance as evaluated by the scientific advisory board may result in a decrease of 25% of the annual budget.

Each institute is supervised by a scientific advisory board which consists of international renowned scientists which evaluate the institutes and the working groups according to the overall scientific success of the institute, the scientific vision, the career development and education, infrastructure, gender bias and other criteria. Possible consequences of negative evaluation are effects on resources and personal and on the director's income, which is being changed from an age-based to a merit-based salary form.

As an established cooperation between MPIs and local universities, 43 International Max-Planck Research Schools (IMPRSs) have been set up at 54 institutes. 1600 PhD are studying in these IMPRS, out of which 60% are foreigners.

For further questions and comments, the e-mail address of the vice president was given: [vp-bms@gv.mpg.de](mailto:vp-bms@gv.mpg.de)

After this introduction, the discussion points collected before were presented to the vice president.

A first point was the duration of the first contract and the problem of payment between handing of the thesis and the defence.

- He first stressed the point that all MPIs are autonomous, and can thereby define the regulation for their staff. He thinks that the 3 years are a good landmark for a PhD. Stipends can not be prolonged for more than 3 years as this is the time a PhD thesis takes according to the "Bund-Länder-Kommission" regulations. He would suggest a solution where a student gets a stipend for the first 2 years and then obtains a contract for 1+x years.

Concerning the payment of writing up of the PhD thesis and also up to its defence, he reconfirmed that writing up is part of the PhD and should be paid. He is asking to contact him personally and provide him with information about institutes, where there is no payment for this period.



It was asked how a stipend could compensate for children & spouse living in Germany.

- There is the possibility to raise the stipend in these cases.

The point of differential treatment of international Max Planck research school (IMPRS) students and non-IMPRS students was raised.

- He is not aware of such a practice and it is not the aim of the MPS to do this.

It was asked to install local coordinators at the different MPIs for the PhD students.

- He pointed out that every institute is autonomous. But Ms. Ilka Schiessler mentioned that this will be included into best practice guidelines.

The next topic of discussion was the different teaching obligations.

- Ilka Schiessler said that these are limited to 10 h/week, if this does not affect the work of the PhD student.

A further point was the publication pressure at various institutes.

- Little can be done to this, as the MPIs are autonomous. Suggestion to check the lab before going there.

The next problem discussed was the information flow to the PhD students.

- He sees this as a local problem, varying from institute to institute. Concerning the problem of the date of payment Ilka Schiessler said that a decision has not been made yet and that this might happen at the end of 2007.

Next a comment should be given to the position towards public access publications

- He pointed out that the MPS is promoting this and taking a leading position in Europe.

The points dissertation rules and Alumni network were postponed until the next day for the discussion with Ilka Schiessler.

### **Discussion with Ilka Schiessler**

In the first part of the discussion round with Ilka Schiessler, she first introduced the MPS and career possibilities within it. In the second part, some points which had been addressed to the vice-president were discussed in more detail.

First she stressed the point that all MPIs are autonomous, which means that every institute determines its research topics, chooses its research structure, recruits its staff on its own responsibility, manages the institute budget, acquires third-party funds and picks its collaboration partners. The MPS can be a working place at any time of the career, but that of course one should not stay in the MPS its whole life, as a high mobility and flexibility are expected in science. The MPS has currently around 3790 PhD students, 2335 student assistants, which are mainly doing their Diploma thesis at the MPI, 2211 post-doctoral fellows and 1429 guest scientists. One of the first ladders to a higher scientific career in the MPS can be the position as a leader of an independent research group. This position qualifies for a scientific leadership position (professor) in academic research. Scientific members of the MPS (directors) are selected by a commission with the respective vice-president. Since 1969 there have been approx. 217 independent research groups, from which more than 50% were appointed professorship afterwards and 22 of them became scientific members of the MPS.



Next she showed a table about the duration of the PhD on average based on data of the year 2005 obtained from the different institutes (table 1).

Duration of the PhD in average (2005)			
	BM	CPT	HUM
Handing in	3,67	3,49	3,4
First opinion	3,78	3,49	3,69
Defence	3,87	3,63	4,04
All	3,55	3,59	3,78

Table 1: Average duration of a PhD in the MPS  
(Numbers given in years)

She cautioned to draw any firm conclusion based on the data, since the numbers provided by the individual institutes are very different in their quality, e.g. Some institutes do not have records of all 4 timepoints separately. The problem is that only at a few institutes it takes very long between the handing in of the thesis and the defence. The data demonstrates that a PhD in general takes more than 3 years at the MPS. Payment restrictions conflicting with this duration are due to the fact that the "Bund-Länder-Kommission" has to decide upon the maximum length of payment in the public service, under the regulation of which the payment of PhD students very often falls. The official duration of a PhD is currently 3 years.

In the second part of the talk she commented the questions which were postponed from the discussion with Herbert Jäckle the day before

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Payment of the PhD between submitting thesis and receiving degree:

- She pointed out that a PhD should be paid until the defence and most institutes stick to this rule. She also pointed out that the GA can prolong the PhD period upon request of the professor, if this is justified. Nearly all cases get an extension.

Children&Spouse compensation:

- It was pointed out that stipends can be raised by 154 € for the spouse living in Germany and can be raised by up to 204 € for children. In case the mother is working at the MPI, there is also the possibility to get support for day-care. Concerning the working permission of the spouse, there is the general rule that this follows the regulation of the visa holder (remark: stipend holders do not need a working permission). Of course the compensation given lies in the responsibility of every director.

Teaching obligations:

- Should not be added on top of your working duties. People holding a contract with the MPI are not allowed to work beside, without the permission of their director. The teaching should not prolong the duration of your PhD thesis. Generally, teaching duties are imposed from the university which awards the degree, the possibility of changing the university exists in most cases.



Publication pressure:

- There is no general rule from the GA. These are local regulations.

Preparation for future career in the industry:

- Has not been a real topic in the MPS, but she is in the course of collecting ideas in this field.

Alumni network:

- The GA will cooperate with the PhDNet and encourages it to start such an initiative.

Local coordinator for PhD students at all institutes:

- Will be one of the crucial points in the best practice guidelines (Remark: Best practice guidelines will be a brochure for the institutes, which will focus on the needs of the PhD students and is underway, but will be published earliest in a year.)

Information flow between GA and PhD students:

- Since official information should be forwarded by local administration and directors, this is a local problem, but Ilka Schiessler will stay in contact with the spokesperson.

For further questions she gave her email address and phone number:

e-mail: [schiessler@gv.mpg.de](mailto:schiessler@gv.mpg.de)      phone: +49-89/2108-1524

### **Introduction of Work groups**

In the following session, the work group heads were presenting the result of last year's work and perspectives for the upcoming year.

### **Questionnaire Group** (Head: David Alich)

Based on the survey conducted by Niels Syassen and the steering group in 2005, the report "The situation of PhD students in the Max-Planck Society" was published in June 2006. The report was forwarded to all PhD representatives, to the general administration of the MPS and to the president Peter Gruss. It was recommended to forward the report to all directors of the MPS. Around 1300 PhD students participated in the recent survey. The results of the survey can be obtained upon request from the secretary group (e-mail: [phd-sec@gwdg.de](mailto:phd-sec@gwdg.de)).

A new wave of the PhDNet survey will be launched as an online survey at the end of November 2006. New features are a shorter questionnaire and an improvement of question structure, questions regarding publication and conference regulations, children and family issues and parental leave. For participation, e-mail registration is required. The survey will be conducted anonymously. For comparability with the recent survey, questions from the recent questionnaire will be reused. For the design of future surveys, a collaboration with the PhD students initiative of the Helmholtz society, the Helmholtz Juniors is planned.

New members are welcome to join the questionnaire group. Experience in analyzing empirical data, questionnaire/survey construction and writing skills are welcome but not mandatory.



### **Web Group** (Head: Tobias Lenz)

The main tasks of the web group were taking over the infrastructure from the previous group, updating the website and hosting the forum. Furthermore, the web group was responsible for managing and administrating the computer resources which were used by the PhDNet and to give consulting in IT-related problems.

The web group was responsible for websites of the PhD Network, Global Changes Workshop. The new templates for the PhDNet website were mainly created by the working group members of the last web group.

The PhDNet online forum was administrated by the web group as well. The main task was to keep the forum clean from junk posts and junk user registrations, to manage PhD representatives group (with restricted access) and to update forum software. Participation in the online forum can still be improved and all PhD representatives are requested to advert the online forum among the students from their institutes.

### **Secretary group** (Head: Marc Schneider)

The focus of the secretary group was updating the e-mail list of all institute representatives for providing a communication platform within the PhDNet. The acquisition of a sponsor (Deutsche Bank) was done by Dominik Bauer. Another project of the secretary group was to establish a booklet containing initial and helpful information about the MPS which should be distributed to all students starting their PhD at the MPS. The aim of the booklet is not only to provide basic information about the student's situation within the MPS, but also to sensitize new students towards the issues and aims of the PhDNet. A first draft has been sent to the general administration for correction, printing and publishing will be done as soon as possible.

### **Meeting group** (Head: Rainer Stollhoff)

In the report of the meeting group, the schedule for planning and the registrations for the meeting over time and after several reminder e-mails was presented. It was concluded that for future meetings, it is highly recommended to invite famous speakers early in advance, and it was concluded that most registrations were made rather shortly before the meeting after a couple of reminders.

### **Event Group** (Head: Johanna Havemann)

As the primary result of the efforts of the event group, the interdisciplinary PhD student conference "Global Changes" took place from August 17th – 19th 2006 in the conference rooms of the youth hostel Köln-Deutz. The preliminary aims of the symposium were to strengthen interdisciplinary exchange and broaden the perspective on science, to raise awareness of common interests of the research community, especially among PhD students of the MPS to train the ability to communicate research to non-experts in the field, to discuss career prospects and facilitate network building and to represent different scientific perspectives and methods within the MPS by approaching one highlighted topic of general relevance. 53 PhD students from 30 different MPIs attended the meeting. The frame program consisted of 26 student talks, 4 key note talks, 2 poster sessions and a plenum discussion. The registration fee was 50 Euros. The overall costs of the symposium for lodging and location rent, conference material, catering and travel expenses of the keynote speakers were plus travel costs of the organization team were 6.645,30 Euros in total.





The workshop was evaluated by a questionnaire designed and evaluated by Sabine Schnabel and David Alich which was distributed among all participants. The results of the survey are available online ([http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/Evaluation\\_GlobalChanges.pdf](http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/Evaluation_GlobalChanges.pdf)). Further information and photos from the event can be found at the url: <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/workshop/>.

### **Seminar group** (Head: Roland Graf)

In the coming year, 168 places have been created for PhD students from the MPS to attend interdisciplinary soft skill seminars which will be held at different institutes. The program of seminars can be availed by visiting the website <http://www.phdnet.mpg.de/seminars/index.htm>. Fundraising for the seminars was done by Dominik Bauer and included funds from the general administration and the Deutsche Bank. The question was raised whether fundraising should be continued by the workgroup or by local PhD coordinators (see discussion with Prof Jäckle).

### **Alumni group** (Head: Andreas Bock)

The focus of the alumni group was to build up an alumni database in which a user profile and personal homepage can be installed. The issue of an alumni network was implemented in the PhDNet forum, yet only 10 alumni were participating. The importance of a support by the general administration was stressed. The future prospects of the alumni group are to establish an alumni e-mail list, to improve safety of the database and to establish, with the help of the general administration, a vital alumni network.

After the report of the existing work groups, the further conduct of the non-permanent working groups which are the alumni group, the event group and the questionnaire group was approved by a majority vote. The introduction of a new offspring group was approved by simple majority.

### **Plans of the new Working groups**

#### **Seminar group**

Person responsible: Anne Falk ([ann.falk@mpip-mainz.mpg.de](mailto:ann.falk@mpip-mainz.mpg.de))

Plans: Seminars will only be organized upon request of PhD representatives at their institutes. The plan is to hold seminars the whole year.

#### **Event group**

Person responsible: Cornelia Graf ([cgraf@mpipsyttl.mpg.de](mailto:cgraf@mpipsyttl.mpg.de))

Plans: Symposium in Frankfurt/ Main from the 26-28.07.07 in the Youth Hostel with the topic "Communication". Of course everybody is welcome, even if he or she is not working on something related to this topic. Changes will be:

- More time for discussions
- They will put more emphasis on the interdisciplinary part
- Participant number will increase to 60.

The estimated costs are 6200 €, from which ca. 2600 € will can not be covered by the registration fee.

#### **Alumni group**

Person responsible: Simon Bungers ([bungers@em.mpg.de](mailto:bungers@em.mpg.de))

Plans: The PhD Net is currently not able to set up a database on its own, so that possible collaborations with the GA will be elucidated. After collecting more information further steps will be discussed.



## Meeting group

Person responsible: Peter Böttcher (boettcher@mpiib-berlin.mpg.de)

Plans: Meeting next year will take place in Berlin. The date will be in November 2007 according to the schedule of the president.

## General suggestions for improvement

It was suggested to revise the statute to see whether the general process of decision making can be enhanced also in absence of certain votes. The statute should be revised to clarify two points: Double candidacy for Spokesperson and Section Representative, votes are given to old or new working group heads. Furthermore, a scheme for collaboration between the working groups was presented.

## Presentation of the candidates for the elections

Candidates introduced themselves before the plenum had the chance to ask them questions.

Candidates for the spokesperson:

- Cornelia Graf MPI for Psychiatry (11 votes)
- Rainer Stollhoff MPI for Mathematics (33 votes)

Candidates for the section representative Humanities:

- Laura Herbst MPI for Psycholinguistics (9 votes)
- Corinna Handschuh MPI for evolutionary Anthropology (2 votes)

Candidates for the section representative Biomedical:

- Johanna Havemann MPI for developmental Biology (10 votes)
- Ludwig Sievert MPI for Psychiatry (3 votes)

Candidate for the section representative Chemistry/Physics/Technology:

- Rainer Stollhoff MPI for Mathematics (retraction after election as spokesperson)
- Peter Buschkamp MPI for extraterrestrial Physics (11 votes, 2 abstentions).

Results of the elections: Rainer Stollhoff (stollhof@mis.mpg.de) is the new spokesperson, Laura Herbst (Laura.Herbst@mpi.nl) is the new section representative of the humanities section, Johanna Havemann (johanna.havemann@tuebingen.mpg.de) is the new section representative of the biomedical section and Peter Buschkamp (buschkamp@mpe.mpg.de) is the new section representative for the chemistry/physics/technology section.