
Protocol's resume - 6th PhDnet General Meeting

8-10 November 2007, Berlin

Thursday, November 8th

Report of PhDnet spokesperson and steering group

The spokesperson Rainer Stollhof and the section representatives Peter Buschkamp (CPT), Johanna Havemann (BioMed) and Laura Herbst (Hum) started the session introducing themselves as the current steering group.

The secretary Florian Hauer follows talking about the tasks and responsibilities of local PhD representatives, as well as the funding that these individual need for their activities.

Task of local reps
(On the Wiki.)

Funding

It was brought to debate the present central support scheme of the PhDnet and the way this money should be distributed. Conclusions are that the way it is used should be assessed/reported and that an additional workgroup should be created, to organize a draft proposal for additional money to support efforts of local institutes to provide activities for their PhD communities and design a concept of money distribution.

Presentation by Helmholtz Juniors (HJ)

Two representatives of the HJ joined us during this 6th meeting. They introduced the Helmholtz Gemeinschaft (HG), compared to the MPS in terms of mission statements, and also introduced the HJ group: organization, statute, workgroups, funding, recent and current projects (survey, website...). They stipulate they “want to be recognized as young professionals, rather than students.” Discussion on this topic was opened: concept of “PhD student” in Germany and to be professionals with a payment that underestimates their qualifications (few exceptions related to industry). As a solution, they proposed an open market strategy with variable stipends. Having the possibility of negotiating the actual amount of a stipend, the more qualified students could be attracted.

Progress Reports of the last years Working Groups (WG)

Seminar WG's presentation

Ann Falk, leader of the group, states their task as to provide students with the possibility for soft skill training. Their seminars range from half day to 1 day and a half. Currently, there is a budget for 10-15 seminars for the next year.

They want to increase financial support and to have more PhDs reps asking for seminars at their own institutes. Seminars are primarily funded for institutes with no IMPRS, or for people at institutes with research schools that aren't allowed to participate.

Event Group Presentation

They organize an interdisciplinary meeting divided into 3 parts, representing the 3 sections: Humanities, BioMed and CPT. Talks are in a way that ALL people (regardless of background and field) can understand it. Their main tasks are to contact 3 keynote speakers and take care of announcements/promotion. For the last event, they reported problems in the flow of information when spreading the voice about the event.

Questionnaire Group Presentation

David Alich, leader of the group, gave a report on the numbers and final statistics of the new 2007 survey: degree/quality of PhD student supervision and demographics of all students. The previous 2005 report and the presentation of the 2007 results are in the Wiki and can be obtained upon request from the Questionnaire Group.

The questionnaire is an extremely powerful tool to inform both directors and students. It is very important to note that the online survey is anonymous and that the data is only handled by PhDnet Questionnaire group.

Update by PhDnet Spokesperson

The spokesperson Rainer Stollhof presented the main tasks of the Steering Group. He stressed the importance of communication within and among all the levels of the PhDnet: teleconferences, internal/open Wiki pages and updated mailing lists of PhD reps. Communication to organisms outside the net is also of central interest: work council, MPS headquarters, local cooperation within the MPIs. He also pointed out the services/information available to general users on the Wiki.

Apart from these topics, he also commented on legal issues referred to differences in funding and the absence of liability insurance for stipends. He stressed the importance of cooperating with other PhD networks and to keep contact with all the levels within the MPS. On political matters, he referred to excerpts from EU Charter, benefits that could in principle report to us, and position of the MPS and other German associations that have not support it till the moment while a vast number of European associations have.

The last point was about the network finances. The spokesperson is ultimately responsible about them and MPS is very flexible, we have funds available.

PhDnet Statute Draft

The word was taken by Jan Spoenle, our legal counsel. The reason to change the statute is the lack of clarity in the possibility to appeal the election results regarding double candidacies and group leader's votes. At the moment of the discussion, there were no answers to these points in the statute.

The changes (section 6.2.2 and 6.2.3) are that the spokesperson cannot be section leader, i.e.- there is a shift of power to more people. A vote was carried out right away to decide whether these changes should be kept in the draft, finding 26 against and 30 in favor.

Report of 2007 Working Groups

Secretary Group

Florian Hauer, the current group leader makes the report. The secretary group tries to gather, organize and spread information relevant for PhD student. Among their tasks, they are in charged of compiling the newsletter, collect and forward any relevant information to PhD local committees. Though everyone should contribute to the Wiki.

It is responsibility of PhD reps to collect emails of new PhD students in their institutes and to keep updated their own email address on the Wiki.

You can contact the group at phd-sec@gwdg.de.

It is pointed out the interest of some on a MPG-wide Career Day for PhDs and Post-Docs.

Offspring Group—Magazine for PhDnet

Peter Buschkamp reports. This magazine is the PhDnet's voice. It is published annually and offered about 1/2 print and 1/2 PDF. It is not a news magazine but tries to reflect interests of PhD students, appearing more attractive and relevant. Among their interests are relevant news from the general administration, reports from activities, careers/profiles and they make an open call for ideas, info, articles, pictures. They aim to be a forum for interesting questions and insight.

Alumni Group

Simon Bungers reports. The Alumni Initiative wants to establish a platform to connect alumni of MPS.

At the 2006 meeting, it was decided that PhDnet doesn't have resources for this. There is an MPS initiative called maxNet (Prof. Jaeckle) and it is an Internet based, Facebook-like network, regulated by invitation/confirmation. Incorporation of PhD students is planned. The alumni officer at each institute will offer invitations to people leave MPI. PhDnet is connected to maxNet via Claudia Kahmen. Every institute has an Alumni Officer; reps should ask at their institutes and inform current PhD students. Each member adds his/her own information (only information volunteered by members is available). Check the website for details: <https://maxnet.mpg.de>

Meeting Group

The group leader Jan Pieter Böttcher talks about the main tasks: organizing rooms and guest speakers. Advices as the best to combine volunteers from many institutes in one city where the meeting will be held.

Web Group

Informs the group leader Thomas Kahle. The forum will be closed due to inactivity. There is now a link to PhDnet Wiki pages from mpg.de, though hard to find:
<http://www.mpg.de/arbeitenMPG/infoNachwuchswiss/index.html>

Plenary Session

Here people comment on all discussed so far.

Stipends/Contracts

On some stipends pressure (either by money withheld or lost of position) has been put to meet publication deadlines, to pass university German test or to leave the group without prior notice.

Legally there is a difference between stipend holders and contracted students, but practically there is no difference. On the issue of stipends/contracts, MPS is not autonomous; this comes to the decision of individual directors.

Working Group Topics

There was a suggestion to combine career planning with Alumni network affairs.

Friday, November 9th

Preparation of talk with Prof. Gruss:

led by Rainer. The community raised their questions and questions for the discussion were prepared.

Stipends/Contracts

Contributes David Alich (Questionnaire Group Presentation). For the first time we have *data* showing a trend of increasing stipends against contracts among the 33 institutes represented in the survey. Several institutes have *only* stipends. Such a trend devalues PhD students work, and thus decreases the attractiveness of starting a PhD at a MPI.

PhD Education

In which direction does the MPS head? “Anlgo-Saxon” model with mandatory coursework, with extensions possible up to 5 years -or- more traditional German “Doktorandenausbildung”, which is based more on an independent PhD candidate.

The Bund-Länder-Kommission (BLK) instated the current 3-year time frame. If this is no longer accepted by the scientific community, the MPS should bring this to the attention of the BLK.

Promotionsrecht

(right of an institute/university to grant degrees)

Are there intentions to obtain the Promotionsrecht for MPS? Helmholtz is very interested

in this point.

Supervision

It is recommended to have at least a 2nd supervisor, and preferably a full PhD Advisory Committee (PAC).

There is a discussion whether a PAC should be mandatory or not. All PhD students should at least be made aware of the options and benefits. The intention is to depend less on a single direct supervisor. A vote among the audience reveals that the majority favors obligatory formation of PACs for all PhD students.

PhD coordinators

It has already been recommended that every institute has at least 1 PhD coordinator, we want to recall this issue.

Language Problems

English of administrative staff members is not always sufficient and not all documents, contracts, and especially safety documents are available and easily accessible in English.

Foreign officers

Their role is to facilitate integration to a new country, and to know the details of technical/law issues related to foreigners. Local reps should know who their foreign officer is to direct new foreign students to the right person if issues arise.

Local Funding

Supplementary funding is suggested to support local PhD initiatives. We ask the General Verwaltung (GV) to double the amount of financial support (Eur 10K to Eur 20K)

Humanities

Is there the intention to strengthen the profile of the Humanities as a section of the MPS?

Gemeinnützigkeitsstatus

The Gemeinnützigkeitsstatus of the MPS will change. What are the consequences?

Springer

MPS canceled contract with Springer. What are the alternatives?

Helmholtz Juniors are invited by absolute majority to join the discussion with Prof. Gruss.

Discussion with Professor Gruss (PG):

moderated by Rainer. Here are Prof. Gruss answers to the questions.

Status of PhD Students

PG: The main points are the limitations of the MPS, meaning the restraints imposed by

sponsors and taxpayers—these limitations are essentially enforced by the Bund-Länder-Kommission (BLK). The BLK stipulates the rules and regulations. Your employment structure can follow 2 routes. Either (1) a stipend—the number of which allocated is also determined by BLK, or (2) ½ of an employment position.

Issues of insurance coverage of stipend holders are worked on. The decision of stipend vs. contract is up to the director of each institute.

MPS fight for an increase in stipends and longer PhD times. The BLK fears that if they “do something for” the MPS, universities will demand more too. And yes, these issues, when not resolved, will decrease the competitiveness of the MPS to potential PhD students.

The EU Charter not signed/supported by MPS

PG: The EU Charter addresses points in common with the MPS, such as research, stipends, dual career, discrimination. BUT, the Max Planck lawyers found points below and behind what is already established in Germany and MPS. Namely, this involves issues of “freedom of research.” For instance, they define research as needing to be “relevant for society.” This is the reason for MPS not to back this charter. Instead MPS chose to write a letter stipulating reasons for not offering our support.

Questionnaire Results

PG: When the concept of IMPRS first began, MPS started with 20 schools; now MPS has 49. This itself has increased the number of PhDs funded by stipends. Funding so many students is above and beyond any institutes budget. If everyone had ½ position contracts, there would be (a) a marked decrease in the number of students, or (b) an increase in the budget.

PhD Education

PG: The general trend in Germany is towards a dual Anglo-Saxon degree—where students enter with a Bachelors, then proceed with a M.Sc. followed by a PhD. Or they enter a PhD position directly with a M.Sc.. The Diplom/Vordiplom system will be a thing of the past. An M.Sc. *can* be an esteemed degree accepted at the level of (or above) a Diplom. This is what MPS can aim for.

Promotionsrecht

PG: There are always intentions for MPS to gain Promotionsrecht. This is a right/privilege of the German universities so far and the situation is difficult to change.

PACs

Prof. Gruss agrees with mandatory PACs for all MPS PhD students. He will transmit it to all directors.

Local PhD coordinator at every institute

PG: It will be given as a more general wish/recommendation to the directors. This decision depends on each institute: considering size, # students, etc.

Language Issues/Foreign Officers

A list of all documents needed to be translated in English will be provided to Prof. Gruss.

Local funding for PhD initiatives

Prof. Gruss supports creation of a the PhDnet central budget for local activities.

Humanities

PG: This year MPS has been very active—e.g. the 'ship' project displaying everything about languages—and it will regularly endorse “The year of...” initiatives. In terms of Public Relations, Humanities will never win the Nobel Prize, which is always in areas of Natural Sciences. In conclusion, MPIs are very active, and in Germany (though less abroad) it is well known that the MPS covers Humanities.

Gemeinnützigkeitsstatus

PG: This issue has not yet been legally solved.

Springer

PG: MPS was an originator of Open Access, and still MPS likes to encourage everyone to publish as such to make science available to everyone. To set an example MPS ended the contract with Springer. The contract was only canceled centrally, local institutes may still choose to sign institute contracts. The contract with Elsevier persists.

Discussion with Ilka Schiessler (IS)—MPS lawyer

Liability Insurance

IS: As a contract employee, you are only fully liable for intentional damages. In cases of moderate or gross negligence, you are liable, but only to certain extent, you need to pay maximum up to 3 months salary. As a stipend holder, you are considered a private person, not an employee. Therefore you could be held liable for all of the damages you cause, no matter how great your responsibility is in fact (minor, moderate, or gross negligence or intentional) and you are liable with your entire personal assets. MPS is in alliance with Helmholtz, etc. to work to cap this damage responsibility to 3 months salary for stipend holders too.

Residence and Work Permits

IS: In August, a new law was instituted regarding residence and work permits. Much is still open as to the implementation of the law.

MPS wants stipend holders to have the same rights as visitors with work permits. After a job terminates, a worker is permitted to stay 1 year in Germany to look for more work.

Whereas stipend holders must leave when their stipend terminates.

There is little family support for stipend holders. Spouses can enter, but they cannot work. Spouses get the same level residence permit as the stipend holder, but with some limitations. Spouses must apply for their own work permits if they want to work. MPS is trying to increase the financial support for families.

If your stipend is replaced with a contract it could cause a problem, in that you still cannot

change the type of work permit you have. The switch from stipend to contract is possible, but not easy. Sometimes the student will need to apply for a new visa. So if you plan to switch, talk to the Ausländerbehörde (bureau for foreign issues) 8 weeks before it will happen. If you are a PhD student you shouldn't have a student residence permit. Instead you should have a permit "according to paragraph 18." This issue will be brought up at a meeting in December, there are many inconsistencies in the types of permits offered to stipend holders.

PhD Length

IS: MPS is bound by the position of the Bund-Länder-Kommission (BLK) that PhD contracts cannot be for more than 3 years, and institutes are not entitled to pay longer. If there are circumstances which are not caused by yourselves, the PhD can be prolonged. Also, extra time is given for women in the case of pregnancy; up to 1 year after the 3 normal years is paid by the institute.

If a contract extension is needed (with prolonged payment), the supervisor is responsible for this process (filling out forms, giving explanation, discussing with local Administration). The final decision on the prolongation is up to Ilka Schiessler. However, it is still the individual institutes that pay this prolongation, regardless of what the MPS General Verwaltung decides.

Urlaubs-Antrag (Holiday Applications)

IS: Stipend holders are not required to ask for vacation time. Rights and duties vary depending on form of payment (stipend vs. contract). As a contract holder you have to ask for holiday time. Stipend holders just have to report when they take off. Institutes will report if a stipend holder takes more than 30 days, and the stipend can be stopped. If a university (with their own guidelines) funds a student, then differences will exist.

The number of vacation days for others depends on the contract type.

Some institutes count Monday-Saturday as days taken for a holiday. Even with a scholarship, you can respect all holidays. If you encounter something strange at your institute, let Ilka know.

Weihnachtsgeld (Christmas bonus money)

This year the Christmas bonus for contract holders will be as high as last year, 2.5% of the pre-tax year's salary. (It has been 5% the years before).

Voting on Raised Issues

lead by Rainer

For 2008 the following working groups will be created: Questionnaire Group, Event Group, Alumni Group and Offspring Group, and not a Career Interest Group.

Regarding the PhDnet Statute draft that was discussed the day before, there was a voting on whether to accept the new Statute. The result was 53 votes in favor and none against. These changes are to be effective 1 day after this voting, together with signature and

publication on the website.

Presentation of MaxNet and Alumni Affairs

Dr. Andreas Trepte from MPS (AT)

MaxNet

AT: A “Max Planck Facebook” exists for alumni. However, MPS is a company, therefore MPS has privacy issues. The goal for 2008 is to cooperate more with other networks, such as Nature Online. The Internet has the potential to change how we communicate, e.g. the way we publish, the transparency of our ideas, when/where/with whom we talk about our ideas. Currently, the MPS has not alumni “culture”; MPS is working to build autonomy among the researchers by supporting a system of alumni. For this, we need a large platform to hold a critical mass of contacts. This is especially intended to facilitate looking for resources in new cities where alumni might live (e.g. for help moving, traveling, living, etc.). Added values include the ability to look for someone working on similar/related tools or software, organized career mentoring for all PhD students (post-docs too) to help answer “What happens next?”. MPS' plan is the network to be fully functional by 2010. This will include a “tagging” system. The network will be in English. Each institute will have their own portal/page.

Each alumni maintains their own information, decides their own friends, and decides the extent of personal information transparency.

It is also possible to set up interest groups (e.g. the PhDnet is an interest group), as well as establishing discussion forums. There are currently alumni officers at 62 institutes, because MPS has a small number of permanent employees, and a huge body of temporary workers. Thus, it is important to stay networked, e.g. for both recruiting and job searching. The goal is to establish a “hierarchy-free” network.

Claudia Kahmen (CK)

Alumni Affairs

CK: On 10 October 2007, the first Alumni Network meeting was held, which included talks covering technical implementation of such a network, as well as alumni activities. The objective is to create MaxNet as an international, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional network. In 2008 MPS plans to: issue a newsletter to report alumni meetings, announce alumni events, feature an alumnus twice a year, feature special offers in the framework of future alumni events, expand the network both virtually, as well as in communities abroad.

MPS considers alumni to be all past employees of MPS, including post-docs, all students, visiting scientists, etc.

Saturday, November 10th

Presentation of new Working Groups

Detailed information on the Working Group's activities can be found on the Wiki.

Listing of the Working Groups and their group leaders:

Event Group - Anna Lena Keller
Secretary Group - Maike Trenkel
Questionnaire Group - David Alich
Web Group - Thomas Kahle
Offspring - Corinna Handschuh
Alumni - Simon Bungers
Seminar Group - Ann Falk
Meeting Group - Annika Weseloh

Election of New Steering Group

The results are:

Spokesperson:	<i>Melissa Duhaime</i>	41
	Peter Buschkamp	10
	Abstained	1
Biomedical Rep:	<i>Sören Alsheimer</i>	11
	Pier Giogio Pacifici	5
	Abstained	1
Chem-Phys-Tech Rep:	<i>Ralitsa Angelova</i>	15
	Abstained	1
Humanities Rep:	<i>Ian Fitzpatrick</i>	12
	Abstained	1

Scribe of the original version: Melissa Duhaime.

This shortened version has been done by the Secretary group.