

Minutes and Preliminary* Report of the 8th PhDnet meeting October 29 – 31, Jena

Report edited by Alexander Buck,
Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher

Meeting notes taken by Alexander Buck,
Agnieszka Burzynska and Marina C. M. Martins

with Contributions from Dorothea Hämmerer, Daniel Kalthoff,
Veronika Bierbaum, Stephan Klatt and Alexander Jehlin

4 December 2009



Max Planck PhDnet

Legal Disclaimer: All information in this report has been collected to the best of the editors' knowledge. However, no legal responsibility whatsoever can be taken by the authors.

*This report is currently being read and cross-checked by the Administrative Headquarters of the MPS. With their feedback a final report will be published.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Foreword and Scope of this report | 5 |
| 2. Report of the Spokesperson | 5 |
| 2.1. Introduction | 5 |
| 2.2. Report of the spokesperson | 6 |
| 2.2.1. Activities of the PhDnet in 2009: | 6 |
| 3. Payment models for PhD students (stipends and contracts) | 7 |
| 3.1. Mode of payment and stipend guidelines | 7 |
| 3.2. Comparison of stipends and contracts | 7 |
| 3.2.1. Numbers | 7 |
| 3.2.2. Monetary remuneration and benefits | 8 |
| 3.2.3. Contract | 8 |
| 3.2.4. Stipends | 8 |
| 3.2.5. Assigned duties, independence in research | 9 |
| 3.3. Applicability of stipends and contracts / stipend guidelines | 9 |
| 3.3.1. Discussion about PhDnet goals | 9 |
| 3.3.2. Enforcement of stipend guidelines | 10 |
| 4. Insurance issues for stipend holders | 10 |
| 5. Ph.D. representation in the MPS | 12 |
| 6. Financial situation of the PhDnet | 12 |
| 7. Other legal issues discussed at the meeting | 14 |
| 8. Supervision of PhD students | 15 |
| 9. New Statutes | 16 |
| 9.1. Motivation | 16 |
| 9.2. Changes | 16 |
| 9.2.1. Financial Officer | 16 |
| 9.2.2. IMPRS Students and the PhDnet, Eligibility and Organs | 16 |
| 9.2.3. More Continuity | 16 |
| 9.2.4. Other Changes to the Statutes | 17 |
| 9.3. Vote | 17 |
| 10. Additional presentations | 17 |
| 10.1. Network for Postdocs: Ideas for a PostdocNet | 17 |
| 10.2. Tasks of PhD representatives | 17 |
| 10.3. THESIS e.V. | 18 |
| 11. Working Groups | 18 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 12. Elections | 20 |
| 12.1. Voting on the Temporary Working Groups | 20 |
| 12.2. Transitional Steering Group | 20 |
| 12.3. Election of the 2010 Steering Group | 20 |
| 13. Closing remarks | 20 |
| 14. References | 21 |
| A. Stipends vs. contracts – Example calculations | 21 |
| B. New statutes with marked changes | 21 |

1. Foreword and Scope of this report

At the Annual General Meeting of the PhDnet, Ph.D. students and representatives from all institutes of the Max Planck Society come together to learn about and discuss the current and the future activities of the PhDnet. In 2009, 86 Ph.D. students from 49 institutes registered for the meeting. This participation is comparable to the participation of the previous year and reflects the diversity of backgrounds of the PhD students active in the PhDnet.

This document serves both as a report about the activities of the PhDnet in 2009 and as the minutes of the 2009 General Meeting.

2. Introduction to the PhDnet and report of the Spokesperson

2.1. Introduction / Overview of the Max Planck-Society (MPS) and of the PhDnet

Leonard Burtscher, the Spokesperson of the PhDnet in 2009, introduced the MPS and the PhDnet to new PhD students and new PhD representatives at the meeting. The MPS currently consists of 80 Max Planck Institutes, each of which is independently led by one or more directors. The PhDnet is the association of all Max Planck Ph.D. students (currently estimated 4500 PhD students are paid by the MPS) and supports interdisciplinary exchanges between the PhD students from different institutes through workshops, meetings and seminars. Furthermore, it is a forum for discussing and solving common administrative problems and gives PhD students a common voice in the Max Planck Society. Major decisions in the PhDnet are made at the annual General Meeting. The day-to-day work is done in the Working Groups (currently 8) and the work of the PhDnet is co-ordinated in the Steering Group which is led by the Spokesperson. The Spokesperson also represents the PhDnet towards the Administrative Headquarters and towards the outside world. For a more rigorous introduction to the PhDnet and its organisation, see the PhDnet website and statutes.

The current Working Groups are (group leader name in parentheses):

- Secretary (Alexander Buck)
- Web (Phillip Altrock)
- General Meeting (Anna Görner)
- Seminar (Stefan Greif)
- Offspring (Julia Steinbach)
- Event (Nicolas Behr)
- Questionnaire (Dorothea Hämmerer)
- Legal (Clemens Kiessig)

The Steering Group consists of: Leonard Burtscher (Spokesperson), Susannah Burrows (CPT Section Representative), Axinja Hachfeld (HUM Section Representative), and Sandra Schöttner (BM Section Representative).

2.2. Report of the spokesperson

2.2.1. Activities of the PhDnet in 2009:

2 March Axinja Hachfeld attended the Bundestagsanhörung zur Förderung des wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchses in Berlin. This was a first step in order to get involved (or at least informed) about the political decision-making regarding Ph.D. students.

31 March Axinja Hachfeld and Leonard Burtscher met the President of the MPS, Prof. Gruss, in Munich and discuss the insurance coverage of stipend holders. This was identified as the most pressing issue of the PhDnet at the last Annual General Meeting in Bremen in 2008. The President agreed with Axinja Hachfeld and Leonard Burtscher that the unclear situation / lack of insurance of stipend holders was unacceptable. Everything possible within the laws governing the MPS's spending should be done to achieve insurance equality between stipend holders and contract holders, according to him. This included an inquiry as to whether the group insurance policy (Gruppenunfallversicherung), which also pays for accidents of stipend holders, could be extended from the current 38,346.89 EUR (in case of invalidity) to a much higher sum that could really pay for the life-long consequences of accidents. Later Ilka Schießler informed the Steering Group that this extension was not possible (see Sec. 4). The President also informed Axinja Hachfeld and Leonard Burtscher of a newly planned support for stipend holders similar to the Elterngeld / parental leave for contract holders that Ilka Schießler (contact person for young researchers in the Administrative Headquarters) had presented before. The solution would include either an increase in funding to cover a fourth year (to account for the extra time needed for childcare) or an increase in salary to cover the cost of childcare.

On the occasion of the meeting with the President from the MPS, Axinja Hachfeld and Leonard Burtscher also held meetings with the following members of the Administrative Headquarters to raise the profile of the PhDnet and improve relationships between the PhDnet and relevant contact persons within the Administrative Headquarters:

- Ilka Schiessler
- IMPRS coordinator Mrs. Hammerstein. (Later, Peter Buschkamp joined this year's IMPRS coordinators meeting to advertise the PhDnet.)
- Mrs. Kahmen, responsible for the planned MaxPlanck Alumni network, "MaxNet"

5 May Meeting with a Working Group drafting an informational booklet (*Mitarbeiterhandbuch*) for new employees of the MPS. (Leonard Burtscher)

18/19 May Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher participated in the Helmholtz conference for junior researchers. On that occasion they met with representatives from many major German and European Ph.D. student networks, among them the Helmholtz Juniors, Promovierenden Initiative (PI), THESIS e.V., eurodoc, the *Projektgruppe Doktoranden* (PgDok) of the *Gewerkschaft für Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (GEW) and representatives from an institute of the Leibniz Society. A press release was issued to announce this first meeting of this network. Means of communication between these networks were established: A blog (<http://jrresearchersgermany.wordpress.com>) and a mailing list (dok-netzwerke@thesis.de) were created.

From 25 May to 21 June the PhDnet survey 2009 was launched. This was one of the major projects of the PhDnet this year, supported by the Questionnaire Group, the Secretary

Group, the Legal Group and the Steering Group. In preparation of the survey, the PhDnet contacted all directors, the general works council (Gesamtbetriebsrat) and PhD representatives or students of all the Max Planck institutes. Over 2000 students from all of the 80 MPIS participated, making this the most representative survey so far on the situation of PhD students in the MPS (see also presentation by Survey Group, Sec. 11).

5/6 June Axinja Hachfeld joined the GEW's seminar on work and social law for doctoral students and junior researchers

July The 4th issue of Offspring was released (see presentation by Offspring Group, Sec. 11). One issue was sent to the Bundesbank by the Spokesperson to thank them for their continued donations to the PhDnet.

4-6 September The 4th interdisciplinary PhDnet Meeting was held in Leipzig on the topic of "Science and Fiction", with 30 participants.

21 September All major German political parties were asked about their positions on issues concerning junior researchers. A summary of their answers was published online on <http://jrresearchersgermany.wordpress.com>, with more than 8000 visitors in the week between the publication of the report and the elections.

3. Payment models for PhD students (stipends and contracts)

3.1. Mode of payment and stipend guidelines

PhD students funded by the MPS are usually paid either through a stipend (*Stipendium*) or a doctoral student contract (*Fördervertrag*), which are in compliance with the terms regulated in the stipend guidelines (*Förderrichtlinien*) of the MPS. Within the possibilities of the stipend guidelines, the mode of payment and the stipend level is determined for each student individually by the institute director. The stipend guidelines, in turn, are to a great extent determined by rules of the *Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz* (GWK, formerly the *Bund-Länder-Kommission*, or BLK). The GWK is a body consisting of science and finance politicians of the German federal government and of the German states (*Länder*). It doesn't determine the level of federal funding given to the MPS (this is negotiated with the science ministry, BMBF), but it does set binding rules for the MPS, including rules about how much PhD students may be paid. The MPS President and the Administrative Headquarters negotiate with the GWK to update the stipend guidelines every few years.

Note: Throughout this report, "stipend" and "contract" refer to these funding methods of the MPS, unless stated otherwise.

3.2. Comparison of stipends and contracts

3.2.1. Numbers

The fraction of the PhD students affiliated through the MPS who are funded primarily by a stipend (from all funding sources) has increased dramatically since 2005, from 23.3% (2005) to 31% (2006/7) to 50.4% (2009) in the PhDnet surveys. Among students funded directly

by the MPS, the fraction of stipends increased from 38.4% (2005) to 50.6% (2007) to 58.2% (2009) [MPS annual report 2008]. One likely cause of this increase is a change in the internal stipend guidelines of the MPS in October, 2004 (Rundschreiben 93/2004 and 3rd PhDnet report). Prior to October 2004, German students were almost always awarded contracts, while foreign students were almost always awarded stipends. The rule change allowed the directors to determine the mode of funding for each student, independent of the student's nationality. After this change, the absolute number of PhD student contracts decreased in each of the following years (until 2009), decreasing from 1446 (2005) to 1396 (2009), while the absolute number of stipends funded by the MPS increased from 902 to 1948 over the same time period [MPS annual report 2008]. When asked about this increase in the discussion, Prof. Gruss attributed it mainly to the introduction of the IMPRSs, which provide funding only for stipends.¹

3.2.2. Monetary remuneration and benefits

See Appendix A for example calculations and details.

3.2.3. Contract

The level of payment for the PhD contract is based on the wage levels set in the collective bargaining agreement for the civil service (*Tarifvertrag für den öffentlichen Dienst, TVöD*) payment scheme (TVöD 13, 50%). In 2009, the gross salary of a PhD contract was 18,231.84 EUR for the first year, plus an annual bonus of 911.59 EUR paid in December (the *Jahressonderzahlung*, also called *Weihnachtsgeld*). The net annual salary, after payroll deductions, is 13,875.24 EUR, and the total annual cost to the institute, including employer contributions to benefits, is 22,756.00 EUR. Benefits include statutory health insurance (*gesetzliche Krankenversicherung*) and long-term care insurance (*Pflegeversicherung*), pension plan (*Rentenkasse*), and access to unemployment benefits (*Arbeitslosenversicherung*).

3.2.4. Stipends

The median stipend, according to the 2009 PhDnet survey, is 1,200 EUR per month (14,400 EUR per year). The maximum level of the stipend, determined by the GWK, is 1,365 EUR per month, plus a possible monthly lump-sum payment for material costs (*Sachkostenpauschale*) of 103 EUR, for a total of 1,468 EUR per month (17,616 EUR per year).

The net income of a stipend holder (after paying for health insurance) is higher, provided the stipend is paid at the maximum level. However, the loss of insurances and other benefits can completely eliminate this advantage in many cases. Whether a stipend or a contract is most advantageous for an individual student depends on a variety of factors, including the student's family status and nationality, and the nature of that student's work.

A stipend of 1,000 EUR per month costs about 50% of a half-position contract, a 1,200 EUR stipend costs about 60% of a half-position contract, and a 1,468 EUR stipend (i.e. the legal

¹There are now a total of 54 IMPRSs in the MPS [MPS annual report 2008], but each IMPRS only funds a small number of stipends, so the introduction of the IMPRS explains part, but probably not all, of the dramatic increase in stipends.

maximum) costs about 70% of a half-position contract. By our estimate, changing all stipends to contracts would cost about 25 million EUR, or 1.7% of the MPS operating budget of 2007.²

3.2.5. Assigned duties, independence in research

Stipends and contracts represent, in principle, very different relationships between the student and the institute:³

Contracts Students complete specific tasks during specific times, under the direction of the institute.

Stipends Students work on research independently in their own interest and on their own schedule.

However, in practice there is often little or no difference between the work done by contract holders and stipend holders. For example, the 2009 survey showed that there is very little difference in the estimated amount of time spent doing work for the institute unrelated to the PhD project, particularly in the CPT and BM sections (contract PhDs: 13.8% of their weekly working time, stipend PhDs: 9.9%; 75.9% of stipend holders reported spending part of their weekly working time on work for the institute unrelated to PhD project; 23.1% spend more than 10% of their weekly working time). Susannah Burrows asked Prof. Gruss to respond to these results. He pointed out that it is difficult to define which tasks are related to the PhD research and which are not, especially in laboratory settings in the natural sciences.

Foreign students are more likely to be given stipends than German students, but having a stipend often causes additional problems for foreign students, for example by making it more difficult to obtain visas, bring their families to Germany, or enter the public health insurance system.

3.3. Applicability of stipends and contracts / stipend guidelines

3.3.1. Discussion about PhDnet goals

In a plenary discussion, the question of whether the PhDnet should aim to get more contracts or more stipends was discussed. In the light of insurance gaps and a number of other problems

²The Max Planck Society's budget in 2007 was approximately 1.433 billion euros. In our survey, 855 respondents (39.6% of all respondents) reported financing their PhD through a stipend funded by the MPS. The mean stipend level of all respondents was EUR 1,231; the median was EUR 1,200. Assuming that there are currently at most 6000 PhD students in the MPS, and that 40% of these (2400 students) are financing their PhD through an MPS stipend at an average monthly value of EUR 1,231, the total cost of these stipends to the MPS is about 14 million EUR, or 2.5% of the total operating budget. The average monthly cost of a TVöD contract (50% time, level 2) is about 2100 EUR, roughly 170% of the average cost of a stipend.

³"Ph.D. students on regular employment contracts are under obligation towards the MPS to perform a defined scope and volume of work. Ph.D. students on scholarships, however, are not obligated toward the MPS to undertake a defined amount of work. . . . The differentiating rules result historically from the situation whereby formerly non-German Ph.D. students usually had no interest in integrating into German social security schemes". – Rüdiger Willems, head of the Department of Personnel and Legal Affairs of the Max Planck Society, in response to criticisms of the stipend-contract system by Andrea Raccanelli, *The Scientist*, 9 March 2004.

attached to stipends, it seemed obvious that contracts would be preferred by most students, as was also reflected in the results of the 2009 PhDnet survey. However, for students doing mainly desk work, stipends might be preferable due to the greater flexibility in working place and hours. Married students whose spouses are employed may also benefit more from a stipend, since stipends are tax-free and these students may be covered by their spouses' insurance. It was therefore agreed that the ideal situation would be to have both stipends and contracts, but to increase the amount of the stipend to the maximum currently allowed level so that it is an attractive alternative to the contract, and to offer students an informed choice if possible (as previously proposed by the PhDnet in 2004).

During the discussion with Prof. Gruss, Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher asked whether it would be possible to increase the fraction of contracts available. In response, Prof. Gruss stressed that Germany needs more trained researchers, especially in the hard sciences, and stated that there is not enough money available to pay all the necessary people with a half position. Leonard Burtscher suggested that Prof. Gruss could ask for additional money specifically to support granting contracts to PhD students. Prof. Gruss rejected this suggestion: He could not ask for more money (from the BMBF) since they just recently granted the MPS a budget increase of 5%.

3.3.2. Enforcement of stipend guidelines

The MPS has internal guidelines (*interne Verwaltungsrichtlinien*) regulating the conditions under which stipends and contracts may be awarded (Section 1.2 of the stipend guidelines or *Förderrichtlinien*). A disregard of the guidelines may be communicated to the General Administration via the Spokesperson.

Unfortunately, the PhDnet currently lacks information about the content of these guidelines since the relevant document could not be obtained so far. However, presumably the guidelines include many considerations that are in the interest of the students, for example by ruling out stipends for students who will work in dangerous situations for which they may not be properly insured. The new PhDnet Steering Group will work to obtain this information, and the next questionnaire will focus on identifying whether the guidelines are adhered to throughout the MPS.

Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher asked Prof. Gruss and Ilka Schießler whether it would be possible to enforce the strict application of the stipend guidelines. The answer was that there is no way to enforce these guidelines for all institutes.

4. Insurance issues for stipend holders

The most pressing issue facing the PhDnet in 2009 was the insurance coverage of stipend holders, discussed at the last Annual General Meeting in Bremen in 2008. The Legal Group and the Steering Group have worked to improve the availability of information on this topic and to seek solutions with the Administrative Headquarters. More details regarding the differences between student stipends and contracts can be found in Appendix A. The most important differences in insurance include:

- Occupational accident insurance (*Berufsunfallversicherung*): Stipend holders do not ben-

efit from occupational accident insurance while on the way to and from work and (more importantly) during work-related travel. While working at the institute, stipend holders are normally covered by the institute's occupational accident insurance under the clause that covers guests, but this depends on the terms laid out in the statutes (*Satzung*) of the insurance provider (the *Berufsgenossenschaft*, or BG).⁴

- Occupational disability insurance (*Berufsunfähigkeitsversicherung*): In contrast to contracted employees, stipend holders are not covered through occupational disability insurance (*Berufsunfähigkeitsversicherung*, which covers you if your disability makes it impossible for you to work in the occupation for which you are trained) or "strict any occupation disability" (*Erwerbsunfähigkeitsversicherung*, which covers you only if your disability means that you are unable to work in any occupation at all). In any case, the occupational disability insurance that contracted students have only covers work-related accidents and cannot replace a private occupational disability insurance.
- Occupational liability insurance (*Dienstaftpflichtversicherung*): This insurance covers damages by employees to the property of the employer, as long as the damage is accidental and not caused by gross negligence. Employee liability is limited to a maximum of three months' pay. No such insurance exists for stipend holders, who can in principle be held personally liable for all damages, to the maximum extent of the law. In response to concerns of the PhDnet, the MPS Administrative Headquarters is investigating the possibility of extending a guarantee to stipend holders limiting their liability in a comparable way (e.g. limit liability to three months stipend for accidental damages not due to gross negligence). Damages to third parties would not be covered by this arrangement.
- Group accident insurance (*Gruppenunfallversicherung*): One potential solution that was proposed to fill the gap in accident insurance was increasing the group accident insurance policy of the MPS, to a much higher sum that could really pay for life-long consequences of accidents. The group accident insurance applies to everyone affiliated with the MPS, 24 hours per day, around the world and both during work and otherwise. Currently, the group accident insurance pays a lump sum of 15,338.76 EUR in case of death and 38,346.89 EUR in case of invalidity, which is completely insufficient. After investigating the issue, Ilka Schißler informed the Steering Group that an increase in the group accident insurance for stipend holders was not possible since (1) this would constitute "preferential" treatment

⁴Various institutes are insured through different providers, each of which has slightly different terms of insurance. Currently, some BGs are rewriting their terms and would like to exclude stipend holders from this insurance. The Administrative Headquarters of the MPS is currently in negotiations with the BGs to try to prevent this. Many BGs insure stipend holders against accidents at the place of work through their guest paragraphs. According to the PhDnet's research, this includes the *BG Elektro-Textil-Feinmechanik*, *BG Chemie* and *BG Verwaltung* (the latter only insures students that are enrolled in a university) which probably cover the majority of all MPIs.

For example, the *Satzung* of the *Berufsgenossenschaft der chemischen Industrie* (2007) contains the following text:

§ 50 – *Versicherung nicht im Unternehmen beschäftigter Personen*

(1) *Personen, die nicht im Unternehmen beschäftigt sind, aber sich im Auftrag oder mit Zustimmung des Unternehmers auf der Stätte des Unternehmens aufhalten, sind während ihres Aufenthalts auf der Stätte des Unternehmens gegen die ihnen hierbei zustoßenden Arbeitsunfälle und Berufskrankheiten beitragsfrei versichert, soweit sie nicht schon nach anderen Vorschriften versichert sind (§ 3 Abs. 1 Nr. 2 SGB VII) oder eine freiwillige Versicherung (§ 42 der Satzung) hätten beantragen können.*

of stipend holders and (2) the MPS is currently not allowed to pay for any insurance for stipend holders, because they are not employees of the MPS, but instead students are conducting research independently and in their own interest.

Because of these gaps in insurance coverage, the MPS (inspired by the GWK) has taken the official position that stipend holders should not work in dangerous situations or with expensive equipment, unless the associated risks can be insured (at least since the PhDnet General Meeting in Bremen, in November 2008). However, the PhDnet has been informed that at some institutes, stipend holders routinely work in dangerous laboratory settings, or even with human patients, without appropriate insurance coverage. Prof. Gruss has taken the position that the unclear situation and gaps in insurance of stipend holders is unacceptable (in a meeting with Axinja Hachfeld and Leonard Burtscher in March and again during the General Meeting). He has said that the MPS should take every measure possible within the laws governing the MPS's spending to achieve insurance equality between stipend holders and contract holders. So far these issues seem to remain the gravest insurance gaps for stipend holders.

5. Ph.D. representation in the MPS

Over the past years the PhDnet has established the means to collaborate among all students on the level of the whole MPS. The PhDnet has received help and information from the Administrative Headquarters, but was only informed of some of the changes to the rules applicable for Ph.D. students. Also, the PhDnet could only comment on proposed changes to these rules *after* they had already been discussed internally and it then proved very difficult to change the established status quo (see the contract vs. stipend issue). Leonard Burtscher therefore asked Prof. Gruss if it would be possible for the Ph.D. students of the MPS to get an official seat in the Senate in order to be informed about all decisions and – possibly – have a vote on student-related issues. Prof. Gruss answered that the students were already represented in the senate through the *Mitarbeitervertreter*⁵ and that we should contact them. It is unclear whether Ph.D. students can be elected *Mitarbeitervertreter* at all. Prof. Gruss said he would have to check the statutes of the MPS.

Prof. Gruss also said that we could always contact him with any problems and agreed to have more frequent and more formal meetings with him. A protocol of these meetings shall be taken.

6. Financial situation of the PhDnet

Spending since the last General Meeting

Balance 1 Nov 2008: +5,154.49 EUR

| | | |
|------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 05.11.2008 | -852.04 EUR | Booklet |
| 10.11.2008 | -63.00 EUR | Accommodation Meyer-Ross |
| 25.11.2008 | -405.85 EUR | Travel expenses Gerhard Wolf |
| 10.12.2008 | -57.00 EUR | Accommodation Meyer-Ross |
| 26.01.2009 | -4,938.59 EUR | 4 Seminars |

⁵This probably only applies to those $\approx 50\%$ of all Ph.D. students who have a contract.

Balance after payment of all bills from 2008: -2,172.99 EUR

| | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 17.03.2009 | -1,011.00 EUR | 2 Seminars |
| 02.04.2009 | +9,500.00 EUR | Donation from the "Bundesbank" |
| 28.05.2009 | -560.00 EUR | Advance payment for hotel |
| 26.06.2009 | -1,178.21 EUR | 1 Seminar |
| 27.06.2009 | -525.50 EUR | 1 Seminar |
| 13.08.2009 | -1,091.11 EUR | 1 Seminar |
| 13.08.2009 | -2,288.36 EUR | PhDnet Offspring Magazine |
| 25.09.2009 | -1,453.90 EUR | 1 Seminar |
| ? | -1,050.00 EUR | Seminar in Magdeburg |

Remaining: -820.07 EUR

Expected ca. -1,200 EUR Seminar

All expenses prior to and including 26 January 2009 had been generated before the General Meeting in Bremen (November, 2008). The Steering Group 2008/09 started with outstanding liabilities of 7,327.48 EUR and with a balance of 5,154.49 EUR, in effect with debts of 2,172.99 EUR. After the donation from the Bundesbank, 8,147.08 EUR were spent in 2009, leaving a debt of 820.07 EUR. A further seminar is planned for the end of 2009, increasing the expected debt to ca. 2,000 EUR. The Steering Group has asked the the MPS President for financial help and expects to leave the PhDnet budget balanced after their period of office.

The PhDnet's annual income depends on an annual donation of the Bundesbank (9,500.00 EUR). The use of this donation is restricted to projects which further the education of PhD students within the MPS, although the exact rules for its use are unknown to the PhDnet and several attempts by the Steering Group to obtain more information on this point from Ilka Schießler were unsuccessful. Using this money to publish Offspring, brochures or similar documents and to organize workshops has often resulted in discussions with the Administrative Headquarters. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the Bundesbank donation will continue in the future (there has been no contact between Bundesbank and PhDnet in the past⁶ and the motivation for this donation is unclear). Another problem, that Stefan Greif illustrated, is that the amount is too low to meet the demand for soft skills seminars.

Prof. Gruss responded to these concerns by offering the PhDnet an "*Ausfallbürgschaft*" (cancellation guarantee) in case the Bundesbank stops its donation. He also offered to provide the PhDnet with the additional money needed to fund its activities (10,000 – 20,000 EUR annually). The PhDnet will provide him with a budget proposal together with a formal request for funding. This will represent the largest increase in funding for the PhDnet since it was founded in 2003.

A further problem is that the responsibility for administration of the PhDnet's funds has not been clearly defined, making it for instance difficult to know how much of the money has already been spent and who is allowed to spend it. Leonard Burtscher, Susannah Burrows and Axinja

⁶In October 2009, the Steering Group has sent a letter to the Bundesbank thanking them for their continued support and invited a representative to the annual General Meeting. So far no response was received.

Hachfeld therefore suggested the introduction of a financial officer (Zeichnungsbefugter) who is responsible for the finances and to the Steering Group (see Sec. 9.2.1).

7. Other legal issues discussed at the meeting

Payment of the *Jahressonderzahlung* in 2009 In 2009, the *Jahressonderzahlung* will be paid at the end of December rather than at the beginning as has been the case in the past. The *Jahressonderzahlung* is a bonus payment in December of 2.5% of the annual gross salary, and is commonly known as *Weihnachtsgeld* (Christmas money). Some representatives had been informed that they would not be paid the *Jahressonderzahlung* at all this year, or would be paid a smaller amount, however, this would violate the *Förderrichtlinien*. If this occurs, it may be reported anonymously to Ilka Schießler.

Time off to care for relatives, for stipend holders (*Pflegezeit*) It is possible to take short breaks from work as a vacation. For longer periods away, it is possible to temporarily interrupt the stipend.

Pregnancy provisions of stipend For new mothers, the stipend is automatically extended by 14 weeks, comprising six weeks before and eight weeks after birth, as determined by the stipend guidelines. It is also possible for mothers and fathers to ask for the stipend to be reduced but paid over a longer period of time, to allow more time for child care. This has to be negotiated with the student's supervisor and director.

Eligibility requirements for statutory health insurance To qualify for the voluntary statutory health insurance, you must have belonged to a statutory health insurance either for the immediately preceding 12 months or for at least 24 months during the past five years, including times during which you may have been insured through a family member [Ratgeber Sozialrecht: Die Situation von Stipendiaten und Stipendiatinnen im sozialrechtlichen Bereich, Hans Böckler Stiftung]. Time spent in public health insurance in other EU countries may also qualify. This rule is mostly problematic for non-EU citizens with stipends, who usually do not qualify for voluntary statutory health insurance and so must choose a private insurance policy if not employed on a contract.

MPs are currently not allowed to pay for health insurance for stipend holders This possibility will be proposed to the GWK after internal discussions in the *Verwaltungsrat* of the MPS. No timescale for this has been given.

Payment of tuition or dissertation publishing and processing fees not possible Currently, the MPS is not allowed to pay for such fees. The MPS plans to ask the GWK for permission to pay university fees to German universities, but not to foreign universities. No timescale for this has been given.

Payment of moving expenses not possible for stipend holders It was asked whether it is possible to make lump-sum payments to stipend holders to help with moving expenses (*Umzugspauschale*). This would be helpful especially for foreign students, who often have a large one-time expense for moving to Germany. The answer from Ilka Schießler was that this is not possible.

Conditions under which employees are covered by occupational accident insurance when working at home Employees can benefit from occupational accident insurance when working at home if they have a formal written agreement the institute allowing them to work at home.

Combining a stipend and a contract Some representatives reported that their institutes use a combination of stipends and partial contracts to obtain insurance coverage for students at a lower cost to the institute. It is not allowed for a student to simultaneously hold both a stipend and a contract from the MPS. However, in some cases stipends from external sources may be combined with MPS contracts.

Length of stipend and extensions Contracts can be extended, but the extension of a stipend is currently not possible beyond three years. The 2005 PhDnet survey found that the mean length of time spent on a PhD is about 3.6 years, therefore, the stipend is not sufficient to fund the entire PhD for most students. This finding helped catalyze the Administrative Headquarters to collect its own statistics, which were in good agreement with the PhDnet survey and were presented at the fifth General Meeting in 2006. As a result, a policy change is expected (perhaps in 2010) regarding the length of time for which PhD stipends are awarded. Currently, stipends are awarded for an initial period of two years, with the possibility to extend twice for six months each. Under the proposed new policy, stipends would initially be awarded for three years, with a possible one-year extension, for a maximum of four years overall. Some students expressed concern that a longer stipend period might unintentionally lead to an increase in the expected or average length of time spent on the PhD, but in general this was felt to represent an improvement.

8. Supervision of PhD students

The results of the 2009 PhDnet Survey demonstrate the need for a safety net if problems with supervision arise. Altogether, 13.3 % of the PhD students reported having thought about giving up their PhD due to work-related difficulties with their supervisor, and 7.7% thought about giving up their PhD due to personal difficulties with their supervisor. Allowing students to choose their own supervisor could be an additional possibility to avoid problems with supervision.

9. New Statutes

9.1. Motivation

Leonard Burtscher, Susannah Burrows and Axinja Hachfeld suggested changing the statutes to solve the following three major issues. A detailed list of all changes can be seen in the statutes with marked changes (see Appendix B).

9.2. Changes

9.2.1. Financial Officer

In the past there was often confusion between the PhDnet and the Administrative Headquarters in Munch about who was responsible for signing bills and the administration of the PhDnet's budget. This resulted in the unsatisfactory situation that no one knew how much money had been spent and who had authorized it, so that often more money was spent than was available and the PhDnet needed to ask for financial help to pay the bills. To solve this problem, §6.4 defines the role of the *Financial Officer*. After a discussion in the plenum it was decided that the Financial Officer shall not be elected by the General Assembly but appointed by the Steering Group to keep bureaucracy at a minimum level.

9.2.2. IMPRS Students and the PhDnet, Eligibility and Organs

Many students at MPIs are nowadays enrolled in one of the International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) which combine students from MPIs and from university institutes. So far it has been unclear which role IMPRS students may play in the PhDnet. After a discussion in plenum and with Ilka Schießler and Prof. Gruss the wording was chosen that *students affiliated with the MPS* may be eligible for office. In addition § 5 was introduced to clarify eligibility for offices and for voting and § 6 was changed to more clearly define the General Assembly and the General Meeting. A regulation for the replacement, if necessary, of the Spokesperson and Steering Group members was introduced (§§ 6.2, 6.3).

9.2.3. More Continuity

Most administrative tasks that the PhDnet deals with cannot be solved within one year. To ensure continuity, it is essential that the newly elected Working Group Leaders and the newly elected Steering Group are advised by the experienced active members of the previous year. To support the transition, Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher suggested introducing a delay between the time of election and the actual assumption of office (§6.6). During the transition period, the new Steering Group can be briefed on important issues and introduced to relevant people at the Administrative Headquarters.

Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher also promised to organize a “transition seminar” for the newly elected Steering Group during that time to brief them on all important ongoing negotiations and to brainstorm about how the PhDnet's aims can be best realised in 2010.

9.2.4. Other Changes to the Statutes

- §3 (Aims) was changed to better reflect today's aims of the PhDnet
- §7 (Voting and Elections) was simplified

9.3. Vote

The new statutes were voted on section-wise. The vote was held according to the old statutes. The results were

- **Sections 1 (typo) and 3 (Aims)** 38 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention
- **Sections 4 (typo) and 5 (Participation)** 36 yes, 0 no, 2 abstention
- **Section 6 (Organs, Financial Officer)** 38 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention
- **Sections 7 (Status of Diploma and Master students) and 8 (Entry into force)** 38 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention

The new statutes are therefore accepted by a two-thirds majority of people eligible to vote at the General Meeting as required by the old statutes. They were published in the PhDnet wiki and signed by Leonard Burtscher and Susannah Burrows and therefore entered into force on 31 October 2009.

The signed document is with other important PhDnet documents in a folder in Ilka Schießler's office in the Administrative Headquarters.

10. Additional presentations

10.1. Network for Postdocs: Ideas for a PostdocNet

During the postdoc phase, having a contract (as opposed to a stipend) is often more important than during the PhD, since at this later stage in life, both retirement benefits and support for family become more important. Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher suggested that these and other issues could best be discussed and communicated to the President and Administrative Headquarters if there were a postdoc network similar to the PhDnet.

Agnieszka Burzynska presented initial ideas for the creation of a PostdocNet. A mailing list and a meeting for potential active members should be organized and information collected about possible working fields like the differences between stipends and contracts, additional support (family issues) and soft skill courses. The starting point for communication will be the PhDnet wiki.

10.2. Tasks of PhD representatives

Alexander Schwarzkopf explained that the PhD representatives are the PhDnet's link to the individual institutes. Tasks of the PhD representatives at their individual institutes include meeting and welcoming new PhD students, the representation of students' interests within the institute and the organization of regular meetings to exchange ideas and demands. Furthermore, the PhD representatives may organize educational courses, seminars, parties and other activities.

An example of PhD representative activities was given by Madina Karimova and Vanessa Carlos (MPI for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, Dresden). In the area of Dresden, more than 200 PhD students from different institutions have up to eleven PhD representatives. The students discuss problems via a mailing list and a monthly round table. In addition to internal monthly meetings of the PhD representatives and a monthly meeting with the PhD program coordinator, the PhD representatives meet several times each year with members of the faculty.

10.3. THESIS e.V.

THESIS e.V. was introduced by Corinna Manig (MPI for Economy). It is an interdisciplinary network covering all fields of science that addresses people during and after their PhD. With its 700 members, 25% of which are postdocs and professors, it provides regional groups in 25 cities. The activities of THESIS e. V. include an informational mailing list that offers news, seminar announcements, and job offers, as well as a magazine and the organization of trips.

11. Working Groups

Questionnaire Group Dorothea Hämmerer: Due to the decentralized structure of the MPS, the survey conducted by the PhDnet's Questionnaire Group is the only source for most overall statistics about the MPS PhD students and focused on the stipend vs. contract issue, supervision and career plans this year. Over 2000 PhD students took part in the survey (i.e. 40-50% of all MPS PhD students) and its results are of great relevance for the direction and justification of activities within the PhDnet. For detailed results please refer to the survey report, which will appear soon.

The leader of the new Questionnaire Group will be Stephan Dudeck (MPI for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale). The main task for the coming year is the continued evaluation of the last survey, and publication of the results. Depending on the manpower of the group, perhaps an shorter survey will be prepared that can be conducted annually.

Web Group / PhDnet Wiki Philip Altrock: The main task of the Web Group is to maintain the web site and the PhDnet wiki, upload contents on demand, update the pages and create and handle user accounts.

Philipp Altrock (MPI for Evolutionary Biology, Ploen) will continue to lead the Web Group in 2010. The group plans to create a new "updates" mailing list and an email address for each Working Group. The current web structure with both a formal web page and a wiki will be maintained, but reorganized to be more accessible to new members.

Meeting Group Anna Görner: The Meeting Group organizes the PhDnet General Meeting with regard its location, scientific talks and social program and communicates information about the Meeting to the PhDnet and its Steering Group.

The 2010 General Meeting will probably be held in Munich; the new Meeting Group Leader is Clemens Kiessig (MPI for Physics, Munich).

Secretary Group Alexander Buck: The main task of the Secretary Group is to support the communication within, and between the Steering Group and the Working Groups by documenting discussions and distributing the according information. It moderates the PhDnet

mailing list and announces the PhDnet events and activities.

The new Secretary Group, led by Patrick Heißler (MPI of Quantum Optics, München), will fulfill the task of archiving and distributing important information between the Working Groups and the Steering Group. Major breakthroughs of the Working Groups will be communicated by a newsletter of the Secretary Group.

Seminar Group Stefan Greif: The Seminar Group supports and arranges soft skill seminars operated at individual Institutes regarding Scientific Writing, Time Management, etc. Costs for the speaker are paid from the PhDnet's budget; accommodation and travel has to be covered by the respective Institute. In 2009, nine soft skill seminars were supported. Future objectives are to recruit more local organizers as well as speakers and to increase the budget to support more seminars.

Tim Fellingner (MPI for Colloids and Interfaces, Golm) will lead the new Seminar Group. A preliminary budget proposal was presented, to be used in applying for more money from the MPS as encouraged by Prof. Gruss, therefore it is expected that additional seminars will be possible in 2010. An evaluation system for the speakers should be introduced.

Scientific Event Group Nicolas Behr: This year's Scientific Event took place in Leipzig at the MPI for Brain Research with the theme "Science and Fiction". Thirty PhD students took part in the event and each gave a short talk. As there is no budget for this event, all expenses had to be covered by the registration fee of 50 EUR.

The new Scientific Event Group is led by Johannes Stelzer (MPI for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig). The 5th Interdisciplinary Event will be held in Bonn at the MPI for Radio Astronomy in June 2010, with the topic "Everyday Science".

Offspring Group Corinna Handschuh: The Offspring Group creates the annual issue of the "Offspring", the journal of the PhDnet. The Offspring communicates the network's activities, provides relevant information to PhD students and serves as a platform for PhD students to exchange ideas. This year, 2500 copies of the 2009 issue (Topic: Diversity) were provided to 78 institutes. The Offspring can also be found online on the PhDnet page.

The new Offspring Group, led by Roberto Kretschmer (MPI for Biogeochemistry, Jena), chose the topic "Humor in Science" for next summer's issue. The Offspring Group asks for reports from the old Working Groups to be sent to them by the end of January.

The topic for the next issue will be Humor in Science. Email contributions to PhDnet.offspring@googlemail.com.

Legal Group Clemens Kiessig: The Legal Group provides information on important topics for PhD students such as insurances, parental leave, and liability. In 2009, a leaflet was distributed about insurance issues for stipend holders. A meeting was held with Ilka Schießler and Prof. Gruss to discuss these issues. Legal questions were also included in the questionnaire.

The new Legal Group, led by Ananda Landwehr (MPI for Physics (Werner Heisenberg Institute), München), will mainly deal with stipends and contracts, by on the one hand collecting information about internal solutions at the institutes and on the other hand investigating what can be done if an MPI does not follow the stipend guidelines. In addition, they will update the Legal Group pages in the PhDnet wiki.

12. Elections

12.1. Voting on the Temporary Working Groups

The annual approval of the Temporary Working Groups was voted on by show of hands and all four groups can continue in 2010 (Questionnaire: 41 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention, Offspring: 41 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention, Legal: 41 yes, 0 no, 0 abstention, Event: 40 yes, 0 no, 1 abstention).

12.2. Transitional Steering Group

Due to a change in the statutes a Transitional Steering Group had to be elected (Candidates: Spokesperson: Leonard Burtscher, Section Representatives: Susannah Burrows, Dorothea Hämmerer, Alexander Buck) and will be in office until the end of 2009 (Open election: 36 yes, 0 no, 5 abstention).

12.3. Election of the 2010 Steering Group

Daniel Kalthoff (MPI Neurological Research, Koeln) has been elected the new Spokesperson of the PhDnet (Secret election: Philip Altrock 9, Daniel Kalthoff 31, Abstention 3).

Daniel Kalthoff's plans are to create a solid financial basis for the PhDnet and to clarify the situation between the MPIs and the IMPRSs.

Working with him on these topics are the newly elected Section Representatives Alexander Jehlin (MPI for Intellectual Property, Munich) (5 yes, 1 abstention) for the HUM section, Stephan Klatt (MPI for Molecular Genetics, Berlin) (12 yes, 2 abstention) for the BM section and Veronika Bierbaum (MPI for Colloids and Interfaces, Golm) (14 yes, 1 abstention) for the CPT section.

13. Closing remarks

At the end closing remarks were given by Susannah Burrows and Leonard Burtscher. While one of their main goals, solving the insurance issues, was not achieved, it was realised that such a solution could not possibly have been come up within 1 year. The number of people, institutes and organisations involved in deciding upon these financial issues is far too large for any quick decisions. However, extensive information regarding many legal issues has been gathered and is summarised in this report for the benefit of the future generations of the PhDnet. Furthermore, several positive developments have been started and the change in the statutes has increased the probability that work can be continued in a coherent way over periods of several years. Networking in the PhDnet has been increased, which can be seen by the high return rate of around 50% of all students of this years questionnaire. While the PhDnet was not (yet) able to achieve formal participation in the Max Planck Society (e.g. through participation in the Senate), the encouragement of Prof. Gruss to contact him more frequently is also a positive trend. Together with the increased budget, Leonard Burtscher and Susannah Burrows believe that the PhDnet has made important steps forward in 2009.

14. References

- MPS Annual Report 2008; document can be downloaded from the MPS web page
- Ratgeber Sozialrecht: Die Situation von Stipendiaten und Stipendiatinnen im sozialrechtlichen Bereich, Hans Böckler Stiftung
- 2009 (currently in preparation), 2006/7, and 2005 PhDnet survey report; documents can be downloaded from the PhDnet wiki
- MPS Rundschreiben 93/2004
- 3rd PhDnet Meeting report; document can be downloaded from the PhDnet wiki

A. Stipends vs. contracts – Example calculations

Document can be downloaded from the PhDnet wiki

B. New statutes with marked changes

Document can be downloaded from the PhDnet wiki