

# PhDnet General Meeting 2014 in Heidelberg, November 6th to 8th

Notes by Jan Grieb

– Web Version –

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## Day I – Thursday, November 6<sup>th</sup>

### 10:20 – 10:30: Introduction by the Organizers

The organization team of the general meeting, Sebastian Fischer, Dina Truxius and Hendrik Vogel, welcomes the representatives and introduces the agenda to the participants. The agenda has been rearranged due to the cancellations of the speakers from the General Administration. More than 80 PhD representative out of the 100 who registered are present.

## 10:30 – 11:35: Steering Group Overview I

The current spokesperson Andreea Scacioc explains the organisational structure of Phdnet and the steering group. Phdnet is structured analogous to the Max Planck Society (MPS) in sections and has its own statutes. The steering group consists of three section representatives and the spokesperson.

Phdnet comprises all PhD candidates (PhDs) in the MPS, the connection between the steering group and the PhDs is via the PhD representatives (PhD reps) local to each Max Planck institute (MPI).

The results and successes in the recent year of the work of the SG and the associated work groups was presented. Phdnet's publication channels are its website, monthly newsletters, and the internal MPS network maxNet. Email contact to the PhD representatives is established via the Phdnet mailing list and direct inquiries can be sent to the email address of the SP, [spokesperson@phdnet.de](mailto:spokesperson@phdnet.de).

Andreea reviews the payment instruments for PhD candidates that are currently implemented in the MPS, and discusses their advantages and disadvantages. Special focus was paid to the lack of social security for stipend holders (stipendees). Enhancing the social security for stipendees was one of the main goals of Phdnet since its foundation in 2003, and Phdnet's activities and measures which intent to solve this problem were outlined.

Andreea presented details of the many improvements of the stipend system in MPS in the last five years. Nonetheless, the demands by Phdnet have yet not been met. A summarising comparison of the MPS' and Phdnet's position regarding the stipend system was given.

In the discussion after the talk, Andreea answered questions about the stipend situation in the MPS. From the discussions, the lack of the social security was identified as a critical subject for current and future work of Phdnet.

(coffee break)

## 11:50 – 13:00: Steering Group Overview II

Andreea presented how stipends were awarded discriminatory to foreigners in the past. Even though MPS is stating that nationality is not and should not be a basis for the directors' decision about the type of PhD promotion, survey data (for example the career survey by the MPS itself) show the objective and subjective discrimination. The steering group favours a choice (such as now implemented at MPA) to be a short-term solution.

Since 2010 the initial duration of financial PhD support is suggested to be three years (exceptions are the involvement of third party money etc.). After long-standing demands by Phdnet, every PhD contract/stipend should have an initial duration of 3 years since April 2014 (if the money can be guaranteed).

Finishing a PhD while being unpaid was brought up as a fundamental issue by the SG of 2012. Since this year's SG raised awareness of this problem in January, several cases were brought up. Even short periods of unemployment are a problem for foreigners who need a residence permit. Upon termination of a stipend, a foreign PhD candidate might be forced to leave the country.

In principle, dissertations should not be finished on unemployment payment basis (MPS and Phdnet agree on this). In individual cases, a candidate might not seem to be fit to finish a thesis, but in order to avoid complete dependency, the decision to terminate that contract or stipend should not only depend on a one single deciding body (the director), but on an independent reviewer (external consultant) as well.

The approaches and achievements of Phdnet's Steering Group in regard of their goals for 2014 were summarized by Andreea and discussed in the assembly.

The situation of PhD candidates in the MPS had media attention in 2014. The assembly discusses these press articles, which on the one hand inform the public about critical cases. On the other hand however, bad reputation for the MPS could result from such a public demonstration of deficits.

One of the SG's special interests in 2014 was to offer a solution for the health insurance issue for stipend holders. An survey in early 2014 showed that 28% of the PhDs do not have a health insurance which is equivalent to the public health insurance scheme in Germany. Since August 2014 PhD stipendees are required to provide proof of a statutory-like health insurance in the first six weeks after starting their PhD.

To make her point on supervision, Andreea presented Phdnet's vision of an ideal PhD dissertation: First, the candidate is to choose a supervisor and the project; he then is given support in personal, professional, and academic development, is appropriately supervised, and the quality of the progress is reviewed by external reviewers (thesis advisory committee, TAC). By all of this, he is enabled to become an independent researcher in the end. The SG's position is that the implementation of TACs for every PhD is a requirement to make this vision real.

The assembly postpones the remaining topics of Andreas overview until after lunch.

## **14:20 – 14:30: Announcement by the Organizers**

The organization team announces changes in the agenda and points out the location of the dinner.

## **14:30 – 15:00: Steering Group Overview III**

In the last part of the introduction, instruments for change were discussed. Internal instruments for arbitration are SABs for quality control, local ombudspeople for scientific misconduct, and TACs for the PhD progress. In the case that a problem cannot be solved within an institute, section mediators can be called. Before the GA, ombudspeople, or section mediators were addressed, PhDnet can try to mediate. Local discussions with the managing director should always be the first option before addressing external agents.

Regarding supervision, the need for TACs and supervision agreements shall be evaluated such that the requirements of different research fields are met. The SG will check whether the recommendations of the presidential commission will be implemented at full scale. In general, a discussion about the „atmosphere of science“ shall be started, regarding open access, the work-life balance, and the general culture of science.

Last, Andreea thanks the Steering Groups of 2013 & 2014 for their work and great collaboration, and the GBR for his support, and of course, all PhD representatives, for their involvement, the feedback to the evaluation of standard, extensive email exchange, participation in the phone conferences, and all other engagements in regard of PhDs.

## **15:05 – 15:45: Central Works Council**

Lambert Rasche who is a member of the works council at the MPI for Metrology and was elected in the central works council, introduces himself and how work councils are implemented in the MPS: 64 MPIs have a works council, each with 1 to 17 members per institute. The election period is four years.

The works council represents everyone at the institute (even though only employees and no guest have a vote in the election) and meets regularly with the managing director and the head of administration. Local PhD reps are encouraged to meet and discuss PhD issues their work council. The central works council meets 4 times a year. Its main duty is the negotiation of general works agreements, like for the SAP program (evaluation of employees) and the recent agreement on a survey software.

Since April, MPS-wide surveys have to use „LimeSurvey“ (or something similar), a survey software which enforces the protection of the employee's data. Local surveys can be done locally and independent, as long as the data is kept inside the institute (LimeSurvey can also be used); organizers of such surveys are asked to get in contact with the local work council anyway.

The central works council committee is headed by Karin Bordasch. This committee meets the management of the MPG 3 times a year; protocols are published as circulars. The GBR welcomes the circulars 20/ and 42/2012, which Lambert sees as a big improvement of the PhD conditions.

Lambert makes clear that the MPS is much better equipped than universities and a great place to work at. In general, a big factor for success is that science and not administration governs the institutes.

The MPS was covered in the news very positively in the last days: Nobel prize for Stefan Hell, new institute for History and Science in Jena, Weizäcker-Preis for VP Schüth, elected as No 1 employer for German students („Natural Sciences“, FAZ).

According to the HIS career survey, there is a lag of career perspectives for PostDocs. Due to the fact that so many scientists (have to) leave academia, a smooth „way out of science“ needs to be found.

The change of presidency could lead to progress regarding permanently addressed issues. The first meetings of the GBR with the president were very constructive.

Being asked for it, Lambert explains that a works council can be installed when there are at least three employers who want to form an election committee (permanent positions would be helpful). The formation cannot be prevented (nor encouraged) by the GA; works council commitment is voluntary.

## **15:45 – 17:35: General Discussions**

The organization team wants to structure the discussions by finding the most important topics. Being asked, the assembly notes the following issues as relevant:

- **external pressure** (media, external control)
- **future of the PhDnet**

- **PhD student status**
- gender
- TAC meetings
- health insurance
- animal research/ethics
- initial duration of stipends/contracts
- cooperation with other networks
- supervision, supervisor / student ratio

The assembly decides on the three complexes in bold face to be the most important and hence those will be discussed first.

The first topic to be discussed is „*external pressure*“. External pressure in the form of public and political pressure is a last resort in case severe problems cannot be solved within an institution. The MPS could serve as a good-practice example for research in Germany (and also on an international level), since the money is from public sources. The MPS as a very appealing place to work, but there still seems to be room for improvement. Nonetheless, media coverage can, despite all efforts, be biased and facts could be misinterpreted (by the journalist and the readers).

The next topic of this round of discussion is a special „*PhD student status*“. Currently, there is a „whole“ in the law, because PhD candidates are not handled as a separate group in the middle between students and scientific researchers. Handling them as students or as employers is often dealt with in a case-by-case basis (sometimes to the benefit for the PhD, sometimes not). In general, the PhD is a very ambivalent phase, PhDs see themselves as researchers as well as students; whether the actual work is independent or heavily supervised, depends a lot on the field / institute.

The third topic discussed is the „*Future of the PhDnet*“. Andreea presents the current status of PhDnet: it is an independent network of PhD candidates in the MPS, which is equipped with a budget by the president. Financial investments need an application to the GA and their approval is not guaranteed, so PhDnet is not really independent. Nonetheless, PhDnet has a „label“, a logo, and its statutes, and well respected by the GA as a partner in terms of promotion of young researchers. But no real legal status has been given, nor is it a direct organ of the MPS. It could be feasible to become an organ of the MPS: to be reflected in the MPS statutes, a two-third majority of all directors would be needed. The possibility of such a motion is questioned. It might not be worth the effort. Currently, PhDnet is rather stable and will be equipped with budget in the future at a similar level to the current one. In summary, the assembly sees the status quo as adequate and a basis to work on.

## **17:35 – 18:23: Insurances I**

Friederike Wrobel, current general secretary, explains the most important aspects of the two payment instruments: stipends vs. contracts. Special focus is paid to the differences in regard of duties/responsibilities and social security. From the assembly, several questions concerning the level of payment, the subsidies, the days of vacations, and the duties (Are PhD expected to „be“ at the institute?) were raised. The family component was recently implemented: it provides measures similar to parental leave to the MPS stipend holders. All PhDs are eligible to Kindergeld when they are „legal residents“ in Germany.

Accident insurance: There is a statutory accident insurance for MPS stipend holders and guests (external stipend holders), as well as extended group insurance coverage during travelling.

Health insurance: The split-up into private and public insurances is explained. Since there cannot be a „global“ solution (in terms of a private group health insurance) for stipend holders, best-practice examples from local institutes are gathered by the SG and distributed among the reps on a mouth-to-mouth basis.

Currently, there are open court cases on whether the „*Sachkostenpauschale*“ and the health insurance subsidy should count for the calculation of the health insurance costs. This is common practice so far. So in the end, the subsidy is eaten up partially by the increased costs. EU foreigners can keep their home health insurance.

For a more detailed overview, the audience is directed to the PhDnet homepage, where an „information desk“ provides much information on the insurance topic.

## **Day II – Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>**

### **9:15 – 9:20: Welcome Back by the Organizers**

Some changes of the schedule were announced by Hendrik Vogel on behalf of the organization team.

## **9:20 – 9:48: Insurances II**

Friederike Wrobel continues here summary of the insurances for PhDs. Family support for stipend holders are discussed. In the case of pregnancy, working in the six weeks prior to the due date is only allowed when the pregnant woman requests it. In the 8 weeks after birth, no employment is possible (maternity leave). After pregnancy, there is a time and a money component for stipend holders. There is no equivalent of parental leave for stipend holders, but a suspension in analogy to state parental leave is possible. Except for maternity leave, these measures apply for male and female stipend holders.

The statutory accident insurance and the additional accident and liability insurance are explained. In case of an occupation similar to that of an employee, the statutory accident insurance of each institute (the different MPIs are in different Berufsgenossenschaften, BG, which offer this insurance) covers the costs of accidents; but not the way to work. Some BG also cover guests (e.g. stipend holders). There is an additional group accident insurance for a world-wide coverage of all accidents which are work-related or related to leisure activities during travels.

There is also a liability insurance: PhD candidates in the MPS are only liable for damages in case of intent or gross negligence (does not apply for external stipend holders); otherwise the institute's insurance will cover the costs of damages in the lab/office/work place.

Due to a question, Friederike explained that stipend holders do not have the security to be covered or readmitted to your PhD work, after the stipendee is forced to stop research due to children, an accident or illness and the stipend was stopped after six weeks.

In the following discussions, the advantages of a occupational disablement insurance (Berufsunfähigkeitsversicherung) for PhDs was brought up (of course this is associated with some costs).

## **9:48 – 10:15: Open Access**

In his presentation, Prateek Mahalwar (BMS representative and very involved in Open Access) introduces the concept of Open Access: free access and use of peer-reviewed publications. He outlines the time line of the open access movement: the events and motions which took place in the past decade in order to bring forward the case of open-access publication. The benefits and disadvantages of open-access publications are discussed.

The impact factor was introduced and Prateek talks about which implications for the researchers arise from this. In his point of view, knowledge about open access can and should be improved among PhDs. With the aim of spreading the news about open access and finding engaged „ambassadors“ of open-access publication at each institute, the open access Ambassador conference will take place in Munich on December 3rd/4th (at the MPI for Psychiatry). Prateek advertises for this event and encourages PhD reps and other interested students to get involved. Also, the OpenCon conference in Washington is advertised.

## **10:20 – 10:39: Vision in Science**

Christoph Sträter, member of the Event Work Group, introduces the concept of the Visions in Science conference. This years' conference was organized under the title „Bridge the Gap“ and had a special focus on interdisciplinary exchange. Six scientific and seven guest speakers, as well as 80 participants came together in Berlin at the MPI-IB in order to discuss their visionary ideas and exchange knowledge across the (apparent) gaps between different fields of research.

The feedback from the participants was summarised; in overall the conference was perceived as a great success by the organizers and the participants. Hints for the new team were given and the PhD reps were encouraged to enrol for the organization and spread the word about the conference.

## **10:39 – 10:40: Organisational Vote**

The general assembly votes with a great majority to have the election of the steering group today (instead of the last day of the general meeting as suggested by the statutes).

## **10:40 – 12:00: Formation of the Work Groups**

Andreea asks the assembly which work groups shall be formed for 2015. The statutes require some work groups to be formed every year (obligatory, marked by a „\*“) and also offer the possibility to have further voluntary ones. A contact persons from this year's group is announced in case the work group currently exist. For suggestions of a new group, the suggesting member of the assembly acts as preliminary head of the

group.

Current work groups to be reformed:

- Steering Group\* (to be elected later)
- Seminar Group\* (Jan)
- Web Group\* (Johanna)
- Secretary Group\* (Rika)
- Scientific Event Group (Christoph)
- General Meeting Group\* (Hendrik)
- Survey Group\* (Andreea)
- Offspring Group (Prateek)

Suggestions for new groups:

- Open Access (Prateek)
- Media / politics (Scott)
- Gender equality (Juan)

The contact and suggesting persons give a short introduction to the tasks that each work group has to fulfil and which responsibilities are to be taken by the head and the members of each group. Then, the members of the assembly are given time to get in contact with the contact persons and preliminary heads and assign themselves to a work group if wanted.

## 12:00 – 12:36: Presentation of the newly formed Work Groups

The newly formed work groups present their volunteers and their goals and commitments for 2015. The head of each group is printed in italics.

**Secretary Group:** *Sven Weyer*, Friederike Wrobel, Carina Sauvage, Daniel Wendt, Jonathan Reinhardt, Marco Voigt, Lorenz Pammer, Joanna Meinel

Their goal will be to try to keep people informed about the situation of PhD candidates and the actions of the steering group and PhDnet in general. Their communication channel will be the website mostly. They aim at having a page in the Max Planck Journal for updates about PhDnet and PhD life in the MPS.

**General Meeting:** *Atefeh Barekat*, Anna Kramer, Nina Merkel, Bettina Derstroff

The next general meeting will be in Göttingen at the MPI for Solar System Research. The North Campus in Göttingen is well connected and can serve as an excellent location for a constructive meeting.

**Webgroup:** *Johanna Hofmann*, Johanna Biank, Anna-Lena Cost, David Gomez, Alexander Schlemmer

The webgroup will keep the website alive and update it regularly. Also the mailinglist will be run. The group wants to get rid of the PhDnet Wiki; the list of PHD reps will be published on the website, but behind a privacy wall.

**Seminar Group:** *Filip Podjaski*, Fabian Greb, Alexander Lebschy

**Scientific Event Group:** *Megan Rice*, Jan Meyer, Florian Windler, Florian Funke, Daniela Popesco, Mary Gazea, Gabriela Pereyra, Melanie Balbach, Ilja Komarov, Xiangyi Li

The next Visions in Science will most likely take place in Bonn (Frankfurt would be an alternative) and focus on science communication.

**Survey Group:** *Jorge Leitão*, Milena Dürrbaum, Arpan Gujarati

**Offspring Group:** *Anja Muzdalo*, Akankska Jain, Carolina Thomas, Mary Gazea, Uwe Möglinger, Stephanie Preuß, Anna Bajur, Federico Zerbini, Anina Schwarzenbach, Linn Doring, Evangelina-Regkina Symeonidou

The Offspring Group will act as a combined group for PhDnet publications and Open Access. Science communication could be a central theme; there shall be a close exchange with the Visions in Science group, the goal would be to have the visions presented at the conference in written. The group wants to have an offspring magazine printed regularly.

**Strategy and Communication:** *Scott Kilpatrick*, Ilka Vosteen, Adrin Jalali, Roman Prinz, Martin Grund,

Paola de Magistris, Stephanie Uschold, Sebastian Nowak, Ivan David Meza Canales, Dominik Ehberger

This group will be newly formed and wants to handle media and outreach for Phdnet, internally as well as externally. The central goal will be to form a strategy to bring the issue of stipends vs. contracts forward, which has been a key theme of Phdnet since its foundation. The group wants to discuss a plan of action, in collaboration with other PhD networks, because this is a world-wide problem. They want to be understood to be clearly separated from the steering group: this group will be more like a strategy-thinking group, which will focus on single problems, gather background info, and form long-term plans. They want to figure out what possibly can be done, incorporating the ideas / opinions of all members of the Phdnet. The members of the group are conscious about the fact that they only represent a sub-selection of opinions; they only want to evaluate which possibilities could be put in action and then discuss those with the full body of Phdnet.

**Equal Opportunity:** *Juan Bermejo*, Tim Laux, Evangelina-Regkina Symeonidou, Anna Bajur

This newly proposed group was formed in order to support the equality-opportunity motion. Despite many efforts/measures, the subjective feeling is that there is still a lack of support for minorities and visibly discrimination. The members want to ask all Phdnet members for feedback to the question what the experiences of PhDs in regard of gender are.

## **12:36 – 12:45: Group Photo**

A group photo is taken outside the Max Planck House.

(lunch)

## **14:10 – 14:39: Senckenberg Nature Research Society**

Camille Gaillard, a PhD representative of the Senckenberg Nature Research Society (which belongs to the Leibniz society) presents how the Leibniz Association is organized and introduces the Dr. Senckenberg Society and the Senckenberg Nature Research Society. Research in the Leibniz Association is done in several locations in Germany, a large Museum is associated to the Senckenberg Society. In total, over 200 PhDs are funded by the Senckenberg institute. Collaboration between Phdnet and the Senckenberg students shall be organized. Contact: [youngscientists@senckenberg.de](mailto:youngscientists@senckenberg.de).

In the questions, it was stressed how important it is to have dedicated administration officers for international affairs, helping foreigners to settle in Germany.

## **14:30 – 14:52: Helmholtz Juniors**

Sripriya Murthy introduces the Helmholtz Association and the Helmholtz Juniors (HeJu) as network for the young scientists in the association. There are 18 institutes/centers (2 PhD reps are selected at each center). The 36 Helmholtz Juniors represent ca. 6500 PhDs. Two Spokesperson: Nicholas Engel and Sripriya. 5 Working Groups are formed: communication, survey, working conditions, events, steadification. This time, there was a first time mid-term meeting with the headquarters. The survey is done every two years; this year 1500 participants took part. The report about the survey should be done by the end of 2014. In June 2015, the report will be made public (publication platform: [heju-survey.de](http://heju-survey.de)).

The steadification group has the goal to make HeJu an official body of the Helmholtz association. HeJu aims to have an annual budget soon, in order to be able to plan long-term projects and annual events. An official request has been sent to the Helmholtz executives.

## **14:55 – 15:17: THESIS e.V.**

Kathleen Hielscher introduces THESIS e.V. This association is the interdisciplinary network for PhDs and PostDocs in Germany. THESIS has ca. 620 members from all disciplines (25% are PostDocs), at more than 100 universities. Thesis is organized in local groups and finances itself by membership fees. It organises social events and seminars; there is a periodical publication, „die THESE“ (4 issues/year), a mailing list, and a homepage. The association is steered by the board, which is headed by Kathleen. The annual meeting is every year in Göttingen; Andreea took part last time and presented Phdnet's structure and goals.

THESIS has workgroups on higher education policy (best-practice papers) and other topics. It is a member of EURODOC. Contact: [info@thesis.de](mailto:info@thesis.de).

## 15:17 – 16:24: Change of PhDnet's Statutes

Hendrik explains the details about the elections of the steering group, votes by the general assembly and changes of statutes. Andreea suggest a change in the statutes of the PhDnet as follows:

- a) The financial officer and the general secretary should be part of the Steering Group. She explains that they have been treated as (unofficial) members of the Steering Group for the past years anyway.
- b) The spokesperson should not be able to override decisions of the Steering Group. Before the statutes can be changed, the assembly will be asked whether they agree on a change of the statutes during this meeting on such short notice.

Sebastian ask the assembly whether there shall be a discussion and a vote on the proposed changes of the statutes. The vote results to: 50/5/2 (Y/N/Undecided).

Andreea proposes three changes of the statutes to the assembly:

1. In the section „3.2 Solve common problems“ the following change shall be made: „To counteract this, the PhDnet aims to [...] - represent all PhD students in the MPS towards the MPS Administrative Headquarters (*Generalverwaltung*), the MPS President as well as to external parties through the Spokesperson of the PhDnet *on behalf of the Steering Group and in accordance with discussions within the General Assembly.*“

(The suggested addition is printed in red and italics.)

After some discussions of this proposal, there is a first vote on the full change: 19 Y of 61, *denied* because changes of the statutes need a two-third-majority of the assembly.

Second vote on the change as proposed by Andreas except for the replacement of “*discussions*” by “*decisions*”: 30 Y of 61, *denied*.

As a compromise, members of the assembly propose to only use the first part „*on behalf of the Steering Group*“ of the addition. Third vote to only add the first part of the sentence: 37 Y of 61, *denied*.

2. The second proposal is a change which declares the financial officer to be an official part of the Steering Group: a) in the section „6.1 General Assembly and General Meeting“, the closing parenthesis shall be moved after Financial Officer („The General Assembly consists of the Delegates of each institute within the MPS, the Steering Group (comprising the Spokesperson, the Section Representatives, *and the Financial Officer*) and the Working Group Leaders.“) and b) in the section „6.3 Steering Group and Section Representatives” the sentence „The Steering Group consists of the Spokesperson, the Section Representatives, *and the Financial Officer.*“, as well as that c) in the section „7.5 Section Representatives” the number of seats on the Steering Group is *five*, shall be changed.

Vote by the general assembly: 46 Y of 61, *accepted*.

3. The third proposal is to also add the „General Secretary“ to the list of members of the Steering Group: a) in the section „6.1 General Assembly and General Meeting“, the general secretary shall be inserted in the parentheses („The General Assembly consists of the Delegates of each institute within the MPS, the Steering Group (comprising the Spokesperson, the Section Representatives, the Financial Officer, *and the General Secretary*) and the Working Group Leaders.“) and b) in the section „6.3 Steering Group and Section Representatives” the sentence „The Steering Group consists of the Spokesperson, the Section Representatives, the Financial Officer, *and the General Secretary.*“, as well as that c) in the section „7.5 Section Representatives” the number of seats on the Steering Group is *six*, shall be changed.

Vote by the general assembly: 46 Y of 61, *accepted*.

There was no agreement on a definition of the general secretary to be added to the statutes. The next Steering Group shall plan changes of the statutes beforehand the next General Meeting in order to have a clear definition of the status and the responsibilities of the General Secretary.

## **16:24 – 17:07: Election of the Spokesperson**

Sebastian asks for proposals for the Spokesperson:

1. *Martin Grund* (MPI for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig)
2. *Prateek Mahalwar* (BMS section representative, MPI Developmental Biology, Tübingen)
3. *Xixi Feng* (MPI for Psychiatry, Munich)

present themselves in front of the general assembly and announce their ideas for an agenda for the Steering Group 2015.

- First round of elections: Martin: 11, Prateek: 25, Xixi: 22; there is no absolute majority (which is needed to elect a spokesperson according to the statutes) and the election needs to be repeated.

Sebastian asks the assembly whether the second round of votes should include all three runners (otherwise only the two runner-ups): 9 Y, *denied*.

- Second round of elections: Prateek: 30, Xixi: 28; Prateek is elected to be the Phdnet Spokesperson 2015 by an absolute majority of the General Assembly. He accepts the vote.

## **17:08 – 17:15: Election of the Section Representatives**

- BMS section representative: Xixi proposes herself.
- CPT section representative: Adrin proposes himself.
- HUM section representative: Martin proposes himself.

The three elections are done in parallel.

- Xixi: 22 yes (Y) votes
- Adrin: 18 Y, 1 empty, 1 invalid
- Martin: 7 Y, 1 empty, 1 invalid

## **17:15 – 17:24: Election of the Financial Officer**

Sebastian asks for candidates for the position of the Financial Officer of the Phdnet. Two candidates announce themselves:

1. Stas Wüst (biologist, organized Visions in Science, wants to take responsibility in accounting),
2. Roman Prinz (cognitive science, decision making, wants to be active in the Steering Group).

The election of the assembly result in: Roman 31, Stas 23, invalid/empty 2. Roman is elected and accepts.

## **17:24 – 17:35: Presentation of the new Steering Group**

The newly elected Steering Group introduces themselves. Prateek, Xixi, Adrin, Martin, Roman and Sven thank for the trust and the votes.

## **17:35 – 18:30: McKinsey Sponsor Presentation**

Four representatives of McKinsey introduce their employer as an alternative career option next to a career in academia.

## **Day III – Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup>**

### **9:20 – 10:10: Introduction for the Panel Discussion**

Andreea welcomes our two guests, Andreas Sorge, and Sven Grünewald. Andreas was one of the organisers of the fair-pay petition. Sven wrote some articles about the conditions of PhD candidates in the MPS, which have been published in the FAZ in the last years.

It is recommended by Andreea that small subgroups are formed to discuss in parallel how PhD candidates want to make sciences. She introduces how the discussion about the future directions of the Phdnet will be

organized today. The assembly, however, wants to focus on the panel discussion.

As an introduction to the panel discussion, the relationship between PhDnet and the General Administration from the past years is summarized by Andreea.

Scott reminds that a special work group has been formed to intensely discuss the political strategy of PhDnet. Their discussion could be more focussed than a open discussion in the assembly, because the awareness of the problems and the background of the small work group can be more easily homogenized.

Comments from Andreea and Dina make clear how complicated it is to contact all representatives. Andreea especially stresses how much effort she put into the Steering Group work.

## 10:10 – 11:10: Panel Discussion with the external Guests

Andreas and Sven take their places on the podium. Andreas points out how much he likes to be part of the MPS and to enjoy the freedom in research, being enabled to do this by the tax payers' money.

The problem is a fundamental one: the MPS trains people to become directors, but due to the limited positions, many excellent people have to be kicked out. Progress on the career ladder needs a lot of luck. In his view, this system is clearly not sustainable. Until researchers are aged 45, they are in permanent jeopardy whether they can proceed or not („permanent limbo“).

Andreas is here to answer the audience questions, about his former contribution to PhDnet and his point of view. Working / fighting for the employees' rights does not pay off in regard of the own career, but it is one of the best „soft-skill trainings“ one can have. Organizing PhDnet's agenda is a big and difficult task.

Sven introduces himself. What are the risks of involving media? You need to be aware of who you are talking you. Going to the press does not guarantee to have a positive effect. He tries to raise awareness how important it is to find out what PhD reps need to fight for. Journalist who are working for political publications often have their own interests, and don't suffer from the bad effects an article has on the people mentioned.

Being asked about the effect of editors: in Sven's experience no major change was done. As a freelancer, he would need to accept the changes proposed by the editor, otherwise the article would not be published.

Usually, journalists do not need to get the feedback of the source before publication. Even not for an interview, when the interviewed person does not explicitly ask for this.

The panelists were asked about the press coverage of the accused mistreatment of animals at the MPI in Tübingen. This case shows how much easier it is to go to the press with “scandals”. In contrast to this, the articles about the general PhD situation are more structured and more involving for the investigating journalist (because of the larger background knowledge needed). But in summary, the animal testing scandal cannot be used for a campaign to improve the PhD situation.

It was hard for Sven to be fully unbiased. When he asked the MPS press office, his questions were not really answered. Another comment from the audience addresses the lack of information that politicians have about the real situation of young researchers.

According to Andreas there is constantly good news about MPS everyday, and MPS researchers are one of most respected persons in Germany. Three bad articles do not really harm the society.

Dina thanks the audience and the panelists for the fruitful discussion.

(coffee break)

## 11:45 – 12:45: Introduction of the new Steering Group's Agenda

The new Steering Group takes the podium and Martin thanks the current Steering Group for their work. Also big thanks to Dina, Hendrik, and Sebastian for organizing the meeting.

Prateek announces that the Steering Group is motivated to work hard on the improvement of the conditions of PhD candidates. For a better feedback, he asks for input from the audience about what should be the most important aspects to be worked on, which of the discussed issues should be prioritized by the new SG.

The points raised by the assembly are the following topics:

- **contracts vs. stipends,**
- working on the problems of PhD candidates working unpaid,
- **distribution of information, and close collaboration with the local representatives,**
- collection of good practice examples,
- **supervision & review process of a thesis,**

- **TACs,**
- raise awareness of the problems at the local level,
- be aware of the public interest and press coverage,
- revise the statutes and the PhDnet policies,
- (health) insurances (imbalanced for stipend holders).

The issues in bold face should be given higher priority, the issues in italics are also of greater interest.

Regarding TACs, Andreea suggests to have a deeper discussion on when TACs are really needed (depending on the research field), and how they shall be implemented in the different situations.

There is some discussion about whether the Steering Group should set milestones for their goals and need to know when to think about other solutions and asking the GA for help.

Xixi suggests to have local/regional groups of PhD representatives at cities with several institutes and have a close collaboration (regular meetings, maybe once a month) between the reps. Another suggestion is that reps from institutes with a similar research field could improve their networking.

Adrin as member of the SG wants to work on how PhDnet can protect their members; it should act as a close community.

When the creation of an online platform to discuss common problems was raised, Johanna informed about the PhDnet group on maxNet, where important information for reps is shared and discussions are possible.

There are discussions whether the Steering Group is visible enough. In the past, the SG did a lot of travelling to the institutes in order to have info dissemination sessions. The new SG is encouraged to continue and intensify the close contact to the local students.

Andreea points out that the same problems are discussed over and over again. Spreading of information is always complicated; she has been very open about her goals and actions. She asks the reps to help the Steering Group in reaching their goals; criticism should be constructive.

Dina stresses again how easily the PhD reps can access the information by PhDnet on maxNet, where also PhDnet's former publications (newsletter, presentations) are archived. This platform can also be used to socialize and network among reps.

There is a discussion on the election of representatives at each MPI: Can this be formalized? Is it worth to strive for a common election procedure/schedule? It would definitely be very helpful to have a tutorial on „how to get involved“.

Afshar as organizer of the next General Meeting asks all present representatives to send her an email to definitely be on the invitation list for the next meeting.

Adrin summarizes the discussion about the goals of the next steering group: the statutes are incomplete and shall be elaborated on, in regard of stipends his goals are highly ambitious, because he came to Germany to have the high standards of social security which Germany is famous for. But instead, PhD students cannot enjoy these standards; while he thinks, that they should be able to do it.

## **12:45 – 13:00: Closing of the Meeting**

Sebastian closes the meeting and announces a wrap-up email with a request for feedback. The official total number of attendees who signed the participation list is 104 MPS PhD representatives and students. The organisation team thanks Andreea for all her work for PhDnet and Jan for writing the minutes.

München, November 28, 2014

Jan Grieb  
(PhDnet Financial Officer)