



Minutes of the 14th PhDnet General Meeting

Held at

Max Planck Institute for Solar Systems Research, Göttingen

22-24 November 2015

Day 1 - Nov 22nd

- **General rules and instructions for the meeting.**
- **Report from 2015** – Max Planck PhDnet – by Spokesperson Prateek Mahalwar.

2015 Steering Group Members :

- BMS Representative : Xixi Feng
- HS Representative : Martin Grund
- CPTS Representative : Adrin Jalali
- Financial Officer : Roman Prinz
- Secretary General : Sven Veger
- Spokesperson : Prateek Mahalwar

About PhDnet:

- The Max Planck Society (MPS) has more than 80 institutes, 8 of them are outside Germany.
- The institutes fall into 3 categories:
 - Biology and Medicine Section – BMS
 - Chemistry, Physics and Technology Section – CPTS
 - Humanitarian Section – HS
- The idea of PhDnet came in early 2000's. It is an intermediate body between PhD candidates and the General Administration of the MPS (GA), thereby acting as a “Voice” for the PhD candidates of all Max Planck Institutes.
- There are about 6000 PhD candidates (no exact number known).
- The PhDnet Annual meeting is mostly attended by PhDs from all institutes, usually acting as PhD representatives of their respective institute.
- The PhDnet is further organized in several special work groups namely:
 - Steering Group
 - Secretary Group
 - Web Group
 - General Meeting Group
 - Seminar Group
 - Stratcom – Strategy and Communication Group
 - Events Group
 - Survey Group
 - Equal Opportunity Group

Nevertheless, other groups can be made after discussion during the Annual Meeting.

- The Steering Group is a special group that heads or “steers” all other groups. Members of the Steering Group are fixed and correspond to the current section representatives of the BMS, CPTS and HS, the Financial Officer, the Secretary General and the Spokesperson. Also, some members of the Steering Group can be a part of other groups (and vice versa) with (or without) special

postings (eg: the General Secretary heads the Secretary Group, the Financial Officer works closely with the Event Group).

What does the PhDnet do? (Examples)

- Represents stakeholders (Internal and External).
- Manages conflicts between PhD candidates and institutes, supervisors, etc.
- Organizes “Visions of Science” - an inter-disciplinary event.
- Organizes soft skill seminars.
- Promotes Open Science (Open Access Publication, Open Access information/data, Open Scientific Practices, Open Source Software etc.).
- Collects examples of good and bad practices from different MPI and other non-MPI institutes to help improve standard practices (eg: How to assist PhD candidates with children?).

What did the PhDnet achieve so far (up to 2015)?

- Raised the minimum wage for PhD to € 1365 with Health Insurance coverage.
- Key player in establishing the introduction of PhD contracts to all new PhD candidates starting from the 1st of July 2015.
- Conversion of stipends to contracts (for stipends-holders (PhD candidates pre-July 1st)) has undergone progress.
- PhDs are paid till the submission of thesis and additional financial extension is provided – for the publication of journal papers for eg.
- Removed the “Institute Duties” rules on stipend-holders.
- Removed the “Nationality Dependence” policy on stipend-holders.
- Set the minimum length of PhD contracts to 3 years
- Got insightful results from the Payment Survey Report.
- Helped establish a career service at the MPS level.
- Promoted local PhD representation and helped defining their activities.
- Re-structured the PhDnet organization.

Results (Stats) of Payment Survey 2015:

- Finance:
 - 92 % of the PhD candidates were financed by their institute.
 - 3 % were self-financed.
- Extra Tasks:
 - 41 % of the PhD candidates had to do tasks other than their PhD while under stipend.
 - 7 % abstained from voting.
 - 52% did not have to do any tasks.
- Payment option:
 - 70 % of the PhD candidates had no choice in the method of payment.
 - 23 % had a choice.
- Vacation requests:
 - 71 % of the stipend-holders did not fill a vacation request forms.
 - 22 % of the stipend-holders had to fill one.

Guidelines for stipend to contract switch:

- Contracts:
 - 3 years contract with 1 year extension (if recommended).
 - Dedicating 39 hours per week to the doctoral thesis with a minimum of 20 days of vacation per year.
 - 50% to 100% of E13 TVöD payment for contracts.
- Stipends:
 - Stipend to contract conversion is possible and under progress.
 - From the 1st of July 2015, stipends are for guest programs only (eg: Summer Schools). These stipends are for a period of maximum 6 months and should not be more than 10% of all the PhD candidates' payments.
 - Stipends are also applicable to "Non-German" guest postdocs for a maximum period of 2 years and cannot exceed more than 33 % of all the postdoc payments.
 - In total, guest stipends must not exceed 16 % of total budget.
 - Apparently, in some institutes, some directors use this stipend method on regulars to test their work - not good.

Some institutes say that they have legal troubles to convert stipends to contracts, because the work description has a discrepancy when converted. This problem is solvable by slight modification of the work description and without any difficulty, under proper legal guidance. If the institute doesn't do them, then it is the fault of the institute, not the candidates' fault.

Postdoc wrap-up phase:

- Starts after the submission of the dissertation.
- Can extend to up to 12 months.
- The minimum of 50 % E13 TVöD salary is still valid.
- There is more information available in the corresponding documents.

Budget for the year 2015:

Attention! Periods (.) are used for decimal digit separation, while commas (,) are used for separation of digits. Unless specified, the default unit of currency is euros (€).

Total Budget:	50,000
▪ General Meeting:	10,392
▪ Visions in Science:	7,000
▪ Seminars:	15,499
▪ Travels:	5,553
Total spent:	38,444
Rest:	11,556

Other Events sponsored by the PhDnet:

- Networking with companies and bodies like:
Helmholtz Association

GEW
US Capitol
Eurodoc
SENCKENBERG
Leibnitz

- Regional PhDnet Hub meetings held eg. once in 3 months. To discuss and solve local problems faster. To improve interactions between institutes.
- Open Science Workshops:
 - Open Access work
 - Support e-Life – (free publishing platform)
 - Open access ambassadors – initiated by some Max Planck Institutes
 - Open Access Conferences like OpenCon 2015
 - Representation of Max Planck Institutes at SPD by Martin Grund.

Highlights of the PhDnet Council 2015:

- *Visions in Science 2015:*
 - An interdisciplinary event that took place in Bonn, Germany.
 - MPI PhD candidates from all institutes attended and presented their skills and research.
 - Good attendance from international and interdisciplinary speakers.
- *Max Planck Career Fair 2015:*
 - First of its kind.
 - 400 participants attended against the initial estimation of 250.
 - 10 companies came forward in a short notice (1 month).
 - PhD candidates were given “Distributed Travel Scholarships” in collaboration with Deutsche Bahn for travels.
 - The President of the MPS liked the participation and encouraged similar events in the future.
 - The feedback (from PhDs and postdocs) was in most cases highly positive and appreciative – they wanted such fairs more often and on a bigger scale.

Soft Skill Seminars:

- Many seminars were arranged at various institutes (at least 7).

Future Outlook:

- Implementation of new guidelines.
- Career Support for Scientists.
- Strengthening bonds with other organizations.
- Promoting PhDnet representation at a local level.
- Improving communication with GA.

Topics to be discussed in the meeting:

- Define a democratically elected PhD representative for each institute including its election process and its role at local and general levels.
- The new website Max Planck PhDnet 2.0.

- **Question Moderation and Forum** – by Sven

A lot of questions came up with respect to the PhDnet new statutes; in light of this, an open discussion was organized moderated by the General Secretary, Sven. A second draft (draft 2) of the PhDnet statutes resulted from the discussion.

The need of one PhDnet representative.

- Issue:
 - Each institute will have one PhD representative.
 - Some institutes have several PhD representatives who work well in a group, how is the introduction of one single PhD representative be beneficial? How is the quorum reached?
- Discussion:
 - Departmental reps can be selected and they pick a representative within them. This implies that the requirement for a majority voting for the election of a PhD representative can be transferred, i.e. elected and thus acting representatives will vote to elect one PhD representative. The quorum of 50% will be within a group of already elected PhD representatives.
 - The workload of 1 PhD representative per institute will be different depending on the institute.
- Suggestion:
 - The structure of the PhD representation at the local level can be maintained, but the election of a single PhD representative is crucial for the PhDnet representation and status within the MPS. This issue is solved in draft 3 with the change of the naming of the PhD representation (Internal – unlimited number, institute-based election and External- 1 per institute, defined election for the PhDnet).
 - The quorum has to be reached at institute level.

50 % Quorum requirement:

- Issue:
 - Apparently, many institutes cannot reach a 50% quorum.
 - Strictness of the election procedures needs to be evaluated.
 - Quorum criteria to be re-visited.
- Discussion:
 - The 50% quorum needs to be reached as it strengthens the democratic eligibility of PhD representation in the eyes of the MPS and the GA. Less than 50% is not possible.
 - Local administrations may not support in reaching this quorum and hence, if needed, the President of the should encourage the election in all MPis!
- Suggestions:
 - Administration could bundle this election along with scientific representation. Problem: not possible as the scientific representation election happens once every 3 years.
 - Can the Spokesperson and/or the Steering Group actively encourage the

voting emphasis to the directors (eg: an open letter)?
If the managing director is consenting – then it is good.
If the president writes a letter to the directors – then the impact is strong!

Who is eligible to vote?

- Issue:
 - A PhD candidate is “a junior scientist affiliated with an MPI by means of contract”.
 - Can candidates who are registered at a University but work at a MPI (without being part of an IMPRS) have the right to vote?
 - Can IMPRS candidates who worked at a University, and don't have a contract with an MPI, have the right to vote?
- Discussion:
 - It is already unclear, at the central level, what is the exact status of PhD candidates who work in a University and are IMPRS, and those who are not part of an IMPRS but work in a MPI.
 - The election committee (EC) would have to make a list of all eligible voters and make sure that no-one is left out.
- Suggestions:
 - PhDnet has to push the MPS and GA to clarify who fits into PhD candidates of the MPS.
 - The election committee will have the responsibility to look into case-by-case PhD candidates who would like to vote.

Other Points:

- The PhD representative should raise awareness to the new PhD candidates about the PhDnet's activity.
- Timing of voting?
Can it be done in the general meeting – No
Arbitrary month of March was given for the time of voting.
- Can a person be re-elected?
Yes via re-election.
- Is there a difference between “Not voting” and “No Vote”?
- How is the election committee formed?
Members have to be eligible to vote, i.e. only MPS-PhD candidates.
It doesn't apply to non-MPI members.
- There might be issue with MPI directors who would influence the vote.
What should be done in this case?
The democratic way of voting for a PhD representative might be seen as a more credible and positive way to some directors. Nevertheless, step-by-step measures should be taken for institute resisting PhD representation (ask Steering Group for support).
- Special software for voting?
To be decided after meeting with IT PhD candidates in the MPI. A MPS-wide election software can be made.
- Are the voting data in the past history available?

Around 20 institutes have recorded more than 50 % quorum when their reps were elected.

- One Institute does not want to merge with IMPRS – what to do?
- What are the bounds and terms of the deputies? Can they be elected or just nominated?

• Description of Work Group Duties

General Meeting Group:

- Need volunteers – can be given soft skills credits after consultation with PhD Coordinators.
- They can give a lot of information and assistance for future members.
- Getting a list of e-mails of secretaries was useful and beneficial.
- A list of receipts, programs, to-do lists, schedules are available for reference and usage.

Vision and Science Group:

- They have regular meetings – they setup locations and meet often, arrange for speakers.
- Have subgroups or “split-groups” to manage the tasks.
- They managed Career Fair successfully albeit the short notice. More revenue is possible from companies who want to attend.
- There is a lot of logistics involved and the group has enough ideas and guidelines to manage them. All details are online. Future members can expect the help from former members.

Stratcom:

- Role shifted to strategy.
- Think Tank group – they concentrate on long-term ideas. The objective is to bring up political and strategic ideas and implementing them properly through proper communication.
- They meet regularly.
- Communicating information is vital.
- Made the article to convert stipends to contracts – a big task.
- Since stipend issue is solved, the team is looking out for new issues to solve and new ideas to communicate and hence implement.
- “No specific task” - need to work with other groups in unison – this is a think tank business.

Seminar Group:

- They manage seminars and all the logistics involved like speakers, finance, rooms, food and drinks, etc.
- They want to broaden the scope of seminar topics and cover a wider variety of topics.
- 15-20 seminars per year is the target. Working beyond target is also fine.
- First, try to get money from your IMPRS or institute, if not, then through some

other organization. If not, then ask the Seminar Group. They will agree after consultation.

Secretary Group:

- Collaboration with Stratcom and other groups.
- Administration tasks.
- Collect and maintain list of co-ordinators, heads of IMPRS, MPS, etc.
- Need a dedicated secretary head to co-ordinate the tasks.

Web group:

- Manage back content of PhDnet by: improving contents of webpages, updating software, deleting old wiki contents, making changes to the layouts in the future etc.
- Access to the mailing list within and outside PhDnet. The list of all representatives is also available.
- The workload is a lot and difficult – but a necessary work to be done.
- Typo 3 web frame work design (old but efficient) was used so far. A new modern one is needed and this has to be changed.
- People who know CMS, designers, interested in organizing, distributing info to the Steering Group and other groups – are most wanted.

Offspring Group:

- Thinking of converting magazines to blogs or vice-versa.
- Need an editor.
- Need articles.
- Intended for people who are good in writing.

Steering Group:

- Overviews, co-ordinates and manages all group and events within the PhDnet.
- Interacts and establishes contacts with different bodies at different level from PhD reps to institute, central administration and institution outside the MPS.
- Represents the diversity of the institute in different places, conferences, events.
- Have direct contact with the GA and thus can influence financial issues.
- Secretary General has an overall view of what is happening.
- Spokesperson has a big role to play.

Equal Opportunities group:

- This group kind of became a “complaint group” because it tries to sort out problems that are brought by inequality in several aspects.
- Voices out inequalities and troubles like gender bias, sexual harassment, unequal chances to all, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability and other related issues.
- Would like to nominate and maintain equal opportunity offices in all Institutes.
- Like to come up with seminars on the above topics.

- To bring awareness to children to ring them into science.

Survey Group:

- Conducts surveys to know the pros and cons on different topics and issues eg: salaries, work conditions, contracts, freedom, duties, rights etc.

Day 2 - Nov 23rd

- **Inclusions and changes voted for Draft 3 of PhDnet 2.0 –the document to vote on later:**

1. Multiple Internal PhD representatives may be elected, but one single External PhD representative to be elected by voting, winning by 50% + quorum – **Unanimous acceptance from majority.**
2. Steering Group members can also be Internal PhD representatives – **54 yes, 6 no votes.**
3. Election committee decides who has the rights to vote – **Unanimous acceptance from majority.**
4. Election committee must declare the election not less than 2 weeks prior to the election date – **27 yes, 10 no, others – can't say.**
5. A challenge to the election shall be resolved by the election committee and the Steering Group – **at least 45 people agreed.**
6. Challenge should be submitted in written format (email is fine as well) no later than 2 weeks post-election date and be submitted to the election committee and the General Secretary – **at least 45 people agreed.**
7. The term of office for the representative begins immediately after the election and at the most, 2 weeks after the election date. The former representatives are to be available for the new representatives for guidance during an adaptation period – **55 yes, 5 no.**
8. For the first year of election in all MPI's, the quorum can be reduced to 30 % to initiate participants. If less than 30 % quorum is noted, then emphasis will be given to the institute to push the election.
9. Temporary leave from the post is set to 4 months – **55 yes, 5 no.**
10. If a representative withdraws from the post, a re-election is made and the General Secretary is informed – **All yes!**
11. The members of the election committee must be announced to all eligible to vote upon formation – **Majority agreed.**
12. The members of the election committee later decide who is eligible to vote and who is not, and provide a list. – **Majority agreed.**
13. The members of the election committee should be people who are eligible to vote without any ambiguity. Once a member of the committee, they are not allowed to contest the election – **Majority agreed.**
14. People who only have an IMPRS affiliation, but no contract ties with MPS are not part of the election. As of now and until the problem of permutations of people with ties with and without UNI's, IMPRS and MPI is solved, only those who are contractually tied to the IMPRS and to the MPI have the right to vote.– **Majority agreed.**
15. Do you agree with all the changes and corrections incorporated in draft 3 statutes of PhDnet 2.0? - **Yes (54 –majority reached), No (5), Abstention (1).**

Selective Comments:

1. 50 % quorum may not be possible.
2. Secret Ballot feature might be needed.
3. Discrepancy in EC members.
4. Standardize voting procedures.

Day 3 – Nov 24th

- **Presentation of working groups existing in 2015 and call for volunteers for 2016.**
- **Presentation of the new working group for the year 2016:** Stratcom Group, Equal Opportunities Group, Seminar Group, Secretary Group, Survey Group, Work Group, General Meeting, Offspring Group.
- **Election of the new Steering Group**

Election of Section Reps, Spokesperson, General Secretary and Finance Officer voted by PhD representatives representing 56 institutes.

Spokesperson:

Martin – 42 Votes – New Spokesperson by absolute majority
Eva – 12 Votes
Abstained – 2

General Secretary:

Melanie – 25 Votes
Cátia – 30 Votes – New General Secretary by absolute majority
Abstained – 2

Finance Officer:

Roman – 44 Votes – New Finance Officer by absolute majority
Atefeh – 10 Votes
Abstained – 2

CPTS Rep:

José – 17 Votes – Winner by absolute majority among CPTS voters
Matthias – 5 Votes
Abstained – 1

HS Rep:

Christian – 14 Votes – Winner by absolute majority among HS voters.
“No” vote – 0 vote
Abstained – 1

BMS Rep:

This election did not reach an absolute majority in the first round. The top 2 winners of round 1 (R1) competed again in a second round (R2). A majority was achieved in round 2.

Yorick (R1 – 8 Votes, R2 – 11 Votes) – Winner by absolute majority among BMS

voters

Eva (R1 – 1 Vote, R2 – 0 Vote)

Daniela (R1 – 7 Votes, R2 – 8 Votes)

Samuel (R1 – 3 Votes, R2 – 0 Vote)

Abstained (R1 – 0 Vote, R2 – 0 Vote)

- **Formation of 5 new hubs** with hub coordinator to be decided after the General Meeting: Frankfurt/Mainz/Bad Nauheim, Dresden, Köln/Bonn, Tübingen/Stuttgart and Göttingen.
- **Discussion of activities done by other hubs**, eg: party in Munich.
- **Discussion with the new Steering Group:**
 - Collection of current problems and suggestions from the audience:
 - People with Fördervertrag just have 20 days of holidays (that is not much).
 - High load of teaching duties for some PhDs (long-term goal: equality in the regulation regarding teaching requirements in different universities).
 - Creation of a „complaint box“ for the candidates;
 - Survey Group should make a survey on the implementation of the new regulations.
 - Fördervertrag vs. TVöD
 - Many candidates are not enrolled in a university, so they are not part of a Studentenwerk.
 - A PhD candidate can lose 3 to 6 months of work due to an accident without getting any extension for their PhD.
- **Summary given by Christian on the new direction to take:**
 - External related conditions: connect to the university, e.g. cheaper conditions.
 - Internal related conditions: how do we deal with support contracts vs. TVöD, e.g. Vacation days, social security concerns, full-time/part-time, implementation, visas.
 - Role of PhDnet, visibility of the PhDnet.

End of the meeting at 16:25