



PhDnet Prioritizes Communication and Equal Opportunities

Max Planck Society's student platform elects new management board

For several years now, a handful of PhD students at various MPG locations have met regularly for their weekly video conference. Now PhDnet has elected a new managing board for 2017, so a new team is lining up for an online meet.

"We are particularly keen this year to focus on topics that can add further strength to the Max Planck doctoral student community, such as improved communication and equal opportunities," stated the new Board, summing up their program for 2017. "Our predecessors have done a tremendous job over the last three years, particularly regarding the new PhDnet statutes, which bring democratic legitimacy to the status of representatives at MPG by setting a minimum turnout in elections

at each MPI. Our task will be to ensure that this is applied in practice, and the procedure continuously improved."

"There is still much to be done in terms of communicating PhDnet events and activities," says Lisa Scheuermann. "But we also intend to make our voice heard in the area of scientific communication – with the new OFFSPRING magazine and our own blog."

"There is no room for activities without the proper data," adds Spokesperson Leo Borchert – "so our team is planning a survey in the spring that will show us which topics PhDnet should be prioritizing in the coming years. Vacation time, for instance, remains a hot topic that we are keen to address at our handover meeting in Munich."

The PhDnet board: Spokesperson Leonard Borchert (third from right), Secretary General Rafael Laso Pérez (right), Treasurer Gabriel Guerrero (second from left) and Section Representatives Jana Lasser (CPTS), Lisa Scheuermann (BMS) and Teresa Hollerbach (HS, left to right).

According to Jana Lasser, "Vacation time is also an equal opportunities issue. It isn't easy to satisfy the needs of international doctoral students and families with just 20 days of vacation per year." To heighten the general appreciation of equal opportunities, PhDnet intends to campaign for more individual working conditions that give fair consideration to all lifestyles, as well as organize seminars on diversity management.

ERC Funding Times Seven

Max Planck researchers receive sought-after funding boosts



In the contest for the Consolidator Grants awarded by the European Research Council (ERC), one female and six male scientists from among MPG's ranks have each been granted up to two million euros in funding. The MPG was Germany's most successful institution in this fourth round of applications under the EU's "Horizon 2020" research framework programme, ahead of the Helmholtz Association (six grants), the University of Heidelberg (five) and the Technical University of Munich (three). The ERC received a total of around

2,300 applications and awarded 314 Consolidator Grants. The Consolidator Grants, which are awarded annually, are aimed at scientists who received

their doctorates at least seven and at most 12 years prior and who wish to implement their project at a European scientific institution.

THE ERC GRANTEES

Simon Alberti, MPI for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics; Thomas Barends, MPI for Medical Research; Stephan Gruber, MPI of Biochemistry; Naoko Mizuno, MPI of Biochemistry; Steffen Klamt, MPI for the Dynamics of Complex Technical Systems; Pietro Omodeo, MPI for the History of Science (will be doing research with his ERC grant at the University of Barcelona); and Glenn van de Ven, MPI for Astronomy

Symposium in the Age of Brexit

Researchers at Britain's University of Cambridge and the MPG met recently at the Harnack House to explore the possibilities for intensifying collaboration in the neurosciences

It was purely by chance, but symbolic nonetheless: scientists from the MPG and the University of Cambridge assembled in Berlin for a "matchmaking" symposium to consolidate their collaboration on specific projects on the very day on which the House of Commons confirmed that the UK would declare its intention to exit the EU. "In view of the growing uncertainty at the European and global level, this conference cannot

simply be regarded as business as usual," said MPG Vice President Bill Hanson. "It is an important signal of a desire for continued cooperation with our British partners."

The centerpiece of the two-day symposium in early February comprised nine dual presentations, each delivered by a pair of expert neuroscientists from Cambridge and the MPG. Six MPIs were represented, predominantly by Group

Leaders. Participants and organizers alike deemed the event a success: in addition to the ongoing development of existing collaborations, the coordination itself nurtured a productive dynamic environment for new initiatives. Going forward, the "matchmaking" symposium format could serve to close the gaps that might be left if Brexit were to spell the end of established mechanisms for scientific cooperation.

Award for Going the Extra Mile

Two Administrative Headquarters staff members honored for their outstanding commitment

The MPG awards the *Communitas Prize* for particular commitment to our scientific organization. As President Stratmann has emphasized, the award is independent of hierarchies, and this year it goes to two members of staff at Administrative Headquarters. He also encouraged Directors to nominate dedicated colleagues at their institutes.

Both prizewinners work at the Max Planck House in Munich and were themselves – as is commonly the case at HQ – formerly active scientists, which may well be why they are so “hands on.” Verena Mauch is one of a team of just under 20 “IL-ers” in the Institute Liaison department, the first, personal point of contact for MPIs wishing to address overarching administrative inquiries to Headquarters. Organized by Sections, each “IL-er” is responsible for certain individual institutes that in effect become “their” MPIs – in Verena Mauch’s case, those are the MPIs for Biological Cybernetics, Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, and Psychiatry.

“PERFORMANCE BEYOND ALL EXPECTATIONS”

Verena joined the MPG while studying for a doctorate at the Radboud University after a period of employment in The Hague. As MPG President Martin Stratmann explained when the awards were presented at the Scientific Council meeting in late February, she receives the prize for her “performance beyond all expectations,” both in day-to-day business, such as preparing appointment interviews, and in responding to crisis situations, such as the recent campaigns by animal rights activists.

The second prizewinner was Christiane Walch-Solimena, who holds a doctorate in biochemistry and was formerly a researcher at two MPIs, the Howard Hughes Medical Insti-



Award ceremony at the Scientific Council meeting: President Stratmann with the prizewinners, Verena Mauch and Christiane Walch-Solimena (right).

tute and Yale University, and who worked as a Group Leader at the MPI for Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics before moving to Headquarters. Since 2009 she has been the Scientific Assistant to the President for life sciences and medicine. In this capacity, she also assumed responsibility for coordinating the “discussion year on animal studies” initiated by President Stratmann.

Christiane Walch-Solimena met this enormous challenge with “genuine devotion, patience and empathy,” as the President explained – for instance in integrating a wide variety of experts including scientists, animal facility managers, lawyers, IT experts and communications specialists. She was also instrumental in helping prepare content for the policy paper on animal studies in basic research that was successfully presented to the Senate in late 2016.