



## **International Max Planck Research Schools – 25 Years On**

Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

At the 25th Anniversary of the Molecular Biology and Neurosciences  
– International Max Planck Research Schools

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– Check against delivery –

It is wonderful to be back in Göttingen!

Actually, the first time I ever visited the Max Planck Campus here was in 2007. And do you know why? Believe it or not, I came because the IMPRS students invited me to give a talk at their Horizons Meeting! I still remember how impressed I was by the speaker list, including Nobel Laureates Tim Hunt and John Gurdon. And I recall the collaborative atmosphere. Without knowing about it, I could feel the “Göttingen spirit” at that time.

Dear PhD students and alumni,

Dear colleagues,

Dear guests,

Today, we are not only celebrating 25 years of the IMPRS programs. No, we are celebrating a quarter-century of scientific collaboration – across institutional, national, and generational boundaries!

It fills me with great pleasure to see so many people from all around the world join us today – and to see how remarkably successful you are! Did you know that PhD students here have contributed to about 1,300 publications? This is truly impressive. Let me be clear: pursuing a PhD is worthwhile! Supervising doctoral research is rewarding! Time and again, it is these very PhD projects that lead to breakthroughs in science.

But why are the IMPRS programs so successful?

I think this success is rooted in the passion of the PhD students, in the dedication of their supervisors, and in the critical thinking of the community. This success is also due to the advice provided by the



thesis committees, and it relies on the fact that the PhD projects are embedded in a structured doctoral program. Within this program, there are standards – for supervision, for funding, and for the duration of the project. But that’s not all. These programs create the space that doctoral students need to grow – both professionally and personally. The schools also foster networking among the students. They bring about a sense of community, professional exchange, and mutual support. This creates an environment where great science happens.

After three to four years, when candidates receive their doctoral hat and kiss the Gänseliesl, they have become almost like new people. Why? Because doing a PhD is nothing like attending an undergraduate course. No, it is all different. A doctorate is proof of independent scientific achievement. It is training that builds self-confidence and new skills. This way, doing a PhD prepares you for a great career in science or elsewhere.

Dear PhD students,

When you leave the programs, you are ready for big tasks – be it in business, academia, or society. And you will have made friends for life. As one alumna, Tanvi Butola, put it: “Göttingen casts a very wide web of friends. No matter where in the world I go, I can always find someone linked to the city of science.” So, please use this occasion today to find new friends!

Explore the many paths that are open to you. Why not start a company? Some alumni have done so, like Adrian Schomburg. His start-up “Eisbach Bio” develops anti-cancer drugs at Martinsried. Maybe one of you will soon launch a start-up right here! We certainly want to foster tech transfer at Göttingen even more in the future. Or perhaps your path takes you into politics? Did you know that out of the 630 members of the German Parliament, only eight hold a PhD in the natural sciences? To be honest – it can’t stay that way, what do you think?

As PhD graduates, you truly shape our society: 60% of the molecular biology alumni are employed in Germany, at companies and institutions, and about 20% of our neuroscience alumni have become principal investigators or professors in academia.

Sehr geehrter Herr Minister Mohrs,  
lieber Herr Kollege Schölmerich,  
lieber Wolfgang Brück,

The success of these programs is a collective achievement, born out of cooperation between the University, the Medical Center, the State of Lower Saxony, and Max Planck. At the time when this started, it was a conscious new departure that was also triggered by the former minister Edelgard Bulmahn, who was visionary.



And today, once again, we need a new vision! Let me explain. A hundred years ago, the University of Göttingen was number one. At the time, Albert Einstein wrote to a friend here: "Berlin is no match for Göttingen, [...] in this field at least." – of course, he meant the field of general relativity.

And when the University was founded here in 1737, it was one of Germany's first research universities! It placed the ideals of Enlightenment at its core. It enshrined academic freedom and the autonomy of research and teaching, demonstrating how knowledge, openness, and a diversity of disciplines can lead to greatness in science.

So, here is my suggestion: when we meet again in just 12 years' time to celebrate the university's 300th anniversary, let it be said that another visionary renewal has taken place. That Göttingen reimagined the university as an institution that serves society by conducting excellent research and teaching, responding to the post-factual age, and forming a stronghold for our shared values in a world that is rapidly changing. I think this is possible. But it requires courage, change management, and team spirit.

Dear colleagues and friends,

Over the decades, so many people have contributed to the successes of the IMPRS. Today, let me express my special thanks to those who were there from the beginning and to some of those who carried these two schools for many years: Gerhard Paus, Thomas Pieler, Kurt von Figura, Erwin Neher, Gregor Eichele, Nils Brose, Marina Rodnina, Martin Göpfer and of course Steffen Burkhardt and Reinhard Jahn!

You really lead by example. It is due to your dedication that these programs became such a huge success. As two of the first ten IMPRS programs, you have inspired our entire approach to training young scientists. By now, we have 66 such programs, established together with 36 national and 29 international universities. And we are really proud of this!

Dear guests,

It is the next generation here that fills us with hope and pride. And it is their enduring connection to their alma mater that makes it our duty to carry on the "Göttingen spirit" — into the lecture halls, into the laboratories, and into the world! Thank you.