More Planning Security for Young Scientists

The Max Planck Society receives a certificate for its family-friendly HR policy for the second time

A policy of distinction: Federal Minister for Family Affairs Ursula von der Leyen (left) and State Secretary Dagmar Wöhrl (right) from the Federal Ministry of Economics presented the certificate to Martha Roßmayer of the Personnel Department at the MPS.

The Max Planck Society attaches great importance to a family-friendly human resources policy. Just how strongly the Society values the right balance between operating targets and employees' personal interests is reflected in the certificate it received for the second time from the non-profit company *berufundfamilie*, an initiative of the Hertie Foundation. Federal Minister for Family Affairs Ursula von der Leyen and Parliamentary State Secretary Dagmar Wöhrl from the Federal Ministry of Economics presented certificates to the Max Planck Society and numerous other enterprises at a ceremony in Berlin in mid-June.

"Our employees are fundamental to our scientific success – the men and women whose commitment and achievements make us what we are today and in the future." For MPS Secretary General Dr. Barbara Bludau, this can be realized only if the human resources policy takes the needs and wishes of those who work for the MPS into account. This explains why the MPS made the decision some years ago to be audited by *berufundfamilie*. The first certificate was awarded in 2006.

The second certificate is valid from 2009 until 2012. In its latest audit, *berufundfamilie* looked at how successful the Max Planck Society has been thus far in putting family-friendly measures into practice, and specified which new areas should be given priority in the years to come. The independent auditors helped management personnel at the Max Planck Institutes review their progress and select new directions to be addressed. In the future, management personnel will be arranging meetings on a more family-friendly basis, making provisions for part-time employment even in scientific posts, and appointing representatives to advise on issues of family compatibility. They will also investigate whether a separate budget is required.

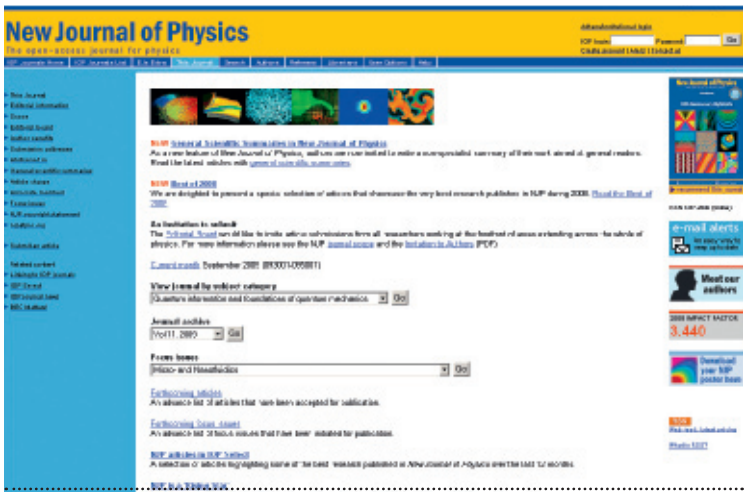
With a wide range of opportunities for employees to pursue personal and professional development and better balance work and family interests, for example through the provision of local childcare facilities or the option to use the pme-Family Service, as well as flexible rules on working hours, the Max Planck Society is already preparing for the future and taking account of demographic change. The MPS will also continue to report annually to *berufundfamilie* on the new goals it sets and the measures taken to achieve them. The MPS is entitled to use the certification logo – which enjoys Europe-wide protection – on publications, brochures and job advertisements for the next three years. The same applies to the 80 Max Planck Institutes – the MPS is the only scientific organization in Germany to be certified in its entirety.

At the presentation ceremony in Berlin, Federal Minister for Family Affairs Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the growing interest on the part of businesses in a more family-friendly human resources policy. Despite the continuing economic crisis, more companies than ever qualified this year: certificates were presented to a total of 322 employers. "Productivity and employee motivation are 17 percent higher at family-friendly companies than elsewhere, while absenteeism is 13 percent lower," added Dagmar Wöhrl, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Economics, referring to a survey carried out on behalf of *berufundfamilie*.

Photo: berufundfamilie

Open Access Times Five

Max Planck Digital Library finances publications in freely available media



The New Journal of Physics is freely available to readers everywhere on the Internet.

In recent years, the Max Planck Society, represented by the Max Planck Digital Library, concluded agreements with five publishing houses and covers the cost of open access publications out of central funds. The publishers include BioMed-Central, Copernicus Publications, the Californian Public Library of Science and Springer, via its "Springer Open Choice" program. An agreement has also been reached with Britain's Institute of Physics and the German Physical Society (DPG) regarding the important New Journal of Physics. The agreements cover all articles whose corresponding authors specify a Max Planck address.

This form of open access is frequently referred to as the "gold road," and it now makes it easier for Max Planck scientists to have their first submissions published in the relevant journals. These publications are accessible free of charge worldwide via the Internet. In this case, the publishers derive their income, not from subscriptions, but in the form of a publication fee paid by the authors or their institutions.

The Max Planck Digital Library (MPDL) and its predecessors have been investigating the possibilities of funding various open access business models since 2003. The five contracts will initially run for a trial period. The publishing houses selected are scientific publishing companies that offer innovative open access business models and are willing to adapt their publication and billing workflows to the needs of a scientific organization as complex as the Max Planck Society. Both the MPS and the publishers are venturing into new territory in signing these central contracts. The challenges facing both sides are, on the one hand, to guarantee a speedy and uncomplicated publication service for scientists, and, on the other, to develop an accurate and transparent billing structure.

The central contracts including acceptance of costs take some of the pressure off the material budgets available to individual scientists or research groups at the MPS. However, the gold road to open access is viable only as long as it is not misused by publishing houses as an additional source of income. In other words, the total costs paid by the MPS to any given publisher for individual open access articles, plus subscriptions to journals or magazines, must not increase. These costs are already high, and for some time now, the prices for subscriptions in particular have been rising far faster than the average rate of inflation.

In the course of this year, the experience gained during the pilot phase will be compiled in a project report. They will also be submitted to both national and international bodies. For example, as part of the EU "Study on Open Access Publishing" project, the MPDL is currently taking the lead in classifying and evaluating the various open access business models available on the market.

A Fund for Pharmaceutical Research

The new DDC Ventures fund will be investing 100 million euros in pharmaceutical projects, predominantly at the life science institutes of the Max Planck Society. According to Max Planck Innovation, the investments will be managed by Life Science Partners (LSP), a leading European venture capital investment firm.

The DDC Ventures fund was jointly conceived by Max Planck Innovation, the Max Planck Society's technology transfer subsidiary, and technology commercialization specialists Inventive Capital Advisors. They are in negotiations with major potential investors and expect to have the financing in place very shortly. The fund is part of the "Drug Discovery and Development Center" concept developed by Max Planck Innovation. The German Federal Ministry of Research is supporting the concept to the tune of 20 million euros within the framework of its Biopharma Competition to promote medicines of the future.

DDC aims to make better use of the huge potential basic research holds in the field of drug development. The object is to professionally transition promising research projects into the development of new drugs.

Photo: MPS

Equal Opportunities on the Rise

New body of provisions attracts new equal opportunities commissioners to annual conference in Tübingen

Record participation: no fewer than 56 participants met for an exchange of opinions at the 13th annual meeting of equal opportunity officers.

Photo: MPS

A record 56 participants attended the 13th Annual Conference of Equal Opportunities Commissioners, highlighting the women's demand for knowledge. In line with the redrafted equal opportunities provisions, all of them took on their positions just this year – marking the first time that all were elected at the same time MPS-wide.

A lot of work lies ahead for the new equal opportunities commissioners, much of which is based on 18 pages of provisions to promote equal opportunities. The equal opportunities commissioners are involved in "all personnel, organizational and social measures relating to sexual equality, the reconciliation of family life and work, and protection against sexual harassment in the workplace." "Past achievements in equal opportunities policy are certainly important milestones for the Max Planck Society," was the assessment of Peter Gruss, Max Planck President, of the MPS's commitment to date in a letter sent to the MPIs on the new central works council agreement. However, the president said that the MPS would have to "redouble its efforts," as Germany could not afford the hemorrhaging of its intellectual resources from a socio-political perspective.

Marlis Mirbach, the MPS's central equal opportunities commissioner and, once again, conference organizer, firmly believes that there is sometimes a wide gulf between what is required and what is achieved. She is, however, pleased that all but five MPIs succeeded in carrying out the election of the equal opportunities commissioners as provided for by the central works council agreement. The fact that not all of the institutes adhered to the defined timeframe of between September 1 and December 1 is a pardonable transgression. It is the task of the independent equal opportunities commissioners to enforce the rights provided by the new body

of provisions. Marlis Mirbach was pleased to offer her support at the meeting at the MPI for Developmental Biology. Even the title "equal opportunities commissioner" requires explanation. Mirbach explained: "we are aiming to gain greater acceptance from men, who can consult the equal opportunities commissioner on issues concerning the reconciliation of family life and work." The fact that only women can be elected to this office by women is due to the provisions of the Federal Equal Opportunities Act, which has been in force since 2001. In 2003, federal and state governments also agreed to apply its key elements in the jointly funded research institutions.

All in all, the promotion of equal opportunities is seen as an important tool for staff development, and as an interdisciplinary task for which all employees are responsible, but especially management and employees with managerial responsibilities. Mirbach told the conference participants: "A key part of your job is to help achieve this through mediation," referring them to the first point on a to-do list. The MPS's principles of equal opportunity state that "specific objectives" should be developed at the institutes. These objectives may relate to staff or to social or organizational issues, but most importantly, the equal opportunities commissioner should be involved. Mirbach said that the achievement or, if applicable, reasons for non-achievement of these objectives would be evaluated quarterly and reported to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

As in the past, equal opportunities commissioners will be involved in recruitment. However, this will now also apply to the appointment and induction of scientists. To carry out this task, the equal opportunity commissioners had to elect one scientist for each individual section – no easy undertaking, as most of the equal opportunities commissioners are non-scientific staff. The equal opportunities commissioners identified candidates and cast their votes by mail prior to the conference. The votes were counted in Tübingen. Elisabeth Binder will serve as the new section equal opportunities commissioner for the Biology and Medicine Section (deputies: Jennifer Winter, Michal-Ruth Schweiger), Iris Abt will be responsible for the Chemistry, Physics and Technology Section (deputies: Josefa Oehm, Cristina Afonso), and Elena Lieven for the Human Sciences Section (deputies: Ute Dercks, Gunda Wößner). Marlis Mirbach is anxious to see how their involvement in the complex appointment procedure works out. She said: "The fact that the commissioners will deliver an opinion for the Senate, which ultimately decides on appointments, could well give rise to conflict."

Ingrid Gabel-Becker, who as central equal opportunities commissioner also attends the meetings of the appointment committees, then told the conference how the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft manages this issue. And the conference was taken aback by the self-assured presentation of Anke Geßner, equal opportunities commissioner at the Social Science Research Center Berlin and spokesperson for all equal opportunities commissioners at the Leibniz Association. She even appears directly next to the executive board in the organizational chart. The sociologist is calling for comprehensive participation in salary grade promotions, the debate about performance-based pay and assessment criteria. She summed up by saying: "Equality means quality. It is not some kind of optional altruism, but a key factor in science policy."

MIT Doctoral Students Visit IMPRS in Stuttgart

Hans-Georg Libuda was delighted to hear that his hard work had paid off. As coordinator of the International Max Planck Research School for Advanced Materials, it had taken him countless transatlantic e-mails and telephone calls to set up a Winter School with the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) – high praise from Boston came as a welcome 'thank you.'

The idea for the meeting came right from the top: around two years ago on a trip to the US, Max Planck President Peter Gruss had met with the president of MIT. Even before he returned, IMPRS-AM management was asked to investigate the possibilities of cooperating in the training of Ph.D. students. Finally in late March, during spring break, 5 professors and 20 doctoral students and post-docs visited Stuttgart.

A series of presentations and a poster session were held under the heading "Nanoscale Materials: Structure, Properties, Relations" to explore the interfaces between the research done by the visitors from MIT and that of the two Stuttgart MPIs for Solid State and Metals Research, as well as the adjacent university.

For the two IMPRS spokespeople and Directors Bernhard Keimer and Eric Mittemeijer, an important aspect of the workshop was to recruit American doctoral students to spend time at the IMPRS as post-docs. The chance to make personal contacts should also make it easier for German Ph.D. students to visit MIT after obtaining their doctorates. The American academics were impressed by the range of subjects covered by the now more than 50 IMPRS run by the MPS. They regretted that there were no employees at the MIT faculties whose job descriptions paralleled that of an IMPRS coordinator, whose task includes reviewing applications from doctoral students, organizing workshops and developing long-term partnerships and projects.

Noble Support for the Florida Institute

The Max Planck Society has recruited no fewer than three Nobel Prize winners to provide support for the Florida Institute in the US: Bert Sakmann will become Scientific Director, while Henry Kissinger and Günter Blobel will join the Board of Trustees.

Henry Kissinger

Bert Sakmann

Bert Sakmann, long-time Director at the MPI for Medical Research in Heidelberg and winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize for Medicine, will launch the research program at the Max Planck Florida Institute as Scientific Director. He is currently still working as an emeritus professor at the Max Planck Institute for Neurobiology in Martinsried, near Munich. Max Planck President Peter Gruss is confident that Sakmann is an excellent choice, thanks both to his international scientific reputation and his extensive experience with the Max Planck Society. "He absolutely personifies our mission and our standards of excellence. He will be an ideal ambassador for the Max Planck Society while the Institute is establishing itself in Florida," said President Gruss.

Sakmann intends to initiate a program of research in Florida that will clarify the precise structure of the nervous system in the cerebral cortex of mice. This part of the brain is responsible for memory, attention, speech and consciousness. Aided by his team, Sakmann plans to develop a three-dimensional atlas of nerve cells, dendrites and axons. The first step will be to label the various cell types with special fluorescent markers in order to visualize and quantify the distribution of neurons.

In addition to this, Henry Kissinger agreed to join the institute's Board of Trustees. He, too, is a Nobel laureate: after serving as a long-time security advisor and Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973. It was former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt who introduced Henry Kissinger to the Max Planck Society. However, the link with Henry Kissinger dates back even further: in the late 1970s, there was talk of appointing him as successor to Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Living Conditions in the Scientific and Technical World in Starnberg.

Biochemist and Nobel Prize winner Günter Blobel, a German native who now works in New York, is also a member of the Board of Trustees. Blobel is best known in Germany for his commitment to the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden.

Code of Ethics Revised

The new "Rules of Good Scientific Practice" at the Max Planck Society entered into force on March 20. They were drawn up by the Ethics Council, chaired by international law expert Rüdiger Wolfrum, acknowledged by the Scientific Council and adopted by the Senate. The sections on scientific publications, in particular, from the previous code of November 2000 were amended and extended. New sections were incorporated covering data protection, possible conflicts of interest between science and industry, and measures to protect whistleblowers, or those who denounce wrongdoing or falsification. The Administrative Headquarters (research law department) will print the new rules in the form of a brochure. These will be sent to the Max Planck Institutes and facilities and will be issued to all new staff upon appointment. The first version of the code was adopted at the end of 2000 as a response to a similar document produced by the German Research Foundation (DFG), which was drawn up following some serious cases of fraud in the German science system. The DFG now grants funding only to universities and research institutions that have established rules of good scientific practice.

Photos: OH / MPS