

The President – And His Start in Office

Martin Stratmann. The chemist was born in Essen and grew up on the Moselle. His career has taken him to places as far apart as Düsseldorf, Cleveland and Erlangen. And his links with the MPS date back more than 30 years.



From Düsseldorf to Munich: Martin Stratmann in the President's office

Less than a week into his term of office in mid-June, he already made his first successful appointment. A special moment, says Martin Stratmann – not least because the appointee, Moritz Helmstaedter, like the President, is also deeply rooted in the MPS. A former Research Group Leader at the MPI of Neurobiology in Martinsried, Helmstaedter became Director at the MPI for Brain Research in Frankfurt am Main in August. One day after his appointment interview, he had accepted the position in writing – sealed by a handshake in the President's office at the Max Planck headquarters in Munich.

MOVE TO MUNICH

And it is from this office that Martin Stratmann, who grew up in Traben-Trarbach on the Moselle, will shape the destiny of the MPS. He and his wife Lieselotte Stratmann, who also holds a doctorate in chemistry, have since moved to Munich. "But Düsseldorf will still be home," says the father of three,

whose career is closely linked with the MPI für Eisenforschung (iron research) in the Rhine-Ruhr metropolis. After completing his studies at Ruhr University Bochum, this is where Martin Stratmann wrote his doctoral thesis between 1980 and 1982, and the place to which he returned as a scientific staff member in 1984 after two years abroad at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland in the US. Three years later, he took over as Leader of the Corrosion Research Group at the MPI.

During this time, he also earned much recognition for being the first to use the scanning Kelvin probe microscope to study corrosion processes, also under ultra-thin electrolytic films and insulating layers. Thanks to this method, it has been possible to largely explain the atmospheric corrosion of iron and iron alloys, and the detachment of polymer coatings from reactive metal surfaces. This research opened the way for the development of new kinds of plastic coatings that protect steel against rust and are self-healing when damaged.

In 1994, Martin Stratmann transferred to Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) where, until 1999, he held the Chair of Corrosion and Surface Technology as the successor to Helmut Kaesche. In 2000, he returned to the MPI as Director of the Department of Interface Chemistry and Surface Engineering before becoming Chairman of the Board of Executives two years later.

President Stratmann has received numerous awards for his research, among them the Masing Prize in 1990 presented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Materialkunde, the U. R. Evans Award in 2005 from the British Institute of Corrosion, and the Carl Lueg Memorial Medal in 2013 awarded by the Steel Institute VDEh for achievements in steel research. One of the first distinctions he received was the Otto Hahn Medal, which he received for his doctorate. As a result of the time he has spent as a Member of the Senate and his many years as Section Chairperson and Vice President representing the CPTS, he is also well versed in the workings of the governing bodies at the MPS.

INDUSTRY AS A PARTNER

The 60-year-old chemist also maintains close links with his alma mater, Ruhr University Bochum (RUB), where he is a member of the Materials Research Department. It is thanks to his commitment that the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia and local industry agreed to fund three endowed chairs at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Materials Simulation (ICAMS), where the Max-Planck-Institut für Eisenforschung also plays a part: "We aim to enhance the attraction of Bochum by combining research, education, support for junior scientists, and industrial relevance," says Martin Stratmann, whose perspective now extends beyond individual centers to research policy as a whole.

The Vice Presidents of the Sections

ANGELA D. FRIEDERICI, Director at the MPI for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, is the first woman to hold this position. She represents the interests of the Human Sciences Section, which comprises 22 Max Planck institutes. In addition, Friederici will become Scientific Director of the Minerva Foundation, the subsidiary that promotes German-Israeli scientific cooperation and supports more than 20 Minerva Centers in Israel.



BILL S. HANSSON, Director at the MPI for Chemical Ecology in Jena, is Swedish by birth and is the first non-German Max Planck scientist to hold this office. During his six-year term of office, the 55-year-old will be responsible for the 27 institutes of the Biology and Medicine Section, including the Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience in the US. He sees the organization of scientific quality assurance and the continuing development of internationalization at the Max Planck Society as two of his main tasks.

FERDI SCHÜTH, Director at the MPI für Kohlenforschung (coal research) in Mülheim an der Ruhr, previously chaired the Scientific Council of the MPS before being elected as Vice President. The 53-year-old scientist will now oversee the 32 institutes of the Chemistry, Physics and Technology Section. Among other things, he will also be responsible for major long-term projects and shared infrastructure, with particular emphasis on the IT infrastructure at the MPS. In common with the other Vice Presidents, Schüth will also continue to remain associated with his own research.



New Career Path for Young Scientists

Outstanding facilities at a Max Planck institute, professional networking at a supra-institutional level, and clear career prospects at a University of Excellence: the MPS and the Technische Universität München (TUM) are launching a program for junior scientists that is thus far unique in Germany. Together, they intend to appoint the most highly qualified junior scientists as both Max Planck research group leaders and assistant professors on tenure track at the TUM. Subject to positive evaluation, after six years they will then progress to a permanent W3 pro-

fessorship at the TUM. "Max Planck research group leadership posts are highly coveted internationally. And with the new follow-up option of further career development, it is now even more attractive to relocate to Germany. This is a winning combination in the contest for the finest minds," says Max Planck President Martin Stratmann.

MPRGs are initially set up for a five-year term, but extensions can be applied for, so that the step up to a W3 professorship at the TUM follows well, time-wise. Even during the first six years, while the successful Max Planck

research group leaders are serving as assistant professors at the TUM, they will have the same rights as tenured professors, including the right to award doctorates. On a limited scale, they will also give lectures.

The Minerva-financed Max Planck research groups established to promote excellent female scientists are also integrated into the program. The TUM and MPS are expected to issue an initial coordinated call for applications in the fall, when the time comes around again to seek candidates to head open-topic MPRGs.

“More than just a plan B”

Marine scientists from six graduate schools sound out alternative career paths

Over 110 doctoral students met with professionals representing environmental associations, government ministries, industry, science management and public relations. The majority were alumni of the six graduate schools that initiated the event.

Greta Reintjes has been working on her doctoral thesis for a year now at the International Max Planck Research School of Marine Microbiology (MarMic) in Bremen. “Sometimes I find myself in the laboratory and nothing is going right,” she says. “But when I hear from alumni how important a doctorate was for their own career, it motivates me to keep working.”

In addition to practical career tips, the 19 specialists at the first “Career Paths in Marine and Climate Sciences” conference described their day-to-day activities, and they didn’t pull any punches. One laboratory manager remarked on the difficulties she faced after taking maternity leave, while a patent attorney referred to his stressful workload. “Even outside of science, all that glitters is not gold. That was an important lesson for me to learn,” said the student.

CREATING A NICHE FOR ONESELF

According to a current survey by the Federal Statistics Office, for many young scientists, the preferred first step after obtaining their doctorate is to seek a fixed-term post-doc position. Barbara Hoffbauer, managing director of Kepos GmbH, commented in her presentation that “those who don’t become group leaders at an early stage find it difficult to establish themselves in the scientific field.” Her advice to up-and-coming scientists who are seeking to follow an alternative career path: “It’s easier for someone who has created a niche for themselves, for example by studying environmental law as well as marine science, to find a job outside of science.”

Christiane Glöckner, Coordinator at the IMPRS MarMic in Bremen, was one of the organizers of the event. “Also on board were the Universities



The speakers were available to answer questions at the podium and in small groups. Conversations continued during the breaks.

of Bremen and Oldenburg, along with the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), the Center for Marine Environmental Sciences (MARUM) and the Leibniz Center for Tropical Marine Ecology (ZMT). This was the first time we had jointly planned and held such a large event.” The alumni of the research organizations were available all day to talk and answer questions in roundtable discussions.

A TREND-SETTING CONFERENCE

Independent of other internal Max Planck resources, such as soft skills courses and “speed informing,” in

which doctoral students meet with alumni, career events such as this are setting a trend at the MPS. Given that doctoral students are trained primarily for a career in science, information on alternative future prospects is frequently lacking. “However, our students are very interested in these alternatives,” says Christiane Glöckner. “The graduate schools are responding and communicating the fact that an alternative career is more than just a plan B – that it can often be a genuine option.” As a result, the conference on “Career Paths in Marine and Climate Sciences” will be repeated in two years.