



Press Release

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New instrument for pooling excellence – Green light for first Max Planck Schools

Germany is to be given a new brand of graduate education with powerful international appeal: in 2018, three Max Planck Schools will embark on a five-year pilot phase. Each of the schools will combine the excellence spread across Germany into an innovative field of research. This intelligent networking is designed to further improve the visibility of German science in international competition, in order to attract outstanding early career researchers from across the world.

The successful applicants were the Max Planck School of Cognition, the Max Planck School of Photonics and the Max Planck School on Physics, Chemistry and Construction of Life. Their selection was announced on Monday by the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Prof Dr Johanna Wanka, the President of the Max Planck Society, Prof Dr Martin Stratmann and the President of the German Rectors' Conference, Prof Dr Horst Hippler. The three schools selected comprise fellows from 21 universities, as well as 31 institutes of non-university research organisations. This underlines the cross-institutional nature of the initiative.

The aim is for outstanding university graduates from around the world to complete their doctoral training at the schools, at which top scientists from universities and non-university research organisations will collaborate in cross-regional associations. Where possible, the training will be fast-tracked, i.e., it will incorporate a master's degree. All academic qualifications earned at the schools will be conferred by the participating universities.

“These Max Planck Schools represent the beginning of a new instrument for top-level research that picks up on the strengths of German science – a broad landscape of innovative and excellent basic research that is based at many different universities and non-university institutes. Skilful networking will connect these many parts to create something big that is world-class. The Max Planck Schools will further advance German science internationally and will attract outstanding researchers from across Germany and the world,” said Federal Minister of Education and Research, Johanna Wanka.

International visibility and competitiveness with top universities across the globe are to be enhanced by bringing the best researchers in forward-looking topics from across the nation together to form a school. The schools represent a new type of cooperation in graduate education. By now offering a national network, they complement very successful regional cooperation formats such as the graduate schools in the Excellence Initiative of the Federal and State Governments or the International Max Planck Research Schools (IMPRS). The three pilot

schools will initially receive financial support from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for five years, at a total of nine million euros per year.

A selection commission headed by the Presidents of the Max Planck Society, Martin Stratmann and the German Rectors' Conference, Horst Hippler, selected the three pilot schools from eight draft proposals covering a wide range of topics. Three representatives each from the universities, the Max Planck Society and the other non-university research institutions – Fraunhofer Society, Leibniz Association, Helmholtz Association – deliberated on the drafts. Ultimately the commission's choice of the three pilot schools was unanimous.

“As transregional research and education networks, the Max Planck Schools bring together the best minds from German universities, the Max Planck Society and the other non-university research institutions. This was impressively demonstrated by the strong draft proposals. I am delighted that the initiative rests on such broad shoulders in the German research landscape,” said Max Planck President, Martin Stratmann. He emphasises that “Germany has top scientists at a range of locations. This spread of talent is a great advantage for social and particularly economic reasons. But if we want to succeed in international competition for the most creative minds, we have to pool this excellence in order to make it more visible.”

President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Horst Hippler, emphasised that “the Max Planck Schools can help very talented doctoral candidates from overseas to find their way to smaller locations, in particular, where outstanding scientists are working but are unable to establish their own graduate school, for example. Through the Max Planck Schools, we are therefore creating an additional opportunity to make the spread of research excellence visible internationally as a strength of the German research system. The universities, as the central players in this system, still bear the crucial responsibility for the quality of doctoral degrees in the new model.”

The Max Planck Schools are an initiative of a cross-organisational nature. This is also reflected in the name: “Max Planck Schools – a joint initiative between German universities and the German research organisations”. The concepts for the three pilot schools will now be further refined for implementation; they will form the basis for the contracts that will be coordinated between the partners. Only then can a call for applications be made in international specialist journals. The evaluation of the pilot phase will provide information about whether the development of a promising architecture for the Max Planck Schools, and hence a permanent basis for the programme, has been successful.

Further information:

Brief descriptions of the first three Max Planck Schools and further information on the concept can be found at www.mpg.de/maxplanckschools (available only in German)

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