

## Funding Your PhD in Germany with DFG – Questions & Answers

### 1. What does DFG do?

DFG, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation), funds top-level research mainly based in Germany in all branches of science and the humanities. We support individuals and projects that have been judged outstanding in a competitive peer review-process. We foster international scientific cooperation and are committed to promoting early career researchers.

### 2. How does DFG fund PhDs?

DFG does not support PhD candidates individually, but indirectly through its research funding programmes, such as Research Training Groups, Graduates Schools and research projects (e. g. in Clusters of Excellence, Collaborative Research Centres, Research Units or individual projects). Grant proposals can only be submitted by researchers who have completed their PhD. You can find more information about these different funding programmes on the web:

[www.dfg.de/en/research\\_funding/research\\_careers](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/research_careers)

[www.dfg.de/gk/en/](http://www.dfg.de/gk/en/)

[www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/gsc/](http://www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/gsc/)

[www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/exc](http://www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/exc)

### 3. Whom do I contact if I would like to participate in a Research Training Group, Graduate School, Collaborative Research Centre or in a research project funded by DFG?

Recruitment for fellowships and research positions in programmes and projects funded by DFG is organised directly by the individual Research Training Groups, Graduate Schools and research projects. If you are interested in a particular programme, please contact the principal investigator or the programme coordinator of the specific project. Our data base GEPRIS can provide you with the relevant information and details: [www.dfg.de/gepris](http://www.dfg.de/gepris).

### 4. How long do I need to complete my PhD?

The time it takes to complete a PhD varies depending on the discipline and specific project in which you are working. On average, it will take about four years. Structured PhD programmes, such as Research Training Groups are designed to shorten this period. As a consequence, DFG funds PhD candidates in Research Training Groups for a period of 36 months.

### 5. What are the requirements and eligibility criteria to start a PhD?

The specific requirements and eligibility criteria are defined by each Research Training Group, Graduate School or research project as well as by the university's relevant examination regulations. Generally, you should have completed your university studies efficiently and successfully and should demonstrate talent and motivation for doing research. Your research interest and qualifications should match the topic of the research project or Research Training Group you are interested in. In your previous career, you should have displayed commitment as well as interest in research and, if possible, you should have some experience in working in a research context. Completing a PhD should represent a logical progression with regard to your previous experience and future career plans.

If you have a **Bachelor degree** or a **degree from a University of Applied Sciences** (*Fachhochschule*), please contact the institution, the principal investigator or the programme coordinator of the project in which you would like to complete your PhD to find out more about eligibility criteria. Some Research Training Groups offer Qualification Fellowships (800 Euro/month) for a maximum period of twelve months in order to allow people with a Bachelor degree or a degree from a University of Applied Sciences to fulfil the requirements to start a PhD.

There are **no age restrictions** on starting or completing a PhD. The recruitment of able applicants should be organized in a process that is both transparent and focusing on applicants' qualifications.

**International applicants are welcome.** More and more Research Training Groups run their study programmes in English and offer language courses for international PhD candidates. To find out about specific language requirements please contact the principal investigator or the programme coordinator. To learn more about visa and work permit requirements, please contact the university's international office. The following website can also give you some practical information about moving to Germany: [www.euraxess.de/portal/home\\_en.html](http://www.euraxess.de/portal/home_en.html)

## 6. How do I find a good topic for my thesis?

Your research topic should be located in a field in which you are interested and qualified. In order to make sure that your project is both realistic and competitive, discuss your ideas with more experienced researchers. Talk to your (potential) supervisor to ensure that the process of supervision matches your expectations as well as your supervisor's. However, even if you have prepared your research project carefully, the topic and focal point of your work are likely to change and become more focused during your PhD as you adapt it to the research context and your personal interests.

If you would like to complete your PhD in the context of a Research Training Group or a Graduate School, your research topic needs to match the research framework provided by the Group or School. If you are interested in a particular Group or School, please contact the respective principal investigator or programme coordinator. You can find more information about Research Training Groups and Graduate Schools currently funded by DFG on the web:

[www.dfg.de/gk/en/](http://www.dfg.de/gk/en/)

[www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/gsc/](http://www.dfg.de/en/excellence-initiative/gsc/)

## 7. How do I find a suitable supervisor for my thesis in Germany?

Whom you choose to be your supervisor primarily depends on the research field in which you are interested to do your PhD. Search the web and publication data bases for people working in your field. Maybe the researchers you know at home have contacts in Germany. Your supervisor should know the discipline and be able to guide you in your research. You should also think about how much time your potential supervisor will be able to dedicate to working with you and how experienced he or she is in supervising PhD candidates. It is often helpful to discuss such issues with your potential supervisor in advance and to talk to other PhD candidates who have been or are being supervised by him or her. It should be common practice to include a second researcher in your supervisory team.

If you would like to complete your PhD within a structured PhD programme, such as a Research Training Group or Graduate School, you can benefit from a well-developed supervisory concept which provides the framework for your PhD supervision (e. g. outlining how many, and which specific, researchers will be on your supervisory team).

Generally, however, it is difficult to guarantee good supervision in advance. Your relationship with your supervisor(s) depends, like all interpersonal relationships, on the dynamics and the quality of interaction between the two people involved. Together with your supervisor, it is your responsibility to shape and nurture this relationship. Rights and responsibilities of all parties can be defined in a (more or less) formal supervisory contract. On our website you can find guidelines for setting up supervisory agreements (only available in German):

[http://www.dfg.de/formulare/1\\_90/1\\_90.pdf](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/1_90/1_90.pdf)

## 8. How much do I earn as a PhD candidate?

If you are holding a **fellowship** funded by DFG, you will receive 1000-1365 Euro/month, plus a research allowance of 103 Euro/month. In case you have children, you will also get the DFG child allowance (see question 11).

Most of the Research Training Groups, Graduate Schools and research projects provide **research positions** with **work contracts** for PhD candidates. Please contact the respective principal investigator or programme coordinator to find out about the specific terms. Remuneration is determined according to the collective agreement for the public sector on the Federal level ("TVöD") or in each *Bundesland* ("TV-L") and ranges between 50-100 % FTE of TVöD/TV-L

E13, depending on comparable positions in both the area and the research field. You can find remuneration tables on the internet by using standard internet search engines.

As a PhD candidate in a Research Training Group, you also have funds available for research consumables and travel.

### **9. What is the difference between a fellowship and a research position (work contract)?**

When doing a PhD funded indirectly by DFG, you will either receive a fellowship or a research position with a work contract. A **fellowship** does not represent a contractual agreement, i. e. neither the university nor DFG fulfil the function of an employer. A fellowship is tax-free and does not include access to the German social security system. Therefore, you are not automatically covered by the various pension-, care-, unemployment-, health- and accident insurance schemes. Please contact the university to find out about the alternative arrangements you need to make.

If you complete your PhD on a **research position** with a **work contract**, this represents a contractual agreement with the university or the research institution as your employer (not with DFG). Consequently, you are covered by pension-, care- and unemployment insurance and have to pay taxes. Before you sign your contract, you should find out on which part of the German "law for fixed-term contracts in research" ("WissZeitVG") your contract is based. It determines whether your contract will be extended beyond the fixed term as a result of maternity or parental leave. You are only eligible for an extension of your fixed-term contract for the period of time you were on maternity or parental leave if your contract is based on § 2 para. 1 WissZeitVG, you are not eligible if your contract is based on § 2 para. 2 WissZeitVG.

For differences between a fellowship and a research position with regard to visa and work permit requirements, please contact the university's international office.

### **10. How does DFG support equal opportunities?**

Equal opportunities policies represent a basic requirement for successful grant proposals at DFG. For example, Research Training Groups can apply for funds to specifically foster female PhD candidates through mentoring schemes etc. It is also expected that female researchers are appropriately represented at all levels of the Research Training Group. All PhD candidates with children are also specifically supported (see question 11).

### **11. Can I pursue a PhD and still take care of my family?**

Policies to support a family-friendly research environment represent a basic requirement for successful grant proposals at DFG. PhD candidates in Research Training Groups who hold **fellowships** and who have a child receive a child allowance of 400 Euro/month. For each additional child this allowance is raised by 100 Euro/month. Furthermore, the period of funding can be extended up to twelve months if you live with your children of up to twelve years of age. If you do not make use of this extension, or only in part, you are eligible for further funds to support your child care arrangements. If you are completing your research on a **research position**, you are eligible for the usual statutory maternity and/or parental support in Germany (please see question 9). It is expected that the university provides suitable child-care arrangements. Please contact the equal opportunity officer at your university for detailed information.

### **12. Can I complete (part of) my PhD outside Germany?**

DFG does not fund PhD projects that are completed entirely outside Germany. However, research and study stays in other countries are often part of the study programmes in Research Training Groups, Graduate Schools and research projects funded by DFG. The group of principal investigators will have international contacts in the field from which you will be able to benefit. In the context of International Research Training Groups, research periods of six to twelve months at the international partner university are part of the formal programme.

### **13. What can I do after completing my PhD?**

While you are completing your PhD, your whole focus is set on your research and it might seem difficult to look beyond the date of your submission. It is useful, however, to start thinking early

about the time after you have submitted your thesis. Talk to your supervisor(s) and other people both inside and outside research. Make use of the careers services at your university. This will allow you to think about options while you are still pursuing your PhD, make contacts and establish a network on which you can build once you have submitted.

If you would like to stay in academia, please remember that – as soon as you have completed your PhD, – you are eligible to submit your own grant proposals to DFG and apply for funding for your own research project. In order to foster early-career researchers' independence, some Research Training Groups, Graduate Schools and Collaborative Research Centres funded by DFG offer so-called 'start-up' funding. It allows selected graduates to be funded directly after the submission of their thesis and enable them to develop their own research project and grant proposal. If you are interested in such start-up funding, please contact your principal investigator or programme coordinator. Some universities have also started their own start-up funding schemes to support their promising early career researchers.

#### **14. Where can I get further information?**

##### **At your university:**

Most universities offer a careers service for their students. This is a good place to gather and develop ideas. There are research officer(s) (*Forschungsreferent/innen*) at every university who can inform you about national and international research funding programmes and institutions. In addition, the DFG liaison officer (*DFG-Vertrauensdozent/in*) at your university will be able to tell you about opportunities to fund your PhD indirectly through DFG.

##### **DFG websites:**

Overview of DFG-funding at different career levels:

[www.dfg.de/en/research\\_funding/research\\_careers](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/research_careers)

Equal opportunities – measures and funding options:

[www.dfg.de/en/research\\_funding/principles\\_dfg\\_funding/equal\\_opportunities](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/equal_opportunities)

##### **Other research funding organisations in:**

Overview of other funding opportunities in Germany:

[www.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-finding-scholarships](http://www.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-finding-scholarships)

*Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen* – Overview of funding opportunities through German Foundations:

[www.stiftungen.org/en/service.html](http://www.stiftungen.org/en/service.html)

##### **Job boards on the web:**

Jobs and fellowships in research:

[www.academics.com](http://www.academics.com)

Jobs and fellowships primarily in the natural and life sciences:

<http://listserv.uni-heidelberg.de/science-jobs-de/sjd-e.html>

Jobs and fellowships in the humanities and social sciences:

<http://www.hsozkult.de/job/page>