



The Walter Benjamin Programme

For the early Postdoc Phase

26/05/2025

Saskia Parobij, Margret Heinze, Ina von der Beck

Information presented on the following slides
are valid on 26 May, 2025.

Please check www.dfg.de for updates and
prevailing regulations.

1 | The DFG – About Us

2 | The Walter Benjamin Programme

3 | Review Process and Advice

4 | Links and Resources

The DFG – About Us

<https://www.dfg.de/en/dfg-profile/about-the-dfg/what-is-the-dfg>

- ▶ The DFG is the largest **independent** and self-governing research **funding organisation** in Germany.
- ▶ It is an **association** under German private law.
- ▶ It serves **all branches** of science and the humanities by **funding research projects**.



The DFG – Our Mission

<https://www.dfg.de/en/dfg-profile/about-the-dfg/what-is-the-dfg>



The DFG

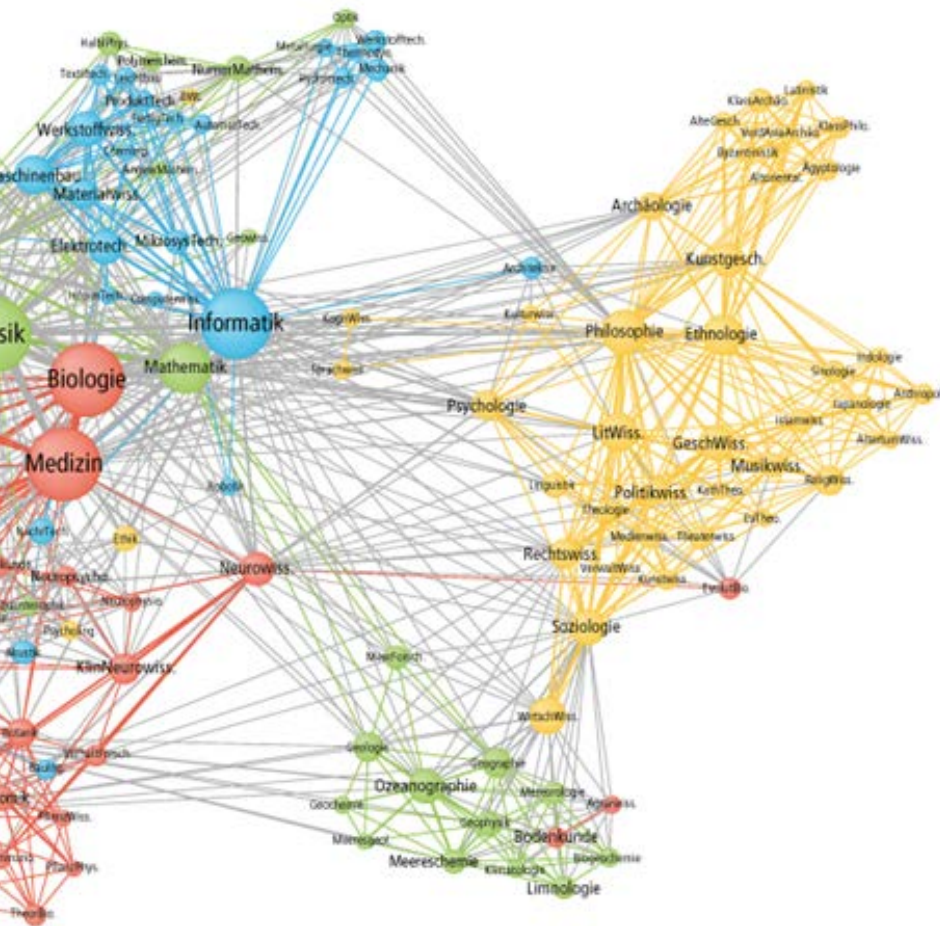
- ▶ funds research projects in the area of **knowledge-driven** research,
- ▶ maintains **dialogue** with society, politics and business, advises state institutions,
- ▶ supports the **transfer of knowledge**.

It takes particular care to promote

- ▶ international **cooperation**,
- ▶ **early career researchers**,
- ▶ **gender equality and diversity** in science and the humanities.

The DFG – In Numbers

www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/facts_figures/statistics

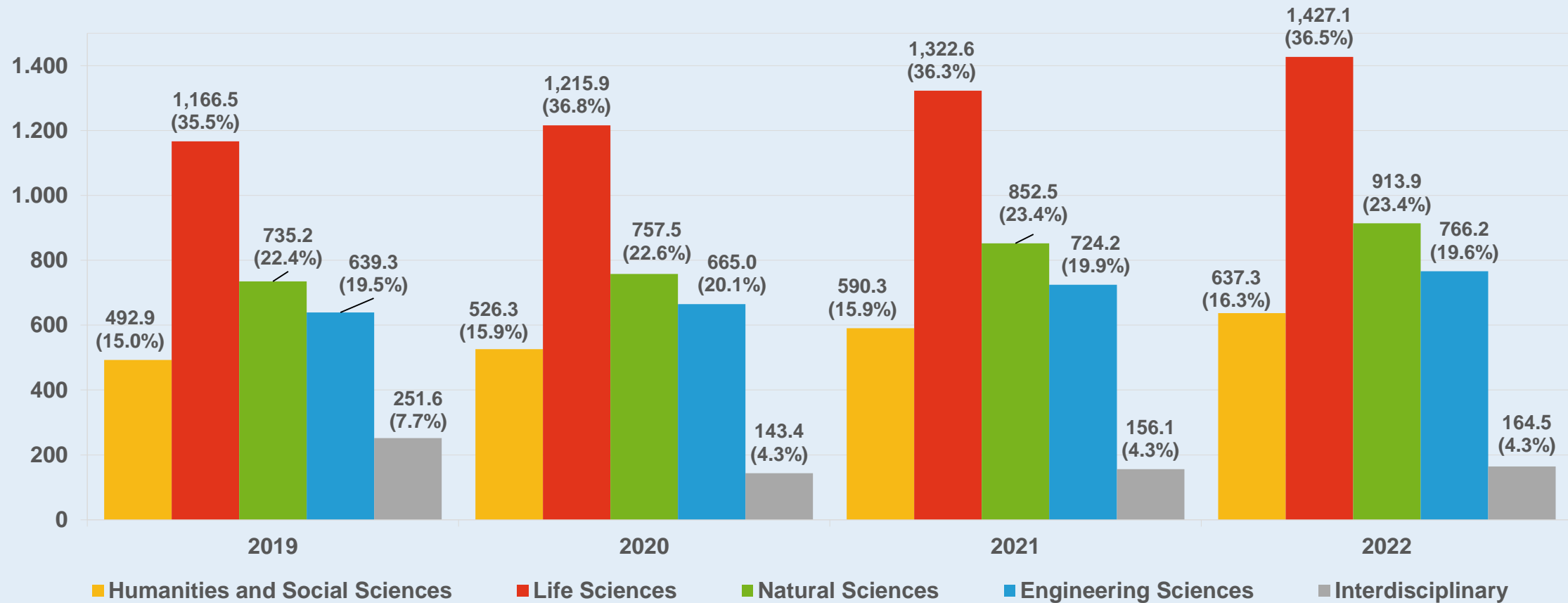


In 2022,

- ▶ the DFG funded around **31,750** projects with a budget that totalled **€ 3.9 billion**
- ▶ the DFG came to **22,300 funding decisions** based on peer-reviews by **16,600 reviewers**
- ▶ almost **€ 1.3 billion** of the budget were spent for **17,700 individual grants projects**

Amount of Research Funding Awarded by Scientific Discipline for Each Calendar Year 2019 to 2022 (in €m and %)

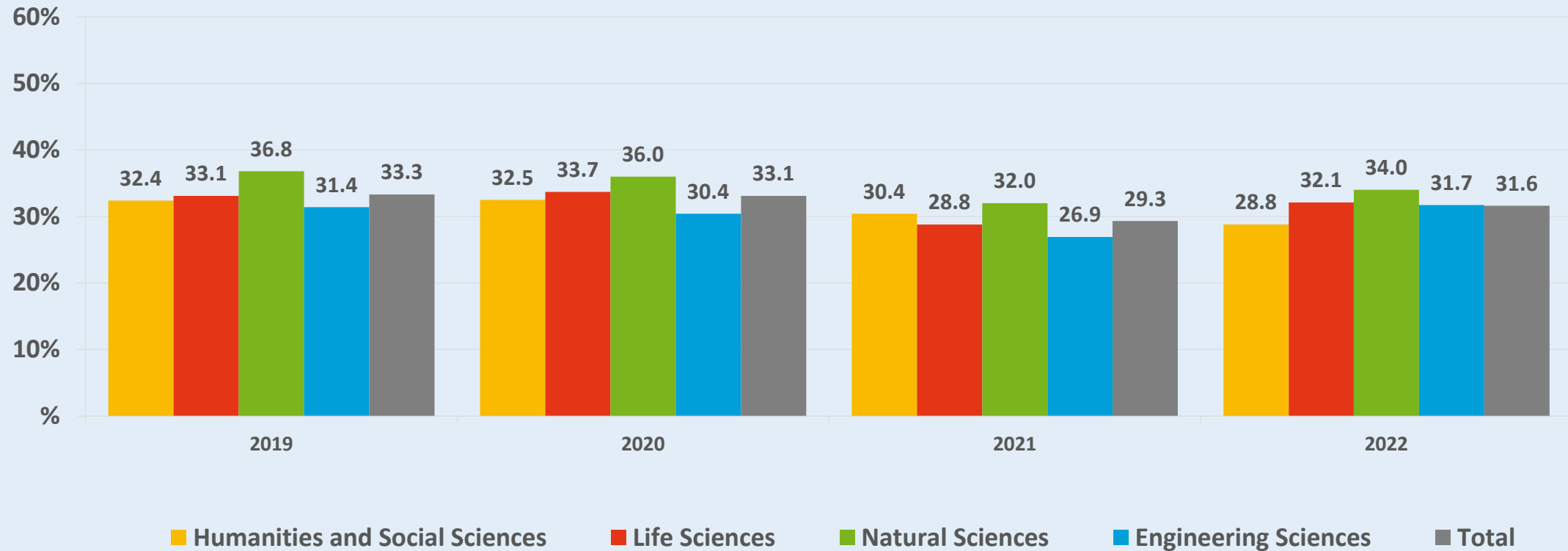
www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/facts_figures/statistics



Funding Rates* in the Individual Grants Programme by Scientific Discipline

2019 to 2022 (in %)

www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/facts_figures/statistics/processing_times_success_rates



* The funding rate (or success rate) was calculated by dividing the number of awards by the number of proposals reviewed.
Source: New Individual grants



Researchers

- ▶ who have completed their scientific training, i.e. who hold a **doctorate** and
- ▶ who (would like to) work in **Germany**.



- ▶ Open, bottom-up choice of **research topics**
- ▶ **Basic research** in any field of science and the humanities
- ▶ No **age** restrictions
- ▶ Individual **career phases** and family-related career breaks are considered in the review process
- ▶ [10 Principles of Effective Career Support in Academia](#)
- ▶ No **deadlines***

excl. Priority Programmes, international calls, Workshops for Early Career Investigators etc.

Topics

1 | The DFG – About Us

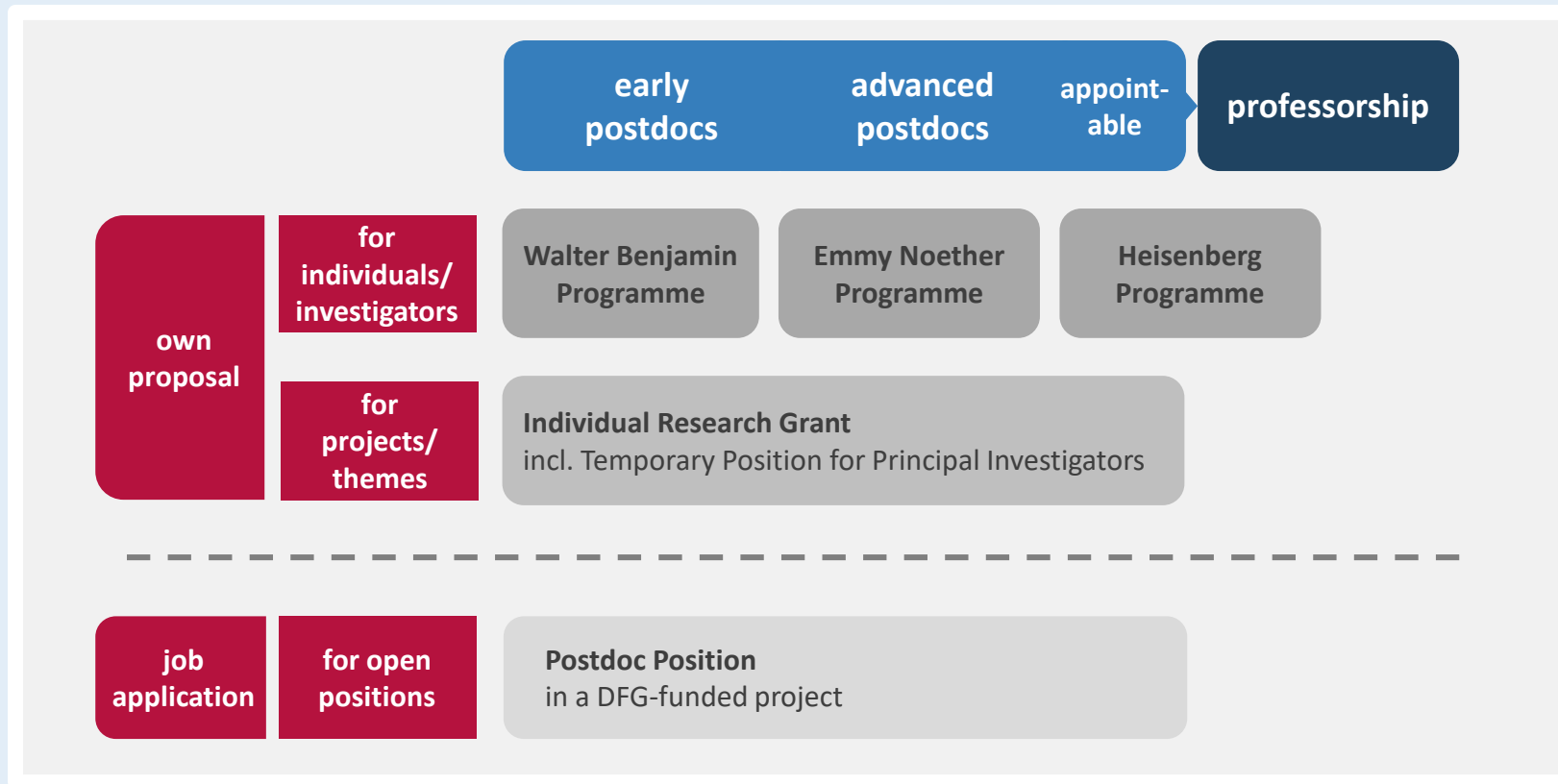
2 | The Walter Benjamin Programme

3 | Review Process and Advice

4 | Links and Resources

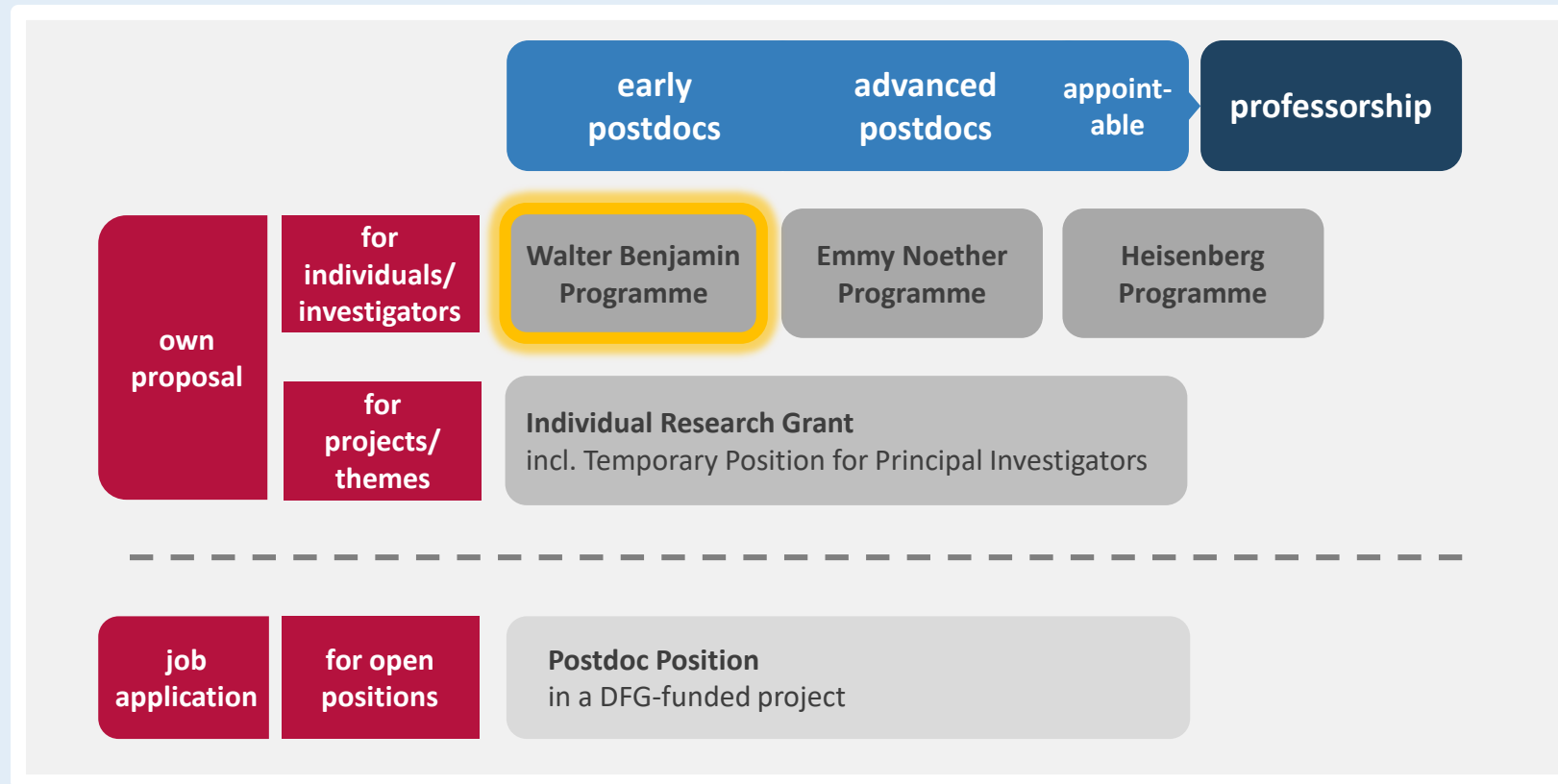
DFG Funding Opportunities for Postdocs

https://www.dfg.de/research_careers
<https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/funding-opportunities/programmes>



DFG Funding Opportunities for Postdocs

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/individual/walter_benjamin





- ▶ **Aim:** Promoting **autonomy and mobility** in an **early postdoc phase**
- ▶ **Mobility:** applicants should move to a **new host institution**, either abroad or in Germany – or combining stays at different places
- ▶ **Career support:** host researcher advises you on your research career and introduces you to new academic networks
- ▶ **Duration:** Funding for up to two years

► Own Project:

- Own, defined research project; **scientific support** by an experienced person is required, who assures the support
- Programme provides step towards more scientific responsibility and independence, as well as further thematic development after the doctorate

► Career Development

- own career planning is part of the application
- the scientific potential for further career steps is an evaluation criterion

► Research institution

- Research institution that allows publication of the results
- Non-profit context

In Germany

Position: E13 TVöD/TV-L

(or position for temporary substitutes for clinicians)

You are employed by your host institution

Abroad

Fellowship: 1,750 €/month +X

+ foreign allowance

+ cost of living allowance

+ child allowance (if applicable)

+ possibility of 6-months return grant

→ use the award calculator on the DFG website

- ▶ **Allowance for direct project costs:** 250 €/month
→ host institution needs to provide all additional project costs



Position in Germany:

- ▶ Support through *Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz (BEEG)*

Fellowship abroad:

- ▶ **child allowance**
 - + € 400 per month for the first child
 - + € 100 per month for each additional child
- ▶ The fellowship can be extended by max. 12 months or costs for **childcare** can be reimbursed.
 - Up to 12 x € 1,750 = max. € 21,000
 - Childcare costs must be verified by presenting invoices and payment receipts
- ▶ Extension and reimbursement of childcare costs can be **combined**.

Programme objective - Mobility

The Walter Benjamin Programme is a **mobility programme**

„Mobility“ means moving to a new **research environment**

- ▶ **As a rule**, a **change of institution** is required

A change of lab within the same institution is insufficient

- ▶ **Exceptions**

Required in the application: Justification of a thematic mobility + justification of exceptional cases

- Family reasons (local childcare, own health condition)
- Highly specialized issue, which can only be carried out at the current institution
- ▶ Criterion of mobility applies consistently for the entire funding period
- ▶ Supporting person should not be the previous doctorate supervisor



Target group – Early stage of career

Early postdoctoral training phase after doctorate

- ▶ No deadline x-years after doctorate
- ▶ Scientific support by an experienced researcher & development measures
- ▶ Orientation framework: EU definition of “recognized researcher (R2)” -> reference to scientific **independence** -> this depends on the content, **subject-specific**
- ▶ Indicators of independent project experience or capability
->Depends on the **individual CV**

Target group - Eligibility

Irrelevant:

- ▶ Nationality
- ▶ Current employment status
- ▶ Current commercial employment (exceptions for the fellowship)

Earliest date to submit proposal:

- ▶ As soon as the dissertation is submitted to the responsible examination office



Target group - Eligibility

Eligibility in Germany (Walter Benjamin Position)

- ▶ No further personal restrictions on eligibility
- ▶ Previous affiliation to Germany's academic research system not relevant

Eligibility abroad (Walter Benjamin Fellowship)

- ▶ Affiliation to Germany's academic research system is assumed
 - You have worked as a researcher in Germany for a continuous period of at least three years during your doctoral and/or postdoctoral phase **at the time of your application.**

OR:

- You have completed the majority of your schooling and higher education in Germany and, as of proposal time, have not spent more than three years abroad for research purposes after completing your doctorate (in Germany or abroad) and have not worked longer than one year at the host institution.



Statement by the Host Researcher

- ▶ Content of the statement by the host researcher (module Walter Benjamin position):
 - **Ensure work environment**
 - **Scientific support** in terms of feedback on the progress of the project, scientific advice
 - Advice on career prospects and development of your own career profile, **concrete measures** for individual support (examples: integration into local structures; integration into professional networks; enabling participation in central conferences, professional and interdisciplinary further training offers)
 - **Provision of funds** to the extent necessary to carry out the project
- ▶ This is not a letter of recommendation, but shows the concrete **offer of support agreed** upon with the host before the application is submitted



Differentiation to the Programme Individual Research Grants

- ▶ Walter Benjamin Programme <-> Individual Research Grants (incl. Temporary Positions for Principal Investigators as project leadership)
 - differ in their funding goals, requirements and funding criteria
- ▶ The **Walter Benjamin Programme** aims to fund the academic career of the applicant. A stay at a host institution in an **early career phase** is funded. The subject of the peer review is therefore also the **career potential** of the applicant. The project is scientifically accompanied by an experienced person.
- ▶ In the case of **Individual Research Grants** (incl. the module Temporary Positions for Principal Investigators), in contrast, aims to fund an independent project, the **quality of the project** is the focus of the evaluation, but not the career development of the project leader.
- ▶ parallel applications are not possible
- ▶ no interruption of a Research Grant project in order to receive funding in the Walter Benjamin Programme

Differentiation to the Programme Individual Research Grants

Temporary Positions for Principle Investigators (Individual Research Grant)

Walter Benjamin Programme

Commonalities

Enables the realisation of research projects in Germany that are limited in time and topic

Differences

All career phases after the doctorate

Independent project management

Mobility not condition for eligibility

Funding period generally 3 years
(extension option)

...

Exclusively early career phase after doctorate

Supervised research

Mobility required (change to a new academic
environment)

Funding period max. 2 years (extension only possible
in exceptional cases)

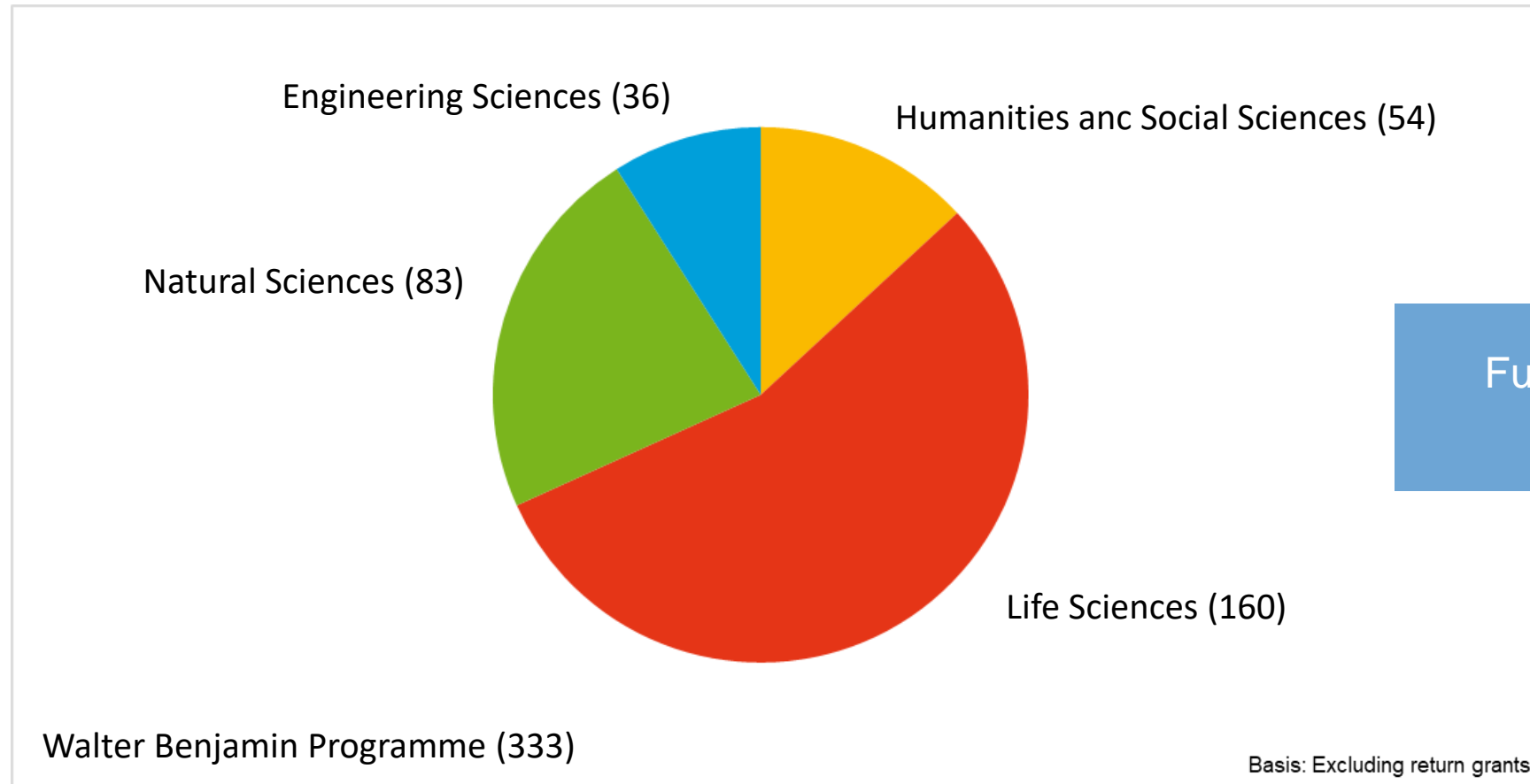
...

Proposal Preparation – First steps

- ▶ Do I belong to the target group? -> early postdoctoral phase; in doubt contact the responsible DFG programme director for your field of science
- ▶ For candidates who want to be funded outside of Germany and only partly completed their schooling and university education in Germany -> check your eligibility
- ▶ Where is the perfect institution? Which experienced person in the scientific field of the project should give me scientific support? -> subject of the review process; institution is a research institution, not commercial context
- ▶ What funds/services do I need? Can I get by with the lump-sum research funds (€250 per month)?
- ▶ What does the supporting person do? -> negotiate which concrete measures; attach a written “host confirmation” (abroad) or “statement” (in Germany)

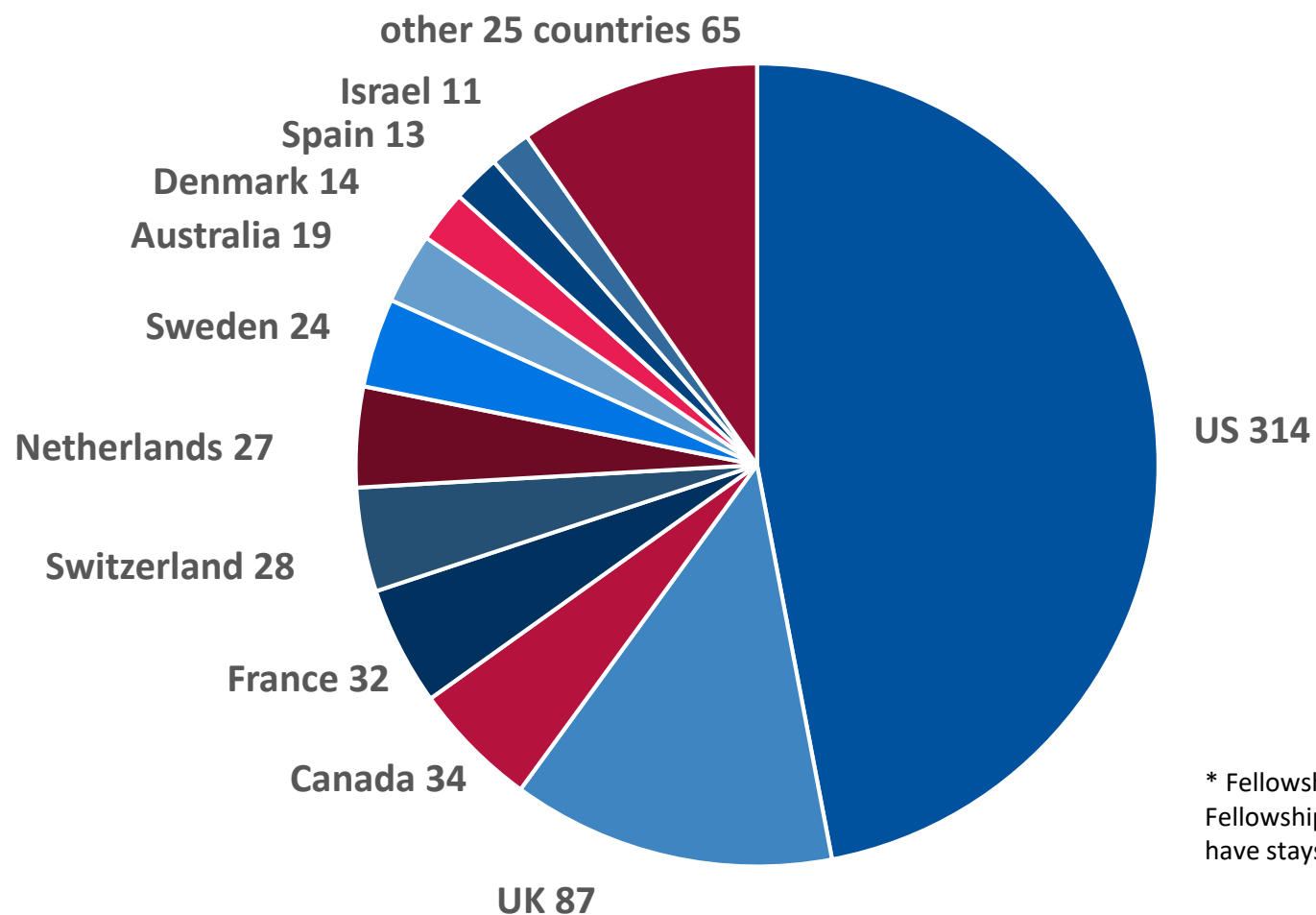
Funded according to Scientific Fields

Number of Walter Benjamin grantees by scientific discipline 2024



Funding rate 2024:
52 %

International Destinations for Fellowships* in 2023



* Fellowships in the Walter Benjamin Programme and the Research Fellowships Programme, without Return Fellowships. Fellows can have stays in different countries.

- ▶ **Do I have to change institutions?** → Yes, if you have worked more than one year at the host institution (fellowship.)/Yes, if there is no special justification to stay (position).
- ▶ **Am I in the early postdoc career?** → Consult the DFG contact persons responsible for your subject area. Indicators: You have already independently managed a research project or you have already managed scientific staff
- ▶ **How long does it take to receive a decision?** → 6-7 months on average
- ▶ **Can I choose more than one institution?** → Yes, if it makes sense for the project and if none of them is your previous institution.



Topics

1 | The DFG – About Us

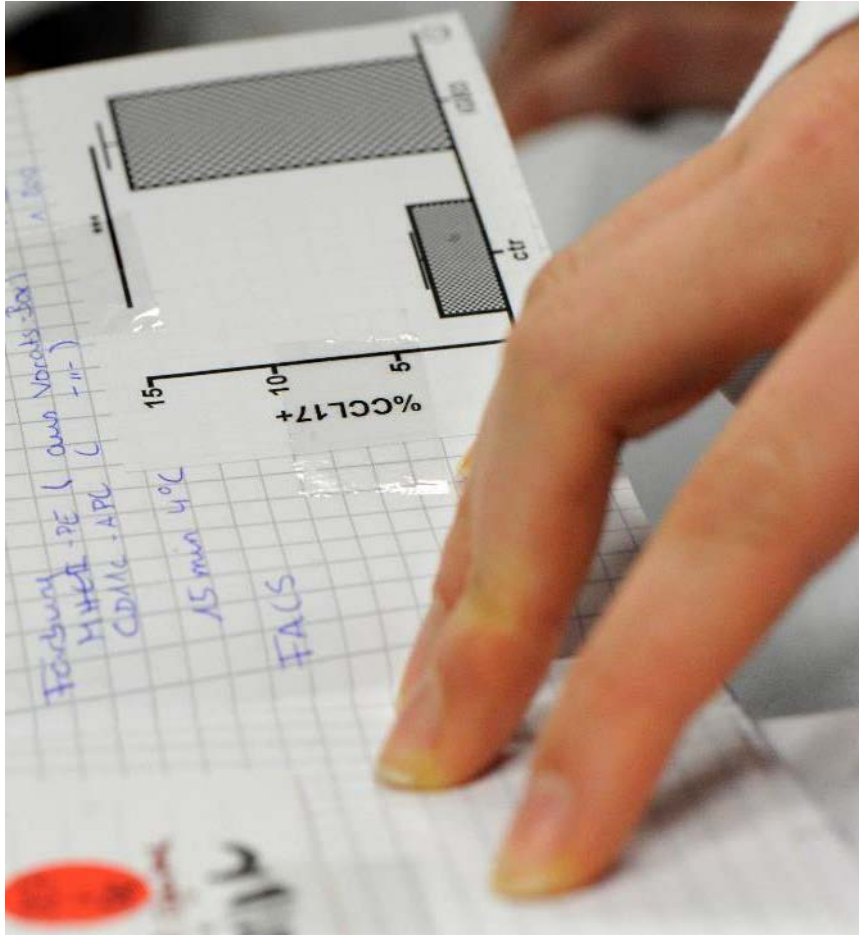
2 | The Walter Benjamin Programme

3 | Review Process and Advice

4 | Links and Resources

Preparing Your Proposal

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/tips_proposals
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/proposal_information
www.dfg.de/en/news/news-topics/announcements-proposals/2025/ifr-25-27



- ▶ Start with smaller projects
 - ▶ Carefully read and follow the proposal instructions
 - ▶ Necessary information can be found on the DFG website
 - ▶ Guidelines, FAQ and contact information
 - ▶ Questions? Ask for help
- ▶ On **eligibility**: procedures-researchcareers@dfg.de
 - ▶ For **general questions** on programmes for **research careers**: info-researchcareers@dfg.de
 - ▶ **All DFG contacts**: www.dfg.de/en/about-us/head-office/programme-contacts

Preparing Your Proposal

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/tips_proposals
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/proposal_information
www.dfg.de/de/formulare-10-20-246348



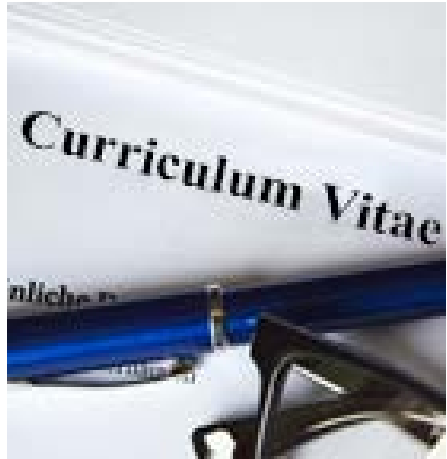
- ▶ Decide on the proposal **language**: English or German
- ▶ Put yourself in the **reviewers' shoes**
 - ▶ Address the review criteria
 - ▶ Write the proposal self-explanatory
- ▶ Seek honest criticism from colleagues
- ▶ Plan on a feasible **timeline**:
 - ▶ Preparation of additional documents takes time
 - ▶ The time to decision is ca. six months
- ▶ Communicate openly with the DFG Head Office, i.e. if a conflict of interest or competitive scenario exists

Proposal Contents

- ▶ What is the knowledge gap you would like to fill?
- ▶ Why are the expected results novel and relevant?
- ▶ What's your concrete, realistic and feasible plan to answer your research questions?
- ▶ How are you going to manage setbacks / what's your plan b?
- ▶ Why are you the right person to successfully run this project?

Preparing Your CV

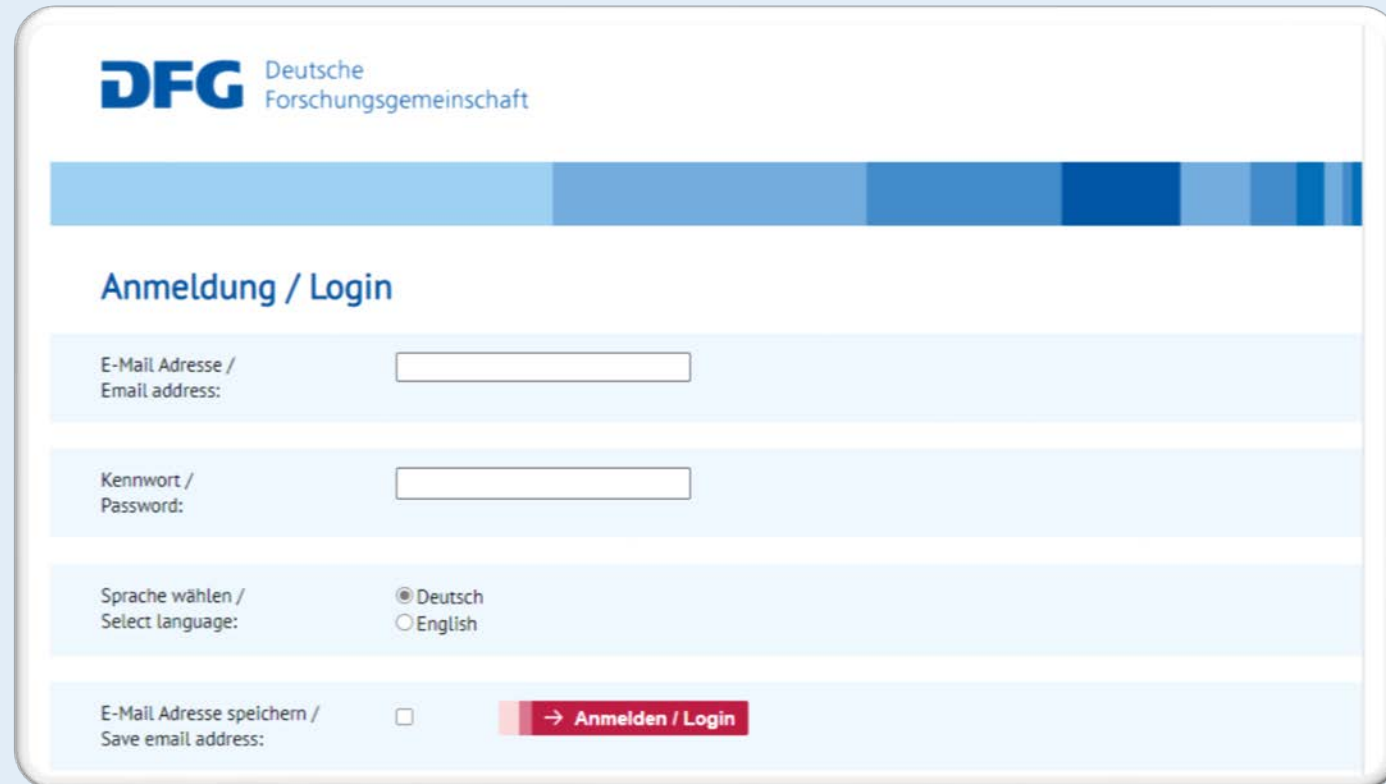
www.dfg.de/formulare/53_200_elan/53_200_en_elan.rtf
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/tips_proposals
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/proposal_information



- ▶ Use the DFG **CV template**
- ▶ Mention time away from research relating e.g. to family, dependent care or illness; no details required
- ▶ Convince reviewers of your **qualification**
 - Include prizes, fellowships and awards
 - List up to **ten peer-reviewed publications**
Comment on your contribution if not obvious
 - Include further publications/results/activities within and outside the research system

Submitting Your Proposal via *elan*

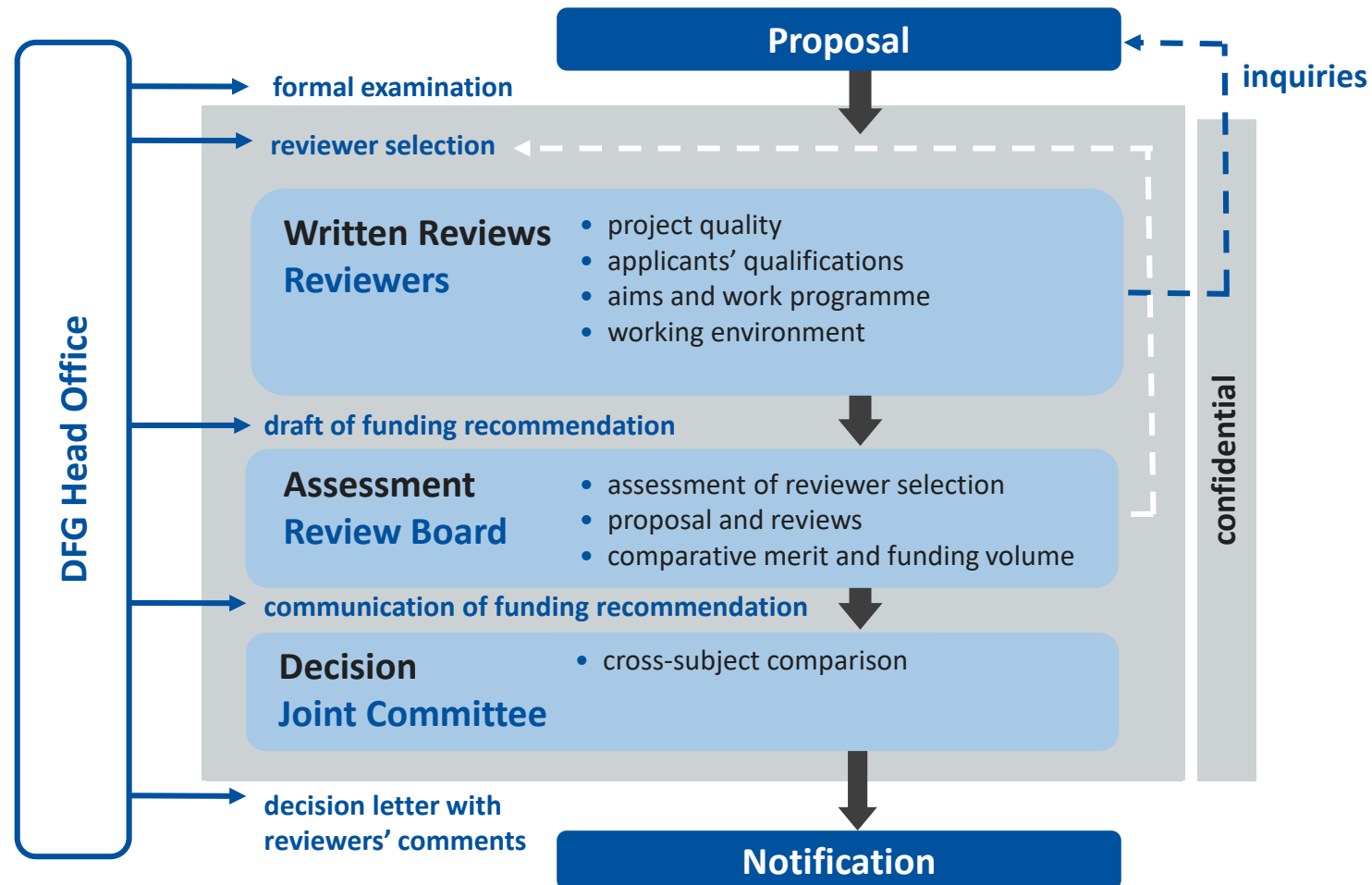
<https://elan.dfg.de/my.policy>
www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes/proposal_information



The screenshot shows the login interface of the DFG elan system. At the top left is the DFG logo (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). Below it is a decorative blue bar. The main heading is "Anmeldung / Login". There are three input fields: "E-Mail Adresse / Email address:", "Kennwort / Password:", and "Sprache wählen / Select language:". The language field has two radio buttons: "Deutsch" (selected) and "English". At the bottom left is a checkbox for "E-Mail Adresse speichern / Save email address:". To the right of the checkbox is a red button labeled "→ Anmelden / Login".

Review Process in the Individual Grants Programme

<https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/proposal-funding-process/decision-making-process>



In Case Your Proposal Is not Successful...

<https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/proposal-funding-process/individual-grants-programmes/approval-rejection>



- ▶ Don't be discouraged
- ▶ Take the reviewers' comments seriously but not personally
- ▶ Consult the DFG Head Office if you need advice or feel that you have been treated unfairly
- ▶ Consider the reviewer's comments – they might give you some pointers for reworking your proposal

Advice for Research Careers

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/research_careers



- ▶ Develop your own and independent research profile
- ▶ Publish independently (or with various researchers)
- ▶ Be mobile and find the best environment for your research
- ▶ Build networks of collaboration partners

1 | The DFG – About Us

2 | The Walter Benjamin Programme

3 | Review Process and Advice

4 | Links and Resources

Links and Resources



- ▶ **Orientation** for early-career researchers: www.dfg.de/research_careers
- ▶ Individual Grants Programmes – A **How-To Guide**: www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programmes
- ▶ **Video Clips**: [Faces: The Walter Benjamin Programme of the DFG – YouTube](#) and [Das Walter Benjamin-Programm erklärt \(with English subtitles\) – YouTube](#)
- ▶ Video clip on DFG decisions: <https://youtu.be/NUIfyUOOCM>
- ▶ Profiles of 25,000 German research institutes: <https://www.gerit.org/en>
- ▶ GEPRIS – database with all DFG-funded projects: <https://gepris.dfg.de/en/>
- ▶ Contacts: [DFG, German Research Foundation - DFG Head Office](#)
- ▶ FAQ: [DFG, German Research Foundation - FAQ: Walter Benjamin Programme \(WBP\)](#)
- ▶ Forms & guidelines: [DFG - Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - Formulare und Merkblätter](#)