

Postdoc fellowships & funding grants

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Which scholarships and funding programmes for postdocs are available in Germany? And under what circumstances are they granted? An overview.

academics.com has put together a list of the largest funding programmes and scholarships for postdocs

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Postdoctoral funding opportunities

BY BIRK GRÜLING

The number of funding opportunities for postdocs has risen sharply in the last few years, especially with respect to subject-specific scholarships and universities offering their own fellowship programmes. This means it is difficult to provide a comprehensive or even complete overview of all of them. Below, academics.com has put together a list of the largest programmes and those that provide funding across various disciplines. Besides conducting their own internet search, potential applicants are also advised to visit the universities they are applying to and to meet with the postdoc supervisors.

German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - DFG) funding programmes

The German Research Foundation has a large range of funding programmes to support researches in the sciences and the humanities at all stages of their academic careers.

Emmy Noether Programme

The Emmy Noether Programme is undoubtedly the most well-known of the DFG's postdoctoral funding programmes. The award aims to promote academic independence by supporting young researchers in conducting their own research projects and in leading a team of junior researchers. [Postdocs](#) with between two and four years of prior research experience and relevant international experience are eligible to

[apply. www.dfg.de/en/researchfunding/programmes/individual/emmynoether/index.html](http://www.dfg.de/en/researchfunding/programmes/individual/emmynoether/index.html)

Heisenberg Programme

The Heisenberg Programme can be described as a continuation of the Emmy Noether Programme and is directed at junior faculty. The programme aims to support applicants in becoming qualified for a tenured professorship.

www.dfg.de/en/researchfunding/programmes/individual/heisenberg/index.html

The DFG also provides many other forms of financial support and funding programmes for postdocs. An overview of all DFG programmes is available

here: www.dfg.de/en/researchfunding/principlesfunding/researchcareers/index.html

Marie Curie Fellowships

The European-wide Marie Curie Fellowships aim to support the mobility of young researchers. The programme is open to applicants from any discipline and is therefore divided into separate funding schemes. Early-career researchers can also apply for a Marie Curie Fellowship to support their own individually developed research projects.

www.cordis.europa.eu

Starting Grants

The Starting Grants programme aims to support young researchers in establishing their own independent research teams. Funding can be granted for a maximum of five years for up to 1.5 million euro per grant. Postdocs with a minimum of two years of professional experience since the completion of their doctorate may apply.

www.erc.europa.eu/starting-grants

Funding programmes of the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst - DAAD)

The DAAD also awards postdoctoral grants for specific research projects abroad.

www.daad.de/deutschland/en/

The DAAD's free scholarship database also provides a good overview of international funding programmes available to scholars and scientists: www.daad.de/deutschland/en/

Euraxess Germany database

Euraxess Germany is directed at young researchers in Europe. The portal contains practical information regarding professional as well as daily life and offers a large database with job and funding opportunities.

www.euraxess.de/portal/fundingdatabasein.html

Research in Germany

Research in Germany helps researchers who come directly to Germany after completing their doctorates. The site contains useful information on funding for postdocs at university, research institutes and in German industry.

<https://www.research-in-germany.org/en.html>

Humboldt Research Fellowships for Postdocs

The Humboldt Research Fellowship for Postdocs is aimed at young scholars from all disciplines and nationalities who are at the start of their research careers (applicants should have completed their doctorates within the last four years). Successful applicants will have the opportunity to carry out their own research project (6-24 months) in collaboration with a research institute of their own choice in Germany.

www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/humboldt-fellowship-postdoc.html

An overview of other funding programmes provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is available here: www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/programmes-by-target-group.html

Fritz Thyssen Foundation

The Fritz Thyssen Foundation supports young scholars in the fields of "history, language, and culture"; "state, economy, and society"; "medicine and the natural sciences"; "imagery and representation"; and "international relations". The foundation awards funding to scholars with a PhD for the pursuit of specific projects and offers scholarships to young scholars (within two years of completion of their doctorate).

www.fritz-thyssen-stiftung.de

Volkswagen Foundation Lichtenberg Professorships

The Volkswagen Foundation's Lichtenberg Professorships support scholars and scientists in innovative fields of research at German universities. Postdoctoral researchers with a minimum of two years of research experience since the completion of their doctoral degree may apply.

<https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en>

The Volkswagen Foundation also offers other forms of funding for academics and researchers in addition to the Lichtenberg Professorships. Details of these can be found at: <https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en>

Leopoldina Postdoc Scholarship

The Leopoldina funding programme is a good example of one of the many subject-specific scholarships available for postdoctoral research. Funding is awarded to outstanding young scholars (under 36 years of age) working within the natural sciences and medicine. Scholarship recipients are given the opportunity to carry out their own independent projects abroad at a leading research institute in their field.

www.leopoldina.org/en/funding/leopoldina-fellowship-programme/leopoldina-postdoc-scholarship/

The German Education Union (GEW) provides a comprehensive overview of other foundations and their funding programmes.

Research funding at the regional and national

level: www.gew.de/ForschungsfoerderungaufBundes-undLaenderebene2.html (in German)

Research funding at the European

level: www.gew.de/FoerderungaufeuropaeischerEbene2.html (in German)

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Research funding for postdoctoral researchers

BY JULIA BECKER

Immediately after being awarded their doctorates, many researchers want to focus on pure research for a few years. But even researchers at this stage of their careers will find a wide range of funding opportunities on offer from German sponsors.

Support for general research: DFG research grants

Scientists in all disciplines who have already obtained their doctorate can apply for a research grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG). These funds can be used for concrete research projects with a high level of scientific merit. Researchers can apply for money to fund their own position, for staff, scientific equipment, resources, travel costs and other expenses. The duration of funding depends on the length of the project being supported.

Support for projects and young scientists: The Fritz Thyssen Foundation

The Fritz Thyssen Foundation also sponsors research projects, primarily those in Germany but also international projects. Researchers with outstanding academic records who have obtained doctorates are eligible to apply for scholarships. Applications will only be accepted from researchers who are affiliated with a university or a non-profit research institution. In addition to extensive evidence of previous work, applicants must also submit a cost analysis for their research projects which details how much money is required and what it will be used for.

In addition to this project-specific support, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation also offers a scholarship for young researchers who have completed their doctorate within the past two years. There are no age limits for these scholarships, and the monthly amount paid to recipients is €1,700 gross. Scholarships are generally awarded for a period of one year.

Supporting research between the USA and Germany: The NIH/DFG Research Career Transition Awards Program

The NIH/DFG Research Career Transition Awards Program organised by the German Research Foundation (DFG) is aimed at highly-qualified scientists who want to carry out research in the USA and Germany after completing their doctorate. The programme is designed to run for five to six years and is divided into two phases: The first two to three years will see researchers visit one of 13 NIH institutes in the USA. During the remainder of the project, participants will attend a research institution in Germany. Researchers will receive a monthly stipend and will also receive support for travel expenses and materials up to a predetermined maximum amount. Applicants to this programme will need an outstanding research background and an original, international research project.

Support for research networks

An important part of the research landscape is broadening horizons and developing cooperation with other research institutions. This is what the German Research Foundation (DFG) seeks to do with its "Scientific Networks" programme which is aimed at young scientists who have already completed their doctorates. This programme is also aimed at researchers outside Germany who will have the opportunity to help establish international networks. The support

provided consists of funding for travel, material and publication expenses incurred as a result of carrying out joint research between two locations and is provided for a maximum of three years. Anyone interested in establishing a scientific network must present a concept which has a clear collaborative research goal.

Funding for foreign scientists in Germany: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation provides support which will be of interest to foreign scientists looking to carry out research in Germany. The Foundation provides, among other things, a monthly research stipend of €2,450 for postdoctoral researchers. In addition, recipients also receive financial support for travel and language courses. The requirements for applicants include a doctorate completed within the previous four years and scientific publications in internationally recognized scientific journals. The Foundation uses this general scholarship to provide funding programmes for scientists from specific countries and with specific specialisms.

Funding for foreign researchers in Germany: opportunities from the DAAD

The DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) offers a wide range of scholarships for foreign scientists who want to carry out research in Germany. To help researchers find the most appropriate programme, the DAAD has created a search engine which allows scientists to enter details about their scientific status, their country of origin and their subject area.

Support from the European Union: Marie Curie Individual Fellowships

The European Commission provides support in the form of Marie Curie Individual Fellowships for scientists from the EU who want to carry out research outside their home country. The fellowships are also available to international researchers who want to carry out research in the EU. The Marie Curie Fellowships comprise a number of different programmes: The Intra-European Fellowships (IEF) are aimed at researchers from within the EU who want to carry out research outside their home country (in another European country). The International Outgoing Fellowships (IOF) support European scientists working on research projects outside the EU. The International Incoming Fellowships are scholarships for non-EU citizens looking to set up research projects in the EU. The Marie Curie Fellowships offer a number of other programmes in addition to the three programmes mentioned above. Applicants for all programmes must have completed their doctorates or have completed a comparable amount of research over a period of at least four years.

Support for the humanities: The "Pro Geisteswissenschaften" funding initiative

Academics involved in the humanities who have recently completed their doctorates can apply for funding from a special cooperation programme run by the Volkswagen Foundation, the Fritz-Thyssen Foundation and the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (the organisation representing donors for German science). These institutions have created the "Pro Geisteswissenschaften" funding initiative for the humanities which is aimed at providing financial support for highly-qualified researchers in the humanities.

The initiative comprises several components of which the Dilthey Fellowship is particularly relevant for postdoctoral researchers. The support provided under this initiative is initially limited to a period of five years but can be extended for an additional five years subject to a successful evaluation. The annual funding amounts to €80,000 and can be used to pay for a researcher's salary, materials and travel expenses. The funding period can also be used to write publications which will form part of the researcher's habilitation.

Scholarships for the historians: Research scholarships from the Gerda Henkel Foundation

Postdoctoral researchers who are active in the area of historical research and are planning large, fixed-period research or projects can obtain support in the form of research scholarships or funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation. Of particular interest to individuals are the research scholarships which are granted for a maximum of two years. Recipients, who can be from Germany or abroad, receive a monthly stipend of €2,000 as well as supplements for childcare, materials and travel expenses. Applicants are expected to demonstrate outstanding grades and a doctorate.

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Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is a renowned address for funding international research cooperation projects. Whether for postdoctoral researchers or internationally established scientists, the funding programmes of the Humboldt foundation create specific areas of research.

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation supports an active network of researchers around the world. Its unique feature is that it allows the funded researchers to freely choose their host research institution. The fellowship is especially aimed at postdoctoral and experienced researchers. There are no restrictions with regard to the applicant's country of origin. Researchers of all disciplines can apply.

Humboldt research fellowships for post-doctoral researchers

The Humboldt research fellowship enables postdoctoral researchers to carry out a research project within a pre-defined timeframe (duration of 6 to 24 months). Applicants are required to have graduated with an above-average PhD grade less than four years ago. If your PhD graduation is still pending, you may apply for the Humboldt Fellowship and include the manuscript of your dissertation.

Humboldt research fellowship for experienced researchers

Experienced researchers may apply if they completed their doctorates less than twelve years ago. It is expected that the applicants have engaged in an academic career. This has to be evaluated individually. You may have been an assistant professor, gained experience in leading a junior research group or have carried out several years of your own research. The fellowship (duration: 6-18 months) can be flexibly divided into a maximum of three stays with research hosts within a period of three years.

The foundation is interested in offering individually tailored solutions to fellows. Therefore, specific research scholarships exist for research projects which directly address the requirements of the researchers. Postdoctoral and experienced researchers can take advantage, for example, of the Thyssen-Humboldt Short-Term Fellowship (for academics from Latin America) and the Georg Forster Research Fellowship (for academics from developing and threshold countries). Internationally renowned researchers may receive one of up to 100 Humboldt research awards the Humboldt Foundation assigns each year. International cutting-edge academics may be nominated for an Alexander von Humboldt professorship, which is associated with pioneering research opportunities.

Financial support from the foundation

The extent of financial support offered is dependent on the type of fellowship or award. The Humboldt Foundation furthermore covers travel expenses and provides mobility allowances as well as supplementary allowances for accompanying spouses or children. The European research fellowship (within the Humboldt and Georg Forster Research Fellowship Programme) offers you a six-month research stay in another European country with the potential for an extension. Apart from the research project, the Foundation also offers language scholarships and German language courses for the fellows and award winners.

What language skills are required?

German or English language skills are required for carrying out a research project. Researchers from the fields of the humanities or social sciences and medicine must have a good command of German if it is necessary to carry out the project successfully. A language course is not compulsory. However, the Humboldt Foundation is interested in integrating its foreign fellows into German social life. Individual support during the stay in Germany as well as continuous contact with the guest researchers are paramount at Humboldt Foundation.

Further information available at: www.humboldt-foundation.de/en

Becoming a professor with Emmy Noether

BY MIRIAM BUCHMANN-ALISCH

Five years of flexible and independent research - the dream of many young scientists. For junior research group leaders it can come true. Marc Toussaint is a junior research group leader at TU Berlin - his subject is machine learning.

Looking around the tidy, window-fronted office, a robot arm wrapped in foil draws the eye. "It's still brand new", explains Marc Toussaint as he removes its protective cover. "Soon it will be demonstrating how robots learn to behave intelligently." The underlying information processing routines are the subject of Toussaint's research, conducted with his "Machine Learning and Robotics" junior research group at the Technical University (TU) Berlin.

The neurocomputing specialist is one of 300 postdocs whose projects are currently funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in its "Emmy Noether" excellence programme. His postdoc project has already been running for two years - the funding period for a research group is usually five years.

Individual research topics for doctoral candidates

With the flexible funding made available to him he finances three doctoral candidates from the fields of cognitive science, mathematics and computer science whom he hand-picked for his group. They work in offices next door, conduct their research embedded into his project, but they also each have their own research focus. "Group leaders handle that in very different ways", declares the young scientist. "I want my doctoral candidates to have their own research topics. What we have in common are the methods." The four-person research group from Berlin has just returned from a one-week international conference in Canada. "We showed up there resembling a small family", recounts Toussaint with a smile. "Everyone on the team had their own paper on their own subject. It was a great success for the group."

The appeal of research

Numbers and logic already fascinated him back in his school days: "Everybody always knew that I would study physics or mathematics." And that's what he did, at the University of Cologne. "Studying at university was great. What I enjoyed most was that feeling of, wow!, something new just opened up for me."

And that remains the appeal of research for him to this day: "What questions are truly open and unanswered?" The question motivated him to switch from theoretical physics to neuroinformatics after his Diplom thesis. He completed his doctorate at the Institute of Neurocomputing of the Ruhr University Bochum with "summa cum laude". Formalistic mathematical solutions like his are currently rare in this field.

Independence abroad

Immediately after his doctorate, Toussaint went abroad for two years with a research grant from the DFG. "The independence was pretty important to me", he explains. He chose the University of Edinburgh, which offered him ideal conditions for his research, and expanded his current specialisms of machine learning and robotics there.

From there, he applied to the DFG for his current post. He covered the six months until his project began as a guest scientist at the robotics department of the Honda Research Institute in Offenbach. "My work there was complementary to my theoretical orientation. It was very interesting to see the robotics laboratories, and what problems arise there." Honda Research is today one of his co-operation partners in research.

"We collect ideas together"

Within the Emmy Noether programme, teaching is not mandatory, but considered desirable. Toussaint will also be holding a lecture this semester. On a typical working day, he spends the morning on his own research, prepares talks and publications.

The shared lunches with his team and other colleagues, which provide lively social and professional exchange, are important to him. "In my first year I spent a lot of time teaching my doctoral candidates the basics and methods in order to create a common basis", he recalls. "Nowadays we discuss specific content-related issues and collect ideas together." Every Monday the team reads and discusses current research literature.

Good management and soft skills are important for a career in research

Living one's life for research also requires abilities that don't come easily to every academic. "If you want to be successful in this business - and it is a business - you need many other qualities you're not prepared for and that often have little to do with research", says Toussaint. He publishes a lot and has had to develop soft skills that are also in demand on other [career paths](#). "Research careers benefit greatly from good management and presentation skills. Or from a glowing personality."

Three or four times a year he gives talks around the world. He has twice won a "Best Paper Award" at international conferences. Nationally he sets up co-operations by regularly presenting his basic research at research institutions.

"There is no tenure track option"

Toussaint would very much like to stay in Germany. "If I wanted to go abroad, I would already have gone." His aim is a professorship. But his five-year research project does not offer the prospect of being kept on at the institute afterwards. "That's the biggest problem in the German system - there is no tenure track option. The Emmy Noether Programme is intended to bridge the gap to a professorship, similar to a junior professorship. And it does, if you're only talking about

the time. But it doesn't when it comes to prospects at one's own institute", he explains. "I know that there is no way I can be kept on here - no matter how good I am."

This will also be a loss to the faculty where the project is embedded practically, but not institutionally. Toussaint has set up his research group there, acquired significant funds and therefore posts with his project, and made a name for the TU Berlin in the field of machine learning and robotics. Once his project ends, little of that will remain.

Good chance with a research profile

Nonetheless he considers the postdoc programme to be an important milestone in his career. He summarises: "The Emmy Noether Programme gives me the opportunity to advance my own research and gain project experience. I was able to set up my own group and can expand my own research profile. Those are important criteria. I think I stand a good chance."

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