

DRS HONORS Fellowships, 2016-1 - Program Guidelines –

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1 Program Overview

Dahlem Research School (DRS) is the Center for Junior Researchers at Freie Universität Berlin. Its aim is to increase the awareness of the needs of doctoral candidates and postdocs in general and to implement sustainable structures to systematically support them in their academic career. The two core elements of DRS are professional qualification programs tailored to junior researchers at different career stages and a fellowship program for outstanding postdocs. For more information please visit www.fu-berlin.de/en/drs.

The DRS Postdoc Fellowship Program aims to integrate postdoctoral researchers into the university's interdisciplinary and international research projects in an early phase of their career. It provides funding and support for outstanding postdoctoral fellows to conduct their own research project at Freie Universität Berlin.

The HONORS Fellowships are part of the DRS Postdoc Fellowship Program. The HONORS program offers annually up to 10 fellowships, each lasting 12 months. This DRS fellowship program is aimed at candidates who have submitted their doctoral thesis in one of the DRS' doctoral programs. To apply, candidates are expected to propose an independently developed research project that will be supported by their prospective scientific advisors at Freie Universität Berlin.

2 Aim

The DRS HONORS Fellowship Program aims to support junior researchers in the transition to their first postdoctoral position or in developing their own research project for their first third-party funded research project. During the program, fellows receive extensive personalized support, along with access to the DRS professional qualification program. Throughout the HONORS funding period and alongside their research activities, fellows are expected to prepare a grant proposal for follow-up funding or to apply for a postdoctoral position.

3 Eligibility Criteria

Candidates may apply if they are a member of **one of the doctoral programs of Dahlem Research School and**

- they have submitted their dissertation
- if the dissertation has already been defended, the date of the defense must lie within 6 months of the application deadline
- they completed their doctoral studies within 3.5 years (time between begin of studies and submission of dissertation). In exceptional circumstances a duration of up to 4.5 years may be accepted.
- their supervisor provides a reference letter in which the quality of the dissertation is evaluated
- they are supported by a professor of Freie Universität Berlin who agrees to act as scientific advisor during the time of the fellowship
- they have developed and propose an interdisciplinary and innovative research project

In order to strengthen the academic networks of Freie Universität Berlin, collaborative research projects with existing or potential partner institutions are highly welcome.

4 Benefits

The *DRS Postdoc Fellowship Program* includes a monthly allowance and access to a tailor-made professional qualification program delivered by Dahlem Research School.

4.1 Financial Support

The fellowship is determined by the postdoctoral stipend rates of the German Research Foundation (DFG) and is made up of a monthly base amount according to age group and a monthly research and travel cost contribution. Fellows with children receive a child allowance.

Monthly base amount 1750€

Monthly research contribution 250€

Monthly child allowance

- For the first child 400 €
- For each additional child 100 €

In the case of parental allowance provided by the state of Berlin, this will be deducted from the HONORS child allowance.

The financial support as part of the HONORS Fellowship will end at the latest after 12 months or as soon as a new position has been accepted or other follow-up funding secured. An extension of the HONORS Fellowship is not possible. The DRS is to be notified immediately once a new position or follow-up funding has been found.

4.2 Ancillary Activities

DRS Honors Fellowships are full-time stipends. The stipend amount is calculated in such a way that it covers fellows living expenses and allows them to concentrate fully on their research project and on grant applications. Ancillary activities are only allowed in exceptional circumstances and only if they do not affect the intended purpose of the stipend. They have to be reported and approved by the DRS. Any additional income may be deducted from the HONORS stipend.

4.3 Professional Development

HONORS Fellows are entitled to take part in the DRS Qualification Program and attend courses in the areas *Academic Performance*, *Management Competencies* und *Career Development*, as appropriate for their career phase during the funding period. All courses are offered at least once per year as part of the [Researcher Development Program](#) (aimed at postdocs, junior group leaders and junior professors) or the [Professional Development Program](#) (aimed at doctoral candidates and postdocs). Beyond the required and recommended courses you may register for any course of your own choosing.

Attendance at following workshops and courses is mandatory:

1. **Orientation Day** (date to be announced)
2. **Grants & Funding**
3. **Grants Writing***

*If the course *Grants Writing* or *Drittmittelantrag* has already been attended during the PhD program, it is not necessary to repeat it. In this case the DRS should be notified in due time.

4.4 Supervision

Each fellow will have a scientific advisor to

- provide subject-specific advice during regular meetings
- support their professional development through integration into department/ institute courses and activities

5 Selection Process

5.1 Eligibility Check and Evaluation of Research Performance

The eligibility check is conducted by the DRS fellowship team.

Only complete applications that meet all eligibility criteria will be passed on to the next phase of the selection process.

5.2 Peer Review

The peer review consists of an external evaluation by an impartial expert who was recommended on the basis of their subject expertise by the future scientific advisor. The external review will be based on the following criteria:

- Quality and innovation of the research proposal (60%)
- Convincing statement of motivation with regard to future career aspirations in academia (20%)
- Proof of scientific excellence as evidenced by the previous career track, publications, awards, successful funding applications, etc. (20%)

Applications will be scored and the ten highest ranking candidates will be invited for a short interview.

Special circumstances and personal commitments (especially family-related career breaks) that place applicants at a disadvantage may be considered. An additional 5% can be added to the score for each year of family-related interruption in an applicant's career, up to a maximum of 25%. Part-time positions will be credited proportionally.

5.3 Structured Interviews

The structured interviews are conducted by an interdisciplinary selection board recruited from Freie Universität's junior professors, junior group leaders and DRS postdoctoral fellows.

Process: Each interview will last 10 minutes.

- Candidates give an oral presentation of their project. The presentation should be clear and understandable to non-specialists. Although notes may be used, the presentation should not be read from a script. (5 min.)
- The panel will ask questions relating to the project and the future career plans of the candidate. (5 min.)

After each interview, the panel will take a further 5 minutes to discuss their comments and agree the final joint score.

Based on the interview scores, the panel prepares a ranking list and makes a recommendation to the Executive Board of Freie Universität. Criteria in the interview are:

- Clarity of research idea and convincing defense of the proposed research project (60%)
- Convincing statement of motivation with regard to future career aspirations (20%)
- Overall quality of candidate's presentation, incl. language and communication skills (20%)

The steering committee (Ständige Kommission - SK) of DRS will approve all recommended applications.

5.4 Final Assessment

The final selection is conducted by the Executive Board of Freie Universität Berlin. The assessment is made on the basis of the internal and external peer reviews and the structured interviews. Up to five fellowships can be offered in each round (up to 10 per year). The most important criterion is scientific excellence.

6 Responsibilities and Services

6.1 HONORS Fellows

HONORS Fellows are required to

- implement the research project described in their application. Major changes to the time and work schedule outlined in the application, especially concerning research trips abroad or applications for further funding, should be reported to the DRS as soon as possible.
- plan a longer-term research project and apply to German and/or international funding organizations for the necessary funding or apply directly for a postdoctoral position
- submit an interim report after 6 months of funding co-signed by the scientific advisor. The DRS provides a report template.
- submit a final report on their activities to the DRS, co-signed by the scientific advisor, no later than one month after conclusion of the project. The DRS provides a report template.
- include a reference to the DRS HONORS Fellowship program of Freie Universität Berlin in all publications associated with the project
- participate in interim and final evaluations as well as follow-up information gathering activities
- notify DRS for any and all ancillary activities. All ancillary activities require the approval of DRS.

HONORS Fellows have the opportunity to present themselves and their projects on the DRS Website: http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/promovieren/drs/drs_fellowships/drs_fellows/index.html.

6.2 Scientific Advisors

General conditions

The scientific advisors ensure that HONORS fellows

- are provided with an appropriate workplace in line with the requirements of their specific projects
- are included in courses and events, colloquia, seminars, conferences, etc.

The scientific advisors also

- provide subject-specific advice during regular meetings
- co-sign the final report

Application phase

As part of their candidate's application, the scientific advisors provide names and contact details for at least two external experts to peer review the application.

6.3 Dahlem Research School

Call for applications

- Call for applications via DRS doctoral programs and DRS fellowship website
- Electronic application form on the DRS fellowship website

Selection process

The DRS manages the HONORS selection process and supports all involved parties by

- conducting the eligibility check
- collecting peer review reports
- organizing structured interviews:
 - o Scheduling with panel members and applicants
 - o Provision of space and technical equipment on request
 - o Analysis of interview reports
- collecting written approvals from SK-member/ SK-representative
- obtaining the final decision from Freie Universität's Executive Board

Fellowship grants

The DRS informs about the grant conditions and makes grant payments.

Online information for applicants and fellows

The DRS provides extensive information for applicants and fellows by

- [HONORS call for applications](#)
- FAQs: www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/promovieren/drs/drs_fellowships/honors_program

Professional qualification program

All courses and activities in the Researcher Development Program and the Professional Development Program are evaluated and adjusted regularly after a review of content, requirements, and requests.

7 Support

Should you have any questions, please contact the DRS Fellowship Team:

Andrea Dünschede, Program Manager
Tel: +49 30 838 50543
E-Mail: andrea.duenschede@fu-berlin.de

Dr. Astrid Bergmann, Program Manager
Tel: +49 30 838 59168
E-Mail: astrid.bergmann@fu-berlin.de

Anja Müller, Administration
Tel: +49 30 838 62061
E-Mail: anja.mueller@fu-berlin.de

Appendix 1: Assessment Guidelines

Scores must be in the range 0-5. Marks for each criterion are given to one decimal point.

Interpretation of the scores:

- 0- The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1- Poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- 2- Fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
- 3- Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.
- 4- Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
- 5- Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

Please use the following structure in your comments:

- Strengths of the proposal (in bullet point format)
- Weaknesses of the proposal (in bullet point format)
- Overall comments

Your review will be treated confidentially and we ask you to please maintain confidentiality with respect to all those involved.

To ensure a timely selection procedure we would like to ask you to complete your independent review within in two weeks and to return it to fellowship-drs@fu-berlin.de.

Impartiality Issues (for external reviewers)

Before taking part in the selection process, please check that you are not affected by impartiality issues. Should you not consider yourself sufficiently impartial or appropriately qualified to provide an expert opinion or not be able to submit your statement in the time foreseen, we should be very grateful if you would provide us with the name and address of a competent colleague and return the application documents to us immediately.

You must decline the peer review if you have a conflict of interest or may be perceived to have a conflict of interest in the eyes of a third party. If you have any doubts, you should clarify the matter with the DRS Fellowship Team prior to the start of the peer review process.

Impartiality issues arise when there is a danger that unrelated considerations could influence the outcome of your peer review.

Please note that impartiality issues may exist in relation to:

- the research project
- the applicant or his/her institution

Circumstances leading to impartiality issues may include:

- a family relationship, close personal ties or personal conflicts
- existing, planned or recently concluded close academic cooperation, such as undertaking a joint project or a joint publication within the last 3 years
- direct academic competition with your own projects or plans
- employment related dependency or supervisory relationships (e.g. teacher / pupil relationship) within the last 6 years
- involvement in ongoing or very recently concluded appointment procedures (professorial or other) relating to the applicant (e.g. as applicant or member of an appointment panel)
- personal financial or commercial interests in the funding decision

Should we not receive any indication from you that there are impartiality issues, we will assume that it is your belief that no such impartiality issues exist. In any event, please declare your connections to the institutions and individuals concerned in your review.