

# **Reviewer Guidelines**

## **DRS Postdoc Fellowships**

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## 1 Program overview

Dahlem Research School (DRS) is the Center for Junior Researchers at Freie Universität Berlin. DRS provides research training, professional development and funding opportunities to its researchers at every stage of their academic career.

The DRS Postdoctoral Fellowship Program aims to support the career development of postdoctoral researchers by integrating into the university's interdisciplinary and international Focus Areas and Excellence Programs in an early phase of their career. It provides funding and support for outstanding postdoctoral fellows to conduct their own research project. For more information please refer to the overview in Appendix 1 and/or visit [www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/promovieren/drs/drs\\_fellowships](http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/promovieren/drs/drs_fellowships).

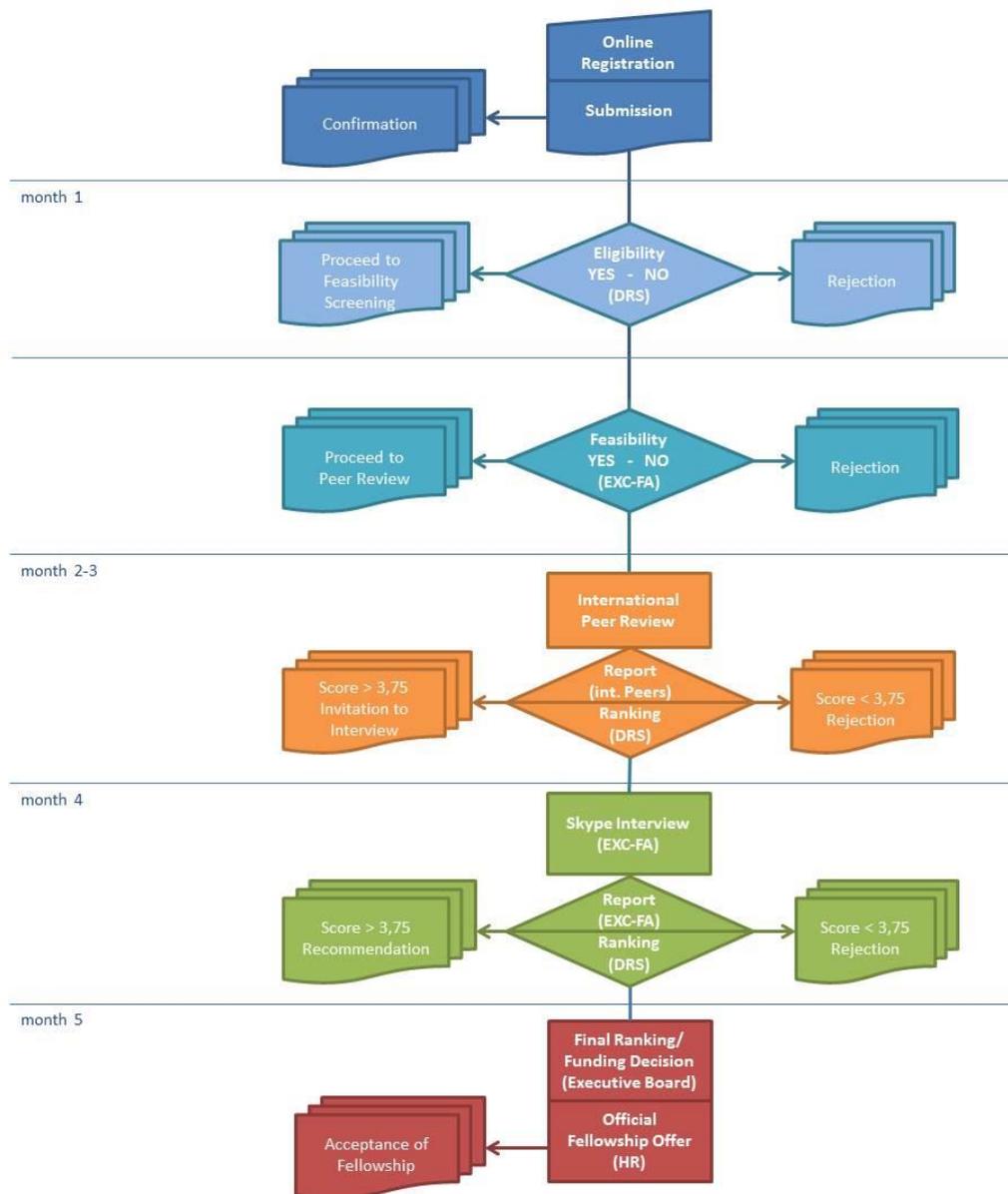
The funding lines Postdoc International - POINT and REGAIN are part of the new institutional strategy of Freie Universität Berlin, *Veritas – Iustitia – Libertas International Network University*, and represent two funding opportunities for postdoctoral fellows implemented under the DRS Postdoc Fellowship Program. The program offers up to 18 POINT/REGAIN fellowships per year, each lasting 18 months. The fellowships can be extended for up to 6 months to bridge the gap to the next granted project funding. The current call was advertised in July 2013 and will start in spring (April/ May) 2014. The program targets international and highly qualified postdoctoral researchers, and gives them the opportunity to work on innovative research projects in the attractive setting provided by Freie Universität's research Focus Areas.

During the program, fellows receive extensive, targeted support for their professional development. The goal for the fellows is to utilize the fellowship period to bring their projects to a level at which they can apply for funding from German or international funding organizations for a subsequent research project at Freie Universität Berlin.

## 2 Eligibility criteria

- Completed doctoral degree (proof of submission)
- A maximum of six years between the completion of the doctoral degree and the time of the application deadline
- Applicants must not have resided more than 12 months in Germany during the past 36 months (except for vacation)

## 3 Selection process



DRS – Dahlem Research School  
 EXC – Excellence Projects: Cluster and Graduate Schools  
 FA – Focus Areas  
 HR – Human Resources Dept. of Freie Universitaet Berlin

Throughout the process, experts should participate in only one selection phase and should not be affected by impartiality issues (see Appendix 3: Guidelines on impartiality issues). Fellows are selected in a four-step procedure. Each phase must be passed successfully to proceed to the next:

1. **Feasibility screening**
2. **International peer review**
3. **Structured interviews**
4. **Approval by Executive Board**

### **Composition and Organization of Selection Committees/ Criteria and Method of Judging Merit**

An eligibility check for completeness, timeliness of submission, meeting of published eligibility criteria will be carried out by DRS. Only complete applications will be subsequently evaluated in a four-step selection procedure. Successful candidates need to pass all four phases of the selection process:

#### **1. Feasibility screening**

Review of feasibility of proposals. Here the Focus Areas/ Excellence Projects check whether proposals fall within the scope of the Focus Area/ Excellence Project and are feasible.

#### **2. International peer review**

The Focus Areas/ Excellence Projects appoint two international peers per application. The experts are drawn either from the international advisory board or from international partner institutions of the Focus Areas/ Excellence Projects, and are selected according to their professional experience and proven expertise in the relevant discipline or field. Wherever possible, gender parity is ensured in these appointments. The experts evaluate the applications using an evaluation form provided by the DRS. The scoring system is described in more detail in appendix 1. The criteria are weighted differently:

- Quality and level of innovation of the applicant's project proposal with regard to the Focus Area/ excellence program (30%)
  - Convincing statement of purpose with regard to the research fellowship and the applicant's academic career aspirations (20%)
  - Quality and level of innovation of the applicant's doctoral dissertation, as evidenced by the abstract thereof as part of the evaluation (20%)
  - Academic or scientific excellence (in academia and/or industry), proven by way of the applicant's previous professional experience, peer-reviewed publications, inventions, patents, prizes and awards, distinctions, etc. (20%)
  - Previous acquisition of approval for project proposals and/or interdisciplinary cooperative arrangements on innovative research topics, international and interdisciplinary mobility (10%)
- Applicants who obtain a score of at least 3.75 points (75% of the total points) are recommended for phase 3.

Special circumstances and personal commitments (especially family-related career breaks) that place applicants at a disadvantage may be considered. An additional 5% will 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.

Phase 2 results in two scored reviews have been produced for each eligible candidate. Dahlem Research School will invite candidates whose average score is above the threshold of 3.75 points (75% of available points) to a structured interview conducted via Skype.

### 3. Structured interviews

The structured interviews are conducted via Skype or videoconference by subject specific panels that should consist of at least three Principal Investigators from the Focus Areas/ Excellence Projects and up to three Principal Investigators from non-university institutions, depending on the number of partner institutions of the respective Focus Area/ Excellence Project. Criteria and their weighting are detailed below:

- Discussion of the planned research project: convincing defense of the proposed research (50%)
- Convincing depiction of how the proposed research fellowship fits into the applicant's career aspirations (20%)
- Convincing presentation of the applicant's CV (20%)
- Candidate's personal suitability for the relevant Focus Area/ Excellence project (10%)

During the interviews the panel members will consider ethical issues within the fellows' research proposals (without grading).

The interview panel give independent scores. For each candidate, an interview summary report will be produced representing the combined views of the panel. Based on the overall interview score, Dahlem Research School will draw up a ranking list of the proposals that are above the threshold of 75% of available points placed in order of merit, for consideration by Freie Universitaet's Executive Board. Should more than one candidate have achieved the same interview score, the peer review score will decide the ranking.

### 4. Competitive selection

Freie Universitaet's Executive Board consisting of six persons: the President, four Vice Presidents and the Chancellor as Head of Administration

The Executive Board will discuss and confirm the top-listed candidates who will be successful. They monitor the overall selection process and ensure fair treatment of all candidates especially that special circumstances, which may place candidates at a disadvantage, have been taken into account. In addition, a reserve list will be compiled consisting of those proposals that might move up if budget becomes available (e.g. following withdrawal of successful candidates). The remaining proposals that attain all the thresholds but for which funding not is available will be rejected for budgetary reasons.

## Appendix 1: Assessment guidelines

Before preparing your review, please check that you are not affected by **impartiality issues** (see Appendix 3: Guidelines on 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.

### Scoring 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. In order to provide helpful feedback for candidates whose applications are rejected, we may forward short, anonymous quotations from your assessment to the applicant.

To ensure a timely selection procedure we would like to ask you use the online application and selection platform to complete your independent review(s) and to do this within in two to three weeks or **by November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the latest**.

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

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## Appendix 2: Schedule from Call for Application to Project Start

2013	
July	Call for applications
Sept.	Deadline 15/09/2013
Sept. (2 weeks)	Eligibility Check
Oct. (4 weeks)	Selection Phase 1 – Feasibility Check
Nov. (4 weeks)	Selection Phase 2 – International Peer Review
Dec. (4 weeks)	Selection Phase 3 – Structured Interviews
2014	
Jan.	Selection Phase 4 – Final Decision and Notification of successful candidates
Feb. – April	Contracting of Fellows and Project Start
May	DRS Orientation Week

## Appendix 3: Guidelines on impartiality issues

**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.