

One of the main goals of the Excellence Initiative is to improve conditions for early-stage academics in Germany. In the past, many promising young researchers have left Germany and have often settled overseas permanently. However, higher education policy makers, research funders and the universities themselves refuse to allow this trend to continue any longer. Likewise it is one of FRIAS' explicit goals to help reverse this trend.

JUNIOR FELLOWS OF FRIAS – CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

The institute awards at least a third of its fellowships to early-stage researchers. The schools offer their Junior Fellows that planning certainty which is often lacking for young academics at this stage of their career. Junior Fellows can commit themselves to three years of intensive research (with a possible two-year extension) in three of the four FRIAS Schools, where they will receive optimum support for their research projects in many respects. Five years provide the continuity that high quality academic work demands, while at the same time leaving room for the complex processes associated with risky innovation and building the necessary academic networks. The School of History follows another model by promoting a larger number of Junior Fellows for shorter periods of time, usually for one academic year.

All 27 early-stage academics who have so far been appointed as Junior Fellows of FRIAS underwent a rigorous selection process before they could start work on their research projects under the umbrella of the institute. The fact that five of the eight Junior Fellows who were originally chosen by the two FRIAS Schools of natural sciences have been appointed as professors is an outstanding success

for the institute. In the humanities schools, Junior Fellows have turned down offers of junior professorships at other universities, which provides welcome proof of the good working conditions at FRIAS. In the course of the selection process, five promising young researchers have also been won back from overseas to continue their research in Germany. In addition, five excellent foreign young researchers have been invited to carry out their research at FRIAS. Also worthy of note is the fact that an Emmy Noether and a Diltthey scholarship holder, receivers of arguably the most prestigious national programmes for top-level, early-stage academics, have chosen an affiliation with FRIAS, since its research climate offers them the best development opportunities.

The institute furnishes all these promising young academics with the best possible resources for their tasks. "By German and international standards, the institute is luxuriously well-equipped. We have substantial funds at our disposal and all staff costs are reimbursed, which is why I rate my working situation here in Freiburg as very positive," says Jörn Dengjel, Junior Fellow of the School of Life Sciences – LifeNet.

He and the other Junior Fellows in the schools of natural sciences are allocated funds, which they can use to hire doctoral candidates, postdoc researchers and even technical staff if necessary; they are also equipped with the latest (large-scale) devices. Their laboratories are situated in the heart of the university, such as in the Centre for Biosystems Analysis (ZBSA), the Freiburg Materials Research Centre (FMF) and the Chemistry Institute. The Junior Fellows in the linguistics department also have their own doctoral candidates who work as project assistants. Michael Butter, Junior Fellow of the School of Language & Literature, aptly describes the facilities and working conditions of the Fellows in literary science and history as follows: "For someone like me, a specialist in American Studies and an arts scholar in Germany, gaining this 3 + 2 year position is like winning the jackpot. I have no administrative tasks and do not have to do the groundwork for a professor. I can concentrate on my research and have a great deal of freedom to choose what I want to teach. I also have my own assistant and a budget to attend conferences. This very comfortable position makes for excellent working conditions.

For Junior Fellows of the humanities schools, another remarkable thing about working at an Institute for Advanced Studies is that they are offered the opportunity to plan and hold conferences on their area of research. They are able to invite experts in the relevant fields of research to attend, some of them even for a period as Senior Fellows. This opens up the best possible chances for young researchers to align their research with the advanced standards of their respective disciplines. In the two schools of natural sciences, working on “hot topics” means conducting research in groups. Biologists, medical scientists, mathematicians and physicists together investigate questions in the field of systems biology, while engineers, chemists and physicists work on materials research projects. “FRIAS offers an optimal research platform,

especially for these new areas which enjoy relatively wide networks,” says Stefan Schiller, Junior Fellow of the School of Soft Matter Research.

Promoting academic exchange and enabling communication between Fellows at different stages of their career are key tasks for every research centre: “There is a great deal of interaction taking place between the different age groups and status groups, and the institute has a far stronger international focus than conventional faculties of humanities in Germany usually do. I see both these factors as extremely positive,” says Sonja Levsen, Junior Fellow of the School of History. The young FRIAS Fellows, in particular, have also established a variety of contacts and collaborations between the schools. As a result of this, Michael Butter and Maurus Reinkowski, a specialist in

Middle Eastern and oriental studies and Senior Fellow of the School of History until a short while ago, will together hold a conference on conspiracy theories in different western and Middle Eastern cultures in January 2011. “Neither of us could have done this on our own. It is a fine example of how this exchange works perfectly, and how the synergy effects of FRIAS bear fruit.”

Junior Fellows who stay at the institute for longer than a year use this opportunity to offer taught courses at the university which relate to ‘their’ fields of research. This is especially relevant with regard to the sought-after *venia legendi* (permission to lecture) and qualifying later on for appointment as a professor. It also intensifies contact between the FRIAS Schools and the university faculties, which is clearly a win-win situation for both sides.

And Junior Fellows are not the only early-stage researchers who benefit from the FRIAS concept: a further 40 doctoral candidates and postdocs are involved in the projects of the two schools of natural sciences and the linguistics department where they are, for the most part, supervised by Junior Fellows. PhD students and postdocs from other faculties also regularly participate in the schools’ academic colloquia and conferences. All these young researchers profit from the knowledge and experience of the renowned academics who are guests of FRIAS.

The involvement of young Fellows is just as crucial for ensuring the success of FRIAS’ interdisciplinary activities, such as the monthly Dinner Speeches, the regular After Hours

Conversations or the weekly Tea Time. Junior Fellow Stefan Schiller views these occasions as good opportunities for looking beyond the boundaries of one’s own discipline. “It is a chance to try and understand the intentions behind work in literary science or historical research. You can also have discussions with people who see things from a totally different perspective, as is generally the case with discussions in society, or at least should be.” This is also the reasoning behind the next “Black Forest Retreat”, planned by three Junior Fellows and two postdoctoral researchers. The two-day inter-school conference will offer a forum for discussing the fundamental questions and approaches of different research cultures.

Despite all the successes in promoting early-stage researchers, FRIAS still faces some real challenges in this area. Recruiting female academics is one of the institute’s explicit goals, as the number of female postdoctoral candidates is still always unsatisfactorily low. The institute also feels the heat of serious competition from other universities and research centres here: all female Junior Fellows of the schools of natural sciences have now been appointed as professors at other universities, and FRIAS is responding by specifically targeting potential female candidates and inviting them to apply.

Furthermore, it is not without trepidation that the Junior Fellows of FRIAS look to the time after their involvement in the Excellence Initiative. Michael Butter is not alone in his fears that “in three years’ time, a great number of outstanding people who are trained at this wonder-

ful centre of excellence will have to compete for a small number of professorships.” The young academics do not conceal their wish for more Tenure Track options in the German federal higher education system. At the same time they also have in mind their colleagues who have to choose from poorer qualification opportunities than themselves. It is clear that an Institute for Advanced Studies, which serves to bring together outstanding researchers and academics for a limited period of time, cannot be the place where early-stage researchers remain in the long term. In the medium term, however, the institute could become a place from which the university’s faculties recruit top-quality research professors, and thus profit from active exchange with the university’s own research centre.

JUNIOR FELLOWS FROM APRIL 2008 – JUNE 2010				
Number and percentage by gender, previous country of work and nationality				
School of	Total	Female	Previously working abroad	Foreign nationality
History	11	5 45%	4 36%	3 27%
Language & Literature	7	3 43%	2 29%	0 0%
Life Sciences – LifeNet	3	1 33%	1 33%	0 0%
Soft Matter Research	6	2 33%	3 50%	3 50%
FRIAS overall	27	11 41%	10 37%	6 22%

*The contract term is usually: 3 year + 2 year extension option
History: usually 1 year
Some Junior Fellows are financed by scholarships, prizes, etc.*



Junior Fellows from left to right: Stefan Schiller, Michael Butter, Sonja Levsen and Jörn Dengjel