

Postdoctoral Researchers at the MWS¹

The MWS promotes research and international cooperation through its German institutes abroad. It is a federal foundation and a recipient of institutional funding from the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology. At the same time, it is a partner in the Federal Republic of Germany's foreign cultural and education policy, for which the Federal Foreign Office is responsible. The institutes conduct research, actively support scholars in their professional development, and foster academic networking between Germany, the respective host countries, and third countries. Through their research, publications, extensive activities in science communication, and diverse employment and fellowship opportunities, the institutes fulfill the foundation's mission to promote mutual understanding between academic cultures. At the same time, they contribute to the internationalization of academic career paths and the academic system.

Career Paths

In line with the foundation's goals, various career paths are available at the MWS institutes abroad. One of these career paths aims to enable promising early-career researchers from Germany to complete the second phase of their academic training abroad, so that the experience and networks gained there can be put to good use in the German academic system. Postdoctoral researchers are typically hired for qualification positions lasting up to six years. The primary goal here is to qualify for a professorship or leadership position through a habilitation or a second book publication, which are particularly highly valued in German history and related humanities disciplines.

Another career path involves a postdoc position at MWS institutes, with the goal of subsequently remaining in relevant research positions in the host country, in third countries, or in Germany. A traditional habilitation is not necessarily a requirement for this. In this way, the MWS takes into account the internationalization and disciplinary diversification of career paths while simultaneously guaranteeing significant added value for the German academic landscape within its global network. In the long term, this approach contributes to the internationalization of the German academic landscape and strengthens its networks. In all cases, the MWS strives to support the career paths of its postdoctoral researchers as effectively as possible, in line with their respective goals.

¹ This version of the document was adopted by the Board of Trustees on May 8, 2026

The pathways outlined require different emphases in the support provided to postdocs, and the institutes and their leadership are committed to implementing them. The institutes regularly review the chosen career plans with the (post)doctoral candidates and provide appropriate opportunities. At the start of employment, a portfolio discussion takes place to identify the research-related areas in which further experience needs to be gained—such as teaching, publishing, organizing events, and communicating research findings to the general public—and how this can best be achieved within the framework of the appointment without losing sight of the primary goal of the research project. In doing so, the different disciplinary cultures must be taken into account. These different approaches are also considered in the internal organization of work and the allocation of resources.

Training Positions for Research Staff

- Requirement: a successful, outstanding doctoral degree
- Employment abroad in accordance with the Foundation's statutory mandate
- Typically for up to six years (interim evaluation after two to three years)
- Freedom to pursue independent research as a basis for a habilitation or second book
- No teaching obligations
- Institutional duties that also serve to prepare the candidate for eligibility for a professorship in Germany or for further qualification for leadership positions in academia and academic administration, or in cultural and educational institutions
- may include representative duties as part of Germany's foreign cultural and educational policy (science diplomacy)

Benefits

- Strengthening of subject-specific expertise
- Close proximity to the field, sources, and archives
- Membership in a research division and editorial teams at the institute
- Reputation of the institutes
- Participation in the extensive and stable networks maintained by the institutes and the MWS, building your own international networks
- Integration into the local research community

- Visibility through integration into the research profile and science communication of the institutes and the MWS
- Excellent research infrastructure and event offerings from the institutes and the MWS
- Collaboration in multinational and often multidisciplinary teams
- Acquisition of intercultural competence
- Academic freedom and independence
- Alumni networks

For assignments abroad

- Overseas allowance and housing allowance in accordance with the Federal Civil Service Remuneration Act to compensate for additional material expenses as well as general and location-specific non-material burdens associated with general service abroad (temporary)

Support Services

- Support for individual career development, e.g., through portfolio discussions on teaching, publications, event organization, knowledge transfer, etc., and other measures summarized in [the Career Paths policy document](#)
- Mentoring by institute directors and advisory board members
- Individual career coaching from the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers
- MWS cooperation offices for a smooth transition to subsequent employment
- MWS internal networking fellowships
- MWS Practitioner Programs

Institute scholarships for long-term stays abroad

In addition to travel grants, all MWS institutes abroad also offer grants that enable postdoctoral researchers to undertake extended research stays abroad. Tandem programs with renowned partner institutions also play a role in this regard.

MWS Institutes as Host Institutions for Postdoctoral Fellowships Offered by Other Organizations

MWS's international institutes are also preferred hosts for postdoctoral researchers through their visiting scholar programs. In addition, they frequently serve as host institutions for long-term funding through DFG, AvH, or EU programs, such as the Heisenberg Program, the

Feodor Lynen Fellowships, or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowships. The international institutes are also a good point of contact for ERC Starting Grants.

Results of the Alumni Study

In 2024, the MWS conducted a **large-scale online survey of alumni from its institutes**.

The alumni gave an overall positive assessment of the support for early-career researchers at the MWS institutes. They found excellent conditions for researchers at the beginning of their academic careers. The following aspects were highlighted in particular:

- the high degree of academic freedom and independence in their own research activities;
- the extended period during which researchers can focus on their own research without having to fulfill teaching obligations at the same time;
- the opportunity to conduct research in an international academic environment;
- holding stable and very well-equipped positions (postings);
- the opportunity to expand international contacts and gain career- relevant international research experience;
- the professional and inspiring work and research environment;
- the institutes' excellent research infrastructure;
- access to resources that are in often unique, e.g., in the form of libraries and archives or through direct field access;
- the networks and reputation of the institutes;
- the personally enriching intercultural experience.

On average, the time between employment or funding at a foreign institute and the next subsequent position was approximately 3 months. The alumni predominantly remained in the academic sector, primarily at universities and non-university research institutes.

Approximately 80 percent were able to directly build on their research work at the institute.