



Max-Planck-Institute for Molecular Genetics
Student Association
Innstraße 73
14195 Berlin

Prof. Peter Gruss
Präsident der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur
Förderung der Wissenschaften e.V.
Postfach 10 10 62
D - 80084 München

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Dear Professor Gruss,

we, the representatives of the Student Association (STA) at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics in Berlin, would like to draw your attention on the situation of the students' welfare at our institute.

The STA has been representing students for over one year. The main goals of our organization are to put forward the problems and needs of students and provide a platform for scientific and social interactions. Still, Ph.D. students have to face a lot of problems during their period of training.

In this letter we would like to point out the main difficulties, which are:

- inadequacies in supervision and education supplied by the institute
- deficiencies in the co-operation between the institute and the universities
- inequalities between different contracts.

Worldwide, the Max Planck Society is known for its excellency in scientific research, which should also include a high quality training of its Ph.D.s. Good supervision and a strong educational support are crucial for the training of future scientists. As no obvious general standards for Ph.D. training exist, there are often differences in the quality of the supervision depending on the personal engagement of the tutor. In some cases a high

number of Ph.D. students per supervisor hinders proper supervision. The tutor is overwhelmed with work and cannot pay enough attention to the needs of the individual student.

In our opinion, it should be of great interest to the MPG to provide a structure for Ph.D. training. This may include:

- lectures and seminars aimed at Ph.D. students, where they can learn by interacting with experienced scientists
- literature seminars to learn how to critically evaluate scientific papers
- English courses for oral and written scientific communication as well as German classes for foreign Ph.D. students
- possibilities to take part in conferences and practical courses

We have already heard about Research Schools, which create a good platform for such interactions. We support this idea and expect all Ph.D. students to have equal access to the same facilities. Therefore we would welcome the establishment of more Research Schools, which would enrich the training process.

The poor cooperation between the MPI and the university is another important issue. Since it is not possible to receive a Ph.D. degree at the MPI, students have to find an additional supervisor at the university. Too often they are left alone with this. We would welcome any solution that allows a closer collaboration between MPIs and universities. Alternatively it would be helpful, if the MPG itself would have the ability to award the Ph.D. degree. Moreover, Ph.D. students encounter difficulties in financing the long period of time between the submission of their thesis and its defence. We would expect that every Ph.D. student would get full support from the institute until the receipt of the degree.

Finally, we would like to address the differences between work contracts, which cause a lot of confusion and discrepancies among students. The majority of Ph.D. students are paid according to three different types of contracts: Max Planck-fellowship, "Hausvertrag" (BAT IIa/2) and DFG-Vertrag (BAT IIa/2). The main difference between the BATIIa/2 based contracts and the fellowship, which is given to foreign students only, is that the latter does not provide any social security including pension, health insurance and unemployment insurance. The student has to cover such expenses privately. We appreciate the recent raise of the fellowship, but it is still not fully compensating all expenses mentioned above. In

general, we think that all Ph.D. students within the Max Planck Society should be paid equally, regardless of their contract at the institute that employs them.

So far the successful work of the STA at our institute is only possible thanks to the support from the directors. We would highly welcome if the Max Planck Society would support the work of student representatives in general and would acknowledge them an official status.

Since most of the issues discussed in this letter do not seem to be institute-specific, but rather MPG-wide, we would like to initiate a new discussion on the situation of the Ph.D. students. From our point of view, all students should have the right to the same intellectual and financial support from the MPG. The necessity of a good educational system for Ph.D. students should be the common interest of the MPG, the universities and the students.

We would be very happy to discuss any part of this letter in detail and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jochen Jäger
Chairman of the STA

Antje Geißenhöner

Barbara Długaszewska
Contract Committee