

Guidelines

Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups



Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.

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I Programme Information

Research Training Groups (RTG) combine innovative top-level research and the structured promotion of excellent researchers in early career phases. They centre on the qualification of doctoral researchers within the framework of a focused research programme and a structured qualification programme that prepares doctoral researchers for the complexities of the job market for scientists and academics. The programme is open to all subject areas and encourages interdisciplinarity. Research Training Groups are instituted by a university or an equivalent higher education institution with the right to confer doctoral degrees or a university of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)) that is able to guide doctoral researchers independently or in cooperation with a graduate institution towards obtaining a doctorate in the subject areas relevant for the Research Training Group (hereafter referred to as “university”).

International Research Training Groups (IRTG), in which German universities cooperate with research institutions in other countries to offer structured doctoral programmes, are a special component of the Research Training Groups Programme (cf. III. Programme Variation International Research Training Groups).

1 Objective

Excellence, innovation and internationality in research and promoting researchers in early career phases constitute the main goals of Research Training Groups and are reflected in their various components.

By funding Research Training Groups, the DFG supports outstanding and particularly innovative research projects. In terms of their topics or methodologies, these projects look beyond the status quo in their respective fields, or hold the promise of scientific reorientation through an interdisciplinary approach that combines subjects or institutions in a novel way. The researchers who run the RTG must demonstrate a track record that promises such a standard of excellence. Specially qualified doctoral researchers, who are recruited internationally, are thus given the opportunity to work on their theses and produce solid findings in a challenging, collaborative research environment.

Through their research and qualification programmes, Research Training Groups train scientists and academics at different stages of their careers. A key objective is to enable the timely completion of doctoral research training. As they focus on their respective core research topics, doctoral researchers also gain an overview of their research field that goes beyond their subject areas by working within the larger context of a Research Training Group. Doctoral researchers are enabled to conduct independent research early on. Research Training Groups aim to accelerate the time to degree. In this way, the participation of researchers in early career phases in RTGs qualifies them to compete in the international job market.

The programme aims to promote structured doctoral training, thereby making doctorates more attractive. Research Training Groups are open to new ways of promoting researchers in early career phases. They offer an opportunity for universities to experiment with new cooperative arrangements in this area – e.g. with universities of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW)/Fachhochschule (FH)), cultural institutions, or businesses – that would otherwise not be available. At the same time, the programme is strongly committed to equity and diversity in research.

Furthermore, the programme promotes international cooperation in the area of doctoral training and aims to enhance the appeal of German universities to doctoral researchers from other countries. Internationality is indispensable to successful research and to the future-oriented training of doctoral researchers. Their integration in the international research environment – including universities and, where applicable, non-university institutions – is therefore a key feature of Research Training Groups.

2 Participating Researchers

A Research Training Group is run by a small team of 5 to 10 professors with proven expertise in the Research Training Group's main topic and outstanding supervisory experience.

The DFG strongly recommends including researchers in early career phases and giving them responsible positions within the RTG. These include advanced postdoctoral researchers, junior research group leaders or junior professors, for example, who may have gained initial experience in supervision. The applicant university is expected to grant such researchers the right to supervise and examine doctoral researchers.

As a rule, participating researchers should be based at a single location. In convincingly justified cases, a Research Training Group may be proposed jointly by several locations.

One member of this group acts as spokesperson and is responsible for the proposal and the scientific coordination of the Research Training Group. The spokesperson must hold a permanent, full-time professorship at the applicant university, appointed in accordance with the applicable employment law, and represent the concerns of the Research Training Group in all committees of the department as well as the applicant university at large. He or she is also required to report to the DFG. The Research Training Group determines the rules for the election of the spokesperson and the responsibilities of the office.

Researchers from non-university institutions and persons from non-academic organisations may be integrated into a Research Training Group if it serves the research and qualification programmes.

3 Research Training Group Members

Within the nine-year period of a Research Training Group, generally up to 30 doctoral researchers can be funded by the RTG. It is also possible to integrate doctoral researchers who are funded through other sources, so-called associated doctoral researchers.

To enable postdoctoral researchers to gain scientific qualifications and to support their professional development within a Research Training Group, up to two postdoctoral researchers can normally be funded simultaneously in a Research Training Group. The Grants Committee on Research Training Groups suspended this funding option until further notice by resolution dated 15 November 2024.

Undergraduate students who demonstrate exceptional scientific or academic talent may be included in a Research Training Group at any stage of their studies to promote an early introduction to research.

In appropriate cases, secondary school students can also be included in areas of the research and/or qualification programme in order to allow them early contact with science.

4 Programme Profile

4.1 Research programme

The core of a Research Training Group is formed by an innovative research idea that focuses on one main topic. The topic must demonstrate novelty against the backdrop of current international research and go beyond existing approaches. Interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged.

The main topic serves as the foundation of a coherent research programme. It provides a framework that ensures the inner coherence of the research programme and the qualification programme relating to it. The research programme should link its thematic and/or methodological focus areas in a manner that yields excellent topics for theses and encourages communication and collaboration between doctoral researchers.

4.2 Qualification programme

The qualification and supervision strategies described below must create a framework that enables doctoral researchers to produce independent research findings with international visibility within an appropriate time period of generally three to a maximum of four years, and at the same time to qualify for the domestic and international academic and non-academic job market. The qualification model includes

- a qualification programme specific to the Research Training Group,
- the integration of visiting researchers, and
- any other measures that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the qualification of doctoral researchers.

The qualification programme, which is specific to the Research Training Group and based on the research programme, enhances and expands doctoral researchers' individual specialities. It also conveys expertise that goes beyond the doctoral researchers' subject areas and thus provides a broader qualification.

Any additional qualification activities should support the doctoral training process without lengthening the time to degree completion. The qualification programme also includes measures aimed at ensuring the national and international visibility of the scientific results attained and the integration of Research Training Group members into national and international research.

4.3 Supervision and career advancement, equity and diversity, organisation and quality management

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all participants, a structured supervision strategy, transparent organisational structures and processes, as well as comprehensive quality management help to guarantee the desired high standard of quality in research and qualification throughout the duration of the Research Training Group.

Key features of Research Training Groups are the transparent and innovative supervision structures they offer. Intensive supervision is provided jointly by two professors or an advisory committee. It should facilitate the timely and successful completion of doctoral training and prepare researchers for their future careers. A healthy balance of intensive supervision and the encouragement of independence should be strived for. Doctoral researchers should be enabled to conduct independent research early on.

Additional quality management requirements for Research Training Groups include:

- objectives and benchmarks for success that are specific to the Research Training Group to ensure its ongoing quality-oriented management,
- a transparent and competitive procedure for selecting domestic and foreign doctoral researchers,
- an evaluation of the performance, time to degree, and career development of researchers who have completed their doctorates within the Research Training Group framework, and
- the assessment of research success in the international arena.

Equity and diversity in research are important factors in successfully supporting researchers in early career phases and must therefore be actively encouraged and promoted in Research Training Groups.

4.4 Environment

Integration into an active scientific and academic environment is a key prerequisite for success in Research Training Groups. This includes the research environment, e.g. associations and collaborations with working groups and research projects at the university and at non-university institutions, as well as other support opportunities for researchers in early career phases, e.g. with existing structured doctoral programmes or graduate schools.

A Research Training Group is expected to support the medium-term scientific priorities of the host university. At the same time, the Research Training Group should, by virtue of its thematic orientation, distinguish itself in a unique way from the rest of the research conducted at this location. Research Training Groups are expected to offer added value over any other forms of doctoral training and/or structured doctoral programmes at their respective locations.

The host institution should enhance the appeal of the Research Training Group as a centre of research excellence, for example through measures that support the doctoral training process, by contributing complementary resources, and by providing incentive mechanisms for participating professors.

Close cooperation with non-university research institutions is expressly encouraged. To the extent that it serves the research and qualification programmes, persons from non-academic organisations can be integrated. Research Training Groups should have networks with reputable international institutions in order to integrate doctoral researchers into the scientific community early on.

Under the Collaborative Research Centre programme, a module for structured doctoral training may be submitted (“Integrated Research Training Group”). Collaborative Research Centres and Research Training Groups that are based at the same location and have largely overlapping topics should not receive parallel funding. The goal is to increase efficiency by bundling funding for closely related research projects. A thematic overlap is acceptable if the Research Training Group’s topic and/or structure are sufficiently unique. For instance, the establishment of an International Research Training Group may be considered to deliver added value.

5 Duration

The maximum funding duration is nine years, currently divided into two funding periods of 4.5 years each. For Research Training Groups approved as of May 2022, the first funding period will be for five years and the second period for four years. Continued funding after the first funding period will be decided on the basis of a renewal proposal.

6 Proposals

6.1 Eligibility

A proposal for a Research Training Group must be submitted by a university or an equivalent higher education institution with the right to confer doctoral degrees or by a university of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)) that has an independent right to award doctoral degrees or is able to guide doctoral researchers towards obtaining a doctorate in cooperation with an institution that is awarded the right to confer doctoral degrees in the subject areas relevant for the Research Training Group. A proposal may also be submitted by more than one such university.

The proposal is written jointly by the professors in charge of the Research Training Group. The designated spokesperson is responsible for the proposal. The spokesperson must hold a permanent, full-time professorship at the applicant university, appointed in accordance with the applicable employment law, and represent the concerns of the Research Training Group in all committees of the department as well as the applicant university at large.

The DFG strongly recommends involving researchers in early career phases and giving them responsible positions within the RTG. These include advanced postdoctoral researchers, junior research group leaders or junior professors, for example, who may have gained initial experience in supervision. The applicant university is expected to grant such researchers the right to supervise doctoral researchers.

6.2 Format and deadline

The proposal procedure for Research Training Groups consists of two stages. In the first stage, a draft proposal is submitted and reviewed. Based on the draft proposal, the review, and a recommendation by the relevant review board, the Senate Committee on Research Training Groups makes a recommendation as to whether an establishment proposal should be submitted in the second stage. If the recommendation is negative, the applicant may submit a revised version of the draft proposal once. For details on draft proposals, please consult the “Draft Proposal Preparation Instructions for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 1.303).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_303

The proposal to establish a Research Training Group must follow the format and contain the information specified in the “Proposal Preparation Instructions for Proposals to Establish Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.05).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_05

Draft proposals and proposals to establish a Research Training Group may be submitted at any time.

The renewal proposal must follow the format and contain the information specified in the “Proposal Preparation Instructions for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups (Renewal Proposals)”, (DFG form 54.07).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_07

When creating the progress report for the renewal proposal, please follow the “Progress Report Preparation Instructions for Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.08).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_08

The submission date for the renewal proposal will be specified in the award letter for the first funding phase.

II Proposal Modules

To apply for funding in the Research Training Groups Programme, the modules listed below may be submitted. For details, please consult the instructions on the respective modules and the programme-specific explanations in the proposal preparation instructions.

- **Module Research Training Group (DFG form 52.15)**
Staff funding for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers as well as for doctoral researchers in medicine; qualifying fellowships; funding for student assistants; funding for equipment up to €10,000, software and consumables, travel, visiting researchers, experimental animals, and other expenses such as announcements and recruiting, language training, communication training, presentation training, media training, publications.

www.dfg.de/formulare/52_15

- Module Replacements (DFG form 52.03)
The Grants Committee on Research Training Groups suspended this funding option until further notice by resolution dated 15 November 2024.
- Module Coordination (DFG form 52.12)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_12
- Module Temporary Substitutes for Clinicians (DFG form 52.04)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_04
- Module Mercator Fellows (DFG form 52.05)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_05
- Module Project-Specific Workshops (DFG form 52.06)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_06
- Module Public Relations (DFG form 52.07)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_07
- Module Start-Up Funding (DFG form 52.11)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_11
- Module Standard Allowance for Equity and Diversity (DFG form 52.14)
www.dfg.de/formulare/52_14

Funding is provided for the entire funding period. Initially, funding is awarded for the first fiscal year and announced for subsequent years. Funding is tied to the fiscal year (which corresponds to a calendar year), i.e. it is not possible to carry over funds to the next fiscal year. Funds that are not used by the end of a given fiscal year are forfeited. For rules on accounting and the use of the funds, please refer to the usage guidelines (DFG form 2.22, available in German only).

www.dfg.de/formulare/2_22

III Programme Variation International Research Training Groups

International Research Training Groups are a programme variation of Research Training Groups. As structured doctoral programmes run by German universities in conjunction with universities or research institutions abroad, they serve to encourage and deepen bilateral collaboration. They promote systematic research cooperation through joint research and qualification programmes as well as cooperative, cross-border supervision of doctoral researchers from both partner groups and longer-term, coordinated and reciprocal research visits by doctoral researchers at the respective partner institutions.

In addition to or deviation from the rules for “domestic” Research Training Groups, the following guidelines apply to International Research Training Groups:

1 Participants

An International Research Training Group is run by two small teams of professors, one in Germany and one abroad. Each team has about 5 to 10 members. The participating researchers' complementary expertise at the various locations should add value to the International Research Training Group.

As a rule, the participating researchers should be based at a single location in the respective country. In convincingly justified cases, an International Research Training Group may be proposed by more than two locations. One member each of the German and the foreign group of participating researchers acts as spokesperson and is responsible for the proposal and the scientific coordination of the Research Training Group. Within the nine-year funding period, generally up to 30 doctoral researchers per partner institution participate in an International Research Training Group.

2 Profile of the Programme Variation International Research Training Groups

The partners in an International Research Training Group undertake a joint research programme. Common research interests and objectives must be reflected in a common framework and joint projects.

The qualification programme promotes collaboration among group members and the international exchange of doctoral researchers. It therefore includes local as well as jointly held courses. Longer-term, coordinated and reciprocal research visits (one or more with an overall duration of 6 to 12 months) by doctoral researchers to the respective partner institutions are a key element of the programme. International Research Training Groups must therefore also develop suitable structures that allow participants at all locations to engage in the necessary intensive exchange.

Supervision is provided jointly through the International Research Training Group's partner institutions, either by two professors or by an advisory committee.

3 Proposals

The proposal for an International Research Training Group is written jointly by the professors in charge of the Research Training Group on both sides.

Just like the spokesperson on the German side, the spokesperson at the foreign location should also be able to represent the concerns of the International Research Training Group within the partner institution.

4 Funding

The DFG can only fund the project-specific costs incurred by the German partner university.

The International Research Training Group's foreign partner institution is expected to provide basic funding for its doctoral researchers, their research, and their visits to the German partner institution. The DFG has agreements with many foreign partner organisations regarding the joint funding of International Research Training Groups; these agreements facilitate the submission of proposals for complementary funding.

If you will be applying for an International Research Training Group programme variation, please particularly note the "Guidelines for Differentiating International Research Training Groups from Research Training Groups" (DFG form 1.312).

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_312

Proposing an International Research Training Group requires intensive preparation and close coordination among all participants. If you are planning to establish an IRTG, please consult the DFG Head Office early on.

In addition, the DFG can provide funding for workshops to prepare the proposal for an International Research Training Group. For more information, refer to the relevant proposal instructions (DFG form 1.306).

IV Special Provisions

1 Core Support and Financial Resource Management

The applicant institution is expected to supply the necessary core support, especially fully equipped work stations for doctoral researchers (office and laboratory space, etc.) and operating costs.

2 Knowledge Transfer Projects

Particularly intensive forms of cooperation with non-university application partners may be proposed as transfer projects. For more information and details on the format of such proposals, see the “Proposal Preparation Instructions for Knowledge Transfer Projects in Research Training Groups and International Research Training Groups” (DFG form 54.06).

www.dfg.de/formulare/54_06

3 Cooperation with universities of applied sciences (HAW/FH)

Research Training Groups provide an opportunity to support cooperation between researchers at German universities of applied sciences (Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) or Fachhochschule (FH)) and universities with the aim of setting up collaborative doctoral programmes. To this end, researchers at universities of applied sciences (HAW/FH) can participate in an establishment or renewal proposal for a Research Training Group. To better facilitate such collaborations, funds can also be requested for preparatory measures (funding for staff, direct project costs and replacements). These measures aim to improve the basic research framework prior to submission of a proposal. For further guidance and information on submitting such a proposal, please refer to DFG form 1.311, available in German only.

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_311

V Obligations

In submitting a proposal to the DFG, the applicant university and the participating researchers agree to:

1. agree to adhere to **the principles of good research practice**.¹

The principles of good research practice include, among others: maintaining professional standards, maintaining strict honesty with regard to one's own contributions and those of third parties, documenting results and rigorously questioning all findings.

2. recognise the **DFG's Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct** (Verfahrensordnung zum Umgang mit wissenschaftlichem Fehlverhalten – VerfOwF) as legally binding.²

Scientific misconduct is defined as the intentional and grossly negligent statement of falsehoods in a scientific context, the violation of intellectual property rights or impeding another person's research work. The circumstances of each case will be considered on an individual basis. In cases where scientific misconduct has been established, the DFG may impose one or more of the following sanctions in accordance with its Rules of Procedure, depending on the nature and severity of the scientific misconduct:

- issuing a written reprimand to those involved;
- exclusion from the right to apply for DFG funds for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- revoking funding decisions (full or partial termination of the grant contract, demanding repayment of funds spent);

¹ The principles of good research practice are presented in detail in the DFG Code of Conduct [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#).

² [Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct \(VerfOwF\)](#), DFG form 80.01.

- demanding that those concerned either retract the discredited publications or correct the falsified data (in particular by publishing an erratum), or appropriately indicate the DFG's retraction of funding in the discredited publications;
- exclusion from serving as a reviewer for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- exclusion from membership in DFG bodies and committees for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- denying voting rights and eligibility in elections for DFG bodies and committees for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct.

By accepting funding, the applicant university and the participating researchers agree to:

- use the grant exclusively and in a targeted manner to achieve the objectives of the Research Training Group as specified in the proposal. The use and accounting of funds must conform to the relevant DFG regulations, especially the usage guidelines for Research Training Groups (DFG form 2.22, available in German only).

www.dfg.de/formulare/2_22

- submit to the DFG progress reports on the Research Training Group according to the dates specified in the award letter; participate in the annual survey to evaluate the programme; and present financial accounts to the DFG detailing the use of funds.

The DFG expects that the findings of the projects it funds be made available to the public.

VI Data Protection

Please note the DFG's Data Protection Notice on research funding, which can be viewed and downloaded at www.dfg.de/privacy_policy. If necessary, please also forward this information to those individuals whose data will be processed by the DFG due to their involvement in your project.

www.dfg.de/privacy_policy