

# **The German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) Statement on the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Humboldt Foundation), Bonn, and on the promotion of international academic transfer of individuals in Germany**

Translation of Summary (pp. 151-153 of the statement)

The Humboldt Foundation is an internationally highly-respected institution and considered an asset to the German science system. It makes an important contribution to opening up Germany to academics from abroad by providing funding for individual researchers. With its sponsorship programmes, which, in the last sixty years, have enabled many outstanding (junior) researchers from all over the world to spend time researching in Germany, its network of more than 25,000 current and former sponsorship-recipients, its scientific events at home and abroad, and a wealth of other activities, the Humboldt Foundation promotes the internationalisation and visibility of the German science system abroad as well as a positive image of Germany in general. Even after sponsorship has come to an end, Humboldtians are often valuable ambassadors for Germany abroad and serve as local contacts for the Humboldt Foundation, German science organisations and other actors. Thus the Humboldt Foundation itself has acquired an important role in the foreign policy domain.

Given the growing internationalisation of the science system, it can be assumed that the Humboldt Foundation will continue to gain in importance. This and its fine reputation place the Foundation under an obligation to drive its future development whilst maintaining its aspirations to excellence. In this respect, it should concentrate on its core task of sponsoring fixed-term research stays for excellent post-doctoral foreign researchers at all career stages who are free to choose their host institutions and the subject of their research in Germany. For this purpose, the Humboldt Foundation should establish an appropriate procedure that will allow it to develop guidelines and perspectives for its future funding activities, as well as ideas for new funding lines, and to formulate appropriate criteria for evaluating and prioritising sponsorship programmes (including those deriving from external sources).

In future, the focus should continue to be placed on research fellowships. The number of fellowships should be ramped up to the previous figure prior to the increase in the fellowship amount and, preferably, extended to include additional benefits for childcare and social security. In this context, the options for introducing greater flexibility and modularisation of fellowships should be examined. The scope for research awards and programmes that do not primarily serve the cause of promoting research should, on the other hand, only be extended if additional funding is provided for this purpose. Irrespective of this, the

distinguished Humboldt Professorship should be continued at the current level. Personal mentoring, which is appreciated enormously by the sponsorship-recipients, is one of the Humboldt Foundation's unique features, and the intensive funding it requires is justified by the degree of its success. The same is true of alumni activities, the positive effects of which have already been mentioned. In order to increase the benefits of the Humboldt Network for international academic exchange amongst outstanding, active researchers yet further the Humboldt Foundation should regularly assess and develop the goals it has set and the tools it employs in its alumni activities (including the relevant funding lines). By visibly opening up, it should strive to rejuvenate the network, involve more women and achieve a balance of subjects. The Academic Council for Programme Evaluation should review the development of alumni activities in about five years' time. The aim of achieving a better gender and subject balance should also be consistently pursued with regard to sponsorship-recipients.

The Humboldt Foundation conducts exemplary quality assurance essentially based on a selection procedure that is internationally recognised, because it rests upon strict scientific criteria. Other important tools for ensuring quality include the *International Advisory Board*, the Academic Council for Programme Evaluation and a well-functioning internal procedure for continually improving funding lines and routines. As planned, both advisory boards should be developed further and their tasks should continue to be clearly differentiated.

In order to facilitate efficient budget management that takes account of both statutory objectives and the respective number of applicants, the Humboldt Foundation is expressly recommended to assign the funds for research fellowships and research awards to one budget item. In contrast, project funds for programmes not primarily concerned with research funding for individual, post-doctoral researchers at all career stages should continue to be allocated separately. Preferably, a binding budget should be determined one year in advance; micro-management of the use of funds and interventions in the budget in the course of the fiscal year should be explicitly avoided. When calculating the budget the financial recommendations contained in this paper must be observed. This includes the necessary upgrading of the salaries of managerial staff at headquarters (both at departmental and division leadership level as well as at that of Deputy Secretary General) to a nationally competitive level. If the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation is continued, the Humboldt Foundation should receive a parallel annual increase in its basic funding. The measures required to undertake the extensive renovation of two of the buildings in which headquarters are housed should be initiated promptly. The means required for this and for the upcoming renewal and operation of the database system should be appropriated by the relevant department on a secure, long-term basis.