

**MAX  
PLANCK  
SCHOOL**

**of  
cognition**

# Doctoral Candidate Handbook

Orientation Phase



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## Orientation Phase

A joint initiative between the  
Max Planck Society and leading German Universities  
together with  
Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Helmholtz Association,  
and University College London

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Dear doctoral candidate,

We would like to welcome you to the Max Planck School of Cognition (MPSCog)!

This handbook will give you an overview of the MPSCog's four-year doctoral program and will guide you through the various administrative steps which are necessary to start your doctoral studies in Germany.

We strive to continuously improve our program. Therefore, the MPSCog's coordination team would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions for updating this handbook by contacting us at [cognition@maxplanckschools.de](mailto:cognition@maxplanckschools.de).

The Max Planck Society offers a brochure on working and living in Germany which you may also find interesting: [MPS Working and Living in Germany](#).

We wish you a successful, exciting and enjoyable time at the MPSCog!

Your MPSCog coordination team

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# 1. THE MAX PLANCK SCHOOL OF COGNITION

## 1.1. MPSCog: A doctoral program in Germany

The Max Planck School of Cognition (MPSCog), one of three pioneering national Max Planck Schools, is a joint initiative of the Max Planck Society and leading German universities together with Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Helmholtz Association, and University College London. Beyond the support from the Max Planck Society, the MPSCog is additionally funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The MPSCog is characterized by the passion to better understand both human and animal cognition, and “mental phenomena” potentially occurring in non-biological systems and agents (artificial intelligence). The interdisciplinary and customized four-year doctoral program at the MPSCog offers exceptionally bright doctoral candidates the opportunity to acquire a multi-faceted understanding on the different methods and approaches used in the rapidly evolving field of cognition.

The MPSCog includes an outstanding and world-renowned cluster of faculty researchers from diverse scientific backgrounds (Figure 1). The researchers come from [Max Planck Institutes, Universities, Helmholtz Association and Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft](#). Forty-seven world-leading researchers from 16 different universities (including University College London, an international partner of the School) and 12 non-university research institutions are involved in the School’s training. Through close personal exchange and mentoring, living and studying together in small groups, and with the help of an excellent infrastructure, the most ambitious Bachelor and Master graduates will be able to learn from the leading experts in various disciplines — all driven by their passion for science.



Figure 1. Variety of research domains within the MPSCog

## 1.2. Structure of the MPSCog

The MPSCog is a majority virtual concept and has no physical campus. The offices of the MPSCog coordination team is situated at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Science (MPI CBS), Leipzig.

### Administrative location

Max Planck School of Cognition  
Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences  
Stephanstraße 1A | 04103 Leipzig | Germany

## PART II – Structure

Figure 2 shows the organization chart of the MPSCog coordination team. A complete list of people can be found [online](#).

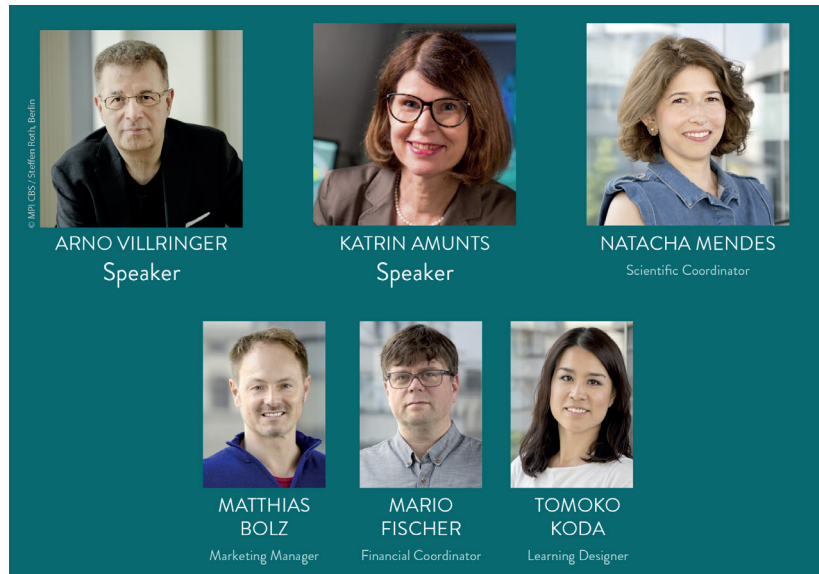


Figure 2. The MPSCog coordination team

### The MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab

MPSCog doctoral candidates who need office space during their time in Berlin may request a working desk within the Berlin Satellite lab (Figure 3). Please reach out to the coordination team if interested.

#### Address of the MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab:

Max Planck Dahlem Campus of Cognition (MPDCC)  
Dillenburger Str. 53, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | 14199 Berlin

Bus station: Dillenburger Straße, Bus Nr. 101, 248, 282

Subway station: Breitenbachplatz, Subway U2, U3

Opening hours of the building: Monday–Friday: 08.00–18.00

At the MPDCC, there are several research labs (e.g., Virtual Reality Lab, MRI Lab, EEG Lab), multi-user offices, and an Open Space Room for meetings which can be booked. Offices are available upon request for MPSCog members who need office space for a period of time in Berlin. The buildings on the Campus offer Wi-Fi, a library, kitchen facilities, lockers, and a canteen.

A weekly meeting (Tuesdays, 13.00–14.00) will be organized — the so-called *Campus Werkstatt* — which is a forum for exchange between all user groups. The *Campus Werkstatt* meetings are hybrid: They will take place physically in the MPDCC meeting room as well as virtually/online via *Webex*. All researchers at the MPDCC including MPSCog members transiently located there are invited to join to present ongoing work-in-progress, to pitch novel research ideas especially for collaborative research projects, and to get support and feedback on scientific and methodological challenges.



Figure 3. Rooms in the MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab

## PART II – Structure

### 1.3. Faculty members and research institutions involved

The MPSCog has established a joint research and educational framework across Germany, the Netherlands and UK by bringing together top scientists from the Max Planck Society, German universities and other non-university research organizations as well as leading international universities. Through this network, the MPSCog offers doctoral candidates the opportunity to conduct lab rotations, master's projects and doctoral research work across a prestigious network of partner institutions (Figure 4).

Our doctoral candidates can conduct their doctoral research with one of 47 renowned faculty members

- from 31 research institutions including Max Planck Institutes, Universities, Helmholtz Association, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, and University College London
- working in 16 cities across Germany, the Netherlands (Nijmegen) and UK (London)
- of which 10 are Leibniz Prize winners (the highest German research prize of € 2.5 million), 12 European Research Council (ERC) grant awardees (two of the faculty members with two ERC grants each), and 13 members of the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Science



Figure 4. The MPSCog partner locations

More information about our [faculty members](#) and [partner institutions](#) can be found on our website.

### 2. ORIENTATION PHASE

Every September, a new cohort of doctoral candidates joins the MPSCog. The candidates come from all over the world and from diverse backgrounds. In order to welcome incoming candidates and ensure a smooth and swift transition, the coordination team will support candidates through the onboarding process as soon as they are accepted into the program.

#### 2.1. Onboarding steps – Before arrival in Germany

Coming to Germany as an international candidate can be challenging given potentially unfamiliar regulations. Some of the necessary procedures involve the German embassy or consulate, and must be started immediately after admission to the MPSCog doctoral program. This section guides our candidates through the necessary steps when moving to Germany. Please do not hesitate to contact the coordination team to check specific requirements.

Our program starts with an orientation phase. Candidates need to provide required information to begin the program. This information is further described on the following pages.

The checklist in Figure 5 provides an overview of which steps candidates need to take care of and when. Some processes run in parallel and not all of them apply to every candidate. Candidates coming from non-European countries have to complete a few more steps, such as applying for an entry visa in their home country and applying for a residence permit after having moved to Germany.

<b>Submit documents</b>	Submit the documents necessary to set up your scholarship agreement with MPSCog. You will receive an e-mail from the coordination team with instructions after admission to the program.
<b>Choose labs for rotations</b>	We will ask you to let us know your preferred labs for the rotations in order to arrange your lab visits with the respective fellows.
<b>If applicable: Apply for master program</b>	Bachelor students need to apply to a fast-track master program at either Berlin School of Mind and Brain or at Freie Universität Berlin.
<b>If applicable: Apply for entry visa</b>	If you are a citizen of a non-European country, then you need to apply for a visa before entering Germany. Appointments at German Missions abroad are always free of cost! Travel health insurance for the way to Germany is recommended. Private health insurance is possible with Mawista. Close support will be given by the coordination team.
<b>Register with Leipzig Uni</b>	It is required to be registered as preliminary doctoral candidate with Universität Leipzig for the duration of the orientation phase. The coordination team will approach you regarding this.
<b>Look for housing</b>	In some cities, it can be very difficult to find reasonable accommodation. Thus it is highly recommended to start looking for it as soon as the first lab rotation is set. Candidates from older cohorts might be able to give support.
<b>Schedule appointments</b>	Given long waiting times, it is recommended to schedule appointments with the residents' registration office in the city of the first lab rotation, and with a bank to open a giro account before actually arriving in Germany. The coordination team can assist with this.

Figure 5. Checklist for the necessary steps after admission to the MPSCog

If a candidate is planning to come with her/his spouse/partner, please refer to *Section 2.1.3*.



### Tips for appointments with authorities

Appointments with the residents' registration office (*Bürgerbüro*) and foreigners' authority (immigration office, *Ausländerbehörde*) are explained in detail in *Section 2.2*. To avoid long waiting times, however, we recommend scheduling appointments with these authorities online before even arriving in Germany. Our International Officer Nicole Lorenz can give support with scheduling those appointments.

### 2.1.1 Submit documents necessary to set up scholarship agreement

As the MPSCog is located at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, the administrative management is carried out by the Human Resources department of MPI CBS. For the preparation of the scholarship agreement, candidates will be asked to hand in several documents. Please help us to move this process forward quickly by submitting documents in a complete and timely manner. The coordination team will reach out to you.

### 2.1.2 Choose labs for rotation

Our doctoral candidates will, on average, visit three laboratories during the orientation phase. Each candidate will be asked to provide a list of preferred MPSCog faculty members and labs shortly after admission to the MPSCog. The individually customized first-year schedule will be coordinated by the coordination team. Please see *Section 2.3.3* for more information.

### 2.1.3 Application for an entry visa (if applicable)

International candidates need to apply for an entry visa before traveling to Germany (Figure 6). The bureaucratic visa processes require time and effort and vary from country to country. Candidates should consult with the local German embassy or consulate for the most up-to-date information for their individual situation — ideally immediately after admission to our program. Detailed information is given on their websites where candidates can also book appointments to submit the application documents. Appointments at the embassy should be booked well in advance and the purpose of the stay (doctoral studies) should be clearly indicated the when applying for the visa to avoid later problems.



Figure 6. Do you need a visa? Non-EU citizens need to apply for an entry visa in their home country or the current country of living, and extend this visa into a residence permit after arriving in Germany

Be prepared to provide the following documents at the embassy — both as original documents and as a copy:

- visa application form for (doctoral) studies (§16b)
- passport
- biometric photo
- admission letter (provided by the coordination team)
- proof of financial means (letter of intent, provided by the coordination team)
- proof of health insurance for the orientation phase\*

#### \*Health insurance for international candidates

Given that international candidates are not living in Germany when applying for the visa, they may have to look for an international private health insurance company. Moreover, it is recommended to have a foreign travel insurance for the trip to Germany.

## PART III – Onboarding steps – Before arrival in Germany

**NOTE:** The visa process may take up to several months. Do not enter Germany with a tourist visa or a Schengen visa, or even without a visa although it would be possible (e.g., for citizens from the USA or Australia) as this may cause serious problems for the visa process. The experience has shown that the first weeks of the program are very intense and time-consuming. Arriving with an entry visa reduces the pressure to take care of the residence permit immediately and enables the candidates to get used to the new cultural environment.

### Useful websites

[German Federal Foreign Office \(Auswärtiges Amt\)](#)

[Make it in Germany](#)

[Do you need a visa?](#)

[Visa requirements](#)

[At a glance: Visa for study purposes](#)

### Coming to Germany with a spouse/partner

In principle, doctoral candidates may also bring their partners or spouses. It is recommended that the spouse enters Germany together with the candidate and does not join later. These so-called family reunions are always more difficult and take longer. The visa application is simplified considerably when the couple is married. If the candidate is entitled to statutory health insurance, the spouse can be insured as a family member. Please find more information [here](#).

In case the couple is not married, the accompanying partner needs her/his own purpose for staying in Germany, such as for academic studies or a professional activity. The partner must apply for a visa herself/himself, provide her/his own financial means for the stay in Germany, as well as apply and pay for health insurance separately.

In line with the MPSCog's commitment to supporting a healthy work-life balance, the coordination team is happy to support our candidates in this process.

### 2.1.4 Application for a fast-track master's program (for candidates with a bachelor's degree)

Doctoral candidates entering the MPSCog program with a bachelor's degree will need to obtain a master's degree before entering the doctoral phase of the MPSCog program. Therefore, the fast-track candidates must apply to a master's program either at the [Berlin School of Mind & Brain](#) (so-called 'fast-track') at *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* or at [Freie Universität Berlin](#). Their place of living will be in Berlin.

In the first year, fast-track candidates have to fulfill the requirements of both, the MSc programs at either Berlin School of Mind & Brain or Freie Universität Berlin and the MPSCog orientation phase. All effort is made to make both programs compatible, e.g. by making the key elements of the program (e-learning, lab rotations) recognized by all programs (see Figure 7).

After admission	Orientation phase		Doctoral phase		
	1–12 months	13–24 months	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose the preferred MPSCog Fellows for the lab rotations</li> <li>Apply for master's program at Berlin School of Mind and Brain (M&amp;B)*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Orientation year of the MPSCog program</li> <li>M&amp;B master's program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master thesis of the M&amp;B master's program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thesis proposal</li> <li>Register at university of your supervisor</li> <li>Doctoral research work</li> <li>TAC meeting</li> <li>2 Cognition Academies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctoral research work</li> <li>TAC meeting</li> <li>2 Cognition Academies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctoral research work</li> <li>TAC meeting</li> <li>1 Cognition Academy</li> <li>Doctoral degree</li> </ul>

\*Please follow the M&B website for the most up-to-date information

Figure 7. Curriculum of fast-track candidates

## PART III – Onboarding steps – Before arrival in Germany

**\*Attention:** Please follow the Berlin School of Mind & Brain website for the most up to date information about the [selection process](#). For the 2022 application process of the master’s program at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain, applicants should have at least a GPA of 1.2 (German grading system) for the *Brain Track* and 1.3 for the *Mind Track*.

### Master’s program

More detailed information about the master’s program at the “Berlin School of Mind & Brain” at *Humboldt-Universität in Berlin* is provided under the section [Getting started](#). Here, candidates can access the M&B Handbook, intended to assist with the organizational and bureaucratic steps needed before becoming a master’s student at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain.

### Contact person at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain master’s program:

Dr. Dirk Mende  
Liaison Officer for Educational Programs  
E-Mail: [mb-education@hu-berlin.de](mailto:mb-education@hu-berlin.de)  
Tel. +49 30 2093-89768

Combining both programs is a challenging task, hence the fast-track candidates are granted an extended orientation period in the MPSCog program. During the initial 18 to 24 months, fast-track candidates are expected to obtain their master’s degree and complete the orientation phase of the MPSCog program. After that, they may move on to the doctoral phase at the MPSCog.

**Note: Information on the master’s program at Freie Universität Berlin will be provided soon.**

### Printing master thesis

The Graphics department at the MPI CBS can print the master thesis books necessary for submission at the university. Candidates can get in touch with the coordination team in case they are interested in that. Shipping costs can, however, not be covered.

## 2.1.5 Register with Universität Leipzig

In Germany, only universities can award academic degrees such as a doctoral degree. Therefore, the affiliation with a partner university (alongside the affiliation with the MPSCog) is an academic requirement for all doctoral candidates.

Getting registered and accepted on the so-called *vorläufige Doktorandenliste* (preliminary doctoral candidates list) is a compulsory step to initiate the MPSCog program. However, since the supervisors for the doctoral phase are not specified until the end of the orientation phase, the preliminary registration takes place at Universität Leipzig for this period. Based on an agreement between the MPSCog and the Deanery of Universität Leipzig, registration is possible either at the Medical Faculty (with Prof. Arno Villringer) or at the Faculty of Life Sciences (with Prof. Erich Schröger) and will depend on the scientific background of each candidate (Figure 8).

The coordination team will advise our candidates on the suitable choice of faculty, and will take care of the actual registration. This process does not require anything from the candidate other than providing the required information in a timely manner. Master candidates are registered with *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* through the Berlin School of Mind & Brain or with *Freie Universität Berlin*.



Figure 8. Preliminary registration as doctoral candidate during the orientation phase is possible with two faculties at Universität Leipzig

## PART III – Onboarding steps – Before arrival in Germany

After successful registration on the doctoral list, candidates receive a confirmation for a preliminary admission as a doctoral candidate (*Vorläufige Zulassung zur Promotion/Vorläufige Promotionsbescheinigung*). This confirmation will be added to the personal documentation at the MPI CBS Human Resources department and at the MPSCog, and thus the candidates must upload it to the MPSCog's curriculum database [Open Campus](#).

### Research Academy Leipzig (RALeipzig)

During the orientation phase, MPSCog candidates preliminarily registered at Universität Leipzig can profit from [Research Academy Leipzig](#) (RALeipzig) offer for pre-doc candidates, such as webinars on e.g., career or mental health. To stay informed about the offer candidates can register for a [RALeipzig Newsletter](#).

**Attention:** Please keep in mind that this preliminary registration will need to be revised at the end of the orientation phase when the doctoral supervisor is determined. Thus, some candidates will need to revert their registration at Universität Leipzig and re-register at the university where their supervisor holds a professorship. MPSCog candidates who switch from Universität Leipzig to another university at the end of the orientation phase to pursue their doctoral research work, will automatically be excluded from RALeipzig.

### Enrollment as student

In addition to registering on the doctoral list (mandatory), candidates may choose to enroll as a student at any university, if they wish to receive associated benefits (e.g., a public transport ticket). However, since this is optional and not a requirement for the MPSCog doctoral program, the applicable registration fees will not be reimbursed.

## 2.1.6 Look for housing

Doctoral candidates are responsible for finding their own accommodation and should start looking for accommodation as soon as the location of the first lab rotation is confirmed.

**To start with...** Many German candidates offer their apartment or shared apartment room for a temporary sublease while they do an internship or travel. This is the most convenient form of accommodation during lab rotations, as the main renter will usually leave all furniture and other essential inventory. For candidates coming from abroad, renting an empty flat for only a few months is very difficult, thus candidates should be looking into temporary living options.

Links for finding temporary living:

- [Housing anywhere](#)
- [wg-gesucht](#)
- [WG-Suche](#)
- [Das schwarze Brett](#)

**Apartment sharing.** A very common alternative to living by oneself is apartment sharing. Many candidates live in a so-called Wohngemeinschaft or WG for short. It has many advantages, such as sharing costs for electricity, internet, and TV license fees. The monthly rent consists of the rent itself (*Kaltmiete*) plus running costs (*Nebenkosten*) including water, heating, and garbage collection (*Warmmiete*). Additional costs are electricity and internet. Usually, one will have to pay a deposit to the landlord. In most cases, this is between 2 to 3 times your portion of the overall monthly rent for the room. The money will be returned about 2-3 months after the contract ends. If the flat needs to be renovated in some form, the landlord may keep parts of the deposit to cover the costs.

**Student housing.** The Studentenwerk (Student Union) of a university is a service provider that offers the option of a student dorm (single or double room) or apartments. These accommodations may require a minimum contract time. The rent usually covers most incidental costs such as electricity, water, heating, and internet access. Generally, the rooms are furnished, but for hygienic reasons, own bedding and kitchenware might need to be brought along. To use this option, it is usually required to be enrolled as a regular student paying semester fees, but there may be exceptions for candidates who are at least registered on the university's doctoral candidate list.

## PART III – Onboarding steps – After arrival in Germany

The following topics will come up with housing:

**Broadcasting fees:** In Germany, every household has to pay a broadcasting license fee for the state-run TV channels, radio stations and online streams of these services — even if one does not have a radio or TV set. This fee is a fixed sum (currently 17,55 € per month), regardless of how many persons live in the household. Candidates should receive a letter from the company automatically. For more information, please visit this [link](#).

**Internet/telephone:** Even though many public areas have free wifi (a.k.a. WLAN in Germany), candidates might want to have wifi at home. If candidates have their own apartment, they have to select a provider. The main providers in Germany are *Deutsche Telekom*, *Kabel Deutschland*, *Vodafone*, and *1x1*. They all vary in their monthly rates. Thus, a comparison of the current offers is advisable, such as on the websites [Telefontarife](#), [Verivox](#) or [Check24](#).

**Electricity:** There is always a basic electricity supplier when renting an apartment, which may be a little more expensive than offers online. If candidates want to save some money, they can compare prices with webpages such as [Check24](#) or [Verivox](#).

### 2.2 Onboarding steps – After arrival in Germany

It may be a good idea to arrive in Germany one or two weeks before the welcome week to take care of a few onboarding steps (Figure 9). For example, appointments with authorities can often be scheduled online beforehand and will be easier to take care of ahead of the first day in a laboratory. The International Officer at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences (MPI CBS) can assist with any of the necessary following steps:

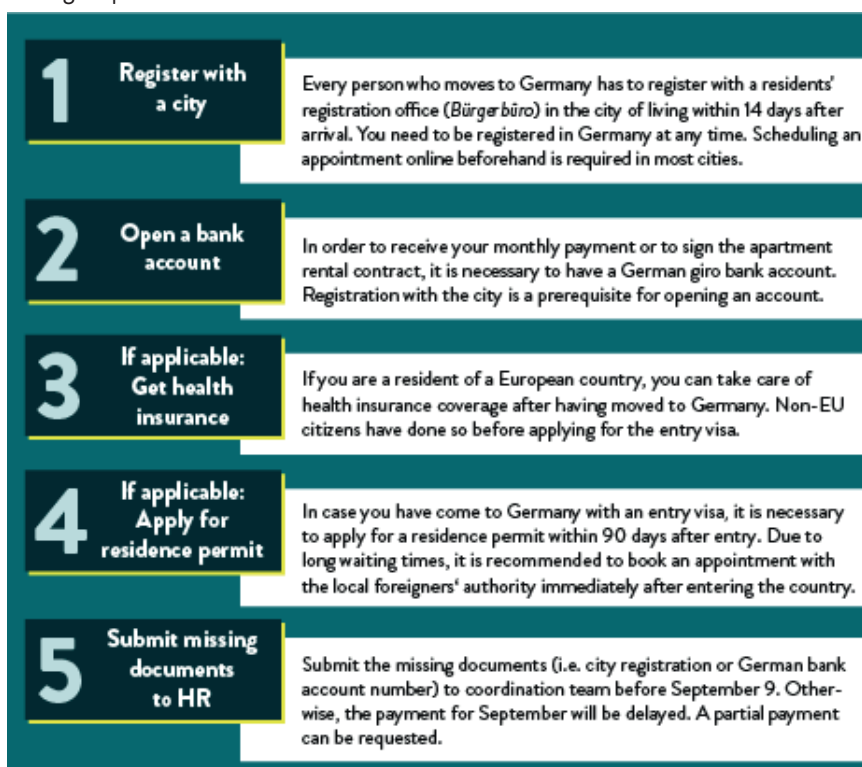


Figure 9. Administrative steps necessary after arrival in Germany

#### 2.2.1 Register with a city

In Germany, everyone is obliged to register in the city of living within 14 days after arrival at the residents' registration office, the so-called *Bürgerbüro* (residents' registration office). Candidates need to stay registered in Germany throughout the complete orientation phase. For doctoral candidates coming from abroad, this would be in the city of the first lab rotation. Should a lab rotation require a move to another city within Germany, candidates do not need to de-register, but need to register in the new city within 14 days. Registration in

## PART III – Onboarding steps – After arrival in Germany

another city is not necessary if candidates keep a home elsewhere in Germany where they are registered and if the stay in the other city is for less than three months. If candidates move abroad for their doctoral phase, de-registration in Germany is required.

Scheduling an online appointment well in advance might be necessary to avoid long waiting times. During the Covid pandemic, it was required to schedule appointments before going to authorities, but they are now tending to offering walk-in days again. Unfortunately, some websites are in German only. If candidates have difficulties navigating the German language, please contact the coordination team.

Here is what you need to bring:

- Completed registration form (typically available online or at the *Bürgerbüro* office, *Anmeldeformular*)
- ID card and/or passport
- Written tenant confirmation or renting agreement signed by the landlord (*Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung*; templates are available online)

At the *Bürgerbüro*, candidates will receive a registration confirmation (*Meldebescheinigung*) which allows them to open a bank account and to apply for a residence title. A few weeks after the registration, candidates will receive their personal tax identification number automatically via mail.

### 2.2.2 Opening a bank account (*Girokonto*)

In order to receive and make regular payments, one needs to have a **German** giro bank account (*Girokonto*), for example with Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, Postbank or Sparkasse which have branches in the bigger cities, or online banks like DKB, ING DiBa or N26. If the monthly income on the account is more than 700 Euros, most banks waive the fees. They, however, also differ in offering services in English or ATM coverage. The former common EC card (Giro card) will be replaced by a so-called Debit Card which is for free when opening of the account and similar to a credit card. Different to a credit card, money will be taken off your account immediately when paying with the Debit Card, and not only at the end of the month. Credit cards may cost an extra fee.

The following documents have to be submitted at an appointment at the bank of your choice:

- Passport or ID card
- Registration confirmation from *Bürgerbüro* (*Meldebescheinigung*)
- Scholarship agreement
- Tax identification number

#### **Transferring money to a German account**

If candidates intend to transfer some of their savings to a German bank account, [Wise](#) may be a good option. It is a cheap service for transferring money from one country to another. One can also exchange money from a different currency to Euro at a very good rate.

### 2.2.3 Health insurance

Health insurance is compulsory in Germany – a travel insurance does not provide sufficient insurance cover when studying in Germany and will not be accepted by our administration. The healthcare topic is quite complex and can be confusing. Thus, please do not hesitate to contact our International Officers at MPI CBS for support with any question regarding individual health insurance options.

There are two types of health insurances: the statutory one (public healthcare system, more common) or the insurance with a private company. Membership in a statutory insurance is recommended, but is only possible for candidates who have been insured in a statutory insurance company in Germany or Europe before. Candidates moving to Germany from a non-European country, have to choose private coverage until they receive a doctoral contract in the second year of the program.

In contrast to statutory health insurances, contributions to private ones are based on age, gender, and state of health rather than on the income. Moreover, doctor's visits have to be paid in advance and will be reimbursed by the provider, whereas the treatment of members of public health insurances is directly settled between doctors and the health insurance company.

A comprehensive health insurance coverage is required to receive the stipend, a very basic tariff of a private insurances is not sufficient. The monthly insurance fees consist of two parts: health insurance and long-term care insurance. For candidates of MPSCog, the Max Planck Society provides a subsidy of 50 % of the monthly fee, but 100 € max. This applies to statutory insurance without questions. The private insurance provider has to issue a confirmation “*Arbeitgeberbescheinigung nach § 257 Abs. 2a SGB V*” to confirm that the benefits corresponds to those of a statutory health insurance. It seems that [Mawista](#) is the only private health insurance provider that candidates can choose. Dr Walter and CareConcept to not offer comprehensive health insurances.

Master candidates are eligible to apply for membership in a statutory health insurance program as they are enrolled as master student and are usually under the age of 30 years.

**EU RESIDENTS** **You have a statutory pre-insurance in another European country or UK?**

**Then apply for membership in a German statutory health insurance company (e.g. TK, AOK, Barmer)**

Costs: approx. 250 € per month; subsidy from MPSCog: 50 % (max. 100 €)

**Necessary documents:**

- Application form from the German insurance company
- Confirmation of former health insurance (E104) or copy of former health insurance card (EHIC)
- City registration confirmation from *Bürgerbüro* (*Meldebescheinigung*)
- Copy of ID card or passport
- Scholarship agreement
- Electronic photo for insurance card

For students coming from UK, it is helpful to provide a registration confirmation with a GP, the NHS number or a tenancy agreement confirming your residence in UK.

**NON-EU RESIDENTS** **You are moving to Germany from outside EU?**

**Then you have to apply for a membership with a private health insurance company (Mawista)**

Costs are age- & tariff-dependent:

- Apply for a comprehensive insurance coverage which is equivalent to a statutory insurance; ca. 250 € per month  
subsidy from MPSCog: 50 % (max. 100 €)  
confirmation about insurance “according to § 257 Abs. 2a SGB V” is necessary
- The cheap basic tariff covering only the very basic medical treatments ca. 50 € per month is not acceptable

**MASTER STUDENTS** **Follow the steps under EU RESIDENTS to apply for a student tariff membership with a statutory health insurance company. You need to additionally provide the matriculation confirmation.**

Figure 10. Options for health insurance coverage in Germany

### 2.2.4 Application for a residence permit (if applicable)

If the candidate is a non-European citizen, s/he has to apply for a residence permit at the foreigners’ authority. The application has to be submitted within 90 days after entering Germany. Since the waiting time for an appointment is long and the process takes several months, it is strongly recommended to schedule an appointment online before entering Germany to have a chance to get it done during the first lab rotation. International Officers at MPI CBS will support with that as appointments can only be booked from an IP address within Germany.

## PART III – Onboarding steps – After arrival in Germany

Due to the pandemic, most foreigners' authorities accept applications via e-mail and then offer a pick-up date for the residence permit. Please consult the website of the local foreigners' authority for current information on how to submit applications.

In some cities, it seems impossible to find available slots on the websites of the authorities. Because the coordination of the MPSCog is done from Leipzig, the connections to the local authority there and their service is extremely good. For candidates registered in Berlin, we can offer to make use of the [Business Immigration Service \(BIS\)](#). The application will be submitted by the International Officers at MPI CBS on behalf of the international candidate.

In general, the following documents need to be provided as copy and as original to apply for the residence permit:

- Completed visa application form
- One biometric photo
- Passport plus copy of passport
- Copy of the rental contract
- Registration confirmation from the residents' registration office (*Bürgerbüro*)
- Copy of scholarship agreement
- Copy of health insurance
- MPSCog admission letter issued by the coordination team

For MPSCog candidates, the permit does not cost anything as the stipend comes from a public institution. The validity period of residence titles during the orientation phase varies from authority to authority, unfortunately.

### 2.2.5 Income

During the first year at the MPSCog, doctoral candidates receive a stipend in the amount of between 1,565 € and 1,665 € per month, depending on the subsidy for health insurance (Figure 11). Subsidy will be granted to candidates who are members of a statutory health insurance company or have comprehensive private health insurance coverage equivalent to a statutory one (see *Section 2.2.3*).

The scholarship during the orientation phase is paid by the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences (MPI CBS) and will be transferred to the candidate's German account at the end of each month. Thus, the first payment will be made at the end of September, in case all documents have been submitted on time. Otherwise, the first payment will be slightly delayed.

Orientation Phase	Doctoral Phase
<b>Stipend from MPS Cog:</b> 1,565 € net + subsidy for health insurance (max. 100 €)	<b>Contract from doctoral institution</b>

Figure 11. Monthly payment for doctoral candidates at the MPSCog

A scholarship is considered as a financial support in the form of a contribution to living expenses and is paid tax-free. Candidates become liable to pay taxes in Germany with the transition into the doctoral phase when receiving their contracts from the institution (Max Planck Institute, university, or other) where their doctoral supervisor is based. The employer will directly deduct the taxes and duties from the salary (*Brutto*) and pay them directly to the state, and transfer the left amount (*Netto*) onto the candidate's account. The amount depends on the regional within Germany, income, marital status, or associated tax bracket.

**Attention:** Please note that the preparation of the contract for the doctoral phase in the institution where the doctoral project will be conducted may take 2–5 months, depending on the institution. Therefore, the decision on the supervision of the doctoral project must be made in May/June of the orientation phase, at the very latest.

### 2.2.6 Personal, scientific, and mental health support

Participating in a doctoral research program can be challenging on both, professional and personal level. There will be stressful times as well as unexpected events that may put someone in a difficult situation.



If a candidate experiences prolonged stress or is under strong pressure, s/he should not hesitate to contact us. No matter how big or small the query is – we are happy to support our candidates! The MPSCog team will happily help and/or assist in finding the right contact point inside or outside of MPI CBS. We can offer internal confidential consultations, assist in contacting external professional counselling services, and also serve as a general information and contact point for a variety of issues. Please contact the coordination team for how to proceed.

### **MPSCog internal consultations**

If candidates experience any problems with their research project, it is advisable to first contact and discuss with the supervisor(s) and/or advisors. If there are any issues with supervision or questions that are connected to the MPSCog program, they may always contact the MPSCog Scientific Coordinator Natacha Mendes.

Additionally, candidates in the orientation phase might find themselves in a conflict or problematic situation they cannot resolve themselves. Depending on whether it is a conflict with the peers, the supervisor, or other staff members, whether there are feelings of discrimination, or whether candidates feel unable to perform the way they wish they could, owing to professional or private issues can find assistance and advice from different contact points at MPI CBS:

**Equal opportunities officers.** The Max Planck Society and each of its institutes support and promote employees regardless of gender, nationality, religion, disability, age, cultural origin, or sexual identity. Whenever needed, doctoral candidates in the orientation phase could seek out the [equal opportunities officers](#) at the MPI CBS.

**Ombudsperson.** Scientific integrity is one of the most highly valued assets in science. This includes an open debate about what constitutes good scientific practice and according to which rules scientific activity is pursued. Generally speaking, the role of an ombudsperson does not concern severe violations in the sense of potential scientific fraud, but rather conflicts that arise from scientific practice. Unresolved conflicts may have an impact on the overall working climate and may significantly affect motivation. Thus, conflicts need to be addressed and solved in a sustainable manner. Most of the discussions held by ombudspersons concern issues of authorship, i.e., questions relating to the fair acknowledgment of scientific contributions to a certain publication on the part of individuals. Candidates in the orientation phase can reach out to the MPI CBS [ombudspersons](#).

### **External consultation**

If you need help in resolving personal problems and issues that impact your well-being at work, an Employee and Manager Assistance Program (EMAP) is available through pme family service: by telephone, online, or in person. Services are free of charge and, importantly, also available in English and several other languages.

*How does pme work?*

Call the free phone number 0800-801007080 or contact them through the form on their [homepage](#), and they will get back to you asap. pme provides a number of services in their [member portal](#). If calling, the candidate should indicate that s/he is part of the Max Planck Society. If they wish to further confirm that a person is entitled to this service, they will simply ask to see a copy of the scholarship agreement.

[Here](#) is information about their services on the MPS PhD net website.

## 2.2.7 Further helpful information

### **Emergency numbers and medical services**

Fire Fighters & Emergency: 112

Police: 110

On-call medical service: 116 117

**Medical practitioner:** If a person is feeling sick, a general practitioner (*Hausarzt*) would be the first place to go. We recommend to schedule an appointment beforehand, otherwise it may take a while before being seen. If one needs to see a specialized physician (*Facharzt*), the general practitioner might need to issue a transferral form. If getting sick (not life-threatening) over the weekend or after the opening hours of the general practitioner, a medical service can be called: 116117 (*Ärztlicher Bereitschaftsdienst*). They will try to immediately assess the situation at hand and will report to a doctor. In case of a medical emergency, please call 112 or go directly to a hospital nearby (*Notaufnahme*). Please contact the secretary of the lab for tips on English-speaking doctors, or

## PART III – Onboarding steps – After arrival in Germany

do an online search. The health insurance will always cover these visits and any emergency services! Bring the insurance card or proof of insurance coverage for consultation. Candidates who have private health insurance will receive an invoice from the doctor after consultation. This invoice needs to be submitted to the health insurance company for reimbursement.

**German courses:** Taking German classes during the time in Germany is voluntary, but advisable, especially when working with participants as not everyone in Germany speaks fluent English. The universities (e.g., Research Academy at Universität Leipzig) offer (online) language courses, but also other institutions like the local Volkshochschule or the Goethe Institute. The MPSCog will cover the fees for courses taken during the orientation phase. For reimbursement of German course fees through MPSCog, please follow the steps outlined below:

### Requesting Fee Coverage

1. *Research German Course Providers:* Explore various German course providers and choose the one that align best with your needs.
2. *Contact Your Preferred Provider:* Reach out to your selected German course provider.
3. *Request Official Course Offer:* Solicit an official course offer from the provider.
4. *Approval Process:* Forward the obtained offer to Mario Fischer at [fischer@mcb.mpg.de](mailto:fischer@mcb.mpg.de) for approval. Please note that MPSCog will only cover expenses for courses approved before their commencement.

### Reimbursement Process

Upon receipt of the invoice from the German course provider, follow these steps:

1. *Advance Payment:* Make the payment in advance.
2. *Submission of Documents:* Forward both the invoice and evidence of payment (e.g., bank statement or receipt) to Mario Fischer.
3. *Reimbursement:* Await reimbursement from MPI CBS.

**Parenthood:** Candidates who become parents during the program, are eligible to receive full state support – prolongation of a stipend and also eligible to take parental leave.

**Shop business hours:** Usual opening hours of shops in Germany are from 10:00 to 20:00. Smaller shops often vary in their opening times. Most supermarkets are open from 07:00 until 22:00 h from Monday to Saturday. Shops are closed on Sundays, although there are exceptions: Stores in central train stations are usually open on Sundays for limited hours, some bakeries are open on Sundays and petrol stations which often offer basic food are typically open 24/7. There are low-priced discounters like Aldi, Lidl, Netto, or Penny, and regular supermarkets like Edeka, Kaufland, Globus, or Rewe.

**Mobile phone contracts:** In Germany, one can choose between two ways to use a mobile phone. The first option is to get a prepaid card for your phone, which is often easier than getting a contract. A prepaid sim card can be purchased in any supermarket. One should compare the prices and packages, also with the second option which would be by contract. Here, one pays monthly and usually has a 2-year contract. It is a bit more complex and there are various phone companies to choose from (e.g., Vodafone, Telekom, O2, a comparison of the current offers can be found here: [Telefontarife](#), [Verivox](#) or [Check24](#)).

**Second-hand sales:** If candidates need any furniture or a bike and do not want to pay the full price, second-hand is an alternative option. The most commonly used websites are [ebay-Kleinanzeigen](#) or [Das Schwarze Brett](#), but Facebook Marketplace or local Facebook groups are also very common.

**Liability insurance:** While not legally required to have liability insurance in the majority of cases (see below), it is strongly advised to get the coverage. Some landlords may want to see a proof of insurance. Private insurance companies often provide combined health and liability insurance. It protects the policyholder against compensatory financial claims caused by damage to the property of a third person, in business or in private context. While being on lab rotations, it might, for example, happen that a candidate accidentally drops an expensive device and it breaks. Every institution has its own regulations and cover of such accidents, but it might be that they are not going to cover the damage. Then it is good to have such liability insurance. More information can be found [here](#). Insurance providers can be found online.

**Insurance of contents:** An *insurance of contents* covers the personal belongings at home (and in some cases, also if they leave the home) against elemental damage (fire, storm, flood, theft), damage through pipe water,

burglary and vandalism. One is not required to have such an insurance, but it would be advised to, since they are usually not very expensive.

### 2.3 Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

Conducting a doctoral program is a huge project. The coordination team is there to support the candidates in all stages of the program.

#### Matching between the accepted candidate and the doctoral supervisor

At the final stage of the selection process, each successful candidate will be matched with the MPSCog faculty member, who will be their doctoral supervisor. The matching is made based on the mutual preferences and complementing research interests of both parties. This initial matching is provisional. A lab rotation in the lab of the provisionally matched faculty member is scheduled at the start of the orientation phase for each candidate. If the faculty member agrees to accept the candidate, and there is a mutual agreement to continue working during the doctoral phase, the candidate can then settle into the desired lab at the start of the second year. In cases where the initial match cannot turn into doctoral supervision, new options for supervision are explored and arranged.

The final decision on the doctoral supervision must be made, at the latest, by May/June of the orientation phase. Towards the end of the orientation phase (around May/June), candidates with established doctoral supervision should initiate preparation of their doctoral contracts at the hosting institution. They should discuss the relevant steps with their main supervisor and/or his PA who will be able to refer them to the HR person in charge. Our MPSCog Financial Officer, Mario Fischer, can guide candidates to the respective HR in case of doubts. Some institutions require a health check which should be sorted out before going on summer vacation.

#### 2.3.1 Overview of the first year and beyond

During the first year of the MPSCog doctoral program, there is an emphasis on two academic elements: lab rotations and e-learning. This so-called orientation phase offers a unique, individually-tailored curriculum to explore research fields across different labs. It also covers the fundamental knowledge from the broad field of cognition via e-learning courses. The MPSCog program allows applicants to enter with bachelor's (the "fast-track" route) and/or master's degrees. Figure 12 gives an overview of each of the four years of the MPSCog program.

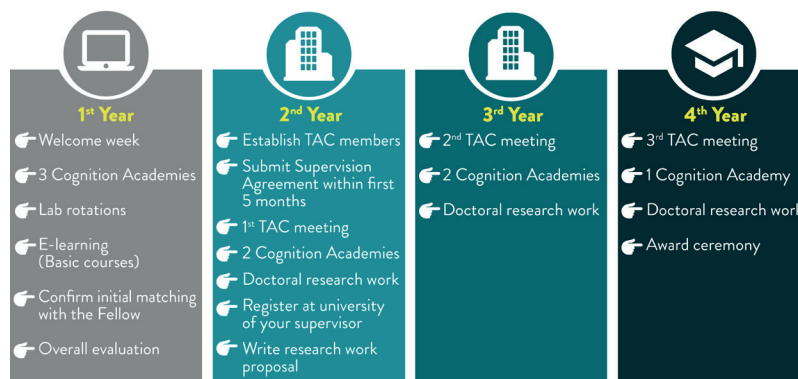


Figure 12. Timeline of the MPSCog doctoral program

Furthermore, three Cognition Academies (and a welcome week in September) are also parts of the orientation phase. They allow candidates who are spread across Germany, London and Nijmegen to meet in person.

At the end of the first year, the accomplishments of the candidates (e-learning, lab rotations and presentations at the labs) are evaluated. Successful candidates then proceed to the doctoral phase.

#### First week at the MPSCog: What to expect?

At the beginning of the first year, candidates take part in the Welcome Days at the Harnack House in Berlin. During these days, candidates meet their peers and the MPSCog coordination team in person. They are introduced to the program and the e-learning platform, present their previous research work to the group, and attend talks by some of our esteemed faculty member.

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

In addition, candidates are invited to join in the Max Planck Schools Day (Figure 13) taking place in September/October. This event officially welcomes all new doctoral candidates from the three Max Planck Schools and allows exchange amongst researchers of participating institutions across a wide range of career stages.



Figure 13. Picture from the first Kick-Off Symposium in 2019. The German Science Minister Anja Karliczek also took part in the event, pictured here with the Max Planck President Martin Stratmann, the Vice-President of the Max Planck Society Ferdi Schüth and doctoral candidates of the three schools (Bojana Grujičić from the MPSCog)  
(Picture: Max Planck Society / David Ausserhofer)

### Peer support across MPSCog cohorts

Candidates from [older cohorts](#) offer support, advice and serve as mentors for the new candidates. We strongly encourage networking and exchange across the cohorts. Getting direct advice from someone who already gained experience in for example, a specific lab or found an accommodation in a specific location can be precious. If candidates are unsure which colleague from an older cohort could support them or answer your questions, we are happy to advise.

### Student representatives

Student representatives act as a liaison between their respective cohort, the coordination team, and the faculty members. They help to optimize the working environment for their cohort and to improve information flow and exchange with the coordination team. Student representatives can join meetings between other doctoral candidates and, for example, the coordination team or Arno Villringer (Chaperone role). Each cohort elects two representatives (some additionally two deputies) at the start of the doctoral program and hold elections on a yearly basis. The student representatives are indicated on the MPSCog website under their respective cohorts.

### Good to know

**E-mail addresses:** Every doctoral candidate will be given an official e-mail address (Name.Surname@maxplanckschools.de) and each cohort will have a group contact (e.g., doccandidates2020@maxplanckschools.de) through which the coordination team can contact the candidates and share all important information. In addition, an MPI CBS account will be created to access the online library and to receive internal e-mails. Be aware that all the communication from HR will be made through your CBS account! If it is too stressful to keep track of the many e-mail accounts, candidates may simply use automatic forwarding to divert all e-mails to the account that they mainly use. Please note that this cannot be an account outside of Germany (e.g., googlemail) due to data protection reasons!

**Curriculum management/Open Campus:** Doctoral candidates will be introduced to the [Curriculum management/Open Campus tool](#), a system for managing academic data collected throughout the doctoral program.

**MPI CBS Library:** As scholarship holders with the MPSCog/MPI CBS, the candidates are also given access to the [virtual library of MPI CBS](#) during the orientation phase. Introductions will be given during the first weeks of the program.

**CV:** For every candidate, we will open a CV page on the MPSCog website. The coordination team will approach the candidates during the first lab rotation.

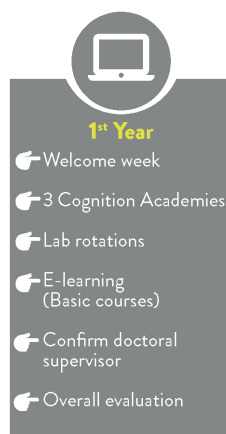
**Laptops:** If a private laptop is not sufficient for doctoral work, doctoral candidates have the possibility to borrow a Windows laptop from the MPSCog during the orientation phase. Please reach out to the coordination team for more details.

### MPSCog affiliation and acknowledgments

Doctoral candidates are asked to add the MPSCog affiliation to the e-signature in their emails: “Doctoral candidate at the Max Planck School of Cognition”. Moreover, please do not forget to mention the MPSCog affiliation on posters and publications: “Max Planck School of Cognition, Stephanstrasse 1A, 04103 Leipzig, Germany”, and make a note in the acknowledgment section: “Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Max Planck Society (MPG)”.

### Orientation phase

After the Welcome Days, doctoral candidates will relocate to the institution where their first lab rotation is to take place. The e-learning sessions will commence in the second half of September.



In the orientation phase, doctoral candidates complete laboratory rotations and attend lectures, the latter consisting of e-learning and classroom teaching (i.e. Cognition Academies). The laboratory rotations aim to equip doctoral candidates with the necessary interdisciplinary knowledge and hands-on research experience via three rotations (on average) in partnering laboratories. Moreover, the rotations will aid candidates in making an informed decision about the focus of their doctoral work, as well as their preferred supervisor(s) for the following three years. Given the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the MPSCog doctoral program, candidates are encouraged to select faculty members with different but complementary research fields as co-supervisors. In the following sections, the academic components of the first year are further described (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Academic components of the orientation phase

### 2.3.2 Cognition Academies

Cognition Academies are planned for each year of the program (Figure 12). They present an opportunity to meet and collaborate with other candidates, tutors, faculty members, invited guests, and the MPSCog coordination team.

#### Purpose of the Academies during the first academic year

- Further and more advanced discussions of topics covered in the preceding e-learning courses
- Chance to attend talks of the MPSCog faculty members and other invited speakers
- In-person opportunity to discuss the learning progress with e-tutors
- Chance to present data and findings from lab rotations and obtain feedback
- Opportunity to socialize with the other doctoral candidates, including those from other cohorts

**Attention:** Doctoral candidates are expected to actively participate in all Cognition Academies, and to give at least two presentations (talks or poster presentations) on their research projects during the orientation phase.

#### Organization of the Academies

Cognition Academies are centrally organized by the MPSCog and mainly take place in Berlin (Figure 15) and Leipzig, with occasional (inter)national exceptions. If needed, accommodation for doctoral candidates will be handled by the MPSCog. Travel arrangements, however, must be made individually and will be reimbursed afterwards. For more information, please see Section 2.4.1.

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

**Note:** Candidates need to make sure they have a private accommodation throughout the whole orientation phase. We are not able to cover a living arrangement in case of sickness before a Cognition Academy.



Figure 15. Harnack-Haus in Berlin — a conference center of the Max Planck Society where Cognition Academies often take place.



Figure 16. Impressions from a Cognition Academy

### 2.3.3 Lab rotations

Candidates will have on average three lab rotations with MPSCog faculty members during the orientation phase. First (or second) of the lab rotations will be arranged in the lab of the provisionally matched doctoral supervisor. Additionally, candidates should submit a list of three laboratories of MPSCog faculty members, where they would like to rotate (only one lab rotation abroad is possible). The coordination team will tailor lab rotation schedules for each candidate.

**Attention:** It is necessary — especially for insurance reasons — to have some kind of guest contract or internship contract with the institutions of the candidate's lab rotations. This is important for both the candidates and the hosting institution. Please contact the coordination team if any problems arise concerning this issue.

#### Which labs to choose for the lab rotation?

The candidates are strongly encouraged to choose the labs from the MPSCog faculty members. All freedom is granted in choosing their preferred MPSCog faculty members labs. Rotations with Adjunct Faculty members can be accommodated, if suitable.

#### How long should the lab rotations last in total?

The total time spent in lab rotations should not be less than 33 weeks, i.e. minimal 11 weeks each rotation. The timeline of the lab rotations must be compatible with the schedule of e-learning and Cognition Academies (Figure 17). The usual timeline is approximately:

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

- Rotation in the 1<sup>st</sup> lab: September – November
- Rotation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> lab: January – mid-March
- Rotation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> lab: May – mid-July

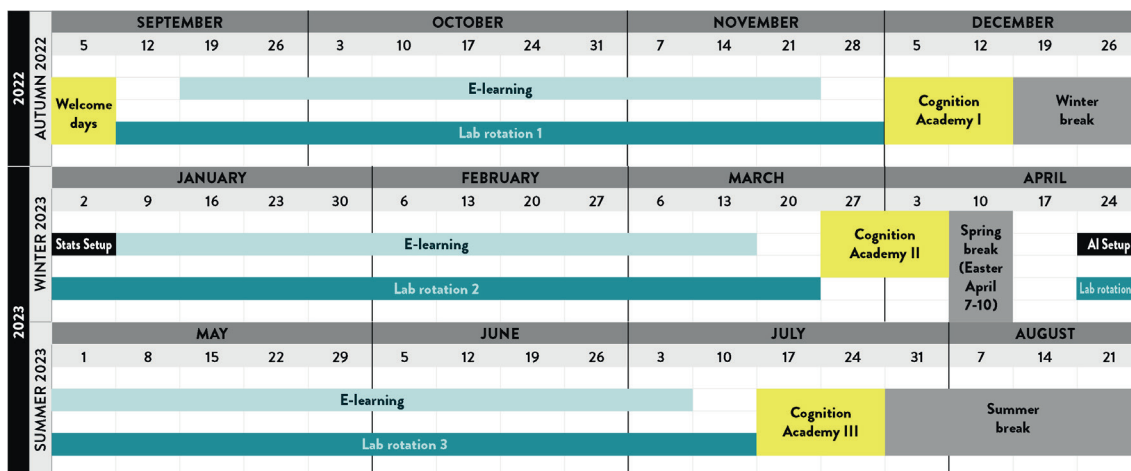


Figure 17. Example of a timeline of Cognition Academies and lab rotations throughout the program

### Flexibility of rotations

The total number and length of lab rotations can vary from the standard (above mentioned) schedule. There is some flexibility in adjusting the timeline of lab rotations for individual candidates. Therefore, in case of queries, the candidates should contact the Curriculum Officer.

**Attention:** We highly recommend getting liability insurance as it will pay if someone causes harm to someone else, such as if a candidate accidentally breaks something in a lab (see Section 2.2.7).

The coordination team is ready to support candidates regarding any questions and challenges (e.g., level of supervision or organisation of the lab rotation) they may encounter during your lab rotations.

### If applicable: Visa for lab rotations abroad

Should a candidate plan a lab visit outside Germany, but within the EU, it is not always necessary to apply for another visa. Research stays in the Netherlands, for example, do not require a visa if the stay does not exceed 3 months, but candidates still have to be registered in Germany during that time. However, for a lab rotation in the UK, international candidates would need to undergo the standard visa processes, whereas EU citizens can stay up to 6 months without visa with a valid passport.

### Purpose of lab rotations

- Exploring several labs in order to better define research interests and make informed choices on the supervisor with whom the candidates would like to continue their doctoral thesis work
- Gaining more experience in a relevant field
- Exploring novel areas of research and techniques
- Getting to know the overall laboratory and location
- Providing faculty members the opportunity to evaluate candidates and assess their potential for fitting into their research group

### Evaluation of the lab rotations

- One month before the end of lab rotation, faculty members supervising lab rotations receive an Evaluation Questionnaire. They are asked to assess candidate's overall performance and the oral departmental presentation (in front of the department or the research team)
- Most essential points of the evaluation are available to the doctoral candidates within their individual profiles of Curriculum management/Open Campus portal (see Section 2.3.7)
- MPSCog does not require any written work or report **from the candidates** about the lab rotation

### First two lab rotations of the fast-track candidates

- Length: 300 working hours each, to be recognized by both programs

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

- Based in the labs in Berlin, to allow attending the in-person master's courses (note that online lab rotations are also recognized by M&B)
- Timeline: October – March (1<sup>st</sup>) and April – September (2<sup>nd</sup>)

### Third lab rotation of the fast-track candidates / Master's project

- Rotation to conduct a master's project
- Start: September of the second year until approximately February
- Based in the labs in Berlin or in Leipzig

### Organization of lab rotations

The logistical arrangements for lab rotations should be organized by the doctoral candidates. Travel costs from Cognition Academies to lab rotations are reimbursed by the MPSCog. It is also possible to combine trips to/from lab rotations and academies with visits to home (for detailed procedure, see Section 2.4). Accommodation costs during lab rotations cannot be covered by the MPSCog. Our team is ready to support candidates in finding appropriate accommodations (see Section 2.1.6).

### Advice for doctoral candidates when starting lab rotations

It is entirely up to the faculty member and doctoral candidates to decide how the lab rotations are structured. However, one weekday should be reserved for synchronous online sessions for the e-learning courses. We encourage candidates to contact the faculty members in advance to discuss expectations regarding the rotation. Tips for a faculty members lab rotation can be found in Figure 18.

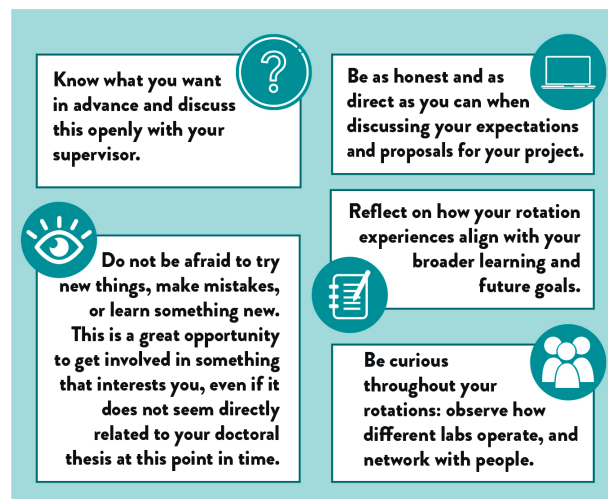


Figure 18. Tips for success during lab rotations

The first year ends with an evaluation of the candidates that will determine whether they can advance to the doctoral research phase (i.e., second to fourth year). This evaluation will consider several points (Figure 19).

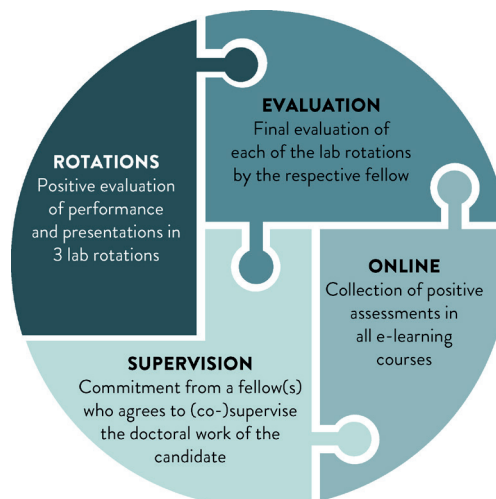


Figure 19. Overview of the first year evaluation process



## 2.3.4 E-learning

### General information

The orientation phase of the MPSCog doctoral program is roughly divided into three terms: Autumn (September–December), Winter (January–April), and Spring (May–July). In total, doctoral candidates will complete approximately three lab rotations (see Section 2.3.3) and eight foundational e-courses and occasional discussion group meetings in the first year (Figure 17). Each term will include one lab rotation and no more than three 10-week e-courses running in parallel. After these foundational courses, each term culminates in a Cognition Academy, during which doctoral candidates, tutors and faculty members of the MPSCog will come together for 2 weeks of advanced lectures and workshops around the subjects taught during the respective term.

The overarching goal of e-learning is to equip the candidates who come from diverse academic backgrounds with the knowledge and skills necessary to produce outstanding research in the field of cognition. As the candidates complete three lab rotations during this period and are spread out across various locations throughout the orientation phase, e-learning is an integral part of the education process.

By utilizing an e-learning platform, the MPSCog has transcended the traditional classroom-recording format and works with an inverted classroom approach. The courses contain both synchronous (face-to-face live sessions) and asynchronous (self-paced) learning elements supported by a variety of high-quality media learning resources and the guidance and feedback of tutors.



### Our Learning Designer

Tomoko Koda  
tomoko.koda@maxplanckschools.de  
Phone: 0049 341 9940 164  
Room @ MPI CBS: C105

Our Learning Designer Tomoko Koda will be the primary point of contact for everything related to e-learning. A full and up-to-date overview of the tutors teaching the e-courses can be found [online](#).

Eight online courses (Figure 20) will cover the fundamentals on different topics related to cognition:



Figure 20. Online courses and discussion sessions offered at the MPSCog

Throughout the year, doctoral candidates will also participate in occasional discussion sessions (*Cognitive Science Discussion*) about various topics within cognitive science led by faculty members or tutors of MPSCog. Attendance is mandatory for the *Cognitive Science Discussion* sessions for all doctoral candidates (no opt-out option).

### Personalized curriculum

If a doctoral candidate has demonstrable expertise in the topic of an e-learning course (e.g., covered equivalent content within previous bachelor's or master's studies), there is the possibility to opt-out from that course. The

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

decision of whether the doctoral candidates can or cannot opt-out will be made by the tutor of the course, based on the previous course syllabus and transcripts, and an assessment of the candidate's knowledge. After the assessment, the tutor will decide whether or not the candidate is granted:

- a complete opt-out (no need to undergo an exam/evaluation at the end of the course),
- a conditional opt-out (may opt-out from certain weekly course activities and synchronous online sessions, but still needs to undergo and pass an exam/evaluation at the end or complete one or several assignments), or
- no opt-out at all.

The doctoral candidate who opts-out from a course is expected to arrange an alternative evaluation with the tutor if applicable, and to update the Curriculum Officer in a timely manner.

There is no limit to the number of opt-outs. However, if a doctoral candidate chooses to completely opt-out of more than two courses, beginning from the third such course, they are required to choose one of the two options below:

- participate in an alternative course of an advanced level in the area of the opted-out course, or a beginner level course in an area not covered by the eight courses within MPS-Cog, or
- participate in the opted-out course as a Teaching Assistant.

The specifics of such an arrangement must be discussed with the tutor and the coordination team.

### Course structure and format

Exception of one or two courses, each course will last for 10 weeks, concluding with a pass/fail assessment.

**Note:** There is an exception for fast-track candidates, who will receive grades according to the Berlin School of Mind and Brain requirements.

The courses consist of two parts: weekly face-to-face live sessions and self-paced learning. Weekly live sessions (90 minutes) require candidates to be virtually present in the same online place (*Blackboard Collaborate* or *Zoom*) at the same time to directly interact with tutors and classmates. For the self-paced learning component, doctoral candidates should review the provided materials (e.g., pre-recorded video lectures, assigned reading) and complete assignments and activities before the deadline at their own pace. Attendance at these sessions and completion of all the materials and assignments/activities before given deadlines is mandatory.

### Virtual campus

We are using [Open LMS](#) as the e-learning platform for the MPSCog. *Blackboard Collaborate/Zoom* provides the virtual classroom for the weekly live interaction with tutors. [Please make sure to read the Code of Conduct for the virtual campus when signing up for Open LMS and adhere to it at all times.](#)

### What technology is required?

- A computer with
  - an up-to-date operating system (e.g., Windows or Mac) and an internet browser (we suggest using either Chrome or Firefox)
  - basic computer audio/video equipment: microphone or headset with microphone and webcam
- Broadband/high-speed internet connection (1.5 Mbps download, 750 Kbps upload minimum)

**Attention:** If doctoral candidates do not have access to the required equipment, they should inform the coordination team as soon as possible.

### Rules and regulations

- Passing all e-courses during the first year is a requirement of the MPSCog doctoral program.
- It is the responsibility of the doctoral candidate to ensure attendance of all e-learning courses, including weekly online face-to-face sessions with tutors.
- In case of a justified absence, such as sick leave, doctoral candidates must inform the respective tutor and MPSCog of their absence by immediately marking it in the Curriculum management/Open Campus calendar (see *Section 2.3.7*).
- If a candidate does not meet the deadline to request an opt-out, the request will not be considered
- The candidates are expected to prioritize weekly synchronous online sessions over e.g., lab meetings, presentations, and other events

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

- Attending all the Cognition Academy sessions is mandatory, and the candidates should avoid booking any trips and/or having appointments during the event
- We ask the candidates to keep their camera on during synchronous online sessions and Cognition Academy sessions (should it take place online due to covid-related or other regulations)
- In case of any queries regarding the course schedules (e.g., special arrangements etc.), our Learning Designer Tomoko Koda should be contacted.

The doctoral candidates should follow the good e-learning practice and tips to have successful online learning experience (Figure 21).

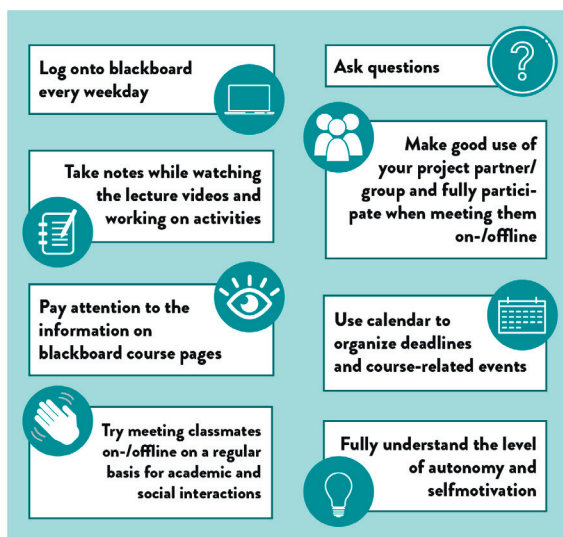


Figure 21. Tips for success in online courses.

In addition to the aforementioned e-courses, candidates are also required to attend a “Good Scientific Practices” workshop, which is offered during one of the Cognition Academies in the orientation year. Moreover, several soft-skills workshops are provided during the Cognition Academies.

Doctoral candidates who want to visit and explore different laboratories can arrange short visits (e.g., 1–2 business days) to labs associated to the MPSCog during the orientation phase. This is an opportunity to meet more faculty members and to get to know these labs, which could also be considered for the doctoral phase of the program.

### 2.3.5 Short visits to other labs

The visits can be arranged individually or in small groups by contacting the faculty members directly. The visits can be planned at any time during the orientation phase, ideally during the breaks between the *official* lab rotations. The travel cost of these visits will be reimbursed (see *Section 2.4.1*). The visits are the initiative of the doctoral candidates, but the coordination team can provide support if needed. Please follow the general procedure of a business trip described in *Section 2.4.1*.

### 2.3.6 External activities

The main focus of the first year is participation in the e-learning courses and Cognition Academies, as well as taking full advantage of the lab rotations experience. Typically, the first year is rather busy and little time remains for any additional activities. The doctoral candidates are, however, encouraged to participate in conferences, especially if they can already present data. They can also attend external (research-related or soft skills) training, including online courses, workshops, and summer schools. All external activities should be relevant and must be approved by the coordination team.

**Attention:** Additional external activities must not overlap with the Cognition Academies, as the attendance at the academies is mandatory.

Doctoral candidates who wish to attend a conference or a workshop are asked to:

- Discuss attending the event (possible absence from the lab) with the supervisor of the lab rotation and e-tutors

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

- Inform the Scientific Coordination (Natacha Mendes) as soon as possible prior to the event so that the request can be adequately considered
- Start the procedure for business trips with the MPSCog (see *Section 2.4.1*)

### **Budget for the orientation phase**

In the orientation phase, the MPSCog grants each doctoral candidate a total budget of 1,000 € for participation in relevant scientific activities. Travel expenses, accommodation, registration fees, daily allowance as well as potential visa costs can be covered by this allowance. There is no limit on the number of activities, but the total budget of 1,000 € must not be exceeded.

**Note:** Please ask the lab rotation supervisor for permission and inform the Curriculum Officer about the content, dates, and estimated costs.

### 2.3.7 Curriculum management within Open Campus

*Curriculum management/Open Campus* is a general database for all doctoral candidates of the MPSCog. It has been established to facilitate the management of academic data, accomplishments, and progress reporting of doctoral candidates. Up-to-date maintenance of the information collected within the *Curriculum management/Open Campus* is required of each candidate and is monitored by the coordination team.

#### **How to access Curriculum management within the Open Campus platform?**

At the start of the program, candidates will automatically be granted an access to Year 1 Curriculum management within their profile in the [Open Campus](#) platform, which they used for applying to MPSCog. If needed, a new password can easily be requested when logging in.

#### **Type of data collected within the candidate's profile in Curriculum management:**

- University registration information
- Lab rotation evaluations from faculty members and feedback from candidates
- E-learning assessments and opt outs
- Supervision Agreement, Project proposal and progress reports (TAC feedback forms from second year onwards)
- Information on publications, awards and external activities
- Satisfaction questionnaire
- Absence record — candidates can mark planned and unplanned (sick leave) absences
- Certificates of attendance at courses/workshops etc.

#### **Advantages of using Curriculum management/Open Campus for the candidates and the MPSCog**

- Collecting and managing all academic records in a consistent and transparent way (e.g., for the first year evaluation)
- Data protected and secure system with tailored access rights to the collected data (e.g., e-learning team views and edits only the e-learning part)
- Uploading files and sharing information in a user-friendly manner (e.g., planned absence)
- Effective monitoring of the progress of the research projects (e.g., scheduled progress reports) via sending automatic reminders

To move on to the doctoral phase (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> year), doctoral candidates must fulfill the following criteria by the end of the orientation phase:

- Complete all online courses successfully
- Participate in all three Cognition Academies including at least two presentations per doctoral candidates
- At least three confirmed lab rotations with positive evaluations
- Confirmed primary supervisor for doctoral research work

### 2.3.8 End of first year evaluation

These accomplishments serve as a foundation and preparation for the doctoral phase. Candidates who do not fulfill all of the aforementioned criteria will not be able to move on to the doctoral research phase immediately. In such a case, a decision on the next steps for the particular candidate will be made by Prof. Arno Villringer/ Prof. Katrin Amunts (Speakers at the MPSCog) and Natacha Mendes (Scientific Coordinator).

## 2.4 Administrative processes

### 2.4.1 Business trips

Business trips need to be applied for and approved by our Scientific Coordinator Natacha Mendes if the place of the business meeting is more than 2 kilometers away from the place of working or home. Max Planck Society (MPS) scholarship holders are automatically covered by its group accident insurance policy – under the condition that the application form has been approved before traveling.

As the MPSCog is bound to the German Federal Travel Expenses Act, each traveler has to keep several rules in mind when planning a business trip (Figure 22) like filling in the [business trip application form](#) before any bookings, sticking to limits for accommodation costs, booking of certain travel classes and handing in the reimbursement for together with original travel tickets after the end of the trip, just to mention a few things. Forms are available at the MPS Cog Wiki on [Open LMS](#) under “Important documents”.

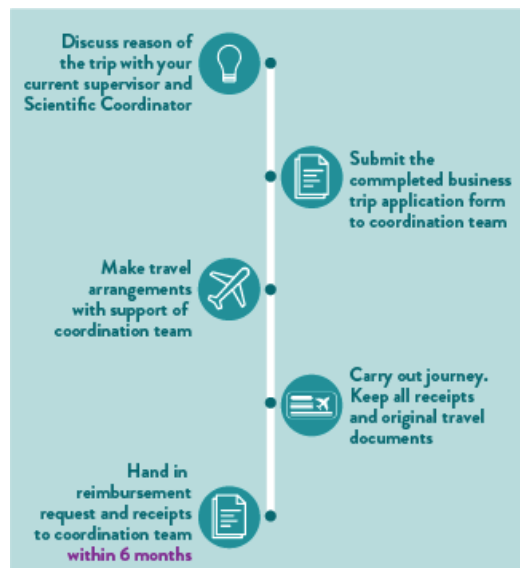


Figure 22. Business trip procedure in the orientation phase

During the orientation phase, our doctoral candidates will travel a lot – from one Cognition Academy to a lab rotation, maybe do another short lab visit, before moving on to the next Cognition Academy, possibly combining their travels with a private trip home (Figure 23). To avoid any unexpected problems, we recommend you to contact the coordination team whenever planning a business trip.

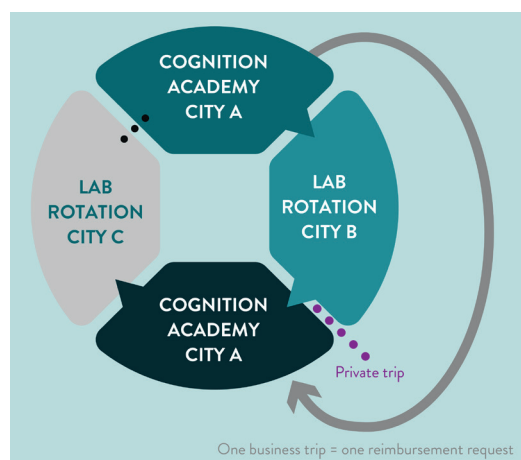


Figure 23. Example of travel scheme for one business trip in combination with a private trip

#### Which trips can be refunded?

- Travel costs from a Cognition Academy (accommodation provided) to the next lab rotation (accommodation not covered) and to the following Cognition Academy (accommodation provided) = one business trip

## PART III – Doctoral curriculum and initial academic steps

- Trips to official meetings in the realm of the MPSCog, such as conference participation or visits to other labs within the 1,000 € budget
- Several business meetings/conferences can be combined
- Trips can also be combined with private trips; in that case, special rules apply and should be discussed with the coordination team beforehand

Further explanation and example: The first Cognition Academy usually takes place in Berlin. The travel costs to Berlin have to be covered by the candidate, whereas the hotel costs will be covered by the MPSCog (arrival one day before the start of the Cognition Academy). From there, the candidate travels to the first lab rotation which is, for example, taking place in Munich. The candidate stays there until the next Cognition Academy that again takes place in Berlin. The candidate would be reimbursed for:

- Travel costs from Berlin to Munich
- Accommodation during Cognition Academy in Berlin
- Travel costs from Munich to Berlin

It gets a little more complicated if the candidate, for example, plans to include a private trip to visit the family living in Dresden. The candidate would get reimbursed the travel costs for the direct way from Berlin to Munich. However, s/he has to prove what those costs actually are. So, when intending to combine a business trip with a private one, please contact the coordination team before booking any tickets.

### Which costs can be reimbursed?

- Economy class flight tickets
- 2<sup>nd</sup> class train tickets
- Private car (0,20 €/km, max. 150 €)
- Public transportation tickets
- Accommodation (there is a limit – please ask the coordination team before booking!)
- Registration fees
- Required courses for lab rotations
- if applicable: visa costs
- Membership fees: If a membership in a society is required to submit an abstract or to attend a conference, then the fees can be reimbursed after the conference along with the travel reimbursement request

### Our reimbursement procedure

Fill in the reimbursement form (available on Open LMS) and submit it with the original tickets **within 6 months** after the end of the trip to the following address:

Max Planck School of Cognition  
Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences  
Stephanstr. 1A  
04103 Leipzig

If online tickets were used, it is sufficient to send the forms and invoices via e-mail: [cognition@maxplanckschools.de](mailto:cognition@maxplanckschools.de).

### Can high costs be reimbursed in advance/before the actual trip?

It is possible to receive reimbursements before the event actually has taken place. Candidates must still submit a signed business trip form prior to any purchases. After getting approval for the trip, candidates should then complete the *Business trip advance payment.docx* form available on Open LMS and send it to the coordination team who will further explain the procedure.

### 2.4.2 Holidays, sick leave and virtual mode

We ask candidates to inform us about their absence via filling out and submitting an “Absence request” in the [Open Campus](#) portal (at the bottom of Year 1 progress tree).

The portal distinguishes two types of absence:

- Planned, e.g. holidays
- Unplanned e.g. sick leave

Based on the information that candidates share with us, we approve the absence.

### **Holidays**

The break slots (winter, spring and summer breaks) in the orientation phase calendar are optimal for taking planning holidays. However, if a candidate's planned absence falls outside the break slots, the plans need to first be discussed with the lab rotation supervisor and then a request has to be submitted into the Open campus portal. A short explanation will be required to submit your request.

The number of holidays should not exceed 30 business days per year.

### **Sick leave**

If a candidate feels sick and needs time to recover, s/he needs to submit a request for "unplanned leave" on OpenCampus and inform the Scientific Coordinator, Natacha Mendes. No need to share any sick leave notification with us, however, they should be kept for the own records.

Please note: If the candidate's absence is on short notice and s/he cannot attend an e-learning session, the [e-learning team](#) needs to be informed about it also. They will inform the tutor. Also, sometimes adjustments to the interactive part of the sessions must be done.

### **Virtual mode**

Given the COVID-19 situation, institutions may be operating in virtual mode. Please keep in mind that due to tax and insurance reasons the candidates should try to remain in Germany throughout the program. Exceptions are the lab rotations (or doctoral phase) based at the partner institution in the Netherlands or in the UK, or holidays or family reasons.