Doctoral Candidates’ Handbook

MAX
PLANCK
SCHOOL
of
cognition

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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0 INTRODUCTION

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.

The Max Planck Society offers a brochure on working and living in Germany which you may also find of interest: MPS Working and Living in Germany

The information given in this handbook refers to normal circumstances. Due to the ongoing special situation with COVID-19 and unforeseen regulations that might come with it, adaptations are possible and will be communicated continuously.

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

Your MPSCog Coordination Team
1 THE MAX PLANCK SCHOOL OF COGNITION (MPSCog)

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 logistic hub of the MPSCog is situated at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig.

**Administrative location**
Max Planck School of Cognition  
Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences  
Stephanstraße 1a  
04103 Leipzig  
Germany

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

![The MPSCog coordination team](#)

**Figure 2.** The MPSCog coordination team

Throughout the program, the most important contact persons for the candidates are **Ewa Koper** (Curriculum Officer) and **Nicole Lorenz** (International Officer).

Ewa’s key responsibilities:
- Overseeing all academic-related elements of the program, such as advice on: curricular and extracurricular activities, opt out from e-learning courses
- Assistance throughout the provisional matching process
- Organizing and coordinating lab rotations and their evaluation
- Providing consultation to candidates (also fast-track candidates) related to: individually tailored curriculum, concluding on doctoral supervisor, transition to the doctoral phase
- Monitoring progress of the doctoral projects (TAC meetings) according to MPSCog timeline
- Offering confidential support in case of challenges, e.g. mental health issues
- Managing Open Campus database and the maxplanckschools.de emails
Nicole’s key responsibilities:
- Onboarding processes (visa organization, health insurance, cities’ registration offices, opening a bank account, housing)
- Registration as preliminary doctoral candidate with Leipzig University
- Organization of business trips
- Renting a laptop during orientation year
- Creating an e-mail account with MPI CBS for library access
- MPSCog webpage and CV pages

The MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab

The MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab opened its doors in November 2021 for candidates who do lab rotations or doctoral research with Arno Villringer, Michael Gaebler. It is located at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and part of the Max Planck Dahlem Campus of Cognition (MPDCC).

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.

Address of the MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab:
Max Planck Dahlem Campus of Cognition
Dillenburger Str. 53, 1st 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

For requests, please contact:
Dr. Ulrike Lachmann
Liaison Officer, MPSCog Berlin Satellite Lab
lachmann@cbs.mpg.de

1.3 Fellows 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 3).
Our doctoral candidates can conduct their doctoral research with one of 45 renowned fellows:
- from 28 research institutions including Max Planck Institutes, Universities, Helmholtz Association, Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, and University College London
- working in 15 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 fellows with two ERC grants each), and 13 members of the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Science

**Figure 3.** The MPSCog partner locations

More information about our [fellows](#) and [partner institutions](#) can be found on our website.
2 PART I – Orientation Year

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 other relevant authorities, and must be started immediately after admission to the MPSCog doctoral program. This section guides you through the necessary steps when moving to Germany. Please do not hesitate to contact our International Officer, Nicole Lorenz, to check your specific requirements.

**International Officer:**
Nicole Lorenz
Nicole.Lorenz@maxplanckschools.de
Phone: 0049 341 9940 149
Room @ MPI CBS: C107

The checklist in Figure 4 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 transferring it into a residence permit after having moved to Germany.

If you are planning to come with your spouse/partner, please refer to Section 2.1.3.

**Tips for appointments with authorities**

Appointments with the Resident Services Office (*Bürgeramt*) 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 beforehand. Nicole Lorenz can support you with scheduling those appointments.

Our program starts with an orientation year. Candidates need to provide required information to begin the program. This information is further described on the following pages.
Figure 4. Checklist for the necessary steps after admission to the MPSCog

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 (MPI CBS) in Leipzig, the administrative management is carried out by the HR department of MPI CBS. For the preparation of your scholarship agreement, you 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.

2.1.2 Choose labs for rotation

On average, our doctoral candidates will visit three laboratories during the orientation year. Each candidate will be asked to provide a list of preferred MPSCog fellows and labs shortly after admission to the MPSCog. The individually customized first-year schedule will be coordinated by the Curriculum Officer. 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 5). The bureaucratic visa processes require time and effort and vary from country to country. Please consult with the local German embassy or consulate for the most up-to-date information for your individual situation – ideally immediately after admission to our program. The embassy will confirm whether you need a visa and which requirements apply to you for taking up a scholarship in Germany. Schedule an appointment at the embassy well in advance. Clearly indicate the purpose of your stay (doctoral studies) when applying for the visa to avoid later problems.

Figure 5. 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.

EU citizens as well as citizens of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States are exempt from this regulation. However, it is recommended that you confirm this with your relevant embassy.

**IMPORTANT:** The process may take up to several months. Do not enter Germany with a tourist visa or a Schengen visa, or even without a visa even if it would be possible (e.g., for US citizens) as this may cause serious problems for your visa process.

Be prepared to provide the following documents at the embassy:

- Passport
- Biometric photo
- Proof of health insurance for the orientation year*
- Proof of financial means and confirmation letter (can be provided by Nicole Lorenz)
- Scholarship agreement
- Visa application form for (doctoral) studies
- sometimes: University entrance qualification or university admission (can be provided by Nicole Lorenz)

*Health insurance for international candidates

Given that you are not living in Germany when applying for the visa, you 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.
Coming to Germany with your spouse/partner

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

In case you and your partner are not married, the accompanying partner needs her/his own purpose for staying in Germany, such as for academic studies or a professional activity. Your 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 you in this process.

2.1.4 Application for a fast-track master's program (for candidates with 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 the master’s program at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain (so-called ‘fast-track’) at Humboldt-Universität zu 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 program at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain (M&B) and the MPSCog orientation year. 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 both programs.
Master’s program
More detailed information about the master’s program at the "Mind and Brain" at Humboldt University 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
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 year of the MPSCog program. After that, they may move on to the doctoral phase at the MPSCog.
2.1.5 Register with Leipzig University

In Germany, only universities can award academic degrees such as a doctoral degree. Therefore, 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 year, 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 7).

Our Curriculum Officer, Ewa Koper, will advise you on the suitable choice of faculty, whereas Nicole Lorenz, our International Officer, will take care of the actual registration. This process does not require anything from the candidate other than providing information that Nicole will ask you for in a timely manner. Master candidates are registered with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin through the Berlin School of Mind & Brain.

![Figure 7. Preliminary registration as doctoral candidate during the orientation year is possible with two faculties at Universität Leipzig.](image)

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 Open Campus and forward it to Carina Schlichter (schlichter@cbs.mpg.de).

Research Academy Leipzig (RALeipzig)

During the orientation year, 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 you 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 year when your 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 year to pursue their doctoral research work, will automatically be excluded from RALeipzig. The MPSCog Curriculum Officer, Ewa Koper, will support candidates at the transition stage.

Enrollment as student
In addition to registering on the doctoral list (mandatory), you may choose to enroll as a student at any university, if you 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. You should start looking for accommodation as soon as the location of your 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. If you are coming from abroad, this is the recommended and most convenient option. Renting an empty flat coming from abroad and renting for only a few months is very difficult.

Links for finding temporary living:
- Zwischenmiete
- wg-gesucht
- Studenten-WG
- WG-Gruendung
- Das schwarze Brett

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, you might need to bring your own bedding and kitchenware.

Apartment sharing. A very common alternative to living by yourself 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. Additional costs are electricity and internet. Usually, you will have to pay a deposit to your landlord. In most cases, this is between 2 to 3 times your portion of the overall monthly rent for your room. The money will be returned to you about 2-3 months after the contract ends. If the flat needs to be renovated in some form after you leave it, the landlord may keep parts of the deposit to cover the costs.
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 8). For example, appointments with authorities can often be scheduled online beforehand and will be easier to take care of ahead of your first day in a laboratory. Nicole Lorenz can assist you with any of the necessary following steps:

1. **Register with a city**
   
   Every person who moves to Germany has to register with a Residents’ Registration Office in the city of living within 6 weeks after arrival. Scheduling online appointments beforehand is recommended.

2. **Open a bank account**
   
   In order to receive your monthly payment or to sign the apartment rental contract, it is necessary to open a German bank account for which you need the resident registration confirmation first.

3. **If applicable: Get health insurance**
   
   If you are citizen of a European country, then you can take care of health insurance coverage after having moved to Germany. Non-EU citizens will have done so when applying for the entry visa.

4. **If applicable: Apply for residence permit**
   
   In case you have come to Germany with an entry visa, it is necessary to extend that visa and apply for a residence permit within 90 days after entry.

5. **Submit missing documents to HR**
   
   Submit the missing documents [i.e. registration with the Residents’ Registration Office (Bürgeramt) and German bank account number] to Nicole Lorenz before September 15. Otherwise, no payment for September will be made.

**Figure 8.** 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 (six weeks during the pandemic) after arrival at the so-called Bürgeramt (every time you move to another city!). For doctoral candidates coming from abroad, this would be in the city of your first lab rotation. Scheduling an online appointment well in advance might be necessary to avoid long waiting times. If you have difficulties navigating the German language, please contact Nicole Lorenz.

You will need to bring:
- Completed registration form (typically available online or at the Bürgeramt office, Anmeldeformular)
- ID card and/or passport
- Written tenant confirmation or renting agreement signed by your landlord (Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung; templates are available online)
At the Bundesamt, you will receive a registration confirmation (Meldebescheinigung) which allows you to open a bank account and to apply for your residence title. After registration, you will receive your personal tax identification number automatically via mail.

2.2.2 Opening a bank account (Girokonto)

In order to receive and make regular payments, you need to have a German bank account (Girokonto). The following documents have to be submitted at an appointment at the bank of your choice:

- Passport or ID card
- Registration confirmation from Bundesamt (Meldebescheinigung)
- Scholarship contract
- Tax identification number (if available already)

The Max Planck Society has negotiated special bank account tariffs for their employees with Deutsche Bank, i.e. free of charge. You should ask for this tariff when opening an account with Deutsche Bank. Of course, you can choose any other bank, for example: Commerzbank, Postbank, Sparkasse or online banks like DKB, ING DiBa or N26 which may also offer special tariffs for candidates/doctoral candidates. Some banks may charge you a monthly fee for your account, whereas online banks mostly don’t raise any fees and might even provide a free credit card.

In Germany, it is more common to use an EC (debit) card rather than a credit card for non-cash payments. Some banks charge annual fees for issuing a credit card.

Transfering money to a German account
If candidates intend to transfer some of their savings to a German bank account, transferwise may be a good option. It is a cheap service for transferring money from one country to another. You 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 monthly insurance fees consist of two parts: health insurance and long-term care insurance. The healthcare topic is quite complex and can be confusing. Thus, please do not hesitate to contact Nicole Lorenz for support with any question regarding your health insurance options.

There are two types of insurance: the statutory insurance (public healthcare system) or insurance with a private company. You need to have a full health insurance coverage, a basic coverage does not suffice. The insurance is composed of health insurance and long-term care insurance. We recommend membership in a statutory insurance company, but in some cases (e.g. if you are coming from a non-EU country), this may not be possible. Under certain circumstances, it is possible to keep the insurance in your European home country (see Figure 9). However, in that case, we advise candidates to apply for a so-called substitutive membership in a German statutory health insurance to receive an insurance card from the German insurer that makes processes easier when visiting German doctors.
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. If the private health insurance confirms membership with benefits corresponding to those of a statutory health insurance, then the subsidy is also granted. Please request an Arbeitgeberbescheinigung nach § 257 Abs. 2a SGB V.

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

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**EU CITIZENS**

**Do you have a statutory pre-insurance in another European country or Great Britain?**

1. **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)
     - Registration confirmation from Bürgeramt (Meldebescheinigung)
     - Copy of ID card or passport
     - Scholarship agreement
     - Photo for insurance card

2. **Stay insured in your European home country while a German provider becomes the supporting insurance company by i.e. providing a German insurance card. This will ease up medical treatments in Germany. You have to present an S1 certificate (former E104) from your insurance company and a copy of your insurance card (EHIC). For students coming from Great Britain, it is helpful to provide a registration confirmation with a GP, the NHS Number or a tenancy agreement for your residence in Great Britain.

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**NON-EU CITIZENS**

**Have you been a member of a statutory health insurance company in Europe before?**

YES —> **Apply for a statutory health insurance in Germany**
   - For necessary documents, see above “EU Citizens, point 1”

NO —> **Apply for a membership with a private health insurance company**
   - (e.g. Mawista, Care Concept, Dr. Walter)
   - Costs are age- & tariff-dependent:
     - apply for 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
     - cheap basic tariff covering only the very basic medical treatments ca. 50 € per month/no subsidy from MPSCog not recommended

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**MASTER STUDENTS**

**Follow the steps under EU CITIZENS point 1 to apply for a student tariff membership with a statutory health insurance company. You need to additionally provide the matriculation confirmation.**

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*Figure 9. Options for health insurance coverage in Germany*
2.2.4 Application for a residence permit (if applicable)

If you are neither a German citizen nor a citizen of the EU or EEA (European Economic Association), you have to apply for a residence permit at the Foreigners’ Authority Office. This needs to be done within 90 days after entering Germany. It is recommended to schedule an appointment online beforehand as the process may take several weeks.

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 your local Foreigners’ Authority for current information on how to submit applications.

The following documents are necessary:
- Completed visa application form
- Two biometric photos
- Passport plus copy of passport
- Copy of the rental contract
- Registration confirmation from the Residents’ Registration Office (Bürgeramt)
- Copy of scholarship contract
- Copy of health insurance

Costs: between 60 and 110 € to be paid at site

Theoretically, residence permits can be issued for two years and can be extended for one more year after application. However, in reality, the validity period of residence titles during the orientation year varies from authority to authority.

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 10). Subsidy will be granted to candidates who are members of a statutory health insurance company or have comprehensive private health insurance equivalent to a statutory one (see Section 2.2.3).

![Figure 10. Monthly payment for doctoral candidates at the MPSCog](image_url)

The scholarship during the orientation year is paid by the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences (MPI CBS) and will be transferred to your German account at the end of each month. Thus, the first payment will be made at the end of September, assuming all documents have been submitted on time.

From the start of the second year (doctoral phase), candidates receive a contract by the institution (Max Planck Institute, university, or other) where their doctoral supervisor is based. They are paid a full TV/TVöD E13 position, whereas the amount may vary due to personal situation (married, children) and region within Germany.
Attention: Please note that the preparation of the contract for your 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 your doctoral project must be made in May/June of the orientation year, at the very latest. Ewa Koper can assist you.

2.2.6 Personal and mental health support

Participating in a doctoral research program can be challenging on both a professional and personal level. There will be stressful times as well as unexpected events that may put you in a difficult situation. Over the last few months, there have also been many unanticipated challenges caused by COVID-19. COVID-19 causes uncertainty and may lead to circumstances that threaten our mental health.

If you experience any stress or pressure, especially regarding mental health, please do not hesitate to contact us – no matter how big or small you feel your query may be! The MPSCog team will happily help and/or assist you in finding the right contact point inside or outside of MPI CBS. We can offer internal confidential consultations, assist you in contacting external professional counselling services, and also serve as a general information and contact point for a variety of issues.

If you are unsure about how to proceed, please contact our Curriculum Officer Ewa Koper.

MPSCog internal consultations
If you experience any problems with your research project, we advise you to first contact and discuss with your supervisor(s) and/or advisors. If you have any issues with supervision or if you have questions that are connected to the MPSCog program, you may always contact the MPSCog Scientific Coordinator Natacha Mendes or the Curriculum Officer Ewa Koper.

External consultation
If you would like to get an external consultation, EMAP (an Employee and Manager Assistance Program) is readily available to you. EMAP is an anonymous, free service for all MPG employees (including scholarship holders) delivered by the Fürstenberg Institute (also in English!). EMAP can also be contacted for issues related to the COVID-19 crisis.

How does EMAP work?
You call the free phone number 0800 387 78 36 or from foreign countries 00800 38 77 83 62. You can also write an e-mail to beratung@fuerstenberg-institut.de or book an online appointment on their homepage. Importantly, the service is available in English and several other languages.

If calling, please indicate that you are part of the Max Planck Society. If they wish to further confirm that you are entitled to this service, they will simply ask to see a copy of your work contract. If candidates prefer, they may also contact Ewa Koper for assistance in contacting EMAP.

Here you can find information about their services on the MPS PhD net website.

*COVID-19 crisis: Reputable sources on mental health management*

- Protecting your mental health during the Coronavirus crisis
- The Conservation- 7-science based strategies to cope with Coronavirus anxiety
- US-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- Manage Stress and Anxiety
2.2.7 Further helpful information

**German courses.** Taking German classes during your time in Germany is voluntary, but advisable, as not everyone in Germany speaks 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. Please get in touch with Nicole Lorenz if you are interested in doing such a course.

**Emergency numbers and medical services**

Fire Fighters & Emergency: 112  
Police: 110  
On-call medical service: 116 117

**Medical practitioner:** If you are feeling sick, a general practitioner (Hausarzt) would be the first place to go. We recommend that you schedule an appointment beforehand, otherwise you may have to wait a while before being seen. If you need to see a specialized physician (Facharzt), the general practitioner might need to give you a transferral form. If you get sick (not life-threatening) over the weekend or after the opening hours of the general practitioner, you can call a medical service: 116117 (Ärztlicher Bereitschaftsdienst). They will try to immediately assess the situation at hand and will report to a doctor. If necessary, you will be transported to the nearest medical facility. In case of a medical emergency, please call 112 or go directly to a hospital nearby (Notaufnahme). Please contact the secretary of your lab for tips on English-speaking doctors, or do an online search. Your health insurance will always cover these visits and any emergency services! Bring your 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.

**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 22:00h 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 who often offer basic food are typically open 24/7.

**Mobile phone contracts:** In Germany, you can choose between two ways to use your mobile phone. The first option is to get a prepaid card for your phone, which is often easier than getting a contract. You can purchase a prepaid sim card in any supermarket. You should compare the prices and packages, also with the second option which would be by contract. Here, you pay monthly and usually have 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: Telefordarife or Billiger Telefonieren).

**Second-hand sales:** If you 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.

**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 you do 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. You should receive a letter from the company automatically. For more information, please visit this link or consult the Onboarding Information file.
Internet/telephone: Even though many public areas have free wifi (a.k.a. WLAN in Germany), you might want to have wifi at home. If you have your own apartment, you 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 or Billiger Telefonieren.

Electricity: There is always a basic electricity supply when you rent an apartment, which may be a little more expensive than offers you can find online. If you want to save some money, you can compare prices with webpages such as Check24.

Liability insurance: While you are 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 you are on lab rotations, it might, for example, happen that you accidentally drop 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 if you have such liability insurance. More information can be found here. Insurance providers can be found online.

Insurance of contents: An insurance of contents covers your 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. You are 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 Curriculum Officer and the MPSCog coordination team are there to support the candidates in all stages of the program. Please do not hesitate to contact us in case of any questions.

Curriculum Officer:
Ewa Koper
Ewa.Koper@maxplanckschools.de
Phone: 0049 341 9940 2300
Room @ MPI CBS: C105

Provisional matching for doctoral phase

Before the start of the program, a provisional matching between the candidates and MPSCog Fellows is established. The matching is made based on the mutual preferences and complementing research interests of both parties. The design of the orientation year assists the candidates and Fellows in making an informed final decision about the supervision of the doctoral phase. A lab rotation in the lab of the provisionally matched Fellow is scheduled in the first half of the orientation year for each candidate. If the fellow 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 in May/June of the orientation year at the latest.

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 year 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 11 gives an overview of each of the four years of the MPSCog program.
Furthermore, three Cognition Academies (and a welcome week in September) are also parts of the orientation year. 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?**
The opening ceremony of the doctoral program takes place in September as part of the welcome week at the Harnack House in Berlin. During this week, 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 fellows.

Candidates are also invited to join and participate in the Max Planck School Day (Figure 12) taking place in 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 12.* 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 Grujić 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 you are unsure which colleague from an older cohort could support you 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. 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.

E-mail addresses, Life Cycle, MPI CBS Library, CV page, and laptops

**E-mail addresses:** Every doctoral candidate will be granted 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. 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!

**Life Cycle:** Doctoral candidates will be introduced to the Life Cycle 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 year. 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. Nicole Lorenz 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 year. Please reach out to Nicole Lorenz 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 your 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)”.

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**Orientation year**
After the welcome week, 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 year, doctoral candidates complete laboratory rotations and attend lectures, the latter consisting of e-learning and classroom teaching. 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 fellows with different but complementary research fields as co-supervisors.

In the following sections, the academic components of the first year are further described (Figure 13).

**Figure 13. Academic components of the orientation year**

### 2.3.2 Cognition Academies

Cognition Academies are planned for each year of the program (Figure 11). They present an opportunity to meet and collaborate with other candidates, tutors, fellows, invited guests, and the MPSCog coordination team.

**Purpose of the Academies during the first academic year**
- Classroom weeks to further discuss topics from the precursory e-learning courses
- Chance to attend talks of the MPSCog fellows 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 respective Cognition Academies, and to give at least two presentations (talks or poster presentations) on their research projects during the orientation year.

**Organization of the Academies**
Cognition Academies are centrally organized by the MPSCog and mainly take place in Berlin (Figure 14) 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 3.1.
2.3.3 Lab rotations

After admission to the program, doctoral candidates must submit a list of four laboratories of MPSCog Fellows that they would like to rotate in during the orientation year. Based on the wish lists of all candidates and the capacity of participating labs, the coordination team will then arrange an individual schedule 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 your lab rotations. This is important for both the candidates and the hosting institution. Please contact Ewa Koper if any problems arise concerning this issue.

Which labs to choose for the lab rotation?
The candidates are given freedom in choosing their preferred labs. However, in order to avoid over-specialization in the first year, candidates are encouraged to choose labs from different but complementary research areas.

Rotations…
… with Adjunct Faculty members can be accommodated, if suitable. In exceptional cases, lab rotations with supervisors who are not MPSCog Fellows can also be considered.

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 15). The usual timeline is approximately:

- Rotation in the 1st lab: September – November
- Rotation in the 2nd lab: January– mid-March
- Rotation in the 3rd lab: May – mid-July
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 you cause harm to someone, such as if you accidentally break something in a lab (see Section 2.2.5).

Ewa Koper, our Curriculum Officer, is ready to support you regarding any questions and challenges (e.g., level of supervision or organisation of the lab rotation) you may encounter during your lab rotations.

If applicable: Visa for lab rotations abroad
Should you 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 you 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.

Figure 15. Example of a timeline of Cognition Academies and lab rotations throughout the program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEPTEMBER</th>
<th>OCTOBER</th>
<th>NOVEMBER</th>
<th>DECEMBER</th>
<th>JANUARY</th>
<th>FEBRUARY</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome week</td>
<td>Lab rotation 1 &amp; e-learning</td>
<td>Cog. Academy I</td>
<td>Lab rotation 2 &amp; e-learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY*</td>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>JULY</td>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>OCTOBER</td>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>DECEMBER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cog. Academy II</td>
<td>Lab rotation 3 &amp; e-learning</td>
<td>Cog. Academy III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Until May, doctoral candidates have to decide on a supervisor for their doctoral thesis.

Purpose of lab rotations
- Gaining more experience in a relevant field
- Exploring novel areas of research and techniques
- Getting to know the overall laboratory and location
- 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
- Providing fellows the opportunity to evaluate candidates and assess their potential for fitting into their research group

Evaluation of the lab rotations
- Fellows supervising lab rotations will be asked to fill out an Evaluation Questionnaire. Candidate’s overall performance and the oral presentation (in front of the department or the research team) will be assessed
- Most essential points of the evaluation will be made available to the individual doctoral candidates via the Life Cycle portal (2.3.7)
- MPSCog does not require any written work or reports from the lab rotation

First two lab rotations of the fast-track candidates
- Length: 300 working hours each, to be recognized by both programs
- 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 (1st) and April – September (2nd)
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 5.1). 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 fellow 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 fellows in advance to discuss expectations regarding the rotation. You can find tips for a successful lab rotation in Figure 16.

Know what you want in advance and discuss this openly with your supervisor.

Be as honest and as direct as you can when discussing your expectations and proposals for your project.

Do not be afraid to try new things, make mistakes, or learn something new. This is a great opportunity to get involved in something that interests you, even if it does not seem directly related to your doctoral thesis at this point in time.

Reflect on how your rotation experiences align with your broader learning and future goals.

Be curious throughout your rotations: observe how different labs operate, and network with people.

Figure 16. Tips for success during your lab rotation

Before the end of the first academic year, candidates need to obtain commitment from a fellow(s) to (co-)supervise their doctoral work. To maintain high supervision standards, the fellows are limited in their supervision capacity. Specifically, each fellow can only supervise one candidate per cohort.

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 17).
2.3.4 E-learning

General information
The orientation year 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 in the first year (Figure 18). 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 fellows 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 year, 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.

**E-learning team**

Cristina Gonzalez-Liencres  
E-learning Officer & E-tutor for Cognitive Neuroscience  
cgliencres@maxplanckschools.de  
Room @ MPI CBS: C105

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

Cristina Gonzalez-Liencres and Tomoko Koda will be the primary points 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 19) will cover the fundamentals on different topics related to cognition:

![Online courses and discussion sessions offered at the MPSCog](image)

**Figure 19.** 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 fellows 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 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 weekly course activities, but still needs to undergo and pass an exam/evaluation at the end), 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 Curriculum Officer.

**Course structure and format**

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 you read the Code of Conduct for the virtual campus when you sign 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 Ewa Koper 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 or another commitment (e.g., another course or conference), doctoral candidates must inform the respective tutor and MPSCog of their absence by immediately marking it in the Life Cycle calendar (see Section 2.3.7). If you need to be excused from attendance or assignments due to sickness, please also provide a doctor's note

![Figure 20. Tips for success in online courses](image)

The doctoral candidates should follow the good e-learning practice and tips to have successful online learning experience (Figure 20).

In addition to the aforementioned e-courses, candidates are also required to attend a “Good Scientific Practices” workshop, which is offered annually. Moreover, several soft-skills workshops are provided during the Cognition Academies.
2.3.5 Short visits to other labs

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

The visits can be arranged individually or in small groups by contacting the fellow 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 5.1). The visits are the initiative of the doctoral candidates, but the Curriculum Officer can provide support if needed. Please follow the general procedure of a business trip described in Section 5.1.

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 Ewa Koper.

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
- Inform the Curriculum Officer (Ewa Koper) 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 5.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget for the orientation year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the orientation year, 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Please ask your lab rotation supervisor for permission and inform the Curriculum Officer about the content, dates, and estimated costs.
2.3.7 **Life Cycle – Curriculum Management Tool**

*Life Cycle* 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 *Life Cycle* is required of each candidate and is monitored by the coordination team.

**How to access Life Cycle?**
Doctoral candidates will receive an e-mail with a link that redirects them to generate a password and access to the platform.

**Type of data collected within the candidates profiles in Life Cycle:**
- Application files
- University registration information
- Lab rotation evaluations
- E-learning assessments
- Project proposal and progress reports (from second year onwards)
- Information on publications, awards and external activities
- Absence record – candidates can mark planned and unplanned (sick leave) absences
- Short summaries from individual meetings between candidates and coordination team member(s)

**Advantages of using Life Cycle 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

2.3.8 **Doctoral supervisor(s) based on a pre-matching**

As aforementioned, before the start of the program a provisional matching between the candidates and MPSCog Fellows is established. The matching is made based on the mutual preferences and complementing research interests of both parties.

A lab rotation in the lab of the provisionally matched Fellow is scheduled in the first half of the orientation year for each candidate. If the fellow 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 in May/June of the orientation year at the latest.

The MPSCog coordination team can be approached at any time for support or advice during this process.

At the beginning of the second year, doctoral candidates will also decide on an advisory team for their doctoral thesis, the so-called Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC).
2.3.9 End of first year evaluation

To move on to the doctoral phase (2\textsuperscript{nd}–4\textsuperscript{th} year), doctoral candidates must fulfill the following criteria by the end of the orientation year:

- 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

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), Natacha Mendes (Scientific Coordinator), and Ewa Koper (Curriculum Officer).
3 Administrative processes

3.1 How to do a business trip – application and reimbursement

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 21) like filling in the business trip application 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.

**Figure 21. Business trip procedure in the orientation year**

During the orientation year, our doctoral candidates will travel a lot – from one Cognition Academy to a lab rotation and on to the next Cognition Academy. This round trip counts as one business trip and costs for this should be claimed in one reimbursement request, as shown in Figure 22. Travel costs to the Cognition Academies will also be reimbursed during the doctoral phase. To avoid any unexpected problems, we recommend involving Nicole Lorenz the first time you plan a business 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
- 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 Nicole Lorenz beforehand

Further explanation and example: The first Cognition Academy usually takes place in Berlin. The travel costs to Berlin have to be covered by yourself, whereas the hotel costs will be covered by the MPSCog (arrival one day before the start of the Cognition Academy). From there, you travel to your first lab rotation which is, for example, taking place in Munich. You stay there until the next Cognition Academy that again takes place in Berlin. You 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 you, for example, plan to include a private trip to visit your family living in Dresden. You would get reimbursed the travel costs for the direct way from Berlin to Munich. However, you have to prove what those costs actually are. So, when you intend to combine a business trip with a private one, please contact Nicole Lorenz before booking your tickets.
Which costs can be reimbursed?

- Economy class flight tickets
- 2nd class train tickets
- Private car (0.20 €/km, max. 150 €)
- Public transportation tickets
- Accommodation (there is a limit - please ask Nicole Lorenz 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

Reimbursement procedure
Fill in the reimbursement form (available on Life Cycle) and submit it with your original tickets within 6 months after the end of your trip to the following address:

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

If you only used online tickets, it is sufficient to send the forms and invoices via e-mail: nicole.lorenz@maxplanckschools.de.

Can high costs be reimbursed in advance?
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 can book tickets or register for a conference and should then complete the Business trip advance payment.docx form and send it to Nicole Lorenz together with an invoice.

3.2 Holidays, sick leave and virtual mode

We ask you to inform us about your 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 you share with us, we approve the absence.

Holidays
The break slots (winter, spring and summer breaks) in the orientation year calendar are optimal for taking planning holidays. However, if your planned absence falls outside the break slots, please first discuss your plans with your lab rotation supervisor and submit your request 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 you feel unwell and need time to recover please submit a request for “unplanned leave”. You do not need to share any sick leave notifications with us. Please keep them for your records.

Please note: If your absence is short notice and you cannot attend an e-learning session you should inform also [E-learning team](#) about it. They will inform the tutor. Also, sometimes adjustments to the interactive part of the sessions must be done.

**Virtual mode**
Given the special 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.