



Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) guidelines for career development

Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) seeks to provide the best possible conditions for all its researchers. These consist of a uniquely constituted and diverse international group, in terms of gender, age and regional background, as much as in terms of discipline. In particular, researchers in the early stages of their careers (i.e. doctoral students and early postdoctoral research fellows) are provided with the necessary guidance, orientation, and good mentorship practices that they need in order to successfully negotiate the demands of independent research in an appropriate manner, in disciplinary, ethical, and administrative terms. This is mostly fieldwork or archive-based, and often conducted in sensitive contexts in the ZMO research regions.

The general rules and framework principles that are laid out and endorsed by the Leibniz Gemeinschaft apply to ZMO as well – such as equality between researchers of different gender, origin, language group, family status, or wealth and age. These aspects are more substantially covered in other respective documents that are available online.

(At Leibniz here: <https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/about-us/equal-opportunities-and-gender-equality.html>; at ZMO here: <https://www.zmo.de/en/about-us/opportunity>).

Seeking to assure that no discrimination along any of those lines will occur, these documents specify related contexts and wider rules within which the provisions formulated by career guidelines here apply. Like all Leibniz institutes, ZMO seeks to provide family-friendly working conditions for all its staff.¹

This specific set of career guidelines has been prepared for ZMO as an institution that, while international in membership and outlook, is run and evaluated according to national German guidelines and standards. ZMO is set within the existent wider structures of the German and Berlin-based research environment and administered as part of the Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin (GWZ) and the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, according to German and Berlin-specific laws, regulations, and procedures. As many of ZMO's researchers come to Berlin from international research institutions and contexts outside of Germany, ZMO provides a regular information session familiarizing these fellows with basic information and valuable tips as to how the system works, and how to act and succeed within it.

With regard to working conditions and career development, these guidelines are meant to assure all kinds of early career researchers of both doctoral and postdoctoral levels who are based at ZMO of 'best standards' and 'best practice' commitments. Centrally, these concern transparency (in relation to all relevant decision-making processes concerning them), reliable career prospects, competitiveness, and secure employment (under the given legal circumstances) for the period of their doctoral qualification process, and their stay at ZMO more generally.

As early career researchers whose career prospects must be enhanced and supported by ZMO policies and practices, the main focus groups are:

¹ ZMO (equal opportunity representatives group) may formulate its own document on family-friendly working conditions, to be found here: [LINK to possible document](#).

- a) doctoral researchers, i.e. PhD candidates;
- b) postdoctoral research fellows in their early career stage, i.e. those in
 - an 'orientation phase' of two years following the conferral of the PhD, and
 - a 'consolidation phase' of a further three years.
- c) administrative, managerial, and technical support staff, incl. student assistants

a) doctoral researchers, i.e. PhD candidates

Doctoral researchers are working at ZMO in a range of relevant disciplines, mostly History, Anthropology, Religious Studies, Political Science, and relevant fields of Area Studies. Depending on the discipline and the field, doctoral research projects at ZMO can result in a dissertation (a publication-focused monograph manuscript) or be cumulative in nature, depending on the stipulations of their universities. As the Centre is not a degree-awarding institution, Doctoral researchers need to be registered at a university of their choice from the beginning of their contracts. This usually happens following consultation processes with the relevant research group/unit leaders and/or the directorate at ZMO.

At ZMO, PhD researchers (wissenschaftliche/r Mitarbeiter/in) receive a standard 65% postdoctoral salary (TVöD, E13), according to Leibniz guidelines and common DFG recommendations, unless special circumstances, provisions, or restrictions by funding bodies apply.

All doctoral candidates who are based at ZMO, whether directly employed or as part of a third-party funded research group, are given the opportunity to be funded for an envisaged four-year time frame for completion – with a mid-term evaluation after two years for those employed at ZMO. ZMO has also introduced a fourth year scholarship scheme towards the completion of PhD projects, to which all ZMO based doctoral researchers (but not externally funded affiliates) whose funded positions would otherwise cease after three years, are eligible to apply. A committee of senior researchers and project leaders as applicable (including members of the directorate) decides on these applications, which are granted when the committee is convinced that satisfactory progress has been made evident.

All doctoral candidates based at ZMO have a ZMO advisor (a research unit leader, a senior research fellow, or a member of the directorate), with relevant expertise in their field of research, and a ZMO-based mentor. They are integrated into a research group, normally as part of one of the research units of the main research programme. Often doctoral candidates are also members of university based graduate schools. ZMO's doctoral students constitute a recognised self-organized peer group that annually elects their representative, who represents their interests in institutional meetings within ZMO, the GWZ, and the wider Leibniz framework.

A further document summarizing the in-house provisions and mutual obligations between doctoral candidates and ZMO ('PhD agreement', internally available here: S:\INFRASTRUCTURE\Grundsatzdokumente; following Leibniz recommendations) lays out the specific provisions and guidelines for mentoring, feedback and consultative sessions, evaluating research progress etc.. This was put in place following in-house discussions involving doctoral researchers, the work council, the research unit leaders, and the directorate.

In summary, all doctoral researchers based at ZMO should normally have a mentor who is a senior researcher based at the centre, and whose academic expertise and experience provide a good basis

for orientation and advice concerning research related aspects of planning and conducting a doctoral research project. Doctoral researcher and mentor have regular meetings for feedback and exchange (approximately once per quarter, and more often, if needed). For more specifics, see here: S:\INFRASTRUCTURE\Grundsatzdokumente ('Mentoring agreement', only internally available).

For doctoral researchers employed by ZMO, the first year serves as a fundamental consolidating period for the research project. After about six months, an extended research proposal is submitted, possibly adjusted, and agreed upon between doctoral candidate and advisor. After about 18 months, a suitable draft chapter and a detailed outline of the dissertation are submitted for review, and after successful review (possibly following revisions) the contract is extended for a further two years (as detailed in 'PhD agreement').

All doctoral researchers are fully integrated into the ZMO research community, as responsible individual researchers working independently yet under guidance on their own projects. ZMO assists in this process and provides funded opportunities (within the overall financial framework) for its doctoral researchers:

- to work independently and receive guidance and adequate feedback in regular intervals;
- to conduct fieldwork and archival research as appropriate and possible;
- to present their research at appropriate stages of the research process, at conferences, workshops, poster sessions, professional meetings and/or other opportunities;
- to participate in additional training sessions etc. for research relevant skills (writing; presentation; methods etc.).

Apart and beyond work that relates directly to their doctoral qualification, researchers will be able to build and shape their individual research profiles by gaining additional experience:

- in a range of knowledge transfer activities, creating bridges between their research and the wider public;
- in the organization of workshops, conferences, and other events at ZMO, and/or with its collaborating institutional (or individual) partners.

While doctoral candidates are expected to participate in such joint activities to some extent, research work on dissertations is the clear priority. ZMO provides support for doctoral candidates who are expected to publish their research during the period of their doctoral studies; hereby, however, expectations may differ considerably depending on discipline, field of study, and supervisor. A small and flexible budget for appropriate individual career development opportunities is available.

Once a year, formal and structured reviews are held between the doctoral candidate, the respective research unit (or group) leader, and a member of the directorate. Here, the progress of the candidate's qualification process and future plans and strategies are discussed and documented. In the final year before dissertation submission, a confidential discussion about career planning, in and beyond academia takes place, as part of this review process. This includes issues of recommendable career orientation outside academia, but also on specific academic options and opportunities (for presentations, publications, collaborations, and realistic future projects building upon the doctoral research).

Doctoral candidates are also supported in developing their soft skills further (also in collaboration with relevant programmes at Berlin universities, where appropriate). This includes opportunities for presenting their research, for participating in training programmes, for producing publications, and writing funding proposals. International networking activities and participation at international conferences, if useful and advisable, are supported where possible.

Through its contacts, ZMO helps to connect its doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to related university departments, to gain teaching experience in higher education at these departments in their field of expertise, as appropriate for their respective level.

b) postdoctoral research fellows in their early career stages:

- in their 'orientation phase', up to two years after PhD
- in their 'consolidation phase' up to 4-5 years after PhD

All postdoctoral researchers employed by and based at ZMO are appointed at 100% scale of full-time positions (following Leibniz guidelines and common DFG regulations), unless specific provisions and/or circumstances may make scholarships preferable. The spectrum of postdoctoral fellows at ZMO covers freshly graduated PhDs up to senior and internationally distinguished research fellows with a permanent appointment. Thus, ZMO commonly provides a mid-term career-perspective for postdoctoral researchers; and in exceptional cases, even a longer-term career path within itself. For postdoc-researchers in the orientation phase, participation in ZMO's mentorship scheme is strongly encouraged; for those in the consolidation phase, this remains an option.

The early-career stage of postdoctoral researchers is characterized by processes of:

- a) more independent research activity (designing and pursuing projects, engaging in collaboration), often including the planning of work toward a 'Habilitation' or its equivalent in one's field and discipline;
- b) systematic and dedicated efforts in publishing in the respective most suitable and most well-regarded journals and publication series (the criteria for which may vary widely between disciplines); often, this work is focused especially on the realization of a book monograph out of the doctoral dissertation;
- c) gaining regular and varied experiences in teaching;
- d) gaining a variety of experiences in related activities of knowledge transfer; the building and maintenance of public relations; policy advice; activities and engagements in collaborative projects in cultural education; multimedia dissemination; film-making, etc.. Significantly, these fields of activity also provide alternative career options, as it may become clear that a long-term prospect exclusively as researcher is actually not one's preferred career choice.

These pathways of gaining experience and building one's specific individual profile through creative, original, and innovative engagement in such research-related fields (of cultural activity and higher and/or public education) by postdoctoral researchers are supported by ZMO. On the whole, specific individual trajectories should be pursued by researchers, and ZMO assists in the relevant processes of finding one's own position and shaping one's profile.

Early career researchers at ZMO benefit from the centre's active collaborative relations to Berlin's universities and their departments relevant to its research fields, and to many departments and institutions with activities in related fields all over Germany. Moreover, they benefit from ZMO's active links with researchers and research institutions based in its regions of study, and with research institutions in its fields of research worldwide. Postdoctoral researchers are encouraged to make active use of these connections for their specific work, as these can assist in building future research collaborations, developing international research projects and partnerships, and gaining group-leading and other managerial and/or administrative experience. ZMO continues in its efforts to build its national and international networks as appropriate. This will benefit postdoctoral researchers at all stages with further opportunities of gaining international experience in research and research-related activities.

Annual structured and formal consultations for all postdoctoral researchers with a member of the directorate – and a mentor, when applicable – take place to document and discuss progress and any other relevant issues with a view to the research projects and other contractual obligations of the fellows.

On the whole, ZMO puts effort into providing an infrastructure that makes it possible for its postdoctoral fellows – as they mature as independent researchers and, at the same time, develop and shape their respective individual research- (and research-related) profiles – to make well-informed and properly prepared career choices for themselves, within the given rules and provisions. ZMO seeks frank and critical feedback on the provisions it provides from its fellows, to make sure it addresses their needs and demands, as these may also change as time progresses.

Administrative, managerial, and technical support staff, incl. student assistants

For its administrative, managerial, and technical support staff, as well as student assistants, ZMO provides opportunities for further professional qualifications within the current job/position, and it supports staff members taking advantage of these. As part of these measures, the benefits of participating in the established Germany-wide Leibniz networks of research centres and their shared infrastructures are accessible and apply to all employees. In this way, ZMO assists its employees more generally to flexibly build their envisaged career paths, within the given institutional and contractual limitations. The intention is that this will also lead to greater employment security, not only with a view to research positions, but also in related commercial and administrative sectors, as well as politics and the media.

Student research assistants are an integral part of ZMO's research community. ZMO employs undergraduate and MA-students from Berlin and neighbouring universities as research assistants for its fellows. These student assistants are already knowledgeable and gifted in their fields of expertise, and represent the potential future generation of researchers, at an early stage of their higher education. Their variable work experiences during the period of their stay at ZMO feed into, enrich, and complement their studies. While working in assisting capacity on research projects, they learn much, and they also practice and hone their particular skills and expertise. As part of ZMO's wider research community, student assistants are informed about and invited to all public events taking place at ZMO. ZMO also offers opportunities for internships in various relevant fields.