

Third-party funded Research Fellowships at Heidelberg University

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is a fellowship?

Fellowships are provided for the altruistic financial support of particularly gifted and committed doctoral students and postdocs. The funds made available by the fellowship-granting bodies are meant to enable the fellowship-holders to devote themselves in the best way possible to their own research work, free from other constraints and without any obligations towards the fellowship-granting body.

2. How is a fellowship-holder selected?

The selection of fellowship-holders is made after an intensive examination of their merits (“the pick of the crop”) in the academic institutes and facilities at Heidelberg University. Accordingly, an orderly selection procedure must be conducted on the basis of known criteria, determined by the applicants (see question 3 and 6) at the institutes and facilities (see also question 5). Even if these criteria are filled, there is no legal entitlement to a fellowship.

A selection commission established by the applicant institute (consisting of at least two people) chooses among the candidates the one who best fits the criteria it has defined. It applies for a fellowship by submitting the form “Application for approval of a third-party funded research fellowship at Heidelberg University” to Division 6 of the University Administration. The application of a fellowship at the Medical Faculties of Heidelberg University is administered by the respective Medical Faculty by using the according application forms.

3. What must the applicant consider in the advertisement for a fellowship?

The applicant must publicly advertise the fellowship to be granted. The written advertisement names how much money the fellowship involves, how long the support will last and which documents must accompany the candidacy – the latter to be decided by the relevant institute.

4. What could an advertisement for the available fellowship look like?

Information in the advertisement for the fellowship to be awarded:

- Name of the fellowship / field of sciences or humanities
- Number of fellowships to be granted
- Duration of the fellowship(s) to be granted (months)
- Monthly amount to be disbursed
- Beginning of the grant of the fellowship
- Origin of the funds
- Application deadline

Documents to be submitted:

- Curriculum vitae (including social involvement and interests)
- List of grades
- Short presentation of the self-chosen topic to be worked on

A selection committee of at least two persons will be set up. If it is already known, its name and function can be mentioned.

NB: Even if these criteria are fulfilled, there is no legal entitlement to a fellowship.

5. What could a selection procedure look like?

Internal criteria for supporting the best must be laid down and evaluated by the grant commission (see question 4). Examples could be:

- Grades (average) in the course / in individual subjects
- A particularly deserving field of work (topic)
- Additional extra-mural commitment
- Weighting individual criteria: no / yes, how?

The process and results of selecting the best must be documented internally but there is no obligation to reveal them.

6. Who applies for a fellowship? Who is the applicant?

The applicant for a fellowship is the project leader, the institute or the central university facility that has a fellowship to grant. The application for granting a third-party funded research fellowship at Heidelberg University is to be sent on the appropriate form to the Research Division of the University Administration.

7. May a fellowship be granted in addition to an existing employment contract (at Heidelberg University)?

No. An exception is a contract as student assistant according to certain criteria (see question 10).

8. May a fellowship be given in addition to the fee as adjunct lecturer?

Yes. A fellowship may be given in addition to a paid or non-paid adjunct lectureship.

9. May a fellowship be given in addition to a work or service contract?

No. This would not reflect the University's interest in supporting the best candidates through a fellowship.

10. Is a fellow eligible for annual leave?

No. Since a fellowship does not constitute an employment relationship there is no entitlement for counterperformance and there is no line management in place.

11. May I accept a fellowship in addition to my contract as student assistant?

An activity of up to 25% (40 hours/month) as student assistant is possible in addition to the fellowship, as long as there is no connection in terms of time and content. Both the fellowship holder and the supervisor, or institute/project director, must sign a statement to this effect during the course of agreeing the contract as student assistant or accepting the fellowship.

12. Is it possible to top up existing fellowships?

Yes. It is possible to top up an existing fellowship from donations and free third-party funds granted by Heidelberg University up to the valid maximum limit.

In case of fellowships granted by any other (external) bodies, there is no possibility to top up the existing fellowship, since there was no selection procedure to choose the candidate who best fits the selection criteria following the respective tender process at Heidelberg University.

13. What is a qualification fellowship?

In order to enable particularly qualified graduates of universities of applied science and particularly qualified candidates with a bachelor degree to proceed quickly to doctoral work, funds may be applied for in the category "Qualification fellowship".

A special qualification programme must be provided for this group of candidates to enable their admission to the status of doctoral student. For this purpose, the legal framework conditions must be available at the University. Within a maximum of 12 months the qualification fellowship-holder must be provided with access to the doctoral course accompanied by research. The qualification fellowship must not be financed in order to work for another degree than the doctorate (e.g. a Master's) (see DFG Module Research Training Group, [Form 52.15](#)).

14. How much can fellowships be worth?

- By analogy with the DFG fellowship regulations (Annex to regulations of the Research Training Group, [DFG form 2.22a](#) - 08/16) doctoral fellowships from free third-party funds have an upper limit of €1,468 (base amount).
- A minimum level of €1,103 applies for doctoral fellowships financed from DFG funds.
- Doctoral fellowships for students of Medicine, who are to receive support after the first section of their course in a hospital, are worth €838 (base amount), which corresponds to the maximum amount paid to students under the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG):
- Qualification fellowships are worth €800 (base amount) per month.
- Postdoctoral fellowships are worth €1,853 (base amount) per month
- According to DFG regulations, there is a child allowance in addition to the base amounts, of monthly
 - €400 for one child, and
 - €100 for every additional child.
- For fellowships from other public funds that are granted on the basis of their own fellowship regulations (e.g. from the DAAD, DFG or foundations), the value of the fellowship depends on the requirements of the funding body

15. Can a fellowship be joined on to an employment contract?

Granting a fellowship directly after an employment contract requires special justification (e.g. work for a doctorate or *habilitation* exclusively to obtain further academic qualifications). Accordingly, any employment contract directly preceding the fellowship must be set apart in terms of time and content in such a way that no work performance can be demanded or accepted. The granting of fellowships as an extension of employment contracts that cannot otherwise be extended is inadmissible. It will be assumed that there is no connection if at least three months lie between the employment and the beginning of the fellowship and the content of the preceding employment is not identical with the self-chosen activity in the fellowship.

16. Can fellowships be given in the framework of third-party financed research projects?

Fellowships can only be given during research projects if the fellowships are explicitly labelled as fellowship funding, if they serve the purpose of the research and promote the personal training of the fellowship-holder. The emphasis here must be on the individual qualification programme.

17. What can fellowships be financed from?

Fellowships are either labelled as such by the funding bodies and must be used according to the appropriate regulations, or they may be financed from free project lump sums / overheads. For the

latter case, please see: Directions for the Granting of Third-Party Funded Research Fellowships at Heidelberg University.

18. What is the situation with fellowships aiming for a degree (doctorate)?

Fellowships aiming to achieve the doctoral degree are given for a maximum of three years. In well-founded exceptional cases this funding may be extended by one year and thereby to four years. The grounds for such a request will be examined.

19. What do fellowship-holders have to consider with respect to taxes/social insurance?

Fellowships may be disbursed by the University free of tax and social insurance if the preconditions of the German Income Tax Act are fulfilled and the granting regulations have been confirmed by the finance authorities. It is up to the fellowship-holder to clarify whether a tax obligation exists or has arisen. The fellowship holder is personally responsible for possible taxation and insurance.

- Tax-free income

According to §3 Nr. 44 Income Tax Act (EStG) fellowships to promote research or academic or artistic education and training are tax-free when they come from public funds or from intergovernmental or transnational organisations to which the Federal Republic of Germany belongs. The same applies to fellowships granted for the purposes described in the 1st sentence by an agency set up or administered by a public law corporation, or by a corporation, association of persons or assets pursuant to §5(1) 9 of the German Corporate Income Tax Act. The precondition for tax exemption is that

a) fellowships given do not exceed the amount required to fulfil a research project or to cover the cost of living and the cost of educational materials and are granted according to the regulations issued by the funding body

b) the recipient is not obliged to perform a specific academic or artistic service in return for the fellowship, or to do the work of an employee.

Generally speaking, income below the subsistence minimum (§ 32a(2) 2nd sentence Income Tax Act) remains out of account in calculating and granting a fellowship. Sums beyond the subsistence level may be offset against the amount of the fellowship, depending on the fellowship programme and requirements of the funding body.

- Basic tax-free allowance: §32a(1) 2nd sentence (EStG):

[...] When calculating the fellowship amount to be granted and disbursed, the income of the fellowship-holder remains out of account if this income does not exceed the respective statutory tax-free allowance [...].

20. What is the situation with the obligation to report income to the tax office?

Recurrent payments by Heidelberg University are, on principle, reported to the tax authorities. Disbursed fellowships likewise number among these recurrent payments.

21. As of when can a postdoc fellowship be granted?

A fellowship for postdocs can be given after passing the final oral examination of the doctorate (*rigorosum/viva/disputation*).