

Drs. 8958-21 Summary  
Cologne 23 04 2021

# Developmental Perspectives of Institutes for Advanced Studies (IAS) in Germany

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Institutes for Advanced Studies (IAS), during the past decades, have been developing from a more exceptional phenomenon into quite a distinct type of institution within the system of research and higher education. Based on historic models such as the Princeton IAS, a number of diverse functions and features have collectively been assembled under the IAS roof. The growing number of IAS as well as the increasing differentiation of the IAS landscape in Germany and internationally give new importance to the question of the specific role and features of IAS. When considering future IAS establishments in the German system of research and higher education, it also becomes a matter of urgency. This development has prompted The German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) to address the IAS as an institutional phenomenon and to present perspectives for the future of this type of institution. Based on discussions with representatives of IAS, of higher education institutions and of funding institutions as well as on the basis of a written survey of IAS, The Council also provides a systematic overview of the responsibilities, services and structures pertaining to IAS in Germany |<sup>1</sup>.

IAS, through their funding formats, open up opportunities for personal encounters and intellectual discourse to researchers. They aim to provide researchers with extensive freedom and scope for experimentation, aiming to stimulate creative processes and to set a framework for unplanned and unforeseen innovations. The Council sees the following aspects as especially important for IAS-specific work:

- \_ Physical attendance by fellows on a temporary basis and in a defined spatial context. On-site residence should remain a significant feature of IAS. Nevertheless, the potential for new combinations of digital and presence-based formats of interaction should be explored.
- \_ Interdisciplinary composition and concentration of different research experiences of fellows in one location. The programmes of IAS in Germany mainly

|<sup>1</sup> To the full original German version *Entwicklungsperspektiven von Institutes for Advanced Studies (IAS) in Deutschland, Köln April 2021*

address researchers who do not rely on the use of laboratories. To attract fellows from experimental fields of natural, life and engineering sciences for sustained engagement with an IAS, flexible funding formats and an integration of fellows into local and regional research networks – including research infrastructures – should be attempted.

- Opening up to the other institutions within the system of research and higher education. Cooperations lend themselves especially to the relationship between non-university IAS and universities. On the other hand, university-based IAS should also consider collaborating more strongly with neighbouring universities to create optimal working conditions.

Considering the aforementioned, The Council assesses neither the quantitative increase of IAS as a particular type of institution nor their institutional diversity as problematic. The dynamic in founding university-based IAS in Germany has mainly been driven by the Excellence Initiative. Positioning IAS at universities offers a chance to attract excellent researchers and to thereby strengthen Germany as a location of science and research.

The past years, however, have seen a distinct rise in challenges that IAS find themselves confronted with. This creates pressure on the IAS to demonstrate their legitimacy. They can only respond to this pressure with a well justified functionality specific to and within their respective local, regional and field-specific contexts. It is crucial to reach an understanding of the functionally essential core of this type of institution. The main purpose of IAS in the future should remain the facilitation and encouragement of top-level research. Other functions, focusing for instance more strongly on the role of science and humanities in society, can be grouped around this core and should clearly relate to it. Defining and refining a functional profile is an ongoing mission that will consistently require adjusting the objectives.

In order to facilitate intellectually stimulating and productive encounters, it is essential for IAS to include and involve a variety of perspectives. IAS in Germany are well-positioned in this regard. Nowadays, IAS generally make sure to raise the percentage of women among their fellows and to attract suitable female candidates. The global competition around highly qualified women also challenges IAS to offer funding formats that are more appropriate to female-specific career paths. Moreover, the systematic involvement of researchers in an early phase of their career is a widely declared objective. Non-university IAS are encouraged to actively engage with young researchers to offer them a realistic opportunity to get involved. University-based IAS should monitor the effects of their work with young researchers and adjust as needed, when misplaced incentives or an overload of expectations become apparent. For an international perspective, it is essential to also bring major non-western world regions into focus. IAS, and not just those with a corresponding regional connection, should therefore explicitly

clarify, if and how an involvement of researchers, for instance from the Global South, can be realised or respectively further strengthened.

Moreover, the following generally applies: Only if IAS have programmatic and financial independence will they be able to fulfil their role in the system of research and higher education. Especially in matters of the conceptual direction of funding formats, this independence must be assured. Decisions with regard to the design and allocation of fellowships must be in the hands of the IAS and those decisions must be taken in a quality-assured manner involving research advisory boards and other committees. The acceptance of IAS depends significantly on criteria-based and transparent selection processes and on a clearly identifiable open access principle. In combination with a publication of decision-making procedures and related criteria, there is in fact a good chance of reaching new groups of fellows. Direct applications – which should always be an option – would thus be made easier. Particularly the structurally predetermined roles of funders (ministries) or responsible institutions (higher education institutions) should be specified in statutes and in the governance in a way that protects the “programmatic core” of an IAS, enables research-based decision-making and allows for long-term planning. This prerequisite is in fact realised within the statutes of most IAS; in practice, however, a certain tension has built up around those objectives, partly resulting from a number of additional performance expectations toward the IAS on the part of the responsible institutions. A university-based IAS should generally only take on those services that correspond to its specific function. Regarding the fellows, IAS have to make sure to keep their expectations in balance. In addition to a compulsory physical attendance period and the participation in internal colloquia, fellows are generally expected to participate in further activities of “their” IAS. In order not to endanger the primary objective, fellows should be able to organise their “free space” independently.

By way of their international orientation, fellows are particularly suited to introduce globally relevant topics and transformation processes into the respective local discourse contexts. Thus, new funding-related and programmatic focal areas for IAS can be initiated. The consistent reinforcement of existing international networking structures and the establishment of institutionalised European structures could produce a significant advancement of IAS. In the context of the European Research and Higher Education Area, it would seem plausible to expand already existing types of European (co-)funding of IAS. Moreover, it should be considered whether some form of a responsible organisation of IAS on the European level (for instance under the auspices of an EU president) would be desirable and feasible. In doing so, the European Union would go beyond the current selective funding of IAS and toward developing them into genuinely European institutions.