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Quality in duplicate

Two young Max Planck scientists receive Humboldt Research Fellowship

Not one, but two young scientists at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Biomedicine have been awarded a prestigious Humboldt Research Fellowship for Postdoctoral Researchers: Liz Ing-Simmons in the research group of Juan M. Vaquerizas and Emma Watson from the department of Ralf Adams. With this fellowship, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation sponsors highly qualified postdoctoral researchers of all disciplines from abroad. Apart from recognising the quality of their scientific work, the fellowship enables the young scientists their first financial independence. Both fellowships start on June 1st, 2018 and will run for two years.

“To my knowledge, it’s not that common for two researchers from the same institute to be granted this fellowship at the same time”, says Dr. Liz Ing-Simmons. Yet, the key selection criterion for the fellowship is the individual excellence. Although the two young scientists obviously share this feature, they originate from completely opposite sides of the world: Dr. Liz Ing-Simmons is from the United Kingdom, whereas Dr. Emma Watson comes from Australia. They both completed their PhDs in their home countries in 2017 and started working at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Biomedicine in March 2017.

Dr. Watson was enthusiastic about continuing her scientific career in Germany. “The research standards here are excellent, so I really want to form strong connections with Germany”, she says. “Applying to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation was especially appealing because of the foundation’s emphasis on integration not only in the lab, but also in everyday life. To help facilitate this they cover the cost of German classes”, she says, setting out one feature of the fellowship.

“Also, the fellowship includes financial support for consumables and travel, enabling us to take our first steps towards independence”, mentions Dr. Ing-Simmons as another major advantage of the fellowship. “This is important both for our personal development and our future careers.”

Furthermore, as Humboldtians Dr. Watson and Dr. Ing-Simmons can create their own networks amongst the research fellows and with Alexander von Humboldt Foundation staff at various events organised by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Dr. Ing-Simmons is investigating 3D genome organisation. The mechanisms underlying this organisation have been described as one of the deepest mysteries in genome biology. “Humans have two metres of DNA inside the nucleus of each of our cells. That’s like fitting Germany’s complete railway network into the Domplatz of Münster”, explains Dr. Ing-Simmons. “The organisation of DNA inside the nucleus influences how genes are expressed. I want to investigate how complex gene expression patterns are regulated and coordinated in space and time during embryonic development. As such, my results will contribute to understanding normal development and misregulation of gene expression in cancer and other diseases.”

Dr. Watson is interested in finding new approaches for the treatment of osteoporosis. In 2010, osteoporosis was estimated to affect 27.6 million patients in the European Union alone and is predicted to increase to 33.9 million people by 2025. “Available treatments are of limited benefit or can cause a range of severe side effects”, says Dr. Watson. Recent studies from Ralf Adams’ laboratory revealed an intimate link between the formation of new bone and the presence of specialised skeletal blood vessels. “I want to extend our understanding of this skeletal vasculature and how it changes in osteoporosis”, explains Dr. Watson. “By doing so, I aim to identify potential novel therapeutic targets for the treatment of osteoporosis.”

About the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is a foundation established by the government of the Federal Republic of Germany; it promotes international academic cooperation between excellent scientists and scholars from Germany and from abroad.

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation promotes excellence in science: the most important selection criterion is evidence of high individual accomplishment and future potential.

Also, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation aims to develop a personal connection between fellows from all countries and disciplines and Germany itself. This does not only happen in laboratories, but in everyday life: through contacts to the people of the country. In order to strengthen these contacts, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation sponsors German courses for the research fellows.

In order to qualify for the Humboldt Research Fellowship for Postdoctoral Researchers, at the time of submitting the application, scientists must be working abroad or have been working in Germany for less than six months.

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Press photos

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Liz Ing-Simmons and Emma Watson are pleased to receive a Humboldt Research Fellowship for Postdoctoral Researchers (from left)

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