

## German Research Foundation approves new research training group investigating the evolution of gene regulation

**(Mainz, 20 May 2019).** *The German Research Foundation (DFG) has approved the establishment of the "GenEvo – Gene Regulation in Evolution: From Molecular to Extended Phenotypes" Research Training Group (RTG) at the Faculty of Biology at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) with effect from July 2019. This RTG, working in cooperation with the Institute of Molecular Biology (IMB), will offer a structured, high-calibre research and training program enabling its PhD students to acquire interdisciplinary qualifications and obtain autonomy at an early stage of their scientific careers. The scientific objective of GenEvo is to gain a better understanding of the evolution of complex and multi-layered genetic regulation systems. The DFG will provide some EUR 5 million to the RTG over the first funding period of four and a half years, plus another EUR 1 million in overhead funding to bolster the strategic orientation of the university.*

Rhineland-Palatinate's Minister of Science, Continuing Education, and Culture, Professor Konrad Wolf, welcomed the decision by the DFG to fund this project: "The approval of the research training group at Mainz University is an outstanding achievement and we have to thank all academics involved for their huge commitment," he said. "The new group is evidence for the university's success in building its specific life sciences profile, which has received support from the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate in recent years through its Research Initiative. I warmly congratulate all those involved."

In order to achieve its scientific objectives, GenEvo will bring together researchers from the fields of evolutionary and molecular biology. "We will analyse which regulatory processes are retained by evolutionary processes, which ones change quickly, and what forms of selection they are subject to. By transferring methods developed for model organisms to other taxa, we will be able to investigate the evolution of gene regulation in a broad phylogenetic and population-genetic context," pointed out Professor Susanne Foitzik of the Institute of Organismic and Molecular Evolution at JGU, who, along with René Ketting at IMB, coordinates the RTG.

With its interdisciplinary focus and, in particular, its cooperation with IMB, GenEvo will provide training to interdisciplinary cohorts of doctoral students in fields which are rarely combined, such as evolutionary biology, epigenetics, gene regulation, omics technologies, and bioinformatics. "The interdisciplinary GenEvo group will contribute to enhancing the profile of Mainz as an internationally visible and attractive location for life sciences research," emphasised the President of Mainz University, Professor Georg Krausch. "The new research training group underlines once again the importance that our university attaches to the training of young researchers – especially across disciplinary boundaries."

The graduate students for the structured research and training program will be selected through a competitive international recruitment process. In the first funding phase, 28 doctoral students funded directly by GenEvo and 28 associated PhD candidates will benefit from various levels of supervision. They will each be directly supervised by two scientists, one from each field of evolutionary and molecular biology, a PhD buddy, and an interdisciplinary doctoral committee.

GenEvo will offer a broad education in the areas covered through specialist lectures, applied methods courses, and the teaching of essential soft skills. The program also includes in-house networking events aimed at fostering the development of a close-knit research community and promoting the exchange of ideas. Events involving eminent researchers at international conferences and summer schools will supplement the program.

#### **Further details**

Further information on GenEvo can be found [here](#).

#### **About the Institute of Molecular Biology gGmbH**

The Institute of Molecular Biology gGmbH (IMB) is a centre of excellence in the life sciences that was established in 2011 on the campus of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU). Research at IMB focuses on three cutting-edge areas: epigenetics, developmental biology, and genome stability. The Institute is a prime example of successful collaboration between a private foundation and government: The Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation has committed 154 million euros to be disbursed from 2009 until 2027 to cover the operating costs of research at IMB. The State of Rhineland-Palatinate has provided approximately 50 million euros for the construction of a state-of-the-art building and will give further 52 million in core funding from 2020 until 2027. For more information about IMB, please visit: [www.imb.de](http://www.imb.de).

#### **About Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz**

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) is a globally recognized research-driven university with around 31,500 students. Its main core research areas are in particle and hadron physics, the materials sciences, and translational medicine, while its most outstanding research achievements in the humanities have been attained in the fields of American Studies and Historical Cultural Studies. JGU's academic excellence is reflected in its success in the Excellence Initiative of the German federal and state governments: In 2012, the university's Precision Physics, Fundamental Interactions and Structure of Matter (PRISMA) Cluster of Excellence was approved and the funding of its Materials Science in Mainz (MAINZ) Graduate School of Excellence was extended. Moreover, excellent placings in national and international rankings, as well as numerous other honors and awards, demonstrate just how successful Mainz-based researchers and academics are. Further information at [www.uni-mainz.de/eng](http://www.uni-mainz.de/eng).

#### **Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation**

The Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation is an independent, non-profit organization committed to the promotion of the medical, biological, chemical, and pharmaceutical sciences. It was established in 1977 by Hubertus Liebrecht (1931–1991), a member of the shareholder family of the company Boehringer Ingelheim. With the Perspectives Programme “Plus 3” and the Exploration Grants, the foundation supports independent junior group leaders. It also endows the internationally renowned Heinrich Wieland Prize as well as awards for up-and-coming scientists. In addition, the Foundation is donating a total of 154 million euros from 2009 to 2027 to the University of Mainz for the Institute of Molecular Biology (IMB). Since 2013, the Foundation has been providing a further 50 million euros for the development of the life sciences at the University of Mainz. [www.bistiftung.de](http://www.bistiftung.de)

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