

Hector Research Career Development Award 2026

Program Information for Applicants

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Founded in 2013, the [Hector Fellow Academy \(HFA\)](#) is a young academy of sciences in the fields of natural and engineering sciences as well as medicine and psychology. It offers a platform for networking, interdisciplinary exchange, and mutual inspiration to the laureates of the Hector Science Award. In addition, the Academy supports promising young researchers.

The Hector Fellow Academy (HFA) strengthens research in Germany and contributes to solving global challenges by raising awareness of socio-political issues and regularly hosting events like symposia, workshops, and conferences. Furthermore, it creates synergies to promote cutting-edge research and innovative projects.

By awarding the Hector Research Career Development Award, the Hector Fellow Academy (HFA) enables W1 assistant professors – with or without tenure track – and junior research group leaders at German research institutions to further strengthen their independent research and to include them as temporary members in the HFA.

Our previous award winners can be found [here](#).

The **HFA pursues the following objectives** with the Award:

- Active promotion of researchers on their way to a professorship at an early stage of their career
- Expansion of the scientific exchange in the HFA
- Building new opportunities for cooperation between Hector Fellows and the Awardees

Scope of the funding

The Hector Research Career Development Award comprises the following:

- One-time 25,000 € flexible personal research funds

- Hector Fellow Academy doctoral researcher position for up to four years: Funding of one doctoral position according to the DFG guidelines¹
 - o Material expenses up to 9,500 € per year
 - o Participation in three units of the HECTOR School of Engineering and Management's [MBA Fundamentals Program](#)
 - o Participation in HFA training program
 - o Coverage of travel and accommodation costs for HFA training and networking events
- Opportunity to apply for other HFA funding formats:
 - o Funding for the organization of joint conferences / workshops which are (co-) organized by at least two Hector Fellows or Hector RCD Awardees (up to 25,000 €)
 - o Funding of a Speaker Award for young researchers at conferences that are (co-)organized by a Hector RCD Awardee (up to 1,500 €)
 - o Funding for the recruitment of renowned keynote speakers for conferences that are (co-)organized by a Hector RCD Awardee (up to 5,000 €)
 - o Access to the Associated Young Researcher Program
- Five years of membership in the Hector Fellow Academy
- Access to HFA alumni network

Application requirements

- **W1 assistant professors** (with or without tenure track) or **junior research group leaders** (e.g. funded by the Emmy Noether Programme (DFG), an ERC Starting Grant (EU), a Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) junior research group, a Helmholtz-Nachwuchsgruppe (HGF), a Max-Planck Research Group (MPG) a Sofja Kovalevskaja Award (AvH), a university junior research group via the DFG-Excellence Strategy or equivalents thereof) in the natural or engineering sciences, medicine or psychology.
- **Doctorate or PhD-equivalent:** completed less than seven years prior to the application deadline (October 30, 2026). Exemptions may apply (p. 3).
- **Temporary Employment at a German research institution:** non-permanent position at a German university, Fraunhofer Institute, Helmholtz Center, Leibniz Institute, or Max Planck Institute for the duration of the supervision of the HFA doctoral thesis project.
- **Formal or content-related right to supervise a doctorate:** the W1 assistant professor (with or without tenure track) or the junior research group leader needs to be enabled by their institution to serve as the primary advisor of a doctoral researcher on the content level. Preferably, he/she will be the first advisor.
- **Support by head of institute:** letter of support by head of institute guaranteeing access to the infrastructure required for the proposed project (e.g., lab space, office space for doctoral researcher). Please have the head of your institute fill in the template (available as a download from the application portal).

¹ Personnel funding DFG (according to TV-L 13): https://www.dfg.de/formulare/60_12/60_12_de.pdf. FTE based on subject area.

Application documents

Please submit the following documents by October 30, 2026, via our [application portal](#). Applications received after the deadline or incomplete applications will not be considered. Documents can be in German or English.²

- **Motivation letter** (1 page)
- **Application form**
- **Proposal for a doctoral project** that shall be pursued by a doctoral researcher in the up to four years of funding by the HFA (max. 3 pages; excl. references).
Important: The doctoral project must not have started yet.
- **Timeline and work schedule for the proposed project for the doctoral thesis** (1 page)
- **CV** (max. 5 pages, including current and previous positions, teaching experience, experience in supervision of students and doctoral researchers since postdoc phase, acquired third party funding in k€, an overview of competitive scholarships and grants won plus other relevant awards, public engagement and outreach activities, patents)
- **List of key publications** (max. 10)
- **Doctoral certificate not older than 7 years** (translated either into English or German)
- **Documentation of any family obligations** (e.g., birth certificate, proof of parental leave) **even without an application for an exemption**. All family obligations are taken into account. Please also include Corona-related hardships.
- **Documentation if exemption from the 7-year post-doctorate regulation is applicable** (e.g., birth certificates of children, proof of parental leave; military service)
- **Letter of support** by the head of institute

Exemptions from 7-year deadline³

1. Clinical training: extension by the documented amount of clinical training received by the applicant after the award of the first eligible degree, up to a maximum of 4 years.
2. Maternity: 18 months extension for each child born before or after the PhD award. If the applicant can document a longer maternity leave, the eligibility period will be extended by the documented amount of actual leave taken until the call deadline.
3. Paternity leave: extension by the documented time of leave taken until the call deadline for each child born before or after the PhD award.
4. Long-term illness or national service: extension by the documented amount of leave taken after the PhD award.

Degree in medicine following the ERC guidelines

“[...] A first degree in medicine alone will not be accepted by itself as equivalent to a PhD/doctoral degree. To be considered eligible, applicants holding a degree in medicine need to provide the certificates of both the medical degree and a PhD or proof of an appointment that requires doctoral equivalency in life science research (e.g., post-doctoral fellowship, professorship appointment). Additionally, candidates must also provide information on their

² HFA Privacy guidelines: <https://hector-fellow-academy.de/en/privacy/>

³ Criteria adapted from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2022/wp_horizon-erc-2022_en.pdf p.28.

research experience (including peer reviewed publications) in order to further substantiate the equivalence of their overall training to a PhD.

In these cases, the certified date of the medical degree completion plus two years is the reference date of the actual PhD/doctoral degree, that will be applied for the calculation of the eligibility.

For applicants holding both a degree in medicine and a PhD, the date used for the calculation of the eligibility period (*i.e.*, medical degree plus two years or PhD award date) is the date of the earliest degree that makes the applicant eligible. [...]"⁴

Selection procedure

1. **Pre-screening of applications by the HFA Office:** formal screening; early applications are strongly encouraged.
2. **Screening and selection by Hector Fellows:** between November/December; final candidates are invited to the last round with a personal presentation.
3. **Final presentation:** personal presentation (online) in front of a multidisciplinary panel of Hector Fellows on January 29, 2027; final decision
4. **Award Ceremony:** June 8, 2027 during the HFA Symposium in Tübingen. Participation in person is required. Please schedule accordingly.

Selection criteria: scientific excellence; innovation & feasibility of the proposed project for a doctoral thesis; connectivity to Hector Fellows and the aims of the Hector Fellow Academy; public engagement & outreach activities; teaching experience.

⁴ Based on: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2022/wp_horizon-erc-2022_en.pdf p.69