Max Planck Institute
of Animal Behavior

Universität
Konstanz

Application instructions for the IMPRS for Quantitative Behaviour Ecology and Evolution from lab to field (IMPRS-QBEE)

1   General instructions

You can only apply electronically. First you have to register for the application process. You will receive an email with your personal registration code. You need this code for the second step of your application. Further, you need to provide your two referees with your personal registration code to enable them to upload their recommendation letters for you. Please do not send any other type of application by regular mail or email as they will be rejected. The application must be completed in **English** only. Besides the online application form, we need several documents from you. Documents that are not in English or German need to be translated. You need to upload all the required documents as **one single pdf-file**. Please give yourself enough time to submit your application and do not wait until the last moment as technical difficulties or other problems might occur. The application period is also a busy time for us. So, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to answer all your questions instantly.

2   Online application form

•	With your filled-out online application, you submit all the information we use to reach a decision on whether to shortlist you or not. The additional required documents verify that the information on the application form is true. Therefore, please **take you time** to fill-out this form, since sloppy applications will most certainly not make it onto our shortlist!

•	All the fields marked with an **asterisk (*)** are mandatory.

•	Make sure that the information (dates, durations, titles …) in your application corresponds to the information in your added certificates.

•	**Do not exceed the character limits** for your theses abstracts and your letter of motivation. These limits might be very narrow but please understand that we have to read dozens and maybe hundreds of them within a very short space of time. Furthermore, it is a highly sought-after skill in science to be able to express yourself clearly within the space of a few sentences.

•	Applicants who are not native English speakers have to prove their proficiency in English. **Participation in an internationally recognized test (e.g. TOEFL) is highly recommended** (TOEFL institutional code for the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology is 6326) **but not mandatory**. Language skills can also be demonstrated by proven higher education in English or a reasonably long stay in an English-speaking country.

•	The application form has fields where you have to name one to three doctoral projects offered by the IMPRS-QBEE. Please make sure that you are **familiar with the research of the groups offering those doctoral positions** by researching their homepages and reading their publications. The better the chosen projects/groups fit to your personal interests the higher your chances are of getting invited.

•	Please bear in mind that the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior and the University of Konstanz are **equal opportunity employers**. What you might consider as weaknesses in your application (e.g. longer breaks) could even change into advantages if you simply explain them properly to us.

3   Required documents

•	We need certain documents that **prove your specifications** in your online application form. Documents

that are not in English or German **need to be completed with a translation**.

• Your academic background is verified by **certificates of relevant university examinations** (e.g. BSc and MSc degrees), and a detailed **record of study** (a list of attended courses and – if applicable – corresponding grades). Please include an **explanation of the grading system** at your university, since we get applications from all around the world but do not know all the different university grading systems (understandably, the German grading system does not need to be explained).

• The official teaching language of the IMPRS-QBEE is **English**. Therefore, you need to convince us that your English proficiency is sufficient for immediately starting with your research work. The best and most reliable way is an acceptable result in an **internationally recognized test** (e.g. TOEFL). Nevertheless, a verifiable higher education in English, or a reasonably long stay in an English-speaking country are also convincing. However, if you wish to prove your English skills, we need it documented by a **third party**.

• If you want to add further information relevant for the project and/or show your personal preferences, you are very welcome to upload an **individual CV** (max. 3 pages, no photograph please).

• Add further certificates that prove the given information in the application. But please, **only provide documents which are important to support your application**. Do not overload your application with certificates and documents of minor significance.

4   Reference letters

• We do need two reference letters **from academic colleagues**. When choosing your referees, please make sure that they a) **know you well** enough to fill-out our **online recommendation form**, and b) have enough time to do it prior to the application deadline (**January 15**). Recommendation letters from referees who obviously know you very well make a lot more impact than those from referees you chose simply because of their famous name but who do not know you very well. Your application will only be considered if the two recommendation letters reach us prior the application deadline!

• After your registration you will receive an email with your **personal registration code** and a link to our online recommendation form. Provide your referees with both, the link and your personal registration code since this is the only way for them to upload their **recommendation letter**.

• Only after we have received your complete application AND the two reference letters before the deadline, will we consider your application.

5   Processing your application

• **Register** for the application process.

• You will receive an email with your **personal registration code** and two links. One link will lead you to our online application form, the other link will lead your referees to the online recommendation form. Be sure to copy your registration code exactly as given (LASTNAME_4DIGITS), otherwise it won't be recognized by the system!

• Provide your **referees** with your personal registration code and the link to the online recommendation form. Make sure they realize that we can consider your application only if they fill-out the recommendation form and upload their recommendation letter prior our application deadline (January 15). You will receive a **confirmation email** after each of your referees uploaded her/his/their recommendation letter.

• Assemble all **required documents**, scan them and convert them into **one single pdf-file** and **name it LastName.FirstName.pdf**.

• Carefully fill-out the **online application form**, upload the PDF and press the start button. You will receive an email confirming your upload.

• After we received your complete application and the two recommendation letters in time you will get

an email **Mid-February** telling you if you are shortlisted and therefore invited for the Selection Symposium or not (there will be a scheduled online interview before the invitation is sent out).

• Our **Selection Symposium** is scheduled for **End-March**. Your travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by IMPRS-QBEE. You will have to present your latest and most relevant research (most probably your MSc thesis) in a **short talk** to the faculty and doctoral students of the IMPRS-QBEE. Additionally, there will be **interviews** by faculty and doctoral students, visits to the institutes and labs, and socializing evenings.

• Shortly after the Selection Symposium we will inform you of whether you are accepted as a doctoral student for the IMPRS-QBEE program.

• The earliest appointment to begin your studies is April 1 but this depends on your ability to move to Konstanz and e.g. the conferral of visa procedure.

6 Some basic rules about applications

1) Every employer, no matter whether they are in industry or academia, has to predict from your application/interview how well you might work. Can you imagine what impression it makes if you are sloppy and thoughtless with your application? We do indeed assess if your application was prepared with care, if everything is well documented, or if something is missing without any explanation. Twenty-five percent of all the applications we receive drop out because they are incomplete, they lack certificates, they come too late, or they are just sloppy. So, if you want to increase your chances make sure that you carefully think about your application before you submit it. If you have problems obtaining a certain document or certificate, then write an explanation of why you can't provide this document. By the way, it is definitely not a good strategy to send out your CV at random (we receive tons of these CV every day). This holds true for probably all institutions or companies.

2) Make your application a personal one. It is nearly impossible to learn about you as a person from certificates and grades: are you more the creative type of scientist with lots of ideas or are you very focused in your work? Are you a team player or do you like to work by yourself? All the information you provide helps us to understand who you are. This is important because we want to ensure that you fit into the group and that the time spent on your doctorate as well as your stay in the program will be a great experience for all sides.

3) The clearer your vision is, the closer you are to realizing it. So, make sure that you know what you are applying for. There is so much information about the different groups and departments, their publications, their research statements, their websites and so on. Just take an hour or two to find out what doctoral projects are most interesting to you, where you would like to work, or what field seems most exciting.

4) Make sure that your referees know you well. It doesn't make sense to ask someone for a letter of recommendation, who may be famous in her/his/their field but does not know you at all. One can tell immediately if a recommendation letter is meaningful or not, and a good letter from somebody, who may not be a "big shot" in that field, is more helpful than a negative one from a Nobel prize laureate.

5) Do not try to hide "weaknesses" because everybody has strengths and weaknesses: I am too young, I am too old, I have not enough experience, I have too much experience, I have a gap in my CV, I have been in one place far too long…. First of all, you do not know if we consider that a weakness or not. But more important than this is that we love people who are honest! Science has a lot to do with honesty (remember the scandals of scientist who falsified their results and published them). If we realize that you are honest in your application, we can be pretty sure that you will do the same in the lab if an experiment goes wrong or the results are not as expected.

6) I don't want to mention this point but unfortunately our experiences have taught us that it is necessary: NEVER ever cheat in your application! We have received several falsified certificates or recommendation letters and applications where applicants have lied about their age, expertise, courses, or grades. There

are a lot of good reasons not to cheat:

    a. we do have a bunch of tools to find out if your data are true

    b. you don't know what we are looking for in your application, maybe the course you "invented" for your CV is not at all interesting to us?

    c. we do contact your referees, especially if we suspect something could be wrong

    d. imagine what happens if we find out that there are some "mistakes" in the application: firstly, we will report that to other programs as well and secondly, we may get a bad impression of applicants from your university or home country in general. So, you not only harm your own future career but also that of your peers. Would you like to drop out just because someone else from your university has cheated before?

7) Once you are invited for the Selection Symposium, prepare your talk carefully and practice with friends or colleagues whom you trust to be honest and give fair criticism. Remember to stick to the time limit! Usually, the real presentation takes longer than the rehearsals and we have to interrupt you if you need much longer. Then you may miss the chance to tell your full story.

8) During the individual interviews you may not only be asked about scientific issues but also questions like "Why do you want to join the IMPRS?" or "Tell me about a situation when you made a mistake". These questions aim to get to know you better and the best thing you can do is be honest when you answer. Especially when it is about "weaknesses" or "mistakes" because we all know that everybody makes mistakes and has weaknesses and this is NOT a knock-out criterion!

9) During the socializing evenings you will meet a lot of people from the institutes. Talk to them! You can ask all the questions you may have; you can ask students about the atmosphere in the lab, about the supervision, about their experiences, and so on. Don't you want to know where you may spend the next three to four years of your career?

These are a few application tips that I think might be helpful. There are of course a lot of other issues; if you have any further questions just send an e-mail to the coordinator.

And now GOOD LUCK. We are looking forward to receiving your application!

adopted from http://www.mpipz.mpg.de/50775/Tips

7   Further Information

For any further questions refer to the IMPRS-QBEE homepage https://www.ab.mpg.de/3228/imprs

or contact the program office by e-mail IMPRS@uni-konstanz.de !