9th Forum on the Internationalization of Sciences and Humanities
Identifying the Best – Theory, Methods, Practice

Results

“Identifying the Best – Theory, Methods, Practice” was the topic of the 9th Forum on the Internationalization of Sciences and Humanities in Berlin on October 18 – 19, 2015. The Forum was held by the International Advisory Board of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. The International Advisory Board came to the following conclusions:

- **The definition of who is ‘the best’ is dependent on several contextual, largely qualitative, factors:** among the most important of those are the specific task the candidate is supposed to fulfill and the intellectual environment to which she or he is expected to contribute. High-quality results of former research, proof of the ability to cooperate with other disciplines, and a performance which creates confidence that the candidate will continue to inspire her or his intellectual environment are qualities that characterise ‘the best’.

- **Methods for identifying the best should be inclusive:** When trying to select the best, the net should be cast as wide as possible in order to reach out for diversity and to avoid staying within the narrow confines of one’s own school of thought or paradigm. When diverse, interdisciplinary selection committees reach an overwhelming consensus, this ensures that a high-quality candidate is selected.

- **Role of incentives in identifying the best:** Given the fact that peer review is extremely labor-intensive and that many senior scientists and scholars are overburdened with requests for reviews, the incentives for contributing to evaluation processes should be stronger. Currently, there are especially insufficient incentives for reviewers from subject areas further away from the one that is being evaluated. In general, little credit goes to reviewers. Since science is driven by reputation, not money, measures that could lead to enhanced visibility of reviewers might increase the incentives for them to become part of the process.

- **Funding organizations between scientifically ‘safe’ research and ground breaking research:** Established peer review methods tend to favour proposals which are scientifically correct but not ground breaking. Funding organizations therefore need to reconsider their risk-taking management. Innovative ideas need to be discussed, e.g. trying out new selection formats such as “selection fairs”, or dedicating a specific proportion of the budget to funding risky projects proposed by younger scientists for longer periods of time.

- **There are cultural dimensions and development dimensions to “identifying the best”:** Especially in emerging and developing economies the overriding challenge is to provide incentives for people to remain in research in their own country. Selection processes have to consider the additional challenge of brain drain. In those regions, different criteria for ‘what defines the best’ may also apply, e.g. the place where candidates have received their education may play a larger role than in industrialized countries.
International Advisory Board

For more information, please visit the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation’s website.

The International Advisory Board of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation:

- Background

- Members
  [http://www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/iab-members.html](http://www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/iab-members.html)

The 9th Forum on the Internationalization of Sciences and Humanities:
“Identifying the Best – Theory, Methods, Practice”:


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