

Within the east German research institutes of the Leibniz Society, three-quarters of institute directors, and over a third of department heads, come from west Germany. The directors of the three new national research centres are west Germans, and 55 per cent of department heads are from west Germany with a further eight per cent coming from abroad.

Even more extreme ratios exist in the 20 Max Planck institutes, with only three of the 240 institute directors and department heads being east Germans. In contrast to universities and other research organizations, 40 per cent of these top jobs are occupied by foreigners. Three of the society's 19 independent research groups are east German; the rest are west German. However, the MPS did not take over existing institutes, but founded new ones from scratch (see below).

Most see the west German 'takeover' as having been inevitable. Benno Parthier, one of only two Academy of Sciences research directors who were never members of the Communist party, finds the survey results "unsurprising". "You have to accept that there will be a lost generation," which disap-

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peared for the good of east Germany's scientific future, he says. At his own Institute for Plant Biochemistry, from which he retired as director at the end of 1997, "even those hired on temporary grant money come increasingly from west Germany".

Parthier, currently president of the Leopoldina Academy, says the restructuring of the academy "involved few genuine victims of injustice". But Jens Reich, a bioinformaticist originally from the academy's prestigious Central Institute for Molecular Biology (CIMB) in east Berlin, believes the restructuring of the non-university research institutes could have been much fairer. In 1994 Reich was appointed head of bioinformatics at the Max Delbrück Centre for Molecular Medicine, which took over the CIMB.

"We were not treated unfairly, according to western rules," he says. "But the rules were against us. For example, the selection process was in English, whereas we could have done better in Russian, and publication record was a major criterion, whereas we had had few chances to publish in western journals."

There were also cultural differences. "We all spoke German, yet after 40 years of cultural divide it was hard to really talk to each other," says Horst Franz Kern, dean of science at the University of Marburg, who chaired the Wissenschaftsrat's committee on biology and medicine at the time of the *Wende*.

Joint Wissenschaftsrat evaluation committees of east and west German scientists became essentially run by west Germans — and according to west German rules — says another west German member of the committee, because "the east Germans were not used to our open way of discussion and at the beginning were mostly silent". More importantly, the founding committees of the new institutes that made the final recruitment decisions were heavily dominated by west Germans, says Kern.

Max Planck Society's careful planning reaps benefits

Munich

Shortly after the *Wende*, as Germans call the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the Max Planck Society (MPS) made itself unpopular by refusing to join other research organizations in their rush to rescue good scientists by taking over their research institutes.

The society wanted to stick to its principle — the so-called Harnack principle — that institutes should be created in scientific areas that balance its overall portfolio, and that each institute should be built around the research of prominent scientists recruited from around the world. At the time the society ran about 60 institutes in west Germany.

The society mitigated some of the criticisms it received by creating, at a total cost of DM200 million, 27 temporary research groups within universities, each headed by an east German scientist. The universities hosting the groups agreed to take over the support of each professor and at least part of his or her research group after the end of the MPS's five-year funding period.

Opening new territory

Drawing up clear contracts with the universities made all the difference to the success of this programme, whose aim was to help reintegrate research into universities. All the professors were taken



Markl: new institutes and fresh research.

into faculty, in contrast to the government-sponsored WIP programme, which had the same aim, but was less successful (see page 635).

In parallel, the society planned more thoughtfully the directions of 20 new institutes. "We chose themes that extended our research areas —

for example, for the first time we set up an engineering institute — and took the opportunity to create institutes in particularly exciting new areas of research," says Hubert Markl, MPS president.

"But in a few cases we continued some of the very good research of the DDR, for example the microstructure-physics work in Halle, in innovative directions."

The MPS ventured into areas of research — such as cognition and evolutionary anthropology — that would have been unthinkable for Germans in the decades after the Second World War, with sensitivities to the abuse of biology very high. Demographic research was also a particularly sensitive area into which the MPS ventured.

"It is perhaps helpful that the directors of our new Institute for Demographic

Research in Rostock are foreigners, and better able to lead discussions which we can't avoid anyway," says Markl.

The proportion of foreign research directors in MPS institutes in east Germany — 40 per cent of the total — is twice as high as in the west. This was a deliberate move, says Markl, "to signal that we do not represent the colonizing power of Wessies [west Germans], but an opening up of the scientific future in Germany as a whole".

The MPS also took pains to consider new approaches to research, putting together groups from different scientific areas in the same institute to promote interdisciplinary working. The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig has departments for developmental and



Pääbo: neighbours spark new interests.

comparative psychology, evolutionary genetics, linguistics and primatology, for example.

"It's hard to say how far physical proximity will help generate genuinely new interdisciplinary ideas," says Svante Pääbo, one of the institute's research directors. "But already my interest in chimp evolutionary genetics has been sparked." ■