MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Press Release

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Düsseldorf trainees win Max Planck Apprenticeship Award

Sascha Flaum and Jana Kuschke acknowledged for outstanding achievements

Sascha Flaum, an industrial mechanic, and Jana Kuschke, a materials tester at the Max Planck Institute for Sustainable Materials (MPI-SusMat), have been honoured with the Apprenticeship Award of the Max Planck Society (MPG). The award highlights their excellent performance in both practical and theoretical work, with each winner receiving €750.

"My deepest gratitude goes to our workshop team. Without the expertise of my trainers and the support of this incredible team, this award would not have been possible. Furthermore, the cross-departmental exchange at the institute was always enriching and makes this a truly special place to work", Flaum noted. He specialized in the construction and maintenance of fine mechanics devices, completing his final exam with 94 out of 100 points.

Kuschke scored 98 points in her final examination. During her training, she collaborated closely with scientists at the institute, testing various materials for hardness, tensile strength, and heat resistance. "During my time here, I had the opportunity to learn from the best experts in the field, and I also grew on a personal level. I'm excited to stay at the institute and pass on my knowledge", Kuschke said.

Each year, the MPG awards only around 20 apprenticeship awards across its 84 institutes. This year, two of them were awarded to trainees from the Düsseldorf-based MPI-SusMat. "This recognition reinforces our approach to nurturing young talents. Our goal is to develop trainees in a long-termed perspective by gradually giving them more responsibility. With such outstanding young professionals, we are well-prepared for the generational transition at the institute," said Dr. Kai de Weldige, administrative executive at MPI-SusMat. Both prize-winners will remain at the institute: Flaum continues working in the workshop while pursuing a technician qualification, and Kuschke works as a technician on the scanning electron microscope, becoming a trainer herself. Both will play a key role in the upcoming generational transition.

In addition to training for industrial mechanic and materials tester, MPI-SusMat offers four other apprenticeship programmes: chemical laboratory work, IT specialist for system integration, office management assistant, and mathematical-technical software developer. Career opportunities after training are diverse: some apprentices stay at the institute, others move into industry, or choose to pursue further studies at university.

Sascha Flaum and Jana Kuschke are among the best trainees of the Max Planck Society and will continue working at the Max Planck Institute for Sustainable Materials as technicians. © Max-Planck-Institut für Nachhaltige Materialien GmbH

Materials science is facing major challenges: The steel industry alone contributes eight percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. Each year, e-waste, equivalent to 350 mega cruise ships, is discarded or incinerated rather than recycled, despite containing valuable metals. At the Max Planck Institute for Sustainable Materials (MPI SusMat), we are exploring climate-neutral, resource-conserving approaches to produce, utilize, and recycle essential materials for modern societies. We seek to produce metals using hydrogen instead of fossil fuels, extend material lifespans, enhance recyclability, and minimize waste. When developing materials that fulfil these requirements, we are increasingly relying on artificial intelligence to make the process significantly more efficient. The institute conducted its research under the name Max-Planck-Institut für Eisenforschung GmbH until 2024.

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