HZB Helmholtz Zentrum Berlin

lichtblick

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Our new Administrative Director

PORTRAIT OF SASKIA VORMFELDE

Picture: Tino Merkau

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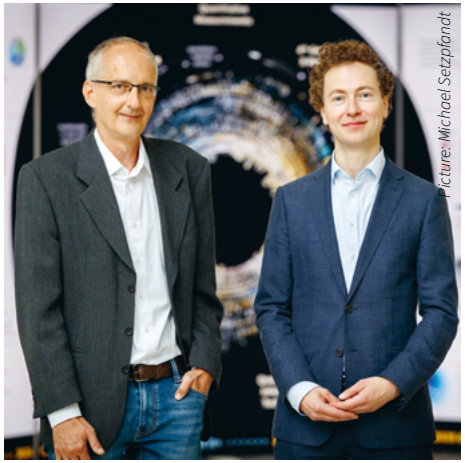
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Two questions for Bernd Rech


Picture: David Ausserhofer

After the intensive evaluation period at HZB in the first half of the year, the summer break was certainly particularly important. What impressions and ideas did you take away from it?

Bernd Rech (Scientific Director): My holidays were brief and very inspiring. There is now a lot to do: exciting opportunities and challenges await us all. HZB is a very important research centre that will also provide decisive impetus for the German government's new High-Tech Agenda. Despite many concerns, including the geopolitical situation, I am very optimistic about the coming years. We must build on our strengths and find solutions together.

With Saskia Vormfelde taking office, a new management team will start at HZB in the autumn. Have you had time to get to know each other better? And what will be the first major challenge you will face together?

I have been in regular contact with Saskia Vormfelde for the past six months. It was great that she was on site for the entire week of our Helmholtz evaluation to get to know the science, and that she had already participated as a guest in our workshop on corporate culture and in the last supervisory board meeting. With her experience, enthusiasm and the commitment she has already shown, I am very much looking forward to jointly leading HZB. The joint challenge will be to achieve HZB's strategic goals with the tailwind of the evaluation and to jointly secure the necessary finances. To do this, we need the entire HZB, our partners and our funding bodies.

The questions were asked by Silvia Zerbe.

Picture: Tina Merkau

The new Administrative Director Saskia Vormfelde seeks common ground: “We have a shared mission.”

The Enabler

Saskia Vormfelde takes on her new role as Administrative Director in September – and she is bringing more to the table than just a knack for accounting.

There were nights when Saskia Vormfelde found herself pulling into Freiburg's train station at 1 or 2 in the morning, still buzzing from a long day's work in Hamburg. And in those moments, she recalls, she'd shake her head and wonder, "am I out of my mind for doing all this?" For years, she would commute clear across Germany once a week, but from here on out, life is going to be simpler: from her new home on the outskirts of Berlin, it's just a 25 minute bike ride to HZB's campus in Adlershof, and although Wannsee is a little further away, she's not fazed by that.

The late-night train anecdote says a lot about her: when Saskia Vormfelde commits to something, nothing can hold her back, even hundreds of kilometres of inter-city rail. Until 2019, she ran a software company in Hamburg – which she built up as a subsidiary of two Berufsgenossenschaften. "Berufsgenossenschaften are the public providers for statutory accident insurance," she explains. "All work-related accidents that we cannot prevent are handled there." Doing this armed her with two very useful traits for her future career: the excitement in helping to choose a strategic direction. And, she adds with a smile, "the fun in bridging the differences in mentality between IT and public service."

The reason she's now turning a new page in Berlin, at 51, goes back to a long-standing agreement with her husband: once the four kids were grown and out of the house, they'd start a new chapter. And the "new" part in this case is mainly the city and the Helmholtz universe – because Saskia Vormfelde is no stranger to research institutions. From 2020, she was Director of Administration at the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems in Freiburg. With 1,400 employees and a 200-person admin team under her leadership, the institute is similar in size to HZB, except that the budget in Berlin is much bigger.

She knew early on that she would study business administration. Enrolling at the university in her hometown even turned out to be a lucky move: it's where she met her future husband, a physician and clinical pharmacologist "with a passion for research," she tells us. "He completely swept me up in his enthusiasm for science." They met through ballroom dancing: both were competitive Latin dancers looking for a dance partner. Their coach introduced them – and the rest is history, says Saskia Vormfelde. They even went on to earn instructor licenses and spent a decade coaching amateur dance groups – until life with four kids took over.

In the early years after graduation, she stayed in academic professions. She worked as a research associate at the Institute for Accounting and Auditing before becoming a controller at the Göttingen State and University Library in Lower Saxony. She also taught accounting, tax law, and financial reporting at an adult education centre (Volkshochschule), at the Academy of Administration and Economics in Göttingen and at the University Göttingen.

A new path opened up for her in 2012 – though not in the way she originally intended. She had applied to the VBG – Statutory Accident Insurance in Hamburg, went through the assessment centre, and... didn't get the position. Looking back, she sees it was a blessing in disguise. The organisation still wanted to take her on – but with something else in mind: "They offered me a place

in their leadership trainee programme," she recounts. That path eventually led her to the IT company she would later run as Managing Director and, in just a few years, would expand from the original 40 employees to a company twice the size.

But what ties all these things together: her years of working in the Berufsgenossenschaft, an IT company, and then ultimately research institutes? "I made the conscious decision already while studying to focus on the management of public institutions," Vormfelde explains. "It's an important area where I see the opportunity to really make a difference." The private sector never really appealed to her – she's more drawn to roles that contribute to the public good. And that's the common thread running through all the positions she's held.

This ideology is what still drives her in her new role. "What matters to me is that we never fall into an 'us versus them' mindset that separates scientists on one side and admin on the other. We're all working towards the same goal," she says. "I'm not a scientist, so I can't contribute directly to the energy transition. But what I can do, with my

Picture: Tina Merkau

"What matters to me is that we never fall into an 'us versus them' mindset that separates scientists on one side and admin on the other. We're all working towards the same goal."

Saskia Vormfelde

team, is take things off the researchers' plates, things we're better equipped to handle – to lighten their load so they can focus on the science." Her vision is simple yet powerful: "If we all see ourselves as one big team, everyone can do their job better. And whenever that happens, it's incredibly rewarding."

At the Fraunhofer Institute in Freiburg, she launched a number of initiatives to strengthen that team spirit: workshops to improve processes, lab tours, even a shadowing day where admin staff spent time in the science departments. "If a team of legal and procurement experts have spent months negotiating procurement contracts to buy new lab equipment – going a hundred times over every detail, fine-tuning the documents – it's so nice when they finally get to see the equipment in use and see what it's for," she says. Going from Managing Director at her former company to Administrative Director in Berlin is more than just a change in title for her. "It gives me more room to shape things – and I really enjoy that," Vormfelde says.

She and her husband have already found a place to live. The search was meticulously planned. "My husband approached it with the precision of a scientist," she laughs. He drew circles around HZB on a map of Berlin to calculate commuting times by different modes of transport: which neighbourhoods and areas are easily accessible from there and by which means of transport? They don't want to go back to hours of commuting every night. They visited flats within the target radius and sussed out onsite whether

they could see themselves living there. Pretty quickly, they found the right spot. As for the future, they're keeping things open – so they can stay driven by curiosity. After a 20-year break, Saskia Vormfelde has no plans to take up dancing again just yet. "We're more likely to get annual museum passes and go exploring," she says.

After all, starting this new chapter at HZB is just one part of the story. Saskia Vormfelde has never lived in Berlin before – "and it's high time I did!"

■ BY KILIAN KIRCHGESSNER

Picture: Tina Merkau

WE SAY THANK YOU, THOMAS FREDERKING!

After many years of dedicated service, we had a happy celebration on 2 June 2025 to bid farewell to our Administrative Director, Thomas Frederking, as he entered his well-deserved retirement.

Picture: Tina Merkau

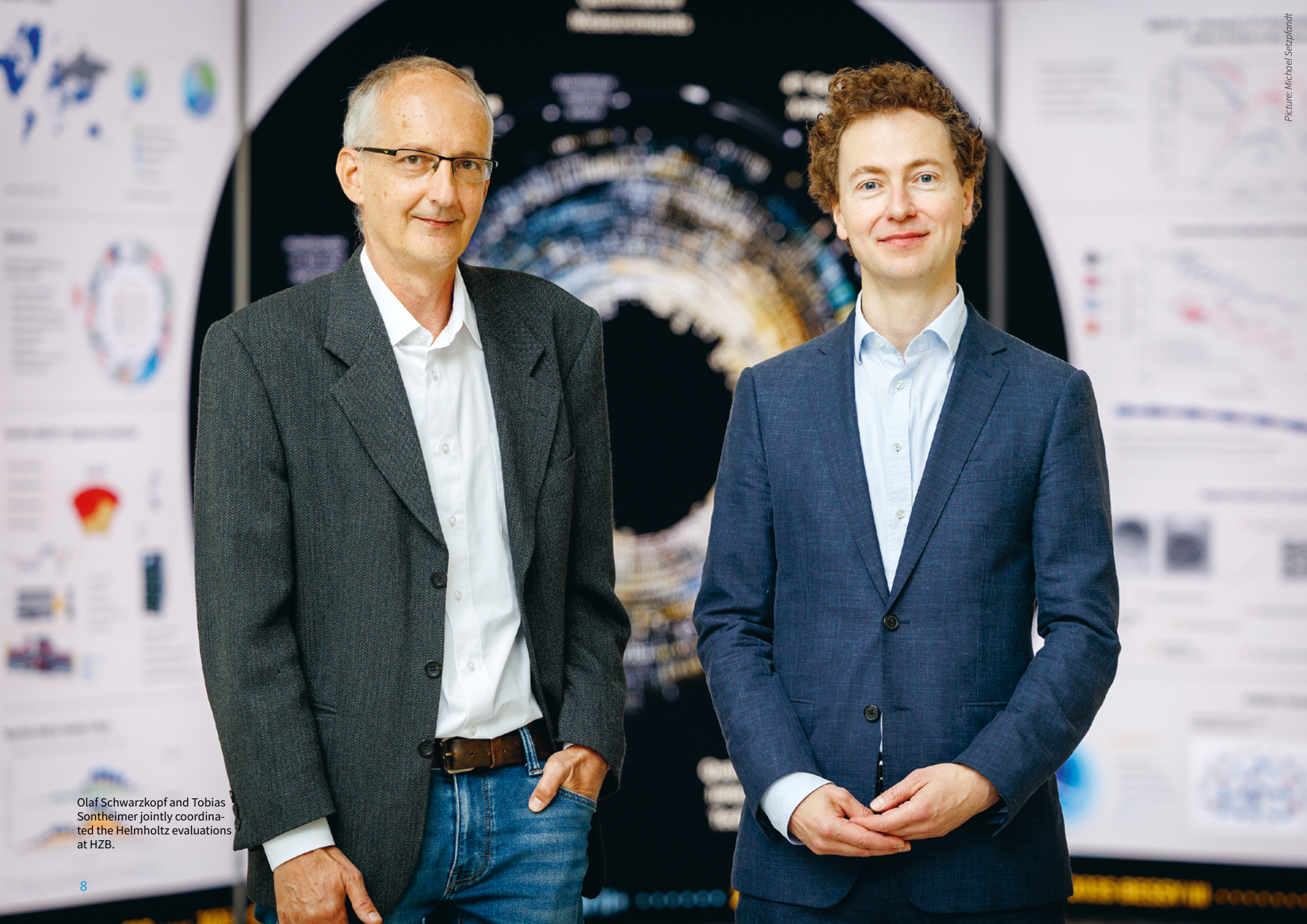
Picture: Tina Merkau

Picture: T. Merkau

For thirteen years, Thomas Frederking steered HZB through challenges and opportunities alike. He took on the role of Administrative Director in January 2012, having already worked for many years at BESSY GmbH, one of HZB's predecessor institutions. From January 2023 to December 2024, he also served as an Administrative Vice President of the Helmholtz Association.

With strategic foresight, Thomas Frederking not only kept HZB's finances on solid ground, but also oversaw the Administration, Facility Management, Information Technology departments and the dismantling of the research reactor. His constructive, solution-oriented leadership was instrumental in HZB's success.

At his farewell, when asked what he would miss most about HZB, Thomas Frederking didn't hesitate: "It's the people who work here, who are dedicated and make this place what it is." *(sz)*



Picture: Michael Setzpfandt

Olaf Schwarzkopf and Tobias Sontheimer jointly coordinated the Helmholtz evaluations at HZB.

“Our performance as a team was truly impressive”

It took almost a year to prepare for the major evaluation in May 2025. Olaf Schwarzkopf (Matter and Information) and Tobias Sontheimer (Energy) coordinated the entire process on behalf of HZB’s board of Directors. We spoke with them about how it went – and what they took away from it all.

How important were the reviews for HZB?

Schwarzkopf: The reviews in May gave us the chance to present our research and set the stage for the coming years. They form the basis for our funding from 2028 through to 2034.

What exactly did the reviewers assess?

Sontheimer: They assessed our work in the research areas of energy, information, and matter for both scientific excellence and strategic direction, as in, are we pursuing the right topics? Where do we stand in international comparison? Are we making the most of what we've got?

Schwarzkopf: But it wasn’t just about “grading”. It was also a critical look at how HZB is positioned overall. As one example: the way we’re lining up BESSY II to be an operando synchrotron for energy research really resonated with the panel of reviewers. We had their full support. That is perhaps even more valuable than a perfect grade. So, we can also see the evaluation as a kind of business consultation, which is a big plus.

Foto: Michael Setzpfandt

> “The way we’re lining up BESSY II to be an operando synchrotron for energy research really resonated with the panel of reviewers.”
>
> **Olaf Schwarzkopf**

What kind of feedback did the reviewers give for the individual research areas?

Sontheimer: For us in Energy, they confirmed our scientific excellence. We have an inspiring work environment to thank for that. An important takeaway is that, in our core areas, our research is among the world’s best.

Schwarzkopf: If I were to sum up the results for Matter and Information, I would say: it was a strong endorsement of what we have accomplished so far, and a motivator for what comes next. In particular, we got some valuable guidance on how we can continue developing the centre – for example, by identifying areas we should build with priority to better align with HZB’s strategy.

Can you also say something about interdisciplinarity in research?

Schwarzkopf: Yes, we can say that the

centre's alignment is very coherent. Our light source gives us a unique selling point, and we have chosen the right topics to focus on there. Our collaborations are also a major asset.

And what were the most rewarding things for you personally?

Sontheimer: One of the reviewers said at the end that she had come as a guest but now quite liked the idea of staying and becoming a part of the HZB team – a place where happy people love what they do and want to make a difference in the world. That kind of feedback says it all: they saw the culture we have built at HZB, where work is enjoyable, not just for the master's students, doctoral researchers, postdocs, and senior scientists, but also for the colleagues in admin, strategy, and board of Directors.

Schwarzkopf: That's a very important point. Beyond the science, our performance as a team was truly impressive. The reviewers remarked at how well the HZB team worked together in all areas, with enthusiasm and conviction. Everyone contributed: the speakers, the poster presenters, the tour guides, and all those behind the scenes who made sure transfers ran smoothly, catering was spot on, and that somebody was there to answer the reviewers' questions right away. That's the spirit at HZB; and it couldn't be forced or faked. Reviewers pick up on things like that immediately. They're professionals. They know when someone is truly invested in what they're doing. And that's where we really shone as a centre.

Did you try anything new in your presentation?

Schwarzkopf: Yes – we added a touch of gamification. The colleagues at the demo stations came up with the idea to install hands-on control tools that the reviewers could try out themselves. It was a real hit with the reviewers, especially as a refreshing change in a full day.

What helped you most during the preparation phase?

Schwarzkopf: We had a lot of support from our scientific advisory board during the rehearsal sessions. Some joined us on-site, while others followed along online – but they all gave us valuable, practical feedback. A lot of it drew directly from their own experience with evaluations like this.

Picture: Michael Setzpfandt

"The reviewers saw the culture we have built at HZB, where work is enjoyable."

Tobias Sontheimer

Sontheimer: The effort in preparing for the evaluation was huge, on every side. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that it was also an opportunity for everyone to present exactly what it is they are working on. You start to see the broader impact of what you are doing, and how that feeds into the centre's overall strategy. So the evaluation process doesn't just matter for external evaluation – it really drives internal development, too.

Were there other key topics, besides scientific excellence?

Sontheimer: Talent development and diversity were both major points of interest for the reviewers. And they gave us a very strong signal that the concepts and programmes we've put in place are genuinely excellent.

Schwarzkopf: Some of the highlights were the sessions on collaboration and transfer. Many of our partners came in person to show their support, with statements that repeatedly showed their trust and confidence in

HZB. None of that was planned or scripted; it was genuine. The reviewers also recognised what a strength it is for HZB to be located in Adlershof: with our laboratory infrastructures and our proximity to partners like the Max Planck Society, the National Metrology Institute (PTB), the Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing (BAM), the Leibniz Institutes, and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

If we look ahead now, how will next year's strategic evaluation be different?

Schwarzkopf: This evaluation focused on HZB and its scientific contributions to the Helmholtz programmes. The strategic evaluation will shift the spotlight onto the programmes and topics as a whole. The centre itself will be more in the background.

Sontheimer: Also, the strategic evaluation will focus more into the future, while the current scientific evaluation in May focussed on the results of the past five to seven years.

What are your personal takeaways from this experience?

Schwarzkopf: That we have fantastic people at HZB – across the board – and it's thanks to them that I can say with real confidence that we know how to handle an evaluation. That gives me a good feeling going into the next one.

Sontheimer: We learned a lot about how to bring teams together across different units and departments. This only worked because everyone was fully on board and gave it their all. There were some long days, no doubt about it, but the commitment from our people was the real driving force.

Schwarzkopf: The prep was tough. But the review itself? That was fun. That was showtime.

The interview was conduced by Ina Helms and Antonia Rötger.

What is the Helmholtz evaluation about?


Picture: Silvia Zerbe

The panel of reviewers listened to the advantages the BESSY III facility will offer for research.

Through Programme-Oriented Funding (PoF), Helmholtz centres work together to develop joint research programmes. This collaborative approach ensures that complex scientific questions are tackled by top researchers from a range of disciplines.
All programmes are reviewed by independent international experts, who assess both the scientific quality and the potential for innovation. Funding is only approved if their assessment is positive.
The Programme-Oriented Funding is based on a two-stage evaluation process: In the first stage, each centre and its ongoing research undergoes a **scientific evaluation**. In the second stage, future programmes are assessed in a **strategic evaluation** on the broader scale of the research fields.The resulting reports form the basis for the Helmholtz Senate's recommendation on the extent to which the federal government and the federal states should fund the research programmes and how the funding should be apportioned.

A dynamic seating area for brain-storming

Peter Sandhaus builds a bridge between science, art, and communication in front of BESSY II

Picture: Tino Merkel

Picture: Michael Setzpfandt

The artist Peter Sandhaus setting up the neuron accelerator.

Science doesn't only happen behind closed lab doors; flashes of inspiration can strike anywhere. With his "Neuron Accelerator", Peter Sandhaus has created a new space for fast-moving thoughts to unfold. While electrons are accelerated close to the speed of light inside the circular tunnel of BESSY II, the dynamic energy of the electron storage ring is reflected in Sandhaus's sculpture installed in front of the facility. The circular, marble-white "Neuron Accelerator" creates a space for encounters and invites people to get brainstorming together. The artist hopes that, "this will really become a meeting place that gets used intensively."

The name is a deliberate play on words. "The likelihood of confusing it with the word 'neutron' is intentional," Sandhaus explains with a wink. "I want people to stumble over the term, and in that way, get their neurons firing." Peter Sandhaus came first in the "Art Meets Science" competition. Wining factors of his project were the sculpture's high potential for interaction and the shared identity between the "Neuron Accelerator" and the facility behind it.

The conceptual artist likes working with places whose meanings he can explore and emphasize through his works. At the University Hospital in Regensburg, Sandhaus's "Antibody" (2019) made of red, wavy aluminium grows out from the facade of the immunology lab. In Frankfurt's Gateway Gardens, his mirror-polished "Highflyer" (2023), shaped like a paper aeroplane, echoes the nearby airport while acting as a contrast to the round, organic architecture of the FLOW Europa-Center.

And in the same vein, at BESSY II, Sandhaus captures the spirit of the site in an "embodiment". "This takes an abstract idea, a symbol, or a dimension of meaning that's relevant here and gives it a tangible, physical form." As a former architect, he creates organically spherical spaces of experience, carefully selecting the right materials for each piece. In this instance, he chose white-pigmented high-performance concrete to enhance the rough concrete facade of BESSY II with an elegant, participatory artwork.

Creating the mould turned out to be more challenging than anticipated. If Sandhaus had used 3D-printed sand moulds, as envisaged, the surface of the "Neuron Accelerator" would have come out too grainy – and not even sandblasting would have achieved the desired smoothness. Ironically, he opted for a more complex process, but had the support of Swiss company dade design: "Each individual segment was assembled from at least three different moulds. First, a positive mould was machined out of rigid foam. This was cast over with fiberglass-reinforced plastic in three separate pieces, which were inverted, put into wood-reinforced shells and then filled with concrete." These moulds were resanded and spackled many times throughout the process, Sandhaus recounts. The sculpture consists of eight separate parts, and the concrete is self-compacting. During installation, the eight segments were pieced together like a puzzle. They rest on eight screw piles, allowing the asphalt below to remain intact – otherwise, large areas would have had to be removed to make way for concrete foundations. The precast elements were slid together with dovetail joints and sealed. The requisite expansion joints were filled with silicone. Now, the artwork is complete, reaching up to 1.3 meters tall. A hydrophobic coating and algae-resistant treatment keep the surface pleasant to sit on even after rain. Over time, the "Neuron Accelerator" will develop a natural patina. But the ideas that emerge there will shine brightly – and help to bring about further progress.

■ BY SUSANNE GIETL

Picture: Michael Setzpfandt

GOOD SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE

Consulting in the interests of science

The whole purpose of rules of good scientific practice is to make sure that research results are obtained and presented in a way that's honest and above-board. But in the reality of research, there is bound to come a time where you have to ask what is okay and what is not. At HZB, we have four ombudspersons who offer confidential advice. Sebastian Fiechter has been doing this job for almost 15 years.

The phrase "good scientific practice" brings to mind spectacular cases of scientific fraud, where researchers have manipulated or even fabricated data, like the recent case of American researcher Ranga Dias, who published multiple studies on superconductivity at room temperature using fake data. In your profession, what is your experience?

Sebastian Fiechter: Spectacular data manipulation with the intention to deceive is something we only very rarely come across, maybe once a decade. Much more common are things like labelling points on graphs as outliers, or altering the contrast of an image. That may or may not be justified; it's a grey area. Most of the issues we deal with arise from management problems or poor supervision.

Can you elaborate on that?

A classic case would be a dispute over the names included in the list of authors, if the team lead didn't clarify it in advance. Just imagine, colleagues start raising complaints, and only then does the team lead realise that the list of 25 authors includes certain high-profile names who didn't actually contribute to the work. Someone had emailed these well-known people and, if they didn't object, added them to the list to give the publication

> “Read also older publications, monographs, and books. It lets you come up with genuinely new ideas.”
>
> **Sebastian Fiechter**

more weight. Then it's too late to correct it. Or someone writes papers but has to submit them to the department head for approval first. If the head doesn't take the time to review the manuscripts promptly, that prevents their publication.
Or another example: A doctoral researcher doesn't have decent supervision and portrays the experimental results as better than they are. Doctoral researchers in particular are under a lot of pressure to get finished. Ideally, supervisors will advise the young students very carefully and point out things like questionable data analyses, or if there's plagiarism or missing citations.

Do the young scientists actually ever get to hear of all this?

In principle, students already learn to observe the rules of good scientific practice while they are still studying, and certainly by the time they do their bachelor's or master's degree with us. That’s because everyone who signs a contract with HZB also agrees to abide by those rules. It is a regular topic at the annual meetings organised by the doctoral students. Something that we think is missing is a quick, concise set of slides that present these rules, followed by a quiz.

Is there anything else have you noticed recently?

We have had significantly fewer enquiries since the COVID-19 pandemic. We don't know why that is. It could be that many people don't dare to contact us. For example, because they feel dependent on us and don't want to jeopardise their contract. As in, close your eyes and hope for the best. This might especially be an issue for doctoral researchers from abroad.

What is your advice to researchers?

Don't neglect reading! And don't just read the latest scientific news in your field, but also older publications, monographs, and books, including ones on other related topics. I find that a lot of progress is made by researchers who read thoroughly and who gain amazing insights from something that was published decades ago. It lets you come up with genuinely new ideas. Take the time to do this for yourself.

The interview was conduced by Antonia Rötger.

Rules of good scientific practice

The German Research Foundation (DFG) has laid down guidelines for good scientific practice. Building on these rules, both the Helmholtz Association and HZB have formulated their own rules for good scientific practice. All researchers are obliged to apply these rules as the basis for their work. Anyone who believes that these rules might have been violated in any way, whether intentionally or unintentionally, should approach one of our four ombudspersons: Sebastian Fiechter, Annette Pietzsch, Michael Tovar und Manfred Weiss.

Contacts and rules at HZB:
hz-b.de/values

Guidelines of DFG:
https://t1p.de/DFG

Picture: Jessica Sauer

Doing experiments at the Long Night of Science: How can thin layers of solar cells be produced?

Why we strengthen our outreach activities

The social climate has been undergoing its own kind of change these past years. Science is being more heavily called upon to justify itself and open up to dialogue. How can research institutions respond?

Science communication circles are naturally hot on these issues. It is increasingly clear that simply publishing news on websites and sending out press releases is not enough anymore. The people who read our news are effectively already part of our "community" and are naturally interested in science. What about everyone else? How do we reach them?
Nothing builds a lasting impression like a real conversation and a shared experience. The Long Night of Science is our biggest opportunity for making this kind of connection. This year, nearly 4,000 visitors came to HZB in Adlershof. They took part in experiments, asked questions, and met the people behind the research. These moments build trust and understanding in how scientific knowledge actually comes about.
In the Communications department, we've made it our mission to get closer to where people live their everyday lives. And so HZB joined the district festival in Wannsee this year and will run a booth at the Adlershof Autumn Festival. Events like these create moments of connection – people come away with the feeling not only that science is accessible, but that it's actively engaged in solving real-world challenges such as climate change. Employees from various teams at HZB also take part every year in the Highlights of Physics festival, each time in a different German city, showing the public why large science facilities like BESSY II matter. If we want people to hear us, we have to meet them where they are. We can't sit back and expect them to come to us. Face-to-face communication is also very important in keeping everyone up to speed on the decommissioning of the BER II research reactor. In April,

Picture: Silvia Zenz

In April, HZB invited to an information day about the planned dismantling of the BER II research reactor – the interest was great.

Picture: Jessica Sauer

Why do we need even better batteries? And how can research help? The Long Night of Science provides an opportunity to explore questions like these.

HZB experts held an info day at the old town hall in Wannsee, answering questions from local residents. Around 100 people turned up – proof of the strong interest. And as they were leaving, several attendees mentioned how much they appreciated the open dialogue. This is a good reminder that every single conversation counts, no matter how big or small the crowd.

HZB returned this year to the Lesbian and Gay City Festival in Schöneberg – our third time participating. In a climate where queerphobia is on the rise and diversity itself is being called into question, it counts that we're there. The event draws a huge and varied crowd – up to half a million people. And it gives us the chance to connect with folks who might have no connection to science at all, and who likely wouldn't show up to something like the Long Night of Science. At our Student Lab, the hands-on experiments might spark curiosity about science, but the interest shown by the kids – that's what is truly inspiring.

My personal takeaway: Festivals help us reach people whom science communication has long overlooked – those often labelled as "not our target audience". I've been part of many events, and have had very touching encounters. Here is where we get close to people's daily realities – where we listen to what matters to them. And that, to me, is more valuable than sharing just another technical detail about our research. Right now, we need the human-level connection more than ever before.

■ BY SILVIA ZERBE

Picture: Stefanie Kodalle

The HZB booth during the City Festival in Schöneberg.

Diversity and dialogue

For the third time, HZB took part in the City Festival in Berlin-Schöneberg. Around 30 colleagues turned the stand into a lively gathering place. In particular, the experiments of our school lab attracted a lot of visitors. Politicians also showed great interest. The colourful street festival and scientific curiosity gave rise to an exchange that will continue long after the festival has ended.

INTER-NATIONALITY OF OUR EMPLOYEES

Being internationally appealing and attracting talents from all over the world to our centre is very important for our research. But how international are we already?

28 %

international employees work at HZB.

50 %

Nearly 50 percent our scientific employees have an international background.

REGIONS WHERE OUR EMPLOYEES COME FROM

Asia	187 employees
EU	115 employees
(without Germany)	
Rest of Europe	38 employees
South America	22 employees
Africa	21 employees
North America	16 employees

70

nationalities are represented at our centre.

THE MOST REPRESENTED NATIONS AT HZB

Germany	1043 employees
India	64 employees
China	56 employees
Spain	25 employees
Italy	23 employees
USA	22 employees

4 %

The proportion of international employees rose by **four per cent** between 2021 and 2025.

Status: 31.12.2024

Picture: Tina Merkau

Oliver Franke originally trained as a carpenter and spent many years working in trade show construction and logistics. He's now a familiar face for many colleagues in Wannsee, often being the first person they see when picking up a package or signing for deliveries. He's been working in the Logistics and Customs department at HZB for nearly three years. His job includes managing incoming and outgoing shipments, as well as cutting materials in the warehouse. What many might not know is that Oliver Franke was once a successful boat racer and comes from a family with a long tradition of boatbuilding.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Oliver Franke

Logistics & Customs department

Tell us what a typical day might look like for you.

Oliver Franke: I take the bike to work every morning, in any weather – snow, wind, ice – doesn't matter. For me, it's a great way to start the day. Once I'm here, I sit down with a cup of coffee, check my emails, and look over the material orders from colleagues. Then I usually get started with cutting jobs in the warehouse. We've got all kinds of stock in there – plastic, stainless steel, aluminium, you name it – and I cut it to size using a mix of machines: the panel saw, band saw, and a guillotine shear for thinner sheet metal.

I use the quiet early hours to focus on that work before the doors open at around 8 a.m. After then, things get busier at the front desk: suppliers show up, packages arrive, and incoming goods need to be recorded. Sometimes I'll need to hop on the forklift to help unload a delivery.

What's the best part of your job?

I like that I'm not stuck at a desk all day, but I'm not constantly on my feet, either. It's a good balance for me. What I really enjoy is placing orders and handling material requests with suppliers. That kind of variety keeps things interesting and breaks up the routine

Were there any surprises for you at HZB?

Things move a bit more slowly here than I was used to. I come from workplaces where there was more time pressure, so it feels natural to try and get things done as quickly as possible. Here, you sometimes just have to wait patiently.

What was really a positive surprise for me was the working atmosphere. I've got great colleagues, the onboarding was excellent, and I felt at home from day one. I try to pass on that same openness when someone new joins the team.

If you could spend an evening with anyone, who would it be and what would you talk about?

I think I'd spend an evening with Dieter Hallervorden. He's a classic Berlin character – sharp and funny even at 90, still making jokes and social commentary. I like how he has so many different sides, that he can be hilarious but also serious – like in Head Full of Honey, where he played a man with dementia. I reckon you could talk to him about a lot of things – about life, and why it's important to speak your mind.

The interview was conducted by Mariam Aliabadi.

Many employees ensure everything keeps running smoothly at HZB. In our series, we present the people of HZB, and would like in this way to say a big Thank You for their often invisible work!

PICTURE RIDDLE

Curious glances at the Long Night of Science: What could that picture be?
Can you find the 7 mistakes? Here's what you can win:
1 x Romme card game*, 1 x Skat card game* (*special edition with scientists), 1 x jute bag “Rainbow ghost”
Closing date: 30.10.2025

Picture: Jessica Sauer

Please mark all the mistakes clearly in the image and send us an email to **lichtblick@helmholtz-berlin.de**. Alternatively, you can send your solution by internal mail or post to: **Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin, keyword: lichtblick competition, Communications department, Hahn-Meitner-Platz 1, 14109 Berlin**. We will notify the winners by email. With your entry you agree that your name will be published in the next issue. The legal recourse is excluded.

The troll puzzle from our last issue was very tricky. The solution is: “You let the cat go free.” **Alina Eisert**, **Moritz Lechner** and **Christin Scholz** came up with the correct answer. Congratulations!

Picture: TU-Kenya

Workshop strengthens cooperation with Kenya

In June, an HZB team travelled to Nairobi to meet with researchers from Kenyan universities. Together, they participated in the workshop “Cooperation with Africa – Energy Research at Large Research Infrastructures – Sustainability through Cooperation”, which was co-organised by HZB. The workshop was made possible by the EU project “Neutrons and Photons Elevating Worldwide Science”, NEPHEWS. The researchers not only shared their findings, but also had many chances to make new contacts. And there was an opportunity to learn about funding and exchange programmes, as well as a tutorial on writing research proposals. A special moment during the visit was when HZB and the Technical University of Kenya (TUK) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote future cooperation. The photo was taken after the visit to the laboratories at the Technical University of Kenya. *(fk)*

NEW DEPARTMENT FOR AI AND BIOMOLECULAR STRUCTURES

Andrea Thorn has been setting up the AI and Biomolecular Structures department at HZB since 1 July. The biophysicist brings with her many years of expertise in AI-based tools for structural biology and is looking forward to working closely with the team for macromolecular crystallography at the MX beamlines of BESSY II.

PERSONALIA

NEW HELMHOLTZ YOUNG INVESTIGATOR GROUP ON PEROVSKITE SOLAR CELLS

Silvia Mariotti wants to advance the development of multiple solar cells made from different perovskite layers. Their goal is to produce full perovskite triple solar cells with efficiencies significantly above 30 percent and stability lasting more than five years.

NEW BMBF JUNIOR RESEARCH GROUP ON TIN-BASED PEROVSKITE SOLAR CELLS

Artem Musiienko wants to significantly accelerate the development of perovskite solar cells. He is using robotics and AI to analyse the many variations in the material composition of tin-based perovskites.

GEORG FORSTER RESEARCH FELLOW AT HZB

Moses Alfred Oladele is a chemist from Redeemer's University in Nigeria and will spend two years conducting research at HZB and the University of Potsdam thanks to a Georg Forster Research Fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

DEPARTMENT OF MATERIAL CHEMISTRY FOR CATALYSIS ESTABLISHED

The Material Chemistry for Catalysis (CE-AMCC) department is headed by **Prashanth Menezes**, who has been playing a key role in developing the Catlab project since 2021. He has been able to expand his group thanks to third-party funding projects.

CONGRATULATIONS

Picture: Oliver Wolfenscheid

HELMHOLTZ DOCTORAL PRIZE FOR HANNA TRZESNIOWSKI

Hanna Trzesniowski researched nickel-based electrocatalysts for water splitting during her doctoral studies. Her work contributes to a deeper understanding of alkaline water electrolysis and paves the way for the development of more efficient and stable catalysts. For this, she received the Helmholtz Doctoral Prize, which honours the best and most original doctoral theses of the Helmholtz Association.


Picture: Stefan Klenke

BERLIN SCIENCE AWARD GOES TO PHILIPP ADELHELM

The Governing Mayor of Berlin Kai Wegner presented the Berlin Science Award to **Philipp Adelhelm** at a ceremony in the Rotes Rathaus. Adelhelm is a professor at the Institute of Chemistry at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and heads a joint research group at HZB. He conducts research into the development of sustainable batteries. He is one of the leading experts in the field of sodium-ion batteries.


Picture: Silvia Zeltner

ANA PALACIOS SAURA Best oral presentation at ICMAT2025 in Singapore


Picture: Nils Lucas

LEA ZIMMERMANN Poster prize at the TandemPV Workshop Hasselt


Picture: Kevin Fuchs

MICHELLE BROWNE Fellowship from the Daimler and Benz Foundation

RECIPE FROM INDIA

Handvo

Lentil cake

Ingredients for 4 people

For the batter:
1 cup rice
½ cup chana dal (split Bengal gram)
¼ cup toor dal (pigeon peas)
¼ cup urad dal (black gram)
½ cup curd (yogurt)
water (as needed to grind and ferment)
salt to taste

Next day:
½ cup grated bottle gourd (lauki/doodhi)
1 green chili, finely chopped
1,25 cm ginger, grated
¼ tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp red chili powder
1 tsp sugar (optional)
½ tsp baking soda or 1 tsp Eno fruit salt
2 tbsp oil

For the tempering:
2 tbsp oil
1 tsp mustard seeds
1 tsp sesame seeds (til)
a pinch of asafoetida (hing)
few curry leaves (optional)

1. Prepare the batter:
First soak rice and dals in water for one hour. Grind to a slightly coarse paste using little water. Mix with yogurt and keep covered for 8–12 hours to ferment. After fermentation, batter will rise and become slightly tangy.

2. Add veggies & spices:
Mix in grated bottle gourd, green chili, ginger, turmeric, red chili powder, sugar, and salt.

3. Prepare the tempering:
Heat 2 tbsp oil, add mustard seeds. When they crackle, add sesame seeds, hing (asophotida), and curry leaves. Pour this into the batter and mix lightly.

4. Cook Handvo on a frying pan:
Heat a non-stick frying pan or tava on medium flame. Add 1 tsp oil and spread.
Pour 1½ to 2 cups of batter (about 2,5 cm thickness). Cover with a lid and cook on low heat for 10–12 minutes until bottom turns golden brown and crisp. Flip carefully using a flat spatula. Add a few drops of oil. Cook the other side uncovered for 6–8 minutes till golden and cooked through.

Repeat for the remaining batter. Handvo is ready! Serve it with green chutney, mango pickle, and masala tea for Gujarati vibes.

જમવાનું માણો *Jamvanu mano! Enjoy your meal!*

Picture: Adobe Stock

Picture: Michael Setzpfandt

Sonal Ramesh Patel

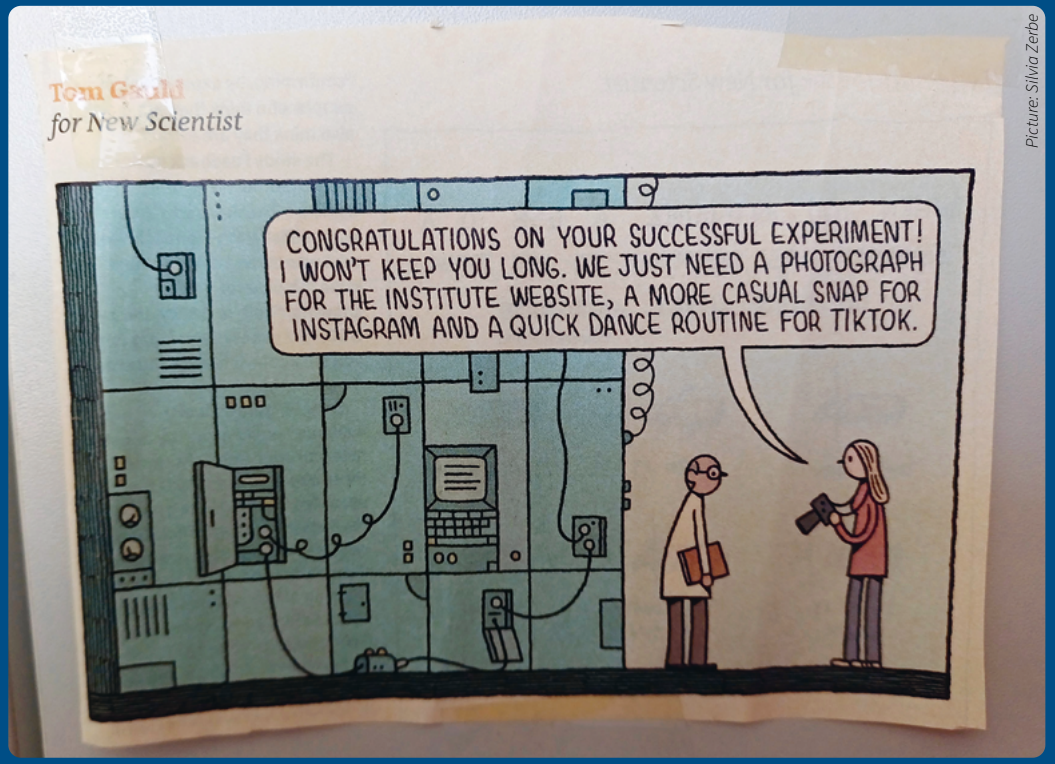
Department Optics and Beamlines

"I'm originally from India and moved to Europe in 2020. Since 2024, I have been working at HZB as a Data Steward.

My role focuses on promoting data standardisation in BESSY II experiments, with the goal of making the data we generate as FAIR as possible - Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable."

Notes of HZB

Just a simple request...



Picture: Silvia Zerbe

Findspot: PT-building in Wannsee

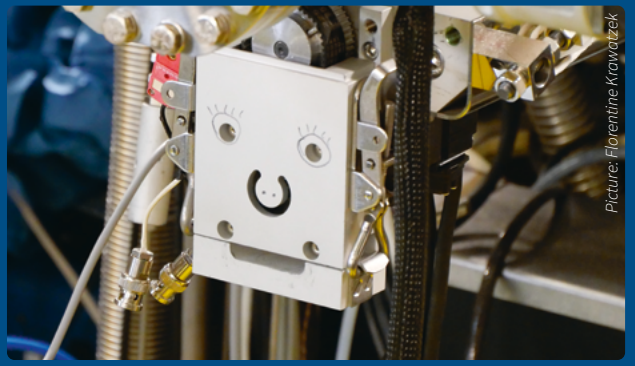
What funny notes at HZB catch your eye?
Please send them to: lichtblick@helmholtz-berlin.de

Who's secretly eating compote?

Picture: Silvia Zerbe

Findspot: a kitchen in Wannsee
Translation: "Apples are disappearing from the kitchen. Someone is plotting a compote against me."

Our friendliest employee



Picture: Florentine Krawatzek

Findspot: at a beamline in EMIL.