
Statement of the Chairman of the German Council of Science and Humanities Professor Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Marquardt

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Excellence Initiative is a tool of a far-reaching restructuring of the German research system. It has triggered a great dynamism in the universities. Everywhere, creative and original measures are being developed that, at many universities, have led to better institutional settings for research.

We present to you today another stage on the road towards even more research quality in the German research system: seven universities are invited by the Joint Commission to submit an initial proposal for the "institutional strategy" funding line by 1 September 2011.

Even though the federal and state governments conceived of the programme and provided the funding, the real actors of the Excellence Initiative are the universities. With their institutional strategies to promote top-level research, they venture a new step, set goals, and define courses not only for their internal development and organisation, but for the entire location – in some areas, for the region. The tireless dedication and incredible motivation of the researchers who are working at the universities to prepare the applications for the Excellence Initiative deserve the greatest recognition and respect.

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Not only the already funded universities, but also the draft proposals, make clear what has transpired since the first call for proposals: The capability of the universities to develop strategies has made great strides, numerous ideas on gender equality have been developed, the quality of teaching has gained in importance and the internal and external communication processes have improved considerably. Thus, the Excellence Initiative has an effect far beyond the actual funding and improves the overall performance of the universities.

The universities use the ideas competition to explore new models for their location. The presented concepts, all designed to meet specific needs, vary correspondingly. They also address the question of how the proposed measures affect teaching and how any undesired side effects can be countered. Furthermore, many have also described concepts for research-oriented teaching and thereby give consideration to the fact that research and teaching are inseparable.

The universities now selected for a detailed proposal are characterised by the fact that they could demonstrate strong scientific achievements and, at the same time, also outlined promising strategies to further improve their respective basic conditions for top-level research. From the status quo and quality assessment of the project, a prognosis on the effect of funding was deduced with regard to the following question: Will the university, with the aid of their institutional strategy, be able to become competitive internationally and take a place among the leading group of universities?

In the second programme phase, 22 universities have applied with an institutional strategy. Only three of these universities have submitted an institutional strategy in the Excellence Initiative for the first time. The universities just selected include two from the West (Bochum, Cologne), two from the East (HU Berlin, TU Dresden), one from the North (Bremen) and two from the South (Mainz, Tübingen). Among these seven universities there are six universities with the full spectrum of disciplines including medicine, three universities with engineering sciences, and one medium-sized university.

With today's decision, seven new applicants face nine already funded universities, bringing to 16 the total number of applications presenting an institutional strategy. There is approximately one third more money at play in the second programme phase. With the increase in funding, the financiers shared the optimistic prognosis that it is worthwhile to invest even more in top-level university research and their basic conditions. Making this decision in times of a severe economic crisis was extremely courageous and remarkable, particularly given the strikingly different developments in other countries.

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We will evaluate the quality of the new and renewal proposals during the review process in the autumn and winter with the help of high-calibre experts from around the world. Central to the programme is the fact that the decisions are made in a peer process and – unlike in similar programmes in other countries – there are no thematic guidelines. The voluntary restraint of politics – the importance of which cannot be underestimated and for which we are envied abroad – contributes to the reputation and acceptance of the process within the scientific community.