

Statement by Prof. Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker on the Topic of "Elite Universities"  
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The President of the DFG welcomes the proposal by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to strengthen Germany's position as a hub of research and education. He particularly supports the proposals aimed to strengthen the universities. The universities are at the losing end of the current discussion on the distribution of funds; despite the best of intentions, even the more affluent federal states are experiencing cuts. The universities therefore need to be strengthened by means of structural and financial measures.

- From our point of view, the structural measures should include the increased involvement of non-university institutions with universities. The gap between research funds provided to universities, on the one hand, and non-university institutions, on the other, is widening. In the end we could reach a situation where the universities are merely responsible for teaching, while non-university institutions merely for research, and this in a country which not only invented the unity of research and teaching but also has been largely successful in its application. We must not allow this to happen under any circumstances, since at the end of the day only the universities have access to young academics, thus guaranteeing our intellectual and economic future.
- When it comes to the question of elite universities, it should be taken into consideration that there is already a considerable performance gradient within the German university system. The DFG's funds are by no means evenly distributed. On the contrary, the best 17 of our approximately 100 universities receive 50 percent of the funding. It would indeed be important to give some of the universities even better chances to develop in order to make them more visible on an international level and thus more attractive to young academics from around the world.

The DFG therefore recommends the establishment of a limited number of graduate schools and research courses to enable about six universities, initially, to concentrate on top-class research. These graduate schools would have to be selected on a competitive basis. As the best course to take is as yet unclear, and due to the nature of modern science, which is characterized by its extreme complexity, it is important to try various models of promoting excellence, not just at one location but at various universities, in order to improve international attractiveness. Experience will then quickly reveal which model proves to be the best.