

Schavan: An Important Day for Science and Research in Germany

In today's session, the Excellence Initiative Grants Committee decided unanimously — with all 39 academic votes and all 32 votes of the federal government and the states — which university projects will receive funding in the first round of the Excellence Initiative.

This is an important day for science and research in Germany. We have seen that numerous proposals for outstanding graduate schools and clusters of excellence have been awarded funding. This demonstrates the strength of our universities' performance.

The Excellence Initiative has triggered a lot of dynamic activity in universities, which will benefit higher education in Germany as a whole.

I would like to thank all the scientists and academics, from Germany and abroad, who took on the demanding task of diligently reviewing the proposals.

I would like to thank the staff of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the German Science Council for their efforts over the last several months, far in excess of their normal workload.

The nominations presented by the scientists and academics were not debated because the list only consisted of projects that received unanimous votes from the scientific and academic side. Controversial cases were not presented.

This was subject to criticism from the federal government and the states, because based on a previous agreement it was assumed that today's meeting was also intended to discuss contentious cases jointly among scientists and politicians.

The scientists proposed a different path today, and the politicians unanimously went along. Not least, this proves that the politicians trust the scientists' opinions.

With regard to future procedures, the government side voiced the expectation that contentious proposals should be able to be discussed jointly within the Grants Committee.

The consensus in today's meeting was that the only relevant criterion for both funding rounds should be scientific excellence, without regard to regional considerations.

Under the Excellence Initiative, the federal government and the states will invest a total of 1.9 billion euros from 2007 to 2011. This is an important signal to our universities to strengthen academic research.

Today's result confirms that this political step — on top of additional activities by the states and the federal government, such as the Pact for Research and Innovation — was the right one to strengthen Germany as a research location.

Therefore I am convinced that we should do whatever we can to perpetuate the Excellence Initiative beyond 2011. That is what I will work for.

I am very pleased that we were able to come to a consensus that will highlight the strength of Germany's universities.

Therefore I say: This is an important day for science and research in Germany.