

Bonn, 13 October 2006

**Statement by Professor Dr. Strohschneider at the Press Conference
on 13 October 2006 following the Grants Committee Meeting**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The politicians decided to entrust the scientists and academics with choosing the winners in this competition. This trust is an honour as much as it is a responsibility. Today, the political side will tell you **what** decisions were made under the Excellence Initiative; the academic side will tell you **how** these decisions were reached.

You may recall that the selection process involves two stages. After the preliminary selection in January, 10 out of the 27 universities that originally applied for funding under the third line were invited to submit proposals. In the summer, these 10 proposals were reviewed by groups of experts during site visits lasting two days each. Two members of the Strategic Commission participated in each of these visits to ensure equal and fair procedures.

The expert groups were made up of internationally renowned high-level scientists and academics, and customised to fit each university's profile and proposal. Half of these experts came from abroad (11 different countries) and half from Germany. The groups always included members with academic leadership experience, industry representatives and, in many groups, experts in the areas of development programmes for young researchers, gender equality and higher education management. Seventeen percent of the experts were women.

Site visits provided each university the opportunity to present its institutional strategy in detail. Afterwards the expert group had on-site discussions with the principal investigators of the institutional strategy, as well as with university administrators, cooperation partners, and host state representatives. In addition, the experts visited selected research institutions within the university.

At the end of each in-depth two-day visit, the experts agreed on an assessment, taking into consideration the quality of the institutional strategy, the university's previous research activities, and the progress that can be expected under the proposed institutional strategy. The initial goal was to assess the merits of each proposal individually on site.

During each stage of the process, great attention was paid to possible biases. All expert reviewers were required to be free of conflicts of interest. In addition, any member of the Strategic Commission whose own university was still in the running did not participate in any discussions regarding this case or in any comparative discussions.

Among my personal impressions during the review process, two in particular stand out:

1. Our foreign experts were deeply impressed by the high research performance in Germany, especially considering the circumstances under which the achievements are being accomplished. Seen from a distance, the efficiency of Germany's research system seems peerless. A closer look, however, reveals where the German system is not competitive. Experts particularly pointed to staff/student ratios, teaching loads, and under-funded universities.
2. At the universities we visited, all the people involved demonstrated a remarkable pioneering spirit and a great willingness to overcome obstacles and, as members of an institution, to agree on goals and strategies. Some of the presentations received standing ovations in large auditoriums as expressions of people's approval of and commitment to their university's institutional strategy.

This means that the political concept behind this competition is proving to be successful: the Excellence Initiative has a leveraging effect on the academic system that is far greater than the grant amounts might suggest. The third funding line in particular provides dynamic impulses to the world of higher education in a way that no other existing funding programme could.

In a moment you'll learn about the decisions for the three funding lines — assuming you don't know them already. First allow me to clarify one thing. Those universities that were not awarded funding today are not automatically eliminated; they will still participate in the qualification round under the second call for proposals. The second round will definitely be tough, because many universities have learned from the process so far, and because there will be new and strong competitors. The Excellence Initiative continues.