


## **Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments to Promote Science and Research at German Universities**

### **Call for Proposals for the Second Programme Phase**

Decision by the Joint Commission of the  
Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) and the  
Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) of 10 March 2010



On 4 June 2009, the German federal and state governments passed the “Administrative Agreement between the German Federal and State Governments, under Basic Law Article 91 b Paragraph 1 Number 2, on the Continuation of the Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments to Promote Science and Research at German Universities (Excellence Agreement II)”. The continuation of this funding programme is meant to further strengthen Germany as a research location for the long term and improve its international competitiveness. It is designed to promote top-level research and to raise the quality level of German academia and research at large.

The programme features a uniform, project-based, research-oriented and competitive decision process. It provides funding for research activities by the host universities and their cooperation partners in academia, non-university research, the private sector, and other areas. There are three funding lines:

- **Graduate schools to promote early career researchers**
- **Clusters of excellence to promote top-level research**
- **Institutional strategies to promote top-level university research**

Proposals may be submitted by universities, with the heads of universities applying on behalf of the institutions. The funding amounts under each funding line are:

- Graduate schools: € 1 million to € 2.5 million each per year
- Clusters of excellence: € 3 million to € 8 million each per year
- Institutional strategies to promote top-level university research: There are no set amounts. The goal is to fund up to five new proposals and a total of up to 12 institutional strategies.

In addition, a supplemental allowance amounting to 20 percent of the respective funding sum will be made available to cover indirect costs related to the project.

The resulting total funding volumes are approximately € 60 million per year for graduate schools, € 292 million per year for clusters of excellence, and € 142 million per year for institutional strategies.

If several universities plan to submit a joint proposal for a graduate school or cluster of excellence, they must demonstrate the synergy and structural added value the cooperation will generate at each university, as well as the institutional long-term effect the strategic cooperation is expected to have. If a joint proposal meets these conditions, more than one university may apply to be speaker, subject to approval by the Joint Commission. Funding for an institutional strategy is contingent on funding for at least one cluster of excellence and at least one graduate school. Universities with a speaker role will be credited with any jointly proposed cluster of excellence or graduate school as a prerequisite for funding under the third line.

## Funding lines

**Graduate schools** serve as an instrument of quality assurance in promoting early career researchers and are based on the principle of training outstanding doctoral researchers within an excellent research environment. Graduate schools thus offer ideal conditions for doctoral researchers within a broad and interdisciplinary scientific area.

**Clusters of excellence** are designed to enable German university locations to establish internationally visible, competitive research and training facilities, thereby enhancing scientific networking and cooperation among the participating institutions. Clusters of excellence should form an important part of a university's strategic and thematic planning, significantly raise its profile and reflect its research priorities. They should also create excellent training and career conditions for early career researchers.

**Institutional strategies to promote top-level university research** are aimed at developing top-level university research in Germany and increasing its competitiveness at the international level. Funding is provided for measures that allow universities to develop and expand their areas of international excellence over the long term and to establish themselves as leading institutions in international competition. In this programme phase, universities may also present innovative strategies for research-oriented teaching; these strategies will be considered for the evaluation but cannot be funded under the Excellence Initiative.

## Funding criteria

In all three lines, funding will be granted on the basis of proposals and only according to scientific criteria. The following general criteria will be evaluated:

- excellence in research and in promoting early career researchers in at least one broad scientific area;
- a general strategy for interdisciplinarity and international networking in research;
- cooperation with other universities and/or non-university institutions, usually on the basis of concrete and binding cooperation agreements.

An additional criterion is the suitability of gender equality measures.

Detailed review criteria can be found in guidelines published by the DFG and the WR. Funding decisions will take into account the different starting positions of initial proposals and renewal proposals. Universities submitting a renewal proposal must demonstrate the extent to which they have been successful during the first programme phase in meeting goals and making scientific progress. They must also explain how they intend to further develop the graduate school, cluster of excellence, or institutional strategy.

Both initial and renewal proposals must discuss the sustainability of their measures. Renewal proposals must document the extent to which the commitments set forth in the initial proposal have been implemented.

## **Procedure**

### **Drafts of initial proposals in all three funding lines may be submitted until 1 September 2010 (cut-off deadline).**

The application process for initial proposals has two stages (draft proposal, full proposal). Applying universities are asked to submit a non-binding declaration of intent by **30 April 2010**. Drafts of initial proposals in all three funding lines must be received by the DFG Head Office by **1 September 2010** (cut-off deadline). Draft proposals for new graduate schools and new clusters of excellence will be reviewed during panel meetings. Draft proposals for new institutional strategies will be evaluated by the Strategy Commission of the WR. In March 2011 the Joint Commission will meet to decide which initiatives in all three funding lines will be invited to submit full proposals. These invitations will be issued in March 2011.

Draft proposals for graduate schools and clusters of excellence must discuss the respective university's research priorities, also in terms of its general strategy and including previously funded institutions of excellence and other draft proposals. When submitting new projects, universities are expected to demonstrate careful choices that indicate the projects' fit with the universities' long-term development plans as well as their sustainability.

### **Initial and renewal proposals in all three funding lines may be submitted until 1 September 2011 (cut-off deadline).**

The application process for renewal proposals has only one stage (no draft proposals). Universities are requested to announce their intent to submit renewal proposals by **15 September 2010**. The Joint Commission will invite universities whose projects are already being funded under the Excellence Initiative to submit renewal proposals in March 2011.

Funding decisions for initial and renewal proposals in all three funding lines will be made in June 2012 by the Grants Committee, based on suggestions by the Joint Commission. The funding period is five years. The German federal and state governments will decide in 2016 whether the programme will be continued.

**Declarations of intent, draft proposals and full proposals for all three funding lines must be addressed to the DFG.** Please note that draft proposals and full proposals for all three funding lines must be submitted to the DFG via the state ministries responsible for research.

## **Further Information**

**Please note:** Templates are available for declarations of intent to submit initial proposals for graduate schools and clusters of excellence. If you intend to submit a draft proposal for the third funding line, please send an informal notification.

**Please use only the templates and guidelines updated for the second programme phase:**

*For graduate schools:*

Guidelines for graduate schools, a template for declarations of intent, and notes on preparing draft proposals for graduate schools are available at:

[www.dfg.de/exin/gsc/formulare/](http://www.dfg.de/exin/gsc/formulare/)

*For clusters of excellence:*

Guidelines for clusters of excellence, a template for declarations of intent, and notes on preparing draft proposals for clusters of excellence are available at:

[www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/](http://www.dfg.de/exin/exc/formulare/)

*For institutional strategies to promote top-level university research:*

Guidelines for institutional strategies and notes on preparing draft proposals for institutional strategies are available at:

[www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/additional-documents/](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/additional-documents/)

For more information on the programme, visit:

[www.dfg.de/en/excellence\\_initiative/](http://www.dfg.de/en/excellence_initiative/)

[www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/](http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/)

The Excellence Agreement II as of 24 June 2009 is available at:

[www.dfg.de/en/research\\_funding/programmes/excellence\\_initiative/general\\_information/index.html](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/excellence_initiative/general_information/index.html)

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