

Statement

by DFG President

Professor Dr. Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker

on the Decisions for the

First Round of the Excellence Initiative

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm very happy to comply with the request by Dr. Schavan, the Federal Minister for Education and Research, to discuss the Excellence Initiative programme and our key experiences during the first round of selections. After a marathon of meetings this week, during which the Expert Commission of the DFG, the Strategic Commission of the German Science Council, the Joint Commission of both organisations, and today the Grants Committee convened, we were able to finalise the decisions for the first round of the Excellence Initiative, by mutual agreement with representatives of the federal government and the states. I'm very grateful that these decisions were reached purely on the basis of scientific and academic criteria and guided only by the quality of the submissions.

As you know, the DFG was in charge of the first two pillars of the programme — “graduate schools” and “clusters of excellence”. Following a preliminary selection in January of this year, 39 proposals for clusters of excellence and another 39 proposals for graduate schools were submitted by 36 universities by the appointed date. These 78 proposals were assigned to 24 specialised panels and reviewed by international groups of experts. In the summer we rented a nearby hotel for four weeks to hold these assessments. The approach taken was explicitly non-comparative — each proposal was to have an equal chance at success, regardless of how many other outstanding proposals were being reviewed by the same panel. The panels themselves were composed of international members. About 60 percent of roughly 300 experts came from other European countries, about 30 percent from overseas, and about 10 percent from Germany.

As you know, only universities that have been approved for at least one graduate school and one cluster of excellence are eligible for funding under the third pillar — “institutional strategies”. I'm very grateful to those who designed this programme for the clear statement it makes — that there can be no elite university without a solid basis of academic excellence.

A few words about the financial framework: the available amount for the first round of the Excellence Initiative is 190 million euros. This allows for funding for about 20

graduate schools, 15 clusters of excellence, and a maximum of 5 institutional strategies. About 1 million euros per year has been allocated for each graduate school and about 6.5 million for each cluster of excellence. Institutional strategies will be addressed by Professor Strohschneider.

What have we learned from the first round? All the evaluations were primarily based on the scientific concept, the quality of the work done so far, and the innovative potential of the proposals. In terms of the structural framework it became clear that promoting young researchers and gender equality are key issues, and that these are areas where things really have begun to change in German academia.

What happens to those who didn't make it in the first round? Proposals that were not awarded funding today will be re-evaluated by the Joint Commission in January 2007. In other words, these initiatives will compete against the newly submitted draft proposals in the second round.

On the whole we can already say that the Excellence Initiative will have a significant impact on Germany's academic and scientific landscape. More than virtually any other funding programme, it will help higher education institutions to distinguish themselves and raise their profiles.