
Statement by the Chairman of the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) Professor Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Marquardt

Check against delivery.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Everything will turn out all right in the end, and if it’s not all right, then it’s not the end.” This is what the manager says in the film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* when the implementation of his strategy for a hotel leaves something to be desired. And it is the motto under which I would like to place my comments on the selection decisions.

Many things has already become very good in our university system. The international review panels that have examined the 16 proposals in the third funding line can back me up on this. The universities – also as a result of their proposals – are in a better position, and the German university system has already become a lot more visible than it was just a few years ago.

What are the selected universities’ recipes for success? Different universities need different strategies. Accordingly, the models that were devised to expand top-level academic research in Germany and make it internationally more competitive are diverse. Proven ideas from the first phase of the programme were revived; new ideas were developed. The experts who reviewed the proposals on site were impressed by the universities’ commitment to reform and their ability to change. They emphatically praised the research achievements as well as the high quality of both researchers and students. Another recipe for success, it turns out, was broad participation in strategy design. It was wise not to prescribe institutional strategies from the top down, but to develop ideas across the entire university. Strategies were able to compete successfully, first internally and then in the contest, wherever university managers saw them-

selves as integrating coordinators and translators of ideas into structures and processes.

The creation and internal coordination of institutional strategies has triggered in universities a process of self-reflection and strategy development, which in itself brings about change and for which many peer reviewers have envied us. None of the 16 applicant universities will return to the status quo ante. Even if their approach has not been able to win a grant, it will be implemented, although perhaps more slowly and on a smaller scale.

The fact that many things already become very good, including the institutional-strategy proposals, meant that the Grants Committee had some hard choices to make.

Among the selected institutional strategies, there is a nice balance between first-time and renewal proposals. This shows that there was a level playing field for new entries. Furthermore, grants have been awarded to some large full-scale universities, but also to medium and small universities covering a smaller range of subjects. The advantage that prestigious traditional universities used to enjoy, which was still more evident in 2006, has softened even more. Young and dynamic universities with a steep gradient in their research performance were able to prevail – often after a difficult start – and were rewarded for their perseverance and intensive development efforts. Very large mass universities have proven that good education for large numbers of students is perfectly compatible with top-level research. The regional distribution, which in 2006 was still somewhat concentrated in the south, shows more of a balance today – and entirely without regional quotas, purely on the basis of quality. This is something I'm especially pleased with. So as you can see, we do have a dynamic university system, and with the decisions on the first phase of the programme, the course was by no means set once and for all.

“Everything will turn out all right in the end” – this is also what we would like to say to the universities that were not selected, be it because the rules of the game called for them to exit the programme, or because their ideas turned out to be less convincing when they were implemented, or because their plans seemed less promising than others. But this doesn't mean they turned into mediocre institutions overnight. And “Everything will turn out all right in the end” is also what we would like to tell those universities that did not submit any proposals but may very well feature excellent research and environments. After all, the Excellence Initiative does not simply separate the wheat from the chaff. There are more excellent universities in Germany than those with an institutional-strategy grant. And to make everything turn out all right in the end, they all need an outlook. We can't allow today's decisions to set up a closed shop, but want to promote a vibrant, high-performing university system.

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As an “initiative”, this programme has kicked off a powerful dynamic and given universities an opportunity to develop sustainable institutional strategies. In this respect, it has served its purpose, but the ultimate goal has not been reached yet. “Everything will turn out all right in the end, and if it’s not all right, then it’s not the end.” That’s why we say to federal and state governments: Help us make sure that this complex programme will deliver a good result. To take advantage of the opportunities offered by the second phase of the programme – that is the task of the universities honoured today. In this I wish them every success.