

Statement

First Results in the Second Phase of the Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments to Promote Science and Research at German Universities

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you to today's press conference and thank you for coming in spite of the somewhat inconvenient time for journalists. I would also like to thank everyone who is following this press conference via the internet. We are aware of the suspense with which the results are awaited.

The Joint Commission, which is composed of the members of the DFG's Expert Commission and the Strategic Commission of the German Council of Science and Humanities, made its preliminary decisions in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative programme today.

You can see in your documents as well as in information provided online that 59 new proposals have cleared the first hurdle of the two-stage selection process. Full proposals have been invited for 25 graduate schools, 27 clusters of excellence, and 7 institutional strategies.

What next? Detailed funding proposals for the selected projects must be submitted by the universities by 1 September 2011. We also expect to receive the renewal proposals of the 85 projects currently funded under the first phase of the Excellence Initiative by this date.

Both the initial proposals as well as the renewal proposals will then be reviewed over the course of the winter. The final decisions for both the new and the renewal proposals will be made on 15 June 2012—again in this room, by the way.

With a total of 2.724 billion euros (including programme allowances for indirect project costs, transitional funding and completion funding), significantly more money is available than the 1.9 billion euros provided for the first phase. Thus, we expect exciting as well as hard competition between the current projects—all of which are certain to apply for further funding—and the new ideas and projects.

If you take a closer look at today's decisions, you will see that the universities and federal states that continuously invested in their universities over many years and which practised a corresponding appointment policy were particularly successful.

The effects of such prioritisation on education and research are apparent—at least selectively—in the new federal states as well if you look at Dresden.

Also notable is the success of individual universities, such as Mainz or Bonn, each with three clusters of excellence, as well as that of smaller universities such as Frankfurt/Oder, Kaiserslautern, Oldenburg or Paderborn, each of which was successful with one cluster.

Furthermore, the proposal and review culture of the Excellence Initiative has also led to a new way of thinking in various areas.

For example, while reviewers have turned their attention to the topic of gender equality in science and the humanities, they have been happy to discover that the topic no longer needs to be viewed as a special problem. Much has become more matter-of-course here, even if the issue as such has not yet been fully resolved.

And, lastly, a comment on the topic at hand: The binding remuneration and mentoring relationships in research associations, such as the clusters of excellence and the graduate schools, are, particularly for our early career researchers, an important pillar and are a virtual guarantee for the quality of their qualification in every regard, particularly in terms of good, i.e. sound, scientific practice.

But there is more: The large majority of proposals for graduate schools include measures for comprehensive quality assurance. A considerable number of these schools would like to include ombudspersons of their own in addition to the ombudsman committees of the university.

A few words on the background of today's preliminary decision in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative: By 1 September 2010, the DFG received a total of 227 new draft proposals. This included 98 proposals for graduate schools, 107 for clusters of excellence and 22 for university-based institutional strategies.

Initial applications were submitted by a total of 65 universities from across Germany. The main academic disciplines were the life sciences, the natural sciences, the engineering sciences and the humanities and social sciences, all of which were represented more or less equally.

The new draft proposals for graduate schools and clusters of excellence were assigned by the DFG to one of 20 panels based on subject-specific criteria. Each of these panels held a selection meeting over the past months.

During these meetings, 217 reviewers, 192 of whom were from abroad, intensively discussed and evaluated the draft proposals according to subject-specific and structural aspects. The assessment was dependent solely on scientific content.

The most important criteria were

- excellence in research and the funding of early career researchers in at least one broad field of research,
- an overall concept for networking the disciplines and for international networking in research, as well as
- inter- and extra-university cooperation.

In addition, the measures undertaken by the universities and projects for promoting the equality of men and women in science and the humanities were also taken into account, a topic I've already addressed.

Compared to the first phase of competition, more flexible funding amounts were defined for the second phase.

Based on these new amounts, graduate schools can be funded with between 1 million and 2.5 million euros per year; clusters of excellence can be funded with between 3 million and 8 million euros.

For the university-based institutional strategies, which Mr. Marquardt will address next, elements of research-based instruction should also be given increased consideration.

I would like to close by thanking the federal and state governments, which resolved last spring not only to continue funding of the Excellence Initiative, but also to substantially increase that funding by more than 30 percent.

As this announcement came during the middle of the financial crisis, it sent a strong signal for science and research in Germany, from which we will all benefit. Because the prosperity and future of our country can only be based on education and training, science and research—a fact that we must remind ourselves of time and again.