

Excellence Initiative by the German federal and state governments to promote science and research at German universities

Köln, 28 July 2005

Guidelines

for “Institutional Strategies to promote top-level research”

I. Objectives and scope of the third funding line

Objectives

The objective of this funding line is to advance top-level university research in Germany and to improve its international competitiveness. All measures can be funded that allow universities to substantially develop and supplement their areas of international excellence and to establish themselves among the leading institutions in international competition. This will make a significant contribution to strengthening science and research in Germany in the long term and raising the profile of current areas of excellence.

Number of grants and volume of funding

The number of universities in the third funding line is limited by the following conditions:

- a) The funding of a university's Institutional Strategy requires that at least one cluster of excellence and at least one graduate school are funded.
- b) For the funding of Institutional Strategies, on average 21 million Euros per year including the funding in the lines “graduate schools” and “clusters of excellence” are provided per university. If a university applies for several graduate schools and clusters of excellence, the funding total applied for can be well above the average figure. For each funding line, a supplemental allowance, equivalent to 20 percent of the approved sum, will be granted to cover indirect expenses related to the funding.

The actual amount of funding will result from an overview of the decisions made in all three lines of funding. Since the procedure is highly selective, there will only be a relatively small number of universities being funded in the third funding line.

Two rounds of application are planned. Approval of funding in the first round is scheduled for October 2006; second-round approvals are to follow in October 2007. Universities are free to participate in any of the rounds.

Funding period

The funding period will be five years, initially, in each of the two rounds. In 2009, the Federal Government and the states will decide on the continuation of the programme on the basis of an evaluation report.

II. Conditions of the third funding line

1. **Features of the funding line:** All funded initiatives must focus on the sustained expansion of top-level research at a university and in particular on sharpening the university's profile. Universities are free in designing such measures. They are encouraged to develop unconventional and innovative ideas. The intended measures shall be organised as projects and directed at specific and defined goals (no blanket funding). The spectrum of objects eligible for funding is very broad and includes all types of personal and project funding as carried out by the German Research Foundation (DFG) on the basis of article 91b of the German constitution (joint research funding).
2. The funding line has the following specific features that distinguish it from clusters of excellence and graduate schools:
 - Measures for funding can extend beyond individual disciplines to the university as a whole,
 - an Institutional Strategy can be a bundle of different instruments integrated into an overall strategy,
 - existing units of outstanding performance can be expanded to establish new high-profile centres of excellence,
 - funding can relate to new organizational units to install innovative formats of research funding.
3. **Entitlement for applications:** Applications in the third funding line have to be submitted by individual universities, represented by their respective governance. Draft proposals and full proposals are to be sent to the German Research Foundation (DFG) via the responsible state ministry.
4. **Procedure:** The application process is divided into two stages. At the first stage, draft proposals are submitted. Based on the draft proposals, it is decided which universities are invited to proceed to the second stage and submit full proposals. Prerequisite is that full proposals have been invited for at least one draft proposal in the first funding line and at least one draft proposal in the second funding line. Whether for the purposes of the application procedure an existing DFG-research-centre counts in place of a cluster of excellence, is decided by the Joint Commission on request of the university.
5. If an application for a cluster of excellence is submitted by more than one university and if one or more of the universities involved also submit draft proposals on an Institutional Strategy, the Joint Commission decides whether any, and if so which university or universities will be allowed to apply for the third funding line.

6. **Content of draft proposal:** In the draft proposal (not more than 25 pages, in English), the university has to state its long-term objectives for research and the advancement of young scientists, and its strategy for achieving these objectives. The university is expected to specify the core areas defining its profile and characterize the role of proposed graduate schools and clusters of excellence as well as the role of existing centres, collaborative research programmes and German and international partner institutions within the proposed strategy (cp. the “Notes on preparing draft proposal for Institutional Strategies”).
7. **Content of full proposal:** The full proposal (in English) is expected to contain the following:
 - Comprehensive strategy statement explaining the long-term strategic direction of top-level research at the university, consisting of a description of the profile of research and the training of young scientists as well as a development plan based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Research excellence on an international level in a number of research areas that define the university’s profile has to be documented by applications for graduate schools and clusters of excellence within this programme, by success in other funding programmes or centres established in competition, and by evidence of top-level research performance in international competition (e.g. publications, patents, awards, prizes – disciplinary and interdisciplinary).
 - Description of existing and projected instruments to make sustainable the expansion of scientific excellence at the university as an institution. Research planning including strategies for handling areas that are lower performing, yet necessary for the university’s profile.

Explanations have to be provided on: how the specific features of the funding line (cp. 2.) will be implemented as specific project proposals, for which the funding is sought; the objectives of individual measures; and how these measures are embedded in the overall strategy.

8. **Subject of proposal:** The proposed measures can relate to the university as a whole, to departments which are not yet involved in a cluster of excellence proposal, and/or to subject areas that are already part of a cluster of excellence proposal. In the latter case, special reasons should be given to show that the proposed measures do not constitute merely an addition to the cluster of excellence, but something qualitatively different.
9. Within the funding line “Institutional Strategies”, funding for three types of expenses can be applied for: staff expenses, investments and other direct expenses. For the professorships initially funded within this funding line, the plans for the period after the termination of this programme have to be specified.

A concrete, but not detailed budget plan for all funds applied for has to be provided and the mechanisms of the internal allocation of resources have to be explained. The funding covers the additional costs due to the funded projects and includes a supplemental allowance of 20 percent to cover indirect expenses related to the programme.

10. **Criteria:** In addition to the general criteria for funding as listed in the call for proposals (according to §3 of the BLK agreement), the following additional conditions are relevant:
 - Excellence in various academic fields which characterize the university’s profile,
 - outstanding research quality, to be demonstrated also by graduate schools and clusters of excellence,

- interdisciplinarity and cooperation also with non-university research institutions and other scientific partners,
- international network
- dedicated advancement of young scientists,
- provisions to sustain the expansion of research excellence.

In their Institutional Strategy, universities may put different emphases on these points.

11. The selection of draft proposals and full proposals is based on the following standards of assessment: The strategy must be coherent and its objectives must be likely to strengthen top-level research in the long term, to sharpen the university's profile and thus to raise substantially the international visibility of the university. The proposed measures should generate a qualitative leap forward and reflect properly the scale of funding. Their success after five years should be measurable and their impact sustainable. The proposed measures should build on proven successes. The assessment of the strategic planning of the university will be based on the university's achievements to date.
12. After five years, in case of the assessment of any follow-up applications, it will be checked to which extent the objectives and milestones set out in the first proposal have been realised. Degressive phase-out funding is planned for the case that, as a result of that assessment, funding for a university is discontinued at that stage.

III. Application and review process

The German Research Foundation (DFG) has set up a Joint Commission with the Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat). This Commission consists of an Expert Commission (whose members are appointed by the DFG Senate) and a Strategy Commission (whose members are appointed by the Scientific Commission of the Science Council). The Joint Commission specifies the terms of funding for the programme and decides which initiatives will be selected in all three funding lines out of those that have been invited, on the basis of draft proposals, to submit full proposals. The Joint Commission will also develop the funding recommendations for all three funding lines. Funding decisions will be made by a Grants Committee consisting of the members of the Joint Commission and the ministers responsible for scientific research in the federal and state governments.

The call for proposals will be a two-stage process (draft proposal and full proposal). Universities submit draft proposals and full proposals to the DFG through the responsible state ministries. In the third funding line, each university can submit only one draft proposal. Draft proposals should be submitted in English (cf. "Notes on preparing draft proposals for institutional strategies"). For the review, the Joint Commission will be supported by international expert groups. Site visits are planned to applicants for "Institutional Strategies" funding.

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For draft proposals in the third line of research, please also send a copy to the Office of the Science Council, Brohler Straße 11, 50968 Köln