

**Excellence Initiative by the German federal and state governments
to promote top-level research at German universities
- Second Programme Phase -**

Cologne, 2010-03-12

Guidelines

“Institutional Strategies to Promote Top-Level Research”

These Guidelines provide instructions for universities wishing to submit draft proposals (and, if selected, full initial proposals) or renewal proposals under the third funding line of the Excellence Initiative. Information about the overall programme, its procedure and schedule can be found in “Call for proposals for the second programme phase“ (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/ausschreibung_zwei.pdf) and “Excellence Agreement II” (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/exzellenzvereinbarung_zwei.pdf). In addition, please refer to the assessment criteria and the key questions for Institutional Strategies (see section 9 of these Guidelines).

1. Objectives and features of Institutional Strategies

The aim of this funding line is to expand top-level research at German universities and improve its international competitiveness. The funding should enable the universities to substantially develop and supplement their areas of international excellence and establish themselves among the leading international competitors.

The shaping of their Institutional Strategy is completely left to the applying university. The universities are encouraged to propose unconventional and innovative ideas for their future institutional development. The focus should be on the institution as a whole, the enhancement of its research performance and its attractiveness for top international personnel at every career level. Expected is a strategy with, at its core, a convincing design for the future, plausibly expressing how its aims will be achieved from the present starting situation.

2. Number of possible grants and volume of funding

The number of universities to be awarded grants in the third funding line will be limited by the following conditions:

- The aim is to accept up to five initial proposals and support 12 Institutional Strategies, in total, through the second programme phase.
- Total funds amounting to about € 142 million p.a., including overhead allowances, are provided for Institutional Strategies. There are no prescribed upper or lower boundaries for the annual funding volume for any individual Institutional Strategy.

3. Eligibility and formal conditions for funding

Proposals for the third funding line have to be submitted by individual universities, represented by their respective governing body. Draft proposals and full proposals must be sub-

mitted to the German Research Foundation (DFG) via the responsible state ministry. The two-stage process with draft proposal and full version only applies to initial proposals. Renewal proposals do not require the submission of a draft proposal. For the third funding line, a university may submit only one application.

To be eligible for funding of its Institutional Strategy, the university must be the responsible administrator (speaker university) for at least one Cluster of Excellence and at least one Graduate School in the second programme phase.

4. Funded measures

The proposed measures shall be organized as projects and directed at specific and defined goals (no lump-sum funding). The spectrum of funded measures is very broad and includes all types of personnel and project funding as carried out by the DFG on the constitutional basis of article 91b of the German Grundgesetz (shared responsibility for research funding).

- Proposed measures may relate to the university as a whole or to individual institutes/departments/faculties, even if the latter are not currently involved in a Graduate School or a Cluster of Excellence. If the Institutional Strategy includes institutes/departments/faculties that are part of a Graduate School or a Cluster of Excellence, a specific rationale should be laid out showing that the proposed measures aim for something qualitatively different, clearly beyond the normal objectives of a Graduate School or a Cluster of Excellence. Existing areas of outstanding research can be shaped by Institutional Strategy into high-profile foci that enhance the envisioned future profile of the institution.
- The measures may also relate to the organizational development of the university and should be suitable to improve the framework conditions for research and internal control processes at the university. Measures may support either ongoing reform or restructuring processes or experimental initiatives involving innovative formats of research units or internal research funding.
- The proposed measures may consist of a variety of instruments, which, however, must be integrated to a coherent overall strategy.

5. Requirements concerning the draft proposal

The two-stage procedure involving a draft proposal and, if selected, a full proposal, only applies to initial proposals. The first requirement is that by April 30, 2010, the DFG receives an informal statement of intent to submit a draft proposal for the third funding line.

Submission of draft proposals, written in English and German, is requested by September 1, 2010, the English version being the decisive document that will be evaluated. The draft proposal may not exceed 25 pages, in which the university is requested to outline its development goals for research and the advancement of young researchers, and the strategy and measures by which it intends to achieve these goals. The university is expected to specify the core areas defining its profile and characterize the role of already funded Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence, as well as of existing centers or collaborative research programmes and German and international partner institutions under the proposed strategy. The draft proposal must also demonstrate how and to what extent the measures would be sustained beyond the end of funding from the Excellence Initiative.

On the basis of the draft proposals, the Joint Commission will decide, in March 2011, which universities will be invited to submit a full initial proposal. Such invitation will only be granted to universities from which full proposals have been invited on the basis of at least one draft proposal in the first funding line and at least one draft proposal in the second funding line, or which submitted renewal proposals for initiatives in which the university is seeking or holding the role of responsible administrator (speaker university).

For more detailed information about the preparation of a draft proposal, please see "Notes on preparing a draft proposal for Institutional Strategies" (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/notes_zwei.pdf).

6. Requirements concerning the full initial proposal

The full initial proposal must be submitted in English and German language versions, with the English version being the decisive document that will be evaluated. Meetings during site visits are usually conducted in English.

Every full initial proposal is expected to offer a coherent, comprehensive strategy statement explaining the long-term strategic direction of top-level research at the university as a whole. The proposal must cover three sections (Status Quo, Institutional Strategy, Long-term planning of the university):

Status Quo:

The prior achievements of the university to date provide the foundation on which the Institutional Strategy is built. The university-specific starting situation (Status Quo) is expected to be described with regard to the following:

- The university's profile and the quality of the research achievements in its research units should be described. Research excellence at international level, in a number of research areas that define the university's profile, must be evidenced by: successes in the first two funding lines, other funding programmes, or centers established through competitions; proof of top-level research achievements in international comparison (e.g. citation analyses of the research performance, patents, awards and prizes – both disciplinary and interdisciplinary).
- It should be explained in which way the structures and processes of the research organization promote top-level research, and what reforms have recently been initiated.
- The internal infrastructure to promote research at the university should be described.
- The recruitment processes to secure the services of outstanding researchers should be elucidated.
- The description of the Status Quo should also cover the status of the support for young researchers, including their prospects for promotion, the status of internationalization and gender equality.
- The forms and quality of cooperation with external partners should be outlined.
- The status of research-oriented teaching should be described, if the Institutional Strategy refers to it. In this instance, proof of performance is also required (e.g. prizes, success in competitions, external funding awards, evaluations by external peers).
- The university's capacity to act should be demonstrated on the basis of a critical analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats it is facing (SWOT analysis) and an account of the processes and results of the strategy development and profile shaping activities of the university. Also, the institutional steering (e.g. quality management and resource allocation) and internal communication processes should be explained.

Institutional Strategy:

Based on the general goals of the Institutional Strategy, the overall approach, specific measures and an implementation plan (project plan) should be developed. In this section, the objectives of the respective measures and their contribution to a coherent, overall strategy should be described.

- Based on the programme objectives and the university-specific starting situation (Status Quo), including the SWOT analysis, a plausible strategy for excellence in research and the advancement of young researchers should be outlined. This strategy outline should also cover the treatment of implicit consequences, especially for those research areas that are not producing research of outstanding quality, but are nevertheless indispensable for the specific profile.

- The innovative potential of the proposed measures should be made clear.
- The effects and development progress to be achieved through the proposed measures should be explained, with regard to the target groups (both young and senior researchers) and structures (cooperation with other institutions, interdisciplinarity, internationality, gender equality).
- The expected positive effects of the proposed measures for the advancement of top-level research on teaching at the university should be presented. Similarly, a description should be provided of how any unintended side effects on teaching would be handled. If a concept for research-oriented teaching is included, its aims should be explained, and how it is going to be implemented.
- The project organization and project management at executive and operational levels should be documented. In the implementation planning, the control processes should be described. This includes the definition of interim targets and instruments of internal quality management, so that instances of progress and success will be verifiable, and readjustments and corrections will be feasible and transparent. Procedures for resource allocation should also be outlined.
- Financial management for the specific measures proposed as well as for the total sum of new funds must be convincingly plausible.
- The proposal must contain plans for the continuation of the proposed measures beyond the end of the funding period. Especially, provisions made to ensure the secure funding of particular measures must be described. For the professorial positions initially funded through the project, the planning beyond the end of the funding period must be specified.

Long-term planning of the university:

- The proposal should elaborate on how the Institutional Strategy will be integrated in the university's long-term planning.
- The role of the Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence proposed for establishment or continuation should also be considered in the long-term planning.
- The foreseeable effects, within the university (including effects on teaching) and beyond, of the Institutional Strategy for the sustained expansion of top-level research should be outlined.
- The chance provided by the Institutional Strategy to develop the university's international competitiveness should be clearly expressed. International reference institutions, with which the university as a whole intends to compete ("aspirational peers"), should be named; the university's ranking among its national and international competitors, which the university aims to achieve through the Institutional Strategy, should be stated.

For further information about how to prepare an initial proposal, please see "Guide for Proposers with Proposal Form – initial proposals", which is distributed with the call for proposals.

7. Requirements concerning renewal proposals

For renewal proposals, submission of a draft proposal is not required. However, renewal proposals are subject to the precondition that full proposals have been invited on the basis of at least one draft proposal in the first funding line and at least one draft proposal in the second funding line, or that renewal proposals have been submitted for initiatives in which the applying university seeks or holds administrative responsibility (speaker university). The renewal proposal must be presented in English and German language versions, the English version being the decisive document that will be evaluated. Meetings during site visits will usually be conducted in English. The renewal proposal must represent a coherent description of how the Institutional Strategy has evolved, plausibly explaining the further expansion of top-level research at the university. The proposal must include three sections (Report, Institutional Strategy/Continuity planning, Long-term development of the university):

Report on first programme phase (Status Quo and Implementation Status):

In the report section of the proposal, a detailed description of the actual Status Quo and the Implementation Status of the first programme phase is expected. The university-specific starting situation, taking into consideration the developments of the first programme phase, should be described with regard to the following:

- The report section should comprise descriptions of the primary research advances achieved in the profile areas and in the other research areas of the university. It should explain to what measures the improvement of the research performance is attributable.
- In the report section, an account should be provided of how the institutional setting for top researchers at every career level was improved, with emphasis on the effects of the Institutional Strategy measures. Descriptions should be provided of:
 - how structures and processes of the research organization have been improved.
 - the improvement of the research infrastructure.
 - how recruitment processes have been optimized, and what successful recruitments were achieved at different career levels.
 - successes in the advancement of young researchers, internationalization and gender equality.
 - the extent of improvement regarding the formats and quality of cooperation with external partners.
- The status of research-oriented teaching should be reported, as far as the Institutional Strategy refers to such teaching. In this case, the university is also requested to provide performance evidence (e.g. prizes, success in competitions, external funding awards, evaluations by external peers).
- The university's capacity to act should be demonstrated on the basis of an updated, critical analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats faced by it (SWOT analysis), accompanied by an account of the processes to develop a strategy and enhance the profile of the university. Also, the governance procedures (e.g. quality management and resource allocation) with their effect on the development of the organization and the internal communication processes should be explained. The university should describe any variations applied in the course of the implementation process for the original proposal, and explain the readjustment processes and the reasons for them.
- In a summary of the first programme phase, the university should point out to what extent the strategy and measures embarked on with the original proposal were realized, and their objectives achieved.
- The general effects within the university and beyond (e.g. concerning the perception of the university in Germany and abroad), the structure-building effects of the Institutional Strategy and the effects of the project funding on the teaching activities at the university should be made clear.

Institutional Strategy/Continuity planning:

The continuity planning should be based on the goals of the overall strategy proposed in the original proposal (first programme phase) and describe how they have evolved towards the objectives of the funding programme. The measures in connection with continuity planning must demonstrate an integrated coherent overall strategy.

- The evolution of the high-profile areas should be persuasive, including the updated SWOT analysis. Any changes in strategy from the first programme phase should be explained. This should also cover the treatment of implicit consequences, especially for

those research areas not producing outstanding research quality, yet indispensable for the specific profile.

- Additional ideas and measures should be described. Overall, there should be an appropriate balance between the continuation of proven measures and the introduction of new ones.
- Anticipated progress and the intended effects of the measures with regard to the target groups (both young and senior researchers) and structures (collaboration with other institutions, interdisciplinarity, internationality, gender equality) should be presented.
- The expected positive effects of the proposed measures for the advancement of top-level research on teaching at the university should be described as well as how any unintended side effects on teaching would be handled. If a concept for research-oriented teaching is included, its aims should be explained, and how it is going to be implemented.
- The project organization and project management for continuity planning (executive and operational levels) should be outlined, including the processes of resource allocation and quality management.
- Financial planning regarding the specific measures and the total funding volume must be feasible and convincing.
- The project section should show how proposed measures would be continued after the end of the funding period. Special emphasis should be placed on which measures would be securely sustained, and what provisions are made to achieve this. For the professorial positions initially funded from project budgets, the planning beyond the end of the funding period must be specified.

Long-term planning of the university:

- The university should show how the Institutional Strategy would be integrated in the university's long-term planning.
- The role of the Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence proposed for establishment or continuation should be considered in the context of the university's long-term planning.
- The foreseeable effects – within the university (including effects on teaching) and beyond – of the Institutional Strategy for the sustained expansion of top-level research should be outlined.
- The opportunity offered by the Institutional Strategy to develop the university's international competitiveness should be explained. International reference institutions, with which the university as a whole intends to compete ("aspirational peers"), should be named and the positioning among the national and international academic competitors, which the university aims to achieve through the Institutional Strategy, should be stated.

For further information about how to prepare a proposal, please see the "Guide for Proposers with Proposal Form – renewal proposals", which is distributed with the call for proposals.

8. Spending plan

For all funding requested in initial proposals and in renewal proposals, a spending plan for all essential items must be presented, including an outline of the mechanisms of internal allocation of funds. It is expected that the proposed annual funding sums will be staggered through the phases of the project and the individual measures.

The funding line "Institutional Strategies" allows proposals for funding of three different cost types: personnel costs, material costs and investment costs. The funding includes 20 % overhead allowance to cover indirect expenditures in connection with the funding. There is no need to apply explicitly for this allowance.

9. Assessment criteria for initial proposals and renewal proposals

Based on the general funding criteria according to Excellence Agreement II § 3 and the conditions for funding of Institutional Strategies, set out in the annex of that Agreement, the Joint Commission has passed assessment criteria for the third funding line. Any decision about funding in relation to initial proposals or renewal proposals will be guided exclusively by academic criteria.

In the assessment of **initial proposals**, the university-specific starting situation (Status Quo), on the one hand, and the proposed Institutional Strategy, on the other, will be taken into account. In the overall assessment, the Status Quo and the Institutional Strategy will be considered of equal weight.

The assessment of **renewal proposals** refers, firstly, to the report on the first programme phase (Status Quo and Implementation Status) and, secondly, to the respective continuity planning (Institutional Strategy). In the overall assessment, the realization of the goals pursued with the strategies and the principal research progress achieved so far (Status Quo and Implementation Status) will be of higher weight than the continuity planning. It will be of central importance to what extent the goals and interim targets defined in the original proposal have been achieved, what processes were initiated and implemented under the Institutional Strategy, and what effects were generated by the measures implemented so far. The progress expected to be achieved through continued funding must be convincingly demonstrated. Also, in the assessment and comparative evaluation of the renewal proposals, any differences in the funding periods (funding commenced in 2006 or 2007) will be taken into account.

The individual assessment criteria and the key questions derived from them are set out in the following documents:

- Assessment criteria for Institutional Strategies – initial proposals (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/criteria_NA.pdf)
- Assessment criteria for Institutional Strategies – renewal proposals (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/criteria_FA.pdf)
- Key questions for Institutional Strategies – initial proposals (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/keyquestions_NA.pdf)
- Key questions for Institutional Strategies – renewal proposals (http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/keyquestions_FA.pdf)

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For draft proposals for the third funding line, please also send a copy, at the same time, to the Office of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR), Brohler Straße 11, 50968 Köln, Germany.

Further information pertaining to the third funding line can be found at: <http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/>

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