

Joint Press Release of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR) and the German Research Foundation (DFG), 19 July 2019

Final decisions in the German Excellence Strategy: Excellence Commission selected ten Universities and one University Consortium of Excellence

On 19 July 2019, the Excellence Commission has taken the much-awaited decisions in the first call of the funding line “Universities of Excellence” of the German Excellence Strategy. Out of 19 applications, ten universities and one university consortium of Excellence were selected to receive permanent institutional funding as well as the sought-after title as universities of excellence.

Selected were (in alphabetical order):

- RWTH Aachen University
- Berlin University Alliance
- University of Bonn
- Technische Universität Dresden
- Universität Hamburg
- Heidelberg University
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
- University of Konstanz
- Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
- Technical University of Munich
- University of Tübingen

A list of the selected universities can also be found here:

https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/2019/ExStra_Entscheidung.pdf

The much-anticipated decisions of the Excellence Commission were announced immediately after the decisive meeting in the Wissenschaftszentrum Bonn in a press conference and via internet live-streaming. The Federal Minister for Education and Research, Anja Karliczek, and Professor Dr. Eva Quante-Brandt, the Senator for Science, Health and Consumer Protection of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, who are also the chair and the co-chair of the Joint Science Conference of the federal government and the 16 state governments, announced the names of the universities and university consortia that were selected to together receive total annual funding in the amount of 148 Mio. Euro (from 1 November 2019 onwards). Professor Dr. Martina Brockmeier, the chairwoman of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR), and Professor

Dr. Peter Strohschneider, the president of the German Research Foundation (DFG), then elaborated on the decision-making process and provided a preliminary assessment of the Excellence Strategy.

“I would like to congratulate and pay my greatest respect to the selected universities and the Berlin University Alliance,” WR-chairwoman Professor Dr. Brockmeier commented. “The selected universities have very impressively demonstrated how universities of the future could look like. In order to compete with the top institutions on the international level, a university requires a very strong foundation in excellent research as well as a clear sense of its institutional profile and sound plans for its institutional development. The selected universities have all demonstrated very convincingly that they are in an excellent position with respect to all of these aspects”.

DFG President Professor Dr. Peter Strohschneider summarised, stating: “Today’s decisions on Universities of Excellence were based on the decisions to fund 57 Clusters of Excellence. The Clusters were selected last September and have been funded since 1 January. With the completion of this first round of competition, the Excellence Strategy builds on the three funding rounds in the Excellence Initiative (2006, 2007 and 2012). Both competitions together reflect the remarkable cooperation between research and politics in promoting top-level research at German universities at an internationally competitive level.”

The prerequisites

Eligible for competing for the title as universities of excellence were universities that in September 2018 secured at least two Clusters of Excellence (or at least three Clusters of Excellence in the case of university consortia) in the German Research Foundation (DFG)-administered funding line “Clusters of Excellence”. 17 universities and two university consortia from eight federal states (Länder) managed to meet this formal prerequisite for submitting an application in the funding line “Universities of Excellence”.

Subsequently, the DFG handed over to the WR who is responsible for administering the funding line “Universities of Excellence”. On-site visits at the 19 applicant universities and university consortia took place from January to May 2019. In total, 190 reviewers (more than 90 % from abroad) participated in the evaluation process that was specifically designed to assess universities as a whole, in particular the past and current performance in research as well as in teaching, transfer, and research infrastructure. Additionally, universities and university consortia had to present convincing plans for the continued development of the institution as a whole.

The selection procedure

Meeting from 16 to 18 July 2019, the so-called Committee of Experts (consisting of 39 internationally recognized scholars) comparatively assessed the results of the 19 individual evaluations. Based on the funding recommendations made by the Committee of Experts, the final funding decisions were then taken by the Excellence Commission on 19 July 2019. The Excellence Commission consists of the members of the Committee of Experts as well as the ministers responsible for higher education and research of the federal government and the 16 federal states (Länder). Positive funding decisions required the majority of votes of the members of the Committee of Experts as well as at least 25 votes from the federal government and the federal states.

The future of the Excellence Strategy

The funding provided through the funding line “Universities of Excellence” is, in principle, permanent. However, the administrative agreement underpinning the Excellence Strategy contains two additional provisions. First, the selected universities need to again secure the required minimum number of Clusters of Excellence in the next call (in seven years) in order to continue to meet the formal funding prerequisites. Second, the selected universities of excellence will be regularly evaluated every seven years and continuously funded if the evaluation result is positive. Moreover, when successful in the highly competitive and academically-driven procedure, four additional universities or university consortia could be funded from 2026 onwards in the second call for universities of excellence. In the funding line “Clusters of Excellence”, the 57 Clusters of Excellence (located at 34 universities) that were selected in September 2018 are already receiving funding since 1 January 2019.

The Excellence Strategy was agreed by the federal government and the governments of the 16 federal states in June 2016 in an administrative agreement pursuant to Article 91b Paragraph 1 of the German “Grundgesetz”. It is a permanent funding program aimed at strengthening top-level research at German universities as well as encouraging the development of distinct university profiles and enhancing cooperation within the German system of research and higher education. The federal government and the 16 federal states are providing an annual total budget of 533 Mio. Euro. 75 % of the funding is provided by the federal government and 25 % by the respective state governments.

Further information

www.wissenschaftsrat.de/exzellenzstrategie

www.dfg.de/excellence_strategy

Detailed information about the German Excellence Strategy can also be found at:

<https://www.gwk-bonn.de/en/>

Expert contacts

Dr. Inka Spang-Grau

Head of Unit Excellence Strategy of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)

Telephone +49 221 3776-281

spang-grau@wissenschaftsrat.de

Dr. Ulrike Eickhoff

Head of Department Coordinated Programmes and Infrastructure of the German Research Foundation (DFG)

Telephone +49 228 885-2254

ulrike.eickhoff@dfg.de

Press contact

Dr. Christiane Kling-Mathey

Head of Press and Public Relations of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)

Telephone +49 221 3776-243

kling-mathey@wissenschaftsrat.de

Marco Finetti

Head of Division Press and Public Relations of the German Research Foundation (DFG)

Tel. +49 228 885-2230

marco.finetti@dfg.de