

Statement

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Science and Research During the Energy Crisis

Our country is faced with great challenges in these current weeks and in view of the upcoming winter. Drastically rising energy prices and imminent energy supply shortages raise questions, including those of an existential nature, for all parts of society, entire industries and not least millions of citizens. Policy makers seek to counteract these developments by means of the relief packages planned by the Federal Government which involve major financial strain. Nevertheless, the “energy crisis” has become a serious concern of the population.

This crisis was caused by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine that has lasted for more than half a year now. The Alliance of Science Organisations is aware of the complexity of the related challenges. It also feels responsible for raising awareness of the threatening consequences that the current developments entail for science and research in Germany and for those who are working in these fields.

A further increase in electricity and gas prices and possible supply shortages of key energy sources that cannot be covered using the organisations' own funds would affect all areas of scientific work including academic teaching. Certain scientific disciplines are particularly threatened by the foreseeable difficulties. The effects would be grave, for example, for biobanks and biological archives, as well as for running large-scale experimental series and studies in medicine and the natural science and engineering disciplines, and for complex research infrastructure.

Across all disciplines, the technical infrastructure at the higher education institutions and non-university research institutions would also be subjected to significant strain and their operability would be at risk. Higher education institutions will have to use far greater resources for energy, and this could make staff cuts necessary, cause constraints on academic teaching and have an impact on the studies of thousands of students. Savings realised by closing university buildings and switching back to online teaching would bring back the negative didactic and psycho-social consequences for students that could be observed during the lockdowns due to the coronavirus back in 2020 and 2021.

The Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany and its members have already taken measures to significantly reduce energy consumption at their institutions, and to contribute to mastering the energy crisis through joint efforts. In addition, prioritisation has been carried out to prevent the most serious forms of impact on research and teaching, and to allow for scientific work to be upheld.

It is necessary, despite those efforts, to consider hardship cases in science when it comes to energy supply and also with regard to possible financial relief, in order to counteract a severe weakening of the German scientific system and of Germany as a higher education and research location in its entirety. The organisations of the Alliance rely on exchange with policy-makers and all other stakeholders, and would like to constructively contribute to this dialogue with all their expertise. In this context they consider the agreements between the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Federal Network Agency as a positive signal, as these include – not least – the situation at higher education institutions and in academic teaching.

One of the key goals of all necessary considerations and measures that must now take place quickly and resolutely, must be to secure relevant research work and results that are threatened

by destruction or loss, across all academic disciplines and at all scientific institutions. Furthermore, good academic conditions must be ensured for the just under three million higher education students. This is the only way to further develop and harness the considerable potential for achievements, innovation and problem solving that science and research can contribute to mastering the energy crisis, as well as other societal challenges, also in future.

The Alliance of Science Organisations is an association of the most important research organisations in Germany. It regularly comments on important issues of research policy. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) is a member of the Alliance and is the spokesperson organisation for 2022. Other members are the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Fraunhofer Society, the Helmholtz Association, the German Rectors' Conference, the Leibniz Association, the Max Planck Society, the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the German Council of Science and Humanities.

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