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# Excellence Strategy | Excellence Initiative

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**EXZELLENCES STRATEGY**

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The German “Excellence Strategy” is a permanent funding programme that was jointly initiated by the Federal Government and the 16 State Governments in 2016. The programme is designed to maintain and build on the effects generated by the preceding “[Excellence Initiative](#)” with the aim to further strengthen universities by supporting research of the highest standard, enhancing distinctive research and university profiles as well as facilitating cooperation between the various actors of the German system of higher education and research. The ultimate objective of the Excellence Strategy is to sustainably bolster Germany’s position as an outstanding research location, further increase its international competitiveness in research, teaching and innovation and continue the successful development of an academic culture that supports high quality research. The programme is also intended to support universities in the development of distinctive research strategies and profiles, which may relate to all performance areas (research, teaching, transfer, research infrastructure). Moreover, projects initiated within the previous programme “Excellence Initiative” are provided with a long-term perspective.

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) and the Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) jointly administer the German “Excellence Strategy”. The programme consists of two funding lines:

**1 - Clusters of Excellence** provide project-based funding for internationally competitive areas of research at universities or university consortia. The DFG is in charge of the funding line “Clusters of Excellence”. An annual amount of approximately €385 million will be provided for this funding line. The latest funding decisions in the funding line “Clusters of Excellence” were taken in September 2018. Further information is available on the [DFG website](#).

**2 - Universities of Excellence** to institutionally strengthen universities or university consortia as a whole and to further improve their international position. The WR is responsible for the funding line “Universities of Excellence”, as well as the regular evaluation of the universities of excellence, which takes place every seven years. An annual amount of approximately €148 million is provided for this funding line. The latest decisions in the funding line “Universities of Excellence” were taken in July 2019, when 10 universities and one university consortium were selected as “universities of excellence”.

In its third meeting (September 27th - 28th 2017), the Committee of Experts of the Excellence Strategy took a first decision in the funding line **Clusters of Excellence** by giving 88 draft proposals the permission to enter the full proposal-phase. The respective [press release](#) as well as a [list of projects invited to submit full proposals](#) can be

found on the [DFG website](#). By the deadline of 21st February 2018, 41 universities submitted 88 full proposals in the funding line “Clusters of Excellence” to the DFG.

By the same deadline of 21st February 2018, the WR head office received 26 letters of intent to submit a proposal in the funding line **Universities of Excellence**, thereof 24 letters of intent for a proposal as an individual university and two letters of intent for a proposal as a university consortium. Based on these letters of intent, the WR head office started preparing the on-site visits at these 26 universities/university consortia. On 27th September 2018, the Excellence Commission made the final funding decision in the funding line “Clusters of Excellence”, selecting 57 research projects. This meant that 17 universities and two university consortia were eligible for submitting a proposal in the funding line “Universities of Excellence”. On-site visits at these potential universities of excellence took place between January and April 2019.

On 19th July 2019, the Excellence Commission selected 10 universities and one university consortium that could henceforth call themselves “Universities of Excellence”.

Selected were (in alphabetical order):

- \_ Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen (RWTH)
- \_ Verbund Berlin (Berlin University Alliance)
- \_ Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn
- \_ Technische Universität Dresden
- \_ Universität Hamburg
- \_ Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg
- \_ Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT)
- \_ Universität Konstanz
- \_ Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
- \_ Technische Universität München
- \_ Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

### **Current status of procedure**

In accordance with the Administrative Agreement “Excellence Strategy”, regular status meetings are held between the Federal Government and the state during the funding phase to discuss the progress of projects, the use of additional funds and further planning. In addition, the WR observes the universities in the implementation of their measures and monitors the effects of the Excellence Strategy. In this context, further events are planned; information on these events will be announced on the WR website.

Funded institutions are subject to regular external evaluations every seven years in accordance with the Administrative Agreement “Excellence Strategy”. In this context, it will be examined whether the conditions for funding continue to be fulfilled. The evaluation is organized by the WR and assessed by the Committee of Experts. The result of the evaluation will be presented to the Excellence Commission.

If the funding conditions are fulfilled, funding will be continued. For the continuation of funding, it is required to successfully secure at least two or, in case of the university consortium, three Clusters of Excellence as well as to obtain a positive evaluation of the University of Excellence/the University Consortium of Excellence.

In the event of a negative result, the Federal Government and the state will decide on the modalities for the withdrawal of the University of Excellence or the University Consortium of Excellence. Upon withdrawal, the university or university consortium will receive degressive completion funding from the Federal Government and the host state, limited to a maximum of three years.

### **Further information**

The programme “Excellence Strategy” is based on an “Administrative Agreement between the Federal Government and the State Governments in Accordance with Article 91b Paragraph 1 of the Basic Law on the Funding of Top-Level Research at Universities – Excellence Strategy” (German version only) adopted by the Federal Chancellor and the prime-ministers on 16th June 2016.

As part of the programme implementation, a Committee of Experts was formed, consisting of 39 internationally leading experts from various subject areas with substantial international experience as well as expertise in university management, academic teaching, knowledge and technology transfer, or research infrastructure. The Committee’s members are proposed by the DFG Senate and the Scientific Commission of the WR; they are appointed by the Joint Science Conference (GWK). A list of the current members of the Committee of Experts is available on the GWK website.

Graduate Schools, Clusters of Excellence and Institutional Strategies funded through the Excellence Initiative on the basis of the Excellence Agreement II may apply for bridge funding for a maximum of 24 months with funding to begin on 1st November 2017. For details visit the DFG website.

## Documents and guidelines for submitting a proposal and further information

In its meetings in September 2016 as well as April and September 2017, the Committee of Experts adopted the following documents for the funding line “Universities of Excellence” on the basis of the Administrative Agreement “Excellence Strategy”:

- \_ Call for Proposals in the Universities of Excellence Funding Line
- \_ Funding Criteria Universities of Excellence funding line
- \_ Guidelines Universities of Excellence funding line
- \_ Instructions on writing letters of intent for the Universities of Excellence funding line  
(German version only)
- \_ Schedule for the Excellence Strategy through 2019

## History

On 11th December 2014 the Federal Chancellor and the prime ministers of the 16 German states have reached an agreement concerning the succession of the Excellence Initiative.

Agreement concerning the succession of the Excellence Initiative  
(German version only)

On 29th January 2016, the report of the International Expert Commission for the Evaluation of the Excellence Initiative was published (the “Imboden Commission”, German version only).

On 17th February 2016, a public discussion on the further development of the Excellence Initiative took place in the Committee for Education, Research and Technology Assessment of the German Bundestag. In this context, the Chairman of the German Council of Science and Humanities, Prof. Dr. Manfred Prenzel, issued a statement which can be found here.

On 22nd April 2016, the GWK published a press release concerning the new administrative agreement on the succession of the Excellence Initiative.

On 16th June 2016, the Federal Chancellor and the prime ministers adopted the “Administrative Agreement between the Federal Government and the State Governments in Accordance with Article 91b Paragraph 1 of the Basic Law on the Funding of Top-Level Research at Universities – Excellence Strategy”.

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The DFG and the WR welcomed the agreement on the new initiative by the federal and state governments “Excellence Strategy” in their [joint press release](#) from 17th June 2016 (German version only).

On 11th July 2016, the WR published [programme announcement for the launch of the Excellence Strategy](#) (German version only).

WR and DFG issued Calls for Proposals for Universities of Excellence and Clusters of Excellence in [their joint press release](#) from 28th September 2016.

On 7th April, the DFG and the WR published a joint press release on the second meeting of the Committee of Experts, which is available [here](#).

## Contact

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**EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE**

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**Aims of the Excellence Initiative**

The programme Excellence Initiative was launched on the 18th July 2005 and ended on 31st October 2017. The Excellence Initiative intended to strengthen Germany as a location of excellent research, to enhance its international competitiveness, and to increase the visibility of top-level universities and research areas.

The Excellence Initiative was administered by the DFG and the WR. It comprised three funding lines:

- 1 – Graduate Schools to promote young researchers,
- 2 – Clusters of Excellence to promote top-level research,
- 3 – Institutional Strategies to institutionally strengthen universities as a whole.

The WR was in charge of the third funding line, while the DFG was responsible for the first and the second funding line. In total, € 4.6 bn of funding through all three funding lines were approved, € 1.9 bn for the first programme phase (2006-2012), € 2.7 bn for the second programme phase (2012-2017). 25 % of the funding is given by the state where that particular university is located, 75 % is provided by the Federal Government.

**Monitoring**

On the basis of the agreement between the Federal Government and State Governments, the Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) were commissioned to plan and conduct the decision-making process for the allocation of funds, to assist the funded institutions and to evaluate the implementation of the funded measures. The WR accompanied the implementation of the Institutional Strategies. The monitoring included:

- \_ to advise the funded institutions (currently 11 universities),
- \_ to analyse documents and reports,
- \_ to organize mid-term visits at the universities,
- \_ public relations, reporting, conferences and workshops.

Concerning the first programme phase the WR and the DFG already submitted a report on the Excellence Initiative to the Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz (GWK, Joint Science Conference) on 30th November 2008. The report contains first results of the first programme phase.

- ➔ Report on the Excellence Initiative
- ➔ Press Release by the Joint Science Conference



RWTH 2020: Meeting Global Challenges - The Integrated Interdisciplinary University of Technology

Freie Universität Berlin: Veritas - Iustitia - Libertas. The International Network University

University of Freiburg: Windows for Research

Göttingen University: Tradition - Innovation - Autonomy

Heidelberg University: Realising the Potential of a Comprehensive University

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology: Foundation of KIT

University of Konstanz: Modell Konstanz - Towards a Culture of Creativity

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München: LMUexcellent

Technical University of Munich (TUM): The Entrepreneurial University

**List of Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence being funded in the 2nd programme phase:**

List of Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence being funded



RWTH 2020: Meeting Global Challenges - The Integrated Interdisciplinary University of Technology

Freie Universität Berlin: Veritas - Iustitia - Libertas. The International Network University

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Educating Enquiring Minds. Individuality – Openness – Guidance

University of Bremen: Ambitious and Agile

Technische Universität Dresden: The Synergetic University

Heidelberg University: Realising the Potential of a Comprehensive University

University of Cologne: Meeting the Challenge of Change and Complexity. Strategies for Future Excellence in Research and Education

University of Konstanz: Modell Konstanz – Towards a Culture of Creativity

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München: LMUexcellent

Technische Universität München: The Entrepreneurial University

University of Tübingen: Research – Relevance – Responsibility

**List of Graduate Schools and Clusters of Excellence being funded in the 2nd programme phase:**

List of Graduate Schools and List of Clusters being funded

– Distribution of the authorized projects in the first and second funding line, according to universities with and without Institutional Strategies and according to subject groups (German version only)

– Results of the meeting of the Authorising Committee from 15th June 2012

## History and Documents

### *First Programme Phase (2006 - 2012)*

#### **Statements and Reports of the Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) from the 1st Programme Phase**

On 18th July 2005 the Federal Government and State Governments agreed to start the Excellence Initiative which included the financial support for Graduate Schools, Clusters of Excellence and Institutional Strategies at German universities. The implementation of the programme was divided into two calls for proposals during the first programme phase with one year in between.

- [German Research Foundation and German Council of Science and Humanities appreciate the Excellence Agreement \(German version only\)](#)
- [Preparations for the Excellence Initiative are on the way – WR appoints a Strategic Commission \(2005, German version only\)](#)
- [German Council of Science and Humanities is impressed by the draft proposals for the Institutional Strategies \(German version only\)](#)

#### *First Call for Proposals – Funding decisions from 13th October 2006:*

- [Statement by the Chairman of the Wissenschaftsrat 2006, Professor Dr. Peter Strohschneider \(German version only\)](#)
- [Joint press release 2006 of the German Research Foundation und German Council of Science and Humanities \(German version only\)](#)

#### *Second Call for Proposals – Funding decisions from 19th October 2007:*

- [Statement of the Chairman of the German Council of Science and Humanities, Professor Dr Peter Strohschneider \(German version only\)](#)
- [Funding Decisions | Gemeinsame Presseerklärung von DFG und Wissenschaftsrat 2007 \(German version only\)](#)
- [Speech of Professor Dr Peter Strohschneider \(German version only\)](#)
- [Report on the Excellence Initiative \(German version only\)](#)

***Second Programme Phase (2012 - 2017)***

In June 2009 the Federal Government and State Governments decided to continue the Excellence Initiative until 2017 with an overall funding of € 2.7 bn. The period from November 2012 to October 2017 was defined as the second programme phase.

Basis for the arrangement of the second programme phase and the funding decisions is the agreement of the Federal and State Governments for the Excellence Initiative:

- \_ [Exzellenzvereinbarung II \(German version only\)](#)
- \_ [Presentation with general information on the Excellence Initiative](#)

***Statements and Reports of the Wissenschaftsrat (WR, German Council of Science and Humanities) from the 2nd Programme Phase***

- \_ [Joint Press Release of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft \(DFG, German Research Foundation\) and the WR: First Decisions in the Second Phase of the Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments \(2011\)](#)
- \_ [Statement by the Chairman of the WR, Professor Dr Wolfgang Marquardt \(2012\) \(German version only\)](#)
- \_ [Joint Press Release of the DFG and the WR: Decisions on the Second Programme Phase of the Excellence Initiative \(2012\) \(German version only\)](#)
- \_ [In June 2015 the WR and the DFG have submitted the report of the Joint Commission about the programme of the Excellence Initiative to the Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz \(GWK, Joint Science Conference, German version only\).](#)