

Joint Press Release

of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) and the Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities)

15 June 2012

Decisions on the Second Programme Phase of the Excellence Initiative

2,4 Billion Euros for Top-Level Academic Research / Grants Committee Selects 99 Projects at 39 Universities / Results Announced in Bonn

Funding decisions for the second programme phase of the Excellence Initiative have been made. Following evaluation and discussion of a total of 143 proposals from 46 universities, the Excellence Initiative Grants Committee decided on Friday, 15 June 2012, in Bonn to support 45 graduate schools, 43 clusters of excellence, and 11 institutional strategies. In total, 39 universities will receive 2.4 billion euros.

A list of the locations and titles of the approved projects is available at:

www.dfg.de/exzellenzinitiative

<http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative/history-and-analysis/>

The decisions of the Grants Committee were announced, following its meeting, by Germany's Federal Minister of Education and Research Annette Schavan, and, representing the state governments, by Ministers of Research Doris Ahnen, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Johanna Wanka, Lower Saxony. Matthias Kleiner, President of the DFG (in charge of graduate schools and clusters of excellence) and Wolfgang Marquardt, Chairman of the German Council of Science and Humanities (responsible for institutional strategies) explained the results and the process from the perspective of science and academia.

"This second phase of the Excellence Initiative makes it clear once again: this contest has triggered lasting changes in the German university system and strengthened our research considerably within the international arena, and it will continue to do so – with cutting-edge research topics and innovative models for organising research and training young researchers, which would not exist otherwise," said the DFG President. "The approved projects were proposed by more than one-third of all German universities. This shows that top-level research in Germany is broad-based and diverse," added Kleiner.

Participation by almost two-thirds of all public universities in this second phase of the programme demonstrates continuing strong interest in the Excellence Initiative. There were far more submissions than could be approved. About 70 percent of all proposals were granted funding.

"We were impressed by the high quality of the submissions in all three funding lines. The continuers had set the bar very high, but the new applicants are definitely able to keep up with them. We decided not to approve the full amounts of the requested budgets in order to be able to fund more proposals instead," explained the Chairman of the Council of Science and Humanities, Wolfgang Marquardt.

A novelty in this second phase is that first-time proposals were competing with renewal proposals from the first phase. 84 previously funded institutions and 59 first-time applicants participated in the contest.

For graduate schools, 63 proposals had to be considered, including 38 from previously funded institutions and 25 first-time entries. Of the total of 45 approved graduate schools, 33 are continuations of projects

funded since 2006 or 2007, and 12 are projects approved for the first time. Overall, 71 percent of all proposed graduate schools were approved (87 percent of renewal proposals and 48 percent of first-time applications).

For clusters of excellence, the Grants Committee had to decide on 64 proposals, including 37 renewals and 27 first-timers. Of the total of 43 approved clusters of excellence, 31 are continuations of projects funded since 2006 or 2007, and 12 are projects approved for the first time. Overall, 67 percent of all proposed clusters of excellence were approved (84 percent of renewal proposals and 44 percent of first-time applications).

For institutional strategies to promote top-level research, a total of 16 proposals were up for decision. Of the nine strategies already funded since 2006 or 2007, six were able to secure continued support, while five of the seven new applications were approved as well. Overall, 69 percent of all proposed institutional strategies were approved (67 percent of renewal proposals and 71 percent of first-time applications).

The preparation of the decision

After a preliminary selection of draft proposals in March 2011, a total of 63 official proposals for graduate schools and 64 official proposals for clusters of excellence were received. These were assigned to 37 specialised panels, reviewed by international peer review panels, and discussed by a DFG-appointed Expert Commission. Of about 457 reviewers, 87 percent were based outside of Germany. Proposals were evaluated for research quality, the reputation of the participating researchers, support for early career researchers, and research structures.

“We have seen quite excellent applicants that can definitely hold their own internationally with their exciting research topics and modern training models for young researchers,” one reviewer summed up his impression at the conclusion of a review panel.

Responsible for the 16 proposals on institutional strategies was the Strategy Commission appointed by the Council of Science and Humanities. Initially, proposals were assessed by review panels on the sites of the applicant universities. Of the 119 reviewers, 84 percent were based outside of Germany, about two-thirds in Europe, and the rest in North America and Asia. Reviewers evaluated the status quo of a university — and, in the case of renewal proposals, the current implementation status — as well as the institutional strategy and its potential. To qualify for an institutional-strategy grant, a university had to be approved for at least one cluster of excellence and one graduate school.

“Institutional strategies are a great funding programme with high national and international visibility, and a fantastic tool for attracting young researchers and promoting interdisciplinary research,” said a reviewer in the wake of an on-site visit.

The Expert and Strategy Commissions combined formed the Joint Commission, which discussed the proposals and the results of the reviews. Its recommendations provided the basis for the Grants Committee’s funding decisions.

The Excellence Initiative

The Excellence Initiative to promote top-level research at German universities was launched in June 2005 by the heads of the federal and state governments, initially for five years. The first funding decisions were made in October 2006 and October 2007. In mid-2009, the programme was extended for a second phase from 2012 to 2017 and endowed with another 2.724 billion euros in grant money (including overhead, transitional and expiration funding). 75 percent of these funds are provided by the federal government and 25 percent by the states. According to an agreement between the federal and state governments on the benchmark amounts for the individual funding lines (including a 20 percent allowance for overhead), each graduate school is to receive between 1.2 and 3.0 million euros per year, and each cluster of excellence between 3.6 and 9.6 million euros per year. The guide value for institutional strategies is 142 million euros per year in total.

The first programme phase of the Excellence Initiative ended on 31 October 2012. In it, 39 graduate schools, 37 clusters of excellence, and nine institutional strategies were awarded a total of 1.9 billion euros in grants. Projects in all three funding lines that were not approved for continued support will receive expiration funding for a period of two years. For this purpose, the federal and state governments have made available a total of 91.2 million euros, including overhead allowances, that are granted on a staggered basis: for the first year up to 70 percent, and for the second year up to 40 percent of the amount received in the final year of the funding period.

Further Information

This press release, a list of the approved projects in the three funding lines, all other materials on the press conference "Decisions on the Second Programme Phase of the Excellence Initiative", as well as detailed background information can be found on the websites of the DFG and the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat):

www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/excellence_initiative
www.wissenschaftsrat.de/1/fields-of-activity/excellence-initiative

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