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Academia

Excellence Strategy

The Federal Government and the *Länder* are strengthening cutting-edge research at German universities under the umbrella of the Excellence Strategy. Funding is provided to Clusters in selected fields of research and to Universities of Excellence.



The aim of the Excellence Strategy is to ensure that German universities fare even better in the face of international competition and achieve even more academic excellence.

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In 2016, the Federal Government and the *Länder* agreed to launch a new funding programme to promote cutting-edge research at German universities. The goal is to strengthen Germany as an internationally competitive research hub in the long term. The funding programme aims to enable scientific excellence in research, raise the profiles of the universities and encourage even closer

networking and cooperation among stakeholders in the science system. In this way, the Excellence Strategy combines funding for cutting-edge research with long-term strategic investment in the higher education system.

The newly launched Excellence Strategy is based on the predecessor programme – the Excellence Initiative – which ran from 2007 until 2017. This initiative played a major role in making outstanding research possible. Moreover, it strengthened collaboration between universities and non-university partners and enhanced the international networks of German higher education institutions. This development has been widely recognized worldwide and, as a result, more and more foreign researchers are coming to Germany. Other countries have launched their own programmes modelled on the Excellence Initiative. This greater international visibility benefits the entire German higher education landscape. The new Excellence Strategy aims to maintain and expand on this positive development of recent years.

The Excellence Strategy comprises two elements or funding lines: the Excellence Clusters and the Universities of Excellence.

Excellence Clusters

The “Excellence Clusters” funding line provides project-based funding in internationally competitive fields of research at individual universities or university alliances. The Excellence Clusters involve scholars from various disciplines and institutions in a collaborative research project. The funding enables them to focus intensively on the objective of their research, train young talent and recruit leading international peers. Universities that are host to an Excellence Cluster can furthermore apply for a “university allowance” that provides additional strategic funding to strengthen their organization and strategic orientation.

Clusters of Excellence are funded for seven years. A second funding period of another seven years is possible. The funding calls are announced regularly every seven years.

Universities of Excellence

The “Universities of Excellence” funding line sets out to strengthen individual universities or university alliances as an institution and to expand their leading international position in research. Funding presupposes that institutions have successfully applied for at least two Excellence Clusters per individual university, or three Excellence Clusters in the case of university alliances. Universities of Excellence receive long-term funding, while the prerequisites for funding are re-evaluated every seven years. Moreover, Universities of Excellence are required to apply for the necessary number of Excellence Clusters every seven years in competition with other new proposals.

Decisions on the Excellence Clusters and Universities of Excellence are taken on the basis of fully science-led selection processes. The Federal Government and the *Länder* have commissioned the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) and the German Council of Science and Humanities (*Wissenschaftsrat*) to implement these processes.

The first funding decisions under the Excellence Strategy were taken on 27 September 2018 when a commission involving international experts and the Science Ministers of the Federal Government and the *Länder* selected 57 Excellence Clusters to be funded starting on 1 January 2019. The preceding science-led process for selecting the Excellence Clusters took almost two years and involved the evaluation of 195 proposals.

The selection of the Excellence Clusters fired the starting pistol for the second part of the Excellence Strategy. Universities that host at least two clusters or are involved in university alliances for at least three clusters can apply for funding as a University of Excellence until the end of 2018. The funding decisions for the Universities of Excellence will be taken on 19 July 2019. Funding for up to eleven individual universities or university alliances will start in November 2019.

The Federal Government and the *Länder* are making available some 533 million euros of annual funding for the Excellence Strategy starting in 2018. The Federal Government is providing 75 percent of the funds, while the remaining 25 percent are funded by the *Land* that is home to the Excellence Cluster or University of Excellence. Funding for Excellence Clusters accounts for about 385 million euros per annum, while the Universities of Excellence receive approx. 148 million euros of annual funding.

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Homepage Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: Excellence Strategy

<http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/excellence_strategy/>

Homepage Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: Clusters of Excellence:

Committee of Experts selects 88 draft proposals

<http://www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press_releases/2017/press_release_no_41/index.html>

Homepage Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: Excellence Initiative at a Glance

<http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/dfg_im_profil/geschaeftsstelle/publikationen/exin_broschue_re_en.pdf>



Homepage Wissenschaftsrat: Excellence Strategy

<https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/en/fields-of-activity/excellence_strategy.html>