

Recommendation by the
19th General Meeting
of the German Rectors'
Conference (HRK)
on 10 November 2015
in Kiel

**General Principles
for Continuing
the Excellence Initiative**

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

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The continuation of the Excellence Initiative beyond 2017 is currently the subject of intense debate by the federal government and the federal states. In this regard, the HRK is affirming the resolution of its 18th General Meeting "On Continuing the Excellence Initiative" of May 2015 and formulating here in four points some essential principles for the continuation of the Excellence Initiative with reference to the status of the discussions and with a view to designing a successful programme.

1.) The purpose of the Excellence Initiative is to promote top-level research in universities with a strictly science-driven process including peer-review at the highest international level. Funding is provided for thematic projects across the full spectrum of disciplines and for governance-related measures to improve the framework conditions for top-level research and to increase international visibility (brand development, successful rankings).

2.) The acknowledged dynamic of the current Excellence Initiative arose from the judicious restraint of political input that allowed for the design of a research-driven programme which has promoted valuable measures through which every university has cultivated an institutional profile. Each university which submits an excellent proposal must have a chance to obtain approval without any consideration of its size, its location or the availability of partners. The dynamic and justification of the Excellence Initiative would be lost if certain regions, cooperation partners or institutional characteristics were to be given preference even indirectly through political input. Only a comparative evaluation using the excellence criterion may determine whether a project is worthy of funding; this includes an examination of the extent to which suitable partners are involved. As the Excellence Initiative is continued, it must offer the universities of applied sciences the opportunity to be involved as partners.

3.) The political input, which is essential for the call for entries in the competition, can and should be designed to be very flexible, given the strict evaluation. Generally speaking, when funding top-level research it is appropriate to set quality standards high but to reduce quantitative specifications to a minimum. Broad financial corridors are important because the projects should not be designed to comply with overly narrow financial specifications. For the clusters, a financial corridor of three to twelve million euros appears appropriate. However, the universities and the other higher education institutions involved should explain not only for governance-related projects but also for thematically designed clusters how the inclusion of early career researchers and the general development of the personnel and organisation associated with the project is structured and how responsibility for them are borne by the institution.

4.) To allow plans for institutional development and for subject-specific priorities to be productive, close integration with the current Excellence Initiative must be guaranteed. To do this, two-stage application and review procedures under the supervision of the DFG are essential.