

Appeal to the federal and state governments

to urgently stabilise and increase the research programme overhead. Research contributions, competitiveness and attractiveness of German universities must not be jeopardised.

In the run-up to the meeting of the Joint Conference of Science Ministers on 28 November 2025, the Universities Member Group of the German Rectors' Conference is urging the federal and state governments to implement the coalition agreement. It also calls on them to increase the DFG programme overhead and make it permanent.

Third-party funding enables research projects of the highest scientific quality. Third-party funding has represented around 30 per cent of university budgets for over ten years. Project funding does not cover the costs incurred by universities for third-party funded projects. The overhead is thus an indispensable element of third-party funding. An empirical study commissioned by the BMBF in 2024 concluded that the overhead requirement is actually around 45 per cent.

Unless this increase is implemented and made permanent, there could be serious consequences for research contributions, competitiveness and the attractiveness of German universities: The more successful the universities are in attracting third-party funding, the greater the strain on their basic budgets. Success in the area of third-party funding must not come at the expense of other services provisions, such as study and teaching, transfer and internationalisation.

The DFG's new guidelines ensure that the funded universities receive the DFG overhead in the general budget and use it in a transparent and verifiable manner.

The increase in a **permanent** overhead to 30 percent in line with the coalition agreement is the right step in a development that gradually takes the universities' real expenditure on third-party funded projects into account.

Resolution of the 87th meeting of the HRK Universities Member Group on 3 November 2025

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Background

'The overhead was introduced in 2007. Initially 20% of direct project funds were budgeted as an overhead. From 1 January 2016, the overhead was increased to 22%. From the outset, all agreements on the overhead to date have stipulated that it may not be used to increase direct project expenditure. It may only be used to cover indirect, variable project expenditure associated with the funding, which, from a business perspective, is directly linked to the research projects.'^{*}

^{*} Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation), 'Guideline Model DFG Overhead in Usage Guidelines from 1/1/2023', www.dfg.de/de/foerderung/antrag-foerderprozess/programmpauschale, last accessed on 30/10/2025.