

15 March 2016**HRK Senate: universities want dynamic funding for excellence**

The universities in Germany are of the view that the federal government and the federal states are sending important and appropriate signals concerning a new joint initiative to succeed the Excellence Initiative. However, at its meeting today in Berlin the Senate of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) recognised worrying tendencies in the political discussion which would put the dynamic of the previous Excellence Initiative, and therefore its positive impact on the whole higher education system, at risk.

The HRK Senate said that the universities strongly welcome the stated intention of the federal government and the federal states to complete the process to establish a successor programme to the Excellence Initiative on schedule. From the perspective of the universities, it is matter of key importance that funding line 1 (clusters of excellence) will be provided with financing sufficient to ensure a reasonable success rate (60 clusters). "Top-level research at German universities has enormous potential which must be further increased and used," explained Prof. Dr. Ulrich Rüdiger, HRK Vice-President responsible for research, after the meeting. "The researchers at the universities and their partner institutions wish to continue to bring their powers of innovation, their dynamic approach, their creativity and their ability to compete on an international level to bear on funding proposals. The universities note with approval that the responsible figures in the federal government and the federal states are being guided by the principle of a science-driven process and by the idea of continuity with the successful concept of the former Excellence Initiative. Obviously, the whole funding concept should not involve any interference in the autonomy of the universities."

The HRK Senate warned, however, against weakening the dynamic impetus of genuine competition with funding lines designed inappropriately for the higher education system overall. In particular, the universities are opposed to excessively stringent conditions on access to funding line 2.

They agree with the concept of making access to the planned funding line 2 (keyword: "top universities") dependent on success in funding line 1 ("clusters of excellence"). In their view it makes sense to integrate the required planning and strategic ability of a university and the quality-led procedure of line 1. However this combination would present a problem if the conditions on which access to line 2 depended were so strict that the participants could not expect open competition independent of size. "The need to attract several clusters of excellence – possibly even from different research areas – in order to access line 2 is not consistent with the challenge which presenting a single successful proposal in the central line 1 means for even very well-placed universities," said HRK President Professor Dr. Horst Hippler.

"The universities want full and open competition. Attracting one cluster of excellence, presenting a strategy concept plus other factors such as 'past merits', as discussed – these are an appropriate basis for line 2."