

22 April 2016**GWK Decision on Successor Programme to the Excellence Initiative:
HRK President Criticises High Barrier to Second Funding Line**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr. Horst Hippler, has reacted with approval and also criticism to today's decision by the Joint Science Conference (GWK) on a successor programme to the Excellence Initiative:

"This represents an important step in the continued strengthening of excellent research at universities in Germany. If the GWK proposal is approved at the highest levels of the federal and state governments, the universities will have planning certainty in an important area.

The federal and state governments have today agreed on a programme in which the allocation of project funding is based solely on scientific or academic quality. This is an essential foundation for the funding of excellent research, not just in German universities but elsewhere too. It also ensures the acceptance and good reputation of the programme abroad. The emphasis given to the funding line Clusters of Excellence and the strengthening of university management through additional allowances are correct decisions because they support the strategic development of the universities.

However, not all the fundamental questions have been adequately addressed. This is especially true with regard to access to the second funding line, known as Universities of Excellence. Restricting access to institutions which propose at least two clusters of excellence does not reflect the diversity and capabilities of German universities. This formal restriction places too much emphasis on the size of a university. Anyone who is familiar with the international landscape knows that the most successful universities are by no means always the biggest. The competition is therefore being severely limited right from the start. This cannot be adequately compensated for by the possibility of future funding for alliances and financially smaller-scale clusters, because even the latter need to be planned in detail and implemented within the university structure.

The universities are also concerned about the possible organisation of the procedure for the submission of proposals for clusters of excellence. This procedure must not be subject to time pressures which have little to do with the real purpose of research. A process that does not allow sufficient time for the review of draft proposals cannot be conducive to the quality of the programme as a whole and therefore the results. I would consider it entirely inappropriate to impose such requirements on the DFG programme at this critical point, so vital to the acceptance of the decisions."