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**Author**

MEYER, Hans Joachim

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**Abstract**

For quite a long time difference in university standards was not considered as desirable in German academic life. All universities were regarded as equal in status and achievement. It is undoubtedly a merit of the "Exzellenzinitiative" of the DFG to reveal how unrealistic this assumption was - at least in the field of research. The question, however, is whether this initiative offers a realistic alternative. In fact, its criteria of success are highly divergent. The first and the second stages in the competition promote graduate schools and research clusters in well-established DFG tradition on the basis of available research results. The third stage, however, serves to select a group of excellent universities on the basis of the quality of their research planning. In the first and second stages it is research work which is rewarded, whereas in the third stage it is a managerial project of research perspectives which is given a financial chance. The prestigious title of an "Exzellenzuniversität" was granted only in the latter case. The question is why academic excellence in this competition has not been identified exclusively on the basis of existing research results, which would also have revealed a wide spectrum of differences in research achievement. The answer seems to be that it was the main target of the

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"Exzellenzinitiative" to bring about a new type of university leadership, which puts aside traditional structures and follows the pattern of American elite universities. In so far the "Exzellenzinitiative" resembles the German version of the Bologna process, which introduced Bachelor, Master and PhD as academic degrees. In fact, there are grounds to suspect that the motivation for both reform moves was an ideological one, accepting English as the language of the emerging global society and taking the USA as its model. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)