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**Abstract**

This chapter introduces some of the traditional characteristics of German higher education and presents the major areas of change and reform since the 1990s. This sets the scene for the analysis of the Excellence Initiative introduced in 2006/2007. The initiative broke a long-standing taboo by giving up the idea of basic institutional homogeneity characteristic for the German higher education system after World War II. The selection process and its outcomes in the three rounds of competition that have taken place so far are described. This is followed by a critical analysis of the effects and side effects the German Excellence Initiative has had so far on the German higher education system, that is, more stratification, a downgrading of teaching, an additional administrative burden and a trend towards institutional fragmentation. The final part discusses whether the intended goals have been reached and can be reached. The conclusion is that the Excellence Initiative as a political programme has changed its course and did not achieve all the goals attached to it and a new balance has to be

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found between attributed status and objective performance. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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