



Rhine-Main Universities are once again presenting the RMU Awards

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The award winners are Professor Tamer Butto and Professor C. Katharina Spieß, both scientists from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

On 20 October 2026, the Rhine-Main Universities (RMU) once again presented the RMU Awards as part of a festive ceremony at Goethe University Frankfurt. The awards were presented in the profile areas *Health* and *Society* which, together with *Data* and *Matter*, constitute the four profile areas in which the RMU pools its research.

The winner of the RMU Award in the area *Health* for "Pharmaceutical Research & Innovative Medical Theories" of Frankfurt Foundation Quality of Medicines was Jun.-Prof. Dr. Tamer Butto. He has been a junior professor at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz since July 2026 and received the award for his innovative research idea aimed at improving the diagnosis of rare genetic disorders. The novel approach combines cutting-edge RNA sequencing with the aim of gaining a better understanding of individual disease mechanisms, diagnosing Ribosomal disorders such as Diamond-Blackfan anemia more quickly and more precisely, and, in the long term, opening up new avenues for targeted therapies.

The Sibylle Kalkhof-Rose RMU Award for the Humanities and Social Sciences was presented to Prof. Dr. C. Katharina Spieß, professor of population economics at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and Director of the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB). She received the award for her outstanding research on education, family, and social inequalities. Her innovative work has had a significant impact on economic research on early childhood education and care in Germany, extending far beyond the field of economics. Through her interdisciplinary work, her support for early-career researchers, and her commitment to evidence-based education and family policies, she combines academic excellence with social responsibility.

Prof. Dr. Tanja Brühl, President of Technical University of Darmstadt and current RMU spokesperson, said: "I extend my sincerest congratulations to Tamer Butto and Katharina Spieß on receiving this year's RMU Awards. Their work are an example for what we as RMU stand for: Excellent research that asks new questions and develops solutions for the great challenges of our times. Research that is in dialogue with partners from society and politics, thus enabling viable and sustainable changes. The research of Tamer Butto and Katharina Spieß is anchored in two defining areas of our profile as an alliance – in the area Emerging Targets and Transformative Therapies, where the focus is on diseases that have been difficult to treat,

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and in the area Challenging Societal Orders, in which scientists explore how societies deal with social and political challenges.”

Brühl added: “In our joint research profile as an alliance, we pool the complementary strengths of three universities. As a University Excellence Consortium, we will intensify our successful collaboration even further and will give room to and create opportunities for researchers at all stages of their career to think in new ways and to shape new ideas together. Because it is the people and their ideas that shape and advance our alliance.”

Brühl also thanked the founders, Prof. Dr. Hennig Blume and Dr. Dagmar Walluf-Blume of Frankfurt Foundation Quality of Medicines, as well as Dr. Wolfgang Litzenburger of Sibylle Kalkhof-Rose-Stiftung, and the laudators Prof. Dr. Robert Tampé of Goethe University Frankfurt and Prof. Dr. Daniel Schunk of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.

In his laudatory speech for Jun.-Prof. Dr. Tamer Butto, Prof. Dr. Robert Tampé emphasized: “Scientific progress does not always come from answering an old question better. Sometimes it comes from making a new question possible. And that is what I find particularly compelling about Tamer Butto’s work. He did not simply apply nanopore sequencing to an existing problem. He combined RNA biology, computational biology, sequencing technology, ribosome biogenesis, and disease biology to create a new way of seeing the problem. This interdisciplinary character is also why his work speaks to such a broad audience. Tamer Butto is an example of a new generation of scientists capable of asking questions that we have not yet learned to ask.”

Prof. Dr. Daniel Schunk stated in his laudatory speech for Prof. Dr. C. Katharina Spieß: “If you look at the academic work of Katharina Spieß, you quickly realize: You can weave many threads through her work, and each one gives a coherent picture. There is the education economist, the family researcher, and the demographer. There is the researcher who builds bridges to sociology and to psychology. There is the architect of research infrastructure. And there is the policy advisor who, for more than twenty years – for example, on the Scientific Advisory Board for Family Affairs – has been bringing evidence to decision-makers. But among all these threads, there is one that, in my view, shines particularly brightly. It is this: Investing in young people early on pays off – but it takes patience. Katharina Spieß is also known for inspiring young scholars to pursue research. She has supervised over 30 doctoral dissertations. She does invest in young people early on – not just as research subjects, but in a very practical way, within her own team



The foundations

Frankfurt Foundation Quality of Medicines

The Frankfurt Foundation Quality of Medicines promotes research projects with the aim of assuring, developing and optimizing the quality of medicinal products and their therapeutic use. The focus is on the development of advanced processes, innovative technologies and modern standardization approaches. The Foundation also honors outstanding scientific achievements and initiatives in this field through prizes and awards – both at its own initiative and in cooperation with professional associations.

Starting in 2025, the Foundation presents the RMU Award for Pharmaceutical Research & Innovative Medical Therapies to outstanding early career researchers. The award honors creative, pioneering research ideas with high scientific and therapeutic potential and is endowed with 10,000 euros.

Sibylle-Kalkhof-Rose Foundation

The Sibylle Kalkhof-Rose Foundation promotes research and teaching at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (JGU), in particular early career researchers. There are two funding lines: The University Award is presented each year to young researchers in the categories humanities and social Sciences, natural sciences and medicine. In addition, the Foundation supports outstanding, sustainable and significant projects and acquisitions at the JGU that cannot be funded from regular means.

In 2025, the Foundation honors outstanding, personal and scientific achievements at the Rhine-Main Universities with the RMU Award. It is endowed with 10,000 euros to be used at the awardee's discretion.

The Rhine-Main Universities (RMU)

Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and Technical University of Darmstadt make up the RHINE-MAIN-UNIVERSITIES (RMU). The universities have a combined total of more than 90,000 students and 1,500 professors and cooperate closely in research, studying and teaching. These renowned research universities are shaping the Frankfurt-Rhine-Main region as an internationally visible academic hub. From January 2027, the Rhine-Main Universities will receive funding as a University Excellence Consortium as part of the Excellence Strategy of the German federal and state governments.



Additional information: www.rhein-main-universitaeten.de