



Excellence Strategy: Rhine-Main Universities submit joint proposal as a University Excellence Consortium

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A clear vision for a globally leading hub of cutting-edge research

As part of the Excellence Strategy of the federal and state governments, the Rhine-Main Universities (RMU) – consisting of Goethe University Frankfurt, Technical University of Darmstadt, and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz – submitted a joint proposal today to be recognized as a University Excellence Consortium under the Universities of Excellence funding line. The proposal, titled “RMU-EXCITE – Excellent. Collaborative. Transformative.”, highlights the shared goal of transforming the Rhine-Main Universities alliance into an internationally leading center for cutting-edge research that provides groundbreaking solutions to complex scientific and societal challenges. At the same time, the alliance is committed to fostering a research culture that strengthens the connection between science and society, emphasizing dialogue, participation, and the collaborative creation of knowledge as integral components of scientific excellence.

This proposal was made possible by the significant success of the three universities in the Clusters of Excellence funding line – in May, five RMU cluster initiatives were approved for funding starting in 2026.

Prof. Dr. Enrico Schleiff, current RMU spokesperson, states: “We as the RMU have steadily deepened our cooperation over the past decade – and in the last three years, we have worked intensively toward this milestone. My colleagues Tanja Brühl, Georg Krausch, and I sincerely thank the many RMU members who helped shape the proposal, contributing their innovative ideas and expertise with unwavering enthusiasm. This was true teamwork – across departments, campuses, and universities. Together, we have accomplished a great deal over these three years, and this proposal is just one of the results.”

Schleiff, Brühl and Krausch are proud of the result and firmly convinced that RMU-EXCITE represents a forward-thinking strategy that builds on RMU’s diverse successes across all performance dimensions and further unlocks the partnership’s potential.

“‘RMU-EXCITE – Excellent. Collaborative. Transformative.’ is more than the title of our excellence alliance proposal – it embodies the very spirit of RMU. Through excellence in research, teaching, and societal engagement – and through collaboration among our researchers, institutions, industry partners, and international networks – we drive the sustainable and digital transformation of society and the economy. We are inspired by new members joining the RMU, exploring emerging research fields together, and fostering the next generation of academic leaders – empowering them

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to shape a sustainable and humane future with innovation and purpose,” Schleiff added.

In its proposal as a University Excellence Consortium, the RMU is strongly supported as a cross-state alliance by its home states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate.

Clemens Hoch, Minister of Science for Rhineland-Palatinate: “The submission of the Rhine-Main Universities’ proposal today sends a strong signal for scientific excellence and collaboration at the heart of Germany. Rhineland-Palatinate stands firmly alongside Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and its partner universities in Frankfurt and Darmstadt. With the administrative agreement concluded between Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate, we have established a reliable foundation to sustainably support this cross-state cooperation. Together, we aim to further strengthen top-level research – research that sets international standards and provides answers to the central challenges of our time.”

Hesse's Minister of Science Timon Gremmels: “For the first time in history, universities in Hesse are competing for the prestigious title of University of Excellence and the accompanying funding. Strong alliances are entering the competition with equally strong proposals. I sincerely thank everyone involved – especially the leadership teams of the applicant universities. Over the past months, they have prepared their proposals with exceptional dedication and commitment. Collaboration within these alliances has long been a hallmark of their success. I therefore warmly welcome this proposal process, as cooperation allows individual strengths to be combined and synergies created that reach far beyond each university. We support and accompany both proposals with great determination and hope that, following our success in the Excellence Cluster competition, we will once again achieve strong results in the Universities of Excellence funding line.”

The applicant universities or consortia will be evaluated in the next phase through on-site visits conducted by international review panels between April and June 2026. In October 2026, the Excellence Commission, consisting of experts from all research fields as well as federal and state ministers responsible for science and research, will decide on the funding of the Excellence Universities or Excellence Consortia. Up to fifteen Excellence Universities or Excellence Consortia can be funded for the period from 2027 to 2033.



The Excellence Strategy: Financial Support and International Visibility

The Excellence Strategy aims to sustainably strengthen Germany as a hub for science and enhance its international competitiveness. It is jointly implemented by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the German Science and Humanities Council (Wissenschaftsrat) through two funding lines: the Cluster of Excellence funding line, which supports internationally competitive research fields at universities or university alliances, and the Universities of Excellence funding line, which aims to permanently strengthen universities either as individual institutions or as university consortia, enhancing their international leadership in research based on successful Clusters of Excellence. Individual universities must have at least two Clusters of Excellence, while consortia must have a minimum of three.

Success in the Excellence competition is significant for universities not only because of the financial support provided by federal and state funds. It also boosts national and international visibility, since the program is globally regarded as an elite funding initiative. Clusters of Excellence can address interdisciplinary research fields with a long-term perspective, advance research and infrastructure in collaboration with non-university partners and increase the university's appeal as a place for research and study. As an alliance, the Rhine-Main Universities aim to strengthen their attractiveness through diverse joint and complementary offerings in research and teaching, better support for scientists and staff, and leveraging synergies in infrastructure and knowledge transfer. In doing so, they also seek to contribute to positioning the region as an internationally visible science hub. A successful proposal as a consortium in the Universities of Excellence competition would reinforce this positioning, particularly in the international context.

About the Rhine-Main Universities (RMU)

Goethe University Frankfurt (President: Prof. Dr. Enrico Schleiff), Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (President: Prof. Dr. Georg Krausch) and Technical University of Darmstadt (President: Prof. Dr. Tanja Brühl) make up the RHINE-MAINUNIVERSITIES (RMU). The universities have a combined total of more than 95,000 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.

Further information: <https://www.rhein-main-universitaeten.de/en>