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Excellence Strategy of the Federal and State Governments

A GREAT SUCCESS: THE UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG AWARDED 4 CLUSTERS OF EXCELLENCE

The University of Hamburg was extremely successful in the framework of the Excellence Strategy, securing funding for the 4 existing clusters of excellence in the next funding round from January 2026. The University has thus consolidated its top position among the leading group of German research universities. With this funding, the University of Hamburg will further expand its role at the center of the excellent research hub of Hamburg and provide vital ideas and inspiration for science and society.Teaser

The 4 existing clusters of excellence that have been awarded the contract are Climate, Climatic Change, and Society (CLICCS, climate), CUI: Advanced Imaging of Matter (photon and nanosciences), Quantum Universe (mathematics, particle physics, astrophysics, cosmology), and Understanding Written Artefacts (manuscript research).

The University of Hamburg also has several researchers involved in BlueMat: Water-Driven Materials—the new cluster of excellence at the Hamburg University of Technology (TU Hamburg). The cluster develops sustainable, water-activated materials.

Today's decision by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the members of the international panel of experts appointed by the Bonn-based Joint Science Conference (GWK) of the federal government and the states once again confirms the University of Hamburg's great success of 2018. The 4 clusters of excellence have prevailed in a highly competitive process and will each receive up to around €10 million in funding per year from 2026.

This is also key with regard to the Excellence Strategy funding line, because the prerequisite for further funding as a University of Excellence from 2027 is the acquisition of at least 2 clusters of excellence.

Dr. Peter Tschentscher, mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: “The fact that all current clusters of excellence are being funded for a further 7 years and that another cluster is even being added at TU Hamburg is great news. The success of Hamburg’s applications in the Excellence Strategy provides additional impetus for the development of the city as a research hub. I would like to congratulate the participating universities and research groups on their success and thank everyone involved for their commitment.”

Katharina Fegebank, deputy mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: “This success for the University of Hamburg is the goal we have worked so hard for in recent years: 4 confirmed clusters of excellence at a university in key future fields and a great and pioneering application whose time will surely come. Hamburg is thus once again one of the leaders in research and science in Germany. The fact that the federal and state governments are jointly providing such clear financial and non-material support in times of serious global crises, growing threats to democracy, and attacks on academic freedom is an important sign for strong, independent, and sustainable science and thus for a future worth living. The decision provides a real funding boost to the University of Hamburg, its partners, and the city as a research hub—it’s fantastic! You get this far only if you investigate unusual issues on an international and interdisciplinary basis and have a unique infrastructure like we do in Hamburg. There is a real Hamburg spirit behind this success—the hard work of so many people who are passionate about their topics and have given their all together. Today is your day! Congratulations from the bottom of my heart!”

Maryam Blumenthal, senator of the Ministry of Science, Research and Equality (BWFG): “What a great gain for the University of Hamburg. With 4 clusters, the successful course of our flagship university is entering the next phase. The University’s research focus and its international connectivity have thus been confirmed once again. This decision highlights Hamburg’s attractiveness as a research hub and opens many doors for the future. This is because Hamburg has an environment in which research excellence can flourish and be developed jointly across disciplinary, institutional, and national borders—with the 4 approved clusters and the outstanding research of all the applications. I congratulate everyone involved who contributed to this extraordinary success.”

Prof. Dr. Hauke Heekeren, president of the University of Hamburg: “With 4 clusters of excellence, the University of Hamburg is excellently positioned—that’s a great success! We are northern Germany’s strongest research university with international visibility and one of the top German universities. This outstanding result confirms the international appeal of our research and recognizes the commitment of our researchers. We would like to thank all our researchers and participants for their



tireless efforts. The outstanding new application from the Gateways initiative did not prevail this time due to the very strong competition; however, thanks to the strong partners at the site, this project remains an important driving force for infection research in Hamburg. We will work together to further develop this focus in a targeted and sustainable manner and to open up new funding channels. In the coming years, we will continue to expand cutting-edge research in Hamburg in a targeted manner and play an active role in shaping social challenges. The 4 clusters of excellence for the University of Hamburg and a total of 5 clusters of excellence for Hamburg send a strong signal about the city as a research hub and for the future.”

Information on the funded clusters:

Climate, Climatic Change, and Society (CLICCS)

The Cluster of Excellence Climate, Climatic Change, and Society (CLICCS) at the University of Hamburg researches climate change, with a focus on the natural sciences, societal dynamics, and their interplay. What developmental scenarios (climate futures) are plausible? CLICCS II also asks which desired climate futures are realizable. Societal discourse and scientifically sound recommendations to policymakers are key factors. The cluster is comprised of 12 Hamburg climate research centers.

CUI: Advanced Imaging of Matter

Functionalities form the focus of the Cluster of Excellence CUI: Advanced Imaging of Matter. Atoms combine to form solids; molecules interact and react. As systems grow more complex and larger, new functionalities emerge. To observe, understand, and control these processes, 185 researchers in the fields of physics, chemistry, and structural biology have joined forces. Researchers from the University of Hamburg work with teams from DESY, the Max Planck Institute for the Structure and Dynamics of Matter (MPSD), and European XFEL. In the future, they will focus more closely on the question as to how to design new functionalities.

Understanding Written Artefacts

The Cluster of Excellence Understanding Written Artefacts (UWA) studies one of humanity’s major practices: writing by hand, from its origins in antiquity to the digital age. The cluster focuses on the material nature of written artifacts, taking a holistic view that opens new perspectives on the development of handwriting across the worlds’ cultures. Significantly supported by the niche subjects, UWA incorporates expertise from the natural sciences, such as food chemistry, particle physics, and computer science. In this way, the cluster creates a conceptual framework to study written artifacts from a global perspective and develops innovative methods in the materials science. Researchers from the



University of Hamburg cooperate with DESY, the Hamburg University of Technology (TU Hamburg), and the Helmut Schmidt University.

Quantum Universe

Researchers in the Cluster of Excellence Quantum Universe at the University of Hamburg and DESY ponder the great, unanswered questions of the universe. They focus on the Higgs boson and its significance to the development of the universe, from its origins to today. Quantum Universe is a leader in technological development for gravitational wave detectors. It profits from the synergies between experiments on dark matter and gravitational waves. The combination of new ideas in theoretical physics and modern mathematical structures facilitates major progress in describing quantum gravity. The cluster develops innovative AI methods that make for more efficient and resource-friendly processing of large amounts of data.

Information on the additional fifth application:

Despite the decision of the Excellence Commission, the unsuccessful application also deserves great recognition for its outstanding scientific concept and exceptional commitment.

Gateways to Health

The researchers within the Gateways to Health initiative aim to investigate how life on Earth is impacted by various pathogens (viruses, bacteria, and parasites). Experts in medicine, the biosciences, the humanities, and the social sciences jointly examine not only the causes of infectious diseases but also their consequences and social impact. They also focus intensively on possible prevention measures. Gateways to Health enables researchers to examine infectious diseases from various angles and develop appropriate measures for tackling the challenges of a rapidly changing world. In addition to the University of Hamburg, the following institutions are involved: the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf (UKE), DESY, the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, the Leibniz Institute of Virology, and the Research Center Borstel.

Information on the Excellence Strategy of the Federal and State Governments:

With the Excellence Strategy, the federal and state governments want to strengthen Germany as a center of research in the long term and further improve its international competitiveness. The further development of German universities is to be continued by promoting scientific excellence, profile building, and cooperation in the research and higher education system.

The Excellence Strategy of the Federal and State Governments takes place in two funding lines. The first funding line, which is currently



running, is for clusters of excellence that receive funding for 7 years in each round.

The second funding line, for which the German Council of Science and Humanities is jointly responsible, is dedicated to designated Universities of Excellence as a whole. Universities must have at least 2 clusters of excellence to apply for recognition as a University of Excellence. The decision for the funding period from 2027 to 2034 was made in spring 2026.

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