



Science & Innovation developments in Germany – January 2015

Federal funding of German universities

After years of negotiations between the parties, in December Germany's regional parliamentary chamber (Bundesrat) finally approved an amendment to German Basic Law, which will allow the Federal Government to provide permanent funding for German universities and individual institutes. Until now university funding was a Länder competence and the Federal Government could only finance research at German universities through certain programmes/ initiatives. Research minister Johanna Wanka praised the reform as "particularly important for Germany and the researchers in our country", but she also said that the expectation shouldn't be that the Federal Government will now pay for everything. She stressed that it is about supporting "strategic plans that are of importance for research in Germany as a whole" and called on the Länder not to neglect their universities.

Temporary contracts for researchers

Research minister Wanka says the Länder can use the money they save from not having to finance the student loan/ grant system to finance 10,000 new positions at universities. She also admitted that it was necessary to adjust the legislation governing fixed-term contracts in research institutes: "fixed-term contracts do make sense, particularly in the research field, but they are sometimes over-used". 84% of the 160,000 researchers at German universities are now on fixed-term contracts, a significant increase in the last ten years.

Germany planning new Internet Institute

Research minister Johanna Wanka explained in a newspaper interview this month plans to provide funding for a national Internet Institute. Wanka said that setting up such an institute is a concrete example of how the Federal Government wants to use the Basic Law reform (see above) to develop new nationwide centres of excellence. The new institute would look at the entire complexity of the topic of the Internet from the technical as well as ethical and legal aspects. The idea would be to start a competition where universities or a consortium could bid for the funding.

German R&D spending remains high

Official figures published by the Stifterverband für die Wissenschaft this month show a surprising decline in overall R&D spending for the year 2013. In total German companies spent €53.6bn on R&D in 2013, a decline of €0.2bn on the 2012 figures. Overall R&D spending increased by 1.3% to almost €80.2bn, which means it is at 2.85% of GDP.

Germany no. 1 in ERC grants

For the first time Germany is no.1 in the ERC grant programme, with one in every five starting grants for basic pioneering research in 2014 going to a German institute. In total 70 ERC grants went to researchers at German institutions and in terms of nationality of project leaders Germany is also top, with 68 grants going to German nationals. This puts Germany ahead of the UK for the first time.

Merkel hosts international innovation meeting

For the second time, Chancellor Merkel hosts an international innovation meeting, inviting 150 scientists, companies and experts for social innovation to the Chancellery. Among the attendees was NESTA Chief Executive Geoff Mulgan, who told the assembled audience that Germany needed to do more in terms of social innovation. At the end of the meeting Merkel said she was particularly interested in the “narrative” that needs to accompany innovations in order for them to be adopted by the wider society.

Leopoldina recommendations on handling changes in life sciences

The German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina has expressed concerns that Germany is failing to keep abreast of developments in the life sciences. The Report on Tomorrow's Science entitled “Life sciences in transition” sets out six recommendations on how existing deficiencies can be overcome and research and teaching better equipped for the challenges of modern life sciences. The recommendations include setting up a national OMICS and IT infrastructure and providing targeted support to young researchers in this field. The report can be found here (LINK).

[http://www.leopoldina.org/en/publications/detailview/?publication\[publication\]=604&cHash=458519e2a776c7470f516b24e1935e8e](http://www.leopoldina.org/en/publications/detailview/?publication[publication]=604&cHash=458519e2a776c7470f516b24e1935e8e)

British biologist awarded Helmholtz International Fellow Award

The British cell biologist Professor Amanda Gay Fisher of Imperial College London (ICL) has been honoured with the Helmholtz International Fellow Award for her excellent research. Fisher is one of seven outstanding researchers from abroad who received the award, each of which is endowed with €20,000. The award also includes an invitation to spend time researching at one or several Helmholtz research centers. Professor Fisher wishes in particular to strengthen her existing collaborations with the Berlin Institute of Medical Systems Biology (BIMSB) of the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC) Berlin-Buch. The MDC is working with the Berlin University hospital Charité to set up the Berlin Institute of Health.

Energy savings and energy efficiency

The Federal Government's Energy Concept aims to halve primary energy consumption by 2050 as compared to 2008. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) announced at the beginning of January 2015 a new set of funding measures for applied research and development in the field of energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy. Within the Federal Government's 6th Energy Research Programme energy savings will be encouraged at every stage of the energy chain: energy generation, energy conversion, energy transport and, above all, energy consumption by end users. The new funding also aims to strengthen European and international collaboration within the framework of the

Strategic Energy Technology (SET)-Plans and the IEA-Implementing Agreements. The Project Management Centre Jülich (www.ptj.de) will implement the research and innovation funding programme.

Further energy efficiency measures

In December 2014, the Federal Economic Affairs Ministry and the Environment Ministry jointly signed an agreement with business associations and organisations on the nation-wide introduction of energy efficiency networks. The agreement aims to establish approx. 500 new networks by 2020, thereby making an important contribution towards mitigating climate change and boosting energy efficiency in industry, crafts, trade and commerce. An energy efficiency network consists of 8 to 15 companies. Each company uses the services of an experienced energy consultant to set a conservation target, and backs this up with action.

Science & Innovation Team, Germany