

Excellence Initiative by the German Federal and State Governments to Promote Science and Research at German Universities

Guidelines for Graduate Schools

I. Programme objectives and scope

Graduate schools play a key role not only in developing internationally competitive centres of top-level research and scientific excellence in Germany but also in increasing their recognition and prestige. They serve as an instrument of quality assurance in promoting young researchers and are based on the principle of training outstanding doctoral students within an excellent research environment. Graduate schools thus offer ideal conditions for doctoral students within a broad scientific area and, as integrative institutions with international visibility, they encourage students to be active members of their academic and social communities. As a result, graduate schools will extend far beyond DFG Research Training Groups and differ from them substantially.

1. Numbers

Approximately 40 graduate schools will be funded, distributed over two grant rounds (2005 and 2006).

2. Funding volume

A total of €40 million will be available annually; an average of €1 million per graduate school each year. A supplemental allowance, amounting to 20% of the total sum, will also be available to cover indirect expenses related to the funding programme.

3. Funding period

The initial funding period for each graduate school will be five years.

II. Conditions of the programme

1. Applicants will be universities seeking to establish a major research focus on the basis of existing structures. This focus should clearly raise the research and training profile of the university, and its impact should continue beyond the programme's funding period. More than one graduate school can be funded at the same university
2. Universities are requested to submit a specific structural plan for the design of a graduate school along with their proposal.
3. Proposals will be assessed on the basis of a combination of different factors in a balanced, structure-building strategy that will ensure the best conditions for doctoral students at the location in question. This should include: the scientific quality of the investigators and the location involved; plans for selecting, training and supervising doctoral students; promotion of early independence; ability to attract both domestic and international students; measures for integrating doctoral students from abroad; promotion of gender equality; and quality assurance in the research training process.
4. A graduate school can be set up at the departmental or faculty level, but it may also include several, or even all, of the departments/faculties of a university. The school should not focus on a single, traditional subject, but incorporate an integrative interdisciplinary approach.
5. A graduate school must stand out through a) its scientific profile in the form of overarching issues and approaches (not specialised topics), b) a structured research training process that contains an innovative and clearly defined supervision plan, including compulsory tutorials and a differentiated training programme, and is clearly anchored in the regulations governing the award of Ph.D. degrees.

Under this umbrella structure, a graduate school may be divided into different sections focusing on different topics, thereby integrating other structures such as DFG Research Training Groups, Max Planck Research Schools, and Collaborative Research Centres and their doctoral groups.

6. Graduate schools should incorporate non-university research institutions in the region, including those from the private sector and the arts, whose participation can enhance scientific training and/or help prepare students for a non-academic career.
7. The aim is to achieve national and international integration and focus in the research training process.
8. The essential components of a graduate school will include professional leadership and efficient management.
9. The selection and corporate status of Ph.D. students, as well as their position and integration into the university and the graduate school, should be clearly defined. Together with the principal elements of the supervision and training strategies, they should be laid down in the statutory regulations governing the university's structure and degree rules.

10. The university should take into account, in cooperation with the state authorities, the extra work required from the university lecturers involved in this government initiative, for example by making it eligible to count for their teaching workload.
11. Funding is available for personnel, direct project-related expenses and infrastructure measures. This may also include resources to fund doctoral students. The internal allocation of resources will be decided by the graduate school's management committees in mechanisms which should be described in the proposal. Funds are available within the graduate school scheme to cover staffing and direct costs to ensure efficient management, including funding the professional recruitment of doctoral students, and funds for the public presentation of the graduate school's activities.
12. The funding of a graduate school out of special funds from the federal and state governments is initially limited to five years. In 2009 the federal and state governments will decide on the future scope and form in which the programme will be continued. If it is continued, each graduate school will be reviewed in its fourth year. Depending on the results of the review process, the DFG will decide on the continuation of funding on the basis of recommendations from the Joint Commission. Graduate schools that receive a negative evaluation will receive commensurate degressive run-out funding after the review process.

III. Application and review process

The DFG has set up a Joint Commission together with the German Science Council. This Commission consists of an expert commission (whose members are appointed by the DFG Senate) and a strategic commission (whose members are appointed by the Scientific Commission of the German Science Council). The Joint Commission specifies the terms of funding for the programme and decides which initiatives will be selected in all three funding lines out of those that have been invited, on the basis of draft proposals, to submit full proposals. The Commission will also develop the funding recommendations for all three funding lines. Funding decisions will be made by a Grants Committee consisting of the members of the Joint Commission and the ministers responsible for research and science in the federal and state governments.

The call for proposals will be a two-stage process (draft proposal and final proposal). Universities submit draft proposals and proposals to the DFG through the responsible state ministries. A university can submit more than one proposal within the programme. Draft proposals should be submitted in English (cf. "Notes on preparing draft proposals for graduate schools"). When selecting the initiatives to be invited to submit a full proposal, the Joint Commission will be supported by international groups of experts. The full proposals will also be reviewed by international groups of experts. The establishment of a graduate school will be decided by a Grants Committee consisting of the members of the Joint Commission and the ministers responsible for research and science within the federal and state governments. Two funding rounds are currently planned. Funding for the first round is scheduled to be announced in October 2006 and for the second round in October 2007.