

Press Release

Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade under new leadership

Christian Böhlmann and Dr.-Ing. Simon Kothe – New co-leadership heads Automation and Production Technology in Stade

On June 1, 2026, Dr. Dirk Niermann handed over leadership of the Fraunhofer IFAM Stade branch to the next generation in order to begin building up the aerospace business unit at Fraunhofer IFAM in Bremen

Since June 1, 2026, Christian Böhlmann and Dr.-Ing. Simon Kothe have been leading the Automation and Production Technology division at the Stade site of Fraunhofer IFAM within the CFK NORD Research Center. They are picking up the baton from Dr. Dirk Niermann, who established the branch in 2009, expanded it into a globally renowned R&D institution and headed it. As co-leaders, they are joining forces with the Stade R&D team to pioneer the automated, digital, AI-supported and versatile production of the future.

World-renowned – Automation and Production Technology from Stade, Germany

A series of milestones in the field of automated assembly and machining of large lightweight structures have been achieved at Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade under the leadership of Dr. Dirk Niermann.

These include the fully automated shape and position adjustment during the assembly of large components into larger structures, such as aircraft fuselages, the automated filling of remaining joining gaps, the enhancement of the absolute accuracy of conventional industrial robots through retrofittable technology modules as well as completely newly designed, highly rigid robots that, thanks to hybrid drives, can also machine metal materials such as steels with a precision previously unattainable for industrial robots.

These and other technologies have, for example, made it possible to carry out the world's first fully automated assembly of a full-scale thermoplastic fuselage segment for a passenger aircraft as part of the Clean Aviation Multi Functional Fuselage Demonstrator (MFFD) project at Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade.

Co-leadership – A strong signal for the future of Fraunhofer IFAM at the Stade site

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With the new co-leadership for Automation and Production technology, Christian Böhlmann and Dr.-Ing. Simon Kothe, Fraunhofer IFAM is sending a clear signal for the future: The Stade site will be strategically developed as a leading innovation hub for automated production and large-scale assembly.

The focus is on transferring research results into industrial applications – particularly for the next generation of efficient, zero-emission aircraft – as well as the consistent expansion of key technologies for robotics and artificial intelligence.

At the same time, Stade aims to strengthen and expand its significant role beyond the aviation industry through its research and development activities: by providing new impetus in the sectors of space, energy, mobility, maritime applications and agriculture as well as through even closer and more targeted collaboration with industry, government and science.

The shared leadership structure creates the conditions necessary to significantly accelerate strategic development, growth as well as technology transfer and ensure the long-term resilience of the site.

In addition, the scientific quality of the research and development work will be further enhanced through even closer collaboration and affiliation of Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade with colleges and universities, for example through lectures as well as joint supervision of theses and doctoral dissertations.

The experts

Dr. Dirk Niermann joined Fraunhofer IFAM as a researcher in 1997. Among other things, he has developed the European Adhesive Engineer training program – offered in both German and English – as a project and course leader and set up the Accredited Certification Body for the Bonding of Rail Vehicles and Vehicle Components. As head and auditor of the certification body, he certified companies worldwide for bonding in rail vehicle construction according to DIN 6701 (now DIN EN 17460) from 2006 to 2009. Since 2009, Dirk Niermann established the Fraunhofer IFAM branch for Automation and Production Technology in Stade and led it until May 2026.

Going forward, Dr. Dirk Niermann will focus on building up the aerospace business unit at Fraunhofer IFAM in Bremen. With his wealth of experience, scientific expertise and keen sense for new areas of application, he will play a key role in ensuring that the capabilities of Fraunhofer IFAM can also be successfully applied in this industry in future.

Christian Böhlmann, M.Eng., has been working at Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade since 2013 and has played an active role in developing the Automation and Production Technology division in various capacities. Drawing on his professional experience at Dow Chemical and Airbus Group Innovation, he quickly assumed responsibility as a project and group leader after joining the institute as a research associate. Until May 2026, Christian Böhlmann served as head of the Integrated Production Systems department as well as deputy division and site head. His work focuses on high-precision, automated production solutions, AI-based multi-purpose robotics as well as the close interlinking of research and industrial application.

In addition to co-leading the Fraunhofer IFAM branch in Stade, Christian Böhlmann will continue to head the Integrated Production Systems department. With his many years of

experience, his leadership skills and his strong ties to the location, he will play an active role in shaping the future development of Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade.

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Dr.-Ing. Simon Kothe has been with Fraunhofer IFAM since 2011. From 2011 to 2017, he served as a group leader at the Stade site, where he was responsible for establishing and leading a research group in the field of robotic machining. From 2018 to 2026, he headed the Business Development and Communications at Fraunhofer IFAM in Bremen. In this role, he made a significant contribution to the strategic development of Fraunhofer IFAM and the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft in the aviation sector, particularly as Head of Central Office of Fraunhofer AVIATION & SPACE and as the speaker of the Fraunhofer Program Management Clean Aviation.

In addition to co-leading the Fraunhofer IFAM branch in Stade, Simon Kothe remains responsible for the Aviation Business Unit of Fraunhofer IFAM and the Central Office of Fraunhofer AVIATION & SPACE. His work is characterized by strategic foresight, extensive leadership experience and close, trusting relationships with national and international research and industry partners.

Further Information

- **Website**

www.ifam.fraunhofer.de/en/stade

Photo

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www.ifam.fraunhofer.de/en/Press_Releases/Downloads.html



Figure | Caption

New co-leadership for Automation and Production Technology: Christian Böhlmann (left) and Dr.-Ing. Simon Kothe (right) are taking over the head of Fraunhofer IFAM in Stade from Dr. Dirk Niermann (center); (© Fraunhofer IFAM).

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, headquartered in Germany, is one of the world's leading organizations for applied research. It plays a major role in innovation by prioritizing research on cutting-edge technologies and the transfer of results to industry to strengthen Germany's industrial base and for the benefit of society as a whole. Founded in 1949, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft currently operates 75 institutes and research units throughout Germany. Its nearly 32,000 employees, predominantly scientists and engineers, work with an annual business volume of 3.6 billion euros; 3.1 billion euros of this stems from contract research.

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