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Astrid Bergmeister

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Offen im Denken

A first success in the Excellence Strategy competition: Water Research reaches a milestone

Within the framework of the University Alliance Ruhr, the three universities in Duisburg-Essen, Dortmund and Bochum jointly advanced their research strategically, for example by establishing the joint Research Center One Health Ruhr. The University of Duisburg-Essen and its partner universities' excellent water research is part of this Research Center and has now prevailed in the first round of the two-stage competition as part of the Excellence Strategy from the federal and state governments with the research project 'REASONS – river ecosystems in the anthropocene, sustainable scientific solutions'.

Rising temperatures, antibiotic residues, droughts and flooding: worldwide, rivers are increasingly under pressure. To prepare them for the challenges of the future, researchers from the proposed Cluster of Excellence REASONS is developing a new, sustainable concept for the management of freshwater ecosystems. The interdisciplinary research team is led by Prof Dr Bernd Sures (UDE), Prof Dr Torsten Claus Schmidt (UDE) and Prof Dr Martina Flörke (Ruhr-Universität Bochum).

Using novel methods for measuring and analysis, the water experts are exploring a basis for future-proof river management that integrates stress factors such as climate change, substance pollution and changes to biodiversity. What makes this approach stand out is that it is centred around the changing system and aims to identify innovative ways of dealing with the changes inland waters are subject to, some of which are irreversible.

The University of Duisburg-Essen has prioritised water research in a way that is unique in Germany. Researchers from the disciplines of biology, chemistry, medicine, engineering as well as from the humanities and social sciences have built an excellent interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary cooperation over the past two decades. In addition, specific degree programmes and the Water Graduate School for early career researchers provide a superb structure for top researchers in the early stages of their professional trajectory.

The REASONS excellence project emerged from the established network of the University of Duisburg-Essen's Center for Water and Environmental Research with partners at Ruhr University Bochum, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, the University of Marburg, the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, the Fraunhofer Institute for Molecular Biology and Applied Ecology IME, the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB) and the Senckenberg Society for Nature Research.

'With proven excellence in research and great passion, our leading researchers have attained the first milestone in the Excellence Strategy competition. The University of Duisburg-Essen is delighted and I would like to congratulate the developers of the proposal. Along with that, I also want to express our gratitude for their outstanding research work', says Prof. Dr. Barbara Albert, Rector of the University of Duisburg-Essen. 'The German Council of Science and Humanities and the German Research Foundation have communicated their decision today, asking us to submit a full proposal on the basis of the presented draft proposal by 22 August 2024. This goes to show: together with our partner

universities in the University Alliance Ruhr, who share in this success, our top-level international research is on the right track with our research strategy.'

Since its foundation in 2003, the University of Duisburg-Essen has developed an exciting research profile that can compete on an international level. 'Together with our partner universities in Bochum and Dortmund, we have succeeded in setting strategic research priorities within the University Alliance Ruhr and the Research Alliance Ruhr by appointing professors of great renown. With the excellent results of our joint research, the Ruhr area is delivering vital ideas. Our transformation into a knowledge society is generating ground-breaking new insights for a changing world. Our pioneering water research offers science-based solutions', Vice-Rector for Research and Early Career Researchers Prof. Dr. Astrid Westendorf explains.

With the Excellence Strategy, the federal and state governments have been funding top-level international research since 2018 and inviting German universities to compete. Funding is provided along two lines, which are now made available for the second time, with calls for proposals being published successively.

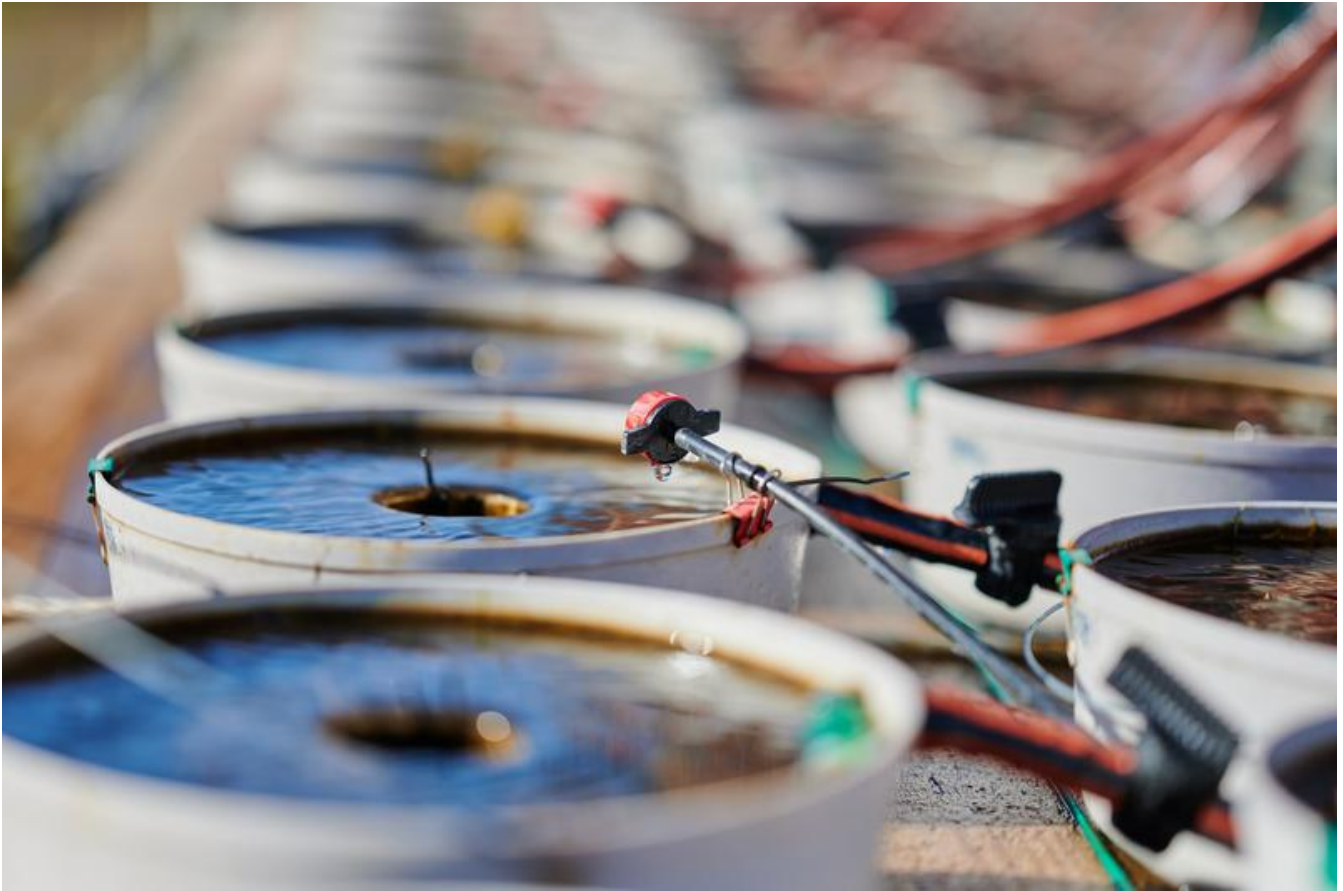
The current proposal phase is for Clusters of Excellence, which itself is divided into two stages. In the first step of the selection process, German universities were invited to submit draft proposals for new clusters of excellence by May 2023. These were then assessed by a panel consisting of 39 internationally renowned scholars. On 1 February, applicants were selected to be called upon by the German Council of Science and Humanities and the DFG to compile full proposals and submit them for further assessment by 22 August 2024. Decisions on the awarding of funding are expected to be made in May 2025 by the Excellence Commission. In total, up to 70 clusters can receive funding for a period of seven years. Funding will be made available from 1 January 2026, with the federal and state governments providing up to 539 million euros.

In a later phase of the competition, universities that successfully acquired at least two Clusters of Excellence have the opportunity to apply for the status of University of Excellence. For applications as University Consortium of Excellence from multiple universities, at least three Clusters of Excellence and at least one Cluster of Excellence per university joining the application are required.

wissenschaftliche Ansprechpartner:

Prof. Dr. Bernd Sures, Aquatic Ecology,
bernd.sures@uni-due.de, phone: +49 201 183 2617

URL zur Pressemitteilung: <https://www.uni-due.de/reasons/about.php>



Water Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen using Mesocosm experiments
Frank Preuss
UDE/Frank Preuss