



Press Release

Technology for the Brain

Minister of Science Theresia Bauer Opens New Cluster of Excellence BrainLinks-BrainTools

Baden-Württemberg's Minister of Science and Research **Theresia Bauer**, Rector Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. **Hans-Jochen Schiewer**, Dr. **Harald von Kalm** from the German Research Foundation (DFG), and Cluster Director Prof. Dr. **Wolfram Burgard** inaugurated the Cluster of Excellence BrainLinks-BrainTools on 9 April 2013 in the presence of high-ranking scientists from Freiburg and abroad. "As a newcomer in the Excellence Initiative, BrainLinks-BrainTools was not only convincing in the stiff competition among 27 new proposals but also stood its ground in comparison to already established clusters. That is an outstanding achievement," said Minister of Science Theresia Bauer.

"Medicine, biology, and engineering collaborate in a unique way at the University of Freiburg, connecting fundamental research on the human nervous system with the development of microsystems and robots capable of autonomous action," emphasized Rector Hans-Jochen Schiewer. The scientists at the cluster are pursuing two goals: developing artificial limbs or robotic assistants that paralyzed people can control through the power of their thoughts alone and deploying tiny implants in the brains of people suffering from neurological illnesses like epilepsy or Parkinson's disease to alleviate their symptoms.

Following the opening ceremony, researchers presented their initial findings from the joint project. The innovations included a robot arm controlled by

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■ brain signals that is capable of moving objects autonomously. The scientists also demonstrated how future implants will harness the body's own energy, obviating the need for operations to replace batteries. "We are delighted that the world's leading specialists in brain-computer interfaces are here in Freiburg to celebrate the launch of the cluster and discuss new findings and technical solutions from this exciting field with us," said Wolfram Burgard.

In her greeting, Minister Bauer stressed that "our universities again achieved outstanding results in the new round of the Excellence competition and clearly defended our top position on the national stage. The University of Freiburg contributed to this success, not least with the only newly approved cluster from Baden-Württemberg." She welcomes the important role ethics will play at the cluster as well as the participative events the scientists plan to host to get the general public involved in their research and familiarize them with their goals. She expressed her certainty that the cluster will be instrumental in further consolidating the status of Baden-Württemberg as one of Europe's leading centers for biomedical technology. According to Minister Bauer, the state has earmarked 8.4 million of a total of 143 million euros in state funding for the Excellence Initiative for the new cluster: "We need to make it clear in the public discussion that providing funding for research, knowledge, and education is a good investment that will produce returns for us in the future."

The Cluster BrainLinks-BrainTools

The DFG is providing just under 30 million euros in funding for the cluster BrainLinks-BrainTools from 2012 to 2017 as part of the Excellence Initiative of the Federal and State Governments. The State of Baden-Württemberg is contributing 8.4 million euros of this total. The University of Freiburg intends to continue funding BrainLinks-BrainTools in the long term and make it into one of Germany's largest neurotechnology research and training centers. Thanks to partnerships with institutions in Germany and abroad, the participating disciplines will benefit from a comprehensive research network.

Further Information:

www.brainlinks-braintools.uni-freiburg.de

The University of Freiburg achieves top positions in all university rankings. Its research, teaching, and continuing education have received prestigious awards in nationwide competitions. Over 22,000 students from 100 nations are enrolled in 186 degree programs. Around 5,000 teachers and administrative employees put in their effort every day – and experience that family friendliness, equal opportunity, and environmental protection are more than just empty phrases here.

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