

The “Public Discourse” line of funding

Exchange of information between the research community and the public is highly important when addressing ELSA of the life sciences. The aim here is to encourage debate in our society as a whole with regard to the opportunities and risks presented by new possibilities arising from modern life sciences. So far, funding of discursive projects has mainly been targeted at young adults. The goal is to enable young participants in public discourse to build their own informed opinions on ELSA topics.



The participants of the ELSA status seminar in April 2016 at the BMBF.

Status Seminars

The BMBF is promoting the networking of relevant stakeholders in the ELSA research area by means of regular status seminars. At these seminars, all those currently receiving funding meet and discuss current issues of their projects and the progress of individual activities. Status seminars also provide a framework for symposia focusing on selected topics which are of special interest to research, politics or society as a whole.

Further information is available at: www.bmbf.de
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The ELSA funding initiative

**Focusing on the impacts of the modern life
sciences on society**





The modern life sciences affect elementary issues of life - from early embryonic development to genetic engineering to the risk of infection.

One of the key tasks of

an innovative research policy is to study these questions and to provide scientific evidence to inform the national and international discussion process. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has therefore been supporting an independent funding priority on the ethical, legal and social aspects of the modern life sciences - or ELSA, for short - since 1997. Our aim is to constantly uncover new knowledge to provide appropriate and state-of-the-art answers to these fundamental questions.

Prof. Dr. Johanna Wanka
Federal Minister of Education and Research

What does “ELSA” stand for?

The rapid developments in the modern life sciences in recent decades are almost without parallel in other research areas. New knowledge acquired here is giving rise to many questions regarding the impacts of these developments on society. This has led to the establishment of an independent field of research – so-called ELSA research – that accompanies the modern life sciences.

The acronym “ELSA” refers to a multi-faceted research area that deals with the ethical, legal and social aspects of the modern life sciences. ELSA goes beyond the confines

of ethics, as many specialist disciplines work together and complement each other here.

The aims of ELSA research

The goal of ELSA research is to establish findings regarding the opportunities and risks presented by the modern life sciences. It is intended that the results of funded projects will serve as a basis for societal discourse, research and development, medical practice and decisions taken by politicians and legislators. Close cooperation between stakeholders in the humanities, social sciences, life sciences and in public life is a prerequisite for ELSA research. In this way, it is ensured that ELSA research is based on the very latest developments in research in the life sciences and that its results are developed taking into account all relevant specialist disciplines and groups of persons. Also important for this cooperation is the highest possible level of objectivity and impartiality among all participants.

The funding initiative of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) recognised the importance of ELSA research at an early stage. The ministry has been supporting ELSA research in a programme-based manner since 1997, and current support amounts to around 4.5 million euros annually. The ministry’s activities in the area of ELSA were initially part of research on the decoding of the human genome, but they have now developed into an independent funding priority with several distinct lines of funding. Currently, the most important of these lines are “Research Projects”, “Support for Young Researchers” and “Public Discourse”. Funding is often provided in cooperation with international partners. A so-called status seminar for all supported projects takes place at regular intervals. ELSA research is an important part of the Health Research Programme of the German Federal Government.

The “Research Projects” line of funding

The funding of national ELSA research projects is the main element of this funding priority. The ministry generally supports interdisciplinary research in the format of joint research groups. The projects focus on current issues in the modern life sciences and help to identify their societal importance. Research projects are instrumental in establishing and maintaining an internationally competitive ELSA research community in Germany. Since 2006, several international research projects have been funded in cooperation with research institutions from other countries. The call for proposals on ethical, legal and social aspects of modern genome editing procedures that was published in 2015 is a good example for a call that was published in response to a current need



for public debate. The projects supported contribute to the establishment of knowledge regarding this subject area and often outline acceptable methods of dealing with the new opportunities that are available.

The “Support for Young Researchers” line of funding

Cooperation across the boundaries between individual research disciplines is an important prerequisite for successful ELSA research. Disciplines from the medical and natural sciences on one hand and humanities on the other have traditionally tended to act in isolation. They must be brought together and encouraged to take an interest in each other. One of the priorities of ELSA funding is the creation of research and development opportunities for young researchers who are interested in such interdisciplinary work. With this aim in mind, summer schools that give young researchers the opportunity to improve their interdisciplinary working and communication skills are funded. These activities are currently shifted to a more international scale.