

KIT Will Consistently and Determinedly Continue along Its Path

2012 Annual Academic Celebration: Further Increase in Third-party Funding, Doctorates, and Number of Students



KIT President Professor Eberhard Umbach welcomed the guests of the Annual Academic Celebration. (Photo: Markus Breig)

More than 300 million euros of third-party funding, 430 completed doctorates, 23700 students: These figures show that Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) continues to grow. The review of the year presented by KIT President Eberhard Umbach at the Annual Academic Celebration focused on recent successes of KIT scientists, future challenges as well as on the results of the Excellence Initiative.

KIT President Eberhard Umbach admitted that the results of the Excellence Initiative were a big disappointment for KIT. But he added: "The reviewers considered our institutional strategy "Advancing KIT" to be excellent. KIT is a unique and trend-setting model – and this is why we will continue along this path in a highly determined manner. It is our objective to make KIT a widely visible success." Umbach said that optimization of the research strategy and organizational structures and streamlining of the administrative processes were started to master the challenges lying ahead.

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According to Umbach, KIT offers excellent research conditions, which is reflected by recent awards. In 2012, the computer scientist Professor Peter Sanders was granted the renowned Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize in the amount of EUR 2.5 million by the German Research Foundation as well as the State Research Award of Baden-Württemberg. The Alfried Krupp Prize for Young University Teachers in the amount of EUR 1 million went to the engineer Professor Christian Koos.

Umbach pointed out that the development of third-party funding acquired, a major factor of success, continued to be positive. Compared to 2011, third-party funding increased by more than EUR 22 million to an amount of approximately EUR 310 million. Umbach said: "But this also makes us face difficulties, as these third-party funds do not cover all our expenses. It is an inherent deficiency of the funding structure that big success is punished with big money troubles." Umbach stated that KIT is therefore working on a sustainable funding scheme that also includes the expenses for staff, energy, and overheads. According to Umbach, upcoming tasks in research and education will also require other funding options. To increase independence in the long term, KIT established the KIT Foundation in 2012. This foundation is aimed at establishing endowed chairs, at promoting young scientists and supporting construction projects.

This year, the number of students reached an all-time high of 23700 in the current winter semester. Moreover, KIT is more successful in terms of doctorates. In 2012, 310 male and 119 female students were conferred their PhD. Umbach pointed out that the comparably high proportion of females of about one third is a big success.

Umbach added that the departure of his colleague in office, Professor Horst Hippler, was a big loss for KIT. Hippler was elected President of the German Rectors Conference (HRK), Bonn, in April. "Hippler was the mastermind of the merger of the University and Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe and decisively determined the first years of KIT."

In his welcome address on behalf of the city of Karlsruhe, Lord Mayor Heinz Fenrich said: "The students, graduates, and employees of KIT, the Karlsruhe Technology Region, and the city of Karlsruhe are important ambassadors for the competence, technologies, and viable cooperation projects of Karlsruhe. They carry the message of "high-tech and lifestyle" into the world."

Ceremonies to confer awards and distinctions have always been part of the Annual Academic Celebration. This year, Professor Alexander Wanner, Chief Higher Education Officer of KIT, handed over department teaching awards to 17 lecturers and an institute. The prize money in the amount of EUR 10,000 per department is to be spent for promoting education. Promotion of young scientists also is of high priority at KIT: Professor Detlef Löhe, KIT Vice President for Research and Information, handed awards for excellent PhD theses in the KIT competence areas over to six young scientists.

The 2012 Carl Freudenberg Prize was granted to PD Dr. Alexander Konyukhov. The prize in the amount of EUR 5000 is intended to promote young university teachers in natural sciences and engineering. Konyukhov has been teaching and conducting research at KIT's Institute of Mechanics since 2002. He is granted the Carl Freudenberg Prize for his post-doctoral lecture qualification thesis on "Geometrically Exact Theory for Contact Interactions". Contact mechanics focuses on surfaces of bodies that are in contact with each other. Movement and loading may result in a deformation of these bodies. An example is the collision of two vehicles. The geometry of the body surfaces is changed. Within the framework of his thesis, Konyukhov developed methods to determine the geometry of deformed surfaces with high quality.

The scientific presentation made at the Annual Academic Celebration concentrated on the key technology of terahertz radiation. It is generated by the ANKA synchrotron of KIT. Under the heading of "The Long Way to Short Pulses", Dr. Anke-Susanne Müller from the ANKA Synchrotron Source of KIT explained the background and perspectives of this new tool for life sciences and materials research. Terahertz radiation closes the gap between microwaves and infrared radiation in the electromagnetic spectrum and provides new insights for biologists, physicists, chemists, and engineers. Vibrations of proteins can be studied as can the behavior of superconductors or novel semiconductors. Thus, fundamental research at large devices like ANKA paves the way to new findings in science. The presentation also covered the challenges that were mastered for compression of the electron packages circulating in ANKA to such an extent that intensive, brilliant, and coherent terahertz radiation is generated. Presently, Anke-Susanne Müller and her team are working on enhancing the control of the electron packages for adapting terahertz radiation perfectly to the needs of the users.

KIT's Chamber Orchestra conducted by Dr. Dieter Köhnlein framed the Annual Academic Celebration. It performed three pieces for string orchestra by Erwin Schulhoff (1894–1942): Alla Valse Viennese, Alla Tango milonga, and Alla Tarantella.

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation according to the legislation of the state of Baden-Württemberg. It fulfills the mission of a university and the mission of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. KIT focuses on a knowledge triangle that links the tasks of research, teaching, and innovation.

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