

13 May 2025

NRW university consortium consolidates top genome research facility

The West German Genome Center has been re-established on a new legal basis, allowing it to continue its internationally competitive genome research in the medical field and the life sciences. The center provides state-of-the-art genome technologies for medical and biodiversity research, plant breeding and other areas of genetics.

The universities of Cologne, Bonn, Düsseldorf and Aachen agreed to establish a joint academic institution (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftliche Einrichtung, GWE) on 1 January 2025. The contractual partners will thereby be transforming the West German Genome Center (WGGC) from its current form as a collaborative research network into a new kind of institution. Newly founding the center as a GWE ensures that the partners can maintain already existing structures and further develop established technologies.

The WGGC was originally established in 2019 as a Next Generation Sequencing Competence Center, which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Since 2024, the center has been supported by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (MKW) and it has established itself as the primary central infrastructure facility for the generation and processing of genomic data in North Rhine-Westphalia. The Next Generation Sequencing methods that the center applies enable the analysis of DNA and can be employed much more quickly and efficiently than former methods, for instance to identify the causes of a genetic disorder. The data obtained by way of this process can be applied in many areas, including research into aging, cancer and neurodegenerative and inflammatory diseases, in virological, microbiological and biodiversity research, and in plant breeding.

The network of these four universities will contribute to the further development of technologies for genome analysis. This, in turn, will benefit research and patient care in North Rhine-Westphalia. The WGGC will also foster exchange with further research facilities to

incorporate the newest developments in the fields of data and information technology, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

As a joint academic institution, the WGGC is an initiative of the University of Cologne, Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf, the University of Bonn and RWTH Aachen University. From 2024 onwards, it has been funded by the MKW and by the participating universities. The spokesperson for the center is Professor Dr Dr Michal Ruth Schweiger from the University of Cologne. Further spokespersons at the universities are Professor Dr Joachim Schultze (University of Bonn), Professor Dr Dagmar Wieczorek (University of Düsseldorf) and Professor Dr Ingo Kurth (RWTH Aachen University).

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