Dear Reader,

The Excellence Strategy, launched by the German government and federal states, aims to promote cutting-edge research and increase its international visibility. This spring, the University of Oldenburg celebrated a sensational success in this highly competitive arena, gaining approval for all three research projects that had applied for funding as Clusters of Excellence. This achievement places the University of Oldenburg in a league of its own among Germany's younger universities. Of the 21 universities founded since 1960 (known as Neugründungen), it is the only one to host three of these top-level research projects.

As a result, the university now has a unique opportunity to apply to be designated as one of up to 15 Universities of Excellence. In this next phase of the Excellence competition, the University of Oldenburg will be competing alongside the University of Bremen. Although the two universities – founded just over 50 years ago – were viewed critically for a long time, they are now regarded as young, unconventional and forward-looking universities with a remarkable track record, particularly in research. This is reflected in the fact that they have a total of four Clusters of Excellence between them, including one joint Cluster. The topics of the three Oldenburg Clusters – hearing research, marine research and animal navigation research – already have a long and fruitful tradition at the University. EINBLICKE provides regular updates on the fascinating findings emerging in these fields. In the current issue we outline the direction that the Excellence projects will be taking over the next seven years.

We also portray an impressive young researcher from the Ocean Floor Cluster of Excellence: geoscientist Sinikka Lennartz, one of the principal investigators of the Cluster whose work has overturned a paradigm that had been in place for decades and has earned her several prestigious awards. She investigates how microscopic processes in the ocean impact the global climate.

The University is also breaking new ground in medical research – for example, into how the brains of newborns develop. At the premature baby unit of Klinikum Oldenburg, neonatologist Axel Heep battles every day to give the babies in his care the best possible start in life. He also works with an interdisciplinary team at the university, researching factors that are crucial for brain development – from the molecular level to potential therapies for cognitive impairments.

Special needs education researcher Teresa Sansour is investigating ways to ensure that people with complex disabilities can participate as fully as possible in everyday life. In our interview she discusses how to reduce barriers and foster true inclusion.

Among other exciting topics covered in this issue, we explore the link between AlphaGo, the AI that defeated the champions of the board game Go for the first time, and the management of energy networks. We also examine new methods of restoring sensitive ecosystems, ranging from seagrass beds to mangroves, in tidal zones around the world. Finally, we take a journey through art history, exploring how artists have dealt with crises in the financial system in their work over the centuries.

We wish you an inspiring read!

Yours, the EINBLICKE editorial team