

## Background information

# Results of the 2015 evaluation

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**ZB MED – Leibniz Information Centre for Life Sciences was evaluated by the Leibniz Association in June 2015. In March 2016 the Leibniz Association Senate issued a recommendation to the German central government and federal states that they should no longer provide funding for the ZB MED. This article provides more information on the evaluation process and its results.**

### What is ZB MED?

ZB MED – Leibniz Information Centre for Life Sciences, also known as the German National Library of Medicine, is Germany's central service centre for specialist information and research support in the field of life sciences. It evolved from the world's largest library in the subject combination of medicine, health, and nutritional, environmental and agricultural science. ZB MED's primary goal is to support researchers, students and key disseminators and multipliers working in these disciplines. To achieve that goal, ZB MED offers literature and specialist information in both digital and print formats, both on-site and through its semantic-based search portal LIVIVO. ZB MED also offers its own open access portal known as PUBLISSO, as well as a registration service which assigns Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to ensure articles and research data remain permanently accessible online. ZB MED has two sites, one in Cologne and one in Bonn. As a member of the Leibniz Association, ZB MED helps provide the information infrastructure required for scientific research.

[www.zbmed.de](http://www.zbmed.de)

### What are ZB MED's unique selling points?

- Unique subject combination (medicine, health care, nutritional, environmental and agricultural sciences) covers a large swathe of the field of life sciences.
- Stocks include 2,700 journals which are not held by any other institution in Germany.
- Second largest specialist medical library in the world after the National Library of Medicine in the USA.
- Run independently of PubMed/National Library of Medicine (politically, strategically and in the event of institutional failure).
- ZB MED's comprehensive search portal LIVIVO provides access to 55 million quality-reviewed items of life science literature through a modern, in-

tuitive and user-friendly interface: [www.livivo.de](http://www.livivo.de) (ranked as “very good” by the evaluation commission).

- Pioneer of the open access movement with German Medical Science and, more recently, PUBLISSO, a publishing portal for the life sciences: [www.publisso.de](http://www.publisso.de) (ranked as “very good” by the evaluation commission).
- Central deposit library which lends items to many smaller libraries which have consequently reduced their collections of printed items to avoid duplicating the comprehensive, national remit covered by ZB MED, and which are not capable of assuring long-term archiving of electronic systems on their own.

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### What does the result of the evaluation mean for ZB MED?

The joint funding of research institutes in Germany is governed by Article 91b of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, the first paragraph of which states: “The Federation and the *Länder* [German federal states] may cooperate on the basis of agreements in cases of supraregional importance in the promotion of sciences, research and teaching.” The funding of Leibniz Institutes is performed on this basis and is regulated by the Joint Science Conference (GWK). An alternative form of funding by the central government and *Länder* is theoretically conceivable on this basis. But there is no doubt that unless some other form of funding is found, ejection from the Leibniz Association will cause ZB MED to lose the financial basis it requires to operate.

Strictly speaking, the recommendation by the Leibniz Association in May still needs to be ratified by the Joint Science Conference (GWK). However, the reality is that the GWK has never in its history voted against a recommendation issued by the Leibniz Association Senate.

### So what will happen next?

The funding of ZB MED is secured until 2019 thanks to what is known as a “phase-out” funding agreement. But it is not clear whether or how ZB MED will continue to exist. Options on the table include continuing to run ZB MED as an institution operated by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia or adding parts of the libraries in Cologne and Bonn to the respective university libraries. As well as putting jobs at risk, this will also put in jeopardy the accessibility and provision of literature in the life sciences. To give one example, a total of 2,700 journals are exclusively held by ZB MED and are not available anywhere else in Germany.

### What has happened at ZB MED since the 2011 evaluation?

ZB MED was already the subject of criticism during an appraisal in 2011. This previous evaluation called on ZB MED to transform itself into a legally independent entity and to

build up its own area of research. It was also suggested that ZB MED should conduct a market survey to gain a better understanding of its own customers and to align its products to their needs. Other criticism included the fact that the library's subject areas and ZB MED's two sites had still not been properly drawn together and amalgamated. ZB MED was given four years to implement these points.

On the heels of the 2011 evaluation, ZB MED underwent a participative change process which included a major market survey and target group study. The library completely overhauled its organisational structure to knit its two sites closer together. Following a legislative procedure in the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia, ZB MED became a foundation under public law on 1 January 2014. Based on the results of the target group analysis and market survey, ZB MED also developed new products including the open access publishing portal PUBLISSO. It also replaced its previous search portals MEDPILOT (for medicine) and GREENPILOT (for nutritional, environmental and agricultural sciences) with the LIVIVO portal, which is tailored to the life sciences arena as a whole.

Cooperation agreements were signed with the universities of Cologne and Bonn to establish professorships at ZB MED in order to build up ZB MED's research capacity. In collaboration with Cologne University, applications were invited for a W3 professorship to head up ZB MED. The appointment process was already completed by the time the Leibniz Association took its recent decision. In addition, applications had been invited for a W2 professorship to be established jointly with Bonn University. This procedure had also reached an advanced stage by March 2016.

### **What has the Leibniz Association Senate criticised about ZB MED?**

A press release issued by the Leibniz Association regarding the ZB MED evaluation stated the following:

*"The most recent assessment of ZB MED four years ago criticised the institution in several respects, which is why this new evaluation is being carried out earlier than normal. Back in 2012 the Leibniz Association Senate regretted the absence of a strategy which would allow ZB MED to transform itself from a traditional library into a modern specialist information centre. Due to the dynamic developments in the international market for specialist information, the development of a corresponding strategy was regarded as a matter of urgency.*

*The Senate has now determined that ZB MED has not succeeded in overhauling its strategy to the extent that was expected. Although the library has become legally independent as recommended and improved its organisational structure, it has not succeeded in developing a coherent overall strategy which would clearly demonstrate that change is underway. In particular, ZB MED lacks a convincing research strategy which could be used as a basis for further developing its digital services. There has also been virtually no progress in tapping into the potential offered by cooperation on research and development projects with the neighbouring universities. Over the past four years ZB MED has also failed to*

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*implement the recommendation to significantly boost its capabilities in the realm of information science.*

*The Leibniz Senate also sees no indication of an adequate strategy for positioning ZB MED's digital services in the highly competitive specialist information market. At the same time, ZB MED's activities in the arena of supplying literature via delivery services have continued to weaken over the past four years.*

*In view of this critical overall situation, the Senate hereby recommends to the central government and Länder that they should cease their joint funding of ZB MED."*

Click the following link to see the statement by the Leibniz Association Senate, including the report by the external evaluation commission: [http://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/downloads/Evaluierung/Senatsstellungen/ZB\\_MED - Senatsstellungnahme vom 17 03 2016 mit Anlagen.pdf](http://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/Evaluierung/Senatsstellungen/ZB_MED_-_Senatsstellungnahme_vom_17_03_2016_mit_Anlagen.pdf)

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## **The Leibniz Association**

The Leibniz Association unites 88 non-university research institutions and facilities that provide infrastructure for research and society. The institutes' remits cover a broad range of areas including general science, engineering, environmental science, economics, spatial studies, the social sciences and the humanities. Leibniz institutes work strategically and are geared to specific topics. Their research projects and the services they offer are of national importance and of national scientific and political interest, which is why they are funded by the central government and the federal states.

<http://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/home/>

## **How does the Leibniz Association's evaluation procedure work?**

All Leibniz institutes are regularly evaluated by an external organisation, at least once every seven years. The services and structures of each institute are evaluated by internationally renowned experts who acquire the information they need from relevant documents and an evaluation visit. The results of their expert assessment are recorded in an evaluation report to which the evaluated institute may then issue a response. On this basis, the Senate of the Leibniz Association issues a scientific policy statement which generally contains recommendations on providing further funding to the respective Leibniz institute. This statement is used by the Joint Science Conference of the central government and federal states (GWK) to check whether the funding requirements are still being met. Together with the annexes A (presentation of the key content and structures of the institute), B (evaluation report) and C (response by the institute to the evaluation report), the statements by the Senate are published on the Leibniz Association website. All the committees involved in the evaluation and appraisal are staffed by people who do not work at Leibniz institutes.

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### **The #keepZBMED petition**

Soon after the Leibniz Association announced its recommendation, protests erupted on Twitter. Ever since then the hashtag #keepZBMED has been used by researchers, library professionals and many other people to discuss how to ensure a future for ZB MED.

In addition, Professor Rudolf Mumenthaler from HTW Chur University of Applied Sciences started a petition on Change.org directed at the Joint Science Conference which requests that the funding of ZB MED should continue. The petition remained online until the end of April 2016. By 19 April 2016 it had already been signed by more than 7,500 people.

Find out more about the petition: <https://www.change.org/p/keepzbmed>

A number of prestigious organisations have also expressed their support for keeping ZB MED up and running, including the German Association of Scientific Medical Societies (AWMF), the **German Network for Evidence Based Medicine (DNEbM)**, the German Society for Technology Assessment in Health Care (HTA.de) and the German Society for Social Medicine and Prevention (DGSMP).

Read the statement from the AWMF (in German): <http://www.awmf.org/die-awmf/awmf-aktuell/detail/news/zb-med-erhalten.html>

Learn more about the responses from DNEbM, HTA.de and DGSMP (in German): <https://idw-online.de/de/news648999>

### **Comments by people who have signed the petition:**

“As the Vice President of DGI, I’m signing the petition because when you are dealing with a “highly competitive specialist information market” (quote taken from the Leibniz Association Senate’s report) it’s more important than ever to have access to an institution which stands for stability, quality and expertise in providing medical information. ZB MED is that institution, successfully providing that vital service to researchers, the business community, and dedicated members of the public.”

**Dr. Luzian Weisel, Germany (DGI – German Association for Information and Knowledge)** <https://www.change.org/p/keepzbmed/c/420888476>

“I’m signing the petition in my role as a lead researcher at the Paul Ehrlich Institute (PEI), the German federal institute for vaccines and biomedicines. As a medicine regulatory body and research institution, the PEI has spent years benefiting from the professional services offered by ZB MED in both its regulatory and research work. The closure of ZB MED would have a major negative impact not only on our research projects, but also on our regulatory work.”

**Dr. Stephan Steckelbroeck, Germany**

<https://www.change.org/p/keepzbmed/c/434147633>

“Closing a library in the times we’re living through at the moment is like closing a hospital during a plague.”

**Enrico Litschko, Germany** <https://www.change.org/p/keepzbmed/c/420395909>

“ZB MED is a key component of this country’s information infrastructure when it comes to medicine and related areas. With the German Institute of Medical Information and Documentation (DIMDI) also set to discontinue all its literature databases, we are facing a real threat to the provision of medical information in Germany. That’s why the idea of closing ZB MED is not simply ridiculous in terms of scientific policy, but also dangerous in terms of restricting the flow of information in the medical and healthcare arenas.”

**Wolfgang Stock, Germany** <https://www.change.org/p/keepzbmed/c/419733581>

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### **ZB MED images and photos**

Please click the following link to download ZB MED images and photos:

<http://ow.ly/4mQLqr>