

## **The Alliance's Strategy for the Further Development of Academic Publishing 2026-2030<sup>1</sup>**

### **Executive Summary**

The Alliance of Science Organisations advocates Open Access to scientific information as the basis for transparent, efficient and high-quality research processes and as a driver for the transfer of research results from science to society, business and politics. The Alliance's commitment to Open Access, which dates back to 2003, has resulted in the Alliance's Open Access Strategy 2021-2025, which has now been updated to become the Alliance's Strategy for the Further Development of Academic Publishing 2026-2030.

The strategy focuses on measures in the following four areas:

- I. Evaluating and shaping developments in the dynamic field of academic publishing**
  - Identification of new types of technical tools for scientific publishing, their evaluation with regard to the sovereignty and openness of science and, if necessary, derivation of necessary measures to be taken by the Alliance.
- II. Preparation of further negotiations (in particular DEAL)**
  - Development of criteria for the effectiveness and target dimensions of future DEAL contracts based on the analysis of current DEAL contracts.
- III. Establishment of scholar-led Open Access infrastructures**
  - Identification and evaluation of models for joint or distributed financing of permanent, professional, quality-assured publication infrastructures at scientific institutions.
- IV. Further measures to promote the Open Access transformation**
  - Active lobbying for a reduction in VAT on scientific publishing from 19% to 7%.
  - Development and establishment of standards for standardised and efficient publication and cost monitoring at scientific institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The strategy was adopted at the meeting of the Alliance of Science Organisations on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025 in Berlin. Regarding the genesis: The strategy incorporates feedback on an earlier draft, which was contributed by representatives of the following organisations as part of a consultation process: Forum13+ working group, GASCO, DEAL Group, MPDLS Scholar-Led Focus Group of the OA.network, SeDOA, the university presses working group, FID Steering Committee and FID working group, DBV Section IV. The Alliance of Scientific Organisations would like to thank all those involved. This strategy does not claim to represent the positions of the above-mentioned organisations, but formulates the consensus of the Alliance's member organisations.

## A. Starting point

The Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany promotes Open Access to scientific information not only as a basis for transparent, efficient and high-quality research processes, but also as a driver for the transfer of research results from science to society, business and politics. For this reason, the Alliance has been advocating Open Access since 2003 as a key catalyst for the scholar-led transformation of the publishing system into a modern digital system of services that is suited to science for the demands of research. In the Alliance's Open Access Strategy 2021-2025, two of the four measures were aimed at promoting the national DEAL project and making the adjustments necessary for the implementation of DEAL in the funding structures at various levels of the German science system. The other two measures related to non-profit Open Access infrastructures in Germany and the role of Open Access and Open Science in scientific evaluation procedures.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2024, the Alliance decided that changed framework conditions made it necessary to develop its Open Access strategy into a more comprehensive strategy for the further development of the scientific publishing system:

- 1) Very dynamic developments are currently taking place in scientific publishing. New publication formats beyond the traditional journal article or book, such as data and software publications, suggest an expanded understanding of scientific publishing. Sharply rising publication figures require adequate responses to ensure scientific quality, and artificial intelligence (AI) is playing a growing role in the publishing process. These developments require intensive monitoring and systematic evaluation in order to develop common goals and measures for the Alliance and to help shape these developments in the interests of German science organisations. This applies not least with regard to adapting the scientific evaluation system in order to recognise the contributions of scientists to these developments.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the Alliance's Open Access Strategy 2021-2025, the broad initiative to reform scientific performance assessment has gained massive momentum, e.g. as part of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). These developments will also have consequences for scientific publishing and the topics addressed in this strategy.

On this topic, see also Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, et al. (2025). The future development of assessment processes for research activity in the context of open science. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15836010>.

- 2) The Open Access transformation continues to shape the current development phase of text-based academic publishing.<sup>3</sup> Since the Alliance's last Open Access strategy, three DEAL agreements have been concluded with terms until the end of 2028, the possible further development of which is to be discussed, taking into account the evaluation of their effectiveness to date. In addition, numerous transformation agreements and original Open Access agreements are being negotiated and concluded with small and medium-sized publishers in Germany. In many cases, these are coordinated by the Forum 13+ working group and the GASCO consortium of German, Austrian and Swiss consortia. In this sector of the Open Access transformation, there is still a need for reflection and action with regard to the objectives and design of agreements<sup>4</sup>
- 3) At the same time, the Open Access publishing sector, which is not-for-profit and predominantly publicly funded, has become increasingly important in terms of science policy, partly as a result of decisions by the Council of the European Union (2022 and 2023), while in most cases there is a lack of robust or permanent funding options and appropriate recognition of the services provided in the context of the development and provision of these infrastructures.
- 4) Finally, the transformation contracts are increasingly competing with other investments in the field of academic publishing as the institutions have smaller budgets. As a result of the Open Access transformation, there is a shift from expenditure on reading to expenditure on publishing. Previous cost models based on the volume of publications are therefore leading to a higher financial burden, particularly for research-intensive institutions. In addition, the continuing cost increases on the part of publication service providers continue to represent a burden for the public purse. Overall, appropriate and sustainable pricing for specialised scientific information remains a central goal of a successful Open Access transformation.

The present Alliance Strategy for the Further Development of Scientific Publishing 2026-2030 details how the Alliance, together with other stakeholders, intends to shape the developments outlined in the interests of science. The strategy focuses on the Alliance's national field of action, taking international developments into account.

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular: German Science and Humanities Council | Wissenschaftsrat (2022): Recommendations on the Transformation of Academic Publishing: Towards Open Access; Cologne. <https://doi.org/10.57674/0gtq-b603>.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Pampel, H. et al. (2022): Empfehlungen für transformative Zeitschriftenverträge mit Publikationsdienstleistern: Handreichung der Schwerpunktinitiative: Handreichung der Schwerpunktinitiative „Digitale Information“ der Allianz der deutschen Wissenschaftsorganisationen vor dem Hintergrund der Umsetzung der Open-Access-Strategie 2021-2025 der Allianz der deutschen Wissenschaftsorganisationen, Schwerpunktinitiative „Digitale Information“ der Allianz der deutschen Wissenschaftsorganisationen, 9 p. <https://doi.org/10.48440/allianzoa.045>.

## **B. Guiding principles**

The following aspects should have a formative effect on the further development of academic publishing:

### **Openness of publications and publishing infrastructures**

The further development of the academic publishing system is determined by the barrier-free and permanent accessibility of publications and infrastructures in order to enable Open Science practices. The large-scale transformation to Open Access must therefore be driven forward.

### **Sustainability through cost efficiency and cost transparency**

In view of the cost increases that are visible also in the area of Open Access publishing, cost efficiency and transparency remain key objectives – both for future contracts with publishers and for scholar-based publication infrastructures. It is assumed that transformation contracts will include even better price-performance ratios in the future. In order to achieve this, co-operative action by scientific institutions will continue to be promoted.

### **Scholar-led further development<sup>5</sup>**

The organisation of the scientific publication system is determined by scholar-led rules and standards. Publication services must be fundamentally orientated towards the requirements of the scientific communities. This involves the operation of publication organs under the sovereignty or at least with the participation of researchers or scientific institutions. Publishing activities – regardless of whether they are profit-oriented or not – are regarded as services and must be organised accordingly in a scholar-led manner. The promotion of non-profit Open Access models is complementary to the further handling of offers from commercial publishers (especially DEAL) and is a guiding principle of this strategy.

### **Promotion of bibliodiversity**

A central aim of the strategy is to do justice to the diversity of the publishing system (bibliodiversity) and thus the diversity of academic publishing cultures, even in the course of the changes described above.

### **Digital sovereignty**

The promotion of digital sovereignty in publishing is considered a central concern. Scholar-led and quality-assured publication infrastructures open up new opportunities for science to strengthen digital sovereignty. This is particularly evident in the transparency, traceability and sovereignty over processes and control mechanisms. For example, data tracking and AI usage provisions that would be detrimental of science are not acceptable.

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<sup>5</sup> For a definition and differentiation from comparable terms, see appendix.

## C. Strategic priorities: Goals and measures

### I. Evaluating and shaping developments in the dynamic field of academic publishing

Digitalisation has a wide range of effects on academic publishing. Examples of this include new publication formats (in particular data and software publications) and infrastructures, novel tools for the compilation, selection and reception of scientific as well as the digital availability of texts for text and data mining and AI applications. However, this is also associated with known as well as new challenges in addition to the constant increase in the number of scientific publications available worldwide. These include quality assurance issues and new uncertainties regarding the standards of good scientific practice in view of the rapid spread of AI tools in the publication process.

Established methods of quality control for scientific publications are contrasted with formats and processes such as preprint servers and open peer review, which have the potential to make the publishing process more transparent. The use of generative AI also promises to simplify the writing of publications across language barriers. However, these new formats often cause uncertainty with regard to the underlying quality assurance mechanisms and compliant use. This is aggravated by a system of scientific performance assessment that often motivates researchers to focus on traditional publication formats, on the one hand, and quantity, on the other. This mixed situation creates a great deal of uncertainty for scientists and their institutions with regard to the question of which forms of publishing are most conducive to the rapid and reliable dissemination of new scientific findings and at the same time advantageous in the competition for reputation in science. Last but not least, the functionality of the system is at stake if the self-regulation of science and the associated quality assurance of the knowledge generated cannot be guaranteed due to these developments. As these challenges need to be addressed at system level, the Alliance believes it has a responsibility to help shape these developments and provide guidance to scientific institutions.

**The overarching goal** is to jointly develop options for action to help shape these complex developments in a way that promotes science. This is preceded by a joint understanding and positioning of the Alliance organisations with regard to the evaluation of new publication and quality assurance formats, including the use of AI in the publishing process, as well as measures to deal with the current “flood of publications”.

## Measures:

- 1) The steering committee of the Alliance's focus area "Digitality in Science" is setting up a new task force. It will be pursuing a three-part mission: Firstly, it will identify the new formats and types of technical tools for scientific publishing currently of relevance to German scientific organisations, including those for the selection and quality assurance of publications. Secondly, the task force evaluates these developments with regard to their potential and risks for increasing the sovereignty and openness of science. In this assessment, the new formats and types of tools are also to be categorised with regard to their position in the scientific reputation system. Thirdly, the Task Force makes recommendations for central fields of action with concrete measures that ought to be addressed by the Alliance.

## II. Preparation of further negotiations (in particular DEAL)

The conclusion of the three DEAL contracts with the major publishers Elsevier, Springer Nature and Wiley is a decisive development for Germany in the transformation of publications into Open Access. With the contracts running until the end of 2028, the current DEAL contracts and their predecessors now need to be reviewed to determine which of the goals<sup>6</sup> set by the Alliance have been achieved and which goals can and should be achieved through future contracts with these three providers.

The interactivity of the DEAL agreements with other transformation and Open Access Gold framework agreements with commercial publishers will also be looked at. The Alliance and the scientific communities it represents regard small and medium-sized publishers (SMPs)<sup>7</sup> as important players and partners in the publishing industry. The Alliance supports the Forum 13+ working group and its commitment "to the modelling and practical implementation of Open Access transformation agreements and the coordination of negotiations with small and medium-sized publishers and expert association"<sup>8</sup> in cooperation with its partners (e.g. GASCO).

**The overarching goal** is to prepare future DEAL negotiations in an appropriate and goal-orientated manner. To this end, a task force, in consultation with other important stakeholders, will identify objectives for the negotiations of future DEAL agreements and prepare them for decision-making in the DEAL committees. The results of this measure are also to be used by the Forum 13+ working group in a synergistic and targeted manner for future negotiations.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. <https://deal-konsortium.de/ueber-deal/hintergrund-und-ziele>.

<sup>7</sup> "SMP" stands for a group of publishers outside the three major DEAL publishers with very different profiles in terms of specialisation and size. Publishers from this group based in Germany are organised in the German Publishers and Booksellers Association. The Forum 13+ working group is thus a complementary and equal measure in terms of science policy to the previous DEAL project with the Alliance's Open Access strategy as a common frame of reference. See also the Alliance's resolution of 6 June 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <https://forum13plus.de/>

## Measures:

- 2) A new task force to be set up by the steering committee of the Alliance focus area “Digitality of Science” will define the criteria of effectiveness and the target dimensions that will serve as guidance for the possible conclusion of future DEAL agreements for the German science system. On this basis, a consultation process is planned that involves the stakeholder groups involved in DEAL as well as negotiators from other consortia. The consultation should take place with representatives of the Alliance partner organisations as well as networks such as TU9 and U15 and, if necessary, other relevant stakeholders. The task force develops recommendations for the Alliance that include an analytical examination of the fulfilment of the objectives of current agreements and a consideration of international developments. On this basis, requirements and a prioritisation of the objectives for the possible extension of the agreements will be defined. Finally, alternative scenarios are to be developed for the event that contracts cannot be negotiated satisfactorily. These preparations serve the Alliance as a basis for the possible issuing of a negotiating mandate.

At the same time, the task force is working on the question of the governance structure required for the actual negotiation of future DEAL agreements, if necessary with the involvement of additional expertise. This structure should both ensure the connection to the Alliance and provide the necessary technical and strategic expertise for the negotiation and implementation of the agreements.

The task force will liaise closely with the task force on topic area III “Establishment of scholar-led Open Access infrastructures”. Once the measures planned in topic areas II and III have been finalised, the steering committee of the Alliance focus area aims to draw up a strategy paper for 2029 that takes a look at the overall system of Open Access publishing in Germany based on the exchange between the task forces.

## III. Establishment of scholar-led Open Access infrastructures

Parallel to the developments in the for-profit publishing sector, scholar-led publishing and Open Access infrastructures have received an immense amount of attention at the science policy level since 2020. Appeals from important political (Council of the European Union, EU Commission, UNESCO) and scientific actors (International Science Council, Science Europe) emphasise the need to initiate a reform in the direction of scholar-led publishing. At national level, the Diamond Open Access Service Centre (SeDOA), funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), is currently being set up to complement European projects such as “Creating a Robust Accessible Federated Technology for Open Access” (CRAFT OA), “Developing Institutional Open Access Publishing Models to Advance Scholarly Communication” (DIAMAS) and the international initiative European Diamond Capacity Hub (EDCH), which aims to contribute to improving the performance of Diamond Open Access infrastructures. Open Research Europe is to be expanded to a joint, pan-European organisation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Research Council of Norway et al. (2025). Statement of Intent on Open Research Europe. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/records/14725287>.

The Alliance sees the need for a series of measures that contribute to stabilising and strengthening the segment of scholar-led Open Access infrastructures<sup>10</sup>. It thus urges all scientific institutions and funding bodies in Germany to view investment in non-profit, scholar-led services as a strategically important contribution to a future-oriented publishing infrastructure. New ways of (co-)financing them must be found and pursued in order to ensure their long-term operation. At the same time, the efforts of the providers to professionalise their services remain crucial. This can lead to a standardisation of the quality criteria against which these services are to be measured as well as of the editorial processes, and it may also mean a consolidation of the services in the event of redundancies. As part of the reform of academic performance assessment, the Alliance organisations are committed to ensuring that work in editorial offices and with infrastructures is recognised as academic work and made more visible. Incentive systems that promote publishing in scholar-led publication infrastructures should also be strengthened in order to increase their attractiveness and acceptance among scientists and thus also their use<sup>11</sup>. It is central to all of this that the bibliodiversity of scientific publishing cultures is appropriately taken into account and thus preserved. These positions of the Alliance largely coincide with the premises of the Diamond Open Access Action Plan<sup>12</sup>.

The DFG-funded SeDOA Service Centre is expected to make a key contribution to the professionalisation and quality assurance of Diamond Open Access services in Germany, with the expected knock-on effects of consolidating the field and increasing the attractiveness of the services for researchers. Due to its role in the system alone, it cannot resolve the contradiction between the objective of long-term and sustainable funding, including the necessary staff positions, and the current situation, which is characterised by a large number of projects funded for a limited period of time. The Alliance aims to address this need and translate into coordinated action its call for investment in scholar-led offerings as a strategic contribution to a future-oriented and sovereign publishing landscape in Germany.

**The overarching goal** is the sustainable financing of professional, high-quality, not-for-profit, scholar-led Open Access infrastructures that are attractive to researchers working at German institutions. This is also linked to the goal of increasing the sovereignty of German research institutions in the field of scientific publishing by establishing an attractive option for Open Access publishing independent of the business models – although not necessarily without the services – of commercial publishers.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.allianz-der-wissenschaftsorganisationen.de/themen-stellungnahmen/stellungnahme-zur-studie-kartierung-und-beschreibung-der-open-access-dienste-in-deutschland/>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft | AG Publikationswesen. (2022). Academic Publishing as a Foundation and Area of Leverage for Research Assessment. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6538163> and Tautz, D. et al. 2025. A New Concept for the Direct Funding and Evaluation of Scientific Journals, Discussion. Halle. [https://doi.org/10.26164/leopoldina\\_03\\_01262](https://doi.org/10.26164/leopoldina_03_01262).

<sup>12</sup> Ancion, Z. et al. (2022). Action Plan for Diamond Open Access. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6282403>.



## Measures:

- 3) A new task force to be set up by the steering committee of the Alliance focus area “Digitality in Science” will identify and evaluate models of joint or distributed funding that guarantee the long-term operation of professional, quality-assured and quality-assuring publishing infrastructures at scientific institutions. These considerations should take into account publishing infrastructures operated by individual institutions as well as those that are financed across institutions. These models must be open to the diversity of scientific publication formats and should enable innovation. It is also crucial to consider the scholar-led governance that such models of distributed funding require in order to organise operations in an efficient manner. These options for action should be considered in relation to the Alliance’s measures in the area of transforming content from commercial providers (see Measure II) and to the numerous projects that already exist to promote Diamond Open Access in Germany and Europe. In particular, possible measures that support the Diamond Open Access promotion of the institutions via their budgets (keyword “information budget”) and an analysis of the legal obstacles that exist in this regard should be considered. These considerations are based on the premises and requirements of the Alliance statement on the study on “mapping and describing Open Access services in Germany”<sup>13</sup>.

To ensure complementarity with the activities of measure II of the strategy, close cooperation with the corresponding task force is planned. This should result in a joint strategy paper by 2029 (cf. above).

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**13** Biela, J. et al. (2024). Kartierung und Beschreibung der Open-Access-Dienste in Deutschland. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11121906> and Alliance of Science Organisations (2024) Statement on the study commissioned to map and describe open access services in Germany

#### IV. Further measures to promote the Open Access transformation

The future development of academic publishing requires framework conditions that include, in particular, general regulatory and financial aspects of the academic system. Therefore, when making recommendations on such framework conditions, the Alliance will consider what impact they may have on the transformation of the scientific publishing system.

From a regulatory perspective, concrete measures to reduce bureaucracy should help to make administrative procedures associated with the publishing process or the publication funding process as transparent and simple as possible for scientific institutions. This requires improved coordination between funding providers and funding recipients. For example, the existing measures of the funding bodies for financial support of Open Access differ in terms of scope as well as billing and verification modalities. Coordinating the funding bodies in this regard would improve planning security and standardise the funding regulations for research institutions.

From a financial perspective, it is foreseeable that expenditure on contracts with publishers will increasingly compete with other expenditure in the field of scientific publishing as the budgets of the institutions decrease in real terms, which is why flexible publication budgets that enable efficient use of funds must be established as the standard. Last but not least, the Open Access transformation is more expensive than necessary due to the unequal tax rate that is currently levied on reading and publishing scientific publications. Political measures to reduce the tax rate for publishing are therefore necessary.

**The overarching goal** is to create a regulatory and financial framework that supports the establishment of the Open Access principle as the standard for scientific publishing and does not create any new bureaucratic hurdles.

## Measures:

- 4) At present, reading and publishing scientific literature are taxed differently at 7% and 19% respectively for no objective reason. This represents a decisive hurdle in the Open Access transformation, which essentially aims to switch from the subscription model to a publication-based billing model. In view of the fact that the success of the Open Access transformation is also “a special concern”<sup>14</sup> of the federal and state governments, the harmonisation of taxation at 7% should also be a common political concern of all scientific and science policy stakeholders in Germany<sup>15</sup> and possibly beyond in the sense of the “science-friendly adaptation of the Value Added Tax Act”<sup>16</sup>.

The steering committee of the Alliance’s focus area “Digitality of Science” will set up a task force on this topic. As a first step, it is to prepare a legal review to clarify whether a corresponding amendment to the VAT Act can be made at a purely national level or whether this must be preceded by a VAT system directive at European level – similar to the procedure that paved the way for a reduced tax rate on digital media. The task force will then propose a procedure for how the Alliance and its partners can systematically and concertedly communicate this issue to the relevant political players in order to support its implementation.

- 5) The (further) development of internal institutional structures for improved publication and cost monitoring as well as the development of a central overview and, if necessary, budget of the publication resources available per organisation (“information budget”) have made progress in recent years. However, these processes are far from being completed – despite existing incentive structures (such as the DFG funding programme “Open Access Publication Funding”) and other supporting measures (e.g. Open Access Monitor and the projects OA Datenpraxis and Transform2Open). The potential for significantly improving the comparability of Open Access monitoring (e.g. with regard to dashboards) or for more efficient reporting of publication and cost data as well as simplified reporting obligations has not yet been fully utilised.

For this reason, the steering committee of the Alliance focus area “Digitality of Science” will set up a task force with the mandate to identify corresponding potential and develop common standards whose implementation requires the least possible regulatory effort.

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<sup>14</sup> Bund und Länder (2022) Open Access in Deutschland. Gemeinsame Leitlinien von Bund und Ländern

<sup>15</sup> Cf. also dbv (2024) Digitale Teilhabe, gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt und exzellente Forschung stärken. Forderungspapier zur Bundestagswahl

<sup>16</sup> Alliance of Science Organizations (2025) The Demands of the Alliance of Science Organizations in Germany to the Future German Government

## **Appendix Definitions of terms<sup>17</sup>**

The following defines key terms for the strategy as defined by the Alliance.

### **Diamond Open Access**

Collective term for Open Access publishing organs that do not charge publication fees, such as an Article Processing Charge (APC).

In practice, these Open Access publishing organs use a variety of financing and business models. These range from consortial funding to budgets from libraries to funding from expert associations or funding organisations. The term makes no statement as to whether a publishing organ is published by a public institution or an actor from the private sector. Nor does it make any statement about possible profit intentions of the editor/publisher.

### **Scholar-led Open Access / Community-led Open Access**

Collective term that emphasises the leading role of scientific communities in the governance or operation of a publication organ. The ownership of the title rights to a journal or book series by the respective community, e.g. represented by researchers, academic institutions or learned societies, is central. The term makes no statement about business and financing models and therefore does not exclude APC models.

### **For-profit vs. not-for-profit**

The distinction concerns a possible intention to make a profit and is independent of the question of the publishing/publishing actors. The distinction is used when it is important to emphasise whether or not the intention of an entity to make a profit is relevant.

### **Transformation contracts**

These contracts with publishers serve to transform scientific publications into Open Access. They govern the payment of access and publication fees.

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<sup>17</sup> The open-access.network glossary can be consulted for additional basic terms relating to Open Access publishing: <https://open-access.network/en/information/glossary>.

## **Contact**

### **Monika Landgraf**

Director of Corporate Communications

Spokesperson for the President

Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft

Hansastraße 27 c

80686 Munich, Germany

Phone +49 89 1205-1333

[presse@zv.fraunhofer.de](mailto:presse@zv.fraunhofer.de)

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

### **Dr. Lisa Kressin**

Alliance's focus area "Digitality in Science"

Leibniz Association

Chausseestraße 111

10115 Berlin, Germany

T +49 30 20 60 49 613

[kressin@leibniz-gemeinschaft.de](mailto:kressin@leibniz-gemeinschaft.de)

[www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de](http://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de)