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Press Release

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Ceremonial Handover of the President's Office at the University of Mannheim

Science minister Petra Olschowski bid farewell to Professor Dr. Thomas Puhl / Professor Dr. Thomas Fetzer accepted the Chain of Office as the new President of the University of Mannheim with a first programmatic speech on Monday / Core topic: Promoting research

After a brief welcome by the acting President, Petra Olschowski, member of the Landtag and Minister of Science, Research and the Arts of the Land Baden-Württemberg, bid farewell to President Professor Dr. Thomas Puhl with a ceremonial speech: "Professor Puhl's term of office has been characterized by his eye for the essential features of his university, the needs of the students, and excellent research. He led his university through difficult times with a calm and successful leadership style," said Olschowski. He particularly stood out because of his excellent communication skills. "As a fair mediator and active listener, he understood how to create synergies between different stakeholders and always represented the interests of his university and those of the other universities in Baden-Württemberg in a competent and constructive way," said Olschowski. He left his successor a university in an excellent position. Professor Fetzer had challenging tasks ahead of him, but he would also have the opportunity to make his own mark. "As Vice-President for Strategic Planning, Internationalization and Equal Opportunity Professor Fetzer has already laid the foundations for the future of the university," said science minister Petra Olschowski. With the ministry, he had allies at his side. She wished him every success and joy in his new role.

Margret Suckale, Chair of the University Supervisory Board, paid tribute to Professor Puhl in her speech. The secret of Professor Puhl's success lied in his respect for the opinions of others, his pleasant modesty and in his reliability. With these qualities he led the university through the dire straits of the coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. "There is no doubt the university always supported you," said Suckale. "Working with you has always been a pleasure and an inspiration."

In his farewell speech, Professor Puhl thanked his colleagues from the university, the ministry and society. He was lucky to spend close to 40 fulfilling years at the University of Mannheim. The position of President was his dream job, he said. "They were the most colorful, exciting and beautiful years of my professional life. I received so much support from the university and the ministry," Puhl summarized. He said he was delighted that his

colleague Vice President Thomas Fetzer decided to take on the position. The university was “in the very best hands” with him.

Professor Fetzer thanked his predecessor, saying that he was fortunate to be taking over a university that was in an excellent position. During his term of office, he wanted to make sure that the university continued to be at the top in Germany and Europe with its research and education profile. Excellent research was the foundation for excellent teaching and transfer. And the University of Mannheim was currently doing very well in research, he said. Not only the DFG Funding Atlas and the numerous awards received by Mannheim researchers were evidence of this, but also flagship projects such as the Collaborative Research Centers “Accounting for Transparency” and “Economic Perspectives on Societal Challenges”. However, past successes were no guarantee for future ones, he said. Continuous success in research required continuous new efforts. Over the next five years, the university would further strengthen its clear-cut profile and its focus on empirical research. He intended to promote interdisciplinary research even more intensively, for example with the establishment of a Mannheim Center for Advanced Studies (CAS), which provided researchers with the opportunity to work on joint research projects. Further priorities in the coming years would be promoting diversity, sustainability, digitalization and academic career paths. With its strategy, the university had a “compass in times of great challenges,” Fetzer emphasized. In particular, those are future university funding, international crises and increasing skepticism towards science in society and politics. These presented universities with major uncertainties. Nonetheless, he was not worried, Fetzer continued. The university had a good strategy and a large network of support—in the Ministry of Science as well as in the city and the region—and “incredibly motivated researchers, teachers, students and employees.”

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