

Dear colleagues, dear members of staff, dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

When the physician and scientist Max von Pettenkofer assumed the rectorship of this university in 1865, he did so with a guiding conviction that continues to resonate today: *“The progress of science is the progress of humanity.”*

That belief—rooted in the very foundation of what a university can and must be—inspires me today, on my first day as President of our Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich.

I step into this office with gratitude, humility, and energy. Gratitude for the trust you have placed in me. Humility before the achievements, the traditions, and the potential of this remarkable institution. And energy—for the opportunities we can seize and the challenges we will face - together.

We live in an era where science must do more than expand knowledge. It should offer guidance – as the world around us has grown more complex. The questions we face are global, technological, ethical, and social - all at once.

And in that complexity lies the great task—and the great promise—of a university like LMU: To be a place not only of research, teaching, and learning, but a place where responsibility is defined, debated, and lived: By every scientist, every student, every staff member, and every member of our academic community.

Our mission is to create knowledge—but also to carry responsibility. For the future of science. For the future of the young people who come here to learn. And for the future of a society that is looking—for progress, for meaning, for trust. This will always be about excellence—but not just the kind found in global rankings or research metrics. It’s about excellence in how we think. Excellence in how we collaborate. And excellence in how we serve society.

In this spirit, we will shape LMU’s future together.

Today, I’d like to offer a few first ideas that could serve as our shared compass in the years ahead:

We must not only *protect* the diversity that defines LMU—we must *harness it*. The plurality of people, of disciplines, of perspectives—this is not just what we *have*, it is what makes us strong. It is the wellspring of our creativity. It is the engine of our insight. And in this moment—an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence—we cannot stand still.

We must reimagine the bond between research and teaching. Because our students deserve more than knowledge. They deserve the tools to create it. They must be empowered by curiosity. They must be guided by critical thinking. And they must be inspired to turn learning into action—so that the future is not something that simply happens to them, but something they have the power to shape.

We will strengthen LMU's role as a space for public dialogue. In an increasingly polarized world, we need places where disagreement does not mean division. Where people listen, reflect, and build new ideas together. LMU is such a place—and should become even more so.

Interdisciplinarity must not be a slogan, but something we live every day. To answer the challenges of our times - our society needs new connections—between AI and philosophy, between health science and robotics, between climate research and economics, between engineering and responsibility. This is the promise of LMU as a comprehensive university: not just excellence within disciplines, but breakthroughs *fostered through their connections*.

As a University of Excellence, LMU will also deepen its commitment to the responsible transfer of knowledge to society. We will remain a stronghold of academic freedom and fundamental research. But we can at the same time become even better at turning new insights into novel solutions — whether in the form of startups, educational programs, or policy frameworks.

We will strengthen a culture of openness, accessibility, and shared purpose. Aim to be a leadership team that is present, responsive, and representative. A presidential leadership team that doesn't float above the university—but walks among it - working with faculties, students, staff, committees, and initiatives at eye level.

That includes a clear commitment to boundaries and values. LMU is committed to a Code of Conduct, that is aligned with the world's leading universities.

There will be zero tolerance for discrimination or abuse of power—in any form, at any level. Human, collegial, and academic integrity—from our students to our leadership—will not be a footnote of our work. It will be its foundation.

Let me be clear: there will be challenges. We know that staffing shortages, financial constraints, and digital transformation will test us. We know that artificial intelligence is reshaping the very nature of research and learning – faster than we may realize. And we know that societal trust in science is no longer something we can take for granted.

But we also know this: we will be ready.

With the LMUexcellent strategy—developed in close collaboration with my predecessor, President Bernd Huber, and his team—we have taken an important step. We've defined a strategy, a direction and a set of goals that are bold and clear.

From here we will move forward together. With a renewed, concrete and shared vision for LMU's future—one that we will develop together, over the year ahead. The German excellence strategy review - a few days from now - will undoubtedly represent a critical moment on this path. But I am convinced: if we stand together as Team LMU—if we summon the courage to think anew, and the trust to act as one - this will not be a test. It will be a milestone.

My guiding stars in this new role as president of LMU include not only exceptional scientists like Max von Pettenkofer, but also remarkable individuals like Sophie Scholl.

Sophie Scholl held no official title at this university. She had no professorship, no office, no accolades. And yet her voice—quiet, principled, unwavering—still echoes here today. She reminds us that a great university must not only be excellent in thought, but also fearless in spirit. And that leadership is ultimately about doing what’s right, even when it’s difficult.

And so my wish today is simple: That we too may choose wisely—again and again—even in uncertain times. That we may shape a university that is open, ambitious, excellent—and human. A university that meets the world’s highest standards—and rises to its deepest responsibilities.

Thank you for your trust. I look forward to all that lies ahead. Let’s get to work. Together.