Safeguarding the Future

■ Preparing – Scientific research would be inconceivable without a sound educational footing upon which new-found knowledge can build – knowledge that must be acquired, learned and understood. The Max Planck Society is thus closely following the studies and discussions surrounding the German education system. Today’s students are, after all, the researchers of tomorrow, and schools should introduce them to science at an early stage. This means not only specialized knowledge, but also creative thinking, independent action and a taste of how exciting it is to conduct research for oneself. The Max Planck Society offers special facilities for teachers and students to gain direct insight into its work. For example, via the MAX series of brochures, BIOMAX, GEOMAX and TECHMAX. We also offer advanced training for teachers. The Max Planck Institute for Human Development also plays an important role in analyzing the German education system. In 2000, the institute took a lead role in overseeing the first PISA study. In this issue’s “Viewpoint,” Jürgen Baumert and Kai Maaz describe how valuable it is – not least economically – to promote education and support children at an early age. And how much Germany stands to lose if it fails to act or responds too late.

■ Prioritizing – Spending on education and research is one of the most enduring investments a country can make, so it is only right that it should feature prominently in discussions on how to overcome the global financial crisis. Education and research are the only means by which to lay a permanently sustainable foundation for a competitive economy. Only a well-educated and well-trained population can meet the demands of the modern globalized labor market. And only innovative research can safeguard the creation of new products and processes, as all genuine innovations are ultimately based on scientific progress. Science has the potential to revolutionize technology and fundamentally change our lives. Investing in education and research can prevent the current financial crisis from developing into a long-term structural crisis. For our federal system, this means that every federal state must make education and research a priority, financially and otherwise, as these issues fall under their jurisdiction. They have the power to implement the sustained enhancement of education and research, both for the benefit of individual regions and in the interest of Germany as a whole.

■ Planning – The issue of energy supply is a prime example of the economic and social importance of innovative research. Even though the price of oil is currently lower than it was last summer, the search for sustainable and, above all, climate-friendly energy supplies is one of the central issues facing mankind. As described in the last issue of MaxPlanckResearch, the Max Planck Society has just devoted a book to this issue: “Die Zukunft der Energie. Die Antwort der Wissenschaft” (The future of energy. The answer from science. Verlag C.H. Beck, 2008). In this issue, you can read a condensed chapter in which Carl Christian von Weizsäcker discusses the option of a world climate treaty. This represents the political and economic aspect of research into this subject. Of course our scientists are also contributing to the development of new energy sources – from hydrogen and biomass to nuclear fusion – and are investigating new means of storing and saving energy generated in environmentally friendly ways. The more doors research opens, the better our chances of overcoming this huge challenge.