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Jürgen Rühe studied chemistry at the universities of Münster and Mainz. In 1989 he received his Ph.D. from the Johannes-Gutenberg University, Mainz, working with Prof. Dr. G. Wegner at the Max-Planck-Institute of Polymer Research on electrically conducting polymers, specifically conjugated polyheterocycles. After a postdoctoral stay at the IBM research laboratories in San Jose, California, where he studied ultrathin layers for the improvement of tribological properties of materials, he returned to Germany and in 1991 started to work at the University of Bayreuthas a "Liebig"-fellow of the VCI and a fellow of the German Research Council (DFG) in the area of polymers at interfaces. In 1995 he completed his Habilitation at the faculty of Biology, Chemistry and Geosciences of the University of Bayreuth and rejoined the MPI of Polymer Research, where he held an associate professor position ("C3-Stelle der Max-Planck-Gesesellschaft") and was in charge of a Max-Planck research group on interface chemistry at the MPI-P. From 1998-2001 he has been appointed visiting associate professor at Stanford University and as associate member of CPIMA (Center for Polymer Interfaces and Macromolecular Assemblies). In October 1999 he accepted a full professor position as the chair for chemistry and physics of interfaces at the Department of Microsystems Engineering (IMTEK) at the University of Freiburg.

He has been visiting scientist at the Cavendish Laboratories, Cambridge (UK), RIKEN, Tokyo (Japan) and Stanford University (USA).

Jürgen Rühe was the Managing Director of the Department of Microsystems Engineering and the founding director of the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS). From 2006 to 2014 he served as Vice Rector for Internationalization and Technology Transfer of the University of Freiburg.