

"German Universities  
in the World  
and for the World"

**International Strategy of  
the German Rectors'  
Conference (HRK) –  
Principles and Guidelines**

**Resolution by the  
4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
of 18 November 2008**

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## Summary

The spread of global networks and knowledge systems is associated with growing uncertainty as well as increasing opportunities, both for specific societies as well as for the individual. However, the **opportunities inherent in globalisation** are essentially available only to those with qualified knowledge and extensive competence. Therefore, the education system is key in enabling the individual as well as society to strike a balance between the opportunities and risks of globalisation.

In light of this background, **universities** (the term is used in the context of this document to include all institutions of higher education) play a role as "agents of change"; yet at the same time they themselves are influenced by economic and political developments. The ability of the national systems of higher education to react flexibly and competitively will determine whether they can effectively respond to international developments without compromising quality of research and teaching. It is not sufficient to define internationalisation as the mere exchange of students and teaching staff and the participation in international research projects. Instead, it will be essential that every university – starting with its mission and profile – develops a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that aims at achieving the transnationality of the university as a whole.

The two main responsibilities of the **German Rectors' Conference** (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK*) – providing operational support services and representing members' political interests – will be fulfilled by providing advice and support to its member universities throughout the process of internationalisation. To keep pace with the emergence of a global system of higher education, it will also develop norms and standards that will help to ensure that German universities have a realistic chance of securing a place in global competition. The HRK will thus represent the interests of German universities and provide them with services to support the pursuit of their core internationalisation objectives.

## 1. Education toward Global Citizenship and Research for Society as Responsibilities of the Universities

The **education** of the next generation of young people at German universities aims not only to make them employable but also to equip them to assume global citizenship. Along with methodological reasoning and scientific logic, **research** commits itself to a choice of topics that support the values of civil society and, following on from this, the development of new knowledge for society. In this sense, the universities of the future are institutions in the world and for the world. This orientation of the universities of the future is a result of the challenges arising from globalisation, including in the area of academic teaching and research. The universities proactively address these challenges of globalisation by grasping emerging opportunities and simultaneously endeavouring to manage the risks associated with globalisation. These are, for example, the possibility that commercialisation of the tertiary sector may detrimentally affect those in the world who have so far been denied access to higher education.

## 2. Challenges of Globalisation for Society

Globalisation as a process that started in the economic and political arena has far-reaching implications, also for academic teaching and research. Globalisation in the economic sector involves the internationalisation of markets with varying values, social standards, and rates of productivity. In the field of politics – as in economics – globalisation is defined by growing competition accompanied by processes of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation. Due to increasing market interdependence, economic and political decisions often trigger global effects (boom and bust). The proliferation of global networks and knowledge systems via new information media facilitates and accelerates the globalisation process. This acceleration affects economic and social innovations as well as changes in market activity, and is coupled with increasing volatility. Globalisation is therefore associated with vastly increased uncertainty, but also with newly emerging opportunities, both for particular societies as well as for individuals.

This development entails the need to manage uncertainty, more frequently restructure social conditions and personal environments, and display greater flexibility. Rational decision-making becomes increasingly difficult. Rapidly changing conditions mean that long-term decisions such as starting a family, wanting children, as well as setting career or educational goals carry substantial risk for the individual. This, in turn, weakens relationships, the family, and diminishes everyday well-being.

On the other hand, obvious opportunities provided by the globalisation process lie in increased productivity, higher living standards – also beyond Western societies – and in improved

employment conditions. Such opportunities need to be effectively utilised. Admittedly, they are primarily available only to those with qualified knowledge and extensive specialist and general competence, which leads to the risk of growing social injustice. With protections provided by family and the welfare state dwindling, opportunities abound for those who are better able to cope with uncertainty as a result of their education. At the same time career entrants, mothers returning to work and the poorly-trained, for example, tend to fall victim to such uncertainty.

To strengthen the positive effects of globalisation and to avert the negatives, social systems employ institutional filters, such as the employment system, the social system and, within certain limits, also the family system. Particular importance is attached to the education system, above all with regard to higher education. It is the key to enabling the individual as well as society to create a balance between the risks and opportunities of the globalisation process.

### **3. Challenges of Globalisation for the Universities**

Developments in industry, the economy, politics, communications and information technology and their effects manifest themselves within the higher education system in the form of

- a high level of competition beyond national borders,
- a higher degree of cultural diversity as a result of educational migrants,
- demographically linked conflicts between the older and the younger generations over access to (academic/scientific) educational resources,
- state difficulties in financing a higher education system with broader access, and
- user expectations of education in terms of employability and professional training.

Accepting and mastering these challenges will be easy or difficult for different societies in different ways. A new divide will open up between educationally poor and educationally rich nations when - as expected - some 250 million students worldwide simultaneously surge into the tertiary sector.

### **4. Transnationality of the Modern University as a Consequence of Globalisation**

If the German system of higher education properly assimilates the globalisation process and its implications, bearing in mind the basic parameters that exist in Germany (demographic development, funding, "grand" tradition, etc.), it will have to develop its self-identity in a globalised sense, and this should not only to so-called "Excellence Universities". A university that ignores the globalisation

processes and its associated challenges does not stand a chance in the medium term, and possibly even in the short term. This applies to the individual university as much as to the German system of higher education as a whole.

Due to market mechanisms a global system of higher education will develop – largely uncontrolled and organically – in the next few years. Allowing this process to happen unchecked may mean that the result is unlikely to correspond to ethical and political conceptions within the tradition of European as well as German higher education. For this reason, the internationalisation of German universities cannot be restricted simply to meeting harmonised teaching standards defined in a European context, acquiring research funding from Brussels, or expanding the international exchange of students or academics within the limits of national or European schemes. It would be a fundamental misunderstanding to envisage "internationalisation" in isolation as an – albeit important – element within the scope of a strategy for higher education. What is crucial today is not internationality in such a superficial sense, but rather the transnationality of every university as a whole.

Therefore any university must – in all the conceivable aspects of its work and business – be aware that it is a creative part of a developing global system of higher education and must act accordingly. It will be of utmost importance that German universities now not only define their place within a global system of higher education, but that they themselves become active and contribute responsibly to the definition of this system.

Internationalisation aims at the transnationality of the university. This is why a sustainable and forward-looking university will define itself via its transnationality within the scope of the globalisation process.

Just as the profile and mission of each individual university differ in light of an increasingly diversified system of higher education, a university's internationalisation strategy is also customised and differentiated, embedded in the institution's mission statement. Based on a vision of internationalisation agreed by all the universities, each university must develop its own internationalisation strategy that appropriately considers the specific features of the individual university as well as the regional and national context in which it is embedded.

To achieve internationalisation within the scope of the globalisation process, German universities have at their disposal an internationally tested and partially proven set of instruments, a repertoire of measures to apply. It can be taken as certain that in future the quality of German and international universities will be assessed also with respect to achieving such standards of internationalisation.

## 5. Tasks and General Conditions for German Universities Against the Background of Opportunities and Risks of Globalisation

Universities, in their capacity as the world's "workshops of the future", face a highly important responsibility in the interplay of opportunities and risks inherent in the globalisation process.

German universities will not be able to keep pace with international developments without:

- **Autonomy of Higher Education from Government:** To the extent that the state is withdrawing from its responsibility for the financing of the tertiary sector, it forfeits the right and opportunity to determine its course.

It will be essential to establish forms of university governance in a responsible manner that justifies autonomy, ranging from curriculum design through to staff recruitment.

- **New Types of Funding:** The unrestricted access of large numbers of students to higher education is not easily managed, even by educationally rich countries. It must be expected that in the medium term the public purse will only be able to provide partial funding of higher education. This will inevitably lead to initiatives in the free market.

One of the tasks will be to counteract "rampant privatisation" by means of exemplary public-private partnerships.

- **Entrepreneurial Universities:** Chronic public underfunding of higher education calls for new legal structures and new entrepreneurial models for universities.

It will be essential to harmonise the university's academic role with its entrepreneurial governance.

- **New Forms of Learning:** The great demand for information and teaching may result in high social selectivity that presents societies with the difficulty of not being able to provide enough adequately trained staff for their future needs.

Therefore it will be essential to facilitate access to open sources of learning, in virtual formats, and via publicly accessible courses and programmes (open educational resources).

- **Consolidation of General Studies:** The great emphasis on the applicability of scientific/academic education and training may result in a negative impact on general educational content, even affecting the higher levels of secondary education. Political pressure exerted on government may suggest neglecting the humanities and social sciences in favour of engineering and natural sciences in terms of funding and thereby jeopardising the normative, cultural foundations and traditions of societies.

It will be essential that the universities themselves provide sustained support for these subjects.

- **Delivery of Cross-Disciplinary Competence:** Students expect a specialised qualitative education, but moreover the delivery of key qualifications, such as innovative capability, entrepreneurial capacity and the ability to work in a team.

It will be essential that the universities not reject the delivery of such skills as being "beneath them", but rather integrate it

subject-specifically into their curricula; for only the universities have the means to deliver these skills in a qualitatively appropriate manner.

- **Freedom of Research as the Basis for the Modern Knowledge Society:** The knowledge society calls for a broad approach to basic research that alone is able to open up new academic horizons and prepare young people for the associated challenges. Research also aims to support knowledge-based businesses, receiving, in return, valuable ideas and suggestions.  
It will be essential to protect the autonomy of researchers so that they are free in their choice of research topics and methods. In return for this privilege, researchers are obliged to make their knowledge appropriately available to society.

Furthermore, the universities will have to respond to the consequences of globalisation within teaching, learning and research. Meeting and mastering the upcoming challenges that will face the national systems of higher education will be impossible without:

- **Differentiation within the System of Higher Education:** The globalisation process will inevitably lead to a high degree of diversity and variety in the types of higher education institutions found worldwide.  
It will not only be essential to enable quality assessment, but also to assign to those institutions not internationally active an important role within this system. In particular, this will involve complying with regional values, interests and needs that will develop as part of an inevitable regionalisation process.
- **Educational Standards in Higher Education:** The possibility of a rapidly expanding market within the tertiary sector bears with it the substantial risk of non-transparent quality differences that the users of the system will become aware of too late or not at all.  
It will be essential to establish a global system of quality assurance that ensures educational standards are met at every level down to the actual classroom.
- **Comparability of Academic Qualifications:** Mobility expectations of consumers and university graduates will exert substantial pressure on the national systems of higher education to converge. The Europeanisation of higher education, with its implied standardisation, will have to be followed very quickly by an analogous global process.  
In this context, it will be essential that the European elements of the system of higher education as well as its transferable traditions are safeguarded within the globalisation process.
- **Dealing with Uncertainty:** The globalisation process, with its risks and opportunities, calls for a fundamental change of attitude by (global) citizens towards their educational processes.  
It will be essential to enable them to deal productively with uncertainties and to derive from the changes opportunities appropriate to their educational status.

- **Managing Issues of Educational Migration:** Despite conditions allowing easier access to information and means of transport, a concentration of universities in Western societies creates social selectivity on a global scale.

It will be essential that established universities facilitate access to the education they offer, including in developing countries and emerging nations, by setting up campuses abroad.

- **Assuming Responsibility in an International Context:** By cooperating with foreign partner universities, Germany's higher education institutions strengthen these centres of research, education and the training of experts and leaders, thereby promoting development in other parts of the world.

It will be essential that in all these activities the interests and goals of all participating universities are harmonised to create a win-win situation.

- **Exporting Higher Education:** The obligation to create access to higher education for as much of the world as possible calls for new forms of provision worldwide. These include non-collaborative arrangements, branch campuses, off-shore institutions, "flying faculty", as well as collaborative arrangements extending from the recognition of external programmes without case-by-case verification, via authorisation of externally-developed degree programmes (franchising), through to twinning (dual-degree) programmes.

It will be essential that such diverse forms of programmes become accepted at German universities in addition to more traditional approaches.

- **Managing the Impact of Teaching, Learning and Research in an Intercultural Context:** The delivery and exchange of knowledge must be adapted in line with the growing interculturality within which they occur. Globalisation in the field of science requires greater flexibility when managing diverging expectations in respect of the collaboration between students and/or researchers at a university.

It will be essential to sensitise teachers and students to intercultural differences with the aid of targeted further education courses, and to create an awareness of the fact that teaching, learning and research within an intercultural context demands a lot from all involved.

## 6. The Responsibility of the HRK with Reference to the Globalisation of the System of Higher Education

Acting on behalf of its member universities, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) is responsible for representing its members' interests and providing support services. Within the scope of representing its members' interests, the German Rectors' Conference will pursue a strategy of targeted influence on the creation of a global system of higher education wherever decisions are made (e.g. German education policy, European education policy,



partner organisations, pressure groups, etc.) and will thus provide its member universities with a realistic chance of securing a place within this system, even in the medium-term.

German universities will be able to take their place in the globalisation process only if they are strategically equipped for this process. This includes the universities initiating such measures and establishing such structures that allow them to be successful in the coming competition. The German Rectors' Conference is developing and maintaining a set of such tools, providing the universities with a range of advisory services and training courses, and compiling new strategies – where appropriate, in cooperation with other internationally active partner organisations.

In line with the universities' mission to educate and train students to be global citizens and to undertake research for the continuing advancement of societies (cf. 1.), the German Rectors' Conference will fulfil its two tasks, namely of **representing the political interests of its members** and of **providing operational support services**. As a global system of higher education emerges, as national concepts of higher education are developed, and in the provision of concrete support, the HRK will work to develop, establish, and implement norms and standards in such a way that a global system of higher education offers its participating universities a fair chance, educates the next generation for a socially just world, and at the same time acts competitively and with a commitment to quality.

<b>The HRK supports the Internationalisation Goals of German Universities</b>						
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Internationalisation Goals of the Universities</b>		<b>Key Tasks for the HRK International Department</b>				
		<b>Influencing international decision-making / Establishing German interests</b>	<b>Political environment / Internationalisation know-how</b>	<b>Increasing further the international focus of study and teaching</b>	<b>Increasing further the international research networks</b>	<b>Worldwide promotion of German universities as attractive centres of study and research</b>
IZ 1	Establishing the interests of German universities in the development of international standards					
IZ 2	Shaping the European Higher Education Area					
IZ 3	Shaping the European Research Area					
IZ 4	Representing the interests of German universities at key strategic locations abroad and establishing German study programmes and universities abroad					
IZ 5	Improving the mobility and interculturality of students, researchers and scientists					
IZ 6	Promoting degree studies, doctorates or research activity at German universities					
IZ 7	Providing professional support to foreign students, doctoral candidates and researchers					
IZ 8	Making internationality transparent, benchmarking and comparing it, and setting institutional incentives to drive internationalisation forward					
IZ 9	Managing internationalisation professionally at executive level and developing an institutional internationalisation strategy					
IZ 10	Turning foreign universities into strong partners of German universities and assuming responsibility internationally					