

The Hamburg Declaration

“Rebuilding University – Society Relationships”

A statement adopted by the Global University Leaders Council Hamburg – a meeting of 45 university leaders from around the world invited for discussion in Hamburg from 5 to 7 June 2019 at the invitation of the German Rectors’ Conference, the Körber Foundation, and Universität Hamburg.

As the Global University Leaders Council Hamburg, we met to address the critical relationship between the university and the society it serves. Universities have a dual responsibility for leading changes and responding to emerging needs and expectations of society. Currently, we face challenges from some who contest the mission and role legitimacy of the university. We answer these challenges, providing direction from our historic strength of seeking objectivity through evidence and grounded expertise. Exercising leadership, we strive with honesty to engage society in its various forms through constructive dialogue.

We begin with the following observations:

- Our universities are embedded in the society they serve, and the fulfilment of their mission inevitably depends upon this fact. We benefit from the insights and best practices of the global community of scholars.
- No society is unified or uniform. There are differences and inequalities among groups as well as among individuals. Different strands of society have different claims on universities, affecting access to education, curricular emphases, and the personal and social benefits arising from teaching and research. These claims produce uncomfortable, but also productive tensions between universities and their society.
- Our universities, whether public or private, are influenced to a considerable degree by politics. We respond to law making, funding sources and amounts, and priorities expressed in public policy.
- Social influences and politics produce a variety of institutional profiles and missions serving the needs of a diverse and ever-changing society. University missions differ from one another, yet there is a common understanding of the central roles of teaching and research in the interest of society.
- Our universities educate present and future generations of graduates as well as contribute to present and future labour markets, civic values and virtues, social

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innovation and economic performance, and the general health and well-being of society. We also provide educational opportunities to the broad public through museums, performing arts organisations, and a variety of cultural activities. We do so while honouring human rights, democratic process, and the sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations.

We intend to pursue the following actions and recommend them to our colleagues in universities worldwide:

- We pledge to develop continually as actors for the common good.
- The autonomy of universities to define their mission and profile and set goals and targets for their academic task is a critical precondition for their very existence. This is not license for isolation. Seeking and maintaining a good balance between independence, political preferences, and expectations from partners in society are the responsibility of all involved.
- It is our responsibility to be high performers in education and research. Guaranteeing that we are good at these tasks enhances our intrinsic value to society. True academic excellence is best achieved when a university is an authentic civic institution.
- Definition of university mission and profile as well as performance review, setting incentives, and assessment of universities should explicitly address interaction with and impact upon society. The development of mission and profile should be specific to the institution and its unique social setting.
- University – society engagement is happening in various spaces: local, regional, national, international. No single institution can be everything to all and for all purposes. A balanced practice among institutions of different mission and profile will best be supported by society. Measuring or ranking performance should reflect and promote such variety among universities rather than suppress it.
- We should develop and maintain updated maps of our ever-changing societal environment. To respond properly to these changes, we should as necessary rethink and reset our study and research programmes.

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- We develop intellectual capital for all who engage us. We are not a haven for particular social elites. To remain acknowledged resources of great value, we aim to reflect society as a whole and to maintain an agility and responsiveness to it.
- As actors for social inclusion and mobility, we should mobilize our research capacity, adapt our learning formats, and reach out to schools and communities to remove hurdles hindering access to and completion of university study.
- Universities themselves are not homogenous communities. A variety of backgrounds, opinions and values characterize faculty and students. We promote and celebrate this diversity, fostering spaces of openness and respectfulness, and thus aspire to be a model for society.
- We will more effectively practice intense and open ongoing communication and engagement, internally within our own deliberations and externally with all elements of society. For efficient dialogue, we will use multiple methods to interact with specific audiences.
- In strengthening our relationship with society, we will naturally form partnerships and collaborations with a variety of stakeholders and communities.
- As actors for the common good and champions of academic freedom we constitute a platform for all in society.

To implement these recommendations, a governmental framework with appropriate incentives and strong support is essential. Furthermore, this can only be done if political actors and other stakeholders in society actively engage to make this relationship a success.

We as the Global University Leaders Council intend to move forward, sustaining an ongoing dialogue and building strong relationships with society into the future.

Hamburg, 7 June 2019

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