

German-Japanese Symposium

"Education, research and innovation – The mission of universities between academic values and societal expectations"

With the ever greater weight given to the direct applicability of research and teaching, there is a risk of losing sight of the long-term goals of research, teaching and education, concluded delegates at the fourth joint conference of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), the Japanese-German Center Berlin (JDZB) and the Japan Committee of Universities for International Exchange (JACUIE) held on 28/29 June 2016 in Berlin.

At the symposium, which was attended by around 160 experts including over 60 university leaders from Japan and Germany, delegates discussed how the concepts of innovation and social utility should be understood in the context of various academic disciplines and how universities in Japan and Germany could respond to societal expectations without giving up their educational objectives. Participants agreed that in order to create "innovation" and "societal impact", it was entirely misguided to view the STEM subjects as virtually the only relevant ones and to regard the humanities and the social sciences as optional extras in a modern knowledge society.

Based on a systemic definition of innovation, participants formulated the following guiding principles:

- **Laying the foundations with sound education and training**

In order to face and solve future challenges successfully, our knowledge societies rely on highly qualified citizens. In this context, universities play a key role as they not only provide society with expert knowledge, but – even more importantly – educate our young people and turn them into highly qualified graduates. In order to fulfil this essential task successfully, universities in Japan and Germany emphasize that

- students and doctoral candidates must not only be trained to acquire and apply sound expert knowledge and professional competences, but must also be educated and supported in becoming responsible, reflective and interculturally sensitive global citizens.
- students and doctoral candidates must furthermore be provided with the opportunities to acquire the management skills and the entrepreneurial mindset necessary for coping with new complex challenges. In this context, a sound balance of theory and practice plays a crucial role. Cooperation with business in particular and society in general – e. g. in the form of internships and joint projects in teaching, (applied) research, transfer and community service – builds important bridges, also for future inter-sectoral mobility and collaboration.
- general studies provide students and doctoral candidates with the necessary personal qualifications. They provide a platform for integrating questions of ethics, integrity and sustainability into university education and research and for enabling students to communicate the concerns of their particular discipline to representatives of other academic disciplines and the general public. A discussion on how to best interlink subject-specific and general education is an important prerequisite for a future-oriented development of university education.

- **Promoting transdisciplinary and transsectoral cooperation**

Innovation and societal change happen when borders are crossed. Thus, we need more communication, mobility and collaboration at eye level between

- individual disciplines in the form of transdisciplinary collaboration;
- individual research organisations at a regional, national and global level;
- different societal sectors, i. e. universities & research organisations and business & industry.

It is important to understand that academic core values and societal expectations are mutually stimulating catalysts. Societal challenges should be addressed in the curricula of all disciplines, grounded on a scientifically sound basis. At the same time, the diversity and quality of the individual disciplines needs to be ensured. The successful implementation of innovation and societal change is not solely founded on excellent research and transfer in the engineering sciences and natural sciences. It also requires an accompanying societal dialogue, based on sound research in the social sciences and the humanities. Only when those conditions are met will societal resilience and response readiness be fostered.

In this context, it is important to underline the crucial role of the humanities and the social sciences for the well-being of the individual and society in general. While the humanities and the social sciences themselves have to proactively confront societal challenges, universities in Germany and Japan also call upon policymakers at national and international level to address the importance of “culture” as key to societal innovation and transformation.

- **Establishing funding schemes and criteria for performance measurement that are adequate to the nature and the needs of education and research**

By their very nature, universities have open doors. They regard themselves as part of society and hold themselves accountable to society. With this in mind, universities in Germany and Japan point out that

- it is critical to formulate definitions of “successful performance” which are adequate to the nature and the needs of academic education and research and which are accepted by all stakeholders. All too often, the evaluation of university performance is based on rather simplistic quantitative criteria. While these do enhance transparency, it is important to acknowledge that they represent only part of the picture. Qualitative aspects need to be adequately incorporated into the evaluation of institutional performance. Peer review and peer audits, for example, are effective tools for institutional enhancement.
- suitable funding programmes that flexibly react to the needs of the various academic disciplines are indispensable. Research funding schemes need to be open and dynamic and should encourage inter-disciplinary as well as inter-sectoral research partnerships.
- quality takes time. The trust of their funding bodies and partners in society is a necessary prerequisite for universities to operate successfully.