

The Hamburg Declaration

“Navigating Competition and Collaboration – The Way Forward for Universities”

A statement adopted by the Global University Leaders Council Hamburg – a meeting of 30 university leaders from around the world, convened to discuss in Hamburg from 14 to 16 June 2023 at the invitation of the German Rectors’ Conference, the Körber-Stiftung and Universität Hamburg.¹

Global challenges such as the pandemic and the climate crisis have led to new forms of cooperation in science worldwide. At the same time, competition has become more intense and complex: Universities around the world are competing for talent, funds and prestige. Recent transformations of competition and collaboration in higher education have led to serious concerns, especially about the impacts of new forms of competition on university life and the relationship between universities and their societies.

Currently, the changed geopolitical situation, the threat to academic freedom and increasing scepticism about science in many countries around the world are posing a particular challenge to universities. At the fifth of its biennial meetings, the Global University Leaders Council met in Hamburg in 2023 to focus on how university leaders manage the key processes of competition and collaboration for the benefit of society, science and future generations.

Competition and collaboration have been common processes in academic life as far back in time as we can recognise the precursors of what today we call universities. Although in some respects the processes seem opposites of each other, they typically exist in a complementary relationship. They not only affect individual scholars, but also their institutions and the countries where these institutions are located.

Informed by our focused consideration over three days of fruitful discussion, we, the university leaders assembled, present **the following declaration reflecting our concerns and aspirations on the role of competition and collaboration in higher education** for consideration by the international public.

- Universities should stand together to safeguard and defend **academic freedom** against unwarranted internal and external infringements. Universities should collaborate to address the challenge that academic freedom is currently under serious threat in many countries around the world.

¹ Our discussions and subsequent conclusions were informed by a major academic study commissioned by the Körber-Stiftung and conducted at the University of Oslo, Norway, by Peter Maassen, Jens Jungblut, Bjørn Stensaker, Rachel Griffith and Arianna Rosso. This study considered competition and collaboration at 27 universities located in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia and Europe. This Hamburg Declaration has also been informed by the Hamburg Declarations of 2015 (Core Mission of Universities), 2017 (Diversified Organization of Higher Education in the Coming Century), 2019 (Relationships Between Universities and Society), and 2021 (Facing the Grand Challenges of Climate Change and Sustainability).

- Universities should pursue **strategic institutional partnerships** based on long-term commitment and trust, not only between institutions of similar stature and mission, but also between complementary institutions, and with non-university actors. To ensure resilient and sustainable international collaboration and avoid bilateral dependencies in a multipolar world, universities should make more efforts to diversify their partnerships and build multilateral networks. Especially, mutually beneficial partnerships between institutions in the Global North and the Global South on an equitable footing are key to addressing global challenges.
- To tackle today's societal challenges, universities should promote and support **cross-disciplinary collaboration** in research and teaching, in university governance and organisation as well as in the internal allocation of funds and career policies. University leaders should encourage governments and their agencies to adjust their policy instruments accordingly. Given that competitive schemes often prioritise STEM disciplines and the life sciences, the humanities and social sciences with their essential and historical appreciation of human values and creativity should be especially promoted.
- Universities should be visible actors in their communities; they should develop and use the power of their **collective voice** to ensure that their message is effectively communicated in all segments of society.
- University leadership at all levels should **review their current understanding** and use of competition and collaboration, both internally and externally, to ensure that they are properly grounded in their core vision, mission and institutional values.
- Universities should promote their democratic values to serve as **exemplars of democracy to society**. They should remain beacons of the search for truth and bulwarks against misinformation, disinformation and anti-intellectualism.
- Universities should promote and communicate their **engagement with society** and their relationships with their communities more clearly as a means of building kinship and enhancing trust and access. Universities should use collaboration strategically to engage with society more effectively.
- Universities should work collectively to ensure that governments and agencies establish instruments to promote healthy competition. Universities must retain **institutional autonomy** in the face of external pressure of universities to conform. Coherent policies by governments and their agencies are key to competition being used more responsibly and to academic collaborations becoming more resilient, sustainable and inclusive.

- University leaders should anticipate and actively inform political and societal thinking and actions. University leaders should be **proactive in protecting institutional values and standards** when strategically navigating competition and collaboration.
- As rankings and classifications should **reflect the universities' various missions and values**, university leaders should actively promote the reconfiguration of the measurement of institutional performance with key performance components, such as the quality of research, teaching and community service, economic and social impact, sustainability and green transition. Collectively and individually, universities should acknowledge that the current global university rankings often result in an unhealthy use of competition that reproduces and reinforces social inequities and global science inequalities.
- University leaders should actively promote the production of **evidence-based knowledge** on the impact of competition and collaboration among and within universities.

Hamburg, 16 June 2023