

**Promoting the International Attractiveness of European Higher Education – German
Perspectives and Strategies**

Brussels, 7 June 2011

Prof. Dr. Hans Jürgen Prömel

HRK Vice-President for Governance, Human Resources Policies and Management,
Organisation,

President of the Technische Universität Darmstadt

**The HRK-Audit „Internationalisation of Universities“:
aims and benefits for universities**

Dear Mr Truszczynski,

Dear Mr Greisler,

Dear Professor Winckler,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Throughout the last decade higher education has assumed an unprecedented visibility at the European level. The Bologna Process, starting in 1999, initiated a new pan-European approach to higher education. In March 2000, the Heads of the States and Governments of the European Union adopted the Lisbon Agenda, which recognised that knowledge and innovation are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly in the light of stagnating socio-economic development and increasing global competition. This is a rather new development, as higher education (and education in general) played no major role in the creation of the European Community/Union during its first decades.

The fact that higher education has only recently been discovered as a major European policy issue is somewhat surprising, given that over the centuries European universities have contributed significantly to the social, economic and cultural development of Europe. Particularly from the age of the Enlightenment on, European universities became the institutional home of modernity. Rationality and the corresponding attitude to science and technology became essential and decisive elements of European identity.

Today, in the wake of the modern “knowledge society”, education is of paramount importance for individuals and nations, and universities are expected to assume an even more complex role than in the past. Politics and society as a whole expect universities to act as agents of change: as providers of skilled personnel, contributors to innovation, attractors of international talent and business investment into a region, agents of social justice and mobility etc. Simultaneously, universities are affected by global economic, social, and political developments and they have to adjust to a changing external environment.

Therefore, the context in which universities act has changed profoundly. In order to keep pace with international developments, Europe’s universities will have to respond to the consequences of the globalisation of teaching, learning and research. Higher education is acquiring an increasingly international dimension. Furthermore, Internationalisation itself has changed its character from being mainly of academic or cultural interest to a subject that is also of economic importance: Higher education “outputs” in terms of graduates, research results, patents, consulting services etc. have a significant share in the competitiveness of national economies.

In May 2010 the Council of the European Union called for higher education institutions to further internationalise their activities, i.e. to foster a truly international culture within these institutions and to increase the international attractiveness of European universities. Accordingly, the European Commission has been invited to develop an EU international higher education strategy in collaboration with the Member States.

Already in 2008, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) adopted an International Strategy which defines the new role and responsibility of the German universities in an emerging world higher education community. In our international strategy, we maintain that only a truly transnational university will be in a position to respond adequately to the changing systemic conditions of globalisation and stand its ground in the national as well as the global higher education community. We argue that the future challenges described call for a new definition of what internationalisation really means for universities and how successful and sustainable internationalisation can be achieved.

Internationality, merely understood as the sum of single, unconnected international activities by different members and units of a university is not what we should aim at. Although these individual links and activities are valuable as such, this kind of "haphazard internationalisation" will most probably not be sustainable. Rather, it will be essential that each and every university, building on its mission and its profile, develops a comprehensive internationalisation strategy.

Such an institutional strategy should follow a holistic approach, which comprises all fields of activity of the institution (i.e. teaching and studying, research, management, services etc.). In all dimensions of its work and business, a university must perceive of itself as a creative part of a world higher education community. Furthermore, an internationalisation strategy involves planned action, rather than development by chance. A university must pursue internationalisation as an intended, systematic shift towards internationalised contents, methods, personnel and structures. Therefore, successful internationalisation needs professional management. Internationalisation is to be understood as a strategic task for the heads of universities. Naturally, internationalisation depends on the commitment and dedication of individuals and is spurred from the bottom up. But professional management at all levels is needed to accommodate these individual efforts, in order to make them sustainable and to create synergies.

Each and every university has to provide for a clear idea about its individual motivations for and approaches to internationalisation. Why does a university want to internationalise? What does it want to achieve through internationalisation? How can these goals be achieved? These questions and the answers to them are all but trivial. What is good for university A, does not necessarily have to be useful for university B. Different institutions are differently organised, are of different type, they work in different national, regional, socio-economic contexts and make different policy choices. This is why internationalisation strategies – in order to be successful – have to account for all relevant internal and external factors. A tailor-made strategy for each institution is needed.

Another critical issue is the connection between internationalisation and quality. More internationality is not automatically better. Internationalisation should not be pursued for its own sake, but serve a “higher” goal: It can be used to improve learning outcomes and research results, to enhance knowledge and technology transfer and to foster the competitiveness of the institution as a whole. Thus, internationalisation is not to be seen as an end in itself, but it needs to be pursued goal-oriented and with a focus on quality enhancement.

Based on these convictions, the German Rectors’ Conference provides advocacy and service with regard to core goals of internationalisation. One of the most prominent results of our international strategy is undoubtedly the HRK Audit “Internationalisation of Universities”, which was launched in 2009.

The HRK-Audit offers independent consulting services, which helps German universities to approach their internationalisation strategically and anchor it firmly within the institution. In concrete terms, the Audit “Internationalisation of Universities” offers universities the following benefits:

- It assesses the university’s current degree of internationalisation.
- It helps to identify and to formulate the university’s internationalisation goals.
- It gives assistance for the (further) development of an institutional internationalisation strategy and it recommends concrete measures to implement this strategy.
- Finally, the Audit supports the university in developing these measures sustainably.

The Audit's consultation process is highly individualised and tailored to suit the needs of each university. It takes into account the current state of internationalisation and is oriented towards the university's self-defined goals, and its capacity and resources, in terms of finances and staff. In this way, it is an exercise for self-improvement, which does not prescribe practices or advocate standardisation of internationalisation approaches.

Taking a holistic perspective on internationalisation, the HRK-Audit comprises all fields of international activity of a university: This is much more than student mobility and joint research projects. It covers the analysis of internal management structures, of the teaching and learning environment, the given research and development activities as well as the internationalisation of administrative structures and processes within the university.

The whole Audit process takes about ten months. It combines a good deal of self-reflexive analysis on the university's part with external advice given by a team of internationally experienced consultants. Key milestones of the process are the university's self-evaluation report and the three-day audit visit to the university by a group of our international experts. Prof. Georg Winckler, for example, is one those experts.

In September 2009, six German universities took part in the pilot run of the Audit "Internationalisation of Universities". The feedback provided by the universities at the end of the process was a very positive one indeed:

- According to the universities, the audit provided an independent and knowledgeable assessment of their internationalisation status. The discussions with the external consultants and the final recommendations helped them to develop their internationalisation strategically and in a focused manner. In this context, it proved very helpful that our external consultants are not only experts on universities, but from universities. This helped to build trust and increase the acceptance of the whole advisory process.
- As we hoped it would do, the Audit proved to be a highly flexible means that allowed the HRK to provide support in those areas where the universities most need assistance. The universities receive specific recommendation for their further internationalisation in the four areas "Planning & Steering", "Study & Teaching", "Research &

Technology Transfer” and “Advice & Support”. This holistic approach of the audit process was highly appreciated by the participating universities.

- In addition, the tight structure of the Audit process and its built-in self-evaluation helped the universities to bring their internationalisation process to life and to make it an important subject across the institution. Within the university, the Audit initiated a process of reflection and discussion that involved all actors and areas concerned with internationalisation.
- And finally, universities which participated in the first run maintained that the Audit significantly increased the visibility of internationalisation – not only within the university itself but also for external partners.

Moreover, the Audit is not only of benefit to those universities that are actually taking part in it but also to the German higher education system in general. A detailed analysis of its results will allow us to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of internationalisation at German universities at a more general level. Thus, the Audit enables HRK’s international department to identify the needs of our member universities more accurately and to then provide the advocacy and the services required. One case in point is a working group on the issue of institutional language policy that we just have launched this spring.

Because of the extremely positive results of the Audit’s pilot run, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research decided to financially support this successful HRK-project for another three years. What is more, German universities continue to show great interest in the Audit. Almost 90 universities applied for the second run in 2010. That is, approximately one out of four German universities did apply! We have just completed another round of twelve audits and expect to have performed 50 audits by the end of 2013.

In the course of the next audit’s next phase, we will also enlarge our portfolio. We will offer a so-called Re-Audit to those universities which have already taken part in the Audit process. Complementary to the Audit’s approach, the Re-Audit will give universities the opportunity to check back on the success of the internationalisation measures that they implemented as a

result of the Audit. The first Re-Audits are scheduled for the year 2012. Furthermore, we think of other possible instruments, with which we will be able to support the strategic internationalisation of universities.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Mr Truscynski, for attending our event and for your warm welcome address. We are grateful for the European Commission's great interest – not only in the topic of internationalisation as such, but in German approaches to strengthen the international dimension of higher education. We know that the Commission, in the context of its initiative “Youth on the Move” and its Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education, is currently working on a new Communication to be published in autumn 2011.

This communication, which is to set out the key challenges and actions needed for higher education in Europe in a 2020 perspective, provides a good opportunity to put new emphasis on internationalisation as one key dimension of the European higher education agenda and to sketch the envisaged EU international higher education strategy. Such a strategy surely needs to be developed in close cooperation with the Member States and the higher education institutions. HRK will always be happy to chip in its expertise and make an active contribution to promoting the international attractiveness of European higher education.

Thank you for your attention!