

## Press release

### Growing expectations placed on universities

#### International study finds that universities are expected to contribute more to society in addition to teaching and research

— **Hamburg/Berlin, 04 April 2019.** The list of requirements placed on universities is long. They are expected to make higher education available to a growing number of students, attract new social groups to study programmes and meet diversified labour market requirements. At the same time, internationally competitive research is expected to solve issues concerning the world's future and applied research is supposed to boost the economy at the local level.

— These growing, sometimes conflicting expectations regarding the societal relevance of universities can be seen all over the world, however, they differ with respect to their form from country to country. Universities in Germany are also being confronted with these growing demands.

These were the key findings of the study "The Place of Universities in Society" by the University of Oslo, commissioned by the Körber Foundation. The study was undertaken in preparation for the third Global University Leaders Council Hamburg to be held in June 2019, commissioned by the Körber Foundation.

#### Political and legal conditions often unclear

The study compares the societal connections of selected universities in six countries: Germany, Canada (Ontario), Chile, Great Britain (England), Japan and South Africa. On the occasion of the publication of the study, experts from universities, ministries and scientific organisations met yesterday in Berlin to discuss the key challenges facing Germany.

"In most countries, political and legal conditions with respect to the desired relationship between universities and society are unclear," said Peter Maassen, Professor at the University of Oslo and head of the study. "In addition, public funding for the further development of strategies and activities in this area is inadequate, with the result that universities generally only have a limited capacity to develop a professional approach in this regard."



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## Overview of the key findings of the study:

### **Societal demands placed on universities are growing worldwide**

The demands placed on universities by policy-makers are growing in many countries. In response, they are expanding their activities in order to meet these demands and develop their relationship with society, in addition to research and teaching. The sum of these measures in the areas of continuing education, knowledge and technology transfer and social engagement is referred to as the "third mission" of universities in many places. Universities in Germany have also been focusing more strongly on their relationship with society over the last ten years. According to the study, however, they are not achieving the same degree of effective institutionalisation as universities in Anglo-Saxon countries.

### **Focus of knowledge transfer on the private sector and industry**

Third mission activities focus on the exchange between universities, the private sector and industry. Conversely, initiatives with a social focus are generally considered "engagement" and are less institutionalised. This also applies to Germany where knowledge transfer in the form of industrial cooperation is well established at the institutional level and is more systematic than in the area of involvement in civil society.

### **National context crucial for the societal integration of universities**

In light of the increasingly globalised academic landscape, the respective national context remains the key criterion for expectations placed on the university as an institution. Exceptions to this are internationally aligned research universities that tend to develop in worldwide competition with other top universities.

The challenges in Germany are inadequate funding and the relatively rigid and complex legal conditions, such as stringent regulations in the area of funding opportunities, publication rights and the use of research findings.

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Negotiations with external partners are therefore often associated with a high administrative and financial burden. The individual chairs in Germany also have a particularly high degree of autonomy; social engagement is confined to the voluntary initiatives of individual members of universities. According to the authors of the study, this situation is compounded by the classification of activities carried out by universities.

### **Innovative concepts predominantly in teaching**

With respect to innovations in the relationship between universities and society, these can predominantly be found in teaching, for example the use of digital technologies and the introduction of new educational methods. These help to attract new communities and population strata to higher education, lower drop-out rates and prepare students for the changing labour market. This is also true in the case of Germany: "Innovations in education are important at German universities, however, they mainly consist of educational changes and the use of digital technologies and not so much of adapting the curricula to societal change," said study head Maassen.

Both in Germany and worldwide, innovative concepts targeted at the relationship with society are less widespread in research than in teaching. "An often rigid disciplinary organisation of universities obstructs new, truly multi-disciplinary research activities," explains Maassen.

### **About the study**

The study "The Place of Universities in Society" was conducted by the Department of Education at the University of Oslo, with academic oversight by Professor Peter Maassen. The authors analysed the relationship between universities and society in six countries with five or six selected universities. The Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, RWTH Aachen University, TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences, the University of Duisburg-Essen and Heidelberg University were examined in the chapter on Germany. Publicly accessible strategy papers, mission statements and other documents of universities were evaluated for the study.

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Furthermore, publicly accessible data, such as data provided by of the Federal Statistical Office and other studies, were used, university leadership members surveyed and experts consulted.

The study was undertaken in preparation for the third Global University Leaders Council Hamburg to be held in June 2019. It will bring together presidents of leading universities around the world in Hamburg. The Council is a joint initiative of the German Rectors' Conference, the Körber Foundation and the Universität Hamburg Its central objective is to actively shape the process of global higher education development.

#### **Materials for download**

- [Full study \(English, PDF\)](#)
- [Executive Summary \(German translation, PDF\)](#)

#### **Interview opportunities (enquiries via press contact please)**

- Prof Dr Peter Maassen, University of Oslo
- Prof Dr Peter-André Alt, President of the German Rectors' Conference
- Dr Lothar Dittmer, Chairman of the Executive Board, Körber Foundation
- Prof Dr Dr h.c. Dieter Lenzen, President of the Universität Hamburg

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