

**14 May 2018****University leaders from Japan and Germany:  
Clear guidelines needed for interaction between universities and society**

“Interaction between universities and other sections of society makes a vital contribution to the economic success of nations such as Japan and Germany. However, clear rules must apply to this important collaboration.” This point was underlined by the President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Horst Hippler, following a two-day Japanese-German higher education conference in Tokyo. For some time now, universities in both countries have shared a common concern that economic and profit-making interests may exercise an undue influence on government appraisals and funding.

“Forward-looking universities are mindful not just of their own future development, but that of society as a whole. They are faced with the justified expectation that, in their work, universities will take account of various stakeholders' needs for analysis and expertise, and that they will play an active part in discourse. And this responsibility relates not just to business and industry, but also to the political, social, cultural or media domains. However, universities must not allow their real mission in research and teaching to be cast into doubt or endangered. Both Japanese and German universities are looking in depth at the balance between these various demands,” the HRK President said.

One hundred and sixty experts from Japan and Germany, including 65 university leaders, took part in the fourth joint conference of the Japan Committee of Universities for International Exchange (JACUIE), the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Japanese-German Center Berlin (JDZB).

Professor Hippler added, “Universities play a key role in a nation's scientific, economic and cultural development, a role which they must define and further develop in constant dialogue with society. This interaction benefits everyone involved, provided that it is done properly and the rules of play are clear and transparent. Universities have the right – but also the responsibility – not only to make their potential clear to their stakeholders and the public, but also to clearly communicate the necessary conditions for independent scholarship and research.”

The organisers reinforced the three guiding principles for successful interaction between universities and society on which they had previously agreed in 2016:

- Academically sound education and training not only includes the communication of specialist knowledge and professional competencies, but the development of a mature personality whose actions are guided by ethical principles.
- The diversity of specialist disciplines must be maintained in its current quality. At the same time, transdisciplinary and trans-sectoral cooperation must be promoted at all levels and on a permanent basis.

- Both funding programmes and the criteria used to assess the performance of universities must be appropriate for the character and the demands of research and education.

(The three organisers issued a joint press release after the conference.)