

Press release

Growing need for the social engagement of universities

Relationship between universities and society: International university leaders adopt recommendations

Hamburg, 07 June 2019. Rising expectations and pressure to legitimise: at the third Global University Leaders Council Hamburg, 45 university leaders from 23 countries gathered from 5 to 7 June to discuss the relationship between universities and society. It is marked by increasing, sometimes conflicting expectations placed on universities to contribute to social development on top of their core commitment to research and teaching.

As a result of their exchange, the participants of the Council jointly organised by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), the Körber Foundation and the University of Hamburg, adopted the "Rebuilding University – Society Relationships" declaration. In it, they recognise the social responsibility of universities. The Council has set out recommendations in the declaration on how universities can live up to this responsibility and meet the requirements of academic freedom, political guidelines and the expectations of societal partners.

"In light of the profound political and social changes as well as the growing importance of universities for social mobility and the economic success of a country, there is a growing need for the social engagement of universities," explained HRK President Prof Dr Peter-André Alt. "With respect to their respective profiles and capabilities, universities need to clearly define and convey what they can and are willing to accomplish on top of their core commitment, as well as what they cannot and are not willing to do."

To better exploit the great potential of universities in terms of information, advice and innovation in future, such engagement should be recognised and encouraged with appropriate legal frameworks and incentive structures, such as consideration in performance evaluations and funding programmes.

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Universities as models for an open society

The Council also highlights the orientation of universities towards the model of a diverse and inclusive society in its declaration. Universities should remove obstacles to higher education and successful completion of a course of study and adapt learning formats for this purpose.

“As agencies for the common good and advocates for academic freedom, universities also constitute a social platform,” said Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Dieter Lenzen, president of Universität Hamburg. “Universities should be places of openness and respect, they should endorse and support diversity, and, to this end, they should act as role models for society at large.”

Council participants stressed the role of communication and exchange as crucial to the successful structuring of the relationship between universities and society. "It is necessary to set up a dialogue on an equal footing between universities and society in order for universities to grasp changing social requirements and successfully convey their contributions to social development," explained Dr Lothar Dittmer, Chairman of the Executive Board of the Körber Foundation.

[Materials for download](#)

- "The Hamburg Declaration – Rebuilding University – Society Relationships"
- Group photo of Council participants

Further information

The programme of the Global University Leaders Council Hamburg, the list of participants and further information are available at www.guc-hamburg.de

About the Global University Leaders Council Hamburg

The Global University Leaders Council Hamburg brings together university leaders from major universities around the world in Hamburg. The Council is a joint initiative of the German Rectors' Conference, the Körber Foundation and the University of Hamburg. Its central objective is to actively shape the process of global higher education development.

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