



Hochschul
Rektoren
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Opening Remarks

***German – Australian Conference on Higher Education Financing
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President
Hochschulrektorenkonferenz**

Your Excellency, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege and pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – the Association of Universities and Other Higher Education Institutions in Germany – to the German-Australian Conference on Higher Education Financing.

Money makes the world go round, we know that. The ongoing discussion about the structural reforms at German higher education institutions is closely linked to the discussion on the financing of our institutions. Universities today are facing major challenges, some keenly wished for, some rather unwanted. Universities – and when I talk about universities I naturally include the universities of applied sciences, the *Fachhochschulen* – welcome the paradigm shift to increasing autonomy in governance and more performance-oriented steering mechanisms. We also welcome the increasing internationalisation of higher education with an ever-growing network between higher education institutions worldwide.

As welcome as these reforms are, however, sometimes we cannot help thinking that behind the shining façade of this quality-driven process, higher education ministers are looking for further ways to cut some of our funding. It cannot be repeated often enough that change – and a change for the better that is – does not come for free. If institutions of higher education are to be successful in restructuring themselves in order to become fit for the 21st century, it must be clear that they can only do so on the basis of solid funding. Since public funds are not likely to grow in the years to come, this leads to the conclusion that universities have to be able to acquire additional funds.

It is within this framework that the introduction of tuition fees at German institutions of higher education has been intensively and controversially debated in the past years. The discussion gained currency once again with the federal legislation, which clearly prohibits the charging of tuition fees.

In a situation like this, experience tells us that we should not try to reinvent the wheel time and again. Many countries have gone through similar reform processes and, as already the Chinese philosopher Laotse says, “only fools have to make every mistake themselves”. This is why the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, across all fields of activity, attaches great value to the dialogue on higher education policy issues at an international level.

The German-Australian Conference on Higher Education Financing offers a welcome chance to intensify the dialogue with our Australian partners on the issue of higher education financing. We are thankful for this excellent opportunity to get first-hand information about the Australian model and, at the same time, discuss options of higher education financing in Germany in an international setting.

I would like to thank Her Excellency Ms Pamela Fayle, the Australian ambassador to Germany, for whole-heartedly supporting this joint conference of the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz and the Australia Centre Berlin and for hosting our conference in the Australian embassy building.

I would also like to thank our Australian colleagues who travelled a long way to join us here today. Furthermore, I would like to thank all German presenters for providing us with some stimulating input for our discussion.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all participants of the conference, the representatives of our member institutions and related organisations, our partners in government, business and research. I would like to ask everybody, but especially the participating students, to take this opportunity to actively join the discussion.

I wish us all a fruitful conference – a lively exchange of knowledge, experience and new ideas – giving new impulses for the future development of our higher education institutions.

Thank you.