

7 July 2014**Precedent in Lower Saxony: education funding repurposed with fatal consequences for higher education**

The state of Lower Saxony intends to invest financial resources earmarked for schools and universities in the funding of additional child daycare staff. As of 2015, the German federal states will have more money at their disposal to spend on schools and universities because the federal government has undertaken to cover in full the contribution that the individual states were previously required to make to education funding ('BAföG' funds). In return, the state governments pledged to make the €1.17 billion thus released per year available to schools and universities. However, the state of Lower Saxony intends to fully withhold the €110 million released as a result of the federal government's undertaking from the originally intended recipients.

In its meeting on 24 June 2014, the Senate of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) called for the relief of state budgets to be used to improve the basic funding of universities. Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler, President of the HRK, commented today: "Basic financing for the higher education institutions has not kept pace with the increasing demand for higher education. The changed BAföG funding model creates a certain amount of scope to at least partially countermand this negative trend. This is why the entirety of the funds released from the student BAföG must be invested in higher education. Failure to do this will jeopardise future university places and force institutions to scale down their capacities. In our view, the action taken by Lower Saxony constitutes a precedent of arbitrary repurposing of education funding. It fatally cements the underfunding of higher education."

"These plans make a mockery of the election promises of the red-green government in Lower Saxony," says the chair of the Niedersachsen Rectors' Conference (LHK), Prof. Dr. Jürgen Hesselbach. "One of the most important announcements prior to the state parliament elections in 2013 was the abolition of tuition fees and full compensation for them. Both we and students were promised that the universities would not be burdened with costs in other areas. We are now seeing what was really behind the election promises: the state is basically claiming back the €130 million needed in compensation almost entirely from the universities."

The federal education minister Johanna Wanka linked the funding compromise for the benefit of the federal states with clear conditions: "It was important to me that the additional funding would actually be used for the benefit of school pupils and students. The state governments have now pledged to do exactly that," she announced in a [press release](#) on 27 May. The government of Lower Saxony, says Prof. Hesselbach, is ignoring the agreement of the party chairpersons in the governing coalition, including SPD chairperson Sigmar Gabriel, that the released BAföG funds would be used exclusively for schools and higher education.

"This will place higher education institutions in Lower Saxony in an inferior position compared with other German states," stated Prof. Hesselbach.

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