

**11 May 2015**

**HRK Annual Meeting in Kaiserslautern**

The situation surrounding the humanities is the focus of the Annual Meeting of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) in Kaiserslautern, Germany. TU Kaiserslautern and the University of Applied Sciences Kaiserslautern are jointly hosting the HRK.

Prof. Dr. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Professor of Comparative Literature and of French and Italian at Stanford University, is giving the ceremonial address on the topic of humanities.

In his opening speech, HRK President Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler emphasised the fact that despite the importance of the humanities, there is a need to keep fighting for their inclusion in European research policy. "The focus is too often on opportunism and commercialisation," said Hippler. He went on to say that some states have stopped funding research into the humanities altogether. Hippler also referred to problematic developments in Germany: "Time and again, drastic budget cuts, particularly in financially weak federal states, lead to fringe humanities subjects no longer being taught. So it is true to say that the humanities are both holding their ground and at risk. This is a good enough reason to discuss the issues surrounding the humanities today."

Hippler quoted Gumbrecht, the keynote speaker, who had described the fringe subjects as "laboratories of risky thinking" when concluding the "Mapping the Fringe Subjects" project by the HRK. "You have not just stated an important reason to legitimise the humanities here, you have also turned this reason into a plea to representatives of the humanities to measure up to this," said the HRK President.

Hippler explained that important steps in higher education policy were taken in Germany last year. The Basic Law was amended which he reckons made it possible for the government to make a long-term financial commitment to funding universities and for the Higher Education Pact to be continued with a slight increase in overhead funding for third-party funded research. It was also possible to make a fundamental agreement on continuing the Excellence Initiative. He added that these steps also include the government bearing all costs for BAföG, which would give federal states scope to improve basic university financing. However, some federal states apparently did not get on board with this idea.

Hippler stated that the HRK would make its contribution towards fleshing out possible development opportunities for universities. This would urgently require reliable prospects where the uninterrupted demand for higher education, the inadequate state of early career research and the challenges faced by research are concerned. Hippler believes that the position the humanities have been put in reflects the university system as a whole. Reasonable financial and legal framework conditions would also ensure that the humanities remain in German universities.

The HRK General Meeting is being held on the day after the Annual Meeting and its agenda addresses current challenges. Decisions are planned on the future of the Excellence Initiative, cooperative doctoral training, a framework for guidance for early career researchers in the post-doctoral phase and the Academic Fixed-Term Contract Law (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz). Franchising in medicine and the planned free trade agreement with the USA TTIP are also on the agenda. The General Meeting is also voting for the HRK President for the term of office beginning on 1 September 2015 and ending on 31 August 2018. The candidates are the current President Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler; Prof. Dr. Klaus Dicke, Professor of Political Theory and the History of Ideas at the University of Jena, where he was the Head between 2004 and 2014; and Prof. Dr. Walther Christoph Zimmerli, former President of Witten/Herdecke University and the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus.