

4 April 2014**HRK Universities Members' Group: draft Higher Education Act for North Rhine-Westphalia is ill-advised**

The Universities Members' Group of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) has studied in detail the draft higher education act ('Hochschulzukunftsgesetz') of 25 March 2014 for North Rhine-Westphalia and has consulted with experts in tertiary education law. The Universities Members' Group is deeply concerned at the attempt by the state to encroach on academic freedom with regard to both research and teaching. The draft law is characterised by excessive regulation and bureaucratisation. The act will jeopardise the competitiveness of higher education institutions in North Rhine-Westphalia. This is particularly true in view of the extraordinary progress that universities have achieved by their own efforts in recent years (including the successful management of double intakes of university entrants due to the reduction in the number of years required to complete the Abitur as well as a notable increase in research capabilities).

The future economic success of North Rhine-Westphalia, including prosperity and jobs, is dependent to a large extent on the state's capacity for innovation in research. The developments outlined in the draft legislation would engender a risk to Germany as a whole as a place of research. The German Rectors' Conference will therefore look again at the draft law and decide on its next steps at its General Meeting in May. The Universities Members' group hopes that the state government and parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia will discard this ill-advised draft, which would be damaging to all higher education institutions in the state.