

Hamburg Protocol

At the invitation of the German Rectors' Conference, the Körber Foundation, and Universität Hamburg, university leaders from around the world met in Hamburg from 10 to 12 June 2015 to discuss the current situation of universities worldwide and their future development within the globalisation process.

In response to the globalisation process, in which higher education systems worldwide face similar challenges and increasingly have to compete across national and regional borders, convergences and divergences can be observed in the global post-secondary sector as well as the higher education systems therein. No single model should dominate over others. Diverse concepts of the university, embodying cultural identity, should be promoted, particularly in a globalised world.

United both in the aim of safeguarding the university's dual mission of generating new knowledge for humankind and educating responsible global citizens and out of concern about developments in post-secondary education systems worldwide, conference attendees have agreed upon the following analysis and recommendations:

The university leaders present at the 2015 Hamburg Transnational University Leaders Council regard it as essential:

- for the theoretical and ethical foundations of university education to strike the right balance among the acquisition of knowledge and skills essential for cultivating personal development, meeting both the needs of business and industry, and providing benefits for the society.
- for the relationship between individual researchers and their institution and the relationship between universities and the state to be shaped in such a way that academic freedom for research and teaching is continuously protected.
- for the differentiation processes in the post-secondary sector to be based on decisions arising from consultation with the academic community, the institutions themselves, and appropriate to the needs of science and scholarship.
- that all persons have the opportunity to participate in higher education regardless of social backgrounds or financial means, thus facilitating social mobility.
- to act in a spirit of cooperation, stimulating the circulation of academic talent between all world regions and thus promoting the development of knowledge-based societies in all parts of the world.
- to address the grand challenges facing society and the planet.

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*The core
mission of the
university*

The traditional understanding of a university, the principal purpose of which is to advance science, research, and education, is currently challenged by a variety of forces that require universities to be adaptive to changing conditions in society, for instance simplistic reactions to market pressures, while preserving their core values.

Today, no simple definition of the term “university” is available, or even desirable. Rather, the core mission of the university includes at least three main aspects: research, teaching and outreach to society. Universities foster critical thinking to enable academic staff and students to adapt to new situations, solve problems and bring forward innovations.

There is a broad and desirable spectrum of diverse institutional types that depend on the social, economic, political, and regional environment. On the one hand, the university as an institution that impacts society; on the other hand, the university as a place of individual education and as a public good.

*Academic
freedom and
university
autonomy*

Human development and scientific discovery are only possible when academic freedom encompassing the free movement not only of thoughts but also of people flourishes. In a university that promotes autonomy at all levels, teaching and research have to be co-determined by the university's members.

Organisational autonomy entails a commitment to take on social responsibility and ensure accountability through a continuous dialogue with society, business, and politics. Universities justify the trust bestowed upon them by grounding research, teaching, and learning on the shared values of the global academic community and by safeguarding the integrity of research, teaching, and learning.

We claim academic freedom, typically understood as the freedom to teach and the freedom to conduct research in an academic environment.

We also claim institutional autonomy, which comprises legal, financial, organisational and academic autonomy.

*Differentiation
in national
higher
education
systems*

Expansion and mass higher education are calling for differentiation – in the sense of diversity – in many dimensions. There is no single way to follow, flexibility is needed.

Research excellence is not the only feature of high quality: Governments should also reward other features of quality.

It is within the responsibility of the universities to respond to the needs of the students and society – independently of the underlying system –, and to articulate the quality of the different university missions beyond research.

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*Access to
higher
education*

Every individual should have access to post-secondary education. For that reason, post-secondary education has to be differentiated into different kinds of institutions.

Access should not be socially selective. It should be based solely on the measurement of potential. Every effort should be made to reach and encourage participation of marginalised communities. Only the institution should decide on matters of access; more than secondary school results should be taken into account.

*Financing
university
research and
higher
education*

We are concerned about inadequate levels of funding by state governments. Increasing market orientation and the ensuing privatisation of higher education and university-based research lead to both restricted access to universities and the depletion of academic disciplines, particularly in the humanities and the social sciences.

Higher education and basic research are public goods. The necessity of public funding of basic research and education should therefore be acknowledged. This is the only way to safeguard the universal right to access higher education.

For planning properly, long-term budget stability is very important. Universities should be allowed to seek multiple sources of funding.

We, the attendees of the 2015 Hamburg Transnational University Leaders Council, are united in the belief that the future viability of universities depends on their responses to the common challenges to the post-secondary sector worldwide. It is thus imperative that we formulate and promote the values we hold in common for a world higher education system fit for the future. Only by working together will we succeed in achieving the equitable coexistence of locally, nationally, or regionally adapted post-secondary systems based on a set of globally shared values. We pledge – both individually and jointly – to shape this process according to these convictions.

We also expect that those making decisions governing the development of post-secondary education and basic research be guided by the shared values of the Hamburg Protocol and, within the scope of their responsibility, do everything in their power to make these values a reality.

Hamburg, 12 June 2015