

Resolution of the
Executive Board
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**Guidelines and standards
in international university
cooperation**

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

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Preamble

The university of the future is transnational. Only a university that conceives of itself as a formative part of the global university community and acts accordingly will be viable in the long term. The HRK formulates this guiding principle in its international strategy. Given the increasing globalisation of all areas of life and the consequences thereof, the universities with their mandate in education, research and transfer have a central role to play as agents of change. In view of far-reaching social changes in times of increasing nationalism, anchoring the universities' cross-border operations in firm, well-considered value systems is becoming considerably more important.

In their activities, German universities operate on the foundation of the German Basic Law, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations declaration of human rights. As laid down in the Magna Charta Universitatum, freedom of research and teaching is an indispensable basic prerequisite for academic life and the successful operation of universities. It includes the principles of the pursuit of truth and basis in fact as well as the absence of ideological or religious influence or any form of influence on content by external stakeholders.

These parameters describe inalienable and non-negotiable fundamental principles that also apply to German universities' international activities and partnerships. International cooperation is of great value to German universities and is indispensable to the complete fulfilment of their mandate. At the institutional level, it provides substantial impetus for innovation in teaching, learning and research; at the individual level, it constitutes academic and personal enrichment for all involved. German universities have a clear picture not only of the opportunities and possibilities this presents, but also the challenges and risks international cooperation may pose to the integrity of national structures. In this tension between opportunities and risks, the HRK believes that it is important to proactively identify realms of possibility, without jeopardising one's own values and standards in the process.

Due to profound changes in the global environment, there is currently a heightened need in the higher education system for critical evaluation and orientation. The HRK is addressing this need and has formulated the following guidelines and standards for the international partnerships of German universities. These guidelines and standards have been developed around the overarching dimensions of "Strategy and governance," "Joint teaching and learning," "Joint research" and "Universities as transnational spaces". They are designed to provide key players – both universities as institutions and the individual members of universities – with support and orientation on the ground when setting up and maintaining resilient university partnerships. In view of the fact that conditions in the higher education systems worldwide are subject to an ongoing change process and that the realities of international cooperation are complex and multifaceted, the HRK will review these guidelines and standards at regular intervals.

Strategy and governance

- **Long-term commitment and equal partnership:** In their cooperation with international partners, German universities adopt an approach based on equal partnership and aspire to stable cooperation arrangements with a long-term perspective. Within a partnership, they define their goals and interests clearly and pursue them within the framework of an institutional strategy.
- **Sound basis for cooperation and mutual respect:** Sound knowledge of the partner and their research milieu are central to the success of a partnership; mutual acknowledgement of differing cultural paradigms and approaches is also essential. In-depth knowledge of the language and culture of the partner country helps to build confidence. One aspect of mutual respect is making differing values or principles transparent, thus allowing potential frictions to be addressed at an early stage.
- **Robust governance and professional management:** The growing complexity of international cooperation needs to be accompanied by increased professionalisation of the structures and processes provided at universities in support of internationalisation. Transparent responsibilities and a clear allocation of tasks are essential to successful cooperation and enable the partners to bring their specific strengths to bear in the partnership. It is equally crucial to jointly define transparent decision-making structures that also include procedures applying in the event of a disagreement and clearly outlined exit strategies in the interests of risk management.
- **Balanced funding:** International cooperation projects are based on a funding model that ensures a balanced distribution of the expenses incurred. This guarantees partnership on an equal footing, in which dependencies are avoided.ⁱ
- **Transparent communication:** In their internal communications, German universities formulate fundamental principles and frameworks for their international activities which provide orientation for all university members. In the context of their external communications, they affirm their international commitment and the guidelines and values on which it is based.
- **Acknowledgement of basic institutional rules:** International students and researchers are part of the university community. They have the same rights, as well as the same duties, as domestic members of universities. The basic institutional rules that apply equally to all university members include the law applicable to the protection of intellectual property and the acknowledgement of both the university's constitution and Germany's constitution based on the principles of democracy and liberty.

Joint teaching and learning

- **Freedom of study and teaching:** German universities guarantee freedom of study and teaching in their joint teaching with international partners. In the partnership, the freedom of teaching covers content and methodological design of courses and lectures and the freedom to disseminate and exchange academic opinions. Both teaching staff and students have the right to express academic or artistic opinions freely.
- **Added value of joint teaching and learning:** Teaching that is jointly designed and carried out places high demands on both teaching staff and students. At the same time, jointly developed curricula and study programmes represent an attractive opportunity to enable students to gain international and intercultural experience at their home university, in other words, to support internationalisation at home effectively and to educate culturally sensitive and broadly qualified citizens of the world.
- **Quality-assured teaching processes:** The German universities engaged in international teaching ensure the quality of the study programmes they offer within the framework of their institutional quality assurance processes and regular monitoring. This includes a quality-assured selection of the students made on the basis of transparent and verifiable criteria, ongoing further development of the curricula on which the programmes are based and transparent and reliable examination processes. Through the use of digitalisation in teaching, the potential of interactive teaching and learning forms for international partnerships is acknowledged and realised. The employment of modern teaching technology is based on joint standards for access and use of digital teaching modules. In relation to their qualifications, teaching staff involved in joint teaching meet the requirements of both the German universities involved and those of the partner location. The universities involved take joint responsibility for the continuing education of teaching staff and schedule time and capacity for further academic, linguistic and intercultural training of the responsible university teaching staff.
- **Promoting student mobility:** As globally minded institutions, German universities have a keen interest in gaining qualified students from other countries, whether for a temporary stay or permanently. They provide information to international applicants about their study programmes, access and admission rules and the costs involved, and offer academic orientation and social and cultural support at both the central and course-specific level. By the same token, they promote the mobility of their domestic students, whether for a study programme or a practical placement in another country. Transparent rules in relation to the selection, progression and subsequent recognition of the stay abroad facilitate international mobility. Likewise, the universities support their students with offerings for academic and intercultural preparation and follow-up for as well as assistance during their stay abroad.

Joint research

- **Freedom of research:** German universities guarantee freedom of research in joint research with international partners. Freedom of research includes the selection of questions and research subjects, the methodology and assessment of the research outcome and its dissemination, for example by way of publication.
- **Added value of joint research:** Research is inherently international: it lives and evolves through local, national or global exchange and competition of hypotheses and academic knowledge and findings. This guiding principle applies not merely to major global challenges but is inherent in all research questions. International research cooperation always takes place in the sphere of tension between cooperation and competition.
- **Observance of scientific, ethical and legal standards:** Freedom of research goes hand in hand with a special responsibility on the part of individual researchers and of universities as a whole. In international cooperation projects, the universities ensure adherence to scientific and ethical standards and observe the general principles of good research practice. This also includes compliance and enforcement of the applicable law for the protection of intellectual property as well as regulations on handling security-related research (risk analysis and minimisation, compliance).
- **Equal partnership:** International research and innovation projects are based on a governance model that guarantees that the project and the results generated in its course benefit both sides. This not only includes transparent rules in relation to the joint use of research infrastructure, but also unimpeded access to jointly generated research data and observance of internationally accepted publication practice, for example with respect to authorship and quality assurance through review processes.
- **Promoting researcher mobility:** As globally minded institutions, German universities have a keen interest in recruiting qualified doctoral candidates and researchers from other countries, whether for a temporary stay or permanently. By the same token, for many domestic academics undertaking research abroad constitutes an essential part of research activity at their home university.

Universities as transnational spaces

- **Intercultural dialogue and transnational campus:** In the context of their international partnerships, German universities are advocates for open dialogue. The fundamental prerequisites for this are fact-oriented discussion and tolerance of different opinions. Interaction and dialogue between international and domestic students, researchers and artistic teaching staff are central elements of university life on the home campus. In this way, channels can be opened for open communication across the barriers of language and culture, stimulating thought and change processes in all those involved. A

university with such a transnational orientation is enriching for all university members. This also provides the opportunity, in particular for members of the university who, for a variety of reasons, cannot be internationally mobile, to gather intercultural and international experience on their home campus.

- **Living a culture of welcome:** The German universities involved in a partnership offer international students, researchers and artistic teaching staff orientation and support before they take up their studies or their work and during their studies or project. As part of planning a partnership, social support for students, teaching staff and researchers is taken into consideration from the outset.
- **Promoting linguistic competence and multilingualism:** German universities support their international students, researchers and artistic teaching staff in acquiring and improving their German language skills and, if necessary, additional teaching or research languages. Likewise, they support their domestic students, researchers, artistic teaching staff and other university staff in acquiring and improving their foreign language skills. Alongside the proactive use of English as an academic *lingua franca*, German universities consciously advocate the promotion of the German language and of multilingualism, in recognition of the fact that linguistic competence is an important prerequisite for a successful stay in Germany or in the partner country and facilitates international graduates' integration into the German labour market.

Concluding remarks

University cooperation across national borders must be guaranteed and supported by the governmental frameworks – both in Germany and in the respective partner country – through appropriate legal frameworks and adequate and reliable financial resources. Attempts by German or foreign state bodies or other domestic or foreign stakeholders to exert influence over German universities in general or individual international cooperation projects in particular cannot be tolerated.

German universities conduct a regular evaluation of their international partnerships. If it should no longer be possible to guarantee adherence to the guidelines and standards formulated in this document in the course of an international partnership, the German universities involved will seek dialogue with their international partners in order to clarify the situation. As a last resort, they reserve the right to terminate the partnership in question following thorough examination.

ⁱ Exceptions to this rule apply in the context of development cooperation.