

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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### **Germany**

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

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Germany

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**Speech of Herr Helmut Schäfer  
Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office  
Germany**

***Higher education in the 21st century - Perspectives and activities***

Mr President,  
Director-General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the eve of the next century dramatic changes and new challenges are emerging in the fields of education and training which can only be tackled through increased international cooperation. I should therefore like to thank UNESCO for convening this World Conference on Higher Education 1998. Before I take the opportunity to outline the perspectives and activities of German higher education policy at today's plenary meeting, let me say that I represent the outgoing Federal Government. A new government will shortly formulate its own policy, which I cannot anticipate.

As an exporting and scientific nation with no notable raw materials other than its human resources, Germany is particularly dependent on its integration into the international scientific community and on the exchange with foreign elites. This is the only way to ensure a high standard of education and science in our country.

There is therefore broad agreement in Germany about the objectives and focuses of the necessary reforms. A new Framework Act for Higher Education came into force on 25 August 1998. It aims - through deregulation, performance orientation and the creation of performance incentives - to make possible competition and differentiation and to increase the competitiveness of German higher education institutions for the 21st century.

The crucial aspect of this reform is a fundamental restructuring of government funding for higher education institutions. In future funding will depend even more on the university's performance in teaching and research and on its promotion of young scientists and academics.

The German higher education institutions will be freed from excessively detailed government control so that they have the necessary scope to establish their own focuses and profile. In addition, a systematic evaluation of studies is intended to ensure a high level of performance. However, we are right at the beginning of the process and we want to learn from the experiences of other countries. Let me stress that it is not least to the US and Great Britain that we are looking in this respect.

By introducing a credit point system, which makes possible the mutual recognition of examination results by higher education institutions, we are increasing students' and graduates' mobility. They will no longer lose any time if they want to study at more than one university. At the same time this will increase the competitiveness of German institutions compared with those abroad.

In addition to this reform of the institutions' legal foundations, we have taken specific measures to enhance the international attractiveness and competitiveness of the German higher education system:

- We are stepping up support for courses of study specially tailored to the requirements of foreign students. One clear and very successful example is the "Internationally Oriented Study Programme". This programme creates new bachelors and masters courses, which began at twelve German universities in the 1997/98 winter semester and will start at eight further institutions this winter semester. These courses can be embarked upon by students with no knowledge of German. As the teaching and working language, English ranks equal with German; periods abroad are an integral component of the courses. The programme covers the fields of economics and business administration, engineering, computer science, maths and science.

- In parallel, we are offering a "Bachelor/Master Programme", which enables foreign graduates with a bachelors degree to continue their studies in Germany. Closer integration with degrees awarded abroad will of course foster the exchange of experience which is so important to all of us.
- Furthermore, a growing number of German higher education institutions offer courses of further study on subjects relating to developing countries. Participants in these courses receive grants.
- At the same time, Germany's information network on courses of study is being expanded, particularly through the use of new information media. For instance, the Federal Government participates in ORTELIUS, a European Union database of courses on offer in Europe.

So you can see that our higher education policy is designed to cope with the challenges arising from the rapid changes taking place in our societies, not least by looking beyond our own national borders. This is true for the outgoing Federal Government, and I believe that the new government - I take it that you know there is a new government in Germany - will pursue the same course. Let me mention in this connection a unique German achievement: in order to accommodate the different educational careers and talents of people on the one hand, and the manifold requirements of the labour market on the other, Germany decided more than 25 years ago to establish universities of applied sciences - the Fachhochschule - to complement the traditional type of university.

These applied sciences institutions have developed into an important factor of and are fully integrated into higher education, despite the fact that they are a relatively recent phenomenon compared to the long tradition of European universities. After all, it is no coincidence that universities of applied sciences are considered a unique success story within the higher education system in Germany.

Let me say just a few words about data networks. This seems inevitable at a time when you can hardly see a sentence without the word "Internet". I am proud to say that Germany has the most modern academic network in the world; it is to be expanded to a 2.5 gigabit net by the year 2000. All 326 German higher education institutions are linked up to it, with no need to pay for the privilege.

Cooperation with other countries, especially industrializing and developing countries, is a particular aim of German higher education policy. We have established a prize for international cooperation, which is now being awarded for the seventh time. The prize has to date been awarded in recognition of the exemplary character of cooperation agreements with institutions in countries including the Philippines, Ghana and Indonesia. Germany's higher education policy is based on the belief that globalization and international cooperation are buzzwords not only for business, but that they must also be anchored in the education of future generations.

Science and education will determine the well-being of people and nations in the future. They will determine whether they will be able to shape their destinies freely and responsibly and hold their own in global competition.

We are confident that the reforms initiated by us will contribute towards safeguarding the quality and efficiency of German higher education institutions, thus enhancing their ability to compete internationally. We rely on and encourage increased international cooperation between higher education institutions, as well as greater student mobility.

I wish the conference every success.

Thank you.