

Key issues regarding the inquiry into national security risks affecting the Australian higher education and research sector – the German Rectors' Conference's point of view

- The safeguarding of institutional autonomy and academic freedom is of paramount importance to the successful operation of universities. 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.
- These parameters describe inalienable and non-negotiable fundamental principles that also apply to the universities' international activities and partnerships. International cooperation is indispensable to the complete fulfilment of the universities' mandate. It provides substantial impetus for innovation in teaching, learning and research. Only globally connected universities will be successful in the long-term and can thus continuously contribute to the economic and social well-being of societies.
- It is self-understood that university autonomy and academic freedom go hand in hand with the institutional commitment of universities to act responsibly. Universities have a clear picture not only of the opportunities and possibilities international partnerships present, but also the challenges and risks international cooperation may pose to the integrity of national structures. Due to profound changes in the global environment, there is certainly a stronger need in the higher education system for critical evaluation and orientation. In Germany, the HRK has addressed this need by formulating guidelines and standards in international university cooperation.
- Certainly, the conditions under which universities in Germany and Australia operate are quite different, but the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) nevertheless regards the measures taken by our Australian partner organisation, Universities Australia, as exemplary for our own actions. In our work on these issues, we were very grateful for the inspiration and support provided by them.
- From the HRK's point of view, it is key to raise awareness and build up knowledge within the sector. It is also critical for the success of measures taken to create opportunities for exchange and cooperation. In Germany, too, we are pursuing the approach of an ongoing exchange between universities and research institutions, state actors and other stakeholders on security-related issues. We are convinced that the challenges that lie ahead can only be overcome by working together. Excessive state regulation of international cooperation would, so to speak, throw out the baby with the bathwater, as it threatens to hinder and damage international networking and cooperation, which is so vital for universities and research institutions.
- The ongoing exchange with our Australian partners as well as other partners within the European Union and beyond strengthens our conviction that we as universities have ways and means to deal productively with the challenges of our time. A continued dialogue with governmental actors is an important basis for our actions in this context.