

From May 17–18, 2010, the JDZB will host the conference “Higher Education Reform in Japan and Germany – Opportunities and Challenges for Cooperation.” This event, held in cooperation with the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (Association of Universities and Other Higher Education Institutions in Germany, HRK, Bonn), the Japan Committee of Universities for International Exchange (JACUIE, Tôkyô) and the Japan Association of National Universities (JANU, Tôkyô), will incorporate the JDZB into the ‘Berlin Year of Science 2010’ that commences with the series “Sciences in Berlin’s Southwest” on May 16.

Below is an interview with the Vice President of the HRK for International Affairs, Prof Dieter Lenzen (Hamburg University).



*Currently there are approximately 3000 cooperation agreements between German and Japanese universities. What are the focal points of cooperation?*

Japan is an important partner for German universities in Asia; the number of university partnerships has risen continuously. It covers all areas of university cooperation, ranging from student and academic staff mobility, to jointly developed study programs and joint research projects.

*Japanese and German universities are facing similar challenges. Where are they similar, and where are there obvious differences? What will be the main issues for the future of universities in both countries?*

I see the main challenges for German universities in the immediate future as driving forward the implementation of the Bologna Reform and making adjustments where required. We must also ensure continued autonomy of universities from the government. Moreover, universities must understand the process of internationalization as a process that not only concerns shaping curricula or conceptualizing research projects, but how it shapes the institution as a whole. There are parallels here with the Japanese university system: the autonomy of public universities has increased significantly there as well - a process that requires new instruments for management and quality assurance. Similar to Germany, the Japanese universities are facing considerable

globalization pressure which in turn promotes internationalization. At the same time private universities dominate in Japan with more than 70% of students educated at private institutions. This is very different to the German system.

*University reforms in both countries create new opportunities for more structured cooperation. How far have we progressed in mutually recognizing academic qualifications or promoting mobility in graduate and postgraduate areas?*

Over the past few years, both Germany and Japan have pushed forward the internationalization of universities. And in fact this has resulted in new potential for academic cooperation. Moreover, we have recognized both here in Germany and in Japan that universities must actively deal with the challenges of the globalization process in the areas of academic teaching and research. Inevitably this has resulted in stronger internationalization. At the same time, barriers exist particularly in the areas of mobility and qualifications recognition between Germany and Japan. The conference jointly organized by the HRK and JDZB specifically sought to topicalize these challenges and determine new solutions.

*A few years ago there was a model project of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Association) with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to establish a German-Japanese graduate school. Has this project been completed?*

Yes, this program has been running very successfully for five years. Meanwhile three joint graduate schools were established between German and Japanese universities as well as a trilateral graduate school between Germany, Japan and the USA. The focus of the colleges is the natural sciences, but happily we are finding this form of structured cooperation in the liberal arts area as well.

*Which forms of German-Japanese scientific cooperation should be further expanded and which areas of cooperation should we promote over the long term in research and teaching?*

Overall I would hope that the foundations for good bilateral cooperative relations between staff of individual universities lead to stronger and more structured partnerships which would unify the various forms of cooperation such as student mobility and co-developing curricula. We can already witness these trends in university cooperation with other countries; but there’s a need to reach similar levels of cooperation with Japan. Japan is an important strategic partner for us. The conference in May will offer a welcome opportunity to expand on existing contacts and create new areas of cooperation.