



UWE JENS NAGEL / URSULA HANS /
ESTHER VON RICHTHOFEN

Internationalisation Humboldt Style

It is hardly necessary to stress the importance of internationalisation in research – there are few research projects without international partners and no researchers without a network of experts in different (sometimes even remote) parts of the world, networks always carefully selected according to the individual needs of the researcher's field of expertise. The university management does its utmost to support its researchers in these endeavours structurally. It must provide an institutional strategy for internationalisation, foster intensive cooperation with key partners worldwide and give administrative (as well as financial) assistance in order to support research that transcends national borders. Moreover, the university is an environment where the spirit of internationalisation and the amalgamation of many cultures are clearly visible, where staff and students are internationally mobile, and where a recruitment process attracts the best minds from around the world for the academic and the student body. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin is an example of a university where all these various and varied components come together.

Because of the figure of Alexander von Humboldt, the traveller, and discoverer, the scientist and uni-

versity lecturer, who held his famous Kosmos lectures at Berlin's *alma mater* in the first years after its foundation, Humboldt-Universität – perhaps more so than other universities – has been linked with international endeavours. Alexander's brother Wilhelm von Humboldt's model for the modern university was adopted throughout the world. He saw to it that the German higher education system became a point of reference globally. The university owes it to the legacy of the two brothers that its name has become known throughout the world, but it also looks back on many more famous alumni, the philosopher Hegel, for instance, or each of the no less than twenty-nine Nobel Prize Winners of international acclaim – Albert Einstein, Robert Koch, Otto Hahn and Theodor Mommsen to name but a few. This is an impressive, but challenging legacy: the university in 2010 has big shoes to fill, not least in the field of internationalisation.

Since re-unification in 1989 and the self-renewal of the university which ensued, the promotion of young researchers has been a focal point of the university strategy. The university was among the first in Germany to introduce »junior professorships« and has 41 such positions today – over half of them occupied by women. In order to further doctoral students, the Humboldt-Graduate School was founded in 2006 to provide an administrative home to structured doctoral programs for a large group of doctoral students; at the moment about 40% of all doctoral students are international students. In total, the university maintains 12 junior research groups and 29 graduate schools/graduate programs to date.



In order to promote research careers that are anchored in international research networks, an international focus is encouraged early on as a matter of course. Each and every doctoral student and junior researcher is encouraged to take an international approach, to spend a considerable amount of time abroad and to explore the international field of his/her own discipline. Including the international aspect in the training of young researchers early on is important for two reasons. Firstly, in order to conduct research, it is necessary to continuously question and test one's own outlook. There is no better way of doing this than by going abroad, spending time in an environment with a wholly different (or perhaps, surprisingly similar) outlook on one's own subject and with a challenging approach to it. Secondly, young researchers must be given a chance to establish their international networks very early on in their careers in order to give them all the opportunities to build on such networks as their careers progress. Thus equipped, they will enrich Humboldt-Universität and their respective department upon their return.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin at present is as internationally oriented as ever and seeks to provide the means for internationalisation to all its members – from the student to the professor. Its lecturers and professors are highly mobile. It is home to highly visible international research projects, for example a research group worth several million looking at »Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History« involving high-ranking international partners. Each year, it is successful in attracting many

international researchers who come to work and teach here as guest professors and guests lecturers, for example 69 scholarship winners of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation in 2009. There are also countless international students seeking to complete their PhD program here, benefitting from the high-tech science campus in Adlershof for instance. It offers 29 international, English-speaking Master degree courses such as the German-Turkish Master program GeTMA in the field of social sciences and – by the newest count – 46 international Ph.D. programs. Many of its academics and students have been inspired to foster a spirit of »internationalisation at home« with projects, with an international focus, though based in Berlin. Up to 1200 of its students complete part of their studies in partner universities all over the world every year. And, to close the list, its researchers are involved in various development projects conducted in Africa, South and South-East Asia in the field of Agricultural Science, Biology or Geography.

With so many different research projects going on, how does the university manage to keep an overview, let alone pursue an institutional strategy? The only way this is possible is by providing breadth and focus at the same time: breadth of individuals, institutes and faculties involved in international projects with a highly diverse group of individually appropriate partners, but focus of each of those persons or institutions on a small group of core partners. For example, where the university management once had hundreds of partnership agreements that it could not cultivate simultaneously, it has now

identified twenty strategic partners for developing joint research projects, with whom exchanging students and academics as well as discussing possible improvements to the administrative side of the internationalisation process mutually enriches the partner institutions and Humboldt-Universität. On top of that, there are a further sixty partners with whom intensive students exchange programs are coordinated. This is the approximate number of partners an international office at the central level can cater to intensively: the contacts can be attended to, contracts and activities monitored, regular visits and meetings can take place. The make-up of the group or partners is not static, however. One partner may become more important at a strategic level and will be included in the list of strategic partners, while the partnership with another institution might prove to be fading out after some years. It may also turn out that a partner who was deemed to be reliable is, in fact, the opposite, making promises that are not kept or being too occupied to devote enough time to the partnership as is necessary. It is, therefore, less important to cling to a firm partner list of university names that was once decided on and more crucial to constantly evaluate and carefully select the partnerships of the university, always asking the question where it is useful to invest time, and where time could be wasted.

The number of eighty partners in total might sound high, but considering that the university has eleven faculties, thirty departments, 29.000 students, 1.700 lecturers and research assistants and 400 professors, it is productively small. In addition to this number, scientists and institutes and faculties of course have a considerably larger group of partners in research and teaching. This group is maintained by them to pursue strategic goals: to make sure that a university which offers teaching input for their students is cultivated, to support their own research



projects and to link their Ph.D. students to other work groups which coordinate with their own. It is out of these various connections and cooperative activities that the central core list evolves.

But what makes a partner a central strategic partner? Fortunately the universities with which scientists and teachers at the Faculty and Institute level like to cooperate are often the same universities with whom scientists and teachers in other Faculties and Institutes like to cooperate. The list is generated out of the collected »grass root« interest in connection with a few considerations involving the geographically strategic interest of the »world education market«. The changing nature of the list



reflects the interests of the university both at the Faculty and at the central level; as professors move on or are replaced, the list changes yet remains somewhat constant in especially close and trusting relationships.

Yet for a network to be alive it needs to connect people. Student exchange is one important aspect of activating an international network. The other is the establishment of joint research projects with third-party funding. Also, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin is committed to the promotion of young researchers together with its partner institutions, and this is the example chosen here to show how the cooperation with partner universities abroad

can benefit an individual researcher, an inner-university institution or the university as a whole.

With reliable international partners, the mobility of doctoral students and post-docs can be well-structured. In the past, structural programs with international partners offers generally focussed on third-party funded international graduate schools in a particular discipline and with a certain international project partner. Doctoral students conducted research in both countries, working intensively with their colleagues from the partner institution. The downside is that this offer only extends to the students in the particular graduate schools and is not open to others. To circumvent this, there is the

option of Coututelle doctoral programs, whereby supervisors in two different countries agreed to supervise the same student, examine him/her together and bestowing a degree from both institutions. There is, as is to be expected a downside here too: the intensive administrative hurdles to set up these Coututelle doctoral programs are so immense that it discourages academic and administrative staff alike to venture this course. Recently, however, Humboldt-Universität has embarked on a new course, a course that will hopefully become the norm one day. The university administration identified one strategic partner, King's College London, with whom it came to an agreement

offering joint PhD courses in several possible disciplines, open to various applicants but without creating additional academic hurdles. If successful, this program can offer an international PhD

which does not have to be part of a particular school, where doctoral students are encouraged – forced, even – to be internationally mobile and open to two schools of thought grounded in two educational systems, thus broadening their outlook, giving them experience abroad and allowing them to form networks at the earliest stage of their research careers.

Projects such as these can only be carried out with reliable, suitable partners if they are to be successful. But if the conditions are right, the university and its members stand to gain a lot from such projects. Internationality is, after all, no more a question of »if«, but »how«. Humboldt-Universität nowadays has its own approach to answering the question of »how«: through breadth and focus. By following this rule, it is still an international university, able to step into the footsteps of its founding father, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and his brother Alexander.

Internet

www.international.hu-berlin.de/



Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c.

Uwe Jens Nagel

Born in 1942, professor of agricultural extension and communication science with the Faculty of Agriculture since 1993. Since 2006 Vice-President for Student and International Affairs.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Vice-President for Student and International Affairs

E-Mail: vpsi@uv.hu-berlin.de



Dr. Ursula Hans

Born in 1962, Director of the International Office at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since 2006.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, International Office

E-Mail: ursula.hans@cms.hu-berlin.de



Dr. Esther von Richthofen

Born in 1980, Region Officer for Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, International Office

E-Mail: esther.von.richthofen@uv.hu-berlin.de