

Academic celebration for the handing over of the Presidential Office of the University of Göttingen

Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, City Hall Göttingen

Prof. Dr. Ulrike Beisiegel

- The spoken word applies. –

Dear Mr von Figura,

Dear Prime Minister McAllister,

Dear Minister Wanka,

Dear Mr Krull,

Dear Vice Presidents: Mr Hoppe, Ms Casper-Hehne, Mr Lücke and Mr Münch,

Dear guests

**and**

particularly

Dear colleagues, dear staff and dear students of the Georg-August-University Göttingen, which is now also **my University** and which, together with you, I am hoping to support wholeheartedly in the coming years.

Initially my thanks goes to the members of the selection committee, the senate and the board of trustees, who respectively expressed their trust in me through recommendation, selection and confirmation – I will take this trust very seriously and am looking forward to working with all of you.

My particular thanks however also goes to you, Mr von Figura. As has already been appreciated by the previous speakers, during your time in office you have led the Georg-August-University to a national and international peak position. Under your management the University of Göttingen has become a University of Excellence and you are thus handing over an outstanding institution to me. I promise you that, together with all the associates of this University, we will do everything to ensure that we continue to keep this status in the second round of the Excellence Initiative.

My thanks however also goes to the deans and all the associates of the faculties who have introduced me to their institutions and research activities in such an informative and pleasant way over recent months. That way I have gained a very good insight into this University even prior to assuming my office.

I would not be standing here if it was not for the many people in my life who have supported and encouraged me and from whom I was able to learn. I would like to thank all of them very much, even if many are unable to be here and I cannot list them all individually.

Our University has the central theme just mentioned by Mr Krull of 'Freedom for New Thinking' and I would like to take this theme very seriously indeed in my work.

The main duty of the University is to give the future generations the opportunity to acquire knowledge – even after the Bologna reform. That means, **we** as responsible individuals must ensure that this becomes possible in the new Bachelor and Master courses. And I am delighted that this concern has already been picked up by you, Mr Lücke, as Vice President for Learning and Teaching and is being implemented with active participation of the students.

University teaching must be based on the latest scientific knowledge – it must be 'research-based'. This requirement can only be fulfilled if universities are also outstanding research institutions that give their associates, as you, Mr Krull, have already formulated in such an outstanding manner, the *time and space* to think through the complex connections. Thus my goal for our University is to give science the space for creative endeavours as well as the time for corrections of the unavoidable and often by no means minor errors through targeted deceleration of the process. In that way we can considerably increase the quality of science.

Wolfgang Frühwald, the former DFG president much appreciated by myself said on this: *'The deceleration of the process of science that is necessarily accompanied by errors has become an obligation which is no longer second to other world problems (climate, energy and water problems).'*

What is now required is the courage to evade the excessive publication pressure in accordance with these insights and the DFG initiative on the quality of research, and to once again place the actual substance of the new knowledge into the foreground of the research projects and applications. In his contribution on "University at a Crossroads" (in *Research and Teaching*) already quoted above, Mr Frühwald sees a sociological trend that has also taken over the academic community. Namely that *'performance factors in the World's research and teaching markets have increased to an almost unbearable extent'*. - He describes this trend with the term *'bluff society'*.

I myself have paraphrased this development in a recently published and intensely discussed interview with the trend for 'shop window research' and indeed consider this development a big problem, which we as scientists have to be clearly opposed to. We as researchers should be convinced by scientific substance, competence and personal integrity and should not allow ourselves to be led by performance factors or continuously take part in inventing new, formal evaluation processes.

Breaking away from the dynamic development in all parts of society just described by Mr Krull is no easy task, but many conversations with colleagues as well as discussions in the academic organisations have shown me that the time pressure in the academic system constitutes a serious problem for the essential research and that a large number of individuals are now willing to defend themselves against this development. I would be delighted if as many as possible of you find the courage to join me on this path.

The reality at many German universities is described in an *'organisational theory analysis'* by the business administration professors Scholz and Stein in the most recent issue

of 'Research and Teaching' as 'presidential feudalism'. And the question of the form of organisation of our universities really does require in my opinion a serious and intensive discussion.

At our University I would thus like to live, in the spirit of Mr Mackschies, a 'science-led cooperative management structure', for which the faculties with their professors and all researchers and teaching staff together with the students entrusted to them form the core of the University – and for which we as presidium and administration offer the suitable academic, administrative and financial framework. Here we must, as has already been mentioned by Mr von Figura, find ways to *reduce administrative expenditure*; that means fewer formalities to create more space for creative learning, teaching and research.

Included in this topic is also the recognition of the diversity of a University offering a full range of subjects with the completely different faculties and the different subject cultures, to whose respective requirements the University administration has to be attuned to and with whom we have to correspondingly establish differentiated, relevant and realistic performance criteria to promote excellent performance in all areas of our University.

On the question of the further development of forms of organisations at both society and university level we do not however require only business management thinking, but above all the academic assistance from the social sciences and the humanities. That is the reason why I emphasized even before my inauguration how important these areas of the University are to me. The creation of a philanthropic academic community cannot be undertaken without philosophical and sociological competence.

A further development which we must critically analyse again and again during our work, is the question to what degree we may structure our universities, **which must of course be managed under consideration of economic efficiency**, also as commercial enterprises. To satisfy the special requirements for fundamental research and academic learning, **university enterprises** must not be primarily shaped by

market economy criteria. We must continue to let our work be guided by the quest for the truth and put the attainment of knowledge for the human race in the centre, and not allow the laws of market economics to be considered as superior criteria. The standardisation of processes used in many areas of market economics is counter-productive in science.

Science is not an 'institution', but is undertaken by human beings who are researching. In some areas these individuals are particularly scientifically productive as 'lonely thinkers' and in other areas require collective approaches, such as in particle physics, to generate new insights. Politics must provide the universities with space, time and money for both and all other forms of scientific working.

Over recent years the Georg-August-University has taken a very successful path and has on its way recognised many of the problems just mentioned and accordingly adopted the central theme 'Freedom for New Thinking'.

The future concept has dedicated itself primarily to the promotion of young talent as well as to several outstanding research projects and the exciting scientific exchange in the Lichtenberg-Kolleg. In all subject areas independent posts for young scientists have been set up and various graduate programmes have been successfully introduced. This has opened up many interesting opportunities for the up-and-coming researchers. Included in this are also the international opportunities which have been created with the very substantial involvement of the faculties, coordinated by the Vice President Ms Casper-Hehne.

Over recent months I was able to view all these measures together with Mr von Figura and the other individuals actively involved in the future concept, and I can say that they have been overwhelmingly very successful and that we can now, by building on these existing programme points, move on to developing the future concept for the next round of the Excellence Initiative.

The future concept had a notably important structural component, which I would like to emphasize in particular: the establishment of a structured cooperation of the University with Göttingen's non-University research institutions. We are envied by many for the cooperation in the 'Göttingen Research Campus' and I was very pleased to be allowed to join this cooperation. I would like to extend it further in the future and solve existing problems together with the partners in the faculties and the research institutions. As a University we can profit from the additional research competence and from the interaction in teaching.

Together we must be able to maintain not just the excellence in research but also, again in the spirit of Wolfgang Frühwald, *'to awaken the interest of the students in the imparted objects in such a way that they independently think further, driven by their own curiosity'*.

I would however also like to extend the future concept somewhat:

**Firstly** by scientific aspects of teacher training and innovative teaching concepts. In these areas I can build on the competence already available at ZeUS and the innovative concepts of the X-Lab. New teaching concepts are intended to increase the use of the scientific excellence for the benefit of students even more and extend the opportunities for comprehensive education.

**Secondly**, the scientific collections of the University should be preserved as cultural heritage and used to a much greater extent for current research and teaching.

The success of our University is also very closely linked to the cooperation with the City, the region and the State. It has already been emphasised that there is a very good cooperation with these partners and I assure you that I will continue this and improve it where still necessary. This also includes the cooperation with the other universities in Göttingen and in Lower Saxony. I am looking forward to getting to know all the important partners in this context over the coming months.

For me, the academic success of a University also builds on the degree of mutual trust. Considering the complex requirements made on modern universities it is important to recognise problems quickly through utmost transparency and good communication, to discuss them in a factual manner and to then solve them with the necessary willingness to compromise from all sides, for the good of the entire University. This form of cooperation should not only be demonstrated in the work of committees and the interaction with the faculties, but also refers expressly to the interaction with the student body.

Let us remember at all times in the spirit of 'Tradition, Innovation and Autonomy', how important the concept of responsibility of the academic community and the learning from history is under consideration of the currently almost limitless technical possibilities and the explosion of experience.

Let us take the time to analyse and understand developments that appear innovative before implementing them. This avoids reinventing the wheel again and again – often without improving it. And it allows the necessary sustainability.

To conclude I would like to express the hope that the State government supports us on this path to further increase the quality of the Georg-August-University Göttingen. I am in any case looking forward to the job ahead of me and the cooperation with all associated partners.