

Bonn, 25th February 2010

Survey shows high international regard for the humanities in Germany

The humanities in Germany are held in high international regard. This is the result of a survey entitled "The International Standing of the Humanities in Germany", to be presented to the public at the conference "Mind Crossing Borders. How international are the humanities in Germany?" in Bonn today. 1,250 humanities scholars from Germany, the UK, Australia, Japan and the USA were surveyed for the study, which was carried out by the Higher Education Information System (Hochschul-Informationssystem GmbH, HIS, of Hanover) and funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBWF).

"The research quality is considered methodically outstanding; Germany often sets the worldwide standard for a given subject", reports Karl-Heinz Minks of HIS, project manager for the survey. "The highly differentiated research landscape and the existence and excellence of the 'small disciplines' create a wealth of intellectual diversity that is internationally valued."

Humanities scholars from abroad highlight the country's outstanding range of libraries, archives and museums; the extensive source material induces them to frequently visit Germany for research purposes, and numerous high-class conferences and congresses are considered an additional draw. They have an especially positive opinion of the German programs promoting international mobility (e.g. DAAD, Humboldt Foundation). Australian and American respondents in particular praise the high density of research institutes and a friendly, co-operative atmosphere within the German scientific community.

The vast majority of those interviewed consider it a matter of course to conduct their work in an international context. German humanities scholars have the most research-related contacts to the USA (43%), the UK (30%) and France (23%), followed by Austria (20%), Switzerland and Italy (both 16%). Research in the humanities is highly individualised both in Germany and abroad, and at the same time defined by informal research networks. Particularly when first embarking on a career, international conferences serve as important opportunities to make new contacts and present one's own research.

The German language often acts as an "export obstacle"; only in very few disciplines of the humanities is it still internationally recognised as an academic language. Publications written exclusively in German rarely enter



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the international scientific discourse. German research publications are often considered "highly academic" and linguistically too complicated for interested laypersons abroad. Of the surveyed humanities scholars from Australia, the UK and the USA, 69% read publications in French, 59% read publications in German, but only 21% read Italian, 17% Spanish and 12% Dutch publications.

Humanities scholars from Germany and abroad alike expressed concerns about reductions in professorships and mid-level faculty positions, particularly in the small disciplines that traditionally have an internationally prominent profile. A related issue seen as worrying are the conditions for young academics in Germany; measures for their career development are not considered competitive compared to those in Anglo-American countries.

Conference "Mind Crossing Borders"

Researchers from Europe, Japan and the USA will be discussing the results of the survey at the BMBF conference "Mind Crossing Borders. How international are the humanities in Germany?" (25th/26th February, Bonn). Subjects include successful forms of networking, research quality, career paths, scientific language and publication practice. Prominent speaker will be Professor Dr. Homi Bhabha of Harvard University, Cambridge; the cultural scientist is known in Germany particularly for his book "The Location of Culture".

The conference is part of the BMBF funding initiative "Freedom for Research in the Humanities", with which the BMBF aims to structurally enhance the humanities and offer them greater latitude to develop their strengths. The humanities contribute to shaping the future and to our cultural memory; they mediate between cultures, reflect and offer orientation regarding values and developments in the various sections of society.

An abridged version of the survey is available here:

www.his.de/publikation/bericht

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