

Universität Bielefeld | Postfach 10 01 31 | 33501 Bielefeld

**Prof'in Dr. Martina Kessel**

Raum: A3-139

Tel.: +49 521.106-4071

Tel.: +49 521.106-6976 (Sekretariat)

Fax: +49 521.106-6464

prorektorat-intkom@uni-bielefeld.de

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## Strategy of Internationalisation

Knowledge production is a phenomenon that requires researchers, students, and institutions to act internationally, and challenges them to judge the quality of their work by international standards. Bielefeld University therefore understands internationalisation not as an end in itself but as a surplus for all its members, as a necessary element of top level research and education. Internationalisation is considered as a crucial dimension in sustaining and improving further the university's academic quality and its position within the increasingly competitive national and international academic landscape.

Bielefeld University was founded in 1969 as a university with a strong focus on interdisciplinary research. International dimensions have always played an important role, not least due to the university's mission as a research university. In 2009, the university established a Vice-Rectorate for International Affairs and Communication in order to institutionally support its strategic thinking regarding internationalisation. Understanding internationalisation comprehensively, as an integrative process concerning all aspects of the university and addressing and including all its members, the university developed a first overall strategic assessment of the university's internationalisation aims, in close co-operation with individual scholars, the faculties, the administration, and the university's leadership. As a result, Bielefeld University defined four main strategic goals of internationalisation, to be framed by processes of mainstreaming and quality assurance:

- 1) Internationalisation of research
- 2) Internationalisation of teaching and studying
- 3) International recruitment
- 4) International mobility

These strategic goals will be implemented and developed further by systematically integrating bottom up processes with leadership framing.

## **Bielefeld's goals of internationalisation:**

### **1) Internationalisation of Research:**

Bielefeld's hallmark in terms of research is its interdisciplinarity. The particular focus on thinking across disciplinary boundaries has always led to transcending national boundaries as well. As a result, Bielefeld University is already highly visible internationally in a number of research areas, due to co-operations of individual scholars, but also to a wide spectrum of agreements at different institutional levels. In recent years, the university has sharpened its interdisciplinary profile by organising five interdisciplinary strategic research areas, involving members of all 13 faculties:<sup>1</sup>

- Theories and Methodologies in the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Human Development, Conflict and Violence
- Interactive Intelligent Systems
- Molecular and Nano Sciences
- Theoretical Sciences

Bielefeld University now aims to internationalise its interdisciplinary research profile systematically with the following measures:

- **International networks in all strategic research areas:** The university wants to develop multilateral, international thematic networks in all five strategic research areas in order to sharpen their interdisciplinary profile internationally. At the moment, it supports applications by the strategic research areas "Interactive intelligent Systems" and "Theoretical Sciences" for funding by the DAAD of such international thematic networks.
- **One strategic partnership in each strategic research area:** Integrating developments within the strategic research areas with overall university planning, Bielefeld University plans to identify one of the international partners in each of these multilateral networks as a strategic partner for the university as an institution. Within the strategic research area "Interactive intelligent Systems", Bielefeld has already established a strategic partnership with Osaka University, one of the high ranking universities in Japan. Within the international thematic network developed by the strategic research area "Theoretical Sciences", the goal is to seek out the chances to build a strategic partnership with Warwick University, UK, which has developed into one of the high-ranking British universities in recent years.
- **Encouraging further international co-operations with our strategic partners:** By framing and stabilising the international thematic networks institutionally, the university offers faculties beyond the members of the originally involved strategic research area a chance to establish structured co-operations with the university's strategic partners. These strategic partners are selected accordingly to criteria of quality and of structure, in the sense of offering possibilities of excellent cooperation with fields other than those already

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/Universitaet/Forschung/Forschungsschwerpunkte.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/Universitaet/Forschung/Forschungsschwerpunkte.html)

engaged in the multilateral network. For instance, the university's strategic partnership with Osaka University, originally organised within the strategic research area "Interactive intelligent Systems", has already helped to initiate co-operations for research and the exchange of teaching personnel in the field of chemistry.

The university organises central services and support for its internationalisation, here for example by establishing a WelcomeService for international researchers and international doctoral students,<sup>2</sup> organised since 2010 by its International Office and offering active support regarding visa and entry requirements, health insurance, language courses, family issues, and general information about Bielefeld University. In 2011, Bielefeld University's Welcome Service was awarded the 'Best Practice Award' of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation.

## 2) Internationalisation of teaching and studying

Bielefeld University understands international expertise and competence as important requirements for all of today's students, regardless of their specific plans for their life after university. As an institutionally flexible and innovative university, Bielefeld was one of the first German universities to implement the Bologna system. It has used its reform to systematically integrate a window of mobility into its study structure, by designing an elective study module allowing students to study a different discipline or to go abroad for one semester.

At the same time, the university pursues a program of 'internationalisation at home' starting primarily at the Master level. Its elements are meant to provide international expertise to those students who cannot go abroad, while also making the curricula more attractive for international students. Again in this context, the university pursues its particular goals by integrating initiatives from academics with leadership encouragement:

- **Definite implementation of 'international tracks':** Offering financial help for a take-off stage of 2 ½ years, the university leadership has initiated since 2009 the development of three international tracks within the Master programs of the three faculties of Sociology<sup>3</sup>, Education<sup>4</sup> and Technology.<sup>5</sup> The programs have started successfully and now need to be implemented in a sustained manner into the study structures of these faculties.
- **Establishment of International Master programs:** Following the establishment of the above mentioned five interdisciplinary strategic research areas, Bielefeld University is about to implement at least one international Master program (either an English taught course program or a double degree program) for each of these areas. These programs aim at improving the quality of teaching in the five strategic fields and at ensuring the high qualification of Master students and younger researchers. Up to now, three of the five research areas have implemented such an international Master program: "Theories and Methodologies in the Humanities and Social Sciences": Double degree program in History with Bologna University; "Theoretical Sciences": Master in Quantitative Economics (English

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/International/Scientists/](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/International/Scientists/)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/soz/studium/international/international\\_track.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/soz/studium/international/international_track.html)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/erziehungswissenschaft/internationalisierung/internationalvorort/internationaltrack.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/erziehungswissenschaft/internationalisierung/internationalvorort/internationaltrack.html)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.zfl.uni-bielefeld.de/studium/module/techfak/techfak\\_engl](http://www.zfl.uni-bielefeld.de/studium/module/techfak/techfak_engl)

taught); “Interactive Intelligent Systems”: international track for the Master Intelligent Systems (English taught).

- **Internationalisation of study contents in each faculty:** Beyond such internationalised structures, the university offers further programs to the faculties designed to help them develop systematically their strategies of internationalisation. The university finances an *International Guest Lecturer Program*, offering money on a competitive basis for faculties to invite international guest lecturers for their field, in order to use their guests' teaching and expertise as elements in the development of their own strategic internationalisation, while in turn the faculties' strategic thinking serves as one indicator in the competition for the money.<sup>6</sup> Another centrally organised offer consists of modules of a ‘studium internationale’ that can equally be used by all disciplines and faculties to broaden the international character of their respective curricula.<sup>7</sup> Finally, all faculties are systematically encouraged to include courses taught in English or other foreign languages into their regular curricula.

In this context, the university offers service and support for example through its Academic Language Centre,<sup>8</sup> established in 2008, providing foreign language classes for all members of the university in order to improve proficiency at an academic and professional level, infrastructure for autonomous learning, and innovative learning concepts regarding intercultural discovery and international cooperation, for example through virtual classroom activities or pair work. Furthermore, teaching support services offer didactic concepts and language support for academics teaching in English.<sup>9</sup>

### 3) International Recruitment

People carry ideas, and different academic cultures frame scholarly problems differently. Recruiting international students, teachers and researchers to Bielefeld University offers the chance of testing ideas and academic standards and renewing one's contact with different conceptualisations of academic work. Therefore, the university strives to position itself nationally and internationally by drawing in international students and academics.

- **Recruitment of highly qualified Master students:** Bielefeld University defines its internationalisation processes by qualitative criteria, starting its systematic recruitment processes on the Master level. Built into the study structures, international tracks and Master programs can help to attract international Master students. Furthermore, the university has developed a professional marketing strategy to recruit highly qualified international Master students, in tune with the university's profile of focusing on research oriented education at the Master level. This strategy is being implemented already, representing the university at recruitment fairs in countries identified as important such as China, Russia or Brazil, offering stipends on a competitive basis, and streamlining the processes of international applications.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/International/IGD/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/International/Students/dokumente/studium\\_internationale\\_en.pdf](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/International/Students/dokumente/studium_internationale_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/fachsprachenzentrum/](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/fachsprachenzentrum/)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/pep/fortbildung/service\\_lehre/tie\\_sose.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/pep/fortbildung/service_lehre/tie_sose.html)

- **Recruitment of highly qualified doctoral students and post docs:** The international research structures described above are also meant to integrate research and top level graduate education, offering systematic exchange possibilities for Ph.D. students, post docs and teaching personnel. Next to these structures, International Graduate Training Groups and Collaborative Research Centres are expected to engage international doctoral students and researchers in the future to an even larger extent than is presently done. Such research endeavours by academics are supported by central support, visiting international recruitment fairs such as the European Career Fair.
- **Recruitment of highly qualified international faculty:** Positions are advertised internationally and in English, recruitment fairs are used to contact promising younger academics. In the wider context of professionalizing recruiting processes within the university, the university leadership offers workshops on international recruitment to all faculties in order to increase the chances of attracting qualified international personnel to Bielefeld.

The university supports these recruiting efforts with its Welcome Service for international researchers and international doctoral students (see above). Furthermore, it has established an Academic Service Centre for young researchers,<sup>10</sup> offering support for German and international post docs, PhDs, and students interested in doing a PhD., such as individual advisory service or seminars for young researchers, regarding German and international funding opportunities and the art of writing funding proposals. In addition, the German Language Learning Center "PunktUm"<sup>11</sup> offers German language courses for international students and scholars, both for academic purposes and for everyday life.

#### 4) International Mobility

Internationalisation does not mean to perceive the world as becoming the same everywhere. Bielefeld University wants to enable its students to understand and to be able to translate difference, the difference in study cultures, the different ways in which academic cultures define and frame scholarly problems, or different cultures in a more general way. In 2012, the university received the Erasmus Quality Award for the organisation of its Erasmus programs. Sustaining the high quality of organising its exchange programs, Bielefeld University now also aims at increasing the rate of students' outgoing mobility, by pursuing the following measures:

- **'GOING ABROAD IS EASY':** In order to encourage more students to go abroad, not only the structure of communication will be changed, but also the content. The International Office is developing highly specialized information offers for every faculty.
- **'GET IN TOUCH':** In the future, we want to enter into a more intensive way of communicating with students, including active "customer retention". Therefore, the

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/nachwuchs/allg\\_informationen/beratungsangebote/servicestelle.html](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/nachwuchs/allg_informationen/beratungsangebote/servicestelle.html)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/Universitaet/Studium/Studienbegleitende%20Angebote/Punktum/>

International Office will establish a new concept of communication with potentially outgoing students, using the concepts of “audience development”.

- **Validation of results of studying abroad:** A major problem with studying abroad is the validation of the studies at the home university. As of 2012, Bielefeld University has implemented a university wide policy for a well structured way of study recognition (Anerkennung) that is identical for any study abroad scheme.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding mobility, Bielefeld University offers services and support such as extensive counselling of future outgoing students about the exchange programs and mobility opportunities as guest students at partner universities all over the world, including financial and organizational advice, specialised training programs aiming both at intercultural issues in general as well as at the introduction to different cultural spheres (for example “Get ready for Sweden!”), and re-integration programs for students returning from abroad to Bielefeld University.

### **Tasks for the future:**

The task now is to implement and develop further Bielefeld University's four main goals of internationalisation, in a comprehensive endeavour that will be supported by processes of mainstreaming and quality assurance. Sustainability can only be reached if internationalisation is embedded in minds and structures. The supportive measures already listed above are geared towards ensuring the academic success and the social integration of international students and researchers, and helping our students and personnel to internationalise more successfully. Beyond such offers, the university pays particular attention to the task of increasing the international and intercultural competence of service and management. One important measure is to identify in each area of the administration so-called ‘international guides’, staff members who will be trained in English and can function as interpreters for important areas, for example by offering specific office hours for such needs. Classes for intercultural training have already been developed for non-academic personnel, and these programs are being extended to all member groups of the university.

Furthermore, Bielefeld University is currently developing an overarching system of quality control and processes of quality assurance, concerning research, teaching, and the qualification of younger researchers. Its internationalisation strategy will be a part of all these aspects, as internationalisation can serve as one indicator for quality. In turn, processes of internationalisation are themselves being monitored all the time. In order to have the development of its internationalisation strategy as such assessed externally, the university participates in an international auditing process organised by the German *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (HKR), the Audit “Internationalisierung der Hochschulen” in 2010 and the corresponding Re-Audit in 2013. Regarding international students, the university participates since 2011 in the International Student Barometer, evaluating the results and communicating them to faculties and administration. Regarding outgoing students, international graduates, and international scholars, the university has developed its own questionnaires, using qualitative indicators for success. Regarding all aspects of

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<sup>12</sup> [http://ekvv.uni-bielefeld.de/wiki/en/Anrechnung\\_und\\_Einstufung:\\_Erl%C3%A4uterungen](http://ekvv.uni-bielefeld.de/wiki/en/Anrechnung_und_Einstufung:_Erl%C3%A4uterungen)

quality assurance, the university is discussing intensively with the faculties how to weigh and to balance quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Just like the current goals of internationalisation have been developed in communication with members of the university, such processes of communication will be intensified further, regularly bringing together representatives of the faculties, the administration, and the university leadership. Such communication bodies can help to identify specific interests and initiatives of the faculties and to communicate strategic goals into the faculties, working on the understanding that Bielefeld University considers its internationalisation goals not as a once-and-for-all blueprint but as a roadmap for developing the common goal of internationalisation further in an interactive, communicative way.