

The future of higher education: global, local, digital



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Participants of the Global Learning Council: Networking during breaks

At the Global Learning Council Summit in Berlin, an event co-organised by the DAAD, experts from all over the world gathered together to discuss forms of digital learning, irrespective of age limits and national borders. In the field of university education, digitalisation in the context of mobility, further training and the internationalisation of higher education institutions is a key topic for the DAAD, which was represented on a panel at the Summit by Secretary General, Dr Dorothea Rüländ.

“We should all go back to university every now and then to recharge our intellectual batteries,” argued DAAD Secretary General Dr Dorothea Rüländ at the [Global Learning Council \(GLC\)](http://www.globallearningcouncil.org/) Summit, which was held in Berlin this year and hosted by the Leibniz Association with input from the DAAD. The consensus at the conference was that, in the digital age, people around the world will need to adapt to the rapid advancement of digital technology continuously throughout their lives. Technology-enhanced learning has become an integral part of day-to-day educational activities and education must be seen as an ongoing, lifelong process. “We need to keep learning to acquire new knowledge and use it productively,” said Dorothea Rüländ as part of the panel discussion on the digital transformation of higher education. Besides schools and companies, higher education institutions would also be well advised to adapt swiftly to this development, she said, namely by establishing learning environments in the virtual world.



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Dorothea Rüländ: Plea for the energy of knowledge

With respect to the implementation of digital concepts in higher education, the conference's higher education panel showed that industrialised countries could learn from developing countries and emerging markets. "In my experience, African students immediately find ways to take advantage of digital courses," said Elijah Bitange Ndemo, associate professor in entrepreneurship at the University of Nairobi's Business School. In doing so, many a technical innovation had simply been skipped, he said: in rural areas of Africa, people had bypassed computers completely and jumped straight to mobile platforms. A bureaucratic structure of implementation was also a hindrance, he said, because it was simply too slow with regard to technological development.



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On the platform of digital transformation of higher education (left to right): HRK-General-Secretary Jens-Peter Gaul, DAAD- General-Secretary Dorothea Rüländ, Friedrich W. Hesse, scientific vice-president of the German Leibniz Association, Elijah Bitange Ndemo from the University of Nairobi und Bror Saxberg from Kaplan Inc.

The picture is slightly different in Germany, as it is in other industrialised countries. Here, it is currently seen as crucial for a comprehensive digital strategy to evolve at higher education institution management level, in order to reduce obstacles in the introduction and use of digital learning environments by teaching staff. Effective positioning and stimulus are needed, such as that recently demonstrated by the board of directors of the University of Göttingen - one of the oldest and largest universities in Germany, which now intends to internationalise

the curricula of all of its faculties by means of digital formats. The university will be assisted in this by the DAAD, as Katrin Haufe-Wadle, DAAD desk officer for digital higher education, explained in Berlin: “The huge opportunities offered by digitalisation with regard to internationalising curricula are obvious.”

Opportunity for suitable “glocal” services

Specific regional aspects can be flexibly incorporated in digital modules of the curriculum – not only to take account of cultural differences and different learning approaches, but also with due regard to practical orientation and the respective local labour market. “The DAAD believes that globally functioning curricula with locally oriented content are part of genuine cross cultural dialogue and effective internationalisation,” said Katrin Haufe-Wadle.



Encounters at the GLC Summit: Talks on digitalisation, internationalisation and more

The DAAD also thinks that the virtual world offers many opportunities for the international mobility of students and academics. “There is obviously no substitute for real cross-cultural interaction,” emphasised Secretary General Dorothea Rüländ on the GLC panel. “But in times of political crisis, virtual mobility is sometimes the only option for international exchange.” In other words, people who cannot travel abroad still have the opportunity for cross-border exchange in virtual mobility windows. And people who do not want to travel abroad might nevertheless want to attend a summer school overseas to actually meet the people they have already got to know in a virtual training room. Positive learning experiences in the virtual world are also important for the higher education institutions that offer them. Being mentioned favourably on social media around the world promotes the successful internationalisation of these institutions, says Katrin Haufe-Wadle.

A passion for adapting to new realities

„Die Menschheit war immer gut darin, sich an neue Umgebungen anzupassen“, gab Professor Friedrich W. Hesse, wissenschaftlicher Vizepräsident der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, zu bedenken. „Jetzt haben wir eine sich verändernde Umgebung und wir können sogar etwa dafür tun, unsere neue Informationsumwelt zu gestalten.“ In der digitalen Welt können zum Beispiel völlig andere Architekturen von Schulungsräumen eingerichtet werden, hebt Katrin Haufe-Wadle hervor: „Kein Unterricht von der Kanzel mehr, stattdessen Lernen in kooperativen, demokratisch organisierten Arbeitsgruppen.“ Ein wertvolles Ziel, für das es sich international einzusetzen lohnt. Deshalb betont Bror Saxberg, Vorstand der Kaplan Inc., eines

führenden Anbieters digitaler und internationaler Bildungsformate, beim Thema technologiebasiertes Lernen auch den Wert von Liebe und Leidenschaft. Das seien wichtige Voraussetzungen – fast wichtiger als Geld.

“Humans have always been good at adapting to new environments,” pointed out Professor Friedrich W. Hesse, scientific vice-president of the Leibniz Association. “Now things around us are changing and perhaps we can even do something to shape our new information environment.” For example, in the digital world training rooms could be set out in completely different ways, emphasises Katrin Haufe-Wadle: “Gone is the teacher at the front of the classroom; instead, learning takes place in cooperative, democratic and organised work groups.” A valuable goal that is worth pursuing on an international level. That is why Bror Saxberg, chief learning officer of Kaplan, Inc., a leading provider of digital and international education formats, also stresses the value of love and passion when it comes to technology-enhanced learning. These are important requirements, he says – almost more important than money.

But only almost. In Berlin, the GLC Summit was followed by a conference at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) on digital higher education – a meeting that Katrin Haufe-Walde of the DAAD is especially pleased about: “The funding bodies want to gather concrete ideas on how the future of digital higher education in Germany can be sustainably supported in the context of internationalisation.” With the suggestions and ideas from the GLC Summit – which, besides the Leibniz Association and the DAAD, was co-organised by the National Academy of Science and Engineering (acatech), the Deutsche Telekom Foundation, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, Hochschulforum Digitalisierung and the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) – the participants are ideally equipped.

Bettina Mittelstraß (11 July 2017)

FURTHER LINKS

[Global Learning Council \(GLC\) \[http://www.globallearningcouncil.org\]](http://www.globallearningcouncil.org)

[„Hochschulforum Digitalisierung: Abschluss als Auftakt“
\[https://www.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/50785-hochschulforum-digitalisierung-abschlusskonferenz-als-auftakt/\]](https://www.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/50785-hochschulforum-digitalisierung-abschlusskonferenz-als-auftakt/)

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