

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I answer the questions from the HIS, I would first like to introduce myself and "my" university. My name is Joachim Wittern. From September 1993 to February 2009 I was Kanzler of the University of Rostock. (I don't like to use the term "chancellor", because I never had been the Prince of Wales and neither the term of "registrar", like our colleague, Mrs. Gaehtgens, did yesterday, because this is more a bookholder and not the head of administration with broad responsibility for the university budget)

The university was founded in 1419 and is the oldest university in northern Europe. Rostock is one of two universities located in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The University of Rostock is a highly differentiated, classic university. Of course we have the traditional faculties from the earliest years: philosophy, medicine, law and theology. And in addition we have the newer faculties: mathematics and natural science, economic science, agriculture, and two engineering faculties. The first engineering faculty is for mechanical engineering and ship-building, while the second is for informatics and electrical engineering.

In order to answer your questions, it is especially important to consider the surroundings of the university. As I mentioned already, the financial backer of the university, the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, is one of the poorest states within the Federal Republic of Germany. The result of this is that the financial assets of the universities in this state are one third lower than in other states; for the medical faculty the funding is only half of what it would be in states in the western part of Germany. This meant that in addition to reducing the faculty and staff of the universities by 50% shortly after reunification, which affected nearly all East German universities, Rostock also faced further reductions of staff during my entire time as Kanzler of the university. This included, for example, the closings of the entire department of civil engineering and of the regular faculty of law.

In this situation, the pressure on the administration of the university was especially high, because the earlier thought from the time right after reunification of "there cannot be an upturn without a functioning administration" had been forgotten. As an administrator myself, I liked this earlier statement, but I had not heard it before, nor have I heard it since.

Very soon it was replaced with the age old expression of "administration must be reduced to benefit academics". The fact that this was and is impossible -- due to an increasing number of duties and tasks being delegated by the state to the individual universities despite a continually growing number of students -- does not need to be explained in more detail.

In the mid 1990s, the administration was confronted with an (in my opinion) unqualified assessment conducted by an external consulting firm. Based on this assessment study, the state government cut the number of employees arbitrarily and drastically. Because of this, I was interested in getting objective data and comparisons, in order to discuss and argue further expected cuts both internally and at the state level.

Of course this was not only to defend against further reductions in staff; it was also to learn what and why others were doing things differently, perhaps even better, than we were. We needed to learn how to streamline processes, which personnel already existed and, if possible, how to improve the administration. However, I will say that the administration was mostly filled with employees in low- and mid-management positions. Only 10 positions total were held by top managers. In German we call it *Mittlerer, gehobener und höherer Dienst*.

In the entire state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern there are only two universities, three universities of applied science, and one academy of music. Because of this, there is too little basis for comparison with other institutions in just one state. Therefore, I have worked to form a so-called "Northern Alliance" consisting of all the universities in the northern states of Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein. This has been difficult because there are many different types of universities involved: very small and very large universities, technical and humanities-oriented universities, and even one in the beginning stages after its founding.

Of course the university staff members were skeptical of the new project, especially in light of the negative experience mentioned earlier. They fear the goal of the new project is once again to reduce the number of positions. Also the additional work required to begin this project, in particular under the current overworked and in such a stressful environment, was not exactly met with enthusiasm.

However, the staff understood how meaningful the project is, especially the argument of

creating an objective foundation of data. They were convinced that a continuing analysis of the administrative process would lead to better working conditions in the long run. In addition, the improvement of the basis for argumentation in order to fight against the ever-present discussion regarding more staff redundancy layoffs significantly helped the acceptance of the project as well.

The original goal of the project was to **estimate** the yearly effort required for all the tasks to be completed, a goal which was more easily realized than an absolutely exact, extremely time-intensive analysis. This estimate requires (self-) critical reflection on all processes and this reflection is a good start in the subsequent analysis of the processes involved. I also find both the internal and multi- university workshops positive, because they allow clarification of objective content. Without this clarification, the realization of the project is not possible. Trust in the accuracy of the data collected at the participating universities can be won and strengthened further, thus ensuring continuing cooperation among the universities and their departments.

One of the most important things I learned from the entire process was and is for me to learn that the administration of the University of Rostock does not differ in any significant way from the norm or the median, which is satisfying to know regarding our own organizational structure. Moreover, the procedure is well suited for finding convincing comparisons of these structurally very different universities, even if the results of this benchmarking can and should only be understood as a warning, and even if no particular structural or procedural changes can be made without adequate analysis of the processes involved.

At the University of Rostock we proceeded in exactly this way: we used the results of the benchmarking as a basis for additional analysis of our processes. The department for technology examined the following tasks in conjunction with the TU Berlin, using an in-depth procedural analysis. This led to the following changes:

- in the field of energy, steps have been taken to reduce consumption with the aim of continuously trying to reduce it even further.
- in the field of domestic services, continuing education and qualification of the personnel was introduced, with the aim of expanding the areas covered and with the long-term goal of reducing staff. And
- in industrial cleaning we have introduced specific quality assurance management and have new companies bidding for the contract to clean at the university.

#### Changes in budget and financial matters included

- the procurement procedure was changed structurally with the result of noticeable reduction in personnel by mutual agreement from within the department.
- data management, which was operating at a deficit, was temporarily strengthened, in order to meet the massive requests for change, such as the introduction of cost accounting now and double-entry bookkeeping in the future.
- the problem of under-qualification in some positions within the purchasing department as result of the staff reductions mentioned earlier has also been addressed.

#### In the Human Resources department

- we have strived for decentralization of personnel matters,
- improved and strengthened communication with the faculties, in the hope of reducing expenses
- simplified electronic access to personnel files with the aim of providing even better career counseling and advice and
- eliminated the often unnecessary awarding of only short-term employment contracts, which have been identified as one reason for higher personnel expenses in the budget.

Changes have also been made to both the admission and examination requirements at the university. These changes were made with the aim of simplifying the process and reducing the administrative effort. In the area of the administration of third party funding there have been changes made as well, with the aim of stronger decentralization.

Finally, it should not remain unsaid that the experience gained from the benchmarking has led to a lasting establishment and continuation of the analysis of processes, with which a continuous adaptation and improvement of the administration should be ensured.

Based on these experiences I would evaluate the benchmarking process positively; it brings objective insights into the quality and the structure of one's own administration in relation to the other universities taking part. Thus the participants are highly motivated to continually improve themselves.

It includes all employees of the administration, making them responsible for the estimates given and makes it possible to identify with the process and the results, because these are not just "forced to fit". I can evaluate the character of the operation as a "warning function" in only a positive way, because (with the results associated with it), the necessity of a deeper analysis of process becomes self evident. Thus no reason for the additional work and expense for this analysis must be given; rather it is in the interest of all involved that it should be done.

The work and time requirements necessary for this benchmarking are indeed justifiable when considering the efficiency described. Finally, I would like to mention the invaluable gains in trust and communication between the universities involved and their various departments.

An external accompaniment of this procedure is not only necessary, because neither the competence nor the capacity for the carrying out of such a procedure is (normally) available at the universities. It is also in the interest of the objectivity of the results and how they are used both within the university and outside its walls. Of course a moderation function of external observers within the framework of the internal and multi-university communication and for the safeguarding of results is both required and requested.

Joachim Wittern

Kanzler of the University of Rostock, retired