

## **Speech by the President Professor Angela Ittel**

**Abridged version of the welcome address given at the reception of professors  
on 08 September 2022**

Dear Colleagues

A good year ago, we celebrated that I took office in a relatively small group in the main lecture hall due to the coronavirus. It was a great event that I will never forget.

A lot has happened since then: Together, we have survived another digital winter. Many of you probably felt the same way I did. It was only in spring, with the strict restrictions slowly being lifted, that we realised how much the circumstances over the past two years had affected and restricted our lives.

I was very grateful that I was finally able to meet many of you in person again; and I was thrilled to see how much easier it is to work together when we see each other in person and talk to each other. That is why I particularly enjoy being here with you today and that - unlike in previous years - the pandemic is not making it difficult for us to be together.

Unfortunately, this sense of relief has since been overshadowed by other, overlapping crises. The brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, which has led us - just like all other German universities - to interrupt scientific cooperation with a country for the first time. This has never happened before and has touched me deeply, despite or perhaps because of my many years of experience in international cooperation. But there was one thing this situation has made clear immediately: The members of TU Braunschweig tackle crises courageously, decisively and effectively. In a very short time, donation programmes were created and successful solutions to help refugees from Ukraine were found. All this was achieved in close cooperation with our reliable regional partners. It is this sense of solidarity that gave and still gives us courage, despite the great helplessness caused by the war.

Now, another crisis is just around the corner, which will not only affect us here at the University, but has everyone worried about autumn and winter: the gas and energy crisis and the effects of an ever-increasing inflation rate. We do not know what exactly is in store for us. But what is very clear is that we are once again moving together. Together with a very large number of supportive colleagues and under the leadership of our esteemed colleague Dietmar Smyrek, we are coming up with ideas and measures on how we can overcome this particular crisis, too. We are firmly determined to keep the University open as long as possible and to maintain "normal" teaching and research operations despite all trials - after all, the pandemic is not over yet either. Thank you for working so hard and with such determination!

## Hope and outlook

Of course, many positive things have also happened in this past year, many great new people have become members of the professorship at TU Braunschweig, many exciting new initiatives and research projects have been started. That is why we also need to celebrate a little bit today. Above all, however, I would like to use this late summer party, which has now unfortunately been spoiled by rain, to encourage you to meet colleagues and exchange ideas across the borders of institutes and faculties. All the kind feedback - also from colleagues who cannot be here today - shows that we have been able to send a very positive signal. I am pleased about that.

## The importance of communication

These moments of meeting and exchange are extremely valuable. Because it is possible to simply talk.

To simply talk means: to be able to discover common goals, to create community, which in turn is the condition and basis for trust. And trust is necessary for the holistic further development of our University - the model to which we have committed ourselves.

## A model of holistic development

When we express these thoughts in documents and formal processes, it sometimes seems a bit abstract, but it is simple at its core. Because in holistic development we do not compete against each other, instead we all contribute to the development of our University in a decisive and responsible way according to our own abilities and possibilities. That is the essence. I cannot repeat it often enough. We have established a quite elaborate and comprehensive procedure for internal university development that supports us on this path. Let me briefly go into this.

## The University Development Initiative 2030

The University always needs development planning. Just as our supervisory bodies and the ministries of the State need it. We all need to know against what we benchmark ourselves and by what we are judged. The initiative does not break with the University's history, but builds on the previous strategy process. We are using this self-evident requirement to jointly define a coherent university strategy that will lead us to holistic development. The key is to transparently put strengths and weaknesses side by side like a jigsaw puzzle.

We are using a uniform scheme of the University's performance dimensions, which we also call the pillars of the University: research, transfer, administration, teaching & learning.

You know my mantra: It is extremely important that we consistently integrate our four cross-cutting issues throughout our University, irrespective of all content-related orientation and scientific topics: digitalisation, internationalisation, equality & diversity, and knowledge exchange as a mutual exchange of knowledge between science, industry and society.

We have already achieved a lot in the process. In **phase 1**, we collected points for discussion from all pillars of the University. There were discussion groups within the faculties, among the students and between employees from the administration, the central facilities and the designated offices. The results of nine discussion groups formed the basis for **phase 2** and its future workshops on the topics mentioned. Several dozen people from all phase 1 groups as well as external “critical friends” took part in a strategy workshop and discussed the results from phase 1 with regard to key issues. The committees of TU Braunschweig and working groups on specific topics can draw on this basis to further elaborate on the corresponding topics.

Coming up in the autumn is **phase 3**, which marks the end of the first round and, at the same time, the start of a continuous participatory process of higher education development. Based on the results of phases 1 and 2 and in dialogue with the faculties, we want to implement concrete strategic measures in the chapters of the university development concept that are specific to the faculties. To this end, we are holding so-called **development talks** with the faculties. The main purpose is, as the name suggests, to get talking, to allow exchange on the strategic goals and to create an overall picture of our holistic development. Phase 3 then ends with a joint event that brings all this together. At the same time, it will be the kick-off for the further development of a continuous university development process planned for the long term.

All this requires a lot of coordination and cooperation, and so far, it has worked out very well. I would like to thank all those involved from the bottom of my heart! Contemporary university development can only be achieved together - if everyone makes a contribution.

## Opening the University to the outside world

I am very keen to take this opportunity to point out: Internal cooperation is an important basis for our holistic development. Without a doubt. But we also need to be open and trusting to the outside world. This is central in our positioning vis-à-vis regional, national and international partnerships. I know trust is a fragile thing. How quickly do we tend to be extremely cautious at first. Being sceptical about what is unfamiliar is often based on an effort to be correct or an attempt to avoid rash actions at all costs. In competition and in the face of current challenges, this has seemed reasonable for many years. That is what we have learned. Yet we can learn so much from mistakes and - more important - in times of global challenges, in times where knowledge is acquired faster and faster and more precisely, we can no longer afford to isolate ourselves or to squirrel away our knowledge and not to share it.

Therefore, I would like us to make a concerted effort to open our University and our hearts even more.

There is no need for us to hide. I have seen and experienced a lot of universities, and you know it too, that we are unique. This becomes very evident in so many aspects. Having successfully established core research areas and our clusters of excellence are just one example to show this.

Of course, in some places there are others who are better, but we are also sometimes at the top and can cooperate on equal terms in so many aspects - that is urgently needed, especially on an international level.

Because in science, for a long time now, no one can make a big impact on their own anymore. As researchers and teachers, as members of this University, I do not have to tell you that. Without disciplinary or interdisciplinary teams, without trusting cooperation, excellence can no longer be achieved. So, I plead and encourage to be open, to be curious and, above all, to have the **self-confidence** that is often denounced in Lower Saxony, to present ourselves with firm belief and thus to work together as equal partners.

It is a matter of great importance to me to support our University, all of you, on this path. Let us work together to dispel our fear, scepticism and doubt about the unfamiliar and instead to awaken curiosity and interest in what is still unknown time and again. It is what we so urgently need and what we will surely achieve together.

Apart from the necessary crisis management mentioned at the beginning, there are of course many other issues to be dealt with in the coming months. I am very pleased that the Executive Board is now stronger and that the colleagues are working together with such determination and in very good cooperation to push forward many important topics at a strategic level and to plan and accompany the implementation.

Let us move things forward together at our TU Braunschweig, at our own pace, with our own priorities, but always with a lot of energy and persuasion!