

Recommendation of the  
14th General Meeting of  
the German Rectors'  
Conference (HRK)  
on 14 May 2013  
in Nuremberg

**Recommendations on  
Teacher Education**

## **A Introduction**

In view of existing and future challenges in teacher education, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) has appointed an expert committee to address questions relating to the present situation and the future profile of teacher education at higher education institutions (HEIs). The outcomes of the discussion held by this committee are included in these recommendations.

Higher education institutions consider themselves as committed to providing teacher education that is competence-oriented and based on the mediation of knowledge and on personality building. However, the competencies required for teachers are not simply acquired by completing the first phase of teacher education – gaining a college or university qualification. Teacher education is much more an occupational, biographical process of ongoing theory- and practice-based education and advanced education; it is a process that continues throughout college or university, in teaching practice and through every part-time advanced education and continuing education course.

The contributions of the different actors involved in teacher education must be integrated in appropriate and useful ways; however they each have a specific function and are therefore not interchangeable. The objective of the first phase of teacher education – the university or college course – is to equip future teachers with an academic qualification. It is the imparting of pedagogic skills as well as subject-specific academic and didactic knowledge with a methodical research orientation. Yet HEIs cannot also be expected to provide the school- and lesson-based skills and competencies that are necessary for teaching. With regards to this first phase of teacher education, the HEIs therefore expressly commit themselves to providing the necessary core academic element of teacher education, which must then be supplemented by cooperation with other types of higher education institutions depending on the kind of school, the level of teaching and the subject area to be taught.

HEIs, on the other hand, do not consider themselves responsible for the first phase of teacher education only. They can and want to make a significant contribution to the third phase, too: part-time advanced education and continuing education for teachers. This is only possible if the HEIs receive adequate support from the decision-makers in education policy. For this reason, the German Rectors' Conference wishes to direct its suggestions and recommendations for the future profile of teacher education and the part-time advanced education and continuing education of teachers in HEIs not only to the institutions themselves, but also to the relevant

education policymakers, the federal states and their coordination committees, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and to the Federal Government. Naturally, the German Rectors' Conference makes no demands to make these recommendations binding.

## **B Proposals on the basic issues relating to teacher education and professional teaching practice**

The structure of teacher education and teaching profession in Germany is based on a tradition of practical teaching and administrative elements that is separate to the university system, yet which poses certain challenges for the initial phase of teacher education. In academic and non-academic teacher education, as well as in professional practice, numerous difficulties emerge as a result of the two-subject principle that is unique to German universities, and the free choice of subject combinations for teaching degrees in many federal states. Problems include the lack of a 'home' department for those on a teaching degree programme, as well as the high likelihood of timetabling clashes. Moreover, students on teaching degree programmes with two equally weighted subjects that include the mandatory subject-specific didactic and pedagogic course components inevitably emerge with fewer academic qualifications than students on standard programmes with a single discipline. The two-subject principle thus represents an obstacle for the national and international mobility of teaching students, student teachers and teachers. In light of these issues, the German Rectors' Conference proposes that:

1. access to teaching in different school types and of different grades is given and/or improved for teachers who are qualified to teach a single subject, as well as for teachers who studied two or more subjects in a major/minor course model (i.e. subjects with unequal weighting), and
2. the existing range of permitted subject combinations in different federal states is examined, and the possibility of standardised regulations is pursued.

In addition, a number of fundamental problems relating to teacher education and professional practice arise as a result of the multitude of different models, structures and general conditions of academic and non-academic teacher education in the individual German federal states. Especially challenging is the co-existence of two different types of course (bachelor's/master's degrees and the traditional German foundation degree), as well as differing state and academic

examination systems for teacher education.

3. Although the various state-specific examinations and certificates are now recognised in all of Germany, the German Rectors' Conference recommends that education policymakers seek to reconcile these models and structures at a national level in the interest of all those affected.

## **C Proposals for the future profile of academic teacher education**

1. The funding of pedagogic and subject-specific didactic research.

No satisfactory answer has yet been given to the question as to which core competencies are required for the professionalisation of all teachers, regardless of the type of school or the grade that they will teach. There is an urgent need for theoretically sound, empirically substantiated argumentation and decision-making tools. Consequently, the German Rectors' Conference recommends the support of pedagogical research relating specifically to professional practice. Taking into account the universities' contribution to the ongoing vocational and bio-graphical process of teacher education, the HRK also recommends the furthering of research on subject-specific didactics.

2. Anchoring of teacher education in HEI structures

Two different models can be identified: teacher education in HEIs that specialise in teacher education (e.g. the Baden-Württemberg College of Education), and the incorporation of teacher education into the structures of universities and other HEIs. The first model means that the courses have a clear profile characteristic; however, there is the danger that the teacher education courses lack the breadth of subject-specific knowledge. On the other hand, neither the teacher education centres at universities, which are mandatory according to the education laws of some federal states, nor the independent Professional Schools of Education cannot yet themselves be considered as measures that improve the quality of the education.

The German Rector's Conference recommends that these centres also provide advanced academic qualifications for teachers in the field of subject-specific didactics. This would require that regulations concerning the release of teachers for extra education are developed by the education authorities and implemented across all federal states.

3. Advanced education and continuing education for teachers / those transferring to teaching from another career or subject area

HEIs can only take responsibility for the third phase of teacher education – the part-time advanced education and continuing education of teachers – if they have adequate resources. For this reason, the German Rectors' Conference recommends that advanced education and continuing education courses are included in HEI capacity calculations, or that fees are introduced for the courses. In turn, this would mean that education authorities must make it mandatory for teachers to attend the courses and that they are also offered adequate financial support to do so. The same applies to part-time courses in order to support those wanting to transfer to the profession from other subject areas or careers.

4. Quality assurance in teacher education

The quality assurance of teaching degree programmes at HEIs must be evaluated according to the respective model (see point 2). The German Rectors' Conference recommends abolishing the different federal state-specific accreditation methods for teaching courses, and instead enforcing external quality assurance for teaching programmes, to be included in the framework of institutional auditing or assessments. Quality assurance for the second and third phases of teacher education must be guaranteed through cooperation contracts with partners and through accompanying academic research.

5. Suitability assessment, advisory service and reflection on choice of study

The quality and effectiveness of teaching in schools depend greatly on the knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics of the teachers. However, the effectiveness of teacher education in an academic context is not only dependent on the education, but also on the suitability of the student for the teaching programme and for the teaching profession. The German Rectors' Conference therefore recommends that HEIs develop and implement instruments for assessing students' suitability.

6. Inclusion / Implementation of the Disability Rights Convention into teacher education

HEIs welcome the implementation of the Disability Rights Convention. Integrating inclusion pedagogy in the teaching degree programmes at HEIs could, for example, equip future teachers with the diagnostic tools to qualify them as an initial point of contact for advice, for example, as well as facilitating effective further cooperation with inclusion support workers and special and social education workers in schools. Therefore, when implementing the Disability Rights Convention in subject-specific university teacher education, the German

Rector's Conference recommends that rather than education teachers to become specialists in inclusion pedagogy, the orientation be much more on the concept of the 'multi-professional team'. The HRK thereby points out once more that adequate resources are a necessary precondition if HEIs are to offer future teachers qualifications in inclusion pedagogy.

#### 7. Cooperative forms of professionalisation and specialisation of schoolteachers

In order to ensure that teachers' portfolios include comprehensive subject-specific academic and didactic knowledge as well as pedagogic and social-communication competencies, cooperative kinds of specialisation must be supported, along with the professionalisation of school teachers through part-time education courses. Teachers should therefore be assisted in creating working units and teams for providing mutual support as a form of ongoing and collegial supervision, as well as for supplementing their specific competence profiles through extra education. In order to enable future teachers to benefit from this kind of cooperation, the German Rectors' Conference recommends that cooperative modes of research-based, problem-oriented learning is better integrated into teacher education at HEIs.

#### 8. Internationalisation and intercultural practice in teacher education

The job description for teachers is increasingly determined by their ability to apply their pedagogical skills successfully in heterogeneous and culturally diverse learning groups. Moreover, the dissolution of national reference points is influencing the environment of school pupils to an ever-greater extent. Teachers can only fulfil their role as multipliers if they themselves can lay claim to the required personal intercultural experiences. For this reason, the German Rectors' Conference recommends that HEIs integrate the internationalisation of teacher education courses consistently into their general internationalisation strategies. This means including windows of mobility in the curricula and supporting work experience placements in schools abroad, as well as the targeted mediation of intercultural knowledge and skills as a form of 'internationalisation at home'.

#### 9. Cooperation between universities and different HEIs in teacher education

The aim of teacher education at universities is the integrated mediation of specialist subject, pedagogic and subject-specific didactic competencies, which is what makes it an academic

qualification. It must, however, be supplemented by selective collaboration with other HEIs and non-HEI actors depending on the type of school, school grade and subject to be taught. Calculating the capacities for teacher education

10. In many universities, the individual academic departments that contribute to teacher education are larger than the pedagogy and subject-specific didactic departments. However, the size of these smaller departments is often used to calculate the available capacity for teaching degree courses. A high-quality university teaching degree is based on the integration of academic, subject-specific didactic and pedagogic content. The German Rectors' Conference therefore proposes that universities calculate their teaching degree capacity based primarily on the discipline that has the lowest capacity for students to be supervised; this way, universities should be able to avoid capacity bottlenecks in teacher education courses.

## **D Concluding Remarks**

HEIs are aware of the particular responsibility that they are taking on in contributing to teacher education. In the past, they have successfully tackled challenges in the field of teacher education, and will continue to prioritise teacher education in the future. Nevertheless, the German Rectors' Conference emphasises that HEIs can only fulfil their responsibilities on the precondition that they receive adequate support at both federal and state level. The implementation of the above proposals for the future profile of teacher education at HEIs demands a commensurate level of engagement by the federal states and the Federal Government in the named areas. The resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs from March 2013 on the nationwide mandatory recognition of teaching degrees from 2014 onwards, as well as the quality initiative for teacher education that was resolved by the Joint Science Conference in April 2013 are two important steps in the right direction, and are emphatically welcomed by the HRK.