

Recommendation
by the 21st General Assembly
of the HRK
on 8 November 2016
in Mainz

Part-time study

HRK German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

Leipziger Platz 11
10117 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0)30 206292-0
Fax: +49 (0)30 206292-15

post@hrk.de
www.hrk.de

Ahrstraße 39
53175 Bonn

Tel.: +49 (0)228 887-0
Fax: +49 (0) 228 887-110

post@hrk.de
www.hrk.de

I. Preliminary remarks

For a number of years, a discrepancy has been evident between the formal courses on offer at German higher education institutions and actual study behaviour. While governments and higher education institutions mostly still use a standard full-time course as the starting point for their planning, this is no longer the most appropriate organisational form of study for a steadily growing group of students. Instead, this group is deciding to study part-time. "Informal" part-time study is a reality that is not fully addressed either by the various higher education laws at the state level, or by existing funding models.

However, what is at issue here is not a uniform study model, but a broad spectrum of options, ranging from a formal flexible study structure to pragmatic workarounds by students using "de facto" part-time courses. Existing studies demonstrate that there is a demand for part-time courses targeted at specific groups.¹

The HRK therefore considers it to be productive to present a breakdown of the problem in the present paper, and to offer higher education institutions recommendations for action to deal with the topic of "part-time studies".

The paper thereby reverts to the HRK's recommendations for action for the further implementation of the European Study Reform dating from November 2013², in which the HRK had noted, under the heading "The increasing heterogeneity of the student body as a challenge and an opportunity for the higher education institutions," that many students need flexible frameworks such as courses that can be undertaken at differing paces or are also offered as part-time study programmes or programmes combining work and study.

On this point, the HRK position is consistent with a demand originally formulated in 2009 in the "Leuven Communiqué" of the European education ministers: "Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as workbased routes."³

When making its recommendation on this topic as late as 1997, the HRK was still working on the assumption that although formal part-time courses ought to be possible, they were best avoided by good student advisory services and study conditions. In contrast to that position, in its new recommendation the HRK intends to make it clear that a higher

¹ Notably, 20th Social Survey by German National Association for Student Affairs, 2013; 12th Student Survey 2014 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF); Centre for Higher Education study "Das Teilzeit-Studium an deutschen Hochschulen – Wo stehen wir und was ist möglich?" (Part-time study at German higher education institutions – where do we stand and what is possible?), 2016; Tino Bargel and Holger Bargel: Studieren in Teilzeit und Teilzeitstudium (Studying part-time and part-time courses), Bielefeld 2014

²https://www.hrk.de/uploads/tx_szconvention/HRK_MV_15_Empfehlung_Europaeische_Studienreform_EN_01.pdf

³ http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf

education institution's strategic planning should also address the topic of "part-time studies" in order, where necessary, to better integrate the development of the appropriate part-time courses along the "student life cycle" in higher education institutions.

However, a positive re-evaluation of flexible study programmes also requires careful resource planning and a modified definition of the concept of "standard course duration" appropriate to the present day; this concept should in fact be understood as a planning parameter, rather than as a disciplinary parameter.

II. Differentiation of definitions

The terms "part-time studies", "course combining work and study" and "continuing academic education" are often mentioned in the same context.⁴ Despite the overlaps that exist, they do, however, describe different forms of study:

- Part-time studies are distinguished by a reduced time commitment associated with the study load per semester compared to full-time studies, whether in a formally structured degree programme or as an informal manner of studying.
- A course combining work and study enables employed people to study alongside their employment. This also encompasses evening and distance education courses, amongst others. A course combining work and study can be offered as a part-time study programme, but this is not necessarily the case.
- The increasing demand for continuing academic education has its roots in the context of Lifelong Learning. Continuing academic education offers study options, including part-time options, after a first vocational or higher education institution qualification. This can also include bachelor's degrees.

III. Background: Demand and supply

Although in the summer semester of 2012 only 4% of students were enrolled in a part-time study programme or one combining work and study, in actual fact every fifth student (22%) formally studying full-time, completed an informal part-time course.⁵

The reasons most frequently given by students studying part-time include being employed, different educational backgrounds and study prerequisites, caring for children or other family members, disabilities or chronic diseases and also special involvement in politics, sport, culture or similar.

⁴ "Dual studies" are to be seen as distinct from these forms, as, while they can take many different forms in respect of linkages between learning units and locations, they are completed full-time rather than part-time.

⁵ 20th Social Survey by the German National Association for Student Affairs, 2013

While isolated examples of part-time studies already exist, currently just under 10% of undergraduate and 14.5% of post-graduate courses on offer can be currently taken part-time.⁶

These formal variations on studying part-time – mostly with half the study load and double the study duration – are still not very much used, since they obviously fail to address students' needs. Individualised variations such as the following are still not offered frequently enough:

- informal part-time studies involving studying at different paces (in phases or over the entire course of studies)
- release from compliance with examination periods and standard course duration (individual, on application) and
- individually structured study programmes – for example through more flexibility to opt in to modules – after consultation and with supervision.

IV. Difficulties expanding part-time study

Various factors contribute to the low take-up rate for courses currently on offer. These include:

- bureaucratic procedures for authorisation and processing
- rigid timing requirements (a decision to study part-time generally has to be taken for a whole year),
- inadequate information about courses currently on offer.

In relation to financing part-time studies, various sets of circumstances arise that should be taken into account by higher education institutions when developing the appropriate options. Where the courses on offer target students who are also working, it can generally be assumed that these students support themselves by parallel employment. BAföG, i.e., financial assistance under the German Federal Training Assistance Act, is a family-income dependent social benefit that focuses primarily on initial vocational training. It offers support to persons who cannot finance part-time studies by working while they study, for example students with children requiring care or chronic disease. However, education benefits are currently only paid under BAföG if the studies constitute a full workload. A student who enrolls in a formal part-time study programme is therefore not eligible to receive financial assistance. The HRK sees the necessity of being able to apply for financial assistance for education even as part of formal part-time studies, provided the additional prerequisites of the German Federal Training Assistance Act are met.

Additional considerations relating to support options should be developed, e.g., jointly with the German National Association for Student Affairs, and then be trialled across the board.

V. Focus on undergraduate courses

There is already a diverse range of study programmes on offer at the masters level, and particularly in the area of continuing education, that can be undertaken part-time and/or combined with work. With the

⁶ HRK Higher Education Compass, May 2016

introduction of tiered programmes as part of the European Study Reform, a growing demand for part-time study options also emerged in the area of undergraduate courses. However the structures and processes of continuing academic education at masters level cannot simply be transferred over to bachelor programmes. The present recommendations focus on increasing the flexibility of programmes of study at undergraduate level, including courses combining work and study.

VI. Part time courses combining work and study as an element in the development of institutional profiles

Part-time studies provide higher education institutions with the option of offering flexible study models, in particular for employed people who wish to study.

A part-time course, in particular one combining work and study, also frequently entails gaining credits for skills acquired outside higher education. The higher education institutions should establish both individual and blanket credit procedures for this purpose. The Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications, revised by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) and the HRK in 2016, will promote the development of specialist qualifications frameworks that will in turn facilitate the awarding of credits for skills acquired outside higher education.

VII. Resources

Almost all the higher education laws of the Federal states give the higher education institutions the fundamental option of offering part-time courses and in general allow them considerable scope for this. It is an almost universal requirement that more consideration be given to the needs of students. However, as called for above, this presupposes that the standard course duration, particularly in the case of informal part-time studies, is understood as a planning parameter and that exceeding that period is not used as a disciplinary tool either with respect to the higher education institution or students. Overall, the additional demands on higher education institutions must be associated with the corresponding allocation of funds.

VIII. What is expected of higher education institutions

Due to the increasing heterogeneity of students, demographic trends and the shortage of qualified staff, the higher education institutions have been called upon for over 20 years⁷ to address the topic of "part-time study" constructively. The formal part-time courses already in existence are often not used enough because of the rigid structures. In contrast, a variety of experience can be drawn on with individualised programmes of study that can serve as an inspiration to interested

⁷ German Council of Science and Humanities 1993: "10 Thesen zur Hochschulpolitik" (10 theories on higher education policy)

higher education institutions.⁸ The HRK encourages its member institutions to take up this topic and to have it feed into their strategic planning. This will allow the development of appropriate course options along the student life cycle that can be used in a targeted manner to develop institutional profiles and create transregional demand. The HRK proposes the following procedural steps for this purpose:

IX. Recommendations on action for the introduction of formalised part-time courses⁹

1. Recording and analysis of the demand / potential at a higher education institution for studying part-time

The potential demand for part-time courses should be determined on the basis of projections about new students as well as trends in the job market and technological developments such as the digitalisation of the workplace. Factors such as private providers of academic courses, distance education courses at public higher education institutions in the region and other continuing education and certificate courses should be taken into account in this process. Exchange with business, schools and other stakeholders is advisable.

2. Integration of part-time study into the higher education institution's strategic development planning

The professional planning and development of courses appropriate to target groups should occur in consultation with teaching staff and students of the faculties and departments, and take into account the appropriate market and target group analyses (see above). The intentions of the higher education institution in the area of "part-time study" should be mentioned explicitly in development planning, and the respective responsibilities of the higher education institution leadership should be defined.

3. Determination of the additional costs incurred

The introduction of new course is associated with additional costs, firstly for additional tasks in the start-up phase, e.g. when developing Blended Learning courses, but also long-term, for example in marketing of courses and in student advisory services. These additional costs must not be charged to the higher education institution budget.

4. Drafting of statutes for studying part-time and drafting or amendment of examination and study regulations

Studying part-time should not be regarded as a stopgap solution for those who cannot manage full-time studies. Drafting statutes and making provision for special features in the study and examination regulations emphasises the complete validity of this form of study, even it is not completed in a formalised part-time study programme, and can increase its acceptance.

⁸ e.g., the Baden-Württemberg state programme "Studienmodelle individueller Geschwindigkeiten" (Study models of individualised paces)

⁹ See also nexus Impulse "Studieren in Teilzeit" (Part-time study), June 2014

Establishing a contact point for information and coordination of part-time courses on offer

The responsibilities of such a contact point, above and beyond traditional student advisory services, include liaison with departments, promoting and providing information on part-time courses, and collaboration with external partners.

5. Inclusion or creation of online and blended learning courses

Better use must be made of the options of online study and e-learning for part-time courses. Blended learning courses make it possible to learn independent of a set time or location, and facilitate the flexible linking of part-time, distance and on-campus study.

6. Credit for skills acquired at a higher education institution or in the workplace

Awarding of credits for skills acquired outside the higher education institution or at other higher education institutions is of great importance for all those interested in studying, but particularly for people who wish to undertake a course combining work and study. Options for awarding credits under the KMK¹⁰ rules should be applied here.

¹⁰ Anrechnung von außerhalb des Hochschulwesens erworbenen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auf ein Hochschulstudium (I) (Recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside of the higher education system in higher education courses (I)), resolution of the KMK on 28.06.2002 (http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2002/2002_06_28-Anrechnung-Faehigkeiten-Studium-1.pdf) and Anrechnung von außerhalb des Hochschulwesens erworbenen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auf ein Hochschulstudium (II) (Recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside of the higher education system in higher education courses (II)), resolution of the KMK on 18.09.2008. (http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/KMK/Vorgaben/KMK_Anrechnung_ausserhochschulisch_II.pdf)