

17 November 2016**Part-time study – from stopgap solution to modern study option**

The demand for part-time study opportunities far exceeds supply. The General Assembly of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) analysed this situation in a recommendation adopted last week, giving universities concrete guidance on the introduction of formalised but flexible part-time study options.

In reality, every fifth student completes his or her study part-time, but only around four per cent are formally enrolled in a part-time study programme or one that combines work and study. In most cases, people studying while in employment or simultaneously caring for children or other family members are enrolled in a regular study programme and try to adapt their study conditions to their situations – largely relying on their own resources, and with varying success. Existing part-time study options (mostly with half the study load and twice the study duration) are not much used, since they are relatively inflexible and thereby evidently fail to address the needs of many students.

In view of the continually increasing diversity of the student population, the HRK is therefore calling for improved options for courses to be structured individually and flexibly. In its recommendation, the General Assembly emphasises that the European Degree Structure, with its modular design, offers a most appropriate basis for this. At the same time, the General Assembly is departing from the view of part-time studies as a stopgap solution and a model with a uniform structure.

The recommendation notes that the use of online study and forms of e-learning are indispensable to achieve the desired flexibility. Part-time courses, if developed appropriately in response to needs and target groups, could also constitute elements of universities' strategic development and the establishment of their profiles.

In the HRK's view, there are still unresolved questions, mainly in relation to the costs to universities and BAföG, the German Federal Training Assistance Act. As far as financing options for students are concerned, one particular problem is that BAföG is currently only paid if studies constitute the entire workload. Students completing a formal part-time course are therefore not eligible for financial assistance under current law. The General Assembly is calling for these provisions to be amended. In addition, the existing capacities and resources frequently do not offer the scope necessary for creating flexible part-time study options that meet students' needs.

Given that numerous programmes already exist at masters level, in particular continuing education courses, the HRK recommendations concentrate on undergraduate courses, including courses combining work and study.

Text of the recommendation