



**To further improve the employability of  
university and college graduates**

**July 2016**

**Joint declaration by the BDA, DGB and HRK<sup>1</sup>**

The employability of university and college graduates, whether in dependent employment or self-employment, is a key topic for the future of our country – with a view to demographic trends and also in light of the sharp increase in the university entrance rate in recent decades. In the context of international competition, Germany needs a high-performing education system that facilitates excellent skills development on the part of its graduates, putting them in a position to not only cope with the rapidly changing demands of the working world but to shape and form it. In this respect, personal development also continues to gain in importance.

The signatory organisations endorse the view of the German Council of Science and Humanities: It is the duty of universities to take into account in an appropriate manner each of the three central dimensions of academic education – academic discipline, personal development and preparation for the labour market. A fourth dimension arises in the form of social engagement skills. The associated framework conditions are good: Graduate unemployment has been remarkably low in Germany for many years. It is not only the robust economy but also the German understanding of graduate employability that contributes to this situation. This tends to focus on problem-solving and, as a rule, does not aim at preparing students for a specific job but for fields of potential employment including self-employment. Nevertheless, there are variations in the degree to which employability is taken into consideration in the various disciplines and academic cultures during a course of study and to which the corresponding skills are conveyed. In some courses of study, practical orientation is still not fully developed. It is therefore expedient and necessary to reinforce the labour-market relevance of courses in terms of practical application. This helps to motivate students and, as a rule, also contributes to improving academic success.

The employability of graduates arises from their ability to take up qualified employment based on their academic education, to tap into new fields of employment and to identify their own need for further training. Scientific problem-solving skills are the central characteristic of academic education. Employability includes the acquisition of various skills that are also relevant to the labour market. This specifically includes skills relating to an academic discipline and methodology, social and personal skills and the ability to engage in entrepreneurial activity.

The labour-market relevance of university and college qualifications and maintaining the life-long employability of graduates are also key issues of the European Study Reform. The 2015 Yerevan Communiqué calls for a strengthening of the exchange of information between governments, universities and employers to this end.

With regard to reinforcing employability, the individual stakeholders are assigned different tasks:

The universities put students and the quality of studies and teaching at the centre of their teaching activities and provide students with support within the scope of the aforementioned qualification objectives for building up scientific skills of practical relevance during their studies. They refine their courses continually as part of an ongoing exchange with professional practice.

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<sup>1</sup> This declaration was prepared in consultation with the following government and private stakeholders: Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, Accreditation Council, Centre for Higher Education, German Council of Science and Humanities, the Cologne Institute for Economic Research.



Businesses and other employers contribute in the form of high-quality and challenging internships and support for theses. They assist universities in designing degree and further qualification programmes. Representatives of businesses and trade unions (representatives of professional practice) are involved in assuring the quality of degree programmes within the framework of programme and system accreditation.

The duty of policy makers is to put suitable legal and material framework conditions in place to ensure good study programmes as defined by the aforementioned qualification objectives. They safeguard transparency and grant universities the necessary leeway to develop their individual profiles at their own responsibility.

Good study programmes that boost individual employability do not come about without student involvement. Students have the right and the responsibility to shape their studies proactively. They choose the content of their studies taking into account the line of work they aim to take up. They solicit personal feedback on a regular basis over the course of their studies and, in turn, provide the university with their feedback.

The signatories reaffirm their commitment to fulfilling and refining their respective ongoing duties in dialogue with all partners concerned in order to guarantee the employability of graduates even in a rapidly changing economic and societal environment.