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## **European Study Reform**

**HRK** German Rectors' Conference

The Voice of the Universities

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## **European Study Reform in Germany: Recommendations for further implementation**

### **Preamble**

The HRK working group "European Study Reform" presents here its recommendations for the further implementation of the European study reform at higher education institutions in Germany. They are based on an interim report which the working group presented to the General Assembly of the HRK in May, feedback to the blog in which the report was discussed, an exchange of ideas with representatives from the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), the German Education Union (GEW), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German National Association for Student Affairs (DSW), as well as on a discussion with representatives of the Rectors' Conferences of the German Länder.

Germany was one of the first signatories to the Bologna Declaration to create a European Higher Education Area in 1999. The following goals were defined in the declaration:

- introduce a two-tier structure (*undergraduate/graduate*) courses,
- facilitate recognition, amongst other things through the Diploma Supplement
- introduce a credit system such as ECTS,
- cooperate in Europe on quality assurance,
- encourage transnational mobility of students and staff and
- reinforce a European dimension in higher education.

More themes were subsequently added which included

- a focus on the students (the shift from teaching to learning),
- formulation of learning outcomes, skills orientation and qualifications frameworks,
- the increasing heterogeneity of the student body as a challenge and an opportunity for the higher education institutions and
- the social dimension of studying.

Three elements were decisive for the further development of the Bologna reforms:

The Bologna Process rapidly generated a powerful dynamic and a spirit of optimism because it showed the countries involved that there were approaches on a European level which promised to solve the problems of their higher education systems, which they assumed were of a purely national nature.

The Bologna Process aroused such enormous expectations of the goals that it was overburdened from the beginning. Additionally, the implementation only appeared to be implementable at little cost and was made more difficult by many different individual interests.

It is true that the German higher education institutions have, since the beginning of the Bologna Process, thoroughly changed both the form and the substance of their study programmes and achieved great improvements. However, the HRK also underlines that the freedoms opened up by "Bologna" were underused and often constrained by bureaucracy, micromanagement and frequently unsuccessful implementation. This applies on the one hand to the often unnecessarily detailed internal and external specifications for the structure of the bachelor and master's programmes and for quality assurance. On the other hand it applies to aberrant developments on the operative level caused within the Universities themselves, which they must put right. This is a matter to be addressed at every level and by all the elements of the university, from its management and the faculties and departments to its administration and individual members of the teaching staff.

*The HRK emphasises that the German higher education institutions have shown enormous reform achievements since the beginning of the Bologna Process. While individual aspects of the route taken with the Bologna Process must be optimised, its fundamental direction is and has always been right, and Germany must continue to progress along the same lines.*

These recommendations are divided into three sections addressing the European, national and institutional dimensions of the reform process.

## **I. Germany in the European Higher Education Area**

From a European perspective, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the "Bologna countries" convening in Bucharest in 2012 acknowledged that further efforts were required to implement the reform. They said

"We will strive for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes.(...) To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed.<sup>1</sup>

Our position paper shares this critical evaluation from a European point of view.

### **I.1 Acceptance of the two-tier degree structure in Germany**

First it should be noted that, according to two more recent European comparative studies<sup>2</sup>, the German Universities have achieved a great deal with respect to some of the Bologna goals: External quality assurance procedures (programme and system accreditation) have been established, the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been ratified, outgoing mobility has increased and so on.

In a European comparison, the long parallel operation of the old and the new degree structures is unusual, particularly the long retention of courses leading up to the Staatsexamen (a government licensing

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<sup>1</sup> Bucharest communiqué 2012:  
[http://www.bmbf.de/pubRD/Bukarest-Kommunique\\_2012.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pubRD/Bukarest-Kommunique_2012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bologna Implementation Report:  
<http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf>  
EUA Trends Report: <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/trends-in-european-higher-education/trends-vi.aspx>

examination). In comparison: In 34 of the 47 Bologna countries, 100% of students had enrolled under the new structure already 4 years ago.

However, the change to the new structures has accelerated considerably in recent years: while in 2008/09 only 36 % of all students in Germany were enrolled in bachelor's and master's courses, making Germany one of the lowest five Bologna countries<sup>3</sup>, this figure has now risen to 65 %. 87% of the courses at German Universities now lead to a bachelor's or master's degree.<sup>4</sup>

*From an international perspective, Germany should implement the bachelor's/master's model as widely as possible, taking into consideration the particular conditions in the "Staatsexamen" programmes in law, medicine and pharmaceuticals.*

## **I.2 Mobility**

### **I.2.1 Student mobility and the recognition of study periods and examinations**

The *Bologna Implementation Report* of 2012 shows that Germany, along with Austria and Switzerland, has a reasonable balance of incoming and outgoing students. The report considers this as an indication of an open university system<sup>5</sup>.

However, this is not cause for satisfaction: In no other area does reality lag further behind the expectations aroused by "Bologna" than with regard to mobility. DAAD studies show that the outward mobility of German students taking bachelor's courses at universities in 2007, 2009 and 2011 stagnated at 15% or 16%. There was an increase only in

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<sup>3</sup> Implementation Report, p. 33

<sup>4</sup> Statistische Daten zu Studienangeboten an Hochschulen in Deutschland Studiengänge, Studierende, Absolventen, Wintersemester 2012/2013 [Statistical data on Higher Education Studies in Germany: courses, students, graduates winter semester 2012/2013 ]: [http://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/HRK\\_Statistik\\_WiSe\\_2012\\_13\\_Internet\\_02.pdf](http://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/HRK_Statistik_WiSe_2012_13_Internet_02.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Implementation Report, p. 162

students in bachelor's courses at universities of applied sciences (from 9% to 17%).<sup>6</sup>

The results of a 2011<sup>7</sup> HIS (Higher Education Information System) project report are slightly more positive: they indicate that 29% of graduates of both universities and universities of applied sciences had had a study-related stay in another country.

Figures for mobile students should also include those who take their entire degree in a foreign country (degree mobility), but these are not included in any statistics.

It is clear that Germany has not yet achieved the mobility target of 50% set by the federal government, and that the issues obstructing mobility should be analysed in more detail. At least four problem areas can be identified. The 20th social survey by the Deutsches Studentenwerk emphasises that the international mobility of students is substantially affected by their social background: the proportion of students from a 'high' educational background is significantly different from those from a 'low' educational background and both figures have grown further apart since the previous survey<sup>8</sup>. 66% give the financial burden as a significant barrier to a stay abroad; in second place is the pressure to complete their studies as quickly as possible (55%)<sup>9</sup>, and the third continues to be an issue of recognition of study abroad periods. While the Universities are not in a position to make any changes regarding the first two issues, as this is a matter for social systems throughout Europe, they do have a particular responsibility where the solution to recognition problems is concerned. The main legal

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<sup>6</sup> DAAD | BMBF (Federal Ministry for Education and Research) 5. The "go out! studieren weltweit" (go out! study anywhere in the world!) conference on the international mobility of German students in May 2011, selected results from the 2nd investigation of study visits by German students in other countries, fig. 3

<sup>7</sup> Rehn, Brandt, Fabian, Briedis: Hochschulabschlüsse im Umbruch, HIS-Projektbericht (Major changes to HE degree courses, HIS project report) June 2012, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Studierenden in Deutschland 2012 (The economic and social situation of students in Germany 2012). 20th Social survey by the Deutsches Studentenwerk, excerpt, p.7

<sup>9</sup> Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Studierenden in Deutschland 2012 (The economic and social situation of students in Germany 2012). 20th Social survey by the Deutsches Studentenwerk, p. 179

instrument for recognition is "The Lisbon Recognition Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region" and its principles (notably the reversal of the burden of proof and the substantial difference). However, five years after ratification by the federal government, the convention appears to be unknown in many Universities<sup>10</sup>. In July 2013, the HRK therefore presented a guideline on improvement of recognition and the application of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.<sup>11</sup>

ECTS plays a key role in recognition. Germany is performing badly in its implementation, and, together with two other countries ranks last in the European Higher Education Area. ECTS is used on fewer than 75% of all study programmes in Germany and is not yet linked to learning outcomes. Particularly in this latter respect, there is a need for Germany to act, as 'workload' is frequently and incorrectly given as a key criterion for assessing student performance.<sup>12</sup> This does not take into account that the 'workload', expressed in ECTS credits, is only meaningful in combination with specific learning outcomes, and that performance is still qualitatively assessed with the grading system. Furthermore, only a few Universities so far are using the ECTS grading table recommended in the 2009 ECTS guideline to simplify recognition procedures<sup>13</sup>.

Germany is doing relatively well in issuing the Diploma Supplement, although this is largely due to the fact that no Diploma Supplements are issued in study programmes that have not been converted to the two-tier structure<sup>14</sup>. The HRK emphasises that the usefulness of the Diploma Supplement depends greatly on how well the learning outcomes/skills of the programme in question are described in it.

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<sup>10</sup> At universities for applied sciences, 62% of the courses taken in other countries were credited to ECTS credits and 46% at universities. Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Studierenden in Deutschland 2012 (The economic and social situation of students in Germany 2012). 20th Social survey by the Deutsches Studentenwerk, p. 187

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hrk-nexus.de/themen/anerkennung/leitfaden-zur-anerkennung/> (available in German only)

<sup>12</sup> Implementation Report, p. 47

<sup>13</sup> ECTS guideline 2009:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_de.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_de.pdf). p. 43

<sup>14</sup> Implementation Report, p. 53

*To improve the recognition process, the Universities should ensure that the staff at the Universities are sufficiently familiar with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the function and application of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. The HRK proposes to support the Universities by collecting and documenting learning outcomes for each subject, e.g. at the HRK.*

Joint study programmes and degrees at European Universities are, in the view of the HRK, another valuable tool with which to improve the mobility and overall qualifications of the graduates, and should therefore find more frequent application.

"Mobility windows" slotted into the curriculum have proven suitable for integrating study or work experience in other countries into programmes. Neither instrument, however, absolves the Universities of their duty to provide the majority of their mobile students with a simple and efficient recognition procedure.

*The university staff occupied with recognition must adopt the principle of generous recognition based on learning outcomes and skills, as represented by the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This involves not only applying the convention to studies carried out abroad, but also at the national level, for example, when students switch universities within Germany or during the transition from a bachelor's to a master's course.*

## **1.2.2 Mobility – a task for the entire university**

The HRK emphasises that it wants to see a broad understanding of the concept of mobility: Universities should implement a practice of constructive recognition to support their students not only if they wish to study abroad, but also if they change institutions within Germany. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten in the discussion about German students' mobility that mobility into Germany should also be encouraged – for students as well as teachers. The creation of a



European Higher Education Area should also be seen as an opportunity for the staff of German Universities to move around.

*Europe has taken the first step with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. From a European perspective, however, the German Universities must improve the framework for mobility and the recognition process. Each university has individual responsibility for this. University leadership should therefore work closely with faculties and departments to remove formal, procedural and content-related obstructions to mobility and endeavour to deliver appropriately short preparation times for periods in other countries.*

## **II. Implementation on the national level**

### **II.1 Bachelor's and Master's degrees.**

#### **Structure and function of the new degree programmes**

A key element of the Bologna Reform is the three-tier degree structure: Bachelor, master, doctorate. In the view of the HRK, the doctoral phase should not be included in the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, the study pathway should be viewed as an entity so that the prospects and the range of options available to students are not limited from the start. Consideration should be given to each separate tier, but also to the transition between them. Structural questions and resources are a matter for the Universities; where the students are concerned, the issues are heterogeneity, individual study pathways and social background.

#### **II.1.1 Bachelor's degree**

While the universities for applied sciences are convinced on the whole of the quality of the bachelor's programmes, the universities' evaluation depends frequently on the culture of the discipline and the objective of the course.

Students who embark upon a master's course immediately after completion of their bachelor's degree do not always take this step because they are interested in a career in research, but because they do

not consider the bachelor's degree to be a fully valid qualification.

Mostly this is a misunderstanding which can be traced back to the ignorance of some academic teachers.

It is important for the HRK to emphasise that bachelor's degree courses must be structured in a "polyvalent" way, offering students at least three ways forward: 1) master's courses at a deeper level in the same discipline, 2) a switch to a master's course in a related but different subject or 3) entry into employment within or outside of the university.

This is in line with the formulation of the qualifications framework for German higher education degrees university and the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area. In essence, this states that a bachelor's degree programme should provide a fairly broad-based knowledge of the fundamental issues of a subject, that the graduate must be able to apply this knowledge in a career and that the degree should allow access to a master's programme.

Currently, bachelor programmes are often so specialised that they only allow further study in a directly linked master's programme, thus hindering 'vertical' mobility. The diverse options available in curricular design are often ignored and remain unused. Instead, the consecutive arrangement of bachelor's and master's programmes continues to dominate. Particularly continuing education, in the form of part time master's courses, is still often neglected. Only the flexible deployment of all the options available in curricular development will allow the realisation of educational policy goals such as support for lifelong learning and individually tailored study pathways.

*When designing their curricula, the Universities should consider alternatives to the consecutive bachelor's-master's pattern more than they have to date. Bachelor's degree programmes should be developed in line with the principle that they open up at least three options (multi-purpose): 1) master's courses at a deeper level in the same discipline, 2) a switch to a master's course in a related but different subject or 3) entry into a career within or outside of the university.*

### **II.1.2 Bachelor's and master's degree programmes: structure and measures for greater flexibility**

If the BA-MA programmes are considered as a structural unit, there are problems to address on a national level:

firstly, the transition processes must be made more professional, academic aspects must be separated from the purely administrative and quantitative problems must be solved. A distribution and admission model must be developed. Secondly, the HRK points out that admission and selection processes should not be used to implement university policy positions. Thirdly, the growing diversity of students is making it necessary to design courses so that they are suitable for study at different speeds. In principle, the HRK finds that the "structural specifications" imposed by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany are unnecessarily uncompromising and would prefer to see a more flexible arrangement.

The maximum permitted period of study in Germany, 10 semesters or 300 ECTS credits, often leads to rigid schemata and even to university-internal 'templates' for course design. The prevailing<sup>15</sup> model of a six-semester bachelor's programme means frequently that the curriculum is compressed, resulting in a heavy workload and examination schedule for the students. The limit of 300 ECTS credits is also often too restricting. The "structural specifications" imposed by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany allow this to vary for individual students, so that in some cases a master's with 240 or 360 points is possible. The existing models must therefore become more flexible and new models tested. For example, it should be possible to exceed the 10-

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<sup>15</sup> In Germany, just under 70% of all bachelor's courses run over 6 semesters and almost 22% over 7. However there are great differences between the various types of university and federal states: While almost 50% of the bachelor's degree programmes at universities of applied sciences have a standard duration of 7 semesters, this only applies to 3.5% of university bachelor's programmes. There are 7-semester bachelor courses at universities of applied sciences in BW, BY, HB, HH, MV, RP and TH (Statistische Daten zu Studienangeboten an Hochschulen in Deutschland, (Statistical data on HE courses in Germany)) HRK November 2012, pp. 13 and 14).

semester limit and this option should be used. This means that an 8-semester bachelor's degree followed by a 4-semester master's, with a post-graduate option, for example, could be conceivable. It is important that this is not viewed as an option to bypass the current model, but as a conscious decision and genuine alternative.

Furthermore, the regulation that the maximum credit allocation for a bachelor's dissertation is 12 ECTS credits and 30 ECTS for a master's hinders a consistently subject-related orientation towards research in final dissertations, particularly in the case of the master's degree. To allow university teaching staff and students greater flexibility in terms of the subject and more freedom to structure their courses, as well as an incentive to produce good research, particularly in the master's tier, the specification for an upper limit on final papers should be removed completely. If the restriction is retained, it must consistently be in proportion to the actual effort. The specified lower limit of 6 (bachelor) or 15 (masters) ECTS credits could be retained to ensure that the papers meet the minimum academic requirement.

Retaining the traditional degree dichotomy depending on the profile of the university is hindering development of the differentiation process and narrows the diversity of their profiles. This differentiation is no longer relevant and should be removed from the "structural specifications".

*Universities and the universities in particular should separate the bachelor's and master's content more than they have to date and encourage the students to try to tailor their study pathways individually, so that they do not necessarily reflect the 180+120 ECTS credits model dominating the universities. This is in line with the structure defined for all the federal states by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK). Transition to a master's at another type of university should be supported and also be viewed as an opportunity by the Universities. The same applies to transitions to a master's in subjects that are not completely compatible.*

*To do this, the Universities, provided they have the resources, should apply their admission procedures with greater leniency. Bachelor's and master's should not be assessed by their duration nor the number of ECTS credits, but by the skills that are learnt. This requires the transition system to be more professional and the specific university profile to be taken into account.*

*The structure defined for all the federal states by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany should be more flexible, and those applying to a specific federal state should be abolished.*

### **II.1.3 Qualifications for an academic and non-academic career**

HRK considers the current debate in which the expectations of the labour market are used to justify the educational mandate of the Universities as erroneous. On the one hand it is indisputable that studying at an university, irrespective of the type and the subject, at an academic level should prepare students for a career – the higher education legislation in all the federal states includes a statement of this nature. At the same time, this does not mean that the university, particularly at the bachelor level, should prepare students for a specific career. This focus on an "academic qualification for a career will shift, depending on the type of university and the culture of the subject. On the other hand, the fundamental employability of all graduates, also at the bachelor level, is essential; otherwise the graduated structure of a

study programme loses one of its key benefits.

Nevertheless, the HRK emphasises that the academic education and qualification of the graduates must be the highest priority of the Universities. Depending on the culture prevailing in each discipline and on the type of university, the concrete expectations of the labour market should only be addressed if this priority is never questioned: that is, the design of the degree course and teaching remain the responsibility of the Universities to be accomplished as they see fit. They are already making a contribution towards progress and innovation, and therefore to the creation of completely new career areas.

For reasons associated with the acceptance of the bachelor qualification, the HRK also finds it essential that graduates with a bachelor's degree should be able to enter not only the professional, but also the executive grades in public service.

*Degree courses should be designed in coordination with the qualification framework for higher education in Germany and comply with the principle that bachelor programmes as a rule should teach a broad range of fundamental themes in a discipline, and thus also the skills to apply the knowledge acquired.*

*Some bachelor programmes qualify students for certain careers. However, most of them do not offer actual preparation for a career, but serve to make the graduate employable on the academic and the non-academic job markets.*

*The federal government and the federal states should change the admission conditions for the executive grades in public service in order to make them accessible in principle to holders of a bachelor's degree.*

## **II.2 Skill orientation:**

### **New orientation of teaching and examinations**

In the Bologna debate, a consensus has developed around the suggestion that Universities should offer overarching skills in addition to and associated with subject knowledge and skills.

The concept of skill-oriented teaching does not in any way focus on knowledge-reproducing formats. It is rather a matter of teaching and learning formats that require the application of knowledge, its implementation in practical contexts and the assessment and consideration of realistic issues in small groups of students, for example.

This "shift from learning to teaching" is based on learning as a research methodology, but also requires appropriate examination formats. Bologna demands both, but a framework for the capacity, space and teaching method is required: it is more difficult to evaluate skills than to test knowledge.

The concept of skill allows both the training and action-related, as well as the identity and personality-related aspects of educational processes to be integrated. It is therefore important that teachers use the task of formulating precise and comprehensible learning outcomes carefully to complete the shift of perspective from "teaching to learning".

It should be questioned at this point whether the traditional grading system is still appropriate in the early semesters, and whether it should be replaced with coursework portfolios, for example. This would offer an opportunity to make performance assessments and documentation more transparent, and to empower the development of systematic learning strategies and encourage self-reflection in the learners.

In principle, the orientation towards learning and skills objectives offers teachers more scope than before. The objectives to be achieved are specified instead of a detailed curriculum. The route towards them can be structured with relative freedom, and is to a large degree derived from the learning or development process of the students.

However, this new freedom to design courses changes the demands made of teaching staff and those responsible for the courses. Skill orientation assumes knowledge of the technical and the more general facets of the skills to be conveyed. Furthermore, it is important to offer learning situations that relate to both application and practice, and that are oriented towards the professional requirements that have to be met in a subject area.

Implementation of this orientation towards skills at the Universities requires sufficient time and resources with which to design the courses and examinations, and to allow teachers to be trained and share their



experience. As a rule, more input is required in skill-oriented teaching than in designing, conducting and evaluating traditional teaching and examinations.

As discussed in II 1.3, most bachelor's degree courses are aimed at employability, and not at preparing for a particular career. This is achieved with the teaching of general skills, amongst other things. If the opportunities that emerge from this actually manifest themselves in the lives of the graduates, particularly concerning their chances on the non-academic job market, it is essential that this be taken into account by the institutions responsible for career advice, such as the Federal Employment Agency, when determining employment conditions for graduates. Not only must current university policy developments and changes be included, but it must also be made clear that a specific academic degree does not provide qualification for employment in just one professional field.

*University leadership should ensure that the university staff and students are familiar with the fundamental ideas of skill-oriented teaching and examining. This requires teachers to enter into dialogue with others, the provision of appropriate career development and the time and space to work on developing teaching and examinations. The federal government and the federal states must support the Universities in skill-oriented teaching and examinations by providing appropriate funding.*

### **II.3 Quality assurance of degree courses and teaching based on research and adapted to suit the needs of science**

Since the foundation of universities of the Humboldt type, it has been a matter of course for Universities to be responsible for quality assurance and development. This view was confirmed by the European Education Ministers when they said in Berlin in 2003: "that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies within each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework."<sup>16</sup>

In line with this principle, the Universities take responsibility for designing their curricula. The various goals, strategies and profiles of the Universities are key to the formulation of qualification targets for their courses and the required learning outcomes of the course elements. This independence is also a major factor in the accreditation of courses and should be strengthened.

At every level within the university, its staff bears responsibility for ensuring that internal quality management, as the culture of quality applying throughout the university, drives and maintains the continuous improvement of teaching and learning, and that internal quality development and assurance processes are designed appropriately. This can be regularly verified with external quality assurance to guarantee that the internal processes of quality assurance and development genuinely improve the quality of the subject matter-related content and the structure of teaching and learning and gives an independent and academic account of itself to the state.

System accreditation has been introduced in Germany as an alternative to programme accreditation (which remains useful in some subjects and for some Universities). This step accommodates the responsibility of the

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<sup>16</sup> "Den Europäischen Hochschulraum verwirklichen", ("Realising the European Higher Education Area") Communiqué from the Conference of Higher Education Ministers in Europe on 19 September 2003 in Berlin, p. 3, [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique\\_dt.pdf](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique_dt.pdf)

university for its quality assurance, and the first system-accredited Universities are expressing themselves in mainly positive terms about their experiences.

The recommendation of the German Council of Science and Humanities<sup>17</sup> allows other procedures to be tested under the coordination of the Accreditation Council. These procedures should similarly meet the requirements of the Universities, show their potential for optimisation and by close alignment with the ESG<sup>18</sup>, support international compatibility and thus student mobility. Future quality assurance procedures should be associated more clearly with the university's own targets, strategies and programmes than was the case with programme accreditation, and thus underline its autonomy and profile.

*In the view of the HRK, strengthening institutional quality culture is key: Teachers and students must be involved more closely in the design of the processes and the departments and faculties should take more responsibility. The Universities should furthermore use programme or system accreditation in order to use the "experimentation clause" formulated by the German Council of Science and the Humanities, and thus help to strengthen a science-oriented non-governmental quality assurance system.*

#### **II.4 The financial consequences of the changing requirements of taking and teaching degree courses**

It is an indisputable fact that implementation of "Bologna" cannot be cost-neutral. The Universities are facing the difficult task of fundamentally re-organising teaching, degree courses and advisory systems without commensurate resources because the stronger focus on teaching has not yet been expressed in an appropriate increase in

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<sup>17</sup> German Council of Science and the Humanities: Recommendations on accreditation as an instrument of quality assurance  
<http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/2259-12.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20%282%29.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20%282%29.pdf)

basic funding. The commitment of many teachers is little recognised, neither in material terms with performance bonuses nor in a reduction of teaching commitment nor through higher visibility or improved reputation.

However, increased commitment on the part of individuals cannot compensate in the long term for the existing structural and financial shortfall in the teaching and learning environment. The German Universities need a demand-driven and internationally competitive level of staffing and material resources to improve the quality of their teaching. According to the calculations of the German Council of Science and the Humanities, the higher education system requires an additional amount of EUR 1.1 billion per annum to do this.<sup>19</sup>

The project-based funding path chosen by the government and the federal states cannot close this gap because budgets cannot rely on the funding which also represents a level of control which is counter to HE autonomy in teaching and learning. The lack of sustainability of the method of funding has to date had a negative impact on the career paths of young researchers who represent an interesting and particularly innovative clientele for teaching. This analysis was confirmed in July 2013 by the German Council of Science and the Humanities in its concept for a 'future pact', in which it states that more basic funding and more and better teaching is essential for the Universities.<sup>20</sup>

The HRK shares the view that a significant increase in basic funding is indispensable in order to provide the Universities with a secure financial basis on which to develop degree courses and teaching. Competitive financing could offer additional incentives.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 9,: EUR 357 million for professorships, EUR 480 million for quality improvements (tutorials, staff to advise first-year students and to support teachers in organising their teaching and examinations; career development for teaching personnel), EUR 251 million for university-internal quality management systems for teaching and learning and infrastructure and EUR 15 million for centres of competence for higher education teaching.

<sup>20</sup> German Council of Science and the Humanities, Perspektiven des deutschen Wissenschaftssystems, (Prospects for the German research system) 12.7.2013

As well as adequate financing, a reform of the personnel structure, the calculation of the teaching input and of the student capacity law are all necessary.<sup>21</sup>

*The federal government and the federal states should meet their obligation to ensure sufficient basic financing to provide good conditions for studying and teaching. This includes buildings, infrastructure and resources relating to student capacity. As determined by the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany, this requires that basic financing be significantly increased and student capacity legislation reviewed.*

## **II.5 The increasing heterogeneity of the student body as a challenge and an opportunity for the higher education institutions**

This gives teaching an important additional dimension, which changes the composition of the student body, which is increasingly characterised as heterogeneous.<sup>22</sup> Reasons for increased diversity are the sharply rising ratio of students from 42.5% (2010)<sup>23</sup> and successful attempts by

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<sup>21</sup> German Council of Science and the Humanities: Recommendation on accreditation as an instrument of quality assurance, p.10

<sup>22</sup> Wilkesmann, U./Virgillito, A./Bröcker, T./Knopp, L. (2012): Abweichungen vom Bild der Normalstudierenden – Was erwarten Studierende? (Deviations from the image of normal students – What do students expect? In: Kerres, M./Hanft, A./Wilkesmann, U./Wolff-Bendik, K. (Ed.): Studium 2020 (Studying in 2020). Positionen und Perspektiven zum lebenslangen Lernen an Hochschulen (Positions and perspectives on lifelong learning at higher education institutions). Münster, New York, Munich, Berlin, pp. 59-81. Michael Kerres, Anke Hanft & Uwe Wilkesmann: Lifelong Learning an Hochschulen. Neuausrichtung des Bildungsauftrages von Hochschulen.(Lifelong Learning at Higher Education Institutions. A new direction for the universities' mandate to educate). Higher Education (6) 58: 183-186: [http://mediendidaktik.uni-due.de/sites/default/files/HSW6\\_2010\\_Kerres\\_Hanft\\_Wilkesmann.pdf](http://mediendidaktik.uni-due.de/sites/default/files/HSW6_2010_Kerres_Hanft_Wilkesmann.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Nachhaltige Entwicklung in Deutschland, Indikatorenbericht 2012, (Sustainable development in Germany, Indicator Report 2012, Statistisches Bundesamt (Federal Statistical Office): [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/UmweltoekonomischeGesamtrechnungen/Umweltindikatoren/IndikatorenPDF\\_0230001.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/UmweltoekonomischeGesamtrechnungen/Umweltindikatoren/IndikatorenPDF_0230001.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)

the Universities to provide an equal opportunity and make studying for a degree more inclusive.

Greater diversity in the composition of the student body is an opportunity for higher education institutions. However, Universities first need to put in a certain amount of effort in order to exploit it. For example, professional and subject-related expertise and personal maturity in the professionally qualified, intercultural skills in students from an immigrant background and the knowledge that students bring with them from school to the university are often at different levels. Many students require flexible conditions, such as degree courses which can be studied at different speeds or part-time or other arrangements under which to accommodate employment. E-learning can also play a greater role than merely as a supplement to face-to-face teaching, because it allows study programmes to be more flexible, students to take more responsibility for their studies and the optimised use of resources. An alternative structure to the initial phase of studies would also be desirable to introduce the heterogeneous student body to life and learning at the Universities.

However, it has not been possible to make the necessary changes at many Universities for financial reasons.

Furthermore, demographic change will reduce the number of students with traditional study pathways in the coming years, and the shortfall of highly-qualified employees for the German economy will continue to grow. This is another reason why under-represented groups should be specially supported. However, the state must not leave Universities to carry out this task on their own. Questions concerning the capacity legislation and student financing above all must be resolved.

*Universities should use the opportunities offered by student diversity purposefully. This includes in-depth advice for students and people interested in studying, and making admission requirements, pace of study, teaching and examinations and transition from bachelor to masters courses more flexible.*

*Universities must receive help to finance these endeavours from the federal government and the federal states.*

*Teachers in higher education institutions should be offered training on*

*how to deal with diversity among students. Experience in new learning concepts with diversity and the willingness to take further training should be taken into consideration when new teachers are appointed. Student financing, such as funding under the German Federal Law on Support in Education (Bafög), should be adjusted to more flexible study pathways.*

## **II.6 Study pathways: linear – switching– discontinued studies**

The public and the policy makers lay the responsibility for high student drop-out rates in some subjects at the doors of the Universities. At the same time, it is pointed out that opportunities to meet the requirement for specialists and thus maintain economic prosperity are lost in this way.

The HRK emphasises that the discussion fails to differentiate sufficiently, or at all, between the reasons why students do not complete their course and drop out or switch to another. Students who fail to complete their courses represent in principle a loss to the academic education system, and the Universities do attempt to analyse the reasons and find a remedy. However, from the individual perspective of the students who do not complete their courses and those who switch courses it can also be a matter of a conscious wish to change their choice of course or a decision in their personal life plan. Failing to complete an academic course can be understood to be taking a new direction and need not mean that the student or the university has failed.<sup>24</sup>

The HRK therefore emphasises that the tools with which the student drop-out phenomenon has been analysed and interpreted up to now are inadequate. Today's student reality cannot be summed up in two categories: "normal study pathway" and "drop-out". It is more the case

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<sup>24</sup> Ulrich Heublein/Johanna Richter/Robert Schmelzer/Dieter Sommer, Die Entwicklung der Schwund- und Studienabbruchquoten an den deutschen Hochschulen, Statistische Berechnungen auf der Basis des Absolventenjahrgangs 2010 (The development of attrition and drop-out rates among students at Germany universities, statistical calculations based on graduation year 2010): [http://www.his.de/pdf/pub\\_fh/fh-201203.pdf](http://www.his.de/pdf/pub_fh/fh-201203.pdf)

that study pathways are increasingly fragmented, a situation to which the Universities must adjust.

Students who choose not to complete their course should benefit from the university's cooperation with employment agencies, the chambers of Industry and Commerce and representative bodies of the various trades and should be offered alternative educational and training programmes. Mutual recognition to facilitate the transition from the abandoned course to training for a career would be desirable.

In order to minimise the actual number of students failing to complete their courses, the HRK recommends that support and advice services be developed during the course and that the students receive more help with this issue. Obviously, the reason for not continuing can be a failure to fulfil the requirements. To counter this and to compensate for functional deficiencies, the Universities should offer support up to a certain point.

*Each case in which a student has failed to complete a course must be viewed individually. The Universities should make it clear to the public, to policymakers and to business that student drop-out is a very complex phenomenon which does not necessarily mean that students or the university has failed.*

*When students have genuinely failed to complete their course, alternative educational and training programmes should be considered. At the same time, the Universities should adjust course organisation (advice, supervision, recognition of credits on moving from one subject or university to another, the feasibility of completing a study programme, etc.) to the reality of the students.*

### **III. "Bologna Culture". Differences between types of Universities and department culture**

The HRK emphasises that there are Universities which have taken advantage of the opportunities that the reform offers; the recommendations in this document do not apply to them, or only partly. Furthermore, every university has its own framework conditions



and objectives. This individuality makes it necessary for each university to undertake its own analysis.

According to a study<sup>25</sup> commissioned by the HRK, teachers at German Universities identify with the objectives of the Bologna reform, but think that there is room for improvement in the actual implementation.

However, opinions vary greatly depending on the type of university, the subject and the staff. Professors at universities of applied sciences are significantly happier with the study reforms than their colleagues at the universities. In the view of the teachers, the most urgent requirement at the Universities is more staff to manage the increasing numbers of students.

However, teachers in higher education are themselves responsible for delivering some of the other measures that they are demanding, such as improvements to courses so that it is feasible for students to complete them within the given time or the establishment of mandatory work experience.

Students also welcome the objectives of the Bologna Process in principle.<sup>26</sup> According to the 11th survey of students<sup>27</sup>, however, students complain that the implementation of the reform has led to a compaction of the study programmes due to their excessively rigid structure, too little choice and too few options for mandatory courses and too frequent assessments, particularly at bachelor's degree level. The HRK agrees with the students that, in some places, strong compaction of the material and shorter periods in which to study have

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<sup>25</sup> Harald Schomburg, Choni Flöther und Vera Wolf: Wandel von Lehre und Studium an deutschen Hochschulen – Erfahrungen und Sichtweisen der Lehrenden“ (Changes to teaching and study at German Higher Education Institutions – experience and views of teachers), Kassel: Internationales Zentrum für Hochschulforschung der Universität Kassel im Auftrag von Nexus/HRK 2013 (International Centre for Research into Higher Education at the University of Kassel, commissioned by Nexus/HRK 2013).

<sup>26</sup> fzs (free coalition of student unions - freie zusammenschluss von studentInnenenschaften) press release: Bologna nach 2010 – Schwerpunkte aus studentischer Sicht vom 28.10.2008 (Bologna after 2010 – priorities from the students' point of view, 28.08.2008)

[http://www2.fzs.de/uploads/bologna2010\\_fzs.pdf](http://www2.fzs.de/uploads/bologna2010_fzs.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Ramm, M./ F. Multrus/ T. Bargel: Studiensituation und studentische Orientierungen. 11th Studierendensurvey an Universitäten und Fachhochschulen (Study situations and student directions. 11th student survey at universities and universities of applied sciences)

had the results that the students describe. However, it also emphasises that continuous assessment of learning progress, which should be distinguished from the system of giving marks to be included in the final grades, is not a bad development but a fundamental requirement of the European Higher Education Reforms, which primarily allows students to plan their studies better and continuously build on their skills.

To reduce the pressure on students on bachelor's degree courses, particularly first-years, HRK proposes that the Universities use their freedom to design the examination structure responsibly. Particularly the current practice of assigning grades should be reviewed from two points of view. Firstly, there is the question of the point in time at which the grades are assigned. It would make sense not to give marks on examination results until the end of the 4th semester or at least not include any marks from examinations taken before the 4th semester in the final grade. Up to that point, certificates should be issued and guidance and advice offered. For more transparency and to justify the assessments, the introduction of coursework portfolios should be aimed at, in which students are given feedback about their progress. It is clear that this requires more individual supervision. Secondly, the "system of relative grades" as a feature of admission should be tested. These instruments could foster a positive culture of teaching and learning, for students and for teachers.

The "Bologna culture" also includes increased flexibility, that is, options, skills training designed for personal development and trust in the students and their willingness to learn.

*Universities must review their courses in terms of the feasibility of their successful completion within a certain period and of the unwelcome effects of compaction (lack of options), and where necessary modify them. The options of more flexibly designed study pathways offered by a tiered structure should be better utilised. Graded examinations in the first semesters of a bachelor's programme should be avoided, or the results should at least not be included in the final grade. It would be desirable not to award grades until after the 4th semester and to include relative grades in the admission procedure.*

*The federal government and the federal states should support the Universities in creating more options for choice that are not limited by restrictive specifications or insufficient financing.*

#### **IV. Summary**

*The Bologna ideas have reached the Universities and have largely been accepted. The HRK is convinced that the European Education Reform is the correct approach to meet the challenges with which the German Universities are confronted: rapidly rising numbers of students, new directions for teaching, learning and examining; students' increasingly varied expectations of the courses and the conditions etc. However it will be impossible to implement Bologna if it is seen as a model for saving on higher education learning and teaching.*

*Existing problems are not caused primarily by Bologna. It is the fundamental restructuring of learning and education that began over 10 years ago that will put the Universities in the position to deal with the challenges that have been described - provided they are given the necessary basic funding.*

*The HRK is convinced that the recommendations it has made can contribute to further improvement of teaching and learning if embraced by those to whom they are addressed, furnished with resources and implemented professionally.*