Reform or Re-labeling?

A Student's Perspective On The Introduction Of The Bachelor's And Master's Degree In German Higher Education

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The German higher education illness: a diagnosis

The German higher education system is suffering from a serious malaise. After years of inactivity and half-hearted reforms, the diagnosis is clear - we have to change our habits, or the patient will die a silent death. The findings reoccurring in the public debate on German higher education can be summarized as follows:

When they finish their first degree, German students are much older than their European peers. The average age of a German graduate in the year 2000 is twenty-eight years, the average freshmen having entered into university at the age of twenty-two (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2002). Apart from extended costs for the state in the form of child benefit, tax exemption and losses to the pension funds, an average 6 years of study also prolongs the payments of parents during the period of their children's education and deprives the students themselves of possible income.

In Germany we find dropout rates of about 30 % at university level (Hochschul-Informations-System, 2002: p7). Dropout rates are especially high in the social sciences, where 42% of the students leave without a degree, and the humanities, where we find dropout rates of 41% (Hochschul-Informations-System, 2002: p28).

Furthermore, the degree of internationalisation of the German higher education system is too low. The German degree system is not compatible with the Anglo-American one, and Germany has always been very reluctant to accept foreign degrees, both in the academic sphere and in the labour market. Likewise, German universities are very inflexible when it comes to recognizing individual courses attended at foreign or even other German institutions. It is also argued that German degrees are not easily transferable on the international level. It is thus concluded that studying in Germany is an unattractive prospect for foreign students.

Finally, employers and graduates alike complain that German degree programmes are too impractical. Applied coursework is rare and many programmes do not include internships or other career-oriented elements.

The common lament is that the prestige of German graduates and German Higher Education on the international scene is seriously in decline. The phenomenon of the mass university combined with long-term shortages in funding has lead to a deterioration of the student-teacher ratio and ever-growing deficits concerning equipment and infrastructure of the German university. Obviously, the quality of German Higher Education is completely

overturned in a society where more than 30% of a generation attend a university based on the values of an 19th century elitist system designed to prepare a selected minority for a career in academia. At the same time, the need for qualified graduates is growing, so it is not an option to blindly restrict the access to higher education. Thus, the public debate stresses the need to reorganise the degree structure in a more efficient way, enabling students to complete their first degree earlier.

European medication

In this context, the introduction of the Bachelor's and Master's degree in the German Higher Education system comes as the ultimate cure. The German policy is a result of the 'Bologna-Sorbonne-Prague Process' that recognizes the need for student transfer in European higher education and on the European labour market, but also increases the competition between the national higher education systems. Following these international developments, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Laender in Germany (KMK[1]), the federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF[2]), as well as the Association of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany (HRK[3]) have set the framework for the introduction of 'modularisation' and 'credit point systems' leading up to a Bachelor's Degree after three or four years and a Master's Degree after one or two more years. The stipulations of the amendment of the German Higher Education Framework Act of 20 August 1998, which allows the introduction of a new two-cycles system, has by now been incorporated in all state higher education

acts (HRK, 2000). The old and the new degrees will exist in parallel in the near future (KMK 1999).

New Degrees: Dealing with basic structural deficits

The introduction of a two-cycle degree system is supposed to respond to the challenges the higher education system has to face after the basic social changes of the last decades. Not only has the university system turned into a mass system, but also the process of individualisation as described by Ulrich Beck (Beck, 1986), has led to the dissolution of traditional biographical patterns and to a diversification of lifestyles and renders the student population in modern societies more heterogeneous than ever. Their expectations concerning a degree programme may vary enormously, as may the weekly time they can invest in their studies and the competences they already possess in their field of choice.

The tradition of German higher education, which is deeply rooted in the early 19th century neo-humanistic educational ideal, is very badly prepared for the increase in student numbers and the heterogeneity of the student population. It is based on a) the concept of *Bildung* (education), which is strongly connected to *Lernfreiheit* (freedom of learning), b) the concept of *Lehrfreiheit*, i.e. academic freedom of the professor and c) the concept of unity of research and teaching (Humboldt, reprinted in 1968).

Thus, it presupposes an ideal student who is fully dedicated to his studies and can invest all his time in them. He is supposed to be striving for *Bildung*, a

notion that stresses the emancipation and affirmation of the individual, and is realised through a process of self-conducted enlightenment. To give this ideal student room for personal development, he is given considerable freedom in the design of his educational career, i.e. the possibility to learn as and when he or she wishes.

Furthermore, the German tradition presupposes an ideal professor who is equally dedicated to his 'calling' of teaching and research, and who needs freedom from exterior control to develop scientific ideas in an atmosphere of *Einsamkeit und Freiheit* (seclusion and freedom). The latter are to guarantee his independence from any instrumentalisation, be it political or other. The ideas of seclusion and freedom, which are seen as respectively dependant prerequisites of pure science and knowledge, were originally formulated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the context of a theory of knowledge (see Humboldt, reprinted 1968) but have been translated in an institutional structure pertinent throughout Germany.

Finally, it presupposes an ideal exchange process between the two of them, embodied in the concept of unity of research and teaching. Research is to be not only a function of science, i.e. the seeking of true principles for the universe as a whole, but is also to direct the process of teaching. Thus, students will work directly under the research professor in the discovery of truth.

The first concept has resulted in barely structured curricula, the absence of restrictions concerning the length of study periods and the students' freedom of choice concerning courses. This is the case above all in those programmes leading to a

Magister Artium degree (generally in the humanities and social sciences) whereas the *Diplom* is a degree with restricted choices and a stricter organisation. In the following, my analysis is thus referring mainly to the problems we find in the degree programmes leading to a *Magister*, where the influence of the concept of freedom of learning is still very strong. Still, it is noteworthy that the independence of tenured staff from any control, be it from the state, the students or their colleagues, is an everyday reality we could find in any German higher education context. It is neither linked to specific degree structures, nor to departments or university organisation types, and therefore the difficulties resulting from it are to be observed in any discipline. To sum up, the introduction of the Bachelor's and Master's degree is designed to do away with the outgrowth that has resulted from the abovementioned principles over the last decades, such as:

Overlong Study Periods: With the introduction of the Bachelor's degree, the time that leads up to the first degree qualifying for the labour market is reduced from five to three years. As over 90% of the graduates do not enter into the academic profession today, it seems adequate to abolish a degree system forcing all students to qualify for an academic career. Equally, the reform finally does away with a system in which the student's graduation marks exclusively depend on his final exam(s). The psychological effects of this traditional regulation are frustration on the student's part (considering that the relevance of all the marks he has received throughout his studies is reduced to zero) and an understandable reluctance to face up to the final exam, which is simply postponed, if possible. Study periods should also become shorter through the

introduction of credit point systems facilitating student mobility on the national and international level, so that students no longer lose precious time making up for the incompatibility between university systems. The attempt to shorten the study periods is enforced by their official standardisation, which is valuable for the old and the new degrees.

Dropout rates: The new degree programmes are supposed to limit dropout phenomena through tightly organised schedules and instant feedback processes. The latter are at least to reduce the dropout rates at an advanced level of study, which pose a problem in the *Magister* degree programmes. Here, the student seldom receives any feedback concerning his ability to actually achieve his graduation in his subject of choice. As long as he 'passes' the necessary minimum requirements, which he may be capable of fulfilling, bad marks will do him no harm. Still, he may be presented with the cruel reality that in the end he is not capable of earning his degree. The absence of intermediary exams, freedom from restrictions concerning the choice of courses and a lack of feedback have resulted in a system, which leaves the student in considerable doubt about which skills he might actually need for his final exam. A well-structured curriculum with exams after each semester guarantees close linkage between courses and exams, gives the student instant feedback as to his performance, valorises continuous work and reduces the symbolic load of the final exam.

Internationalisation and increased mobility: The introduction of credit point systems is seen as a means to facilitate student mobility on the national and international level. Equally, the two-cycle degree

system is supposed to render the German higher education system more attractive for foreign students, who can now come to Germany for a Master's degree. Before, foreign students with a Bachelor's degree often had to redo two or three years of study before being admitted to final exams in Germany. Equally, German students can finish their postgraduate studies abroad without having to fear that their qualifications will not be recognized in Germany.

Enforcing career orientation: With the introduction of the Bachelor's degree the German higher education system acknowledges that for the present student generations a university degree is no longer a guarantee for lifetime employment and certainly not for one in the academic sphere. The BA is supposed to be a more general and career oriented degree, a preparation for a first employment, while at the same time serving as a basis for further qualification. Obligatory internships and applied coursework are often part of the new Bachelor programmes.

New Degrees: A strategy that allows avoiding in depth reform

The recent debate concerning the BA and MA expects a lot of the new degree structure. It is presented as a reform, that is supposed to improve the quality of German higher education with the aim of restoring its competitiveness in a European Higher Education Area and beyond. If we summarize the abovementioned results of the introduction of the new degrees we may come to certain observations:

The focus of the BA/MA issue lies with structural changes to the higher education system. As international competition and notably competition for national and international investment have reached the neglected field of education, the political aim is a quick and above all low-budget reform, that somehow updates the German University and its graduates to international standards by adjustment of structural frameworks.

The structural changes basically aim at a reduction of the deficits resulting from the translation of the concept of freedom of learning into 'absence of structured curricula and feedback processes'. In other words, they concentrate on a change of behavioural habits among the students, while at the same time completely neglecting the role of the tenured staff in the urgently needed reform process.

Consequently, the whole debate systematically excludes those problems, which cannot be mended by a sheer restructuring of exams or the introduction of credit points, however ingeniously calculated they may be. These problems can be grouped into two categories:

Problems resulting from funding deficits: As we take the example of overlong study periods, we can see that they are not solely a problem of postponement of final exams or disorientation of students in barely structured degree programmes. The number of students receiving public funding had almost been reduced by half from an average 442 000 in 1991 to 227 000 in 1998. After an innovation of the conditions for public loans in 1999 and 2000 this trend has been reversed. Still, as only 24% of the student population

received public funding in the year 2000, the percentage of students working to finance their studies has increased from 51 % in 1991 to 67 % in 2000 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2001). That the BA/MA debate includes the institutionalisation of part-time studies, which officially has not existed in Germany up until now, will help to acknowledge this fact - it will not reduce the prolonged time of study. Equally, the shortages concerning equipment, teaching staff and general infrastructure contribute significantly to overlong study periods. Especially in the Sciences, were coursework is based on the availability of laboratories and technical equipment, students sometimes lose a semester or two waiting for a place in a course they have to attend. It is at least doubtful if these problems will be solved by the Bachelor's degree without additional funding, when there is a need for more qualified graduates rather than less in the long run.

These factors necessitate political decisions other than a new degree system. Unfortunately they are often considered a legitimate excuse for low performance and resistance to change from inside the university, where staff and students alike affirm that quality improvements 'under these circumstances' are just impossible. Certainly, the universities cannot solve these problems, but a comprehensive reform could help to render studies more effective and accessible. To realise this aim, it is necessary to take into account the greatest potential for qualitative improvement of the German higher education system, i.e. the teaching and learning processes inside the university. This complex forms the second, and by far the most important category of problems, basically left untouched by the debate circling around a reform by new degrees.

Problems resulting from deficits in the teaching and learning processes: The basic problem of the German higher education system today is its complete lack of an extensive and integrative perspective of the teaching and learning processes that form its own basis. The German model, drawing on the concepts of seclusion and freedom as prerequisites of science, has produced a culture of anonymity and withdrawal in which fruitful communication for the sake of a common cause – i.e. knowledge – is the exception rather than the rule. This can be said for the communication processes between students and academic staff as well as for the relationships among academic staff. Not only does the German University generally have no concept of what it is that it wants to transmit to its students, but also there is basically no effort made to find out how this transmission is best realised. In short, the discussion on deficits and the reform of degrees omits the basic question of what makes the qualification processes, which are at the core of higher education, a success or a failure.

A question of qualifications

Qualifying the academic staff

Academic qualification processes in Germany bear a strong reference to the "*Genieästhetik*" (aesthetics of the genius) of the 18th century (Peters, 1982). The academic career is basically a matter of chance and barely institutionalised. As the concept of academic freedom in learning suggests, the ideal underlying the German academic recruitment processes is the image of the lonely genius, which by its struggle for scholarship introduces himself autonomously to the wondrous world of science. What

this vision stresses rather ironically is a sad truth in the German higher education day-to-day business. Allowing for differences between the disciplines, we can observe that the degree of systematic introduction of the German student and junior staff to research is very low. Training in management techniques is missing and – what is most deplorable - an introduction to teaching methods is completely nonexistent. As the German academic career is based on the concept of the genius, which is simply gifted with certain competences, the underlying presumption is that teaching skills are learned 'on the way'. It is generally assumed that a gifted researcher must be a gifted teacher anyway, following the principle of unity of research and teaching. The possibility that this may not be the case is simply not acknowledged and accordingly, the necessary professionalisation of teaching activities is ignored. The informal training processes of German academics results in a system, where the teaching qualifications of each academic vary strongly according to his personal interests, preferences and gifts. Furthermore, the academic recruitment processes strongly emphasize research activity over teaching qualifications, so that an investment in the teaching section is often punished by the higher education system.

It may be surprising that, according to a survey performed in 1995 "83 percent of the German University professors consider themselves well trained or qualified as teachers and thus think themselves more often well qualified for teaching than for research" (Enders/Teichler 1995:19). In contrast, German students from all disciplines complain about low didactic competences, missing commitment and absence of presentation skills among German

professors, as well as severe deficits concerning general course design. This gap between the self-perception of German academic staff and the perception of their main audience, the students, indicates a serious dilemma: the absence of a common perspective that links teachers and students in the learning process. The call for professional guidance, which can coordinate the preparation of academic staff for teaching activities in the form of didactics of higher education, is as such well founded. However, the aim is not to abolish all learning by doing processes, but to use the findings of higher education didactics research to institutionalise problem-oriented training in teaching methods as part of the academic career path. Equally, systematic training of young academics for research will have to be introduced in Germany. This professionalisation of the higher education teacher's role is indispensable, as the current culture of educational "amateurism" undermines any attempt to develop a holistic and transparent vision of which competences a department wants to give to its graduates. Consequently, a debate on the question which course designs, work assignments or presentation methods would be most suitable to transmit these competences is missing, too.

The underlying ideologies of academic freedom and the *lonely genius* have lead to a system in which higher education teachers are often incapable, and sometimes unwilling, to assume their responsibilities as teachers and designers of comprehensive degree programmes. At the same time, teaching processes and methods are a quasi-secretive issue, closed to any public scrutiny – and thus to all possible criticism and praise from colleagues or a joint conceptualisation.

In this system, the student is left alone with the task of selection and reduction of contents and therefore will always experience himself and his progress in deficit. This is above all the case as he faces academic staff, which is highly specialised and organisationally isolated and thus barely informed about what has been going on "elsewhere", i.e. in those courses taught by someone else.

Often, academic staff complain that students lack basic knowledge and competences but at the same time, higher education teachers are unable to agree on the content of basic courses and to design a comprehensive introduction to the topography of their discipline. The German model that is presented as liberal and enforcing the student's intellectual maturity, is in fact eluding its responsibility for the qualifications of its students, "passing the buck" to teachers in grammar school, the students themselves and education politics.

Consequently, in this system the unity of teaching and research has become an illusion. Students lack basic competences and are not systematically introduced to the process of research in a way that would allow for advanced courses to become a place where students and professors cooperate to solve a scientific problem.

The deficiencies of this system are deeply rooted in the institutional structures, career patterns and last but not least, in the habits of the members of academia. They will neither be abolished by shortening the study time leading to the first degree, nor by modularisation or credit points. The pressure exerted by internationalisation processes, such as growing competitiveness and the need for student and graduate

transfer, may certainly contribute to wake the German sleeping beauty from its neo-humanistic dreams and give new impulses to the deeply muddled reform debate. Still, it seems as if the BA/MA initiative will once more allow avoiding a comprehensive reform of the German higher education system, as it concentrates on administrative and structural questions instead of a change of behaviour and contents. This tendency is emphasized, as all those who profit from the current system show a great inertia and unwillingness to contribute to reforms that might do away with their privileges. Perhaps this is the reason why, in the case of the BA/MA debate, protest comes mainly from the students' representatives and not from university teachers - because its blind spot is their role in the qualification process of German graduates.

Qualifying the student

The problems that hinder an educational process of high quality in German universities are the same before and after the introduction of the BA/MA degree. The innovation, which will – perhaps – make students study more quickly, will not suffice to change the causes of low quality in German higher education. The phenomena of anonymity, seclusion and irresponsibility for academic qualification processes, which rule German higher education organisations today, can only be broken up by bottom-up reforms. These have to be initialised on the department level, as they have to comprehend local decision-making, implementation and control mechanisms, including as many members of the department as possible in the process. The introduction of a BA/MA programme can certainly be an impulse to rethink the premises that

underlie the traditional degree programmes and to develop a new approach and a new culture of cooperation inside a department. But this process has to go a lot further than shortening the degree programme to three years, adding some language or IT courses and an obligatory internship. It is necessary to develop a culture of responsibility for the qualification processes of students and teachers inside the educational organisation. There will have to be a joint effort to overcome the barriers in certain fields, which undermine quality in German higher education today. In the following, I will describe these fields and cite some examples of German universities that have introduced innovative concepts, which show that in-depth qualitative reforms are possible.

1) Organisational development: In German university departments, we find a very weak managerial level and a very strong professorial level. A comprehensive reform process can thus not rely on a strong head of department to make major decisions and control their implementation alone. An alternative avenue is the installation of a reform committee, in which those who want to change something are brought together in a dialogue over education. The reform committee has to be recognized by the respective committees of higher education self-administration and make its results act on them. It has to develop propositions for intervention and carry them through. In such a committee, the equal participation of students must be assured. This requires a perspective in which students are respected as serious partners for innovation and believes in their ability to judge and perceive the problems of their own qualification process. Unfortunately, the German higher education system, although theoretically

stressing the personal development and independence of the students, until today practically distrusts their competence to judge the quality of their own education, their teachers and their university.

2) Getting to know the student: In general, German faculties do not know their students. Unprepared for the enormous increase in student numbers, which considerably reduced the personal contact with students, departments have switched from looking after their students to simply administrating them. The lack of insight into the students' personal and educational background, leads to a situation in which departments do not know those for whom they are designing an educational programme (Welbers 1997: 58 ff). The aim is thus to get to know the student's living and study situation, their competences as well as their expectations and judgements concerning the degree programme to consider them in the reform process.

3) Getting to know the resources and possibilities of a department: Degree programmes today have become highly complex systems, integrating educational, scientific and economic aspects. To design a degree programme that optimally uses the resources a department has to offer and to continually develop these, the reformers have to win back the competence of joint planning by making their own inventory. The aim is to develop a transparent and action oriented set of data on a) the quantitative dimension of the degree programmes and exams, b) the basic teaching resources c) the courses on offer and their funding structure and d) the degree to which the capacity of the courses in each department has been made use of in the past. The department should have a

look at these figures covering at least the passed 8 semesters to be able to concentrate its resources where they are most needed and in accordance with its own qualification model as described below.

4) Developing a qualification model: to improve the quality of higher education in Germany, faculties will have to ask themselves which competences they want their graduates to earn throughout their studies. These competences can be differentiated into a) subject-oriented qualifications (like mastering the most important theories, methodological skills, critical treatment of scientific literature on the subject), b) general skills (retrieving and analysing complex information, moderation and presentation skills, team and project oriented work-styles etc.) and c) additional skills (foreign languages, IT skills, practical experience, international experience and so forth). Higher education, especially in those subjects, which do not aim at a specific profession, will decreasingly be able to prepare students for the exact challenges of their future work places. Thus, the aim must be to transmit those skills beside the subject-oriented qualifications, which will enable the student best to meet his future challenges – no matter which field of employment he may eventually choose. Faculties will have to develop their specific model of competences and fix it in a way that makes it transparent and binding for each participant in the qualification process. Next, they will have to define exactly which courses will serve to transmit which skills. This means introducing transparency at each level of the qualification process by

making academic staff cooperate in developing a comprehensive curriculum that openly

acknowledges the teachers' joint responsibility for the students' qualification process,

not only making the content and methods of all courses visible but also by defining beforehand the exact aims of each course held in the department and fixing them in a written document,

disclosing the necessary qualifications and commitments on the teachers' part which will permit an optimal qualification of the student through different forms of learning.

5) Offering orientation, preparation and pedagogical support: The lack of orientation and pedagogical guidance most students suffer from in the German higher education system, is a persistent cause of frustration, long study periods and high dropout rates. The introduction of the BA/MA can be a first step towards giving the student a more solid framework for his learning processes. Still, a transparent qualification model can only function in a mass university system if students are offered constant orientation and information as to their own progress and their further possibilities. That means, if faculties want to treat the causes of long study periods and drop-out phenomena, they will have to start building up a network of intertwining feedback and information mechanisms. These mechanisms will have to include two aspects that are basically non-existent in the German higher education system:

a) Mentoring processes: Higher Education teachers have to become qualification counsellors, who, knowing about the educational profile of the student support him in his development and his choices. The

University of Erfurt has chosen a model which makes pedagogical guidance obligatory for students and academic staff throughout each semester - and not only once or twice during the studies, as it is the case in most German universities. At the University of Erfurt, each student chooses a mentor from his major subject, who is responsible for the individual course guidance and who is the first contact person for planning in any domain, from schedules to internships and international mobility. This requires a high degree of commitment among academic staff and students. The latter have to hand in a question-guided but freely formulated study report every semester, which serves as a self-reflection and an evaluation process at the same time (Lehmkuhl 2002:324).

b) Institutionalised preparation for final exams: In Germany, the element of uncertainty concerning the final exam is very high for the student, as he is mainly left with the task of reduction of contents and contact between students and teachers throughout the degree programme is limited. This tendency is emphasized, if the final exams are held orally and almost wholly depend on the judgement of one or two professors, as in most *Magister* degree programmes. Not only is the student left in doubt about the concrete demands of a respective professor in the final exam, but also there is a lack of standardized information about exam procedures in general. At the Ruhr-University of Bochum, the introduction of an exam preparation programme can be taken as an example which, starting from the students' problems, aims at an institutional change. At the Ruhr-University faculties offer general information on the exam procedure and the range of relevant topics, but also help in the choice of examiners and offer exam simulation procedures for

interested students. In the context of isolation and anonymity the importance of group counselling on the topic of exams is fundamental, as students often misinterpret their difficulties as an individual phenomenon, not noticing its institutional character (Meer 1997).

6) Assuring quality: Bottom-up reforms that aim at a qualitative change in teaching and learning processes need internal evaluation. As we can imagine, in a teaching system that is founded on the idea of freedom from control, the idea of course evaluation is often badly received by academic staff. Furthermore, much has been said for and against the validity of students' evaluations of teacher's performance. In general, the aim of evaluation in a qualitative reform process is not accreditation, but a continuous mechanism of self-reflection and optimisation. Two aspects are important here: First, the content and findings of this evaluation process are designed for internal use, measuring the effects and shortcomings of the reform process on the department level. As such, quality assurance through evaluation goes further than an evaluation of individual teaching performance. Second, scepticism and rejection concerning evaluation on the part of teaching staff are a problem that could be faced by public pressure, i.e. by forced evaluation, ranking of courses and negative sanctions through stigmatisation. However, if evaluation is used as an instrument to improve qualifications, mere compliance to external pressure will have no in-depth consequences for the quality of teaching and learning processes. As a consequence, the Faculty of German Philology at the University of Düsseldorf has chosen an integrative evaluation strategy, which measures the degree to which students and teachers are content with

reformed courses and which deficits they still see. Academic staff have the possibility to state anonymously if and why they see their course as successful or unsuccessful. This strategy, which stresses a consensus perspective rather than a competitive one is designed to integrate sceptics and critics into the reform process.

Conclusion

What the German university system needs most is not a new label for its degrees, but a reform that centres on the causes of low quality in higher education. The BA/MA reform can serve as the necessary spark for an innovation process because it gives an external impulse that reformers can use to build internal changes on. Unfortunately, the policy once more allows the German university to take the easy way out. It is possible to adjust the structural framework of an educational programme and then sit back refraining from in-depth qualitative reform, while using the introduction of the new degree as a legitimate proof of innovation. As long as the focus of the BA/MA initiative lies with changing the labels instead of changing the habits, it is hard to see how the quality of the training a student will receive in Germany in the future should be improved by it.

The degree that is in urgent need of a structural reform today, seems to be the degree qualifying for professorship. With the introduction of the junior professorship first steps have been taken in this direction, but the most important deficits – the lack of formalisation concerning training in research, management and teaching competences of German academic staff – are far from being sufficiently treated.

However, the defenders of the two cycle system seem to think those members of the academic staff, who were incapable of assuming their pedagogical responsibilities before, will suddenly be able to do so after the introduction of the two cycle-system – without further qualification or the least organisational change.

Finally, what decides the quality of higher education, as of any educational design, are the everyday communication processes between those who teach and those who learn. To improve these, we will need more than credit points and shortened degree programmes. All German academics will have to accept that transmitting skills and building up qualifications is at the core of their profession, and not a favour to give or to withhold according to personal preferences.

Notes

[1] KMK : Kultusministerkonferenz
[2] BMBF : Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung
[3] HRK : Hochschulrektorenkonferenz

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