

Chapter 5

Quality Management Practices in Lifelong Learning Programs at German Higher Education Institutions: Answers from the Fringe to Emerging Challenges for All

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ABSTRACT

This chapter gives an overview of quality management activities in German universities engaging in lifelong learning. Projects funded within the German-wide funding competition “Advancement through Education: Open Universities” aim to open universities to lifelong learning and to increase permeability between vocational and academic pathways. They range from development of concepts for part-time courses, further education and blended learning study formats to new kinds of cooperation with institutions outside university. Quality management activities have to be developed and implemented in all projects. The chapter presents the findings of an action research process including a quality management workshop with different universities involved in the funding competition and the resulting recommendation paper, complemented by a document analysis, which show the variety of quality assurance and quality management activities within academic continuing education in German higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic and societal changes towards an information and knowledge society make the necessity of lifelong learning (LLL) increasingly obvious. So far, mainly non-university institutions

have answered to these needs. However, higher education institutions are increasingly tasked with meeting the needs of LLL provision. Still, lifelong learning has far to go before it becomes a central task of higher education institutions in Germany (Hanft & Knust, 2009). When lifelong learning

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in Higher Education (HE) is addressed, the focus is on new target groups (students coming back to university after some years of work experience as well as persons with work experience but without a first university degree), and competence orientation and student orientation (regarding teaching, program structure and content) are at the center of the efforts. In the European higher education areas, various stakeholders, initiatives (such as the European Association for Quality in HE, ENQA) and higher education institutions (for example Open University UK) have been addressing the topics of lifelong learning and quality management of LLL in higher education – this chapter will focus on the German context and the links that are made to European initiatives.

First, the chapter *investigates lifelong learning and quality management policies and framework conditions specifically regarding LLL within the German higher education area* and its links to the European level. Initiatives and funding competitions have been set up in Germany to support universities, urging solutions for lifelong learning. In addition to these frameworks, the chapter *presents various approaches to and models for quality assurance and management* in this sector.

Then, the author *maps the quality measures of selected universities along with a process model of program development and screens whether – and how – quality measures play a role in the various phases of this model*. These selected universities have been funded by a key initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany, the funding call “Advancement through Education – Open Universities” with a total grant of EUR 250 million for the years 2011 to 2020. In the first phase, 55 universities engaged in 26 projects received a grant to develop strategies for implementing lifelong learning by offering programs and facilitating access for different types of lifelong learners. The initiative aims at providing access to higher education for new target groups, designing programs for them and increasing the permeability between vocational and academic

pathways. Together with *Carl-von-Ossietzky University Oldenburg* and *Humboldt University Berlin*, the *Berlin University for Professional Studies* is in charge of the academic facilitation of these projects (“Wissenschaftliche Begleitung”). Based on an action research approach, all 26 projects were supervised during the first years of the program. The analysis of the funded projects and their quality assurance and management approaches and plans is the basis for this part of the chapter.

Before outlining possible *future research directions* and drawing a *conclusion*, the author shows possible *solutions and recommendations*.

BACKGROUND

Lifelong Learning in Germany

LLL was identified as a central element of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Prague Communiqué of 2001; at the subsequent conference in Berlin in 2003, it was stated that universities play a central role in the realization of LLL (European Higher Education Area, 2001, 2003). The German Rectors’ Conference affirmed the importance of LLL in 2001 and stated that higher education must play a central role in developing a LLL strategy (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz [HRK], 2001). The German Council of Science and Humanities recommends the integration of continuing education into the core tasks of universities and demands that LLL should become the leading principle for the organization of programs within universities (Hanft & Zilling, 2011, p. 128).

In Germany, LLL in higher education is usually framed as academic continuing education: programs for professionals, taking into consideration market demands and the needs of this target group. As continuing education, it is set as one of the central tasks of higher education institutions, according to the higher education framework law – and not as LLL which goes beyond continuing

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