

Recommendation by the
HRK Universities Member Group
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Ensuring the quality of teacher education

HRK German Rectors' Conference

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The social significance of academically well-trained teachers for the next generation of a country is extraordinary. Teachers are responsible for passing on social, technical and vocational interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as for the development of competences and decisions about individual educational opportunities. In addition, they take on important tasks in the context of socialisation and integration into social life. Especially in a knowledge society such as ours, competent and sufficient numbers of teachers are essential for social justice, the support of successful educational biographies and social prosperity.

The current forecasts for the actual demand for teachers in Germany are correspondingly critical. At the beginning of 2023, The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (SWK) pointed to a worrying shortage of teachers in certain federal states, school levels and subjects. Teacher education is under great pressure to innovate. Science and education administration must therefore cooperate closely.

Numerous associations, institutions and state governments are currently developing proposals and models in response to this emergency situation. The common goal of these models is to provide a broader basis for access to the teaching profession and at the same time to ensure the high quality of teacher education in Germany. On the one hand, the large number of models – some of which are highly controversial – offers great potential for innovation. On the other hand, however, there is also the danger that the variety of models will hinder mobility between school levels, federal states or countries and thus further exacerbate the emergency situation.

For this reason, the HRK Universities Member Group does not wish to add any further proposal or model with this position paper. Instead, the primary intention is to specify requirements for general education and vocational teacher education, along which decentralised models should be oriented.

We agree on the following requirements:

1. Teacher education must take place at a university and requires 300 credit points.

Teachers have a special role to play in the education of responsible and critically reflective citizens. To this end, students and those working in the teaching profession must not only complete a subject-specific, didactic and educational science degree programme, but also a sufficient number of reflectively supervised practical phases. In the academic disciplines in particular, a sound understanding of methods and limitations must be acquired and demonstrated in addition to knowledge. In times of fake news and rapid change in the sciences, this is more urgent than ever.

The quality-assured university degree programme for teachers is fundamental. It must be worth 300 credit points. The three pillars of educational science, academic discipline and didactics must be studied to a sufficient extent. This is the only way to meet the high demands of later professional life.

2. Educational sciences must be research-orientated and anchored at universities.

The study of educational science is a central, constitutive component of teacher education. This is because students not only acquire the necessary academic knowledge and skills to perceive, analyse and reflect on school and extracurricular practices based on criteria, but they are also enabled to develop scientifically sound and therefore well-founded alternative courses of action. This requires students to take an active and research-orientated approach to educational, school and teaching-related issues, guided by the requirement of a degree programme that is both academic and professionally oriented.

These scientific principles and skills are taught from an interdisciplinary perspective in cooperation with various university (sub-)disciplines, namely educational science, psychology, sociology, philosophy or educational economics. It is only by dealing with different disciplinary perspectives and research approaches that educational science standards for interdisciplinary teaching and learning can be realised and specific perspectives on school, teaching, society and the individual can be adopted. This specific form of disciplinary constitution at universities is therefore a necessary prerequisite for the study of educational science and the professionalisation of prospective teachers.

Recourse to disciplinary theories, discourses and research findings lays the foundations for teachers' professional behaviour, which – in contrast to practical behaviour – is always subject to an obligation to provide reasons and thus refers to scientific and research-based findings. Studies illustrate the need to lay the foundations for this knowledge and to instil in students a corresponding science-based reflective competence. This also applies to the educational science elements in the organisation of the practical phases. Universities in particular fulfil these requirements due to their high research commitment and orientation.

3. Specialised didactics is a core area of teacher education, which must be represented by professors.

Subject-specific teaching and learning is addressed by specialised didactics in a specific way. Specialised didactics is therefore of central importance for the professionalisation of future teachers.

Empirical studies show that the professionalisation of prospective teachers in subject-specific didactics requires both scientifically based knowledge and approaches and concepts that are geared towards this.

They also show what effect subject-specific didactic knowledge and skills have on the quality of subject-specific teaching and learning. The first phase of the professionalisation process lays the foundation for this. It includes the work placements integrated into the didactics degree programme, i.e. as practice-related study phases, these should support the development of a scientific-reflective basic attitude. The foundation of such an attitude as the basis for a lasting scientific and research-orientated approach must be the primary goal of subject-didactic studies. This applies analogously to educational science studies.

In order to do better justice to the importance of specialised didactics for schools and teaching, the research that has already been well established at universities over the last two decades must be further developed in a targeted manner. This requires professorships in subject didactics with the relevant expertise and the necessary space for research in order to meet the demand for securing and promoting young academics and to ensure the quality of subject-specific didactics studies. The latter also requires orientation towards scientifically set subject-specific and didactic standards.

4. Experiences in school practice are essential for the development of a successful teaching personality. In order for these experiences to provide space for the integration of knowledge and practice, they must be systematised and integrated into the degree programme.

Unlike in many other degree programmes, the future working environment in teacher education is already known during the course: the school. A modern teacher education programme should therefore establish direct links to schools and network the stakeholders in the various study phases. In both educational science and didactics, such practice-based study components should be used to develop academic reflection skills.

The models used by the federal states to establish the practical and vocational relevance are diverse – in scope and form. On the basis of previous discourse and findings, internships should not be seen in isolation from other elements of the programme. They require didactic embedding and support in order to be effective. In this respect, this being simply recognised as work as a substitute teacher does not fulfil this requirement.

5. Cooperation between the first and second phases of education must be successful.

Closer dovetailing of the two education phases is crucial for the successful professionalisation of teachers. Students often perceive the university and the host institution of the second phase as separate worlds. They manifest the worlds of "theory" and "practice" in their gaze. This hinders critical and science-led reflection on one's own actions in the school

context, especially as the third institution, the school, does not play an independent role in this division. However, this contradicts the experience of the education and its objectives.

Successful cooperation between the two phases of education on the one hand and the schools on the other supports the coherent development of the prospective teachers' skills and personalities. The practical phases must be recognised as a joint task in teaching and education by all three institutions. Joint courses involving action and reflection must be established. This enables students to grasp the complexity of their future work and systematically prepare them for their professional activities. This can only succeed if closer institutional and personal links are established. The common goal is to provide high-quality, scientifically sound and practice-oriented, reflective education while retaining the specific functions and strengths as well as contributions of the respective phases.

6. Access to the teaching profession should be made more flexible.

Teachers must have extensive subject and methodological knowledge, didactic competences as well as social skills and autonomy of action. This is achieved through academic study and corresponding school practice.

We are in favour of opening up different access routes to the teaching profession without devaluing the undergraduate teaching degree. To this end, the federal states should establish the permeability of subject-related polyvalent bachelor's degree programmes into teaching-related master's degree programmes as a regular entry route, at least in designated shortage subjects (e.g. in the STEM subjects), in order to also enable those people to work as qualified teachers who only develop their career aspirations during or after their studies.

Practical school phases also serve to review one's own choice of future profession and should therefore not take place too early so that prospective teachers are not overwhelmed by the complexity of school practice. Individual study counselling and support is essential in order to promote appropriate career choices.

7. Universities are responsible for the further education and education of teachers.

The networking of school practice and current educational science and didactic research must not end with the start of employment. All teachers should therefore regularly familiarise themselves with the latest scientific findings at universities as places of research and take these with them into everyday school life. Only updating the academic foundation ensures competent educational services in changing circumstances. Lifelong learning, especially for lifelong teachers.

Universities should be given the authority and resources to systematically combine the teaching degree programme, the post-qualification of cross-sector and lateral entrants, and the further and continuing education of teachers. This will make it possible to link the three phases of teacher education in a more targeted manner.

8. A region, school subject and country-specific teacher quota should be introduced for schools in disadvantaged areas.

The shortage of teachers is currently presenting the German education system with major challenges. "Schools in challenging situations" are particularly badly affected, which jeopardises both the quality of schools and teaching and increases inequalities in the education system.

With our demand for the introduction of a region, school-subject and state-specific teacher quota in analogy to the successfully practised rural doctor quota and further funding scholarships, we want to contribute to the recruitment and professionalisation of additional student teachers who want to qualify and commit themselves in particular as teachers for schools in so-called in disadvantaged areas.

In addition, these students should be prepared for their future challenging work with customised offers, especially during the practical phases of their teacher education programme. We consider this to be an important prerequisite for the effective education of sufficient university-qualified teachers to meet the needs of schools in disadvantaged areas.