



# **COUNTRY REPORT – GERMANY**

## **Intellectual Output 3**

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*“They say ‘social competence’,  
but they mean ‘behaviour’.*

*Christof Nägele at the Crossing Boundaries Conference,*

*Valencia 2019*

## **1. Preface**

Since Humboldt at the latest, universities in Germany have had the task of educating people in the sense of active and responsible participation in society. Baer describes the need of higher education to come back to the sense of Humboldt and understand higher education as a possibility to strengthen democratic values (Baer, 2019). In doing so, they fulfil a social mandate, alongside other educational and socialisation instances through which individuals pass. This also includes, at the latest since the Bologna Processes, the promotion of social competence within the framework of higher education. In the case of Germany with its federalist character, this means the non-binding orientation of the individual higher education institutions towards the German qualifications framework. According to Dehnbostel (2016), however, this is still not very present. Moreover, the design of higher education between scientific education and employability seems to be challenging (Wildt, 2012). However, there are developments that make it reasonable to take up this orientation framework again: firstly, the development of student numbers, which makes good teaching necessary even with large cohorts; secondly, a series of state funding projects that explicitly aim to increase the quality of higher education teaching; and thirdly, the steady increase in accreditation projects. This study deals with the question of the extent to which the promotion of social competence, as recommended by the German qualification framework (Deutscher Qualifizierungsrahmen, DQR), is pursued by higher education institutions. If the DQR is not the orientation point, it is in the interest of the study to highlight any other reference points. The aim of the research project “Development, assessment and validation of social competences in higher education” (DASCHE) is to obtain a Europe-wide approach to a common understanding of social competence and, at national level, to highlight examples of good practice in the field of the development and recording of social competence. First, the German higher education system and current developments in this context will be presented (chapter 4). Alongside, a short description of the state of the art about the social competence discourse in Germany is given (chapter 5). A look at the current situation of quality management and accreditation approaches in the national context follows (chapter 6). The study will then be developed (chapter 7) and evaluated in summary (chapter 8). Finally, recommendations for action at institutional, national and European level will be developed (chapter 9).



## 2. National abbreviations and acronyms

AC	Accreditation Council
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution(s)
DFG	German Research Community (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft)
TU	Technical university (Technische Universität)
FASPG	Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany
QPL	Quality pact for higher education teaching and learning (Qualitätspakt Lehre)
DQR	German qualification framework (Deutscher Qualifizierungsrahmen)
DASCHE	Development, assessment and validation of social competences in higher education, Erasmus+ project
QA	Quality assurance
BA	Bachelor's degree
MA	Master's degree
HQR	Qualification framework for higher education qualifications
KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz)
HSP	Higher education pact (Hochschulpakt)
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
IT	Information technology
DDR	German Democratic Republic
BMBF	German federal ministry for education and research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung)
EQR	European qualification framework
VET	Vocational education and training
HQR	German qualification framework for higher education
QM	Quality management
EQAR	Quality assurance register for higher education
ENQA	European association for quality assurance in higher education
HRK	Higher education rectors' conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz)
ACQUIN	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
AHPGS	Accreditation agency in health and social sciences
AQAS	Agency for quality assurance through accreditation of study programmes
ASIIN	Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics
FIBAA	Foundation for international business administration accreditation
ZEVA	Central evaluation and accreditation agency
DQR-HS	German qualification framework for lifelong learning
ECTS	European credit transfer system



### 3. Methods applied (2 Seiten)

The research questions for this report are therefore as follows:

- RQ1**      *Which role does social competence play on the organisational level of Higher Education institutions and for the related actors?*
  
- RQ2**      *What approaches do the institutions provide for the promotion of social competence?*
  
- RQ3**      *What is needed to enhance the development of social competence in Higher Education?*

The research design bases on document analysis (Higher education institutions' (HEI) mission statements, quality assurance (QA) documents, accreditation documents, module manuals) and qualitative, semi-structured interviews according to the research consensus of the research frame. In two cases, focus groups captured the perspective of students. The interviews were mainly carried out as telephone interviews, while the focus group took place in face-to-face-settings. For a better legibility, the cases are introduced at the beginning of chapter 7.2.

The interview guideline included the following questions (deepened or completed in relation to the conduction process of the study) is adapted in Annex I.

## 4. Higher Education Sector in Germany (5 Seiten)

### 4.1 Types of Higher Education Institutions and development of student numbers

In Germany, there actually exist six different types of higher education institutions (HEI), namely (1) *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences), (2) *Universitäten* (universities), (3) *Kunsthochschulen* (art colleges), (4) *Verwaltungsfachhochschulen* (Technical colleges for administration), (5) *theologische Hochschulen* (theological colleges) und *pädagogische Hochschulen* (university of education/teacher training college).

The number of HEIs is relatively stable during the last eight years, whereby a little increase of the number of universities of applied sciences occurred. As Tab.1 shows, most of the HEIs focus on applied sciences, while universities are the second remarkable group. Higher education institutions in Germany are public, state-approved or private. The biggest part of the German HEIs are in governmental responsibility<sup>1</sup>. Due to the focus of the project DASCHE, this chapter will refer to the public HEIs.

While arts and music colleges have a very specific profile, universities of applied sciences often focus on application and practice orientation. The range of subjects is generally not as extensive as at universities and usually focuses on technical-engineering, economics and social science areas. State-approved universities and public universities are the only universities in Germany with the right to award doctorates. Universities are usually strongly research-oriented and characterized by a wide range of subjects, unless there are specialized (i.e. on teacher education or theology; *ibid.*). There is an overview of the type and number of HEIs in Germany provided in Annex III.

The number of qualifying exams (Bachelor (BA), Master (MA)) and doctorates shows the efficiency of the actual higher education. Due to the implementation of the Bachelor degree, the rates of graduates were doubled between 2002 and 2012, without any significant increase of participation in education (bpb, 2016). Compared to the total number of graduates, the number of students, which contribute to scientific work and research, has been halved. Actually, higher education seems to mainly serve vocational preparation (*ibid.*).

### 4.2 Consequences of the Bologna process for the German Higher Education Sector

The German Rectors' Conference summarizes, that, since the Bologna agreement in 1999, the higher education system in Germany changed from a one- to a two-stage model, which should provide students a high flexibility related to the planning and following of individual learning goals. Additionally, studying itself should become more compatible on an international level. The exams, including their allocation within the qualification levels, as well as related goals regarding qualifications and competences of graduates are fixed in the German Qualification Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (HQR). To ensure the comparability of qualifications, organisations, as well as the structure of study courses have to be oriented in the fundamental conditions, presented by the Standing Conference of the

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<sup>1</sup> retrieved from: <http://www.hochschulen-deutschland.org/>; online: 09.04.2018, 13:21

Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK). Since 1999, there exists a nationwide accreditation system supervised by an Accreditation Council (AC) under the roof of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (FASPG)<sup>2</sup>. New study courses may carry the quality label of the accreditation council after accreditation<sup>3</sup>.

### 4.3 The Excellence Initiative

The excellence initiative, funded by the state and federal countries of Germany, aims the enlargement of top-level research, as well as the quality development of the scientific location of Germany and to visually point out excellence in German higher education (DFG, 2016)<sup>4</sup>. From 2005 to 2017, the German Research Community (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) and the science council together conducted the initiative. Higher education institutions can apply in three different funding lines: graduate schools, clusters of excellence and institutional strategies. Eleven HEIs succeeded in getting the excellence label from 2013-2017: University of Cologne, Technical University (TU) of Dresden, University of Bremen, Eberhard-Karls-University Tübingen, TU Munich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, Humboldt-University of Berlin, Free University of Berlin, Rheinisch-westfälische Technische Hochschule (university of applied sciences) Aachen, Ruprecht-Karls-University of Heidelberg and the University of Konstanz. Recently, the application procedure for the next cycle of the excellence initiative is running (state of April 2018). The funding for universities within the excellence initiative refers to research performance and strategic concepts of the funded universities and not causally relates to teaching and learning in higher education.

### 4.4 Actual federal funding programs for HE in Germany

*The Higher Education Pact 2007-2023 (HSP 2020)*

The HSP 2020 consists of three so-called pillars. The first pillar supports the admission of additional first-year students by funding the extension of study capacities at higher education institutions. This program is co-funded by the federal countries. The second pillar means a program for financing of programme lump sums for those research projects, which are funded by the German Research Community (DFG). The third pillar contains the quality pact for higher education teaching and learning (QPL), which was set up aiming better study conditions and increased quality of higher education teaching (Institut für Innovation und Technik (iit), 2017).

The HSP follows a number of goals. These are mainly the innovativeness in Germany, the chances for students to study for the young generation and to offer high quality higher education to an increasing number of students. Moreover, it aims the assurance necessary young talents in science, to meet the demand for skilled labour on the labour market and to face an increasing number of students, caused by demographic and other societal reasons. Further, federal related goals are recruitment of additional staff, the extension of places for first-year students, increasing the number of female first-year students in science, technology,

<sup>2</sup> view also: <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=44&L=1&contrast=1%27%22>; online: 10.04.2018, 13:30)

<sup>3</sup> German Rectors' Conference: retrieved from: [https://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/Das\\_Hochschulsystem\\_In\\_DEUTSCHLAND.pdf](https://www.hrk.de/uploads/media/Das_Hochschulsystem_In_DEUTSCHLAND.pdf); online: 10.04.2018, 13:16

<sup>4</sup> retrieved from: <http://www.dfg.de/foerderung/programme/exzellenzinitiative/>; online: 13.04.2018, 09:51

engineering and mathematics (STEM) and information technology (IT) subjects and, finally, to enlarge the share of women in the filling of professorships (ibid.).

In 2017, the evaluation report of the HSP was published. A summary of the results shows, that the number of first-year students increased in a more than expected way, what lead to a deterioration despite the enlarged number of staff. The diversity of study courses increased dramatically, explained through the demands of students, as well as to provide interesting, fitting offers in the competition of higher education institutions. The difference between the new federal countries (former German Democratic Republic (DDR)) and the ancient federal countries in the west of Germany is still valid. This led to the goal of making studying in the east German countries more attractive, which is reported as quite successful. Most of the before named goals can be valued as reached, while three goals were not reached or only insufficiently: innovativeness, high quality of higher education and more first-students in STEM and IT (Institut für Innovation und Technik (iit), 2017, S. 14).

#### *Advancement through education: open higher education institutions 2011-2020*

This program promotes innovative, demand-oriented and sustainable concepts for higher education institutions in order to reach four main goals: (1) to assure skilled workers in a sustainable way, (2) to improve permeability between vocational and academic education and (3) to transfer new knowledge in practice quickly. Finally, the last goal means to strengthen the ability of the German scientific system to compete on international level through sustainable development of profiles in lifelong scientific learning and through extra-occupational studying.<sup>5</sup> The program is

#### *Quality offensive teacher education 2014-2023*

This program focuses the education of ongoing teachers in Germany. Teachers are supposed to fulfil the social mission of good education nationwide. The “Quality Offensive Teacher Education” supports the implementation of already initiated reforms at higher education institutions and promotes innovation in future teachers’ education.<sup>6</sup> Funded projects (single or networks) focus on the structural level of higher education courses, the improvement of practice relations during study courses, target group-related counselling, handling heterogeneity and diversity, as well as the integration of specialist science, subject didactics and educational science. From 2020 on, the program will provide “Digitalisation in teacher education” as a new funding line.

#### *Women professors programme 2008-2022*

In Germany, a woman occupies every fifth professorship. To increase the number of women professors, there are a number of structural changes necessary. Those go together with equality of chances. The development of a promising equality concept allows higher education institutions to apply for an initial funding for three to five women professorships for five years. A new focus of the program is the human resource development and recruitment; it means that up to ten higher education institutions can apply for a fourth women professorship, if they were

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<sup>5</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.wettbewerb-offene-hochschulen-bmbf.de/bund-laender-wettbewerb-aufstieg-durch-bildung-offene-hochschulen>; online: 04.02.2019, 13:48

<sup>6</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.qualitaetsoffensive-lehrerbildung.de/de/programm-50.html>; online: 04.02.2019, 14:04

excellent and achieved a specific rating during the application process. The program is still running quite successful and the demand obviously stable.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Initiative “innovative higher education institution” 2018-2027*

This initiative bases on a federation-countries agreement. It aims the fostering of research-based transfer of ideas, knowledge and technologies at German higher education institutions. The “*innovative higher education institution*” program targets especially small- and medium-sized universities of applied sciences through supporting them in case of cross-regional meaning of their research. Moreover, the program intends to strengthen the regional anchoring of higher education institutions and to contribute to innovation in economy and society. The initiative stands for the “third mission” of higher education institutions in the triangulation of education in the sense of Humboldt (“Bildung”), research and innovation.<sup>8</sup> In sum, the initiative supports the strategic orientation of higher education institutions in relation of the transfer of innovation to establish active and visual cooperation with the economic system and society.

### **4.5 The quality pact for higher education teaching and learning (Qualitätspakt Lehre, QPL)**

Since 2011, the federal ministry of education and research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) actively supports the improvement of study conditions and teaching quality in German higher education institutions. Basis for the successful implementation of QPL activities is the Higher Education Pact 2020 (HSP 2020), actually running until 2023.

Main goal of the QPL program is to achieve a better staffing in higher education institutions, as well as to support them to qualify academic staff in teaching, supervision and counselling. Assurance and development of a high quality of higher education teaching and learning is another important goal. The program currently ends in 2020 and involves all of 16 federal countries<sup>9</sup>. The projects funded in two rounds by the QLP cover all higher education issues. In numbers, the first round (2011-2016) included 186 higher education institutions with 253 projects in total. The represented types of HEIs were universities (78), Universities for applied sciences (78) and universities of arts and music (30)<sup>10</sup>. The second round involved 71 universities, 61 universities of applied sciences and 24 universities for arts and music. The evaluation report of the program presents a number of interesting results. The biggest number of projects (single or network projects) was located at small universities (up to 5.000 students) all over the most crowded federal countries and those with the most universities. The categories of the project contents referred inwards higher education institutions to curricular and extracurricular offers for studying and teaching, counselling/supervision, motivational systems and thematisation of high quality teaching in higher education and human resource development/further education. Relevant project contents with an outward-facing perspective were exchange and networking as well as management and organisation of the initial study phase (Zentrum für Qualitätssicherung und -entwicklung & Prognos AG, 2018, S. 20). The

<sup>7</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.bmbf.de/de/das-professorinnenprogramm-236.html>; online: 04.02.2019, 14:26

<sup>8</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.innovative-hochschule.de/de/foerderinitiative/bund-laender-vereinbarung>; online: 05.02.2019, 09:26

<sup>9</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.qualitaetspakt-lehre.de/de/qualitat-von-hochschullehre-und-studienbedingungen-verbessern-1764.php>; online: 30.01.2019, 14:21

<sup>10</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.qualitaetspakt-lehre.de/de/die-hochschulen-im-qualitaetspakt-lehre-1736.php>; online: 30.01.2019, 14:27

evaluators identified eight main content directions: (1) digitalisation of teaching, (2) research orientation, (3) practice orientation, (4) competence orientation, (5) problem orientation, (6) interdisciplinarity and (7) mixed. The report shows that 49% of the whole program funding were expended in the field of curricular and extra-curricular studying and teaching offers. The next group of projects deal with counselling and supervision (18%). Following the report, the topic of digitalisation seems to dominate the area of new-created teaching and learning offers, while other projects focus the optimisation of already existing programs. The projects related to counselling and supervision mainly target a reduction of university dropouts through mentoring and the involvement of professional practice by the exchange with alumni. The projects within the QPL program address with 82% mainly students, followed by 9% for teachers and 5% non-scientific staff. The topics and weighting of those is similar for all types of participating higher education institutions. Moreover, the range of the projects cover the whole study-cycle, however, with a clear focus on the initial study phase.

For this report, which highlights the fostering of social competence in higher education in Germany, social competence is not addressed directly in any of the projects. However, some project descriptions mention social competence, mainly as part of professional action competence in the field of competence orientation. Further relevant results of the QPL evaluation are that heterogeneity of the students seem to determine the demands of students. For many higher education institutions, the QPL made the increase of higher education quality possible in first place through the enlargement of the number of teaching staff. However, the QPL takes over the role of an add-on on already existing higher education teaching and learning structures. The main challenge of the QPL program seems to be the sustainability of projects and related results; the perpetuation of offers mostly goes together with staff reduction, especially in the field of additional offers, such as soft skills (Zentrum für Qualitätssicherung und -entwicklung & Prognos AG, 2018, S. 118), which would also include social competences. If one associates this result with an increasing heterogeneity of students influencing demand, a critical point in the future development of higher education teaching and its quality becomes apparent. However, in the cited evaluation report, the interviewed higher education teachers reported an increasing positive perception of appreciation of teaching, growing awareness of teachers for ongoing optimisation of their own teaching, as well as increasing open-mindedness towards innovative conception in this field. This can be seen as promising conditions for social competence as teaching and learning object, as far as it is a part of the political agenda of the federal republic of Germany or a higher education institution. Jongmanns (2016) point out, that, due to the QPL, the reflection about quality oriented development of studying and teaching at higher education institutions has increased. He sees this on an individual level of single teachers as well as on the organisational level and concludes that this ability to reflect is the basis to react on external demands in an adequate way (Jongmanns 2016, S. 10).

## **5. The national context of ‘social competences’**

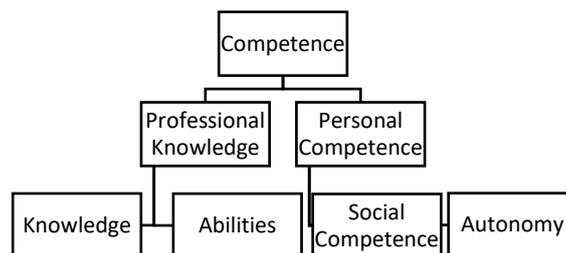
Although there seems to be a consensus regarding the meaning of social competence or social competences as an aspect of learning, there is presently far less agreement regarding an evidence-based model of this construct. The plurality of the approaches to defining and constructing social competence is the result of several factors. Practice requires functional approaches and ‘what works’ is adapted to the field, which is proven by practice itself. The scientific community instead focuses on theoretical constructs and, in fact, an increasing number of concepts with evidence-based impacts on practical settings. This caption provides

the description of the German discourse about social competence both in general and related to higher education.

## 5.1 National Qualification Framework (DQR)

The German Qualification Framework (Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen DQR) is an instrument to classify qualifications of the German education system. It serves as an orientation within the German education system and contributes to the comparability of German qualifications in the context of Europe. However, it serves as an orientation, it is not binding.<sup>11</sup>

For the European Qualification Framework (EQF), the European Commission defines competence as “the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development”. Additionally, it points out the way of conduction, namely “in terms of responsibility and autonomy” (European Commission, 2006). The EQF mentions neither social competence, nor ethic-related competence definitions. An explanation for this fact is that these “attributes denominated as meta-competences cannot be taken into account, due to their interdependence towards professional knowledge, abilities and competences” (Europäische Kommission, 2008, S. 11). It further sees these aspects as “integrated elements of professional knowledge, abilities and competence. [...] ethic competence for example is from high relevance for autonomy and responsibility” (ibid.). The EQF describes competence on its eight levels. Related to the HE sector, the levels six to eight are relevant. A Bachelor’s degree is located on Level 6, a Master’s on Level 7 and a doctorate degree on Level 8. This report focuses the Levels 6 and 7.



**Fig. 1.** Structure of the DQR (Own presentation following the DQR)<sup>1</sup>

In Germany, the EQF has been transferred to the German Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR) and, furthermore, to the German Qualification Framework for Higher Education Degrees (HQR). Both frameworks relate to each other. The structure of the levels described differs from the one provided by the EQF, due to a concretisation on National level. Here, the pillars “knowledge – abilities – social competence – autonomy” represent the aimed learning outcomes related to a holistic understanding of competence. The term “competence” represents the bracket around the learning outcomes knowledge and abilities. Figure 1 shows the overall structure of the concept. The DQR does not define social competence as an isolated construct. It rather provides a selection of social and personal aspects, which relate to this construct, such as the ability to work in teams, ability to lead, ability to design one’s own learning and working environment, ability to communicate. Moreover, autonomy and responsibility, reflexivity and learning competence are part of this construction

<sup>11</sup> retrieved from: <https://www.dqr.de/>; online: 07.02.2019, 11:01

(Kultusministerkonferenz, Der DQR, 2018). The DQR belongs to the orientating qualification frameworks and, therefore, is a transparency instrument with no legal effect. “These type of frameworks base on an existing system of the education system and leave it unaffected. The sole aim is to make commonalities and differences between qualifications more visible. This is the case with the DQR” (Kultusministerkonferenz, Der DQR, 2018).

Annex II shows the learning outcome referred to social competence and autonomy. Next to this national approach, there exists the Higher Education Qualification Framework (Hochschulqualifikationsrahmen, HQR). This concept focuses the academic identity of Higher Education graduates (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2017). All learning outcomes refer to the NQR. That means, that social competence as a construct is one the one hand defined as in Tab.1 within this report, but also thought as a cross-dimensional learning outcome. Due to that, it can be seen as part of the learning fields “Implementation, application and generation of knowledge” and “scientific self-conception/profession” (ibid.). Areas of interest in terms of the scope of DASCHE are as follows (examples taken from the Master’s degree descriptors):

#### Communication and Cooperation

- exchange information on alternative, theoretically justifiable problem solutions with representatives on the subject and in relation to the subject in question of different academic backgrounds and non-academic fields of action;
- involve participants in tasks in a target-oriented way, taking into account the respective group situation;
- recognize conflict potentials in the cooperation with others and reflect on them against the background of a situation-overlapping approach of the conditions;
- Through constructive, conceptual action, they guarantee the implementation of solution processes appropriate to the situation.

#### Scientific self-conception

- recognize situation-appropriate and situation-overlapping framework conditions of professional action and reflect decisions responsible and ethical;
- reflect critically on their professional actions in relation to social expectations and consequences and develop their professional acting (ibid.).

Overall, it seems that the social competence definition used in the German Higher Education sector refers to successful vocational acting in the work fields of science or on the economic labour market. Social competence appears as socio-technical learning goal on different levels, while critical, reflective and ethical considerations are part of the superordinate concept of professional action competence.

## 5.2 National discourse of social competence or social competences

The national discourse of social competence presents two main streams according to the related goals. The scientific community deals with the question of constructing *social competence* without reducing its complexity and multi-dimensionality. Depending on the respective discipline, different concepts emerge. The practice community mainly uses the term of *social competences* or *social competencies*. They describe a number of dimensions that

represent social skills in order to enhance the professional performance of individuals from different target groups.

*The scientific discourse about social competence in Germany*

The *psychological* view differs in two key respects, since social competence can firstly be seen as a result of the successful development of one's personality (Oerter & Dreher, 2008). The psychological manifestation of mental characteristics secondly represents the main perspective of psychological research in terms of psychometrics. An important field in this regard concerns the measurement of those characteristic values (Kanning, 2002). Social competencies in this context can therefore be seen as social skills, that is, the observable part of a psychical representation. Social competence here refers, naturally, to action in general social contexts (Seeber & Wittmann, 2017). The relation between action and behaviour (not only) in psychological constructs remains unclear (Neubert, 2009).

The separation between the psychical representation – disposition – and its realisation – performance – has also been adopted by the community of *educational sciences*, especially in the field of education standards (Klieme & Hartig, 2007). The concept of competence (Weinert, 2001) defines competence itself as

*'in all individuals available or learnable cognitive capabilities and skills to solve specific problems, as well as the related motivational, volitional and social willingness and skills to be able to successfully and responsibly use those solutions in various situations'* (Weinert, 2001, S. 27f.).

From this perspective, the focus is on the learnability of competence aspects, mostly in the fields of social and cultural learning, as well as lifelong learning; (Straka & Macke, 2009; Gudjons, 2008). Developmental challenges are not neglected, but rather enriched by the controlled growth of knowledge and capabilities in the different contexts of formal education. Due to this perspective, the related research focuses on the development and impact of teaching and learning environments under complex contextual conditions. Moreover, social competence is defined as

*'superior, [...] strategic-functional capability of a mental system [...] to understand, to be able to handle the complexity of his action environments. [...] it [is] to be understood as the principal ability of an individual to understand the individual Action environment through targeted interaction in the various action systems and to arrange the environmental complexity in this way again and again. to be reduced'* (Neubert, 2009, S. 206).

It is interesting to note that an attempt is being made here to create a freedom of value by normative expressions in specific professional contexts. Socially competent action is always dependent on context and values. Reduction of corresponding teaching and learning contents to idealistic and exclusively positive oriented forms disregard the spectrum actually present in the world of work normative constraints. The perspective of educational science considers the situational aspect of competence to be important to the theoretical model of social competence, which is reflected in the vocational education and training in Germany.

Over the last two decades, the German *vocational education and training* (VET) system has shifted towards a competence-orientation in both class and exams. Bader and Müller (2002) developed a basic concept of action competence and social competence, which represents

one part of that orientation, in addition to professional and methodical expertise, as well as self-competence. All these components are understood as interacting facets of the construct of action competence. The (dual) VET system in Germany strongly refers to this concept due to its status as a key educational and political standard (Kultusministerkonferenz, 1996, 2007, 2011). Social competence appears to be related to additional constructs, for example, intelligence, competence and skills. She found that emotions play a major role in many aspects of social intelligence, competence and skills, although it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the emotional aspects from social intelligence, competence and skills (Monnier, 2015, S. 70). Yet, in terms of social situations, intelligence, competence and skills can be separated. These results demonstrate that the role of emotion in approaches to fostering social competence must be taken into account. A definition of social competence based on the approach of Weinert respecting the former thoughts can be found here:

*‘the cognitive skills and abilities available to individuals or learnable through them in order to solve problems in social situations as well as the related motivational, emotional and volitional willingness to successfully and responsibly use the problem solutions in standardized and value-oriented situations’ (Kühn, 2017, S. 350).*

It remains unclear, if social competence is a key competence, a meta-competence or one aspect of the holistic approach of complete actions. There is still research necessary in this field.

#### *Social competence in the practice field*

Within the practice field, social competence seems to be an issue where it is lacking or insufficiently developed. This applies in particular to the stabilisation of children and adolescents in the area of behavioural change. Moreover, there exists a wide range of relevant programmes and curricula containing social competence (but not necessarily address it directly) in the context of school. Here, however, it is not so much the scientific foundation as the practical discussion and value-driven reflection that is of importance. The assessment and development of social competence or competences is particularly important in the field of recruiting and personnel development. Numerous publications have been produced in this field in recent years (Metternich, et al., 2018; Kauffeld & Frerichs, 2018; Aymans, Friese, & Kauffeld, 2017).

### **5.3 Social competence in German higher education institutions**

The DQR formulates for the HE learning outcome: “Higher education targets the ability to autonomous scientific work in terms of the professional standard of a subject and in compliance with social responsibility of research” (Kultusministerkonferenz, Der DQR, 2018). The German discourse regarding social competence in the higher education sector bases mainly on the tradition of Roth (1971), as described in this chapter before. The theoretical approach behind this distribution is that individuals perform competence in specific contexts. Each context requests specific conditions of action and, due to that, all four types of competence in a specific composition. Schools as institutions with a social mission (in their role as socialisation instances) are in charge to fulfil both the development of knowledge and skills as well as the development of attitudes and values. When individuals enter the HE sector, the actors here seem to expect these students to have a solid fundament at their disposal, which allows the ongoing development of social competence learning outcomes related to higher education. The German Qualification Framework for Higher Education (HQR) defines a number of

relevant targets for higher education graduates. Firstly, it requires reflective, innovative acting as well as the reflected application and critical adaption of knowledge (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2017, S. 3). Moreover, students are develop their competences through research-based learning (ibid.). Alumni are able to make decisions and actions freely and self-determined in a large extent, take over responsibility for things, persons and generality and reflect structured by science- and knowledge-oriented principles (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2017, S. 4). The HQR follows an understanding of science in the frame of a democratic and welfare constitution under the rule of law (ibid.).

Regarding the situation of students, a study of Aymans, Friese & Kauffeld (2017) gives an impression. The authors conducted research on competence development and design of Higher Education teaching and learning in the context of mobility (Germany-India) (Aymans, Friese, & Kauffeld, 2017). Focusing on Germany, they found that there exists a connection between research and learning as well as there are cooperation and the possibility to make field excursions, which allow the development of professional knowledge and abilities on a practical level. Asked for necessary competences to successfully graduate from university, students named many facets of social competence. Moreover, students defined self-competence through stress-resistance and perseverance. Often, German students have to combine their studies with an own household, a job and their free time. Many of them stated that they manage learning much better, if they learn in groups (Aymans, Friese, & Kauffeld, 2017, S. 67). One interesting result was, finally, that Indian students discussed ethical issues within the interviews made in the study. German students made some statements regarding motivation and interest, but the study presents no German students debate on ethics in terms of their studies (Aymans, Friese, & Kauffeld, 2017). The presented teaching and learning approaches named by the German students all focused on their practical benefit, such as employability rather than on their chance to foster critical, innovative or ethical thinking. This exemplary article gives an impression of the role, which social competence has within the German Higher Education sector. The lack of literature in this field speaks for itself.

Concluding the section it is stated, that social competence in higher education is not necessarily visible. It goes implicitly with the general outcome orientation of higher education institutions like democracy as constitutional frame or the ability to critically reflect and adapt knowledge or conduct actions in a responsible way and on an academic level. However, the students' ability to act socially competent seems presumed by the HEIs. The

## **6. Evaluation of social competences in external QA systems**

### **6.1 Quality management systems in Germany**

Quality management (QM) is well-established especially within the social and health care field, as well as in the educational sector of the public sector of Germany. Löffler (2018) differs five main concepts of quality in the public sector:

Quality as...

- compliance with (external) requirements (technical scope),
- efficiency (usability),
- quality as coordination of input, process, output and outcome (strategic management),

- reaching or exceeding of customers' demands (customers' perception of quality) and
- emotional relation between subject and object (quality is beyond of language and quantification) (Löffler, 2018, S. 3).

Löffler (2018) concludes that the definition of quality cannot be reduced on one of the presented concepts. However, to enhance quality, all actors involved need to agree on one definition to realise related actions. Within the public sector, quality management mostly aims the improvement of the provided services (not products) of an organisation. This means the inseparability of production and consumption (Löffler, 2018, S. 3). The definition of quality within the public sector focuses on both results and process. It is described here as a complex political negotiation process, where perspectives of a variety of client groups as well as political demands and legal requirements need to be taken into account. According to Zeithaml et al. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990), Löffler names five attributes of quality related to services: (1) tangibles, (2) reliability, (3) responsiveness, (4) assurance and (5) empathy (Löffler, 2018, S. 4). Quality management in the public sector, finally, is located in a conflict area of operational instruments and strategic QM models (ibid.).

## **6.2 Accreditation as quality management instrument in German higher education**

Quality management in the higher education sector provides a variety of options. Firstly, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) serves the development of a European Higher Education field. European study offers refer to European standards and guidelines for quality assurance are evaluated regularly and included in the EQAR (Löffler, 2018). The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) coordinated the cooperation of national accreditation agencies (ibid.). Schwarz, Westerheijden and Rehburg (2005) provide an overview of accreditation in the European higher education area (Schwarz, Westerheijden, & Rehburg, 2005).

The German context shows a high heterogeneity of the higher education sector. Due to that, there is no unified evaluation system (Kaufmann, 2012). The German accreditation system mainly contains two possibilities to run a quality check of a higher education institution's services, namely program accreditation through an external agency and system accreditation, done by the higher education bodies themselves. Moreover, a number of alternative procedures is licensed. The Foundation Accreditation Council is responsible for the decision of accreditation (ibid.). This foundation bases on the agreement of all sixteen federal countries of the republic of Germany for quality assurance in study and teaching in German higher education<sup>12</sup>. The members of the foundation accreditation council come from both representatives of the federal countries and the German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, HRK). Recently, there are ten agencies in total (located in Austria, Swiss and Germany), which are authorised to conduct accreditations in Germany, such as ACQUIN, AHPGS, AQAS, ASIIN, FIBAA, ZEvA.

In most cases, the conduction of accreditation takes place decentralised by deans of studies, faculties or institutes. The departments, faculties or institutes mostly make the decision about the accrediting agency. In the case of system accreditation, the higher education institutions leadership chooses the accreditation agency (Kaufmann, 2012; Beise & Polte, 2016). Kaufmann (2012) shows, that the two main types of higher education institutions in Germany, namely

<sup>12</sup> retrieved from: <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=10&L=0>; online: 15.02.2019, 12:55

universities and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen), perceive accreditation procedures in different ways. Study courses at universities of applied sciences are traditionally structured module-based in a higher degree as programs or courses at universities (Kaufmann, 2012, S. 94). These preconditions make it easier to adapt internal structures according to the Bologna-reform. From this perspective, universities get closer to universities of applied sciences. Kaufmann mentions this movement as „Fachhochschulisieren“ of universities, what means that both types become similar structured and through that, universities take over parts of the structure of universities of applied sciences (Kaufmann, 2012). Moreover, universities of applied sciences have high interest concerning the accreditation of study courses, because they allow the further employability of graduates also in higher public services. For university programs, this has always been automatically the case. As a critical point, universities see the modular structure as a limitation to their freedom of teaching (ebd.).

Kaufmann (2012) draws the conclusion that especially universities experience these processes as a limitation of their autonomy and feel restricted by the Bologna-reform (Kaufmann, 2012, S. 97). Nevertheless, the number of accreditations increases (Beise & Polte, 2016), though there are still some critical points recognisable. Firstly, the *financing* of accreditations places varying loads on institutions of higher education and their departments. Often, departments and faculties have to carry the financial load up to a specific amount, in fewer cases the leadership takes over the costs. In the case of universities of applied sciences, single faculties take over costs around 10.000€, which appears to be on the upper end of the cost range (Kaufmann, 2012).

Secondly, the *effects* of accreditations are not perceived as significantly positive. It seems reasonable, that those involved tend to evaluate positive effects rather than those not involved in the process (ibid.). This becomes more clearly, when taking the main reasons for perceived quality improvement into account: here, the intensive internal discussions and reflection processes before the accreditation process play the most important role. Moreover, positive accreditation reports help to assert and establish specific course offers or teaching and learning formats on an internal policy level (Kaufmann, 2012, S. 96). However, if there are no positive effects, actors from higher education institutions often relate the reasons to the formal and legal restrictions as well as on the focus of the accreditation systems on these aspects, while neglecting the content quality of courses or programs (ibid.).

Thirdly, the greatest challenge appears to be the *sustainability* though the *realisation of actions* to improve results and processes, caused by a loss of motivation after the interest and support of policy and administration heads decreases. Internal resistance about cultural and structural changes, as well as the difficulty of operationalisation and validation of qualitative indicators are problematic. The further education of staff to enable them to develop and implement such approaches, finally, is a point to cut costs (Löffler, 2018, S. 10). Löffler points out, that more external evaluations would help to increase the effectiveness of public institutions.

Handling the *freedom of teaching* (“Lehrfreiheit”) or rather the academic freedom is an important topic in the context of all types of accreditation. This aspect relates to the role of the European and National frameworks as orientation, not as binding contexts. Another fact of maybe increasing meaning is the so-called *law of academic freedom* (Hochschulfreiheitsgesetz) in a number of federal countries of the Federal Republic of Germany, while the case of North Rhine-Westphalia currently sets the standards. This concept separates the higher education institutions from public bodies, such as ministries and policy makers and releases them to a more self-determined organisation with all economic

consequences. This debate currently is a political topic that is why most of the related sources come from political parties or unions<sup>13</sup>. While liberal parties welcome the new draft legislation<sup>14</sup> towards the autonomy of higher education institutions, unions point out the negative effects for employees and students<sup>15</sup>.

### 6.3 Social competence(s) in German higher education quality management

Based on this analysis, it is not surprising that social competences do obviously not play an explicit role within the accreditation processes of German higher education institutions. Nevertheless, they appear in several documents, albeit at the abstract level of strategy development. Additionally, there seems to be a field of tension between higher education didactic and teaching (Polte, 2016). Moreover, there is a development regarding system accreditation that HEIs tend to move from formal to informal assessment procedures in QA. These new procedures are supposed to be oriented in HEI specific criteria not in minimum standards. This is one result of a study, Beise and Polte report (Beise & Polte, 2016).

These basic criteria or minimum standards for accreditation of study programs or courses are oriented in qualification goals, which include both professional and interdisciplinary aspects. The resolution of the accreditation committee fixes the qualification goals as follows:

- scientific or artistic aptitude,
- ability to take up qualified employment,
- ability to engage in society,
- development of personality (Akkreditierungsrat, 2013).

A number of criteria refers to structural aspects in the context of this report. However, indirectly, social competence appears on several levels of successfully accredited programs or program bundles. Examples for social competence with embedding on organisational level:

- a. *University of Würzburg*: In the guideline it is fixed, that e.g. "students should train their ability to think, judge and express themselves during their studies (to enable them to acquire competences) [...] and in doing so they should exemplify honesty, responsibility and the will to perform (to convey values)". The values of the institution are named diversity, differentiation, dialogue, openness, diversity, equal opportunities<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, there are offers for counselling and orientation at the transitions into studies and subsequent career entry, facilitation of study entry (e.g. through e-learning offers, activities, exchange programmes). Continual development of staff to promote and maintain a positive teaching and learning environment, tutors and mentoring programme.

<sup>13</sup> For a liberal pro perspective: <https://fdp.fraktion.nrw/content/24012019-korner-die-nrw-koalition-stellt-die-hochschulfreiheit-wieder-her>; online: 21.02.2019, 13:08

<sup>14</sup> Draft legislation: [https://www.gew-nrw.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Mein\\_Bildungsbereich\\_PDFs/Hochschule\\_Forschung\\_PDFs/MKW-NRW-Entwurf\\_Hochschulgesetz.pdf](https://www.gew-nrw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Mein_Bildungsbereich_PDFs/Hochschule_Forschung_PDFs/MKW-NRW-Entwurf_Hochschulgesetz.pdf); online: 21.02.2019, 13:10

<sup>15</sup> For a union's contra perspective: <https://www.gew-nrw.de/meldungen/detail-meldungen/news/entwurf-fuer-neues-hochschulgesetz-beschlossen.html>; online: 21.02.2019, 13:08

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/fileadmin/39030000/ZiLS/Material/Kompetenzorientierung/Kurzleitfaden\\_Kompetenzformulierung.pdf](https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/fileadmin/39030000/ZiLS/Material/Kompetenzorientierung/Kurzleitfaden_Kompetenzformulierung.pdf); online: 31.05.2019, 22:10

- b. *Free University of Berlin*: Internationality is expressed as a fixed profile characteristic of the university<sup>17</sup>. Social competence represents a part of the system accreditation, an inclusion of social and personal competence in the sense of the German qualification framework of lifelong learning (DQR-HS) is in scope, as well as focus areas (e.g. gender competence) are included in the accreditation documents. Key competences mentioned here are e.g. “leading conversations and preparing presentations”.

## 7. Social competences in HEIs – case study in the German higher education sector

The German pilot study portrays the University of Bremen. The main issue of the pilot is to test the instruments and specify them, as well as the research questions for the main part of the national cases for the country report. This chapter introduces the research questions, used instruments and the procedure of conduction. As one result of the pilot conduction, the case selection for the further cases is done. The methodology has been presented in chapter 3, according to the overall structure of the DASCHE reporting. For that reason, they are not repeated here.

### 7.2 The German pilot case: University of Bremen

One of the main goals of the DASCHE project is to identify good practice in the field of developing social competence. According to that, the first interview addresses a central figure of the quality management structure of the university. One goal of this interview was to gather information about preferably contrasting cases within the University of Bremen, where social competence might be treated as an important learning goal and, therefore, delivers examples for good practice in teaching and learning. Due to that approach, single study courses became units for the analysis. Each unit is represented by one central figure, which is involved in the organisation (and quality) of teaching and learning of his or her faculty and, additionally, conducts lectures him- or herself.

On a meta-level, the organisational context of the case “University of Bremen” is analysed on the base of the guidelines, the active participation in a strategy presentation workshop related to these new guidelines and an interview with one member of the management of the university.

Firstly, this chapter briefly describes the University of Bremen. The analysis of the official guidelines of the university is content of the document analysis, which additionally includes the analyses of the module handbooks of the selected cases.

#### 7.2.1 Context description

The University of Bremen is a medium-sized German university with around 20.000 students. It provides more than 100 masters and bachelors programs, as well as the state law exam. The university employs 2.500 academics, among them 270 professors, who work in 12 different faculties and the Centre for Marine Environmental Sciences (MARUM). From 2012 until 2017, the University of Bremen was one of 11 universities in Germany with the label “excellent” – an initiative to strengthen German universities in international competitiveness. Actually, the organisation works on an application for the next excellence application round. In

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<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/inu/international/index.html>; online: 31.05.2019, 22:13

2016, the University of Bremen took part in a system accreditation. The scope on the improvement of teaching and learning therefore is currently very strong.

The University of Bremen was founded as a reform university in 1971. According to that, the so-called “Bremer Modell” with the core elements “*interdisciplinary, research-based learning in projects, orientation in practice and social responsibility*” was established. Today, these basic orientation lines are still valid. New leading goals complete this model: internationalisation of teaching and research, gender equality and environmentally compatible acting.

### 7.2.2 Document analyses

The new guiding principles of the University of Bremen<sup>18</sup> were presented almost simultaneously with the start of the DASCHE project. A comprehensive manual sketches the strategic orientation<sup>19</sup> of the university. Both are taken into account for the document analysis, as well as the protocol made at the strategy presentation workshop.

The so-called “Bremen Spirit” drives the strategic orientation of the University of Bremen. It contains six main fields of strategic engagement: research, teaching, transfer, internationalisation, diversity and digitalisation. The main values responsibility, integrity, consciousness and appreciation require social competence in terms of the definition within this context. All actions in higher education, here, should be led by a peaceful and sustainable global development, based on sharing of knowledge and open discourses, to name an example. Remarkable is the commitment to democratic values, such as equal participation and diversity of people and opinions. Following the strategy paper, the higher education teachers are encouraged to stand up for students, common reflection of teaching and optimisation of didactical concepts. Passion for research and studying, taking place under the described conditions leads to knowledge gain and innovation. All in all, the obvious accentuation of emotions of individuals (passion), quality of work through active confrontation (communication, reflection) and commitment of teachers towards students (perspectives, responsibility for development and quality) shows a great need of all actors for social competence with relation to democratic aspects.

It is clear, that internal concepts like accreditation reports or quality assurance concepts do not necessarily relate to this strategic alignment, since they were developed before the strategic paper. The effort to evaluate all module descriptions for this investigation would be enormous, which is why a selection was made for the pilot study. The leading interest was to identify hints for social competence within the existing documents. Selected were the following study courses, due to their very different contents of studying, study conditions and future work environments for graduates: (1) economic sciences, (2) production engineering and (3) educational sciences.

In economic sciences, the faculty’s homepage promises an open, esteeming and turned towards work environment and the possibility to strengthen one’s social competences by working together in selected projects.

In the context of Bachelor studies, the module descriptions directly name social competence in the field of project management. A number of modules contains the term of *behaviour*,

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.uni-bremen.de/universitaet/profil/leitbild/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/universitaet/profile/strategy-20182028/>

meaning rational ways of decision-making, binding, selection and placement of employees and the development of problem-solutions as well as and understanding of complex interdependences<sup>20</sup>. The base for the projects to work on is always professional. Methodological competence will be developed on that base, social competence means to be able to work in groups (not teams!) in order to solve the task. One module targets the theory of customer behaviour. Here, aspects of social competence are listed as content, but not brought together to a concept of social competence. They rather seem to stand for isolated dimensions of human (customer) behaviour. One further module targets teamwork and team training on the level of cognitive adaptation of the content. The related practice consists of the creation of student articles and expert interviews. Overall module descriptions, reflection is part of most of the learning offers, however, the term *critical reflection* is missing. Social competence seems to remain a cognitive, functional part of economic knowledge. The transfer to individual social competence and a reflected own positioning appears a hidden or at least present agenda.

Also in the Master studies, the explicit mention of social competence as a learning goal is related to projects (Teaching Project Logistics). It is not clear, what social competences are targeted. A module about counselling includes professional aspects, but counselling competences (which would require social competence in a specific extent) do not appear. Within the Master studies, the term *critical reflection* appears in several modules. However, it is related to the evaluation of measurement results, not to aspects of an individual's social competence<sup>21</sup>. One module related to research methods, on the other hand, contains ethical questions. All in all, neither the Bachelor, nor the Master study courses offer a systematic inclusion of social competence learning goals on a visual level.

### 7.2.3 Analysis and results of the qualitative questioning

Five persons from different faculties took part in the semi-structured interviews, representing deans, who do both organising study programs and teaching. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed with f4 (digital tool to transcribe audio files) and the analysis was made with f4 analysis (digital structuring help to analyse qualitative data bases) following the structuring content analysis approach (Mayring, 2008). The presentation and interpretation of the results was made by contrasting the cases and figuring out the similarities as well as differences.

### 7.2.4 Objective of Higher Education and its role for society

**Analysis unit 1** is taken from economic sciences. The objective of higher education, here, is seen as ability to solve complex problems based on a wide professional foundation. These problem-solving processes focus scientific problems, which go further than the pure professional basement (CASE1\_1, par. 189). Moreover, successful higher education enables individuals to reflect on methods to use in a critical way (CASE1\_1, par. 189). The ability to value facts on a higher level means also that Higher Education should overcome the sharing of knowledge, but build up cognitive patterns (CASE1\_1, par. 192). It is also pointed out that

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fachbereiche/fb7/fb7/Dokumente/Bereich\\_Studium/Modulhandbuch\\_Bachelor\\_BWL\\_WiWi.pdf](https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb7/fb7/Dokumente/Bereich_Studium/Modulhandbuch_Bachelor_BWL_WiWi.pdf); online: 08.03.2019, 13:32

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/fachbereiche/fb7/fb7/Dokumente/Bereich\\_Studium/Modulhandbuch\\_Master\\_BWL.pdf](https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb7/fb7/Dokumente/Bereich_Studium/Modulhandbuch_Master_BWL.pdf); online: 08.03.2019, 14:01

not everybody has to be employable; it can also be enough to be able to carry out the later chosen profession (CASE1\_1, par. 201).

Within analysis unit 1, universities are described as important socio-political actor, because they “create specific patterns of thinking in heads” (CASE1\_1, par. 194). The transfer of knowledge is seen as an important interface of exchange between university and society, due the universities core business of producing “things”, but also exert influence on the world outside university (CASE1\_1, par. 194). Referred to the creation of knowledge, the interviewed persons see a difference between universities of applied sciences and universities in a conservative way (CASE1\_1, par. 197). This practice-related is also described as the reason for a rather slow process of recognizing internships and other practical references as important part also for education at a university (CASE1\_1, par. 200). Additionally, different actors have different ideas about practice, which hinders a common approach of goal-orientation (CASE1\_1, par. 201).

**Analysis unit 2** sees the goal of Higher Education primarily in delivering education (CASE1\_2, par. 39). Moreover, individuals should become autonomous, thinking human beings within society, equipped with solid professional knowledge (CASE1\_2, par. 39). The scope of education is described as learning to “think outside the box and be able to process facts abstractly” (CASE1\_2, par. 39). In that context, social competence is valued to play an important role, because “one does not live alone on earth [...] one can only be successful, if one can also convey your education” (CASE1\_2, par. 39).

The role of Higher education, here, is on the one hand to develop visions of society and develop it according to these ideas. On the other hand, they should also be a picture of society (CASE1\_2, par. 39). This means, that universities would have to shift from elitist education towards an “education for the masses”. This would also imply further education (CASE1\_2, par. 39). Desirable would be a relatively free education despite Bologna. Handling heterogeneity and diversity while developing professional knowledge, while research-oriented learning and a maximum for everybody to work by his or her own style is described as a core task of universities. The role of leadership seems to have a special meaning; due to their affiliation to the organisation, they are also responsible for the realisation of those described goals (CASE1\_2, par. 85).

Within **analysis unit 3**, which represents production engineering, the goal of Higher education is seen in the development of employability. Moreover, students are prepared to pursue their chosen profession during the whole lifetime (CASE1\_3, par. 196). This approach involves both research and practical vocational profession. Research, here, is interpreted as a vocational profession, as well (CASE1\_3, par. 200).

The role of Higher education includes the fields of employability, education (in terms of completing the tasks of former socialisation instances) (CASE1\_3, par. 200 140) and the education of work professionals, but not “one-track specialists” (CASE1\_3, par. 144). Universities also would have the task to provide a learning environment, which aims the ability to act more than to produce graduates in an effective way (CASE1\_3, par. 136). That means to involve fostering these abilities through different courses and topics during the study courses (CASE1\_3, par. 144). Universities need a diversity of focal points to develop society in different areas, such as social, socio-political, economic and technical, to develop innovation and carry out critical discourses with these new things (CASE1\_3, par. 204). Also within this case, the difference of universities (further development) and universities of applied sciences



(application of knowledge) is mentioned (CASE1\_3, par. 206). Finally, this interview critically reflects on the self-conception of a university. “[Universities] are economic-driven systems. If our core funding depends on the number of students [...], the system will accept more of them” (CASE1\_3, par. 242). The statement ends with the sentence “Tell me one [university], which would refuse to create a study course, just because it is ethically questionable [if it promises 200 students]” (CASE1\_3, par. 244).

**Analysis unit No. 4**, representing the leadership of the case, does not see the primary goal of Higher Education in the training for a vocational field (CASE1\_4, par. 44). Students learn to analyse, to structure, to develop, to decide and to value. These abilities are main competences to be developed during academic education. These competences should be flexible enough to apply it to different (learning) objects, because this allows a flexible placement of individuals (CASE1\_3, par. 44). The difference between universities and universities of applied sciences is also mentioned in this example. Within this interview, the problem of constriction of programs is stated. This would lead to a constriction of competence development. Nevertheless, competences are needed to challenge social developments in highly dynamic and flexible frames, which still show increasing dynamic and diversity (CASE1\_4, par. 44). Universities are seen as those institutions, which deliver graduates to take over important controlling points within society. Due to that, they have to be able to deal with complexity and dynamic and this is what they learn at university, rather in the sense of competence and less in the sense of collections of knowledge (CASE1\_4, par. 44).

In **analysis unit 5**, which represents educational science, has two ideas about Higher Education. The first idea is a traditional one and contains the further development of personality and the self-education as part of the self-understanding" of universities. The second objective of Higher Education relates to the immediate preparation for professional employment (CASE1\_5, par. 1). This includes a focus on the direct application of research projects and the permanent discussion of study-relevant aspects such as the goals of individual study. Combining these two objectives, Higher Education serves as an introduction to working methods, strategies, ways of thinking and to the subjects of a certain discipline. However, the university is clearly separated from vocational training. It is about exploring scientific disciplines and the goals of science, as well as the support of employability. It is pointed out that the focus should not be exclusively on one occupational field programs (CASE1\_5, par. 2 f.).

The role of higher education in society is reflected in many different functions of university. According to the Dean of EW, the university has different weighted tasks. The most important one is the "generation of scientific knowledge". Furthermore, the university has the function of knowledge production, allocation and selection. The university grants licenses, creates legitimation and develops its students' specialization in the individual disciplines. At the same time, it has the responsibility for the research and the knowledge which the university produces and publishes. Higher education is open to the future and enables students to manage their future careers based on methods, knowledge and attitudes. In addition, it develops students' ability to review ethical standards, to question and to reflect (CASE1\_5, par. 3).

An overview of the involved analysis units it can be said, that all define the development of meta-competences as a main goal of Higher Education, next to a solid basement of professional knowledge. Differences emerge in relation to the question of employability. This ranges from “not everybody has to be employable” up to interpreting research as a vocation and, therefore, see both on the same level, even though the “work practical” fields are quite different.

The role of Higher Education for society means the same for all units: universities educate people to become important pillars of the society. Due to that, they have to take over a special responsibility for organisation, staff and learning environments. Academic education means to enable people to handle complexity, diversity, fast changes and innovation and to be flexible, to be able to solve problems and to give this knowledge to others in a reflective, critical and ethical way.

#### 7.2.5 Definition of social competence and its position in Higher Education

In **analysis unit 1**, a concrete definition of social competence cannot be found. The object is described as „not only professional, but also personal development“(CASE1\_1, par. 55). The adequate evaluation of situations after a defined time of development appears to be the fundamental idea. Together with this comes the ability to name concrete problems, anticipate possible solutions and evaluate situations to reach holistic perspectives (CASE1\_1, par. 55). This involves self-reflection and self-structured work processes and the ability to recognise areas, where one needs support (ibid.).

A value dimension of social competence is described as “part of the general view [...] now [interview context; a.n.] this is for me the pure scientific view” (CASE1\_1, par. 59). As another, but not necessarily related part “social behaviour, volunteer work” are named as “soft levels” (ibid.). A third approach within this unit is to understand social competence as social behaviour, like for example the ability to work in a team (ibid.). During the interview, the simple technical or “pure scientific” view is completed by another perspective, which relates to values or adequate social behaviour and has also be taken into account (“the heartless manager is not socially competent [...] he would fulfil the pure scientific criteria”, CASE1\_1, par. 59 + 64). The respondents agree that social competence is quite important. Social behaviour cannot be seen separated from a value perspective. They base this on the interaction of individuals, which is naturally reciprocal (“the more we are personally involved in a contact, the more we deal with the consequences of our behaviour and that is why I think, that this it is independently unthinkable at all”, CASE1\_1, par. 88). An indicated critical view might be seen in the statement, that “especially we [Germans], when we talk about social behaviour and social development, that the German context is quite important (CASE1\_1, par. 94).

Concerning the positioning of social competence in Higher Education, analysis unit 1 presents three approaches. Firstly, universities would have to enable students to develop competences additional to professional knowledge and skills (CASE1\_1, par. 12). Moreover, the organisation itself has to provide a democratic structure, not least because of the German historical context (CASE1\_1, par. 103). Related to a global view or definition of social competences, they assume personality dimensions as a possible core, due to the diversity of society and resulting diversity of definitions (CASE1\_1, par. 109). To bridge this gap, they consider intercultural competence as another related field of competence development at university (CASE1\_1, par. 135). They see challenges in the structures of universities: very large groups hinder the realisation of methods, which allow a “great togetherness” (CASE1\_1, par. 113). The organisation as a whole has to provide structures to enable individuals (teachers as well as learners and other actors) to develop social competence (CASE1\_1, par. 219).

Within **analysis unit 2**, the definition of social competence happens through listing dimensions. The ability to communicate, empathy, to learn to take over one another’s perspective, to be able to interact, to work together with others, ability to work in a team, “these classic, flat terms. This, in the end, is social competence” (CASE1\_2, par. 67). Autonomy and

reflectivity, especially in terms of autonomous learning processes, also are mentioned (ibid.). The respondent also states “if one takes the definition from the qualification framework, everything is clear. But I believe that, apart from that, that the faculties understand various things by social competence” (CASE1\_2, par. 7).

This unit looks at social competence in a rather practical, formal way. With relation to accreditation processes, the respondent states that this aspect is not evaluated (CASE1\_2, par. 9). Key competences are a general requested part of the evaluation process, but not explicitly social competence (CASE1\_2, par. 11). To provide development fields for social competence is a task, which faculties define autonomously for themselves (CASE1\_2, par. 17). Highlighted is social competence in the trajectory between university and society, for example represented by practice offices that coordinate internships (CASE1\_2, par. 75). However, the influence of the leadership of a university on its deans and related Higher Education teachers is considered as relative (“of course, the university administration can only give such a thing via the deaneries, but everyone has to participate him- or herself”, CASE1\_2, par. 91) .

The analysis unit 3 provides a wide range within the definition of social competence. On the one hand, the same dimensions as in the other units are named, such as ability to work in a team, act in crises situations, ability to communicate and to act adequate (CASE1\_3, par. 94 + 120). Moreover, social competence is valued as part of the profession development (for example through rhetoric courses; CASE1\_3, par. 122) and, additionally, everything that is not technical in this faculty. The communication of human beings with machines on the one hand and other human beings on the other requires different styles to communicate or interact (CASE1\_3, par. 120). Especially within this context, ethic is named as an important issue in the technical field and, therefore, is related to social competence. However, the respondent prefers the term of personal competence (see chapter 2.2), because this one appears to be easier to classify, though it is clear that both terms are not congruent (ibid.).

Within **analysis unit 3**, social competence development is located in the field of general studies (CASE1\_3, par. 94). Helpful are guidelines towards contents and definitions of the general studies (CASE1\_3, par. 36). The system of university does not teach individuals autonomy directly; it rather forces them to develop this competence area by acting in these specific structures (CASE1\_3, par. 120). Nevertheless, the respondent also notes differences between faculties. Finally, a change in the study culture is pointed out. Related to own experiences, the new generation of students is described as more critical, technophile, but responsible in terms of society and ecologic environment (“we were a bit more believing in the system run”; CASE1\_3, par. 128).

The respondent from the **analysis unit 4** defines social competence from an organisational top-down perspective. “The communication aspect, the cooperation aspect, the aspect of taking over responsibility [...] for persons, who are responsibly assigned to a leading position [...] not only for the completion of tasks [...], but also for the individual [professional and competence-related; a.n.] development of these persons” (CASE1\_4, par. 8). The respondent separates social competence from the different professions and points out, that there is a great intersection of dimensions valid for all faculties (CASE1\_4, par. 10). Listed are responsible leadership, empathy, appreciation, readiness to take over responsibility for persons, work fields and development, as well as the willingness to control these processes and intercede, if

necessary (ibid.). Moreover, active management of conflicts, ethic and social responsibility<sup>22</sup> play an important role in terms of a definition (CASE1\_4, par. 17+18). Values are also important, but not as absolute values; this would hinder the diversity of values in the context of university. "One must also accept great diversity there, because it has to do very strongly with people" (CASE1\_4, par. 32).

Social competence from this last perspective is considered on different levels inside university. One is the representation on study courses, but with no control option, if these programs could reach each single student (CASE1\_4, par. 4). General studies, as well as the subject-related fields content approaches to create room for (social) competence development, for example through research-oriented learning (CASE1\_4, par. 12).

The university as a whole has the task to develop young researchers especially in the field of competences, rather than in specific professions. Nevertheless, both development lines are part of a genuine academic education (CASE1\_4, par. 12). Social competence, as part of this competence development line, is also fixed to human resources development programs inside university (ibid.). This area of doctorate and post-doc-phases appears to be well developed, while study courses do not have such a wide range of offers at their disposal (CASE1\_4, par. 12). On the level of organisation development, social competence is named to be important within the appointment procedures (CASE1\_4, par. 14). In addition to professional aptitude, the ability to become a leading personality also plays a role. If necessary, there will be steered, according to the interviewee's statement.

The organisation culture is described as participation-oriented. The university does not only offer participation, but also demands it to generate solutions, each one concerned can understand and identify with (CASE1\_4, par. 20). This requires a culture of trust and confidence. These aspects can be seen as part of social competence on an organisational level. Social competence as a learning or development goal, finally, is located in each single study course: "[...] there is no subject to study responsibly, without taking care about questions of values, attitudes and the placement in a greater, social system. That is impossible" (CASE1\_4, par. 50).

In **Unit 5**, no clear definition of social competence can be found. The term is approached in a negative way because it has a high degree of uncertainty and indeterminacy (CASE1\_5, par. 5). The term "competence" has changed over the years depending on the different language styles. It was originally used in psychology as a contrary term to intelligence, later also known under the term "key qualification". Now in Analysis 5 it is described as a domain-specific expression. Social competence is a subordinate dimension of general competence and part of competence development. There are some general aspects of social competence as well as specific forms. In everyday language, social competence is understood as socially accepted behavior, cooperation and adaptability. More specifically, the analysis unit 5 describes social competence as the ability to work together and to interact well in a particular domain (CASE1\_5, par. 4). Furthermore, based on a limited understanding of the term, social competence means a basic ethical attitude towards the themes of work (CASE1\_5, par. 20).

**Analysis unit 5** assumes that social competence can not to be found as a subgoal or competence goal in university. It is also assumed that the development of social competence

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<sup>22</sup> Ethic and social responsibility were part of a deepening question, they were not brought into the interview from the respondent's perspective.

has no own area in higher education. Occasionally, social competence can be found on a more abstract level in guiding principles of study programs, as it is seen important. However, the implementation is considered critical as there is no clearly formulated concept in the module manuals. There may be creeping implementation which can be found in the descriptions of competences, in the descriptions of objectives, in work or examination forms (CASE1\_5, par. 6). It is considered that social competence can be achieved by self-organisation of the studies or by daily university life, for example appreciation for the positions and the work of other students. The acquisition happens in cooperation and exchange (CASE1\_5, par. 7). Therefore it is seen useful "if science as its own practice, which would introduce students into their forms of (.) collaboration and cooperation" (CASE1\_5, par. 7). Cooperation means that knowledge cannot be generated alone and that you can deal and work with the perspectives of others. In addition, the respondent also mentions that a certain ethical attitude and responsibility for professional practice should be gained (CASE1\_5, par. 9).

In general, a difference is made between a wide and a tight concept of social competence. Different dimensions of social competence are mentioned, ranging from meta-competences and skills, such as self-reflection and autonomy to concrete social behavior, like teamwork or interaction. It is generally noted, that there may also be different understandings between domains and faculties. However, a general intersection is not excluded. It can be seen that the term has a vagueness and is seen as an addition and complement to the professional side. Values and ethics also play a role in the term. The position of social competence in higher education is mainly dealt at the organisational level. Starting with the university structures, which support the development of social competence, up to the organisation of the individual study courses. Students have to find their way in these structures and they have to act accordingly.

#### 7.2.6 Responsibility for social competence development in Higher Education

Related to the question of responsibility for social competence development in the Higher Education sector, the respondents strongly agree, that this task is located on each single level of an organisation.

Higher Education **teachers** are responsible to act as role models and to sensitize for social competence as an academic learning goal. Social competence as a course-related learning goal should be implemented on a volunteer base (CASE1\_1, par. 143). However, Higher Education teachers have to provide space to develop social competence in the frame, the management, structure and culture of the university allows. Helpful would be a person, who points out in a comprehensible way, where social competence development takes part (CASE1\_1, par. 148). Secondly, a structural orientation for study deans and the teachers would support a learning with more reflection on social competence.

It is considered as not possible, to realise related learning goals top-down, but the **leadership** of the university is also in charge to set an example (CASE1\_1, par. 146). Moreover, the responsibility for social competence development is also seen by other socialisation instances, like family and school. However, universities of course are responsible, because, as a public institution, they get money to realize these developments (CASE1\_2, par. 83).

**Students** are also in charge to take their chances for competence development autonomously. The degree of autonomy differs between the analysis units and the position of students (more at the beginning or in the further process of studying).

Overall, the responsibility of developing social competence seems to relate to an interdependence between all organisational levels of the university. The leadership has to create the overall orientation and the formal frame, in which the responsible persons for the single faculties can realise social competence development according to the subject requirements. To overcome pure subject-relation and to develop social competence as a meta-competence, all actors including students are in charge to actively take over their responsibility in terms of reflected social acting.

#### 7.2.7 Role of Higher Education teachers related to social competence development

Teachers, firstly, are in charge to handle conflicts in work groups (CASE1\_1, par. 16). The teaching of social competence is considered as difficult. At least, they should reflect with their students on practice relevant competences, because these are not always obvious (ibid.). However, following the respondents of analysis unit 1, there exists the opinion that Higher Education teachers have no “pedagogical mission” (CASE1\_1, par. 201). They see this statement as widespread. One could consider this as hindering factor in terms of social competence development.

In analysis unit 3, social competence appears to be a part of the work profession. Especially projects within this field require the work in teams. These things have to be part of the teaching and learning processes within this faculty, while the success of teaching and learning depends on the educational-pedagogical suitability of the teacher (CASE1\_3, par. 120). Teachers have to support students to recognise the importance of social competence issues and to take learning chances (CASE1\_3, par. 140). Sometimes this requires leaving the path of efficiency of one’s own work to realise learning chances for students.

The respondent from analysis unit 4 sees a culture established at the university, which supports the development of social competence. The interest in other persons is the most promising predictor to develop social competence (CASE1\_4, par. 32).

Higher Education teachers are required to use provided and create new space to design social competence learning environments. They could be more active in taking over responsibility for the initiation of processes that foster social competence for their students. Moreover, they are responsible to act as a model, what also means to be interested in the learning processes of students.

In analysis unit 5 teachers are responsible to reflect on what and how they teach, whether it makes sense, and what empowerment opportunities students have. Responsibility ends at the point of individual use (CASE1\_5, par. 10). Teachers must also define for themselves the scope teaching they have. In addition, their own basic ethical attitudes must be made visible in their work (CASE1\_5, par. 12).

#### 7.2.8 Examples of good practice

This point sums up already existing approaches to foster social competences within Higher Education. However, sometimes the respondents address rather necessary conditions than real examples. The following methodological approaches were named:

- internships in companies,
- service learning,
- tutoring programs,



- transfer laboratory,
- binding projects within study courses,
- steady supervision including discussions towards social competence aspects,
- include reflection parts in written reports (necessary to gain ECTS credit points),
- elaboration of portfolios and further documentations,
- group work,
- projects and laboratory exercises,
- oral examinations,
- orientation week at the beginning of study courses,
- work associations (like research groups or presentation groups),
- actively taking care about individual frameworks (family, work, care of family members),
- establishing commitment towards tasks, society etc.
- explorations of occupational fields
- expand student´s repertoire of methods.

In terms of didactics, social competence development requires the following points:

- no subject “social competence” needed, it should be a crossover-topic,
- helpful to have joined a “background-course”,
- groups in some faculties too large to focus social competence directly,
- long-term factor of development has to be taken into account (change of behaviour and personality needs continuity and time),
- requires detachment from thinking in modules,
- “learning islands” on the campus allow meeting of work groups (learning infrastructure),
- research-oriented learning,
- transparency of teaching and learning processes,
- sensitisation for this kind of learning processes (communication structure)
- offer freedom in the studies
- introduction to science at more complex level
- keep connection to the discipline.

Moreover, the respondents associate learning fields with social competence development, which should also be named here:

- intercultural competences, communication and education,
- basic knowledge about European and democratic structures,
- science ethics,
- teambuilding,
- leadership and conflict management,
- sustainability,
- individual and legal boundaries,
- deal out criticism,
- respectful interaction with each other.

### 7.2.9 Limitations of social competence development in Higher Education

The development of social competences shows a number of limitations. In order to deliver a brief overview, the points are reduced and summed up.

- (1) Only the “good” students take their chances.
- (2) No existing (or known) concepts/instruments to evaluate group works with relevance for grades.
- (3) Observation and evaluation of students might strongly relate to subject and teacher.
- (4) Too large groups hinder social competence development because of missing chances to communicate or interact.
- (5) Respondents consider a “representative for social competence” as not helpful.
- (6) Performance orientation of a university shifts the time-scope from long- to short-term.
- (7) Forms of exams needed that also require social competence.
- (8) Higher Education teachers partially have no pedagogic education.
- (9) Not easy to convince teachers to be committed to social competence development.
- (10) Formal issues (time, money, not permitted to control the attendance of students) hinder engagement of teachers.
- (11) Missing formal demands of social competence as a binding learning goal.
- (12) Expectations of labour market (young professionals with high qualifications and five years’ work experience) hinder focus on time issues.
- (13) Course program of the university focuses own human resources (staff), not students.
- (14) It is possible to sensitise people, but they cannot be forced to do something.
- (15) Social competence development or implementation in study courses highly depends on the person of the teacher
- (16) Transfer of competence goals into practice.

These limitations relate to all organisational levels of the university. There can be made out three main aspects: the development of social competence has a lack of formal resources. To realise learning processes means to save own resources elsewhere. The second point refers to missing concepts, instruments and exam forms to implement social competence development in the existing course structure. The “outsourcing” of this topic to a field called general studies suggests to be enough. The third aspect concerns the different actors and their conceptions of studying. Teachers would have to become living examples for social competence, what collides with the recognition of academic education as distributor of knowledge. To see students as already finished personalities means to neglect the need to foster social competence and, therefore, not see the necessity to become a role model.

### 7.2.10 Chances and conditions of social competence development

However, there are not only limitations; the interviewees also identified a range of chances, which are presented below. Many of them relate to the methods described above.

- (1) Implementation of tutorials (peer-to-peer-reviews),
- (2) Coach education for students,
- (3) study workshop,



- (4) work group for informal approval procedures,
- (5) development of best practice,
- (6) define a responsible person to figure out successful social competence learning processes,
- (7) development of instruments to operationalise and document the social competence learning achievements,
- (8) Implementation of social competence aspects in the development of a “Bremish Profile” attesting each student, who graduates from university the achievement of a number of specially defined milestones,
- (9) “quality pact” teaching,
- (10) awareness of social competence (personal competence) within the faculties is evaluated high.

#### 7.2.11 Importance of social competence within the pilot study

The respondents strongly agree that social competence development is very important in the context of university, though they partially start from different points of understanding. However, the extent and scope of social competence relates to different faculties or even persons. While social competence within university is mainly related to social technics or soft skills that enable individuals to work under academic conditions and develop their autonomy, it undergoes a change when turning outwards of the university. In the trajectory from university to labour market, ethic, democratic and sustainability-related dimensions become important. The need of socially competence individuals for the society as well as the responsibility of Higher Education in this context, stand out here very clearly. It could be a chance for social competence development to transfer this perspective inwards Higher Education and to anticipate social and work requirements before entering the area of trajectory.

#### 7.2.12 Students’ perspective

In the frame of the pilot case study, one focus group with six students from educational science Master course took place.

Firstly, the students discussed the **objective of higher education and role of universities** in the society. The discussion identified two perspectives on university. On an organisational level, students see universities in charge to deliver a holistic higher education. They used expressions like “development of multi-dimensional perspectives” and “education in more than one domain”. Students also value this as an offer the university makes for students. They see themselves as responsible to take these chances. However, they also see critical points. Since Bologna, they consider university running into the danger to become a qualification institution (“everybody should go to university”, “train workers”) and to neglect the creation of learning environments like the above named. Nevertheless, they say that higher education enables students to focus on subjects, to create an individual (vocational) profile, not least by providing possibilities to study abroad. They point out that it is possible to follow one’s own interests and to reach personal goals, to gain acknowledgement and build up networks. Summed up, the students opinion describes universities as a (1) learning environment between social requirements of educating a large number of students for the labour market, (2) an institution, where thinking out of the box is possible and (3) a space, where individuals can develop their identity and build up networks.

The **role of Higher Education for society** is described as “promotion of acquisition of knowledge”, “preparation for research” and to “create new and teach knowledge on actual

state". Nevertheless, they also see Higher Education institutions in conflicts with economic interests (especially in the field of natural sciences) and as a driving force concerning the manifestation of power of a Northwestern society.

Related to a **definition and learning goals towards social competence**, the students associated ideas on a pre-definition state. One idea was that students at university should have the chance to overcome social anxiety. They agreed on the statement that social competence is only seen (by society) as an important topic, if it is missing. Related to university they state that social competence is not an explicit topic, though it is an important learning goal. The students discussed this construct as important for positions in society and they link it to jurisprudence. As dimensions of social competence, they name

- empathy,
- problem-solving between individuals and groups,
- conflict-solving between human beings,
- self-reflection and
- learning how to act/ behave adequate.

They consider it important to actively deal with questions and tasks related to social competence and they see two ways of developing it, on the one hand in a cognitive and on the other hand in an empathic way. All of the students strongly agree with the necessity to have social competence ready for their profession. They discussed coaching as a way to develop social competence, because before all learning comes the identification of what is difficult and how to overcome these difficulties.

Asked for **situations**, where they had the chance to develop social competences, the students name different environments. At university, they would have to work in constellations, which do not work well. This requires (frustration) tolerance, active problem solving and communication skills. Moreover, they would develop solidarity and pursuing their interest in groups with people with same interests. Here, they would have both stabilisation and innovation in social contexts. Also supporting fellow students with difficulties while studying is named as an area to develop social competence. The direct exchange with Higher Education teachers and the individual positioning in courses also appear to be a learning field. Here, they mention the attitude of the teachers as a motivating or demotivating factor to participate. Feedback to students' works, discussions in course settings, study content and the critical reflection of own behaviour play an important role in the context of didactical-methodological conceptions for social competence from the students' perspective. Other learning fields come from outside Higher Education, however strongly related to the study structures. The possibility to engage in volunteer work or to have a side job helps students to slowly leave their family structure and create their own constructions of life. Living in flat-sharing communities for example provide informal learning fields for social competence, due to the high degree of heterogeneity they have to deal with. Finally, the students evaluate a maturation process as a part of social competence development.

**Key persons for learning processes** in the scope of this study, the respondents name teachers (to achieve productive feedback), students' representatives and committees (even if they are sometimes elusive), friends (to encourage and challenge oneself) as well as fellow inhabitants and fellow students.



If they could change something towards a learning environment, which is more committed to social competence, they would do the following:

- get ideas of how to apply knowledge in this field,
- make abstract topics more concrete,
- more exercises,
- more interest of teachers for the students,
- diversity of methods to learn social competence,
- a clear differentiation of lecture and seminar,
- more self-organised learning within the time of the courses,
- no alibi-participation (announcement of participation, but not realised in the end),
- no exposing of students,
- creating sublevels of courses (by tutorials or exercises),
- more realised social competence of teachers,
- willingness of teachers to teach off-standard,
- more and direct information (communication; includes to answer e-mails),
- leave university (by excursions, case studies...),
- more direct feedback (helps to learn from mistakes),
- transparency in responsibilities (organisational processes),
- teachers be visible as contact persons (offer themselves for discussions etc.).

The **proposals** made by the students can be condensed to some core conditions to fostering social competence in Higher Education from their perspective:

- (1) There exists an active exchange between teachers and learners. The teacher is present as a discussion partner in learning and organisation issues and shows interest.
- (2) The teachers live an attitude that allows students to make mistakes. They realise a respectful and congruent learning climate and give productive feedback to foster social learning processes.
- (3) The structure of the study course is transparent in terms of responsibilities, learning goals and the ways to achieve them.
- (4) The course content includes practical parts, involving related practice fields, to exercise social competence in situations with serious character.
- (5) These elements should be realised from the beginning of studies to fulfil the maturation dimension into account.



Due to the huge number of higher education institutions and related study offers, it seemed necessary to choose a contrasting approach. The kind of contrast could be related to a number of variations: 1) small vs. big HEIs, 2) Universities vs. Universities of Applied Sciences, 3) Elaboration of (promising) guiding principles, 4) appraisal of national accreditation agencies (or those agencies, who are involved in accreditation processes on national level). Moreover, 5) wide range vs. focused, domain-specific study offers, the representation of HEIs in geographic relations or the explicit respect to a humanistic approach could be the contrasting category of the case selection. The last point would lead back to the possible contrast no. 3).

For this study, four cases were selected, following the approach of the *most different* cases as described by Seawright and Gerring (Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Georg, 2005; Gerring, 2007). Related to the German HE sector, this appears to be a small number and due to that, the results will not be representative. However, it will help to understand different perceptions of social competences in different structural embedding. On the macro-level, the guiding principles of a HEI give an impression of the strategic alignment of the organisation. On a meso-level, accreditation documents, quality assurance systems and the question, how they involve social competence seem to be important for this research. Finally, on a micro-level, the single teaching and learning approaches, experiences and practices as well as teacher-learner-relationships are located.

This research approach followed two pathways to select cases. Firstly, a preferably wide range of HEIs should be represented, including different study courses and their interpretations of good practice in the field of social competence development, assessment and validation. This should lead to an idea about possible consistent understandings as well as differences can be pointed out. Secondly, the cases should represent the core regions of the Republic of Germany to pay respect to the federal structure. Moreover, the size of the HEI was important to present both smaller, medium and large HEIs. Both main types of HEIs seemed to be important to involve, universities as well as universities of applied sciences.

A third dimension of the case selection was the results of an in-depth interview within the pilot, where the interviewed person was asked to make recommendations of possible good practice cases. The internal position of the HE actor enabled her to suggest some potential cases. Before the final selection, two accreditation agencies were consulted in terms of social competence in HEIs they worked with. It became clear, that social competence was no (explicit) topic in accreditation issues that is why the access to concrete good practice examples became the last indicator of case decisions. Finally, on the base of the above-described procedure, the cases of the University of Konstanz, The University of Cologne and the University of Dresden were selected.

Before the deeper analyses of the cases, a brief description of each case is given, beginning with the University of Konstanz. Konstanz is located in the very south of Germany, in the federal country of Baden-Württemberg. In the winter semester 2017/18, here, 359.749 students in total were matriculated to the HE sector in all types of HEIs. The HEIs are distributed all over the federal country, approx. one quarter on the countryside (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg, 2019).

The case analyses based on the data presented in Tab. 3. The document analysis begins with the investigation of commitment towards social competence within the guiding principles of the selected HEIs. Research questions for the document analyses were:

1. Is social competence or social competences named explicitly?
2. If not, which indicators are addressed as learning content or goal?

<b>Tab.3. Data foundation for the case study</b>			
	<b>Case 1 Konstanz</b>	<b>Case 2 Köln</b>	<b>Case 3 Dresden</b>
<b>Analysis units</b>	QA, Project “transfer teaching”	HE teacher further education, teaching professional in “special education teachers”	Vocational education and vocational didactics, project “METIS”/political science
<b>Document analysis</b>	Guiding principles of the HEI; website for general descriptive information; (actual) accreditation reports, if available; module descriptions; further, diverse documents related to good practice examples (especially information about projects); teaching evaluation reports		
<b>Interviews</b>	1 interview with a QA actor	1 interview with a member of a central HE didactics institution	1 interview with a teaching professional
	1 interview with a project member	1 interview with a teaching professional	1 interview with a teaching professional

**Tab 1. Data foundation for the case study. Own presentation following Peters (2019).**

*Documents to include in the document analysis*

*Guiding principles or mission statements* are a platform to promote values, not competences, which involve a performance level. However, the values of an institution serve as a guide for actions on both levels internal (as all those acting) and external (as graduates educated in the sense of an institution). Therefore, it is not surprising that no social competence issues are expressed on this abstraction level. Nevertheless, since values affect actions, they are also relevant for social competence development. In this context, especially target areas, which require a huge amount of social (inter)actions appear to be relevant for this research.

*Module or study course descriptions* inform about the definition and involvement of social competence on the operational level of teaching and learning. They create the frame for HE teaching orientation and goal description and, therefore, support the implementation of an HEI’s overall mission.

*Accreditation reports* serve as control instruments for the quality of study courses. One strength is the external perspective on internal input, processes, output and outcome. One weakness is that those types of reports can only report on internal defined indicators. If social competence does not appear in study course description, it is not likely be part of the accreditation, as well.

Before the description and analysis of the cases, a short summary of the social competence definition within this research is given (for details see chapter 5.3):

- 1) Social competence as part of the model of holistic action means the individual knowledge, skills and abilities, readiness and values to act adequately in social situations. This means the interaction between individuals in a specific context with a specific target and the successful elaboration of compromises on a target level for all actors in a socially accepted way. The need of structuration derives from the definition of vocational or professional goals.
- 2) Social competence as a relatively stable part of individual personalities. The need for research derives from the requirements of the research discipline and aims the conception of social competence in terms of empirical evidence and stability.
- 3) Social competences is dominant term, wherever adequate human behaviour or target groups at risk are addressed. It means a variety of skills and abilities in the context of social interaction. Without a clear structure, it rather appears in a loose sample of dimensions. The need to look at the concept like this derives from the need to structure flexible, clearly defined modules for the explicit enhancement (including assessment). One example is the module collection “Fit for Life” (Jugert, Rehder, Notz, & Petermann, 2010).
- 4) Social competence, next to autonomy, stands as a part of personal competence within the German national qualification framework DQR. It involves at least three dimensions of socially desired acting capacities after reaching a specific educational degree (here: BA and MA degrees). The need of this approach derives from the need to assure the quality of higher education on different levels (input, processes, output and outcome). Meanwhile, the structure is left open intendedly, in order to allow HEIs to define their own profiles.

Due to the diffuse or very specific understanding of social competence, the data analysis is made open to all perceptions of social competence that might appear. In terms of the summary of results and development of conclusions, an attempt is made to achieve an integrated structuring of the construct, which itself allows the deduction of action recommendations on institutional, national and European level.

## 7.3 The University of Konstanz

### 7.3.1 Context description

In the winter semester 2018/19, the public University of Konstanz has 11.268 students in total (approx. 12% students from foreign countries). It ranges on position 189 (2018-2019) of the THE World University Ranking worldwide 2019 and position 22 Germany wide. The University of Konstanz as a reform university is organised in sections and assigned departments instead of institutes and chairs<sup>23</sup>. The *faculty of science* contains six departments related to mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, computer and information science and psychology. The faculty of humanities includes four departments dedicated to, firstly, history, sociology empirical educational research and sport science, secondly literature, art and media studies, thirdly philosophy and, finally, linguistics. The third section includes politics and public

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<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.uni-konstanz.de/en/university/faculties-and-departments/>; online: 01.04.2019, 11:58

administration, law and economics. The HEI is actually applying for the excellence status, based on two excellence clusters.

### 7.3.2 Document analysis

Next to the guiding principles resp. mission statements, it has transparent *codes of practice* to outline the main values of the organisation. The guiding principles<sup>24</sup> of the University of Konstanz highlight the strong relation of research and teaching, which requests high quality in basic research and study offers. Relations to social competences (as discussed in chapter 5.3) on the macro-level can be found in quotes like “Contribution to the self-enlightenment of society”, “ethical reflection of science on its methods and the consequences of its results for people and the world”, “development of personalities” and “it [the HEI] follows the principles of sustainability in its social [...] processes”. Moreover, the institution defines a “culture of creativity”, “transparent, participative processes of decision making” and “clear responsibilities”. “Profession and performance” define hierarchies, “discussions in committees have to be open to everybody”. The intended relation of HE with the development of personalities and different contexts (learning, working, living) becomes clear. The design of these three life dimensions is led by academic freedom, equality, work-life-balance and diversity as well as transparency and dialogue with the public. Following these quotes, the University of Konstanz (on a strategic level) creates a specific culture based on specific values. These affect the interaction of individuals by requiring open-mindedness (freedom of prejudices and stereotypes), flexibility (family friendliness, which demands continuous negotiation of compromises on micro-level) and discourse-related values, such as transparency, participation and esteem. The statement towards the hierarchies might on the one hand point out a meritocratic positioning of the HE, on the other it opens space for social performance as one indicator for verifiable profession.

For the first case, the following study courses were analysed: “Bachelor Life Science, BA”<sup>25</sup>, Continuing Education in Psychology with focus on forensic psychology, MA”<sup>26</sup>, “Cultural foundations of Europe, MA”<sup>27</sup>, “Business education, MA”<sup>28</sup> and “Business Education, BA (specialisation in economics)”<sup>29</sup>.

The study course “Life science, BA” describes social competence directly on the level of learning targets, namely through the “ability to deal with conflict and criticism”, the “ability to work in a team”, “empathy”, “assertiveness” and “leadership qualities”. Within this analysis unit, there seems a difference to be made in types of social competence or rather concerning its transfer to learning goals. A set of social techniques is defined as “written and oral expression”,

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.uni-konstanz.de/en/university/about-the-university-of-konstanz/profile/mission-statement/>; online: 02.04.2019, 13:28

<sup>25</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx\\_studiengang/modulebook\\_103\\_1554190815.pdf](https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx_studiengang/modulebook_103_1554190815.pdf); 06.05.2019, 13:56

<sup>26</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx\\_studiengang/modulebook\\_181\\_1490088970.pdf](https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx_studiengang/modulebook_181_1490088970.pdf); 06.05.2019, 14:03

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx\\_studiengang/modulebook\\_37\\_1400135588.pdf](https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx_studiengang/modulebook_37_1400135588.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 14:24

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx\\_studiengang/modulebook\\_20\\_1506066866.pdf](https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx_studiengang/modulebook_20_1506066866.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 15:05

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx\\_studiengang/modulebook\\_19\\_1400243550.pdf](https://www.uni-konstanz.de/uploads/tx_studiengang/modulebook_19_1400243550.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 15:26

“presentation techniques”, “discussion skills” as well as “target group oriented communication”. “Communication skills” and “intercultural knowledge” are identified as related fields. The didactical embedding is the module “key competences”, which serves the enhancement of general employability of graduates.

The “Continuing education in psychology with focus on forensic psychology” masters course is the first within this analysis, which formulates “social competences” as a learning field. Within this context, “critical-reflective evaluation of results”, the “ability to argue and solve problems in both research and practice” and “communication competences, which include a reflected summary and communication of findings” appear.

The study course “Cultural foundations of Europe, MA” does not directly address social competences in its formal documents. Nevertheless, relations are given, such as the formulation that “graduates of the programme act as scientists, opinion formers and managers”. These three profession levels lead to a number of different requirements about social competence in this context, which range from “competence to leadership” over “consulting and facilitation functions in an international context” to “cultural and intercultural competence” and “key qualifications (independence, self-criticism, orientation, willingness to move and cosmopolitanism)”. The last two aspects describe the related fields within this analysis unit. It is noticeable that the description of learning targets appears to be quite general and abstract. Relations to social competence as learning targets can rather be assumed, when referring to other examples, which describe i.e. the “competences to leadership” through ability to manage conflicts, to communicate etc. The structural embedding takes place via a semester abroad (students) as well as scientific exchange of students and higher education teachers, each peer-to-peer.

Within the master’s course of “Business education”, there is also no direct description of social competence available. Indirectly, relations can be seen in different learning fields, which name situations or methodical approaches for business education professional practice, such as “Learning and motivation”, “teaching and assessment (teaching profession)” and “critical questioning of both own teacher personality and performance”. The denomination of these dimensions as performance fields for social competence is quite artificial, due to the necessity of interpreting the professional situations in the light of social competence expressions. However, this interpretation is at least plausible, when one includes the related content fields. These fields refer to the so-called “interdisciplinary competences” (in detail: independent familiarisation with new problem areas, application of methods to solve problems, presentation of findings, ability to enter a critical dialogue). Still very general, there nonetheless can be found aspects, which are important issues for social competence, which includes social techniques, as well. Didactically, the fostering of the named competences is mainly related to the conduction of a research project combined with competence assessment (not for social competence).

In contrast to the master’s course, the bachelor’s course of “Business education, BA” gives a very clear description of social competence. Relevant dimensions are the “ability to deal with conflict and criticism”, the “ability to work in a team”, “moderation and communication skills”, “international orientation” and “leadership qualities”. Next to these descriptions, the connection of social competence and employability becomes clear though “[learning], how to combine competences for studies and future occupational opportunities”. The “communication in

English and in multicultural milieus”, “key qualifications” and the “responsible and ethical application of professional knowledge and methods” describe the field of related topics here. The embedding is given by a so-called “competence centre for key qualifications”, providing a module for practical vocational training and key qualifications, which is not graded. The module bases explicitly on “interactive courses in which active participation in the evaluation of learning outcomes is encouraged”.

Summarizing the results of the document analysis for case three it can be said that social competence seems to be more a topic on the bachelor’s courses. Here, the most explicit descriptions are available. This becomes more obvious in the direct comparison of a bachelor and master’s course of the same study offer. Taking the study program “Business education” as an example it shows that the descriptions of social competence in the bachelor’s course is well-described (related to less developed descriptions), while the master’s module descriptions simply name “social competence” as a learning or development target, without an explicit explanation. This could mean that social competence in the higher education context is seen more as a general topic in bachelor studies, while master’s courses focus more specifically on work-related techniques or qualifications that take into account later professional demands (free market, outside the university).

### 7.3.3 Analysis of the interviews

Within this case, three goal levels can be found. The goal of higher education is mainly seen in the academic and scientific education and qualification of students. Moreover, HEIs have an educational mission (“Bildungsauftrag”), which, in the German context, goes beyond the professional education. Further educational goals are the education to be critical and reflexive, relate actions to ethic components and to act responsibly, related to profession, but also as an active and engaged member of the society.

Therefore, the role of HEIs for society is described as being responsible to educate upcoming scientists and leading personalities, which are able to recognize societal and ecologic challenges and develop solutions for those or support others to find solutions. Moreover, HEIs are responsible to transport impulses of thought-provoking impulses and discussions into society to forward the societal development. In this case, HEIs also have the task to react on i.e. local or regional needs and support initiatives, which present a solution for challenges in this context.

#### *Definition of social competence and its position in Higher Education*

The definition of social competence, here, bases on several approaches. Firstly, dimensions of social competence are named, such as the ability to work in teams, conflict ability, empathy and the ability to communicate. These competences appear to be activated in team or group settings. Similar denominations were direct confrontation settings, like team work, projects, direct exchange with diverse groups of persons or service learning. Secondly, social competence is considered as key competences, next to personal competences. One interviewee reflects the possibly synonymous use of the terms social and key competences. Reflection processes towards individuals (internal) and others (external) is described as a part of social competence, as well as responsible acting in society and on work level.

„And not always to see these directly set professional goals, so to speak. That one develops actually there a reflexive, ethical-moral basic attitude. What are the consequences of my own professional actions later or of my actions as a part of society“ (CASE 2\_2, par. 22).

Thirdly, the use of a work-oriented description of social competences would require another, “wider” term for competence. It would allow two definitions of social competence, one for learning or development goals in terms of employability and another for future citizens in diverse societies. In this context, the interviewees describe ethics as an important topic. „Because one is an attitude for me and the other is actually a technique“(CASE 2\_2, par. 38).

However, the interviewees conclude that they would count social competences to the overall goals of higher education, which actually appears to be not considered in most faculties and study courses. Moreover, they see three levels of higher education: (1) scientificism (“Wissenschaftlichkeit” CASE 2\_2, par. 45), (2) employability and (3) social engagement. Social competence is represented on all these levels in diverse intensity. Currently, the development of scientific character and intellectual abilities and innovation abilities (recognize gaps and develop or find solutions) is understood as part of the scientific education, not as part of social competence development. Overall, social competence is described as important, however not yet developed part of higher education, while the interviewees suggest humanistic faculties to have the most developed approaches to developing social competence.

The position of social competence in higher education is described as being more an interest of students than of the leadership. The anticipated position of the HEI towards social competence development is the preference of professional education, while social competence appears to be a subordinated goal. Nevertheless, if faculties are not able to involve social competence development in their courses, they have to include specific modules in the study courses (CASE 2\_2, par. 88). These courses focus on the development of key competences. An own institution offers such courses, so there are two responsible persons (besides the university as the second responsible institution). Overall, the offers of courses in that field address mainly bachelor’s programs and, therefore, are limited to some extent.

The responsibility to forward social competence development is seen firstly in the basic structure of academic education, as well as in all types of professional education. The extent to which social competence can be developed in higher education, however, is seen limited due to former influences of socialisation processes and experiences made. Higher education, therefore, seems less to be the place for basic social competence development, which has to happen before and not every offer actually provided would fit with academic education targets:

"And in higher education is the highest education I can somehow attain before the doctorate or habitat. In this respect, of course, there would have to be some kind of gradation. My feeling is partly when I see what they are doing in the key qualifications; I see very basic competences that one would like to promote. Of course, there is also a demand for them, something like rhetoric. [But I think, that] does not necessarily have to be in higher education" (CASE 2\_1, par. 72).

The responsibility to involve social competence development on an organisational level is seen at the faculties. However, the interviewees discuss that social competence in the understanding of HE teachers appears to focus on basical, technical skills (presenting, time management, arguing) without developing an approach in terms of an interdisciplinary

education („überfachliche Bildung“, CASE 2\_2, par. 42). While some faculties tend to handle this topic quite reflected, others are not. One interviewee explains this with the missing curricular embedding.

According to one interviewee, the universities themselves are more oriented towards the requirements of the academic labour market, while the interviewees see it as their task to promote "ethical, responsible action among their students" (CASE 2\_2, par. 44). In this context, also the students and their responsibility for their own social competence development are remarked.

### *Structural embedding of social competence*

Social competences are part of each qualification set, what makes them significant for the accreditation of study courses. Moreover, courses or seminars, which provide practical experiences and reflection phases, are seen as worth to be fostered. Content relations appear in the interface of study programs, international context (international office), didactics of higher education (“Hochschuldidaktik”) or the centre for key competences (“Schlüsselqualifikationszentrum”). However, the scope is mainly on upcoming academics. A curricular embedding of special didactical concepts to fostering social competences, such as service learning, is not given. Here, a quite vivid discussion argues the necessity of voluntary participation in such offers.

### *The role of higher education teachers for social competence development*

One interviewee describes the enhancement of higher education teachers teaching profession as an important point. Currently, there are networking activities between higher education teachers, but on a very informal and open format. The motivation to improve teaching, because "Many lecturers lack the ability to know how they can better integrate and promote social competences in their courses or in examination formats" (CASE 2\_1, par. 132). Binding further education is not considered an adequate way, for the binding character might reduce motivation. This motivation is an important aspect, as interviewee CASE 2\_2 states: "a general success factor of all such [social competence fostering] formats is of course the self-interest and motivation of the teacher in the subject" (CASE 2\_2, par. 58). This interviewee links social competence as a learning field to the personality of a teacher. Without deepening the discussion about the interaction of personality and teaching profession, there are a number of factors mentioned, which are considered to support social competence development. These are the ability of a HE teacher to delegate responsibility to students and to trust them to work on complex problems in a self-organised way. This described attitude serves the self-efficacy experience of students and, due to that, fosters sustainable learning. One limitation relates again to the teachers' personalities: "Some teachers can, of course, do it simply because they can or because they have perhaps also trained themselves a little further" (CASE 2\_2, par. 58). The role taking of teachers according to the different functions they have to realise is also named as relevant factor.

### *Examples of good practice at the University of Konstanz*

In this analysis case, a number of good practice examples are named. One is courses about intercultural interrelations, where young scientists learn how to work in intercultural contexts. These courses base on a number of daily seminars, ending up with a certificate. Another

example is the internal competition “Freedom for teaching (“Freiräume für Lehre”)” for higher education teachers aiming the enhancement of their teaching concepts. Teachers would apply for this special type of funding and, when succeeding, get a reduction of their teaching load in order to develop teaching and learning concepts in a new way. This program can be seen as a chance to design learning formats, where profession knowledge and social competences can be combined didactically and methodically.

One further relevant example is the concept of service learning within the “Transfer in teaching (“Transfer in der Lehre”)", which offers support with conception, organisation, financing and implementation of projects, teachers or students want to initiate between academic and non-academic institutions and persons<sup>30</sup>. The concept started as a project and meanwhile became a part of the steady offer of the University of Konstanz. Students are able to gain practical experiences with external partners while dealing with topics of social relevance. The role of teachers appears to be highly relevant, because he or she supports the implementation and takes care about the project process.

While the concept of service learning, which underlies the projects mentioned above, addresses students, another format focuses on higher education teachers. The “Days of Transfer in teaching” (“Transfer in der Lehre Tage”). Here, higher education teachers can participate in a number of workshops to discuss problems, which appear in these didactic contexts, such as communication with external partners, appreciation, failure and the question, how to structure such formats (CASE 2\_2, par. 60).

#### 7.3.4 Conclusions

Within this analysis case, the understanding of social competence is expressed on three levels: the level of academic profession, the level of work-environment and its requirements and as a key competence of societal relevance. The definition or definitions of social competence are not highly selective, but they suggest that differences in definitions should correspond to different performance ranges or levels. This would also have to include a gradation that takes into account a kind of logic of content or development, so that certain contents that are relevant in other socialization instances no longer appear here (or are not in charge). Nevertheless, social competence, here, seems to be a subordinated goal, far behind the development of academic profession. The interviewees describe the HEI as a quite competitive environment, what might explain this positioning of social competence. However, especially in an environment like this, social competence could play an important role in terms of a fair or appreciating competition.

Within this case, social competence development seems to be a topic driven by students and less by the HEI, as reported by the interviewees. Moreover, there seems to be a conflict between the direction of the institution to focus on employability, while HE teachers see their mission in promoting specific attitudes and values. The establishment of the project “transfer in teaching” towards a continuous offer shows the growing awareness of interest- and project-based learning conceptions as rooms to development social competence within interactions with serious character.

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<sup>30</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.uni-konstanz.de/en/university/society-and-business/transfer-lehre/>;  
online: 17.05.2019, 11:33

## 7.4 The case of University of Cologne

### 7.4.1 Context description

The second case, the University of Cologne, was founded in 1388 and now one of the leading German universities<sup>31</sup>. The public HEI includes six faculties: 1) management, economics and social sciences, 2) law, 3) medicine, 4) arts and humanities, 5) mathematics and natural sciences and 6) human sciences. In the winter semester 2017/18, 48.841 students (7.169 freshmen) were matriculated at the University of Cologne, what makes it one of the largest HEIs in Germany. In total, the institution provides 335 study programmes, structured in Bachelor and Master programs, teacher education (BA, MA) and study courses with state exams (such as medicine, dentistry and law), which derive from 100 subjects. In terms of HE teaching, the case describes itself as provider of innovative teaching schemes and structures<sup>32</sup>. Related to teacher education, there is a project to develop the future teacher education funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Moreover, the meaning of fostering diversity, while guaranteeing quality and equal opportunities is fixed within the HEI's mission. These aspects relate to the whole study life cycle and, therefore, involve each single HE actor ("smooth start" up to "successful completion of their [the students] studies"). The University of Cologne has an internal *Institute for Evaluation of Studies and Teaching/ Higher Education Research Institute*, which is a part of the Vice-Rectorate for Teaching and Studies<sup>33</sup>. It aims to explore studying at the named university. Therefore, its tasks are the development and conduction of university-wide surveys, preparation of the results for the quality development in studying and teaching, networking and exchange between central and decentral positions in terms of the responsibility of evaluation of studies and teaching and, finally, training, consulting and supporting of other university members. The University of Cologne regularly carries out the accreditation on its subjects, in orientation on the nationwide standard. Aiming the optimisation of teaching and study conditions, the HEI chose the program evaluation approach, but goes beyond it<sup>34</sup>. One scope of the quality development is to enhance and promote the interdisciplinary focus of the HEI's teaching.

### 7.4.2 Document analysis

The overall mission statement of this case bases on the principles of gender equality and diversity<sup>35</sup>. In the focus of these ambitions lies the fostering of an organisational culture, which "appreciates individual, social, and cultural diversity and does not judge people according to preconceived stereotypes". This approach relates to the claim to "create awareness for (un)equal opportunities, particularly in the areas gender equality, family friendliness, internationalization, interculturality, accessibility, and educational justice". All members of this HEI are required to uphold these values. All named dimensions require different types of socially competent acting, due to the diverse contexts they address.

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/8911.html?&L=1>; online: 01.04.2019, 12:28

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/uniprofil\\_lehrkonzept.html?&L=1](https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/uniprofil_lehrkonzept.html?&L=1); online: 01.04.2019, 12:44

<sup>33</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/13807.html?&L=1>; online: 01.04.2019, 12:59

<sup>34</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/14002.html?&L=1>; online: 02.04.2019, 08:19

<sup>35</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/leitbild.html?&L=1>; online: 15.05.2019, 17:16

In order to present a most different variety, module descriptions from the “Teacher education, special educational support, BA”<sup>36</sup>, “Medicine, BA”<sup>37</sup>, “Mathematics and nature sciences for teachers, MA”<sup>38</sup>, “Business administration, MA”<sup>39</sup> and the “Studium generale”<sup>40</sup> were analysed. All quotes refer to the information presented in the module descriptions available online.

The first module descriptions analysed was that of the study course “Teacher education, special educational support, BA”. Here, social competence or competences are mentioned on a relatively high level of concretion. Examples are “the ability to work in a team”, “communication and cooperation in acting and thinking” and “a habitus of professional, didactical and pedagogical-psychological knowledge”. Critical reflection about actions, values and attitudes and the relation of own values to the diversity of education cultures are described, as well as practice-oriented understanding of organisation of learning processes and teaching as leadership in educational professional contexts. Related termini are “social intervention”, “social diversity, knowledge, and competence, which show relation to a societal work environment and a general type of employability skills. The didactical embedding is carried out via the module “educating”, the work in small groups and the ability to make own experiences.

In “Medicine, BA”, neither social competence, nor dimensions of it are mentioned. In contrast to this, the study course promotes itself as the first course of this kind with a structuration in learning fields and problem-oriented learning approaches. Per definition, this would include social competences on a conception level (see chapter 3.6.2). However, these are not named explicitly.

For the study course “Mathematics and nature sciences for teachers, MA”, no relation to social competence were identified.

In the case of “Business administration, MA”, social competence can be found on a meta level, similar to the dimensions of the NQF. The following content can be understood in the sense of social competence: “active participation in discourses with objective arguments”, “contribution to common statements of a group/organisation”, the “ability to challenge professional life ethically and morally”, “critical and innovative societal integration”, “ability to reflect”, “find solutions alone and in teams”, “differentiation of own and group statements”, “evaluation of statements by societal, ethical and scientific standards (norms, note by author)” and “recognition of social responsibility”. Moreover, the situated analysis of social and methodical aspects of leadership issues in companies are important. Here, a selection of social competences are listed, which contribute to employability: techniques of leading,

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<sup>36</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.hf.uni-koeln.de/data/hflehestudium/File/Lehramt/Foerderschule/UzK\\_HF\\_MHB\\_SoP\\_BA\\_BiWi\\_Fassung\\_PO\\_26.02.2016.pdf](https://www.hf.uni-koeln.de/data/hflehestudium/File/Lehramt/Foerderschule/UzK_HF_MHB_SoP_BA_BiWi_Fassung_PO_26.02.2016.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 12:34

<sup>37</sup> Retrieved from: [https://medfak.uni-koeln.de/sites/MedFakDekanat/studium/semesterdownloads/SS\\_2019\\_Erstsemester-Broschuere\\_Medizinische\\_Fakultaet.pdf](https://medfak.uni-koeln.de/sites/MedFakDekanat/studium/semesterdownloads/SS_2019_Erstsemester-Broschuere_Medizinische_Fakultaet.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 12:45

<sup>38</sup> Retrieved from: [http://www.mi.uni-koeln.de/www\\_mi/Studiengaenge/MHB\\_Mathematik\\_LA\\_GymGe.pdf](http://www.mi.uni-koeln.de/www_mi/Studiengaenge/MHB_Mathematik_LA_GymGe.pdf); online: 06.05.2019, 13:09

<sup>39</sup> Retrieved from: [https://www.wiso.uni-koeln.de/sites/fakultaet/dokumente/downloads/master/m\\_mhb\\_po2015\\_ba\\_accounting.pdf](https://www.wiso.uni-koeln.de/sites/fakultaet/dokumente/downloads/master/m_mhb_po2015_ba_accounting.pdf); 06.05.2019, 13:14

<sup>40</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/si-details.html>; online: 06.05.2019, 13:51

communication, presentation and reflection. The didactical embedding is based on at least one module “Management Skills” by project management, extracurricular activities to enhance curiosity, complex thinking, the ability to work in teams, to foster foreign language skills.

The “Studium generale” offers no definition of social competence, while social issues are content of the general education field. “Social affairs”, “societies and cultures”, “ethics” and “education” are related topics. The didactical embedding is carried out as a binding offer in Bachelor studies, however, the students do not get grades, practical activities are credited.

One first result was that there are mainly two ways to mention social competences in study course documents. One way is to name social competence directly as a learning target. This option goes together with the mentioning of two or three dimensions of social competence (mainly the ability to work in a team and the ability to communicate). This kind of description can be found in business or economics programs related to project management modules. The most references to social competence were identified in terms of single or random named dimensions of social competence, while a genuine structure or model was lacking. These dimensions are treated as direct references due to their reflection in the theoretical framework. Next to these two types, a number of related termini were extracted and listed here, as well.. The results suggest, that the extend of a definition or consideration of social competence in study course documents relate to the extent of its employability needs. Teachers for students with special needs must have a high level of pedagogical and psychological professional knowledge and skills, which includes also social competence. In Business administration, especially the fields of leadership and social responsibility seem to be important and related to skills and knowledge, which can be related to social competence. While a clear definition of social competence is not given in both cases, the importance of specific values and attitudes is shown through mentioning. All in all, the definition and consideration of social competence in module descriptions seems to appear very differently elaborated within the same institutional context.

In the following cases, the idea is put down that the differences are based less on the orientation of a HEI than on the content or vocational orientation of a study program. The significance for the construction of professionalism in the context of higher education is taken up again in the interpretation of the results.

#### 7.4.3 Analysis of the interviews

##### *Objective of higher education and its role for society*

The first interviewee mentions the professional education as the most important goal of higher education. An educational mission comparable to schools or families as educational institutions is excluded explicitly. "Nevertheless, something like support with the - I'll make that really big - becoming human in the sense of the Humboldt's educational ideal [is a goal of higher education]" (CASE 3\_1, par. 12). This statement is supported by the second interviewee. Here, the main mission of higher education institutions as public bodies is described through actively shaping society through creating awareness and the discussion of societal developments. "[C]ommitted to the constitutional system, we are in any case an institution that promotes democracy, tolerance and respect and all that is, so to speak, in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany" (CASE 3\_2, par. 4). Sometimes, that means

"to stand up [very consciously] for these democratic ideals or for this, yes, for these basic democratic attitudes" (ibid.). Higher education is described as something more than "that it is more than just, in quotation marks, training or education for the profession." (ibid.).

Higher education institutions should realise both „Bildung“ [education in the sense of Humboldt; author's note] and qualification. "If you look into the higher education law, there's something in it like a university is also committed to sustainability. [...] when it comes to the development of society, social responsibility, [it is] [...] very, very important to transport that within university" (CASE 3\_1, par. 18). The interviewees say that HEIs should have this claim on themselves, carried by the leadership. Moreover, the "third mission" of HEIs is mentioned. This term describes the transfer of research findings towards society, next to the two other tasks of research and teaching. A general engagement of universities in the promotion of projects to realise these transfer activities is seen in the attitude of the HEIs' leadership.

#### *Definition of social competence and its position in higher education*

On the one hand, social competences are considered as so-called soft skills, though the interviewee sees this term as too shapeless or vague. Nonetheless, they are described as base for cooperation and an indispensable condition to get in contact with others to, finally, initiate learning processes. Through an active realisation of this approach, social competence would be developed. Here, social competence is a prerequisite for professional education, based on a sustainable working relationship between teaching and learning individuals, which appears to be rather an attitude than a specific outcome. Social competence, the interviewee concludes, "is very overarching and that the attitude is decisive here and must also be the pedagogical guide for action"(CASE 3\_1, par. 34).

On the other hand, various dimensions (ability to cooperate, ability to handle conflicts, ability to communicate, empathy, to be sympathetic, patient and thoughtful) are used to describe social competences. Here, attitudes are seen as part of personal competence, as it is defined in the DQR. Empathy would include values that represent the appreciation of other human beings. This interviewee localises democratic values within personal competence, as well. "Social competence really means something like the ability to work with others, which doesn't necessarily mean having to have an attitude like that" (CASE 3\_2, par. 12). Soft skills, here, appear to include work- or employability-related aspects, such as communication according to addressees. Also key competences appear as term, linked to adaptable skills, like presentation skills, communication skills or conduction of job interviews (CASE 3\_2, par. 36). Related to overarching societal topics (here: diversity, equality of chances, heterogeneity or gender-related issues), one interviewee describes

"social competence high class. So, even if we say so social competence is, first of all, to work together with others can communicate. Then the next step would be so to speak, yes okay and now people are also different and what are the differences and how do I deal with the differences and how can I value them? And how can I now even do inclusive teaching?" (CASE 3\_2, par. 78).

This approach would include a taxonomy of social competence, related to growing complexity.

The positioning of social competence in higher education is seen firstly on institutional level as well as on the level of higher education policies. However, on this level the interviewees

describe the actual state as expandable. An example is the proceeding decrease of students' possibilities to participate in HE committees within this specific case. A perception of students as "consumers of the system" (CASE 3\_1, par. 36) is a development, which counteracts the development of social competence in the sense of a joint shaping of the university (ibid.).

Moreover, social competence development is localised on the level of HE teaching and learning, meaning the creation of space to make experiences and to practice or try out things. Related to social competence, one interviewee sees this learning field as "hasn't been organized or structurally reworked at all [and] to what extent this should be done" (CASE 3\_1, par. 40). Finally, a relation is stated between the realisation of social competence development in study courses, HE policies and the "individual sensitivities" of individuals on the position of decision-makers (CASE 3\_1, par. 52).

Another view on social competence is the relation of study course and requirements of social competence. A high need appears to be in social and pedagogical professions, due to the target groups. In opposite to that, it is considered that STEM subjects or economic and socioscientific subjects have a lesser need of social competence. Overall, social competence, independently from its meaning for single study courses or faculties, seems to be still only marginal developed on a systemic level, while many actors see the necessity:

"[...] social competence plays an important role in all study programmes and we are also pushing this very hard in higher education and also in higher education didactics and are trying to bring it to the faculties, which have had little contact with it so far. Of course, the faculties themselves have already understood that this is important. And also because of the change in society as a whole, but above all because of the change in occupations" (CASE 3\_2, par. 24).

### *Structural embedding of social competence*

In terms of the structural embedding of social competence, there are several possibilities described. One is the not graded module exam to avoid an evaluation of the developed social competences based on levels (here: communication competence in counselling contexts). The formal evaluation takes place in a related, more knowledge based course. This model allows the discussion of experiences in a safe room, which is considered as supporting learning. Moreover, the realisation of small courses serve to gain life-world references of the students, which help the teacher to understand and support individual learning conditions and processes. Large course settings hinder this approach.

The "studium generale" as a cluster of diverse study courses provides the chance to develop key competences as described above. Additionally, there exist professional centre courses, also aiming the development of key competences on a skill level.

Concluding this section, social competence seems to requires approaches, which "deal with it as practically as possible" (CASE 3\_2, par. 61). However, "this is not so easy to implement in the curricula or in the didactic courses. Ultimately, the goal is to change a teaching and learning culture in the faculties. And that takes a very long time" (CASE 3\_2, par. 24).

### *The role of higher education teachers for social competence development*

The role of teachers concerning the development of social competences appears to be important. HE teachers actively go in contact with students, especially in critical situations. Hit

requires social competences on the side of the teachers. Moreover, HE teachers have to deal with the dilemma of their task to evaluate and select on the one hand and a pedagogical attitude while teaching on the other. This contradiction is especially remarkable in the humanistic study offers.

The individual engagement of HE teachers seems to play a leading role in the design of good lecture with questions like "[...] how can I bring students into their self-responsibility?" (CASE 3\_1, par. 74). Additionally, the awareness about the role of emotion on teaching and learning processes and its impact on learning success, as well as the acting following this approach, appears as a part of the teaching profession of HE teachers (CASE 3\_2, par. 47f.).

#### *Examples of good practice at the University of Cologne*

One good example is the above describe module in the field of counselling, where no grades are given. The fact of the necessity to formally evaluate students is considered as not fitting with a pedagogic relation on an equal footing. To allow this orientation in human relations, the grade is linked to another part of this course. This study offer belongs to the field of special education, where a special target group requires specific communication abilities of the graduates on a professional level. This study course benefits from a practice-oriented approach of the HE teachers involved. Actually, a development of this study course as open offer to all students is under planning.

Another example is the creation of structures and provision of support on the level of higher education didactics through the centre for higher education didactics (ZHD). On the one hand, HE teachers get support with the development of innovative teaching conceptions. On the other hand, they are held to stronger emphasis on the field of human relations in HE teaching and learning. This includes the involvement of reflection phases and change of perspectives to allow students to develop "such competences" (CASE 3\_1, par. 56). The humanistic and philosophical faculties mostly frequent the ZHD, probably because these are closer to didactic issues as other faculties (CASE 3\_2, par. 54). However, the collaboration with STEM, economic and medicine faculties increased during the last years. Due to its strong networks within the university, it can also offer events highlighting topics of importance to society as a whole, such as diversity and gender, which target the ways of dealing with diversity and its appreciation, which both count as core elements of social competence (CASE 3\_2, par. 76).

Other mentioned good practice examples tough the implementation of specific methods on single courses, related to the engagement of single HE teachers. Named were "Learning discussing and writing" as critical examination with texts, video reflections with teachers students in chemistry and the teamwork-based electronic cartography including reflection phases in the field of geography didactics. Another example was the project-based realisation of an arts exhibition in the public eye, which includes a strong serious character.

#### 7.4.4 Conclusions

Within this case, social competence on a structural level is described as based on several (at least three) levels. Soft skills mean practical or work-environment oriented and observable social abilities, such as being able to present or to communicate in a specific content. Moreover, social competence is related to the level of key competences, which mean the general ability to socially interact. The linkage to overarching societal topics and social competence is seen in a specific attitude, especially values related to democracy and the

appreciation of diversity. There is a kind of taxonomy stated for the inner structure of social competence, which means an increasing complexity, beginning with skills in specific settings and ending with attitudes towards abstract societal values.

Social competence seem also be important to initiate learning processes and to conduct them successfully. This requires social competence on the teachers' side, as well, due to their responsibility to creating supporting teacher-learner relationships.

This case shows that the establishment of social competence on higher education level must be both carried by the leadership and anchored structurally, for example in module descriptions or through active networks between HEI internal providers of profession in different ways and HE teachers, who use these networks actively. Overall, a common understanding and, therefore, a common attitude towards ways of development and assessment are lacking, but necessary for a structural change, which can only happen over time.

## 7.4 The case of the Technical University of Dresden

### 7.4.1 Context description

The Technical University of Dresden, as the third case, founded in 1828 as the Royal Saxon Technical School, nowadays unites the natural and engineering sciences with the humanities, social sciences and medicine. In addition, here, a strong interdisciplinary focus can be identified. The HE includes five schools with 18 faculties and had 32.389 students (7.530 freshmen) in 2018. The proportion of foreign students is approx. 15%<sup>41</sup>. Since 2012, the TU Dresden is one out of 11 Excellence Initiative universities in Germany. Actually, the TU Dresden runs three excellence clusters, Physics of Life (PoL), Complexity and Topology in Quantum Materials (ct.qmat) and the Center for Tactile Internet with Human-in-the-Loop. (CeTI). Saxony has a so-called law of academic freedom, which requires HEIs to involve students in the teaching evaluation. This aspect has been transferred to the quality management system for studying and teaching of the TU Dresden. The TU Dresden is a public HEI, ranked on position 151 in the THE World University Ranking 2019.

### 7.4.2 Document analysis

The mission statement of the third case bases on the promotion of interdisciplinarity and contribution to the integration of science into society. The balance of professional and personal responsibilities is as relevant as the creation of equal opportunities in all employment practices. Relevant is also the commitment to positive, trusting relationships in teaching, studies and research. The presented case highlights different types of relations, which their actors keep with the HEI's environment: relations to alumni, to international relations within the academic community, to companies and cultural institutions on local level and to the civic society; the latter through transferring knowledge and research. In terms of the excellence label, the mission statement actually provides dimensions, which relate not at last to social competence, namely "expertise, initiative spirit, creative curiosity, dedication to performance, communication

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<sup>41</sup> Retrieved from: <https://tu-dresden.de/tu-dresden/profil/zahlen-und-fakten>; online: 02.04.2019, 8:52

and the ability to cope with criticism". The interdependent relation of researching and learning, as well as efficiency and transparency drive all processes.

For the case of the Technical University of Dresden, the following study courses were selected, based on a most diverse range: "Civil engineering BA, MA" (distance learning course), "sociology, diploma" (expiring), "international relations, BA", "Social pedagogy, social work and welfare sciences, BA". For civil engineering as well as sociology, there were no items found, which describe social competence on a learning target or content level.

The study course of "international relations, BA" delivers some aspects related to social competence, namely the "understanding of protection of human rights", the "ability to evaluate real facts independently", the "ability to reflect critically" and "the ability to present (written and oral)". While these dimensions refer more to superordinate relationships between norms, values and society, the next group of content refers to social competence as a learning target area for employability (named "general qualification/ key qualifications"): "methodological competences", "presentation and communication competences", "interdisciplinary competences (regional and cultural studies)", "third foreign language" and "intercultural competence (extralinguistic competence)". These goals are embedded didactically by a module "general qualification" and a not to be graded "internship module", both dedicated to "negotiation training/conference simulation on the basis of case studies taking cultural differences into account". Though there are a number of profession specific issues, a clear description of social competence as a learning field is lacking.

In the study course "Social pedagogy, social work and welfare sciences, BA", social issues seem to be content on the level of profession knowledge. Social competence itself can be assumed in the context of related competences, here named "interdisciplinary and professional qualifications in one of these: foreign language, rhetoric, self-management, interdisciplinary cooperation, ability to reflect professional issues". A didactical linkage can possibly be seen in the module "general qualifications".

To sum up the results of the document analysis it can be said, that social competence does not appear here in an explicit or elaborated way. Nonetheless, some didactic frames appear to be promising, i.e. the formal involvement of extracurricular activities, which are not graded. Overall, it can be seen here to some extent that social competence seems to play a role, where it potentially plays a role in the professional environment.

#### 7.4.3 Analysis of the interviews

##### *Objective of higher education and its role for society*

The first interviewee describes the development of a critical basic attitude and scientificism ("Wissenschaftlichkeit") as one definite main goal of higher education. This means scientific thinking and working, critical ability, transparency and traceability as important parts of scientific profession. Further, this statement is included within a "professional attitude that is important to me in all courses of study", which also involves,

"[...] that one makes one's own statements transparent and comprehensible, that one attaches importance to intersubjectivity and that one compares one's own positions, which are subjective,

with objective insights. And to use scientific knowledge as objective knowledge in order to develop oneself further" (CASE 4\_1, par. 16).

Another interviewee sees two aims of higher education, firstly, the qualification of students for the work market and secondly, the qualification of young researchers. These goals are linked to the mission of higher education institutions to "[...] further develop research there in order, for example, to further develop knowledge or to maintain or promote innovative capacity in certain areas" (CASE 4\_2, par. 4). Other goals, such as technical or social sustainability would derive from the specific orientation of study programs. Following this argumentation, social competences are described as part of study offers like i.e. business ethics, where it can be addressed directly and where "[...] the whole thing is not just a cross-section" (CASE 4\_2, par. 8). Overall, the second interviewee considers a "fundamental social mission" of HEIs. "And we too must really make an effort not to lose sight of the issue of social competence there, because it is necessary to solve social problems in which we are clearly involved" (CASE 4\_2, par. 40).

The role of HEIs for society is considered as highly important in the actual "post factual society" (CASE 4\_1, par. 32). The responsibility of universities includes the development of evidence-based scientific findings, to counteract an attitude that says that everything is arbitrary and that it is purely a matter of representation, which is important to be successful in various social functions (ibid.). This would also require active statements of HE teachers in an HE adequate way. Moreover, the heterogeneity of students in study settings would require active dialogues (initiated by HE teachers) to get to know other perspectives and "that you can stand it, too, that there are other opinions" (CASE 4\_1, par. 38). This was especially important for i.e. teacher students, who once will be in a (societal) multiplier position.

Within another interview, the role of HEIs for society is described as linking innovation capacity and social responsibility. Some study courses would allow to directly address topics related to this field, even on an abstraction level. Within this context, the interviewee highlights the political neutrality of HEIs and discusses, in what way and extent HEI teachers are allowed to express their political opinions. The discussion of macrosocial and individual values on the one hand and institutional norms on the other hand seem to be important at this HEI. This becomes even more relevant, as the definition and context of meaning of social competence in western democratic societies might differ from those in other cultures or forms of government.

"Is that indoctrinative then? Or can we do that, because society demands it and universities have a social mandate? This is the dilemma, in which we are also very active with this social competence" (CASE 4\_2, par. 23).

Finally, it is stated, that HEIs are not neutralization devices, because people live in them. Neutrality has its limits, where values that are worth protecting are attacked. Here, the HEI positions itself very clearly in order to counter the image that is brought to the HEI by the regional and national environment (CASE 4\_2, par. 24-26).

#### *Definition of social competence and its position in higher education*

Firstly, social competence is considered a personal trait. This entails a number of considerations that are usually associated with the measurement of personality traits, especially in quantitative empirical social research. The evaluation of social competences, for example, would require the isolated consideration of single dimensions against the background

of supporting theoretical constructs (CASE 4\_1, par. 44). This interviewee points out, that a HE teacher's definition of social competence derives from his or her academic profession resp. tradition of research. This would also take the case into account that HE teachers approach the term through an understanding of everyday life (CASE 4\_1, par. 48). As important dimensions of social competence within the own work environment, the first interviewee mentions respectful relationships, active clarification of critical issues, mutual development support what requires an environment that allows questions (CASE 4\_1, par. 50). While working in teams, the ability to take someone back sometimes, though HE teachers usually first have to put themselves in the spotlight. Especially the last argument states a dilemma, in which HE teachers have to balance.

Another interviewee describes in a first association process "[...] the ability to relate, empathy, trust, the ability to reflect, the ability to deal with conflicts" (CASE 4\_2, par. 12). A more abstract understanding is formulated as "the ability I need to be able to shape interaction relationships, to be able to shape them to succeed" (ibid), which explicitly excludes manipulative communication processes and rather bases on the approach of success on both sides [two individuals in an interaction situation; author's note]. In addition, here, the "ability to change perspective and listen to other points of view and let others be who they are without constantly insisting that people are who I am" is mentioned as a necessary condition for successful relations (ibid.). Considering the role of the context of a HEI, the interviewee describes the development of social competence in the field of values and norms as contextual factors with impact on the culture of a HEI, didactical concepts and an individual's personality on the opposite side. The context affects "how I behave and what social competence or how strongly I can express my social competence" (CASE 4\_2, par. 16). Trusting relationships are seen as a fostering factor, though this aspect appears to be valuing (CASE 4\_2, par. 52).

Also within this case, the development of social competences is widely considered as a task mainly related to families, which are responsible for the "fundamental social competence" (CASE 4\_2, par. 32). HEIs and schools are put in the same position while discussing the possibilities of educational institutions to affect an individual's social competence development. The relation of HEIs, teachers and students is described as a "[...] path, which we're trying to go together. That we together try to develop ourselves, individuals [HE teachers; author's note] as well as organisation and students. This takes both own social competence and the ability to reflect" (CASE 4\_2, par. 32). While the institution sets clear conditions, all actors have to take part in development processes, because this development comes from bottom-up rather than top-down (ibid.). Additional named requirements for social competence development are "available tools" (didactical concepts) as well as the motivation of both, students and HE teachers and other staff to design interaction situations to enable learning (CASE 4\_2, par. 33-34).

#### *The role of higher education teachers for social competence development*

In the course of the interviews, the role of HE teachers is described as a very active one. They act as role models, using the example of which students deal with aspects of social competence in order to develop their own (CASE 4\_1, par. 88). Lecturers provide suggestions for solving conflicts or problems, for example by introducing further perspectives. In addition, the principle of reciprocity expects teachers to bring into the learning process what they

themselves would like to see. Instead of an educational mandate, impulses for reflection are given, which the students then take up (or not) (CASE 4\_1, par. 92+96).

Until now, the extent of intrinsic motivation seems to be a driving factor behind a HE teacher's commitment towards social competence development (CASE 4\_2, par. 54). This means also the teachers' openness and "feeling" for the other person, as well as the readiness to get to know their students (CASE 4\_2, par. 72). They seek and find ways to implement related goals in their lectures,

"[...] because I believe that good teaching depends on being socially competent and that students are socially competent. Because I believe that I have to create a good, trusting basis or relationship between students and myself, that learning and good learning become possible and that we have a good exchange with each other and then I also get the feedback that what I do arrives, does it work?" (CASE 4\_2, par. 54).

This interviewee also sees the combination of both qualification of student by building up a solid fundament of knowledge in combination with competence development. This interviewee describes a huge persona benefit from own teaching activities: "I think it's great. Because I can develop myself" (CASE 4\_2, par. 66).

### *Structural embedding of social competence*

Starting with an overall view, the interviewees do not see a rather poor curricular embedding of social competence in their case. While there are courses about communication including the possibility to initiate specific social competence learning processes, higher education seems to be a space for cognition and cognitive learning goals (CASE 4\_1, par. 61-62). Either usually, social competence in HE teaching and learning appears as cross-sectional learning goal or, more often, when difficulties appear at the periphery of study courses. Related to the last case, a lack of social competence requires action by HE teachers. On the didactical level, social competence related aspects can be found in the implementation of concepts to foster cooperation between students, such as cooperative learning. However, the main orientation for HE teachers are module descriptions. "If there is social competence in it, then of course I will make it a very explicit theme" (CASE 4\_1, par. 80). If not, social competence would rather continue being a side effect of higher education teaching and learning.

While the first interviewee refers to the lack of curricular embedding of social competence to explain a rather less thematisation of it in lecture, the other interviewee describes the design of active teacher-student relations as possible implementation of social competence development apart from curricula or module descriptions. This approach requires an attitude of HE teachers, which includes the way to respond students' requests, the way to deal with students who want to test boundaries, as well as the consistency and congruence of a teacher's own interaction styles and capacities. Especially with regard to international students, a conscious approach is necessary here, as linguistic and cultural differences come into play (CASE 4\_2, par. 56). "I do not believe in prescribing normative concepts and saying that this is it". The pedagogical relationship seems to be much more important than a normative definition of learning goals.

### *Examples of good practice at the Technical University of Dresden*

A one example, the implementation of a relation-oriented didactical approach is mentioned, which enables open communication and a basis of trust. The receiving and giving of feedback is named as a fundamental need in this context. Another example is seen in a specific course concept called “project workshop” within the study course of “Project management”. The environment of self-organised learning and team development with intercultural aspects appeared to be a good example for social competence development in this case. However, the study course was closed in recent years. Moreover, the conduction of specific methods is named as helpful (here: exercises, which try to focus acoustic perception and place other forms of perception in the background in order to pay more attention to content instead of facial expressions or gestures (CASE 4\_2, par. 62).

Another example was created in a research project. Based on a qualitative inquiry of students, the researchers developed specific kinds of questions to animate students to reflecting on their learning processes. Also the further education for teachers in intercultural contexts was a part of this project (CASE 4\_2, par. 80). Problematic seems to be the sustainability of project results after its end.

One last example is existing cooperation with Polish and Czech HEIs to realise student exchanges. The intercultural seminars, which are organised in this context, are evaluated as serving the development of social competence (CASE 4\_2, par.80).

#### 7.4.4 Conclusions

Within this case, social competence appears to be one important outcome of higher education. It is described from two perspectives: a) a personal trait in terms of quantitative research with need of evidence and b) everyday understanding and c) a socio-scientific view. Overall, the development of social competence is seen as an important task of HE teachers through an informal embedding of learning impulses in the usual professional lecture. It is not stated, whether an embedding in explicit modules would be desirable. The interviewees rather state a strong individual commitment of HE teachers towards social competence as the base for its development.

## **8. Findings and results**

### **8.1 Summary of the results**

The inquiry of Higher Education actors on different organisational levels shows, that social competence is mostly rather part of a hidden agenda. The summary of the results concerning the actual state is pointed in a rather critical way to create room for discussions.

*Vague and different understandings of social competence between the faculties and HEIs.*

Related to the summed up state of the art (see p. 41), the results refer mainly to the first type of social competences, which bases widely on the “concept of competence” from Weinert (2001). The thematisation as social competence as a personal trait is a topic for empirical quantitative working scientists and the psychological view on social competences as enabling

drop-outs to find their way back into society is not a topic, at all. However, social competence expressed in terms of the DQR is also only rarely to find.

Social competence as understood by the interviewees shows a variety of expressions. 1) A profession-oriented point of view treats the term as part of the ability to act professionally in vocational contexts (including adequate behaviour, problem solving and communication/cooperation capabilities), which can be defined as 1a) employability. Another professional dimension means social competence in terms of 1b) scientificism. The dimension of employability dominates the structural embedding of social competence development in study programs, while HE teachers follow the goal of scientificism driven by their own commitment towards it. The level of structural embedding tends to be informal. 2) The second perspective describes social competence as something to be there after graduating from higher education, because it shows the realisation of the social mission, universities have. This understanding includes sustainability of acting, social responsibility (especially in leading positions) and the ability to create innovation. A third level of understanding social competence shows through the description of the students' working style. The realisation of a productive work and learning climate by students can also be seen as a field, where social competence manifests.

*Courses of study, whose fields of work have a strong focus on the implementation of social international situations, have more detailed descriptions of social competence than those, which have a more technical focus.*

On the one hand, this is not surprising, for higher education institutions were described in the interviews as institutions for education professionals in terms of knowledge and skills. Following this logic, technical courses would develop professionals in technical fields, while those with scope on human relations would "produce" graduates with social professions. On the other hand, the formal expression of social competence as learning goal in module descriptions is less than expected for study courses with scope on human relations. Moreover, especially the case three showed that the lack of social competence expression on a formal level does not necessarily hinder HE teachers to include social competence learning goals in the seminar contexts. However, it seems to stabilise the heterogeneous extent of fostering social competence, due its relation more to individual motivation than to structural embedding.

*Detailed definitions of social competence or social competences appear in bachelor's courses.*

Master's courses assume students to have developed general social competence and, therefore, focus rather on profession-related expressions of social competence, insofar as they consider them. This is surprising, because there were at least two goal dimensions of social competences defined within the case study: one targets the employability and another the scientificism of an academic education. Referring to the existing types of Masters' degree, for example the Master of Arts, Science or Education, one might have assumed specific expressions. Furthermore, often the contents with explicit relation to social competences are located in a specific module. It is questionable, whether this isolated structure does justice to a development idea including a temporal perspective.

*Importance of social competence is realised on an individual level. The development currently depends on teaching persons.*

Teachers, who consider social competence important, implement related learning goals in their study courses and lectures. However, these figures do not necessarily motivate colleagues to follow these approaches.

*Time is an important factor.*

Development needs the acquisition of knowledge and exercises, but for long-term success, practice over a longer timeframe is needed. Current structures on the one hand do not foresee an ongoing, comprehensive “red line” of practicing social competence explicitly. On the other hand, students are often forced to graduate quickly from university (financial, private or labour market related reasons). The time for sustainable changes is not always available.

*Great gap between strategic goals and operational level.*

The overall guiding principles of the presented case target social competence indirectly, but on a very abstract level. At this point, there is no transfer foreseen towards social competence in the study programs. This is shown in the next point.

*Structural appearance of social competence development is marginal.*

Clear descriptions of learning goals as well as adequate forms of exams, which focus social competence development, are missing within the study programs and module descriptions. A critical view on the field of “general studies” might see this structure as hindering the development of social competence, because the responsibility for these teaching and learning contents here seems to release others from their duties. Moreover, students can study whatever they prefer – social competence is not necessarily content of general studies. Overall, there is a little tendency that social competence is structurally embedded in the field of social sciences related to STEM programs. However, this difference is only small and not likely to be significant.

*A general commitment to social competence is questionable.*

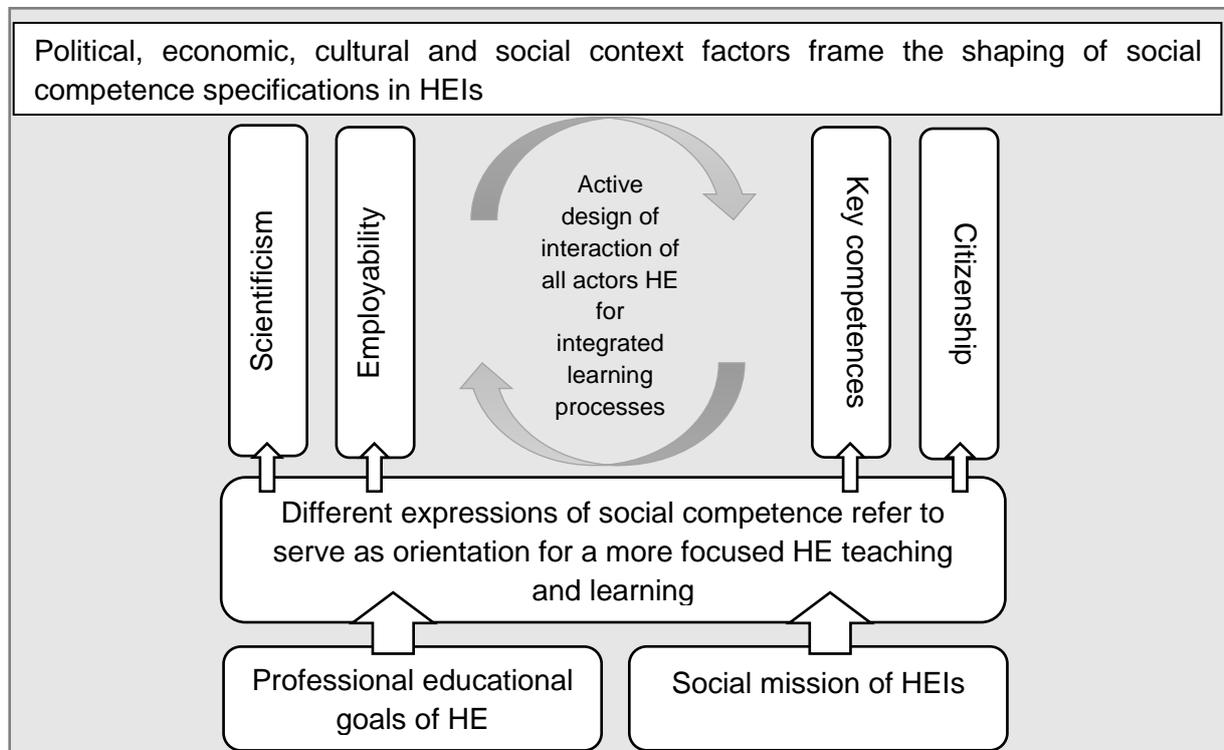
Everyone sees his/her responsibility for social competence development, but the level of acting seems to be difficult. Engagement towards social competence development relates to individual performance. The DQR and its descriptors for social competence is nearly unknown. Following a study about the utilisation potentials of the DQR, this is not surprising, as the DQR still has a low level of awareness (Dehnbostel, 2016). This study indicates a number of further difficulties in the HE sector, such as difficulties of understanding the level descriptions, missing assessment instruments for all dimensions and unclear learning goal descriptions (Dehnbostel, 2016, S. 26f.).

*Description of good practice examples are carried out in a very general way.*

The descriptions of good or best practice models tend to be either very vague or very related to the individual work environment. This fits with the former findings about the

## 8.2 Considerations towards necessary changes for an improved social competence development in Higher Education from German perspective

The presented case study has a number of limitations: firstly, the amount of cases does not even remotely reflect the variety of the German higher education sector, as presented in chapter 4.1. Secondly, there is no University of Applied Sciences included in the sample and due to that, the field of assessment is underrepresented here. As Universities of Applied Sciences are assumed to have rather developed the handling of competence and learning fields descriptions (see chapter 4.1), there could have been found examples. Finally, the identified good practice examples came from the conducted interviews and were not selected before. One last limitation on the structural level is the orienting and not binding character of the DQR, as well as the freedom of teaching. The reasons, why these limitations were accepted, were as follows: making a selection was necessary, so the decision was do



**Fig. 2.** Learning fields of social competence in higher education. (Own presentation)

represent different regions of Germany in order to represent different context conditions. The scientific approach of this study was to better understand the understandings and definitions of social competence. Therefore, universities as research institutions seemed to be the most promising, because they educate professionals for higher education careers by mission. Employability, here, is important as one of at least two equivalent targets (next to scientificism), while in the case of Universities of Applied Sciences it is the regular goal. The collection from best practice examples out of the interviews take place in order to get an idea about the consciousness of actors about social competence and the extent of their related understanding. The orienting character of the DQR cannot be disbanded by this study, as well as the freedom of teaching. This is not desirable, anyway. Both are important characters

of the German HE sector. However, they are taken into account when formulating the recommendations as environmental conditions, which offer a potential to develop social competence teaching and learning environments and set up cultural changes within HEIs in Germany. This chapter presents aspects, which arose from all sources taken into account. Figure 2 (p. 59) illustrates the results of the case study towards the definition of social competence in relevant target areas, where possible descriptors could relate to, namely scientificism, employability, key competences and citizenship.

**Social competence as a learning goal depends on a high commitment of everyone active in Higher Education.** Therefore, the management has to promote this actively towards the faculties and create orientation not only for doctorates, post-docs and professors, but also for everyone.

**Social competence teaching and learning needs formal embedding and informal frameworks.** Teachers need clear definitions, guidelines and examples of how to implement social competence in their teaching and learning, especially in large courses. This ranges from the communication and work style in seminars and lectures over the availability of exam forms and evaluation guidelines, until the fixed anchoring of such learning goals in module descriptions. If the formal implementation of social competence learning goals appears to be difficult, an internal Charta for social competence could make the beginning. This form would not need descriptors, but allow a cultural change in HEIs as well as the gathering of experiences to define descriptors in the future. However, it has to be proven, whether descriptors are sensible, as they leads to the desired results.

**Social competence as a learning goal needs a binding character and permission to act.** The implementation of related learning goals in accreditation procedures would be a necessary condition towards actions, which create fostering structures, such as the founding of task forces, a specified quality management, the creation of further education programs etc. A stronger funding in this area might lead to an increased need for justification.

**Social competence development needs time.** To realise this, the study structures must be adapted and students should be encouraged to think about critical time issues. It could be promising to address social competence development not only in BA, but also in MA courses directly.

**Environmental conditions have to be taken into account regularly and directly.** Developments that counteract democracy must be taken up actively. Universities and university actors must be allowed to react individually or through involve actual societal topics in their lectures. Moreover, the leadership itself should avoid antidemocratic movements within organisations, such as the reduction of participation opportunities for students.



## 9. Recommendations

According to the other country reports within this study, the following chapter is presented as a table. It provides recommendations towards social competence development and, where available, assessment and validation. The recommendations derive from both the interviews and the theoretical considerations before.

### 9.1 Institutional level

Case	HEI	Recommendations on institutional level
Pilot	UHB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rough conception frame is needed to offer more orientation</li> <li>- HE teachers all have to pull the same rope and take social competences into account within their didactic conceptions</li> <li>- establishment of higher education didactic centres, where none is implemented, yet</li> <li>- Consideration of social competence (ability to teach, readiness to enable others) in appointment procedures</li> <li>- multipliers in HEIs</li> <li>- put social competences on the HEI's agenda actively</li> <li>- conduct research and provide more literature about the topic</li> <li>- forward the development of theoretical model conceptions</li> </ul>
Case 2	UKonstanz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increase networking with other faculties, benefit from interdisciplinarity</li> <li>- not financial cutbacks in such modules that presumably develop social competence</li> <li>- Consideration of social competence (ability to teach, readiness to enable others) in appointment procedures</li> <li>- teaching must be given greater weight and become more visible</li> <li>- topic must be carried by HEI's leadership</li> <li>- HE teaching must become more present on the agenda of education policies</li> <li>- allow HE teachers to use free space creatively</li> </ul>
Case 3	UCologne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- state must financially support further education of HE teachers</li> </ul>
Case 4	TU Dresden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practice must be lived, papers will not help; means: engaging HE teachers towards social competence in their teaching</li> </ul>



## 9.2 National level

Case	HEI	Recommendations on national level
Pilot	UHB	- interpretation support for the DQR for example from the BMBF
Case 2	UKonstanz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- creation of best practice collection in the field of teaching</li> <li>- learning from other HEIs through communities of practice</li> <li>- laws not useful, better to support a bottom-up growing, for example through projects</li> <li>- national funding for social competence development projects</li> <li>- motivate HE teachers to try out something new in terms of didactic-methodical conceptions</li> <li>- attract professors as strong promoters</li> </ul>
Case 3	UCologne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observing the development, whether young people tend to make a dual apprenticeship first and then enter HEIs</li> <li>- observing the trend of private HEIs</li> </ul>
Case 4	TU Dresden	- marketing campaign for social competence to make it popular as an important topic and, though that, slowly change organisational cultures. Also thinkable as institutional recommendation

## 9.3 European level

Case	HEI	Recommendations on European level
Pilot	UHB	- more information about possible transfer of social competence teaching and learning into HE teaching through the European Commission
Case 2	UKonstanz	-
Case 3	UCologne	-
Case 4	TU Dresden	-

## 10. Executive summary

To start with the social competence definition, there were three levels of social competence identified. In terms of a HE mission, social competence appears as part of scientificism, employability and key competences, which help to take part actively in society through the ability to successfully initiate and conduct social relationships and interactions. The identification of descriptors was not conclusively possible. However, it became clear, that everyday understandings of social competence are associated with very narrow aspects of employability or as part of an educational mission, which would be task of families or schools. It is assumed, that descriptors in HE should include a specific kind of taxonomy or logic that help to differ general abilities from an academic expression of social competence learning goals.

HE teachers consider social competence important at all levels of higher education. In particular, university lecturers in the academic middle school are concerned with the quality of teaching, which apparently also includes the promotion of social competence.

Students see the development of social competence as an important part of their education. However, the understanding of social competence is not very differentiated and refers mainly to three points: communication with teachers and fellow students, preparation for later professional life as well as opportunities for co-determination within the university as a learning and testing space. Moreover, students, as well as HE teachers, considered the development of capacities necessary, which can be seen as expressions of democratic basics.

Also on the level of HE governance, social competence seems to be an important aspect. Moreover, this level is the one to act as a role model, more than the HE teachers. Even, if cultural changes can probably start bottom-up, it is desirable (and maybe much easier) that leaders initiate a change towards a more conscious social competence development top-down.

All actors see themselves responsible for the development of social competence, always in relation to the own position, function or profession. The commitment of the interviewees and participants of focus groups towards social competence relates to what this means to the different groups of actors.

Overall, a public discourse about social competence development in higher education is still missing, probably due to prejudices or misunderstandings as named in the first paragraph of this section. Existing examples and practices have to be much more visible to enrich teaching and learning and the quality of HE teaching in general. The identified good examples were rather punctual. A general view on social competence as learning target or object to professionalization or exchange was found in beginnings, however, not on the level of formal assessment. Informal assessment approaches have been identified, but often lacking a structural embedding.

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## Appendices

### Annex I – Interview guidelines for higher education staff and students

#### Leading questions for interviews with quality management actors in higher education/ higher education teachers/ chancellors/ deans

1. What do you mean by the objective of higher education? What role do universities play in society?
2. What do you think of when you hear the term "social competence"? How do you position social competence in higher education?
3. To what extent do you think higher education institutions are responsible for developing social competence? Whose responsibility do you think this is or whose should it be?
4. How do you see your role as university teachers in promoting social competence among students?
5. What examples of good practice in promoting aspects of social competence do you think of, both in your own practice and in relation to higher education in general?
6. What do you think are the limits to the development of social competence in higher education in general and in your institution in particular?
7. How important is the development of social competence in higher education to you and why?

#### Leading questions for focus group discussions with students

1. What do you mean by the objective of higher education? What role do universities play in society?
2. What do you think of when you hear the term "social competence"? To what extent has your higher education so far contributed to your development as a socially competent individual?
3. What examples can you give of how learning situations at university - or beyond - have helped you to develop your social skills? In your opinion, who played a major role in this?
4. What recommendations or suggestions do you have as to how "your" university can become an even more socially thinking institution?



## Annex II – Level descriptors of the DQR

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DQR Level 6

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### **Social Competence**

Work responsibly in expert teams or lead groups or organisations<sup>42</sup> responsibly.

To guide the professional development of others and to anticipate problems in the team.

Present complex technical problems and solutions to experts in an argumentative manner and develop them further with them.

### **Autonomy**

Define, reflect and evaluate goals for learning and work processes and design learning and work processes independently and sustainably.

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Level 7

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### **Social competence**

Lead groups or organisations responsibly within the framework of complex tasks and represent their work results.

Targeted promotion of the professional development of others.

Leading sector-specific and interdepartmental discussions.

### **Autonomy**

Engage in new application- or research-oriented tasks, define goals by reflecting on the possible social, economic and cultural effects, use suitable instruments and independently develop knowledge for them.

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Level 8

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### **Social competence**

To lead organisations or groups with complex or interdisciplinary tasks responsibly, thereby activating their potentials.

To promote the professional development of others in a sustainable and targeted way.

Leading interdisciplinary discussions and making innovative contributions in subject-specific discussions, also in international contexts.

### **Autonomy**

Define goals for new complex application- or research-oriented tasks, by reflecting on the possible social, economic and cultural effects as well as select suitable instruments and develop new ideas and processes.

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<sup>42</sup> Including enterprises, administration units or non-profit organisations.

## Annex III – Types and numbers of HEIs in Germany (state 2018)

Tab. 1. Number of higher education institutions in Germany from 2010/11 to 2017/18<sup>43</sup>.

	2017/2018 <sup>*</sup>	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
<i>Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen)*</i>	217	217	215	217	212	216	210	207
<i>Universities (Universitäten)</i>	106	106	107	107	106	108	108	106
<i>Art Academies (Kunsthochschulen)</i>	53	53	52	52	53	52	52	51
<i>Colleges of administration (Verwaltungsfachhochschulen)</i>	30	30	30	29	29	29	29	29
<i>Theological Universities (Theologische Hochschulen)</i>	16	16	16	16	17	17	16	16
<i>Universities of (Teacher) Education (Pädagogische Hochschulen)</i>	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
<i>Higher education institutions in total (Hochschulen insgesamt)</i>	428	428	426	427	423	428	421	415

<sup>43</sup> retrieved from: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/247238/umfrage/hochschulen-in-deutschland-nach-hochschulart/>; online: 09.04.2018, 13:08.