

## Quality Assurance For Transition Areas From Vocational To Academic Education

Christian-Andreas Schumann[1], Claudia Dittrich[2], Eike Ickelsheimer[3]

West Saxon University of Applied Sciences Zwickau

Dr.-Friedrichs-Ring 2A,  
08056 Zwickau, Germany

[1]Christian.Schumann@fh-zwickau.de

[2]Claudia.Dittrich@fh-zwickau.de

[3]Eike.Ickelsheimer@fh-zwickau.de

### ABSTRACT

The cooperation between the West Saxon University of Applied Sciences Zwickau and a non-academic educational provider is a relative new form of education, within which vocational competencies get extended in a way, so that their later accreditation is easily possible. For the cooperation model with the Academy for Business and Administration existing competencies get recognized on the basis of a joint quality management and are complemented by supplemental offerings with the result, that an augmented accreditation and therefore the assessment in a higher semester is possible. Within the frame of lectures, which are implemented by both educational institutions, different preliminary competencies get adjusted in the transition area. The quality assurance concept that covers contents, teachers and organization guarantees that rendered achievements can be recognized in any case. The accreditation procedure as a whole serves as beneficial activity to facilitate the transition from vocational to academic education and to abbreviate the duration of study. But also the further development of additional offers and tutoring systems are important components of the recognition and transfer management since they benefit the formative and developmental process of vocational qualified individuals regarding quality enhancement.

### Keywords:

### INTRODUCTION

Since 2008 the West Saxon University of Applied Sciences Zwickau (WHZ) offers in cooperation with the Academy for Business and Administration (VWA) Munich an extra-occupational Bachelor's degree for Business Administration with duration of eight semesters. Students who obtain the certificate in Business Management have therefore the possibility to gain an academic degree without the general university entrance qualification. The essence of this cooperation lies in a joint accreditation procedure, which enables the graduates of the VWA Munich to get recognized their vocational training and experiences for the studies at WHZ. Due to this procedure 50 % of the studies can be substituted. The accreditation procedure serves as beneficial activity to facilitate the transition from vocational, non-formal to academic education and to abbreviate the duration of study. These and further measurements for quality improvement are put to the test within the project "Recognition and transfer management for the integration of vocational training, non-formal, academic and further education within the process of lifelong learning", one the one hand to increase attractiveness of education at VWA and WHZ and on the other hand to open up new target groups. This is one of twenty research projects which are monitored and supported by a nationwide initiative on "Accreditation of Prior Learning From Vocational Education and Training and Work for Higher Education Programmes" (ANKOM), launched by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (further information available at ANKOM homepage).

### Methods and Processes

The aforementioned project deals with procedures and modes of accreditation and with designing transfer scenarios from vocational to academic education. The consideration of corresponding offers is essential to stick with the transition from information to knowledge society and to remain competitive in the sector of training opportunities. The cooperation with a non-academic educational provider allows the extension of vocational

competencies and their later recognition for the university training. On the basis of a joint quality management existing competencies get recognized and are further more complemented by supplemental offerings. Therefore an augmented accreditation and the assessment in a higher semester are possible. Within the frame of lectures, which are implemented by both educational institutions, different preliminary competencies get adjusted in the transition area. The quality assurance concept that covers contents, teachers and organization guarantees that rendered achievements can be recognized in any case. In this instance an all-in accreditation procedure is used. Whether the contents of modules of both educational institutions are of the same value is determined by an equivalence test (ANKOM 2010). For a successful accreditation process transparency and reliability are two important factors. Additionally to the recognition of qualifications gained through vocational education, students have the possibility to get recognized informal learning outcomes, which they obtained during their working life experiences. Since they study extra-occupational it is only reasonable to consider the workplace also as learning environment. Therefore, in a specially designed module "Working on Projects", students develop papers corresponding to real projects and tasks of their workplace. By reflecting academic theory on vocational tasks and contrariwise, an optimal interlocking between theory and practice is ensured.

In order to facilitate the transition to university further measurements are necessary. Therefore, it must be distinguished between complex and special action fields. The question of recognizing vocational acquired skills and the successful transition to academic education can only be solved in a complex approach. Thus, integrated solutions for the holistic process from the cognition of educational requirements to the final degree are needed. By establishing framework conditions within the complex approach, foundations are laid for the special action fields, in which integrated training opportunities for vocational qualified individuals can be implemented. The accomplished measurements include the areas organization and structure, program and content, services and resources. The specific promoted measurements in all areas benefit the accreditation of prior learning and the facilitation of the transition to higher education and create therefore an immediate advantage for every participant with vocational and non-formal qualifications.

To meets the students' requirements and to ensure quality standards the program is permanently evaluated. Corresponding to the results specific measurements are immediately implemented. Of special interest at it is the permanent optimization of the transition and accreditation process. Definite evaluation results and the derived actions will be discussed in detail in the following paragraph. Another process serving the permanent quality assurance is the further development of the university course. In response to changing demands in theory and practice enduring adaptations are made. Teaching and learning contents are pointedly reorganized and adjusted in order to exhaust a maximum of accreditations potentials. Resulting scopes are used to optimize transition and to provide supplemental offerings.

With the aim of adapting the already successfully realized university course to further applications, all experiences and best practise solutions are gleaned and documented. They will serve to develop a guideline for other departments of WHZ and other universities to transfer the model to other courses and co-operation partners.

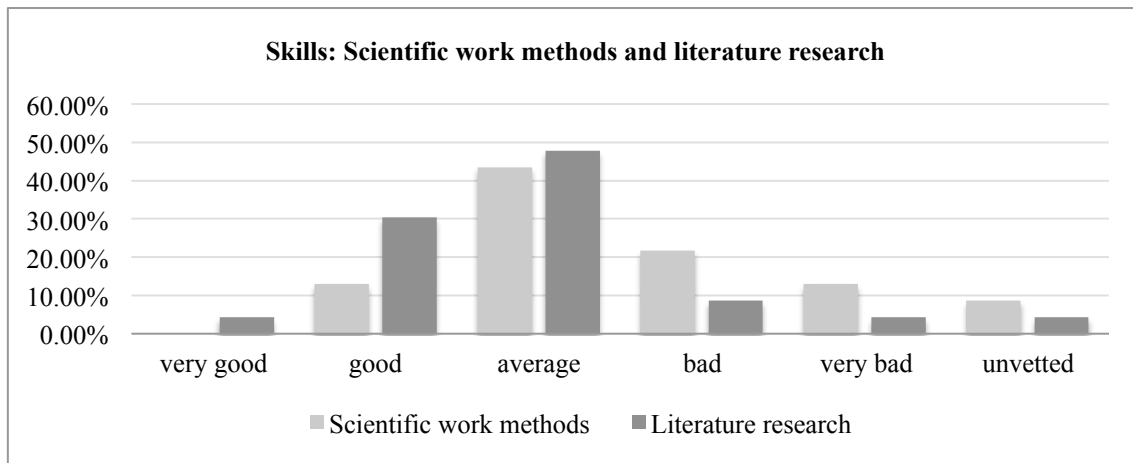
### **Outcomes**

The extra-occupational distance course Business Administration was substantial and structural reorganized in order to abbreviate the duration of study, adjust learning contents and therefore to optimize the transfer and recognition management. Furthermore, the redevelopment happened for the purpose of a demand-orientated adaptation, the enhancement of attractiveness of the university course and the opening up of new target groups. The model has shortened from ten to eight semesters, from which the first four semesters can be fully accredited for graduates of VWA Munich. The curriculum and contents of modules were reviewed and revised regarding topicality, workload and legal conformity. In this context also regulations for university admission, accreditation and assessment have been reviewed, preconditions made by the German Ministry of Culture and Education have been adapted (KMK 2002 and 2008). A further innovation is that students prospectively have to choose only one profile, in which they intensify their studies, instead of two. Possible profiles are: accounting and controlling, business management, human resource management, informatics or logistics. The aim is a stronger profiling corresponding to the student's personal interests and their individual tasks in their workplace. For a fluent transition from vocational to academic education students' have to absolve preparatory courses. With this supportive measurement students shall be optimal prepared for academic requirements and challenges they have to face when starting their specialisation in the chosen profile.

Parallel they are working they absolve the module “Working on Projects” to get recognised their vocational experiences by developing papers on academic issues corresponding to the tasks in their workplace. They have to detect and analyse problem areas and find appropriate solutions.

As already mentioned above, the university course is regularly evaluated to ensure quality assurance and an adequate development. Besides general questions about program, content, organisation and services, within the last evaluation students were questioned about their own estimation of their previous knowledge and skills. The analysis has shown that the participants partly have essential deficiencies in the fields of scientific work methods and literature research:

Figure 1: Extract of student poll



Source: own figure

Another essential result of the evaluation was that a larger part of participants demands a more extensive offer concerning consulting and guidance in the areas of content and organisation. Corresponding to these and further results of the evaluation specific measurement were undertaken to ensure the efficient transition to higher education and a successful graduation:

#### *Tutoring system*

To remedy the deficiencies concerning scientific work methods and literature research a tutoring system was established. By participating in a workshop, students learn fundamental techniques about scientific research and writing. The active attendance enables them to implement and apply the new knowledge, at first to drafting papers for several modules and finally to writing their Bachelor thesis. The tutorial is meanwhile a permanent feature of the university course and very well accepted by the students.

#### *Supplemental offerings*

In cooperation with the “Job Factory” Career Service of WHZ supplemental offerings for distance learners were established and implemented. Students have the possibility to gain additional qualifications by participating in e-learning modules or workshops or to take advantage of services concerning career consulting. The joint setup of these supplemental offerings is again a beneficial measurement for the designing of the transfer management, on the one hand concerning the transition from vocational to higher education and on the other hand from university to the professional career. The target-group-specific offers include the promotion of intercultural competencies as well as soft skills and leadership skills.

#### *Establishment of a service centre*

The establishment of a service centre serves the individual support of the students regarding organisation and

university program. The realisation of the service centre including help desk occurs in cooperation with the VWA Munich. It serves as beneficial measurement for the facilitation of the transition to academic education and the study progress. Students or anyone interested receive comprehensive consulting on questions regarding the study, conditions of studying, examination requirements and accreditation regulations. To warrant an unproblematic accessibility especially for the students at VWA Munich a staff member of WHZ visits Munich for on-site consulting on a settled day in quarterly periods.

All these measurements encompass the complex and special action field and are important keystones for a successful transfer and recognition process.

### **Conclusion**

All presented processes and measurement serve the integration of vocational and academic education, especially in the areas propaedeutic and transition from vocational training to university and finally also to the professional career. They have substantial influence on the successful study progress as well as graduation and aim at supporting the students in their vocational and personal development. Thus, the pursuance of a holistic approach is of fundamental significance and only by steady optimizing the recognition and transfer management the educational process of vocational qualified individuals can be supported at best. For the attainment of target objectives transition areas from vocational to academic education are designed corresponding to the demands of vocational qualified students and higher education is adapted to different forms of qualifications of prior educational processes. The most important elements in this procedure is the recognition of prior learning outcomes and vocational experiences but also the establishment of supplemental offerings like preparatory courses and tutoring systems.

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