

Educating teachers to embrace diversity

Joint recommendations

**by the German Rectors' Conference and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of
Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany**

(Resolution passed by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and
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Resolution passed by the German Rectors' Conference on 18 March 2015)

Inclusion: enabling participation and a successful education for everyone

The development of inclusive education in mainstream schools aims to make the education of every pupil as successful as possible, to promote social cohesion, social participation and to avoid any kind of discrimination. Diversity in the wider meaning of the word is part of the real world and the responsibility of all schools. Consequently, schools also need to take the different aspects of diversity into account. These include disabilities within the meaning of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹ and inherent conditions such as language, living situation, cultural and religious orientation, gender as well as special gifts and talents.

At any school, it is the teachers who will create an environment in which diversity is acknowledged and appreciated as normality and as a strength. Teachers need professional competences to allow them to recognise pupils' special gifts and any disadvantages, impediments and other obstacles that they might exhibit or experience and to put in place appropriate pedagogical measures for prevention or support. Cooperation and communication between teachers in different teaching functions and between the various professions are gaining in importance. Therefore, degree programmes which lead to a teaching position in any type of school and at any level of schooling should prepare prospective teachers cooperatively to take a constructive and professional approach to diversity.

Diversity needs diversity: education paths for teachers in inclusive schools

With its "University for All" recommendations of 21 April 2009 and those on teacher education of 14 May 2013, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) provided the initial impetus for dealing with diversity in its own institutions and in the courses these institutions offer. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) issued a recommendation entitled "Inclusive education of children and young people with disabilities in schools" in 2011, the 12 June 2014 reworking of "Standards for Teacher Training in the Educational Sciences" and the "Jointly Issued Content Requirements of the Federal States for Academic Disciplines and Subject-specific Didactics in Teacher Education" thus creating the necessary framework that now needs to gain substance and authority in the curricula for teacher education.

To facilitate and promote this task, the KMK and the HRK held a joint conference on 1 December 2014 which was attended by researchers in educational sciences, special-needs education, various subject-specific didactic and academic disciplines as well as by representatives from the ministries responsible for schools and for higher education. The key findings of the debates that took place at the conference are included in this recommendation.

Both organisations are keen to ensure that including people with different learning needs, capacity and educational history in shared learning processes and shared locations is not perceived primarily as a burden, but as a benefit. This includes paying particular attention to learners who are at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement. The recommendation is intended to provide guidance on inclusion to higher education institutions, ministries and authorities as part of teacher education and to encourage all those involved to engage with the issue.

It should be noted that the starting points from which the federal states and the higher education institutions and teacher education institutions approach school and education structures are very heterogeneous. Federalism and the different profiles of higher education institutions and degree programmes make it possible to achieve the same objective of obtaining the fundamental competences required to create inclusive learning environments and schools in which diversity is embraced in different ways. It is indispensable that the content of teacher training programmes be

¹ "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" of 13 December 2006

comparable so that the mutual recognition of teacher training qualifications as well as the mobility of qualified teachers can be guaranteed.

Dealing with inclusion professionally: teacher education in cooperation with colleagues

The demands made on teachers have changed significantly with the desire to ensure that education and intellectual development take better account of the many aspects of diversity. Dealing professionally with inclusion will become a general requirement of teacher education. Educating teachers to embrace inclusive schooling is therefore a cross-sectional task for educational sciences, subject-specific didactics and academic disciplines which must be dealt with cooperatively and mutually agreed upon for all types of teaching. Classroom practice in the second phase of teacher education should develop appropriate concepts for teaching methodologies which view the heterogeneity of the groups of learners as the accepted standard. The continuing education and career development of teachers who are already working in schools should be given particular consideration. The required competences for teachers include not only knowledge, abilities and skills. Teachers should also exhibit an attitude and a disposition towards diversity which is to be developed through professional processes of reflection, based on experience and supported by theory, and made tangible by practical experience.

All teachers should be educated and continuously trained in a way that will allow them to acquire fundamental transferable competences in general teaching and in special needs education. This should also enable them to develop a professional approach to dealing with diversity in schools, particularly in the areas of educational diagnostics and special programmes to foster and support their pupils. These competences will be substantiated and consolidated by studying subject-specific didactics and academic disciplines and will be analytically and practically put to the test and also be reflected on in a task-based teaching practice. Subject-specific didactics also have a key part to play in the development and implementation of concepts of differentiated teaching. It remains essential that teachers provide in-depth expertise in special-needs teaching that goes beyond basic competences.

Professional cooperation between different strands of the teaching profession and/or professional groups is a crucial factor in the success of inclusive schools. It is therefore recommended that multi-professional teams be formed that will fulfil the complex professional duties when dealing with diversity, cooperation and networking within the school community and beyond. A professional attitude to the limits of their own competence, the knowledge of the potential offered by other professions and the readiness to work with colleagues are essential elements of a career in teaching. These elements are acquiring greater significance and university teachers must take account of them so they can set good examples themselves.

To enable higher education institutions to meet the expectations associated with educating teachers for inclusive teaching, the higher education institution, faculty or department management need to give the issue the necessary priority. Discourse within the higher education institutions on educational sciences, special-needs education, subject-specific didactics and academic disciplines in order to develop the teacher education curricula is indispensable. This discourse should facilitate the processes of change and use the tools available to higher education institution management to reinforce and safeguard positive approaches in research and teaching. The cooperation of higher education institutions, teacher training institutions, schools, institutions offering continuing education and cooperation partners outside of schools in this area will contribute to the success of further development.

Inclusion as a mission statement in teacher education: recommendations for implementation

It depends on the situation prevailing in the higher education institutions whether additive concepts (basic qualification modules) or integrative concepts (integration in education sciences, subject-specific didactics and academic discipline modules, lectures and other teaching) in the teacher education degree programmes are more suitable for the implementation of topics specifically related to inclusion in the curricula. It is recommended that additive concepts are complemented by integrated concepts and that an overall design for inclusion in teacher education is implemented. Curricular coordination and cooperation between educational sciences, subject-specific didactics, academic disciplines and practical studies are particularly important. Intertwined curricula will enable students to gain specialist knowledge in educational sciences and academic disciplines, transfer this knowledge to specific issues in subject-specific didactics, apply and reflect it in practice. Inclusion and dealing with diversity can become a main subject matter for existing modules, lectures and other teaching or provide material for reflection and observation in training sessions for teaching practice or be prioritised in teaching practice itself.

Internships for teaching practice offer a number of different options for learning, experiencing and thinking about diversity in the regular routine of a school, depending on when they are placed during the study process and on their length, the level of supervision and integration in the degree programme. Practical elements at the start of the course offer provide orientation and the initial opportunity to contemplate the demands placed by diversity on the professional role of teachers. Teaching practice over a longer period, on the other hand, offers the opportunity to gain awareness of the complex demands of teaching in a school, which can be analysed and systematically associated with the courses in educational science, special-needs teaching and subject-specific didactics. Throughout the different phases, the use of reflection tools such as portfolios, can encourage potential teachers to reflect upon their own professional image with reference to their conduct and their attitudes to the issue of inclusion in schools.

Furthermore, changes to the content of teacher education require different forms of teaching and learning to be established, and also a new way to define and assess competences. It is recommended that competence-led and cooperative assessment formats to be used both during and at the conclusion of the courses are developed in every higher education institution offering teacher education courses.

Implementing competence-orientation in higher education institutions requires adequate time and resources for designing the teaching and examinations and also ongoing training for and an exchange of information between lecturers. Successful teaching of inclusion-specific topics needs to rely on more research into the handling of heterogeneity and inclusion (in discipline-related diagnostics and inclusive subject-specific didactics, for example) and appropriate qualification of early career researchers to reach an adequate number of professors. Research programmes on a national scale are needed to achieve this.

Concepts throughout and across higher education institutions support them to assess the requirement for adequate material and personnel resources for research and teaching and to secure these resources. Use should be made of the options made available by the "Quality Offensive in Teacher Education" initiative.

In the second phase of teacher education, future teachers must be enabled to apply diagnostic procedures, to offer a range of ways to make learning accessible in the classroom in the form of different exercises and topics at different levels and to evaluate their own teaching.

The HRK and KMK point out that in many cases teachers in schools are already facing the current challenges of inclusion and that extending the opportunities for the further qualification of teachers already working in schools should be examined. More opportunities for high-quality career development should be made available to teachers who are working in schools and to school management to support them to put inclusion into practice at their schools. The potential of the

higher education institutions should be used for measures of this kind when teachers embark on their careers and in their ongoing training and career development. The establishment of study courses for professional development should be examined.

The HRK and KMK are aware that the implementation of these recommendations will entail fundamental changes at higher education institutions, particularly in teacher education degree programmes. They recommend to address the necessary changes in a dialogue between schools, teacher training institutions, higher education institutions and ministries in order to fully use the available possibilities.

Evaluation procedures aimed at enhancing quality can support the further development of degree programmes. Procedures for (re-)accreditation will allow the higher education institutions to demonstrate that potential teachers can obtain the competences required by an inclusive school at their institution.

The HRK and KMK urge everyone involved in teacher education to fulfil their responsibility for creating the institutional and conceptual basis and content of teacher education that will allow teachers to embrace diversity. They agree to evaluate the progress of the implementation and subject it to consideration at appropriate intervals.