

Evaluations on diversity in German higher education: developments and examples

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Both the increase in access to higher education and globalization overall have been instrumental in moving university leaders to assess their institutional stance on equity and diversity. Depending on the history and location of countries, some HEIs already have well-established codes of practice in place that encourage and maintain equity (Ingle, 2005). Their teaching takes diversity into account (Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005; Levitan & Wolf, 1994). Other HEIs are, however, still in the infancy of developing instruments that raise awareness of equity and the encouragement of diversity on campus. Students in Germany were, until the 1990s, fairly homogenous in origin, predominantly white European from within Germany. The events of the Second World War raised awareness regarding racial discrimination, which is perhaps best exemplified if we refer to the liberal constitution, passed in 1949, which allows free access to higher education and is tolerant of all cultures and religions. However, universities did not perceive a great need to address diversity in detail. German student demography has, however, altered quite markedly in more recent times (cf. Gärtner, 2010). Numerous factors can be identified: an increase in immigrants from Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey gaining access to German university education from the 1960s onwards (so-called *Bildungsinländer*), growing numbers of international students, who are attracted to predominantly non fee-paying German higher education, the Bologna Reform, which has opened up the European higher education arena and, more recently, an influx of refugees who wish to complete their education. Mechanisms have been introduced to cater for differing student needs, many of which have been financially supported by the state. This seems slightly paradox, however, when actual *needs* remain largely unknown, or only known to a limited extent. Two questions therefore arise: Is diversity in Germany being identified, for example, through the implementation of evaluation instruments, and secondly, to what extent is diversity, where identified, regarded as a resource which can enrich the student learning experience?

If we examine the number of foreign students at German universities at present, we see that the figures are fairly low on average, with the University of Munich welcoming the largest number of foreign students at 15% of the total student population (Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich, 2014). Students originate from increasing numbers of countries, e.g. 99 countries at the University of Rostock (Rostock University, 2014) to name just one example. However, diversity addresses not only ethnic background, but other aspects such as age, gender, educational background, country of origin, main language spoken, religion, sexual orientation, disability etc.). If we examine the mission statements from Germany's ten oldest universities, the majority include gender mainstreaming, diversity and internationalism as areas they wish to support, with the main focus on gender mainstreaming and international partnerships in research. However, difficulties arise in terms of developing equity in academia when the demographics and needs of the student body are unclear. This is one of the challenges German universities face at present, as they frequently do not have enough information on their students in order to make informed strategic decisions relating to equity and diversity.

When comparing the large amount of information gathered by universities in Great Britain on student admission (e.g. self-assessment statements, motivation, background, interests, headteacher statements etc.), or that gathered by the National Student Survey to that being gathered in Germany, there is far more information available in Britain than in Germany. On matriculation, German students are only required to provide very basic demographic data (*Abitur* grade, gender, age, address), data which is not forwarded to course leaders. Unless the latter ask for voluntary information from students on their demography in course or module evaluations, they can usually only speculate at reasons for poor progress, let alone adapt teaching and learning to meet specific student needs. Although demographic

student surveys have been carried out, notably that conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation in cooperation with CHE-Consult from 2010-2012 (Berthold & Leichsenring, 2012), and unless universities conduct their own evaluations which incorporate items on demography and discrimination, they may only have limited information to help them understand their students at micro level. If HEIs wish to encourage diversity and equity, they need to develop appropriate instruments which will provide information on their students.

Although evaluations of teaching programmes and courses are widely implemented in Germany, these seldom include detailed questions on student demographics. In order to investigate the extent to which diversity is being evaluated in Germany and which kinds of evaluation are presently being conducted in the German-speaking higher education area addressing the context of diversity, the working committee of higher education of the Evaluation Society (DeGEval) recently held a one-day conference with a view to identifying not only the types of evaluation being employed to learn more about students and their different needs, but whether these evaluations were actually leading to an enhanced learning experience.

Drawing on presentations held during the conference, in this paper we introduce some of the instruments in place or which are currently being piloted to examine diverse student needs. One evaluation (Lehmann, TU Dresden) investigates the particular needs of foreign students who make up large numbers currently taking music degrees in Germany. Another (Happ et al., Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) compares diversity in economics students, asking which items are of particular importance to teaching. Two separate evaluations (Kopischke, University of Hamburg and Koch, University of Bremen respectively) examined the extent to which student diversity is necessitating changes in the structure of degree programmes. The University of Duisburg-Essen, whose student body is highly diverse, has introduced a diversity-sensitive evaluation programme for its educators, marking a switch from seeing diversity as “a challenge to be dealt with” (Sliwka, 2010, p.214) to instead becoming “an asset and opportunity” (ibid., p.214). Bonnes & Breiwe show how ongoing feedback from elected students *during* courses in Duisburg-Essen is currently being implemented to raise educator awareness with regard to diversity. We conclude with a prognosis as to how the evaluation landscape on diversity may develop in Germany over the next few years.

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