

The dual study concept of the Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University – New perspectives for an effective collaboration between science and business

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1. Objectives

The Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW) is one of the best-known locations for dual degree programs in Germany. It is based on the principle of dual studies, that was pioneered by its predecessor “Berufsakademie” (University of Cooperative Education) 40 years ago (cp. Zabeck, Weibel & Müller 1978; Zabeck & Zimmermann, 1995). The system of dual learning, in which employers and a state-run institution work closely together, has an outstanding reputation in Germany. The DHBW represents the extension of this system into the field of higher education. Its trademarks are the participation of training companies and the tight integration of theory and practice. With this strategy, DHBW provides a route to sought-after academic qualifications while enabling students to gain extensive practical experience. This foundation equips DHBW students and graduates to take on challenging tasks early in their professional careers, helping to launch them on successful career paths.

2. Framework

The German system of tertiary education faces major challenges, following the demographic change and modified demands of the labour market (cp. Kehm, 2004; Wehrin, 2011). The relationship between higher education and employment has to be reconsidered; alternative models need to be established. The recent developments, which took part in the last few years, can be described as a functional differentiation (cp. Teichler, 2005). The binary system of Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) was split up. Developments such as the “Bologna Process” lead to the transformation of study programs, new structures of curricula and innovative forms of educational governance (cp. Schomburg, 2000; Mayer, Müller & Pollak, 2007). The race between higher education institutions is going to be highly competitive (cp. Pasternack, 2009; Erhardt, 2011). Even the German Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) recommends a further diversification of the higher education sector (cp. Wissenschaftsrat, 2011). Within this ongoing process of internal differentiation, the dual study concept counts as a suitable answer to the changing demands of the economy (cp. Bachem & Pietschmann, 2011).

3. Approach

The entrepreneurial approach of the DHBW consists particularly of the close connection between scientific studies and professional experience. The key feature of dual, practice-oriented degree programs is alternating three-month phases, with students learning theory at the university and receiving practical training from an enterprise or social institution. Additionally, the provision of key skills, personal development and cross-cultural competences are important building blocks for education. The curriculum and course content is tailored to the changing demands of industries and businesses (cp. Berthold et al., 2009). As dual partners of DHBW, the participating companies are integral members of the university. The cooperation between the university and its dual partners is characterised by its level of intensity, personal contact and institutionalised collaboration in committees. As a result, the dual partners routinely participate in important university decisions. This collaboration helps to ensure that degree programs are developed which are both academically sound as well as meet the

needs of the labour market. Regular workshops serve the optimization and quality assurance in all academic areas. In addition to the full time professors, courses are also taught by freelance trainers, consultants and executives who contribute cutting-edge knowledge and expertise from their professional fields.

4. Relevance

The dual study system counts as a suitable answer to the changing demands of the economy. With more than 30.000 students – and almost 9.000 partner companies – the DHBW has become one of the largest universities in the country. By selecting students directly through the dual partners, it is ensured that top-notch, goal-oriented high school graduates with an affinity for practice-oriented education study at DHBW. Success indicators of its trendsetting concept, which will be presented on the conference in detail, are for example the extremely high employability rate: Roughly 90% of the graduates are already holders of employment contracts before they have even finished their studies and they take on demanding jobs in industry and commerce immediately after graduation. They know and understand cross-departmental relationships, and have developed a high degree of autonomy, responsibility and team-oriented decision-making skills. That's why several countries worldwide have already started to adapt main features of the dual study concept.

5. Implications

One of the main future aims is to realize cooperative research projects in collaboration with the dual partners. The cooperative research at DHBW is both applied and transfer-oriented. It is supposed to develop innovative concepts, strategies and technologies that reflect the professional and technical reality in the field of business administration. It also serves to improve the teaching and training and offers an application-oriented benefit for the dual partners (cp. Nolting & Beedgen, 2012). Furthermore, internationalisation becomes one of the major topics in the field of higher education (cp. Teichler, 2004; Hahn & Teichler, 2012). DHBW supports the internationalisation of the curriculum and cultivates global cooperation with universities, companies and social institutions. Through international exchange programs for students and professors, by integrating theory and practical experience and through collaborative teaching and research projects, DHBW can engage in a diverse variety of professional fields worldwide.

6. Conclusion

The DHBW provides a new and, in Germany to date, unique organizational structure in the tertiary education sector. The growing success is the result of integrating theory and practical study concepts, smaller class sizes, intensive praxis phases, and an all-around focused teaching and learning plan. The dual studies combine academic learning with direct application and expansion of knowledge in professional practice. Both partners, the university and the companies, benefit from their close partnership in training qualified young professionals: students are able to focus their study goals accurately, while at the same time the companies know, what kinds of highly trained professionals they can expect in the future. By selecting students directly through the dual partners, it is ensured that top-notch, goal-oriented high school graduates with an affinity for practice-oriented education study at DHBW (cp. Kramer et al., 2011). The continuing high rate of employability offers students excellent future prospects and business partners reliable employee retention.

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