

Integration of vocational and higher education in dual courses of study

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Dual study courses were created as a form of educational provision offering both an academic and a practical vocational qualification. The coupling of competence acquisition in both higher education and practical company-based contexts is aimed at supporting learning transfer and hence achieving a benefit over purely academic or purely hands-on forms of initial vocational training. There is, however, a lack of clear criteria for describing this duality. The article presents different approaches and concludes with a plea for the future, to focus on the interlocking of content across learning phases and curriculum units as a matter of priority.

What characterises dual courses of study?

In recent years the number of dual courses of study has risen sharply. Dual study models have evolved into increasingly diversified forms with marked structural differences from one another (cf. AusbildungPlus 2014 and 2015). Discussions as to what constitute the essential characteristics of a dual study programme are taking place without ever having agreed upon a universal definition. In 2013 the German Science Council published its recommendations on the development of the dual degree programme and suggested some criteria. In view of the growing diversity and the debate about criteria for defining dual study programmes, it is worth looking at how the formats currently offered work in practice. Referring to the dimensions of diplomas, scheduling models and learning venues, this article outlines how duality is described in these courses of study. The basis is the AusbildungPlus database containing around 2,100 relevant course offers.

Diplomas from dual courses of study

The first common feature of all dual courses of study is that they are framed as an academic degree programme leading to a tertiary qualification – normally a Bachelor's degree. Some dual courses of study lead to the acquisition of other recognised qualifications from the vocational sector in addition to the higher education qualification, meaning that these educational formats confer double or multiple qualifications. The most familiar at the level of initial vocational training in Germany is the training-integrated format, in which a qualification in a recognised training occupation is acquired in addition to the Bachelor's degree. Beyond this, there are multi-qualification dual courses of study which further incorporate advanced vocational qual-

ifications, such as Master Craftsman upgrading training (cf. LUTZ 2015) and some of which are also designated as triple study programmes; by the same token, there are courses of study which confer only one academic qualification but which, in parallel to the degree programme, offer units of an upgrading training programme which are eligible for credit transfer. By this analysis, dual courses of study lead to an academic degree and at least one additional qualification from the vocational education sector.

Scheduling models for the organisation of dual courses of study

A further possibility for linkage is offered in terms of how the learning phases are scheduled between the institutions in both sectors. In the last evaluation of the AusbildungPlus database of these data in 2013, the preponderant structure in the initial vocational training sector, accounting for more than two thirds of courses, was the block model, in which the higher-education based and in-company phases are approximately the same length, rotating within the semester. In other courses of study, the practice phases always take place in the lecture-free period at the end of a semester (cf. AusbildungPlus 2014, p. 35). A special form of the block model is the semi-separated model with a preceding initial vocational training phase. In this case, training begins between 6 and 18 months before the study programme so that the bulk of the initial vocational qualification has been completed prior to starting the degree programme. These models with a preparatory phase of the initial vocational training frequently last considerably longer than three years; up to five years in individual cases (cf. AusbildungPlus 2014, p. 35). Other models shuttle between the higher education institution and the practice

establishment within a working week (rotation model) or work with self-study and distance-tuition elements so as to increase the frequency or number of days spent in the practice establishment.

Learning venues for dual courses of study

The concept of the dual study programme, unlike classic types of degree programme, is derived from dual-system initial vocational training. “Duality” in this case refers to the interplay of the two learning venues, i. e. the part-time vocational school and the company. By analogy, the two learning venues of a dual study programme are the higher education institution or college of advanced vocational studies (Berufsakademie) and the workplace or practice establishment, which provide a joint education programme. Alongside these learning venues, a dual course of studies may also involve other institutions. For integrated-training courses of study, which comprise a dual or full-time school-based initial vocational training programme in addition to the Bachelor’s degree, an additional, third learning venue is the part-time or full-time vocational school. For certain training occupations, predominantly in the skilled crafts, parts of initial vocational training are also carried out at inter-company vocational training centres which complement the vocational training provided in-company. In such cases the competent bodies, i. e. chambers and occupational associations, are also involved in the dual courses of study. A whole range of institutions can play a part in the design and implementation of dual courses of study. In this case it would be more accurate to talk about multilateral than dual cooperations.

Interlocking of learning venues and curricula

The three aspects – certificates, scheduling models and learning venues – approach duality in different ways. Each of them only sheds light on a sub-aspect of duality. Often, as well, it yields no information about how the content of curricula and diplomas interlock with one another. Those involved in the learning venue debate point out that the definition of learning venues in terms of mere institutions or distinct educational settings is too narrow and must be broadened by including a pedagogical perspective (cf. EULER 2014; LACHMANN/SAILMANN 2014). Learning venues in this pedagogical sense would be methodologically-didactically designed entities within the organisations. The distinction made between theory and practice phases – depending on attendance of the individual institutions – is inadequate. It would be much more helpful to determine which practical vocational learning content requires academic reflection, or how units of theoretical content will be assigned to practical (vocational) contexts, and which

institution should take charge of which elements. Transitions between the learning venues should be designed and supported so that they never leave student transfers solely to chance (cf. KUPFER 2013). Only in this way will genuine interlocking – not just of organisations or institutions but also of curriculum content – come about. In its Recommendation the German Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat 2013) proposes that in dual courses of study at least half of the study programme should be spent at the academic learning venue and at least two thirds of the credit points should be acquired from theory-based work, but not necessarily at the higher education institution. Furthermore it calls for at least organisational and/or scheduling coordination between the learning venues, and for the degree subject to be chosen for its affinity to the vocational training programme or job, in order to create content-based reference opportunities. Only provision which interlocks at the curricular level and is closely coordinated between all learning venues at the interface of vocational and higher education can honour the promise of duality. To strengthen the “brand of dual courses of study” brand, transparent and unambiguous minimum criteria for interlocking learning venues and curricula must be defined. Only in this way can dual courses of study be clearly profiled and differentiated from other hybrid formats at the interface between vocational and higher education, or indeed from regular degree programmes. ◀

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