



DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR
WISSENSCHAFTLICHE WEITERBILDUNG
UND FERNSTUDIUM E.V.

GERMAN ASSOCIATION FOR
UNIVERSITY CONTINUING AND
DISTANCE EDUCATION

Recommendation

of the German Association for University Continuing Education and Distance Education e.V. (DGWF) on the structure and transparency of continuing education programmes at higher education institutions in Germany¹

Decided by the extended board on 5 September 2018 in Cologne.

Supplements with resolution of the regional group in Baden-Württemberg on 14 March 2023 in Albstadt.

Adopted by the extended board on 21 & 22 June 2023 in Freiburg.

Proposal of the DGWF

The DGWF is committed to making the variety of continuing education offers, formats and degrees of the higher education institutions transparent and clear. Therefore, it presents a proposal on how the various offers can be structured, clustered, and named with regard to formats and degrees. The aim is to enhance comprehensibility and comparability for both providers and consumers. The legal regulations governing higher education in Germany, which the continuing education institutions are also subject to, are taken into account. The following is a compilation of the legal conditions, along with an overview of a clustered structure of programmes offered.

The graduation system described in more detail below corresponds to the practice in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, where it has already been recommended by both the Ministry of Science of Baden-Württemberg and the service point *HOCHSCHULEWIRTSCHAFT* of the employers' associations since 2017.

¹ Suggested citation

DGWF (2023): Recommendation of the German Association for University Continuing Education and Distance Learning e. V. (DGWF) on the structure and transparency of offerings of continuing education at universities in Germany. Revised and adopted version of June 21/22, 2023. Freiburg.

This proposal was supplemented and revised in February 2023 on the basis of the recommendations of the EU Commission on the microcredentials dated 10 December 2021 and brought up for discussion in the context of conferences and workshops with various partners, including the German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, HRK).

Systematisation of continuing education programmes in Germany

Framework

- The Bologna Process, including the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), is binding for continuing education programmes.
- The regulations of the respective state university laws are binding for continuing education programmes and certificate/part-time programmes in the sense of modular studies. In the case of such programmes with less scope than a complete degree programme, some federal states provide freedom of choice for awarding credit points (CP) according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).
- One credit point must equal a workload of at least 25 and no more than 30 hours.
- Certificates can be combined in larger degrees and credited to degree programmes (accumulation), provided there is a relation in terms of content and a logical combination of the acquired competencies.
- Reference for the minimum size of a module are the specifications of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany.
- All formats are subject to higher education quality assurance; formats eligible for credits must undergo defined quality assessment procedures.

Systematics of the degrees

- Bachelor's and master's degrees must be designed to be compatible with the Bologna Process.
- A certificate can only be acquired on the basis of passed exams.
- Certificates for which students acquire up to 9 ECTS credits can be referred to as microcredentials.
- The proposed canonisation of degrees is based on the framework and provides a basis for classifying continuing education programmes in a reliable way.

Variety of designations

- In addition to the classification in the overview, there is a wide variety of designations resulting from market requirements and specific market experiences of the higher education institutions. This is evident, for instance, in the continuing education portal of the higher education institutions: <https://hoch-und-weit.de/>.
- The higher education institution offering the programme selects the designation according to its respective marketing strategy and target group, among other things.

Transparency

To improve clarity and comprehensibility, we recommend aligning the designations with the binding framework conditions. For this purpose, the DGWF proposes the following basic scheme (overview grid). This provides interested parties with central characteristics for their individual educational objective. As a basis, we use a systematisation according to degrees, the number of achievable credit points, and the degree format.

Reference to the German Qualifications Framework

For a better orientation and overview, we recommend that degrees offered in university continuing education refer to the levels of the German Qualifications Framework (DQR). This enhances the transnational comparability of continuing education degrees in Germany.

In accordance with the outcome logic of the qualifications framework approach, a reference can only be made beforehand. The actual learning outcome achieved by an individual depends on a variety of factors, particularly on prior knowledge and expertise, which are decisive for the competence acquired in addition to the completed learning unit. Therefore, for example, an individual (continuing) education strategy aimed at achieving action competence at master's level (DQR level 7) can also include learning units that are typically assigned to level 6 as long as they complement the learner's prior experience. For individual orientation, we recommend the study advising provided by the continuing education providers.

Overview grid

Degree	Format	Credit Points (ECTS)	Level (DQR)
Master's	Master's programme	60 – 120	7
Bachelor's	Bachelor's programme	180 – 240	6
Certificate*	Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS)	min. 30	7
	Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS)	min. 10	7
	Diploma of Basic Studies (DBS)	min. 30	6
	Certificate of Basic Studies (CBS)	min. 10	6
	Microcredentials (MC)	1 – 9	6 or 7
Participation confirmation	Short course with exam*	none	6 or 7
	Short course without exam*	none	6 or 7

CP = Credit Point | ECTS = European Credit Transfer System

* For the variety of common designations of the individual offers, see above.

Description of the formats or degrees below the degree level

Diploma of Advanced Studies (DAS)

DAS programmes offer thorough training in a specific field at competence level 7 according to the DQR, allowing individuals to acquire an additional qualification in their established profession or in a new subject area. DAS programmes usually last one to two years and include an examination, such as a final paper, in addition to classroom instruction and self-study. The programmes are part-time and comprise at least 30 ECTS credits, equivalent to a workload of 750 - 900 hours (including self-study).

Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS)

The CAS is the shorter format. CAS programmes offer specific knowledge on a topic at competence level 7 according to the DQR, allowing individuals to acquire an additional qualification in a specific subject area. CAS programmes usually last a few months to a year and, in addition to classroom instruction and self-study, also include an examination, such as project work. The programmes are part-time and comprise study and examination credits of at least 10 ECTS points, equivalent to a workload of 250 - 300 hours (including self-study).

Diploma of Basic Studies (DBS)

DBS programmes offer thorough training in a specific field at competence level 6 according to the DQR, allowing individuals to acquire an additional qualification in the established profession or in a new subject area. Otherwise, the structure is the same as the DAS.

Certificate of Basic Studies (CBS)

CBS programmes offer specific knowledge on a topic at competence level 6 according to the DQR, allowing individuals to acquire an additional qualification in a specific field. Otherwise, the structure is the same as the CAS.

Microcredentials (MC)

Microcredentials comprise and certify learning outcomes achieved in the context of a smaller learning experience (e.g., a condensed course, training session or self-learning unit). They are a flexible, targeted tool that supports individuals in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need for personal and professional development. In the higher education context, a performance record is required. This can be in the form of an oral or written examination, but also in the form of a final paper, presentation or other defined procedures to determine the performance achieved. In addition to the certificate, students are issued a confirmation of the completed coursework, acquired competencies and number of ECTS points.

Short courses

Short courses offer subject-specific knowledge for selected professional groups or general content for an audience interested in academic topics at either competence level 6 or level 7 according to the DQR. As a rule, participants receive a participation confirmation, or, if they take an examination, a certificate.

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Annex: References and further reading

Universitäre Weiterbildung Schweiz (2010): Abschlüsse und Zugangskriterien, <http://www.swissuni.ch/abschluss-und-zugang/> (accessed on 22 March 2023).

Rektorenkonferenz der Schweizerischen Hochschulen (2012): Qualifikationsrahmen für den schweizerischen Hochschulbereich, <https://www.swissuniversities.ch/de/hochschulraum/qualifikationsrahmen/> (accessed on 22 March 2023).

European Commission (2021): Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability; cf. https://germany.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/lebenslanges-lernen-kommission-starkt-zugang-zu-weiterbildungen-2021-12-10_de with links to the original documents (accessed on 22 March 2023).

Rat der Europäischen Union (2022): Empfehlung des Rates über einen europäischen Ansatz für Microcredentials für lebenslanges Lernen und Beschäftigungsfähigkeit, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9790-2022-INIT/de/pdf> (accessed on 22 March 2023).

Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (2023): Microcredentials an Hochschulen – strategische Entwicklung und Qualitätssicherung. Ergebnisse der Zukunftswerkstatt Microcredentials https://www.hrk-modus.de/media/redaktion/Downloads/Publikationen/MODUS/Ergebnisse_der_ZW_Microcredentials_WEB_01.pdf (accessed on 07 July 2023).

Annex: DQR Levels 6 and 7

DQR Level 6

Level 6 describes competencies required for the planning, processing and evaluation of comprehensive specialised tasks and problems and competencies for autonomous management of processes in sub-areas of an academic subject or in a professional field. The structure of requirements is characterised by complexity and frequent changes.

Professional competence

Knowledge

Broad and integrated knowledge including knowledge of basic scientific principles, practical application of a technical specialism as well as critical understanding of the most important theories and methods (corresponding to level 1 [bachelor's level] of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications*) or broad and integrated professional knowledge including current developments within the field.

Knowledge regarding the further development of an academic subject or of a professional field.
Relevant interdisciplinary knowledge.

Skills

Ability to use a wide spectrum of methods to tackle complex problems within an academic subject (corresponding to level 1 [bachelor's level] of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications), further fields of study or a professional field.

Ability to develop new solutions and evaluate these taking various standards into account even where requirements are subject to frequent change.

Personal competence

Social competence

Ability to assume responsibility when working in expert teams or to demonstrate responsibility when leading groups or organisations **.

Ability to provide instruction for the professional development of others and to adopt a proactive approach to dealing with problems within the team.

Ability to present experts with arguments relating to complex subject-specific problems and solutions and to work with them on further development.

Autonomy

Ability to define, reflect on and assess objectives for learning and work processes and to structure such processes autonomously and sustainably.

*see following page!

**This includes companies, administrative bodies and non-profit organisations.

DQR Level 7

Describes competencies for the processing of new, complex tasks and problems and for the autonomous management of processes in an academic subject or in a strategy-oriented professional field. The requirement structure is characterised by frequent and unpredictable changes.

Professional competence

Knowledge

Comprehensive, detailed, specialist and up-to-date knowledge in an academic subject (corresponding to level 2 [master's level] of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications) or comprehensive professional knowledge in a strategy-oriented professional field. Extended knowledge in related areas.

Skills

Specialised technical or conceptual skills to solve strategic problems in an academic subject (corresponding to level 2 [master's level] of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications) or in a professional field.

Ability to consider alternatives even where information is incomplete.

Ability to develop and apply new ideas or procedures and assess these taking various evaluation criteria into account.

Personal competence

Social competence

Ability to assume responsibility when leading groups or organisations in the context of complex tasks and to present the work results of these groups or organisations.

Ability to support the professional development of others in a targeted manner.

Ability to lead both field-specific and interdisciplinary discussions.

Autonomy

Ability to define objectives for new practice- or research-oriented tasks while reflecting on potential social, economic and cultural implications, to use appropriate means and to independently access knowledge required for this purpose.

*Developed in cooperation between the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) and in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and adopted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany on 16 February 2017: see

https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_02_16-Qualifikationsrahmen.pdf

**This includes companies, administrative bodies or non-profit organisations.