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Academic development units in German Universities.

Results report of an online questionaire of the project HoDaPro.

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HoDaPro

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Summary

The project HoDaPro, funded from 2019 to 2022, focused on investigating the individual professionalization of academic developers within a one-year further education program. To learn more about the influence of the work context on this process an online questionnaire was send out to all German universities. Key statistical results of the survey are reported in this Working Paper (compare as well Merkt et al., 2022).

Of all 422 German universities, 371 (88%) could be contacted. 168 (40%) complete questionnaires were included in the analysis. First, descriptive data analysis was conducted to describe the participants, the participating institutions, and the organizational framework of Academic Development (AD) in Germany. Second, correlation analyses were used to assess potential influences of the age of the AD units, and type of university (traditional universities, universities of applied sciences, technical universities). Third, correlation analyses were also used to assess, whether the age of the AD unit or the prior experience of those responsible for higher education influenced their views on the central fields of action of AD. For all statistical analyses, significance was Bonferroni corrected where appropriate.

More than half of respondents were (N=97; 57,7%) vice-presidents or vice deans of their respective institutions. 30 (17,9%) worked as academic developers (other positions N=39, 23,4%; missing N=3, 1,8%). Half of the respondents (N=83, 49,4%) had worked in AD prior to their current post while the other half had not (N=83, 49,4%, missing N=2, 1,2%).

The study included different types of secondary education institutions in Germany. 85 (50.6%) were technical colleges/universities of applied sciences, 55 (32,7%) were universities, 21 (12,5%) were other types of institutions including (colleges of education, art colleges etc.) (missing N=7, 4,2%).

Institutions were sampled from all over Germany, the geographic location and size were representative of the overall sample.

115 (68,5%) of participating institutions reported to have a dedicated AD unit[1]. 115 (68,5%) reported to be part of a larger AD network. 13 (7,8%) of institutions only had a dedicated institution but were not part of a larger network, 25 (15%) reported to only be part of a network and 36 (20,4%) of the participating institutions were neither part of a network, nor did they have a dedicated institution for AD (missing N=16, 9,6%).

In most cases, further education in AD was neither mandatory for new staff, nor lecturers (N=123, 73,2%), doctoral candidates (N=158, 88,7%) or other employees of the higher learning institutions (N=149, 88,7%). Though in most cases, further education was a voluntary service (N=139, 82,7%). 32 (19%) of institutions reported to offer no further education in the field of AD.

As to the age of the AD units, six respondents (3,6 %) reported that their institution was founded between 1950 and 1900. 50 (30%) reported that their university included an AD unit since 1992-2010 and 60 (36%) since 2011-2020. Five (3%) reported that their AD unit had been founded in 2021(missing N=52, 32%).

There were different types of funding reported for the AD units. 70 (42,7%) respondents reported that their AD units were funded directly by the higher education institution. 63 (37,5%) reported mixed funding, both third-party

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[1] This is the first reported statistic on the number of AD units in Germany, thus no official statistics exist to ensure whether the current data is representative, though the large sample size speaks to the representativeness of the sample. However, we expect that the institutions with an AD unit were slightly overrepresented in the current study since those persons were more likely to participate in a questionnaire on AD.

funding and being funded directly by their respective institution, and 10 (6%) reported only third-party funding (missing N=25, 14,9%).

Allocation and work position: 116 (69%) of respondents stated that 1-5 people were currently working in AD at their respective institution. 11 (6,5%) reported that they had no personnel currently working in AD. 17 people (10,2%) reported more than 5 people working in AD (missing N=24, 14,3%).

Respondents were also asked to select the number of people working in AD as scientific staff, the number of full-time equivalent permanent contracts and how many of those were scientific staff. The answers can be found in table 2.

1. Geographic location and institution size

54 (32,1%) institutions were from western Germany, 32 (25%) from eastern Germany, 36 (21,4%) from southern Germany and 33 (19,6%) from northern Germany (missing N=3, 1,8%). 12 (7,1%) universities reported to have more than 30.000 students, 94 (56%) have 3.000-30.000 students and 59 (35,1%) have less than 3000 students (missing N=3, 1,8%).

2. Involvement of AD units in university organization and resources

Table A-1: staff working in AD units

	Number of persons working as scientific staff		Full-time equivalent with permanent contracts		Scientific staff - full-time equivalent with permanent contracts	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	38	22,5	22	13,1	46	27,4
0,1-1	8	4,7	35	20,8	27	16,1
1,1-2	37	22	27	16,1	14	8,2
2,1-5	22	13,2	20	12	12	7,2
5,1-10	6	3,6	7	4,2	5	3
>10	5	3	>10	4	>10	1
missing	52	31	53	31,4	63	37,5

AD units mostly have a staff of 1 – 5 persons, more persons seem to be seldom. Scientific positions are seldom.

Table A-2 Organisational attachment of AD units

Which organisational unit is the AD attached to at your institution? (multiple selection possible)

	N	%
Directly attached to the university management	61	36,3
Central unit	43	25,6
Position with reporting relationship to management	30	17,9
Institute/Centre	21	12,5
Part of Quality Management	21	12,5
Administrative sub-department	17	10,1
Part of a larger Centre	15	8,9
Professorship	12	7,1
Other	11	6,6
Faculty	5	3
Do not know	1	0,6

AD units are mostly attached directly to the university management, to a central unit or the AD person holds a position with reporting relationship to the management. Attachment to faculties or professorships seems to be rare.

Table A-3 Representation of AD staff in panels and commissions

AD staff is represented in which panel or commission within your institution? (multiple selections possible)

	N	%
Commissions dedicated to teaching	79	47
Not represented in any panels or commissions	59	35,1
Senate	23	13,7
Other	9	5,4
Faculty council	8	4,8
Unsure	7	4,2
Student council	1	0,60%

In about half of the reported cases (N=79, 47%), AD was represented in the panels or commissions dedicated to teaching at the respective university.

Table A-4 Cooperation with AD personnel

Who does your AD personnel work with within your institution? (multiple selections possible)

	N	%
Professors and lecturers	144	85,7
Vice-rector's office	117	69,6
Personnel working on developing teaching	115	68,5
Advisors/supervisors of central institutions	78	46,4
Student tutors/mentors	68	40,5
Students	60	35,7
Vice deans	58	34,5
Academic management	85	32,3
Student council	43	25,6
Chancellor	28	16,7
Unsure	5	3

As for who the AD staff worked with within the institutions, most respondents named professors and lecturers (N=144, 85,7%) followed by the vice-rector's office (N=117, 69,6%).

3. Perceptions of AD units by persons in charge

Respondents were asked (on a 0-5 Likert Scale) which aspects they considered to belong to the fields of action of AD units.

In your opinion, to what extent are the following aspects fields of action of academic development?
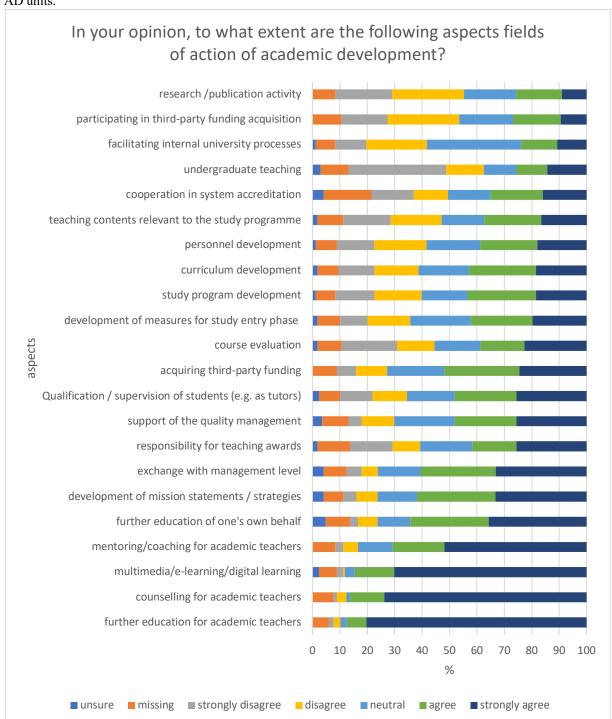

Figure 1: Fields of action of AD perceived by persons in charge.

The three highest-rated fields of action of AD were further education for academic teachers, counselling for

academic teachers and instructional design of multimedia/e-learning/digitalization. The lowest-rated aspects were research/publication activity, participating in third-party funding acquisition and facilitating internal university processes.

Respondents were also asked to select which they considered being the three main tasks of their AD unit out of the same list.

Table A-5 Three main tasks of the AD unit at your university

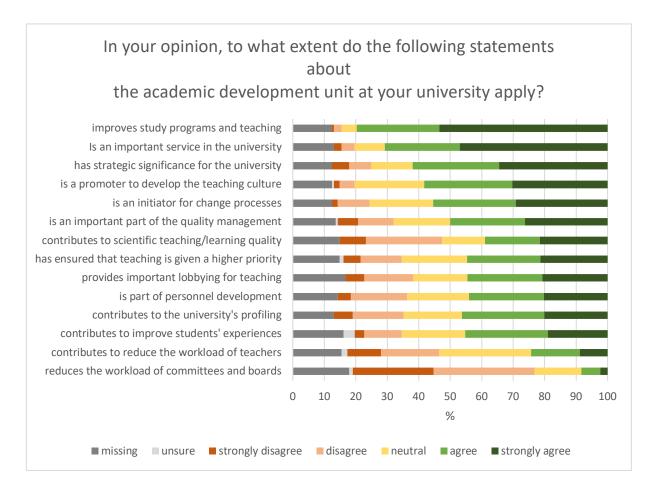| And what are the three main tasks of the AD unit at your university?	N	%
Further education for academic teachers	116	69
Counselling for academic teachers	86	51,2
Instructional design of multimedia/e-learning/digital learning	85	50,6
Mentoring/coaching for academic teachers	31	18,5
Development and/or implementation of measures to improve the study entry phase	20	11,9
Course evaluation	16	9,5
Development of mission statements / strategies with teaching/study relevance	15	8,9
Curriculum development	10	6
Exchange with management level	*9*	5,4
Support of quality management	9	5,4
Qualification / supervision of students (e.g., as tutors)	9	5,4
Acquiring third-party funding for the development of teaching and learning quality	8	4,8
Study program development	8	4,8
Unsure	7	4,2
Personnel development	6	3,6
Teaching contents relevant to the study programme (e.g., key qualifications)	6	3,6
Undergraduate teaching	5	3
Facilitating internal university processes	4	2,4
Responsibility for teaching awards	3	1,8
Further education of one's own behalf	3	1,8
Research /publication activity	2	1,2
Cooperation in system accreditation	2	1,2
Participating in third-party funding acquisition	1	0,6

Figure 2: Perception of persons in charge regarding the function of their AD unit within the university

Respondents most strongly agreed with the statements that their AD unit contributes to the improvement of study programs and teaching, is an important service and has a strategic significance for the development of the university. They most strongly disagreed with the statements that AD reduces the work of academic teachers or of committees and that it contributes to improve students' experiences.

Last, respondents were asked to select reasons for resistance to innovations in their university they perceived when their AD unit tried to implement innovations.

Table A-6 Resistance within HEIs

When innovations are introduced, there is often resistance within the organisation. If you have perceived resistance to AD at your university, where do you think it comes from?

Resistance is due to the fact that…(multiple selections possible)

	N	%
… further education for teaching is an additional workload for academic teachers	105,00	62,5
… academic teachers consider themselves first and foremost experts in teaching.	97,00	57,7
… other actors within the institution do not understand the benefits of AD.	72,00	42,9
…developing teaching quality is perceived as being in competition with research and there are no reputation and no resources for it.	44,00	26,2
… academic developers are not perceived as being competent.	22,00	13,1
… I did not perceive any resistance.	22,00	13,1
… other actors within the institution doubt the scientific basis of AD concepts.	20,00	11,9
… other.	11,00	6,6
…in the past, AD has interfered in matters that are none of its business.	4,00	2,4
… unsure.	4,00	2,4

Responses most often selected were, that further education by AD increased the workload of teachers, that teachers saw themselves as experts in teaching and that other actors within the institutions did not realize the benefits of AD.

During the validation phase of creating the questionnaire (development of mission statements / strategies with teaching/study relevance, curriculum development, study program development, facilitating internal university processes) of our study we identified aspects that were considered to be development-oriented as opposed to aspects that were considered being part of the traditional scope of responsibilities of AD (e.g. further education for academic teachers, counselling, mentoring/coaching for academic teachers and instructional design of multimedia/e-learning/digital learning). We expected that the age of AD at the respective institutions might predict, whether these aspects were more highly rated. Second, we investigated whether having been involved in AD work before having the actual position might have influenced the rating of these specific attitudes. None of the results were significant.

Table A-7 Differences of perception in rating aspects of AD

		U	Z	p (2-sided)
age of AD (pre/post funding line Quality Pact for Teaching)	facilitating internal university processes	1551,5	-1,02	0,31
	development of mission statements / strategies with teaching/study relevance	1580,0	-0,25	0,79
	curriculum development	1695,5	-0,03	0,97
	study program development	1640,5	-0,51	0,61
AD experience of respondents (involved in AD work before the actual position)	facilitating internal university processes	2769,5	-0,59	0,56
	developing models	2551,5	-0,73	0,46
	curriculum development	2537	-1,17	0,24
	study program development	2787,5	-0,51	0,61

4. References

Merkt, M., Rüther, J.N., Knauf, A., Preiß, J., Kraut, M. (2022): *Ergebnisse der Online-Umfrage "Die Perspektive von hochschuldidaktisch Verantwortlichen auf Hochschuldidaktik – eine deutschlandweite Befragung des BMBF-Projekts HoDaPro. (Arbeitsbericht Nr. 1)*. Universität Hamburg, HUL. Available at: https://www.hul.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/projektarchiv/hodapro/ergebnisbericht-hodapro-umfrage.pdf (Accessed: 20 August 2024).