

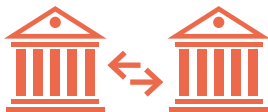
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Enhancing student mobility
across educational boundaries
through recognition

Academic Recognition

The system of academic recognition in
Germany: quick start in basics, procedure
and examination



In the German higher education system, a distinction is made between “**Anerkennung**” and “**Anrechnung**”. “Anerkennung” is translated as “**academic recognition**” and refers to competences acquired at higher education institutions (HEIs), while “Anrechnung” is translated as “**recognition of prior learning**” (RPL) and refers to competences acquired in any other context.



Basics

Academic recognition builds bridges in the European Higher Education Area by facilitating student mobility. It allows individuals to transfer between HEIs and study programmes and prevents that students have to undergo a second examination of the competences they have already acquired.

Academic recognition refers to higher education achievements. This includes temporary stays abroad, changes of HEIs or study programmes and also foreign school degrees as well as degrees from foreign HEIs.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which was transposed into German law in 2007, and the higher education acts of the *Länder* form the **legal foundation** for academic recognition in Germany. Further legal bases are administrative law and accreditation requirements. For example, some general administrative principles are also applied to recognition procedures: Applicants must cooperate, decisions must be taken within a reasonable period of time and reasons must be stated for any decision. The LRC adds two important components: The **reversal of the burden of proof** and the assessment criterion of “**substantial difference**”.

The concept of **substantial difference** refers to five criteria that need to be assessed when considering the question whether the recognition would hinder the successful continuation or commencement of studies: the quality of the institution, the learning outcomes, the level of studies, the profile of the study programmes and the workload. When the HEI does not approve the application for recognition, it has to justify why.



Procedure

German HEIs regulate the practical implementation themselves, for example in their examination regulations or ideally in the form of a consistent, easily understandable statute. Apart from the process, it should bindingly regulate responsibilities, time limits and the handling of grades.

Certain **principles** should be observed in a recognition procedure:

Academic recognition takes place upon **application**, i.e. students can decide whether they would like to receive recognition. Each case must be **examined individually**. At the same time, the examination should be carried out according to **consistent standards**. In addition, the procedure should be as **transparent** as possible.

In practice, the recognition procedure takes place in several stages. Students, advisors, teachers and administration work hand-in-hand. In advance, the HEI should provide students with **comprehensive information** and advice. For general information, HEIs can refer students to the website "AN!"

(www.an.hrk.de). The actual procedure begins with the application.

The **formal examination** should take place in the examination office: Is the application filled in completely and correctly? Are the documents submitted authentic? Does information need to be submitted subsequently?

The content-related examination is carried out by the examination board or a recognition officer.

The decision should be made **promptly** and **communicated in writing**. **Reasons** must be given for rejection and **possible legal remedies** should be pointed out.

The entire procedure, including the recognised achievements, should be documented.



Examination

When examining the content of recognition applications, the learning objectives of the study programme or module are compared with the competences already acquired. The decisive factor is not whether the contents are identical – but whether there is a **"substantial difference"** that could jeopardise the success of further studies. Three principles must be observed in the assessment:

There is **no limit** to the extent of recognition – unless it is explicitly regulated by law. Acquired competences **do not expire** and can also be recognised more than once. As the HEI bears the burden of proof, achievements must be recognised in cases of doubt.

The central test criterion is called **"substantial difference"**. It refers to five sub criteria: the quality of the institution, the level of study, the profile of the study programmes, the workload and the learning outcomes.

The **quality of the institution** is an entry test: If the issuing institution does not meet the standards of a German HEI, the application should be rejected. The

anabin database (www.anabin.kmk.org/anabin.html) of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) helps with the assessment.

The second decisive criterion is the **learning outcomes**. The module descriptions of the performance to be recognised and those to be learned in the student's current study programme are compared. Not every detail has to match. Rather, it is a matter of an overall view, as usually not all competences are equally relevant within a module or study programme.

Three further criteria can help in the assessment: **The level and profile of a study programme** and **the workload**. However, these criteria can only indicate differences and do not alone justify a substantial difference.

Important **documents** for the examination are the module handbooks and the examination regulations. Qualification frameworks and taxonomies are also helpful for classification. **Learning agreements** guarantee the recognition of achievements in the context of stays abroad in advance.

Recognition must not impair the quality of the study programme. However, insignificant differences should be accepted in order to facilitate mobility during studies.

You can find further information, explanatory films and web seminars on recognition on our website:

www.hrk-modus.de/en

German Rectors' Conference

Project MODUS

Ahrstraße 39

D-53175 Bonn

Phone: +49 (0) 228 887 0

modus@hrk.de

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