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## **Scientific political consulting and university education in Germany: demand and supply patterns in the context of the Bologna process**

Arne Niemann and Sabine Heister

### **Abstract**

This article examines the competences required for a career in scientific policy consultancy (especially in the field of foreign policy) in Germany and the extent to which university education in the field of political science can and does prepare for this occupation. Our analysis indicates that both university education and on-the-job training are equally important for such a career. Among the broad competences, ‘analytical skills’ and ‘expertise/know-how and experience’ are regarded as more important than ‘communication skills’ and ‘customer focus’. We have found that political consultants would prefer university programmes to include more practical elements, including a greater degree of involvement of policy-makers, and more integrated internships and innovative forms of studying such as role play and the drafting of policy papers. When comparing these findings with the university programmes offered, an ambiguous picture emerges. On the one hand, it is clear that most universities are making a concerted effort to offer new innovative programmes and to meet the challenges of the Bologna process. On the other hand, traditional perceptions and methodologies of university education have been preserved. There thus seems to be a certain gap between ambition and implementation. The article limits itself to analysing the German case but nevertheless aims at encouraging a European-wide debate about political science programmes and scientific political consulting.

**Key words:** Bologna process, Political Consulting, university education, Germany

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this article we analyse the competences and skills helpful for entering a career in the field of scientific (foreign) policy consulting<sup>1</sup> in Germany. To that end, the inquiry aims at analysing the degree to which universities prepare their students for such a career and how the recent changes introduced by the Bologna process have affected the employability of graduates in the field of scientific policy consulting. Our empirical analysis is based on a survey of over fifty political consultants, on two semi-structured interviews with political consultants, on eleven structured interviews with directors of study, and on analysis of the documentation relating to selected study programmes. We seek to ascertain both the competence requirements in the field of scientific (foreign) policy consulting and the (potential) supply of competences by relevant political science programmes at German universities, in order to juxtapose them for the sake of comparison. However, the article does not claim to identify clear cut relationships of cause and effect. Rather, we intend to consider tendencies. Neither do we seek to evaluate critically individual study programmes, but rather aim to delineate trends concerning demand and supply patterns in the field of scientific foreign policy consultancy in Germany. This article limits itself to providing a case study of the latter but seeks to stimulate a broader European debate regarding the effects of the Bologna reforms. Furthermore, while ‘scientific’ policy advice is sometimes associated primarily with the natural sciences (cf. Lentsch, 2006), this article focuses on the social sciences, and particularly on political science. We restrict our analysis to programmes at the Masters (as opposed to Bachelors or PhD) level.

We approach the above questions firstly by introducing the most important concepts, actors and trends in scientific (foreign) policy advice in Germany. Secondly, we discuss the changes introduced by the Bologna process as well as the constraints and opportunities it potentially affords. In the third and fourth sections we examine the demand and supply sides of the labour market for political consulting in Germany. This enables us, finally, to compare the two sides heuristically and to map out some general trends and tendencies.

### **SCIENTIFIC FOREIGN-POLICY ADVICE IN GERMANY: CONCEPTS, ACTORS, TRENDS**

Three different models for the relationship between scientific policy consulting and practical politics may be distinguished (Habermas, 1966).<sup>2</sup> Firstly, the so-called ‘decisionistic’ (Note to editors: please add the following clarification as an endnote here: Decisionism refers to a philosophical position holding that moral norms are not derived from objective and immutable ethical laws but rather depend on a subjective act of will. In legal discourse the term denotes a similar idea according to which legal norms are neither based nor depend on universally applicable laws of nature. What is important for the applicability of a law is therefore not its particular content but that it has been derived from the proper legal authority. In Sociology and Political Science, however, decisionism is understood in the Habermasian sense according to which politicians define the objectives and means of political action. In this model the role of scientists/experts is limited to providing expertise to previously defined objectives. Political action is therefore first and foremost political rather than utilitarian.) strictly separates experts and politicians while assuming that the (social and natural) sciences mainly function to serve politics by providing expertise. In this sense the model tends

to subordinate scientific expertise to practical politics as the former serves to provide technical knowledge to the latter. This also implies that political consultants can hardly pursue interests of their own independently from politics. Secondly, the ‘technocratic’ model sees politics as tending to be subordinated to the sciences. According to this perspective, a strict separation of the two domains is hardly possible as politicians depend on expertise to such a degree that they are likely to lose their autonomy.

Both models describe a largely linear relationship between politics and science in which information flows from one domain to the other. The difference lies solely in the question of whether this process makes science dependent on politics or vice versa. In contrast, the ‘pragmatic’ model assumes a process of constant inter-communication and feedback mechanisms, which lead to reciprocal learning processes and dependencies. According to this model, consultants react to the needs of politics while actively influencing the formulation of problems on the political agenda and the policy options taken into consideration.

Turning to the particular relationship between politics and science in Germany, it appears that while scholars have refined the three models (Böhret, 1997; Weingart, 2001) or developed additional concepts based on them (Lompe, 1966, 1972), the traditional linear conception of scientific political consulting still plays a major role in the perception of political actors. According to Lompe, actors in practice operate ‘somewhere between the decisionistic instrumentalisation of science and the technocratic idea of politics serving scientific expertise’ (Lompe, 2006: 32; authors’ translation). Characteristic of the relationship between politics and political science in Germany is a dual system in which the two domains meet through scientific political consulting but nevertheless remain largely separate spheres as the decisionistic model

predicts (cf. Mayntz, 1994: 17).<sup>3</sup> Scientific political consultants may reach a certain degree of prominence when commenting on controversial questions in fairly intense public debates. Bernd Rürup, who is a reasonably well-known expert on questions of social policy, may serve as an example.<sup>4</sup> There is, nonetheless, hardly any ‘cross-border commuting’ of experts from research to practical politics or vice versa as is the case in, for example, the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The main actors demanding scientific foreign policy consulting include the Government, particularly the Chancellery, the Foreign Ministry and the Department of Defence. In addition, Parliament, especially parliamentary committees concerned with foreign affairs and increasingly also actors in the private sector, such as multinational corporations, play an important role in this context. However, the latter usually have their own research departments, as do the major investment banks and large corporations. Lastly, the media increasingly demands academic expertise, especially at times of national or international political crisis (Segbers, 2006: 529). One significant trend that should be noted is that, generally speaking, there appears to have been a considerable increase in demand for scientific political consulting.

On the supply side, while the market continues to be dominated by well-established traditional institutions, there is a wide variety of diverse actors in the field of scientific foreign policy advice. The Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) is probably the most influential institute in Germany. Founded in 1955 it has become the largest think tank for foreign and security policy in Europe, following its incorporation of the Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien (BOIst) and the Südost Institute (SOI). In the course of moving its headquarters from Ebenhausen, near Munich, to Berlin the SWP has undergone a significant shift of focus towards operative policy analysis. In other words, it has

become considerably more visible in the public sphere and has been able to play a more prominent role in public discourse.

There is a considerable number of other established institutes such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP) in Berlin, the Hessische Stiftung für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (HSFK) in Frankfurt, the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) in Berlin, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) in Eschborn, and the Deutsche Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) in Bonn among others.

There is also a group of institutions that are tied more or less closely to universities, such as the Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik (IFSH) at the University of Hamburg, or the Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen.

Moreover, there are a number of institutes which were established fairly recently, and which are either financed by private funds, such as the Berliner Informationszentrum für Transatlantische Sicherheit (BITS), or are directly tied to private sponsors. The Centrum für Angewandte Politikforschung (CAP), closely linked to the Bertlesmann Foundation, which itself is involved in scientific research may serve as an example of the latter type of institute. Furthermore, there are institutes with a specialised profile such as the Bonn Center for Conversion (BICC).

Finally, it should not be forgotten that politics has its own research institutes. Here, those research institutes incorporated into political foundations, which are directly linked to particular political parties, should be mentioned. The Social Democratic-based Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung and the Christian Democrat-affiliated Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung are prominent examples of this type of institute. Furthermore, the lower house of the German parliament has its own research centre,

the Wissenschaftliche Dienst des Deutschen Bundestages. Also worth mentioning is the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, which mainly serves as a public information centre fitting the definition of a political consulting institute in the sense that it attempts to participate in, and shape, public discourse.

This outline of the main actors operating in the field of scientific political consulting in Germany shows that the spectrum is fairly (and increasingly) diverse. Besides an increase in demand for scientific political consulting, a trend towards diversification may thus be observed. This holds true both in terms of the type of institute and in terms of the subject areas of expertise.

A further major trend in recent years has been the ‘mediatisation’ of scientific political consulting given that global and international issues are placed on the political agenda chiefly via the media. For this reason, think tanks and other scientific institutes have become increasingly visible in the public sphere by appearing alongside pressure groups such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace. These rely heavily on public attention in order to further their causes. Visibility is, however, not only significant in terms of shaping public discourse, but is also the main source of income for some advisers and may thus become a goal in itself. From an overall perspective the main objective of experts is thus to provide advice on current topics of interest in order to appear in the media as often as possible. Strategically, they must aim at establishing a lasting connection between a specific topic or area of expertise and their name, which extends beyond academic circles. Marketing thus goes hand in hand with expertise. Furthermore, they must try to find a niche in which they share the market with as few competitors as possible. As a consequence, experts’ recommendations at least partly follow the logic of the market (cf. Neumann, 2002).

[Key quote 1 about here]



In sum, scientific (foreign) policy consulting in Germany is a dynamic field undergoing both diversification and increasing ‘mediatisation’. Furthermore, there appears to be a rapidly growing demand for scientific policy advice. Considering that at the same time universities require only a very small percentage of graduates to replace their existing staff, the question of whether university programmes adequately prepare students to enter a career in scientific political consulting, is becoming increasingly relevant. While it is only one of many career options, it nevertheless constitutes a growing market offering attractive employment opportunities for graduates in the natural and social sciences, particularly in political science, as the subsequent analysis will further indicate.

Before taking a closer look at the labour market for scientific (foreign) policy consulting in Germany, the next section briefly outlines and discusses recent developments in the context of the Bologna process, and the opportunities (and challenges) it entails for universities.

## **NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

The Bologna process presents European universities with two major challenges. Firstly, it has initiated the development of a uniform and transparent European higher education system with collective structures, mainly by harmonising requirements and standards of quality. Secondly, universities as institutions have to undergo significant structural changes. This mainly concerns a move away from an understanding of universities as publicly funded actors in the direction of being efficient service providers, capable of competing with other institutions.

In this context two key elements of the reform are of particular importance, namely the introduction of the two-stage Bachelor-Master system instead of one single (and lengthy) *Magister* or *Diplom* degree, and the establishment of departments that determine the content of their programmes independently. This new independence, supported by newly established ties to actors from the private sector, has brought an increasing diversification of programmes and has set universities in direct competition with each other, both at the national and at the international level. Competitiveness – in other words supplying courses and determining their content according to demand – has significantly altered the nature of university programmes. As our analysis will confirm, reforms geared to market principles have been implemented as immediate reactions to Bologna. Due to scarce public resources, universities, academic institutes and research centres have become increasingly dependent on programmes that attract both private funds and large numbers of students. While in the past it was mainly graduates who had to confront the uncertainties of the practical utility of their acquired skills when entering the labour market, the problem now concerns universities themselves. In the search for answers, fears for the future of higher education seem inevitable as it becomes clear that some basic assumptions need to undergo significant revision.

In this context critics of the reforms have pointed out that the balance between the provision of market-orientated education and career training on the one hand, and the supply of scientific research and academic excellence on the other hand may shift to the detriment of the latter. According to this argument, the Bologna criteria have triggered a process in which increasing emphasis is being put on the employability of graduates according to market conditions. This aspect was previously only moderately emphasised in a system that tended to put primary emphasis on the skills required for

a scholarly career. As a further consequence critics fear that the reform will result in students being treated rather like pupils in need of tight boundaries and constraints (see e.g. Kerst *et al.*, 2005). This stands in sharp contrast to the traditional German university system, which left students with significant freedoms (e.g. in terms of course options) and (relative to the Anglo-Saxon system) little guidance.

For the purposes of this article, the most important problem created by the Bologna process appears to be its potentially negative effect on transnational student mobility. According to this argument, the greater rigidity of the curriculum and the size of the workload in the two-tiered system are likely to discourage horizontal transnational student mobility (Timmann and Peltzer-Hönicke, 2008: 16). Vertical mobility – i.e. enrolment in a Masters' programme abroad after the completion of a Bachelors' degree at a domestic university – does not appear to have been affected by the reforms. There is evidence to suggest, however, that undergraduate student mobility, such as participation in the Erasmus programme, has become increasingly difficult to organise under the less flexible new system. This trend is manifest in the expectations and experiences of university representatives voiced at a 2006 conference on transnational student mobility (Hellmann and Peltzer-Hönicke, 2006: I-VII), as well as in the findings of a 2007 report, which concluded that 'many voices within the institutions visited considered that the introduction of the Bologna first and second cycle degrees have had, and will continue to have a negative effect on mobility' (Crosier *et al.*, 2007: 43).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, recent statistical evidence indicates that while the total number of participants in the Erasmus programme is still increasing every year, the rate of increase has declined from approximately 10,000 per annum since 2001 to only 5,000 in the academic year 2006/7 (European Commission, 2008: 1). It is certainly too early to conclude on the basis of these figures that 'the

programme is in crisis' (Ruuska, 2009) given that the number of outgoing students has varied considerably before.<sup>7</sup> Neither is it possible conclusively to attribute the recent statistical variations to the systemic changes of the Bologna process alone. Given the rigid structure of the curricula in the new system, the integration of mobility units is nevertheless likely to become a major challenge for German universities.

[Key quote 2 about here]

The opportunities which the Bologna process has opened up in Germany should also be outlined. Overall, according to some experts, universities increasingly regard the reforms as an opportunity to revise long-standing assumptions and practices with respect to the design and content of programmes (Zervakis and Wahlers, 2007: 2; Reichert and Tauch, 2005: 27). As Petzina (2005: 30; authors' translation) puts it, 'the introduction of the Bachelors' and Masters' programmes means that a process of innovation has been fostered in the domain of teaching. The discussion and preparation of accreditation requests, which precede the introduction of new programmes, have led to hitherto unknown reflections about what the precise objectives of newly drafted curricula ought to be'. Bologna therefore holds the potential to improve the quality of higher education in Europe. In addition, generally speaking the Bologna process seems to have put universities in a better position to react to the demands of the labour market, thus enabling them to educate in a more differentiated, tailor-made and focused fashion.

## **SCIENTIFIC POLICY CONSULTING AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION:**

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY**

With specific regard to scientific foreign-policy consulting, Bologna has opened the possibility for universities to react to the demand for such consulting by creating

programmes that adequately prepare students to undertake careers in scientific policy advice. Demand for such advice has grown thanks to the ever increasing complexity and interdependence of the situation in which actors from the political, cultural and private sectors operate. Universities are in a privileged position here as they prepare students not only for future employment in the narrow sense, but also provide a basis for scientific research and the ability to analyse complex issues and relationships.

The Bologna process has thus furthered the diversification of Masters' programmes offered by universities. At the same time, if the growing demand in the field of scientific policy advice has challenged universities to react to these developments, private institutes have long been aware that the field of scientific political consulting is a growing market and have developed new programmes accordingly, particularly in the form of workshops and seminars. In these cases lecturers, who are predominantly practising political consultants, provide further vocational training rather than basic/foundational education.<sup>8</sup>

While universities have not entirely disregarded the matter of scientific policy advice, they have hardly considered scientific political consulting an ostensible career choice or teaching objective. Nevertheless political science, law or economics appear to provide students precisely with those forms of expertise and skills that are required by employers in the field (Klewes, 2006).

In terms of political science, it is striking that that those policy domains with a particularly high demand for scientific consulting coincide with some of the sub-disciplines of political science. Thus, with an eye on current demand patterns, an increasing number of (largely political science-oriented) Masters' programmes have emerged with an emphasis on security-, conflict-, or peace studies, offered for instance by universities in Berlin, Magdeburg, Münster or Tübingen. Furthermore, a

whole range of Masters' programmes focusing on European integration have been developed, either from existing political science programmes or with political science as the disciplinary anchor. Such programmes are now taught, for example, at universities in Berlin, Bonn, Chemnitz, Frankfurt/Oder, Hamburg, Hannover, Münster Regensburg, Saarbrücken und Tübingen. In addition, students may specialise in development studies, or similar interdisciplinary programmes focusing more generally on the complexities of globalisation, at the universities of Berlin, Bochum, Bremen or Leipzig. While they are dominated by political science, these programmes also adopt interdisciplinary approaches incorporating legal and economic aspects. This broad approach attempts to do justice to increasingly interwoven issues and may thus be particularly valuable for students' skill sets. The same also holds true for the recently developed and less specialised Masters' programmes in international relations – offered for example in Berlin, Bremen, Dresden and Potsdam – which put particular emphasis on inter- and multidisciplinary. Given that programmes are increasingly orientating their content according to demand, a broad consensus has emerged concerning the importance of inter-disciplinarity.

The creation and diversification of programmes in political science clearly show that the Bologna reforms have given rise to a process of innovation. Universities have been given an opportunity to develop curricula according to their perceptions of the state of labour-market demand. Given that according to Reichert and Tauch (2004), 91 per cent of institutions in higher education consider the 'employability' of their graduates as one of the key outcomes their programmes should have, this may be regarded an advantage not to be underestimated. The question that emerges with regard to political consulting is the degree to which universities can meet the expectations and requirements of potential future employers in the field. Before

answering this question we need to take a look at the requirement profile for political consulting.

## **REQUIREMENT PROFILE FOR SCIENTIFIC POLICY ADVICE: A VIEW FROM POLITICAL CONSULTANTS**

This section is based on a survey conducted in 2006/2007 among researchers working in the field of scientific foreign-policy consulting.<sup>9</sup> Its purpose is to investigate which competencies practising consultants consider important for a career in policy advice. This will serve as a basis for comparison with current (mainly political science) Masters' programmes. Firstly, respondents were asked to rank different skills and competences according to their perceived importance for working in scientific political consulting (Table 1). Political consultants were, secondly, requested to rank broad categories of competence (Table 2). This is followed by an inquiry concerning the academic disciplines likely to prepare students best (Table 3) as well as the relevance of university education in comparison to 'learning by doing' (Table 4). Lastly, respondents were asked to rank the importance of particular features of university programmes for a career in the profession (Table 5).

Turning to the first question, the three skills that ranked highest were 'ability/power of judgement', 'expertise/know-how concerning the topic in question' and 'ability concisely to summarise key points'. Indeed, 98 per cent of respondents considered these skills 'important' or 'very important'. They were followed, in terms of perceived importance, by 'knowledge of political actors' and 'experience in practical politics'. The broad consensus among respondents suggests that these skills are essential for a career in policy advice. This is also obvious from the fact that the

categories ‘rather less important’ or ‘not at all important’ were not chosen at all for the first four competences.

[Table 1 about here]

Communication skills (C) are generally seen as important even though some of the skills in this category rank lower than others. Thus, interestingly, knowledge of a foreign language is judged to be a crucial skill while considerably fewer respondents thought general rhetorical skills were essential. Mastery and knowledge of scientific technical language is seen as of little relevance, with only 22 per cent stating that it was an important or very important skill for a career in political consulting.

[Key quote 3 about here]

When turning to the weighting of the broader competence areas, the considerable importance attributed to ‘expertise/know-how and experience’ (*Sachverstand, Fachwissen und Erfahrung*) is further corroborated: this competence was felt to be crucial for working as a political consultant by 33 per cent of respondents, and was followed by ‘analytical skills’ (thought to be crucial by 28 per cent). By contrast, ‘communication skills’ and ‘customer focus’ were thought important by 22 and 17 per cent respectively.

[Table 2 about here]

With regard to the utility of different academic disciplines as a basis for foreign policy consulting, relatively great importance is attributed to political science, followed by economics, law and history. It should be noted, however, that a majority of respondents (67 per cent), are themselves political scientists by academic training. Consequently, the finding must be treated with caution because respondents seem likely to confer higher value on the disciplines in which they took their own degrees



than on other disciplines. The significant statistical correlation between these variables appears to confirm this impression.<sup>11</sup>

[Table 3 about here]

Respondents were then asked if universities can prepare students at all for the job of political consultant or if the required skills and competences are better acquired through learning by doing (i.e. on-the-job training). Here, the results of the survey show a relatively balanced view while slightly more importance is given to learning-by-doing (cf. Table 4). In reply to an open question, respondents repeatedly emphasised that a university degree should, above all, provide fundamental, general and scientific knowledge and know-how, while everything else is better acquired on the job.

[Table 4 about here]

Given that a considerable number of respondents, nevertheless, ascribe an important role to university education, it is appropriate further to investigate the utility of particular features of university education for scientific (foreign) policy advice (cf. Table 5). We therefore asked respondents which features of university degrees, especially of Masters' programmes in political science, they considered particularly important for students looking for a career in the profession. Here, interdisciplinarity and specialised knowledge of particular regions and policy areas rank highest. When asked about room for improvement or changes that should be made to programmes currently available, a majority pointed out that a higher degree of emphasis on practical considerations would be highly desirable. In this context, integrated internships, the integration of actors from the policy-making community (e.g. in the form of guest lectures/seminars), academic exchanges with foreign universities, the drafting of policy papers or role playing and simulation games were mentioned most

often. Some also emphasised, however, that no university programme alone can prepare their students perfectly for a job in political consulting. Hence, universities' main role should consist of providing their students with disciplinary expertise; mastery of scientific methodology; analytical, communication and other transferable skills. Yet, political consultants seem to agree that in terms of disciplinary expertise German universities already perform comparatively well. The survey further suggests that existing programmes also give students analytical and communicative skills, albeit less successfully in respondents' view. This is also corroborated by the wishes and suggestions expressed by consultants, for example concerning greater emphasis on policy papers, courses in debating and negotiation, and foreign-language training. In the words of one respondent, universities should aim for 'a practical orientation, with a strong emphasis on concrete examples or case studies, while this should at the same time be guided by, and based on, a sound theoretical background in order to avoid thought exercises without substance.'

[Table 5 about here]

Another interesting point is how political consultants view the utility of their own studies for their careers. Analytical skills, mentioned twenty-eight times, appear to be most important in this context, including analytical and critical thought as well as the ability to work independently. Additionally, knowledge and expertise in the discipline studied were also considered crucial (mentioned twenty-six times). This emphasis on analytical skills and disciplinary knowledge/expertise is consistent with the findings shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Having analysed the requirements regarding graduates' skills and competences from the point of view of the demand side, we may now turn to the universities'

perspective and ask about the degree to which their priorities are compatible with those of scientific political consultants.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AS A ROUTE TO SCIENTIFIC POLICY**

### **CONSULTING: THE UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE**

The supply side presents itself as a very heterogeneous field and the large variety of programmes offers students – including those interested in a career in scientific policy advice – a very wide range of choices and options. The search for an adequate programme becomes a highly complex challenge that goes far beyond a mere comparison of content and requirements. From the perspective of prospective students crucial factors in choosing a programme are not only entry requirements and individual expectations with regard to the key competences a programme promises to provide. Considerations regarding practical utility for a future career, international ties, and, last but not least, financial aspects are also critical factors to be taken into account when making a choice.

This section attempts to gain an insight into the degree to which current Masters' programmes, particularly in political science, prepare their students for a career in political consulting. While acknowledging that there is 'not a single secure path for a sound training in political consulting' (Schattenberg and Steuber, 2006: 547) we approach this issue by outlining the objectives and priorities of universities in developing their programmes.<sup>13</sup> In this context, the inquiry focuses on the following questions. What importance do universities ascribe to the so called 'hard skills'<sup>14</sup>? How relevant are 'soft skills'<sup>15</sup> from the point of view of universities? How much room do these skills take up in the programmes? The analysis of study directors'

answers should enable us to compare the priorities of universities with those of political consultants. The inquiry concentrates especially on Masters' programmes in political science. To a lesser extent, and partly because of the interdisciplinary nature of programmes, Masters' degrees in – or with a (substantial) component of – economics and law are also included in our inquiry.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, we will consider the question whether or not the structural changes made in the context of the Bologna process have had a positive effect on the degree to which university programmes match the preferences of political consultants.

Many aspects of universities' priorities and objectives appear to be fairly consistent with the preferences of scientific political consultants. Considerable attention is still devoted to hard skills. According to the self-perception of universities all Masters' programmes place particular emphasis on providing broad disciplinary knowledge. In contrast, specialised knowledge of a particular region or a particular policy area is regarded as less important. In terms of analytical skills, power/capability of judgement ranks highest as was the case for political consultants. This is followed by the ability to conduct independent research. A further similarity between the supply and the demand sides may be found in the fact that directors of study at universities regarded the ability to produce original or unconventional ideas as less essential.

Generally, the importance ascribed to hard skills shows that the programmes analysed remain closely linked to the traditional views of higher education. Graduates are to be endowed with the skills necessary to advance scientific arguments in order to come to coherent conclusions on the basis of differentiated sources. That this fairly traditional view of university education continues to play a crucial role is further evidenced by the dominant didactical approaches given that lectures, essays,

presentations and debates are still at the core of teaching. Lectures especially are seen as the main didactical tool for providing knowledge while seminars aim at giving students opportunities to acquire analytical as well as communication skills. Teamwork (group work) in particular is an important means by which these skills are to be acquired and practiced.

Turning to soft skills, almost all directors of study felt that the provision of these skills ranked very high on their curricula. Teamwork is hardly a new approach to the teaching of soft skills. It is nevertheless increasingly organised in innovative ways, for instance through the use of foreign languages or role-play games aiming at simulating intercultural communication processes. The primary value in this form of teamwork lies firstly in the fact that it allows students to practice hard and soft skills at the same time. Secondly, the common and uniform evaluation of all participants provides for a realistic approximation of professional life in which the results achieved by the team/group, rather than the performance of each individual, are what are usually evaluated by the employer or client. Also in terms of soft skills, it is noticeable that the breadth of competency generation (rather than specificity or detail) appears attractive.

This can be taken as further evidence that universities, more or less explicitly, design their programmes according to the conditions of the labour market. In this context it can be argued that the Bologna process has generally had a positive effect on the employability of graduates given that it created an environment making it possible for universities to take the preferences of employers into account. Firstly, the relatively recent prioritisation of breadth (of competences) over depth, which the reforms enabled, is relevant here, considering that all respondents at universities described the range of potential future employers as very wide, heterogeneous and

unspecific. Graduates may work in politics and the public sector, the private economic sector, or increasingly also in (transnational) NGOs and international organisations. In order to retain this wide range of options it is in the interests of students that the general utility of their knowledge and skills be given preference over depth and specialisation. This point applies to scientific political consulting in particular as it potentially incorporates many different fields of activity considering the large number of institutes with different backgrounds and foci, a fairly diverse set of clients, and the ever increasing interconnectedness of different issue areas in the globalised political world. The trend towards emphasising breadth over depth does therefore appear to be consistent with the preferences of those on the demand side.

Secondly, the Bologna reforms are likely to have encouraged the development of programmes with a focus on interdisciplinarity, a feature on whose importance there is broad consensus. Among scientific political consultants 81 per cent regarded this feature as a crucial one for university programmes. At the same time, in the search for ideal forms of preparation for students' future careers, universities – as we have seen – also view interdisciplinarity as an important consideration when designing their programmes.

The inquiry thus supports the view that there is no tension between the broad educational approach of universities on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the employability of graduates in the field of scientific political consulting or the unspecific<sup>17</sup> expectations of practising political consultants.

In the context of this article the main reservation regarding the reforms concerns the potentially negative effect on transnational student mobility. The importance assigned to inter-disciplinarity by political consultants suggests that a broad range of perspectives and approaches, which mobility certainly (further)

reinforces, enhances the employability of graduates. In addition, 86 per cent of respondents regarded foreign language skills as important and 84 per cent saw the ability to cultivate new contacts as a crucial skill. This appears to confirm that transnational mobility can be a major asset to graduates seeking to pursue a career in scientific policy consulting. Thus, the inquiry supports the view that universities should either make mobility a mandatory degree requirement or at least allow for a sufficient number of elective courses in order to give students the flexibility to study abroad during their undergraduate programmes (Helmann and Peltzer-Hönicke, 2006: VII).

Overall, with regard to the question of the degree to which current Masters' programmes prepare students for a career in scientific political consulting, the results of this inquiry allow for a fairly optimistic (preliminary) evaluation. One interim conclusion that may be drawn is that the generic preferences of scientific political consultants match the broadly defined objectives of universities. The goal of the latter to allow students to acquire and practice a wide range of academic skills appears particularly valuable in the field of scientific foreign policy advice and is thus consistent with requirements of the demand side. The increasing emphasis on the importance of soft skills in combination with the more traditional repertoire of hard skills appears valuable to employers in this context. It should also be noted, however, that hard skills (still) dominate the curricula of the Masters' programmes we investigated.

[Key quote 4 about here]

Despite significant differences between programmes, there are important commonalities that seem to point to a number of general trends. These are to be found in the interdisciplinary approach of many programmes and in the focus on the breadth,

rather than depth, of knowledge conveyed. At the same time, an increasing emphasis on the acquisition of soft skills has taken the place of the provision of specialised knowledge. These trends are the direct result of the tendency of universities increasingly to take account of the demands and requirements of the job market, thus laying new emphasis on training rather than on the reproduction of future researchers. In this sense the inquiry confirms the critical view that the Bologna process fosters a view of universities that sees them less as centres of scientific research than as schools for vocational training.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The central objective of this article was to analyse the competences and skills necessary for, and conducive to, a career in scientific (foreign) policy consulting, and the extent to which existing Masters' programmes in Germany prepare graduates for careers in this area. Therefore, priorities and preferences both on the demand and on the supply side have been analysed. With regard to the former, political consultants place particular emphasis on 'expertise/know-how and experience' and on relevant 'analytical skills'. Furthermore, the analysis shows that a large majority views a university degree and learning by doing as equally important. This is highly relevant mainly because it makes clear that while universities can prepare for a career in the field, they can only do so to a certain degree. Political consultants would want university programmes to include more practical elements such as integrated obligatory internships, a greater involvement of policy-makers, and innovative forms of studying such as role-play games or the drafting of policy papers.

When comparing these findings with what Masters' programmes currently offer, an ambiguous picture emerges. It is clear that most universities are making a



concerted effort to offer new innovative programmes and meet the challenges and requirements of the Bologna process. The latter appears to have had a generally positive effect on the employability of graduates by giving universities the opportunity to design their programmes according to the preferences of employers. The major challenge universities will face is incorporating ‘mobility units’ into the more rigid new curricula.

The traditional expectation of university education, that it should provide wide ranging knowledge of the discipline, is clearly met by existing programmes. Here we can confirm that the provision of a broad range of competences by universities is in line with demand in the field of foreign policy consulting. The frequent emphasis on so-called key competences seems to have led universities increasingly to offer courses conveying soft skills. A question emerges about how new key competences are to be provided effectively within the framework of traditional approaches to teaching such as lectures, presentations and essays. At the same time alternative innovative teaching methods, such as simulation games or the drafting of policy papers, seem only rarely to have found their way into curricula. The demand, voiced by political consultants, that programmes have a more practical orientation seems to have been acknowledged by universities mainly through the introduction of compulsory internships, excursions or student exchanges with foreign universities. While an effort on the part of the universities is clearly identifiable, it nevertheless appears that the integration of such elements into programmes has not been implemented to its fullest extent yet.

This is, in some respects, also reflected in the more general criticism concerning the way some universities have implemented the change from the *Magister* or *Diplom* degree to the two-stage Bachelors’/Master’ system, namely, by renaming old schemes and types of teaching and making only minimal changes of

substance: new wine in old bottles, so to speak. On the other hand, as many political consultants have pointed out, there are no study programmes capable on their own of training students for a career in political consultancy because many skills can only be acquired on the job. In addition, the configuration of university education is not dependent on universities alone given that personal initiative on the part of students – in the form of internships, voluntary work or extracurricular (other) activities – obviously plays an important role.

In conclusion one can argue that the architects of the Masters' programmes we have investigated have acknowledged the changes in contemporary university education and attempted to develop appropriate programmes. However, at this point there seems to be a certain gap between ambition and implementation; for a clear effort is being made to adapt to new circumstances, while at the same time traditional perceptions and methodologies of university education are being preserved. In this sense there is still considerable potential and need for reform – involving the fundamental redesign and reorganisation of programmes. However, the effects of the Bologna process, and the nature of demand in the field of political consulting seem to be supporting and fostering, rather than obstructing, this process.

This article has focused on the effects of the reforms regarding university-level political science programmes in Germany but may also be understood as part of a more general European research programme seeking to evaluate the Bologna process. In order to do so adequately, however, further research should be devoted to the question of the degree to which the results of our inquiry correspond to the experience of universities, political consultants and graduates in other member states. This would allow for a comparative analysis of supply and demand structures. It is one of the central long-term objectives of the reforms to foster the creation of a common

European labour market with a highly mobile labour force. Thus, such a broader analytical perspective should provide insight into the degree to which European universities are preparing political science graduates for employment in the field of scientific political consulting abroad. In this context we may additionally ask about the degree to which the Bologna process has fostered the harmonisation of content and emphasis in the teaching of political science in the EU allowing students to compete on equal terms in a single European labour market. Assuming that universities increasingly design their programmes according to patterns of labour-market demand, a wider European perspective on the preferences and requirements of scientific political consultants may prove helpful for universities seeking further to refine the content and structure of their programmes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘scientific policy advice’, ‘scientific policy consulting’ and ‘scientific political consulting’ will be used interchangeably here. We have opted not to use the term ‘political consulting’; for, without the prefix ‘scientific’, the term usually refers, especially in the US context, to general consulting in political matters, and particularly to an industry which has grown up around advising and assisting political campaigns. In terms of content, what we denote by ‘scientific policy advice’ is broader than what is usually referred to as ‘political consulting’, as it often goes beyond political campaigning. It also differs from the latter by more expressly and substantially drawing on expert, scientific or academic input.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed summary of the different models see Lompe (2006).

<sup>3</sup> This and some of the subsequent parts of this section are based on Böckenförde and Niemann (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Other examples include Rita Süßmuth, Alfred Müller-Armack, Karl Schiller, Rupert Scholz and Horst Ehmke.

<sup>5</sup> Notable US ‘commuters’ include, among others, Condoleezza Rice, Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, Richard Haass, Stephen Krasner, Samuel Huntington, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Joseph Nye as well as Paul Wolfowitz.

<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the results of the conference, the so called ‘Kassel study’ found that 60 per cent of university representatives included in the inquiry expected the Bologna reforms to have positive effects on transnational student mobility. The degree to which the study reflects the actual situation is, however, questionable given that it mainly considered programmes that already include mobility as a mandatory degree requirement (Hellmann and Peltzer-Hönicke: p.I).

<sup>7</sup> While the number of outgoing Erasmus students increased from 73,407 in 1994/1995 to 84,642 in 1995/1996 for instance, it decreased to 79,874 in 1996/1997 then to increase again to 85,999 in 1997/1998 (European Commission, 2008: 1)

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see the offer of the private German Institute for Public Affairs, [www.dipa-berlin.org](http://www.dipa-berlin.org).

<sup>9</sup> In total 51 consultants of the following institutes participated in the inquiry: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP), Centrum für angewandte Politikforschung (CAP), Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), and Berlin Polis. Hence, consultants were chosen from the largest and most representative think tanks, while also including one smaller institute. We also ensured that respondents represented different (thematic and geographic) areas of scientific foreign policy advice, including specialists on the European Union, the Middle East, Russia, security policy, development policy, external energy policy, and so forth.

<sup>10</sup> The scale runs from 1 (very important) to 5 (unimportant). The last column shows the combined percentages answering 1 (very important) and 2 (important). The penultimate column shows the average on the scale from 1 to 5. The letters in brackets assign the individual skills to larger groups of competence (E: Expertise and experience; A: Analytical skills; C: Communication skills; O: Customer focus)

<sup>11</sup> Of our 51 surveyed consultants 67 per cent held a degree in political science, 30 per cent in economics, 9 per cent in law, 9 per cent in history, 9 per cent in area studies. Multiple entries were allowed.

<sup>12</sup> Scale: 1 (very important) to 5 (not important). The last column shows the combined percentages answering 1 (very important) and 2 (important). The penultimate column shows the average on the scale from 1 to 5.

<sup>13</sup> Partly for reasons connected with safeguarding the anonymity of interviewees, the authors have abstained from describing the specific features and qualities of the programmes of specific universities. Neither is the inquiry meant to offer a guide to individual Masters’ programmes in detail.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Hard skills’ are defined here as analytical competence, expert knowledge and (practical) experience.

<sup>15</sup> By ‘soft skills’ we mean social competences and communication skills, including rhetorical and (foreign/technical) language competencies.

<sup>16</sup> The focus on these disciplines is based on the well-founded assumption that they are especially well-suited for preparing students for a career in scientific political consulting. This assumption is confirmed by the results of our inquiry, above, and is also supported by Schattenberg and Steuber (2006). The choice of relevant programmes to include in the inquiry is based on the results obtained by using the online search engine Hochschulkompass (2007).

We have analysed the following Masters’ programmes:

Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität Berlin, Universität Potsdam	M.A. Internationale Beziehungen
Freie Universität Berlin	Master Osteuropastudien Master Europawissenschaften Master Transatlantic Studies
Ruhr-Universität Bochum	Master Development Management
International University Bremen, Universität Bremen	Master International Relations. Global Governance and Social Theory
Universität Bremen	Master Development Policy
Technische Universität Chemnitz	Master Europäische Integration – Schwerpunkt Ostmitteleuropa
Technische Universität Darmstadt	Master in Politikwissenschaft
Technische Universität Dresden	Master in Internationale Beziehungen
Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt	Master Internationale Beziehungen
Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg	Master in International Business
Europäische Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder	Master in European Studies
Universität Freiburg	Master in Social Sciences (Global Politics)
Fachhochschule Fulda	Master in Intercultural Communication and European Studies
Universität Göttingen	Master in International Economics
Hamburger Universität für Wirtschaft und Politik	Master für Europastudien
Universität Hannover	Master in European Studies
Universität Kassel	Master in Global Political Economy
Universität Konstanz	Master in International Economic Relations/ Internationale Wirtschaftsbeziehungen Master of Public Policy and Management
Universität Leipzig	Master in Global Studies
Universität Magdeburg	Master Friedens- und Konfliktforschung

Universität Marburg	Master in European Studies
Universität Münster	Master in Konflikt- und Friedensforschung
Universität Osnabrück	Master in European Studies
Universität Passau	Master in Europäische Integration und Transformation nationaler politischer Systeme
Universität Regensburg	Master in European Studies
	Interkulturelle Europastudien
	Ost-West-Studien
Universität Tübingen	Master of European Studies
	Master in Friedensforschung und Internationale Politik

<sup>17</sup> That political consultants' expectations are rather unspecific has been derived from the fact that they see quite a large number of different skills and competences as well as university programme features as desirable (cf. Tables 1 and 5).

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#### **About the authors**

Dr. **Arne Niemann** (BSc London, PhD Cantab) is Lecturer in European Integration Studies and International Relations at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam. He previously worked as a Lecturer in Political Science at the

University of Dresden (2002-2006). He is author of *Explaining Decisions in the European Union* (Cambridge University Press 2006) and has published in several journals, including the *Journal of European Public Policy* (1998, 2004) and the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (2008).

**Sabine Heister** holds a BA First Class Honours degree in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Dundee, a Diplôme d'Administration et Politique Internationales from the Université Pierre Mendès France-Grenoble II, and an MSc in International Relations at the University Amsterdam. She was awarded a Certificate of Merit from the University of Dundee in 2004. She currently works as a Research Assistant at the University of Amsterdam.

Key quotes:

‘Visibility is...not only significant in terms of shaping public discourse, but is also the main source of income for some advisers and may thus become a goal in itself.’

‘...the most important problem created by the Bologna process appears to be its potentially negative effect on transnational student mobility.’

‘...interestingly, knowledge of a foreign language is judged to be a crucial skill while considerably fewer respondents thought general rhetorical skills were essential.’

‘...with regard to the question of the degree to which current Masters’ programmes prepare students for a career in scientific political consulting, the results of this inquiry allow for a fairly optimistic (preliminary) evaluation.’

**Table 1 Importance of skills for political consulting<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>1-2</b>
Ability/power of judgment (A)	1.28	98%
Expertise/know-how concerning the topic in question (E)	1.34	98%
Ability concisely to summarise key points (A)	1.40	98%
Knowledge of the relevant actors (E)	1.54	92%
Experience with political processes (E)	1.70	88%
Cultivation and generation of new contacts (O)	1.74	84%
Foreign language skills (C)	1.82	86%
Ability to filter information quickly (A)	1.84	82%
Special knowledge of the particular client (O)	1.90	78%
Adaptation to the technical language of the particular field of consulting (C)	2.02	72%
General rhetorical skills (C)	2.18	68%
Effective research methods (A)	2.22	62%
Ability to develop unconventional and creative ideas (A)	2.44	50%
Customer focus (O)	2.48	52%
Mastery of scientific (technical/academic) language (C)	3.37	22%

**Table 2 – Weighting of competence areas**

<b>Competence area</b>	<b>%</b>
Expertise/Know-how and experience	33.10
Analytical skills	28.45
Communication skills	21.90
Customer focus	16.55

**Table 3 – Importance of academic disciplines for political consulting<sup>12</sup>**

<b>Academic discipline</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>1-2</b>
Political science	1.69	86%
Economics	2.35	63%
Law	2.94	33%
History	3.16	31%

**Table 4 – Weighting of university education and learning by doing**

<b>University education vs. learning by doing</b>	<b>Ø</b>
University degree	47%
Learning by doing	53%

**Table 5 – Features of Masters’ programmes preparing for employment in political consulting**

<b>Crucial features of university programmes</b>	<b>Ø</b>	<b>1-2</b>
Interdisciplinarity	1.91	81%
Expert knowledge of a particular region	1.96	71%
Expert knowledge of a particular policy area	2.04	76%
General education	2.09	72%
Specialist knowledge	2.43	51%