



Intellectual Output 4 - Pilot Reports

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE TEACHING - INDISPENSABLE IN A DIVERSE ADULT EDUCATION SETTING | VHS KURSPROGRAMM

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project “Diversity Capacities - Improving the Capacities of Adult Education Institutions to Successful Dealing with Diversity”

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1. General description of the organisation - VHS Kursprogramm: tradition and change for over 100 years

VHS Kursprogramm is a division of the “Ada-und-Theodor-Lessing-Volkshochschule Hannover (VHS Hannover) “. The VHS Hannover was founded in 1919 by Ada and Theodor Lessing and celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019. Nowadays it is the “Fachbereich Volkshochschule”, a department of the “Landeshauptstadt Hannover (LHH) “, the municipality of Hanover. Thus, for VHS Kursprogramm the legal frameworks of the LHH are compulsory, encompassing HR processes and goals. An advisory board facilitates the communication between the city council and the VHS Hannover.

The LHH has signed the Charta der Vielfalt (diversity charta: a corporate initiative to promote diversity in companies and institutions) in 2008 as well as the EU-Charta for equal opportunities. The departments of the municipality engage in various activities and networks promoting sensitivity towards different aspects of diversity and reducing discrimination.

In addition, the LHH is part of several international networks like Mayors for Peace, UNESCO Creative City Network, Rainbow City Network, Farbenspiel and it established integration advisory boards. Throughout the last years, the LHH initiated various participatory processes for citizens and employees alike „Hannover - internationale Stadt“, „Lokaler Integrationsplan 2.0 - Wir in Hannover“, „Hannover - kosmopolitisch“, „Kulturentwicklungsplan“, „Schulentwicklungsplan“. The overall goal of these were to adapt its services to the needs of a more and more diverse urban society.

VHS Hannover is financed by the fees of participants as well as public subsidies from the municipality, the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony and third-party funds (e.g. employment agency, social assurance, European Social Fund, European Commission).

It consists of three divisions: central departmental affairs (43.0), VHS Chance (43.1) and VHS Kursprogramm/Course program (OE 43.2).

Central departmental affairs is taking care of the infrastructure and maintenance to offer classes of all different sorts, e.g. organizing job interviews, making schedules for the staff to run VHS and so on. VHS Chance offers training for special targets groups with a focus on basic education, German as a foreign language and school of second chance as well educational counselling. These trainings are mostly refinanced by the state or have very low fees in order to diminish obstacles for participation.

VHS Kursprogramm on the other hand is the division of the VHS Hannover, that offers a diverse educational program and training to the general public. In general, the costs of its courses and training programs need to be covered by participants' fees with the exception of most courses in the section political education. In order to facilitate social and educational participation for all, VHS Kursprogramm offers a generous discount policy for people with small incomes, though. In the action concept "My Hanover 2030", the VHS Kursprogramm developed the concept "VHS Room3", which provides offers of political, social, ecological, economic and social education for free and strengthens the importance of the adult education center as a so-called third place.¹

In 2020, VHS Kursprogramm consisted of 3 teams - „VHS International“, „VHS Aktiv“ and „Political Education“ with a total of 10 different program areas. Due to staff turnover in several positions and the pandemic-related suspension of all staffing procedures for several months in 2020, the opportunity arose at the same time to better align the entire organisational structure with the changing educational needs and to compensate for eliminated positions by changing the structure of numerous program areas and teams.



As of January 1, 2021, the department „Beruf|Digital“ / Occupation|Digital with its 10 employees was transferred from VHS Chance to VHS Kursprogramm and eliminated jobs. At the same time, the previous teams of VHS Kursprogramm, VHS International and VHS Aktiv, were merged with additional positions from other teams to form a new department VHS InterAktiv with 18 employees, while the position for political education was eliminated. This was also accompanied by office moves.

Therefore, since 2021, VHS Kursprogramm consists of a total of two new subject departments: „VHS InterAktiv“ and „Beruf|Digital“. VHS InterAktiv offers educational formats in the areas of foreign languages, health, ecology, cultural education, political education and is involved in EU projects. VHS Beruf|Digital organizes courses in the areas of IT, skills, inclusion, vocational training and retraining, as well as continuing education for pedagogical staff in early childhood education.

Resources

¹ Stangl Werner, <https://lexikon.stangl.eu/25839/third-place-dritter-ort>



2. Constantly changing - Bearing in mind the diversity of society

2.1 The self-perception of VHS Kursprogramm

"We are committed to respect for human dignity, openness, dialogue and equal opportunities" is the central statement of the mission statement, which was developed in 2003 and revised in 2010. This important statement illustrates VHS Hannover's and VHS Kursprogramm's overall aim to provide education to all people in Hannover.

According to the mission statement, the course descriptions in the course booklet as well as the homepage, VHS Kursprogramm tries to present itself as an institution open to the general public and anybody seeking adult educational offers.

But this is mainly restricted to text, only a few pictures in the public relation materials and channels depict diverse participants. And the institution publishes everything in German only.

"In addition, our program serves to reduce gender-specific disadvantages and to integrate migrants into our society. In doing so, we want to maintain our strength as a major provider of public welfare-oriented educational work with a social and emancipatory profile in Lower Saxony" is another important statement in the mission statement that underlines the general awareness towards certain aspects of diversity and the organisations's aim to help reduce disadvantages for certain groups with educational offers.

But is all of this really enough? And how relevant is the mission statement in the daily work of the planners of the different program sections? The mission statement hasn't been revised in over 10 years and an explicit diversity statement is missing. And most employees do not even know this mission statement and those who do, find it hard to read.

In their 100-year tradition, Volkshochschulen (adult education centers) have always reacted promptly to social developments and changes and the resulting individual educational needs and provided appropriate offers. This also applies to VHS Kursprogramm, which, thanks to its well trained and motivated staff and its very good spatial and technical infrastructure, offers a broad program for all adults that is geared to current developments and topics. A section of its program addresses special needs of special target groups like men, women, elderly people and people with disabilities as well as LGBTIQ*. But how to address and how to plan offers for certain target groups for the more general courses is not yet reflected or discussed on an institutional level. Instead, this is entirely based on the individual knowledge and engagement of program planners.

2.2 Human Resources

Since the LHH and VHS Kursprogramm try to represent the diversity of the society in its employment structure, a gender equality plan determines goals for all functions in all departments. Therefore, in job advertisements, there always will be a statement that a member of a certain underrepresented gender will be preferred if the person is equally qualified. People with a migration background or people with a disability are especially encouraged to apply for job positions.

The staff structure of VHS Kursprogramm is currently still limited in diversity. Of the total of 29 positions, 4 are currently vacant and need to be filled. 21 of the 25 current employees are female and only 4 male. 6 employees are known to have a migrant background, 2 of which are interns on temporary contracts. In the next 6 years, 5 more employees will retire due to age, including 2 of the 4 men. One employee has a severe disability and one employee has come out as homosexual at work. No reliable statements can be made regarding the religion and social situation of the employees. In the last 10 years, there have only been about 10 new appointments, but 3 men and 4 people with a migration background were recruited. A general barrier for migrants applying for a job in the public sector - and therefore at VHS Kursprogramm - is the collective wage agreement (Tarifvertrag). For each position the necessary formal qualification has to be indicated and anybody without this qualification cannot be employed. Comparable abilities, qualifications and professional experience cannot be acknowledged, the expected professional degrees are compulsory. Therefore, VHS Kursprogramm offers stages for the recognition of a foreign occupation or profession.

The institution also offers flexible working conditions with flexible hours within the working day, and the option of a mobile working place for enabling someone to work partly at home. VHS Kursprogramm is a secular institution and any kind of religion is respected but not actively supported (e.g. there are no prayer rooms).

During the project period, there were also several personnel changes in VHS Kursprogramm and its network that influenced the course of the project since all management positions in VHS Kursprogramm that were entrusted with the DivCap project were newly filled. The previous head of VHS Kursprogramm ("Bereichsleitung") became the first woman since Ada Lessing to head VHS Hannover, and the new divisional head of VHS Kursprogramm started January 2020. The project management of DivCap also changed: After the retirement of the former project leader, the head of cultural department took over the management of the project for VHS Kursprogramm in 2020.

In addition, in 2020 there was a revision process of the Local Integration Plan of the LHH, in which the VHS Hannover is actively involved on two levels.

On the management level, VHS Hannover is represented by Jacqueline Knaubert-Lang in the steering group, which is staffed with internal and external personnel and which approves the proposed concepts and measures and submits them to the LHH Council for decision. On the other hand, the project manager of DivCap is the internal spokesperson of the working group Education .

No concrete statistics can be provided on the diversity structure of freelance instructors, as only the gender dimension is systematically recorded, and only since 2019 has it been possible to specify diversity². Out of approximately 600 freelance course instructors, about 400 are women and at least 2 course instructors indicated to be other. In general, the share of course instructors with a migration background is highest in the program segment of foreign language education, because most of them are native speakers.

2.3 Networks

The employees of VHS Kursprogramm are active in various networks on different (diversity) topics and work closely with other departments and divisions within the LHH³. For example, the Hanover Diversity Network HaDi is coordinated by the DivCap project leader together with the coordination office ALBuM. In addition, the employees are also involved in networks with civil society, associations and organizations at municipal, state and federal levels as well as at the international level. Examples of this are the Diversity Working Group of the Lower Saxony Association of Adult Education Centers and the Diversity Committee of the German Adult Education Association (DVV). The participation in these networks already have a positive effect on the course program of VHS Kursprogramm in terms of diversity issues. And for most programm planers, the networks are a self-evident part of the promotion of their offers for relevant target groups of their network partners.

2.4 Education

The Lower Saxony Adult Education Act (NEBG), which regulates the content and focus of state funding, is authoritative for VHS Kursprogramm. It is important that adult education programs are geared to the needs and requirements of the population.

Freelance trainers in VHS Kursprogramm usually face very heterogeneous groups in their daily work. How does VHS Kursprogramm support them and the students in regard to diversity issues? Training on intercultural competence was offered on a mandatory basis to all employees of the municipality until 2014, after which employees continued to receive follow-up training if interest was expressed or if there was a high level of service in direct customer contact. In addition, managers have been taking part in a training module on LGBTIQ* in the workplace on a mandatory basis as part of management development (FKE). However, this does not apply to freelance trainers. Because of their status they cannot participate in those diversity trainings, provided by the municipality.

Resources

2. Hanover's Local Integration Policy revision and the new targets for the Educational sector, view Attachment 2
3. Due to the diversity of topics, a complete listing of all cooperations and network partners is not expedient and would go beyond the scope of the project report, although this listing is planned on the newly designed website.



2.5 Conclusion

The self-perception of staff and the VHS Kursprogramm as an institution as a whole is open, open-minded and diversity-sensitive. And it is definitely at an advanced level as an intercultural organization. Nevertheless, some shortcomings and potentials for improvement could be identified during the case study:



The mission statement is outdated, too long and partly incomprehensible. An explicit diversity statement should be included corresponding to a diversity policy which still has to be worked out.

The homepage and mostly all public relation material are published in German only and foreign language skills are not mandatory for programm planners nor leadership positions.

For a multi-lingual way of communication and a better approachability for participants, it is necessary to promote multilingualism and diversity competence among employees and to re-evaluate job requirements concerning these skills and competencies.

The future website should be multilingual and all general information should be available at least in English and preferably also in e.g. French (since there are many participants who want to learn German as a second language with French as first language).

Diversity training should be offered for employees and freelance instructors as well. In the long term, VHS Kursprogramm should develop and implement an ongoing reflection and monitoring system for the diversity policy, in order to ensure that it is actively carried out and current (perhaps an annual reflection).

3. The Change and Learning Process - Education for all

3.1 Aims and approaches

The central task in the area of diversity at an adult education institution such as VHS Kursprogramm is to develop and implement a diversity-sensitive and diverse course offering and to design the announcements accordingly. The professionalization of the employees as well as the participation in networks is indispensable for this.

The self-perception of staff and the institution as a whole is open, open-minded and diversity-sensitive. However, individual and overarching training needs in relation to diversity-sensitive action are not always perceived or considered, or they are put on the back burner as lower-priority training topics.

A common attitude towards diversity as well as a clearly formulated goal of the organization, how diversity should be carried out and implemented, has not yet been developed in VHS Kursprogramm. This is a central task in the context of the revision of the outdated mission statement and for the strategic orientation.

Approaches of critical colonialism and capitalism should be at the center of the discourse, when dealing with the topic of diversity with ever more differentiating groups. The goal should be a continuous discursive negotiation process. This process should include attempts to programmatically communicate the current state of research internally and externally in suitable formats. This ongoing task can only be implemented through a constructive confrontation with one's own limitations in perception.

However, a one-sided view of diversity is insufficient in this regard. And diversity management as an employment tool is implemented in many companies with the goal of increasing profits by attracting new customers, yet not as an attitude of approaching all people in a diversity-sensitive manner. Diversity mainstreaming, on the other hand, i.e. the consideration of diversity in all processes, tasks, offers, etc., is an approach that appears to be purposeful for a further education institution with the claim to serve "the social and individual emancipation of the participants, social justice and solidarity...".

In order to implement this in the future, several approaches to action and a continuous process of change are required. VHS Kursprogramm sees itself as a learning organization, and the deeper examination of diversity at all levels is an important (learning) goal.

3.2 Activities

3.2.1 Commitment of management

Far-reaching change processes that affect the attitude of an organization and its employees, such as the intensive examination of diversity, must be supported by all employees in order to be implemented successfully. Management has an important role to play in this. It must formulate the change as an important goal, initiate the process and set the framework, because a change process requires activities, guidance and, above all, resources, which can only be provided by management. Therefore, the first thing to do is to get management involved with the issue.

Before the results of the case study and the resulting recommendations for change could be presented to the head of VHS Kursprogramm and discussed with her detail in 2019, she became director of the whole VHS Hannover and her successor was to take over in January 2020. In order to give the new head of VHS Kursprogramm some time to get familiar with the colleagues, the structure and the processes first, she was contacted some time after her start via mail with the case study attached in February.

“Most important: It [Diversity] must be truly supported and driven from the top and it needs resources!!! “
(network partner)



3.2.2 Corona changed everything overnight - new priorities with surprising side effects

Then, the corona virus reached Germany, VHS Kursprogramm was closed in March 2020 due to the nationwide lockdown. And staff was to work from home as much as possible until further notice. Priorities shifted from one moment to the next, as the in person aspect of the business, which had by and large been the sole core business of VHS course programs for over 100 years, came to a complete standstill, resulting in financial and future staffing constraints.

3.2.3 Digitalisation overnight

Already in the week after the lockdown started in March 2020, the Learning Management System vhs.cloud and the integrated video conferencing system edudip , which are both used at almost all German-speaking adult education centers, were introduced on a test basis at the VHS Hannover. The employee and freelance staff online-training that followed was very time-consuming and tied up a lot of personnel capacities, nevertheless, by April 120 courses could be offered online via vhs.cloud.

At the same time, the Corona pandemic situation required constant readiness to adapt to new requirements from everyone and caused extensive additional work at the planning and administrative level in the context of the planning and implementation of offers, online and in presence.

These resources were not available for the strategic development of the entire VHS Hannover and neither for the originally planned activities in the project, such as the actually intended mission statement process, the further training of employees. Instead, the new conception of online-supported formats and the securing of a program also under corona conditions had pedagogical and economic priority over the further planned measures within the framework of the Diversity Capacities project.

3.2.4 A new plan and new opportunities for re-shaping VHS Kursprogramm towards more diversity sensitivity

Even though the pandemic put a lot of strain on the organisation in many respects, digitalization and pandemic-related postponed staffing procedures, resulted in new opportunities and requirements for organisational development - with exciting and unexpected consequences for the diversity competence of VHS Kursprogramm.

So in a long online meeting the management and the project leader and DivCap coach determined which of the original recommendations could be implemented under the changed circumstances. Furthermore, they re-assessed the much changed situation in VHS Kursprogramm in detail and developed a strategic plan with new priorities.

3.2.5 Implementation

Diversity training for employees and freelance instructors

Conducting diversity training for employees initially seemed unrealistic in 2020 due to the pandemic. However, as online offerings became more widespread, it was decided to conduct online training on diversity topics. For this purpose, existing concepts were researched and offers were obtained. These were recorded and relevant with regard to criteria such as type of implementation (presence, online, hybrid), duration, content, instructors, costs and feasibility in a company context. The compilation was given as a decision proposal to the management of the VHS Hannover.

After an intensive exchange, the decision was made in favor of two online training courses offered by the VNB (Association of Lower Saxony Educational Initiatives) as part of the #vielgestaltig project, which offers training courses on diversity topics throughout Lower Saxony. The focus is on the one hand on the specific, diversity-sensitive addressing of different target groups and on the other hand on a critical examination of one's own privileges and racism-critical action, which can be attended during working hours. Due to their status, it is difficult to offer trainings to freelance instructors in diversity competence. Participation in training courses cannot be financially supported by the VHS for tax and social security reasons. However, an online self-learning course with centrally provided content of the DVV on intercultural communication has been set up in the vhs.cloud for the freelance lecturers and also the permanent employees and advertised to all course leaders. Interested parties can use the course flexibly in terms of time and location, but beforehand they should use the Implicit Association Test of Harvard University.

Promoting multilingualism among employees and intercultural openness

A survey on multilingualism among the 105 permanent employees of the VHS Hannover made it possible to assess their language skills from level B1 for the organization - for the first time.

For this purpose, the employees were asked by email which languages they speak at least on level B1 CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Information on language skills at levels A1 and A2 was recorded insofar as they were named. However, these are not relevant due to their limited usability in potential discussions with participants, course instructors and other persons. With a total response of 28 persons, it is noticeable that German as a mother tongue was only named by a few. Since "foreign language skills" were not explicitly asked for - only language skills were mentioned - apparently German as the mother tongue was not considered relevant in the survey by quite a few.

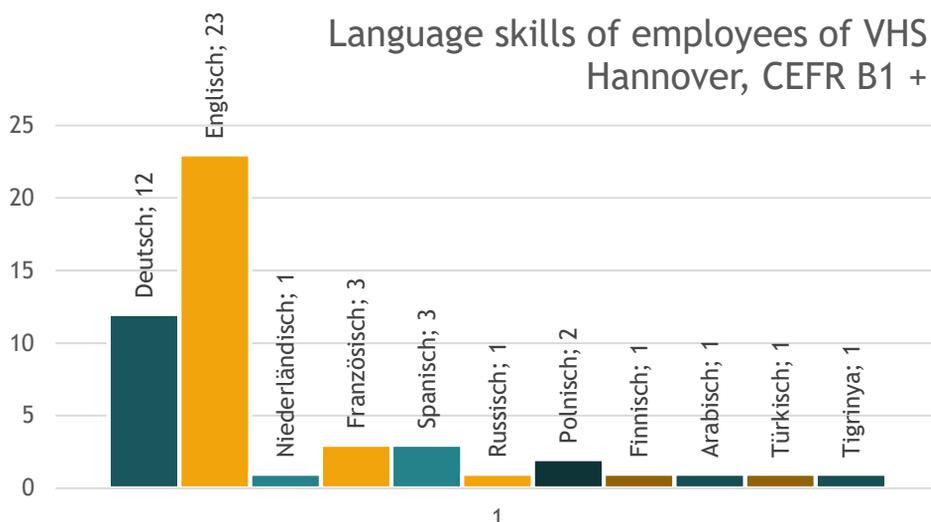


Illustration 3: Language skills of employees of VHS Hannover, CEFR B1+

The results of the survey are presented here for the entire VHS in order to have a larger sample and not to be able to draw conclusions about individuals.

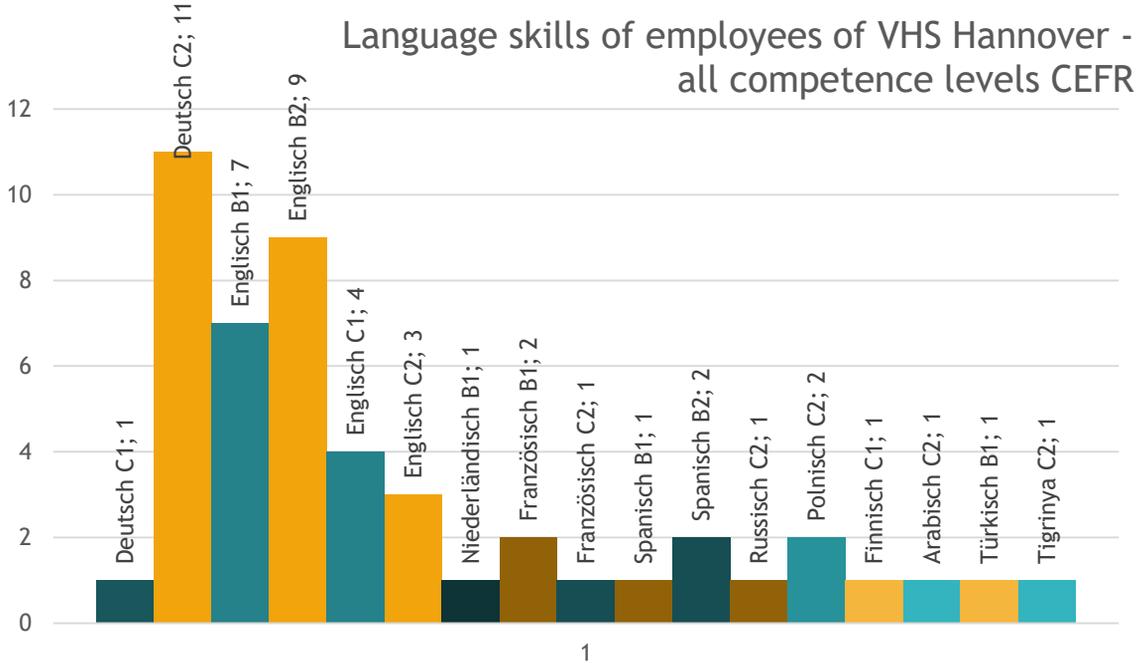


Illustration 4: Language skills of employees of VHS Hannover, all competence levels CEFR

After the feedback, the numbers were mirrored back to the management of VHS Kursprogramm in order to decide on next steps in presenting the language skills to the public in order to enhance service orientation.

Survey on diversity in the network

In order to also get to know the perspectives on diversity in the network of VHS Kursprogramm more closely and to be able to include them in the process of revising the mission statement as well as developing a diversity strategy, a short survey was conducted in a diversity-sensitive network in March 2021. The questions of the survey are attached (see attachment 1).

3.3 Lessons Learnt

3.3.1 Diversity training for employees and freelance instructors

The online staff training courses on the specific, diversity-sensitive addressing of different target groups and on a critical examination of one's own privileges and racism-critical action will take place in May 2021. In the mean-time, some of the staff as well as the freelance lectures worked on the online self-learning course. Since a participants' survey will not be conducted until the end of the semester, it is not yet possible to make a statement about learning outcomes and possible knowledge transfer into practice.



Illustration 5: Screen shot

But first feedbacks show a great willingness to participate in self-learning courses covering diversity topics. So new topics and content should be sought or developed.

3.3.2 Promoting multilingualism among employees and intercultural openness

The survey of linguistic competencies revealed that the knowledge of English, the lingua franca, is not as widespread as expected by the management. Since four positions are to be filled in the near future, the requirements for the jobs were carefully reviewed and interviews were conducted with job holders of comparable positions. The need was seen to strengthen the organization's diversity competence and intercultural openness, among other things, by increasing the multilingual competencies of employees, and the need for active participation in international network. Therefore, it was decided that social and diversity competence as well as English language skills would be a requirement for all management positions and program area management positions from now on.

Job descriptions have already been revised for three specific positions (1 team leader and 2 program area leads) to include these two job requirements in the official job description:

Aufgrund der Heterogenität der Teilnehmenden ist ein hohes Maß an sozialer und Diversitätskompetenz erforderlich. Im Rahmen der Netzwerk- und Projektarbeit sowie zur Teilhabe am Fachdiskurs sind gute Fremdsprachenkenntnisse in Englisch für den Arbeitsplatz erforderlich.

Due to the heterogeneity of the participants, a high level of social and diversity competence is required. In the context of networking and project work as well as for participation in professional discourse, good foreign language skills in English are required for the workplace.

3.3.3 Survey on diversity in the network

Find network partners.

Ask questions.

Don't speak about groups but with them. Include the groups in your preparations.

Let people find words to describe themselves.

Be aware of your own privileges.



Overall, many very important aspects were addressed by the participants of the conducted survey. They will be discussed with all employees in the planned participation process in order to obtain further suggestions for the concrete design of a more diversity-sensitive adult education center. At the same time, this also gave rise to the idea of placing the topic of diversity broadly at an online barcamp on the future of the VHS Hannover planned for September 2021, to which employees, course instructors and network partners will be invited. In March 2021 a survey among network partners took place that gave a wide inside into different ways of handling diversity in different organisations.

3.3.4 The domino effect of lived openness - new opportunities through digitization

With the introduction of the online learning platform vhs.cloud alone, VHS Kursprogramm has become already more diverse. For quite some time no courses in presence could be (and still can't be) offered. Furthermore, quite a lot of the existing freelancers weren't keen on offering online courses and for some it wasn't possible (i.e. due to the subject, missing digital competencies or technical reasons). Hence, new subjects, course ideas and even new instructors were needed. Therefore, existing course instructors as well as cooperation and network partners were asked to provide new content.

Through the new content, other new course leaders became aware of VHS Kursprogramm, which in turn ensured new offers and more reach and visibility.

In particular, the cooperation with the Indian Association Hannover and the then president (chairman) was very successful. He was able to win researchers as speakers for joint events on autonomous driving, data science, Covid vaccines and so on, through his own scientific networks of the Indian diaspora worldwide (including from the USA, India, UK).

And at the same time he could win top-class speakers for transcultural encounters. This cooperation, as part of the series "Encounters with India", also resulted in a course offer for the subject area Profession | Digital: a Python programming course in English.



*Dear Sir or Madam, I would like to thank you for your extensive online program. You are certainly one of the best adult education centers in the field of online teaching. Hopefully your online teaching program will continue after the pandemic, because people with disabilities (I am visually impaired) benefit immensely from this opportunity to participate in cultural education in an uncomplicated way. Thank you very much.
(participant from Bad Harzburg)*

Digitization in VHS Kursprogramm has also helped overcome spatial barriers to participation, as evidenced by the growth in the number of participants from all over Germany, and at the same time has opened up the course content and the providers.

The perception of the VHS Hannover as a place of encounter and exchange, the positive feedback as well as word-of-mouth among speakers resulted in a more diverse course program due to a chain reaction on the content and human level. New freelancers created new content and via their networks new customers and more new lecturers could be attracted. Other adult education centers also perceive this positively and planning networks are emerging, such as the "Denkraum Volkshochschule", a merger of the VHS Hannover with the VHS Langenhagen and the VHS Hannover-Ostkreis, which want to jointly advance political education.

To this end, there was a kick-off event in April 2021 in cooperation with the Spielfeld Gesellschaft of the Lower Saxony Lotto Sports Foundation: an anti-racism reading with Massoud Doktoran followed by a discussion and, one day later, a writing workshop on racist experiences, which is to be included in the general course program in perspective.

And there definitely is more to come.

3.4 Good Practice Examples

3.4.1 English languages skills and diversity competence as a requirement in the job descriptions

Since English language skills as well as diversity competence will from now on be a requirement for all management positions and program area management positions, the job advertisements needed to be reformulated and a new interview guideline with explanations had to be developed.

In the second DivCap pilot project at VHS Hannover, VHS Chance worked on the integration of intercultural competence in job-advertisements, interview guidelines and developed a role-play for assessing communication skills and intercultural competencies. At VHS Kursprogramm it was decided to focus on how to ask for English language skills of applicants in job advertisements and how to determine them in the course of an interview.



BEWARE: Defining English language skills as mandatory for the job could lead to unintentional discrimination of applicants.

When including mandatory skills in the official job description of a position in the public sector in Germany with its collective agreement, the organization also has to decide how to ask for the languages skills in the job advertisement. The job advertisement is the basis for determining which applicants can be invited for an interview and finally, if they fulfill all the requirements of the job and can be contracted.

If you formulate the job description with English language skills as a prerequisite for the job, anybody who does not have them at the time of the application (if a certificate is to be handed in) or at the time of the interview cannot be contracted. This could unintentionally result in a discrimination against people that haven't learned English as a second language, e.g. if they went to school in another country. It is therefore important to decide, whether a candidate needs to have the language skills straight away or if the person only needs to prove a willingness to learn English or to improve his*her language skills promptly.

Since VHS Kursprogramm does not want to risk to exclude otherwise suitable candidates, it was decided to use this sentence in future job advertisements:

Since the level of English language skills of the applicants may therefore vary, a flexible way to assess these in the job interviews needs to be established.

If the applicant indicated a good knowledge of English in its application, one question should be posed and answered in English in order to assess this. Therefore, the applicant will be asked to introduce himself and his position to a foreign network partner as the future jobholder. If the applicant indicated a willingness to acquire or develop English languages skills in its application, the same task will be given, but the task will be explained in German.

Imagine that you have started on this job and that you meet a foreign network partner for the first time.

Please introduce yourself and your job position to the network partner.

Alternatively for applicants who stated that they are willing to acquire or develop English language skills this task will be given (task will be read in German):

You indicated that you are willing to acquire or develop your English language skills. Still, we would like to ask of you to introduce yourself briefly to a foreign network partner in English:

Imagine that you have started on this job and that you meet a foreign network partner for the first time.

Please introduce yourself and your job position briefly to the network partner.

If this is not possible at all, please do so in German.

This can be used to find out whether the applicant is aware of his or her role and responsibility as well as the level of language skills.

1 2 3 4 5

Since networking is also a crucial competence and task for management and pedagogical staff another question will be included in the interview guideline for these positions:

In which networks are you involved that could be relevant for this position?

This can be used to find out whether the applicant is aware of the importance of networking for the position as well as to assess his level of networking competencies.

1 2 3 4 5

These tasks will be included in the interview guidelines for all leadership and pedagogical staff positions.

3.4.2 Promoting multilingualism among employees and intercultural openness

There are several approaches to making the language skills of employees visible to customers and visitors in the future.

First, the language competencies will be made visible on the door sign by means of country flags (see pictures) in order to enable visitors to quickly find their way around.



Illustration 6: door sign to make the language competencies visible

Secondly, the small flags could also be placed on name tags. By wearing the name badges, employees can make their responsiveness visible to walk-in customers. Since the organisation is closed for an indefinite period of time due to the pandemic, the idea of name tags will only be concretized and implemented in the medium term.

And third, the language skills should be displayed on the website, also with little flags indicated the languages spoken. But since the website will be migrated to another system in the second half of 2021, this also will be implemented in the medium term the earliest.

In addition, an EU mobility project was (successfully) applied for in 2020 in order to enable employees from all functional groups and course instructors to take part in language or specialist training (focusing on diversity and digitization) during stays in other European countries. Due to the pandemic, however, it has not yet been possible to plan and carry out any mobility. For this, all the necessary administrative paperwork and processes were developed and prepared.

4. Implementing Diversity - A task for all

4.1. Summary

Some of the planned activities could not be implemented as planned due to the pandemic during the course of the project. Those, that could be implemented will still have to prove their validity. Because the new wordings for job descriptions, job advertisements and job interview guidelines will be tested in the upcoming application processes for the first time.

Instead, due to the Corona pandemic, VHS Kursprogramm focused on digitization and realigned itself in terms of subject areas, new content and organizational structure in order to better meet the needs of a more diverse urban society. Digitization has significantly expanded the local, regional, national and international network of all planning colleagues.

4.2 Lessons Learnt



Initiating change processes in an adult education centre must be done with a high degree of flexibility in planning. Fluctuations in staff, management and especially freelancers constantly create new situations. Project planning must therefore have leeway, flexibility and a plan B. In addition, adult education centres are highly dependent on its network.

And as far as the adaptation of mission statements, labor law processes and structures and the general implementation of change processes are concerned, in a system that is part of the public service, sufficient time must be planned in, since many other agencies and, in some cases, political bodies must be involved.

4.3 Feedback of the management of VHS Kursprogramm on the process and the activities

This feedback was written by the head of VHS Kursprogramm and shows her individual view and perspective on diversity within the organisation.

4.3.1 What has the organization learned about diversity?

VHS Kursprogramm is already in the process of addressing diversity in its various facets in terms of staff and also the many diversity-related offerings. However, this has not yet been done in a strategic and structured way. The potentials and hopes for the project in this regard were correspondingly high. Due to the change in leadership, the Corona pandemic and subsequently changed organizational priorities certain activities could not be carried out and intended changes were not yet achieved as a result. Nevertheless, the survey on the language skills of employees in particular, in conjunction with the overall increased awareness of the importance of diversity skills, has already led to a concrete change in the form of changed job description and job advertisements for leadership positions as well as pedagogical staff.

In addition, however, also the new form of predominantly online networking under Corona conditions that led to significantly more diverse but also more diversity-sensitive course program with a multiplying effect.

Having worked for 9 years to promote digitization in adult education, it is not surprising to me that we are reducing barriers for participation in time and space through online offers. Even so, the extent to which we have been able to attract new and more diverse course instructors and participants in the last 12 months alone while obtaining new experience to support and advise them all, has been unexpected in its entirety. This is a positive side effect of digitization that will be used strategically and in a targeted manner in the future and will be anchored in the development of a diversity strategy.

4.3.2 What were the most important lessons learned in this change process?

Enriching perspectives often come from outside. These should be sought out and invited in a targeted manner!

In addition to the diversity survey in the network, there has also been an increased focus on diversity through new employees and interns.

Since 2018, the VHS Hannover has been offering a place in the framework of the Voluntary Social Year (FSJ) Culture, in which so far two volunteers with international backgrounds have accompanied and enriched the work at the Adult Education Center for a year with their own project. This also contributes to the diversification of the staff, since these are young adults fresh out of school who take a different, questioning look at the institution and thus represent an enrichment.

The hiring of an apprentice for an apprenticeship recognized in Germany since December 2020, as well as the planned hiring of two apprentices who might have had another field of studies, with a migration background for the apprenticeship in office management from May 2021. They are an asset to the organization in terms of people, content and organization. Especially in terms of diversity, which is another important step towards diversification and dealing with diversity in an everyday work environment. For instance, many employees once again became aware of their own privileges in the dialogue with our new colleagues.

New working conditions and new organizational structures - potential for new ways of communication and getting to know long-time colleagues better.

The organizational restructuring was extensive and still requires a lot of the employees and the management, since all employees had to find their way into the new organizational and communicational structures and help shape them. They also had to adapt to the new spatial conditions, and all this under completely new working conditions due to the pandemic, with predominantly home offices, alternating office use, and generally little personal contact. A challenge for everyone. Simultaneously having the regular exchange in weekly team video conferences with everyone or video conferences with colleagues in between. All these nuances result in completely new communicative possibilities and opportunities to get to know each other, to obtain mutual understanding and cooperation.

Digitalization in particular offers great potential for taking into account the diverse realities of the lives of employees during the Corona pandemic as well as in the future.

4.3.3 Which concrete results did the process produce?

As for the proposed activities we obtained an overview of the language skills of our staff and successfully implemented the review of our hiring process: Job descriptions, job advertisements and job interview guidelines were adapted and high social and diversity competencies as well as good English language skills (or the willingness to acquire and improve them promptly) are mandatory from now on. We also provided some training opportunities for our staff and freelance trainers. However, due to the Corona-related late implementation of this activity in relation to the project timescale, we cannot provide any reflection on the effects of that.

4.3.4 What did you find most difficult in this development process?

First of all, it is hard to separate the project-related change process from the overwhelming changes of VHS Kursprogramm since January 2020.

Briefly: the new management implemented a major change in the organizational structures without being able to implement an actually necessary participation process and team development process in person. All this in addition to all the changes due to the Corona pandemic and personnel changes, which has been, to this day, a great challenge, especially for all staff members.

Although it would be very important to develop a common team and department culture in a targeted manner and to address the issue of lived openness toward diversity, this is not possible under the current working conditions. This is unsatisfactory.

And the great willingness of the colleagues to continue being highly committed and motivated in constructively coping with the current crisis situation with alternative solutions, uncertainty and extra work due to the pandemic and, in some cases, new clashes between different work cultures cannot be taken for granted and is therefore particularly important and worthy mentioning. Because with these colleagues, who prove to be highly emphatic, very resilient and at the same time willing to accept necessary changes on a daily basis, even if this is not easy for many, the upcoming intensive confrontation with diversity, which we are already experiencing more noticeably than ever in our cooperation, will succeed well.

4.3.5 What long-term effects can be expected for the organization as a result of dealing with diversity and the development process that has been initiated?

While reflecting on all the changes and small steps undertaken towards a more diversity sensitive organization throughout the last 16 months with the DivCap coach and some colleagues, we came to realize that especially networking activities and digitalization as well as hiring interns had a large impact. These are all activities that were not specifically mentioned in the original plan for the project, but proved to be very successful in taking us further towards our goal to become a more diverse and diversity sensitive organization. Therefore, these activities and their impact will definitely be discussed with all employees.

The municipal educational mission of an adult education center is to enable residents to actively participate in society and help shape democracy. VHS Kursprogramm can be a platform for this. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of an internal concretization of this mission and an agreement on common goals and priorities. In addition, planners often lack concrete ideas about diverse target groups and their educational needs as well as their preferred channels of communication and information. For this purpose, it is necessary to discuss the individual decision-making paths of the program planners in a collegial manner and thus uncover possible blind spots in the planning and resulting barriers to participation for certain groups of people, in order to jointly and comprehensively fulfill this social mandate. This is foreseen to be done, as soon as the participation process required for this can be planned and implemented in presence.

The introduction of a new course management software and homepage with significantly more options for the differentiated and target group-oriented presentation of content and information has also been closely supported by many employees since October of last year. The hoped-for multilingualism of the homepage will thus be possible in the future. Administrative processes will also be significantly simplified, and at the same time, the new course management software will make it possible to implement a more addressee-oriented registration procedure. When redesigning the website, however, diversity will be considered in its entirety and not isolated to one aspect such as multilingualism alone. For example, accessibility for people with disabilities or the integration of images of diverse target groups will also be addressed in order to appeal to additional groups of people.

4.3.6 What can be improved and what is yet to be achieved

The change process was initiated within the framework of a scheduled project and therefore results had to be available at a certain point in time. Since an adult education institution must constantly react to social developments and undergoes constant fluctuation in its staff and network, sometimes activities cannot be accomplished by a fixed date.

4.4 Recommendations

Recommendations to the management

- Trust your highly trained staff to provide the right content.
- Involve as many groups as possible in the planning.
- Make time and financial resources available.
- Encourage staff to share ideas with each other and in networks.
- Actively promote an anti-racist and diversity-sensitive attitude among all staff.

Recommendations to pedagogical staff

- Seek out networks and actively participate. The added value in terms of knowledge is more valuable than another repetitive offer.
- Look for experts and instructors who are diverse and look diverse. The diversity of the instructors, who may serve as role models, will increase the diversity of the participants.
- Look for instructors who are enthusiastic and can motivate others.
- Look for instructors who are open-minded and sensitive to diversity.

Recommendations to other employees

- Be aware that you are the face of the institution. Your behavior represents the entire organization, in this case the adult education center, if not the city government.
- Do not make attributions based on appearances. For example, ask everyone about their gender identity (gender).

Recommendations to external freelance pedagogical staff

- Educate yourself if you have the opportunities (time, financial, offers).
- Work for institutions that share your values.

Diversity must be addressed at all levels of an organization. At management level, at employee level and with the participation of the respective network.

Management must set the framework for this, make clear the strategic importance of a diversity-sensitive approach - also by setting an example - and provide financial and time resources for this process. A common approach to diversity must be developed together with all employees and with the involvement of the network of customers, course instructors and other external partners and expressed in a mission statement.

The results of the project show that it is not possible without the inclusion of new and external perspectives and ideas. Targeted feedback and ideas from outside stimulate the organization's engagement with diversity. Therefore, a comprehensive participation of different actors and network partners should be strived for in order to gain an all-round view of the structures and processes of the organization and to be able to adapt them better if necessary. This is very important for the further process. All employees must adopt this as a basic attitude, and the new opportunities offered by digitization provide many approaches to this.

Networks are also important in the provision of expertise and in the implementation of services. Adult education institutions have the necessary infrastructure to offer any content, and cooperation and network partners have the expertise so that participants can have a successful experience. A win-win-win situation for everyone.

"Higher education and the ability to acquire new knowledge independently are increasingly demanded and assumed as qualifications and personality traits. The desired or forced flexibilization of work, cooperation across institutional boundaries, the dissolution of boundaries in work, and also the erosion of collective security models are shifting many activities that once took place in clearly defined institutional or personal spaces into a new in-between space that is neither private nor public in the classic sense. This is the space of networks, communities, informal cooperation, and swapping and sharing, enabled by now ubiquitous digital communication."

(Stalder 2019, p. 38)



5. ANNEX

5.1 Diversity Survey via E-Mail

The following questions were asked per e-mail:

- 1. Name (anonymous or named quote if possible)**
- 2. Institution (anonymous or named quote if possible)**
- 3. Position within the institution or organization (anonymous or named quote if possible)**
- 4. How would you describe diversity in one sentence?**
- 5. In regards to diversity at the workplace, what and how has it changed? Do these changes go according to societal changes and what kind of changes are they?**
- 6. What are some of the requirements necessary for successful diversity awareness?**
- 7. What areas still need improvement? What is needed?**

The replies were received per email. The people surveyed had a choice between having their reply stay anonymous or if they, their company and position should be mentioned. Most participants decided to remain anonymous.

5.2 Hanover's Local Integration Policy revision and the new targets for the Educational sector

By Maya Nyagolova, Expert Advisor for Education in Hanover's Local Integration Policy revision process

The city of Hanover's Local Integration Policy (in short LIP) constitutes both a strategic framework and an action plan for measures regarding issues of migration and social participation for all residents. The policy unfolds in public administration's main fields of action like Education, Social care, Urban Life and Culture etc.

The existing framework, created in 2008, now seems a bit outdated, as it no longer covers every aspect of the reality of the current open and diverse urban society. That is why, in 2020, the administration started a broadly based policy revision process under the working title LIP 2.0, consulting different stakeholders like experts in the field of diversity and inclusion, migrant-led established organisations as well as more contemporary youth initiatives. The actual needs of the broad public have been assessed using online surveys and open public discussions. The final output is being expected in summer 2021.

The drafted paper defines two basic principles for the future policy: 1) mutual recognition and respect between all members of society, including a better representation of (ethnic) diverse society members on all administration levels, along with systematic measures against discrimination and 2) open access to and permeability of institutions for all people in the city.

In this way, the administration aims to achieve equal opportunities for all people in Hanover. Through an individualised approach, everyone including newcomers, long-term residents and marginalised groups should be enabled to participate actively in social life, which in turn is an essential prerequisite for social cohesion

Furthermore, the drafted policy describes the main topics in every field of action. In the field of education, the city aims to minimize existing barriers regarding transitions and permeability of educational domains and promote equal opportunities regardless of social, ethnic, educational or economic background.

Therefore, six main topics have been concluded in the Educational action field, which should be addressed in every educational domain, starting from elementary to adult education:

- 1) Literacy and language acquisition in German allowing for multilingualism
- 2) Access to educational opportunities
- 3) Transitions in and out of the educational domains
- 4) Comprehensive educational opportunities / Informal education
- 5) Digitalisation and critical media literacy
- 6) Anti-discrimination work and prevention of violence in the context of education

In 2021, experts are going to derive specific measures on each of the above-named main topics.

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