
Methodologies for recognition of learning outcomes from VET to HE adapted to the German context, including methodologies for portfolio method blanket RPL (R06)

LEONARDO DA VINCI Transfer of Innovation Project
“RELATE – PROMOTING THE RECOGNIZABILITY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION”

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Contents

1	Situation of the extra-occupational study programs and the possibility and present procedure of recognition of outside HE acquired competences at the FHD	3
2	Survey of students about their process of general recognition at FHD.....	6
3	Methods of Learning and the competences acquired in VET for studying	12
4	Using Simulation pedagogy as method of recognition of competences acquired in the VET....	18

1 Situation of the extra-occupational study programs and the possibility and present procedure of recognition of outside HE acquired competences at the FHD

The FHD addresses applicants in getting a study place with a vocational training and in professional activity. This regards explicit for the study programs of social pedagogy & management (1) and nursing management (2). In addition to the Higher Education entrance qualification as usual precondition for studying, the applicants for an extra-occupational study place must have for their field of study a defined enclosed vocational training. Either in the case of social pedagogy & management as kindergarten teachers or therapeutic education for the disabled (1) or in the study program 'nursing management' they have to be nurses (2). Another condition is, that they have to work a half-time in their profession as kindergarten teacher or nurse during studying.

The formulated precondition is necessary, because the defined vocational training and training qualification enable to recognize 60 ECTS and the shortening of the study-time (one year less). Since the resolutions of the Conference of German Cultural Ministers 2002/2008 and the Common structural guidelines of the Länder for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's study courses

¹ In the majority of cases: kindergarten teachers.

² In the Federal Republic the education of nurses is regulated by law (health professions are regulated (,reglementierter Beruf'). They need a governmental admission by certificate. The law of the education is issued by the ministry of health for the federal states of Germany (Länder) and it ends with a state exam. The law is the obligate frame for all education of nursing in Germany with defined 4600 hours and regulates contents. Against the background of the regulation contents of the nursing education program will be re-formulated as modules in the range of 60 ECTS and recognized. But on the other side this 60 ECTS cannot be replaced by offering courses for studying. Result is, that we have only the possibility to accept students with a VET in nursing. This does not apply for the study program ,social pedagogy & management', the FHD offers the opportunity for applicants without a vocational training as kindergarten teachers, too. This students obtain with studying the access to the profession of a kindergarten teacher. For the extra occupational study program in social pedagogy & management, contents of the VET of kindergarten teachers/therapeutic education for the disabled are re-formulated as modules in the range of 60 ECTS, too.

(2010) the crediting of competences acquired outside higher education towards higher education studies is possible up to 50 % of the study program.³

Different procedures are possible for the recognition of competences acquired outside higher education. The using of *individual assessments* includes that the institution of Higher Education checks the documents of the candidates whether and to what extent the competences are equivalent to the terms of content and level to the contents of the study program. *General recognition* can be used, if the groups of candidates are homogeneous. In such cases arrangements for cooperation between the institution of higher education and educational establishments exist. In a third form the Competences will individually examined by a procedure which is regulated in the examination regulations of the university (*placement exam*).

The FHD uses at present a general recognition procedure. Problems to come along with a general recognition are, that the students have different requirements for their studying. They share only the same vocational training and profession, but this allows no conclusion about competences on the base of their vocational education to the study program. Many different aspects influence the ability for studying:

The new students are very heterogeneous concerning to their education, their professional experience, their idea about the study program and studying, about the time, which have to be

³ Anrechnung von außerhalb des Hochschulwesens erworbenen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auf ein Hochschulstudium. Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 28.06.2002. Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Anrechnung von außerhalb des Hochschulwesens erworbenen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auf ein Hochschulstudium (II). Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 18.09.2008. Common structural guidelines of the Länder for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's study courses, 10 October 2003 as amended on 4 February 2010.

⁴ For example: The age of the cohort of students have a large range (from the beginning of 20 to 50 years). The age is combined with different life situations and settings. The educational qualifications are incomparable (no higher education entrance, school days date back several years). The various professional experience induce heterogeneous ideas and aims related to the study.

invested in studying, about the technique and the use of technique, the work with literature and so on.

Consequences are, that the student groups are very different concerning their competences to manage the needs of the extra-occupational study programs which are marked by a high rate of self-study (ca. 75 %). This means, that the students have to work self-dependent in order to manage the requirements combined with the study program.

In addition the understanding of studying of a lot of extra occupational students makes it difficult to fulfil and to follow the needs for studying. Typically the students have problems with the teaching methods, independent study (reading papers, ...), context studies (critical thinking, analyzing) and the transfer of knowledge terms.

Because of recognition of prior learning and the shortening of the study-time, less time is available to find out where the new students need support to come in the context of studying. There is too little time to offer modules or courses adapted specific to their individual competences and skills. Such support programs can help to compensate the existing missing preconditions for studying.

Against with background we decided to take and test three instruments our project partners use, to find a way for optimization our procedure of recognition.

2 Survey of students about their process of general recognition at FHD

At first it seems important to learn about the implementation of the general recognition at our institution which is done by the course guidance service, a part of the administration of the institution. They are responsible for the formalities at the begin of studying.

We developed a questionnaire with twelve questions and asked students of the two study programs to fill it out. Table 1 summarizes the issues with questions and answers:

1. How do you describe the process about the recognition of your vocational education competences?

- submit the reports, certificates, on enquiry they confirm that I have now the access authorization to the study program
- information about the process of recognition
- in the frame of the application of matriculation and the submittal of the reports, certificate
- no problems, vocational education was recognized, the study time will be shorten
- recognition of the first two semesters very good, less effort and costs
- process not assessable; requirements fulfilled
- uncomplicated procedure
- smooth process
- recognition of achievements on the base of the VET leaving certificate
- not extensive
- the difference between professional experience for a long or short term is ignored
- no recognition of certificates
- informed, that VET kindergarten teacher will be recognized, shortening the studying (1 year)
- recognition on the bases of certificate of acquired skills
- fill out the application -> study contract (without explicit feedback with regard to the recognition)

2. What does the prior learning recognition mean, in your understanding?

- the recognition of competences acquired in the field of vocational education, in the context of the professional activity or in other study programs
- the recognition of competences acquired outside higher education
- the recognition of competences acquired in the field of vocational education
- the recognition of competences acquired outside higher education
- shortening the study time
- the recognition of modules from another study program
- checking the contents of the further education
- recognition of preliminary work or working experience, shortening the study time
- recognition of the vocational education
- certificates
- years of professional experience
- professional experience in different fields,
- number of supervision
- further education
- demonstrate abilities (certificate)
- abilities or VET; modules or semesters will be recognized

3. Where did you get the information about the possibility for the prior learning recognition?

- homepage
- personal call with a person of the administration of the institution
- personal call with a person of the academic staff
- flyer about the study program
- talk with a person of the administration
- informative note of the FHD
- internet
- consultation
- talking with friends
- consultation: possibility to speak with the professors
- talking with professors
- written information of the FHD

<p>4. Did you get counselling about the recognition and how do you assess it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yes, I would like to have an intermediate result, because it was not clear, if i have to do a qualifying examination • yes, I have a talk, it was ok, questions are answered • yes, no problems • no • yes, good and understandable • good • yes in consultation • yes, to less • questions have been answered • no consultation only information (it was clear)
<p>5. How much time did you spent in the recognition process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two visits at the institutions, all in all six hours (with travelling time) • less time • no time • much time for writing the letter of motivation • one hour
<p>6. What documents have to be presented in the frame of the recognition process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reports, certificates • reports, certificates, curriculum vitae • no documents • certificate of vocational program, contract of employment
<p>7. How long have you to wait for your recognition of the acquired competences?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I get the result shortly of the begin of the studies an only on enquiry • answer directly in the information talk • less time • no time, immediately communicated • four weeks
<p>8. Do you know, what has to be accepted?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no, I think my vocational education and other vocational certificates • vocational education • vocational education, vocational experience (?) • vocational education, vocational experience • modules of child development • evidence of professional activity • no

<p>9. Can you explain, why the competences have to be accepted?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think about guidelines of the accreditation agency and the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) • as access authorization to the study program • because, the study program based on the vocational experience • because contents of VET correspond with the contents of the first and second semester • previous knowledge about VET corresponds to the first and second semester • contents of the recognizes modules in VET • experience
<p>10. What does the recognition of prior learning means to your study process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the vocational experience facilitates some times in the studies • shorten the study time • reduce costs • combine VET and HE • directly beginning with the relevant content and time • shorting the duration of study <u>to</u> one year • time for other contents • recognizes contents are not content in studying • professors can build up on existing knowledge
<p>11. Has the reduced study time influence your studies? How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no • no, because of the professional experience • not at the moment, the contents focused on crèche and day nursery
<p>12. What should be developed concerning the recognition process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not promise that of a lot things can be recognize, and then to determinate, that nothing (concerned to the promised) can be recognized • process was transparent and well • the influence of recognition to the study process should be explained • the specific terms and there meaning should be explained • more information of the process • management experience should be entry requirement, than there will be more time for development of specific competence • study program focuses too much to crèche and day nursery • if therapeutic education for the disabled are allowed for studying, aspects in context of people with disabilities should be addressed • social education worker work not exclusively in day nursery • concrete in consultation, prediction • planning of the attendance time, • enough work equipment • semester ticket • explicit information about the recognition

Table 1: Questions to the students about the process of general recognition⁵

One student says that she/he has not participated at the recognition process, she/he has only signed the contract of studying without any counselling or information.

It became clear, that the process of general recognition takes less time for the students and they get normally a fast answer to their application (questions 5 and 7). The not time consuming procedure could be a reason, that it was not exactly clear, why and what of the VET, the professional experience and other abilities have been essential for recognition. The answers to this questions are not wrong but often not specific or exactly (questions 8 and 9).

The recognition was a lean and uncomplicated procedure with a manageable number of documents and time at the institution (questions 1, 3, 4 and 6).

Consequences of the lean process can be, that the students not exactly or sometimes fundamentally not know, what prior learning recognition (RPL) means, the answers are on the right track but mostly refer to their own situation of recognition (60 ECTS for defined contents of their VET) not specific (question 2).

The students get the information about the possibility of RPL mostly about the internet, homepage or written information (flyer, ...), sometimes about talking with a person of the FHD or the utilization of counselling. Counselling of RPL take place in most of the cases (questions 3 and 4).

With regard to the effects of the shortening study to the process of studying predominate practical aspects for the students, they do not realize or reflect, that they have less time to achieve the goals of the study program. Even though the content of VET and the professional experience are

⁵ Multiple answers are once only documented.

important and helpful, the vocational education was completed more or less a long time ago and the practical experience can also complicate the critical engagement or the application or acceptance of theoretical knowledge (question 10, 11). Therefore it is helpful that in the framework of the procedure of recognition a discussion takes place about the competences, their equivalence and the requirements and goals of studying.

The answers to question 12 addresses mostly aspects outside the process of recognition for example the orientation of the study programs. Nevertheless it seems that uncertainties persist with regard to the process and the contents of recognition. Some students wish more explanations of terms, information and counselling in the context of RPL.

All in all are the answers were different: some students are informed and pleased with the process, others are not. It is meaningful, to inform the candidates, what will be recognize and why, so that they understand the background of this possibility. For our institution it is necessary to ensure that the students get the information and counselling for recognition and its process, to have an understanding about studying and the requirements and goals of their study program.

3 Methods of Learning and the competences acquired in VET for studying

Learning and teaching play an important role for the acquisition of competences. This concerns in particular students of extra occupational study programs namely two main reasons. *Firstly* there study programs are characterized by a high rate of self-study. So that the study in attendance time can not only be used for the transfer of knowledge (in lectures) but it also refers to discuss, to analyze and to use the knowledge. *Secondly* the study programs are characterized by competence orientation. The occupational students passed in many cases their school and vocational education long time ago and have no experience with competence orientation and the teaching methods, like problem-orientated learning. Teaching and learning methods in competence orientated study programs are often not adapted with the learning experience of these target group.

Against this background it is important to know about the learning and teaching. Furthermore it is interesting to have information about the methods the students used or helped them in their vocational education to acquire competences and knowledge.

The process of general recognition we currently perform at the FHD, which is a very formal act, it is not intended to talk about the experience of learning and methods for acquire competences.

We want to learn something about the former experience of non-traditional students with their vocational education, and the learning and teaching methods. To explore this field, we want to ask the students who are about to begin their studies. This will be in September 2015. With our questions we want to find out about the experience the future students have had with their vocational education. Beside the timeframe, fields of study and the major focus of working, we are interested in following information:

- which teaching and learning methods the applicants get to know in the vocational education and which learning methods are individual the best

- whether the applicants have experience with the method problem-oriented learning. If she/he has experience that could be relevant for us.

The applicant shall describe the relation between teaching and learning methods in the vocational education and the vocational competences. We ask the applicant which competences are the most important for the professional activity and for the studies.

At last we are interesting to know how the competences have been developed for the professional activities.

Therefore we used the idea of our project partners and we developed eight questions about these issues with the intention of helping the applicants to reflect about the consequences of recognition of prior learning, with the aim to link their recognized competences of former learning with the study program and their studies. Another focus is on the methods of learning. Often the non-traditional learners with a vocational education have difficulties with the self-study which represents a great part of our study programs. With the questions we will achieve, that the new students realize that higher education uses other teaching and learning methods e.g. problem-oriented learning to reach competences. The outcome can help to develop some instruments or courses to bridge the gap between VET and HE.

We tested the questionnaire with students in the first semester, because we have had no possibility to reach applicants before they start studying this year in autumn.

We asked about the *vocational qualification*: All students are nurses, kindergarten teachers or therapeutic education workers for disabled.⁶ Some students have more but low level (social

⁶ This are the vocational training, which are necessary for beginning an extra occupational study program in nursing management or social pedagogy & management.

assistant) or qualifications from other professional areas (bank clerk). A few students have a further professional education for management positions.

The *professional experience* (contents, professional emphases, functions und locations of the professional activities): The professional experience of the students is different. They all have a lot of experience in different professional fields and settings in common. Some of them have to plan projects, to guide and control the care of their clients/ patients. They often are in responsible position, function or in a management position.

The professional work and background can be characterized by autonomy und responsibility.

Learning and teaching methods used during the vocational education: lecture, workshop, group work, partner work, frontal teaching, self-studying, practical teaching, homework.

Learning and teaching methods students learned mostly for themselves:

- the mix of theory and practice
- mix between frontal teaching and the transfer of knowledge in group work
- to explain someone something
- to communicate with others, interaction
- in group work learn from one another
- by addressing a number of different sensory impressions
- using methods for learning (visual/auditory; monitoring/reading), index cards.

The answers make clear, that the mix of different learning and teaching methods is important, because different senses are addressed and the interaction with other participants and the transfer of knowledge to a situation and practice is meaningful.

A method in the context of competence orientation is *problem- oriented learning*. Only one of the asked students tried the method in VET with good experience, because of the realistic character of the themes.

Similar answer are given to the *relation of the learning and teaching methods with the professional competences in the job:*

- learning by teaching
- interaction in group work
- visualization
- group work as method in professional activities
- active involvement in developing something

The student shall be asked to document their most important competences for their professional activities and for their studies (tab. 2).

Most important competence for	
professional activities	studies
monitoring	
clarity	
structure	structure
planning	time management
openness	
spontaneity	
empathy	
creativity	
communication	
personnel management	
ambition	ambition
balance	experience
endurance	motivation/endurance
sense of duty	determination
flexibility	good perception
ability to work in a team	
appreciation	
the belief in man's inherent goodness	
able to listen	
supporting	
musical skills	professional experience
work at the human	knowledge about the own learning style

Table 2: Most important competences for professional activities and studies⁷

All in all more competences for the professional activities are documented. The most important competences for the job are personnel competences, competences in the context of working with

⁷ Multiple answers are once only documented.

other people or competences needed in a management or responsible position. The comparison with the competences for the studies shows that less competences are documented.

The *development of competences for the professional activities* is another indicator to see how the student learns or how he/she have used the learning settings for the professional development.

Aspects the students write down are:

- experience
- learning every day
- learning by critique
- a change in perspective
- confirmation
- reflexion on processes and situations; self-reflexion, feedback
- working with different people
- dialogue with different points of view
- try out
- different methods
- confidence and self-confidence
- time
- personal development
- learning from other (skills, performance)
- professional competence

The illustrated development of the professional competence can be transferred in the reflexion of the development in the study. The change of perspective, the use of different methods etc. are a useful and helpful experience in the professional setting and in the new setting of learning in HE.

Therefore it seems helpful for the institutions of Higher Education to use such questionnaires to learn about the target group ,extra occupational' students, its previous development and competence.

4 Using Simulation pedagogy as method of recognition of competences acquired in the VET

The method of simulation pedagogy enables to assess the competences of the applicant better than a general recognition procedure. The method provides an opportunity to configure situations which allow to observe competences needed for achieving the aim of the study program.

Even for the institution (FHD) it is important that the students get the competences associated with the particular study program. The graduates have to prove in the professional practice, e.g. in an executive position, that they have acquired the skills and the professional qualification through studying.

Therefore it is necessary that the students use the shortened study time effectively with the possibility to compensate the missing skills.

This means that the study progress have to be adapted to the individual competences of the students. Condition for achieving is to implement an assessment prior to the start of the studies of the new students which collects the present competence relevant for studying. The results of the assessment should be the base for recommendations for each student. This can be a regular counselling about the study progress or defined themes or in the study progress integrated complementary courses.

Simulation pedagogy is a student-centered learning approach and an action-based learning method. Characteristics of simulation pedagogy are the group orientation and a holistic learning environment, the roles of students and lecturers changed towards the traditional, mentoring and coaching become more important. The learning goals are integrated in specific work place (or

study) situations. Simulation pedagogy is often used in nursing education, clinical situations will be learned in this way:

Independently from clinical and practical training settings and from the training of skills in the education of health care professions, the principles of simulation pedagogy will be suitable to assess and analyses the competences from applicants in the frame of recognition of prior learning.

Simulation addresses different aspects of competence (intellectual, technical, ethical, communication, personal and feeling). Against this background the utilization of simulation in the context of recognition of competences can increase the focus of different levels and themes. The below-mentioned competences can be proved:

1. Referring to the profession, professional practice, situations in professional contexts:

- problem solution
- decision making
- theory-practice- transfer
- dealing with conflicts
- analyzing a situation
- reflecting a situation
- explain situation

⁸ In international contexts simulation is an integrated method in the curricula of nursing education. Many universities established skill centers and simulators. An important aspect for developing and using of simulation in clinical settings is the safety of patients. In the practical education, the time to develop skills during the work with the patient is too short to achieve handling safety for the students. Berragan, E. Simulation: An effective pedagogical approach for nursing? *Nurse Education Today* 31 (7): 660-663, 2011. Lyons, Judith: Learning with technology: theoretical foundations underpinning simulations in higher education. In: Brown M., M Hartnett and T. Stewart (eds.): *Future challenges, sustainable futures. Proceedings ascilite. Wellington 2012*, p 582-586. Murphy, Siobhan, Irene Hartigan, Nuala Walshe, Angela V. Flynn and Sinead O'Brien: *Merging Problem-Based Learning and Simulation as an Innovative Pedagogy in Nurse Education. Clinical Simulation in Nursing* 7 (4): e141-e148, 2011.

- overview of complex contexts
- draw conclusion from a situation, context or problem
- counselling and conversation in the professional practice
- issues of the vocational training

2. referring to the context of studying:

- work with and application of literature
- theory-practice- transfer
- problem solution
- decision making
- dealing with conflicts between studying, profession, family
- planning and managed the personal situation (time management, importance of tasks, estimation of the own competences)
- idea of studying
- compatibility of study and career
- idea of professional perspective after studying
- issues related to the profession and the studying

The advantage of a simulated situation is that:

- the applicant will not be interviewed about aspects of studying or his problem solving strategy in practice or general. In fact she/he is in a quasi-real situation in a setting and she/he is involved as a person acting.
- for the applicant the simulation takes place in a safe environment. The simulated context is real but his/her action will be not sanctioned.
- the applicant doesn't speak about his competences, he/she acts as he/she would normally do.

Simulations and the total process must be well prepared.

1. To do before simulation starts

- choosing the topic of the simulation, creation of a scenario, defining the learning outcomes
- planning the setting (themes, participants and their roles, preparing the applicant, preparing the other participant(s), etc. ...)
- the prior competences of the applicant is taken into account for the scenario-plan (application documents are necessary for preparation)
- the applicant have to be prepared about the theme, with literature, etc.,
- the environment of the scenario should be authentic (considerations about room, material, ...), realistic feeling for time dimension
- the equipment should be planed and organized
- process should be planned
- the length of the scenario should be fixed
- the debriefing have to be prepared in the frame of the preparation of the simulation (question guide)
- the participants, the observers, the applicant have to be instructed about the scenario and the learning outcomes

2. Performance of the simulation

The planned scenario will be performed

3. After simulation – the debriefing

Debriefing is very important to describe and analyze the situation with all participants and drawing conclusions. It is clear that not the mentor or the lecturer (who planed and lead the process) determine the result of the simulation.

Debriefing starts with the applicant, the participants, the moderator and the observers of the scenario after the scenario/the simulated situation.

The debriefing consists of four phases. At first, the *description phase* will work out, what's

happened and characterized the situation by the participants. The *analyzing phase* aimed to discuss what went well and what not, why and what can be done in a different manner. The third step – *application phase* – makes the use of the addressed aspects to subject of discussion. At last, the simulation will be closed with the question, if someone have any comment to add.

The debriefing is an import part of the simulation pedagogy and it aimed to understand the situation and the outcome, it is not a method to show the applicant that he/she is unfit for studying. The shared debriefing makes the applicant clear what competences are necessary for studying and why.

The lecturer leading the simulated situation conducts the discussion between the participants. This should be a dialog at eye level about the consequences with regard to the process of studying.

Results can be:

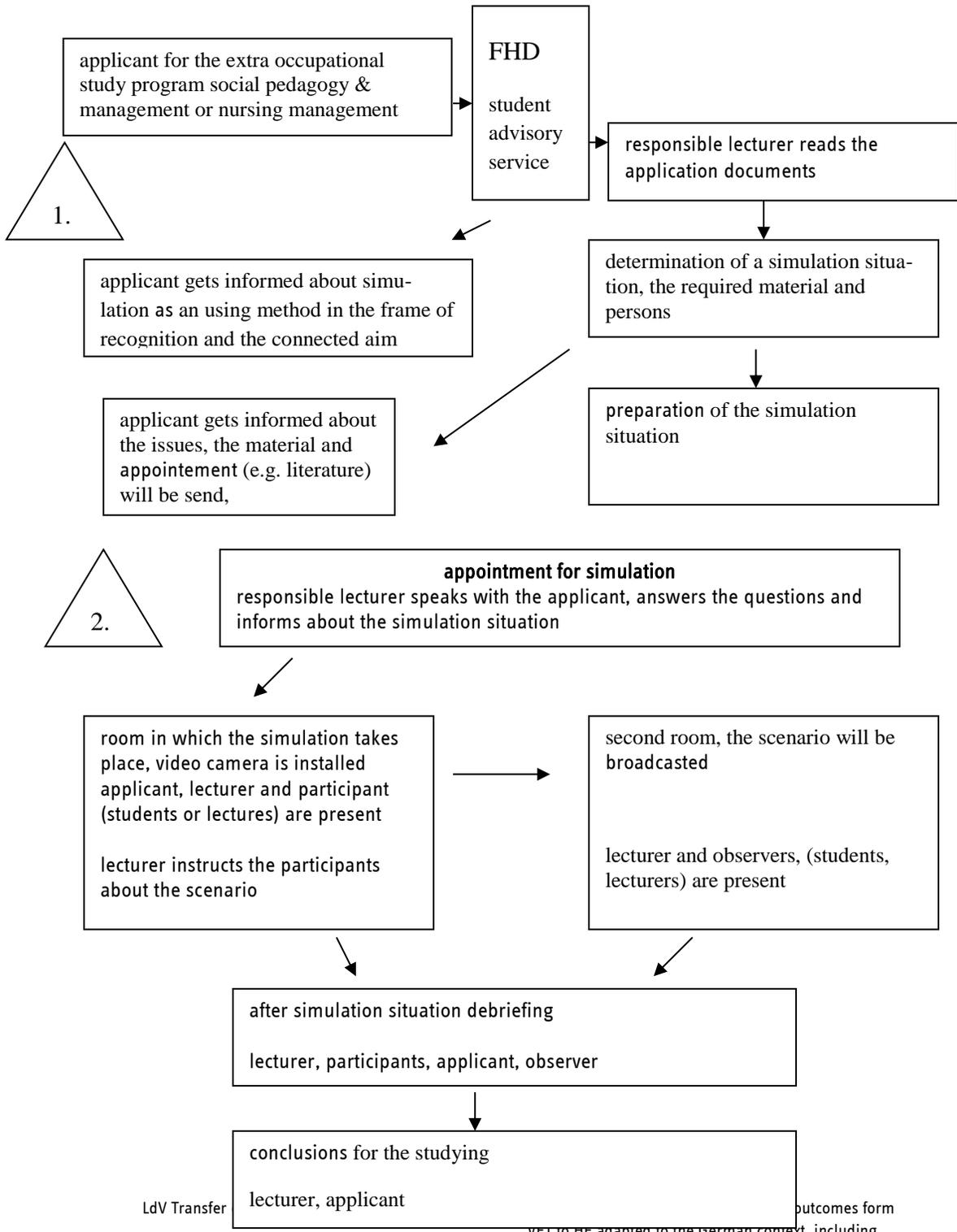
- speak about studying
- answer the questions of the applicant
- counselling about needs for studying
- support prior the study program by pointers on recommended reading
- offer complementary courses to the regular study program
- establish a mentorship between the new and an older student
- establish a mentorship between the new student and a lecturer
- agree regularly and fixes dates to evaluate the process of studying
- in case of the social pedagogy & management study program, modules from the presence course can be additionally visited.

If the simulated situation shows that the applicant have fundamental problems to fulfil the requirements of studying or to achieve the aim of the study program, it should be encouraged to discuss about the estimation and find a solution and define the steps to realize the solution.

4. Steps for Implementation

Simulation uses technical support by perfect equipped skill centers or video cameras and broadcasting to the observers in another room. Using of video camera and broadcasting is helpful, because the direct presence of the observers in the simulation's room could lead to irritation of the applicant as well as of the participants and interfere with a standardized setting of the simulation.

Fig. 1: process of a simulation situation in the frame of recognition



LdV Transfer

outcomes form

VEI to HE adapted to the German context, including methodologies for portfolio method blanket RPL

(R06)