

History

History of University of Applied Sciences Schmalkalden (UASS)



When the "Royal Vocational College for Ironmongery and Steel Goods Schmalkalden" was founded on 1st July 1902, the district Schmalkalden was one of the districts in the Province of Hessian-Nassau within the Prussian kingdom.

For centuries, people in this area had been making a living from the manufacture of ironmongery goods of all sorts including awls, files, curry combs, drills, pliers, spoons, nails and buckles. These products were renown throughout the kingdom as "Schmalkalder Articles." However, the products, which were being manufactured in small businesses in the area, were coming up against increasing industrial competition from factories in Rhineland-Westphalia and from abroad, and the regional businesses could not keep up.

If the economic situation was to be improved, then it was important to ensure that the manufacturing methods were modernized and the workforce better trained. Dr Hagen, the district administrator of the time, suggested to the Prussian Minister for Trade and Business in 1893 that a vocational college, similar to the existing one in Remscheid, should be established in Schmalkalden.



The school never considered itself to be simply a training centre for craftsmen. Rather, it saw its role as a college providing the craftsmen in the area with a wide variety of training courses and with access to the technical, technological and trade expertise of the teaching staff.

In order to up-date their information on modern machines and plants, facilities and procedures, all teaching staff worked a few weeks every year in one of the big German companies. And this knowledge went into helping to guarantee modern training facilities.

The first director was the engineer Emil Beil. He held this position for 27 years. It was in particular thanks to him that the school quickly acquired a good reputation far beyond the boundaries of the state of Prussia. This fact is reflected in the students' directories of the period and in the files of the schools' administration offices.

The vocational school also attained international recognition. Even before the start of the First World War visitors were coming from various European countries, the USA and China in order to look at what was being done here. In particular, the extensive advisory services to craft businesses in Schmalkalden allowed this new school to make a contribution towards improving economic conditions.



After the Weimar Republic was founded in 1918, the school continued as the "State Vocational College for the Ironmongery and Steel Goods Industry". There was no change in its duties. From 1920 onwards, courses for master craftsmen were added to the training program. A new step in developments started after the end of the Second World War. The training capacities at technical colleges and universities of the time were unable to deal with the sudden boom in demand for technical engineers.

By the autumn of 1945, Schmalkalden had already started its training program for technicians. This was followed in 1948 by a request from the Thuringian Minister for Education of the People to change the vocational college into a technical college. In the spring of 1951, the first engineers to be trained in Schmalkalden received their certificates. Since then, the number of students has continually risen.



In the following 45 years, until the end of the training facilities at this "Technical College Schmalkalden" in 1995, more than 10,000 young people received their engineering diploma here. Students came from all parts of the German Democratic Republic, from the Baltic Sea to Lausitz. The quality of the education they received was an important factor in ensuring that engineers from Schmalkalden were preceded by a good reputation, wherever they went. This reputation had also spread to businesses in West German states and was only stopped by the construction of the Wall. Even during the Fifties, one occasionally could find job advertisements for engineers in some West German journals which explained that students from the technical school in Schmalkalden would be considered first.

The founding of the University of Applied Sciences on 1st October 1991 started a new era in the history of further education in Schmalkalden. A new type of university was set up in the town. The Minister for Science and Art called on Prof. Dr. Wolf-Dieter Eckert to head the new university during its founding years. Prof. Eckert took on a difficult task, and he could only start his job a few weeks before course work was to begin.



His first task was to establish a foundation for a functional university administration. Then, before the degree courses could be started, the first professors had to be named. The fact that the university got off to a smooth start had a lot to do with his methodical attention to detail.

Engineering remained one of the pillars of the educational profile at the university. Others joined it. The Electrical Engineering faculty started up in the same year, with a degree course with the same name. The faculties of Computer Science for Business Administration followed the next year. These were the first steps in the construction of a modern university with a technical-business profile.

However, simply founding new departments is not the only thing needed to make a university function. New buildings had to be constructed and a framework established, in particular for the new degree courses in Schmalkalden.



While the university was starting up operations in the technical college's buildings, the technical college itself was finishing up its training program. This meant that there was a shortage of properly equipped lecture and seminar rooms. The departments of electrical engineering and computer science did not have any laboratories at all, and there were no offices for the newly appointed professors.

Right from the start, the development of the buildings and the improvement of the university's facilities were at the top of the list of problems that had to be solved. The most pressing difficulties were solved by the purchase of a former trainee residential home nearby. The departments of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science could provisionally start here and move in on a more permanent basis once reconstruction and renovation had been completed.



However, it soon became clear that only a comprehensive construction program would provide a long-term solution if a modern and efficient university was to be established in Schmalkalden. Active support from the town of Schmalkalden and the district administrative offices meant that the land necessary for this task could be obtained within the first few years.

A building plot was bought at the site of the former Prussian vocational college, and this was what was needed in order to construct a campus university. An architectural design competition was held in 1994, and this competition provided a building concept that has been realized step-by-step.

The first campus in Thuringia was turned over to the still young University of Applied Sciences Schmalkalden in the autumn of 2000. The new campus consisted of a central lecture building with three large lecture halls and numerous seminar rooms. The library - a well-lighted, glass building with a separate reading island - holds about 95,000 books/ periodicals and 160 PC workstations for the students.



The Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering now have access to a new, modern laboratory building. The Department of Computer Science now has its own institute building. Even the central canteen glows in a modern design. The buildings at the University of Applied Sciences Schmalkalden catch one's eye straight away. They are alive with the positive tension derived from the fusion of historical buildings with modern architecture.

The excellent educational facilities has lead to high university rankings; the south Thuringian University of Applied Sciences regularly has a top rating in leading German university rankings ("Stern" and CHE). The fields of Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering have the most satisfied students in the nation.