

## Wir sind UP – The podcast

Guest: Anne Klinnert

### Episode Title:

UPtransition

### Transcription:

#### **\*Intro\*:**

Welcome to all listeners. In our podcast, we introduce you to students, teachers, and administrative staff from the University of Potsdam. These are people with and without disabilities, and we want to find out how inclusive the University of Potsdam is as a place to study and as an employer.

**Erika:** Hello and a warm welcome to everyone to today's episode of "We Are UP." I'm Erika, a student and student assistant at the University of Potsdam in the Accessibility Team, and today I have Anne Klinnert as my guest. She is the project coordinator of the UPtransition project, and that's exactly what today's episode will be about. Ms. Klinnert will first tell us what it's all about and what opportunities this project can offer certain students. But first, over to you, Ms. Klinnert—please feel free to briefly introduce yourself.

**Anne Klinnert:** Yes, hello, I'm happy to be here. Thanks for the introduction. As you mentioned, my name is Anne Klinnert. I've been working at the Career Service of the University of Potsdam since 2020. Last year, I took over the project coordination for UPtransition. Before that, I spent a long time pursuing a PhD, but I ultimately decided to discontinue it. I earned my master's degree in political science here at the University of Potsdam. On a personal note, I was recently re-elected as the central equal opportunities officer for central and scientific institutions.

**Erika:** Okay, thank you very much. I'll dive right into our Q&A session. My first question is a general one: what exactly is the UPtransition project about?

**Anne Klinnert:** That's a good question, and I'll try to explain it as simply as possible, as it can sometimes get complicated. UPtransition offers a qualification program aimed at enhancing diversity and providing career orientation opportunities. You might wonder what "UPtransition" means. "Transition" here refers to the process of moving forward. We aim to support students during their transition from bachelor's to master's or from bachelor's to career, or even from master's to career, offering them support and guidance. The program consists of four key components: workshops, counseling, networking, and student jobs. That, in a nutshell, is the program. We'll go into more detail later.

**Erika:** And what was the motivation behind this project? Why was it created in the first place?

**Anne Klinnert:** There are three key issues that we regularly encounter in our career counseling practice. These are challenges that many students report and that are also reflected in student surveys and higher education research. First, students often mention a lack of career orientation,

second, a lack of practical experience, and third, financial challenges. Many students don't know what they can do with their degree or what career paths are available. Often, the only suggested route is an academic one, but that's not the right fit for everyone. There's also very little room for gaining professional insights during studies. As for the third point, many students need to finance their studies through part-time jobs, and this can sometimes clash with their academic workload. If their job is unrelated to their field of study, it doesn't benefit their future career. These are the three key issues students consistently bring up. That's what motivated us. From the university and staff side, we wanted to specifically target underrepresented groups of students. We'll get into that in more detail shortly. So, we're not addressing all students at the university, but rather specific groups who may be more affected by these challenges.

**Erika:** Okay, thank you. So, who exactly are these groups? Who can apply for this project, and how?

**Anne Klinnert:** There are many groups, so I'll just list them all because it's best for everyone to hear. We target first-generation students, international students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities (physical, psychological, or chronic illnesses), students with a migration or refugee background, students with children or caregiving responsibilities, students who didn't follow traditional educational paths (e.g., those who didn't complete high school but attended night school), and generally students who have experienced discrimination. As for your second question—how to apply—you can apply to the program twice a year during designated application periods. There's one running right now. You can easily apply through our website, where you'll find an application form. While it says "application," it's really a low-threshold process. We just ask for basic information about the person, along with questions about career orientation, such as what topics interest you or if you already have an idea of what career path you want to pursue. Once you've done that, you're pretty much in! The current application period runs until November 3rd.

**Erika:** Okay. For the students who apply and are selected, what are the possible individual benefits or specific gains they can get from participating in the program?

**Anne Klinnert:** I'd say there are many benefits from the program. First, as the title suggests, career orientation and professional qualification. That might sound a bit complicated, but orientation really just means gaining a clearer idea of what you can do with your degree. And maybe, if you already have a dream job in mind, how to get there, because that's not always clear. Sometimes, students hear they can do certain things with their degree, but don't know how to get from where they are now to that point. So, the orientation helps provide a clearer picture of your own path. This is something many students struggle with. We see that in our counseling sessions, even with students who've completed their studies without any major issues—there are still many unanswered questions. I'd say the benefit is feeling more oriented and having a better plan for entering the job market.

Additionally, students can acquire new skills, particularly soft skills that aren't usually part of their academic curriculum. For example, we offer workshops on project management, non-violent communication, or journalism, topics that don't necessarily fit into regular coursework. That's another benefit. And of course, one key component is networking. The group of students that is selected remains together for a year, and we try to facilitate regular exchange events, both online and

in person. From our experience, we've seen that while it's valuable for us as staff to give advice and offer support, the interaction between students themselves is often incredibly valuable. Students who are in similar life situations can offer each other insights. It's not just about building a professional network—it's also about making connections, maybe even friendships, and expanding your network in a way that helps you learn more about different fields of work or organizations that might interest you. So, networking is a big advantage.

We also offer counseling. It's important to us that participating students feel they can come to us whenever they want. We encourage them to have at least one individual counseling session, but we're always available if there are problems or questions.

The biggest benefit might be the opportunity to get a WHK job (student assistant position) at the university. We have funds to create new positions, and students in the program have the chance to be employed at the university. I know that all the students who apply are interested in getting a WHK job, and that's really one of the best aspects of the project. Gaining work experience in a scientific or academic-related field at the university is fantastic. It also addresses the three issues I mentioned earlier—funding, gaining insights into a career field, and getting practical experience—all through this WHK position.

**Erika:** Very good. Now, I'd like to go into more detail. How is the qualification program structured for a student? For example, if I were to participate in the program, what exactly can I expect over the course of a year? You also mentioned the four key components. What do those look like in detail?

**Anne Klinnert:** Sure, I can explain that. It all starts with a kick-off event. As I mentioned earlier, the current application period ends on November 3rd, and for this round, the kick-off is scheduled for November 15th. The interested participants will be invited, and we'll introduce the team and explain the entire program. This is where the group first meets each other.

Regarding the four components, the first one is workshops. As part of the program, you're expected to attend four workshops. One of these is already set—we want all participants to attend a diversity training or a basic workshop on diversity. That's mandatory, and the other three workshops can be chosen based on individual interests from the offerings of the Career Service or other university departments. You can choose these workshops at any point over the year, depending on what fits your schedule. The diversity workshop will have two dates to choose from during the year.

The second component is counseling, which I've already mentioned. We ask that you come in for at least one individual counseling session, though you're welcome to do more. This gives us the chance to discuss your specific questions in a one-on-one setting, which is different from group formats.

The third component is networking. As I said earlier, we try to ensure that the group, which goes through the program together for a year, meets regularly. We know students have a lot on their plates—between studying and possibly working as a WHK—so we organize networking meetings every two months or so. These meetings often include a short input session on a topic that interests the students. During the kick-off, we usually gather questions and topics that students are curious about. For example, we've had a networking meeting called "Find Your Career Path Through

Volunteering," which gave insights into how volunteering can be a great way to enter a career if you have the time for it.

The fourth component is the WHK jobs. We'll provide more information about these during the kick-off. There are always open positions because university departments and faculties can submit WHK projects to us. You can find these openings on our website, and participating students can apply for them. If you're selected for a WHK job, the start date might be a bit later, as the hiring process at the university takes some time. The WHK job itself usually lasts a year, so it can overlap with the program in that sense.

**Erika:** So, the WHK position is limited to one year?

**Anne Klinnert:** Exactly, because we want to make the most of the project funds we have, so we limit it to one year. That's also the minimum employment duration. Oh, and another thing: at the end, there's a "Kick-Out" event, where we come together again and celebrate that the students have completed the year.

**Erika:** And these networking meetings, are they only for the participating students and the Career Service staff, or do business partners, companies, and other organizations also participate?

**Anne Klinnert:** The networking meetings are just for the cohort—what we call the "round"—we're currently finishing the first round, and now the application period for the second round is open. The meetings are only for the current cohort of participants. However, depending on the topic, we sometimes invite guest speakers. For example, we have many international students in the program, so once we invited an international alumna to talk about her journey. This was part of the volunteering event, where she explained how volunteering led to her getting a job. It really depends on the topics that interest the students. We could also invite people from companies, but the Career Service already organizes separate events, where industry representatives are invited, such as the Matching-Day or the UniContact fairs, where students can connect with employers.

**Erika:** Okay, great. One of the four pillars you mentioned is workshops, where students can choose three based on their interests, while one is mandatory (diversity competence). And these workshops don't necessarily have to come from the Career Service, right? The Career Service workshops usually come with a fee. Are the workshops free for participating students?

**Anne Klinnert:** Most of the workshops are now free. If they are offered by Career Service staff, which many are, they're free for all students, including program participants. If we bring in external trainers or coaches, there's a small fee, which the program participants also have to pay. But the fees are really low—if it's a one-day workshop or a four-hour session, it's usually around 10 euros for students. For two-day workshops, it might be 20 euros, but that's quite rare. Most workshops, including those offered by other university departments, are usually free of charge.

**Erika:** And who exactly are the cooperating partners or supporting departments at the university involved in the project? What can they offer the students, apart from the WHK positions? Also, what motivates these partners to participate in the project?

**Anne Klinnert:** Good question. Basically, any university department or faculty can submit a WHK project idea to us. We refer to them as projects because they are limited to one year, and we want the students to be able to complete something within that time frame. We continuously receive new project submissions, and they're almost equally split between university departments and central facilities. By central facilities, I mean units like the Career Service, the Central Student Advisory Service, or the International Office—university-wide services that also regularly employ student assistants. These facilities have many ideas and regularly submit projects to us.

Many positions are open to students regardless of their academic background, but we also receive projects that are more specific. For example, at the Institute of Biochemistry, it would make sense to hire a student with a relevant background. But many positions are quite open to a broad range of students.

Now, regarding what these departments or faculties offer students: when a student is hired for a WHK position, the department or faculty supervises them as they would for any other WHK job. What's additional in our case is that we're always available in the background for support or advice. If there are any issues or misunderstandings—though that rarely happens—the departments and students can come to us for help.

As for what we offer the cooperating departments and faculties: first, of course, we provide the funding for an additional WHK position. But we also offer diversity workshops to their staff. One of the main goals of this project is to contribute to a more diversity-sensitive university culture. We target specific student groups to give them more opportunities, but we also want to raise awareness among university staff. While many are already aware of diversity issues, there's always room for growth, and we offer the diversity training as a way to support that.

A lot of departments are really interested in these diversity workshops, which is great. Another wonderful thing is that many of the WHK projects submitted to us already include a focus on diversity. It's clear that the project's mission aligns with the goals of many departments, and it's encouraging to see that diversity is becoming a more prominent theme in their work.

**Erika:** I just realized that I forgot to ask—how many students can apply?

**Anne Klinnert:** Yes, I thought of that too. It's open, and we've already received inquiries from students who have applied early, though we usually wait until the end of the application phase. But we've decided to keep it open to everyone. The workshops, for example, are almost individualized, and they are already in place, so we can handle that. If necessary, we could ask colleagues from the Career Service for help, even if we had 100 participants. So, we're open because we believe this is important. The only thing to know is that we can't guarantee everyone will get a WHK job, as we have limited funds. But in the first round, I think everyone who wanted one and applied for it got a position.

**Erika:** How many students applied in the first round?

**Anne Klinnert:** In the first round, we had 36 applicants, and 20 ended up participating, which is fine. But we still have two or three weeks left in the application phase, and we've already received 30 applications this year. I have a feeling we might get even more this time. But essentially, everyone can participate. At the Kick-Off event, we explain everything in detail, and students can decide if it's too much for them or if they just want to attend a Career Service workshop or get advice separately. It's up to them to weigh the options. Some students may be drawn to the networking opportunities and the chance for jobs. The key point is that only program participants can apply for these positions, which wouldn't exist without the project since we fund them with additional resources.

**Erika:** That's interesting. So, does that mean students who already have a WHK job or another part-time job can still participate in the program?

**Anne Klinnert:** That's a great question. Exactly—if we had a visual of the program, you'd see the WHK job in a dotted box, meaning it's optional. Students can participate in the program even if they're not interested in a WHK job, or if they already have one. And even if they want a job but don't get one, they can still participate. So, it's optional. Oh, I almost forgot—there's another possibility we always mention at the Kick-Off: if none of the offered positions suit a student, or if the positions are filled quickly, but the student has a great idea for their own project, they can propose it. They would need to discuss it with a professor or department, asking if they'd be willing to support the project. If they find someone to supervise the project, they can come back to us and request funding. This happened in the first round—a student had an idea, found a supervisor, and we're funding it now, which I think is fantastic.

**Erika:** Cool, very nice. Okay, cool. So, could you summarize the important dates again? The application deadline is?

**Anne Klinnert:** The deadline is November 3rd.

**Erika:** And the Kick-Off?

**Anne Klinnert:** November 15th.

**Erika:** November 15th is the start of the second round?

**Anne Klinnert:** Exactly. And I can also say that the third round will start with the application phase from around March to May 2025. We always start around the beginning of the semester, a bit before, so new students can hear about it.

**Erika:** Okay, very cool. Now for my final question: How inclusive do you find the University of Potsdam?

**Anne Klinnert:** That's a great question. I've been discussing it with my colleagues today. I'd say, considering it's a huge institution, there are already many great offerings. But the challenge, as with many support or advisory services, is that not all students, staff, or faculty know about them. That's

something we're all working on—getting the information to the right people. The students need to know about these opportunities.

**Erika:** Promotion, right?

**Anne Klinnert:** Yes, exactly. What channels we use, how we promote it. I'd say we already have a lot in place, but not everyone knows about it. That's an ongoing task. In terms of experience, there's a lot of openness—students are becoming more diverse, and the university is adapting to that. But of course, there's still room for improvement. For example, if you think about physical accessibility, it can be tricky in some of the older buildings here. So, there's still work to be done, but a lot is already happening.

**Erika:** We're on the right track. Okay, great. Thank you so much for the insightful look into this meaningful and interesting project. I hope many more students apply, and that it continues to run for a long time. Wishing you continued success and all the best.

**Anne Klinnert:** Thank you very much.

**Erika:** Goodbye.