

# **Report on the Evaluation of the Austrian FH Council**

**November 2007**

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## 1 About the Procedure

The external evaluation of the Austrian FH Council was commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF). The objective of this evaluation is to determine in what ways and to what extent the FH Council fulfils its legally mandated responsibilities. In addition, the evaluation is intended to check whether the FH Council is implementing the criteria for membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) regarding (external) quality assurance in the European higher education area. These requirements are laid down in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance. At the same time, the evaluation looks at adherence to the criteria for membership in the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

ENQA together with international higher-education associations (EURASHE and ESIB) suggested and recommended having an independent and international panel of experts evaluate the FH Council. This panel was to consist of experts in quality assurance, experts in international and national higher education, and a student representative. The Federal Ministry of Science and Research appointed the expert on higher education in Austria. The panel of experts included the following members:

Jon Haakstad (chair), Norwegian National Quality Assurance Agency (NOKUT)

Bert Hoogewijs, Hogeschool Gent

Vanja Ivošević, European Student Union

Mark Frederiks, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

Manfred Prisching, University of Graz

Assistant:

Agnes Leinweber, Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany

The evaluation is based on a comprehensive documentation prepared by the FH Council. It includes an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its own performance and an on-site visit by the evaluation team from 17 to 19 September 2007 in Vienna. During this visit, they spoke to representatives of the Fachhochschule Conference and practitioners, representatives of FH degree programmes and Fachhochschulen, students, and decision-makers in higher education. The evaluators were granted access to all information they required.

## **2 Profile and Position of the FH Council in the Austrian Higher Education System**

### **2.1 Context and Development**

The FH Council was established in 1993 when the federal law on FH degree programmes was passed (Fachhochschule Studies Act - Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz, FHStG, Federal Law Gazette 340/1993 as amended). It is an independent public authority created to assure the quality of FH degree programmes, which were newly established in Austria in 1994. FH degree programmes are not created by transforming existing higher education institutions, but by accrediting new degree programmes.

In addition to extending the range of higher education programmes, the Fachhochschulen in Austria are intended to contribute to the following key objectives, compliant with the principles of new public management:

- Abolishing the government's monopoly as a provider of higher education and strengthening the autonomy of institutions;
- Redistributing control by organising the course-providing body under private law, which increases the autonomy, responsibilities and flexibility of education providers; decentralising decision-making powers as well as deregulating laws pertaining to the organisation of education institutions and studies;
- Public accountability for the quality of education and public funding of the demand for education.

In view of the planned reforms, the legislator has deliberately kept the Fachhochschule Studies Act concise.

In addition to Fachhochschulen, Austria has private and public universities and has recently established teacher training colleges. Approx. 83% of students are enrolled in the 22 public universities (including 6 universities of the arts, 3 medical universities and 1 university for continuing education). The proportion of students at the 18 FH institutions is approx. 10%. The 10 private universities and the 9 university colleges of teacher training have a share of approx. 2% and 5% of students, respectively.

In Austria, three institutions are responsible for quality assurance in the higher education sector: The FH Council, the Austrian Accreditation Council (ÖAR) for private universities, and the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA).

An accreditation awarded by the Austrian Accreditation Council (ÖAR) grants the right to bear the name "private university" for a limited period of time. As a public authority, its

activities comply with the federal law on the accreditation of higher education institutions as private universities (University Accreditation Act, Universitäts-Akkreditierungsgesetz - UniAkkG), which entered into force on 1 November 1999.

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) was founded in early 2004 as a non-profit association and has four full members: the Austrian Rectors' Conference (ÖRK), the Fachhochschule Conference, the National Union of Students (ÖH), and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. As a support organisation, AQA also arranges for evaluation procedures in the FH sector pursuant to the evaluation regulation (Evaluierungsverordnung) of the FH Council. These procedures are a prerequisite for the FH Council's decision on the re-accreditation of degree programmes (see chapter 3.1.2).

### **Assessment**

The evaluators find that the establishment of the FH sector in Austria is a unique approach in Europe because of the flexible structure of the Fachhochschule Studies Act as amended. In particular, setting up accredited FH degree programmes without a previous accreditation of the institution makes it possible to establish high-quality degree programmes within a short period of time.<sup>1</sup>

The evaluators recognise the achievements of the FH Council in successfully developing the FH sector in Austria and are impressed by the professionalism it displays. The system of external quality assurance maintained by the FH Council and the methods it applies are vital for the quality of FH institutions in Austria.

## **2.2 Goals and Responsibilities of the FH Council**

Pursuant to § 6 FHStG as amended, the responsibilities of the FH Council encompass:

- Deciding on the accreditation of degree programmes as FH degree programmes except for their location, on the revocation of the accreditation, as well as on the right to bear the name "Fachhochschule" and its revocation;
- Awarding the academic degrees for FH degree programmes and recognising degrees earned abroad;
- Ensuring high educational standards pursuant to § 3 by evaluating degree programmes and in particular final examinations;
- Promoting quality in teaching and learning as well as fostering innovations in FH degree programmes through research, continuing education and other measures;

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment an institutional accreditation is not provided for under Austrian law.

- Continuously monitoring the FH sector's coherence with the education system as a whole, its acceptance on the labour market, and the demand for education programmes;
- Advising the competent Federal Minister on FH matters and on the use of public funds as well as making recommendations on the locations at which the degree programmes are to be established;
- Preparing an annual report on the activities of the FH Council in the previous calendar year, on the state of the development of the FH sector as well as on its short-term and long-term demand; the report is to be sent to the competent Federal Minister by 1 March of each year for presentation to the National Council. 2

The aims of the work of the FH Council are set out in its mission statement of 3/4 March 2006, which is published on its website. Its mission is to strive for transparency, consistency, and a dialogue with the Fachhochschulen. It defines itself as a learning organisation.

The FH Council is a member of the following international networks and organisations: International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN), German-Austrian-Swiss Accreditation Network (DACH) and Joint Quality Initiative (JQI).

### **Assessment**

It is the impression of the evaluators that the above-mentioned legal regulations and policy decisions for the Austrian higher education system entail that the FH Council is playing numerous roles: It functions as accreditation body, advisory board for FH degree programmes, strategic planning unit for the FH sector, regulatory agency, and appellate board for students. This plurality of roles is rarely found in Europe. Although the FH Council is very dedicated and committed to its work and harnesses synergies between its activities, the evaluators consider all these functions difficult to fulfil in view of possible role conflicts.

Since the Fachhochschule Studies Act as amended contains few or sometimes no regulations regarding study programmes, the FH Council develops detailed regulations in its accreditation guidelines in order to ensure comparability within Austria, in particular

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<sup>2</sup> § 6 subsection 2 Fachhochschule Studies Act, Federal Law Gazette No. 340/1993, as amended by Federal Law Gazette No. 43/2006

regarding admission procedures and examination standards. The evaluators are aware of the criticism voiced by some course-providing bodies that the regulations of the FH Council are too bureaucratic and that its decisions are taken on a case-by-case and ad-hoc basis. Given the regulations in the accreditation guidelines pertaining to the studies, the work of the FH Council covers aspects that the evaluators consider to be more of an administrative task of the competent Federal Ministry or to be part of the institutional autonomy of Fachhochschulen. Similarly, for the completion of other tasks, the evaluators would like to see a separation between the responsibilities of the FH Council and those of the competent Federal Ministry (see chapter 3.3).

The evaluators are of the opinion that in particular the managing body of the FH Council fulfils an important advisory function in its day-to-day operations, since inquiries from representatives of FH degree programmes about legal, administrative and practical matters are – and have to be – answered rapidly and in a non-bureaucratic manner.

This advisory role of the FH Council could conflict with its assessing role in ensuring high education standards and awarding accreditations. The evaluators are generally concerned about potential conflicts of interest arising from the dual role of advising and accrediting. The reason for this concern is that neither the trusting relationship necessary for quality improvement in advising is created, nor can it be ruled out that there are dependencies between the advice it provides and a later accreditation it awards. However, the evaluators understand that the FH Council is at present the only body in Austria to which representatives of the FH degree programmes can turn with questions pertaining to legal aspects of the studies.

The evaluators find that the name "Fachhochschule"<sup>3</sup> essentially only means that the institution has the right to confer academic degrees. Traditional functions of academic self-administration, such as passing and amending examination regulations for accredited FH degree programmes, cannot be assumed by institutions recognised as Fachhochschulen pursuant to the Fachhochschule Studies Act as amended, but are a responsibility of the FH Council. Even minor changes in the examination regulations therefore have to be reported to the FH Council. Apart from the enormous administrative burden for the FH Council, the evaluators perceive constraints limiting the institutions' decision-making powers. When establishing recognised higher education institutions, they could be given greater leeway for shaping their academic environments.

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 3.2 on the organisational and formal requirements for bearing this name.

## 2.3 Organisation

The FH Council is a public authority whose responsibilities and activities are laid down in federal laws. Pursuant to § 7 FHStG as amended, the FH Council consists of 16 members, of whom at least four have to be women. The members need to have the ability to take informed decisions on pedagogic and didactic matters. Half of the members need to have academic qualifications in the form of a post-doctoral lecture qualification (Habilitation) or a similar qualification, while the other members need to have several years' experience in the professional fields relevant to the FH degree programmes. Students are not represented in the FH Council.

The members of the FH Council are appointed by the competent Federal Minister. Four of them are to be appointed following nominations by the Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs<sup>4</sup>. The competent Federal Minister also appoints the President and the Vice President of the FH Council. Their term of office is three years and one reappointment is possible. Their appointment is part-time and remunerated. The FH Council is supported in its work by a managing body, which is headed by the President of the FH Council.

### Assessment

The evaluators have found that all work is organised efficiently and that the communication between the FH Council and the managing body is very good.

The evaluators explicitly share the criticism that the majority of the members of the FH Council are university faculty members, which conveys the impression of an "educating authority" for the new FH sector. However, the evaluators understand that the development of the FH sector would not have been possible without the support received from university faculty members at different levels. The evaluators can also not rule out distortions of competition, since national university faculty members decide on the accreditation of FH degree programmes in Austria and therefore take decisions that affect their own competitors.

The evaluators consider it unfortunate that no students are members of the FH Council, the team for the evaluation, and the teams developing new FH degree programmes<sup>5</sup> (see chapter 4.1).

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<sup>4</sup> The Austrian Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs was established in 1963 on the basis of an informal agreement among the four large Austrian social partners (Federal Economic Chamber, Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour, Federation of Austrian Trade Unions, Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry).

<sup>5</sup> Pursuant to § 12 subsection 3 FHStG as amended, when designing a new FH degree programme, the course-providing body has to put together a development team consisting of four members, two of whom need to have a post-doctoral lecture qualification and two of whom need to have relevant professional experience.

## **2.4 Human and Material Resources**

At present, the managing body has 11 employees (equivalent to 10 full-time positions), including two managing directors, seven academic staff members, and two administrative staff members.

The managing body has office space amounting to a total of 438m<sup>2</sup>. Its annual budgets for 2007 and 2008 amount to 450,600 EUR each.

### **Assessment**

It is the opinion of the evaluators that the managing body is largely perceived as very professional and service-oriented. Although the FH Council's multiple responsibilities result in a very heavy workload for the managing body, its well-trained staff are highly motivated. In particular, the documentation required from the applicants for the accreditation of FH degree programmes ties up the human resources of the managing body and also increases the workload for the members of the FH Council, who only work part-time in this position.

The evaluators find that the human resources of the managing body are barely sufficient for the current workload. Also, its budget is rather tight, in particular when compared to similar bodies in Europe. The evaluators consider the equipment and room capacities to be sufficient.

## **2.5 Recommendations**

Against the backdrop of developing an entire sector and the experience gained over the past few years, the evaluators consider an evaluation of the entire system and all procedures to be appropriate. The further development should lead to the establishment of a universal system of external quality assurance for Austrian higher education institutions in order to apply the same evaluation and accreditation criteria to all types of higher education institutions and to ensure that they compete on an equal playing field. The evaluators are convinced that the FH Council and its responsibilities are critical for this.

In view of the successful performance of established institutions, the evaluators recommend to gradually strengthen the institutional autonomy of Fachhochschulen, similar to the rights of public and publicly recognised universities in Austria. In the course of the institutional accreditation procedure, the FH Council should grant this right to those Fachhochschulen that meet the required quality criteria.

The evaluators understand that the FH Council has come to take on a number of responsibilities that emerge from a deliberately concise FHStG as amended as well as from policy decisions. It also appears that the establishment of the FH Council was intended to transfer regulations from the powers of government to the decision-making powers of the FH Council in order to be able to respond more swiftly to developments characterising the early years of the new FH sector. Many of the typical tasks of the Ministry, such as responsibilities for accrediting new FH degree programmes, have been transferred to the FH Council without any modifications. The evaluators think that this keeps the old hierarchical and bureaucratic patterns of control alive, although the Bologna process has to some extent helped realise the objectives of independence and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe.

A stronger separation of responsibilities, for example between the FH Council and the competent Federal Ministry, would help substantially increase transparency, objectivity in decision-making and efficiency. Therefore, study-related legal matters that are fundamental for reasons of comparability of studies and examination standards at FH institutions in Austria should be decided by the competent Federal Ministry after consulting with partners from the sector.

In addition to a clear separation between the FH Council and the competent Federal Ministry, the advisory function and the quality improvement of the FH sector should also be separated more clearly from accreditation procedures. The evaluators suggest several possibilities: The responsibilities of the FH Council could in the future focus on accreditation. Also, the responsibility for accreditation could be transferred to one body responsible for all higher education institutions in Austria, while the FH Council continues to be responsible for regulating and monitoring the FH sector and advising the Ministry.

As regards the composition of the FH Council, the evaluators recommend including international members from Fachhochschulen in the future. In addition, the evaluators think that students should be involved as equal partners in the FH Council as well as in the development and evaluation procedures of degree programmes. The FH Council should enter into a dialogue with the national union of FH students, which is being set up, to discuss how this can be achieved.

In view of the many legal issues the FH Council encounters in its work, the evaluators recommend strengthening existing legal competencies in the managing body or increasing the funds for obtaining legal advice.

## **3 The Work of the FH Council in Compliance with Its Legally Mandated Responsibilities**

### **3.1 Accreditation**

#### **3.1.1 Accreditation Procedure for FH Degree Programmes**

The FH Council is responsible for accrediting FH degree programmes pursuant to the stipulations of the FHStG as amended, which have not been changed since their inception in 1993<sup>6</sup>. Criteria and procedures were laid down in the resolution "Guidelines of the Fachhochschule Council for the Accreditation of Bachelor's, Master's and Diploma Degree Programmes" passed by the FH Council on 1 December 2006.

Every application is assigned to two members of the FH Council with relevant expertise. Their duty is to assess the quality of the applications based on the documents submitted and to check their adherence to the accreditation criteria. If the FH Council does not have the expertise for reviewing applications, assessment reports from external experts have to be obtained.

The FH Council decides on the accreditation of degree programmes in a plenary session. The accreditation decision is valid for a maximum of five years. For the re-accreditation, an assessment report based on an external evaluation is required (see chapter 3.1.2).

#### **Assessment**

The evaluators find that on-site visits are not a part of the accreditation procedure, even if an established institution offers a degree programme with a similar focus. According to the evaluators, this bears the risk that the accreditation is confined to administrative and formal aspects, since no exchange between external experts and the development teams of degree programmes takes place, for example about teaching or content. The evaluators see this as a disadvantage, since such talks with peers and instructors can provide valuable inputs for quality improvement.

Members of the FH Council act as reviewers in their roles as members of the accreditation board. This does not make it possible to separate the assessment of a degree programme application and the decision on the accreditation. The evaluators consider this separation important, as it creates checks and balances. The two members of the FH Council who also act as reviewers have considerable responsibility, since they are part of the decision-making body, which may prompt the other members, who are not reviewers, to prepare less thoroughly. The evaluators also regret that the institutions are not informed which members prepare the assessments of the degree programmes for the FH Council.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless stated otherwise explicitly, the term accreditation denotes both the initial accreditation and the re-accreditation.

Given the logic of the FHStG as amended, several criteria cannot be examined at all, or to a limited extent only, when a programme is accredited for the first time, in particular in the early years of the Austrian FH sector. These criteria include, for example, the qualifications of instructors, infrastructure, equipment, and rooms. Clearly, when a programme is accredited for the first time, information and parameters pertaining to the studies exist only on paper. The evaluators believe that this situation is intensified by the fact that FH degree programmes in Austria can also be set up outside of established higher education institutions and instructors are typically appointed only after the successful accreditation. The FH Council tries to compensate this by evaluating a programme two years after the initial accreditation.

The evaluators feel that it would be problematic, if the decision to re-accredit individual degree programmes were based on the results of an institutional evaluation, unless it contained an evaluation of the degree programme (see chapter 3.1.2 on the interplay of procedures for institutional evaluations and for degree-programme evaluations). For the evaluation of the degree programme and its re-accreditation, the FH institutions have to submit a separate comprehensive documentation for each of them, even if one procedure takes place shortly after the other.

### **3.1.2 External Evaluation**

The objectives, procedural steps, and standards of the external evaluation are laid down in the resolution "Regulation of the FH Council on the Evaluation in the Austrian FH Sector" passed on 10 November 2006.

The procedure encompasses:

- Self-evaluation of the institution
- External evaluation carried out by a review team
- Response of the course-providing body to the assessment report prepared by the review team
- Acceptance and review of the assessment report by the FH Council
- Follow-up procedure
- Publication of evaluation results

The FH Council determines in the months of June/July each year which degree programmes or FH institutions will be evaluated in the following year. The external evaluation has to be organised in cooperation with an independent and internationally

recognised institution which the FH institutions may choose. In the past, the evaluation procedures were – with one exception – carried out by AQA.

The review team has to consist of at least three members. One of them has to be in an academic leadership position in a similar degree programme abroad, one member has to have relevant professional experience, and one member has to have sufficient expertise in teaching and didactics. The composition of the review team has to be communicated to the FH Council, which may reject individual members or the entire team.

The FH Council distinguishes between degree-programme and institutional evaluations. The evaluation of degree programmes pays particular attention to the congruence of the professional fields in which graduates will work, their qualifications, and the curriculum. The procedure is grounded in the fitness-for-purpose approach to quality. The institutional evaluation focuses on strategy and organisation, quality management and human resources development, applied research & development, resources, infrastructure and finance, as well as internationalisation and cooperation projects.

The results of the evaluation are published in the form of summaries prepared by the review teams. Before results are made available publicly, the course-providing body has to consent. If the course-providing body does not grant this approval in time, the results may not be published. In this case, it is, however, made public that the summary cannot be published in the absence of the course-providing body's approval.

### **Assessment**

The evaluators point out that it would greatly facilitate internal planning for FH institutions, if they were able to determine the time of the evaluation within the accreditation period. This would imply, however, that combining the evaluation procedures of degree programmes is no longer possible. However, the evaluators consider this to be an exception anyway.<sup>7</sup> This should not curtail the FH Council's right to carry out its own evaluation procedures, for example two years after an accreditation has been awarded based on a proposal.

AQA and the FH Council consider their collaboration to be trusting and good; the evaluation regulation (*Evaluierungsverordnung*) was commended as state of the art.

It is the opinion of the evaluators that institutional evaluation procedures do not take into account reports already submitted to AQA on degree-programme evaluations or accreditation.

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<sup>7</sup> The possibility of combining the evaluation procedures of degree programmes is provided for in the evaluation regulation (*Evaluierungsverordnung*) of the FH Council (cf. §3 and 4) and was used once in 2004 for degree programmes in social work.

The evaluators note with concern that the FH Council makes only a summary of the evaluation report publicly available and that FH institutions are not entitled to make the full text publicly available either (see chapter 4.1). The evaluators do not share the FH Council's opinion that the full reports should not be published in order to prevent evaluation reports from being used as window dressing. Rather, the evaluators consider the need for transparency and accountability vis-à-vis the general public to be more important.

### **3.2 The Right to Bear the Name "Fachhochschule"**

Pursuant to FHStG as amended, a course-providing body may offer one or more FH degree programmes, even if it is not entitled to bear the name "Fachhochschule". FHStG as amended states the following requirements in § 15 sub-section 2 for bearing this name: at least two accredited degree programmes offered by the applicant institution, plans to accommodate at least 1,000 students within five years, and establishing a FH Board pursuant to § 16 FHStG as amended.<sup>8</sup> If the application of the course-providing body provides proof of compliance with these requirements, the FH Council grants the right to bear the name "Fachhochschule" by a formal notification in writing. This right is not tied to a time limit, but may be revoked, if any of the requirements are no longer met.

As of 14 May 2007, 11 of the currently 18 course-providing bodies are organised as Fachhochschule pursuant to §§ 15 and 16 FHStG as amended.

#### **Assessment**

The evaluators think that the FH Council fulfils its responsibilities efficiently and adequately when it comes to granting the right to bear the name "Fachhochschule". For the rights associated with the name "Fachhochschule", see chapter 2.2.

### **3.3 Additional Responsibilities**

When advising the competent Federal Minister on FH matters, the FH Council makes recommendations on which planned FH degree programmes should receive government funding. In 2002, the FH Council has introduced a procedure for this, according to which the FH institutions have to submit proposals by 1 October of each year, referred to as summaries, outlining planned, publicly funded FH degree programmes. In a plenary session of the FH Council, recommendations on these applications are made. Only when public funding has been granted, will the course-providing bodies submit the full application for the accreditation of the planned FH degree programme.

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<sup>8</sup> Pursuant to § 16 FHStG as amended, the FH Board is a body of academic self-administration, which consists of students, instructors, and the directors of degree programmes. Among other things, it is the FH Board's responsibility to apply for the establishment, modification or discontinuation of degree programmes to the course-providing body, to make suggestions for the appointment of instructors, and to coordinate and evaluate classes and examinations.

In addition to accreditation, the FH Council is also responsible for the collection and analysis of data on the FH sector. The following data are collected and analysed electronically: Applications; students including data on graduates, drop-outs, incoming/outgoing, stop-outs; personnel and research & development.

Another responsibility of the FH Council is to check whether the requirements for establishing continuing education programmes at Fachhochschulen are met. Pursuant to the amendment of the FHStG of 2004, the course-providing bodies also have the right to offer continuing education programmes in the fields in which they offer accredited FH degree programmes. Two different types of programmes for continuing education are distinguished in § 14a FHStG as amended. If admission criteria, scope, and requirements of the programmes correspond to similar master programmes abroad, master degrees typically conferred abroad may be awarded for the field of study. If these stipulations do not apply and the programme comprises at least 60 ECTS credit points, the title "Academically accredited ..." may be awarded together with a relevant supplementary title. The curricula have to be submitted to the FH Council before the programme starts. If the legally mandated requirements are not met, the FH Council has to interdict the establishment of the programme by issuing a formal notification in writing within three months after receipt of the application.

Apart from these activities, the FH Council is responsible for continually monitoring the entire FH sector regarding its coherence with the education system as a whole. Therefore, the demand and acceptance analysis, which is a mandatory document for the accreditation of a new FH degree programme, also has to include the number of new students enrolling at similar university programmes as well as the number of applicants for similar FH degree programmes in the same geographic area over a period covering the past four years. As part of the monitoring of the FH sector, the first analysis of graduates in Austria was conducted and published as an external research project in the year 2000.

The legally mandated responsibilities of the FH Council include monitoring the degree programmes and in particular final examinations in order to ensure educational standards that live up to the educational mandate. To this end, if necessary, the FH Council commissions interviews on specific questions or problems encountered by degree programmes during the accreditation period. In addition, members of the FH Council sit in on final examinations, if time permits.

The FH Council is also responsible for improving the quality of teaching and learning as well as for fostering innovations in FH degree programmes through research, continuing education and other measures. For this purpose, the FH Council periodically commissions

research projects. The results are published in the FH Council's own publication series and are presented and discussed at events.

The FH Council also deals with complaints about accredited degree programmes. In addition, students may appeal against a decision taken by the FH Board on the conferment of academic degrees, against decisions on the recognition of degrees obtained abroad, or against decisions affecting examinations and their administration.

### **Assessment**

The evaluators are of the opinion that the FH Council fulfils the stipulated responsibilities adequately and delivers high quality. The evaluators perceive the FH Council's responsibility for ensuring education standards as well as on-site visits as a fulfilment of its role as an "educating authority", which the government has bestowed upon the FH Council when establishing this new sector (see chapter 2.3).

As regards the application procedure for public funding of FH degree programmes, the evaluators have found that the responsibilities of the FH Council and the competent Federal Ministry have become blurred. Formally, there is a separation, since the FH Council makes a recommendation on whether to publicly fund FH degree programmes based only on a summary. Nevertheless, in the large majority of cases, the Federal Ministry confirms the decision taken by the FH Council. Therefore, the evaluators perceive a great risk in binding the FH Council to its own affirmative recommendation when decisions on the accreditation of degree programmes are taken. The structure of the current procedure results in a two-year start-up period for the establishment of FH degree programmes. Apart from the risk of application details becoming obsolete, this is bound to lead to a distortion of competition for Fachhochschulen in view of the new autonomy granted to Austrian universities.

Furthermore, the evaluators disapprove of the fact that the FH Council substantiates neither the recommendation to provide public funding nor the recommendation to reject a degree programme. FH institutions do not have the possibility to elaborate or comment on their summaries in the course of the procedure. Because of the long and complex application procedure it cannot be ruled out that competitors from the university sector come to know about ideas for new degree programmes. The evaluators feel that this poses an obstacle to a trusting collaboration between the FH Council and the FH institutions.

The evaluators are aware that apart from the right of the FH Council to interdict the establishment of continuing education programmes by issuing a formal notification in

writing, no specific external quality assurance is required by law. The evaluators find it difficult to determine whether students and employers are able to distinguish between certificates issued by continuing education programmes that – pursuant to 14a FHStG as amended – are allowed to confer master degrees typically awarded abroad (e.g. Master of Business Administration) and academic degrees awarded by accredited master programmes (Master of Arts in Business).

### **3.4 Recommendations**

Overall, the evaluators perceive the different procedures of the FH Council, including degree-programme accreditation as well as degree-programme and institutional evaluation, as separate processes whose interdependencies are difficult to see. The presently parallel procedures increase costs and the workload for the FH institutions. In addition, the added value of having these separate procedures is limited, since they co-exist rather than coalesce.

If reports on degree-programme evaluations and accreditations are available, they should certainly be taken into account when evaluating institutions. The introduction of a procedure for the institutional accreditation (as mentioned in chapter 2.5) could reduce the workload.

Furthermore, the evaluators recommend using the documentation provided by the applicants for degree-programme evaluations as a basis for re-accreditation procedures in order to reduce the documentation required from the applicants. Statistics included should be updated, if necessary. Also, the procedures for the initial accreditation should take into account whether the stipulations of the FHStG as amended make a reduction in the documentation required possible.

The evaluators consider it important that an on-site visit or at least talks with the development team take place prior to the initial accreditation of FH degree programmes, which is also common in Europe. They further recommend making this a part of the procedure (see chapter 4.1).

A stronger integration of external experts, in particular for the initial accreditation, would significantly reduce the workload for the members of the FH Council and the managing body.

As regards the evaluation procedures, the evaluators recommend publishing the entire reports in order to increase transparency and comply with European standards.

The managing body and the FH Council should encourage students more strongly to lodge complaints directly at FH institutions.

As for the process of obtaining public funding, the evaluators recommend developing a procedure that avoids the dual role of the FH Council, even if this means setting up a separate advisory board.

## 4 Assessment of Compliance with Membership Criteria of ENQA and ECA

### 4.1 Use of External Quality Assurance Processes for Higher Education

#### European Standards and Guidelines 2.1

2.1 Use of internal QA procedures: External QA procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal QA processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

#### European Standards and Guidelines 3.1, 3.7 and 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6

3.1 Use of external QA procedures for higher education: The external QA of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external QA processes described in Part 2 of the ESG.

3.7 External QA criteria and processes used by agencies: The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process; an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

2.3 Criteria for decisions: Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

2.4 Processes fit for purpose: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

2.5 Reporting: Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

2.6 Follow-up procedures: Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

#### ENQA Regulations 4.8

4.8 The processes, criteria and procedures used by the member should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the member;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

The member may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. The member should pay careful attention to its declared principles at all times and should ensure both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. A member that makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each member.

#### ECA, Code of Good Practice 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17

4. Must be rigorous, fair and consistent in decision-making.

8. Can demonstrate public accountability, has public and officially available policies, procedures, guidelines and criteria.

9. Informs the public in an appropriate way about accreditation decisions.

10. A method for appeal against its decisions is provided.

12. Accreditation procedures and methods must be defined by the accreditation organisation itself.

14. Must include self-documentation/-evaluation by the higher education institution and external review (as a rule on site).

16. Must be geared at enhancement of quality.

17. Must be made public and be compatible with European practices taking into account the development of agreed sets of quality standards.

### Facts and Data

(see also chapter 3.1, Accreditation pp. 11-14)

The evaluation regulation (Evaluierungsverordnung) adopted by the FH Council provides for the following procedural steps in the evaluation process: self-evaluation, on-site visits with external experts, drafting of a report, response to the report, follow-up and publication of a summary of the findings. The procedural steps laid down in the accreditation guidelines include the following: compilation of documentation by the applicant institution and external evaluation by the FH Council. The follow-up procedure is part of the evaluation. Both procedures are carried out on the basis of published criteria and are committed to the fitness-for-purpose principle. Summary findings from the process are published. As far as the evaluation procedure is concerned, the consent of the course-providing body must be obtained prior to publication.

Student representatives are not involved in the FH Council procedures and in the FH Council as such.

### **Assessment**

The evaluators are of the opinion that the FH Council is largely complying with the ENQA standards and the ECA membership criteria listed above. For the procedure governing the first-time accreditation of FH degree programmes, the evaluators consider it advisable to conduct an on-site visit or at least talks with the development team according to standard 3.7, in order to be able to support quality development in a better way. Based on the positive experience gained in Europe, and according to standard 3.7, student involvement would also be highly desirable. The evaluators expressly welcome the commitment of the FH Council towards building a national union of students at Austrian Fachhochschulen. According to standard 2.5, evaluation reports should be published in full.

***Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance***

## **4.2 Official Status**

### **European Standards and Guidelines 3.2**

3.2 Official status: Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

### **ENQA Regulations 4.4**

4.4 A Full member should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as an agency with responsibility for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. It should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdiction within which it operates.

### **ECA, Code of Good Practice 2**

2. Is recognised as a national accreditation body by the competent public authorities.

## **Facts and Data**

With the adoption of the FHStG as amended, the FH Council was set up in 1993 as an authority not bound by instructions for the accreditation of the FH degree programmes to be set up.

### **Assessment**

The FH Council meets the above criteria for membership in ENQA and ECA, as its status is laid down in law.

### ***Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance***

#### **4.3 Regular Basis of Activities**

##### **European Standards and Guidelines 2.2, 2.7, 2.8 and 3.3**

2.2 Development of external QA processes: The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

2.7 Periodic reviews: External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

2.8 System-wide analyses: Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

3.3 Activities: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

##### **ENQA Regulations 4.3:**

4.3 A Full member will undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member. In undertaking its activities, the member should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area.

##### **ECA, Code of Good Practice 13**

13. Must be undertaken at institutional and/or programme level on a regular basis.

### **Facts and Data**

(see also chapter 3.1, Accreditation pp 11-14)

All 194 FH degree programmes offered in the academic year 2006/2007 have been accredited by the FH Council. The procedures are repeated at regular intervals, as accreditations of FH degree programmes are granted for a limited period of time. The basic principles and criteria governing these procedures have been publicly documented in the resolutions "Regulation of the FH Council on the Evaluation in the Austrian FH Sector" passed on 10 November 2006 and "Guidelines of the Fachhochschule Council for the Accreditation of Bachelor's, Master's and Diploma Degree Programmes" passed by the FH Council on 1 December 2006. The FH Council is the central collection point for FH sector data and draws up regular statistical analyses.

### **Assessment**

The large number of accreditation procedures performed to date, as well as repeat evaluations carried out because of limited accreditation periods, ensure the required regularity. The ENQA and ECA membership criteria stated are being met.

***Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance***

#### **4.4 Resources**

**European Standards and Guidelines 3.4**

3.4 Resources: Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

**ENQA Regulations 4.5**

4.5 A Full member should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable it to organise and run its external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of its processes and procedures.

**ECA, Code of Good Practice 5**

5. Has adequate and credible resources, both human and financial.

#### **Facts and Data**

At present, the managing body has 11 employees (equivalent to 10 full-time positions), including two managing directors, seven as academic staff members, and two administrative staff members.

The managing body has office space amounting to a total of 438 m<sup>2</sup>. Its annual budgets for 2007 and 2008 amount to 450,600 EUR each.

#### **Assessment**

While the evaluators noted that the managing body is running on tight human and financial resources given its extensive current workload, the ENQA and ECA membership criteria stated above are being largely met.

***Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance***

#### **4.5 Mission Statement**

**European Standards and Guidelines 3.5**

3.5 Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

**ENQA Regulations 4.6**

4.6 A Full member should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, contained in a publicly available statement. This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.

**ECA, Code of Good Practice 1**

1. Has an explicit mission statement.

## Facts and Data

The FH Council's mission statement as published on its website describes its self-understanding as an institution, the goals and principles governing its work, and its position in the higher-education policy environment. According to its mission statement, the FH Council defines itself as a learning institution in a process of continuous development and oriented towards international challenges and standards.

## Assessment

The above listed ENQA and ECA membership criteria are being met.

*Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance*

## 4.6 Independence

### European Standards and Guidelines 3.6

3.6 Independence: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

### ENQA Regulations 4.7

4.7 A Full member should be independent to the extent both that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders. The member will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the member.

### ECA, Code of Good Practice 3

3. Must be sufficiently independent from government, from higher education institutions as well as from business, industry and professional associations.

## Facts and Data

(see also chapter 2.3, Organisation p. 7)

According to § 7, subsection 4, FHStG as amended, the 16 members of the FH Council are not bound by any instructions (constitutional provision) in the exercise of their responsibilities. The principle of independence and impartiality also applies to the members of the review team pursuant to § 4, subsection 2, second sentence, of the FH Council evaluation regulation (Evaluierungsverordnung).

## Assessment

The evaluators believe that the above ENQA and ECA membership criteria are being met.

*Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance*

#### **4.7 External Quality Assurance Criteria and Procedures Used by Agencies**

(see chapter 4.1, Use of external quality assurance processes for higher education)

#### **4.8 Accountability Procedures**

##### **European Standards and Guidelines 3.8**

3.8 Accountability procedures: Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

##### **ENQA Regulations 4.9**

4.9 The member should have in place procedures for its own accountability. These procedures are required to include the following:

- a published policy for the assurance of its own quality, made available on its website;
- documentation which demonstrates that:
  - the member's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
  - the member has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
  - the member has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
  - the member has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement
- a mandatory cyclical external review of its activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.

##### **ECA, Code of Good Practice 6, 7, 11, 15**

6. Has its own internal quality assurance system that emphasises its quality improvement.

7. Has to be evaluated externally on a cyclical basis.

11. Collaborates with other national, international and/or professional accreditation organisations.

15. Must guarantee the independence and competence of the external panels or teams.

#### **Facts and Data**

Although it has not adopted a published policy for the assurance of its own quality according to ENQA Regulation 4.8, the FH Council practically implements a number of quality assurance measures. An internal organisation and process manual of the managing body documents the process of accreditation. Open questions or suggested changes to the accreditation procedure are addressed in regular meetings of the managing body. The managing director collects and disseminates questions and problems relating to accreditation centrally.

Follow-up workshops are being staged with the heads of the review teams each year in September to give feedback after the completion of the evaluation processes. The first large-scale evaluation round on degree programmes was scientifically monitored in the year 1998 by a social-science research project that was commissioned by the FH Council, the outcome of which was published in the publication series of the FH Council. The

findings from the research project were used for the review of the then applicable evaluation guidelines (Evaluierungsrichtlinien).

The first-time institutional evaluation in 2003 was equally evaluated by an accompanying study. The study, also published in the FH Council's publication series, performed an analysis of how the newly-developed institutional evaluation procedure is implemented in terms of organisation, content and methodology. The study contrasted and analysed the experiences and assessments of the review team and of the representatives of the higher education institutions being evaluated.

A series of measures and initiatives are designed to ensure the quality of work of the managing body. An organisation and process manual describes the organisational set-up of the managing body, as well as the responsibilities of the staff according to distinct post profiles. It defines the activities of the managing body at the interface between the FH Council and relevant stakeholders and documents all process descriptions as to external quality assurance procedures as well as internal administration.

Starting in late 2007, the office will engage in a systematic and comprehensive annual and resource planning process. A closed two-day seminar was held with the president of the FH Council in September 2007. In December 2006, the staff of the managing body launched a human resources and organisation development process to improve its internal coordination and to adopt a staff appraisal policy and resultant human resources development measures.

### **Assessment**

The evaluators note that the FH Council has not yet developed a formally differentiated internal quality assurance system, but is applying several external feedback mechanisms and processes. The FH Council is largely meeting the above ENQA standards and ECA membership criteria.

***Compliance, partial compliance, non-compliance***

## 5 Conclusion

In the assessment of the evaluators, the swift and successful establishment of the Fachhochschule sector in Austria is an exceptional achievement in the European context, to which the FH Council has contributed significantly by its professional work.

The evaluators believe that the FH Council is fulfilling its legally mandated responsibilities in an adequate and professional manner. The criteria for membership in ENQA and ECA are also being largely met. Here, the evaluators consider minor amendments necessary.

Some 14 years after the introduction of the FH Council and given the establishment of the Fachhochschule sector in Austria, the evaluators recommend a thorough review of the entire set-up and of the procedures of the FH Council. The FH Council currently acts as accreditation authority, advisory board for FH degree programmes, as strategic planning unit for the Fachhochschule sector, as regulatory agency, and appellate board for students. The FH Council should strive for a more clear-cut separation of advisory/quality assurance tasks and accreditation tasks. Moreover, the evaluators recommend reviewing the respective functions assigned to the FH Council and the competent Federal Ministry. For instance, the responsibilities of the FH Council and the competent Federal Ministry are not sufficiently transparent for outsiders as regards the application procedure for federal financing. The managing body runs on very tight human and financial resources which barely suffice to meet its extensive current workload.

The evaluators consider it essential to introduce a system of external quality assurance across all types of higher education institutions, so as to create a level playing field for all types of higher education institutions. In the framework of an institutional accreditation procedure, it should be possible for Fachhochschulen to be granted autonomy, modelled on the rights of public and publicly recognised universities in Austria. The evaluators welcome the institutional evaluation procedures that furnish more systematic feedback to the Fachhochschulen and strengthens their exercise of autonomy. The current organisation of programme accreditation procedures, of degree-programme and institutional evaluation, does not show significant synergies, as it is unclear how the different procedures interact. The added value created by the different types of procedures for Fachhochschule institutions is limited, while the burdens and cost increase. The evaluators recommend bearing this in mind, also in light of the further development of the system of external quality assurance in Austria.

As far as the composition of the FH Council is concerned, the evaluators recommend that international FH representatives be appointed in the future. Moreover, the evaluators

encourage the involvement of students as equal partners in the FH Council as such, as well as in the development and evaluation process of degree programmes.

In the event that the accreditation procedures of FH degree programmes are being retained, the evaluators recommend introducing on-site visits or at least talks with the development team in order to promote an exchange on contents and didactics. Stronger involvement of external experts in these procedures would relieve the members of the FH Council and the managing body significantly. As far as evaluation procedures are concerned, the evaluators recommend that the entire reports be published.

## Annex 1: List of Abbreviations

AQA	Österreichische Qualitätssicherungsagentur
AVG	Allgemeines Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz
BGBI	Bundesgesetzblatt
BMBWK	Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kunst
BMWF	Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung
CEEN Assurance	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Agencies in Higher Education
DACH	Deutsch-österreichisch-schweizerisches Akkreditierungsnetzwerk
ECA Education	European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher
ENQA Higher	European Network on Quality Assurance in European Education
ESG in the	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
ESIB	European Higher Education Area European Students' Union (formerly European Student Information Bureau)
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
FH	Fachhochschul
FHR	Fachhochschulrat
FHStG idgF	Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz in der geltenden Fassung
INQAAHE Higher	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Education
JQI	Joint Quality Initiative
NOKUT	Norwegian National Quality Assurance Agency
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie
ÖAR	Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat
ÖH	Österreichische Hochschülerschaft
ÖRK	Österreichischer Rektorenkonferenz
UniAkkG	Universitäts-Akkreditierungsgesetz

## **Annex 2: Terms of Reference and Protocol**

Evaluation Austrian FH Council  
"Terms of Reference and Protocol for the Review"  
29/09/2006

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# 1 Summary

This document describes the context, the objective and orientation as well as the evaluation procedure of the Fachhochschule Council (FH Council) in autumn 2007. The procedure is being organised by the Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur (BMBWK; Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture) and coordinates and considers both national and international requirements.

The evaluation's objective is to determine in which way and to what extent the FH Council fulfils its tasks in the area of external quality assurance. This national objective of the evaluation is to be seen in connection with the issue of meeting international requirements as stipulated by the "Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines)"<sup>9</sup> and the Code of Good Practice<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the issue of meeting the European Standards and Guidelines is also of vital significance as regards the fulfilment of the criteria for the ENQA membership.

In short, the evaluation procedure relates to the answers to the following questions:

- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council fulfil the tasks stipulated by the *Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz* (Fachhochschule Studies Act) in the area of external quality assurance?
- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council thereby fulfil the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the European Standards and Guidelines?
- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council comply with the Code of *Good Practice*?

The basic attitude towards the entire evaluation procedure should be one of self-criticism, objectiveness and openness, analysing the strengths and weaknesses, and consists of the following steps:

- ▶ nomination and appointment of the members of the review team;
- ▶ self-evaluation by the FH Council including the preparation of a report;
- ▶ external evaluation by a review team;
- ▶ discussion of the evaluation results by the FH Council, including the relevant interested groups and follow-up procedures;
- ▶ submission of the evaluation report to ENQA and ECA;
- ▶ publication of the results and follow-up measures.

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<sup>9</sup> cf. European Association for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, ENQA: [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu)

<sup>10</sup> cf. European Consortium for Accreditation, ECA: [www.eacaconsortium.net](http://www.eacaconsortium.net)

## 2 Background and Context

### 2.1 Legal Basis of the FH Council

The FH Council is responsible for external quality assurance within Austria's FH sector. The Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz (FHStG; Fachhochschule Studies Act, Federal Legal Gazette no. 340/1993 as amended), which entered into force on 1 October 1993, serves as the legal basis for the operations of the FH Council.

The tasks of the FH Council are basically regulated in section 6 sub-sections 1 and 2 FHStG, and, relating to its tasks in the field of quality assurance, can be summarised as follows<sup>11</sup>:

1. Execution of procedures for initial- and re-accreditation of FH degree programmes and approval of FH degree programmes by issuing administrative decisions on accreditation
2. Decree of a regulation on the performance of the institutional and degree programme-related evaluation as a prerequisite for re-accreditation of FH degree programmes (cf. section 13 FHStG)
3. Prohibition of programmes for further education by administrative decision (cf. section 14a FHStG)
4. Advising the competent federal minister in issues regarding the FH system and the use of federal funds as well as recommending locations for FH degree programmes
5. Continuous monitoring of the entire FH sector with regard to its coherence with the other sectors of the education system and to its acceptance by the employment system and the demand for education
6. Ensuring education standards by monitoring the degree programmes, in particular the final examinations
7. Promoting the quality of teaching and learning as well as innovations in FH degree programmes through research activities, further education and other measures
8. Collecting and analysing statistical data on the FH sector.

The FH Council consists of 16 members who have the relevant academic qualifications and professional experience (cf. section 7 sub-section 1 FHStG). They are appointed by the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Culture; four members are appointed on the basis of suggestions of the advisory board for economic and social issues. The term of office is three years. Members can be re-appointed once for a consecutive term. Pursuant to a constitutional provision, the members of the FH Council are not bound by any instructions when performing their responsibilities (cf. section 7 sub-section 4 FHStG).

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<sup>11</sup> cf. [http://www.fhr.ac.at/fhr\\_inhalt/01\\_ueber\\_uns/rechtliche\\_grundlagen.htm](http://www.fhr.ac.at/fhr_inhalt/01_ueber_uns/rechtliche_grundlagen.htm)

With regard to the accreditation procedure, the Allgemeines Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz (AVG; General Law on Administrative Procedure) is applicable. The FH Council must decide on an application for accreditation or re-accreditation as an FH degree programme without unnecessary delay, but after a period of nine months after the application was filed at the latest.

Section 11 sub-section 1 of the FHStG stipulates that the FH Council is subject to the supervision of the competent federal minister and to the review of the Austrian Court of Audit. Subject to supervision by the competent federal minister are the compliance with rules and regulations as well as the FH Council's execution of its tasks.

## 2.2 National Context

The FH Council executes its tasks under modern framework conditions as regards educational policy that are characterised by deregulation on government level and private-body regulation under governmental control ("New Public Management"). In 1994, the Austrian FH sector was created from scratch and has expanded continuously ever since. When the FHStG entered into force on 1 October 1993, a control mechanism that was innovative for the Austrian higher education system was created, which provides excellent conditions for setting up and expanding the Austrian FH sector. In order to give higher-education institutions institutional autonomy vis-à-vis the government, the relationship between government and higher-education institutions was also remodelled.

The framework conditions regarding educational policy on which the FHStG is based are characterised by the following features:

- ▶ the monopoly of the government as provider of higher education was abolished and the institutions were given greater autonomy to manage themselves;
- ▶ the rights of disposal over resources were redistributed as a result of the fact that course-providing bodies are organised under private law and, consequently, education providers enjoy enhanced independence, responsibility and flexibility;
- ▶ the laws pertaining to the organisation of higher education institutions and courses of study were deregulated and decision-making powers decentralised;
- ▶ the tasks of the state were limited to external quality assurance (FH Council) and financing (BMBWK).

Within the regulatory framework conditions, the Austrian FH sector is being set up and expanded in co-operation with official top-down control and private bottom-up initiative. Education in Fachhochschulen is not offered by transforming existing institutions but by accrediting new degree programmes.

FH degree programmes will be accredited for a limited period of time not exceeding five years. Extension of accreditation requires the submission of an evaluation report. In the Evaluation Regulation (cf. [www.fhr.ac.at](http://www.fhr.ac.at)), the FH Council has set out the objectives, the evaluation methods and principles, the procedures to be carried out (institutional and degree programme-related evaluation), the publication of the evaluation results and the follow-up procedure.

## 2.3 International Context

In the Bergen Communiqué, the ministers responsible for higher education adopted the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines)” and, at the same time, laid down that the organisations competent for external quality assurance shall be subject to a compulsory national evaluation in 5-year intervals. The European Standards and Guidelines drawn up by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in close cooperation with interested groups<sup>12</sup> also contain standards for the quality assessment of organisations that are responsible for external quality assurance. In addition, being a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), the FH Council has committed to have the extent of compliance with the Code of Good Practice prepared by ECA reviewed by the end of 2007 at the latest.

Against the backdrop of these international developments, the FH Council discussed the issue of performing the evaluation in the 95th plenary session on 3-4 March 2006. In agreement with the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK), the FH Council decided to undergo an international evaluation procedure which is to be coordinated and performed under the responsibility of the Austrian BMBWK.

All relevant bodies of the Austrian FH sector are to be integrated in the preparation, execution and discussion of the evaluation results: the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, the Fachhochschule Conference (FHK), the FH institutions, the students and the FH Council. Moreover, all relevant and important steps of the procedure are agreed upon with ENQA and ECA.

## 3 Purpose and Aim of the Evaluation

The evaluation’s objective is to determine in which way and to what extent the FH Council fulfils its tasks in the area of external quality assurance. In this context, the evaluation will particularly deal with the procedures developed by the FH Council and its practical implementation. This national objective of the evaluation is to be viewed in connection with the issue of meeting international requirements as stipulated by the “European Standards and Guidelines” and the ECA Code of Good Practice.

Moreover, the question of meeting the European Standards and Guidelines is also of vital significance relating to the fulfilment of the criteria for the ENQA membership. In short, the evaluation procedure to be carried out under national responsibility and under consideration of international requirements, involves the answers to the following questions:

- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council fulfil its tasks according to the Fachhochschule Studies Act in the area of external quality assurance?
- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council thereby fulfil the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the European Standards and Guidelines for external quality assurance agencies?

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<sup>12</sup> EUA, ESIP, EURASHE, European Commission.

- ▶ In which way and to what extent does the FH Council fulfil the ECA Code of Good Practice?

The basic attitude towards the entire evaluation process should be one of self-criticism, objectiveness and openness, analysing the strengths and weaknesses. It is committed to the principles of critical analysis of the developed and implemented procedures, an assessment of these procedures and to opening up perspectives for their further development, thus implementing the true objective of quality assurance procedures.

## 4 The Evaluation Procedure

- ▶ The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:
  - ▶ nomination and appointment of the members of the review team;
  - ▶ self-evaluation by the FH Council including the preparation of a report;
  - ▶ external evaluation by a review team;
  - ▶ discussion of the evaluation results by the FH Council including the relevant interested groups and follow-up procedures;
  - ▶ submission of the evaluation report to ENQA and ECA;
  - ▶ publication of the results and follow-up measures.

### 4.1 Nomination and Appointment of the Review Team Members

In agreement with the BMBWK, the FHR decided in the 95th plenary session on the following composition of the review team which was accepted by the ENQA board (cf. letter FH Council and BMBWK of 2 May 2006, reference code 2006/183 and response ENQA of 19 June 2006):

- ▶ one national expert well familiar with the Austrian higher education system;
- ▶ two international experts from organisations that are responsible for external quality assurance (ENQA);
- ▶ one international expert from a higher-education institution (EURASHE);
- ▶ one international expert with students' experience (ESIB);
- ▶ one assistant. This person is not to be in a state of dependence to the FH Council.

The national expert is appointed by the BMBWK. The international experts (ENQA, EURASHE, ESIB) will be nominated by ENQA by the end of 2006. The chairperson comes from an organisation that is an ENQA member and nominates the assistant. The BMBWK appoints the members of the review team, the chairperson and the assistant and prepares the review team for the evaluation in an appropriate manner.

The evaluation will be made in German, even though persons who speak English but have a good oral and written command of the German language may also be members of the review team.

### 4.2 Self-evaluation of the FH Council

The FH Council is responsible for the execution and organisation of the self-evaluation process, which has to adhere to the following principles:

- ▶ Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant interested groups.
- ▶ The basic attitude towards the process of self-evaluation process should be one of self-criticism, objectiveness and openness, analysing the strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ The self-evaluation report is well-structured, comprehensibly prepared and broken down as detailed below within the relevant topics of the evaluation: Description of the actual situation; analysis and appraisal of the actual situation; proposals for improvement and planned measures; summarising strengths/weaknesses analysis.

The self-evaluation report is to present in an understandable way in which way the FH Council fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance as stipulated by the FHStG and to what extent it meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the European Standards and Guidelines as well as the requirements of the Code of Good Practice.

The self-evaluation report is characterised by short and precise wording, and will be submitted to the review team and the BMBWK within four weeks prior to the external evaluation at the latest.

### 4.3 External Evaluation by the Review Team

In agreement with the FH Council, the chairperson and the assistant of the review team, the BMBWK will draw up and publish a time schedule for the external evaluation. The schedule will also contain information on talks with persons of the relevant interested groups. The duration of the external evaluation will be three to four days.

The external evaluation will close with a meeting between the review team and the FH Council during which the most important findings of the evaluation will be discussed.

### 4.4 Drawing up the Evaluation Report

In agreement with the members of the review team, the chairperson and the assistant of the review team are responsible for drawing up the evaluation report, which, in an adequate manner, takes into account the objective and orientation of the evaluation as defined under point 3 of this document. The report is usually drawn up by consent between all participating experts. In order to avoid dubious consent, dissenting opinions may also be given. The BMBWK will provide the review team with a template for the report. The report is to be finalised within three weeks after completion of the evaluation. It shall have the same structure as the self-evaluation report and the introduction shall contain an "executive summary".

Depending on the field of evaluation, the report consists of statements and assessments as well as recommendations that are clearly listed separately. The evaluation's time schedule as well as a list of the persons interviewed shall be attached. The evaluation report should not exceed 20 pages. Additions to the reports that are not part of the sub-headings can be attached.

A draft of the evaluation report will be submitted for comment to the FH Council within three weeks after the evaluation. Should a statement by the FH Council be necessary, it will be submitted to the chairperson of the review team within two weeks' time. Taking

into account the statement that may be submitted by the FH Council, the final version of the evaluation report will be drawn up and transmitted to the BMBWK and the FH Council.

## **5 Follow-up Procedure and Publication of the Report**

The FH Council will discuss the evaluation report in a plenary session and inform the BMBWK on the measures for the implementation of the evaluation that relate to the results and, in particular, to the recommendations of the review team. Subsequent to the discussion of the evaluation results and the planned implementation measures with the BMBWK, the evaluation report and the follow-up measures agreed upon will be published on the FH Council's Website.

## **6 Schedule of the Evaluation**

Coordination BMBWK and FH Council of execution of the evaluation	March 2006
Coordination of procedure with ENQA	May/June 2006
Drawing up project plan self-evaluation FH Council	Mid-September 2006
Adoption of evaluation concept (ToR and Protocol)	End of September 2006
Submission of concept to ENQA and ECA	Mid-October 2006
Start self-evaluation of FH Council	End of November 2006
Appointment of review team members by ENQA	End of Dec. 2006
Commissioning members of review team by BMBWK	Mid-February 2007
Preparation of external evaluation and schedule	Mid-March 2007
Briefing of review team members	End of April 2007
End of self-evaluation FH Council	End of May 2007
Discussion of results with relevant groups	End of June 2007
Sending SE report to review team and BMBWK	End of July 2007
External evaluation	Mid-September 2007
Draft of evaluation report to FH Council	5 October 2007
Statement of FH Council to review team if necessary	19 October 2007
Final report to BMBWK and FH Council	End of October 2007
Discussion of report and implementation plan FH Council, BMBWK	November 2007
Publication of report and implementation plan	Mid-December 2007
Submission of report to ENQA	Mid-December 2007

## Annex 3: Site Visit Programme 17-19 September 2007

Montag, den 17.09.2007

Zeit	Ort	Gespräch	Gesprächspartner
09:00 – 10:30	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit dem Präsidenten und einigen Mitgliedern des Fachhochschulrates und der Geschäftsführung des FHR	Mitglieder FHR Univ.-Prof. DI Dr. Leopold MÄRZ (Präsident) Hofrat Dr. Hubert REGNER Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang MAZAL Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ingrid PABINGER-FASCHING Mag. Peter SCHLÖGL Univ.-Prof. DI Dr. Norbert VANA Geschäftsstelle FHR Dr. Kurt SOHM Dr. Wilfrid GRÄTZ
10:30 – 10:45		Pause	
10:45 – 11:45	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit Mitarbeitern der Geschäftsstelle des FHR	Frau Gabriele WAGNER Mag. Gudrun HABERL-TRAMPUSCH Dr. Maria E. WEBER Dr. Andreas NEUHOLD Mag. Herwig PATSCHEIDER
11:45 – 12:45		Mittagsimbiss mit interner Besprechung	
12:45 – 13:45	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit Fachhochschulen und Erhalten von FH-Studiengängen	Fachhochschule Salzburg GmbH: Dr. Gerhard JÖCHTL (Vizekanzler) Mag. Raimund RIBITSCH (GF) Dr. Doris WALTER (GF) Fachhochschule Oberösterreich Management GmbH: Prok. Regina AICHINGER Dr. Witold JACAK (Studiengangsleiter Software engineering) FH Technikum Kärnten DI Herbert KOTSCHNIG (stellv. GF)
13:45 – 14:00		Pause	
14:00 – 15:00	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit Studierenden (VFFH- Verein zur Förderung einer Studierendenvertretung von Fachhochschulen und FH-Studiengängen und aus akkreditierten Studiengängen und Österreichische HochschulInnenenschaft ÖH)	Philipp HENSE (Obmann VFFH- FH Joanneum) Carmen HUBMANN (FH Vorarlberg) Maria WALTHER (Technikum Wien) Christian KEUSCHNIG (FH Salzburg) Florian FLUNGER (MCI Innsbruck) Bernhard BLASCHEK (FH Studiengänge WKW) Hartwig BRANDL (Österreichische Hochschülerschaft)
15:00 – 15:15		Pause	
15:15 – 16:15	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit Vertretern des Bundesministeriums für Wissenschaft und Forschung BMWF	SC Mag. Friedrich FAULHAMMER Dr. Wilhelm BRANDSTÄTTER Getrude SCHMID Gottfried MASCHA
16:15 - 16:30		Pause	
16:30 – 17:30	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit der Geschäftsführung der AQA und einigen Gutachtern aus Evaluationsverfahren	Leiterin wissenschaftliche Steuerungsgruppe: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Anke HANFT Geschäftsführung AQA: Mag. Alexander KOHLER GutachterInnen: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Monika PETERMANDL Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Eike GRUBER Univ.-Prof. Dr. Hans PECHAR
17:30 – 18:30	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Interne Abschlussbesprechung des ersten Tages	
ab 20:00		Abendessen der Gutachtergruppe	

Dienstag, den 18.09.2007

Zeit	Ort	Gespräch	Gesprächspartner
09:00 – 10:30	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit Fachhochschulen und Erhaltern von FH- Studiengängen	FH Wien-Studiengänge der WKW Ing. Mag. (FH) Michael HERITSCH (GF) Dr. Christian KREUZER Campus 02 – FH der Wirtschaft GmbH Univ.-Prof. Dr. Franz SCHRANK (Rektor) Mag. Dr. Erich BRUGGER (in Vertretung der GF) Management Center Innsbruck – MCI Dr. Andreas ALTMANN (GF) Dr. Ralf GEYMAYER (Studiengangsleiter Management & Recht)
10:30 – 10:45		Pause	
10:45 – 12:00	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1010 Wien	Gespräch mit Rektoren einer Fachhochschule und Führungspersonen eines Erhalters von akkreditierten Fachhochschulstudiengängen 13	Lauder Business School Alexander ZIRKLER (GF) Mag. Silvia KUCERA (Studiengangsleiterin) FH Wiener Neustadt für Wirtschaft und Technik GmbH Prof. Mag. Werner JUNGWIRTH (GF) Prof. (FH) Mag. Dr. Ferry STOCKER (Rektor)
12:00 – 13:00		Mittagsimbiss mit interner Besprechung	
13:00 – 14:00	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1010 Wien	Lehrende aus denselben fachhochschulischen Institutionen	Lauder Business School Mag. Martin SAMEK Dr. Eva THIERY-METLEWICZ FH Wiener Neustadt für Wirtschaft und Technik GmbH Dr. Johanna HÄFKE-SCHÖNTHALER Michaela ROSENBLATTL DI Birgit HERBINGER
14:00 – 14:15		Pause	
14:15 – 15:15	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1010 Wien	Studierende aus denselben fachhochschulischen Institutionen	Lauder Business School Sis TIMBERG Thyago OHANA FH Wiener Neustadt für Wirtschaft und Technik GmbH Karin PRESSL Jürgen WURZER
15:15 – 15:30		Pause	
15:30 – 16:30	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1010 Wien	Gespräch mit Vertretern aus der Berufspraxis	DI. Anton PLIMON, Arsenal Research Mag. Alexander MÄDER, Personalschef Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft-BIG Dr. Isabel EISSLER, Do&Co
16:30 – 16:45		Pause	
16:45 – 18:30	BMWf, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1010 Wien	Interne Abschlussbesprechung des zweiten Tages	
ab 20:00		Abendessen der Gutachtergruppe	

<sup>13</sup> Als Beispiel für die Akkreditierungsverfahren des Fachhochschulrates wird eine große und lang akkreditierte Fachhochschule ausgewählt (z.B. Fachhochschule Wiener Neustadt) und ein Erhalter mit wenigen Studierenden, der nicht als Fachhochschule zertifiziert ist (z.B. Lauder Business School). Im Laufe des Tages wird mit den Führungspersonen, den Lehrenden und Studierenden der ausgewählten Einrichtungen gesprochen.

Mittwoch, den 19.09.2007

Zeit	Ort	Gespräch	Gesprächspartner
09:00 – 9:45	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit der Fachhochschulkonferenz (FHK)	Präsidium FHK: Mag. Werner JUNGWIRTH (Präsident) Generalsekretär FHK: Mag. Kurt KOLEZNIK
10:00-10:45	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Gespräch mit dem FHR und der Geschäftsstelle	Univ.-Prof. DI Dr.Leopold MÄRZ (Präsident FHR) Dr. Kurt SOHM (GF FHR) Dr. Wilfrid GRÄTZ (GF FHR)
10.00 – 13:00	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Interne Abschlussbesprechung der Gutachtergruppe	Gutachtergruppe
13:30 – 14:00		Mittagsimbiss	
13:30 – 14:00	BMWF, Zi 132 Teinfaltstr. 8, 1014 Wien	Abschlussbesprechung und Wiedergabe der ersten Eindrücke der Gutachter	Univ.-Prof. DI Dr.Leopold MÄRZ (Präsident FHR) Hofrat Dr. Hubert REGNER SC Mag. Friedrich FAULHAMMER Dr. Kurt SOHM (GF FHR) Dr. Wilfrid GRÄTZ (GF FHR) Dr. Wilhelm BRANDSTÄTTER (BMWF) Mag. Sabine PÖLZL (BMWF)
Ab 14:00	Abreise		

## Annex 4: Documents consulted

Selbst-Evaluationsbericht des FHR  
 Bericht Bundesrechnungshof Jänner 2001  
 Endbericht Review des Auf- und Ausbaus des Fachhochschulsektors  
 BIS Schnittstelle  
 Benutzerhandbuch Lehrgänge zur Weiterbildung Jahresberichte des FHR 2003,  
 2004, 2005 Arbeitsplatzbeschreibungen Geschäftsstelle FHR  
 Organisations- und Prozesshandbuch Schriftenreihe des FHR: Band 1 - 11  
 Evaluierungsberichte - Institutionelle Evaluierungen Evaluierungsberichte -  
 Studiengangsbezogene Evaluierungen 1

Erhalterkurzbezeichnung	StgKz	FH-Studiengang	Art	Org-
FH OÖ Studienbetriebs GmbH	0454	Software Engineering	Ma	VZ
FHW Wien	0058	Finanz-, Rechnungs- und Steuerwesen	Dipl	VZ+BB
FH Wr. Neustadt	0478	Polizeiliche Führung	Ba	BB
FH Technikum Kärnten	0473	Unternehmensführung	Ba	VZ
FH Salzburg	0435	Physiotherapie	Ba	VZ
FH CAMPUS 02	0317	Innovationsmanagement	Ba	BB
MCI GmbH	0352	Umwelt-, Verfahrens- und Biotechnik	Ma	VZ
Lauder Business School	0090	International Marketing & Management	Dipl	VZ

Evaluierungsberichte - Studiengangsbezogene Evaluierungen II Folgende Anträge auf Akkreditierung als FH-Studiengang:

\*Ba = Bachelorstudiengang, Ma = Masterstudiengang, Dipl = Diplomstudiengang = Vollzeit, BB = berufsbegleitend  
 Negative Akkreditierungsentscheidungen