

8. The Austrian higher education system

Post-secondary Education in Austria

In Austria the post-secondary sector at **university level** (higher education) comprises 22 Universities (*Universitäten*) maintained by the state, 3 Schools of Philosophy and Theology (*Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschulen*) maintained by the Roman-Catholic Church, 18 Fachhochschule institutions (*fachhochschulische Einrichtungen*), maintained by legal persons under private (= 16) or public (= 2) law (6 of them have been awarded the right to use the title of „Fachhochschule“) - with subsidies from the state, and 7 Private Universities (*Privatuniversitäten*) run by private maintainers with state accreditation.

The post-secondary sector at **non-university level** comprises 50 Teacher Training Colleges for teachers in compulsory schools (*Akademien für Lehrerbildung*), 7 Midwife Academies (*Hebammenakademien*), 49 Technical Medical Colleges (*Medizinisch-Technische Akademien*), 2 Military Academies (*Militärische Akademien*), 26 Schools of Psychotherapy (*Psychotherapeutische Ausbildungseinrichtungen*), 12 Conservatories (*Konservatorien*), and 2 Business Schools (*Wirtschaftsschulen*).

Below there is referred only to higher education.

Overall Structure of Higher Education

A diploma degree (*Diplomgrad*) is awarded by Austrian universities after eight to twelve (in the arts up to 16) semesters, depending on the relevant field of study. Its full denomination is „*Magister/Magistra ...*“, including a description of the field in which it was obtained, e.g. *Magister philosophiae*, in the fields of engineering, it is „*Diplom-Ingenieur/in*“. The studies of medicine and dentistry are exceptions: The first degree awarded is „*Doctor medicinae universae*“ or „*Doctor medicinae dentalis*“, respectively, after twelve semesters.

The study programmes leading to a *Diplomgrad* can be split up into an undergraduate programme with a bachelor degree (*Bakkalaureatsgrad*, denomination „*Bakkalaureus/Bakkalaurea ...*“) after six to eight semesters, and a graduate programme with a master degree (*Magistergrad*, denomination „*Magister/Magistra ...*“) after two to four semesters.

Graduates of Fachhochschule programmes are awarded, in analogy to the university studies, either a Fachhochschule diploma degree (*Fachhochschul-Diplomgrad*, after eight to ten semesters of study; „*Diplom-Ingenieur/in (FH)*“ in the fields of engineering, or, respectively, „*Magister/Magistra (FH)*“ in the other fields of study), or a Fachhochschule bachelor degree (*Fachhochschul-Bakkalaureatsgrad*, after six semesters of study; „*Bakkalaureus/Bakkalaurea (FH)*“) and a Fachhochschule master degree (*Fachhochschul-Magistergrad*, after two to four further semesters of study; „*Magister/Magistra (FH)*“). The abbreviation „*FH*“ distinguishes those degrees from university degrees.

Holders of a *Diplomgrad* or a *Magistergrad* (including *Fachhochschul-Diplomgrade* or *Fachhochschul-Magistergrade*) are entitled to enter a doctoral programme (*Doktoratsstudium*) at a university. The doctoral degree (*Doktorgrad*, denomination „*Doktor/in ...*“) is awarded after four semesters.

Beyond the degree programmes (*ordentliche Studien*) described above, there exist non-degree programme studies (*außerordentliche Studien*) which can be a university course programme (*Universität-lehrgang*) or the attendance of individual courses.

Diploma programme (*Diplomstudium*)

Admission to a diploma programme is granted on the basis of an Austrian or equivalent foreign secondary school leaving certificate (*Reifezeugnis*), a certificate on a special university entrance examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*), or a certificate on a *Berufsreifeprüfung*. The studies are subdivided into two or three stages of study (*Studienabschnitte*). The length of each part of studies as well as the subjects to be taken and their extent are laid down in the curriculum (*Studienplan*). There are required subjects (*Pflichtfächer*), restricted elective fields of concentration (*gebundene Wahlfächer*) which have to be selected from a catalogue set out in the curriculum, and elective fields of concentration (*freie Wahlfächer*) which have to be chosen without being bound to catalogues. Each stage of study is concluded with a diploma examination (*Diplomprüfung*). The approval of the diploma thesis (*Diplomarbeit*) is a prerequisite for admission to the last diploma examination.

Bachelor programme (*Bakkalaureatsstudium*)

Admission to a bachelor programme is granted on the basis of an Austrian or equivalent foreign secondary school leaving certificate (*Reifezeugnis*), a certificate on a special university entrance examina-

tion (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*), or a certificate on a *Berufsreifeprüfung*. The subjects to be taken and their extent are laid down in the curriculum (*Studienplan*). There are required subjects (*Pflichtfächer*), restricted elective fields of concentration (*gebundene Wahlfächer*) which have to be selected from a catalogue set out in the curriculum, and elective fields of concentration (*freie Wahlfächer*) which have to be chosen without being bound to catalogues. At least two bachelor essays have to be written within the subjects of the programme. The programme is concluded with a bachelor examination (*Bakkalaureatsprüfung*).

Master programme (*Magisterstudium*)

Admission to a master programme is granted on the basis of a completed Austrian bachelor programme (*Bakkalaureatsstudium*) or equivalent programme at post-secondary level. The subjects to be taken and their extent are laid down in the curriculum (*Studienplan*). The main area of concentration is the master thesis (*Magisterarbeit*), including studies in related subjects. The programme is concluded with a master examination (*Magisterprüfung*). The approval of the master thesis (*Magisterarbeit*) is a prerequisite for admission to the master examination.

Doctoral programme (*Doktoratsstudium*)

Admission to a doctoral programme is granted on the basis of a completed Austrian diploma programme or master programme (including Fachhochschule diploma or master programmes), or equivalent programme at post-secondary level. The subjects to be taken and their extent are laid down in the curriculum (*Studienplan*). The main area of concentration is the doctoral thesis (*Dissertation*), including studies in related subjects. The programme is concluded with the approval of the doctoral thesis and with a doctoral examination (*Rigorosum*).

Fachhochschule programmes (*Fachhochschul-Studiengänge*)

Admission to a Fachhochschule diploma or bachelor programme is granted on the basis of an Austrian or equivalent foreign secondary school leaving certificate (*Reifezeugnis*), a certificate on a special university entrance examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*), or a relevant professional qualification.

Admission to a Fachhochschule master programme is granted on the basis of a completed Austrian Fachhochschule bachelor programme or an equivalent final qualification at post-secondary level.

A selection process is to be carried out only if the number of candidates exceeds the number of higher education places available.

At Fachhochschule bachelor and diploma programmes, career-oriented practical training periods of 6 to 15 weeks are compulsory. At Fachhochschule bachelor programmes it is compulsory to draw up independent essays as part of the course work. The final examination at Fachhochschule bachelor programmes is an examination before an examination committee. Fachhochschule diploma and master programmes have to be concluded by a diploma examination which consists of a diploma thesis and an examination before an examination committee.

Fachhochschule programmes are accredited by the Fachhochschule Council (*Fachhochschulrat*) for 5 years at the maximum.

Evaluation of performance and grading system

According to the examination modalities outlined in the curricula (*Studienpläne*), examinations can take the form of oral and written exams, or projects. Oral examinations are principally public exams.