

NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005

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1. Main achievements since Berlin***1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms***

The Austrian system of higher education consists of uUniversities, private universities, universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen), teacher training colleges, and post-secondary institutions (mainly medical-technical academies as well as agricultural and military colleges).

The most important legislative reforms took place before the Berlin Conference. The University Act 2002, which provides the legal framework for the implementation of the Bologna objectives in Austria, took effect in 2004, the implementation is still ongoing. An English version can be found at: <http://www.weltklasse-uni.at/upload/attachments/947.pdf>.

The "Fachhochschule" Studies Act was introduced in 1993 (an amendment in 2002/03 provided the legal framework for implementing the Bologna goals, a.o. by improving the internal quality management system, introducing the possibility of double degree programmes and calling for full-scale introduction of the diploma supplement by December 2005).

The University Accreditation Act was introduced in 1999. It establishes the tasks and responsibilities of the Austrian Accreditation Council and provides a legal framework for the accreditation of private universities.

The Academy Studies Act of 1999 is the basis for turning the teacher training colleges into universities for teacher training (with bachelor programmes for teachers in primary and lower secondary education).

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance was founded in January 2004.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies (For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

All higher education institutions report to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. There are a few exceptions concerning the above mentioned academies and colleges which answer to the respective ministries (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Ministry of Health..).

The Science Council advises the Minister, the legislature and the universities on university matters and on questions of science and arts policies, and monitors the Austrian higher education and research system, considering European and international trends, and formulates proposals for its further development.

The Fachhochschul Council is an autonomous public authority subject to ministerial supervision, and carries out the accreditation of universities of applied sciences and/or the programs run by them.

The Accreditation Council is an autonomous public authority subject to ministerial supervision, and carries out the accreditation of private universities.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure (For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

The Austrian system of higher education consists of universities, private universities, universities of applied sciences ("Fachhochschulen"), teacher training colleges, and post-secondary institutions (mainly medical-technical academies as well as agricultural and military colleges).

21 universities governed by the Universities Act 2002 plus 1 university governed by the Act on the Danube University of Krems (which specializes in further education).

19 universities of applied sciences ("Fachhochschulen") regulated by the Fachhochschulen Studies Act of 1993

9 private universities regulated by the University Accreditation Act of 1999.

28 teacher training colleges regulated by the Academies Study Act of 1999.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country (National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

A national Bologna follow-up group consisting of representatives of the responsible ministries and authorities, as well as representatives of the higher education sector (e.g. Rectors' Conference, Fachhochschule Conference, Conference of the Teacher Training Colleges, the Austrian Students' Union, the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance,...) was established in 1999. The national follow-up group is - among other things - responsible for the preparation of the Austrian contribution to the European follow-up process and for the elaboration of the Austrian position for the Ministers' conferences, and ensures the flow of information within Austria.

All Austrian universities and "Fachhochschulen" have nominated a Bologna Coordinator who is responsible for promoting the implementation of the Bologna objectives in his/her institution.

A national Bologna website -- <http://www.bologna.at> -- was set up in 2001 to provide information on the developments in Austria and to disseminate information on the developments and events at the European level.

Besides there are thematic working groups active on all levels to consider the stakeholders' needs and experience in implementing the individual Bologna objectives (e.g. working group on joint degree programmes, committee for international affairs of the universities of applied arts, international forum of the Rector's Conference,..).

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance, operating since the beginning of 2004, provides for quality assurance services and evaluation to public and private universities, to universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen), and -- in the future -- to teacher training colleges. The agency's responsibilities include the development of evaluation standards and procedures, the co-ordination of evaluation of study programmes and institutions as well as the certification of institutional quality assurance processes.

The "Fachhochschul" Council carries out the accreditation of the universities of applied sciences and/or the programmes run by them.

The Austrian Accreditation Council is a public authority responsible for carrying out the accreditation of private universities.

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

Public universities (comprising around 85% of students in HE, ISCED 5,6):
There is no legal obligation for accreditation of institutions or study programmes, but universities are obliged by law to establish internal quality management systems and to carry out internal and external evaluations. Performance agreements will be concluded between

each university and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK) from 2007 for a period of three years and will specify appropriate measures for quality assurance.

Universities of applied sciences (comprising around 8% of students in HE, ISCED 5A):
Universities of applied sciences apply for accreditation by the FH Council for a period of five years on the basis of a proof of external needs. The decision for re-accreditation by the FH Council is taken on the basis of an external evaluation co-ordinated by an independent evaluation agency, and must be approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Private universities (comprising around 1% of students in HE, ISCED 5,6):
The accreditation decision is based on an evidence of needs and a site visit by an experts' panel for a period of five years. The decision of the Accreditation Council must be approved by the Federal Minister of Education, Science and Culture.

Teacher training colleges (appr. 6% of students in HE, ISCED 5B) are required to carry out internal quality assurance measures by the Academies Study Act.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

The Scientific Council of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance includes a majority of international experts (i.e. three out of five). Its role is to guarantee the independence of the agency by approving standards and procedures applied.

The Accreditation Council comprises eight experts, half of which are Austrian and the other half from other European countries. This guarantees that international standards are maintained and that national conflicts of interest are avoided. For the same reason 90% of the members of expert panels for accreditation procedures are from abroad.

International experts play a vital role in the evaluation procedure for the reaccreditation of universities of applied sciences .

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

At the universities, currently about 25% (this corresponds to 172 Bachelor and 217 Master programmes) of those study programmes that may be organised in the two-cycle structure are now following the Bologna system. (Medicine and higher secondary school teaching programmes are exempted by law from the BA/MA-structure. They may only be offered as “old style” diploma studies.). However, such a quantitative factor does not tell the “whole” story but needs to be balanced with both a structural as well as a qualitative approach. First of all, the implementation of the Bologna study structure does not proceed in a linear fashion,

but there are strong variations among different disciplines, e.g. from implementation rates of about 15% in the humanities and social sciences to around 40 % in the natural sciences or the arts. This can at least partly be explained by structural aspects. Most study programmes in the humanities offer both teaching programmes for higher secondary school teachers as well as research programmes. Therefore, if a department in the humanities introduces the BA/MA-structure for the research programme, they are faced with the prospect of having to organise a parallel Diploma programme for the students of the higher secondary school teaching programmes. Moreover, the introduction of the Baccalaureate and Master programmes must be preceded by significant reforms of the curricula in question. Obviously, such a major development must be given appropriate time in a sector that comprises about 200,000 students.

Also the universities of applied sciences have converted about 25% of their programmes to the two-tier structure so far.

Private Universities follow the Bologna study structure.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

Currently, admission to doctoral studies is open to graduates of Master or "old style" Diploma programmes. Doctoral programmes tend to emphasise the thesis and do not require much coursework, though again there are differences between disciplines, with e.g. the natural and technical sciences usually requiring more organised courses than e.g. the humanities. The minimum required study period for the doctorate is two years, with much longer average study periods in some fields. However, the debate on the future of doctoral studies has recently intensified. A major national conference on the subject was organised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Rectors' Conference in November 2004. According to what has emerged so far, efforts at reform will focus on (1) stressing research education and increasing structural/curricular elements in those disciplines where this is considered appropriate; (2) intensifying supervision by increasing the number of advisors or introducing dissertation committees; (3) improving scholarship and funding schemes and (4) emphasising internationalisation and mobility also in the context of doctoral studies.

The University Act 2002 also foresees a PhD programme with a workload of at least 240 credits (4 years), and a more balanced distribution of the workload between thesis and course work.

Graduates of universities of applied sciences have access to doctoral programmes at

universities. For certain fields of studies special access requirements must be met.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

Based on the OECD Frascati rules, 43% of the total HE funding or 58% of the total of public R&D funding are reserved for research in Austria. Research funding is mostly carried out by three different ministries: the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology, and the Ministry of Economy and Labour. So far, there is no current data in Austria for an analysis of research activities according to character of work. However it can be estimated that 80 to 85% of the research carried out at universities is basic research. Not surprisingly therefore, almost 90% of the annual financial allocations of the Austrian Science Fund, the main national funding institution for basic research, goes to universities, the rest to the Austrian Academy of Sciences and to other research institutions.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country *(For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)*

Apart from a variety of financial aid measures for needy students (see also chapter 9: "social dimension") an extensive range of scholarship programmes is available for students and graduates alike (e.g. Austro-Hungarian Exchange Programme, Austro-Czech Exchange Programme, Austro-Slovak Exchange Programme, Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies - CEEPUS, grants for postgraduate programmes in non-German speaking countries, national top-ups for ERASMUS-grants, Fulbright grants, "Österreich" grants for work on an Austria-related subject, "Ernst Mach" grants for applicants from selected countries, "Franz Werfel" grants for young university teachers of German language and Austrian literature,.....). For detailed information please see: www.grants.at.

For their study periods spent abroad in transnational, EU, government or university mobility programmes, outgoing students do not pay tuition fees at their Austrian home university. The same is true for students coming to Austria in the framework of such programmes. Besides there is a legal guarantee of academic recognition of study abroad periods, agreed upon between the student and the university in advance, by way of a so-called "Vorausbescheid".

Also the provinces of Austria offer various scholarship programmes for outgoing and for some incoming students.

Portability of national grants for study programmes abroad is possible for up to 2 years.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

- The Austrian Exchange Service offers special University Preparatory Courses (Vorstudienlehrgänge) which do not only consist of language preparation but also provide various measures for cultural integration. There are constant efforts at improving the legal

regulations for foreigners studying in Austria.

- A database comprising all the available grants, scholarships or fellowships for incoming and outgoing students has been established and is constantly updated.
- A new project aims at establishing electronic scholarship application procedures.
- Mobility centers are available all over Austria.

For further information please refer to: www.oead.ac.at and section 9 below -- The social dimension of the Bologna Process.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

International experience is a vital factor for the appointment of university professors.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

The contract of employment can now be extended by up to 5 years for leaves of absence and sabbaticals comprising teaching and research activities abroad.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

The University Act of 2002, which became fully effective on 1 January 2004, provides for a completely new framework for Austrian public universities. Though they remain institutions of public law, universities no longer form a part of public administration, but are autonomous legal entities with full contractual capability. The federal authorities do not have any influence on decisions within universities, except for their competence to review whether these decisions are in accordance with the law. The internal structure of universities (faculties, departments etc.), except for the level of university management (university council, senate, rectorate), are no longer determined by federal university legislation, but are decided upon by each institution itself within a broad given framework. Both staffing and the introduction of new study programmes are the sole responsibility of universities now, with the rector being head of the university staff and the senate deciding upon curricula. The universities remain largely state-funded. As of 2007, universities will receive 80 % of their overall budget on the basis of triannual performance contracts between the federal government and each individual institution. The rest will be allocated to universities according to a set of indicators. All public funding will be disbursed in lump sums.

The course-providing bodies in the sector of universities of applied sciences are legal persons under private law. The Fachhochschul Studies Act foresees a high degree of autonomy regarding internal organization, recruiting, new study programmes, etc.). The Ministry finances universities of applied sciences on the basis of student numbers, the cost of infrastructure is covered by the course-providing bodies themselves.

Private universities have a high degree of autonomy regarding internal organisation, recruiting and establishing new study programmes. The accreditation and supervision carried out by the Austrian Accreditation Council guarantees that the institutions meet internationally

compatible quality standards.

Teacher training colleges retain a certain degree of autonomy over internal organization and staff recruiting but are still controlled by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

Half of the members of the university council, the institutional "board" with either 5, 7, or 9 members, are nominated by each university itself. The other half is nominated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and those two groups are charged with electing one additional member. Public office holders, civil servants from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and staff members of the university in question may not be elected to the university council, which should represent not just HE interests, but also those of society at large. The senate is the representative body of all university members, it consists of 12 to 24 members. Full professors hold the majority of votes, students hold at least 25 %, and the remaining seats are allocated among junior professors and the general university staff. In addition to those prescribed by law, the universities have set up advisory bodies that have students and different groups of university staff participating in decision-making processes. However, in accordance with the principle of autonomy, there is no legal framework for these bodies and they are therefore organised differently at each institution.

Representatives of all sectors of higher education are represented in the national Bologna Follow-up Group (see chapter 2.3 above)

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

For student representation in university senates and advisory bodies pls. refer to 8.2

At universities of applied sciences students are represented on every Fachhochschule degree programme for each year of study. They also serve on the Fachhochschule Board, with voting rights.

At teacher training colleges students are represented on the curricular committees.

Students at all levels are also involved in internal quality assessment procedures. The Austrian Students' Union is a member of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

Equality of access is guaranteed at all levels of higher education for persons holding a secondary school leaving certificate or proof of relevant professional qualifications plus additional exams (e.g. completed apprenticeship training or certificate of an intermediate school).

Support measures for needy students have been increased. Students receiving national grants who spend a study period abroad keep their national support for up to two years and can receive an extra grant to cover their additional expenses abroad. These students also receive a

reimbursement of their tuition fees.

There are performance-related grants as well as incentive grants which are awarded to students for the preparation of scientific or artistic work, if they can submit proof of academic excellence.

Further support measures include partial coverage of travel costs, scholarships for language courses, and child support if the study abroad period comes towards the end of a student's programme or during a traineeship abroad. With the introduction of study fees in 2001/02, a reimbursement scheme (full reimbursement of study fees) for needy students was introduced.

(see also chapter 7 -- mobility of students and staff as well as: www.stipendium.at).

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

At all levels of higher education further training courses are offered. Many study programmes are run as part-time and/or evening courses for students who hold a regular job.

Some programmes are offered as virtual/open-university type courses.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

The recognition of prior learning is possible but is handled differently at the different levels of higher education. An important prerequisite for official recognition and validation will be the development of a national qualification framework, as envisaged by the Ministers of Education in Berlin. First discussions have already started in Austria.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

The University Act 2002 removed any legal obstacles for the universities to award joint degrees.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

In addition to existing programmes, currently many universities are in the process of developing joint degrees, which makes it difficult to give an exact figure. So far, joint degrees are not part of the national reporting system, but this is expected to change in the near future. Four Austrian universities (University of Vienna, Technical University of Vienna, BOKU-University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, and University of Economics and Business Administration, Vienna) have been chosen to participate in the first round of Erasmus Mundus

The universities of applied sciences can also run double degree programmes.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

At the universities, there is a great variety of intergrated study programmes, with some leading to "real" joint degrees, which are jointly awarded by all participating institutions for programmes that have been jointly developed and which include study periods at all participating institutions. However, there are also other arrangements, e.g. sometimes double degrees have to be awarded because of legal obstacles applying to partner institutions. Moreover, some institutions have agreements with partner institutions for reciprocal recognition of study periods that can lead either to informal confirmations of a student's participation (usually awarded together with the diploma of the home institution) in this special type of mobility programme or to a double degree.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

The process of establishing European and international cooperations is seen by Austrian universities not merely in terms of increasing quantities, but primarily as setting priorities within a systematic policy framework in order to balance regional, European and international goals and challenges. Universities have been cooperating with both European as well as non-European institutions since the 1970s, and, consequently, there is a high number of cooperation agreements. In the 1980s, also in connection with the beginning of the participation in European mobility programmes, the need arose for centrally organised structures of internationalisation at individual universities. These are the roots of the "success story" of the International Offices that now exist at every Austrian university and cover a wide variety of services both for incoming as well as outgoing students and staff. As to the European dimension, apart from ERASMUS exchanges, the long and close regional cooperations between the Universities of Graz and Klagenfurt with universities in Italy and South East European countries may be listed as one of many examples. ERASMUS exchanges and cooperation in quality assurance as well as other bilateral und multilateral programmes have also helped universities of applied sciences and teacher training colleges to introduce the European Dimension in their respective course offers.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

In addition to their regular language programmes, all universities offer a variety of foreign language courses that are open to all students without additional cost. There are also some interdisciplinary European studies programmes, for instance there is a postgraduate programme at the University of Vienna, combining law, economics, the social sciences and cultural studies. The University of Salzburg offers an M.A. programme in European Studies with a focus on Central European issues.

Many universities of applied sciences have introduced a stay abroad as fixed component of the curriculum. Students either do a study period or their compulsory practical placement/internship abroad.

Some courses are taught in English and there are special courses for technical language in business, computer and other programmes.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

At the initiative of the ÖAD/Austrian Exchange Service a working group aimed at enhancing the representation of Austrian Higher Education abroad, including representatives of the institutions of higher education and ministries, has been established in Austria. The ÖAD offers a platform for the promotion of Austria as an attractive location for study and research. The activities focus on the participation in three big education fairs (EAIE, NAFSA, European Higher Education Fair in Bangkok) and the preparation of information materials (brochures, folders, homepage, etc.).

Erasmus Mundus, Action 4: ÖAD cooperates as an associate member in the PEER consortium (Promoting European Education and Research) of DAAD, Nuffic and Edufrance.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

The Austrian approach has been to include all stakeholders in the decision-making process governing the implementation of the Bologna objectives from the very beginning.

As the process has moved from providing the legal framework and the political decisions to the implementation at and within the institutions of higher education, cooperation with and the support of the management, the academic and administrative staff, and the students is of utmost importance right now.

A report on the state of the implementation of the Bologna Objectives was published by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2004. The report is addressed to the higher education institutions.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

The main challenge lies in achieving the goals of Bologna in a somewhat coherent and homogeneous way, and at the same speed at all higher education institutions.

- the diploma supplement will be issued automatically in German and English at all higher education institutions by the end of 2005.

- speeding up the conversion to bachelor/master programmes (25% have been converted so far)

- Implementation of the ECTS has proven difficult, as the idea of the student-work-load based allocation of credits is not always readily accepted.

- Another challenge lies in the existing structure of studies (see, e.g., chapter 4 above) which cannot be easily accommodated to the new system. Although by law ECTS should have been fully introduced by now, it will take longer.

- Student and teacher mobility will be further improved and consolidated.

- Further improvement of the European dimension by enhancing participation in ERASMUS MUNDUS and other international cooperation schemes.

- Introduction of the PhD programme according to the Universities Act 2002.