

## **Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research**

### **National overview on the issue of employability of Bachelor graduates in Austria**

1) What are the main challenges for your country in terms of employability? (eg Is graduate unemployment a problem? Are there restrictions on access to certain jobs? Is there a careers and guidance service?) What would help you most as an output from this working group?

What are the main challenges for your country in terms of employability?

In Austria the majority of courses offered at universities (WS 2007: 73%) and universities of applied sciences or Fachhochschulen (WS 2007: 95%) are structured in conformity with the Bologna objectives. Large numbers of students, though, are currently still enrolled in the „old style“ diploma programmes (this is partly due to the fact that medicine and dental medicine or higher secondary school teaching are exempted from conversion to the Bachelor structure while large disciplines such as law have not been converted yet). Already 63% of new students at the universities of applied sciences and 56% at the universities choose Bachelor study programmes.

Of those students completing their studies (first graduates in 2005/06) just a little under 15% have a Bachelor degree. Larger quotas of Bachelor graduates are expected by 2010. That is why there is little experience concerning Bachelor graduates on the labour market, especially since 88% of Bachelor graduates at a university continue to study towards their Master degree. In a recent Student Social Survey (Studierenden-Sozialerhebung 2006) ([www.bmwf.gv.at/submenue/publikationen\\_und\\_materialien/wissenschaft/universitaetswesen/studierendensozialerhebung/2006](http://www.bmwf.gv.at/submenue/publikationen_und_materialien/wissenschaft/universitaetswesen/studierendensozialerhebung/2006)), a representative investigation among students at universities and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) with a special focus on their social situation and study conditions, 80% of bachelor students responded that they were going to enter a Master programme after their Bachelor studies and that one-third of them intended to complete the Master programme while entering the job market. Only 5% of them wanted to engage exclusively in a gainful employment. When asked about their study motives, two-thirds of students in Master programmes stated that they regarded the Bachelor not as a sufficient academic degree although only some 10% said their bachelor degree had failed to help them find an adequate job.

It must be noted in conclusion that there is hardly any experience as regards Bachelor graduates on the labour market. Neither have employers have been confronted with great numbers of job-seekers holding a Bachelor degree, nor do students believe that they are adequately employable with a Bachelor degree. The information efforts of higher education (HE) institutions must thus be directed both at the students and the labour market. It is necessary to describe the qualifications associated with a Bachelor degree and to outline potential employment opportunities for a Bachelor graduate on the labour market. Adequate planning in the pre-curriculum phase, participation of professionals and supply of information on the job market for graduates will help to improve the

credibility of this undertaking. Newcomers and students should not know only about the distinguishing criteria for the qualification profiles of Bachelor and Master degrees but should also be able to adjust these training offers and other university programmes of further education to their education and career biography in conformity with the principle of lifelong learning.

One important task for the integration of all actors and for awareness-building is that of a trans-disciplinary study and career information service, for which competence in Austria is shared by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, responsible for universities and Fachhochschulen, by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, which is in charge of schools, and by the Labour Market Service (AMS). There is a need for action insofar as the relevance of Bachelor degrees on the labour market must be guaranteed and communicated while, quite generally, training and further education as well as job and career patterns must be harmonised.

#### Is graduate unemployment a problem?

Unemployment among university graduates in Austria – apart from occasional press stories about graduates in inadequate employment situations (“political scientist jobbing as taxi driver”) – is not a serious problem. We are rather faced with the challenge of raising the graduation quota in order to boost the economic development with a greater potential of highly qualified employees. The new graduation structure for university studies, especially the Bachelor programme, is expected to serve a dual purpose, namely to help improve, on a long-term basis, the success quota in the tertiary education sector due to the shorter study period until the first degree and to sustainably anchor the principle of lifelong learning in tertiary education.

The main tasks of the Labour Market Service are job placement, training and further qualification measures for persons registered as unemployed. University graduates may register as unemployed and use the general advisory and information service offer. Only those who are entitled to unemployment benefits on account of an extended period of employment during their time of study are listed in the unemployment statistics and are invited to take part in qualification improvement measures.

Complete statistics on unemployment rates among new university graduates are therefore not yet available and impossible to produce. What must be noted, though, is that there is a difference between the various disciplines as regards the length of time to find a first job.

#### Are there restrictions on access to certain jobs?

There are currently only a few professions that are regulated by law and that require students to hold a Bachelor degree, in fact a total of four types of job (including some important ones) where this is the case:

- \* Forest assistant (Bachelor, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Austria)
- \* Midwife (Bachelor, Fachhochschule)
- \* Medical-technical services (Bachelor, Fachhochschule)

\* Social worker (Bachelor, Fachhochschule)

The latter three jobs for Bachelor graduates have resulted from the conversion of the previous academies into Fachhochschule study programmes. A statutory transition clause applies to the university colleges of education that were newly established in the winter semester 2007, and a Bachelor degree will in future also be an entrance requirement for primary and lower secondary school teachers.

Most professions regulated by law require a Diploma or Master degree (prominent examples: lawyers, doctors, business trustees, civil engineers, intermediate and higher secondary school teachers ). A Bachelor degree is currently not sufficient for these professions.

#### Is there a careers and guidance service?

As already mentioned, study and career information for intermediate and higher secondary schools falls within the competence of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, responsible for universities and universities of applied science, of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture with responsibility for schools, and of the Austrian Labour Market Service. The two federal ministries shoulder a large part of the counselling activities for the tertiary sector, e.g. by commissioning education counselling teachers and student counsellors to inform students at higher secondary schools about possible educational paths after the school leaving exam. The Austrian Student Union carries out its statutory mandate by providing counselling services for interested students and registration assistance for course beginners.

The project „Studienchecker“ ensures overall counselling and information by concentrating all offers of information for pupils of final years. These services will be subjected to a process of quality assurance. Moreover, the pupils are offered tests to find out study interests and information on job perspectives.

The study information service of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research issues a series of information brochures , e.g. „Universitäten/Hochschulen, Studium und Beruf“ (universities, studies and professions) ([www.bmwf.gv.at/submenu/wissenschaft/national/studieren\\_in\\_oesterreich/bildungs\\_und\\_berufsinformationen/](http://www.bmwf.gv.at/submenu/wissenschaft/national/studieren_in_oesterreich/bildungs_und_berufsinformationen/)), partly together with the Labour Market Service. The information series “Jobchancen Studium” (job opportunities and study) is mainly oriented towards the professional segments for university graduates and offers supplementary information on the relevant study courses.

To ensure quality standards of training and career information, the Austrian Labour Market Service also operates a research network ([www.ams-forschungsnetzwerk.at](http://www.ams-forschungsnetzwerk.at)) on education and labour market research and occasionally commissions studies on jobs for highly qualified personnel and the first employment of graduates of universities and Fachhochschulen. The (statutory) interest

groups of the employer and employee organisations also participate in these information activities. Many universities have career services in place providing support in the transition period from study to employment by organising company and career fairs and keeping close relations with employers and to some extent even helping them with their recruitment activities.

**What would help you most as an output from this working group?**

The question of the employability of Bachelor graduates must above all be placed appropriately in the context of quality assurance at higher education institutions and the quality management system. The universities and Fachhochschulen could be given a checklist drawn up by scientific experts, but with the help of graduates, experienced professionals or business and labour market representatives. In the Austrian Fachhochschulen sector an excellent quality assurance system (accreditation and evaluation) has been in place since the establishment of the sector in 1994 (at that time only for Diploma study programmes), which frequently addresses the labour market side (see more details under Question 3).

The Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (AQA) was commissioned to make spot checks into the situation of Bachelor study programmes at universities in order to get an overview of how the universities implement the employability concept in their curriculum design, qualification profile, study and career information. Project results will be available in autumn 2008.

Given the broad technical range of disciplines (arts, sciences etc.) and the growing demand of embedding them in a system of lifelong learning, international expert knowledge (good practices) would be highly desirable. It would be particularly helpful to be able to show examples of successful fields of employment for Bachelor graduates.

**2) Is there a dialogue in your country between higher education institutions and employers? If so, at what level does this take place – national, regional, institutional etc? What sort of issues does it cover?**

University councils at the institutional level:

In accordance with the University Act 2002, each university has one university council as one of three managing collective organs. The members of the council are holding responsible positions in the societal, scientific, cultural or economic sectors. The university council performs planning, control and supervisory functions, also acting as an intermediary between government, society and university on matters dealing with the future orientation of the university, especially as regards the substantive orientation of the planned programme priorities.

Dialog at the national level “Welcome Bachelor”:

The Austrian Economic Chamber has commissioned a research project entitled „Bachelor Neu und der Arbeitsmarkt“ (New Bachelor and the Labour market), which is an analysis of various views of

enterprises and of universities and universities of applied science and which includes recommendations both for the employer side and the universities. In particular, intensive awareness measures are being recommended by all sides in order to strengthen the basis of the new study structure.

The result of this study was a cooperation between the Austrian Rectors' Conference and the Austrian Economic Chamber with a view to improving the publicity and acceptance of the Bachelor degree by means of the **information campaign "Welcome Bachelor"**. The university locations at Salzburg, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt and Graz were hosting public information meetings in November 2007 with keynote speeches and panel discussions including not only experts from universities and business companies but also graduates concerned by the measures.

Both the recommendations of the Study and the discussion participants during the information meetings at the universities underscored the following aspects: the Bachelor study programmes open up a new segment of highly qualified university graduates who will in future play an essential role in shaping the job market. International comparability, after-work study opportunities, part-time study offers, improved language courses, traineeships, better use of exchange programmes are expected. Recognition of the Bachelor degree as a qualified academic graduation with matching salaries on the labour market (public and private) is stated in the Study as a prerequisite for its acceptance.

However, the Study shows that there is still a lot of awareness raising needed in Austria in order to firmly anchor the Bologna study structure. Business representatives demand an explanation from the universities of what exactly is a Bachelor. A reformed curriculum and a completely redesigned study were an opportunity to convince the business community: The curriculum designers at the universities should concentrate on the qualification profile preceding the curriculum, because this is "what company personnel managers use for orientation". There is a call for a "resharpening" of standards of universities and universities of applied science (Fachhochschulen) at the various educational levels.

In the meetings at the universities, a comparison was repeatedly drawn between the old and the new course structure and it was pointed out that a Bachelor graduate cannot have the same qualifications as a graduate after having completed his or her diploma study cycle. Bachelor graduates state that they rarely mention their Bachelor degree because of the question whether they did not make to the Master degree. This is certainly one of the reasons why most Bachelor degree holders immediately continue with a Master programme. Improvements in the curricula owing to the experiences from the first years with the Bachelor studies and more cooperation and dialogue between business and university are expected.

Dialogue at the regional level "Bachelor and Master":

The Vienna Fachhochschule (university of applied science), together with the Viennese Economic Chamber will organise an **information campaign "Bachelor & Master"** in 2008, which aims to

increase awareness with the help of information meetings, debates and a conference, to accelerate the identification process and to contribute to the social anchoring of the new academic degrees, Bachelor and Master. The target groups are: business owners, personnel managers, personnel consultants, members of the works council, functionaries, education consultants, education and business journalists and other social multipliers.

3) Can you provide two examples of good practice in your country in relation to any of the themes to be covered by the report?

- See annex "Employers' involvement in quality assurance in the Austrian FH sector" and workshop conclusions "Employers' involvement in quality assurance in higher education".
- See Chapter 2.: Awareness activities "Welcome Bachelor and "Bachelor & Master"

Are there surveys in your country on the topic of employability?

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