

**Bundesministerium für
Bildung, Wissenschaft
und Kultur**

**AUSTRIA
State of Implementation of the
Bologna Objectives**

DAS ZUKUNFTSMINISTERIUM

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The Bologna Process is probably the most important reform movement of higher education in Europe since the late 1960s. With its ultimate aim to establish a European Higher Education Area by the end of this decade, students and staff will be able to move around with ease. They will have fair recognition of their qualifications, accountability of their educational background and transferability of their knowledge and skills.

One of the main goals of the Bologna Process -which encompasses many more countries than just the EU member states- is the achievement of a higher education system in Europe which is characterized by a high degree of transparency and mutual recognition of studies. The diversified national systems will be put into a common frame. By doing so "Bologna" serves as a vanguard of political and economical integration of a greater Europe, far beyond the borders of the European Union. At the same time, it increases Europe's competitiveness. It is important to note that the Bologna Process is a voluntary commitment by the so-far 33 member states to achieve a stronger degree of convergence in Higher Education.

Austria as a relatively small country in the heart of Europe has joined the Bologna Process from its very beginning. The national implementation is embedded in a modern legal framework of study law as well as university organisational law. This enables the higher education institutions to participate actively in the further development of the European Higher Education Area, with Austria as a core piece in it.

This brochure shall give you an overview on the state of implementation of the Bologna Process in Austria. Be it the introduction of the two tier system, be it the implementation of ECTS or of the diploma supplement, be it the promotion of mobility, be it evaluation and quality assurance as well as ombudsing and complaint management activities in higher education – the initiatives are manifold. The responsibility for picking up on them (translating them into reality) lies with the individuals within their respective institutional frameworks.



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State of Implementation of the Bologna Objectives

Introduction

The Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture has initiated a monitoring project for the university sector to follow the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration. The first report was finalized at the end of 2001 and is available in print and on the Austrian Bologna-website - <http://www.bologna.at> - in English and in German.

The second report has been finalized and will be translated into English.

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. Rector's Conference, *Fachhochschule* Conference, Teacher Training Colleges Conference, the Austrian Students' Union) 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.

The above-mentioned Austrian 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.

Implementation of the individual objectives:

UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITIES OF THE ARTS

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

Among many other objectives of the Bologna Declaration, the introduction of the diploma supplement is foreseen in the **Federal Act on the Organisation of the Universities and their Studies (Universities Act 2002)**. A decree regulating the implementation entered into force in August 2002, which means, that as of October 2003, all universities will be required to issue the diploma supplement in German and English to every graduate upon his/her request. Moreover, universities may also choose to issue it in an additional language.

Adoption of a system based on two cycles

About 100 individual bachelor programmes have been running since October 2002, with further applications pending. The aim is to offer at least 50% of all fields of studies as bachelor and master study programmes by 2006. Newly introduced study programmes must follow the bachelor/master pattern. It is **not** possible to run a programme both as a diploma (old system) and a bachelor/master programme.

Establishment of a system of credits

The implementation of ECTS has been compulsory for bachelor/master studies since 1999 and is compulsory for diploma studies (old system) as of October 2002 (Universities Act 2002). 50% of all fields of studies should be covered by 2003. The Graz University of Technology, for instance, has a fully working ECTS system already. (<http://www.cis.tugraz.at/awa/ects.html>)

Promotion of mobility -- students and graduates

Apart from a variety of financial aid measures for needy students (see "Social dimension" below), an extensive range of scholarship programmes is available for students and graduates alike (e.g. Central European Exchange programme for University Studies - CEEPUS, Austro-Hungarian Exchange Programme, Austro-Czech Exchange Programme, Austro-Slovak Exchange Programme, grants for postgraduate programmes in non-German-speaking countries, national top-ups for ERASMUS-grants, etc).

For their study periods spent abroad in transnational, EU, government or university mobility programmes, outgoing students do not pay tuition fees at Austrian universi-

ties. 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*".

University teachers

The new employment law for university teachers will make it easier for teachers to spend some time abroad for teaching and research purposes. Thus, the contract of employment can now be extended by up to 5 years for leaves of absence comprising the above-mentioned activities (under certain circumstances up to 10 years).

Besides, international experience is a prerequisite for appointments as university professors.

Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance

The evaluation decree of 1997 introduced quality assurance measures at universities. In 2000 an accreditation law was passed for private universities. The Universities Act 2002 foresees a new relationship between the state and universities which is governed by full legal autonomy, performance-based contracts and management structures. This will add an additional factor of accountability and, consequently, quality control.

The Austrian Rectors' Conference, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the *Fachhochschule*-sector and the Austrian Student Union have been cooperating in a working group for the establishment of an **Austrian agency for quality assurance** since December 2002. The group has been charged with outlining the organisation and tasks of the agency and prepare its implementation, which is planned for October 2003. The quality assurance agency will be established as a body of private law that will be independent from government as well as from individual institutions. It will offer its services to the whole tertiary sector. On the international level the agency will co-operate with other quality assurance agencies and networks and specifically will seek to join the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education-ENQA. It is projected that the agency shall have two major functions, which are to be kept distinct from another. On the one hand, the agency will offer a meta certification of quality assurance mechanisms at institutional level, thus recognizing that quality management is primarily a responsibility of the institutions. Secondly, it will offer administrative and organisational support for evaluation projects as well as general advice and information on all aspects of quality assurance in higher education.

Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

Activities in this field include the development of joint curricula for modules and university courses with a "European content", as well as joint and double degrees ("double-degree programmes"). If such a programme fulfills certain prerequisites, the Universities Act 2002 also authorises Austrian universities to issue one joint diploma together with the partner institution(s). Special importance will be laid on the value of the degrees awarded for such programmes (including aspects such as acceptance in the international academic and professional systems, quality assurance, and employability).

Six Austrian institutions (five university departments and one teacher training college) have been participating in the Tuning Project, the results of which are expected to be of significant relevance to the majority of Bologna action lines. The conclusions of the Austrian project participants and their experiences in areas such as the definition of generic and subject specific learning outcomes and competences and curriculum development was presented at an event organised by the Austrian Rectors' Conference in May 2002.

The Universities Act 2002 also paves the way for the introduction of special PhD-programmes (in addition to the present doctoral studies), and for easier recognition of exams taken at other EU and EEA universities.

Social dimension

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

Performance-related grants were increased threefold at the beginning of the academic year 2001/02. Incentive grants are given to students for the preparation of scientific or artistic work, if they can submit the proof of excellent performance.

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 the student's study programme or during a traineeship abroad. With the introduction of study fees in 2001/02 a reimbursement scheme for socially needy students was established.

Life Long learning

Life Long learning measures at the university include, a.o., streamlining curricula (shorter duration of study programmes), *Fachhochschule* programmes, the utilization of new media in teaching at universities and *Fachhochschulen*, as well as further

training offers for university teachers (*Donauuniversität* is the first centre of further and postgraduate training for the university sector).

FACHHOCHSCHULEN

The Bologna process with its main goal of creating a European Area of Higher Education, is an important factor in the internationalisation of the Austrian *Fachhochschule*-sector, and subsequently, in increasing the competitiveness of its graduates. The following measures have already been taken or are in the planning stage:

Adoption of a system based on two cycles

With the amendment to the *Fachhochschule Studies Act (FHStG)*, which became effective on May 1, 2002, the legal basis for introducing bachelor and master study programmes in the *Fachhochschule*-sector has been established. The first bachelor programmes will start in the academic year 2003/04; the first master programmes will start in the academic year 2004/05.

Establishment of a system of credits

The amendment to the *Fachhochschule Studies Act (FHStG)* of May 1, 2002, provides for the introduction of ECTS. According to the accreditation guidelines of the *Fachhochschule* Council, ECTS credit points are to be allocated to the individual courses of any study programme. The majority of those Austrian *Fachhochschulen* which have been in existence for more than four years have already introduced ECTS in order to facilitate the lively student and teacher exchange under the framework of Socrates.

Promotion of mobility – Students and graduates

The same offers as for university students also apply to Austrian *Fachhochschule* students (e.g. financial aid for needy students, Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies - CEEPUS, Austro-Hungarian Exchange Programme, Austro-Czech Exchange Programme, Austro-Slovak Exchange Programme, Grants for Postgraduate Programmes in non-German-speaking universities, national top-ups for ERASMUS-students, etc).

The legal guarantee of academic recognition of study abroad periods, agreed upon between the student and the *Fachhochschule*, called “*Vorausankennung*”, ensures a smooth return of students after their studies abroad.

Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

The Austrian *Fachhochschule* Conference is a member of the EUA, ensuring active Austrian participation and contribution to discussions at all "Bologna Follow-up" joint seminars.

To enhance the European cooperation in the field of quality assurance, the *Fachhochschule* Council has been a member of the "European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)" for several years now. In 2002 the *Fachhochschule* Council joined the "Joint Quality Initiative".

A conference on "Quality assurance in the introduction of bachelor's and master's degrees at German *Fachhochschulen*" was held together with the German Rectors' Conference on April 30, 2002.

The *Fachhochschule* Council has commissioned a research project on the internationalisation in the Austrian *Fachhochschule*-sector, which is to answer the principal question to what extent the institutions of the Austrian *Fachhochschulen* are prepared for joining the European Area of Higher Education. The results of the research project shall be discussed at a presentation in autumn 2003.

In 2002, the accreditation guidelines for bachelor's, master's, and diploma degree programmes were completely revised by the *Fachhochschule* Council. As regards quality assurance, special attention was given to the international comparability and recognition of the awarded degrees.

According to the accreditation guidelines of the *Fachhochschule* Council, graduates of *Fachhochschule* programmes have to be given a "diploma supplement" in English at the completion of their studies. The revised evaluation guidelines approved by the *Fachhochschule* Council in 2002 define the presentation of a strategic concept and operational measures in the field of internationalisation as a subject of external evaluation.

TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES

Austrian Teacher Training Colleges are tertiary institutions but do not yet have university-like status and they do not belong to the group of *Fachhochschulen* or *Universitäten*. However, in 1999 a federal law was passed by the Austrian Parliament, stating that the government will create *Hochschulen für pädagogische Berufe* (universities for teacher training) within a period of 8 years. In this Act guiding principles for the establishment of such *Hochschulen* were laid down which are exactly in line with the Bologna Declaration Objectives, such as:

- The implementation of ECTS
- the strengthening of the European Dimension
- international mobility
- quality assurance

The Act also guarantees the recognition of study periods abroad.

The first degree which will be awarded will very likely be based on a three-year course structure.

The Bologna Declaration in general contributes considerably to the structural and organisational changes of the teacher training colleges, which are undergoing the process of their status change towards university-like institutions, a process which will be completed by 2007.

As far as the present implementation of the Bologna declaration is concerned, almost all teacher training colleges use **ECTS** and have meanwhile started work on the preparation of the diploma supplement for their degree courses. The **diploma supplement** will be issued to every graduate as of June 2003.

Almost all teacher training colleges participate in the **student mobility and staff mobility** programmes and many colleges implement EU-funded curriculum projects and intensive programmes under the ERASMUS scheme. Thus they fulfill the aspect of student and staff mobility and their intensive and structured international cooperation with many European partner institutions considerably contributes to the strengthening of the European dimension in teacher training.

In most of the Austrian teacher training colleges quality systems for **evaluation** were first introduced between 1997 and 1999. Some of the college staff underwent specific training in evaluation; evaluation strategies were developed, and contact persons for evaluation were nominated. Some colleges continue to use the systems then introduced, some colleges have diversified, expanded and modified their **quality assurance** systems. The link-up with European quality assurance systems will be the next step. Preparatory measures for reaching this objective will be introduced in the academic year 2002/03.

In June 2002 a questionnaire concerning the level of implementation of the Bologna objectives was sent to all teacher training colleges. The results of this study will be forwarded to the colleges and will thus contribute to the furthering of the implementation of those objectives which have not yet been fully implemented.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, is responsible for a number of Secondary colleges for agriculture and forestry, and for the Agrarian Teacher and Consultant Training College.

The following measures are under discussion right now:

Introduction of a bachelor programme in agricultural pedagogics

The Programme is to be established at the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, and will be operated in cooperation with the Agrarian Teacher and Consultant Training College. ECTS will be used.

Introduction of a bachelor programme in the field of "beverage technology"

Both programmes will probably start as of October 2004.

ACADEMIES -- HEALTH PROFESSIONS

The higher medical-technical academies and the academies for midwifery are recognized post-secondary institutions offering study programmes with a duration of at least 6 semesters. The entrance qualifications are the same as the ones needed for university studies.

On the basis of the new curricula which are to be introduced shortly, **diploma supplements** will be issued.

Some of the academies already employ **ECTS**. On the basis of the above-mentioned reform it is to be extended to all of the academies for health professions.

Students have been able to participate in the actions of the SOCRATES and LEONARDO programmes since the end of the 1990s. A reform of the legal framework for **mobility** is under way.

The results of a project on **quality assurance** in the field of medical services will be used in the reform of the academies for health professions.

MILITARY COLLEGES

Given the specific characteristics of military cooperation in Europe, there is naturally a "**European dimension**" in military college curricula.

There is a *Fachhochschule* programme in the field of "military leadership" which employs **ECTS**.

Quality assurance takes place in the form of evaluations and cooperation programmes with the University of Vienna to train academic advisors for research projects.

**For further information on the implementation of the aims of the
Bologna declaration in Austria**

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