

20 24

Internationalisation

Mobility

Validation

Recognition

Quality of Teaching
and Learning

Fundamental Values

Micro-credentials

3-IN-AT-PLUS

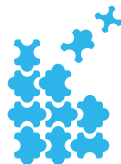
RPL

Sustainability

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS AND PRIORITIES
OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN AUSTRIA

EHEA IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

 **Federal Ministry**
Republic of Austria
Education, Science
and Research



EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area



Co-funded by
the European Union

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Legal notice

Published by: Austrian Federal Ministry of Education,
Science and Research
Minoritenplatz 5, 1010 Vienna, Austria

Responsible for the content: Austrian Federal Ministry
of Education, Science and Research
Editor: Stephan De Pasqualin

Cover – istock.com; chapter pages – OeAD/APA-
Fotoservice/Schedl (p. 8, 70), OeAD/APA-Fotoservice/
Pichler (p. 12, 52); OeAD/Orner (p. 16, 24); OeAD/APA-
Fotoservice/Neumayr (p. 36, 64); OeAD/Zeschitz (p. 74)
Graphic Design: Alexandra Reidingner
Printed by: Druckerei Odysseus, Stavros Vrachoritis
Ges.m.b.H., Himberg

This publication is being implemented by Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) together with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) with funding from the "3-IN-AT-PLUS Interconnection/INnovation/INclusion: Austrian contributions to the EHEA 2030" project (Key Action 3 of the Erasmus+ programme). 3-IN-AT-PLUS is being funded with support from the European Commission. The views and opinions expressed are, however, solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the EACEA can be held responsible for these.

20
24



REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS AND PRIORITIES
OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN AUSTRIA

EHEA IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Preface

The original idea of creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) came to the fore more than 25 years ago as part of the Bologna Process initiative. The goal was to remove the obstacles to mobility that had become evident when implementing the European mobility programmes – not by standardising the European higher education systems, but rather by creating transparency and comparability, primarily with respect to the recognition of academic performance from the respective locations abroad. In addition, efforts were also made to establish the Anglo-Saxon bachelor's, master's and PhD degree system. The aim was to implement the European Higher Education Area by 2010, and this was ultimately also achieved at the 2010 ministerial conference in Vienna and Budapest. Care was always taken to preserve the national characteristics of the respective higher education systems against a background of cultural diversity in the European countries. Despite some initial criticism, which was also justified in some cases and was not necessarily due solely to the EHEA reforms, successes in implementing the goals and priorities of the EHEA did gradually emerge, manifesting themselves primarily in increased student mobility figures and the option of starting a professional career at an earlier stage. The Bologna Process had already been perceived to be a European success story at this stage, including well beyond Europe's borders.

Austria is now represented in almost all of the EHEA's important decision-making bodies today, including the European Bologna Follow-up Group (European BFUG), the Board of the European BFUG, the various working groups and task force groups that work on coordinating the Bologna implementation, implementation monitoring, the qualifications framework, recognition, quality assurance, safeguarding fundamental values in science, teaching and research, the social dimension in higher education, learning and teaching, the global policy dialogue in higher education and leveraging synergies between the European Higher Education Area, European Education Area and European Research Area. The Austrian higher education experts delegated to these bodies are more involved than ever in shaping the European Higher Education Area, with Austria enjoying a reputation as a reliable partner in the EHEA as a result.

The success of the Bologna Process is reflected fundamentally in the current structure of the European Higher Education Area, having succeeded in uniting 49 member states across national borders which are pursuing the same goals agreed jointly for the EHEA, albeit in different forms and at different speeds. A broad-based EHEA community characterised by a sense of community and cohesion has formed over the many years of constructive collaboration. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has made this connection even more important, as the European Higher Education Area is based on the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as on democratic values such as the rule of law, freedom of expression and respect for human rights and international law. The Russian Federation and Belarus have accordingly had their right to participate in meetings of EHEA bodies suspended until further notice. This is a very impressive demonstration of how united the European university higher education community is in being able to handle disruptive changes.

In addition to the fundamental values, which represent a priority topic in the current EHEA implementation, other "trends" have also emerged that are reflected in the current EHEA Implementation Report, including: sustainability, internationalisation and mobility (where the "National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020-2030" is crucial for Austria), recognition and validation, and last but not least: micro-credentials.



© Martin Lusser

Not only are all of these topics current, but they are also backed up by indicators that are used to measure Austrian higher education institutions and national higher education policy, with Austria required to demonstrate its capabilities in these areas compared with the European competition. Selected chapters of this report illustrate the "Austrian process" for implementing the goals and priorities of the European Higher Education Area, which has always been and should continue to be based on peaceful cooperation and mutual respect.

Let us hope that this path is pursued consistently in order to strengthen and ensure the resilience of the Austrian higher education system so that the (higher education) policy challenges as well as those related to the green and digital transition can be overcome successfully based on international understanding and cooperation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'M. Polaschek'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Assoc. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martin Polaschek
Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research

06**Recognition and validation 53****6.1 Fair recognition in Austrian study law 54**

General university entrance qualification 55

Recognition of examinations and other
academic achievements 56

Summary and outlook 57

**6.2 Validation of non-formal and informal
competences 58**Objectives behind the validation of competences
acquired on a non-formal and informal basis
for the Austrian higher education system from
the perspective of the Ministry 58Validation and recognition at Austrian higher
education institutions from the perspective
of AQ Austria 61

The RPL Network Austria 62

07**Micro-credentials 65**

The European Union Council Recommendation 66

National implementation 67

Recommendation of the national
Bologna Follow-up Group 67

National survey on micro-credentials 68

Future developments 69

08**Outlook 71**

09**Appendix 75**

Abbreviations

3-IN-AT	INternationalisation/INclusion/ INnovation: Towards high- quality inclusive mobility and innovative teaching & learning in an internationalised Austrian Higher Education Area	ENIC	European Network of Information Centres
APCC	Austrian Panel on Climate Change	EPICUR	European Partnership for an Innovative Campus Unifying Regions
AQ Austria	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria	ERA	European Research Area
BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group	ERASMUS	EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
BGBI	Federal Law Gazette	ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
BICG	Bologna Implementation Coordination Group	ETINED	Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education
BMWF	Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research	EU	European Union
BNE	Education for Sustainable Development	EUA	European Universities Association
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	EURECA-PRO	European University on Responsible Consumption and Production
CCCA	Climate Change Center Austria	FH	University of Applied Sciences
CEU	Central European University Vienna	FTA	Fast-Track Activity
ClimCalc	Excel-based tool for creating a carbon footprint	GUEP	Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities
CoE	Council of Europe	HEI	Higher Education Institution
COIL	Collaborative Online International Learning	HG 2005	Austrian Teacher Education Act (Hochschulgesetz) 2005
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results	HMIS2030	National Mobility and Internationali- sation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030
EAR	European Area of Recognition	HS-QSG	Austrian Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Hochschul- Qualitätssicherungsgesetz)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System	I-AR	Implementation of Automatic Recognition in the Networks
EHEA	European Higher Education Area	ICT	Information and Communication Technology
EC	European Commission		

IHS	Institute for Advanced Studies	SOLA 2019	Higher Education Students Social Survey 2019
ILO	International Labour Organization	STEM	Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics
IOC	Internationalisation of the curriculum	STOA	European Parliament Science and Technology Options Assessment
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education	SUCTI	Systematic University Change towards Internationalisation
JPI	Joint Program Initiative	TPG	Thematic Peer Group
KA	Key Action	TU Graz	Graz University of Technology
LOUIS	Learning Outcomes in University for Impact on Society	UG 2002	Austrian Universities Act (Universitätsgesetz, UG) 2002
LRC	Lisbon Recognition Convention	UHStat2	University and Higher Education Institution Statistics
MICROBOL	Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna key commitments	UN	United Nations
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
NEKP	National Energy and Climate Plan	uni:data	Higher education statistical information system of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	uniko	Universities Austria
OeAD	Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation	UniNetZ	Universities and Sustainable Development Goals
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	WG	Working Group
ÖH	Austrian National Union of Students	WU	Vienna University of Economics and Business
OSUN	Open Society University Network		
QA	Quality Assurance		
RPL	Recogniton of Prior Learning		
RTI	Research, Technology and Innovation		
S4F	Scientists for Future		
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals		
SET	Social-ecological Transformation		



01



INTRODUCTION

01

INTRODUCTION

Since a further three years have passed involving implementation of the goals and priorities in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), this report for 2024 is once again dedicated to examining the national implementation process in Austria, above all those topics that have been in particular focus or that should be prioritised in the future.

Chapter 2 outlines the national governance structure of the EHEA and the Austrian interface between the national and European levels in order to illustrate the diversity of the various participants.

If you would like a detailed description of all the stakeholders active in the context of the EHEA, please see Chapter 4 of the EHEA Implementation Report 2020. The fundamental values such as academic freedom and integrity as well as institutional autonomy represent an area that has increasingly come up for discussion in the European Higher Education Area since the EHEA conferences in Paris 2018 and Rome 2020. These fundamental values are highlighted once again in the Tirana Communiqué 2024 and will be covered even more

intensively in future. The article regarding this subject in this report was written in English by an international expert in this field.

Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations play an important role in shaping the future, both globally and in the European Higher Education Area, particularly since the Paris and Rome Communiqués. Related questions arise in the context of internationalisation and mobility that need to be examined more closely, such as: How much travelling activity is actually necessary in everyday higher educational life? How is this type of travelling activity implemented and/or are any corresponding incentives provided?

The chapter on internationalisation of study programmes and teaching as well as mobility provides insights into the results of a survey conducted by the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) on these topics. Selected activities are also described from the BMBWF's Erasmus+ project 3-IN-AT-PLUS –



Bologna Day 2022 “Internationalisation implemented on a holistic basis” at FH Campus Wien

© OeAD/APA-Fotoservice/Ludwig Schedl

“INterconnection/INnovation/INclusion: Austrian contributions to the EHEA 2030”, which support Austrian higher education institutions in implementing the HMIS2030 objectives. The online platform “HMIS2030 – Examples of good practice” is also mentioned, via which higher education institutions are able to benefit from their own and other universities’ articles and contributions. The Lisbon Recognition Convention needs to be implemented in practice in order to provide the starting point and framework for fair and transparent recognition in the EHEA states. The national legal framework conditions have been tightened up to this effect. A “Global Recognition Convention” was created based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention in order to also facilitate recognition between the macro-regions.

In this regard the issue of recognising prior learning performance is also being promoted further in Austria. The validation of non-formal and informal competences is being increasingly institutionalised at Austrian higher education institutions in order to enable learners to gain recognition for performance outside of the higher educational area.

Lastly, this EHEA Implementation Report 2024 is dedicated to the visibly growing market of micro-credentials, i.e. those small and flexible learning units that make it possible to respond quickly to rapidly changing labour markets without having to implement comprehensive curricular changes. The recommendation of the national Bologna Follow-up Group on the implementation of micro-credentials in Austria provided the initial momentum for a largely concise practical implementation.

in different E

Networking with
people / universities working
with micro-credentials

Comparison of
approaches

02



**THE NATIONAL BFUG
AS AN INTERFACE
TO THE EUROPEAN BFUG**

02

THE NATIONAL BFUG AS AN INTERFACE TO THE EUROPEAN BFUG

From the outset, the implementation of the EHEA goals in Austria aimed to involve as many stakeholders as possible. The national Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) ensures that they are all represented and brings together the expertise from the different institutions and interest groups.

One of the key tasks of the national BFUG is to formulate Austrian positions related to the respective current issues at the European level. In addition, this stakeholder group also discusses those matters put to the group from the Austrian higher education sector together with the experts responsible for implementation at national level and develops possible solutions.

The Austrian Bologna contact point at the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) Department IV/11 is responsible for chairing and managing the programme in its role as an interface between the national and European levels. As an important overarching and independent advice and information centre for the entire Austrian higher education sector, the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) fits into the general picture as a Bologna Service Point for the Austrian higher education sector. Austria has also had an EHEA expert team for many years (currently Christina Raab/University of Innsbruck, Günter Wageneder/University of Salzburg, Karin Dobernig/University of Applied Sciences Wiener Neustadt, Katalin Szondy/University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, Berta Leeb/Private University College of Teacher Education of the Diocese of Linz, Susanne Linhofer/University College of Teacher Education Styria, Thomas Caspari/Paracelsus Medical University, Antonia Riegler/Austrian National Union of Students, and Agnes Kriz/University of Applied Sciences

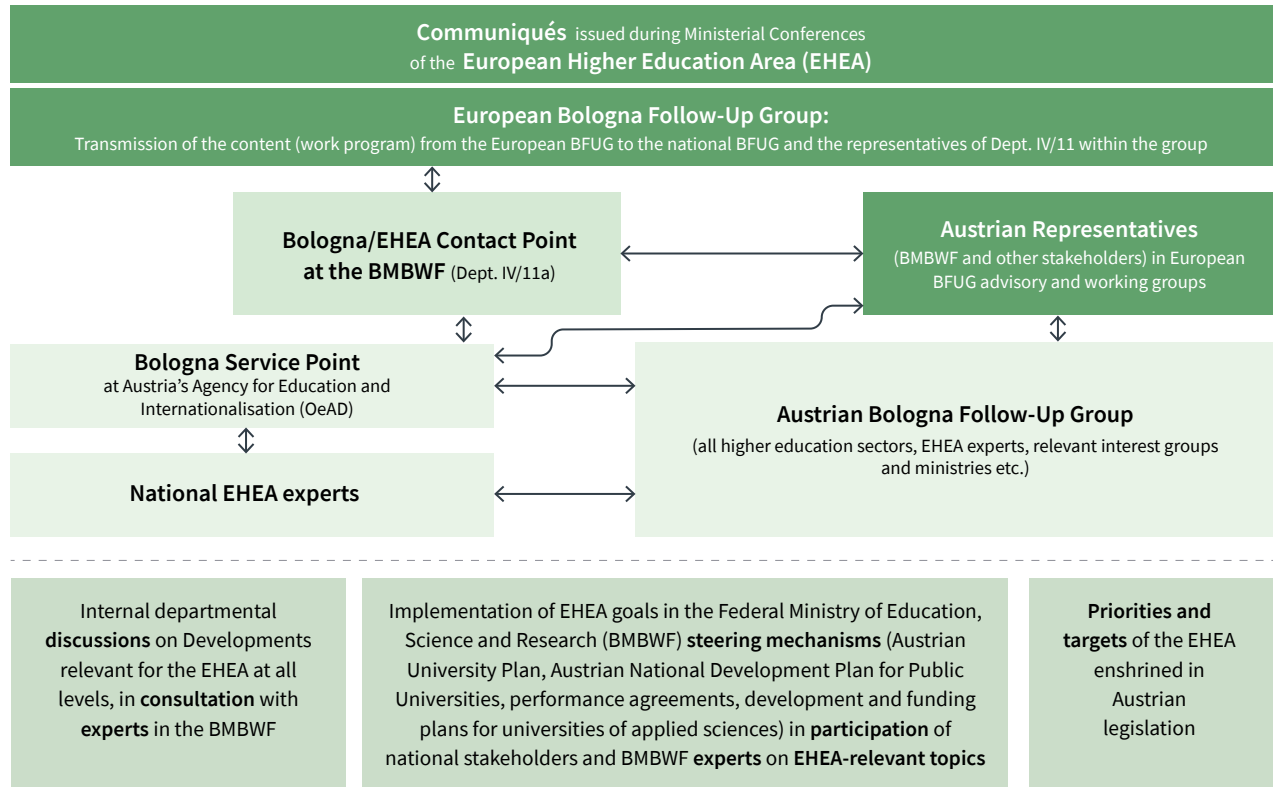
Technikum Wien), which supports the national implementation of the EHEA in a wide range of formats and events.

The priority for the individual members of the national BFUG is to incorporate the positions of the stakeholder groups and organisations that they represent into the discussion and into the process of forming opinions and taking decisions. Their aim is also to ensure that the information on European developments gets through to the groups and organisations they represent, thereby supporting implementation of the EHEA objectives accordingly.

The communiqués adopted at the conferences of higher education ministers (every two or three years) represent the policy starting point for the goals and priorities of the EHEA. As the political steering group at the European EHEA level, the European BFUG prepares the content for the conferences and supports the respective interim follow-up/work programme. It is made up of representatives from all of the countries that are part of the EHEA, the European Commission (EC), European higher education organisations and various other relevant interest groups. It is chaired by the country holding the Presidency of the European Council together with a non-EU EHEA country rotating every six months and in alphabetical order.

The Board of the European BFUG works to support the latter. It is chaired according to the same rules as the European BFUG and consists of representatives of the European Council presidency trio, the troika of the non-EU EHEA country chair, the EC and representatives from higher education and interest groups.

The EHEA/Bologna Network



The EHEA Secretariat (currently Albania) is responsible for administrative management of the work programme and is run by the host country of the next ministerial conference (Tirana 2024).

Following the ministerial meetings, the European BFUG draws up a work programme for the next three-year period based on the contents of the communiqué.

Topic-related working and advisory groups are appointed or existing ones are continued which are dedicated to the relevant topics and draw up recommendations for further action.

Austria has always been a highly active member of the EHEA, which is also illustrated in part through the high level of participation of Austrian representatives in the working groups of the European Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG).

Austria is represented in the following groups in the 2021-2024 work programme: Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) – co-chair Helga Posset (BMBWF); Thematic Peer Group (TPG) A (Qualification Framework, ECTS) – co-chair Karin Riegler (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna), delegate Stephan De Pasqualin (BMBWF); TPG B (Recognition) – Karin Giese (Vienna University of Economics and Business); TPG C (Quality Assurance) Jürgen Petersen (AQ Austria); Working Group (WG) Implementation – Helga Posset (BMBWF); WG Social Dimension – Sophie Lehner (Austrian National Union of Students); WG Fundamental Values – Milica Popovic (formerly CEU); WG Learning & Teaching – Alexander Kohler (BMBWF); Coordination Group Global Policy Dialogue – Michael Roither (University of Applied Sciences Burgenland).



process of design

write learning outcomes with Bloom's Taxonomy

align learning outcomes activities & assessment

add =

03



**FUNDAMENTAL VALUES
of Higher Education in Austria**

03

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES of Higher Education in Austria

by Dr. Milica Popović

Fundamental Values in the European Higher Education Area¹

The European Higher Education Area has been built on shared fundamental values that shaped the vision of the future of higher education in Europe. Since Rome Communiqué 2020², fundamental values, together with democracy and the rule of law, have been spelled out as key to the EHEA vision. Besides encouraging member states active participation in the Council of Europe's (CoE) [Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education](#) ³ (ETINED) and further development of synergies between the EHEA and [the European Research Area \(ERA\)](#) ⁴, the Rome Communiqué provided a definition of academic freedom, and an accompanying statement which further elaborated the shared understanding of academic freedom in Annex I³. Academic freedom and other three, or better said five, values – *academic integrity; institutional autonomy; student and staff participation in higher education governance; and public responsibility for and of higher education* – were recognized in the Paris Communiqué (2018)⁴, even if references to academic freedom and participation of student and staff in HE governance were already made in Yerevan Communiqué (2015)⁵.

Understood as interconnected values, the EHEA strives for member states not only to protect them, but also to promote them. It is expected that at the upcoming [Ministerial Meeting in Tirana](#) ⁶ in May 2024 statements providing shared understanding of all fundamental values will be adopted, along with a general agreement on the further steps needed for the development of a comprehensive monitoring framework. It is also expected that the BFUG Working Group on Fundamental Values will continue its work in 2024–2027 in order to finalize the monitoring framework and its implementation.



[Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education](#)



[European Research Area \(ERA\)](#)



[Ministerial Meeting in Tirana](#)

¹ This report was finalized on 29 February 2024, therefore it does not cover any developments after this date regardless of the date of the publication of the report.

² https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf (Accessed 22 February 2024)

³ https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_I.pdf (Accessed 22 February 2024)

⁴ https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf (Accessed 22 February 2024)

⁵ https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf (Accessed 22 February 2024)

Academic freedom is defined as “freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in and with society without interference nor fear of reprisal” (Rome Communiqué 2020, Annex I)⁶. In the understanding adopted by the EHEA, academic freedom encompasses freedom of thought and inquiry, freedom to exchange openly, freedom to communicate the results of research, freedom to teach, freedom to research and freedom to learn (even if subject to administrative procedures and societal dialogue). It is framed by rigorous scientific and professional standards, respect for the rights of others, ethical conduct, and the awareness of the impact of research on humans and their environment; and yet inseparable from security of employment for academic staff. Academic freedom has been in the spotlight of the European Union’s higher education and research policy activities also through the adoption of the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research (2020)⁷ within the European Research Area; the European Parliament Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) initiative “[The European Parliament Forum for Academic Freedom](#)” [↗](#) launched in 2022 and European Commission’s action within the European strategy for universities⁸ to produce guiding principles on protecting fundamental academic values.

Regarding other fundamental values, the proposed definitions are yet to be formally adopted in May 2024. For **academic integrity**, elements such as honesty, transparency, fairness, trust, responsibility, respect, and courage are considered fundamental. There can be no trust in science and education without commonly shared research ethics. Collegiality and solidarity are indispensable for the development of science, at the institutional, national, and global levels and represent an inherent element of academic integrity. Cheating, ghost-writing, academic fraud, and various corruption practices today endanger academic integrity as well as the developments of artificial intelligence and tools such as ChatGPT. **Institutional autonomy** has been at the centre of various policy debates for a long time and is considered as one of the most widely researched fundamental value within the EHEA. Following the European University

Association’s (EUA) understanding of elements of institutional autonomy, it is considered that it should encompass academic (autonomy of teaching and research), financial, organisational, and staffing autonomy. **Student and staff participation in higher education governance** is indeed an element of institutional autonomy, but one that merits special attention as it is embedded in the sense of ownership and accountability of academic community and represents one of the principal elements for exercise of academic freedom. It should allow students and staff to organise without fear of reprisal, pressure or undue interference from public authorities, governing bodies, or other stakeholders and to actively participate in both the decision-making and the decision-taking processes. Democracy within the governance structures of higher education institutions, as well as student and staff organizations, is a key prerequisite for successful development of democratic citizens and exercise of public responsibility of higher education. While **public responsibility for higher education** represents the obligation of the public sector to higher education systems – especially regarding public funding of higher education; **public responsibility of higher education** focuses on the obligation of higher education towards the society – especially in its mission to share knowledge, as a public good, and to empower students with civic engagement and active citizenship skills.

All the fundamental values are in continuous interaction with each other and need to be understood as a whole. Any future monitoring mechanisms will have to be comprehensive, ensuring the triangulation of data for providing the most accurate information about both de jure and de facto situation in each of the EHEA member states.



[↗ The European Parliament Forum for Academic Freedom](#)

⁶ Even if there are numerous international instruments that do provide definitions of academic freedom, among which the most significant the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) – Revised edition 2016, and some or all of the EHEA members states are adhering to their principles, this report refers exclusively to the EHEA documents, definitions and instruments. For further reading: Popović, Milica, Matei, Liviu and Joly, Daniele. 2022. Changing Understandings of Academic Freedom in the World at the Time of Pandemic (<https://elkana.ceu.edu/sites/elkana.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/391/finalgoafglobalreport20220712.pdf>). Vienna: OSUN Global Observatory on Academic Freedom.

⁷ https://www.bmbwf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/files/_drp-efr-bonner_erklaerung_en_with-signatures_maerz_2021.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2#:~:text=Freedom%20of%20thought%20and%20intellectual,a%20pillar%20of%20any%20democracy (Accessed 22 February 2024)

⁸ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-01/communication-european-strategy-for-universities-graphic-version.pdf> (Accessed 22 February 2024)

Fundamental values in Austria

Austria is considered as one of the EHEA member states which have a highly satisfactory level of respect of fundamental values. In the University Act 2002⁹, among the guiding principles of higher education are embedded following values: academic freedom¹⁰, academic integrity¹¹, student and staff participation in HE governance¹², and certainly many of the important aspects of public responsibility of higher education¹³.

Academic freedom is protected on the constitutional level¹⁴ and is construed as a right. The law also provides for extended protection against dismissal in article 113 stating that: “The termination or dismissal of a member of the scientific and artistic university staff shall be null and void if an official notification has been issued as a result of an opinion or method advocated by such staff member in the course of his/her research, artistic or teaching activities”. Heads of units are obliged to “have regard for scientific and artistic freedom, and for the need to leave sufficient scope for scientists and artists to pursue their research, artistic and teaching activities”. The Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals in article 17 claims that knowledge and its teaching are free, including artistic creativity and dissemination of art and its teaching; and the Federal Constitutional Law in article 81c also states that the public universities are places of free scientific research. The University Act also provides in Article 105 that “No member of a university may be required to participate in scientific or artistic work which conflicts with his/her conscience. Refusal to participate in such work shall not result in any disadvantage.”, further respecting personal freedoms and integrity of members of the academic community.

Freedom in the World report by Freedom House 2023 [↗](#) claims that academic freedom in Austria is generally upheld and that the educational system is free from extensive political indoctrination. Despite solid legislative protections, according to the Academic Freedom Index (see Figure 1), academic freedom has been in slow decline in Austria in the last decade. However, Austria remains among the highest scores among EU member states and among the top 30 % of all countries in the world.

Academic Freedom Index – Austria



Figure 1 | Source: Academic Freedom Index 2023



[↗ Freedom in the World report by Freedom House 2023](#)

⁹ Bundesgesetz über die Organisation der Universitäten und ihre Studien (Universitätsgesetz 2002 – UG) [Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies – University act 2002]

¹⁰ Reflected in Alinea 1: freedom of sciences and their teaching (Art 17 of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals, Imperial Legal Gazette No 142/1867) and freedom of scientific and artistic activity, the dissemination of the arts and their teaching (Art 17a of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals); and Alinea 4: freedom of study.

¹¹ Reflected in Alinea 3a: ensuring good scientific practice and academic integrity and Alinea 8: collaborative relationships between the members of the university.

¹² Reflected in Alinea 6: student co-determination, particularly in respect of matters relating to studies and quality assurance of teaching.

¹³ Reflected in Alinea 9: gender equality; Alinea 10: equality of social opportunity; and Alinea 11: special attention to the needs of the handicapped.

¹⁴ Basic Law on the General Rights of the Nationals https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/ErV/ERV_1867_142/ERV_1867_142.html (Accessed 22 February 2024).

In the report prepared as part of the European Parliament’s efforts in advancing academic freedom “[State of play of academic freedom in the EU member states](#)” ↗ (Maasen et al. 2023), the research team also analyzed the promotion of academic freedom at the level of Austrian HEIs. The report states that HEIs vary significantly, both on their websites and in strategic documents. Even if recognized as an important aspect of their policy, like in the case of the University of Graz, academic freedom is not elaborated as a principle in its strategic development plan. In the case of the University of Salzburg there are no explicit references to academic freedom among its guiding principles. On the contrary, the University of Innsbruck identifies academic freedom as the foundation of its actions and further emphasizes the importance of independent research and teaching in its strategic development plan 2022–2027.

The report further notes recorded incidents of online hate speech towards scientists, especially virologists who were openly sharing their expert advice during the Covid crisis, as well as cancelations or demands for cancelations of some lectures. These individual incidents of infringements on academic freedom have been accompanied by some recent changes in the HE environment through 2021 amendments

to HE legislation. These amendments had major implications for university operations and funding, including the reduction of the minimum amount of coursework required by new students, changes to the procedures of election of the university rectors, chain contracting of temporary staff etc. The Maasen report concludes that while the conducted changes do not represent a major threat to academic freedom, taken together they might require attention of the stakeholders in order to prevent a further erosion (Maasen et al. 2023: 22).



↗ [State of play of academic freedom in the EU member states](#)

System changes across autonomy dimensions

Autonomy dimension	Increased	Decreased	Stable
Organisational	GR, IE, LU, LV, NL, PL, SK (7)	DK, EE, SI (3)	AT, BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CY, CZ, DE-bb, DE-he, DE-nrw, ES, FI, FR, HR, IS, IT, LT, NO, PT, RS, SE, TR, UK-en (22)
Financial	CZ, PL (2)	AT, LU, NL, NO, SK, TR (6)	BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CY, DE-bb, DE-he, DE-nrw, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, IE, IS, IT, LT, LV, PT, RS, SE, SI, UK-en (24)
Stuffing	AT, FR, IE, LU, NL, PL, SI (7)	HR, SK (2)	BE-fl, BE-fr, CH, CZ, CY, DE-bb, DE-he, DE-nrw, DK, EE, ES, FI, GR, IS, IT, LT, LV, NO, PT, RS, SE, TR, UK-en (23)
Academic	AT, BE-fl, CZ, FR, GR, LT, LV (7)	DK,EE (2)	BE-fr, CH, CY, DE-bb, DE-he, DE-nrw, ES, ES, FI, HR, IE, IS, IT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, RS, SE, SI, SK, TR, UK-en (23)

Figure 2 | Source: EUA Autonomy Scorecard 2023, p.70.

Academic integrity, as defined in the current Austrian legislation and policies, mostly focuses on issues of plagiarism and ghost writing, calling for respect of “good scientific practice”¹⁵. Infringements on academic integrity are considered an administrative offence that may result in revocation of the academic degree. Public authorities demand from HEIs to offer trainings on plagiarism, academic fraud and contract cheating for students, but not for the staff¹⁶. Article 5 of the University Act 2002 sets basis for **institutional autonomy** providing the universities with “immunity from ministerial instructions and freedom to adopt statutes”. Looking at the data from EUA’s Autonomy Scorecard 2023 (see Figure 2), it has been indicated that Austria has remained stable in organisational autonomy, increased staffing and academic autonomy and decreased financial autonomy.

Student and staff participation in HE governance in Austria is considered satisfactory, also by reports of national student union and student representatives (see [Bologna with Student Eyes 2024. Brussels: European Students’ Union](#) ↗). The legislation requires participation of student associations and unions in the national HE policy development, as well as of other relevant ministries and QA bodies but it does not require participation of rectors’ conferences (i.e. Uniko), staff associations and unions, employers’ representatives and civil society even if they usually do participate.

Per Universities Act 2002, it is required by law to have student, staff and employers’ representation in HEIs governing bodies and the law states specific proportion of student and staff in the university senate¹⁷. All members of the academic community can contribute to all issues and participate in decision-taking processes. Responsibilities of HEI governing bodies are defined by law, and the highest HEI governing bodies are responsible for election and dismissal of rectors and deans. Student and staff representatives, including student and staff union representatives, are required by law to participate in internal HEI steering bodies which responsibilities are also regulated by legislation.

Both student and staff representatives have the right to participate in all decisions.

Public responsibility of higher education is strengthened by several initiatives in the research sector, like the [Alliance for Responsible Science](#) ↗, and the Action Plan for a Competitive Research Area (2015).

In general, it can be concluded that **public responsibility for higher education**, reflected in funding practices and continuous participatory policy development in the higher education and research, is particularly high in Austria. However, for none of the fundamental values is there a specific requirement for external bodies to evaluate the implementation, nor there are specifically developed guidelines or support mechanisms, and there is no specific data collection academic misconduct. [The Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman](#) ↗ is an important body that is partially safeguarding academic freedoms of students, and their student rights but does not, and cannot, fulfil the role of overall safeguarding of fundamental values.



↗ [Bologna with Student Eyes 2024. Brussels: European Students’ Union](#)



↗ [Alliance for Responsible Science](#)



↗ [The Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman](#)

¹⁵ “Good scientific practice” means to comply with the legal regulations, ethical standards and the state of knowledge of the respective field within the framework of the respective institution’s mission and objectives.

¹⁶ There was a comprehensive recent report on plagiarism practices: Zucha, V. and Philipp Droll. “Plagiatsprävention und -prüfung an österreichischen Universitäten und Hochschulen. Lagebericht zur Praxis in Studium und Lehre”. Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien – Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS).

¹⁷ <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/NormDokument.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20002128&FassungVom=2018-01-03&Artikel=&Paragraf=25&Anlage=&Uebergangsrecht=> (Accessed 22 February 2024)

Future pathways for fundamental values in Austria

While trust in science and democracy in Austria remains comparatively high in relation to other EU countries¹⁸, and overall levels of implementation of fundamental values of higher education in Austria are highly satisfactory, especially in comparison to its European and global counterparts, it is clear that additional work remains to be done. The recent developments in the EHEA call for development of a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of fundamental values, in accordance with the adopted EHEA definitions and statements. BMBWF should initiate the development of such a strategic document, outlining specific aims and targets, measures and action lines in order to plan for further development of fundamental values and assure their protection and promotion in the years to come.

These efforts would require specialized expertise within the Ministry. Such a strategic document should be developed in close collaboration with the National BFUG group, national and international experts and all relevant stakeholders, possibly through an expressly nominated working group. It is of utmost importance and urgency, in the current times, to forge a clear path towards preserving the essential values of freedom and autonomy of higher education in pursuance of preservation and strengthening of Austrian and European democracy.

¹⁸ Starkbaum et al. 2023. Study on Causations of Science and Democracy Skepticism in Austria. Wien: Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS).



04



SUSTAINABILITY in the context of the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching – Are we meeting our expectations?

04

SUSTAINABILITY in the context of the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching – Are we meeting our expectations?

**Em.Univ.Prof. Dr. Helga Kromp-Kolb, University of
Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna**

Motivation

Natural scientists around the world have realised for decades that the climate is changing, biodiversity and soil are being lost, the ocean is acidifying and nature as a whole is being used beyond its capacity as a source and sink. The situation is becoming an increasingly threatening one. With a series of scientific publications based on different datasets and methods most recently showed that the Atlantic overturning circulation is approaching a tipping point due to the melting of ice in the Arctic and Greenland, which is likely to be reached within this century. If the supply of warm surface water in the North Atlantic collapses, the climatic conditions in Europe would become significantly colder, drier and stormier, the sea level on the east coast of the USA would rise rapidly as a result of accumulation, and the Amazon rainforest and the entire monsoon belt would suffer a major negative impact. Johan Rockström called this a “planetary catastrophe” in Davos in 2023.

Scientists are increasingly asking themselves whether promoting scientific findings is enough if politicians and society do not respond to these findings. Even a strike by scientists has even been proposed (Glavovic et al., 2022^[8]). The International Science Council has addressed the issue of science’s role (International Science Council, 2021^[10])

while the European University Association (EUA, 2021^[6]) has examined the consequences for universities. The Austrian UniNETZ project has put forward a declaration of principles for discussion entitled “Transforming higher education institutions into pioneers of social sustainability” (Geuder et al., 2023^[7]), based on the awareness of the growing social responsibility of universities, as expressed in the manifesto of the Austrian Rectors’ Conference (Universities Austria, 2020^[16]).

Universities are privileged places for reflection, experimentation and discussion. They provide a diverse range of expertise, ways of thinking, cultural backgrounds and life stages. They are also free to look to the future without the pressure of operational decisions. They are predominantly financed by taxpayers’ money and have a responsibility towards society as a result of this. Above all though, they shape the thinking of future decision-makers, not only in lectures and courses, but also through the environment in which the degree programme takes place.

Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria ¹⁹

The Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria (the Alliance) was founded in 2012 in order to fulfil this responsibility more effectively. The Alliance is an informal network of almost all Austrian universities that strives to incorporate and reinforce the understanding of sustainability in teaching and research, in social engagement and in the management of universities, thereby contributing towards a sustainable society. A few years ago the universities of applied sciences also joined forces with a similar aim, as the [Nachhaltige Hochschule](#) ²⁰ (Sustainable Universities of Applied Sciences) group.

The Alliance's committee of experts developed sustainability strategies which included specific targets and measures to improve sustainability in research, teaching and operations, and set up working groups on topics such as climate-neutrality, sustainable procurement, sustainable mobility, sustainable buildings, education for sustainable development and promoting biodiversity. The effectiveness of the Alliance is evident: while at its first meeting the committee of experts consisted almost exclusively of academics with a personal interest in sustainability, now almost all universities have established sustainability officers or advisers, who now represent their universities as members of this committee.

The current focus is on universities' efforts to assess their own carbon footprint, using a specially developed tool (*ClimCalc*) and to create their own roadmaps to achieving carbon neutrality, together with the resources needed to support this.



[Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria](#)



[Sustainable higher education institutions](#)

ClimCalc provided the starting point from which the Bavarian Center for Sustainability in Higher Education (BayZ-eN) developed its own programme. Adapted versions of *ClimCalc* are now also being used in Austrian and Bavarian schools. Pioneering Austrian universities have been calculating their carbon footprints since 2015, which means it is already possible to analyse emissions trends – although the two years which were dominated by Covid measures do complicate any interpretation of the results. Mobility and travel undertaken by members of the universities (including students) and energy consumption are the main contributors to emissions; the latter is understandably higher at technical universities than at those with little or no laboratory activity. The findings show that this area in particular is one where significant savings can be made with minimal expenditure, which would also bring economic benefits to the universities – for example by reducing ventilation power or hours of usage in laboratories, or by using sensors linked to timing systems to control lighting. Arrangements for working from home which emerged during the coronavirus pandemic to some extent simply mean that emissions are shifted, but do also reveal an overstated need for space, and can in some cases influence the dimensions of building expansion projects. Awareness-raising and the creativity of staff members, with simple systems for reporting and rewarding suggestions, are key ways to support progress.

In a series of collective actions, Austrian universities have purchased large numbers of bicycles finished in each university's own colours, with the name of the university added, and offered them to employees, and in some cases to students, at a heavily subsidised price. This means that members of the university promote cycling in their cities, for example in Graz on the university's black and yellow bikes, or in Vienna on the green bikes of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU). Many universities encourage the use of public transport through subsidies on "climate tickets", or by allowing some of the time used each day for transfers on public transport to be counted as working time; or they promote the use of university-owned electric vehicles for work-related trips, by requiring any other work-related car journeys to be

¹⁹ <http://nachhaltigeuniversitaeten.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

²⁰ <https://www.nachhaltige-hochschulen.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

approved by the rector's office. The Alliance has launched an initiative encouraging members of their universities to commit to avoiding flights for journeys under 1,000 km, but further persuasive lobbying is still needed to win over the majority of academics to this idea.

Since construction projects are booming in the university sector, guidelines have been formulated for buildings, in consultation with the Austrian Federal Property Association – which in many such cases is the relevant property developer. A few pioneering building projects have already been completed, but the more fundamental question, about what is actually needed, is more difficult to influence due to the lengthy timeframes involved in planning.

As early as 2013, long before the travel restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic, the pursuit of reduced emissions from mobility-related causes resulted in the first international, virtual “Climate-friendly Climate Conference”. This was initiated and hosted by the Alliance as an Austrian contribution to the JPI²¹ CLIMATE Fast-Track Activity (FTA). Building on this experience, guidelines were developed for climate-friendly mobility and conference organisation, which have now been integrated into calls for proposals and evaluation criteria for research projects within the “Austrian Climate Research Program”, for instance, and the JPI Climate, as well as the travel regulations at the BOKU Centre for Global Change, the Tyndall Centre and the IASS Potsdam.

Echoing the influential divestment movement at US higher education institutions, rectorates have been advised to invest universities' own funds according to climate-friendly and ethical principles, as far as possible; colleagues with the relevant expertise were able to show that in the medium to long term these types of investment are more stable and earn comparable returns. This is also a medium-term project for which further lobbying needs to be done, not only in the university rectorates, but also amongst administrative staff.

In the research sector, it is fundamentally important that research funding be adapted to the requirements of transformative research. Transformative research creates

ownership of the process and the findings by those involved through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, participative processes. A vital prerequisite for progress in this area is to define quality criteria for this kind of research. Work is under way on this in Austria, and in collaboration with international partners, but as yet there is no readily available, broadly applicable and recognised evaluation system.

One important milestone towards the transformation of Austrian universities was achieved in 2022: A transdisciplinary professional development course on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for university teachers was devised and offered for the first time in the academic year 2022/2023. Ideally universities should ensure that a minimum number of teaching staff from each organisational unit take this course each year, so that knowledge and practical experience in Education for Sustainable Development is systematically disseminated amongst the teaching staff of the university. The University of Innsbruck has already made a start on this.

“Lectures for Future”, which began in Vienna, was set up as a marketplace making lectures available for free at universities other than the lecturers' own. Teaching staff offer lectures on their own subject areas, and the participating universities can compile a course to suit their own requirements, selecting from the range of lectures available. The underlying idea is to provide external input for the students in an easily accessible form, and in this way to open up new topic areas or present different perspectives on the topics covered at their own university. Thanks to the infrastructures developed during the coronavirus pandemic, the choice of guest speakers is no longer restricted to those who are able to be physically present – geographical limitations are no longer an issue.

The Alliance has also invited student representatives to their meetings and works in close collaboration with the universities and universities of applied sciences in Austria and Bavaria.

²¹ JPI = Joint Program Initiative: A European networking programme which coordinates national research priorities and joint calls for proposals, enabling collaborative work to be carried out at a European level beyond the EU research programmes. {

Climate Change Centre Austria ²²

Even before the Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria was founded, the Climate Change Centre Austria (CCCA) was set up as a network and voice for Austrian research into climate and climate impacts and as a contact point for climate change issues. The CCCA is an association which is also open to non-university research institutions involved in climate research. “Climate research” includes the scientific study of climate change, its systemic causes, its impacts on society, the economy and environment, strategies for climate protection (mitigation) and for adaptation to climate change. The CCCA helps its members to achieve their research goals, bases its activities on the original research of its members, and encourages interdisciplinary dialogue. It sees itself as having a responsibility to society to make evidence-based contributions to addressing the challenge of climate change and to communicate these effectively, and to act as a point of contact for any questions on the physical and societal causes of climate change, and on measures for adaptation and mitigation.

While the activities of the Alliance are mainly focused within the universities, the CCCA is strongly outward-facing. Numerous comments on draft legislation, commentaries in national and international climate-related publications, events and activities in newspapers, social media, interviews, offers of support in response to statements by politicians, etc. document the efforts to make scientific findings accessible and heard.



➤ [Climate Change Centre Austria](https://CCCA.ac.at)

Austria was closely involved in the formation of the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) and in consultation with the Austrian academic community, played an influential role in the selection of topic areas. After the CCCA was founded, it therefore seemed logical this should serve as an interface between the academic community and the relevant government ministry; it continues to act as an intermediary, publicising relevant JPI calls for proposals as well as carrying out its own projects on research policy. The contact point has now evolved into a networking platform which disseminates information about European and international activities in climate research, promotes the nomination of Austrian experts for international research committees and helps to make Austrian climate research more visible at an international level.

In 2014 for the first time an Austrian Assessment Report on climate change was published (APCC, 2014; Kromp-Kolb et al., 2014^[1]), which followed the model of the IPCC reports with regard to open participation and quality assurance procedures – a step which attracted international attention. For Austria the report is not only an important source of information, it also brought together climate scientists from different disciplines and research institutions. Since then, under the aegis of the Austrian Panel on Climate Change (APCC), a series of special reports has been published (APCC, 2018^[2], 2020^[3], 2023^[4]); a new, up-to-date assessment report is due to be published in 2025.

The impressive APCC special report on “Strukturen für ein klimafreundliches Leben” (Structures for climate-friendly living) (APCC, 2023^[4]) is largely based on the work of this group.

²² <https://CCCA.ac.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

The CCCA holds an annual “Austrian Climate Day” – an academic conference that actually lasts several days. It gives an overview of current Austrian research activities in the field of climate change and transformation; it is also the most important interdisciplinary networking event for the climate research community in Austria. Traditionally it includes programmes specifically designed for school students and public administration officials.

The “K3 Congress” for climate communication has been held every two years since 2017, hosted in rotation with Germany and Switzerland; it includes the presentation of awards for particularly successful climate communication. The K3 Congress aims to inspire people to action through effective climate communication. It provides an overview of the international status of research on climate communication and brings together key participants from the fields of policymaking, administration and industry, as well as interest groups, NGOs, the media and PR.

UniNETZ ²³

UniNETZ is a project supported primarily by universities, which constitutes a serious attempt to overcome structural and mental impediments to sustainable development. (The name is derived from the German for “universities and sustainable development goals”.) The tangible goal of the project in its first phase, from 2019–2021, was to formulate options to guide Austria’s implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Options Report was designed to be politically relevant, based on the IPCC Strategy, but without being prescriptive in terms of policy. It was seen as equally important that during the course of their involvement with the project the universities should further their own development, through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, both within and beyond the university sector, by promoting systemic thinking and co-production of knowledge with students, stakeholders and society. In this way the project would make a collaborative contribution to sustainable development in Austria.

For each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in the second phase additionally for 5 overarching priority areas (SPs), universities have taken on sponsorship, in particular coordination, or have agreed to participate. The Options Report (UniNETZ, 2021a, 2021b^[18]) was presented to the Austrian government in 2021. Following on from this work, in the second phase from 2022–2024, UniNETZ resolved to increase its interactions with society, industry and policymakers, and to focus more attention on transformation of the universities. It is essential for universities to advance their own transformation, if they seek to be drivers of transformation in society, and also to demonstrate the credibility of their cause.



UniNETZ

This ambition resulted in the drafting and publication of the declaration of principles mentioned at the beginning of this report (Geuder et al., 2023^[7]), which attracted attention and stimulated discussion beyond Austria. One specific element of the UniNETZ project is the integrative involvement of the arts. Although some arts universities are still struggling to find ways to participate actively in the discourse on sustainability, nevertheless the project has helped to advance this discussion.

Acting on an initiative by students, new teaching formats were devised, particularly “UniNETZ bewegt” (UniNETZ moves), and an inter-university lecture series which will be offered for the first time in the 2024 summer semester, with participation from interested UniNETZ universities.

With regard to extending the project beyond the universities, in addition to interactions with relevant ministers and representatives at state government level, there have been particularly successful interactions with members of the Austrian parliament: in consultation with the Parliamentary Administration and the SDG ambassadors of the parliamentary parties they have been able to establish direct contact with the members of parliament through a series of events.

A publication that attracted media attention was the “Reference NECP” (Referenz NEKP: Kirchengast et al., 2019^[11]), which was an attempt by scientists in UniNETZ SDG 13, coordinated by the CCCA, to show that Austria could contribute more towards achievement of the European and global climate targets than was envisaged in the official National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) that was submitted to Brussels. Consequently it was also important to respond to the new edition of this plan, published in 2023, and to related commentaries (Steininger et al., 2024^[14]).

²³ <https://www.uninetz.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

Another highly topical publication was a reflection by UniNEtZ on the Ukraine crisis, which was released in 2022. This suggests that losing hope for the peaceful coexistence of nations would, in view of the challenges facing our planet, be tantamount to abandoning hope for the future of the human race.²⁴

The activities of the various SDG groups and priority area groups are now culminating in a “Dialogue for the future” which includes both a basis for discussion of principles considered essential for sustainable development (a “vision for the future”), and also a whole range of “building blocks for the future” designed to realise this vision, that could be incorporated into party and government policy programmes. This stage follows what has sometimes been heated discussion, which is still ongoing, on the extent to which scholars can deviate from their role as an honest broker of political alternatives (Pielke, 2007^[13]), providing pertinent comments on all options and discussing their advantages and disadvantages, without emphasising or recommending specific options.

²⁴ <https://www.uninetz.at/beitraege/uninetz-reflexion-zur-ukraine-krise> accessed: 29.02.2024

Other networks and activities

In addition to the three major networks mentioned above, some others have now also evolved amongst the universities. The “Vienna Anthropocene Network”²⁵ is very strongly supported by academics and researchers in the humanities, and there is also a Biodiversity Network²⁶, which is focused on monitoring and documentation of biodiversity in Austria. Within the universities there are also more and more centres being set up to connect researchers in different disciplines, and often with the additional aim of increased visibility for the sustainability actions of the university concerned.

One significant group is “Scientists for Future” (S4F)²⁷, a loosely organised network made up of several regional groups of colleagues from the academic sector, which evolved initially to support the “Fridays for Future” movement with information, presentations and suchlike, and are now keenly committed to societal engagement. In 2018 when the first Friday strikes by schoolchildren generated strong feelings in Austria about whether or not schoolchildren had the right to strike, scientists from Germany, Switzerland and Austria published a statement supported by appropriate scientific evidence, confirming that the schoolchildren’s demands were justified from a scientific perspective; this was subsequently reprinted in the renowned journal “Science” (Hagedorn et al., 2019^[9]). Within a few weeks, the plea to support this statement was responded to in Austria not by the anticipated 300 colleagues, but by approximately 2,000. In the end, it attracted over 26,000 signatures. The potential of this surprised its initiators, but also showed that there was broad willingness in the universities to go beyond their ivory towers. This was the initial spark that launched S4F in Germany and Austria. S4F now offers a wealth of documents, publications and presentations – frequently also on current political issues.

Austrian universities are also strongly represented in international networks²⁸, some of which have embraced sustainability topics, and some of which were explicitly set up as sustainability networks. The Copernicus Alliance²⁹ and other European university alliances specifically focused on sustainability, such as Aurora 2030, EPICUR and EURECA-PRO have become an integral part of Austrian university life. The enthusiasm for lively exchange of Erasmus students also promotes European networking.

²⁵ <https://anthropocene.univie.ac.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

²⁶ <https://www.biodiversityaustria.at> accessed: 29.02.2024

²⁷ <https://at.scientists4future.org> accessed: 29.02.2024

²⁸ An overview of the involvement of Austrian universities is available at <https://education.ec.europa.eu> accessed: 29.02.2024

²⁹ <https://www.copernicus-alliance.org> accessed: 29.02.2024

Ausblick

After a decade of varied, and to a large extent successful activities at Austrian universities to promote sustainable development, university rectorates are also increasingly expressing a desire to bring together the structures that have grown over time, to bundle forces and to unite them in an even more powerful platform. If this is well done, it will link the universities together even more strongly and give additional impetus to sustainable development in universities and thus also in Austria. Furthermore, the determined efforts by Austrian universities to live up to their role as pioneers and promoters of sustainable development – with a diverse range of priorities and measures at individual universities – are also becoming more visible at an international level.

One point of great concern is that in universities, as elsewhere, diversity of opinion and open-ended discussion of controversial or contradictory hypotheses have suffered in recent years. Science must not be abused as a theory of a perceived lack of alternatives when making decisions (Vogt 2024^[19]). An analysis by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) identifies precisely this factor as the main reason why trust in science has been eroded in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis (Bogner, 2024^[5]). There is a general lack of awareness of this problem, although the CCCA did respond by writing a paper on how the scientific community sees itself, and the issue was tackled recently in an editorial in the journal *Science* (Thorp, 2024^[15]). There is a strong argument for a broader debate that goes beyond the simple issue of science communication. If science can no longer be trusted, rational arguments lose their value. This also represents a problem for democracy – regardless of the fact that, although the big challenges and complex issues of our time cannot be resolved by science alone, scientific findings have to play a part in doing so.

The universities, which regard themselves as thought leaders according to the manifesto of the Austrian Rectors' Conference (Universities Austria, 2020^[16]) have some exciting and important tasks ahead of them that will face exciting and important intellectual tasks that require independence, impartiality, disinterestedness and honesty as well as transparent discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, systems thinking and openness to creative, unconventional ideas. But the Austrian universities are not alone in this, as their counterparts in other countries are facing similar challenges. Collaborating and sharing experiences will help to move forward together.

The basis of science, the cooperation of scientists – like the arts – have in the past contributed to bridging political differences and helping states and peoples to live together more peacefully. Universities' efforts to bring about sustainable development must go hand in hand with a striving for peace. Because, as the UN's Agenda 2030 also makes clear, there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Bibliography

- [1] APCC. (2014). Österreichischer Sachstandsbericht Klimawandel 2014 (AAR14) (1 ed., Vol. 1-3). Austrian Panel on Climate Change (APCC). <https://ccca.ac.at/wissenstransfer/apcc/oesterreichischer-sachstandsbericht>
- [2] APCC. (2018). Österreichischer Special Report Gesundheit, Demographie und Klimawandel (ASR18). (W. Haas, H. Mooshammer, R. Muttarak, & O. Koland, Eds.). Verlag der ÖAW, Vienna, Austria. <https://ccca.ac.at/wissenstransfer/apcc/special-reports/srgesundheit>
- [3] APCC. (2020). Klimawandel und Tourismus (U. Pröbstl-Haider, D. O. Lund-Durlacher, Marc, & F. Pretenthaler, Eds.). Springer Spektrum. https://www.klimafonds.gv.at/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2021_Book_TourismusUndKlimawandel-komp.pdf
- [4] APCC. (2023). APCC Special Report Strukturen für ein klimafreundliches Leben (APCC SR Klimafreundliches Leben). (APCC, Ed.). Springer Spektrum. <https://klimafreundlichesleben.apcc-sr.ccca.ac.at>
- [5] Bogner, A. (2024). Nach Corona. Reflexionen für zukünftige Krisen. Ergebnisse aus dem Corona-Aufarbeitungsprozess. https://austriaca.at/0xc1aa5576_0x003eac20.pdf
- [6] EUA. (2021). Universities without Walls. A Vision for 2030. <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/universities%20without%20walls%20%20a%20vision%20for%202030.pdf>
- [7] Geuder, H., Stötter, J., Fehr, F., Glatz, I., Griebler, A., Kernegger, B., Koch, A., Schneeberger, A., & Kromp-Kolb, H. (2023). "Die UniNETZ-Grundsatzklärung – ein Impuls zur (selbst-)Transformation der Hochschulen" in GAIA, 32(1/2023), 3. https://www.uninetz.at/media/Grundsatzklärung%3%A4rung_FINAL-1.pdf
- [8] Glavovic, B. C., Smith, T. F., & White, I. (2022). The tragedy of climate change science. *Climate and Development*, 14(9), 829-833. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2021.2008855>
- [9] Hagedorn, G., Kalmus, P., Mann, M., Vicca, S., Van den Berge, J., van Ypersele, J.-P., Bourg, D., Rotmans, J., Kaaronen, R., Rahmstorf, S., Kromp-Kolb, H., Kirchgangast, G., Knutti, R., Seneviratne, S. I., Thalmann, P., Cretney, R., Green, A., Anderson, K., Hedberg, M., Hayhoe, K. (2019). Concerns of young protesters are justified. *Science*, 364(6436), 139. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aax3807>
- [10] International Science Council. (2021). Unleashing Science: Delivering Missions for Sustainability. https://council.science/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/202108_Unleashing-Science_Final.pdf
- [11] Kirchgangast, G., Kromp-Kolb, H., Steininger, K., Stagl, S., Kirchner, M., Ambach, C., Grohs, J., Gutsohn, A., Peisker, J., & Strunk, B. (2019). Referenzplan als Grundlage für einen wissenschaftlich fundierten und mit den Pariser Klimazielen in Einklang stehenden Nationalen Energie- und Klimaplan für Österreich (Ref-NEKP). Version published as at 9 September 2019. C.C.C. Austria. <https://ccca.ac.at/wissenstransfer/uninetz-sdg-13>
- [12] Kromp-Kolb, H., Nakicenovic, N., Seidl, K. S., R., Ahrens, B., Auer, I., Baumgarten, A., Bednar-Friedl, B., Eitzinger, J., Foelsche, U., Formayer, H., Geitner, C., Glade, T., Gobiet, A., Grabherr, G., Haas, R., Haberl, H., Haimberger, L., Hitzinger, R., König, M., Winiwarer, W. (2014). "Synthese" in: Österreichischer Sachstandsbericht Klimawandel 2014 (AAR14). http://www.austriaca.at/0xc1aa550e_0x003143b3.pdf
- [13] Pielke, R. A. (2007). *The honest Broker. Making Sense of Science in Policy and Politics*. Cambridge.
- [14] Steininger, K. W., Riahi, K., Stagl, S., Kromp-Kolb, H., Kirchgangast, G., CCCA, & al., e. (2024). Nationaler Energie- und Klimaplan (NEKP) für Österreich – Wissenschaftliche Bewertung der in der Konsultation 2023 vorgeschlagenen Maßnahmen, (K. W. Steininger, Riahi, K., Stagl, S., Kromp-Kolb, H., Kirchgangast, G. + CCCA und andere Editoren, Ed.). Climate Change Centre Austria (CCCA).
- [15] Thorp, H. H. (2024). Earning respect and trust. *Science*, 383(6682), 463-463. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1126/science.ado3040>
- [16] uniko. (2020). uniko-Manifest für Nachhaltigkeit. Universities Austria.
- [17] UniNETZ. (2021a). UniNETZ-Optionenbericht. Maßnahmenübersicht (Vol. 3). Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria. https://www.uninetz.at/optionenbericht_downloads/Abstracts_aller_Optionsen_aktuell.pdf
- [18] UniNETZ. (2021b). UniNETZ-Optionenbericht. Von den Optionen zur Transformation (Vol. 2). Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria. https://www.uninetz.at/optionenbericht_downloads/Von_den_Optionsen_zur_Transformation.pdf
- [19] Vogt. (2024): "Nachhaltigkeit und Demokratie – eine Doppelkrise als Herausforderung für die Wissenschaft". Lecture given on 1 February 2024 at a BayZeN fact-finding event. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATL_vN1PK_4 accessed on 1 March 2024



05



**INTERNATIONALISATION
of study programmes and teaching
as well as mobility**

05

INTERNATIONALISATION of study programmes and teaching as well as mobility

When it published its *Nationale Hochschulmobilitäts- und Internationalisierungsstrategie 2020–2030. Internationalisierung auf vielen Wegen* (“National mobility and internationalisation strategy for 2020–2030. There are many routes to internationalisation”; HMIS2030), the BMBWF and Austria’s higher education institutions lit the touchpaper for internationalisation in a higher education context to become even more of a focus for the strategic efforts being undertaken by the institutions and the makers of higher education policy, especially regarding the continued development of study programmes and teaching. As an integral part of internationalisation, the mobility of students, teachers and administrative staff has a key role to play in this. Even though this mobility has recently come under heavy pressure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever there is a need to raise awareness – in the sense of acquiring international and intercultural competences – of the undisputed value that in-person mobility placements can add to a higher education degree or a teaching or administrative role in higher education. The pandemic brought a number of fundamental changes to day-to-day life in higher education that also provided valuable food for thought for “what comes next” – one only need to think of remote teaching and learning formats and of virtual or blended mobility (the latter a hybrid of in-person and virtual mobility). It is highly unlikely that cross-border cooperation in study programmes and teaching would have intensified so quickly in such a short space of time without this – admittedly extremely drastic – watershed moment.

At the same time, the whole of the global higher education sector is facing an environment that is evolving just as drastically. Challenging global issues that can only be overcome

with broad-based teamwork must be tackled “head on”. No country in the world and no national higher education system can even attempt to do this efficiently and expediently on its own: we need the expertise and the good will of EVERYONE across the globe.

There is no hiding the fact that any sense of global “togetherness” amongst politicians and in society is currently largely insufficient for efforts of this kind, yet this makes it all the more important to strive for improvement: we need to approach, listen to and engage with one another, respect one another and accept one another’s point of view.



Higher education institutions have a fundamental and decisive contribution to make in this regard. It is they, who are training the next generation of scientists, politicians and experts, who will be called on to find solutions to the burning questions – in the most literal sense of the word – of our times; it is they who are doing much to help shape these people’s values and attitudes. They have the potential to lay the foundations for the sense of togetherness mentioned above by creating an internationalised environment for teaching and learning where getting along with other people becomes second nature – be this in a cultural, linguistic, academic or value-based context – where dialogue, debate and collaboration can be actively embraced as a matter of course.

The internationalisation of study programmes and teaching thus represents a major milestone in efforts to find solutions for a future in which humanity can thrive, and it is something that cannot be encouraged or demanded strenuously enough.

5.1 Internationalisation of the Curriculum

Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) is a concept for injecting a greater international element into study programmes and teaching at higher education institutions that was devised by the Australian educational researcher Betty Leask. In it, she identifies three pillars:

- the **formal** curriculum – what is actually taught
- the **informal** curriculum – learning experiences that students have outside their formal timetable, e.g. through extracurricular activities and the structure of their higher education environment
- the **“hidden”** curriculum, which includes what teachers understand their roles to be, what norms and standards are applied to students’ work, their criteria for assessment and choice of literature.

Further information on IoC can be found on the HMIS2030 online platform at www.hmis2030.at  under „Internationalisierung von Studium und Lehre“  ³⁰.


With this holistic approach, it is essential that IoC permeates all levels and areas of a higher education institution and that no group is “left behind” when internationalisation measures are being developed and put in place. This is the only way to inspire a broad-based commitment to IoC at a higher education institution. The HMIS2030 adopts the IoC approach and, amongst other things, is geared towards ensuring that Austria’s higher education institutions take action that, ideally, enables everyone – their students, teachers and administrative staff – to acquire international and intercultural competences.

The most effective way to go about this is undoubtedly to promote stays abroad that are related to an individual’s work or studies – i.e. the kind of in-person mobility referred to above. There is also a need to make sure that those for whom in-person mobility is not an option for whatever reason also have the chance to acquire these skills. This is where “internationalisation at home” comes in, offering suitable opportunities by establishing an internationally focused teaching and learning environment at the person’s (home) university. This opens up various promising areas of activity, such as: integrating visiting students into an international classroom as a valuable “resource” for teaching; an internationally minded campus where internationalisation is actively embraced and where studies and the institution’s “operations” are based on an openness towards its members from other countries and cultures and this forms part and parcel of the daily routine; and having international lecturers contributing perspectives from their individual research and cultural backgrounds that their local colleagues (i.e. at their host university in this case) are unable to put forward, either authentically or at all; this list is by no means exhaustive.



 www.hmis2030.at



 [Internationalisation of study programmes and teaching](#)

³⁰ <https://www.hmis2030.at/themen/internationalisierung-von-studium-lehre.html>



International Peer Learning Activity “How are learning outcomes perceived, transmitted, and implemented in daily practice of higher education institutions?” at the UAS Technikum Wien

© OeAD/Fabian Orner



Irish expert Declan Kennedy at the international peer learning activity “How are learning outcomes perceived, transmitted, and implemented in daily practice of higher education institutions?”

© OeAD/Fabian Orner

3-IN-AT-PLUS – „INterconnection/ INnovation/INclusion: Austrian contributions to the EHEA 2030“

The BMBWF is helping higher education institutions to achieve the aims set out in the HMIS2030, which dovetail in many respects with the key commitments and objectives of the EHEA, especially by implementing Erasmus+ projects. [3-IN-AT-PLUS](https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Europ%C3%A4ischer-Hochschulraum/Bologna-Prozess/3-IN-AT-PLUS.html) ³¹ – „INterconnection/INnovation/INclusion: Austrian contributions to the EHEA 2030“³², which is now the fourth project of this kind and which the OeAD is handling in its capacity as a Bologna Service Point, is focusing on mobility in higher education and the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching as one of its priority topics (Work Package 2).

Thus the [Bologna Day 2022](https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/bologna-tag-2022) ³² (Work Package 2.3), a networking conference for the HMIS2030, was entitled “Internationalisierung ganzheitlich gedacht & umgesetzt”

(“Conceiving of and achieving internationalisation in a holistic way”). The event made it clear that, in order to succeed, internationalisation should always be approached and implemented in conjunction and coordination with overarching issues such as digitalisation, sustainability and inclusion. This interdisciplinarity requires the involvement of all participants at the higher education institution in all their diversity, as this is the only way that it can achieve internationalisation holistically and sustainably.

In light of the current challenges in international cooperation – itself a key element in internationalisation – discussions also touched on questions of responsible internationalisation. The opinion was voiced that it is more important than ever before for higher education institutions to make it crystal clear in their strategic considerations regarding “science diplomacy” what aims they are pursuing and what they are capable of and intent on changing in the process.

³¹ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Europ%C3%A4ischer-Hochschulraum/Bologna-Prozess/3-IN-AT-PLUS.html>

³² <https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/bologna-tag-2022>

The Bologna Day 2022 also shone a spotlight on quality assurance in an internationalisation context and prompted a debate on the role played by international offices at higher education institutions. A case study was presented in the shape of the [Swiss Global Competence Lab](https://swissglobalcompetencelab.ch)³³ a project run by the Zurich University of Applied Sciences that is focused on support for internationalisation in higher education.

Between November 2022 and July 2023, the series of workshops entitled “[Flexibilisierung und Internationalisierung von Curricula](https://www.oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-workshopreihe-zur-flexibilisierung-und-internationalisierung-von-curricula)”³⁴ (“Making curricula more flexible and more international”; Work Package 2.1) provided Austrian higher education institutions with a practically oriented format that was organised four times across the country (in Vienna, Linz, Innsbruck and Villach). Starting with the embedding of learning outcomes, the curriculum development topics that were focused on also included the internationalisation of curricula and how to design curricular structures in a way that promotes mobility. Crucially, this format enables those stakeholders at higher education institutions to be reached who are actually in a position to take action and influence learning outcomes and internationalisation.

The [LOUIS-Concept](https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/international/aurora)³⁵ (Learning Outcomes in University for Impact on Society) for describing learning outcomes attracted a great deal of attention. Developed as part of the [AURORA](https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/international/aurora)³⁶ European university alliance with the involvement of the University of Innsbruck, it was unveiled during the workshop series by the internationally renowned expert Kees Kouwenaar. Made up of 16 different academic and/or personal competences, the LOUIS concept provides a set of “building blocks” that enable transversal – including intercultural – competencies to be woven into curricula.

The workshop format also opened participants’ eyes to the broad spectrum of internationalisation in a curriculum development context, including mobility windows, forms of mobility such as [COILs](https://international.univie.ac.at/internationale-kooperationen-und-netzwerke/coil-virtual-exchange) (Collaborative Online International Learning)³⁷ and opportunities presented by the 2021–27 generation of the Erasmus+ Programme as well as the ob-

jectives of the [HMIS2030](https://www.oead.at/en/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-des-workshops-internationalized-and-flexible-curricula)³⁸ and how to define “[study-related stays abroad](https://www.oead.at/en/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-des-workshops-internationalized-and-flexible-curricula)”³⁹.

In the spirit of international cooperation, the fifth and final workshop in the series „[Internationalized and flexible curricula](https://www.oead.at/en/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-des-workshops-internationalized-and-flexible-curricula)“⁴⁰ – was held in Zagreb in November 2023 in an adapted form in partnership with the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education.{



[3-IN-AT-PLUS](#)



[Bologna Day 2022](#)



[Swiss Global Competence Lab](#)



[Flexibilisierung und Internationalisierung von Curricula](#)



[LOUIS-Concept](#)



[AURORA](#)



[COILs](#)



[HMIS2030](#)



[Definition „study-related stays abroad“](#)



[Internationalized and flexible curricula](#)

³³ <https://swissglobalcompetencelab.ch>

³⁴ <https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-workshopreihe-zur-flexibilisierung-und-internationalisierung-von-curricula>

³⁵ https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/LOUIS_deutsch_ENDVERSION_ohneLAYOUT_30112022.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.uibk.ac.at/en/international/aurora>

³⁷ <https://international.univie.ac.at/internationale-kooperationen-und-netzwerke/coil-virtual-exchange>

³⁸ https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Europaeischer-Hochschulraum/Bologna-Prozess/hmis_2030.html

³⁹ https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:1767fd5a-a3d9-4a65-b422-04548c318ada/Definition_studienrelevanter_Auslandsaufenthalt_update_Dez_2022_final.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://oead.at/en/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/nachlese-des-workshops-internationalized-and-flexible-curricula>

HMIS2030 – online platform – Examples of good practice in the context of the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching

At the instigation of the BMBWF, the OeAD is running the “HMIS2030 – Examples of good practice” online platform⁴¹ support the implementation of the HMIS2030. It enables all Austrian as well as international higher education institutions to showcase the initiatives and practices that they have in place regarding the five objectives of the HMIS2030 in an appealing way and in just a few steps. The over 60 posts that have already been uploaded can be filtered as desired by higher education sector, federal state, target group and topic area. The document entitled “13 Gründe für die Einreichung eines Beispiels guter Praxis”⁴² (“13 reasons for sharing an example of good practice”) explains how higher education institutions can benefit from their own and their peers’ articles and contributions. A set of **guidelines** and **step-by-step instructions** are provided [in German] under “Support” in the platform footer.

All Austrian and international higher education institutions are warmly invited to upload their examples of good practice in German and/or English in order to make them accessible to the general public and thus also to their peers or any partner institutions that might be interested.



➔ “HMIS2030 – Examples of good practice” online platform



➔ “13 reasons for sharing an example of good practice”

Internationalisation of the Curriculum at Austrian higher education institutions

Although measures to promote the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching have now become an integral part of the strategy at all Austrian higher education institutions, there was a need to investigate whether the holistic IoC approach is being followed in this regard. The OeAD ran a survey of Austrian higher education institutions on behalf of the BMBWF in late 2023. This revealed that, despite half of the institutions possessing basic theoretical knowledge of the “Internationalisation of the Curriculum” concept, there was scope for improving how it was put into practice. Around 25 per cent of respondents⁴³ “knew hardly anything about IoC”, while some 16 per cent had a good level of knowledge and were also applying the concept in their curriculum development.

Asked about their IoC measures, a number of **public universities** said that they used international or foreign-language literature in their teaching and looked at international case studies. (Virtual) international classrooms and digital exchange enable some subjects to be taken at foreign partner universities. More and more use is being made of COIL and similar formats as well as short-term mobility, which is easy to integrate into curricula. Several respondents mentioned their range of English-language courses and degree programmes and how they involve visiting lecturers and international students in their teaching. The other measures cited by the public universities were creating spaces for intercultural dialogue and acquiring and/or improving intercultural competences.

Amongst other things, **universities of applied sciences** mentioned incorporating mobility windows into their curricula. These windows are used for in-person mobility (including short-term mobility), e.g. as part of Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and COIL projects. They also said that, during their mobility windows, those students who are unable to go abroad are offered a range of courses taught in English at their home university of

⁴¹ <https://hmis2030.at>

⁴² https://www.hmis2030.at/_Resources/Persistent/9/3/3/1/9331a81777a6411b890446382fd93fe1c6419604/HMIS2030%20-13%20Gründe%20für%20die%20Einreichung%20eines%20Beispiels%20guter%20Praxis.pdf

⁴³ Response rate around 45 per cent (34 questionnaires received out of 76 higher education institutions contacted)



Workshop “Flexibilisation and internationalisation of curricula” at the UAS Technikum Wien
© OeAD/Beate Tremel



Workshop “Flexibilisation and internationalisation of curricula” at the Johannes Kepler University Linz
© OeAD/Beate Tremel

applied sciences in which visiting students are involved, thus enabling those who have “stayed behind” to engage in intercultural dialogue too. Across the board, universities of applied sciences confirmed that they harnessed local diversity for transcultural learning and integrated specialist literature written in other languages into courses taught in German in the spirit of “internationalisation at home”. Lecturers make use of students’ international perspectives and invite international guest speakers.

There would appear to be a fairly strong international element to study programmes and teaching at **private higher education institutions and private universities** as a basic principle. For example, teaching guidelines for lecturers recommend tackling international case studies and simulations; a number of recent international sources are included on reading lists; the curriculum is enriched with field trips and talks by visiting lecturers from other countries; and multimedia resources facilitate virtual exchange in teaching.

At the **university colleges of teacher education**, meanwhile, it would seem that curriculum development has been somewhat relegated to the sidelines of late as observers await the new requirements that the 2024 package of legal provisions for higher education will bring. A handful of respondents mentioned measures such as introducing Blended Mobilities as a compulsory elective subject and setting up a “sounding board” made up of members from different countries, who are involved in redesigning curricula, while other respondents are planning “windows of opportunity”. One university college of teacher education remarked on the efficient way that the expertise of its international office was incorporated into the work of its curriculum committee.

5.2 Mobility of teachers and administrative staff – the role of personnel development

The holistic “Internationalisation of the Curriculum” approach described above requires the involvement of all levels and areas of a higher education institution and, ideally, everyone employed there – from its senior leadership team through to its lecturers and its administrative staff working in administration and organisation. This is something that the HMIS2030 refers to explicitly in its first objective, namely to “promote an all-encompassing culture of internationalisation at higher education institutions”. With this in mind, the [Bologna Day 2023](#) ⁴⁴ (Work Package 6.5 of the BMBWF’s 3-IN-AT-PLUS Erasmus+ project) focused on the role played and contribution made by personnel development in the context of the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching. For the first time, the annual conference – which was held as a networking event to support the implementation of the HMIS2030 – also targeted staff responsible for HR management and development at higher education institutions as part of its overall audience.

The event set out to raise awareness of what basic and advanced internationalisation skills lecturers and administrative staff should aim to acquire and how these can be taught. There was a debate on whether incentive systems for this sort of upskilling were either helpful or desirable and, if so, what kind were needed. Participants also explored what fundamental role trained administrative staff play in supporting and implementation internationalisation measures. There was a feeling that internationalisation can be used as a personnel development tool to strengthen



➔ [Bologna Day 2023](#)

and improve the specialist and personal skills of staff. The contribution that career paths can make to the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching and the added value and importance of staff mobility to a higher education institution’s further development were also addressed. The Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme generation may be useful in this context with the corresponding funding offers. The fact that the internationalisation of a higher education institution is embedded as a cross-cutting theme at both the strategic and operational levels, and that those responsible for personnel management and development are aware of their role in the context of implementing internationalisation of study programmes and teaching and fulfil this responsibility accordingly, is of fundamental importance.

The broad range of these aspects alone demonstrates how important it is for the teaching and administrative staff to be involved in the development and implementation of internationalisation measures. These are precisely the people who need the corresponding tools and necessary background that enable them to make their contribution to the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching. In addition to specialised knowledge and language skills, the other primary focus here is on acquiring international and intercultural competences. This is where personnel development is called upon to create beneficial framework conditions. Incentives need to be created in order for teachers and administrative staff to become mobile themselves and so that they can and actually do complete a work-related stay abroad, even if this is just for a few days. It is important for these types of mobility experiences to be incorporated into teaching and the higher educational administrative structure and for them to be taken into account in career paths in a beneficial way.

⁴⁴ <https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaischer-hochschulraum/bologna-tag-2023>



Keynote speaker Marina Casals Sala from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, at Bologna Day 2023

© OeAD/APA-Fotoservice/Franz Neumayr

In order to establish a link between personnel development/personnel management and the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching around 150 higher education experts who took part in the Bologna Day 2023 e.g. discussed methods aimed at the following: making international higher education students and teaching staff as well as administrative staff and researchers feel welcome; promoting systematic invitations and/or recruitment for international teaching staff; ensuring a balanced curriculum that is designed to incorporate international standards and specific local features; enabling a “mobility window” for both administrative and teaching staff; establishing a connection between future skills for higher education students and expanding skills among teaching staff; translating a higher educational institution’s statutes and key regulations into English for transparency purposes, including for international members of an institution; and developing common regional, i.e., cross-sectoral strategies and training programmes to foster a welcoming culture and internationalisation, which includes foreign language courses and teaching of intercultural competences.

Marina Casals Sala, Director of International Relations at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, provided a summary of her internationally award-winning Erasmus+ project [SUCTI](https://suctiproject.com)⁴⁵ (Systematic University Change towards

Internationalisation), a training course for administrative staff, as an international example of good practice within the scope of the Bologna Day 2023 under the title “Internationalisation: what’s in it for me?”. She highlighted the need for a holistic understanding of the broad concept of internationalisation beyond traditional mobility of teaching staff and used her own university to show how she has been able to steadily increase the commitment and added value related to internationalisation based on training.



➤ [Project SUCTI](https://suctiproject.com)

Promoting the mobility of teaching and administrative staff at Austrian higher education institutions

The survey of Austrian higher education institutions cited in section 5.1 of this report also provided information on those aspects that are important in the recruitment process in relation to the international bias and composition of a higher education institution’s teaching staff. The higher education institutions are primarily interested in applicants’ research activities here, followed by their English or other foreign language skills, their experience with virtual/online teaching and their international publications. It is only once these aspects have been considered that the teaching experiences in an international context (teaching international classrooms) and activity-related mobility experiences are assessed. Although the information is weighted differently depending on the specialist area to be filled, there is nevertheless a clear focus on research activities, activities in the international scientific community and the individual’s international networking in this regard.

⁴⁵ <https://suctiproject.com>

Viewed from the perspective of personnel development, the internationalisation of teaching and learning reveals that Austrian higher education institutions have a clear interest in encouraging their teaching and other staff to acquire international and intercultural competences. The opportunities provided by Erasmus+ and other programmes play a major role here. Resources are also provided for the development and maintenance of international partnerships, for the implementation of international teaching formats (e.g. COIL, Erasmus+ BIP) and for involvement in international networks. There are also isolated institutionalised formats (peer learning, shared reflection) aimed at increasing visibility into international experiences at the higher education institution. Certificate programmes providing evidence of international competences play a subordinate role. The specific measures mentioned by higher education institutions include for instance workshops on internationalisation for administrative staff as well as on “Teaching in a heterogeneous classroom”. There is a wide range of training courses on offer on cultural/linguistic diversity as well as language courses for teaching staff and administrative staff. The information provided by the higher education institutions also includes cluster mobilities, reciprocal visits to/from partner universities in order to exchange experiences and learn languages, and a further education programme for teaching staff with national and international experts on topics relating to the internationalisation of teaching and the curriculum.

The Austrian higher education institutions also provide incentives for their teaching staff and administrative staff to become mobile in relation to their activities.

With regard to **teaching staff**, the surveys showed that the possibility of holding courses in blocks at the home university (over 60% of the questionnaires returned) and a favourable assessment of activity-related mobility in teachers’ career development and salary structure (around 40% of the questionnaires returned) are by far the measures most frequently used. Institutionalised substitution regulations at the home institution, the implementation of a teaching certificate that considers teacher mobility, and reducing the teaching workload at the home institution are only stated as incentive measures by around 10% of the higher educa-

tion institutions that returned feedback. Specific measures that are stated include e.g., Erasmus+ information events held twice each semester as part of staff development measures, accounting for mobilities as business trips while maintaining salaries, trimesters with virtually no lectures allowing the teaching staff to undertake international teaching mobility assignments, organised meetings with guests from partner higher education institutions, and (partial) funding through Erasmus+ and internal university funds.

The survey paints a much more comprehensive picture with regard to the incentives for the **administrative staff**. The higher education institutions show more commitment here in comparison. The incentive measures stated range from encouraging a positive mindset by communicating the added value arising from a mobility experience, to providing information on opportunities to become mobile for work purposes, through to support services and funding for mobility activities, as well as support with organising and implementing these types of mobility activities (stated by 70 to over 80% of the questionnaires returned). Active advertising of opportunities for (short-term) mobility activities follows on directly from this with a figure of just under 70%. Measures such as the favourable assessment of these types of mobility activities in career development and/or salary structure as well as institutionalised substitution regulations at the home institution rank just above 10%. One higher education institution specifically states that the topic of mobility is part of the “Guidelines for staff appraisals” for lecturers and administrative staff. Furthermore, one private university noted that the incentive measures stated above are organised by the International Office, although with only “moderate success”.

5.3 Mobility of higher education students with a special focus on teacher training and STEM-related degree programmes

International mobility in the teacher training programme

Direct experience of international environments and the immersion in different languages and cultures during their degree studies strengthen the ability of prospective teachers to deal with cultural diversity and global developments. Stays abroad as part of the teacher training programme can make an important contribution to this.

One objective of the National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030 (HMIS2030) ⁴⁶ is to increase the proportion of teacher training students who have had mobility experience as part of their training. The HMIS2030 highlights the importance of intercultural competences and of critical examination of different cultural perspectives. This appears to be important for someone to be able to act as a teacher in a diverse environment in which many pupils have a migrant background.

The higher education institutions have taken various measures in recent years aimed at facilitating international mobility in teacher training programmes. These include curricular measures, such as the definition of mobility windows or modules that are particularly suitable for a study period abroad. Flexible organisation of courses and information measures are further aspects in promoting stays abroad.



➤ [HMIS2030](#)

A special analysis of the student social survey 2019 ⁴⁷ resulted in some revealing insights into international mobility for teacher training students:

- A slightly lower participation in stays abroad in the teacher training programme was found overall compared to the average for all higher education students.
- This difference ceased to apply once those who had already completed a semester abroad or were planning to do so were included.
- A comparison with other countries even revealed that Austria is above average when it comes to international mobility for teacher training students.
- Looking at different types of mobility, it was noticeable once again that more teacher training students had completed a semester abroad than the average of all higher education students, while participation in internships abroad (internships at schools) was significantly lower among teacher training students.
- However, the student social survey saw signs of a fall in international mobility for teacher training students in the teacher training programmes set up jointly by universities and university colleges of teacher education since 2014.
- A closer analysis revealed that women studying to become teachers spent more semesters abroad than the average of all female higher education students, while the participation of men was slightly below average.



➤ [Special analysis of the student social survey 2019](#)

⁴⁶ National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030 (HMIS2030.at) – https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:dd7ca931-2656-4ab3-9cc7-0cc979035d99/Strategie_Hochschulmobilit%C3%A4t_DE_bf_+eudisclaimer.pdf

⁴⁷ SOLA2019_ Internat. Mobilitaet_Lehramtstudierende (sozialerhebung.at) – https://www.sozialerhebung.at/images/Berichte/Internat.-Mobilitaet_Lehramtstudierende.pdf

- Mobility rates were particularly high among higher education students studying to become primary school teachers and those wishing to teach a foreign language in the future. Higher education students in the natural sciences and STEM subjects were less mobile by contrast.
- Teacher training students observe similar obstacles to mobility as other higher education students, but were more likely to fear a negative impact on their progress, less benefit to their studies, and had concerns about compatibility with their curriculum and recognition as part of their overall degree performance.

The HMIS and the special analysis of the student social survey provided points of reference for joint considerations on how international mobility in teacher training programmes can be consolidated and improved. Representatives from universities, university colleges for teacher education, the Austrian National Union of Students, the education authorities and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria (BMBWF) have participated in multiple events over the past few years. They all assume important roles when it comes to enabling teacher training students to study or work in a different country. The groups of people stated above took part in two “Innovation Workshop” events organised by the BMBWF together with the OeAD in March 2022 and October 2022. They exchanged experiences and discussed conclusions, recommendations and any potential measures.

The [Innovation Workshop in March 2022](#) ⁴⁸ highlighted personal perceptions of the added value of international mobility, as well as the framework conditions.



[↗ Innovation Workshop March 2022](#)

- In addition to the acquisition of personal and professional skills, stays abroad provide valuable insights into other education and training systems.
- Waiving study content in favour of a stay abroad and a lack of language skills are often particularly perceived as obstacles that need to be addressed. However, mobility stays do not necessarily lead to time delays in reality.
- There is some tension between the curricular complexity of teacher training and education and the flexibility that is required. Generous recognition of performance in terms of counting towards overall performance is therefore important.
- As with other degree studies, digital media enable greater flexibility and new possibilities. This includes internationalisation@home, although this should not be seen as a substitute for physical mobility abroad.
- School practice abroad could be promoted specifically in the context of short-term mobility activities and requires high-quality support.

The [Innovation Workshop in October 2022](#) ⁴⁹ dealt with the wide range of mobility formats, their strategic incorporation and the options for implementation. Options and incentives were discussed related to establishing practical experience in a school abroad more intensively as well as to intensifying mobility in the STEM subjects.

This event resulted in a matrix with recommendations that were allocated to responsible parties and interest groups. The discussion opened up further perspectives and confirmed various insights.

- Innovative, flexible and non-traditional mobility formats, including internationalisation@home, should be made more visible and provided with incentives. The recognition of experience abroad as part of an overall degree must be transparent and binding.



[↗ Innovation Workshop October 2022](#)

⁴⁸ https://oead.at/fileadmin/Medien/oead.at/KIM/Veranstaltungen/2022/14102022_Innovationswerkstatt/Dokumentation_Mobilitaet_im_Lehramtstudium_03.2022.pdf

⁴⁹ <https://oead.at/de/aktuelles/artikel/2022/10/rueckschau-innovationswerkstatt-mobilitaet-im-lehramt-teil-ii>

- SPactical experience in a school abroad should be embedded structurally within curricula and supported by education departments. Schools and networks abroad could be utilised to a greater extent.
- Information could be combined more effectively (one-stop shops) and enhanced by authentic testimonials (“ambassadors”).
- Foreign language barriers could be addressed more effectively through early preparation (e.g. teaching materials).
- Study visits and stays by decision-makers (higher education institutions, authorities, schools) could help to raise awareness and provide guidance.

Different pieces of evidence and recommendations for promoting mobility in teacher training programmes were examined and confirmed at a BMBWF symposium on the topic of “Quality through international mobility” in Vienna in December 2023. It also became evident that the model of mobility windows at a fixed point in time as frequently cited turns out to be difficult from an organisational point of view. Optional degree course specialisations that are suitable for stays abroad and modules identified accordingly were named as alternatives. Networking, the use of platforms and greater discussion regarding mobility partnerships were encouraged in particular. The teaching and administrative staff at higher education institutions play a key role in promoting mobility. In addition to the diverse range of options available for higher education students, staff mobility should also therefore be intensified.

The recommendation matrix mentioned and the ideas for promoting mobility are incorporated on a continuous basis into various information measures, as well as into the performance agreements with the universities. Ensuring that teacher training and education programmes facilitate international experience and offer new perspectives is a common objective, despite the high level of complexity with these programmes and the involvement of numerous participants.

International mobility in STEM degrees

The climate crisis and its consequences, demographic change and the increasing demand for skilled labour particularly in the **STEM subjects** means that higher education students in the STEM area are now also increasingly becoming a focus for mobility.

What do we mean by STEM? The following degree programmes classified in accordance with [ISCED-F 2013](#) ⁵⁰ count as STEM degrees in Austria: 05 – Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, 06 – Information and communication technologies and 07 – Engineering, manufacturing and construction.

The shortage of skilled workers was addressed in the federal government’s research, technology and innovation strategy ([RTI Strategy 2030](#) ⁵¹) published in 2020 through setting the overarching objective of “Focusing on knowledge, talents and skills” and the associated action field of “Supporting the international perspectives of researchers and higher education students”, including with regard to the fact that higher education students acquire skills and competencies during study-related stays abroad that can be beneficial for their professional development.

This field of action is specified through the following definitions:

- Active participation in international mobility programmes (in particular Erasmus+)
- “Internationalisation at Home” at all levels of the education and training system



[ISCED-F 2013](#)



[RTI Strategy 2030](#)

⁵⁰ <https://www.studium.at/studienrichtungen-isced>

⁵¹ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/Forschung/Forschung-in-%C3%96sterreich/Strategische-Ausrichtung-und-beratende-Gremien/Strategien/FTI-Strategie-der-Bundesregierung-.html>

- Participation in European research programmes (Horizon Europe) and increased participation by higher education institutions in international study programmes (Joint Study Programmes, European Universities, Fulbright) and the European Universities Initiative
- Increasing visibility as a research location and creating attractive framework conditions in order to attract international talent

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research defined the target of “100% more Austrian STEM higher education students who complete a degree or semester abroad via funding programmes” in order to monitor the quantitative targets set in the RTI Strategy 2030, including the objective of “double the number of Austrian students of STEM subjects who complete a study program or study semester abroad with support from funding programmes. This is based on the STEM degree programmes completed by 2,212 people in the 2019/20 academic year.

The survey on study-related stays abroad (UHStat 2) ⁵² takes into account the following study-related stays abroad:

- Study-related stays abroad of less than two weeks
- Study-related stays abroad of two weeks to less than one month
- Study-related stays abroad of at least one month



[UHStat 2](#)

The RTI Pact 2024–26 ⁵³ sets out the following measures aimed at operationalising the objectives and fields of action from the RTI Strategy 2030:

- Incorporation of international and intercultural aspects in the curricula as well as in the teaching and learning environment,
- Active participation in international mobility programmes (in particular Erasmus+) as well as a STEM campaign aimed at increasing the number of STEM degrees completed with a study-related stay abroad,
- Increased expansion and further development of international cooperation projects, innovative alliances and networking activities, including through participation in European Universities Alliances as part of the EU Erasmus+ programme as well as the development of joint study programmes,
- Support for networking (physical and virtual),
- Increasing visibility as a science and research location (e.g. by focusing more intensively on reputation and the creation of flagship projects of a critical size) and creating attractive framework conditions in order to attract international talent.

The Austrian Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) carried out a special analysis in 2019 on “International mobility by field of study” ⁵⁴ based on data from the Austrian Student Social Survey 2019 (SOLA 2019). This reveals that higher education students in mathematics, computer science, natural sciences and technology are less mobile than other higher education students.



[RTI Pact 2024–26](#)



[Special analysis
“International mobility
by field of study”](#)

⁵² <https://www.statistik.at/uhstat/uhstat2/#/questionnaire>

⁵³ https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/dam/jcr:894f23fe-25a3-4293-a74e-282858a1e79a/42_13_beilage.pdf

⁵⁴ <https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/5471/1/ihs-report-2020-engleder-unger-internationale-mobilitaet-studierenden-sozialerhebung-zusatzbericht-2019.pdf>

There are various reasons for this: For instance, 72% of university engineering students and 71% of chemistry students report a negative impact on their degree course as being an obstacle to mobility.

In engineering, it is primarily the loss of time (59%) and in chemistry the loss of time (57%) as well as a lack of compatibility with their degree course (55%).

Financial and organisational barriers are reported as obstacles for most higher education student groups in the SOLA, including STEM higher education students.

Suitable measures now need to be implemented to make the diverse added value of study-related stays abroad visible for these higher education student groups and to show that the physical mobility they experience can be beneficial for their personal and professional development and subsequently for their careers.

On 29 January 2024, the first Innovation Workshop on the topic of “Promoting mobility in STEM subjects” took place as part of the “STEM Offensive”, in which representatives from universities, universities of applied sciences, university colleges of teacher education, the Austrian National Union of Students, interest groups, the BMBWF and industry and STEM stakeholders discussed the topic in detail under the auspices of the OeAD.

The IHS reported that 30% of all higher education students are studying a STEM subject, half of them in the STEM focus area (ICT and engineering sciences). “Good labour market opportunities” and “high income” are very strongly represented as study motives in the STEM focus area; many are already employed in a relevant field alongside their studies. The most important obstacles to mobility in the STEM field are loss of time for studies, compatibility with the curriculum, lack of interest/lack of motivation (the latter especially for men).

According to the IHS, the mobility potential in the STEM sector currently stands at 17%.

A further Innovation Workshop will be held in June 2024 with the aim of developing guidelines and initial recommendations for promoting study-related mobility in STEM fields of study.

In addition, the topic of STEM will be more firmly anchored in the upcoming 2025–2027 performance agreement period with the universities and monitored in the context of the indicators. The previous indicator “degrees with a study-related stay abroad” has been expanded to include “of which STEM degrees with a study-related stay abroad”.



06



**RECOGNITION
AND VALIDATION**

6.1 Fair recognition in Austrian study law

The Rome Communiqué ⁵⁵ adopted in 2020 reaffirmed the continued pursuit of the central objectives and commitments of the Bologna Process. This article aims to shed more light on the following core objective of the key commitment to fair and transparent recognition on the basis of the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁵⁶ in the light of Austrian study law:

“We will strengthen the implementation of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA, using common assessment criteria and reports, in collaboration with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC and NARIC Networks.”

The amendment to Federal Law Gazette I 93/2021 implemented a long-awaited change regarding proof of general university entrance qualification (access) and the recognition of examinations and other academic achievements, according to which the decisive prerequisite should not be the existence of equivalence, but rather the assessment of whether there are substantial differences with respect to learning outcomes. The term “substantial difference” was taken from the terminology used in the Lisbon Recognition

Convention. On the one hand, this new regulation constituted a reaction to the existing, very restrictive case law on the concept of equivalence and implemented European legal requirements⁵⁷. On the other hand, the harmonisation of terminology aims to enshrine in law the practice recommended by ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA and already applied by the higher education institutions in the interests of uniformity and better predictability, while also promoting recourse to authentic sources and the extensive literature on the subject of fair recognition.⁵⁸

In this context, reference should be made to the documents accompanying the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁵⁹ as well as the “European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual 2023”⁶⁰, which was recently updated as part of the ERASMUS+ project “Implementation of Automatic Recognition in the Networks (I-AR)” with the involvement of ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA and expanded to include current recognition issues. The latter is a manual designed to support credential evaluators in practising fair recognition in accordance with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

⁵⁵ see <https://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-rome-2020> [04.03.2024].

⁵⁶ Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Federal Law Gazette III 71/1999 as amended (in short: Lisbon Recognition Convention).{

⁵⁷ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and of the outcomes of learning periods abroad, OJ C 444, 1

⁵⁸ See explanatory notes to the government bill (Erläuterung) no. 662 in the supplements to the stenographic protocols of the National Council (BlgNR), 27th legislative period (GP), p 22.{

⁵⁹ See https://www.enic-naric.net/page-enic-naric_reference_documents [04.03.2024].

⁶⁰ Concerning this and other publications of the “I-AR” project, see <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/recognition-projects/i-ar-concluded> [04.03.2024].

General university entrance qualification

As already described, the evaluation of substantial differences has been anchored in the Universities Act 2002 (Universitätsgesetz, UG)⁶¹ in two places: under proof of general university entrance qualification pursuant to § 64 para 2 UG and under the recognition of examinations and other academic achievements pursuant to § 78 UG.⁶²

In line with this adaptation to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the provisions on general university entrance qualifications have been restructured. When assessing foreign qualifications for access to bachelor's and diploma degree programmes, it is no longer necessary to check whether they are equivalent to an Austrian school-leaving certificate, but whether there are substantial differences in terms of learning outcomes.

§ 64 para 2 subpara 1 to 3 (1) to (3) UG lists three criteria already established in the international recognition system that must be taken into account when examining foreign qualifications:

- Firstly, the qualification in the issuing state must provide access to all sectors of higher education.
- Secondly, the period of schooling on which the qualification is based must be at least twelve years.
- Thirdly, general education content must prevail in school education. In principle, general education content can be demonstrated by completing at least six general education subjects at upper secondary level, namely two languages (at least one foreign language and the student's own mother tongue), mathematics, one science subject, one humanities subject and one other general education or artistic subject.

§ 64 para 2 UG provides for the requirement of a total of up to four supplementary examinations to be taken prior to admission in the event that the duration of schooling is only eleven years or general education content is missing. However, deficits in foreign qualifications that are based on a school duration of ten years (or less) cannot be compensated by supplementary examinations. In such cases, the general university entrance qualification would have to be proven by other means, such as an external university entrance examination.⁶³

The criteria listed in § 64 para 2 subpara 1 to 3 UG are to be understood as a guideline and are intended to support the responsible persons at higher education institutions in making quick, uniform and fair admission decisions. If a foreign qualification fulfils all three criteria, experience has shown that there are no substantial differences to an Austrian school-leaving certificate, which is why an assessment based on subpara 1 to 3 – a “checklist” as it were – generally leads to less administrative work. However, this does not mean that the assessment of substantial differences is limited to the criteria expressly stated in the law. Rather, this regulation provides a framework for a more detailed assessment of learning outcomes if required.⁶⁴

The evaluation of eligible degree programmes to prove the general university entrance qualification for master's and doctoral degree programmes is also based on substantial (subject-related) differences.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Universities Act 2002 (Universitätsgesetz, UG), Federal Law Gazette I 120/2002 as amended.

⁶² These provisions were also adopted by analogy in the Teacher Education Act 2005 (Hochschulgesetz, HG), Federal Law Gazette I No. 30/2006 (§§ 52b, 56 HG). In view of the fact that the Lisbon Recognition Convention applies to all higher education sectors in Austria, the underlying evaluations can also be adopted for universities of applied sciences as well as private colleges and private universities.

⁶³ See explanatory notes to the government bill (ErläutRV) no. 662 in the supplements to the stenographic protocols of the National Council (BlgNR), 27th legislative period (GP), p 21.1.

⁶⁴ See in detail BMBWF/ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA, Recommendation on the assessment of university access with foreign qualifications (<https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Anerkennung/SpAnerkenn.html> [04.03.2024]).

⁶⁵ See Section 64 (3) and (4) UG.

Recognition of examinations and other academic achievements

§ 78 UG also departs from the concept of equivalence and instead focusses on the recognition of learning outcomes. Accordingly, positively assessed examinations and other academic achievements are to be recognised if there are no substantial differences with regard to the acquired competences (learning outcomes). Regarding assessment of the existence of (non-)substantial differences, reference should also be made to parameters that have already proven their worth in the international recognition system.

Accordingly, the following five criteria can be used to assess the existence of (non-)substantial differences in the recognition of examinations and other academic achievements:

- Quality (quality assurance of the study programme)
- Level (educational level of the study programme)
- Workload (learning workload)
- Profile (purpose or content)
- Learning outcomes (acquired knowledge, skills and competences)⁶⁶

Although these concepts regularly overlap, each individual element is important and must be taken into account when assessing substantial differences. Learning outcomes are the most important factor, and their evaluation is supported by a consideration of the other indicators.⁶⁷

With the amendment to Federal Law Gazette I 93/2021, Austrian study law now also has its own definition of the term “**learning outcomes**” commonly used in international recognition. This includes the knowledge, skills and competences which are acquired within the framework of a study programme, in training, further or continuing education in the work process or as a result of a non-regulated learning process, and may be used with regard to professional activities or further training. Learning outcomes acquired as part of a degree programme are described in particular in the qualification profile for this study programme.⁶⁸

Compared to the now outdated equivalence assessment, which (only) determined which study achievements were completed and to what extent (“input orientation”), the assessment of substantial differences based on acquired learning outcomes is thus based on a contemporary approach (“output orientation”), which is suitable not only for the recognition of formal learning achievements, but also for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements – for example by way of validation.

⁶⁶ See explanatory notes to the government bill (Erläuterung) no. 662 in the supplements to the stenographic protocols of the National Council (BlgNR), 27th legislative period (GP), pp. 26 ff. {

⁶⁷ See Aichner/Wadsack-Köchel in: Hauser/Schweighofer (Hg), Großkommentar zum Fachhochschulgesetz 2 (2023) Rz 61 zu § 12 FHG.

⁶⁸ See § 51 para 2 subpara 34 UG.

Summary and outlook

The anchoring of the principles of recognition established in the Lisbon Recognition Convention in Austrian study law means that the assessment steps described above must be applied to all foreign qualifications, including those not issued by a party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.⁶⁹ Consequently, the core objective mentioned at the beginning has been fully met with the latest amendments to Austrian study law.

With the Global Recognition Convention⁷⁰ to be ratified in Austria in the near future, another core objective formulated in the Rome Communiqué is already within reach and should make an important contribution to strengthening international cooperation in higher education and improving the quality of higher education worldwide⁷¹

“We welcome the adoption of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and commit to ratifying it promptly, in order to facilitate fair recognition of qualifications and periods of study from outside the EHEA, using Lisbon Recognition Convention compliant assessment criteria and reports.”⁷²

69 However, the reversal of the burden of proof provided for in the Lisbon Recognition Convention remains limited to qualifications of the contracting parties – at least until the Global Convention enters into force.

70 Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (<https://www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education/global-convention> [04.03.2024]).

71 See Aichner/Wadsack-Köchl in: Hauser/Schweighofer (eds.), Großkommentar zum Fachhochschulgesetz2 (2023) margin no. 116 on § 12 Universities of Applied Sciences Act (Fachhochschulgesetz FHG).

72 Other endeavours relating to recognition:

- „We will ensure automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the EHEA so that students, staff and graduates are able to move freely to study, teach and do research. We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the ESG and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established. We also encourage the application of agreed and secure systems of digital certification and communication such as blockchain, as well as the further development of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) to facilitate automatic recognition.“
- „In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three “Key Commitments” essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).“
- „Digital solutions will facilitate secure, efficient and transparent exchange of data. Joint digital approaches to enhance recognition, quality assurance and mobility are needed.“
- „We commit to reviewing our own legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations, even when they cannot be fully documented, in accordance with Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.“

6.2 Validation of non-formal and informal competences

Objectives behind the validation of competences acquired on a non-formal and informal basis for the Austrian higher education system from the perspective of the Ministry

The validation of non-formally acquired competences or informally acquired competences that have been acquired through personal learning experience in the context of professional activity or in non-professional voluntary work is an issue that we have repeatedly encountered in a wide variety of contexts in the university policy debate in recent years, both nationally and internationally, with regard to recognition in the context of formal, particularly higher education. This revolves around the objectives of **social inclusion, the permeability of the education and training system, fair recognition of learning achievements and work and professional experience gained, and ultimately, maximising the utilisation of individual and societal opportunities.** A closely related topic is the opening up of higher education institutions to non-traditional students.

The validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences became more prominent in the education policy debate in Austria with the EU Council Presidency in



➤ [Communiqués of the Ministerial Conferences](#)



➤ [National LLL Strategy 2020](#)



➤ [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)

2006. In the Bologna Process, starting in Bergen in 2005, the issue of recognition was addressed in the various [communiqués of the ministerial conferences](#) ⁷³. The recognition of knowledge acquired outside higher education or competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is introduced conceptually, lifelong learning is seen as a priority for the next decade with the Leuven Communiqué 2009 and the focus is placed on recognition of prior learning based on learning outcomes in a way that does not differentiate between knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning pathways.

In recognition that professions and jobs are changing ever more rapidly, that the skills required are becoming broader and more differentiated, that continuing education is indispensable and that it is no longer the learning path alone that is important, but the learning outcome, competence and ability, the [National LLL Strategy 2020](#) ⁷⁴ was adopted in 2011. It was developed across all policy areas and resulted in ten action lines, of which action line 10 with its objectives and measures includes the description of learning outcomes in curricula and the development of an Austrian validation strategy for the comprehensive recognition of the results of non-formal and informal learning processes. This also marked the start of an aggressive approach to improving the permeability of the education and university system, permeability with respect to the labour market and social permeability.

The initial implementation of the measures is supported by the [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning \(2012/C 398/01\)](#) ⁷⁵. This calls on the EU Member States to develop nationally coordinated approaches and procedures for the validation of

⁷³ Bologna Communiqués see: <http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-declarations-and-communiqués>

⁷⁴ https://erwachsenenbildung.at/themen/lebenslanges_lernen/oesterreichische_strategie/aktuell.php

⁷⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EL](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EL)

competences. To this end, a strategy development process was initiated in the higher education sector with the involvement of the interest groups representing universities and universities of applied sciences.

AQ Austria is a valuable resource for various institutions in the tertiary education sector, but also for the Ministry. The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) has been working together with AQ Austria on this topic since 2014, and utilises AQ Austria's expertise in the area of "analyses and reports" for qualified preliminary work on the topic at hand as well as for the coordination and integration of the higher education sector within the strategy process.

AQ Austria subsequently drew up a [review of the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences at higher education institutions](#) ⁷⁶ and, on behalf of the BMBWF, developed [recommendations for the structuring of recognition and crediting procedures](#) ⁷⁷ for non-formally and informally acquired competences, which were published in 2016. This was followed by a consulting project with a term of three years. The aim of this was to give interested universities and higher education institutions the opportunity to [obtain individual advice from AQ Austria and international experts](#) ⁷⁸ on the development and implementation of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal competences.

At the same time, the first [Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2016–2021 \(GUEP\)](#) ⁷⁹ included the "creation of binding and transparent validation, equivalence assessment and recognition procedures for access and crediting with respect to a curriculum as well as the further development of corresponding standards."⁷⁹ Universities were encouraged to open themselves up to a new target group of potential higher education students by means of qualitative procedures. For this reason, the focus of the GUEP was initially on academic continuing education, in which context the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal competences was to be given greater weight.

Two further differentiated national strategies were finalised in 2017: the [National strategy on the social dimension in higher education](#) ⁸⁰ and the [Strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Austria](#) ⁸¹. Both strategies assist with current social and economic challenges by means of concrete measures and guidelines for the education and training system. The goals are to give as many people as possible access to education, training and higher education and to facilitate the transition into work and employment. Until further notice, both strategies will be taken into account in the structuring of the performance agreements with the universities.



[Recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences at higher education institutions](#)



[Recommendations for the structuring of recognition and crediting procedures](#)



[Consultancy AQ Austria and international experts](#)



[Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2016–2021](#)



[National strategy on the social dimension in higher education](#)



[Strategy for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Austria](#)

⁷⁶ https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anererkennung_anrechnung/qa-austria-projekte/bestandsaufnahme-anererkennung-anrechnung-non-formal.php

⁷⁷ https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anererkennung_anrechnung/qa-austria-projekte/empfehlungen-anererkennung-anrechnungsverfahren.php

⁷⁸ https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anererkennung_anrechnung/qa-austria-projekte/anererkennung-anrechnung-non-formal.php

⁷⁹ Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy: the Austrian University Development Plan 2016-2021, Vienna 2015, p. 14. <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Hochschulgovernance/Steuerungsinstrumente/GUEP.html>

⁸⁰ <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Studium/Leitthemen/SozDim.html>

⁸¹ <https://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten/12206-validierungsstrategie-veroeffentlicht.php>

The [project for validation and recognition procedure](#) ↗ was retained in the GUEP 2019–2024⁸² and served as a basis for the 2019–2021 performance agreement period for public universities. This was supplemented by the development of new types of offerings, taking into account prior qualifications and professional experience, which is essentially equivalent to the creation of a new **target group-specific offering**.

At the beginning of the 2019–2021 performance agreement period, six universities defined projects relating to the validation or recognition and crediting of non-university competences in their performance agreements. Performance agreement supplements on this topic were concluded with two other universities. Five universities have addressed the issue of the recognition and crediting of professional qualifications and experience for access to a university degree programme. Five of them did so in relation to accessing a continuing education degree programme, while one university addressed access to an undergraduate degree programme (University of Innsbruck: “Third Way”). A closely related topic is the ability of students without formal entrance qualifications to study at the higher education level. The University for Continuing Education Krems (see Pfeffer et al. 2021) and the Graz University of Technology have been researching and working on this topic.

The Vienna University of Economics and Business, the University of Linz and the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences have been working on the development of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal qualifications/competences. This significantly growing acceptance of opening up the universities by means of adequate resources such as reliable procedures and interna-



↗ [Projects for validation and recognition procedure](#)

tional good practice examples was a positive signal for the continuation of activities in the subsequent performance agreement period 2022–2024, especially as the legal basis established in 2021⁸³ has now been widely discussed.

The universities of Graz, Salzburg and Vienna joined the activities in the 2022–2024 performance agreement period. The latter generally incorporates procedures for the recognition and crediting of non-formal and informal competences into its statutes and does not differentiate between undergraduate studies and continuing education studies. The projects of the other universities range from the continuation of previous activities for developing procedures to the implementation of degree programmes in cooperation with non-university educational institutions that conclude with a bachelor’s professional degree and enable access with relevant professional experience. The [performance agreements of the respective universities are published on their websites or in the bulletins and can be accessed in uni:data, the data warehouse for the higher education sector](#). ↗⁸⁴

In the 2025–2027 performance agreement period too, the universities will continue to recognise and credit prior qualifications as part of the implementation of the continuing education reform.

It can be assumed that this will become routine practice. The example of the validation of non-formal and informal competences and their recognition is an impressive example of the long-term, continuous pursuit of education policy projects by various stakeholders.



↗ [Service agreements uni:data Datawarehouse](#)

⁸² <https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/HS-Uni/Hochschulgovernance/Steuerungsinstrumente/GUEP.html>

⁸³ See contribution IV/9 (see contribution Fair recognition in Austrian study law)

⁸⁴ <https://unidata.gv.at/SitePages/Publikationen.aspx>

Validation and recognition at Austrian higher education institutions from the perspective of AQ Austria

Barbara Birke, AQ Austria

With the amendment to the Austrian Higher Education Quality Assurance Act (HS-QSG), which came into force on 1 January 2021, AQ Austria was given the task of “providing information and advice on issues relating to the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences”⁸⁵ übertragen. This step reaffirmed the commitment of the responsible ministry to promote the implementation of the recognition of previously acquired competences and to facilitate the corresponding information and counselling services by commissioning AQ Austria, which operates across the higher education institutions and sectors.

Based on its many years of work in this field and this legal responsibility, AQ Austria has developed an information and counselling service that includes a range of seminars and workshops on recognition and credit transfer issues. AQ Austria also coordinates the national RPL⁸⁶ [Network Austria](#) ⁸⁷ and (since spring 2022) also a European RPL [Netzwerk](#) ⁸⁸ based on a European cooperation partnership.

These activities of AQ Austria and the higher education institutions associated in the networks are guided by one basic idea: to promote confidence in the recognition of competences already acquired at other higher education institutions by developing and implementing quality-assured procedures at the higher education institutions.



[The RPL Netzwerk Austria](#)



[European RPL Network](#)

Three years after the entry into force of the amendments to the law enabling the validation of vocational and non-vocational qualifications, the following picture emerges with regard to implementation at higher education institutions: just over half of the public universities and almost all universities of applied sciences, and just under half of the private universities and university colleges of teacher education have now ⁸⁹ included⁹⁰ provisions on validation in their statutes. Some universities have decided (in a first step) to only allow validation for non-formally acquired competences.

A look at AQ Austria’s counselling activities shows us that implementation at higher education institutions is progressing. In the first few months after the amendment, questions were mainly related to fundamental legal aspects, and later questions regarding the design of the provisions of the articles of association came to the fore. The current focus is on very specific, practical implementation issues, which suggests that the universities already have experience with implementation.

⁸⁵ § 3 para 3 subpara 12) of the Austrian Higher Education Quality Assurance Act (HS-QSG).

⁸⁶ RPL = Recognition of Prior Learning. This refers to the recognition of competences already acquired.}

⁸⁷ https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anererkennung_anrechnung/rpl-network-austria.php, (21.3.3024).

⁸⁸ https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anererkennung_anrechnung/european-rpl-network.php (21.3.3024)

⁸⁹ The higher education institutions are obliged by their respective subject laws to include corresponding provisions on the validation of competences, insofar as validation is carried out. This also means that the legislator has not obliged higher education institutions to provide validation.

⁹⁰ Analysis of the statutes of the higher education institutions, as at 12 December 2023

The RPL Network Austria

The RPL Network Austria grew out of years of project-related cooperation between AQ Austria and higher education institutions from all sectors (i.e. public and private universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education) and was initially formed as an informal network of ten higher education institutions. From this, a permanent Austrian network was founded in 2021, which is coordinated by AQ Austria.

The RPL Network Austria sees itself as a professional network of experts committed to promoting and disseminating the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences. The common goal is to raise awareness of the benefits of recognition and to actively strengthen the development and implementation of quality-assured procedures.

It serves the exchange of experiences and examples of good practice between representatives of all higher education sectors. The network thus contributes to the intersectoral transfer of knowledge about recognising non-formally and informally acquired competences. The network maintains an active and close dialogue with the institutions of the Austrian higher education area and the relevant interest groups. It is also linked with the **European RPL Network**⁹¹ and other European institutions outside the Austrian higher education area, thus enabling a transnational exchange of experiences and examples of good practice at European level.

The network is opening up to the university public with its first conference “More recognition for recognition” in April 2024.

⁹¹ The European RPL Network is being set up as part of a work package of the BMBWF Erasmus+ project 3-IN-AT-PLUS.



PARACELSUS
MEDIZINISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT



07



MICRO-CREDENTIALS

07

MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Micro-credentials are evidence of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved in the course of a **less extensive learning unit**. These learning outcomes are assessed on the basis of transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide learners with specific knowledge, skills and competences that meet social, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials belong to the learner, can be shared and are transferable. They can be independent or combined \[see “Non-objective” below], resulting in more comprehensive qualifications. They are supported by quality assurance that is based on the standards agreed in the respective sector or field of activity (*Council recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability*, p. 13 (a)).

The European Union Council Recommendation

The Council recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability [↗](#)⁹² was adopted on 16 June 2022.

The Council recommendation was based on the **Report of the European Commission’s consultation group for a European approach on micro-credentials** [↗](#)⁹³ ((n which Austria was represented by FH Joanneum), the **results** of the **Erasmus+ project MICROBOL** [↗](#)⁹⁴ in the European Higher Education Area (representatives of all four Austrian higher education sectors in the project, as well as departments of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research) and the results of an EU survey conducted by the EC.



[↗ Council Recommendation](#)



[↗ Report of the European Commission's](#)



[↗ Erasmus+ project MICROBOL](#)

⁹² https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:c3a53289-f4d4-4b96-a659-d55a16f591be/Empfehlung_der_Rates_der_EU_Microcredentials_16_Juni_2022_DE.pdf

⁹³ https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:eb0b2949-99a5-4682-8999-3d22a8aab3e1/Final_report_A_european_approach_to_micro-credentials_MC-HE_Consultation_Group.pdf

⁹⁴ <https://microbol.microcredentials.eu>

National implementation

At **national level**, a **supporting group** on the topic of micro-credentials was set up in 2021, which consisted of representatives from the four higher education sectors (nominated by the respective interest groups), AQ Austria and the BMBWF. This supporting group drew up a [national higher education position on micro-credentials](#) ⁹⁵, which was represented accordingly by the BMBWF in the negotiations at EU level.

The national position paper states that it is a **non-objective** to collect numerous micro-credentials across national and international higher education systems without a didactic and organisational context for the purpose of obtaining a bachelor's or master's degree: this cannot be the objective of the idea of micro-credentials. This would reduce sensibly structured and coherent curricula to an absurd level. Micro-credentials cannot and should not be a substitute for full degrees.

Instead, the “stackability” of micro-credentials should in principle be made possible (see also EU Council Recommendation, p. 15 (h)), for example within the framework of international cooperation partnerships (e.g. joint programmes, etc.). The added value of micro-credentials includes the targeted development of micro-credentials in order to respond better to social changes and rapidly changing labour markets (re- and upskilling). In addition, micro-credentials can promote and supplement high-quality, academic-level cooperation partnerships with industry (e.g. companies). Micro-credentials can also promote cooperation partnerships between higher education institutions.



➤ [National position of higher education on the topic of micro-credentials](#)

Cooperation partnerships with foreign higher education institutions also contribute to internationalisation and interdisciplinarity.

Recommendation of the national Bologna Follow-up Group

With the **recommendation of the national Bologna Follow-up Group on the implementation of micro-credentials in Austria** ⁹⁶ the EU Council recommendation is broken down to national circumstances. The recommendation provides instructions for action when implementing micro-credentials at Austrian higher education institutions and beyond. The annexes to the recommendation give a practical insight into the realisation of micro-credentials and are also intended to encourage implementation.

One very important aspect in implementing micro-credentials, in terms of transparency, permeability and comparability, is having standard elements for the description and certification of a micro-credential, on which every micro-credential awarded should be based. In addition to personal information (proof of identity, etc.) and details of the issuing institution, these are primarily details of the micro-credential (e.g. title, estimated workload, description of learning outcomes and type of assessment). In addition, the European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials are also considered essential for implementation. These include the learning outcomes approach, the scope of a micro-credential (3-15 ECTS credits), quality assurance and recognition.



➤ [Recommendation of the national Bologna Follow-up Group](#)

⁹⁵ https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:b7080820-930a-49ed-a99c-0e43ce29ab94/211216_Position_der_%C3%B6sterreichischen_Hochschbildung_zu_Microcredentials.pdf

⁹⁶ https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:c4037609-de22-418c-b2e6-bcf871f02af9/Empfehlung_der_nationalen_Bologna_Follow-up_Gruppe_zur_Umsetzung_von_Micro-credentials_in_%C3%96sterreich.pdf

National survey on micro-credentials

In order to get a better picture of the extent to which micro-credentials are discussed and implemented in concrete terms at Austrian higher education institutions, the BMBWF and the OeAD conducted a study in the form of an online survey over the summer of 2022, which was aimed at the university management of the 75 higher education institutions at the time. The survey, which took stock of the current situation, identified the following, insofar as they existed:

- training programmes with micro-credentials;
- the interpretation of micro-credentials;
- the development of and participation fees for micro-credentials;
- the added value of micro-credentials;
- the main target group(s) of micro-credentials education programmes;
- the way in which higher education institutions perceive and assess micro-credentials;
- the importance of university departments and course organisation units for the development of micro-credentials;
- the need for discussion of micro-credentials.

Finally, the higher education institutions were asked to provide some (possible) examples of the use of micro-credentials at their institution.

It should be emphasised that the survey was in no way an evaluation of the performance of the higher education institutions, but rather a national stocktaking of the state of knowledge, the status of the discussion, and the potential and application of micro-credentials in the Austrian higher education area. According to the survey conducted in September 2022, only four higher education institutions in Austria stated that they also offer courses that explicitly include micro-credentials.

Below are some of the results of the survey:

- It can be seen that, at the time of the survey, of the 20 higher education institutions that already offer educational programmes that correspond to the definition of micro-credentials in the European Council recommendation, only four also use the term micro-credentials partially or consistently.
- Ten higher education institutions stated that they had solid plans to introduce micro-credentials education programmes.
- Ten higher education institutions stated that they had solid plans to introduce micro-credentials education programmes. 40% (8 out of 20 higher education institutions) of respondents have developed new formats.
- There is a tendency to offer micro-credentials for a fee (35%) or to charge a cost contribution depending on the target group (42%).
- For the development of micro-credentials programmes, the continuing education department, the university management and the office for the development of course programmes are the most important factors at the higher education institutions, with each of these being specified as such by 79% of respondents.
- Top 3 in terms of “added value of micro-credentials programmes” (multiple answers were possible and grades 1 and 2 were combined):
 1. Offering up-skilling offers (79%)
 2. Responding quickly and specifically to social changes and rapidly changing labour markets with shorter training programmes (78%)
 3. Organising further training courses flexibly in terms of time (69%).
- 75% of higher education institutions (grades 1 and 2 combined) agree with the statement that the added value of micro-credentials programmes benefits people whose flexibility is limited. For 80% of the higher education institutions (school grades 1 and 2 combined), it is clear that this can favour a more flexible student career path.
- According to 87% (school grades 1 and 2 combined) of the higher education institutions, students in the “alumni pursuing further education” study phase benefit most from micro-credentials education programmes.



Internationale Peer Learning Activity “Micro-credentials – implementing council recommendation and digital credential frameworks” at the University of Innsbruck

© OeAD/APA Fotoservice/Pichler

- “Alumni of their higher education institutions” and “people working in a specific field regardless of their formal prior education” are considered the main target groups for micro-credentials programmes according to the higher education institutions’ self-assessment. The driving force of the European Universities Initiative is noticeable. In this context, micro-credentials programmes for students play a far greater role than for international students in general.
- 70% (school grade 1 and 2 combined) and thus 36 out of 51 higher education institutions agree (completely) with the statement that the concept of micro-credentials has benefited from the general expansion of digital learning formats in recent years.
- 47%, i.e. 24 out of 51 higher education institutions, see a high or increased need for a discussion of micro-credentials in the area of qualification of external lecturers and 36% in quality assurance. The topic of funding divides the higher education community: overall, it is either being actively discussed, or hardly at all. This is probably also due to the various legal mandates and framework conditions in the higher education sectors.

Future developments

The development and use of micro-credentials is experiencing a very rapid increase in the Austrian higher education system, which means that, over the next two years, further changes to the implementation and framework conditions will be necessary. The needs of the higher education institutions and the BMBWF will be taken into account here to ensure a holistic implementation (e.g. that standardised study index numbers are used) of micro-credentials.

At a European level, micro-credentials are also being funded through an Erasmus+ call (deadline June 2024) for the concrete implementation of micro-credentials. In this manner, higher education institutions can acquire targeted EU funding to develop micro-credentials.

At the end of the day, it is a strategic university decision whether or not to deal with this topic more intensively. Regardless of how one feels about micro-credentials, it is a good idea to look at and rethink the curricula in terms of responsiveness to rapidly changing labour markets.



08



OUTLOOK

08

OUTLOOK

The objectives and priorities of the European Higher Education Area for the 2025–2027 working period will be adopted by the responsible higher education ministers at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Albania on 29 May 2024 as part of the Tirana Communiqué (not yet adopted at the time of going to press). At meetings of the European BFUG, many delegations called for a streamlining of the working structure of the EHEA. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that, above all, the implementation of the three key commitments of the EHEA (three cycle study architecture in conjunction with national qualifications frameworks, recognition and quality assurance) and thus their working groups will continue. The fundamental values will certainly also be a central topic in the next period. These will require, in addition to an indicator system that still needs to be established, national considerations in how to deal with them.

A very intensive discussion for Tirana concerns the introduction of a permanent EHEA secretariat from 2027, which would replace the current procedure (secretariat is provided by the country that also organises the EHEA conference). The aim is to strengthen the objectivity, continuity and professionalism of the secretariat. The host country of the permanent secretariat would be determined in an application process this year. It remains to be seen at the conference in Tirana whether the ministers will support this plan.

Finally, it should be noted that Romania and Moldova have submitted a joint application to organise the 2027 EHEA Conference and the EHEA Secretariat for the 2025–2027 working period. If the European BFUG and the ministers approve this application (which is expected), the EHEA Conference 2027 will take place in Iași and Chișinău.

Contact persons

Thematic contribution	Institution	Contact person	E-mail address
The national BFUG as an interface to the European BFUG; micro-credentials	BMBWF, Department IV/11	Stephan De Pasqualin	stephan.depasqualin@bmbwf.gv.at
Fundamental Values of Higher Education in Austria	SciencesPo Paris	Milica Popović	milica.popovic@sciencespo.fr
Sustainability in the context of the internationalisation of study programmes and teaching – Are we meeting our expectations?	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences	Helga Kromp-Kolb	helga.kromp-kolb@boku.ac.at
Internationalisation of the curriculum; mobility of teachers and administrative staff – the role of personnel development	BMBWF, Department IV/11	Eva Uthe	eva.uthe@bmbwf.gv.at
Mobility of higher education students with a special focus on teacher training degrees	BMBWF, Department IV/5	Manuela Fried	manuela.fried@bmbwf.gv.at
Mobility of higher education students with a special focus on STEM-related degree programmes	BMBWF, Department IV/11	Alexander Kohler	alexander.kohler@bmbwf.gv.at
Fair recognition in Austrian study law	BMBWF, Department IV/9	Hannah Aichner	hannah.aichner@bmbwf.gv.at
Objectives behind the validation of competences acquired on a non-formal and informal basis for the Austrian higher education system from the perspective of the Ministry	BMBWF, Department IV/7	Edith Winkler	edith.winkler@bmbwf.gv.at
Validation and recognition at Austrian higher education institutions from the perspective of AQ Austria	AQ Austria	Barbara Birke	barbara.birke@aq.ac.at
The RPL Network Austria			
Coordination and editing	BMBWF, Department IV/11	Stephan De Pasqualin	stephan.depasqualin@bmbwf.gv.at



09



APPENDIX

09

APPENDIX



➤ [Rome Communiqué 2020](#)



➤ [3-IN-AT-PLUS in a nutshell](#)



➤ [Recommendations for mobility in the teacher training programme](#)

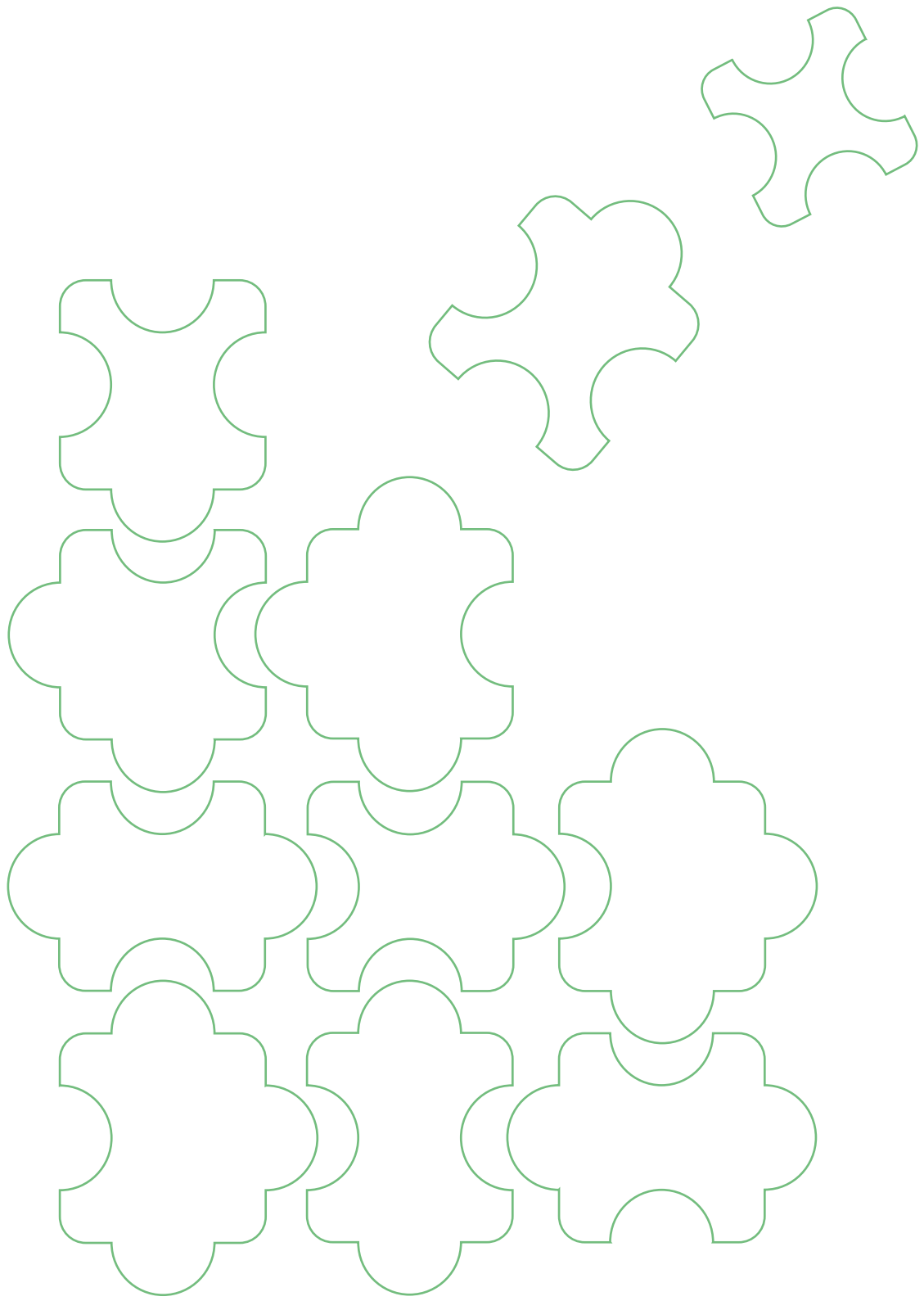


➤ [BFUG recommendations on micro-credentials](#)

Recommendation of the national Bologna Follow-up Group on the implementation of micro-credentials in Austria (PDF, 884 KB)



➤ [HMIS2030 in a nutshell](#)



20
24

