

8. INFORMATION ON THE GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM¹

8.1 Types of Institutions and Institutional Status

Higher education (HE) studies in Germany are offered at three types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI).²

- Universitäten (Universities) including various specialized institutions, offer the whole range of academic disciplines. In the German tradition, universities focus in particular on basic research so that advanced stages of study have mainly theoretical orientation and research-oriented components.

- Fachhochschulen (Universities of Applied Sciences) concentrate their study programmes in engineering and other technical disciplines, business-related studies, social work, and design areas. The common mission of applied research and development implies a distinct application-oriented focus and professional character of studies, which include integrated and supervised work assignments in industry, enterprises or other relevant institutions.

- Kunst- und Musikhochschulen (Universities of Art/Music) offer studies for artistic careers in fine arts, performing arts and music; in such fields as directing, production, writing in theatre, film, and other media; and in a variety of design areas, architecture, media and communication.

Higher Education Institutions are either state or state-recognized institutions. In their operations, including the organization of studies and the designation and award of degrees, they are both subject to higher education legislation.

8.2 Types of Programmes and Degrees Awarded

Traditionally, studies in all three types of institutions were offered in integrated "long" (one-tier) programs leading to Diplom- or Magister Artium degrees or completed by a Staatsprüfung (State Examination).

Within the framework of the Bologna-Process one-tier study programs are successively being replaced by a two-tier study system. Since 1998, a scheme of first- and second-level degree programs (Bachelor and Master) was introduced to be offered parallel to or instead of integrated "long" programs. These programs are designed to provide enlarged variety and flexibility to students in planning and pursuing educational objectives, they also enhance international compatibility of studies.

The degrees awarded by German higher education institutions as well as the included qualification targets and competences of the graduates are described in the qualification Framework for German Higher Education Degrees³

For details cf. Sec. 8.4.1, 8.4.2, and 8.4.3 respectively. Table 1 provides a synoptic summary.

8.3 Approval/Accreditation of Programmes and Degrees

To ensure quality and comparability of qualifications, the organization of studies and general degree requirements have to conform to principles and regulations established by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK).⁴ In 1999, a system of accreditation for programs of study became operational under the control of an Accreditation Council at national level. All new programs have to be accredited under this scheme; after a successful accreditation they receive the quality-label of the Accreditation Council.⁵

Table 1: Institutions, Programs and Degrees in German Higher Education

