

Background Information: Higher Education System in Austria



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Higher Education System in Austria

I. General Characteristics

Population	
Total population (I.I.2013) (million) ¹	8.45
Population density (2013) (persons per square kilometre) ²	102.9
Population Structure (2013) (share of total population %)³	
0-14 years	14.4
15-24 years	12.1
25-49 years	35.8
50-64 years	19.7
65 years and older	18.1
GDP	
GDP per capita in PPS (2013), EU 28 = 100 ⁴	128
GDP year-on-year growth rate (2013) ⁵	0.2
Education (2012) (All levels)⁶	
Enrolment	
Total (ISCED 0-6)	1,729,725
Tertiary Level of Education (ISCED 5-6)	376,498
Tertiary Education	
Population aged 25-64 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	20.0
Population aged 30 – 34 years with tertiary education (2012) (%) ⁷	26.0
Public expenditure on tertiary education (percentage of GDP) (2011) ⁸	1.4

2. Types of Higher Education Institutions

Higher education in Austria is offered by four main types of institutions. These include public universities, private universities, Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), and University Colleges of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*).

The public and private universities focus on scientific and academic research and offer degrees in first (Bachelor), second (Master), and third (Doctoral) cycle qualifications. The

¹ European Commission. (2013). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Basic Figures on the EU, Winter 2013/2014 Edition*. Luxembourg: Publications office of the European Union.

² Eurostat. (2013). *Population density*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00003&plugin=0>

³ Eurostat. (2013). *People by age group*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00010&language=en>

⁴ Eurostat. (2013). *GDP per capita in PPS*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0114>

⁵ Eurostat. (2013). *Real GDP growth rate*. Retrieved from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=teco0115>

⁶ Eurostat (2014). *Students by ISCED level, age and sex*. Retrieved from http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_en1rtl&lang=en

⁷ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

⁸ OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, pp. 232. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

public universities in Austria are legally supervised by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy; however, they have full autonomy in the organisation of studies and in general administration and management. Private universities, on the other hand, are regulated by the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) and must be accredited by them in order to award degrees. The private university sector in Austria is still comparatively small with only around 3 % of all students enrolled in private universities.

Universities of Applied Sciences offer application- and vocational-oriented degree programmes. The Bachelor programmes include an obligatory period of practical training (internship) to equip students with relevant skills and expertise in their respective fields of occupation. Universities of Applied Sciences generally offer degrees in first and second cycle qualifications. Legally, the majority of the Universities of Applied Sciences are private entities; however, a bulk of their funding is derived from public subsidies. The programmes offered by the Universities of Applied Sciences must be accredited by AQ Austria⁹.

University Colleges of Teacher Education are responsible for teachers' training and education for primary schools, lower secondary schools, special-needs schools, the pre-vocational year, vocational subjects, and religion offering courses in pedagogics and the principles of teaching. They offer degrees only in the first cycle qualification. Few institutions are allowed to award a Master degree, however, only in collaboration with a university. University Colleges of Teacher Education are accountable to the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and have restricted autonomy in the organisation of courses, admission decisions, and general management.

3. Study Structure

As a result of the Bologna Process, Austria has widely implemented the three-cycle structure consisting of Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. In some fields of studies, for instance, law, medicine, teacher education, and most arts programmes, the awarded degree remains to be a Diploma. The Universities of Applied Sciences have converted all of their programmes according to the Bologna degree structure. Higher education attainment and student's performance are measured in credit points compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

First cycle qualification (Bachelor)

- The first cycle qualification includes Bachelor programmes, with study duration of six to eight semesters.
- A Bachelor degree generally requires 180 (six semesters) to 240 (eight semesters) ECTS credits.

Second cycle qualification (Master)

- The second cycle qualification includes Master programmes, with study duration of two to four semesters.

⁹ AQ Austria replaced the Fachhochschule Council in 2012.

- The credit requirements for a Master degree vary between 60 and 120 ECTS credits.

Third cycle qualification (Doctoral)

- The preparation of a thesis forms the essential part of the Doctoral programmes. The study duration of Doctoral programmes is at minimum three years.

Long national programmes (Diploma)

- Diploma programmes have a duration of eight to twelve semesters divided into two to three periods each of which ends with a diploma examination.

4. Admission Requirements^{10 11 12}

The general entry requirements include the higher secondary school leaving certificate (*Reifezeugnis*), its foreign equivalent, or successful completion of the university entrance qualification examination (*Studienzugangsberechtigungsprüfung*). A vocational-based examination (*Berufsreifeprüfung*), especially taken by students of compulsory lower schools with apprenticeship training as skilled workers, may also be considered as equivalent to the higher secondary school leaving certificate.

Entry requirements at the Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria include a university entrance qualification (*Allgemeine Universitätsreife*) or other relevant vocational qualification to enrol in Bachelor programmes. Universities of Applied Sciences may also employ certain additional criteria to select their students.

In case of public universities, Austria in general follows a policy of open access (apart from aptitude tests in sports and art programmes). No restrictions to student numbers apply. However, in recent years, the government has restricted the number of study places in a number of subjects. Currently, this applies to programmes in human medicine, dental medicine, veterinary medicine, psychology, communication studies, architecture, computer sciences, biology, pharmaceutical studies, business, and economics. In cases where the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places, universities are free to set their own criteria for selecting students. Access to University Colleges of Teacher Education is regulated by aptitude tests.

Admission to a Master programme requires a relevant Bachelor degree. A relevant Master degree acquired at a university or University of Applied Sciences qualifies for a Doctoral programme.

5. Enrolment Levels

Figure 1 shows trends in enrolment levels (ISCED 5A, 5B and 6, ISCED 97) in Austria between 2003 and 2012. Enrolment levels in 5A and 6 have increased whereas student numbers in 5B¹³

¹⁰ Eurydice. (2014). Bachelor. Retrieved from <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Bachelor>

¹¹ Eurydice. (2014). *Second cycle programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹² Eurydice. (2014). *Third cycle (PhD) programmes*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Second_Cycle_Programmes

¹³ Students in Tertiary Type 5B are not part of the Austrian EUROSTUDENT survey.

institutions decreased slightly until 2008 (due to upgrades of some institutions to 5A level) and doubled since. The increase in the total number of students in 5A and 6 is partly due to a huge increase in foreign students, which make up about 20 % of the students in Austria.

6. Registration and/or Tuition Fees

At the public universities and University Colleges of Teacher Education there is no tuition fee for students who are citizens of the European Union as long as they do not exceed the standard period of study by more than two semesters (many exemptions do apply). All other students have to pay tuition fees per semester with the exception of students from developing countries¹⁴. Unlike public universities, Universities of Applied Sciences may decide themselves whether to charge any tuition fee or not. Currently, there are seven (of 21) Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria that do not charge any tuition fee¹⁵. Additionally, all students are required to become members of the Austrian Union of Students, a body which represents their interests, and to pay a contribution (18.50 Euro/semester) for mandatory membership to this organisation.

7. Financial Support for Students^{16 17}

In Austria, there is a distinction between direct and indirect student aid. Direct student aid includes study allowances, study grants, and study abroad grants. The eligibility criteria for study grants include proof of academic progress, age (start of studies before the age of 30 years), and social needs based on parents' and students' incomes. Supplements for students with kids or students with disabilities apply. Under certain conditions, grants are also available for students to finish their studies. Merit based grants are publicly funded but distributed by the higher education institution based on their own criteria.

Students who are in need may also be granted financial support in cooperation with the Austrian Union of Students, e.g. in the form of discounted meals in student canteens. Indirect student aid for financial support includes family allowance as well as health and accident insurance up to the age of 24 years. Additional options for financial support for students are study abroad grants, or e.g. reduced tickets for public transport.

Figure 1: Trends in enrolment levels

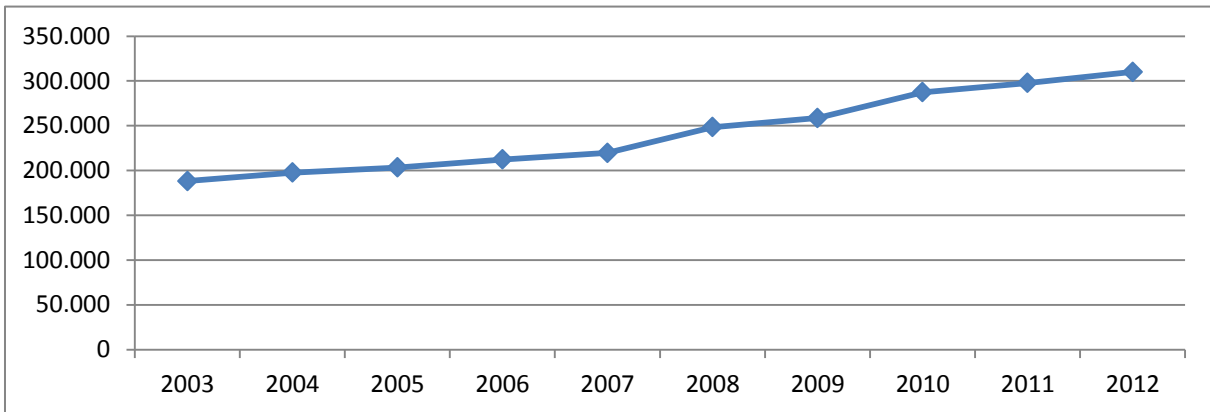
¹⁴ EU citizens have to pay around 360€/semester if they exceed the standard period of study by two semesters, Non-EU citizens have to pay the double amount for every semester.

¹⁵ Eurydice. (2014). *Fees within public higher education*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Higher_Education_Funding

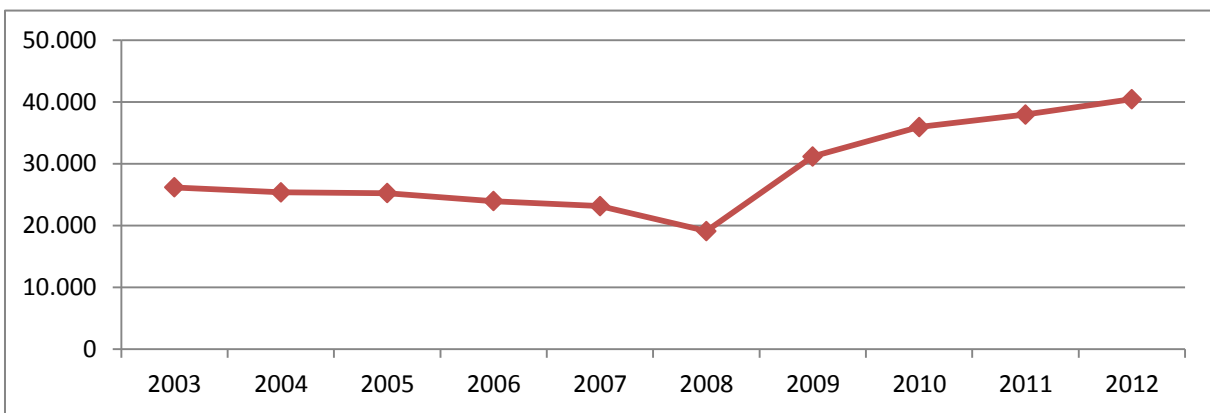
¹⁶ Eurydice. (2014). *Financial support for learner's families*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Higher_Education_Funding

¹⁷ Eurydice. (2014). *Financial support for learners*. Retrieved from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Higher_Education_Funding

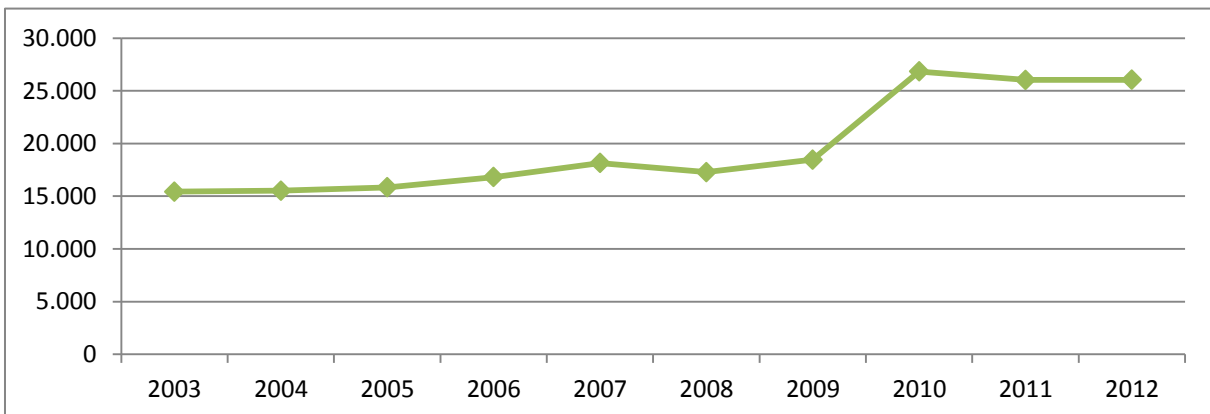
a) Tertiary Type 5A



b) Tertiary Type 5B



c) Tertiary Type 6



Data source: Eurostat (2014), *Students by ISCED level age and sex*, European Commission. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_enr1tl&lang=en#

8. Note on the Austrian data provided for EUROSTUDENT V

The Austrian data for this report comes from a survey in 2011. At that time, a larger proportion of students were still enrolled in Diploma programmes, access to university programmes was less limited, and indirect student aid (family allowances) was paid for two

more years than nowadays. This has to be kept in mind when interpreting the Austrian data on the following pages.

This report is based on the following sources:

European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). (2014). *Higher Education System in Austria*.

Retrieved from http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Higher_education_system_in_Austria

Eurydice. (2014). *Overview Austria*. Retrieved from

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Redirect>