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BMWF

Austrian
EQF Referencing Report

As of
December 2011

Table of contents

Tables and figures

List of abbreviations

AHS	Secondary academic school
AQA	Austrian Agency of Quality Assurance
AQ.Austria	Austrian Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (since 1st of March 2012)
BAG	Vocational Training Act
BAK	Federal Chamber of Labour
BBAB	Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship
BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
BGBl	Federal Law Gazette
BKA	Federal Chancellery
BMASK	Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
BMG	Federal Ministry for Health
BMEIA	Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs
BMF	Federal Ministry of Finance
BMI	Federal Ministry of the Interior
BMJ	Federal Ministry of Justice
BMLFUW	Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
BMLVS	Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports
BMUKK	Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture
BMVIT	Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology
BMS	VET school
BMWF	Federal Ministry of Science and Research
BMWFJ	Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth
BHS	VET college
BRP	*Berufsreifeprüfung*
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation Federal Organisation and Study Act for the Danube University Krems – University of Continuing Education (DUK-G 2004)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area

EC	European Commission
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA
FHK	Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
FHR	Council of Universities of Applied Sciences
FHStG	Universities of Applied Sciences Studies Act
GuKG	Healthcare and Nursing Act
HS	Lower secondary school
HSG	Students' Self-Governing Act
HS-QSG	Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IST Austria	Institute for Science and Technology Austria
IV	Federation of Austrian Industry
CA	Collective agreement
LAP	Apprenticeship-leave examination
LLL	Lifelong learning
LO	Learning outcome orientation
LKÖ	Austrian Chamber of Agriculture
NCP	National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQF STRG	Steering group for the National Qualifications Framework
ÖGB	Austrian Trade Union Federation
ÖH	Austrian Students' Union
QVS	Body responsible for qualifications
ÖPUK	Austrian Rectors' Conference of Private Universities
SBP	*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*
SchOG	School Organisation Act
SchUG	School Education Act
StudBerG	Higher Education Entrance Act
UG 2002	2002 Universities Act

UniAkkG	University Accreditation Act
Uniko	Universities Austria
UniStG	University Study Act
VS	Primary school
WKÖ	Austrian Federal Economic Chamber

Preface – preamble

Since the year 2000 the Lisbon Strategy has been aiming to ensure competitiveness and social cohesion in Europe. The Recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework in 2008 set an important milestone for comparing education systems and qualifications in Europe. With remarkable energy all EU member states and several candidate countries are currently working on the implementation of this Recommendation and are therefore clearly pointing the way towards a European Education Area.

In Austria the significance of a National Qualifications Framework for education policy was highlighted in particular in a national consultation process, and the need to implement this was laid down in the Government Programme of the 24th legislation period (2008-2013).

We firmly believe that the Austrian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has created a sound structure which will be a significant boost for promoting mobility, lifelong learning and learning outcome orientation. Not least thanks to its contribution to the Bologna process and to the establishment of quality assurance models and educational standards, the NQF is a promising instrument for ensuring extensive and wide-reaching improvements in efficiency in the Austrian education system.

This report to the European Commission should be seen as a first milestone in the development, which will also illustrate the good cooperation between BMUKK and BMWF.

At this point we would like to thank all of the stakeholders involved in the process, in particular the NQF steering group, and experts for their active cooperation and for their dedicated work to help us achieve these ambitious goals.

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Federal Minister of
Education, Arts and Culture

o. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Karlheinz Töchterle

Federal Minister of
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1. Summary and Overview

In the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, which was adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council in April 2008, member states were advised to develop national qualifications frameworks on a voluntary basis and create links between them and the EQF by 2010. In addition, they are to adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, such as diplomas, certificates and Europass documents, contain a clear reference to the EQF level.

The main objective of this report is to present the links between the levels of the Austrian NQF and those of the EQF. For this purpose, the report uses exemplary or reference qualifications, which aim to provide a transparent insight into the Austrian educational hierarchy. The creation of a formal basis for the referencing procedure is discussed to ensure the NQF will be implemented comprehensively in Austria. Another objective is to clarify and specify the competences of the bodies responsible for referencing. It is envisaged that, in a next step, all Austrian qualifications will be referenced to an NQF level by 2013.

The design of the Austrian NQF is very closely connected with the EQF. The NQF will comprise eight levels overall, with qualifications planned to be assigned to Levels 6 to 8 based on different sentences describing them. Whereas qualifications of the Bologna architecture acquired at higher education (HE) institutions (*i.e.* bachelor, master and PhD) are classified according to the Dublin descriptors, assignment of all the other qualifications builds on the EQF descriptors, which have been formulated to complement the EQF descriptor[1], and 'reference qualifications'[2]. Levels 1 to 5, which are also characterised by these descriptors, will comprise qualifications from all educational contexts.

1 The NQF descriptors are intended to ensure that the rather abstract EQF descriptors can be applied and understood more easily by using formulations that follow implicitly or explicitly from the analysis of Austrian qualification descriptions (such as curricula, training regulations, legal texts, etc.). This also aims to make differences between levels more clearly visible.

2 'Reference qualifications' are selected qualifications from the Austrian qualification landscape. They aim to illustrate the requirements connected with the levels and make them understood more easily. In the draft report on the referencing of qualifications from the formal sector it is proposed that they should form the basis for referencing jointly with the EQF descriptors and the Austrian NQF descriptors (cf. chapter 2.5 and Annex 3).

The National Qualifications Framework and the EQF referencing report have been developed, with responsibilities shared between BMUKK and BMWF and with the continual involvement of all major stakeholders and experts. This process is explained in the following seven chapters.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction and provides a concise overview of the individual chapters of this report.

Chapter 2 contains an overview of the different levels of the formal Austrian education system as the NQF also focuses on this sector in a first stage.

Chapter 3 presents the development of the NQF in Austria. As well as documenting the steps of this development – starting with the EQF consultation process –, it describes the objectives, work structures and development processes of the Austrian NQF.

Chapter 4 presents the previous and present development steps within the framework of the Bologna process.

Chapter 5 explains the compatibility of the Austrian NQF with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and describes the process of self-certification for qualifications from the tertiary sector.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF as developed by the EQF Advisory Group. Information about the ten criteria relate to the latest state of development of the NQF and of the implementation of the EQF in Austria (November 2011).

Chapter 7 provides an outlook on planned future developments and milestones in the development of the NQF.

Chapter 8 lists quoted, thematically relevant literature, and **Chapter 9**, the annex, contains further information.

Based on BMUKK's specifications, this report has been formulated in a manner which does not discriminate between men and women.

2. The Austrian education system

2.1. Preliminary remarks

As the NQF focuses on the formal sector (see Figure 1) in a first phase, this EQF referencing report also concentrates on this area[3]. This chapter presents the Austrian educational qualifications which will be referenced to the NQF.

It must be noted, however, that this diagram does not present all education pathways in the formal education system nor all qualifications which can be acquired in the formal sector. Some examples of educational programmes from the spheres of competence of other federal ministries are briefly referred to in section 3.7.

The formal education programmes that are illustrated and mentioned in the diagram are described based on the following features:

- the target group and/or age of learners;
- the ISCED classification of the education programme;
- the access requirements;
- the possibilities open for graduates of the education programme (‘access to’);
- the number of learners a year[4];
- the responsibility for this education programme;
- the link to the curriculum or training regulation, etc.

The presentation of education programmes after the diagram follows their position in the illustration: it starts with the lowest area of the diagram (ISCED 1) and leads to the individual education programmes in the same order as in the diagram – from left to right.

3 According to the definition used in the NQF context, the formal sector aims to impart qualifications awarded on the basis of state (legally normative) regulations (cf. BMUKK &BMWF 2008).
4 For some education programmes it was only possible to identify the number of graduates.

Legislative bases

- School Organisation Act (*Schulorganisationsgesetz, SchOG*, *BGBl*. no. 242/1962 as amended): This Act regulates the responsibilities and structures of the school types which are within the sphere of competence of BMUKK. Its content includes the following items: the structure of the Austrian school system; general accessibility and exemption from tuition fees at public schools; the structure of curricula; provisions related to school pilot projects and special provisions concerning school organisation (individual school types and their tasks; organisation forms; admission prerequisites, curricula and training times; qualifications; number of pupils per class; teachers and principals/head teachers).
- School Education Act (*Schulunterrichtsgesetz, SchUG*, *BGBl*. no. 472/1986 as amended): This Act regulates instruction and teaching at the schools to which the *SchOG* applies. It comprises provisions about the following areas, for example: admission, assessment of pupils, repetition of school grades, cooperation of teaching staff, pupils and legal guardians, etc.
- Curricula: Curricula constitute major parts of the legal framework. They are regulations issued by BMUKK on the basis of the *SchOG*. All curricula provide for special focuses that can be selected autonomously by schools. This not only enables schools to define special focuses within a given framework but also to develop their own school profiles.

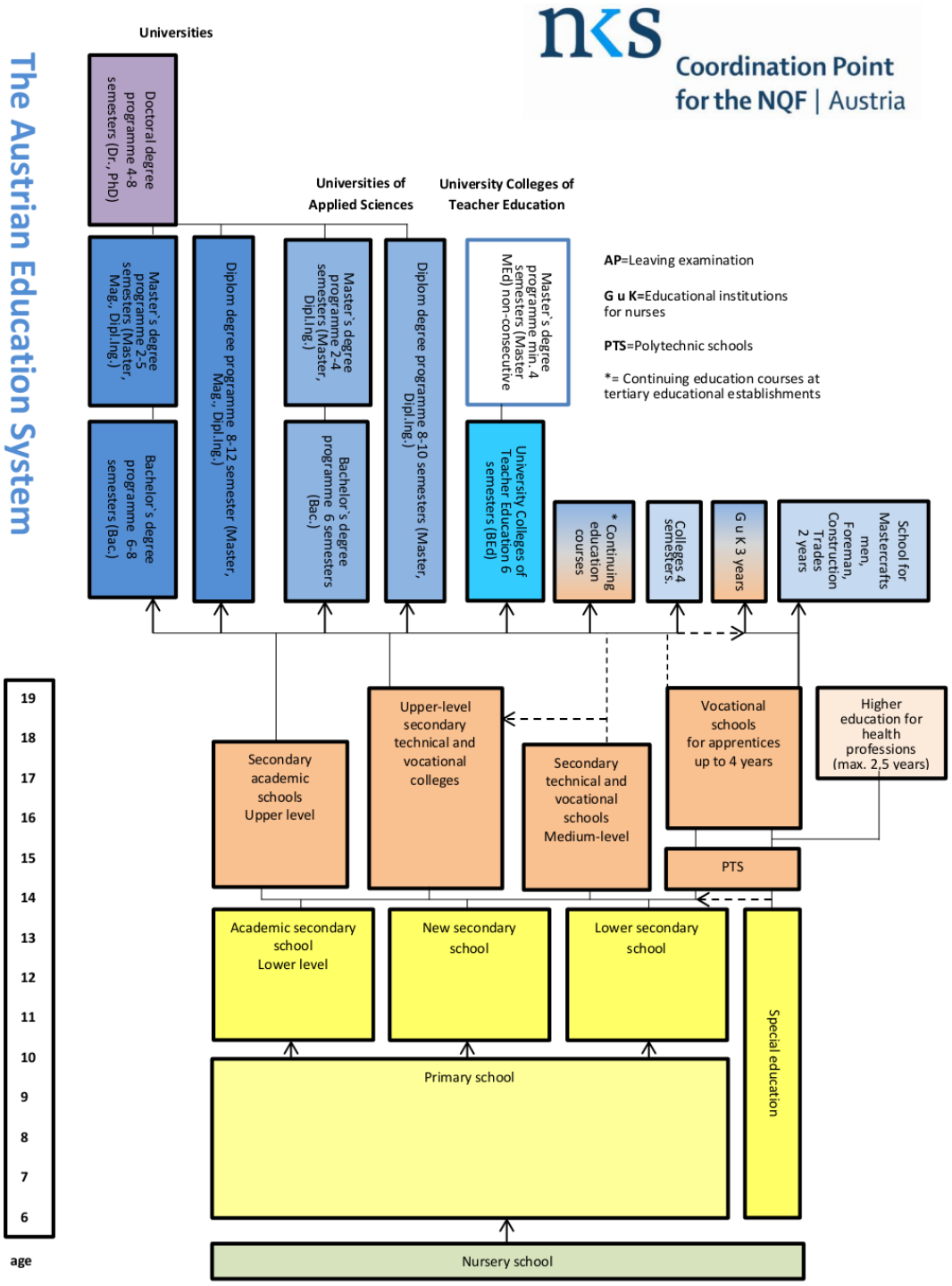
The named school-related acts do not apply to some fields of school-based VET.

- For schools in agriculture and forestry, separate legal regulations have been enacted, such as the Federal Act governing schools in agriculture and forestry (*land- und forstwirtschaftliches Bundesschulgesetz*, *BGBl*. no. 175/1966 as amended).
- The legal basis for healthcare professions is, among others, the Federal Act on healthcare and nursing professions (*Bundesgesetz über Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegeberufe (GuKG*, *BGBl*. no. 108/1997 as amended).
- In the dual system (apprenticeship training) company- and school-based training within the framework of an apprenticeship is regulated by different acts and regulations.

Legislative bases of dual vocational training:

- For the school-based part, *SchOG, SchUG* and the decreed (framework) curricula apply (cf. 3.2). The company-based part of training is regulated by the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz, BAG*, *BGBl*. no. 142/1969 as amended), which is within the sphere of competence of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ). Excepted from this are apprenticeships in agriculture and forestry, which are subject to the Vocational Training Act for agriculture and forestry (*land- und forstwirtschaftliches Berufsausbildungsgesetz, LFBAG*, *BGBl*. no. 298/1990 as amended).
- The specific occupational profiles of company-based training are regulated in a training regulation for every apprenticeship. In the field of apprenticeship, collective agreements (CAs) also play a major role. They are the result of negotiations between representatives of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKÖ) and the trade unions. The majority of CAs refer to entire sectors and are binding for all companies of the respective sector. Some large companies have their own CAs. Regarding apprenticeship training, CAs specify the minimum remuneration to be paid to apprentices during their apprenticeship period.

Figure 1. Formal educational qualifications in Austria



Sources: BMUKK, BMWF, IBW.
The above figure was prepared by the Austrian NCP within the context of this report and based on the above sources.

2.2. Primary level

Primary school

Age	6-10 years old[5]
ISCED	1
Access requirements	Age 6 (compulsory schooling)
Access to	Lower secondary school, lower cycle of AHS (for children with an excellent report in the 4th class of primary school)
Learners a year	About 330,069 pupils, school year 2009/10[6]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/14055/lp_vs_gesamt.pdf

Primary school has the task of providing elementary education for all pupils taking into consideration the social integration of children with disabilities. Primary schools impart comprehensive general education to all pupils with the objective of fostering their social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills and abilities.

Classes for children with special educational needs additionally take the children's individual disabilities into account. Children with special educational needs can either attend a special needs school that is tailored to their needs or primary school classes that are run in an integrative (inclusive) scheme.

5 In Austria compulsory schooling starts at the age of six and lasts for nine years.
6 BMUKK 2010b

Special needs school

Age	6-14 (15) years old
ISCED	1 / 2
Access requirements	For children with special educational needs at the request of parents/legal guardians
Access to	Integration into the world of work must be achieved in close cooperation with legal guardians, institutions for professional integration, training companies and specialist advice and counselling centres
Learners a year	About 12,154 pupils, school year 2009/10[7]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curricula	http:/www.cisonline.at/fileadmin/kategorien/BGBl_II__Nr_137_Anlage_C_1.pdf based on the curricula of primary school and lower secondary school

Special needs school lasts for a total of eight or, if prevocational school or a preparation year for work is included, for nine years of schooling. The Austrian special needs school sector comprises ten branches. The classes for pupils are held by specially trained special needs school teachers who use tailored teaching methods to impart basic general education; this aims to enable the children to tackle further vocational training programmes or attend upper secondary schools. In addition, there are special needs schools with a specific curriculum (for example for learning-impaired and under-achieving children, for children with visual impairments or with hearing impairments).

2.3 Lower secondary level

Pupils have a choice between the following school types which last for four years each: the lower cycle of AHS, new secondary school and lower secondary school. Pupils with special educational needs can continue attending the fifth to eighth grade at special needs school. Afterwards the children can opt for attending an intermediate or upper secondary school depending on their inclinations and talents.

7 BMUKK 2010b

Secondary academic school (AHS) – lower cycle

Age	10-14 years old
ISCED	2
Access requirements	An excellent report in the 4th year of primary school
Access to	AHS – upper cycle, VET school or VET college
Learners a year	About 114,693 pupils, school year 2009/10[8]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/11668/11668.pdf

The lower cycle of AHS aims to impart a broad and advanced general education. It is offered in three branches with different focuses (but for the 1st and 2nd class the curriculum is the same):

- Classical branch: Latin or alternatively a second modern foreign language;
- Technical education with a focus on science: geometrical drawing, mathematics, sciences; technical work or textile work;
- Home economics branch: chemistry; technical work or textile work.

New secondary school

Age	10-14 years old
ISCED	2
Access requirements	An excellent report in the 4th year of primary school
Access to	AHS – upper cycle, VET school or VET college
Learners a year	About 16,874 pupils, school year 2009/10[9]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Begut/BEGUT_COO_2026_100_2_713345/BEGUT_COO_2026_100_2_713345.html

8 BMUKK 2010b
9 BMUKK 2010b

Since the 2008/2009 school year, ‘new secondary school’ has been offered at lower secondary level. This is a new school type for all 10- to 14-year-olds which has an internal differentiation. It aims to impart in-depth and, by all means, basic general education based on individual performance to pupils in all four grades and to enable them to transfer to intermediate or upper secondary schools depending on their interests, inclinations, talents and abilities or prepare them for working life. The applicable curricula of new secondary schools are largely the same as for the lower cycle of AHS. The plan is for a fluent transition as of 2015/16 from lower secondary schools to this scheme. By the 2018/19 school year, new secondary schools will have replaced lower secondary schools.

Lower secondary school

Age	10-14 years old
ISCED	2
Access requirements	Completion of the 4th year of primary school
Access to	AHS – upper cycle, VET school or VET college
Learners a year	About 217,729 pupils, school year 2009/10[10]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/lp/Hauptschulen_HS_Lehrplan1590.xml

Lower secondary schools provide pupils with basic general education. In the subjects German, mathematics and modern foreign language, groups of pupils are formed, in which the pupils’ different performance and speed of work are taken into account. Within a certain margin, every school can tailor its range of subjects to its specific situation. In this process it can also adopt its own curricula within the framework of school autonomy. This leads to the formation of locations with their own profile or a special focus (such as sport, for example). In the 3rd and 4th class youths are offered career guidance classes for their further professional or training career.

10 BMUKK 2010b

2.4 Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector

From entry into upper secondary level, pupils can select between vocational and general education pathways. Vocational education and training (VET) programmes are provided within the framework of apprenticeship training (dual system), at VET schools and VET colleges. Some 80% of pupils opt for a VET programme after completing lower secondary level.

Secondary academic school (AHS) – upper cycle

Age	14-18 years old
ISCED	3A
Access requirements	After the 4th grade of lower secondary school: end-of-year report with positive assessment in the highest ability group in compulsory subjects that are streamed based on performance; no worse grade than B ('good') in the middle ability group and in the other compulsory subjects no worse assessment than C or 'satisfactory' (conference decision in case of worse assessment than C in the second ability group); otherwise entrance exam. Students are entitled to transfer from new secondary school to the upper cycle of secondary academic school if they have reached the educational objective of in-depth general education in all four differentiated compulsory subjects (German, mathematics, English, alternative compulsory subject). Students who have reached the educational objective of fundamental general education in one of the differentiated compulsory subjects but in-depth general education in the other three subjects are entitled to transfer to AHS following a decision of the class conference. In all cases there exists the option of taking an entrance examination. From other school types (*i.e.* not from AHS or HS): if necessary, placement or entrance exam in individual subjects.
Qualification	Upper secondary school-leaving certificate (*Reifeprüfung*)

Access to	General higher education entrance qualification: the upper secondary certificate entitles holders to study at universities, HE institutions, universities of applied sciences, post-secondary VET colleges and specialist higher job-oriented courses and post-secondary VET courses.
Learners a year	About 59,566 pupils, school year 2009/10[11]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curricula	Common parts of all curricula of the upper cycle of secondary academic school: http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/11668/11668.pdf Curriculum & law http:/www.gemeinsamlernen.at/

The upper cycle of AHS imparts general education. Depending on the students' interests and inclinations there is the choice between a classical, business, science, musical and artistic, or language focus. The following main forms are offered (the following description only covers the main differences in curricula):

- Classical branch: Latin (continuation of Latin from the lower cycle or start of a shortened course); in addition, from the 5th year onwards, classical Greek or a second modern foreign language (beginning or continuation with 3rd year of learning)
- Technical education with a focus on science: mathematics; in addition, from the 5th year onwards, Latin (or continuation of Latin started in the lower cycle) or a second modern foreign language; in addition: descriptive geometry, or biology and environmental studies, chemistry, physics
- Home economics branch: from the 5th year onwards, a second modern foreign language or Latin; in addition: home economics and nutrition; geography and economics, psychology and philosophy (including work placement)
- School type *Oberstufenrealgymnasium*: in addition to the eight-year forms of secondary academic school, there exists a separate type called *Oberstufenrealgymnasium* (partly with transition stage). Features of this school type: entry after the 8th grade (years 5-8); from the 5th year onwards, a second modern foreign language or Latin; in

11 BMUKK 2010b

addition: instrumental classes, or fine arts and handicrafts, or descriptive geometry and mathematics, or biology and environmental studies, chemistry, physics (and mathematics).

Within a certain margin, every school can tailor its range of subjects to its situation, both in the lower and in the upper cycle (school autonomy). In this process it can also adopt its own curricula within the framework of school autonomy. This leads to the formation of locations with their own profile or a special focus (such as foreign languages, artistic and creative, sport, science & technology, environmental protection, information technology, etc.)

In the upper secondary exam (*Reifeprüfung*), special importance is attached to reality-oriented learning, autonomous work, identification of connections between individual disciplines, and foreign language knowledge. At the same time, the learners' individual interests can also be expressed thanks to the wide range of *Reifeprüfung* variants and in particular the choice between a written subject-specific piece of work and an oral special-focus exam. From the 2013/14 school year, the standardised, competence-oriented *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* exam will be introduced, with which uniform high quality standards will be set for all graduates.

AHS is also offered in a form aiming at continuing vocational education and training (CVET) (as secondary academic school for people in employment, AHS *für Berufstätige*). Secondary academic school for people in employment lasts for four years, is offered as evening classes and requires successful completion of compulsory schooling. Curriculum contents are the same as in the full-time form. It is completed with a certificate of secondary education (*Reifeprüfung*), which grants access to post-secondary and tertiary education. Students do not pay any tuition fees for secondary academic school for people in employment, which means that this form of CVET is paid by the public.

VET college (BHS)

Age	14-19 years old
ISCED	3A/4A
Access requirements	Successful completion of the 4th year of HS, new secondary school, the 4th or a higher year of AHS or prevocational school at the 9th year; if necessary, entrance exams for pupils from the 4th year of HS or aptitude tests
Access to	• General higher education entrance qualification • Different crafts and trades (for self-employment in regulated trades)
Qualification	*Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma
Learners a year	About 137,533 students, school year 2009/10[12]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curricula	http:/www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/dlcollection.asp

The different forms of BHS aim to provide higher vocational qualifications in different specialisations and well-founded general education.

The main forms of BHS are the following:

College of engineering and trades

- Training for qualified skilled workers in advanced engineering, crafts, trade and arts occupations
- Area specialisations: construction engineering, interior design and timber technology, electrical engineering, electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, mechatronics, material engineering, media technology and media management, information technology, chemistry, chemical engineering, food technology, IT/informatics, industrial management, business management, art and design; specialisations within the framework of school autonomy

12 BMUKK 2010b

College of fashion, of artistic design, of product management und presentation, of fashion design and product design

- Training for qualified skilled workers in the fashion and clothing industry
- Training focuses: among others, fashion design, fashion marketing, fashion and graphic design

College of tourism

- Training for qualified skilled workers of the tourism industry
- Training focuses: among others, third modern foreign language, hotel management, hotel and restaurant management, tourism and leisure management, training focuses adopted within the framework of school autonomy

College of business administration

- Training to exercise senior occupations in all branches of business and administration
- Training focuses/area specialisations: among others, international business activity with marketing, controlling and financial statement, entrepreneurship and management, multimedia and web design, network management, software development, digital business, controlling and accounting, international business with foreign language(s) and culture, information management and information technology, business informatics; training focuses/area specialisations adopted within the framework of school autonomy; also with additional agricultural focus

College for occupations in the service industries

- Training for qualified skilled workers in business and tourist occupations. Training focuses/branches: among others, third modern foreign language, international communication in business, culture tourism, foreign language focus, media informatics, environment and business, culture and congress management, communication and media design, social management, special focuses within the framework of school autonomy

College of agriculture and forestry

- Training for qualified skilled workers in agriculture, forestry and food industry; Area specialisations: agriculture and food industry, horticulture, viticulture and pomology, forestry, agricultural engineering, agriculture, food technology, garden and landscape design; Training focuses include: project and regional management, environmental technology, business management, agricultural quality management, agricultural management

Nursery teacher training college

- Training for nursery school teachers with the option of additional training for educators at after-school day-care facilities and advanced training in early education

College of social pedagogy

- Training for educators and social pedagogues (at after-school day-care facilities as well as homes for children and youths, and in non-school youth work)

Graduates of VET college are awarded a *Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma. One key part is the project work, which candidates have to prepare independently and where they work on a topic from their respective specialist area comprehensively – partly in cooperation with business. Here learners can demonstrate skills and knowledge of relevance for practice which they have acquired. At colleges of engineering and trades there is the possibility of taking the exam subject 'project' of the upper secondary exam in the form of a diploma project. The task of a diploma project has to cover a problem which, to tackle it, requires comprehensive theoretical and practical state-of-the-art knowledge, can include unpredictable situations and requires creative approaches to solutions. As well as subject-specific aspects (complexity of problem, methodology of problem-solving, topicality, benefit and innovative value), the task also has take account of aspects related to implementation (time required, project management, documentation), with project teams of two to five students and time requirements of some 200 hours (within six months in the final school year) assumed for every project member. In their diploma projects, the authors have to prove they know the context of the task, they are able to discuss and analyse known approaches to solutions in an understanding way (*i.e.* considering possibilities and limits of

application) and find solutions by adapting known approaches or developing own approaches that comprise both theoretical and experimental/constructive or software-technological elements. Furthermore, the authors need to prove that they are able to comply with the rules of technical and scientific communication in their argumentation and presentation of results.

In the 2014/2015 academic year, a new competence-oriented form of the *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* examination for VET college will be introduced which, as well as the diploma projects, will also comprise a standardised form of written exams in German, modern foreign languages and applied mathematics for all candidates. Diploma projects are written assignments prepared in a team of two to five candidates, have a certain volume (up to 80 pages excluding annexes or datasheets) and meet relevant quality criteria. For these projects, candidates elaborate a specific question from the respective occupational field or the world of business by applying scientific methods which are commonly used in professional practice and then present it orally.

The *Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma is a double qualification for graduates of VET colleges and secondary training colleges. It provides holders with

- general access to higher education and
- a qualification for senior professional activities.

This means they obtain access to certain regulated occupations and various crafts and trades, which can also be exercised on a self-employed basis. The certificate awarded to graduates of the diploma exam is regulated according to the EU recognition based on Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications (within the meaning of Article 11 point (c) of Directive 2005/36/EC). VET colleges are also offered in CVET form for people in employment. The VET college for people in employment (ISCED 5B) which lasts four to five years also requires successful completion of compulsory schooling. Its curriculum and the specialisations provided there correspond to the main forms of this school type. It is completed with a certificate of secondary education and VET diploma (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung*), thus granting unrestricted access to post-secondary VET colleges and study courses at university and universities of applied sciences. Students enrolled in *VET colleges for people in employment* do not pay any

tuition fees. After three years of professional practice, graduates of VET colleges in area specialisations in engineering as well as agriculture and forestry can submit an application to the competent ministry to be awarded the professional title ‘Ingenieur’ or ‘Ingenieurin’.

VET school (BMS)

Age	14-15/19 years old
ISCED	3B
Access requirements	Successful completion of year 8. In some cases an entrance exam needs to be taken as well.
Qualification	(Partly) completed training programme, final exam.
Access to	• Occupational field – credits for mandatory exams (trade, commerce and industry legislation) in the form of replacements (such as the entrepreneurial exam, professional diploma exam, master craftsperson exam); • *Berufsreifeprüfung*; • Add-on course; • Subject-specific post-secondary VET courses; university of applied sciences programmes.
Learners a year	About 51,713 pupils, school year 2009/10[13]
Responsibility	BMUKK, BMLFUW, provincial governments
Curricula	http:/www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/dlcollection.asp

The main forms of VET school include:

- Business school (three years)
- School of management and service industries (three years)
- School of service industries (one or two years)
- Fashion school (three years)
- School of hotel and catering industries, school of tourism, school of catering industry (three years)
- Schools of social occupations: three-year school of social occupations, two-year school of social services

13 BMUKK 2010b

- Schools of social care occupations (admission only from the age of 17 or 19) with the following focuses: care for the elderly, family work, work with people with disabilities, accompanying people with disabilities; qualification at specialist level (two to three years) or diploma level (three to four and a half years)
- Schools of agriculture and forestry (two to four years)

A VET school aims to impart to students the fundamental subject-specific skills that enable graduates to exercise their occupation immediately upon its completion and also aims to expand their general education. The Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act (*Gewerbeordnung*) and supplementary regulations lay down the general and specialist prerequisites candidates need to fulfil for exercising regulated trades (skilled crafts and other regulated trades) on a self-employed basis. Candidates of VET schools of at least three years' duration can get credits for relevant knowledge and skills and already proven knowledge to required examinations in the form of replacements (such as the entrepreneurial exam, professional diploma exam, master craftsperson exam).

Following completion of a VET school of at least three years' duration, add-on courses (three years) lead students to the *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* exam. For graduates of some four-year schools there are also special forms of subject-specific post-secondary VET courses for people in employment.

Like the apprenticeship diploma, the VET school certificate is considered a 'relevant professional qualification', which is one of the possible access requirements for enrolling in a related programme at a university of applied sciences (*FH*). Which VET school certificate is recognised as meeting access requirements differs depending on the *FH* programmes' subject focus. As a rule, additional exams are also required.

Prevocational school

Age	14-15 years old
ISCED	3c
Access requirements	Completion of 8th year
Access to	Upon positive completion: entry to the 2nd year of a VET school of the same area specialisation (at least 15 weekly hours in the selected specialist area) or, without entrance exam, entry to the 1st year of a VET college
Learners a year	About 19,336 pupils, school year 2009/10[14]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/pts.schule.at/data/PTSLehrplan-2008.pdf

One-year prevocational school is mainly attended as the 9th school year by those 14- to 15-year-old pupils who want to be trained in an occupation directly after compulsory schooling. Prevocational school aims to qualify pupils as well as possible for transfer to the dual VET system (apprenticeship training) and to upper secondary school education in line with their interests, inclinations, talents and abilities. An orientation phase at the beginning of the school year and career guidance as a teaching principle of all subjects provide varied opportunities to them for familiarising themselves with the world of work. Their career choice is supported by company visits, job-related excursions in training workshops and non-school institutions as well as days of practical work experience (‘taster apprenticeships’) in companies.

14 BMUKK 2010b

Apprenticeship training (part-time vocational school and company-based training)

Age	15-17/19 years old
ISCED	3b
Access requirements	Completion of 9 years of compulsory schooling
Qualification	Apprenticeship-leave examination (LAP)
Access to	*Berufsreifeprüfung*, *FH* study, qualifying exam and master craftsperson training
Learners a year	About 130,000 apprentices[15]
Responsibility	BMWFJ, apprenticeship offices of the economic chambers, BMUKK, BMASK, BMLFUW, provincial governments
Curricula and Vocational Training Act (*BAG*) Vocational Training Act for agriculture and forestry (*LFBAG*)	Vocational Training Act *BGBl*. no. 142/1969, *BGBl*. I no. 148/2011 http:/www.bmwfj.gv.at/Berufsausbildung/LehrlingsUndBerufsausbildung/Documents/BAG%202010_minimiert.pdf http:/www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/download.asp?id=7&theme=Lehrpl%E4ne:%20Berufsschulen Vocational Training Act for agriculture and forestry *BGBl*. no. 319/1975 as amended, plus implementing laws of provinces Forest Act *BGBl*. no. 440/1975 as amended Federal Act governing schools in agriculture and forestry *BGBl*. no. 175/1966 as amended http://www.bmask.gv.at/cms/site/attachments/5/8/1/CH2142/CMS1272017449498/landundforstwirtschaftlichesberufsausbildungsgesetz.pdf

In the apprenticeship system, the two places of learning are the training company and part-time vocational school. The apprentices are in a training relationship with their training company and, at the same time, students of a part-time vocational school. Training in the company aims to impart occupation-specific knowledge and skills. The task of part-time vocational school is to teach basic occupation-related theory and expand general education. The company-based

15 Tritscher-Archan & Novak 2011

part of training makes up the major part of the apprenticeship period (80%). Apprenticeship training is completed with the apprenticeship-leave exam (LAP), which is taken in front of professional experts. The focus of the LAP is on the practical skills and knowledge required for the occupation. According to BMWFJ there are 205 apprenticeship occupations[16] pursuant to the Vocational Training Act. They are set up as individual, group, special-focus or modular apprenticeships and governed by regulations. In addition there are 14 apprenticeships in agriculture and forestry, which are regulated in a basic federal act and implementing legislation of the provinces.

The apprenticeship diploma is also considered a 'relevant professional qualification', which is one of the possible access requirements for enrolling in a related programme at a university of applied sciences (*FH*). Which apprenticeship diploma is recognised as meeting access requirements differs depending on the *FH* programmes' subject focus. As a rule, additional exams are also required.

16 http:/www.bmwfj.gv.at/Berufsausbildung/LehrberufeInOesterreich/Seiten/default.aspx (14.11.2011)

Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP)

Age	Only candidates aged 19 or over are entitled to take the final partial exam.
ISCED	-
Access requirements	Apprenticeship diploma (three partial exams can be taken before), skilled workers exam, VET school, school for general healthcare and nursing, 3rd year of VET college plus three years of professional experience, completion of training for therapeutic masseur, and others.
Access to	the higher education sector, study at post-secondary VET colleges and courses; qualification for senior posts in the public service
Learners a year	About 2,609 *BRP* certificates issued in the school year 2007/08[17] About 6,944 students with *BRP* certificate enrolled at *FH* and universities / academic year 2009/10[18]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10010064

Apprenticeship graduates who want to enrol in HE studies can be granted access by taking the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (*BRP*). This exam comprises four partial exams (German, mathematics, modern foreign language, occupation-related specialist area). Prior school attendance is not compulsory for admission to the *BRP* exam. Preparatory courses are offered by adult education institutions recognised by BMUKK and in some VET schools and colleges (cf. 2.7). Examinations can also be conducted at certified adult education institutions in up to three specialist areas.

During the apprenticeship period, apprentices can attend preparatory courses for *BRP*, and here they can already take three partial exams during the apprenticeship period and the final partial exam when they are at least 19 years old. No costs need to be paid by apprentices for preparatory courses and exams for *BRP*.

17 cf. Klimmer et al. 2009
18 cf. Lachmayr & Neubauer 2010

This means that *BRP* provides the general HE entrance qualification to graduates of the dual system (LAP), of VET schools of at least three years' duration, of schools for general healthcare and nursing, of schools for paramedical training, as well as to graduates of the qualifying exam according to the Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act, but does not lead to any professional qualifications.

Another way of acquiring the higher education (HE) entrance qualification in a non-traditional way is by taking the exam called *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*.

Studienberechtigungsprüfung (SBP)

Age	Minimum age 22 years (20 years in case of at least four years of VET)
ISCED	-
Access requirements	Admission for one of 16 groups of HE study programmes, previous qualification acquired through job-specific programmes or non-occupational pathways, nationality of EEA member state
Access to	Restricted study qualification for studies at universities, *Fachhochschule* programmes, university colleges of education, and post-secondary VET courses: only grants access to the programme (study, *FH* programme, university college of education, or post-secondary VET course) for which it is taken.
Learners a year	About 5,248 students with *SBP* certificate enrolled at *FH* and universities / academic year 2009/2010[19]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curriculum	http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10010064

The following requirements must be met for taking the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* exam:

- The decision to attend a specific study programme at a university, HE institution, *Fachhochschule*, a specific post-secondary VET course or study at a university college of education;

19 cf. Lachmayr & Neubauer 2010

- Proof of previous qualification acquired through job-specific programmes or non-occupational pathways in relation to the applicants' intended study course;
- Austrian citizenship (or equality of opportunity in terms of study legislation) (for study programme at a university, HE institution, *Fachhochschule*);
- Minimum age 22 years (20 years in case of at least four years of VET)

As opposed to the *BRP* certificate, the *SBP* is only a restricted study qualification for studies at universities, HE institutions, *universities of applied sciences* programmes, university colleges of education, and post-secondary VET courses.

Accordingly, the *SBP* certificate grants access to the form of education and training (a study course, a *Fachhochschule* programme, a study at a university college of education or post-secondary VET course) for which the exam was taken in the respective case; a change of programme is only possible with great restriction. Furthermore, the *SBP* certificate does not lead to any direct professional qualification and therefore does not provide any direct professional career advancement opportunities.

2.5. Practical, occupation-related tertiary sector – Non-Bologna qualifications

Legislative bases

The overwhelming majority of 'non-HE-based' VET programmes in Austria are subject to the school acts *SchOG* and *SchUG*. This applies to the following forms of training: post-secondary VET courses, add-on and preparatory courses, part-time industrial master colleges, building craftsperson schools and master craftsperson courses**.**

Post-secondary VET courses (*Kollegs*)

Age	Graduates of secondary academic school – individuals who have no IVET qualification; mostly 18/19 years of age
ISCED	5B
Access requirements	Successful completion of the upper secondary exam, *Berufsreifeprüfung* or *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*; for *Kollegs* with focus on engineering, also successful completion of a four-year subject-related *BMS*
Qualification	Diploma examination
Access to	• Senior occupations (depending on the specialisation of the respective *Kolleg*; the *Kolleg*'s specialisations are identical to those of the *BHS* main form) and are given access to regulated trades; both *Kollegs* and *Kollegs* for people in employment are completed with a diploma exam; successful *Kolleg* graduates acquire professional qualifications according to the Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act as well as the Ingenieur Act
Learners a year	About 4,453 students, school year 2009/10[20]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curricula	http:/www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/dlcollection.asp

Post-secondary VET courses are provided in a modular two-year day-form or mostly three-year evening form. Graduates of *Kollegs* with the focus on

20 cf. Statistics Austria (2011)

engineering can apply to be awarded the professional title '*Ingenieur*' or '*Ingenieurin*' after three years of professional practice.

Excursus: Add-on courses and preparatory courses (often offered in combination with *Kollegs*)

Age	*BMS* graduates, apprenticeship graduates (after preparatory course)
ISCED	5B
Access requirements	Completion of *BMS* or apprenticeship training (and the additional preparatory course)
Qualification	*Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma
Access to	• Access to higher education • Access to different crafts and trades (for self-employment in regulated trades)
Learners a year	About 4,198 students, school year 2009/10[21]
Responsibility	BMUKK, BMLFUW
Curricula	http:/www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/dlcollection.asp

Add-on courses as a rule last for three years and have a modular design.

21 cf. Statistics Austria (2011)

Industrial master schools (*Werkmeisterschulen*) and building craftsperson schools *(Bauhandwerkerschulen)*

Age	Typical entry age 18/19 years, minimum duration: two years
ISCED	5B
Access requirements	IVET qualification
Qualification	Final examination before committee
Access to	• Higher vocational qualification in the engineering and trade sector, qualification to train apprentices • Possibility of self-employment after four years of work experience
Learners a year	Industrial master schools and industrial master courses (*Werkmeisterschulen, Werkmeisterlehrgänge*): about 3,706 students, school year 2009/10; building craftsperson schools (*Bauhandwerkerschulen*): about 521 students, school year 2009/10[22]
Responsibility	BMUKK
Curricula	http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/erk/lp_werkmeisterschulen.xml http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20005911

People over the age of 18 who have successfully passed the apprenticeship-leave exam as well as *BMS* graduates can deepen their theoretical specialist education at building craftsperson schools and industrial master schools (ISCED 5B). *Bauhandwerkerschulen* and *Werkmeisterschulen* both last for one to two years and are completed with a final examination.

These qualifications aim to enable graduates

- to work as middle managers in relevant areas of business and administration;
- to tackle tasks in planning, organisation and supervision in their respective specialisation independently;
- to train apprentices;

22 Statistics Austria: Klassenschülerzahlen im Schuljahr 2009/10 nach detaillierten Ausbildungsarten [Number of pupils in classes in the school year 2009/10 by programme type]. www.statistik.at/web_de/Redirect/index.htm?dDocName=020959 (10.11.2011)

- to manage and promote staff in line with modern management methods;
- to demonstrate cost awareness;
- to have knowledge about modern measures of environmental protection as well as safety and health at work;
- to further train themselves in their specialisation and the company's environment and thus continually update the knowledge they have acquired;
- to tackle communicative and social situations at work; and
- to have intercultural competences and reflect on ethical and moral values as well as life's religious dimension.

Master craftsperson schools

Age	from the age of 18/19
ISCED	5B
Access requirements	Successful completion of apprenticeship training, completion of specialist *BMS* or *BHS*.
Qualification	Partly credits for master craftsperson exam in the respective occupations
Access to	Master craftsperson exam for wood turners, string instrument manufacturers, millers, bakers, cake and pastry bakers, communication design, joinery technology and interior design, art and design
Learners a year	About 292 students, school year 2009/10[23]
Responsibility	BMUKK (curricula)
Curricula	http:/www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/recht/erk/lp_werkmeisterschulen.xml http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20005911

Master craftsperson schools (legislative bases: Section 59 (1) sub-para 1 point a [master craftsperson schools in engineering, industry and trade] and point c [master craftsperson schools in arts and crafts], Section 2 of the *SchoG*) impart

23 Statistics Austria: Klassenschülerzahlen im Schuljahr 2009/10 nach detaillierten Ausbildungsarten [Number of pupils in classes in the school year 2009/10 by programme type]. www.statistik.at/web_de/Redirect/index.htm?dDocName=020959 (10.11.2011)

the knowledge and skills required for access to regulated occupations and trades. These qualifications aim to enable graduates to work as middle managers in relevant areas of business and administration.

The goal is to enable graduates

- to tackle tasks in planning, organisation and supervision in their respective specialisation independently;
- to train apprentices and to manage and promote staff in line with modern management methods;
- to demonstrate cost awareness and to have knowledge about modern measures of environmental protection as well as safety and health at work;
- to further train themselves in their specialisation and the company's environment and thus continually update the knowledge they have acquired;
- to tackle communicative and social situations at work;
- to have intercultural competences and reflect on ethical and moral values as well as life's religious dimension.

2.6. Tertiary sector – qualifications according to the Bologna architecture

In the following, qualifications according to the Bologna architecture are sometimes referred to as 'HE' qualifications and all those which do not comply with the Bologna architecture are also termed 'non-HE' qualifications (see NQF position paper[24]). In addition to the Bologna qualifications there are the diploma studies, which hold a special position, such as the studies of human and dental medicine, law, pharmacy and teacher training programmes.

2.6.1. Facts and figures

The institutions of the tertiary education sector at HE level can be assigned to the following categories:

- **Public universities** - funded by the state;
- **Private universities** - funded by private or public providers (except the state) with state accreditation;
- ***Fachhochschulen***, which are funded by providers that are either public or organised according to private law and which are funded by the public in the form of subsidies for study places;
- **University colleges of education** - financed by state funds or private providers;
- the **Institute for Science and Technology - Austria (IST-Austria)**, which is funded by the public, research subsidies via peer reviews, technology licensing, and donations.

Figure 2 gives an overview of institutions of the tertiary sector at HE level and the academic degrees awarded by them. Detailed relevant information can be found at the website of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF)[25] and information about university colleges of education at the website of the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK)[26].

24 http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/19300/nqr_positionspapier200910.pdf (downloaded on 12.12.2012)
25 http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/hochschulen/ (accessed on 28.04.2011)
26 http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/leb/ph.xml (accessed on 5.10.2011)

On the following pages, first some general information about studying at Austrian HE institutions is provided, then the institutions of the tertiary education sector at HE level are described.

2.6.2. General information

The Austrian HE sector is currently being converted in accordance with the objectives of the Bologna Declaration from the system of diploma studies to undergraduate (bachelor's) and graduate (master's) degree programmes (see Chapter 4.1. *HE policy measures - Designing the higher education area*).

The prerequisites for admission to a regular bachelor's or diploma programme at an Austrian HE institution are the general higher education entrance qualification (mostly proven by an upper secondary school-leaving certificate which entitles its holders to HE access that has been awarded either in Austria or an equivalent from another country), the special HE entrance qualification for the selected study, and command of German[27] . In art and sport science studies, admission is based on an entrance exam or aptitude test.

People without the upper secondary school-leaving certificate who have acquired a qualification through job-specific programmes or non-occupational pathways have the option to take a *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (see Chapter 2.4 *Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector – Studienberechtigungsprüfung*) for a specific course or a group of study programmes. For studying at *Fachhochschulen* there exists the possibility to replace the proof of the general HE entrance qualification with a relevant professional qualification (see also Chapter 2.4 *Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector – Berufsreifeprüfung, apprenticeship training*).

The prerequisite for admission to master's programmes is completion of a relevant bachelor's programme (or equivalent), for doctoral studies it is completion of a relevant master's or diploma programme (or equivalent).

Otherwise there is basically free HE access at public universities. For some courses (medicine, psychology, veterinary medicine and dental medicine) an

27 The recognition of qualifications in the HE sector is regulated according to the Lisbon Convention (in force since 1.2.1999):http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp (accessed on 5.10.2011)

amendment in 2005 to the 2002 University Studies Act (*Universitätsgesetz*) [28] created the legal basis for introducing selection procedures due to very high numbers of students.

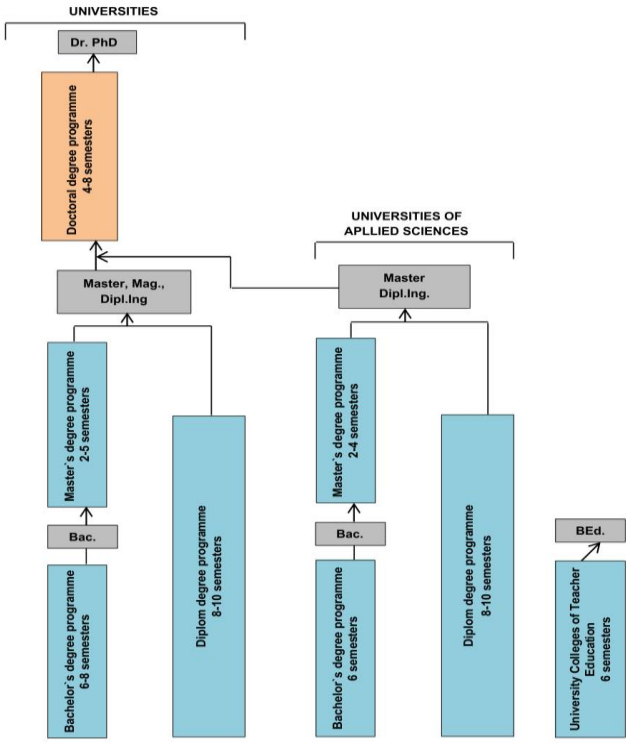


Figure 2. Overview of HE institutions and the academic degrees awarded by them [29]

2.6.3 Higher education institutions in Austria

Since 2007 [30] issues related to public universities, private universities and *Fachhochschulen* have been within the sphere of competence of BMWF, while issues related to university colleges of education are within the sphere of BMUKK.

2.6.3.1 Universities

Public universities

The 22 public universities form the largest part of the tertiary education sector in Austria. All in all, more than 292,000 students were enrolled at public universities

28 Can be accessed at: http://kommentare.rdb.at/kommentare/s/ug/htdocs/start.html
29 Source: FHK; the figure will still be adapted technically in the final version.
30 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_contentbox/bmg_novelle_07_nr.pdf (downloaded on 23.6.2011)

in Austria in the winter semester 2011; for the academic year 2010/11, 31,114 degrees of regular students were registered[31].

The 2002 University Studies Act (*UG* 2002)[32], which entered into force as of 1 January 2004 and constitutes the joint legal basis for scientific and artistic universities, brought complete autonomy for public universities as well as new steering instruments such as global budgets and performance agreements. The legal basis for *Donau-Universität Krems* is the Federal Organisation and Study Act for the Danube University Krems – University of Continuing Education (*DUK-G* 2004[33]), which entered into force as of 1 April 2004. These measures led to the conversion of universities from state educational establishments to legal entities under public law and removed from federal administration. In addition, the 2002 University Studies Act created the three independent medical universities of Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck by spinning off the former medical faculties from their original universities.

Private universities

In 1999 the University Accreditation Act (*UniAkkG*)[34] enabled the recognition of private universities based on regular accreditation. The Accreditation Council is the body which is competent for approving and prolonging accreditation. Now there are 13 private universities in Austria, in which a total of approximately 6,000 students are enrolled.

Academic degrees at universities

When the student has fulfilled all accomplishments laid down in the respective curriculum, the corresponding academic degree is conferred by a written decision which specifies the completed study course, the academic degree and the course's legal bases (the 2002 *UG* and the respective curriculum for studies at public universities, and the *UniAkkG* and the respective curriculum for studies at private universities).

31 KPIs and statistics about the tertiary education sector can be retrieved from *unidata*, BMWF's information system on HE statistics http://www.bmwf.gv.at/unidata (accessed on 5.10.2011)
32 http://ug.manz.at/ (accessed on 6.10.2011)
33 http://www.bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_contentbox/duk.pdf (downloaded on 6.10.2011)
34 http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XX/I/I_01914/fname_140845.pdf (downloaded on 28.4.2011)

The following degrees are awarded at universities:

- Bachelor's degrees:
  - Bachelor of Arts (BA)
  - Bachelor of Science (BSc)
- Master's and diploma degrees:
  - Master of Arts (MA)
  - Master of Science (MSc)
  - Diplom Ingenieur/Diplom Ingenieurin (DI or Dipl.-Ing./Dipl.-Ing.in)
  - Magister/Magistra (Mag./Mag.a)[35]
  - Doktor/Doktorin der gesamten Heilkunde (Dr./Dr.in med. univ.), *i.e.* doctor of general medicine
  - Doktor/Doktorin der Zahnheilkunde (Dr./Dr.in med. dent.), *i.e.* doctor of dental medicine
- Doctoral degrees:
  - Doktor/Doktorin (Dr./Dr.in)
  - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2.6.3.2. Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen)*

The *Fachhochschule* sector was introduced in 1993 as an academic/scientific VET sector with the Fachhochschule Studies Act (*FHStG*)[36]. This means that the Austrian *Fachhochschule* programmes, compared with public universities, have a relatively young history. The introduction of *Fachhochschule* programmes not only diversified the tertiary education offer in Austria but also created an HE system that is largely disconnected from state administration.

From the beginning onwards *Fachhochschule* programmes have been almost exclusively created and run by providers that are organised according to private law. An independent body that is not bound by instructions – the *Fachhochschule* Council (FHR) – was entrusted with external quality assurance (the initial accreditation and reaccreditation of programmes and their evaluation).

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35 The academic degree *Magister/Magistra* is awarded following completion of a diploma study. The study courses in human and dental medicine and teacher training will only be offered as diploma studies until 30 September 2012, then there exists the possibility to convert to the Bologna architecture. The study courses in pharmacy and law are currently being offered as diploma studies, conversion to bachelor and master qualifications would already be possible (*UG* 2002 § 54 (2)).

36 http://www.bmwf.gv.at/startseite/hochschulen/universitaeten/gesetze/organisationsrecht/fhstg/

The funding of *FH* programmes differs from the typical form of HE funding; on the basis of the applicable *Fachhochschule* development and financing plan, the federal government undertakes to take over the costs of a previously agreed number of study places. This means the funding concept of study place management is applied. The key indicator for the funding of *FH* programmes are the costs of a study place.

To date there are 21 *FH* providers with 351 *FH* programmes in Austria, in which more than 40,000 students were enrolled in the winter semester 2011. In 2010/11 a total of 11,905 students completed an *FH* study course successfully.

Academic degrees at *Fachhochschulen*

The corresponding academic degree is conferred when the student has fulfilled all accomplishments laid down in the respective study plan. The academic degrees which are permissible in principle are decided by the *Fachhochschule* Council and determined for the respective *FH* programme in the accreditation decision.

The following academic degrees are awarded at *Fachhochschulen*[37]:

Bachelor's degrees:

- Bachelor of Arts in Arts and Design — BA or B.A.
- Bachelor of Science in Engineering — BSc or B.Sc.
- Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences — BA or B.A.
- Bachelor of Arts in Business — BA or B.A.
- Bachelor of Arts in Military Leadership — BA or B.A.
- Bachelor of Arts in Police Leadership — BA or B.A.
- Bachelor of Science in Health Studies — BSc or B.Sc.
- Bachelor of Science in Natural Sciences — BSc or B.Sc.

Master's degrees[38]:

- Master of Arts in Arts and Design — MA or M.A.
- Master of Science in Engineering — MSc or M.Sc.
- Diplom-Ingenieurin/Diplom-Ingenieur für — Dipl.-Ing. or DI

37 This list does not include the academic degrees of *FH*-based diploma study courses as these have already expired or will expire.
38 The master degrees conferred at *Fachhochschulen* entitle holders to enrol in doctoral studies.

technisch-wissenschaftliche Berufe

- Master of Arts in Social Sciences — MA or M.A.
- Master of Arts in Business — MA or M.A.
- Master of Arts in Military Leadership — MA or M.A.
- Master of Arts in Security Management — MA or M.A.
- Master of Science in Health Studies — MSc or M.Sc.
- Master of Science in Natural Sciences — MSc or M.Sc.

2.6.3.3 University colleges of education

The 2005 Higher Education Act (*Hochschulgesetz*)[39] created university colleges of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) to replace teacher training colleges (*Pädagogische Akademien*), which then started full operation in the autumn of 2007. In Austria there are 9 public university colleges of education (one in each province); however, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture can also recognise private university colleges of education. University colleges of education run teacher training programmes for compulsory school teachers (teachers at primary school, lower secondary school, special school, part-time vocational school, prevocational school, and teachers of agriculture and environment for the professions of teacher and student counsellor/guidance officer) as bachelor's programmes. In addition, HE-based CVET courses which are completed with the master's degree are provided within the framework of their separate legal entity according to Section 3 of the 2005 Higher Education Act.

In the winter semester 2010/11, a total of 11,400 teacher training students were enrolled at 14 university colleges of education (five of which private) and three private programmes; a total of 1,744 graduations were registered in the academic year 2009/10.

Academic degrees at university colleges of education

The following academic degrees are conferred at university colleges of education when students have fulfilled all accomplishments laid down in the respective curriculum:

[39] http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20004626 (accessed on 06.10.2011)

Bachelor's degrees:

- Bachelor of Education BEd

Master's degrees (CVET, non-consecutive):

- Master of Education M.Ed.
- Master of Arts MA or M.A.
- Master of Science MSc or M.Sc.

2.6.3.4 Institute of Science and Technology Austria

The youngest institution of the Austrian tertiary education sector is the Institute of Science and Technology (IST Austria), a research institute with the right to confer doctorates which was opened in Klosterneuburg in 2009. IST Austria is dedicated to basic research in the natural, mathematical and computer sciences and provides top-notch postgraduate training in the form of doctoral and post-doc programmes.

IST Austria is an independent legal entity under public law and has its own governance and management structures according to the Federal Act on the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (*BGBl*. I no. 69/2006)[40]. Its provider is the Federal Government jointly with the Provincial Government of Lower Austria.

Academic degrees at IST Austria

Following positive completion of a PhD programme, students are conferred the academic degree Doctor of Philosophy or PhD.

40 http://www.ist.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Basic_documents/I.S.T.Austria_Law_German.pdf (downloaded on 6.10.2011)

2.7 Selected educational programmes within the responsibility of public bodies of the federal government, provinces and municipal governments on legal bases

The illustration of the formal Austrian education system (Fig. 1) covers a large part of the Austrian educational programmes. In addition, however, there exist other programmes in the formal education system, for which the public bodies of the federal government (ministries), provinces (offices of the provincial governments) and municipal governments are responsible and which also build on legal bases (regulations etc.).

Relevant examples include the following educational programmes and qualifications:

- training measures for state officials (ministries), provinces (offices of the provincial governments) and municipal governments according to the respective provinces' and municipalities' civil service acts;
- the train driver within the scope of responsibility of BMVIT (Regulation of the Federal Minister for Science and Transport concerning the license to drive and operate traction units independently [Train Driver Regulation – *TFVO*], basic version: *BGBl*. II no. 64/1999);
- the master craftsperson examinations and qualifying examinations are provided for in the Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act (*Gewerbeordnung*) within the scope of BMWFJ; they represent access options to a regulated trade; the exam contents are laid down in regulations of the responsible WKÖ professional organisations (Section 21 (4), Section 22 (1) *GewO* 1994; *BGBl*. no. 194/1994), such as qualifying exam regulations for master builders or consulting engineers; the Qualifying Exam Regulation for Heating Technology;
- the civil engineer exam within the scope of BMWFJ (Regulation of the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs concerning the Civil Engineer Examination *BGBl*. 750/1994 as amended by *BGBl*. II no. 490/2001; 1993 Civil Engineers' Act - *ZTG*, *BGBl*. no. 156/1994 as amended by *BGBl*. I no. 58/2010);
- clinical psychologist and health psychologist (Psychologists' Act, *BGBl*. no. 360/1990), psychotherapist (*BGBl*. no. 361/1990),

pharmacist (1906 Pharmacy Act, *RGBl*. no. 5/1907), cardiovascular perfusionist (Cardiovascular Perfusionists Act, *BGBl*. I no. 96/1998), care assistant (Health Care and Nursing Act, *BGBl*. I no. 108/1997), medical masseur and therapeutic masseur (Medical and Therapeutic Masseurs' Act, *BGBl*. I no. 169/2002), paramedic and emergency medical technician (Paramedics' Act, *BGBl*. I no. 30/2002) and paramedical services (Federal Act regulating medico-technical and assisting paramedical services, *BGBl*. no. 102/1961) within the scope of BMG (for more information see the BMG website: http://bmg.gv.at/home/Schwerpunkte/Berufe/)

- the agricultural advisor within the scope of BMLFUW (recognition of the professional qualification based on the national subsidisation guideline)

Schools of the healthcare sector (BMG)

(illustrated here by the example of schools for general healthcare and nursing – as the largest branch)

Age	After the 10th school year
ISCED	4B
Access requirements	Successful completion of 10 school years; good health status, trustworthiness; entrance interview or entrance test
Access to	Work in general healthcare and nursing
Qualification	Diploma examination and subject-specific piece of work
Learners a year	About 2,992 graduates, school year 2008/09[41]
Responsibility	BMG
Curriculum	http:/www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblPdf/1999_179_2/1999_179_2.pdf

Schools of the healthcare sector are institutions which offer programmes according to the Healthcare and Nursing Act and the Federal Act regulating medico-technical and assisting paramedical services. These include the

41 cf. Statistics Austria 2011

following: schools for general healthcare and nursing; specialist basic and special training programmes at schools for the care of children and young people and for psychiatric care; specialist paramedical courses; specialist and continuing training programmes for healthcare and nursing occupations.

Post-secondary VET colleges in the healthcare sector provide practice-oriented training in the following occupations: midwife; physiotherapist; biomedical analyst; radiology technologist; dietologist; occupational therapist; speech therapist; and orthoptist. The number of post-secondary VET colleges is declining, however, as more and more of them are converted into tertiary institutions (*FH*). The number of post-secondary VET colleges is strongly declining, however, because almost all of them have been converted into *FH* programmes.

Security Academy (BM.I)

The Security Academy (.SIAK) is the training and research institution of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BM.I). The focus of training is on planning and organising basic training and career advancement courses for officials of the police force and general administration. Individuals are the focus of all programmes. It is the objective of the Security Academy to impart to learners the knowledge and skills they require to understand their daily duty in its complexity and be able to tackle it by acting professionally.

The basic training and career advancement courses for officials of the police force include basic police training (PGA), programmes to become an official in charge (E2a) and courses for executive officials (officer; E1).

Basic police training comprises a total of nineteen (19) months of theoretical training at a training centre and five (5) months of practical training at a police station.

E2a training has a modular structure. The six- (6-) month training aims to impart to officials, based on already acquired theoretical knowledge, not only integrated problem-solving skills but also the practical skills required for the occupation of the middle management level by means of practice-related instruction and taking scientific findings and methods into account.

Since 2006 training for officers in the federal police has been conducted at tertiary level in the form of the *FH* bachelor's programme in police leadership. The six-semester study in police leadership is conducted based on a cooperation agreement between BM.I and the public *Fachhochschule* in Wiener Neustadt. The *FH* programme is completed with the academic degree Bachelor of Arts in Police Leadership.

Basic training for officials of general administration of the Ministry of the Interior (A1/v1 to A4/v4) is based on the specific requirements of the respective salary bracket and is provided in a modular form.

Academies and schools of the Austrian Armed Forces (BMLVS)

The Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports (BMLVS) is responsible for imparting qualifications in the form of specific – mainly military – competences of management and specialist staff. The academies and schools of the Austrian Armed Forces fulfil this task.

Needs-oriented training is oriented towards the spheres of responsibility, which in turn are derived from the management levels. Training and employment thus change continually in professional practice within BMLVS. Broken down by staff groups, training is divided into programmes for officers and non-commissioned officers.

The completed basic training for non-commissioned officers additionally entitles graduates to take the *Berufsreifeprüfung* exam.

The training and continuing training of officers is conducted in-house, essentially as part of an accredited *FH* bachelor's and *FH* master's degree programme. Training of the top military leadership functions is conducted in cooperation with the University of Vienna as a programme for general officers.

2.8. Adult education and continuing education and training

In the Austrian adult education (AE) sector in general – apart from public authorities such as the federal government, provincial governments and the municipalities – a strong commitment on the part of representations of interest and religious communities (*i.e.* churches) can be observed. These actively help shape the AE landscape via educational establishments or their (umbrella) associations. The representations of interest are actively involved in the administration of Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) at the federal, provincial and regional levels.

Estimations regarding the number of relevant institutions in Austria vary greatly. On the one hand, this range is the consequence of the multifacetedness of the institutions organising or supporting the learning processes of adults, on the other hand, it results from different definitions and structural criteria on which descriptions are based. A general survey conducted in 2004 identified 1,755 AE/CVET institutions in Austria with a separate legal identity.

Non-profit institutions as well as schools with public-law status for people in employment account for a large proportion of participants. Due to the population's growing formal educational attainment level, universities and *Fachhochschule* programmes also play an ever more important role in the AE sector.

On the basis of the objective pursued, it is possible to differentiate between two forms of AE. On the one hand, these are events aiming at certifying learning progress in the form of a recognised certificate with public-law status. There exists a close connection with already described formal qualifications. On the other hand, these are events aiming at the acquisition of general or specialist knowledge without a certified qualification being awarded to exam graduates. The certificate-oriented type is generally possible in training programmes whose curriculum corresponds to IVET programmes. These are, in the main, public-law schools for people in employment or preparatory courses for external exams (admission without prior school attendance). In 1997 another option was introduced in the form of the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (*BRP*) for which preparatory courses are sometimes offered against fees by non-profit AE institutions (partly also with examination competence for individual subjects) (cf. 2.4).

Special forms of qualification-oriented adult education programmes are CVET university courses, *FH* programmes for CVET at *FH* level, and university-style courses (*LuCs*), which will expire in 2012.

Of increasing importance are also international certificates created by companies or professional associations; they are very popular particularly in the field of data processing and IT. The vast majority of offered courses and course participation, however, still concern non-certificate-oriented events in the general and vocational adult education sectors.

All Austrian school qualifications in the lower and upper secondary sectors and apprenticeship training can be acquired or taken in the AE sector. The most active are VET colleges (*BHSs*) for people in employment (with more than 3,000 graduates a year). The specialisations of these *BHSs* for people in employment are identical to the main types (full-time forms) for young people aged between 14 and about 19 or the day forms and comprise engineering, industry and trade; commerce/business; and other occupational fields. VET schools (*BMSs*) for people in employment show larger participant and graduate figures in engineering, industry and trade sectors (industrial master schools, building craftsperson schools, master craftsperson schools) than in the business-oriented segment. Secondary academic schools for people in employment account for about 400 graduations per age group. In addition, there are post-secondary VET courses (*Kollegs*) for people in employment.

According to the 2007 Austrian Adult Education Survey (AES), the most popular continuing education and training (CET) forms among adults were courses, lectures and private instruction with 70.7%, seminars and workshops with 52.2%, followed by supervised on-the-job training with 25.3%, and finally correspondence courses and courses with open learning (3.4%).

The picture of the ‘education gap’ is again corroborated by results of the Adult Education Survey (2007) and of the Microcensus (2009): people with higher educational attainment also participate more in adult education.

According to the AES (2007), more than three quarters (76.6%) of non-formal educational activities are conducted for job-related reasons, in around one fifth

(19.7%) private reasons play a role. Educational activities of men (82.9%) revealed more job-related reasons than those of women (70.0%).

As regards the target for the lifelong learning indicator of 12.5% for 2010 as specified by the European Commission, Austria exceeded this figure as early as in 2007 with 12.8% and in 2010 was clearly above this value with 13.8%, *i.e.* 4.5 percentage points above the EU average of 9.3%.

3. Development of the NQF for Austria

3.1. The EQF as stimulus to develop the NQF

The establishment of an NQF in Austria is based on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning (2008/C111/01). At the core of the EQF there are eight reference levels that comprise the entire spectrum of possible qualifications from basic education to the highest level of academic and vocational education and training and are characterised on the basis of learning outcomes. With the EQF, comparability of qualifications is no longer achieved via learning pathways and learning contents but via learning outcomes. The levels of national qualifications and qualifications systems to be referenced to the EQF can be made transparent by setting up an NQF.

In the course of the national consultation process on the EQF (2005/06) it was demanded that an NQF be set up for Austria. This framework was to comprise all education sectors and integrate – as well as formally, non-formally acquired qualifications – also informally acquired learning outcomes. The aims associated with the NQF not only include the simplified and transparent referencing of the Austrian qualifications system to the EQF, but also comprise educational policy objectives exceeding this scope (such as the orientation to learning outcomes, promotion of permeability, integration of non-formal learning). For the development of the NQF, a combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach was chosen. The goal from the beginning was to put the design and implementation of the NQF on the basis of a broad consensus of key stakeholders of the national qualification landscape and also integrate academic expert knowledge.

The necessity of implementing an NQF referenced to the EQF is laid down in the Government Programme of the 24th legislation period (2008-2013) both in the chapter on education and in the chapter on science & research. This means that by 2013 the entire Austrian qualifications system will be integrated into a classification scheme with eight levels.

The following sections aim to present the key objectives and function of the NQF as well as the work structures which have been set up, activities and development stages, the design principles of the NQF, as well as projects and cooperation projects at European level as part of NQF development.

3.2. NQF objectives

The key objectives of the NQF

In the course of development work on the NQF, the following objectives were laid down with consensus of all stakeholders:[42]

- to increase the transparency of education systems in Europe and at national level for the benefit of citizens, based on a system of easily understandable and comparable qualifications;
- to facilitate the comparability of qualifications and education systems with the EQF (and the individual NQFs) and thus enhance understanding of the Austrian qualifications system in Europe;
- to further develop learning outcome-orientation;
- to introduce a credit transfer system based on the ECTS model;
- to promote the mobility of learners, students, teachers, academics/scientists and administrative personnel as much as possible;
- to promote permeability within and between the formal and non-formal areas of the education system in line with the principle of lifelong learning and thus strengthen the principles and methods of mutual recognition and credit transfer of qualifications;
- to promote the European dimension in the HE sector.

Orienting function of the NQF

The NQF aims to present the Austrian qualification landscape in a transparent manner. The referencing of levels is not connected with any rights however. The allocation to a certain level does not automatically provide access to the acquisition of a qualification at the next level. This means that the NQF has only a guiding but not a regulating function.

42 BMUKK & BMWF 2009

3.3. Work structures of the NQF

NQF project group

The NQF project group was set up in 2006. It comprises representatives of BMUKK and BMWF and was entrusted with the following NQF-related tasks:

- coordination of agendas between the two ministries,
- assumption of strategic planning,
- coordination of the development process and the implementation of the NQF,
- development of proposals on the NQF structure and design and coordination of these with the national steering group for the NQF (NQF STRG),
- establishment of information and communication structures to the stakeholders (such as advisory boards).

National steering group for the NQF (NQF STRG)

NQF STRG comprises representatives of major institutions of the Austrian educational landscape with direct influence on the qualification processes and contents as well as legislative framework conditions: representatives of federal ministries, social partners and provinces. The steering group is chaired by a representative of BMUKK, the deputy chair taken by BMWF. NQF STRG comprises 23 voting members (or substitute members). These members are appointed as follows:

Table 1. Members of NQF STRG

	Chair: 1 representative of BMUKK Deputy chair: BMWF Management: BMUKK
Number	**Institution**
three representatives	BMUKK
two representatives each	BMWF BMWFJ BMASK
one representative each	BKA

	BMEIA
	BMF
	BMG
	BMI
	BMJ
	BMLVS
	BMLFUW
	BMVIT
one representative each	BAK
	IV
	ÖGB
	LKÖ
	WKO
one representative each	Liaison office of the provinces
co-opted members (one representative each)	Uniko
	FHK

According to its rules of procedure, the key task of NQF STRG is the provision of advice to public authorities with responsibility for the legal regulation of education and training qualifications at all levels, particularly BMUKK and BMWF as coordinating ministries.

The advisory tasks of NQF STRG comprise the following:

- the development and design of an NQF,
- the implementation of the NQF in Austria,
- the design of the processes for referencing qualifications acquired in the formal sector and non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes to the EQF levels,
- the preparation and adoption of resolutions on recommendations connected with the development, design and implementation of an NQF and the referencing of qualifications to the EQF,
- the joint consultation on the design and organisation of communication, information and decision-making structures in its own sphere of competence to fulfil the above objectives.

National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria (NCP)

The Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria (NCP) was set up as a staff unit of the National Agency for Lifelong Learning, which in turn is a unit of the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD-Gmbh). It is the central administrative, coordinating and information office on the NQF in Austria.

The NCP is entrusted with the following tasks:

- support for developing and implementing the NQF in Austria,
- establishment of an internet-based NQF information system including an NQF register,
- PR, events and advice, and
- networking at the national and European level.[43]

The NCP's activities are funded by BMUKK and with grants of the European Commission.

Scientific support

The NQF development is continually supported by external scientific experts (http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/_15833/nqr_analyse_08.pdf). Experts were involved, for example, in preparing and drawing up the NQF consultation paper, analysed the statements on the NQF consultation paper, carried out and supervised NQF pilot projects, and cooperated in elaborating the criteria and procedures for the referencing of qualifications to NQF levels.

3.4. The NQF development process

Development design in three 'corridors'

The NQF aims to enable the referencing of qualifications from many different education sectors. To achieve the first objectives, including by taking available resources into account, the process of developing the NQF is structured into three 'corridors' based on the different fields of learning:

43 For the tasks of the Coordination Point cf. http:/www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/aufgaben_der_nks/ (14.11.2011)

- ‘Corridor 1’: referencing of qualifications of the formal education system (these are basically qualifications awarded by the state);
- ‘Corridor 2’: representation and referencing of non-formally acquired qualifications (such as at adult learning institutions, via occupation-specific and company-based CET);
- ‘Corridor 3’: development of the first approaches to classify learning outcomes acquired based on informal learning processes.

The definitions of the three corridors take account of national characteristics (for example, there exists certification in the field of non-formal learning in Austria, which is not the case with the European definition). The represented corridor structure aims to make these differences visible particularly for the European context and clarify them. In the following, the terms formal, non-formal and informal will be used according to national definitions (in the sense of corridors).

It must be noted here in particular that the three corridors have been created as a ‘bridge’ to make NQF implementation easier; this tool mainly aims to structure and clarify the complexity of the Austrian education system and its complex competence distribution (see chapter 2.7.). The corridors are understood in line with the lifelong learning principle: different pathways are accessible, and the long-term goal is to make it possible to portray all of these pathways in the NQF. Therefore the descriptions of NQF levels which are presented in this report should apply equally for all corridors to implement a framework for lifelong learning.

The overall strategy on the NQF in Austria foresees that, in a first step, all qualifications acquired in the formal sector will be referenced. But a qualifications framework should also portray non-formally acquired qualifications and learning outcomes acquired through informal learning to fulfil the requirements of a lifelong learning strategy. Therefore development activities within the three corridors are conducted at the same time to use synergies and pursue the objective of promoting permeability between the fields of learning. NQF-related activities carried out to date also demonstrate that the developments in one corridor frequently have an impact on activities in another corridor and can be used for it.

Phases and activities of the NQF development in Austria

The process of setting up the NQF in Austria was launched in January 2007 with an information phase in which all stakeholders were informed about content-related and organisational aspects. Based on a consultation paper (BMUKK & BMWF 2008) a consultation process on the NQF was carried out from January to June 2008, the results of which were analysed and synthesised in the second half of 2008 (Aff et al. 2008). The high level of involvement in this consultation process (some 270 statements were submitted) revealed that the NQF is a highly relevant topic for the Austrian education system and labour market. Based on the conclusions of the responsible ministries (BMUKK and BMWF) from the consultation procedure, the decision-making process started in early 2009. The NQF position paper (BMUKK & BMWF 2009), which was developed in a next step, presents the cornerstones of the decisions in principle as well as agreements on additional mandates to BMUKK as the responsible ministry. The development of the Austrian NQF was then officially launched with the adoption of this NQF position paper by the Council of Ministers in late 2009. In 2010 the Austrian NCP was set up, and a manual with criteria and procedures for the referencing of qualifications from the formal sector prepared (NCP 2011; Annex 3), which was tested in a pilot phase in 2011 (BMUKK 2010a). The development of criteria and the procedure for referencing qualifications from the formal system also included qualifications from the non-formal sector. But the pilot phase merely aimed to test the referencing of selected formal qualifications. The findings and experiences gathered during the pilot phase were presented and discussed on the occasion of the 9th meeting of NQF STRG in May 2011. Based on feedback from this testing phase, the criteria and procedures have been under review since June 2011 to optimise the overall procedure.

In 2011 the NCP also conducted a range of other measures. These include the following:

- support and backup for NQF STRG;
- PR (website support, preparation of a folder and other materials);
- the organisation of information events in the provinces (NQF Road Show);
- the launch of a series of seminars with the title ‘Fit for NQF’, which aims to illustrate and explain individual aspects of the NQF/EQF and associated

topics and instruments for selected target groups (such as organising a seminar on ‘learning outcome orientation in IVET and CVET’);

- the creation of transnational networks – *e.g.* the organisation of the international experts meeting ‘Highlighting EQF Level 5’ (in June 2011); participation in NCP meetings.

The following table provides an overview of the major activities and milestones in the development of the NQF between 2005 and 2011 in the formal and non-formal education sectors.

Table 2. Development of the NQF in Austria

Year	Formal system (C1)	Non-formal system (C2)
2005/2006	• Consultation process on the EQF • First activities to develop an NQF in Austria	
2007	• In-depth analysis to prepare the NQF in Austria • Preparation of the NQF consultation document	
2008	• Government Programme of the 24th legislation period (2008-2013): necessity of implementing an NQF related to the EQF in the chapters on education and science/research: increasing the transparency of formally and non-formally acquired qualifications and thus enhancing the permeability of the entire education system • Conference ‘NQF in Austria: launch of the consultation process’ • Implementation of the consultation process • Pilot projects on the NQF in the sectors of construction, tourism and for health professions excluding doctors	• C2 strategy and working group

Year	Formal system (C1)	Non-formal system (C2)
2009	• BMUKK & BMWF position paper: establishment of an NQF in Austria. Conclusions, key decisions and measures following the NQF consultation process. • Speech in front of the Ministerial Council on 24 Nov.2009: joint report of BMUKK and BMWF on the establishment of an NQF and implementation measures in the current legislation period • Pilot project: definition of learning outcomes and referencing of qualifications to the NQF based on qualifications in the fields of electrical engineering and electronics	• Concept of a partial strategy to integrate learning outcomes of non-formal learning in a future NQF • General adult education and the NQF – model project on citizen competence
2010	• Development of criteria as basis for allocating qualifications to the NQF • Pilot project: testing the criteria based on subject-specific qualifications from business/administration • Development of a procedure for the process of allocating qualifications • Establishment of the National Coordination Point for the NQF (NCP) in Austria as a staff unit of the National Agency for Lifelong Learning	• Establishment of the strategy group for the NQF C2 / non-formal learning
2011	• Mention of the NQF in the lifelong learning strategy in Austria • "Manual for Referencing Formal Qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – Criteria and Procedures" • Implementation of pilot phase to develop the NQF • Organisation of information events in the provinces by the NCP (NQF Road Show) • Launch of further development activities: - adaptation of criteria and procedures NCP: launch of series of seminars 'Fit for NQF'	• Preparation of guidelines on learning outcome orientation in the adult education sector • Pilot project: non-formal qualifications from construction in C2 / NQF

Year	Formal system (C1)	Non-formal system (C2)
	• NCP: International experts meeting 'Highlighting EQF Level 5' (June 2011)	•

3.5. Design principles of the NQF

The NQF levels

Like the EQF the Austrian NQF comprises eight levels. This number of levels has been considered appropriate in studies on the implicit levels of the Austrian education system as well as in NQF pilot projects. The overwhelming majority of statements made in the course of NQF consultation also advocated this eight-level structure.

NQF descriptors

The descriptions ('descriptors') of the individual EQF levels are formulated in a rather general manner. The results of the NQF consultation process and NQF pilot projects, however, point towards a consensus concerning their practicability in principle as well as their further use to establish the NQF. But it was demanded to carry out a 'translation' of EQF descriptors for the national context in order to make the allocation of Austrian qualifications easier. Subsequently separate descriptors were developed for the Austrian NQF (originally termed 'explanations' in the manual), which formulate learning outcomes with special consideration of the national context. These formulations were the result of analyses conducted while work was carried out on the manual and build on EQF descriptors and the Austrian qualification descriptions (such as curricula, training regulations, legal documents, etc.). To ensure EQF descriptors can be understood and applied more easily, these formulations aim to specify the abstract descriptions in greater detail. This also aims to make differences between levels more clearly visible. Therefore the following criteria have been considered in the referencing of qualifications to the Austrian NQF:

- EQF descriptors
- NQF descriptors
- reference qualifications

Reference qualifications denote qualifications from the Austrian educational qualification landscape and serve to illustrate and understand more easily the requirements connected with the levels. They are to form ‘qualification cornerstones’, an aid for orientation in the allocation of additional qualifications. They were the result of the previously implicit educational hierarchy of the Austrian qualification landscape. In addition, there was broad consensus for the level assignment of the given reference qualifications in the course of discussions with experts on the occasion of several pilot projects conducted in the course of NQF development. Not least, the analysis conducted while preparing the manual and the learning outcome-oriented study of curricula and training plans as well as additional legal bases have been decisive for the assignment of these reference qualifications. This procedure has to date resulted in reference qualifications for all levels except for levels one and eight (outside the Bologna architecture) in the formal area.

Splitting the NQF table of descriptors at levels six to eight

At levels one to five, qualifications of all education sectors are assigned based on the NQF descriptors. At levels six to eight, two sets of descriptors apply. Whereas qualifications of the Bologna architecture acquired at HE institutions (these are bachelor, master and PhD) and qualifications acquired through diploma studies are classified according to the Dublin descriptors, assignment of all the other qualifications builds on the NQF descriptors. The objective in principle is that, in this way, Levels 6 to 8 will remain open both for qualifications from the HE sector and for IVET and CVET qualifications. The following table presents the descriptions of levels of the Austrian NQF (excluding the Dublin descriptors and qualifications of the Bologna architecture acquired in the HE sector; BSc, MSc, PhD, diploma studies).

Table 3. Descriptions of the Austrian NQF levels

Descriptions of the Austrian NQF levels				
	EQF descriptors		**NQF descriptors**	**'Reference qualifications'**
LEVEL 1	**KNOWLEDGE**	Basic general knowledge	He/she has • elementary-level general education, including fundamental knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and use of modern information and communication technologies • knowledge about social norms and values • knowledge about the accepted and common ways of behaving in everyday situations • an insight into the world of work and occupations, which enables him/her to make a decision on the educational and professional career • the ability to acquire available knowledge independently • knowledge which enables transfer to further school-based education or training at the upper secondary level	
	SKILLS	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • communicate properly using language, participate in discussions and share his/her views • deal with simple everyday activities under given framework conditions with the use of literacy and numeracy skills • look for different possible solutions to simple problems, select the appropriate solution and use this to carry out the task • gather basic information about simple themes from common, including computer-aided sources, form a subject-related and value-oriented opinion and take up a corresponding stance • develop his/her own position on issues which affect him/her using social norms and values as a basis • take part in social events and find his/her own role within a community	
	COMPETE	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • deal with simple situations under given framework conditions and with corresponding assistance	

LEVEL 2	**KNOWLEDGE**	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	He/she has • a sound general education • knowledge of fundamental business connections • basic knowledge of the structure of the labour market and how it works • elementary-level previous professional qualifications in a specific field • knowledge which enables transfer to further school-based or vocational education or training •	Secondary home economics school qualification (one-year course); pre-vocational school qualification
	SKILLS	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • use given instruments, methods and procedures appropriately • cope with simple routine tasks autonomously • deal with simple standard challenges independently • develop certain independent and logical thought • actively take part in discussions on familiar themes and take up his/her own viewpoint • understand and use information to fulfil his/her tasks from given sources • present facts and circumstances from his/her experience orally and in writing using the correct standard language	
	COMPETENCE	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • act autonomously in simple situations • cope with simple challenges under given framework conditions and with a certain amount of assistance • successfully deal with new, more specific activities with corresponding support and guidance in order to develop the self-confidence required to take on more extensive tasks	

LEVEL 3	KNOWLEDGE	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work or study	He/she has • a well-founded general education • fundamental knowledge in his/her field of work or study (e.g. about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with simple tasks and challenges provided the framework conditions remain unchanged • the ability of business-related thinking and critical consumer behaviour • knowledge needed to directly carry out simple professional activities	Secondary home economics school qualification (two-year course)
	SKILLS	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • select basic instruments, methods and procedures and use them appropriately • independently cope with simple activities while the framework conditions remain unchanged • demonstrate different approaches to solutions for everyday problems and use these to independently solve the problems after prior consultation • develop independent and logical thought • actively take part in simple discussions on familiar themes, present his/her own viewpoint and give reasons to substantiate this • independently research relevant information to fulfil his/her tasks from given sources, critically assess this and use it after prior consultation • present common contents in appropriate form (i.e. according to the situation and the target audience) and also technically correct while using the correct language	
	COMPETENCE	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • act autonomously and with own responsibility in simple situations • act autonomously and with own responsibility to cope with simple challenges under framework conditions which remain unchanged • adapt his/her behaviour independently to the circumstances in common situations	

LEVEL 4	KNOWLEDGE	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	He/she has • an in-depth general education • theoretical knowledge in his/her field of work or study (*e.g.* about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with common tasks and challenges, including with changing framework conditions • fundamental company-related business and legal knowledge • a university entrance qualification or knowledge needed to directly exercise a profession	VET school qualification (*e.g.* the certificate of the VET school for machine construction, the business school certificate, the certificate of the school of hotel and catering industries, etc.) ; Apprenticeship diploma (*e.g.* the certificate in the apprenticeships office clerk or joiner, etc.)
	SKILLS	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • select common instruments, methods and procedures and use them appropriately • independently cope with standard tasks, including under changing conditions • analyse everyday problems taking into account theoretical knowledge, demonstrate different approaches to solutions and solve these problems independently • develop certain creative and networked thinking • actively take part in discussions in standard situations with familiar themes, present his/her own viewpoint and give reasons to substantiate this • independently research relevant information to fulfil his/her tasks from largely given sources, critically assess this and use it • present information in appropriate form (i.e. according to the situation and the target audience) and also technically correct while using the correct language and using common communication techniques/technologies	
	COMPETENCE	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • handle routine situations independently and behave appropriately according to the circumstances • work in a team and instruct/supervise others in common tasks	

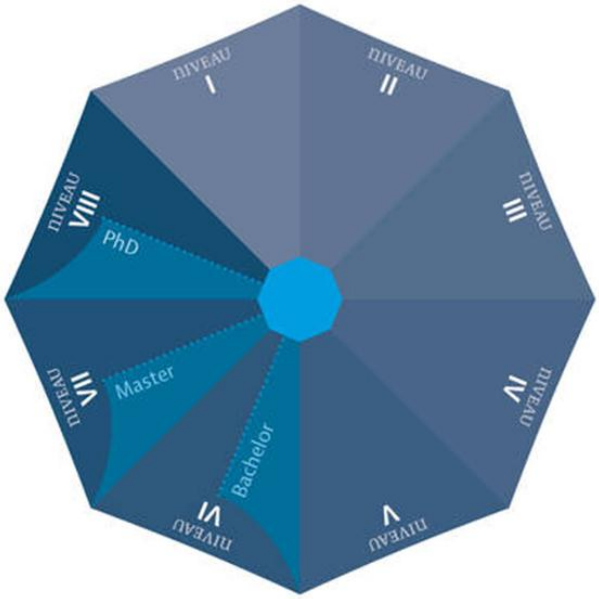
LEVEL 5	**KNOWLEDGE**	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	He/she has • extensive theoretical knowledge in his/her field of work or study (*e.g.* about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with tasks and challenges, including in unpredictable situations • awareness of what effects using this knowledge has on the field of work or study • in-depth company-related business and legal knowledge for taking on managerial tasks and/or heading a company • knowledge needed to directly exercise a high-level profession	VET college *Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma (*e.g.* college of construction engineering, business college, college of tourism, etc. and the certificate of the secondary training college for nursery school teachers)
	SKILLS	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • independently cope with tasks including in unpredictable contexts • assess the implications of such tasks and draw conclusions here for how to proceed subsequently • analyse challenging and multi-layered problems using logical, abstract and networked thinking and solve these autonomously while complying with the respective applicable norms, regulations and rules • use his/her own creative contributions to solve problems • understand connections between ecological, economic and social mechanisms, establish interconnections and use the knowledge gained here in common and also unpredictable situations • form an opinion on new facts and circumstances, explain his/her own viewpoint and present this using the standard specialist terminology in a way which is suitable for the target audience and the particular situation • independently research information from different sources and disciplines, gather the essential content, critically assess, select and present this in a manner suitable for the target audience	
	COMPETENCE	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change Review and develop performance of self and others	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • independently coordinate and manage projects • act independently and flexibly in different situations, including unpredictable ones • reflect on his/her own behaviour and draw conclusions on how to act in the future • critically and responsibly deal with the actions of other people, give feedback and contribute to the development of their potential	

LEVEL 6	**KNOWLEDGE**	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	He/she has • in-depth theoretical knowledge in his/her field of work or study (*e.g.* about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with extensive tasks and challenges • knowledge about the theoretical bases of his/her field of work or study from different perspectives • the knowledge required to lead extensive projects, functional areas or companies	Master craftsperson qualification (*e.g.* the master craftsperson qualification in motor vehicle engineering or of tailors of ladies' clothing, etc.)
	SKILLS	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • carry out tasks at a very high professional level • deal with extensive challenges independently and with full responsibility and develop innovative solutions when doing so • independently elaborate concepts to carry out various tasks while taking into consideration subject-specific, economic and legal framework conditions • act in an anticipatory way and respond flexibly to new/changing circumstances • communicate with different actors (employees, [potential] customers, suppliers, authorities, etc.) in a way which is suitable for the target audience and the particular situation • research information from different media and disciplines, critically assess this and select it to develop innovative approaches to solutions	
	COMPETENCE	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • act entrepreneurially and take on managerial tasks • lead complex and extensive projects, functional areas and/or companies independently and with full responsibility • critically and responsibly deal with the actions of individual employees and also entire project and working teams, give feedback and contribute to the development of their potential with targeted support measures	

LEVEL 7	**KNOWLEDGE**	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	He/she has • expert knowledge in his/her field of work or study (e.g. about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with complex tasks and challenges • knowledge from different disciplines required to deal with tasks and challenges in his/her field of work or study • the ability to incorporate newly acquired knowledge in the further development of his/her field of work or study	Qualifying examinations for master builders, engineering offices (consulting engineers) and the civil engineers' qualification
	SKILLS	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • gather knowledge and findings from different disciplines, critically reflect on them and incorporate them in his/her own activities • discover new findings from practical work and from the theoretical approach and use them for innovations (*e.g.* in the area of procedures, processes, materials, products, etc.) • develop the strategy of complex projects, functional areas and/or companies • examine the performances and results of projects, functional areas and/or companies, assess them, draw conclusions from them and make necessary amendments • communicate views to relevant actors, act as a moderator and state reasons for decisions	
	COMPETENCE	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • lead complex projects, functional areas and/or companies independently and take on responsibility for decision-making • monitor the implementation of the strategy, intervene to take control and, if necessary, draw consequences for content and staff	

LEVEL 8	KNOWLEDGE	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	He/she has • top-level expert knowledge in his/her field of work or study (e.g. about facts and circumstances, principles, materials, processes, methods, connections, regulations and norms, etc.) to independently deal with complex tasks and challenges • comprehensive knowledge from different disciplines required to deal with tasks and challenges in his/her field of work or study • the ability to incorporate newly acquired knowledge in the further development of his/her field of work or study and to contribute to the creation of new knowledge and new subdisciplines	
	SKILLS	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • discover new findings from practical work and from the epistemological approach and use them for innovations (e.g. in the area of procedures, processes, materials, products, etc.) • generate new knowledge and new findings while using various research methods • process new results and findings, make them available, discuss them with relevant actors and advocate them	
	COMPETENCE	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research	In his/her field of work or study he/she is able to • make new knowledge and new findings accessible and in this way contribute to the further development of learners/employees • contribute to further development with newly generated knowledge and with new findings	

Figure 3. NQF structure and design

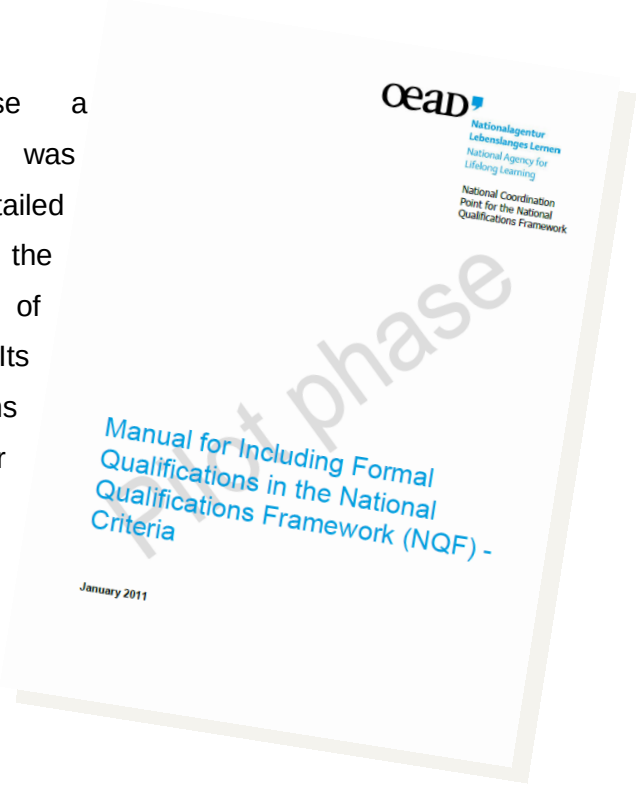


Procedure for referencing qualifications to the NQF

The referencing of qualifications to the NQF is voluntary and based on a formal application which states reasons and furnishes proof for the assignment of a qualification to a level. Such an application can only be submitted for qualifications that can currently be acquired. An allocation of qualifications for which a proof of qualification can no longer be issued is not possible.

Allocations to the Austrian NQF should in principle be conducted by way of a transparent procedure.

On the one hand, this procedure should have clear process structures and be understandable, on the other hand it should reflect the Austrian qualification structure. The already mentioned formal basis will have to define this procedure and its main bodies (including particularly the NCP).



Before the pilot phase a comprehensive manual was elaborated which provides detailed information about the inclusion/allocation of qualifications (see Annex 3). Its aim is to support organisations in the preparation of their applications for allocating qualifications and serve as the basis for stating reasons for NQF allocation. The pilot phase was used to test if the manual was practicable and the experiences gathered could be used in the compilation of this report. The key elements of the manual are outlined in the following:

- Definition of qualifications: The EQF definition defines a qualification as the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. This means that the assessment procedure and the evidence of a qualification form key aspects of a qualification. For these elements the NQF lays down certain minimum requirements which distinguish qualifications from non-qualifications. If they have been fulfilled, the qualification is NQF-compatible and can be assigned in principle.
- Bases for allocation: The bases are legal documents (*i.e.* laws, regulations, decrees, ordinances, etc.) applicable in the formal sector and current descriptions of qualifications in the non-formal area. For the allocation of a qualification to an NQF level, those learning outcomes are decisive which need to be demonstrated when furnishing the proof of qualification (assessment procedure).

- Learning outcome orientation: Qualifications will be assigned on the basis of learning outcomes. As there are no explicit learning outcome descriptions for many qualifications, in these cases the learning outcomes implicitly connected with them need to be specified in the application for allocation. Therefore in most cases a combination of a 'technical approach' (comparison of learning outcome descriptions) and a 'social approach' (such as the involvement of stakeholders and other indicators, including direct entry into the labour market, self-employment rate, unemployment rate, etc.) will be used to assign the respective level.
- The best-fit principle: 'Best fit' means that a qualification is referenced to the level whose descriptions fit the qualification best ('principle of predominance'). It is therefore always necessary to read the entire table of descriptors and consider which level fits best to a qualification overall. This way of reading the descriptors helps determine the 'focus' of the respective qualification and thus makes it possible to decide where it can be classified. In this process it is necessary to allow for a certain 'respectable generosity' when applying the descriptors as well as leave room for interpretation.
- Equivalence rather than equality: Qualifications which are referenced to a level are considered as equivalent regarding the level of learning outcomes – independent of their specific field of work or study – even if they differ in many aspects – such as in the duration of their acquisition, the place of learning, the education sector in which they are acquired, etc. – and are therefore not equal.
- No 'steps' in the acquisition of qualifications: Although the NQF has a hierarchical structure, this does not mean that the acquisition of qualifications must be step-by-step. A qualification which is assigned to a higher level does not necessarily require the acquisition of a qualification at a lower level. The relevant provisions are not regulated by the NQF. Even though a qualification is the prerequisite for acquiring another qualification, it does not follow that the 'add-on qualification' must by all means be assigned to a higher level than the 'prerequisite qualification'. It is conceivable that both qualifications are assigned to the same level.

1. Details about the qualification provider

Name of institution: .....

Type of institution: .....

Legal form: .....

Represented by (name and function): .....

Address: .....

Telephone number: ..... Fax number: .....

E-mail: .....

Quality management system or procedure of external quality assurance (if applicable/relevant):

.....

Please specify the type of institution, e.g. ministry, CET establishment, professional organisation, etc.

Enter the legal form of your institution here, e.g. public corporation, limited liability company, association, etc.

If your institution uses a quality management system or a procedure of external quality assurance, please give more precise details here.

2. Details about the qualification

Title of qualification: .....

Legal basis (if applicable): .....

Activity fields: .....

Duration of training (if required): .....

Access requirements for learners to take the assessment procedure: .....

Access requirements for the qualification if relevant for classification: .....

Rights connected with the qualification: .....

Here you should name the activity fields (branches of industry, fields, areas of responsibility, etc.) which are available to holders of qualifications.

If training should precede the acquisition of proof of qualification, its duration (in weeks/months/years) must be indicated.

The formal access requirements which learners must meet in order to take the assessment procedure to acquire the qualification must be specified here (e.g. age, professional experience, etc.)

Here previous qualifications which may be necessary can be indicated if these are relevant for the applied-for level.

Please present the profile of your qualification. Provide details about the key learning outcomes which qualification holders have and give references to sources on which your description is based.

The qualification profile should reveal the key learning outcomes which qualification holders have. In addition the sources (e.g. legal bases, laws, etc.) which form the basis of this description must also be indicated.

Length: max. 300 words

3. Details about the assessment procedure

Legal basis (if applicable): .....

Course of the assessment procedure: .....

.....

Details about examiners: .....

.....

Assessment scheme: .....

.....

Inspection of exam results: .....

Possibility of appeal: .....

Repetition of exam parts: .....

Please give precise details about which standards, i.e. knowledge, skills and competence, the exam candidates must prove in order to obtain the proof of their assessment.

Indicate which specific steps you take to ensure the quality of the overall process and the reliability of the results. For this purpose you can, for example, describe your procedures concerning the updating of exam questions and methods, your measures to objectify exam situations, etc.

Describe what type of assessment procedure(s) you use (e.g. written, oral, practical demonstration, multiple choice, etc.) and how the individual procedure elements proceed specifically.

Provide details about who carries out the assessment procedure and which formal or subject-related requirements the examiners have to fulfil (e.g. formal qualification, practical periods, etc.).

Indicate which assessment scheme you use (e.g. points distribution, grading scale, etc.).

Provide details about whether and, if so, in what way exam candidates have the opportunity to inspect exam results.

Indicate whether exam candidates have opportunities to appeal against exam assessments and, if so, what these opportunities are.

Specify if candidates can repeat any exam parts they did not pass successfully or the entire exam and specify which regulations apply in this context.

Indicate which standards need to be met to acquire the qualification.

Length: max. 300 words

Please specify which measures you take to safeguard the quality of the assessment procedure.

Length: max. 300 words

Figure 4. Exemplary excerpt from the manual: Application form

4. Statement of reasons for classification in the NQF

NQF level applied for: .....

Indicate the NQF level to which, in your opinion, the qualification in this application should be allocated to.

Give reasons for the NQF level you applied for (if appropriate, applying the best-fit principle) and in this process refer to the EQF descriptors of the three dimensions knowledge, skills and competence. You may find the explanations helpful.

Give detailed reasons for the applied-for NQF level. The basis for this should be the applicable qualification descriptions (e.g. legal bases) which need to be related to the EQF descriptors.

Length: max. 300 words

In what relation is the qualification with other qualifications of the same field of work or study? What reasons can be stated for the NQF classification you applied for with reference to these qualifications and their NQF level?

To help substantiate your reasons you can indicate the following information:

- information about the relation between the qualification in question and other certificates from the same field of work or study (e.g. the reference qualifications or other, already assigned qualifications)
- international comparisons (e.g. bilateral or multilateral agreements for mutual recognition of the qualification, European comparative projects, etc.)
- statistical details which can be used as indicators

All of this information should enable a well-founded decision about NQF allocation.

Are there any comparable qualifications in other countries? Are there any bilateral or multilateral agreements about the mutual recognition of these qualifications? Have any experiences been made in European projects about the comparability of these qualifications?

Give information to substantiate why your qualification is suitable for the applied-for NQF level. In this process you can explain, for example, the statistical data about direct entry into the labour market, rates of self-employed, job ads, unemployment rates, incomes, graduate surveys, etc.

Length: max. 400 words, excluding statistics.

5. Statistical data*

Costs for participants
to acquire the qualification: .....

Please indicate the direct costs which arise for participants when acquiring the qualification (e.g. course costs, material costs, exam costs, etc.).

Number of people who acquire this
qualification a year: .....

Please indicate how many people acquire this qualification on average per year in your institution. If it is a new qualification, please indicate the expected average number of people.

Age of people who acquire this
qualification a year: .....

Indicate how old on average the people are who acquire this qualification in your institution. If it is a new qualification, please indicate the age of the target group the qualification is primarily aimed at.

* not mandatory fields

Annexes:

- ❍ Legal basis ❍ .....
- ❍ Curriculum ❍ .....
- ❍ Form for proof of qualification ❍ .....

Documents can be enclosed in the application to support the presented information. Please describe the attached annexes briefly.

.....

Name of competent ministry

The application must contain the name of the submitting ministry and also be signed by its legal representative.

.....

Signature of ministry, name, function

Contact point in ministry for this application: .....

Telephone number: ..... Fax number: .....

E-mail: .....

Here the person who was mainly responsible for filing the application must be named with the corresponding contact data.

Place, date

The application must be stamped and provided with the date of submission when sent to the NCP.

Stamp

3.6. International cooperation projects, EQF projects

In the course of the development of the NQF and of the implementation of the EQF in Austria there is strong interest in discussing potential developments and changes with other countries – mainly countries which have a comparable education system and the neighbouring countries – and exchanging experiences. This also serves to establish mutual trust, which is vital for the implementation and use of the EQF. Therefore representatives of relevant Austrian institutions (such as ministries, social partners) as well as research organisations, which are frequently involved in the NQF development process, are represented in a large number of international projects and working groups at European level. Since 2006 the European Commission for example has launched several calls for projects to test and develop the EQF in transnational partnerships. Table 5 provides an overview of the participation of Austrian organisations in these projects.

Austrian representatives are additionally committed in the following activities of international cooperation in the context of the EQF and NQF:

- membership in the EQF Advisory Group, which is coordinated by the European Commission;
- participation in peer learning activities, which are organised by the European Commission for the development of the NQF and the implementation of the EQF;
- meetings with 'like-minded countries' to discuss potential NQF developments and their implications;
  organisation of workshops, seminars and conferences about relevant topics in the NQF/EQF context with participation of experts from other European countries.

Table 4. EQF projects with participation of Austrian institutions

Calls	Project title	Project website	Participating Austrian institutions
Call 2006	TransEQFrame	www.transEQFrame.net	BMUKK, 3s
	EQF Frame	http:/EQR.oeek.gr	3s
	AMOR	www.amor-project.eu	ibw
	HE_LeO	www.he-leo-project.eu	BMWF, Danube University Krems
	EASCMF	www.eascmf.eu	3s
Call 2007	SECCOMPAT	www.vdu.lt/seccompat	Camillo Sitte Lehranstalt
	EU in Motion	http:/www.eu-in-motion.eu/	Office of the Styrian Provincial Government, Specialist Unit 8 A, Healthcare Professions Department School for General Healthcare and Nursing of the Province of Styria at the Stolzalpe Provincial Hospital Graz School for General Healthcare and Nursing
	EQR-Hair	www.dfkf.dk/EQR-Hair.aspx	WKO
	Ways to Sustainability	www.project-ways.eu	3s
Call 2008	EQR-Ref	www.EQR-ref.eu	BMUKK, 3s
	INLearning	www.inlearning.eu	3s
	EQR Predict	www.project-predict.eu	3s, ibw
	ZOOM	www.zoom-EQF.eu	BMUKK, BMWFJ, ibw, WKO
	CAR CAREERs	www.itb.uni-bremen.de/index.php?id=334	ibw

4. Development steps related to the Bologna process

Since 2006 intensive work has been conducted in Austria to create structures to develop the NQF while safeguarding participation by all stakeholders. From the beginning it has been the major objective to involve all actors of the Austrian education sector and thus create an NQF which builds on consensual decisions and enjoys high acceptance in Austria.

With the entry into force of the Amendment to the Federal Ministries Act (*Bundesministeriengesetz*)[44] on 1 March 2007 the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (BMBWK) was dissolved. The agendas of BMBWK have since been fulfilled by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research (BMWF), which are jointly responsible for the development of the Austrian NQF. All the processes related to the Bologna structure are within the sphere of BMWF.

The following chapter deals with HE policy measures related to NQF development. Then it describes the composition, tasks and activities to date of the Austrian NQF advisory council and the NQF steering group.

4.1. HE policy measures

Designing the higher education area – the Bologna process in Austria

The Bologna process was launched in Austria as early as in 1999. It initiated a European Higher Education Area with the following objectives:

- to introduce a system of academic degrees that are easily recognisable and comparable;
- to introduce a system based essentially on three cycles (bachelor, master and doctorate);
- to introduce a credit transfer system based on the ECTS model;

44 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_contentbox/bmg_novelle_07_nr.pdf (downloaded on 07.07.11)

- to promote the mobility of students, teachers, academics/scientists and administrative personnel as much as possible;
- to promote European cooperation in quality assurance;
- to promote the European dimension in the HE sector.

In Austria, the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration is accompanied by a monitoring process of BMWF. As part of this monitoring process, regular monitoring reports[45] about the status of the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration in Austria are published. As well as this national survey, the implementation in the individual Bologna countries is also documented at the European level as annual national reports[46].

Structures to implement the objectives of the Bologna Declaration

The national implementation of the objectives of the Bologna process is supported by the Austrian Bologna Follow-up Group[47]. Since 2005 Austria has had a team of six national Bologna experts[48], who give advice to HE institutions about the implementation of the Bologna objectives. In addition, all universities and *Fachhochschulen* have nominated Bologna coordinators, who are responsible for information activities and support in the implementation of the Bologna objectives at their establishments. The University of Vienna ran its own Bologna office until 2008 and also other universities set up units to support the curriculum working groups in formulating new curricula in line with the Bologna study architecture.

The Bologna service unit[49] of the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD-Gmbh) is an independent advice and information centre for the entire HE sector, which dedicates itself to enshrining the Bologna objectives in the Austrian HE landscape. It is a practice-oriented point of contact for

45 The monitoring reports can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/monitoring_report_2009/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)
46 The national reports can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/national_report_0709/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)
47 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/nationale_bologna_follow_up_gruppe/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)
48 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/bologna_expertinnen/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)
49 http://www.oead.at/bologna (accessed on 5.10.2011)

all queries related to the topics of Bologna and the European Higher Education Area and offers a discussion platform for cross-sectoral dialogue and exchange.

At BMWF a Bologna liaison office[50] has been set up, with the tasks of maintaining contact with the European Bologna Follow-up Group and other participating states as well as informing the Austrian HE establishments about the latest developments and supporting them in the implementation of objectives.

Status of implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration in Austria

The implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration has now made good progress in Austria:

The **introduction of academic degrees that are easily recognisable and comparable** was fostered by legally obliging public universities, *Fachhochschulen* and university colleges of education to issue a diploma supplement in German and English to all graduates. Private universities issue the diploma supplement without any explicit obligation. This ensures that diploma supplements are awarded nationwide to all graduates in the tertiary sector.

The basis for introducing a system that builds essentially on three cycles **(bachelor, master and doctorate)** was laid with the 1999 Amendment to the University Studies Act and continued in the 2002 University Act. A 2002 Amendment to the *FHStG* also introduced bachelor's and master's programmes in the *Fachhochschule* sector. Of the total of 1,058 regular study courses available at universities in the winter semester 2011, 891 (84.2%) were bachelor's or master's programmes. The three-tier study system accounts for 66.9% (share of bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes in all study courses taken up). At *Fachhochschulen* the share of two-tier bachelor's and master's programmes in total study courses was 99.2%, 371 out of 374 *FH* programmes, in October 2011. In total 98.1% of all *FH* students were enrolled in bachelor's and master's programmes.

50 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/bologna_kontaktstelle/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)

The **introduction of a credit transfer system based on the ECTS model** is regulated by the 2002 *UG* and the 2002 Amendment to the *FHStG*, both of which specify the obligation to award (ECTS) credits for all lectures held as part of study plans. For private universities, the application of ECTS is one assessment criterion during accreditation. University colleges of education have also revised all of their curricula and now award credits based on the 2005 Higher Education Act.

The objective of **promoting the mobility** of students, teachers, academics/scientists and administrative personnel **as much as possible** is driven by various measures: both the 2002 *UG* and another amendment to the *FHStG* created the legal basis for joint programmes. In addition, a comprehensive range of scholarships (*e.g.* Erasmus) are available and facilitate the students' and graduates' international mobility through financial support. The new service legislation for the universities' teaching staff provides for diverse promotion measures and easier implementation of stays abroad for teaching and research.

The **promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance and quality development** is one of the cornerstones of the Bologna process. One of the major instruments in this connection are the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs), the implementation of which in Austria and all the other Bologna states has made major progress since their adoption in 2005. Austrian HE establishments and quality assurance agencies see the ESGs[51] as a common point of reference for developing in-house and external quality assurance. The HE establishments' quality management systems are oriented towards the standards and guidelines for the in-house and external quality assurance for HE establishments but also the three currently existing quality assurance institutions AQA, *Fachhochschule* Council and Accreditation Council[52] see the ESGs as a point of reference for their activities and are actively involved in international cooperation on issues of quality assurance and quality development. This means that the ESGs make a substantial contribution to the comparability of quality assurance procedures and to the transparency and promotion of a common understanding of quality assurance both at the national and

51 Information about the ESGs can be found at http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf
52 *Cf.* Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*HS-QSG*), which can be downloaded from: (http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20007384)

at the European level. As part of the new regulation of external quality assurance effective from 1 March 2012, the three existing quality assurance institutions AQA, *Fachhochschule* Council and Accreditation Council will be integrated into a joint, cross-sectoral quality assurance agency: the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria.

The **promotion of the European dimension in the HE sector** is ensured, in particular, by orienting the practice of recognising exams and academic degrees towards the international processing of data with the goal of providing reliable information about HE systems in other countries to universities and *Fachhochschule* programmes. This recognition practice is conducted by ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA (Recognition Information Centre) at BMWF thanks to its Europe-wide contacts. Rather than concluding bilateral agreements on the recognition of study courses in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention[53] the goal is the multilateral recognition of qualifications in the European HE sector. Furthermore Austria is regularly presented as a higher education location at the international level to raise and strengthen awareness and interest among foreign HE establishments in the HE location Austria and in cooperation projects with Austrian universities and *Fachhochschule* programmes.

The 'Dialogue on HE partnership'

With the 'Dialogue on HE partnership', a dialogue process was launched in Austria which aimed to develop a clear division of tasks and setting of priorities among HE establishments in times of fundamental changes occurring in the HE landscape.

The kick-off event of the 'Dialogue on HE partnership' was held on 24 and 25 November 2009 and all institutions of the HE sector, BMUKK, social partners and representations of interests, of the provinces, of university bodies, of political parties and students were invited to take part in it.

BMWF designed and implemented the 'Dialogue on HE partnership' as a stakeholder process, thus making it possible for different groups of society to

53 Can be accessed at: http://www.bmwf.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/wissenschaft/naric/lis_anerkennung.pdf (downloaded on 7.7.2011)

discuss and link their positions productively. The aim was to overcome existing conflict, find meaningful solutions and prepare political decision-making. The dialogue was held until June 2010 – half a year of work on various issues.
More than 40 partners in the HE sector overall were involved in the 'Dialogue on HE partnership' and took part in the following five working forums, which had been decided at the kick-off event:

- the tertiary sector's mission for society
- the coordinated development of the tertiary sector: universities, private universities, *Fachhochschulen*, university colleges of education
- Bologna & study structure (curricula) & teaching
- choice of studies and HE access
- resources and financing of teaching and research

As there is a close connection in the tertiary sector between the Bologna process and the development of the NQF, the NQF was the topic of working forum 3, which dealt with *Bologna & study structure (curricula) & teaching*.

In six meetings, participants of this working forum elaborated recommendations in the fields of *mobility, curricular design, qualification profiles, and acceptance of new degrees, teaching & the implementation of 'student-centred learning'* as well as *lifelong learning*. Their recommendations can be found in the final report of the 'Dialogue on HE partnership'[54] and are taken into account in the development of the NQF for the Austrian tertiary sector.

4.1.1. The NQF advisory council

To encourage communication about the development of the NQF with all stakeholders of the tertiary sector, the Federal Ministry of Science and Research has set up a separate NQF advisory council. This council holds regular meetings and contributes substantially to elaborate the position of the HE sector on the NQF.

54 BMWF (2010). Empfehlungen zur Zukunft des tertiären Sektors: Ergebnisbericht des Dialogs Hochschulpartnerschaft [Recommendations on the future of the tertiary sector: Report about the results of the 'Dialogue on HE partnership']: http://www.dialog-hochschulpartnerschaft.at/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Dialog-Hochschulpartnerschaft-Endbericht.pdf (downloaded on 27.10.2010)

The NQF advisory council comprises representatives of the General Directorate for Higher Education at BMWF, Universities Austria (Uniko), the Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK), the *Fachhochschule* Council (FHR), the Accreditation Council, the Bologna Follow-up Group, the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA), the Austrian Students' Union (ÖH), and the Austrian Rectors' Conference of Private Universities (ÖPUK).

Universities Austria[55]

Universities Austria (Uniko) has the function of internally coordinating state universities (with the exception of Danube University Krems), representing them in national and international bodies, and is the voice of universities in the public. In addition, Uniko is the administrative basis for the umbrella organisation of universities.

To date Uniko has held three events about the NQF in Austria. The first of these events on 22 Feb. 2008[56] dealt with concepts and background information about the NQF, on 28 March 2008[57] national experiences with qualifications frameworks by the example of Switzerland and Scotland were at the centre, and at the third event on the NQF on 24 April 2008[58] practice-oriented issues related to the NQF were discussed – about the design of curricula at Austrian universities and the impact of the Bologna process and Dublin descriptors.

The Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences[59]

FHK is an association in which all 21 *Fachhochschulen* (*FHs*) are organised to promote science, research and teaching at these institutions. The FHK's tasks are: to represent the interests of universities of applied sciences in Austria and abroad; to offer a platform for exchange between providers of *FH* programmes and the *FH*

55 http://www.uniko.ac.at/ (accessed on 5.10.2011)
56 The minutes can be found at: http://www.reko.ac.at/upload/Protokoll_der_ersten_NQR_Veranstaltung_der_uniko_22__Feb__2008.pdf (downloaded on 7.7.2011)
57 The minutes can be found at: http://www.uniko.ac.at/upload/Protokoll_28_3_2008.pdf (downloaded on 7.7.2011)
58 The minutes can be found at: http://www.uniko.ac.at/upload/Protokoll_der_dritten__NQR_Veranstaltung_der_Uniko_24_04_2008.pdf (downloaded on 7.7.2011)
59 http://www.fhk.ac.at/ (accessed on 5.10.2011)

programmes themselves; and to coordinate and implement joint projects to strengthen the identity of the *FH* sector in Austria.

In cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, FHK has held two workshops[60] on the NQF consultation paper.

The *Fachhochschule* Council[61]

In its capacity as a body that is not bound by instructions, the *Fachhochschule* Council (FHR) is responsible for external quality assurance in the Austrian *FH* sector. The legal basis of its activity is the *Fachhochschul*e Study Act (*FHStG*). The *Fachhochschule* Council's main tasks are the accreditation of *FH* programmes and the evaluation of *FH* institutions. Other important tasks include safeguarding training standards by monitoring the programmes; promoting the quality of teaching and learning; and advising the competent federal minister in issues related to the *FH* sector and use of federal funds. The *Fachhochschule* Council consists of 16 members; half of them are required to have the relevant post-doctoral lecturing qualification (habilitation) whereas the other half are required to prove that they have worked in the fields relevant for *FH* degree programmes for several years.

The Accreditation Council[62]

The Accreditation Council is an independent body that is not bound by instructions and accredits or reaccredits private universities for a limited period of time. This expert body comprises eight experts in the European HE system. It meets its legal mandate of conducting the quality assurance of private universities by interpreting the quality requirements laid down by law; by preparing guidelines and quality standards for accreditation; by developing instruments for regularly monitoring if these requirements have been fulfilled by private universities; by actively participating in international cooperation projects in accreditation and quality assurance; and annual reporting about its activities to the National Council.

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60 The programmes of both workshops can be found at: http://www.fhk.ac.at/index.php?id=241&L=0 (accessed on 7.7.2011)
Presentations of the workshops can be retrieved at: http://www.fhk.ac.at/fileadmin/fhkdata/NQR/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)
61 http://www.fhr.ac.at/ (accessed on 5.10.2011)
62 http://www.akkreditierungsrat.at/ (accessed on 5.10.2011)

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance[63]

The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) is an independent institution for quality assurance, evaluation and certification for the entire higher education sector. It is organised as a non-profit association which provides its activities to all tertiary educational establishments in Austria.

The mentioned institutions *Fachhochschule* Council, Accreditation Council and AQA will – as part of the new regulation of external quality assurance by way of the Quality Assurance Framework Act – from 1 March 2012 be integrated into a joint, cross-sectoral quality assurance agency: the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria.

The Bologna Follow-up Group

The Austrian Bologna Follow-up Group was set up to create the best possible prerequisites for the national implementation of the Bologna process. Its task is to elaborate the Austrian positions and proposals which will be submitted in the European follow-up process, if possible, in a consensus with all parties and target groups involved, if possible, and in this way ensure that awareness is raised of Austria's positions at the ministerial conferences. In addition, the Bologna Follow-up Group is also responsible for the information flow from the international sphere to national institutions. The Group holds regular meetings and is composed of representatives of universities, *Fachhochschulen*, university colleges of education, and private universities, students, BMUKK and BMWF, among others[64].

The Austrian Students' Union

The Austrian Students' Union (ÖH) is the statutory representation of all students at *Fachhochschulen*, university colleges of education, and universities in Austria and –

63 http://www.aqa.ac.at/
64 The list of stakeholders in the Bologna Follow-Up Group can be found at: http://bmwf.gv.at/startseite/studierende/studieren_im_europaeischen_hochschulraum/bologna_prozess/nationale_bologna_follow_up_gruppe/ (accessed on 7.7.2011)

according to the Students' Self-Governing Act (*HSG* 1998) [65] – represents its members' general and study-related interests.

The Austrian Rectors' Conference of Private Universities

The Austrian Rector's Conference of Private Universities (ÖPUK) represents the educational and academic interests of its members towards national and international partners. The members of this umbrella organisation are all of the 13 accredited private universities in Austria [66].

4.1.2. The NQF steering group

In 2007 a national steering group of 23 voting members was set up which consists of representatives of the Austrian federal ministries, social partners and provinces as well as two co-opted representatives of the tertiary sector who have direct influence on the qualification processes and contents as well as on the legislative framework conditions and provide strategic support in the overall process of NQF development. The steering group is chaired by a representative of BMUKK, the deputy chair taken by BMWF (see also chapter 3.3).

65 Can be accessed at: https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10010113 (accessed on 7.7.2011)
66 Can be found at: http://www.dialog-hochschulpartnerschaft.at/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/AF-2-Darstellung-%C3%96PUK.pdf (downloaded on 7.7.2011)

4.2. Structural integration of formal, informal and non-formal learning into the NQF

In the following, the development of activities for referencing qualifications of the tertiary system to the NQF will be described. The starting point was the orientation towards lifelong learning, which can be seen as a core objective of educational policies, in which context the referencing of informally and non-formally acquired learning outcomes and qualifications in particular plays a major role.

The work on the classification of qualifications of the formal education system can be seen as more or less completed with the implementation of the Bologna process in the HE sector.

As regards the referencing of qualifications and learning outcomes acquired in the course of informal and non-formal learning, the paradigm shift to learning outcome orientation is considered an appropriate and necessary step for the future validation and referencing of these qualifications. The corresponding implementation represents a clear challenge for educational policy makers and particularly also for HE establishments.

4.2.1. Formal, informal and non-formal learning in connection with lifelong learning

To respond to current challenges in the education sector, in the year 2000 the European Commission specified the promotion of lifelong learning (LLL) as the key objective of education policy. The EU 2020 Strategy requires member states to develop national LLL strategies. The Austrian HE sector has already done extensive preliminary work and was therefore able to take part in the overall Austrian process successfully. During development activities on the national LLL strategy, Austria decided to use '*lebensbegleitendes Lernen*' ('life-accompanying learning') rather than '*lebenslanges Lernen'* for the English term 'lifelong learning' in German for its national LLL strategy.

In July 2011 the Federal Government adopted the document "**LLL:2020 – Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich**" ("LLL:2020 – Strategy for lifelong

learning in Austria"). At the core of the Austrian LLL strategy there are ten lines of action which create the framework for the future structure of LLL in Austria. Strategic guidelines and the four fundamental principles which introduce the specific lines of action aim to illustrate the integrated overall approach. The guidelines and fundamental principles have an impact on all ten lines of action and need to be considered in general in the implementation of the LLL strategy. In this implementation, each line of action should be treated in a way that covers all sectors, areas and ministries[67].

A set of strategic objectives and benchmarks was defined to ensure regular, impact-oriented progress measurement can be conducted for the implementation of the ten lines of action. The governance structure for implementation also forms a part of the national LLL strategy, which furthermore explicitly puts learners at the centre – what do learners need and want – and aims to facilitate lifelong learning in a varied manner and with overall support for learners[68].

Non-formal and informal learning are relatively new concepts for the field of learning, which lies outside the formal education system (school, tertiary sector, etc.) or even outside organised learning processes. Although the distinctions of these learning processes still need to be clarified to some extent, the EU has meanwhile laid down for its own purposes which definitions apply in discussions on education[69].

- **Formal learning:** Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
- **Non-formal learning:** Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
- **Informal learning:** Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning

67 Cf. Republik Österreich (2011), Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich, p. 9f
68 More information about the strategy can be found at: http://www.bmwf.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/aussendung/Strategie_zum_lebensbegleitenden_Lernen_in_OEstereich.pdf (downloaded on 28.11.2011)
69 Can be accessed at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF (downloaded on 28.07.2011)

time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or 'incidental'/random).

At this point, reference is made to the 'corridors' of the Austrian NQF as explained in chapter 3.4. The definitions of the three corridors largely correspond to the EU definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning as quoted above, but special attention must be paid to the differences (such as certification in Corridor 2).

These definitions must be understood as typical ideal descriptions while in reality transitions and combinations are fluent and the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning must be understood as tending towards a continuum. This means, for example, that informal learning also occurs frequently within the formal education system, such as social learning within a group or a work process.

4.2.2. Classification of qualifications of the formal education system

As the qualifications of the formal education system will be referenced to the NQF based on their learning outcomes, their learning outcome-oriented description constitutes a major prerequisite for referencing. Here it must be noted that the NQF specifies learning outcomes of qualifications rather than of individuals.

Learning outcome orientation at universities and *Fachhochschulen*

The concept of learning outcome orientation has not yet been fully implemented in all educational establishments of the tertiary system and the description of learning outcomes does not yet reveal any uniform system. The accreditation guidelines of the *Fachhochschule* Council[70] have from the beginning pursued an orientation towards learning outcomes and towards the applicability of learning contents in professional practice. Therefore descriptions of learning outcomes are the standard in *FH* curricula. The introduction of bachelor's and master's programmes has led to a reformulation of the universities' study plans. These were based on sample

70 Can be accessed at: http://www.fhr.ac.at/fhr_inhalt/00_dokumente/Dokumente/AR_08102010_Version1.1.pdf (downloaded on 1.11.2011)

curricula, which has led to a certain standardisation and more uniform presentation of learning outcome-relevant parts (including qualification profile and course aims).

Sample curricula

While this report was being compiled, some Austrian universities, private universities and *Fachhochschulen* provided one or two exemplary curricula that show a clear orientation towards learning objectives and learning outcomes and where the descriptors for qualifications and learning outcomes (Dublin descriptors[71]) have been implemented. In addition, these universities were asked to submit their sample curriculum to enable its implementation to be traced in concrete study plans.

All the submitted curricula contained a detailed qualification profile and a clearly recognisable learning outcome orientation. For the presentation of learning outcome-oriented descriptions for referencing qualifications in Austrian educational reality, five curricula were chosen with the support of the NQF advisory council which represent different institutions and courses. To do justice to the size of the university sector, three curricula were used from this sector and one curriculum each from the other two sectors. The following five curricula can be found in the Annex to this report:

- Universities:
  - Bachelor's programme in English/American Studies
  - Master's programme in Environmental Sciences
  - Master's programme in Alpine Natural Hazards/Torrent and Avalanche Control
- Universities of applied sciences:
  - Master's programme in Biomedical Engineering Sciences
- Private universities:
  - Bachelor's programme in History and Theory of Art and Philosophy

71 For a detailed description of the Dublin descriptors, see chapter 5.2 *Comparison of EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA.*

4.2.3. Recognition of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning processes

Stronger orientation towards learning outcomes aims to make the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes and qualifications easier in the future. This is seen as an appropriate way to enhance the conditions in which recognition is implemented and thus put the lifelong learning strategy into practice in an as wide as possible field.

The work on the qualifications of the formal education system can be seen as more or less completed with the implementation of the Bologna process in the HE sector (see also chapter 4.1. *HE policy measures – Designing the higher education area – the Bologna process in Austria*). The first steps for the sectors of non-formal and informal learning have been taken, but here stronger orientation towards learning outcomes is required for the future and, above all, suitable forms have to be developed to make learning outcomes visible. For learning outcomes from the non-formal sector, a working paper is already available with the title "Concept of a sub-strategy for its integration into the national qualifications framework"[72]. This paper specifies two major criteria for a possible referencing of certificates and other documentation of non-formal learning:

- "Referencing… and administrative decisions on the topic of referencing must in principle be possible." This means, above all, that there must be a learning outcome orientation and valid assessment procedure.
- "The proof of qualification has been authorised by a competent body (a body responsible for qualifications)." These bodies with responsibility for qualifications would have the national and sectoral competence to authorise certificates or certifiers.

Alongside the implementation of projects in the field of formal learning, work is currently being conducted on implementing the two sectors of non-formal and informal learning. At its core there is a standardised definition and use of major terms such as competence, learning objective, or learning outcome by the diverse institutions and a further development of learning outcome-oriented recognition.

72 The final report can be found at: http://www.oeibf.at/db/calimero/tools/proxy.php?id=14344 (accessed on 28.7.2011)

4.2.4. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning at universities

According to the 2002 *UG*[73] there exist two different access pathways to universities which can be seen as possibilities of recognition of non-formal and informal learning, although they are not specifically denoted as such; these are *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*[74] and *Berufsreifeprüfung* (see also chapter 2.4 *Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector – Berufsreifeprüfung*).

- ***Studienberechtigungsprüfung*** (Section 64 (1) subpara. 2, *UG* 2002) provides access to specific courses. Anyone interested with relevant professional qualifications or with general previous education which is considerably above lower secondary school level can obtain access to a selected course. As well as German, students need to take three other subject-specific exams which are connected with the subjects they selected at university, after which they are awarded a restricted study qualification. In this sense, *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* can be considered recognition of previous learning and thus creates a *framework* into which universities can build the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (see also chapter 2.4 *Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector – Studienberechtigungsprüfung*).
- ***Berufsreifeprüfung*** is organised as an external exam (see also chapter 2.4 *Upper secondary level / post-secondary sector – Berufsreifeprüfung*).

The key issue for recognition and/or credit transfer of non-formal and informal learning at universities is the specification of requirement profiles and, as a result, the measurement of competences. This is done, for example, through[75]

- validation of non-formal and informal learning of **scientific activities** "in companies or non-university research establishments which can offer scientific pre-professional qualifications" (Section 78 (3), *UG* 2002) or of **artistic activities** "at institutions outside university which can provide artistic pre-professional qualifications" (Section 78 (4), *UG* 2002). This form of

73 Can be accessed at: http://www.bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_bmwfcontent/*UG*_2002_Stand_1._Jaenner_2009.pdf (downloaded on 11.7.2011)
74 cf. http://www.reko.ac.at/upload/Anerkennung_von_non-formalem_und_informellem_Lernen_an_Universitaeten_Umbruch_Druck.pdf (downloaded on 11.7.2011)
75Can be accessed at: http://www.reko.ac.at/upload/Anerkennung_von_non-formalem_und_informellem_Lernen_an_Universitaeten_Umbruch_Druck.pdf (downloaded on 11.7.2011)

appropriate scientific or artistic activity can be recognised as an exam "depending on the type and scope of the student's cooperation or activity, based on equivalence" (Section 78 (3) and (4), *UG* 2002).

- Another possibility of recognition of non-formal and informal learning is for universities to lay down certain minimum requirements **in the CVET sector**, such as **relevant professional experience** (Section 70 (1) and (2), *UG* 2002). The fields to be covered by the minimum requirements were laid down by Universities Austria in its paper *Grundsätze und Empfehlungen zum Weiterbildungsangebot an Universitäten* (*"Principles and recommendations about CVET programmes offered at universities",* 20 January 2009)[76].

In individual lines of action, the national LLL Strategy 2020 provides for the interaction of objectives and measures to enhance the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and competences in all educational sectors. HE institutions will take part in the development of relevant procedures as part of their respective ranges of responsibilities. These will be fixed for universities, for example, in performance agreements concluded between universities and the federal government.

4.2.5. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning at universities of applied sciences

At *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences or *FH*s) the possibility of recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning mainly plays a role in terms of access to study courses based on relevant professional qualifications (Section 4 (2) *FHStG*).

Similarly to universities, *FH*s can also grant access to a CVET programme (Section 14a *FHStG*) based on relevant professional experience.

According to Section 4 (3) *FHStG* it is possible to prove general university entrance qualifications, as the basic access requirement for a *FH* study, with an Austrian upper secondary school-leaving certificate and also with another Austrian certificate granting study qualifications for the respective *FH* programme. These certificates include the following:

76Can be accessed at: http://www.aucen.ac.at/pdf/uniko_Jaenner2009.pdf (downloaded on 11.7.2011)

- the study entrance qualification based on the Higher Education Entrance Act (*StudBerG*, *BGBl*. I 1985/292 as amended) and
- the *Berufsreifeprüfung* certificate based on the Federal Act on the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (*BGBl*. I 197/68 as amended).

In the *FH* sector, there are also specific regulations on the recognition of informal learning in 'target group-specific' *FH* programmes, the structure of which builds on professional experience. Subsequently, due to recognition of knowledge and competences acquired in the course of professional practice, the study duration can be shortened by up to two semesters (Section 4 (2) and Section 3 (1) sub-para 1 *FHStG*). In addition, the FHR's accreditation guidelines (AR), in connection with the recognition of previous knowledge, explicitly arrange that not only exam certificates but also special knowledge and experience from professional practice are considered (AR 2010, version 1.1, II.D. 7).

5. Compatibility of the NQF with the Bologna architecture

5.1. The relation between EQF – Bologna process – European Higher Education Area

The Bologna Declaration, which was signed in June 1999, aims at the establishment of a European area of higher education by creating a framework to allocate and compare qualifications.

Referencing

The EQF is compatible with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), which was developed as part of the Bologna process. The EQF descriptors of Levels 5 to 8 in particular relate to the descriptors which were decided as part of the Bologna process and are used in the HE sector, and they are consistent with them. The referencing of 'Bologna qualifications' to the NQF is thus automatic. In 2011 Austria concluded self-certification related to the QF-EHEA, therefore the 'Bologna qualifications' of Levels 6-8 of the NQF are at the same EQF levels. The formulation of EQF level descriptors differs from the Bologna level descriptors, which were developed specifically for the Higher Education Area, because the EQF as a framework for lifelong learning also comprises IVET and CVET as well as work-related contexts, including at the highest level.

Design of the Austrian NQF

As part of the consultation of the various stakeholders, no demands were made to set up independent partial frameworks (such as a separate framework in adult education or a separate framework for the tertiary sector). The idea of a common framework was basically assessed as understandable and pragmatic so that professional qualifications can also be assigned to Levels 6 to 8 if they meet the qualification definition as laid down in the EQF. Implicitly, however, the statements emphasised the autonomy of the Bologna process and the necessity of a separate

design for non-formally acquired qualifications[77]. Therefore it was suggested to split Levels 6 to 8 for the 'technical' design. In the NQF all Austrian qualifications can be presented at Levels 6 to 8 for non-HE qualifications through the 'filter' of the EQF descriptions and the NQF table of descriptors. As work in the Bologna process has already progressed so far, it is not necessary to create any criteria or a procedure for the 'Bologna qualifications'. The 'Bologna qualifications' are referenced to Levels 6 (bachelor - BA), 7 (master - MA), and 8 (PhD). No academic qualification is assigned to Level 5 because qualifications which would possibly have to be assigned to it are not recorded as part of self-certification.

5.2. Comparison of EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched in March 2010 at the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference, ten years after the decision of the Bologna process.

Hand in hand with the key objective of the Bologna process, the EHEA aims to guarantee comparable, compatible and coherent systems in the European HE sector. Between 1999 and 2010 efforts of the members of the Bologna process aimed at creating a European area of higher education became reality with the Budapest Vienna Declaration[78] in March 2010. According to the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, the framework for qualifications of the European HE sector should create transparency in the relation between national HE qualifications frameworks and the qualifications contained in them. It can therefore be seen as an articulation mechanism between national frameworks[79] and enhances transparency between the HE systems in Europe. This is to facilitate recognition of foreign qualifications and thus increase the mobility of users of these systems. In addition, the comprehensive framework aims to create a guideline for developing national frameworks and provide the context for efficient quality assurance. Finally it is one of the key objectives of the QF-EHEA to promote and support lifelong learning.[80]

77cf. http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/19300/nqr_positionspapier200910.pdf (downloaded on 24.09.2011)
78 http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/news/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf (downloaded on 07.10.2011)
79 cf. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf (downloaded on 07.10.2011)
80 cf. also http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf (downloaded on 07.10.2011)

The above-mentioned objectives of the EHEA framework clearly demonstrate the overlap with the objectives of EQF-LLL. The document "Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF" clearly states that, while based on separate political initiatives, the two comprehensive frameworks EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA clearly overlap in terms of objectives. EQF Levels 6-8 are fully compatible with the Bologna cycles. Therefore the Bologna framework (QF-EHEA) can be seen as part of the overarching EQF. For this reason the criteria for the referencing process in the EQF can be seen as compatible with those for self-certification in QF-EHEA. [81]

The following chapter describes the compatibility of the Austrian NQF with the Bologna architecture. The criteria and standards developed in the Bologna process can serve as points of reference for the EHEA framework.[82]

5.3. Examination of criteria and procedural standards for the tertiary sector[83]

In the following, the compatibility of the Austrian NQF (Levels 6-8) with the EHEA framework will be examined based on the criteria and procedural standards which were decided in 2005 by the ministers in Bergen. In this connection it must be noted that the following standards refer to the self-certification processes of the individual countries.

5.3.1. Criterion 1:

The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.

Responsibility for implementing the referencing process and preparing the EQF referencing report rests with BMWF and BMUKK, which jointly coordinate the

81 cf. http://www.ngai.ie/documents/EQRReferencingCriteria_000.pdf (downloaded on 07.10.2011)
82 Criteria for the compatibility of national frameworks to the EHEA Framework, can be downloaded from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/EQR/criteria_en.pdf
83 Procedures for verifying that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework, can be downloaded from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/EQR/criteria_en.pdf

development of the NQF. BMWF is responsible in particular for the tertiary sector of the NQF including its further development because all issues related to public universities, private universities and universities of applied sciences are within its sphere of competence according to the Amendment to the 1986 Federal Ministries Act[84]. As all matters related to university colleges of education form part of the sphere of the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK), which is also responsible for developing the NQF for the non-tertiary sector, the two ministries regularly exchange information about the development of the Austrian NQF.

The development of the NQF is closely linked to the EQF, therefore the EQF referencing process is conducted in agreement with the NQF steering group. The NQF steering group consists of representatives of the Austrian federal ministries, social partners and provinces as well as two co-opted representatives of the tertiary sector who have direct influence on the qualification processes and contents as well as on the legislative framework conditions and provide strategic support in the overall process of NQF development. The steering group is chaired by a representative of BMUKK, the deputy chair taken by BMWF (see chapters 4.1.2 and 3.3).

Therefore Criterion 1 is fulfilled.

5.3.2. Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework.

Equivalence of current Austrian qualifications with bachelor and master qualifications has been almost completely implemented in the course of the conversion of the Austrian HE sector according to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration[85]. The NQF degrees of the 'Bologna qualifications' (MA, BA, PhD) are described based on the descriptors that were decided on within the framework of the Bologna process and that are used in the HE sector (Dublin descriptors = cycle

84 Can be accessed at: http://bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_contentbox/bmg_novelle_07_nr.pdf (downloaded on 17.10.11)
85 See also chapter 5.2 *General information*

descriptors). In Austria no HE degrees are located between the cycles of the EHEA framework. Therefore it is possible to reference all current qualifications (such as diploma studies) and the Bologna qualifications unmistakably to Levels 6-8 using the Dublin descriptors[86].

The diploma studies which have not yet been converted will be assigned to Level 7 due to their equivalence[87] with master's programmes. The study courses in human medicine, dental medicine, law, pharmacy and teacher training hold a special position here. The studies in human and dental medicine and teacher training will only be offered as diploma studies until 30 September 2012, afterwards there will be the possibility to convert to the Bologna architecture. The study courses in pharmacy and law are currently being offered as diploma studies although they can already be provided with a bachelor's and master's degree. All of these mentioned studies are referenced to Level 7 (*UG* 2002 as amended by Section 54 (2)).

Bachelor's and master's degrees can be acquired both at universities and at *FHs* as well as at university colleges of education (HE-based CVET course according to Section 3 of the 2005 Higher Education Act) and are equivalent both formally and legally. Only doctoral degrees are awarded exclusively at universities. This ensures high permeability between these types of HE establishments.

Therefore Criterion 2 related to HE qualifications is fulfilled.

5.3.3. Criterion 3

The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits.

In the NQF the Dublin descriptors[88] are used for the Austrian HE qualifications at Levels 6-8 (bachelor, master, PhD). These Dublin descriptors provide a general description of the accomplishments and skills expected in connection with the qualification/title that represents the completion of the Bologna cycle. The Dublin

86 For the comparability of Levels 6-8 of the two descriptor systems (QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL) see chapter 5.2 *Comparison of EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA* (fig. 3)
87 This is expressed, *inter alia*, by the number of credits which can be obtained.
88 For a description, see chapter 5.2 *Comparison of EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA*

descriptors describe what learners should know, understand and be able to do following completion of a programme and thus focus explicitly on results of learning activities.

To illustrate the practical implementation of learning outcome orientation at subject level, some selected curricula are presented in the Annex (see chapter 4.2.2 *Classification of qualifications of the formal education system – Sample curricula)*. These curricula stand for different institutions and courses.They demonstrate a clear orientation towards learning objectives and learning outcomes and an implementation of the descriptors for qualifications and learning outcomes in terms of the Dublin descriptors[89] .

For every course set up at a university or *FH* a curriculum must be prepared and published. Key components of every curriculum are the following: the qualification profile and the course structure, the exam subjects, lectures and seminars and other achievements (each with the scope of achievement in terms of the credits) required for graduation, as well as the mode of examination. The scope of studies must be indicated exclusively in credits according to the European Credit Transfer System or ECTS. This means Austria has adopted and introduced an important mobility-promoting instrument on a nationwide basis (*UG* 2002 as amended by Section 54(3)).

Major elements of ECTS are the information package, *i.e.* the precise breakdown of the range of lectures and seminars, the credits (1 study year = 60 credits, decisive is the workload of an average student with periods of attendance and all the other work connected with the study), and the transcript of records, as confirmation about completed lectures, seminars and exams as well as achieved credits.[90]

89 For a detailed description of the Dublin descriptors, see chapter 5.2 *Comparison of EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA.*
90 cf. http://www.bmwf.gv.at/uploads/tx_contentbox/hssystem_07.pdf (downloaded on 15.10.2011)

Workload[91]

- Bachelor's programmes comprise at least 180 ECTS points and are oriented to the acquisition of academic core competences and theory-based problem-solving competence.
- Master's programmes comprise at least 120 ECTS points and can – depending on the subject area's requirements and the expected learning outcomes – either provide more in-depth knowledge about the respective discipline or have an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary structure.
- Doctoral study/PhD: Since the 2009 *UG* Amendment, ECTS points are no longer foreseen for doctoral studies. The duration of doctoral studies is a minimum of three years. It is permitted to designate the doctoral study as a Doctor of Philosophy study and award the academic degree Doctor of Philosophy, abbreviated to PhD.
- The workload for diploma studies[92] is 240 to 360 ECTS credits (see also chapter 5.3.2 Criterion 2, diploma study in human and dental medicine, law, pharmacy and teacher training).

Therefore Criterion 3 is fulfilled.

5.3.4. Criterion 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent.

The curricula of the Bologna qualifications (bachelor, master, PhD) will be conceived taking the workload/learning input (ECTS model) and the Dublin descriptors into account to ensure that direct referencing to Level 6 (bachelor), 7 (master) and 8 (PhD) is possible. The diploma studies which have not yet been converted will be

91 The awarding of credit points according to the ECTS model is regulated for universities by the *UG* 2002 (http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/imperia/md/content/io/gesetzliche_grundlagen_ug_2002.pdf (downloaded on 26.10.2011)) and for the *Fachhochschule* sector by the *FHStG*.

92 The studies in human and dental medicine and teacher training are only offered as diploma studies until 30 September 2012, then there exists the possibility to convert to the Bologna architecture. The study courses in pharmacy and law are currently being offered as diploma studies although conversion to bachelor and master qualifications would already be possible (*UG* 2002 § 54 (2)).

assigned to Level 7 due to their equivalence[93] with master's programmes. The study courses in human medicine, dental medicine, law, pharmacy and teacher training hold a special position here. From 1 Oct. 2012, human and dental medicine as well as teacher training programmes can also be offered as studies within the framework of the Bologna architecture. Pharmacy and law can already be offered as bachelor's and master's programmes. All the mentioned courses will be assigned to Level 7 (*UG* 2002 as amended by Section 54 (2)).

The qualification profiles of curricula are being developed in line with the Dublin descriptors and implemented in the respective learning outcomes. There are different approaches to implementing learning outcome orientation. On the one hand, it is important to match the learning outcomes which make up a qualification with the levels' descriptors (Dublin descriptors). On the other hand, however, input factors (such as the duration of training, resources, and teaching contents) continue to play a role in the qualifications system. The transparency objective of the NQF is identifying learning outcomes and the associated (further) development of curricula and training regulations. Following the further development of the curricula and training regulations towards a learning outcome-oriented approach it is the goal that the NQF in Austria pursues a learning outcome-oriented approach in the long term, particularly in order to meet the objective of lifelong learning.[94]

Therefore Criterion 4 is fulfilled.

5.3.5. Criterion 5:

The national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process.

Quality assurance in the Austrian HE sector is oriented towards national and international standards and guidelines, such as the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs)

93 This is expressed, inter alia, by the number of credits which can be obtained and the learning outcomes described in the curriculum.
94 cf. http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/19300/nqr_positionspapier200910.pdf (downloaded on 16.10.2011)

and thus also reflects the common principles for quality assurance in the context of the EQF.

The Bologna Communiqués and ESGs emphasise that, in terms of institutional autonomy, the main responsibility for quality and the evaluation of education programmes rests with the HE establishments themselves and they specify the obligation of a comprehensive national quality assurance system. Considering sector-specific features and framework conditions, the Austrian HE establishments bear initial responsibility for quality assurance in teaching, research and organisation which they fulfil as an in-house HE management task. In addition, Austrian HE legislation specifies that HE establishments are obliged to develop in-house quality assurance processes and systems.

External quality assurance for individual HE types is regulated specifically for the different sectors and, in agreement with the ESGs, provides for regular external auditing of HE establishments and quality assurance agencies. In-house and external quality assurance procedures comprise different dimensions and elements (processes, outcome orientation, follow-up procedures, etc.) and provide for the participation of relevant stakeholders. With the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA), *Fachhochschule* Council and Accreditation Council there are currently three institutions for external quality assurance. All three institutions see the ESGs as a point of reference for their activities and are actively involved in international cooperation on issues of quality assurance and quality development.

These structures of external quality assurance, which have developed since the 1990s, will soon be subject to a new regulation which specifies mandatory external quality assurance in a comprehensive common law and provides for the implementation of a new, cross-sectoral agency for external quality assurance. This will further strengthen these developments[95].

Excursus: New regulation of external quality assurance

From March 2012 a new legal basis for the national system of external quality assurance is in force with the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*HS-QSG*). It creates a cross-sectoral uniform framework for the quality assurance and

95 See also chapter 4.1 *HE policy measures – Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance and quality development*

quality development of HE establishments. The *HS-QSG* builds on previous legal bases, the activities conducted by HE establishments and the Austrian quality assurance agencies, as well as international developments (above all the Bologna process) in the field of quality assurance but has also been conceived in a way that new developments, such as the NQF, can be integrated in it.

The major innovations introduced by the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education are the following:

- cross-sectoral law for external quality assurance;
- establishment of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria by integrating previously existing institutions (AQA, *Fachhochschule* Council and Accreditation Council);
- the main framework conditions of quality assurance processes are regulated cross-sectorally (such as the disclosure requirement concerning the results of procedures, the possibility of certification and accreditation on the condition that certain specifications are fulfilled, obligation to pay fees for all procedures, etc.);
- legal specification of areas to be examined via quality assurance procedures; the specific areas need to be laid down by the Agency;
- specification of quality assurance procedures for the HE sectors (audit or accreditation);
- enshrinement in law of an 'ombudsman office for students' as an ombudsman, information and service point for all HE students;
- legal regulation for the registration of cross-border studies;
- enhancement of information about quality assurance for students and the general public.

Therefore Criterion 5 is fulfilled.

5.3.6. Criterion 6:

The national framework and any alignments with the European framework is referenced in all Diploma Supplements.

In agreement with ministerial decisions adopted at the Bologna Conference in Berlin, BMWF prepared framework forms for diploma supplements (in German and English)

for all types of HE establishments[96] where the level of the achieved qualification is recorded. Public universities, *Fachhochschulen* and university colleges of education are obliged by law to issue a diploma supplement in German and English to all graduates. Private universities issue the diploma supplement without any explicit obligation. After the NQF has been implemented, the relevant referencing to the EQF will be included in the diploma supplement.

Therefore Criterion 6 is fulfilled.

5.3.7. Criterion 7

The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published.

Responsibilities for the NQF in the tertiary sector mainly rest with BMWF as the competent organisation and with HE establishments which provide qualifications. The NQF consultation paper [97] and all related statements [98] are also publicly accessible; this also applies to the position paper[99] which was drawn up after the consultation process.

Therefore Criterion 7 is fulfilled.

5.3.8. Standard 1

The competent national body/bodies shall certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.

This report provides a comprehensive description of the referencing of Bologna qualifications with the EQF. BMWF is responsible for all institutions of the tertiary sector except for university colleges of education. Therefore, within the meaning of Art. 10 of *B-VG* in conjunction with the provisions of the 1986 Federal Ministries

96 http://www.bmwf.gv.at/nc/print/startseite/studierende/academic_mobility/enic_naric_austria/diploma_supplement/rahmenformulare/?sword_list[0]=rahmenformular
97 The consultation paper can be found at: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/15830/nqr_konpap_08.pdf
98 The statements paper can be found at: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/europa/eubildung/nqr/nqr_sn.xml
99 The position paper can be found at: http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/19300/nqr_positionspapier200910.pdf

Act[100] BMWF is the supreme competent body for issues of the tertiary sector. Activities related to the Bologna process have already progressed very far, with 'Bologna qualifications' automatically referenced to NQF Levels 6 (BA), 7 (MA) and 8 (PhD/doctoral studies), which correspond to EQF Levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively.

Therefore Standard 1 is fulfilled.

5.3.9. Standard 2

The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process.

With the NQF advisory council comprising the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA), the *Fachhochschule* Council (FHR), and the Accreditation Council, all currently existing institutions for external quality assurance in the HE sector are involved in the NQF development process and thus contribute actively to compatibility of the NQF with the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

Therefore Standard 2 is fulfilled.

5.3.10. Standard 3

The self certification process shall involve international experts.

Three international experts were involved in the Austrian referencing process:

- Mile Dzelalja, Croatia – Professor of Physics at Split University, coordinator of NQF development in Croatia (leader of the CROQF expert team) and of the Croatian EQF referencing process, member of the EQF Advisory Group;

100 Federal Constitutional Act; can be accessed at http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000138
1986 Federal Ministries Act; can be accessed at http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=BgblAuth&Dokumentnummer=BGBLA_2009_I_3

- Achim Hopbach, Germany – head of the Accreditation Council's office (foundation for the accreditation of study courses in Germany), President of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) Board;
- Jos Noesen, Luxembourg – Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation professionnelle (Ministry of Education and VET, VET Unit), coordinator of NQF development in Luxembourg and of the Luxembourg EQF referencing process, member of the EQF Advisory Group.

These three experts were selected due to their comprehensive expert knowledge particularly in the following areas:

- National qualifications frameworks: they have expert knowledge in the field of NQF development in their respective national contexts;
- EQF referencing process and self-certification process: they boast experience with these processes at the national and European levels.

Other reasons for selecting these experts include their command of languages (all three experts speak German, so they were able to read the draft of this report in German and discuss it with Austrian stakeholders), their involvement in key bodies at European level, and their national context (*e.g.*: Germany and Croatia are neighbouring countries of Austria; Germany and Luxembourg have several elements of their education systems in common with Austria).

The draft of this report was sent to the experts on 23 Dec. 2011. They were invited to discuss their feedback on the report with representatives of the NQF steering group and other national stakeholders and experts on the occasion of the workshop 'International expert meeting on the Austrian EQF referencing report' which was organised by the NCP on 11 Jan. 2012 in Vienna. Their feedback was included in the minutes to the meeting and sent to the experts for their renewed revision. The experts' feedback has been taken into account when revising the EQF referencing report.

International cooperation

As well as involving international experts in the EQF referencing process, other forms of international cooperation also play a major role in this context (see chapter 3.6). This includes both experience exchange, mutual learning, and the development of coordinated strategies (such as related to the linking of certain types of qualifications with the EQF via NQF referencing – *e.g.* in the TransEQFrame or ZOOM projects – or related to the development of a structure for the EQF referencing report – like in the EQR-Ref project).
Therefore Standard 3 is fulfilled.

5.3.11. Standard 4

The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out.

Upon completion of the procedure, the Austrian referencing report will be published on the websites of BMWF (www.bmwf.gv.at) and BMUKK (www.bmukk.gv.at) and the link will also be made available for publication on the NCP's website (www.lebenslanges-lernen.at).

Therefore Standard 4 is fulfilled.

5.3.12. Standard 5

The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process.

Austria will publish its referencing report on its ENIC/NARIC website (http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?c=Austria).

Therefore Standard 5 is fulfilled.

5.3.13. Standard 6

The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.

See Criterion 6.

6. Referencing the Austrian NQF to the EQF

To make sure that the referencing process of national qualifications levels to the EQF is comprehensible and credible for the actors in all participating countries, the EQF Advisory Group has agreed on a set of criteria and procedures to steer this process ("Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF"). Information about the ten criteria forms part of all EQF referencing reports.

6.1. Criterion 1

The responsibilities and /or legal competence of all national bodies involved in the referencing process including the National Coordination Point are clearly specified and made publicly known by the competent state authorities.

Responsibility for the EQF referencing process: BMUKK and BMWF

The competent bodies for implementing the EQF referencing process and preparing the EQF referencing report are BMWF and BMUKK, which also coordinate the development of the NQF jointly.

National steering group for the NQF (NQF STRG)

As the development of the NQF is very closely linked to the EQF, the EQF referencing process is conducted in agreement with NQF STRG. NQF STRG comprises representatives of major institutions of the Austrian educational landscape which exert direct influence on the qualification processes and contents as well as legislative framework conditions (cf. chapter 3). The steering group is chaired by a representative of BMUKK, the deputy chair is taken by BMWF.

It is the body which supports the strategy for the overall process of NQF development and implementation and provides advice to the bodies which are

competent for the legal regulation of education and training qualifications at all levels – especially BMUKK and BMWF as coordinating ministries.

Its advisory functions also comprise the referencing process to the EQF regarding the following:

- the design of referencing processes related to qualifications acquired in the formal sector and of non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes and qualifications to the EQF levels;
- the preparation and decision-making on recommendations connected with the development, design and implementation of an NQF and the referencing of qualifications to the EQF.

National Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria (NCP) (since 2010)

The Coordination Point for the NQF in Austria (NCP) was set up as a staff unit of the National Agency for Lifelong Learning, which in turn is a unit of the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD-Gmbh). It is the central administrative, coordinating and information office on the NQF in Austria. The focus of tasks of the NCP in Austria is to provide support for the development and implementation of the NQF and associated information activities at the national and European levels. The NCP is not involved in the EQF referencing process itself. But it will publish the EQF referencing report on the NCP website.

The NCP is entrusted with the following tasks:

- support for developing and implementing the NQF in Austria;
- establishment of an internet-based NQF information system including an NQF register;
- PR, events and advice; and
- creation of networks at the national and European levels.[101]

The NCP's activities are funded by BMUKK and with project-related grants of the European Commission.

101 cf. the tasks of the Coordination Point – http:/www.lebenslanges-lernen.at/home/nationalagentur_lebenslanges_lernen/nqr_koordinierungsstelle/aufgaben_der_nks/ (14.11.2011)

6.2. Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable relationship between the qualifications levels in the National Qualifications Framework and/or system and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

EQF descriptors as the basis for the NQF

The Austrian NQF comprises eight levels. The contents of the NQF descriptors are closely linked with those of the EQF but refer more strongly to the national context. However, the NQF descriptors are not the only criterion in the referencing process of qualifications but, jointly with the EQF descriptors and the defined reference qualifications, represent the basis for referencing (see chapter 3.5).

The decision about the number of levels and about the descriptors of the NQF builds on analyses of the implicit hierarchies in the Austrian education system and the outcomes of the consultation of stakeholders (in the NQF consultation process and in NQF pilot projects) and on analyses of Austrian qualification descriptions (curricula, training regulations, legal texts, etc.). The referencing of the levels of the Austrian NQF to the EQF levels therefore builds on a combination of the social approach and the technical approach.

Due to this close linking of the NQF to the EQF, the EQF referencing process is also closely linked to the referencing of qualifications to the Austrian NQF – see Criterion 4.

6.3. Criterion 3

The basis and objective of the national qualifications framework and system and its qualifications are the learning outcomes. They are linked to regulations about the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and, where available, credit transfer systems.

6.3.1. Learning outcomes as the basis and objective

The descriptors of the NQF are formulated with learning outcome orientation, in close analogy to the EQF descriptors. The referencing of qualifications to the NQF levels also bears a relation with learning outcomes (comparison between learning outcomes that make up a qualification and the descriptors of the levels).

The bases for assigning qualifications to an NQF level are the latest descriptions of qualifications, which for the formal sector are contained in applicable legal bases (*i.e.* laws, decrees, ordinances, etc.). However, they are not formulated in a learning outcome-oriented manner in all cases. Nevertheless it is possible to assign a qualification to the NQF in these cases by analysing the learning outcomes which are implicitly connected with these qualifications and documenting them in a clear manner (see Criterion 4). But the objective is to further develop curricula and training regulations towards a learning outcome-oriented approach, which will be achieved with the NQF in Austria in the long term. There are several initiatives to strengthen and further develop this approach in the Austrian qualifications system. These include, in particular, the introduction of educational standards in the school-based sector (see Annex 5) and the introduction of competence-based and learning outcome-oriented curricula in the Austrian VET sector.

Educational standards for schools providing general education

Educational standards lay down specific learning outcomes. These learning outcomes are based on basic competences which pupils should have by the end of a specific school year (year 4 or 8). These competences refer back to a competence model that is derived from the respective curriculum and is either subject-specific or interdisciplinary and they cover the entire range of the respective subject's contents or of subjects which are connected in terms of content. Competence models structure the educational standards within a subject. Competences describe the intended behaviour and/or observable activities ("Pupils are able to …") and constitute the educational standards.

Educational standards in VET

The educational standards in VET focus on final qualifications and are therefore a proof of qualifications for the graduates' portfolio at the interface to the world of work or a further (tertiary) educational institution. A distinction is made between three competence areas:

- General-education core competences: They ensure graduates have the ability to study and enable them to take an active part in society. They either refer to individual subjects such as German, English, applied mathematics and applied informatics, or to a group of subjects such as natural sciences (physics, chemistry and biology). The competence models build on already existing developments, they are oriented, for example, towards the Common European Reference Framework for Languages of the Council of Europe and recognised structures of the subject-related didactics.
- Occupation-related core competences: These relate to subjects of occupation-related theory and occupation-related practice and subject areas of an education and training programme.
- Social and personal core competences: Here the focus is on the students' personality in the way they deal with themselves and their environment. Major aspects include their reflection skills, their conscious involvement in the community, their development when faced with new tasks, their conscious acquisition of behaviour rules in social interaction.

Competence-based and learning outcome-oriented curricula in the Austrian VET sector

In the future, the curricula of the Austrian VET sector will be competence-based and learning outcome-oriented and thus integrate both previous activities on educational standards in VET and the approach of learning outcome orientation, which is followed by the EQF and NQF. In the course of their training, students of VET schools and colleges acquire, in addition to subject-related, methodical and occupational competences, also social and personal competences. These hold a

key position in VET curricula and refer to the occupational field which is the career objective of the respective programme.

In June 2010 a “Guide for the design of competence-based and learning outcome-oriented curricula for VET colleges and secondary training colleges” was published, and the first curricula in this format are already available (one relevant example can be found in Annex 6).

Learning outcome orientation in the apprenticeship sector

The training regulations in the apprenticeship sector are already formulated in a largely learning outcome-oriented manner: the activity description lists the activities which apprentices are able to carry out after training in the company and part-time vocational school. The required knowledge and skills are laid down in the job profile. Furthermore, BMWFJ has commissioned the preparation of a concept about competence orientation in apprenticeship training (reformulation of the regulatory framework) (http://www.ibw.at/images/aktuell/kompetenzorientierung_lehrlingsausbildung.pdf).

6.3.2. Plans for the validation of non-formal and informal learning

In the first phase, only qualifications from the formal sector will be assigned to the NQF. But work is also ongoing on strategies to allocate qualifications and learning outcomes from the non-formal and informal sector (see chapter 3.4). It is especially necessary to develop assessment and validation processes (and partly also the respective qualifications) for learning outcomes from these sectors and define competences. Relevant development work is coordinated by the strategy group NQF C2 / non-formal learning (see Annex 2).

6.3.3. Credit transfer systems

BMUKK represents Austria in various bodies which have been set up by the European Commission to develop and implement the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). At the same time, Austria is preparing for participation in ECVET by conducting studies and pursuing a

targeted information policy. Austrian institutions have also participated in many pilot projects about ECVET both as coordinators and as partners. Austria's current ECVET strategy foresees that for the time being ECVET will only be used in this country to support transnational mobility stays. It is not planned to link the NQF with a credit transfer system.

To date the other sectors of the Austrian education system have not had any experience with credit transfer systems.

6.4. Criterion 4

The procedures to include qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework or to describe the classification of qualifications within the national qualifications system are transparent.

The procedures to include qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework or to describe the classification of qualifications within the national qualifications system are transparent.

Application procedure

The referencing of qualifications to the NQF levels is based on a formal application prepared by the body that is competent for the respective qualification. This builds on the criteria for referencing qualifications to the NQF (including the level descriptors) and a procedure which has been specifically developed for it and defines the individual steps, specific responsibilities and involved organisations (applicant organisation – in the formal sector these include, in particular, the federal ministries, NQF STRG, the NCP). These bases are described in the following sections. Annex 3 includes the manual which aims to help organisations prepare their application for referencing qualifications to the NQF that are within their field of competence, it will serve as the basis when stating reasons for referencing qualifications to the NQF levels and has been developed for implementing the 'pilot phase' (see chapter 3).

Criteria for referencing qualifications to the NQF levels

The referencing of qualifications to the NQF is based on three sets of criteria, *i.e.* the combination of all three criteria sets forms the basis for referencing:

- Requirements on qualifications: The definition of qualification that is used in the Austrian NQF follows the definition of the EQF. According to the definition, the qualifications which are referenced to the NQF must meet a number of formal requirements. Only those which meet these requirements fulfil the classification criteria. These requirements concern the assessment procedure (i.e. the final exam) and the proof of qualification (i.e. the certificate, diploma, etc.).
- NQF descriptors: The main basis for classifying qualifications are the NQF descriptors, and consequently indirectly the EQF descriptors, which comprise statements that are formulated in a learning outcome-oriented way about knowledge, skills and competence for each level. To ensure these descriptors can be understood and applied more easily, NQF descriptors aim to specify the abstract descriptions in greater detail. In addition, the given reference qualifications from the Austrian qualification landscape aim to serve as 'qualification anchors' which facilitate the assignment.
- Description of qualifications: The application for assigning a qualification to the NQF comprises a detailed description, which is based on a format template that is valid for all qualifications (see Annex 4). This description includes qualitative data (about the qualification, assessment procedure, etc.) and quantitative information (*e.g.* data and facts which underpin the validity of the exam or importance of the qualification for the labour market), which can be used as indicators for the reason for assignment.

The "Manual for Referencing Qualifications" to the NQF level comprises additional explanations related to the descriptors and the principles of assigning qualifications to the levels (*e.g.* best fit, equivalence rather than equality).

6.5. Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the National Qualifications Framework and/or the national qualifications system and is (are) consistent with related European principles and guidelines (as specified in Annex III of the Recommendation).

In Austria there are several institutions which carry out quality assurance in the formal sector. Due to the high density of regulations, the federal ministries in particular are competent for quality assurance in education and training. The bodies competent for the respective qualifications in the Austrian education system are also responsible for their quality assurance. However, in the field of VET for example, social partners are involved in the development of framework curricula; this approach can also be considered an element of quality assurance.

The educational standards which have been developed and implemented since 2001 (see Criterion 3 and Annex 5) are a major instrument of quality assurance in the formal education system. From the 2013/14 school year, the standardised, competence-oriented upper secondary school-leaving exam *Reifeprüfung* will be introduced at AHS (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung* at BHS from 2014/15), with which uniform high quality standards will be set for all exam candidates.

In the Austrian education system, the topic of quality forms an integral part of teaching and administrative tasks. Therefore the principles specified in Annex II of the Recommendation on the EQF are visible in many areas of NQF development. Quality assurance of learning outcomes in all fields of VET has been addressed in particular in recent years. The ‘Educational standards in VET’ project in particular fulfils the European specifications and strategies here.

As part of an amendment to the Federal Constitutional Act in 2005 it was laid down that Austrian schools are obliged to ensure “top-level education while continually safeguarding and developing the best possible quality” (*Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz, B-VG BGBl*. I no. 31/2005 of 09.06.2005 – Art. 14 (5a)).

With the amendments to the Federal School Supervision Act (*Bundes-Schulaufsichtsgesetz, BSchAufsG BGBl.* I no. 28/2011 of 20.05.2011 – Section 18) and School Education Act (*Schulunterrichtsgesetz, SchUG BGBl*. I no. 29/2011 of 20.05.2011 – Section 56 (2)), quality management was established by law as a task of the school supervisory board and of principals.

With the decision on amending Section18 of the *BSchAufsG* on 20.5.2011 (the Amendment will enter into force on 1.9.2012), another quality initiative in the field of general education was launched. The 'School Quality in General Education' (*SQA*) initiative pursues the objective of contributing to the best possible learning conditions at general education schools by conducting quality development and quality assurance in the field of teaching. Independent learning of pupils backed by appreciative, factually founded support by teachers aims to raise the education level. The objective of BMUKK for the general education school sector in the period 2012-2016 is to further develop learning and teaching towards individualisation and competence orientation.

VET Quality Initiative (*QIBB*)

QIBB (www.qibb.at) is the strategy of the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training (GD VET) at BMUKK to introduce a comprehensive quality management system in the Austrian VET sector. Concept-related development work started in 2004. *QIBB* is based on the principle of voluntary participation. But back in the school year 2006/2007 *QIBB* had already been implemented at nearly all VET school and college locations in the whole of Austria.

QIBB meets the criteria of nationally and internationally recognised quality management systems for educational institutions and is carried out in coordination with the developments of European vocational education and training policies. As an example, *QIBB* constitutes one element of the national strategy to implement the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), which was adopted in the context of the Copenhagen process in June 2009. *QIBB* corresponds to the model of the European reference framework as regards objectives, guiding principles, priorities and structure.

At the core of *QIBB* there is the systematic assurance and further development of both teaching quality and of the quality of administrative services. According to the model, schools and also school supervision (provincial level) and GD VET of BMUKK (federal level) must subject the activities required to meet their central tasks to regular evaluation and continuous improvement. The basic principles of work conducted on the quality of processes and results are the same at all three levels. The development process follows a continuous four-phase quality control cycle:

- (1) planning and setting of objectives,
- (2) implementation,
- (3) evaluation and measurement, and
- (4) analysis, assessment, reporting.

The same quality management instruments are applied at every level and in every educational establishment:

- the mission statement (long-term orientation, core messages regarding function and self-image),
- the quality matrix (key processes, long-term and medium-term objectives, implementation measures, results, indicators, evaluation methods),
- the annual work programme or school programme (medium- and short-term objectives),
- the review and objective-setting discussion or management & performance review,
- the instruments to collect evaluation data (individual feedback, system feedback, *QIBB* evaluation platform, Peer Review in *QIBB*) and
- the quality report.

Since early 2005 the development and implementation of educational standards for VET schools and colleges has been a special-focus project within the framework of *QIBB*. Educational standards constitute an instrument for safeguarding and developing quality in the field of action called ‘teaching and learning’.

ARQA-VET, the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (www.arqa-vet.at), was set up in 2007 with the objective of supporting the operational work of GD VET of BMUKK to implement *QIBB* as well as national and European activities related to EQAVET. ARQA-VET's tasks are to create networks between actors and institutions of the Austrian VET sector, play an active intermediary role from and to the European level, and act as the point of contact and service institution for all issues related to quality in VET.

6.6. Criterion 6

The referencing process has the explicit approval of the responsible quality assurance bodies.

As the bodies competent for qualifications – in the formal sector especially the federal ministries – are also responsible for quality assurance, their involvement is guaranteed by their inclusion through NQF STRG and they have therefore given their explicit approval (see Criterion 1).

6.7. Criterion 7

International experts are involved in the referencing process.

International experts

Three international experts were involved in the Austrian referencing process:

- Mile Dzelalja, Croatia – Professor of Physics at Split University, coordinator of NQF development in Croatia (leader of the CROQF expert team) and of the Croatian EQF referencing process, member of the EQF Advisory Group;
- Achim Hopbach, Germany – head of the Accreditation Council's office (foundation for the accreditation of study courses in Germany), President of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) Board;

- Jos Noesen, Luxembourg – Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation professionnelle (Ministry of Education and VET, VET Unit), coordinator of NQF development in Luxembourg and of the Luxembourg EQF referencing process, member of the EQF Advisory Group.

These three experts were selected due to their comprehensive expert knowledge particularly in the following areas:

- National qualifications frameworks: they have expert knowledge in the field of NQF development in their respective national contexts;
- EQF referencing process and self-certification process: they boast experience with these processes at the national and European levels.

Other reasons for selecting these experts include their command of languages (all three experts speak German, so they were able to read the draft of this report in German and discuss it with Austrian stakeholders), their involvement in key bodies at European level, and their national context (e.g.: Germany and Croatia are neighbouring countries of Austria; Germany and Luxembourg have several elements of their education systems in common with Austria).

The draft of this report was sent to the experts on 23 Dec. 2011. They were invited to discuss their feedback on the report with representatives of the NQF steering group and other national stakeholders and experts on the occasion of the workshop 'International expert meeting on the Austrian EQF referencing report' which was organised by the NCP on 11 Jan. 2012 in Vienna. Their feedback was included in the minutes to the meeting and sent to the experts for their renewed revision. The experts' feedback has been taken into account when revising the EQF referencing report.

International cooperation

As well as involving international experts in the EQF referencing process, other forms of international cooperation also play a major role in this context (see chapter 3.6 *International cooperation projects, EQF projects*). This includes both

experience exchange, mutual learning, and the development of coordinated strategies (such as related to the linking of certain types of qualifications with the EQF via NQF referencing – e.g. in the TransEQFrame or ZOOM projects – or related to the development of a structure for the EQF referencing report – like in the EQR-Ref project).

6.8. Criterion 8

The competent national body/bodies certifies/certify the referencing of the National Qualifications Framework and/or qualifications system to the EQF. A detailed report explaining the referencing procedure and the evidence on which it is based is published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point. This report explains each of the Criteria 1 to 8 mentioned here.

The competent bodies for this report are BMUKK and BMWF (see Criterion 1). This report was prepared in a cooperation of the two ministries and in consultation with NQF STRG. It covers the latest state of development of the NQF and consequently qualifications acquired in the formal sector. The Austrian referencing report will be published on the NCP website.

6.9. Criterion 9

The official EQF platform includes a public directory of member states that have confirmed that they have completed the referencing and links to the completed reports on the referencing process.

The report about the Austrian EQF referencing process will be sent to the European Commission. The link to the publication on the NCP website will also be made available.

6.10. Criterion 10

Following the conclusion of the referencing process and based on the timeframe specified in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

It is planned that the NCP enters qualifications which have been referenced to the Austrian NQF in the NQF register (including the NQF level and other details, such as learning outcomes). Subsequently the qualification certificates of qualifications referenced to the NQF will also contain a reference to their level. The steps required for this (for example, amendments to certificate regulations) will be launched.

It can be expected that the Europass documents will be revised when the EQF is implemented at the European level. As a part of these revisions, details about the appropriate NQF and EQF levels will also be included in the Austrian Europass certificate supplements.

7. Outlook

This EQF referencing report documents the NQF-related development activities conducted to date, key decisions in principle that have been taken, as well as the criteria and procedures which were tested comprehensively in the 'pilot phase'. The findings obtained from these development steps currently form the basis for linking the levels of the Austrian NQF with the levels of the EQF.

As this report documents the *status quo* and a number of further developments can be expected in the coming months and years, it will be necessary to update the EQF referencing report after key milestones have been reached (for example, after key qualifications from the formal sector have been referenced to the NQF levels, after structures for NQF referencing of qualifications from the non-formal sector have been implemented).

The current work phase mainly aims to set out in concrete terms the referencing procedure and responsibilities and to specify other bases for the NQF. In addition, development work on the three 'corridors' is continuing. This section briefly outlines the key plans and next steps of NQF implementation.

Procedure for referencing qualifications to the NQF levels

As well as the already developed criteria described in the manual, the referencing process forms the basis for referencing qualifications to the NQF levels. One important question in this connection is the issue of competences and responsibilities for the procedure of referencing qualifications to the NQF levels in combination with current responsibilities (which will be maintained, *e.g*. for the development) of the respective qualifications. At the moment, a proposal for a procedure is being elaborated which aims to define, in particular, the tasks and responsibilities of the NQF steering group and the NCP in this process.

Referencing qualifications from the formal sector to the NQF and documentation of the result

It is planned that future qualification certificates of all qualifications that have been referenced to the NQF will contain a reference to the NQF level. Relevant steps (such as amendments to certificate regulations) need to be introduced after referencing. In addition, it is planned that the qualifications that have been referenced to the NQF are entered in a register managed by the NCP. This register is also being developed at present and in the coming years will represent a major PR instrument related to the NQF. The NQF register will also represent the link to the EQF by making it accessible via the EQF portal[102].

Referencing additional qualifications on a legal basis

But many other education programmes also exist of which it can be assumed that they meet the definition of qualification as used in the NQF. Different federal ministries (see chapter 2.7) are responsible for these educational programmes which also have a legal basis (that is, they are mainly awarded by the state). Accordingly they can also be considered a part of NQF developments in the formal learning sector. Other developments of the NQF might therefore focus on the (gradual) integration of these qualifications.

Referencing of qualifications acquired in the non-formal sector

As set out in the section about NQF development in Austria (chapter 3), development activities in the field of non-formal learning are conducted parallel to work on the overall NQF development process. Here the procedure of referencing qualifications to the NQF is also of key importance. It is necessary to clarify competences and responsibilities for the referencing process – taking into account already existing structures from the non-formal sector (including adult education and CVET).

102 http:/ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm

Referencing qualifications acquired as part of informal learning processes

At the focus of development activities in the field of informal learning there is the possibility of validating and recognising learning outcomes acquired as part of informal learning processes. This approach is understood as a special form of access to qualifications: the determination of learning outcomes acquired in informal learning areas, validation and certification and, on that basis, the awarding of a qualification certificate from the formal or non-formal sector. Future development work will have to clarify these issues in connection with the decisions on the referencing of qualifications from the formal and non-formal areas and, if appropriate, continue the activities on instruments and processes for validating informally acquired knowledge, skills and competence.

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9. Annexes

Annex 1: Responsible actors in the formal education system

Upper secondary level

Full-time school-based VET

National level

- BMUKK is the supreme supervisory authority for the entire primary and secondary school sectors, which comprise both general-education and vocational schools. It is responsible, among other tasks, for the elaboration of important school-related acts, the maintenance of schools, the preparation of framework curricula, the payment of teachers and their in-service education and training. The execution of legal regulations is incumbent on the regional education authorities.
- BMLFUW is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of colleges of agriculture and forestry as well as for the selection and payment of teachers at these colleges. The costs for teachers at schools of agriculture and forestry are borne by BMLFUW and the provinces.
- BMG is responsible for creating the legal bases for programmes for healthcare professions (such as healthcare and nursing occupations, advanced-level medico-technical services, etc.) and in this connection for teaching content, scope, conditions of practical training, examinations and the specification of teaching staff.
- The social partners are entitled to comment on drafts of school-related acts, curricula and other regulations.

Regional level

- School supervision is incumbent on the respective regional education board. Supervision is conducted by regional school supervisors, each of whom are responsible for a specific school type. The most important body within the regional education board is the Board, whose tasks include the submission of

proposals for appointing principals/head teachers on behalf of BMUKK. In addition, the Board is entitled to issue statements on draft legislation and draft regulations (e.g. on curricula) and adopt regionally applicable provisions.

- The federal provinces are responsible for the construction and maintenance of schools of agriculture and forestry and bear 50% of personnel costs for teachers (cost sharing between the federal government and regional government).

Dual vocational training (apprenticeship)

National level

- Company-based training is within the sphere of competence of the Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ), which among other tasks elaborates the Vocational Training Act (*BAG*) and adopts the training regulations for the individual apprenticeship occupations.
- BMUKK is responsible for the school-based part of training (e.g. the elaboration of draft legislation, the preparation of framework curricula). For the payment of teachers, costs are shared with the federal provinces.
- The Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship (*BBAB*) is a body foreseen by the *BAG*. It comprises representatives of social partners and part-time vocational schools. BBAB submits proposals in the form of expert opinions, e.g. about the introduction of new or modernisation of existing apprenticeships, to BMWFJ.

Regional level

- Apprenticeship offices, which are located at the Economic Chambers, are responsible for the administration of apprenticeship training (examination of the training companies' suitability jointly with representatives of the Chamber of Labour, the recording of apprenticeship contracts, the organisation of apprenticeship-leave examinations, etc.).
- The Regional Advisory Boards on Apprenticeship (*LBABs*) elaborate proposals and suggestions on apprenticeship training in the respective province. Their members (representatives of social partners and part-time vocational schools) are appointed by the provincial governors.

- School supervision is incumbent on the respective regional education board. Supervision is conducted by regional school supervisors.
- The federal provinces are responsible for the construction and maintenance of part-time vocational schools and take over 50% of personnel costs.
- Apprenticeship bodies and specialist training offices for agriculture and forestry are responsible for the company-based part of training in agriculture and forestry; they are located at the Chambers of Agriculture in the respective federal provinces. Essentially they have the same tasks as the apprenticeship offices in the field of engineering, industry and trade.
- The federal provinces are responsible for the construction and maintenance of schools of agriculture and forestry and bear 50% of personnel costs for teachers.

Post-secondary VET

- The same institutional framework conditions as in the field of school-based VET at upper secondary level apply to the post-secondary programmes in Austria, to which also the school-related acts *SchOG* and *SchUG* apply (cf. above).

Annex 2: Comparison of the descriptor systems EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA

With the aim of achieving a more detailed description of (learning) outcomes of the cycles that were introduced with the Bologna process and thus increasing and enhancing transparency, recognition and mobility, the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI)[103] was the first to suggest the Dublin descriptors[104] for bachelor's and master's programmes in March 2002 (see also the JQI meeting in Dublin in March 2004)**.** The **Dublin descriptors** developed by JQI are the level descriptors which are recognised in the European Higher Education Area. They provide a general description of the accomplishments and skills expected in connection with the qualification/title that represents the completion of a Bologna cycle.

Both the Dublin descriptors and the EQF level descriptors are essentially based on the description of learning outcomes: They aim to describe what learners should know, understand and be able to do following completion of a programme. However, the two approaches describe these learning outcomes by using a different descriptor system in each case.[105]

As the EQF-LLL constitutes a comprehensive framework which also includes learning in the non-HE sector, the descriptors are defined in broader, more general and more comprehensive terms than the Dublin descriptors. The contents of the two descriptor sets are doubtlessly comparable, which means that the EHEA descriptors must clearly be seen as compatible with the LLL descriptors of Levels 6-8 and the levels must be rated as equivalent even though the descriptors are not identical. In line with this, Levels 6-8 in the EQF-LLL are not only compatible with qualifications acquired in the course of an HE study (Bologna) but also with vocational qualifications which can be acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning.[106] The comparability of the qualification levels of the two frameworks is illustrated in Table 5.

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103 JQI is an informal network for quality assurance and accreditation of bachelor's and master's programmes in Europe. Cf. http://www.jointquality.org/ (accessed on 07.10.2011)
104 http://www.jointquality.nl/ge_descriptors.html (accessed on 07.10.2011)
105 http://www.equi.at/pdf/ihs-duk-EQR-lassnigg-vogtenhuber-pellert-cendon.pdf (accessed on 07.10.2011)
106 cf. http://www.ngai.ie/interdev_EQR.html#twelve (accessed on 07.10.2011)

Table 5. EQF levels and Bologna cycles

EQF levels	Bologna cycles
5	Short cycle within the first cycle
6	First cycle
7	Second cycle
8	Third cycle

In the following table, the descriptors of Levels 6-8 of the EQF are compared with the Dublin descriptors of the QF-EHEA (see Table 6). For the Austrian NQF, the Dublin descriptors are used to describe the qualifications of Levels 6-8 of the HE sector as they are tailored specifically to this sector and are additionally compatible with the EQF-LLL descriptors.

Table 6. Comparison of EQF descriptors and Dublin descriptors

EQF level	**Dublin descriptors**[107]	**EQF descriptors**[108]
6	Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who: have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; • can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are • advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles • advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study • manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts • take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups

107 can be downloaded in several languages (including English) at http://www.jointquality.org/ (accessed on 07.10.2011)
108 Can be accessed at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/general/eqf/leaflet_en.pdf (downloaded on am 07.10.2011)

	• have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; • can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audience; • have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.	
7	Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; • can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; • have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements; • can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are • highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research • critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields • specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams

	specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; • have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.	
8	Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; • have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; • have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication; • are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; • can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; • can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.	The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are • knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields • the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice • demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Annex 3: Position Paper on the National Qualifications Framework (German only)

Anhang 3
Positionspapier NQR 2

Annex 4: Manual for Including Formal Qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – Criteria.

Annex 4 Manual for Including Formal Qual

Annex 5: Application Form for Including Formal Qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework

Annex 5 Application Form for Including Fo

Annex 6: Decree on Educational Standards in Formal Schooling (BMUKK) (German only)

Anhang 6
BGBl_Nr_1_2009.pdf

Annex 7: Learning Outcomes in the new VET Curricula (German only)


Anhang 7
BGBl_II_Nr_300_201


Anhang 7
BGBl_II_Nr_300_201


Anhang 7
BGBl_II_Nr_300_201

Annex 8: Sample Curricula from Higher Education (German only)

Anhang 8_1
Curriculum MA Enviro

Anhang 8_2
Curriculum MA Alpine

Anhang 8_3
Curriculum BA Anglisti

Anhang 8_4
Curriculum Biomedical

Anhang 8_5
Curriculum BA KuWi-P

Annex 9: Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (English version)

Anhang 9 HS QSG.pdf


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