8. INFORMATION ON THE GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

8.1 Types of Institutions and Institutional Status

Higher education (HE) studies in Germany are offered at three types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI),\(^2\):
- Universitäten (Universities) including various specialised institutions, offer the whole range of academic disciplines. In the German tradition, universities focus in particular on basic research so that advanced stages of study have mainly theoretical orientation and research-oriented components.
- Fachhochschulen (FH)/Hochschulen für Angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) (Universities of Applied Sciences, UAS) concentrate their study programmes in engineering and other technical disciplines, business-related studies, social work, and design areas. The common mission of applied research and development implies an application-oriented focus of studies, which includes integrated and supervised work assignments in industry, enterprises or other relevant institutions.
- Kunst- und Musikhochschulen (Universities of Art/Music) offer studies for artistic careers in fine arts, performing arts and music; in such fields as directing, production, writing in theatre, film, and other media; and in a variety of design areas, architecture, media and communication.

Higher Education Institutions are either state or state-recognised institutions. In their operations, including the organisation of studies and regulations established by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK). 6 In 1999, a system of accreditation for Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes has become operational. All new programmes have to be accredited under this scheme; after a successful accreditation they receive the seal of the Accreditation Council. 7

8.2 Types of Programmes and Degrees Awarded

Studies in all three types of institutions have traditionally been offered in integrated “long” (one-tier) programmes leading to Diplom- or Magister Artium degrees or completed by a Staatsprüfung (State Examination).

Within the framework of the Bologna Process one-tier study programmes are successively being replaced by a two-tier study system. Since 1998, two-tier degrees (Bachelor’s and Master’s) have been introduced in almost all study programmes. This change is designed to enlarge variety and flexibility for students in planning and pursuing educational objectives; it also enhances international compatibility of studies.

The German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (HQR)\(^3\) describes the qualification levels as well as the resulting qualifications and competences of the graduates. The three levels of the HQR correspond to the levels 6, 7 and 8 of the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning\(^4\) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning\(^5\).

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

8.3 Approval/Accreditation of Programmes and Degrees

To ensure quality and comparability of qualifications, the organisation of studies and general degree requirements have to conform to principles and regulations established by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany. The result is a system of accreditation for Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes has become operational. All new programmes have to be accredited under this scheme; after a successful accreditation they receive the seal of the Accreditation Council. 7

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### Table 1: Institutions, Programmes and Degrees in German Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme/degrees</th>
<th>Transfer procedures</th>
<th>Bachelor (B.A./B.Sc./B.Eng./LL.B./B.Ed.) [3-4 years]</th>
<th>Master (M.A./M.Sc./M.Eng./LL.M./M.Ed.)</th>
<th>Doctorate (Dr.) (Thesis research; may include formal course work)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIIVERSITIES (Universitäten) &amp; SPECIALISED INSTITUTIONS (Theologische und Pädagogische Hochschulen) [Doctorate]</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES (UAS) (Fachhochschulen, FH, and Hochschulen für Angewandte Wissenschaften, HAW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITIES OF ART/MUSIC (Kunst-/Musikhochschulen) [Some Doctorate]</td>
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**Integrated/long (one-tier) Programmes**

- First degree
- Second degree
- Doctorate
8.4 Organisation and Structure of Studies

The following programmes apply to all three types of institutions. Bachelor’s and Master’s study programmes may be studied consecutively, at various higher education institutions, at different types of institutions and within different phases of professional work between the first and the second qualification. The organisation of the study programmes makes use of modular components and of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) with 30 credits corresponding to one semester.

8.4.1 Bachelor

Bachelor’s degree programmes lay the academic foundations, provide methodological competences and include study phases to the professional field. The Bachelor’s degree is awarded after 3 to 4 years. The Bachelor’s degree programme includes a thesis requirement. Study programmes leading to the Bachelor’s degree must be accredited according to the Interstate study accreditation treaty.

First degree programmes (Bachelor) lead to Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), Bachelor of Engineering (B.Eng.), Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.), Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), Bachelor of Music (B.Mus.) or Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.).

Bachelor’s degrees correspond to level 6 of the German Qualifications Framework/ European Qualifications Framework.

8.4.2 Master

Master is the second degree after another 1 to 2 years. Master’s programmes may be differentiated by the profile types “practice-oriented” and “research-oriented”. Higher Education Institutions define the profile. The Master’s degree programme includes a thesis requirement. Study programmes leading to the Master’s degree must be accredited according to the Interstate study accreditation treaty.

Second degree programmes (Master) lead to Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.Sc.), Master of Engineering (M.Eng.), Master of Laws (L.L.M.), Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.), Master of Music (M.Mus.) or Master of Education (M.Ed.). Many programmes which are designed for continuing education carry other designations (e.g. MBA).

The Master’s degree corresponds to level 7 of the German Qualifications Framework/ European Qualifications Framework.

8.4.3 Integrated “Long” Programmes (One-Tier):

Diplom degrees, Magister Artium, Staatsprüfung

An integrated study programme is either mono-disciplinary (Diplom degree programmes) or poly-disciplinary (Magister Artium) and comprises a combination of either two major or one major and two minor fields (Magister Artium). The first stage (1.5 to 2 years) focuses on broad orientations and foundations of the future study. An Intermediate Examination (Diplom-Vorprüfung for Diplom degrees, Zwischenprüfung or credit requirements for the Magister Artium) is prerequisite to enter the second stage of advanced studies and specialisations. Degree requirements include submission of a thesis (up to 6 months duration) and comprehensive final written and oral examinations. Similar regulations apply to studies leading to a Staatsprüfung. The level of qualification is equivalent to the Master’s level.

- Integrated studies at Universitäten (U) last 4 to 5 years (Diplom degree, Magister Artium) or 3.5 to 6.5 years (Staatsprüfung). The Diplom degree is awarded in engineering disciplines, the natural sciences as well as economics. In the humanities, degree programmes at the University is usually the Magister Artium (M.A.). In the social sciences, the practice varies as a matter of institutional traditions. Studies preparing for the legal, medical or technical professions are usually the Magister Artium (M.Sc.). Further programmes include studies leading to a Staatsprüfung. This applies also to studies preparing for teaching professions. The three qualifications (Diplom, Magister Artium and Staatsprüfung) are academically equivalent and correspond to level 7 of the German Qualifications Framework/ European Qualifications Framework.

8.5 Doctorate

Universities as well as specialised institutions of university standing, some of the FH/HAV/UIS and some Universities of Art/Music are doctorate-granting institutions. Formal prerequisite for admission to doctoral work is a qualified Master’s degree (Magister, Diplom or MBA) in a specific field of study. Further qualification for admission to doctoral studies is the successful completion of a comprehensive final written and oral examination. Admission further requires the acceptance of the Dissertation research project by a professor as a supervisor.

The doctoral degree corresponds to level 8 of the German Qualifications Framework/ European Qualifications Framework.

8.6 Grading Scheme

The grading scheme in Germany usually comprises five levels with numerical equivalents; intermediate grades may be given: "Sehr Gut" (1) = Very Good; "Gut" (2) = Good; "Befriedigend" (3) = Satisfactory; "Ausreichend" (4) = Sufficient. "Nicht ausreichend" (5) = Sufficient/Fail. The minimum passing grade is "Ausreichend" (4). Verbal designations of grades may vary in some cases and for doctoral degrees.

In addition, grade distinction tables as described in the ECTS Users’ Guide are used to indicate the relative distribution of grades within a reference group.

8.7 Access to Higher Education

The General Higher Education Entrance Qualification (Allgemeine Hochschulreife, Abitur) after 12 to 13 years of arts and music, media studies also formally qualify for doctoral work. Particularly qualified holders of a Bachelor’s degree or a Diplom (FH) degree may also be admitted to doctoral studies without acquisition of a further degree if they are accredited by the Accreditation Council.

1 The information covers only aspects directly relevant to purposes of the Diploma Supplement.
2 Berufsakademien are not considered as Higher Education Institutions, they only exist in some of the Länder. They offer educational programmes in close cooperation with private companies. Students receive a formal degree and carry out an apprenticeship at the company. Some Berufsakademien offer Bachelor courses which are recognised as an academic degree if they are accredited by the Accreditation Council.


6 Specimen decree pursuant to Article 4, paragraphs 1 – 4 of the interstate study accreditation treaty (Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany of 7 December 2017).

7 Interstate Treaty on the organization of a joint accreditation system to ensure the quality of teaching and learning at German higher education institutions (Interstate study accreditation treaty) (Decision of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany of 8 December 2016), Enacted on 1 January 2018.

8 See note No. 7.

9 See note No. 7.

10 Access to higher education for applicants with a vocational qualification, but without a school-based higher education entrance qualification (Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany of 6 March 2009).