

**Common structural guidelines of the Länder as set out in Article 9 Clause 2 of  
the Framework Act for Higher Education (HRG) for the accreditation of  
Bachelor's and Master's study courses**

(Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder  
in the Federal Republic of Germany of 10 October 2003)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This resolution replaces the resolution of the Standing Conference “Structural guidelines for the introduction of study courses leading to the degrees Bachelor/Bakkalaureus and Master/Magister ” of 5 March 1999 in the version of 14 December 2001

## **Preliminary remarks**

With the following structural guidelines for study courses leading to the degrees Bachelor and Master (Article 19 HRG), the Länder are complying with the statutory requirement as set out in Article 9 Clause 2 HRG to assure the equivalence of corresponding study and examination results as well as qualifications and the possibility of transfer between institutions of higher education. At the same time these guidelines represent a key step on the path to establishing the European Higher Education Area within the Bologna Process.

Study courses leading to the degrees of Bachelor and Master must be accredited. Accreditation will be based on the guidelines as set out in Section 1 Clause 3 of the “Statute for an accreditation procedure across the Länder and across higher education institutions“ (resolution of the Standing Conference of 24 February 2002 in the version of 19 September 2002). The guidelines are therefore directly addressed to the Accreditation Council and the Accreditation Agencies. At the same time they may be used by higher education institutions as a basis (orientation framework) for planning and designing study courses subject to accreditation.

In this context the structural guidelines do not entail any regimentation of individual study behaviour. Thus, for example, consecutive Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses at higher education institutions may only be accredited if they do not exceed a total standard period of study of 5 years; but individual students are not prevented from moving to another higher education institution for a two-year Master’s study course after having completed a four-year Bachelor’s study course at their first higher education institution.

Special regulations may apply to Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses in the field of state-regulated study courses (especially teaching profession, medicine, law), study courses leading to an ecclesiastic qualification as well as art study courses at colleges of art and music.

### **1. Structure and duration of studies**

The HRG makes a fundamental distinction between Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses, as set out in Article 19 HRG, and *Diplom* and *Magister* study courses, as set out in Article 18 HRG, which does not mean that the study programmes of the two different graduation systems may not in part make use of the same study provisions. But the structural

intermingling of the two study programme systems is not possible. In a system of tiered qualifications, the Bachelor is the standard qualification for study undertaken at a higher education institution. It has its own profile qualifying for a profession distinct from the *Diplom* and *Magister* qualifications which must be evident in the content transmitted within the specified standard period of study. As study courses leading to a professional qualification, the Bachelor's study courses must provide the academic foundation, methodological skills and qualifications related to the professional field.

In all other respects, the following applies:

- 1.1 Bachelor's and Master's study courses can be established both at universities and higher education institutions of equivalent status as well as at *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences) without challenging the different educational objectives of these types of higher education institution.
- 1.2 Bachelor's study courses can also be established if no corresponding Master's qualification can be obtained at the higher education institution. Master's study courses can also be established for holders of a first qualification at higher education level for entry into a profession if the higher education institution does not offer the corresponding Bachelor's study courses.
- 1.3 The standard period of study for Bachelor's and Master's study courses is set out in Article 19 Clause 2- 5 HRG and amounts to a minimum period of three and a maximum period of four years for Bachelor's study courses and a minimum period of one and a maximum period of two years for Master's study courses. For consecutive study courses the total standard period of study comprises a maximum of five years. Shorter standard periods of study are possible on the basis of special organisational measures related to the study courses.

With a standard period of study of three years, 180 ECTS points must as a rule be proven for a Bachelor's qualification. In accordance with international requirements, a Master's qualification requires 300 ECTS points including the preceding study courses for the first qualification for entry into a profession. For the rest, the number of ECTS points to be acquired in Bachelor's or Master's study programmes is determined by the various standard periods of study possible within the framework of the conditions set out in the Framework Act for Higher Education.

- 1.4 For quality assurance, both Bachelor's and Master's study courses require a dissertation (Bachelor's/Master's dissertation), the purpose of which is to demonstrate the ability to deal independently with a problem in the relevant subject area on the basis of academic methods within a set period of time. The scope of the work for the Bachelor's dissertation comprises a minimum of 6 ECTS points and must not exceed 12 ECTS points; for the Master's dissertation it should range from 15 - 30 ECTS points.
- 1.5 During accreditation contents and scope of the offered study courses should be tested as to their feasibility for study.
- 1.6 In four-year Bachelor's study courses, the examination regulations define those modules that if passed, present an equivalent to an intermediate examination as set out in Article 15 Clause 1 Sentence 2 HRG.

## **2. Entry requirements and transitions**

In a system of tiered study courses, the Bachelor degree, as the first professional qualification, represents the standard qualification, leading to the first entry into a profession for the majority of students. Hence the entry requirements for the Master's require that the character of the Master's qualification as a **further** professional qualification must be emphasised. For the rest it has to be safeguarded that after the introduction of the new graduation system the permeability of the higher education system is maintained. As a consequence:

- 2.1 The entry requirement for a Master's study course is always a higher education degree qualifying for entry into a profession. With a view to the international standing and the acceptance of Master's qualifications by the labour market, a high subject and scientific level corresponding at least to the established *Diplom* qualification must be assured. Hence studies in Master's study courses should be made dependent on further special entry requirements. Entry requirements are subject to accreditation. The Länder may reserve the right to approve entry requirements.

2.2 Transitions between study courses as set out in Article 18 HRG and the Bachelor's and Master's study courses as set out in Article 19 HRG are possible in accordance with the general provisions governing credits. Details are set out in the examination regulations or in provisions under Land law.

2.3 Master's degrees acquired at universities and higher education institutions of equivalent status, or at universities of applied sciences, always provide entitlement to doctoral studies. The universities and higher education institutions of equivalent status will regulate entry to doctoral studies in their doctoral regulations.

Holders of a Bachelor degree may also be admitted directly to doctoral studies without acquisition of a further degree by means of a procedure to determine aptitude. The universities will regulate entry to as well as the structure of the procedure to determine aptitude and, if applicable, any cooperation with universities of applied sciences, in their doctoral regulations.

2.4 In accordance with the principle that a holder of a higher education degree qualifying for entry to the profession may study at any other higher education institution, the Bachelor degree is equal to a higher education entrance qualification corresponding to the general higher education entrance certificate.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Profiles of the study courses**

It is widespread international practice to distinguish in Bachelor's and Master's study courses between a "more practice-oriented" and a "more research-oriented" profile. It is, however, sufficient, if this differentiation is implemented at Master's level. There is no differentiation by length of study course. In detail, the following applies:

3.1 Bachelor's study courses lay academic foundations, provide methodological skills and lead to qualifications related to the professional field. There is no allocation of Bachelor's study programmes to the profile types "more practice-oriented" or "more research-oriented".

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<sup>2</sup> In Bavaria, a Bachelor's qualification is equivalent under qualification legislation to a *Diploma* qualification from the same higher education institution in terms of providing a general higher education entrance certificate.

3.2 Master's study courses must be differentiated by the profile types "more practice-oriented" and "more research-oriented". The higher education institutions define the profile of each Master's study programme. Master's study courses can only be accredited if they have been assigned to one of the two profile types and this is set out in the "diploma supplement". Taking international developments into account, the Accreditation Council draws up criteria for the allocation to profile types. Allocation is verified in accreditation. The Master's degree certificate will show the higher education institution awarding the degree. It may also define the profile of the study course.

#### **4. Consecutive and non-consecutive Master's study courses and Master's study courses providing further education**

When Master's study courses are being set up, they should be assigned to one of the categories consecutive, non-consecutive or providing further education. Their assignment should be checked during accreditation.

4.1 Consecutive Bachelor's and Master's study courses are study courses which build on one another as set out in the study or examination regulations and which as a rule fit into the duration pattern 3 + 2 or 4 + 1 years respectively do not exceed a total timeframe of 5 years standard period of study to the Master's qualification (this includes Bachelor's study courses of seven semesters and Master's study courses of three semesters). The Master's study courses may continue and deepen the Bachelor's study courses in terms of subject matter or, if the subject context is maintained, expand it into other disciplines. Bachelor's and Master's study courses may be studied consecutively at various higher education institutions, at different types of higher education institution and with phases of professional work between the first and the second qualification.

4.2 Non-consecutive Master's study courses are Master's study courses which do not build on the preceding Bachelor's study courses in terms of their content. Their requirements (Clause 1.3 and 1.4) correspond to the consecutive Master's study courses and lead to the same level of qualification and to the same rights. The equivalence of requirements will be determined in accreditation.

4.3 Master's study courses providing further education require qualified practical

professional experience of, as a rule, no less than one year following the acquisition of a higher education qualification. The content of the Master's study courses providing further education should take professional experience into account and build on it. In designing Master's study courses providing further education, the higher education institution will set out the connection between professional qualification and the study course of offer. Master's study courses providing further education correspond to the requirements (Clause 1.3 and 1.4) for consecutive Master's study courses and lead to the same level of qualification and to the same rights.<sup>3</sup> The equivalence of requirements will be determined in accreditation.

## 5. Qualifications/Degrees

Bachelor's and Master's study courses are study courses of their own leading to independent qualifications. As a consequence:

- 5.1 **Only one** degree can be awarded for a successfully completed Bachelor's or Master's study course. Hence Bachelor's and Master's degrees in accordance with Article 19 HRG cannot be awarded simultaneously on completion of a *Diplom* or *Magister* study course in accordance with Article 18 HRG; similarly, completion of a Bachelor's or Master's study course in accordance with Article 19 HRG cannot lead to the simultaneous award of the *Diplom* or *Magister* degree in accordance with Article 18 HRG.
- 5.2 In accordance with the graduation system as set out in Article 19 HRG, the Master's degree is only awarded on the basis of a **further** higher education degree qualifying for entry to the profession (Article 19 Clause 3 Sentence 1 HRG). Hence a Master's qualification can only be acquired if a first higher education degree qualifying for entry to the profession already exists. Therefore first degree study courses which after four or five years lead to a Master's qualification are excluded.
- 5.3 Bachelor's and Master's study courses do not differentiate the final degrees by the length of the standard period of study. Hence the same degree is awarded for three or four year Bachelor's study courses. The same applies to Master's qualifications which are achieved in one or two years. This also applies to seven semester

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<sup>3</sup> Issues related to study fees and remuneration for study courses for further education are not affected.

Bachelor's study courses and three semester Master's study courses. Bachelor's qualifications with the addition "Honours" ("B.A. Hons.") are excluded.

## 6. Designation of qualifications/degrees

For acceptance in the labour market and international cooperation, it is necessary to ensure transparency and clarity by restricting the number of different qualification designations. In designating degrees, no distinction is made between the profile types "more practice-oriented" and "more research-oriented". The following designations will be used for Bachelor's and consecutive Master's degrees:

Subject group	Qualification designation
Language and cultural studies Sport, sport science Social sciences Fine arts	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Master of Arts (M.A.)
Mathematics, Natural sciences Medicine <sup>4</sup> Agriculture, forestry and food sciences <sup>4</sup>	Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Master of Science (M.Sc.)
Engineering	Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Master of Science (M.Sc.) or Bachelor of Engineering (B.Eng.) Master of Engineering (M.Eng.)
Economics	depending on the content of the study course: Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Master of Arts (M.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Master of Science (M.Sc.)
Law <sup>4</sup>	Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) Master of Laws (LL.M)

In interdisciplinary study courses, the designation of the final qualification is determined by the subject area which is the major subject in the study course; in engineering and

<sup>4</sup> Note: Does not apply to state-regulated study programmes

economics it is determined by the content of the study course. Subject additions to the final qualification are excluded.

For further education courses and non-consecutive Master's study courses, Master's degrees may be used which diverge from the above designations (e.g. MBA).

For the designation of final qualifications the German language may also be used (e.g. Bakkalaureus der Wissenschaften). Designations comprising more than one language (e.g. Bachelor der Wissenschaften) may not be used.

Detailed information about the studies underlying the qualification is provided in each case by the "diploma supplement".

The conversion of degree designations will be effected as part of accreditation and re-accreditation.

## **7. Modularisation and credit point system**

Accreditation of a Bachelor's or Master's study course requires evidence that the study course has been modularised and provided with a credit point system. The content of a module must be arranged in such a way that as a rule it can be taught within one semester or one year; in specific cases, which have to be justified, a module may also extend over several semesters. In detail, reference is made to the resolution of the Standing Conference "Framework guidelines for the introduction of credit point systems and the modularisation of study courses" of 15 September 2000, which form a part of these common Länder guidelines for Bachelor's and Master's study courses as set out in Article 9 Clause 2 HRG.

## **8. Equivalence**

The introduction of a graduation system in accordance with Article 19 HRG should not lead to a devaluation of the traditional *Diplom* and *Magister* qualifications. Hence the following applies with regard to the weighting of Bachelor's and Master's qualifications (Article 19 HRG) and the *Diplom/Magister* qualifications in accordance with (Article 18 HRG):

- Bachelor's qualifications always provide the same rights as *Diplom* qualifications of universities of applied science.

- Master's qualifications provide the same rights as *Diplom* and *Magister* qualifications of universities and equivalent higher education institutions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to the agreement in force with the Conference of Interior Ministers, Master's qualifications acquired at universities of applied sciences open access to the higher civil service if this was decided in the accreditation.