

**Common structural guidelines of the Länder 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 as amended on 4 February 2010)

Preliminary remarks

With the following Structural Guidelines for Bachelor's and Master's study courses the Länder are complying with their national responsibility in higher education to ensure 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 2, Clause 1, No. 2 of the Law on Establishing a Foundation ("Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany", GV.NRW.2005, p. 45). 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 regulation 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 five 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 medicine, law). Regarding study courses leading to a church degree, reference is made to the "Key Points for the Structure of Studies in Study Courses Involving Catholic and Protestant Theology/Religion" adopted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on 13 December 2007.

Part A: General regulations for all fields of study

A 1. Structure and duration of studies

The Higher Education Acts of the Länder make a fundamental distinction between Bachelor's and Master's study courses, and *Diplom* and *Magister* study courses, which does not mean that the study courses 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 course systems is not possible. In a system of consecutive 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 corresponding to the profile of the higher education institution and of the study course.

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 full-time study amounts to six, seven or eight semesters for Bachelor's study courses and four, three or two semesters for Master's study courses. For consecutive study courses the total standard

period of full-time study comprises five years (ten semesters). Shorter and longer standard periods of study are possible in exceptional cases on the basis of a corresponding organisational study structure.

No less than 180 ECTS credits must be demonstrated for a Bachelor's degree. A Master's qualification requires 300 ECTS credits including the preceding study courses for the first qualification for entry into a profession. This requirement may be waived in special cases where students can demonstrate that they are suitably qualified. This also applies to cases where, after completing a Master's study course, students have not obtained 300 credits. Proven qualifications and competences acquired outside higher education institutions can be credited to provide up to half of the credits required for the study course. Furthermore, the number of ECTS credits to be acquired in Bachelor's or Master's study courses is determined by the various standard periods of study.

- 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 credits and must not exceed 12 ECTS credits; for the Master's dissertation it should range from 15 - 30 ECTS credits.

A 2. Admission requirements and transitions

In a system of consecutive study courses, the Bachelor's 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 character of the Master's qualification as a **further** professional qualification must be emphasised in the admission requirements for the Master's degree. The permeability of the higher education system must, moreover, be maintained after the introduction of the new graduation system. As a consequence:

- 2.1 The admission requirement for a Master's study course is, as a rule, a higher education degree qualifying for entry into a profession. Under Land higher education laws, in clearly defined exceptional cases for Master's study courses providing further education and for artistic Master's study courses, an entrance examination may take the place of the requirement for a higher education degree qualifying for entry into a profession. For quality assurance purposes or on grounds of capacity, additional admission requirements may be laid down for Master's study courses. Admission requirements are subject to accreditation. The Länder may reserve the right to approve admission requirements.
- 2.2 Transitions between study courses of the different graduation systems 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 admission to doctoral studies in their doctoral regulations.

Holders of a Bachelor's degree may also be admitted directly to doctoral studies without acquiring a further degree by means of a procedure to determine aptitude. The universities will regulate admission to as well as the organisation 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 a profession may study at any other higher education institution, the Bachelor's degree is equal to a higher education entrance qualification corresponding to the general higher education entrance certificate¹.

¹ In Bavaria, a Bachelor's qualification is equivalent under qualification legislation to a *Diplom* qualification from the same higher education institution in terms of providing a general higher education entrance certificate.

A 3. Profiles of the study courses

- 3.1 Bachelor's study courses lay academic foundations, provide methodological skills and lead to qualifications related to the professional field corresponding to the profile of the higher education institution and of the study course. This ensures a broad academic qualification in Bachelor's study courses.
- 3.2 Master's study courses serve subject and academic specialisation and may be differentiated by the profile types "practice-oriented" and "research-oriented".

A 4. 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 study courses" or "study courses providing further education". Their assignment should be checked during accreditation.

- 4.1 Consecutive Master's study courses are to be structured as study courses which consolidate or extend knowledge, are multi-disciplinary or cover a different subject. 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 Master's study courses providing further education require qualified practical professional experience of, as a rule, no less than one year. 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 on offer.

Master's study courses providing further education correspond to the requirements (see points 1.3 and 1.4) for consecutive Master's study courses and lead to the same level of qualification and to the same rights². The equivalence of requirements will be determined in accreditation.

² Issues related to study fees and remuneration for study courses for further education are not affected.

A 5. Qualifications/Degrees

Bachelor's and Master's study courses are study courses of their own right 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 cannot be awarded simultaneously on completion of a *Diplom* or *Magister* study course; similarly, completion of a Bachelor's or Master's study course cannot lead to the simultaneous award of the *Diplom* or *Magister* degree.
- 5.2 In the consecutive graduation system, the Master's degree is only awarded on the basis of a **further** higher education degree qualifying for entry to a profession. Hence a Master's qualification can as a rule only be acquired if a first higher education degree qualifying for entry to a profession already exists (see point 2.1). 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 Bachelor's study courses and three-semester Master's study courses. Bachelor's qualifications with the addition "Honours" ("B.A. Hons.") are excluded.

A 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. The following designations will be used for Bachelor's and consecutive Master's degrees:

Subject groups	Designation of qualifications
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 ³ Agriculture, forestry and food sciences ³	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 ³	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 economics it is determined by the content of the study course. Subject additions to the final qualification are excluded.

For further education courses Master's degrees may be used which diverge from the above designations (e.g. MBA).

³ Note: Does not apply to state-regulated study courses.

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 contained in each case in the “Diploma Supplement”, which is part of each degree certificate.

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

A 7. Modularisation, mobility 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. Study courses must be structured so that they can offer periods of study at other universities and of vocational and professional practice without any loss of study time. The higher education institutions must guarantee the coherence of the study concept and the feasibility for study of the contents and scope of the study courses offered, and test and confirm them during accreditation. 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” (see Annex).

A 8. Equivalence

The introduction of a graduation system 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 and the *Diplom/Magister* qualifications:

- 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.

Part B: Special regulations for individual fields of study

B 1. Special regulations for artistic study courses at colleges of art and music

The General Regulations A 1 to A 8 apply to artistic study courses at colleges of art and music with the following conditions:

Clauses A 1 and A 3.1: Objectives of Bachelor's study course

Artistic study courses enhance the ability of artistic creation and develop it further; they impart the academic bases and methodological skills for the subject concerned as well as qualifications related to the specific field of professional activity.

Clause A 1.3: Standard period of study/ECTS credits

In divergence from Clause 1.3, consecutive Bachelor's and Master's study courses may exceptionally be established with a total standard period of study of up to six years in the artistic core subjects at colleges of art and music, as determined in greater detail by Land law. With consecutive Bachelor's and Master's study courses with a total standard period of study of six years the Master level is reached with 360 ECTS credits.

At colleges of music, the artistic core subjects include in particular singing, composition and conducting as well as instrumental training. At colleges of art this is the subject of art⁴. In all other respects, the allocation of a subject to the artistic core subjects arises from the profile of the higher education institutions and is determined in agreement between the higher education institution and the relevant government department.

Clause A 1.4: Dissertations

In free art, the scope of the work for the Bachelor's dissertation can comprise up to 20 ECTS credits and for the Master's dissertation up to 40 ECTS credits in exceptional cases.

⁴ The inclusion of free art study courses in the consecutive structure of studies is decided by the relevant government department in collaboration with the respective higher education institution.

Clause A 2.1: Admission to Master's studies

For admission to artistic Master's study courses, the special artistic aptitude required for this must be demonstrated. This can also be done by a special aptitude examination.

Clause A 2.3: Right to embark on doctoral studies

Master's qualifications at colleges of art and music entitle graduates to embark on doctoral studies only if the Master's study course provided a sufficiently qualification.

Clause A 2.4: Acquisition of higher education entrance qualifications by means of a Bachelor's qualification

For the acquisition of higher education entrance qualifications by means of a Bachelor's qualification in artistic study courses at colleges of art and music, the provisions in force under Land law apply.

Clause A 3.2: Artistic profile

Master's study courses at colleges of art and music should have a specific artistic profile which must be determined in the accreditation as specified by the Accreditation Council and shown in the Diploma Supplement.

Clause A 4.3: Master's study courses providing further education

On admission to artistic Master's study courses providing further education, practical professional activities undertaken during the study course may also be taken into account unless this is prevented by regulations under Land law.

Clause A 6: Designation of qualifications

The qualifications for artistic study courses at colleges of art and music are designated as follows:

Subject groups	Qualifications
Free arts	Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A) Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.)
Applied arts Visual arts	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Master of Arts (M.A.)
Music	Bachelor of Music (B.Mus.) Master of Music (M.Mus.)

Clause A 7: Modularisation

At least two modules are obligatory for the artistic core subject in a Bachelor's study course. They may take up about two-thirds of the work time (160 ECTS credits in a four-year Bachelor's study course). The compatibility of artistic and teaching study courses should be reciprocally taken into account.

B 2. Special regulations for study courses providing the basis for a teaching post

For study courses providing the basis for a teaching post, reference is made to "Key points for the mutual recognition of Bachelor's and Master's qualifications in study courses providing the educational basis for a teaching career" of 2 June 2006 and the supplementary resolution of 28 February 2007. Beyond that, the General Regulations A1 to A8 apply with the following conditions:

Clause A 3 Profiles of the study courses

Master's study courses providing the basis for a teaching post have a specific teaching post-related profile which must be determined in the accreditation as specified by the Accreditation Council and shown in the Diploma Supplement.

Clause A 6: Designation of qualifications

The qualifications for study courses providing the basis for a teaching post are designated as follows:

- Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)
- Master of Education (M.Ed.)

Clause A 8 Equivalence

Career regulations under law of the *Länder* are not affected hereby.

**Framework Guidelines for the Introduction of Credit Point Systems
and the Modularisation of Study Courses**

1. Definitions and Standards

1.1 Modularisation

Modules combine subjects in thematically and chronologically complete, self-contained study units assigned with a number of credits. They can be made up of different teaching and learning formats (such as lectures, tutorials, practical work assignments, e-learning, research training, etc.). A module may comprise content which can be taught within one semester or academic year, or extend over several semesters. To reduce the examination burden modules generally conclude with one examination, the result of which is entered on the degree certificate. In specific, justified cases a number of modules may also be concluded with a single examination. The content of the examination for a particular module is to be guided by the learning outcomes defined for that module. The scope of the examination should be limited to the extent necessary for that purpose. The award of credits does not depend on an examination, but on the successful completion of the module in question. The requirements for the award of credits are to be set out clearly and comprehensibly in the study and examination regulations and the accreditation documents. To avoid excessively small modules, which also generate a heavy examination burden, modules should account for at least five ECTS credits.

Modules are to be described in terms including the workload and the number of credits to be awarded (see point 2 - Explanations - for content and scope). The description of a module should contain at least:

- a) Contents and target qualifications
- b) Teaching formats
- c) Admission requirements
- d) Usability
- e) Conditions for the award of credits
- f) Credits and grades
- g) Frequency at which modules are offered
- h) Workload
- i) Duration

Provided that there are no directly applicable ‘free attempt’ rules [*Freiversuchsregelungen*], rules are to be adopted to promote early completion of the modules required under the degree course curriculum.

1.2 Recognition

The mutual recognition of modules when changing higher education institution or course is to be laid down in manageable rules in the study or examination regulations and to be confirmed in the accreditation. Mutual recognition hinges on the quality of accredited study courses, and the performance of state or accredited non-state higher education institutions as regards the competences acquired by the students (learning outcomes) in accordance with the rules of the Lisbon Convention (Article III). Under the Lisbon Convention, recognition may be granted provided there are no substantial differences between the competences acquired (Article V).

1.3 Award of credits

Credits are a quantitative measure of student workloads. They cover instruction itself, the time required for preparation and follow-up, (i.e. class time and private study), examinations and preparation for examinations, including final and other papers, and in some cases practical work placements.

As a rule 60 credits are awarded per academic year, or 30 per semester. One credit assumes a workload (class time and private study) of 25 to 30 hours maximum, giving full-time students a total workload at lectures and outside class of 750 – 900 hours per semester. This equates to 32 – 39 hours per week for 46 weeks of the year. The higher education institutions must present the feasibility of the study course in a comprehensible manner, taking student workload into account in the accreditation procedure.

2. Explanations

The description of the modules should give students reliable information on procedural aspects of the study course, content, and qualitative and quantitative requirements, as well as on how it ties into the overall study course concept or relates to other modules offered. The description should, moreover, allow an appraisal of the module in terms of equivalence as a prerequisite for crediting it to other study courses or transfer on changing to another higher education institution. On the other hand, it must avoid rigid conditions which prevent a flexible structure of the courses taught. Notwithstanding the responsibilities of the higher education institution to structure the modules in detail, the recommended Standing Conference standards for the description of modules in points (a) to (i) below anticipate details of the following questions:

a) **Contents and target qualifications**

Which subject-specific, methodological, practical and cross-subject contents should be taught, what are the educational objectives? Which competences (subject-specific, methodological, cross-subject competences, key qualifications) should be acquired? The learning objectives and target qualifications are to be geared to an overall qualification to be defined (desired degree).

b) **Teaching formats**

The different teaching and learning formats employed within the module (e.g. lectures, tutorials, practical work assignments, project work, private study, etc.) are to be described. Different class types should, in principle, contribute to the attainment of a target qualification. However, the types of class chosen in specific cases is of less importance. While lectures tend to provide an overview, tutorials serve to apply what has been learned, seminars to consolidate knowledge, etc. Different classes involve different methodological approaches, which together are devoted to a thematic focus.

c) Admission requirements

The admission requirements are to be described for each module. What knowledge, competences and skills are required for successful participation? Information should also be given on how the student can prepare for the module (e.g. reading lists, tips on teaching and learning programmes supported by multimedia, etc.).

d) Usability

In describing the module attention is to be paid to the link between it and other modules within the same study course, and to what extent the module can be integrated into other study courses. This also applies to study courses providing further education, and to postgraduate study courses.

e) Conditions for the award of credits

Conditions for the award of credits (particularly: examinations, proof of attendance, etc.) should be described. These should specify, in particular, the type of examination (e.g. oral or written examination, presentation, paper, etc.) and the scope and length of the examination. Compensation options are to be regulated in the examination regulations.

f) Credits and grades

Credits and grades are to be detailed separately. As well as the grade based on the German grading scale (1 to 5), a relative grade is also to be given in the final grade. It is recommended that this be structured in accordance with the ECTS Users' Guide, as amended⁵.

The ECTS grade is a mandatory supplement to the German grade for academic degrees, and can also be displayed voluntarily for individual modules, where possible and where there is a corresponding need for this (e.g. on transferring to a foreign higher education institution).

⁵The 2009 ECTS Users' Guide currently applies.

g) Frequency at which modules are offered

The module description should specify whether the module is offered each semester, each academic year or only at longer intervals.

h) Workload

The total workload and number of credits to be acquired is to be specified for each module.

i) Duration

The duration of each module is to be specified. This determines procedural aspects of the study course and the examination burden in each semester, and impacts on the frequency of the study course offer. Not least, it impacts on student mobility.