

National strategy on the social dimension of higher education.

**Towards more inclusive access and wider
participation**

Austria

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Universities and higher education institutions shape our knowledge-based society. They provide important stimuli for social developments and their achievements set precedents in terms of creating economic value. This applies to research and development, arts development, and teaching.

The major challenges of our time call for innovations and new approaches. This requires the full range of services of HE institutions: research and innovation, the transfer of knowledge and technology as well as the impact of teaching in order to provide excellent skills and qualifications for all those who pursue academic education and advanced training. HE institutions also have a responsibility towards the society on whose behalf they teach and research.

This "National strategy on the social dimension of higher education – towards more inclusive access and wider participation" is the result of a year-long discussion process with HE institutions and other relevant institutions as well as special interest groups. The activity areas developed along with their specific measures are aimed at gradually increasing social inclusion. Aside from allocating the relevant public funds, this also requires the will and the effort to deploy existing resources in a targeted fashion and to exploit the diverse potential to the maximum extent possible.

The social dimension complements the aspiration to achieve excellence that characterises academic life. Heterogeneity and diversity contribute towards increasing the quality of teaching, thereby benefiting all students and teachers in the long run.

To this end, I would like to thank everyone involved in the strategy development process and I am convinced that they will show their full commitment in implementing the "National strategy on the social dimension of higher education".



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A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Reinhold Mitterlehner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Vice-Chancellor Dr. Reinhold Mitterlehner
Federal Minister of
Science, Research and Economy

1. Introduction



Participation in education and further training at all levels improves the potential for social, economic and political participation and integration in equal measure. In addition to ability and motivation, there are various other factors (e.g. regional and educational background, gender) that help or hinder access to education and training. These can be described as part of the “social dimension”. To respond effectively to social and economic trends, it is clearly necessary to provide opportunities and engage talents and ideas in education and training across all social groups, and thus to maximise the fulfilment of abilities, knowledge, skills and qualifications.

The “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education” presented here is the first full strategy document on this topic with respect to developments in the Austrian higher education sector. Broad objectives have been formulated for all responsible parties following an analysis of current participation by members of all social groups in higher education. These parties include federal ministries, higher education institutions, relevant interest groups and other intermediary bodies as well as civic organisations. Three target dimensions have been defined: “More inclusive access”, “Avoid dropout and increase academic success”, “Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy”. Each has three fields of activity (“action lines”) with a series of far-reaching measures, which have been formulated as a result of extensive consultation with all stakeholders and experts¹ raised general awareness, provided examples of measures and projects that are already functioning well, and explored options for action. More strategically-oriented cooperation between national and international levels, and the institutional level, was considered necessary in order to make access to higher education more socially inclusive, and participation wider and more diversity-sensitive. The large number of statements in response to the

¹ In nine events with about 800 participants in total (higher education leaders and those responsible for the social dimension at HE institutions and intermediary institutions, students, student representatives, experts, higher education researchers, etc.) between February and October 2016, and a consultation phase for the drafting of a strategy paper in November 2016.

consultation paper confirms the clear commitment of stakeholders to the strategy presented here.

The most important task is to develop and expand a socially inclusive culture in higher education, together with teaching and learning that recognises and values the diversity of the student body and the integration of underrepresented groups as a resource for higher education, and supports all kinds of talents and abilities. Development and implementation of measures and projects to achieve this is largely the autonomous responsibility of higher education institutions, which can build on existing good practice in this area.

The role of the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BWF) is primarily to support the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education through performance agreements with universities, the Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences, to “mainstream” the social dimension in (future) policies and to support this through appropriate financial provision for higher education institutions and student support schemes. At the same time, it is expected that there will be a willingness and effort to apply existing (public) funds in a (more) goal-oriented manner.

If the social dimension is successfully established as a core principle in higher education admissions and participation, the entire education chain as well as the equal validation of academic and vocational education and training and their mutual transferability (which are central issues for the whole social dimension) will then be included into the process step by step. Several interdepartmental issues are inherent in the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education, such as the involvement of the university colleges of teacher education and the new teacher training scheme (PädagogInnenbildung NEU), by providing course information and advice as a kind of intermediary function, and increased outreach to schools by tertiary institutions, vocational and adult education and training bodies, to facilitate more inclusive access to higher education.

The Institute for Advanced Studies (Vienna) advised and supported the strategy development process, and a survey was conducted by 3s on the current status of measures and projects related to the social dimension in higher education and intermediary institutions (see Chapter 4). The present strategy paper incorporates many ideas from participants in the discussion process, and examples of current practice in higher education and intermediary institutions that were listed in response to the consultation (in partly generalised form), without mentioning by name. The process documentation is contained in the appendix. It will also be published online together with supporting documents.

2. European and national context - Basic information

The social dimension has, for some time now, been considered one of the key target priorities of the EU and part of the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in general (Bologna Process). This topic was first raised in the 2001 Prague Communiqué on the Bologna Process and received increased attention in subsequent years. In the London Communiqué (2007), member states agreed on the shared goal that the student body should reflect the diversity of the broader population at all levels of higher education, from access, to participation and successful completion.² The 2012 Bucharest Communiqué declares the commitment of member states to implement appropriate measures on a national level. This commitment was addressed in the 2013 **European Council conclusions on the social dimension of higher education**.³ Member states further agreed at the Ministerial Conference at Yerevan in 2015 to develop national strategies for improving the social dimension of the higher education sector. With reference to the conclusions of the 2015 Bologna Implementation Report and previous Bologna Communiqués, the following goals have been agreed:

- Provision of a range of adequate learning options for diverse learners/learning styles (lifelong learning)
- Transferability between education sectors
- Gender balance

2 “We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity” (London 2007: 5).

3 “[The Council of the European Union] invites the Member States [...] to adopt national objectives which are aimed at increasing the access, participation and completion rates of under-represented and disadvantaged groups in higher education, with a view to progressing towards the Bologna Process goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of Member States’ populations [...]” (Council of the European Union 2013).

- Support for access and participation for disadvantaged groups (including international mobility)
- Elimination of barriers to the recognition of prior learning

The government's programme for 2013–2018 stipulated that measures were to be devised “to support the compatibility of work and study and to provide non-traditional access to the entire higher education sector”⁴. Outcome objectives for the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) include an increase in the proportion of students whose parents have no “Matura” school leaving certificate or other HE entrance qualification in order to align the composition of the student and graduate population with that of the whole population.⁵

The Ministry's **Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2016-2021** addresses this goal through “the promotion of a cultural change towards inclusion, gender equality and diversity in universities” (system goal 8⁶) and defines specific action plans for the commitment made by Vice-Chancellor and Minister Dr Reinhold Mitterlehner, at the 2015 European Forum Alpbach Higher Education Symposium, to develop a “National strategy on the social dimension of higher education – towards more inclusive access and wider participation”.⁷

The **Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences through to 2017/18**⁸ provides for the expansion of degree courses that can be combined with ongoing employment, in the context of specific legal regulations and increased transferability in the education system, including into vocational training. Other topics include the proportion of women in technical and engineering subjects and increasing the proportion of students with specific needs and those with a migrant background.

Strategy development on the social dimension in higher education is based on the findings of two **working groups of the Austrian Higher Education Conference** (“Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional access in the higher education sector”, 2015⁹; Concluding report of the working group on “Social Safeguarding of Students”, 2013¹⁰).

Recommendations in respect of non-traditional students were focused on two groups: those who have previous vocational training or are in employment, and those (potentially underrepresented) groups whose socio-economic background hinders their access to education – there is some overlap between these groups, as shown in the following outline, which includes examples of potential students in the target group.

4 Federal Chancellery (2013): Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013–2018, p. 45.

5 See Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) (2016): Budget estimate 2017. Subdivision 31. Science and research, p. 28.

6 Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) (2015): The Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2016–2021, p. 28-31.

7 Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) (2015): “Mitterlehner: ‘Zugang zum Studium verbreitern’“ <http://www.bmwfw.gv.at/Presse/Archiv/Archiv2015/Seiten/Mitterlehner-Zugang-zum-Studium-verbreitern.aspx>, 20 December 2016.

8 See Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW): Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences through to 2017/18, presented to the Federal Cabinet on 27 May 2015.

9 See Austrian Higher Education Conference (2015): Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional admissions to higher education. The working group was composed of representatives from the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW), the Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK), the Austrian Students' Union (ÖH), the Austrian Private Universities Conference (ÖPUK), Universities Austria (uniko), the Austrian Science Board, the Conference of Austrian University Senate Chairs, the Austrian Chamber of Labour and the Federal Economic Chamber.

10 See Austrian Higher Education Conference (2013): working group on “Social Safeguarding of Students”. The working group included representatives of several federal ministries (Finance, Justice, Families and Youth, Science, Research and Economy) as well as members of the Austrian Students' Union and the Austrian Study Grant Authority.

Target groups for the “Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional access”

Potential students	
With career context, e.g.	From under-represented groups of students with socioeconomic context, e.g.
Vocational matriculation examination (Berufsreifeprüfung)	Educationally disadvantaged applicants (e.g. migrant background)
Apprenticeship with “Matura” school leaving examination	Students with care responsibilities
Apprenticeship plus additional qualification	Students with a disability and/or chronic illness
Master’s certificate	

Groups that can be assigned equally to both categories
Qualifying exam for higher education (Studienberechtigungsprüfung)
Students who dropped out of their courses
Second (and further) education path
Part-time students
Employed students
Later entry into higher education studies
Later “Matura” school leaving examination
Complex educational biography (multiple, non-associated educational achievements without a university entrance qualification)

Source: Austrian Higher Education Conference (2015): Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional access to higher education

The measures formulated address access to study opportunities, the prevention of dropout and some broad proposals for flexible study programmes. Further recommendations include financial incentives for tertiary institutions to increase their expenditure on implementation of the suggested measures, e.g. through support for pilot projects, which should be assessed by outcome.

As early as 2013, a working group of the Austrian Higher Education Conference submitted proposals to improve the social safeguarding of students and to avoid hardship cases. In addition to overall improvements in the student support system, special consideration was given to specific groups (students with children, students from large families, students with a disability, chronic illness or specific impairment, mature students). Implementation of these recommendations followed in 2014 and 2016 respectively through amendments to the Student Support Act. The key elements of the recommendations from the working groups are contained in the appendix.

3. Underrepresented groups and groups with specific needs



As described in Chapter 2, the participant countries in the Bologna Process have long been committed to the identification of groups that are underrepresented in higher education and to adopting measures to reduce this underrepresentation. The results of the 2015 Social Survey of Students¹¹ are included in international comparisons carried out by the EUROSTUDENT project¹², and these, together with Austrian higher education statistics, allow these underrepresented student groups to be identified in some detail.¹³ Because the social dimension affects not only access to higher education, but also continued participation in education and the successful completion of studies, an outline follows of groups which are underrepresented in admissions to higher education, and whose progress through their studies, and completion, are at risk – not least due to social reasons. The process does, on the one hand, focus on specific groups, but it also takes into account some criticism of targeting purely by category, by examining the social dimension from a problem-centred perspective: important examples are the compatibility of degree programmes and ongoing employment, as well as the combined effect of multiple so-called diversity markers (intersectionality).

11 See Zaussinger, S., Unger, M. et al. (2016): Studierenden-Sozialerhebung (Social Survey of Students) 2015.

12 EUROSTUDENT VI, The report will be published in spring 2018: <http://www.eurostudent.eu/>, 20 December 2016.

13 Higher education statistics and regular completion of the Social Survey of Students have resulted in comprehensive data on the social dimension in the higher education sector in Austria. Data on the educational background of parents is gathered when students are admitted to higher education, but for data protection reasons not fully available as individual datasets to HE institutions (only applies to UStat 1; UStat 1 is a survey conducted by Statistics Austria at the beginning of tertiary courses on the basis of Section 9 paragraph 6 of the Education Documentation Act, Federal Law Gazette I no. 12/2002, last amended by Federal Law Gazette I no. 56/2016, implemented by a regulation of the Federal Minister of Education, Science and Culture regarding statistical surveys among students at universities and universities of applied sciences, Federal Law Gazette II no. 523/2003, last amended by Federal Law Gazette II No. 290/2009). Standardised sociodemographic data about applicants in the admissions process are scarce, as well as for “transitions” (school – higher education, higher education – job market).

Groups that are underrepresented concerning their access to higher education

40% of the student body comes from households where neither parent has a “Matura” school leaving qualification. According to the EUROSTUDENT comparison, Austria is one of the countries (alongside Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland) where the composition of the student body is relatively representative of the resident population. However, the likelihood of tertiary enrolment for students from educationally privileged homes is around 2.38 times higher than for those from educationally disadvantaged homes. The influence of parental education levels on the educational behaviour of young people is evident, as is an unintentional selectivity in the education system. Students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are also less underrepresented at universities of applied sciences than at other universities. However for the first time in many years, there is now a positive shift in universities too.¹⁴ Admission to higher education, the choice of higher education institution and the choice of subject are partly influenced by students’ social background.¹⁵

Gender statistics show that men are slightly underrepresented in higher education.¹⁶ The majority of students across all higher education sectors are female, with the exception of extra-occupational study programmes at universities of applied sciences (44%). In individual institutions, the gender ratio is particularly unbalanced, such as the University of Leoben, with around 80% men, or the University of Veterinary Medicine, with around 80% women. There are high proportions of female students in education, health and social science degree programmes, and smaller numbers in technical degree programmes. Whichever aspect of the higher education system is examined, there are instances of over- or underrepresentation of men and women. The gender-based discrepancy in rates of progression from BA to MA programmes should also be mentioned in this context.

Striking differences in access to higher education can also be observed by region. In Vienna and Burgenland, more than 50%, and in Lower Austria and Carinthia almost 50%, of any year-group cohort (within Austria) enrol in a degree programme at some point in their lives. On the other hand, in Vorarlberg only 36%, in Tyrol 41% and in Styria 42% do so. Gender-based analysis of the entry rates in higher education by federal state shows even more striking regional differences: in Vienna, Carinthia and Burgenland, the entry rate of women is at least 60%, while in Vorarlberg and Upper Austria barely 30% of men enrol in a degree programme at some point in their lives.

The proportion of higher education students with an Austrian entrance qualification (“educational residents”) who come from migrant backgrounds is significantly lower: the entry rate in higher education is 45% (2nd generation) or 60% (1st generation) of the number of those without migrant backgrounds, i.e. those from migrant backgrounds are underrepresented by a factor of about 2 in comparison to educational residents without a migrant background. However, the enrolment figures for students from second-generation migrant backgrounds have increased significantly in recent years.

It must be assumed that students with a disability, chronic illness or specific impairment (e.g.

14 A more detailed presentation is given in Chapter 5.5 Quantitative goals through to 2025 (p. 30). See also Zaussinger, Unger et al. (2016): *Social Survey of Students 2015*, Volume 1, especially Chapter 1.5.

15 See Hanft, Anke (et al) (2015): *Herausforderung Heterogenität beim Übergang in die Hochschule*, Münster; Lange-Vester, Andrea, Sander, Tobias (Eds.) (2016): *Soziale Ungleichheiten, Milieus und Habitus im Hochschulsystem; Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. EUROSTUDENT V 2012–2015* (2015), Synopsis of Indicators, Bielefeld, p. 51, 52.

16 Men, however, are over-represented in the vocational training system. They represent for example 65% of apprentices at vocational schools (Statistics Austria 2015a).

deafness) are underrepresented in higher education, although the available data do not allow this to be quantified. In the 2015 Social Survey of Students, 0.7% of students describe themselves as having a disability (self-assessed). Evidence for significant underrepresentation of this group in higher education comes from the fact that for approximately 3.4% of the population under 25 years old, increased family allowance is claimed on the grounds of disability, and around 2.6% of all school pupils have special educational needs.

Groups with specific needs

For students with children, especially young children with a greater need for care, time is a key factor, because childcare responsibilities limit the time available for study (most commonly for mothers), or because they spend more time in paid employment because of increased expenses (most commonly fathers). Students with children, especially single parents, are also amongst those with the highest proportion of financial difficulties.

Students with a disability, chronic illness or specific impairment (12% of the student body in total) often progress more slowly through their degree programme. The Student Support Scheme takes account of this by extending the period of eligibility. Financial problems may add to difficulties caused by a specific impairment. Mental health issues or chronic illness are often mentioned in conjunction with physical impairments, or frequently result from other impairments. In addition, students often report stress factors and mental health issues which can also lead to a prolonged study duration or to dropout.

Foreign students whose first language is not German frequently indicate that alongside partial difficulties with subject-specific terminology in German, they have an above-average occurrence of financial difficulties, social isolation and lack of contact with Austrian students. Those coming from non-EU countries sometimes report problems with residence permits/visas and lack or limitations of work permits.

26% of all educational residents delay entry to higher education (more than two years after leaving school or as “second chance” entrants), show an above-average proportion of non-traditional admission to higher education (especially the vocational matriculation certificate, master craftsman certificate or other vocational qualifications) and almost twice as many have parents with no “Matura” school leaving examination – which is why in the European comparison, the social composition of the Austrian higher education system overall appears as slightly more balanced. Because of the higher earnings after beginning their studies, students who delay commencing their higher education studies are frequently confronted with problems of compatibility of study and work on several levels. So it is noticeable that despite comparatively high motivation to study, many drop out during the first year. Another factor is also the long interruption in their (formal) learning – on average they are 28 years old when they enrol in a degree programme.

Combining study and paid employment, or the balance between resources of time and money, presents challenges for many students. Depending on the level of financial support available from the family and from student support schemes, students have to rely on their own earnings and have less time to spend on their studies. Longer duration of studies and consequent loss of support payments or benefits increase the financial need further. According to the Social Survey of Students, the time spent on studies falls markedly with 10 or more hours paid work. The time spent on studies has been declining for a number of years. 38% of all students work for more than 10 hours per week during the semester, and more than half of all 61% employed students find it dif-

difficult to combine their studies and paid work. Just under 40% of students are de facto part time students (<25 hours study time per week). Depending on the type of higher education institution and, to an extent, on the individual degree programmes, it can be easier or more difficult to combine studying with employment.

Around a quarter of the students surveyed mention financial difficulties. It is noticeable that among younger students, their social background has a particularly strong influence on their financial situation, as their families are less able to support them financially and the study grant available does not fully compensate for this. The older the students are, the less they are affected by their social background, because their own earnings are the primary source of income and financial support from parents has less significance. At the same time, the financial difficulties of students between the ages of 25 and 30 years are increasing overall.

4. What measures have already been implemented to address the social dimension in higher education?

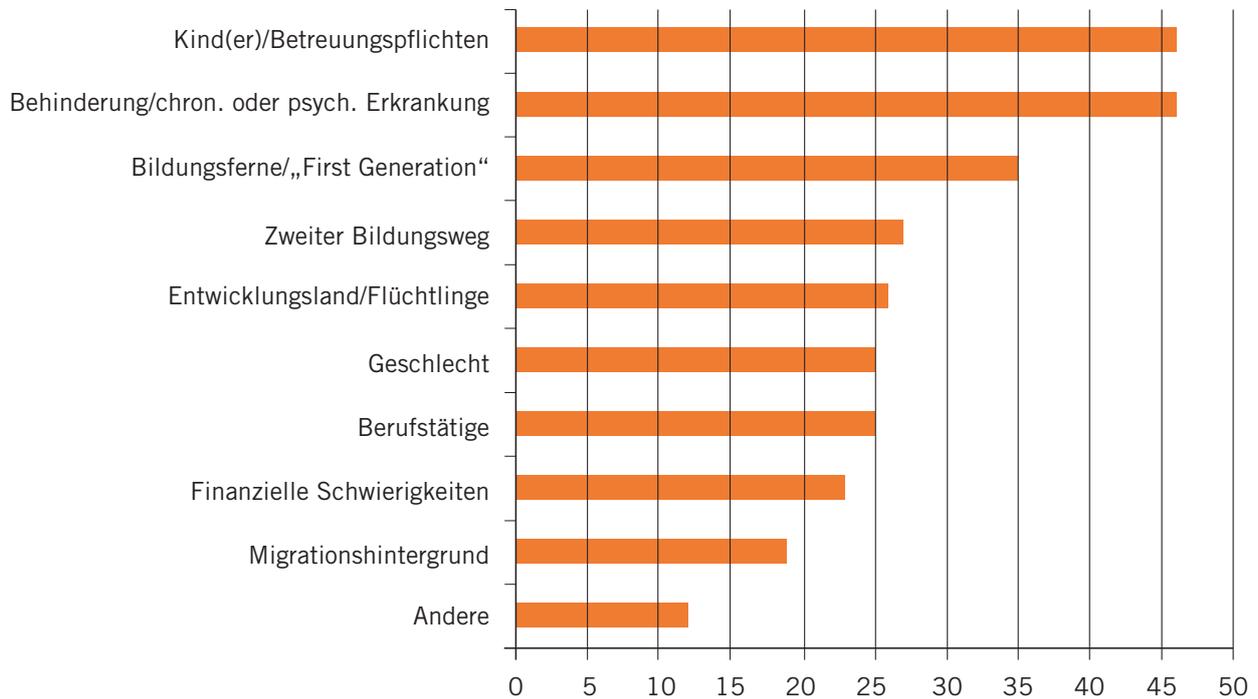
In the context of the strategy development process, existing measures relating to the social dimension in higher education were examined (3s study). On this basis, some examples of good practice can be identified, but there are also instances where a need for development can be observed.

An online survey from May to September 2016 gathered descriptions of 246 initiatives related to the social dimension from 56 institutions.¹⁷ These initiatives were analysed by target group, type of measure and their positioning in the “student life cycle” (understood as the organisational framework for improving the “studyability” and academic success). As many of the measures reported are very broad in scope, some measures were identified amongst them as relevant in a more precise sense of the word, which address underrepresented groups and students with specific needs in a targeted way.

Across all higher education sectors and intermediary institutions (Austrian Students' Union, ministries, Austrian Chamber of Labour, Federal Economic Chambers, employment service) a large number of activities are in place that relate to the social dimension. The majority of the measures mentioned involve the provision of information, counselling and support, while fewer are concerned with financial support (e.g. aid payments).

¹⁷ For the survey design, it was determined that institutions should represent about five of the most important measures. The survey included all higher education institutions (public and private universities, universities of applied sciences, and university colleges of teacher education), the Austrian Students' Union (ÖH), the BMWFW (including the Austrian Study Grant Authority and the Psychological Counselling Services), the Federal Ministry of Education (BMB), job centres (AMS), the Austrian Chamber of Labour, the Austrian Federal Economic Chambers and others. Responses were received from 43 higher education institutions and the above-mentioned intermediary institutions.

**Number of measures by target group, in the narrower sense of the social dimension
(Assignment to multiple categories possible)**



Source: 3s presentation based on online survey (n=246)

Information and counselling for specific target groups exist particularly in areas with legal requirements relating to equality, gender and diversity. There are consequently many related initiatives, particularly in universities, as a result of the performance agreements, that are strategically oriented (e.g. office for equality/diversity, office for students with disabilities, chronic illness or mental illness).

Comparatively few outreach measures¹⁸ are being implemented. General counselling provision includes national projects such as for example 18plus, the Austrian Students' Union advice scheme for school leavers ("Maruant_innenberatung") etc. These principally address students before and at the beginning of their courses. There was less mention of ongoing counselling provision during courses and in the final stages. In a workshop on "information and counselling" (September 2016) it was resolved that stronger links should be created between the existing information and counselling provision (e.g. towards an online information platform) and that these should be extended with information on all aspects of student support schemes (e.g. study completion grants), student financing and guidance. On the basis of the examples provided, it was clear that easily-accessible peer support, individual counselling and other provisions that strengthen the personal motivation of prospective students have particularly positive effects. At the same time, it was clear that the quality is strongly dependent on the commitment at each location, and that measures that are only applied at the transition point between school and higher education do not reach non-traditional students coming through the "second chance" route.

¹⁸ Outreach measures aim to make information or services accessible to people or groups of people who, for various reasons, have not yet been reached; such measures therefore include an active approach to the target groups by HE institutions and intermediary institutions.

The 3s study additionally found that the reported measures varied in intensiveness and/or are not yet being systematically evaluated, which means that only limited observations may be made regarding their effectiveness. The survey and discussions during the strategy development process do however make it clear that some promising measures (e.g. support for educationally disadvantaged young people or students with migrant backgrounds; student tracking and inclusion projects) are under way and collaborations with schools, whose leavers less frequently enrol in higher education, are being intensified. It was also recommended that small-scale projects should be expanded and brought together within a broader strategic framework.

5.

Target dimensions and quantitative goals through to 2025



5.1 Preamble

The overarching, long-term goal for the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education is already embedded in a number of resolutions from ministerial conferences related to the Bologna Process (most recently the Yerevan Conference in 2015) and from the European Council (Conclusions on the social dimension of higher education, 2013) (see Chapter 2): Students who enter, participate in and complete higher education study programmes should reflect the socio-demographic diversity of the population in member states at all levels.¹⁹ The Austrian government has addressed this goal for access to higher education by improving the proportion of non-traditional students and promoting the compatibility of studying with continued employment.²⁰ These goals are also being pursued through the outcome-oriented budgeting of the Ministry for Science, Research and Economy and the departmental planning documents (e.g. Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2016-2021, Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences to 2017/18).²¹

The overarching goal of socially balanced participation in higher education is an ambitious one and should therefore be viewed from a long-term perspective. In 2014/15, the likelihood that children of fathers with a “Matura” school leaving qualification will study at a public higher education institution was 2.38 times higher than for children of fathers without the “Matura” (likelihood of

¹⁹ “[...] establish national targets that are designed to increase access, participation and completion rates among under-represented and disadvantaged groups in higher education”, Council of the European Union (2013): Conclusions on the social dimension in higher education.

²⁰ Federal Chancellery (2013): Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government, 2013–2018, p. 45: “measures shall be taken regarding (...) greater compatibility of work and study, and greater non-traditional access to study in the whole higher educational sector.” See Chapter 2.

²¹ See Chapter 2.

tertiary study or so-called “recruitment quota”). In order to improve access to and participation in higher education for all underrepresented groups, increased scrutiny must be given to social inclusion across the entire education and training system. Increasing heterogeneity and diversity in people’s lives – with a focus on supporting all talents and abilities – present similar challenges for higher education institutions, particularly if these bodies can influence the choices students make and when they can guide those entering higher education to successful completion of their qualifications (or in some cases to another relevant qualification), resulting in excellent employment prospects. With regard to the impact of teaching as well as related achievements in research and arts development, there are justifiably high expectations of higher education institutions.

The analyses presented in Chapter 3 show that the target groups for the social dimension in higher education are many and varied, extremely heterogeneous and subject to overlap. Multiple diversity characteristics may also appear together (intersectionality) or be compounded during the “student life cycle”. The broad absence of measures explicitly targeted to specific groups can also be seen as evidence of the wish for further development of access to and participation in higher education in the sense of “mainstreaming” the social dimension.

The “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education” lays out three broad target dimensions

I. More inclusive access

II. Avoid dropout and improve academic success

III. Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy

with three action lines and practical measures for each. The objectives are oriented around the student life cycle, which is understood as an organisational framework for improving the “studyability” and academic success.

The action lines and measures under each target dimension make no claim to completeness or listing in order of urgency or priority. Just as it is not expedient to define separate target groups, it is also clear that a range of groups or students with varying needs, if not all students, (can) benefit from the available measures. Suggestions build therefore on numerous existing higher education projects as described in the 3s survey (see Chapter 4). The listing also includes a mention by name of the institutions principally responsible for implementation, development and intensification of such measures. General observations on further implementations follow in Chapter 6.

5.2 Target dimension I: More inclusive access

To achieve the ambitious goal that the student population should as far as possible reflect the sociodemographic profile of the whole population, higher education access for previously underrepresented groups of students must be more fully integrated and the influence of the social dimension on educational choices must be reduced. This applies particularly to groups such as students whose parents do not have a “Matura” school leaving examination, students from rural areas, students with a migrant background (especially second-generation children), and to women and men in specific subject areas. For these as well as for students with non-traditional entry to higher education, and for other groups with specific needs, further development and expansion of existing

information sources is needed, as well as the active advice and outreach activities of the responsible institutions (including schools, higher education institutions and ministries). Clarification is also required on which factors have the biggest influence on education and career choices, and the role played by information and guidance. Recognition and validation of previous qualifications and achievements must also be made easier. These activities are the result of the "Third Mission" of HE institutions and are thus an expression of their social engagement, i.e. in addition to their core tasks of teaching and research, and the advancement, appreciation and teaching of the arts, or integrated into these core tasks.

Action line 1: Improve quality and accessibility of information materials

Information for prospective students to use independently, i.e. printed or online materials, covers degree programmes on offer, access regulations, admissions requirements, acceptance methods, requirement profiles for degree programmes, course content, international mobility, qualification profiles and career opportunities, financing for studies, legal aspects (from degree programme regulations to residence permits), information for parents of students and questions regarding the compatibility of studies with a disability, chronic illness or specific impairment, with paid employment or with care responsibilities.

Although there is a wealth of information on all these issues from numerous stakeholders, both within and outside the higher education system, and the information available has increased significantly over recent years, its visibility and accessibility should be improved through better networking, with the aim of offering "a reliable/quality-assured location" for diversity-sensitive information. It is not only the social dimension factors that call for improved (linguistic) comprehensibility of the information, accessibility and greater use of group-specific communication channels. Simply gaining an overview of the highly diverse range of degree programmes and other academic further education options on offer is a challenge for prospective students and the teachers advising them, as well as for those working in educational and vocational guidance. Aspects of the social dimension are also rarely addressed directly, and there is little information available that is focused on any specific needs students may have.

Measures	Responsibility
Establish what study information and support measures are required particularly in reference to the social dimension, and analyse the effects of information on educational and career choices	BMWF, research on higher, secondary and primary education
Assess information and orientation materials across all levels of education in terms of comprehensibility, completeness and accessibility with respect to the social dimension	BMWF, higher education (HE) institutions, Austrian Students' Union, other information providers
Develop (online and accessible) information materials incorporating the social dimension, for prospective students and for those offering advice	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, information providers
Networking of information sources about higher education in Austria, to improve accessibility for all potential groups of students and their parents	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, information providers
Improve the presentation of study profiles, options for higher education and future career profiles	HE institutions
Expand the range of information – in conjunction with schools and other sources of advice (e.g. job centres) – for prospective students with delayed commencement of studies or migrant background, “first generation” students and students with a disability/chronic illness or impairment	BMWF, Federal Ministry of Education (BMB), employers and industry associations, advice centres
Provide clear information about the framework and planning feasibility for degree programmes (expected duration of the course, workload, possibility of combining study with employment, etc.), requirements for completing the course, expected (living) costs, funding possibilities, semester or year abroad, etc.	HE institutions, BMWF
Transparent, easily accessible information regarding admission requirements and possibilities for learning credits between school and higher education, work and higher education, and bachelor's and master's degrees.	HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, educational consultants

Action line 2: Outreach activities and diversity-sensitive course guidance

Apart from the information on offer to all prospective students, specific groups also need to be targeted in order to familiarise them with the options associated with higher education and to support them with their actual choice of study programme. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and the Federal Ministry of Education provide support to schools (in particular to pupils' counsellors and education advisers) as they explore educational and career choices in the final two years of high school, through the “18plus” project. These existing formats can also be used for more effective targeting of individuals from groups that have previously been underrepresented. Many HE institutions cooperate with schools, for instance, or offer trial lectures and other events. The cooperation between higher education institutions and schools with a similar subject focus (e.g. technical universities with higher technical and crafts colleges, UAS with study programmes for business administration with higher colleges for business administration, or university colleges of teacher education with nursery teacher training institutions and institutions for social pedagogy) could be expanded with respect to the social dimension by involving schools with different specialisations or civic stakeholder groups (NGOs that support migrants, disability groups, etc.). Improved and targeted involvement of (potential) multipliers (e.g. teaching staff) and role models is also important. For all these approaches it should be noted that nowadays not all students start their degree programme directly following the “Matura” school leaving certificate; a quarter of all new entrants in higher education either start their studies with a “delay” or have no “Matura” and these individuals can therefore no longer be reached through the school system.²²

²² Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWF) (2016): Materialien zur sozialen Lage der Studierenden, p.42.

Measures	Responsibility
Expand the existing provision of study guidance, particularly with regard to the social dimension	All entities providing educational counselling and course guidance
Expand the cooperation between higher education and schools, with particular attention to underrepresented groups and increased involvement of teachers, who may have a compensatory effect with respect to the social dimension when it comes to educational decisions	HE institutions, BMWFW, Federal Ministry of Education (BMB)
Cooperation with adult, vocational and further education institutions, in addition to job centres and social services entities	HE institutions
Identify and expand collaboration with civic stakeholder groups (e.g. clubs and associations) and training multipliers	HE institutions
Trial of new forms of communication, including those aimed at (younger) target groups	HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union
Provide information about academic career profiles in primary and new secondary schools, including all socio-economic segments of the population	BMWFW, BMB, employers and industry associations

Action line 3: Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal skills

Recognition and validation require a consistent focus on learning outcomes and confidence in the quality of other training providers; they are a crucial factor for non-traditional routes into higher education. Knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by people outside the formal education system, on courses and in the workplace should be given greater visibility through validation, be made compatible with the education system and able to be realised in the employment market.

In 2011 the Austrian government decided to develop an Austrian validation strategy for comprehensive recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as part of the LLL (Lifelong Learning) Strategy 2020²³. A cross-sectoral strategy is being developed through consultation with all essential stakeholders, based on the European Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/019). This strategy will consider all levels of education and training, and is also expected to give a crucial boost to the implementation of the "National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education". As numerous validation initiatives and approaches already exist in practice at the institutional and regional level, the aim here is to formulate an overall coordinated approach, focusing primarily on aspects of quality, in order to increase and support mutual confidence between the educational sectors. A helpful source will be the results of the project "Recognition and consideration of skills acquired through non-formal and informal routes. Recommendations for structuring recognition and consideration procedures"²⁴ by AQ Austria (Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria).

Measures	Responsibility
Final cross-sector agreement on a strategy for validating non-formal and informal learning under the framework of the "Strategy for life-long learning in Austria, LLL:2020"	BMB, BMWFW, HE institutions
Develop both standardised and individual-oriented, transparent and quality-assured processes for recognition of prior learning	BMWFW, HE institutions
Further development of the qualifying exam for higher education (Studienberechtigungsprüfung), shared across all educational institutions and involving all stakeholders, with consideration of validation of non-formal and informal achievements	BMWFW, BMB, stakeholders

23 Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria, LLL:2020; http://www.esf.at/esf/wp-content/uploads/LLL-Strategiepapier_20111.pdf

24 AQ (Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation) Austria (2016): Anerkennung und Anrechnung non-formal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen. Empfehlungen zur Gestaltung von Anerkennungs- und Anrechnungsverfahren.

5.3 Target dimension II: Avoid dropout and improve academic success

Preventing students from dropping out of their study programmes (for reasons related to their social background) and improving the chances of academic success for all groups of students is just as important as ensuring more inclusive access. So the social composition of graduates from each course should be very similar to that of the students who start the programmes. The more heterogeneous the student population becomes, the more diverse the specific needs with which students are confronted during their course and in their study environment. As the survey of existing activities revealed (see Chapter 4), comparatively few measures are actually implemented to prevent dropout and to increase study progress; more attention could be paid to developing and trialling additional forms of intervention (incentives, learning analytics, etc.) in order to help all those who start their degrees and meet the performance requirements to actually graduate wherever possible.

Women complete their courses more frequently than men. In universities, students who are more than 20 years old when they begin their course (approx. 30%) are less likely to complete it; at universities of applied sciences, those more than 25 years old when they begin (approx. 25%) are less likely to graduate. Academic success depends heavily on the type of admissions qualification for higher education and on educational background of the student. There are also clear differences according to subject area (influence of the study situation and “subject culture”) and the extent of students' employment, which is influenced by socio-demographic profile and characteristics of the study programme. Not only academic success but also dropout rates from higher education courses²⁵ are linked with multidimensional factors, which is why support measures should be varied and to some extent specific to certain groups, and sometimes even focus on the individual student.

Action line 4: Ease entry into higher education

Academic integration at the HE institution is crucial in terms of the social dimension. Students begin their studies with different levels of background knowledge, depending on types of schools and the individual schools attended (at home and abroad). Many new students have left the formal education system a long time previously, but have professional knowledge instead. Bridging and preparatory courses help to balance out these differences and strengthen wide-ranging types of potential, as does expanded provision of tutorials and other support for new students. This kind of support format should have a low threshold and – at least implicitly – address groups which so far have lower probabilities of success. Courses such as introductions to academic work/writing or “learn to learn” are particularly suitable if they are structured in such a way that they are popular with a range of different groups. Knowing how to communicate with university lecturers does not necessarily come easily to everyone. An open and supportive climate could provide motivation in very popular courses, promote a sense of belonging and encourage study and exam activities right from the start.

The 2015 evaluation²⁶ of the Introduction and Orientation Phase (StEOP) revealed the importance of a curricular induction phase, not only to provide an overview of the subject area, depending on the faculty culture, but also to facilitate a review of course selection (including initial

25 See also the literature review and case studies in European Commission (Ed.) (2015): Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe.

26 Unger, M. et al. (2015), Evaluierung der Studieneingangs- und Orientierungsphase (StEOP).

study expectations) and suitability, through early assessments and getting students "involved in the course". The evaluation also showed that curricular structures barely reflect the heterogeneity of new entrants.

Measures	Responsibility
Needs-oriented and socially acceptable provision of preparatory and bridging courses	HE institutions, BMWF
Further development of tutoring for beginners, "buddy" systems, mentoring	HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union
Optimise the study introduction and orientation phase (StEOP) of degree programmes, and assess whether this could in specific courses be further developed into a "general studies" module (final choice of study programme to be made after completion of general initial modules in several departments, with full recognition of credits for the study programme finally pursued)	HE institutions, BMWF, Austrian Students' Union
Offer low-threshold assistance ("Learning how to learn", introduction to academic work)	HE institutions
Develop a socially inclusive culture in higher education institutions (e.g. welcome events, anti-discrimination training for higher education staff and students)	HE institutions
Reflection on established habits with regard to academic integration	HE institutions, Research on higher, secondary and primary education

Action line 5: Structure of study programmes and quality of teaching

The heterogeneity and diversity of the student body is in itself a valuable resource, although it also represents a major challenge for lecturers and for the structure of study programmes. These relate in particular to the principles of higher education teaching, the need for further development of teaching and learning methods (including student-centred learning) and the "studyability" of curricula for all students, through to individually structured semester timetables. As for curricular design and study organisation: in most cases there is a need to take greater account of the fact that two-thirds of students are engaged in paid employment during the semester or are faced with other particular needs (care responsibilities, disabilities/chronic illness/specific impairment). Further expansion of online teaching materials – with appropriate pedagogical components – for specific subject areas and target groups reduces the need for physical attendance, without limiting the educational quality, and increases flexibility. Students who are also in ongoing employment and non-traditional students have professional qualifications and experiences that higher education institutions can benefit from. Exam dates that can be planned over the longer term, and spreading examinations out over time, improve scheduling availability.

Modularisation of study programmes can play an important role with respect to the social dimension in higher education, as manageable course sections are more easily compatible with other demands of adult life, and bring benefits in terms of skills acquisition.

Consideration of course structure also includes possibilities for mobility and completing part of the programme abroad. Participation in mobility programmes depends on course-specific and individual features. The most frequent obstructions to mobility are financing the stay abroad and a lack of information on funding options. As a result an action line was incorporated into the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy's 2016 "Higher Education Mobility Strategy", aimed at improving international mobility for underrepresented groups. This is being implemented through appropriate measures within the scope of this Strategy.²⁷

²⁷ Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWF) (2016): Hochschulmobilitätsstrategie, Aktionslinie 4, p. 19.

Measures	Responsibility
Integrate consideration of diversity into higher education teaching and the quality assessment of teaching	HE institutions
Further develop teaching and learning methods (e.g. to include student-centred learning)	HE institutions
Assess curricula and semester schedules (exam weeks) in terms of feasibility	HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union
Further digitalisation of teaching, increased use of accessible e-learning and blended learning tools (including training on licensing issues for authors of texts and open education resources) and assessment of the effects with regard to the social dimension	HE institutions, Research on higher, secondary and primary education
Assess increased modularisation of degree programmes and the possibility of variable study speeds (for separate learner groups) and, if appropriate, establish the necessary legal framework.	HE institutions, BMWF
Improved transfer of study credits already completed in the case of a change of study programme	HE institutions
Create an inclusive teaching and learning environment	HE institutions
Develop and trial of additional forms of intervention to prevent students dropping out and to improve study progress, e.g. early warning system, incentives, "nudging", learning analytics, tracking, including the monitoring of graduates' career paths	HE institutions, BMWF
Qualification and training opportunities for higher education teachers on appreciating and working with diversity	HE institutions
Develop and test ways to promote mobility that focus on the social dimension and guarantee recognition of credits accumulated abroad	HE institutions
Further expansion of "internationalisation at home", e.g. incorporating language learning and intercultural competence into curricula	HE institutions

Action line 6: Increase compatibility of studies with other areas of life

For students with specific requirements, higher education study is set against a background of widely varying life circumstances which impose additional demands on the students and on study organisation. The 2015 Social Survey of Students showed that a combination of individual and structural features determines access to higher education courses and successful graduation from these. "Accurate choice of study programme" and "compatibility" are two key topics. Two-thirds of students are involved (to a widely varying extent) in paid employment (36% of students coming directly from school and 57% of new students who have delayed the start of their studies); 21% see themselves principally as employees, who are also studying. 12% have a health problem, 0.7% a disability, 9% have children, 5% have children of pre-school age (3 - 6 years). There are also students who care for relatives or do voluntary work. If the compatibility of studies with other areas of life is improved, graduation rates can be increased for students with specific requirements; this will also improve what by international standards are the particularly long durations of studies and the low completion rates and graduation rates.²⁸ Socially inclusive framework conditions for students include offering courses that are as flexible as possible, wherever this is feasible and acceptable in terms of the relevant discipline. Taking account of the basic principles, the image of course structures on offer could be improved to extend beyond purely full-time studies, with further development of the associated quality assurance.

²⁸ Austria's completion rate in bachelor's studies (true cohort method) according to curricular duration of studies is, according to OECD 2016, 18 percentage points behind the OECD average. Our completion rate for "3 years after expiration of curricular duration of studies" (N+3) is 11 percentage points behind the OECD average; the proportion still studying is highest in Austria. OECD (2016): Education at a Glance, Tab. A9.1. OECD, 2016.

Measures	Responsibility
Expand availability of courses that facilitate career development, can be completed whilst working, or are integrated with the student's professional work	BMWF, HE institutions
More flexibility in requirements for physical attendance through, for example, the provision of (accessible) online learning	HE institutions
Review of "prerequisite chains" in curricula with regard to social bias	HE institutions
Review of course workloads (e.g. studying while working, technical studies)	HE institutions
Expand flexible childcare at higher education institutions, including cooperation – where relevant – with other institutions in the same location	HE institutions, BMWF
More flexible opening hours for classrooms, libraries, etc.	HE institutions
Expand support mechanisms, quiet spaces and retreats for students with a disability/chronic illness/specific impairment; baby nursing rooms, etc.	HE institutions
Encourage employers to support employees who are studying, through flexible working practices	Employers and industry associations, Austrian Students' Union, HE institutions
Review the feasibility of "sandwich course" programmes (=Duales Studium) where academic learning is integrated with employment in a training company	BMWF, HE institutions

5.4 Target dimension III: Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy

If the social mix of students and graduates is to be significantly improved, the numerous existing measures in higher education institutions need to be developed and targeted for maximum effect. It should be possible to establish a socially inclusive culture in higher education institutions with the social dimension incorporated as a mainstream topic in all areas of governance, strategy considerations and quality assurance. Alongside the management and executive bodies, the teaching staff also play a key role in implementing social inclusion in their seminars and lectures. This requires supporting framework conditions (embedding in the curriculum, continuing education courses, relevance to career, etc.) and leaders of higher education institutions and faculties who recognise the social dimension as an element in further strategic profiling for their institution. Clear objectives in higher education policy, corresponding structural processes between the Ministry and higher education institutions, and adequate resources will amplify the impact.

Action line 7: System-related issues in higher education

Higher education institutions have limits (under existing conditions) in trying to provide solutions for all heterogeneity and diversity requirements for all courses. Austrian legal study programme provisions (including a broad lack of appropriate access regulations, options to change degree programmes deliberately or combine subjects) do not for instance support continuing commitment to studies at public universities. A decision on whether study programme options for different groups of learners should be available at all higher education institutions in equal measure or otherwise, requires the development of profiles and coordination between higher education sectors and individual institutions, not least on resource grounds. The social dimension does not per se have an impact on teacher/student ratios, but above all requires diversified formats in programme structures. Both horizontal and vertical transferability must be considered in this context and standards must be established for transfers and changes (of study programmes), along with increased transparency and accessible information on course transitions.

Two-year short-cycle studies (ISCED 5) which count in full towards a bachelor's degree are offered as additional higher education courses in several European nations which are regarded as innovation leaders (e.g. Sweden, Netherlands)²⁹. Systems like these increase access to higher education institutions in terms of the social dimension and generally result in better completion and graduation rates.³⁰

Measures	Responsibility
Establish the social dimension at the centre of educational policy measures and ensure rigorous review of educational institution governance in terms of support for inclusion and its effects on the social dimension	BMWF
Further develop legal provisions with regard to “studyability” and monitoring	BMWF
Review higher education funding and its effect on the social dimension and integrate social dimension criteria into funding (e.g. incentives, budget allocation) and performance agreements for higher education institutions, and into the next Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences	BMWF
Monitor admissions requirements and procedures, as well as aptitude tests in terms of their effects on the social dimension with respect to meeting social targets in university admissions	BMWF, HE institutions
(Guidelines for) fair and transparent recognition of prior learning achievements and competencies acquired outside the education system, across all courses of study and higher education institutions (transferability)	BMWF, HE institutions
Examine the feasibility of internationally typical “short cycle” courses in higher education, which can be credited towards a bachelor’s degree (ISCED 6), including advance consideration of transferability issues which may arise again, for example with regard to courses at (tertiary) educational institutions (ISCED 5).	BMWF
Networking and support for higher education research at both national and institutional levels (impact analysis, evaluation, graduate surveys, etc.), continual improvement of data structures (e.g. transgender), questions of data protection	BMWF, Research on higher education

Action line 8: Integrate the social dimension into strategic planning for higher education and create appropriate governance structures

As an interdisciplinary issue the social dimension affects all areas of higher education and, as a dimension of diversity which is relevant to social policy, represents a promising resource for developing the knowledge-based society. Integration of this topic into organisational and staff development and into continuing education is encouraged in order to recognise and appreciate this added value. Efforts should be made to integrate the numerous existing initiatives into a strategic framework, with reference to current thematically-based measures (e.g. diversity management), in order to increase their effectiveness. Every higher education institution will find its own ways to integrate the social dimension in teaching, quality assurance, student counselling, etc., and to allocate responsibility within its structure and organisation for the corresponding measures and course options.

Monitoring (taking into account compliance with data protection regulations and any potential transfer of personal data), evaluation, impact analyses and more institutional research overall, with clear consideration of the social dimension, increase understanding of the status quo and allow evidence-based development of measures. The overall strategy development process has shown how beneficial it is for the many relevant stakeholders to exchange experiences. Exchanging ideas and reciprocal learning should therefore be facilitated on a regular basis, including learning from mistakes or measures that did not achieve the desired result.

29 European Commission (2016): European Scoreboard of Innovation (ESI), p. 6.

30 OECD (2016): Education at a Glance: Hochschulabschlussquote Tab. A3.1 (graduation rate), Erfolgsquote Tab. A9.1 (completion rate), Education at a Glance, OECD 2016).

Measures	Responsibility
Implement an institutional strategy on the social dimension and integrate this into institutional profiles on the basis of the “National strategy on the social dimension of higher education”	HE institutions
Consider social dimension categories in diversity management, quality assurance, evaluations and reviews of effectiveness	HE institutions
Consistent implementation of equality measures	HE institutions
Establish contact points for diversity-sensitive and individualised information, counselling and support for students in all higher education institutions	HE institutions
Educate members of higher education institutions about the social dimension and establish measures to improve understanding and appreciation of diversity	HE institutions
Provide support for research/advancement, appreciation of the arts and teaching about the social dimension in higher education	HE institutions
Initiate and maintain peer learning activities	BMWF, HE institutions

Action line 9: Further develop the Student Support Scheme

The Austrian Student Support Scheme has existed for more than 40 years, during which time it has been continuously expanded and developed. The Support Scheme was evaluated by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in 2013 and was judged to be sound in social terms both by international standards and in accordance with the Student Support Act.³¹ At the same time a series of possible improvements was also outlined which were adopted, adapted and incorporated into specific recommendations by the "Social Safeguarding of Students" working group of the Austrian Higher Education Conference³². Some of the recommendations have already been implemented in the latest amendments to the Student Support Act (Federal Law Gazette I No. 40/2014 and Federal Law Gazette I No. 54/2016) The improvements related on the one hand to students' family circumstances (2014) and on the other to older students (over 27 years of age, 2016).

The next step involves increasing the funds for the Student Support Scheme and raising the income limits and grant amounts, with due regard to developments in terms of monetary values and purchasing power; the situation for students in paid employment should also be improved.

There is also potential for further development in the context of family allowance; responsibility for this lies with other departments.

Measures	Responsibility
Increase funding for the Student Support Scheme	BMWF, Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF)
Introduce an amendment to the Austrian law on student support (Student Support Act) to implement additional recommendations made by the working group of the Austrian Higher Education Conference, including an increase in the income limit, increase in grant levels	BMWF
Further development of the “maintenance grant” (for (previously) employed, i.e. self-supporting students) as a separate funding instrument (amounts, prerequisites, etc.)	BMWF
Review the feasibility of additional funding grants (e.g. grants for those returning to education)	BMWF
Review funding requirements with respect to mobility in the Student Support Schemes	BMWF
Review the appropriateness of evidence of academic achievement required for students with a disability/chronic illness/specific impairment	BMWF

31 Unger, M. et al. (2013): Evaluation of the Student Support Scheme. Final report.

32 Austrian Higher Education Conference: Working group on “Social Safeguarding of Students”. Final report, 2013.

5.5 Quantitative goals through to 2025

In order to be able to document progress towards achieving the overall objectives of the "National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education", certain quantitative goals have been defined – largely in relation to educational residents³³ – which are particularly concerned with access for underrepresented groups in the higher education system. Essential data for analysis of the social dimension, such as the educational background of the students' parents, is (not least because of its personal sensitivity) only available either from Statistics Austria (in particular UStat 1) or via surveys (e.g. the Social Survey of Students), and cannot therefore be integrated into the processes for monitoring course admissions and progress (student tracking) at the individual level in each higher education institution. This issue along with any potential analysis of additional diversity characteristics must be resolved as part of the efforts to implement the strategy, so that evidence can subsequently be provided that all students who begin a course of study also graduate wherever possible.

1. Reducing the underrepresentation of students whose parents³⁴ have no “Matura” school leaving certificate. The recruitment quota correlates the composition of the domestic student body beginning degree programmes, in terms of the father's formal educational background, with the corresponding groups within the domestic population. According to this the probability that students from an "educated" family home will enter higher education is 2.38 times higher than for students from an "educationally disadvantaged" family home. The aim is to reduce the probability factor for entering higher education to 2.25³⁵ by 2020 and to 2.1 by 2025. In the case of students from an "educated" family home, the probability that these will study at a public university is significantly higher than for universities of applied sciences, which is why the difference in the recruitment quotas between public universities and universities of applied sciences ought to be reduced, while at the same time reducing the underrepresentation.³⁶

Recruitment quota/probability factor for admission to higher education

	2013	2014	2015	Target for 2020	Target for 2025
Public Universities	2.95	2.80	2.68		
Universities of applied sciences	1.89	1.86	1.81		
Public universities and universities of applied sciences	2.60	2.48	2.38	2.25	2.10

The probability factor of 2.38 (2014/15 academic year) means that students whose fathers have a “Matura” school leaving certificate ("educated family home") are 2.38 times more likely to enter higher education than students from an "educationally disadvantaged family home". In absolute figures this equates to 44.1 new students per 1,000 "educated" men in the parental generation and 18.5 new students per 1,000 "educationally disadvantaged" men in the parental generation.

Source: Statistics Austria (Microcensus), Ustat 1, calculation by the Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna

33 Educational residents are defined as individuals who have completed their schooling in Austria or acquired their qualification for higher education in Austria. Because Austria has no influence over the social composition of students coming from abroad to study in Austria, the definition of this group is pertinent.

34 Measured by the formal educational attainment of the father. Statements about the development of recruitment rates/probability factors are sounder when based on the father's education. With regard to the mother's education, the developments in the parents' generation were very dynamic, which is why the indicator would be influenced more strongly by changes in education in the parents' generation.

35 See Budget estimate 2017, Subdivision 31, Science and research, Objective 1 / Figure 31.1.5; see also the Social Survey of Students 2015. No up-to-date data is available at this time.

36 As soon as UStat 1 is implemented at university colleges of teacher education and private universities, it will be possible to adapt the definition and level of the target value.

2. Increase the number of non-traditional admissions to higher education. At public universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education, around 9% of educational residents were admitted for the 2014/15 academic year with a qualification for higher education (Studienberechtigungsprüfung), a vocational matriculation examination (Berufsmaturaprüfung), an external “Matura” or without a school leaving qualification. This amounted to just under 4,000 people. By 2025 this group is set to grow by a third, to 5,300 student admissions. This also corresponds in part with one of the objectives of the outcome orientation of the Ministry of Education.³⁷

Non-traditional admissions to higher education (educational residents)

Academic years		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2025/26
Universities	Number	1,581	1,675	1,624	1,797	
	Percentage	5.8%	6.2%	6.3%	6.7%	
Universities of applied sciences	Number	1,381	1,534	1,664	1,620	
	Percentage	14.2%	14.8%	15.2%	14.3% ¹	
University colleges of teacher education	Number	630	699	590	561	
	Percentage	12.2%	13.8%	12.3%	12.7%	
Total	Number	3,592	3,908	3,878	3,978	5,300
	Percentage	8.6%	9.2%	9.3%	9.3%	

1 In the 2014/15 academic year the proportion of non-traditional admissions in full-time courses at universities of applied sciences was 11.2%, and 20.8% of those studying part-time while employed.

Non-traditional admissions include students with a qualifying exam for higher education (Studienberechtigungsprüfung), vocational matriculation examination (Berufsmaturaprüfung), an external “Matura” or without a school leaving qualification.

Source: Higher education statistics (Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, Statistics Austria), calculation by the Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna

3. More equal gender balance in all fields of education. By 2025 each field of education (based on ISCED 3-digit classifications; ISCED 97³⁸) at each HE institution should have a minimum of 10% women or men in each student cohort. This affects six bachelor’s degree programmes and seven master’s programmes at public universities, and 16 each of bachelor’s and master’s degrees at universities of applied sciences. The goal in the medium term is to increase the proportion to a minimum of 30% male or female students for each field of higher education.³⁹ The number of subjects which have not yet achieved this quota must therefore be halved by 2025 (currently 58 BA and 68 MA degrees at public universities).

4. Increase the entry rate of (educational resident) students with a migrant background to higher education. The entry rate of (educational resident) 2nd generation migrant students to higher education (i.e. student born in Austria, parents born abroad) was 18% in 2011/12, 22% in 2014/15, and should increase to 30% by 2025 (values based on estimates from the Social Survey of Stu-

37 Increase share of new entrants at HE institutions (universities, universities of applied science, university colleges of teacher education) with the vocational matriculation examination (Berufsmaturaprüfung)”. See Budget estimate 2017, Subdivision 30, Education, Objective 1 / Figure 30.1.5.

38 Excepting doctoral students, since this would require a longer period of time.

39 Gender ratios among beginning students fluctuate too much each year in smaller degree programmes, which means they are not suitable as target values. In the long term the aim is to achieve balanced gender ratios among graduates, so a focus on students in a transition phase seems to be a relevant performance indicator.

dents).⁴⁰ As a result of planned inclusion of the characteristic "migrant background" in the Ustat 1 survey by Statistics Austria, it will in future be possible to present this target value on the basis of a full survey.

5. Reduce regional differences in access to higher education. Higher education entry rates, as an estimate of how many people begin a degree level course "at some point in their life", vary significantly across Austria by state of origin and gender; the percentage currently fluctuates between 36% of any year-group cohort in Vorarlberg and 63% in Vienna.⁴¹ In terms of the entire educational and vocational training system the higher education entry rate should be at least 42% in all federal states by 2025, or efforts should be under way to increase this to reach the Austrian average.

Higher education entry rate (domestic students) by federal state of origin and gender, 2014/15 academic year

	Percentage of domestic new entrants in domestic population (all age cohorts), academic year 2014/15			Target for 2025
	Women	Men	Total	Total
Burgenland	61%	42%	51%	
Lower Austria	56%	40%	48%	
Vienna	68%	57%	63%	
Carinthia	60%	38%	49%	
Styria	49%	35%	42%	
Upper Austria	51%	33%	42%	
Salzburg	52%	40%	46%	
Tyrol	46%	35%	41%	42%
Vorarlberg	40%	32%	36%	42%
Total	55%	40%	47%	

Domestic admissions to bachelor's degrees and diploma courses (not including incoming mobility students) in the 2014/15 academic year.

University colleges of teacher education, not including the summer semester 2015.

Source: Higher education statistics (Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, Statistics Austria), population statistics (Statistics Austria), calculation by the Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna

6. Increase participation in mobility programmes by students from "educationally disadvantaged" social groups. Of those students (summer semester 2015) whose parents have no "Matura" school leaving certificate, 14% have completed a semester or practical work experience abroad, while for students whose parents have a "Matura" the proportion is 21%. Participation in study programmes abroad by students whose parents have no higher education entrance qualifications should therefore be increased to at least 18% by 2025.⁴²

40 Zaussinger, Unger et al. (2016): Studierenden-Sozialerhebung (Social Survey of Students) 2015, Volume 1, p. 42.

41 See Zaussinger, Unger et al. (2016): Studierenden-Sozialerhebung (Social Survey of Students) 2015, Volume 1, p. 82.

42 Source: Social Survey of Students 2015; see Zaussinger, Unger et al. (2016): supplementary report, "Internationale Mobilität der Studierenden", p. 20. As an alternative to this indicator, we are trialling using data from the combination of UStat 2 (survey of study-related stays abroad upon completion of studies) with UStat 1 (the feasibility and validity of data must be reviewed).

7. Increase extra-occupational/vocational training study places at universities of applied sciences to 50% by 2020 (based on the "Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria", LLL:2020).⁴³

8. Increase the number of maintenance grants available through the Student Support Scheme.⁴⁴ 12,973 "self-supporting" students received a maintenance grant in 2015/16. By 2025 this number should rise to around 15,000.

Approved maintenance grants for self-supporting students for each academic year

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2025/26
Public and private universities	7,688	7,829	7,904	7,898	7,957	8,237	
Universities of applied sciences	3,627	3,925	4,118	4,220	4,483	4,736	
Total for universities + universities of applied sciences	11,315	11,754	12,022	12,118	12,440	12,973	15,000

Source: Austrian Study Grant Authority, cited by Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (2016), Materialien zur sozialen Lage der Studierenden (Evidence on students' social situation), p. 16

9. Increase the percentage of student admissions to medicine and dentistry from non-academic family homes. 40.7% of student admissions to medicine and dentistry courses came from a non-academic family home in the 2014/15 academic year. This proportion should be developed towards 50% by 2025.

Medicine and dentistry, domestic student admissions, by the father's highest level of educational qualification

Educational attainment of students' fathers in %	Academic year 2008/09	Academic year 2009/10	Academic year 2010/11	Academic year 2011/12	Academic year 2012/13	Academic year 2013/14	Academic year 2014/15	Winter Semester 2015
Compulsory schooling	3.0	5.4	5.6	3.3	4.2	2.8	4.0	4.2
Intermediate schooling	24.1	28.0	23.7	25.8	23.7	22.9	23.3	23.0
Higher schooling ("Matura" school leaving examination)	17.2	14.2	18.2	18.0	16.6	16.5	13.4	15.2
University / higher education	55.7	52.4	52.5	52.9	55.5	57.8	59.3	57.7

Source: Statistics Austria, Ustat 1, calculated by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy

⁴³ Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Austria, LLL:2020, p. 31.

⁴⁴ The "Maintenance Grant" for self-supporting students is a special form of study grant that is granted regardless of parental income (after at least four years with own income). The funding is particularly intended for students with delayed entry to higher education, or with non-traditional admission to higher education. The 2013 evaluation of the Student Support Scheme by Unger et al. shows that this funding contributes to better social mixing among students and, at the same time, improved compatibility of study and work in those groups that are typically employed during their higher education studies.

Overview: Quantitative goals and areas of responsibility

	Quantitative goals through to 2025	Responsibility
1a	Reduce the recruitment quota/probability factor for admission to higher education to 2.25 (2020), and 2.10 (2025)	BMWF, HE institutions
1b	Decrease the discrepancy in the probability factors between public universities and universities of applied sciences	BMWF, HE institutions
1c	Include private universities and university colleges of teacher education in the calculation of probability factors, adapt target values	BMWF
2	Increase the number of non-traditional admissions (educational residents) to higher education to 5,300	BMWF, HE institutions, employers and industry associations, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
3a	Minimum percentage of 10% men or women in any field of education at any higher education institution (excluding doctoral study)	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
3b	Halve the number of fields of studies at each higher education institution where men or women comprise less than 30%	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
4	Increase the entry rates to higher education of 2nd generation migrant students to 30%	BMWF, HE institutions, employers and industry associations, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
5	Increase the entry rates to higher education in all federal states to at least 42% by 2025 and towards the Austrian average with reference to the entire education and vocational education system	BMWF, regional governments, HE institutions, employers and industry associations, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
6	Increase participation in study programmes abroad by students whose parents have no university entrance qualifications, to at least 18%	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union
7	Increase the number of extra-occupational study places at universities of applied sciences to 50%	BMWF, universities of applied sciences
8	Increase the number of self-supporting students receiving maintenance grants to 15,000	BMWF, HE institutions, Austrian Students' Union, education advisers
9	Sustained increase in the percentage of student admissions from homes where neither parent has a university degree on medical and dental courses towards an eventual target of 50%	BMWF, HE institutions



6. Implementation and next concrete steps for the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMBWF)

All stakeholders are called upon to implement the "National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education". Responsibility for development and implementation of specific measures and activities varies for each action line. For action lines 7 (System-related issues in higher education systems) and 9 (Further develop student support schemes), implementation is primarily being managed and coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy. For action lines 8 (Integrate the social dimension into strategic planning for higher education and create appropriate governance structures) or 4 (Facilitate entry into higher education) and 5 (Course structures and quality of teaching), the higher education institutions bear the primary responsibility for planning and implementing measures and projects. This is where existing measures will be expanded and optimised and where quality-assured new projects will be implemented in order to establish a socially inclusive culture in higher education. Developing institutional strategies for the social dimension and integrating these into the specific development plans/overall strategies of each higher education institution encourages sound, innovative and sustainable solutions for approaches to social inclusion.

It should be noted in this context that the different types of higher education institutions (academic universities, universities of the arts, universities of applied sciences, university colleges of teacher education and private universities) not only have different guiding principles by law and to some extent different missions in terms of teaching, research and arts development, as well as in the "Third Mission", but the statutory framework and therefore their room for manoeuvre also differ from one to another. In terms of the social dimension, universities are required above all to do justice to the heterogeneity of the students (and prospective students) through greater diversification in teaching and course structures, and being open to other types of students (and groups with specific needs). In contrast, universities of applied sciences, as newer institutions, can focus even more on transferability between university and vocational education within the framework of their legal options.

The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy takes responsibility particularly for the implementation of the “National strategy on the social dimension of higher education” via performance agreements with the universities, the Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences, “mainstreaming” the social dimension in all (future) measures, and providing sufficient resources for financing higher education institutions and for student support schemes. At the same time, it is expected that there will be a willingness and effort to apply existing public funds in a (more) goal-oriented manner.

The implementation of the Strategy on the social dimension of higher education is consequently a cross-sectoral issue. The work ahead will initially be concentrated on specific steps in three fields of action:

Expand and disseminate information; further raising of awareness for the social dimension

- Expand the homepage for the Social Survey of Students at www.sozialerhebung.at with reference to the National strategy on the social dimension of higher education
- International peer learning activity on “Mainstreaming the Social Dimension in the EHEA: Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness“ in the context of Erasmus+, 22 March 2017, University of Linz
- Bologna Day 2017, annual conference for Austrian higher education institutions, with the theme: “Towards more inclusive access and wider participation: the national strategy on the social dimension of higher education”, 23 March 2017, University of Linz
- Bologna Day 2018 with the theme “Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competencies”
- BeSt3 (Austrian Job, Training, and Education Fair) – position the social dimension in higher education within the framework programme
- Information events on the results of the Social Survey of Students, including the additional reports (mobility, international students, students with children, female students, students in doctoral programmes, study situation, students with disabilities, chronic illness or health impairments)
- Annual networking conference on topics relevant to the strategy, in coordination with higher education institutions

“Mainstreaming” the social dimension

- Integrate social dimension measures into higher education in preparation for the performance agreement period 2019–2021
- Monitor and support development of measures under the initiative “Shaping HEIs for the future”, where relevant to the social dimension
- Integrate the social dimension into the Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences (from 2019), as well as the UAS expansion plans
- Integrate the social dimension into the monitoring and evaluation of the new teacher training scheme
- Further quantitative and qualitative development of the Student Support Scheme (priorities and budget)

Supportive monitoring (including improvement of data and information structures) and evaluation

- Include migrant background in the UStat 1 survey by Statistics Austria and expand survey to university colleges of teacher education and private universities
- EAG 2017 on the subject of Equity in Tertiary Education; September 2017
- Commission a graduate survey for 2018 that includes the social dimension
- Section on the social dimension in higher education in the national Bologna Implementation Report 2018
- Complete the next student Social Survey of Students in coordination with EUROSTUDENT, with data collection planned for the summer semester of 2019
- Legally binding evaluation of admissions regulations and the “StEOP” (study introduction and orientation phase), in cooperation with universities, by December 2020⁴⁵
- Present an interim evaluation of the “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education” by 2021/22

45 Mandatory evaluation (in accordance with Section 143 lines 41 and 42, Universities Act 2002, Federal Law Gazette I no. 131/2015) with focus on composition of applicants, students and those persons who have registered for an admission procedure, but have not taken the examination, from the perspective of social and cultural factors, as well as gender and citizenship.

Appendix

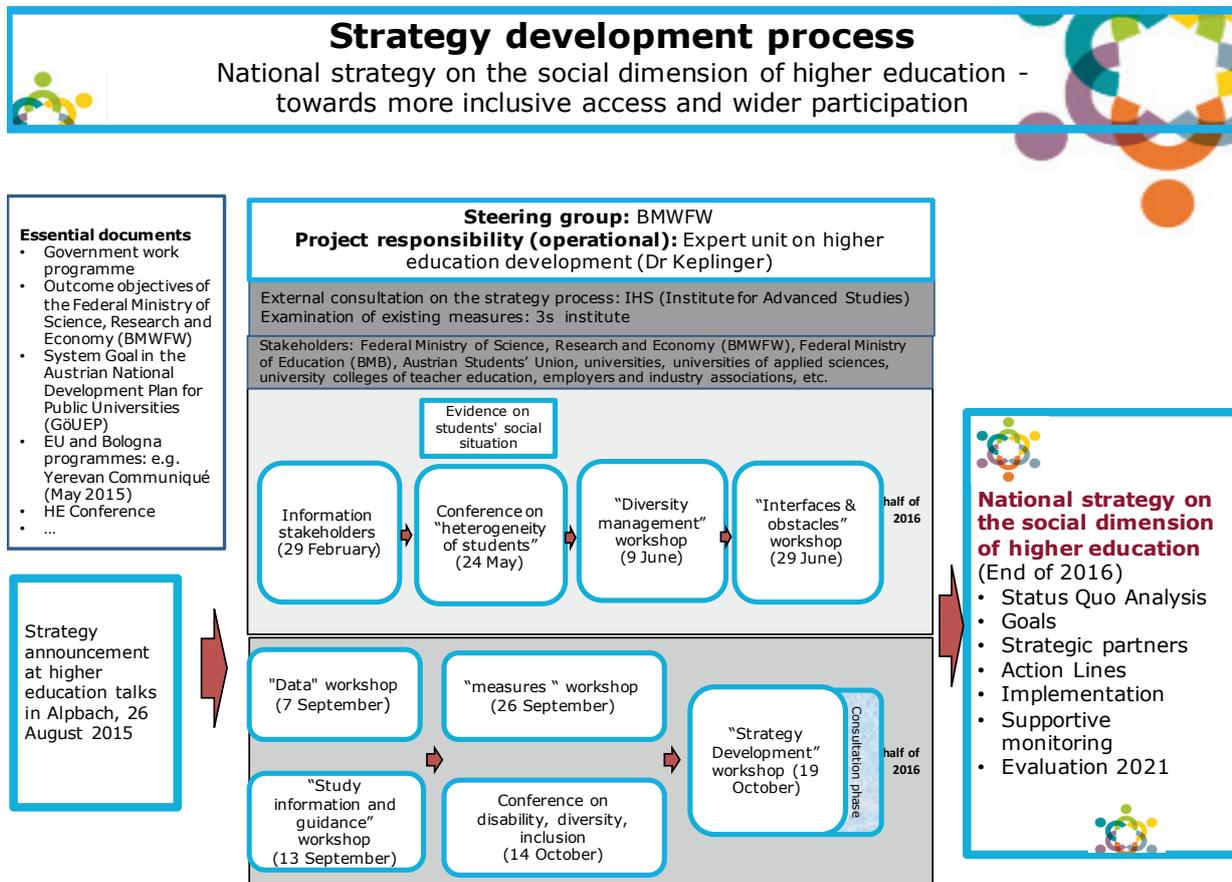
Guidelines for strategy development

The strategy development process was based on the following guidelines, analogous to the recommendations of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) on the social dimension⁴⁶:

- Draw up a coherent and inclusive process
- Determine overall goals
- Analysis of the current situation
 - A) Student population B) Existing measures
- Identification of gaps in data and how to close them
- Identification of barriers to access, during higher education studies and on completion of studies
- Comparison of existing measures and barriers identified
- Develop strategies for dismantling barriers
- Establish specific goals, implement follow-up process
- Repeat process

Process documentation

The following conferences and workshops were organised during the strategy development process:



46 Report of the 2012–2015 BFUG WG on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning to the BFUG, p.35

Conference / Workshop	Date	Cooperation
Stakeholder information	29.2.2016	
Heterogeneity of students	24.5.2016	Vienna University of Economics and Business
Diversity management	9.6.2016	Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna
Interfaces and obstacles	29.6.2016	
Data – Quantifying the social dimension	7.9.2016	Statistics Austria
Study information and guidance	13.9.2016	Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna
Measures	26.9.2016	University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna
Disability, diversity, inclusion	14.10.2016	Student Ombudsman's Office, Austrian Students' Union and HE institutions in Krems
Strategy development	19.10.2016	

Overview of presentations from these events:

Workshop/Title	Presenter
Heterogeneity of students	
Welcome and introduction to the process	Elmar Pichl, BMWFW
The significance of social inclusion in higher education, taking the Vienna University of Economics and Business as an example	Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger, Rector of the Vienna University of Economics and Business
Under-represented student groups and students with specific needs – Results of the SOLA (Social Survey of Students)	Martin Unger, Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna
View of the Austrian Students' Union	Jasmin Kassai, Social Affairs Office, Austrian Students' Union
Data on the social dimension among students at the University of Vienna	Christa Schnabl, Vice Rector of the University of Vienna
Heterogeneity of students at the Joanneum University of Applied Sciences	Werner Fritz, Vice Rector of the Joanneum University of Applied Sciences
The social dimension of higher education	Josef Oberneder, Vice Rector of the Upper Austria University College of Teacher Education
Heterogeneity of students at the Sigmund Freud Private University	Brigitte Sindelar, Vice Rector of the Sigmund Freud Private University of Vienna
Outlook for the strategy development process	Maria Keplinger, BMWFW
Diversity management	
Welcome and overview of strategy development process	Iris Rauskala, BMWFW
BMWFW initiatives to support active diversity management in Austrian higher education	Roberta Schaller-Steidl, BMWFW
Diversity management – University of Graz	Barbara Hey, University of Graz
Gender & Diversity Management	Ulrike Alker, FH Campus Wien
Diversity management as... Student lifecycle management	Martina Gaisch/Regina Aichinger, University of Applied Sciences, Upper Austria
Diversity characteristics in the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education	Sarah Zaussinger, Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna Maria Keplinger, BMWFW
Resonance with themes of the day from the perspective of diversity management as a transformation process	Jutta Überacker, Austrian Society for Diversity – ASD

Interfaces and obstacles	
Welcome and overview of strategy development process	Heribert Wulz, BMWFW
Building trust as a way towards a new culture of recognition across the entire learning continuum	Peter Schlögl, Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training
Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional access to higher education	Sabine Koch, BMWFW
Three steps to an improved Student Support Schemes. A model for the further development of the Student Support Act	Alexander Marinovic, BMWFW
Data – Quantifying the social dimension	
Welcome	Josef Kytir, Statistics Austria
Overview of strategy development process	Elmar Pichl, BMWFW
National and international official statistics on the social dimension of higher education	Guido Sommer-Binder/Wolfgang Pauli, STATISTICS AUSTRIA
Data on the social dimension: What we know (and don't know yet)	Bianca Thaler, Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna
Tracking students and graduates – contexts of utilisation and possibilities for governance	Andreas Raggautz, University of Graz
Case study for University colleges of teacher education: University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria	Alfred Brader, University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria
Study information and guidance	
Welcome and overview of strategy development process	Iris Rauskala, BMWFW
Measures on the social dimension of higher education – research results	Sigrid Nindl, Janine Wulz, 3s
Measures	
Existing measures on the social dimension of higher education – survey results	Sigrid Nindl, Janine Wulz, 3s
Social responsibility in the “Third Mission” of higher education institutions	Attila Pausits, University for Continuing Education Krems
Strategy development	
Draft of the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education	Maria Keplinger, BMWFW & Martin Unger, Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna

Statements/contributions during the consultation phase

Prof. Dr. Anke Hanft, Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, and **Dr. Dominic Orr**, Institute for Education and Socio-Economic Research and Consulting (FiBS), Berlin, commented, at the invitation of the BMWFW, on the consultation draft of the “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education”.

Representatives of higher education institutions:

- University of Vienna
- University of Vienna, Gender Equality and Diversity Unit
- University of Graz
- Medical University of Graz
- Medical University of Graz, Heide Neges
- Graz University of Technology
- University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna
- Vienna University of Economics and Business

- University of Linz
- University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna
- University for Continuing Education Krems
- Campus 02 University of Applied Sciences
- FH Campus Wien, Susanna Boldrino
- FH Campus Wien, Ulrike Alker (Gender & Diversity Management)
- University of Applied Sciences bfi Vienna
- Carinthia University of Applied Sciences
- St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences
- UAS Technikum Vienna
- University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria
- University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Regina Aichinger and Martina Gaisch
- FH Wien University of Applied Sciences of WKW
- MCI Management Center Innsbruck
- PH Tirol (University College of Teacher Education, Tyrol) Manfred Taferner

Other stakeholders and individuals:

- Uniko – Universities Austria
- FHK – Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences
- ÖPUK – Austrian Private University Conference
- Austrian Students' Union national representatives
- Federal Ministry of Education
- Several departments and staff members at the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW)
- AQ (Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation) Austria
- Statistics Austria
- BAK – Austrian Chamber of Labour
- WKÖ – Austrian Federal Economic Chambers
- RFT – Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development
- HFÖ – Hochschulforscher/innen Österreich (“Higher Education Researchers of Austria”)
- Janger Jürgen, WIFO – Austrian Institute of Economic Research
- Creative Commons

Recommendations of the Austrian Higher Education Conference on supporting non-traditional access to the higher education sector (2015)

Easier access through:

- Regulations for the recognition of informal learning
- Further development of the qualifying exam for higher education (Studienberechtigungsprüfung), to minimise the effects of social background; deeper consideration of the European Recognition Manual and the results of the Austrian Higher Education Conference working group on “Transferability in the Tertiary Sector”
- Expand provision of transparent and target-group oriented information for potential applicants

- Advisory services for non-traditional entrants beginning higher education
- Create appropriate statutory framework (recognition procedures) to promote transferability between courses of education

Minimising dropout from higher education:

- Counselling, individual support, online self-assessments
- Bridging courses, introductory seminars, workshops on starting higher education courses, mentoring programmes
- Transparency in decisions on credit recognition
- Teaching methods and materials which allow for the increasing heterogeneity of the student body (e.g. professional development courses for teachers)

Flexible study options:

- Target-group specific advice starting before beginning higher education studies
- Increase the planning feasibility of courses, transparency in scheduling of lectures and evaluation criteria
- More flexibly formulated attendance obligations (due to employment or care responsibilities)
- Increased use of e-learning options
- Adjust the government Student Support Scheme to reflect the actual living conditions of students (with reference to the results of the Working Group on Social Safeguarding of Students)
- Supportive environment for employed students, especially on the employer's side

Further recommendations that were not supported equally by all members of the working group:

- Award necessary funding via calls for proposals for higher education structural funds
- Establish a budget item for measures for non-traditional students
- Establish courses of study at universities of applied sciences intended primarily for working students, which would be more accommodating of non-traditional students

Recommendations of the working group on “Social safeguarding of students” (2013)

- Raise existing rates for study grants – both a general increase as well as the rates for the maximum study grant, which are important above all for students “in particular need”
- Further development of existing funding instruments: further development of the maintenance grant for self-supporting students
- New regulations concerning academic success and changing courses of study
- Student groups requiring special consideration: students with children (especially single parents), students from large families, students with disabilities, and older students

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