

## Private universities in Austria

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July 2017 marked the first time that a comprehensive analysis\* of the Austrian private university sector was published. This sector is relatively young in Austria (the first private university was accredited in 2000), comparatively small (currently there are only 13 such universities with a total of 10,200 students), very heterogeneous (regarding responsibilities/providers, funding, orientation, research intensity, etc.) and frequently has a small-scale/narrow structure in terms of the available study programmes. Nevertheless – as well as public universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education – private universities contribute to stimulating, diversifying and complementing the Austrian higher education sector.

The development of the Austrian private university sector needs to be seen against the background of the development of the higher education sector in general. The expansion of higher education, which has been continuing for a few years, bears clear traits of a shift from elite higher education towards mass higher education. This trend towards mass academisation has, however, (to date) not led to an adequate expansion or differentiation of the higher education offer (by content such as between research and teaching or links to the labour market/professional qualification elements as well as by durations of studies and also graduation levels – short cycle/undergraduate/graduate) at the various types of higher education institutions. They are still strongly academic/research-oriented, have relatively long study programmes and relatively restrictive entrance regulations (primary requirement: the matriculation certificate).

Also private universities rely on academic knowledge and research but definitely have a strong vocational focus. Their study programmes are mainly found in the social sciences and economics and the field of medicine. Accordingly, transition to the labour market is easy and smooth for their graduates: the median duration until private university graduates take up their first employment is as short as between zero and three months.

It is conspicuous that a relatively high number of women study at private universities: around 61% of the students at these establishments are female (versus 53% at public universities and 48% at universities of applied sciences). Around one third of the students at private universities have a non-Austrian home address (versus 16% at public universities and 11% at universities of applied sciences). Analysed by nationality, private universities boast by far the highest share of students with a non-Austrian nationality among all higher education institutions in Austria at almost 40%. The study preferences differ according to the students' territorial origin: two thirds of private university students who come from Germany are enrolled in medical programmes; an above-average number of students who come from other states can be found in the academic discipline of music.

\* Schmid, K.; Nowak, S., Gruber, B. and Petanovitsch, A. (2017): [Privatuniversitäten. Entwicklung und Ausblick](#) [Private universities. Development and outlook], ibw Research Report No. 189, Vienna. ibw Research Brief No. 98 ([Deutsch](#) || [English](#))