

Recommendations Regarding the Development of the Tertiary Education and Science System

Education, science and research are crucially important for Austria's future, its prosperity and its competitiveness. It must therefore be an urgent concern of any Austrian government to both create optimal framework conditions for these areas and to provide appropriate financial resources.

University Funding

For several years now there has been an imbalance in the structure of university funding, which hinders the positive development of the universities. Thus Austrian universities have been suffering from inadequate funding for years already.

The Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development therefore considers that there is an urgent need to substantially increase the General University Fund (GUF) with a view to improving university financing.

At the same time, it is necessary to significantly increase the proportion of resources that are allocated to research on a competitive basis. Research funding obtained via competitive applications to the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) plays a key role for the development of the universities in an international context. However, the provision of adequate funding for the FWF is an essential precondition for this. At the same time, financing for collaborative and applied research funding in the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) should also be increased. Furthermore, the fact that Austrian university buildings are not owned by the universities but by the Bundes-Immobilien-Gesellschaft (BIG) is a massive burden on the universities. This federal property management company is responsible for providing the premises, including the infrastructure, needed for regular university activities "according to market-oriented principles." However, a consequence of this is that the universities currently have to pay roughly 240 million euros to BIG in rent.

The Austrian Council recommends as an expression of a sustainable budget structure:

- raising the **General University Fund (GUF)** by at least **260 million euros per year**,
- increasing the **budget for basic research (FWF, ÖAW, CDG)** by **200 million euros per year**,
- increasing the **budget for applied research (FFG)** by **200 million euros per year**
- transferring to the universities ownership of the shares in the properties used by them and which are managed by BIG, so that **the rental payments made in the past (approx. 240 million euros) can be used in the university budgets.**

Even if these measures were implemented, the 900 million of additional funding that it is envisaged the federal budget will provide, would still leave the university system trailing far behind comparable leading international universities such as the ETH Zurich and while it would fail to meet the both the 2020 target of spending 2 percent of GDP on the tertiary sector and 3.76 percent of GDP on research, the opportunities for development would be vastly improved.

University Research and Teaching

The allocation of the agendas of the Ministry for Science and Research (BMWF) to other ministries envisaged during the current coalition negotiations would be a grave setback for Austria in its efforts to join the group of leading innovation nations in Europe. Separating universities from their research would not only result in a marginalisation of these areas, it would also mean that in future universities would have to conclude performance agreements with several ministries with the risk of falling between two stools.

The Austrian Council therefore recommends:

- the **option of dropping the idea of dividing the ministerial competences of the BMWF**, and instead according the areas of science and research the importance they deserve given their significance for Austria's future. Building on the Austrian Government's RTI Strategy from 2011, what is needed is not just a clear commitment but genuine engagement on the part of the entire government and new momentum for reform – irrespective of any party politics.

Study-Place Financing

The number of students has fortunately greatly increased in recent years. While in the 2001/02 academic year the number of firsttime students enrolling for a degree programme totalled 26,850, the figure in the 2006/07

academic year had already risen to 33,515, and in the 2011/12 academic year totalled 44,452. At the same time, however, spending per student fell well short of the levels in other countries and it has not been possible so far to find any clear solution for financing study places.

In addition, the current structure of admission restrictions and the introductory periods of study are also problematic. A number of universities are already using these instruments very successfully. It should therefore be left to the discretion of the universities as to which instruments are applied at which point in time. Introductory periods of study are intended to give new students an overview of the content of their chosen course of study so they can choose the course that is best suited to their individual requirements. However, the current situation is characterised by opaque requirements on the part of the Ministry for Science and Research (BWF) and consequently by a variety of implementation measures at the universities.

The Austrian Council therefore recommends:

- the swift development of a sustainable system of study-place financing on the basis of a **socially balanced mix of tuition fees and student grants**, as well as
- the development of **fair admission restrictions**, which will support “active” students and will in future help prevent “nominal” students.

The Austrian Council addresses this recommendation in particular to those members who currently bear responsibility for the future of Austria’s science and research system within the framework of the negotiations to form a coalition government.