

Austrian Student Ombudsman submits his Annual Report 2013/14 to the Minister of Science, Research and Economy and to the Austrian Parliament

On 15 December 2014 the Austrian Student Ombudsman (ASO) at the Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy (BWF) submitted his second annual report (AR) to the Minister and to the Parliament as required by Section 31 Subsection 7 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2011 (HS-QSG 2011).

The report covers the period from 1 September 2013 to 30 September 2014.

- **Subject of Report and General Statistics:**

The subject matter of the report is the Austrian Student Ombudsman's perceptions regarding the cases submitted to it relating to courses, teaching, exams, services and administration at higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Austrian Higher Education Area.

These institutions include state universities, private universities, universities of applied sciences and teacher training universities.

The concerns addressed were submitted to the Austrian Student Ombudsman by individuals applying to or interested in courses of study at such institutions, and by students and former students.

The number of students at the aforementioned higher education institutions totals (with deviations from the respective cut-off dates per sector) 365,599.

The number of applicants at these institutions, insofar as it can be ascertained totalled

- 21,568 at state universities applying (multiple applications are possible!) for first degree courses with admission requirements (pursuant to § 124b Universities Act 2002)

- 53,721 at universities of applied sciences (multiple applications possible!)

There are no figures available for applicants at private universities and teacher training universities.

- **Cases in Figures**

As in the past, there was a noticeable increase in the number of cases submitted as semester deadlines approached (i.e. in November and April, when the extended registration deadline ends at state universities and in September and February, when admissions of new students to

state universities end and the results of selection procedures are announced at private universities and at universities of applied sciences).

Cases by Gender: 47% of cases were brought by men, 53% by women

77% of cases were resolved directly by the ASO with the party submitting the case; in 17% of cases, the matter resolved itself as a result of current developments; in 4% of cases, investigation showed that the ASO has no jurisdiction to deal with the matter, in 1% of cases, the party submitting the case did not give permission for the ASO to pursue the matter further; 1% of cases were still being dealt with at the time the report was being compiled.

Complaints and issues came in in correlation to the total number of students at each type of institution,

85% of cases concerned state universities,

9% universities of applied sciences,

4% teacher training universities,

1% private universities.

- **Cases by Topic:**

In overall statistical terms, the cases raised in the reporting period concerned:

91 admission to HEIs or to specific courses of study

69 changes to the curriculum

46 tuition fees

41 social support schemes and grants

39 administrative matters

37 problems with mentoring by teaching staff

35 recognition of exams

34 performance assessments

26 “other” issues

25 financial aid

The frequency with which particular issues were raised varied according to the type of institution.

- **Description of Anonymised Cases**

As in the AR 2012/13, genuine cases have been included in an anonymised form, setting out the facts of the case, the measures taken by the Austrian Student Ombudsman and the solution or lack of thereof. The national laws or institutional regulations which had to be considered are each presented at the beginning of the case studies.

- **Proposals Made to the Governing Bodies and Members of the Higher Education Institutions and to Lawmakers**

As was the case in the AR 2012/13, the present report also contains a number of suggestions:

A total of **nine were made to governing bodies and members of HEIs** regarding

- Ranking criteria at universities of applied sciences
- Publication of statutes / study regulations and exam regulations at universities of applied sciences
- Assignment of academic supervisors for doctoral theses
- Exceptions regarding the furnishing of proof of eligibility to study in the case of conflicts or wars in the student's home country
- Possibility of mediation for students at the institutions of higher education
- Implementation of the European Charter for Researchers
- Increased transparency with regard to the recognition of credits
- Administrative measures in the case of extensions to the duration of study
- Criteria for education contracts at the universities of applied sciences and private universities

One suggestion was made to lawmakers

- Right to view examination documents and papers, also within the framework of application procedures, suitability and admission procedures

- **Summary and Outlook**

In the reporting period, a number of further Austrian HEIs established local ombudsmen, by now six of them. The Austrian Student Ombudsman at the ministry cooperates closely with these.

The following events are planned by the Austrian Student Ombudsman for 2015 in accordance with HS-QSG 2011 Section 31 subsection 2:

- *Universities hauled over the coals*: Early experiences with the Federal Administrative Court as a new appellate court
- Workshop and networking day for ombudsmen at Austrian higher education institutions
- Education contracts, study and exam regulations at universities of applied sciences and private universities
- Discrimination at Austrian higher education institutions: Age, sex, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation
- The situation of international students in Austria: Visa, entry to Austria, admission, language, culture, study programmes, working, residence

The Annual Report 2013/14 will be presented by the Austrian Student Ombudsman and discussed with members of parliament at the meeting of the Sub-committee for Higher Education at the Austrian Parliament on 17 March 2015.

The full text version of the Annual Report 2013/14 (all in German!) is accessible at http://www.hochschulombudsmann.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/OS_Taetigkeitsbericht-2013-14.pdf

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