

Summary of the Annual Report for the 2024/25 Academic Year

The Annual Report of the Austrian Student Ombuds Office at the Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research (BMBWF) provides information on our work and key developments in the 2024/25 academic year. It presents statistical data, explanations and summaries of cases handled by the Student Ombuds Office, as well as the most important findings and recommendations to the legislator and higher education institutions, which we have derived from our casework to improve the situation of students in Austria.

In the past academic year, 775 requests were submitted, relating to various topics such as study conditions, admission, study grants and tuition fees, financial matters and recognition of academic achievements. Each request can involve several main and subtopics. The 775 requests were assigned a total of 1,103 main topics.

The most common topics covered were

- **Study conditions:** difficulties regarding teaching, grading and examination conditions; curricular changes; studyability; compatibility with employment and caregiving responsibilities
- **Admission:** conditions and implementation of admission procedures; admission with qualifications obtained abroad
- **Miscellaneous:** various topics such as residence permits, general advice on study programmes, and the transition from studying to employment
- **Study grants:** clarification of the eligibility requirements for study grants and questions regarding repayment demands
- **Financial issues:** questions about financial support options such as grants and scholarships that are not covered by the Austrian Study Grant Authority
- **Academic degrees:** assessment, registration and regulation of foreign academic degrees, and issues related to nostrification
- **Recognition of academic achievements:** general questions concerning recognition, limits on recognition, deadlines, and possibilities for appealing decisions
- **Expiry of admission:** questions arising from non-payment of tuition fees or expiry of admission after a negative grade in the final examination
- **Bullying/Discrimination:** cases involving (sexual) harassment, discrimination and bullying at higher education institutions
- **Disabilities/Sickness:** especially alternative examination methods and accessibility of institutions
- **Tuition fees:** refunds, waivers, or questions regarding the amount of tuition fees
- **Good Scientific Practice:** cases of alleged scientific misconduct; difficulties in supervisory relationships; use of unauthorized tools
- **Dormitory:** tenancy agreements and the rights and obligations of dormitory representatives
- **Mobility:** general questions and questions regarding the funding of mobility programmes

Facts and Figures

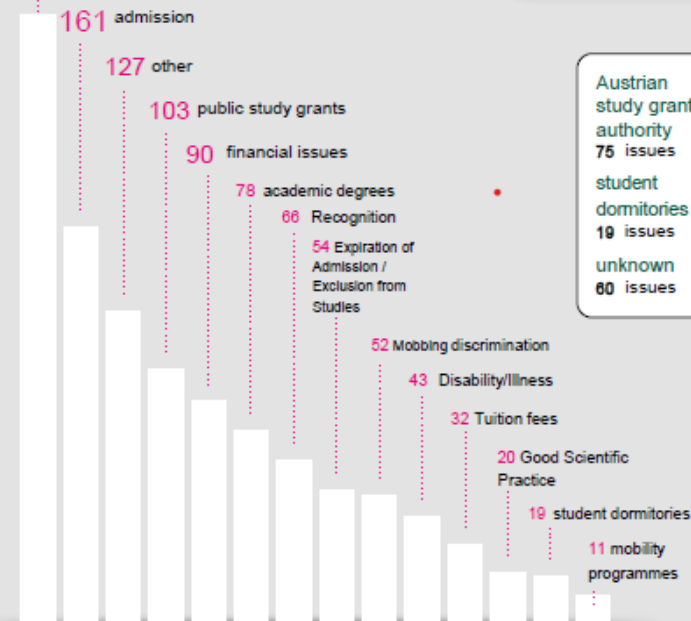
academic year 2024/25

439,494 students

14 main subject fields

1.103 assignments to main topics

247 study conditions



77 Higher Education Institutions
775 issues

Austrian study grant authority 75 issues
student dormitories 19 issues
unknown 60 issues



312 issues

§ 27 Institutions 5 Concerns

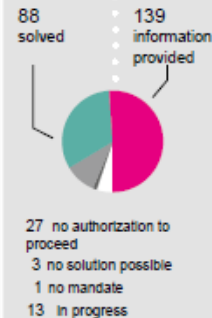
Institutions 153 Requests
80 public institutions
20 foreign educational institutions
13 other institutions
12 residence authorities
11 private continuing education institutions
4 Conservatories
3 insurance companies
1 funding agencies

public universities



290.507 Students at 23 public universities

271 issues

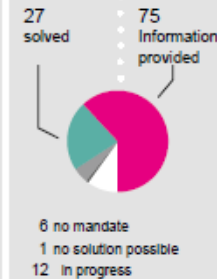


universities of applied sciences



75.888 Students at 21 universities of applied sciences

121 issues

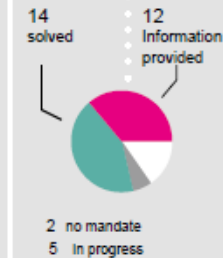


university colleges of teacher education



51.685 Students at 14 universities of teacher education

33 issues

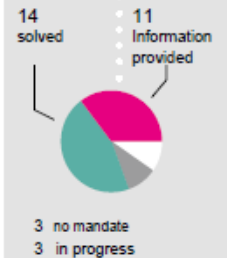


Private Colleges/Universities



21.441 Students at 19 private colleges/universities

31 issues



* Request cannot be processed further due to lack of consent

As part of its annual report, the Austrian Student Ombuds Office develops recommendations based on the cases of the respective academic year. These recommendations are addressed to legislators and higher education institutions and aim to improve the situation of students in Austria. In the annual report for the 2024/25 academic year, the following recommendations have been made:

Proposals

Focus topic

Scientific Integrity

Proposals to the legislator

- * Obligation for notification in case of investigations regarding §§ 116 UG and 32 HS-QSG
- * Monitoring of conducted and completed proceedings at higher education institutions regarding misconduct (cf. § 2a HS-QSG) as well as revocation of academic degrees (§ 89 UG, § 67 HG, § 10 FHG)

Proposal to the institutions

- * Inclusion of provisions on AI use in course descriptions

Focus topic

International Students

Proposals to the legislator

- * Regulation of the procedure to deal with unusual large numbers of applications for admission
- * Renewed application for nostrification at another university after deadline expiry
- * Proof of language proficiency in accordance with § 63 of the Universities Act
- * Clarification of the understanding of academic activity in the Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals

Proposal to the institutions

- * Onboarding of international students
- * Nostrification

General

Proposals to the legislator

- * Definition of courses with continuous assessment character
- * New deadline for the activity report of the Austrian Student Ombuds Office
- * Legal determination of the confidentiality of the Austrian Student Ombuds Office
- * Regulation of the loss of health suitability for specific study programmes

Proposals to Higher Education Institutions

- * Allocation of ECTS credits for non-degree programmes

Proposals of the Austrian Student Ombuds Office as part of the development of the Federal Government's National Action Plan against Violence against Woman

- * Inclusion of a reference to the Federal Equal Treatment Act in the Higher Education Act
- * Clarification of the concept of a serious threat to other university members as mentioned in § 68 UG

The Austrian Student Ombuds Office regularly organizes virtual exchange sessions. These are 30-minute formats in which topics of current relevance to ombuds offices are presented and discussed. An expert usually gives a brief input and is then available for questions. In the 2024/25 academic year, the following sessions took place:

- The *Disability Ombudsperson* gave an overview of their responsibilities in the field of higher education.
- *Verbraucherschlichtung Austria – Schlichtung für Verbrauchergeschäfte* explained its mandate and activities.
- *AST – Contact Point for Persons with Qualifications Acquired Abroad* discussed nostrification and the challenges faced by persons holding foreign qualifications.
- The head of the *Office of the Student Ombuds at the University of Alberta* and former president of the *Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)* provided insights into ombuds work in Canada and presented a tool for ombuds offices.
- The *Gender Equality and Diversity Officer at Central European University (CEU)* presented insights and results from the GenderSAFE project and discussed how to handle cases involving gender-based violence.

At the annual network meeting of student ombuds in higher education in Austria, we piloted a new format: intervission. Intervision is a form of structured peer consultation in which ombuds colleagues advise and support one another. As this format proved very successful, we decided to offer it every second month as a virtual meeting within the network.

In the 2023/24 academic year, the Austrian Student Ombuds Office, together with ÖAWI, established an informal international exchange platform for dealing with transnational cases of alleged scientific misconduct. The first outcomes of this platform were published in the 2024/25 academic year under the title “Orientierungshilfe zur transnationalen Fallbearbeitung (OTF)”. The experiences gained through this exchange platform were also presented at the 2025 conference of the European Network of Research Integrity Offices (ENRIO) in Ljubljana, Slovenia:

<https://oeawi.at/otf/>

The Austrian Student Ombuds Office defines two focus topics for each academic year. In 2024/25 these were scientific integrity and international students. We organized events on both topics. An interdisciplinary workshop entitled “Digital Culture and Scientific Integrity” addressed current developments and legal aspects of scientific integrity, as well as the use of AI at higher education institutions. We also organized a conference entitled “Education without Borders: Success Factors for International Students”, which focused on challenges and good practices for international students in Austria, particularly in relation to admission, onboarding and nostrification.

The full version (in German) of the annual report can be downloaded from our website: <https://hochschulombudsstelle.at/publikationen/>