

Introduction of the bachelor's-master's system in higher education

In the transition to the bachelor's-master's system in higher education, institutions should be given as much freedom as possible to give it their own interpretation, advises the Education Council. The introduction should be complete four years from now.

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The Minister for Education recently signed the Bologna Declaration. The declaration sets out an agreement on the countries of Europe adopting the Anglo-Saxon higher education model. The aim of this is to allow better comparisons of the various study programmes and, as a result, improve the international mobility of students by enabling flexible learning pathways.

Two cycles of higher education

Higher education will soon be based on two separate cycles: undergraduate and postgraduate. The undergraduate phase in higher professional education (HBO) will last four years. These professional programmes will lead to the award of a bachelor's degree and the corresponding title, for example, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.). Graduates of these professional programmes who, after a period of relevant work experience, wish to deepen their knowledge will be able to follow an advanced programme of professional study leading to the award of a legally recognised master's degree (for example, Master of Engineering, M.Eng.). The only requirement is that the programme is accredited.

In university education (WO), the undergraduate phase lasts three years. This broad-based academic programme leads to the award of the bachelor's degree: Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.). Universities should encourage their students to go on to follow a master's programme. The postgraduate phase varies from one to three years. A bachelor's degree should essentially give graduates access to further studies. Universities should offer flexible study programmes (including part-time studies) to appeal to those who decide to enter the world of work straight after their bachelor's degree. This would enable them to enter further study while working.

The doctor's degree (PhD) is only accessible by student's who have first obtained their master's degree. The assessment of candidates would remain – just as it is at present – the responsibility of individual institutions.

Accredit all study programmes

An independent accreditation body should be established to verify the quality of study programmes and study levels. This will make it easier to compare study programmes and diplomas internationally. The institutions will need to have this quality hallmark before they can award legally recognised degrees and obtain government funding. The accreditation system should be up and running no later than 1 January 2002. The introduction of the bachelor's-master's system could then be concluded two years later.