

Situation Description on Practical Placements in Austria

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In Austria, regulations for practical placements within the higher educational system differ according to the field of study. In some disciplines obligatory practical placements have to be done externally, in an institution not tied to the university, whereas others have to be done within the scope of the university curriculum.

1. "Fachhochschule (FH)" – University of Applied Sciences:

Universities of Applied Sciences (FH) provide a compulsory practical placement in their curricula. These practical placements concentrate on gaining work experience in the specialized field of study. Furthermore, the practical placement needs to correspond to the training objective of the respective field of study offered by the FH. Students have to be employed in areas which match their level of qualification.

In these cases, certain labour-law regulations have to be obeyed which is why a policy of freedom of contract is applied within this special employment relationship. Normally, the legal status of "intern" is applied to the person doing the practical placement. The employment relationship implicates the following characteristics:

- Interns have an employment relationship with the company
- Interns are obligated to work performance
- Interns are entitled to a money consideration, which can be agreed on individually with the institution
- The money consideration should at least cover the intern's expenses arising out of the working activities (travelling expenses, etc.)

This form of practical placement plays a vital role when it comes to the official career entry because in many cases, interns/students get their first steady employment in the companies where they have completed their practical placement.

2. University:

Some fields of study at university list a practical placement as compulsory within the curriculum. This practical placement is often handled like a course/seminar and usually students can rely on the guidance of professors/tutors teaching the class. Within fields of study like Medicine, Health Studies or Educational Studies (aspirants for lectureship) practical placements are scheduled within the curriculum and are obligatory. Students, who aspire a teaching career in the Austrian school system, have to complete a compulsory teaching year, educating a school class for the duration of one year. Only then, they are allowed to begin their career as teachers for the Austrian school system.

2.1. Business Studies:

Within the field of business studies, regulations differ according to regional (Bundesland/state) levels. Austria's most important university for business, the WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business) requires compulsory practical placements only within some branches of study, like for instance International Business Economics. In these cases, the practical placement has to be done abroad to acquire the needed skills. This can happen either in form of a semester abroad, a summer university, the diploma writing phase or an internship in a company abroad or in-country. At the Alpen-Adria University in Klagenfurt/Carinthia a compulsory practical placement in the field of marketing for the duration of several months has to be done. The practical placements are done in institutions or companies external to the university.

2.2. Humanities:

In the Humanities practical placements can either be compulsory or voluntary. In most cases, it is recommended to do a practical placement during the time of study in order to gain special working skills and facilitate the future career entry. Still, there are several branches where students are obliged to do practical placements:

- Psychology students are obliged to do a practical placement for a minimum of 6 weeks (§9 UniStG) in an institution external to the university
- The curriculum for Geography students includes a compulsory practical placement in an institution external to the university for a minimum of 8 weeks
- Students of Political Sciences have to do a practical placement in an institution external to the university for a minimum of 8 weeks

Practical placements in these cases always have to be relevant for the course of study and the university curriculum.

2.3. Natural Sciences:

As natural sciences expect a thorough scientific expertise from their students, it is obligatory to do a practical placement for a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 16 weeks in nearly all of the branches of natural sciences.

Concluding, it is to state that many fields of study do not provide compulsory practical placements. In any case, practical work experience simplifies getting started in the employment market and should be a main point in the students' own curriculum planning whether or not it is part of the compulsory curriculum. It resides with the personal initiative of the individual student to care for an appropriate practical placement, relevant for his/her course of studies. On the part of the universities, practical placements are offered within a special framework. For instance, the universities' on-site career center institutions often provide internships within renowned companies. Companies like to recruit on campus and actively establish contact to students via individual faculties, career centers, career fairs, workshops or company presentations. Making use of these kinds of institutions' offers facilitates the search for and the access to practical placements.