University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten

Online Continuing Higher Education Programmes

Supplementary Provisions for the Establishment and Implementation of Online Continuing Higher Education Programmes

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I. Structure and Scope

§ 1. (1) These provisions are an integral part of the Statute of USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten (in short: "**USTP**") and are to be issued by the USTP Board in agreement with the Provider (§ 10 (3 (10)) FHG[1]).

(2) These provisions apply to all online continuing higher education programmes (§ 9 (1,4) FHG) of USTP established in Austria and form the basis for the educational relationship between the students and USTP.

II. General Provisions

§ 2. (1) The establishment of online continuing higher education programmes, especially in cooperation with non-university legal entities, is associated with some special characteristics.

(2) Among these distinctive features are aspects of programme organisation (deviations from the traditional semester system or asynchronous learning phases), location-independent teaching and learning formats, the absence of capacity controls based on fixed study places, and alignment with internationally comparable degree programmes in terms of admission requirements, scope, and academic standards.

(3) Due to these peculiarities, complementary provisions are in place for online continuing higher education programmes. Where this part of the Statute does not contain any complementary provisions, the other parts of the Statute governing continuing education programmes shall apply.

III. Special Provisions

§ 3. (1) The responsibilities of USTP and any non-university legal entities associated with it must be clearly defined in cooperation agreements, which must include the following minimum provisions:

- USTP's responsibility for the process of continuous quality assurance and for achieving the intended learning outcomes;
- USTP's authority to intervene, particularly in the areas of: the continuing education programme, its management, personnel, quality assurance, validation, and infrastructure
- The non-university legal entities undertake to execute decisions made by the USTP Board or other USTP bodies and to address recommendations of the USTP Board or other USTP organisational units, particularly in the context of quality assurance.
- Continuous monitoring of the teaching and learning formats used by the non-university legal entities from a higher education didactics perspective
- Maximum transparency regarding the teaching and learning formats used by the non-university legal entities as well as regarding teaching staff who have appropriate academic, academic-artistic, artistic, professional-practical, and didactic qualifications

§ 4. (1) In addition to the provisions in the existing sections of the Statute governing degree programmes and continuing higher education programmes, the following provisions apply to online continuing higher education programmes:

1. Admission Requirements

§ 5. (1) Admission to online continuing higher education programmes generally requires a relevant university degree (at least a bachelor's degree or 180 ECTS credits) as well as relevant professional experience. The specific academic requirements are outlined in the respective curriculum. If necessary to ensure that students have the required prior knowledge, additional prerequisites or supplementary exams may be required.

(2) As for MBA and EMBA continuing higher education programmes, other admission regulations may be defined on the basis of relevant professional experience.

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[1] University of Applied Sciences Act, orig. version Federal Law Gazette no. 340/1993 as amended by Federal Law Gazette I no. 177/2021

2. Validation/Recognition

§ 6. (1) Professional and non-professional learning experiences are given special consideration in the design and delivery of online continuing higher education programmes. The goal is to transparently recognise skills already acquired and thereby promote individualised educational pathways, provided that these skills can be demonstrated.

(2) Students may apply for the recognition of academic, professional, or non-professional competencies they have already acquired. This is subject to the condition that the demonstrated learning outcomes correspond to those of the respective courses or modules and that there are no significant differences. Competencies acquired outside of a professional context must be demonstrated through a validation process. Recognition is granted to the extent permitted by law.

3. Semester System

§ 7. (1) Online continuing higher education programmes may be structured as flexible study programmes. The curriculum may provide for enrolment at any time, regardless of semester or academic year boundaries. To the extent that provisions of the Statute refer to semesters or academic years, different organisational units and deadlines may be established for online continuing higher education programmes. The specific regulations are to be set forth in the curriculum.

4. Didactic Concept

§ 8. (1) Special didactic quality standards may be established for online higher education programmes. The didactic concept must ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved through appropriate digital teaching, learning, and examination formats as well as adequate guidance and support for students. The teaching and learning formats must be regularly evaluated in accordance with higher education didactics. As for online continuing higher education programmes conducted in collaboration with a non-university legal entity, the cooperation partner is obligated to implement the USTP's recommendations within the framework of didactic quality assurance. The specific provisions are set forth in the curriculum.

5. Examinations and Proctoring

§ 9. (1) For online continuing higher education programmes, the curriculum may provide stricter regulations to ensure the identity of students, the independence of their exam performance, and the proper conduct of online exams. This may include, in particular, the use of proctoring systems, technical supervision measures, and extended documentation requirements. Students must be informed of these requirements in advance. The details are specified in the curriculum.

6. Master Thesis Process

§ 10. (1) For online continuing higher education programmes conducted in collaboration with a non-university legal entity, the partner institution may propose a qualified individual to supervise master theses. The proposed supervisor is responsible for providing ongoing academic guidance to the students and for conducting the first review of the master thesis. In such cases, the Academic Director must approve both the supervisor and the thesis proposal. The evaluation of the master thesis must be conducted in accordance with the following principles: In addition to the first evaluation by the supervisor, USTP ensures an independent second evaluation of the master thesis. If the results of the first and second evaluations are not in agreement, the Academic Director, within the scope of their authority under academic regulations, decides on the next steps and on the approval of the master thesis. The requirements for the approval of the master thesis as the basis for admission to the master examination remain unaffected by this regulation. Admission to the master examination and the composition of the examination committee also remain unaffected.

7. Quality Management

§ 11. (1) Online continuing higher education programmes are subject to USTP's general quality standards and are integrated into USTP's quality management system. USTP is therefore responsible for the process of continuous quality assurance and for ensuring that the intended learning outcomes are achieved

(2) Due to their specific organisational and teaching structure, supplementary quality requirements and quality assurance measures may be established for online continuing higher education programmes. These may pertain, in particular, to the development, establishment, implementation, evaluation, and continuous further development of the continuing higher education programme.

(3) USTP ensures that appropriate procedures for quality assurance and quality improvement are in place for online continuing higher education programmes. In particular, consideration must be given to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, the quality of instruction, student support, the qualifications of the teaching staff, and the suitability of the digital infrastructure.

(4) Detailed provisions regarding quality management, evaluation measures, the involvement of relevant stakeholders, and organisational and didactic quality standards may be set forth in guidelines, curricula, or other internal regulations of USTP.

(5) If online continuing higher education programmes are offered in cooperation with a non-university legal entity, it must be ensured that responsibility for the quality of the programme and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes remains with USTP.

8. Scientific Personnel

§ 12. (1) The delivery of online continuing higher education programmes requires the use of academically and/or didactically experienced teaching staff who are qualified in both their subject areas and teaching methods.

(2) Teaching staff must possess the competencies necessary to teach the learning outcomes specified in the curriculum in digital teaching and learning environments.

(3) USTP ensures that students receive appropriate supervision and that established quality standards are met.

(4) In the case of online continuing higher education programmes conducted in collaboration with a non-university legal entity, the use of teaching staff proposed by the cooperation partner requires the approval of USTP. USTP may deny approval, in particular if the necessary academic, didactic, or quality requirements are not met.

9. Infrastructure

§ 13. (1) Due to their unique organisational structure, additional requirements regarding technical and digital infrastructure may be established for online continuing higher education programmes. USTP ensures that the technical and digital infrastructure required to conduct the online continuing higher education programme is available and suitable. The specific provisions may be set forth in cooperation agreements with non-university legal entities, in USTP's internal regulations, and in the respective programme documentation.

IV. Effective Date and Transitional Provisions

§ 14. (1) The provisions of this guideline on the establishment of online continuing higher education programmes will take effect beginning with the academic year 2026/27.

(2) Amendments to this section of the Statute will take effect with the next curriculum revision for the respective online continuing higher education programme.