In the course of the Bologna Process to establish a European Higher Education Area the study system is being converted to the consecutive structure of study with Bachelor’s and Master’s qualifications. The study structure reform has largely been completed. In the 2017/2018 winter semester, 91.4 per cent of all study offers at German institutions of higher education were Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses.

Alongside the Bachelor degree, the Diplom degree, the Magister degree as well as Church and state qualifications obtained after an integrated single-cycle course of study exist as first vocational degrees qualifying for an occupation.

**Diplom and Magister**

A small number of study courses end with a Diplom examination. Courses of studies that culminate in a Diplom concentrate on a single subject. The Diplom examination is associated with a Diplom degree (e.g. Diplom-Psychologe). The Fachhochschule Diplom certificate bears the additional notation (“FH” for Fachhochschule), e.g. Diplom-Ingenieur/-in (FH).

A very small number of courses currently still end with a Magister examination. Courses of study that lead to a Magister, Bachelor’s or Master’s degree admit a combination of several subjects (usually one major subject and two minor subjects, or two equally weighted major subjects), particularly in arts subjects. The Magister examination is associated with the award of the Magister degree (e.g. Magister Artium).

The Fachhochschule Diplom qualification is assigned to the Bachelor level; university Diplom qualifications and Magister qualifications correspond to the Master’s level.

**Staatsprüfung**

A state examination or Staatsprüfung has to be taken in some courses of studies that prepare students for professions of particular importance to the public interest. This is the case in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmaceutics, food chemistry, law and to some extent the teaching profession. The standards of performance on state examinations correspond to those on academic examinations. Hence, the difference between state and academic examinations is essentially of a formal nature. The state examination is conducted by the state examination bodies; professors from the universities are appointed as examiners. After the First State Examination, prospective lawyers and teachers, in particular, undergo a second phase of training called Vorbereitungsdienst or preparatory service, which is concluded by another state examination. Only this Second State Examination entitles them to practise their profession. Information on teacher training courses conveying the educational prerequisites for teaching positions are available in the section on initial teacher education in the school sector [1].
As a rule a state examination entitles graduates to start doctoral studies in the same way as an academic degree.

**Theological degrees**

In December 2007 the Standing Conference adopted the guidelines developed in conjunction with the Protestant Church in Germany and the German Bishops’ Conference (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz) on the structure of study courses in Roman Catholic or Protestant Theology/Religion (Eckpunkte für die Studienstruktur in Studiengängen mit Katholischer oder Evangelischer Theologie/Religion). For theological courses of study which qualify students for the ministry, priesthood or the profession of a pastoral assistant (theologisches Vollstudium – full theological course of study) the guidelines provide, until further notice, for courses which conclude – after a standard study period of five years in total – with an academic and a Church examination. There are no plans at present to introduce a consecutive study structure pursuant to the Bologna Process within the theologisches Vollstudium. The courses of study are, nonetheless, modularised and provided with a credit point system.

In addition to consecutive Master's study courses, there are other weiterführende Studiengänge (special graduate study courses) which may be taken after the completion of a first degree. These special graduate courses of two to four semesters’ duration lead to the awarding of a certificate stipulating the level achieved or to a further higher education degree (Diplom, Magister, Master).

**Other postgraduate study courses**

In addition to the courses leading to a first degree, besides consecutive Master's study courses and Master’s study courses providing further education, there are other postgraduate study programmes (further study, supplementary and follow-up courses) that either build on the first degree, providing further vocational skills, increased specialisation and reinforcement, or are taken in parallel with a different course of study. Key characteristics of postgraduate study courses are, inter alia:

- a completed higher education course of study leading to a first degree as the admission requirement and, where applicable, additional admission requirements depending on the objective of the postgraduate study course
- specific orientation to the level of qualification achieved in the first degree qualifying for entry to a profession and corresponding admission requirements
- the structuring of the study course through an examination regulation
- the award of an independent qualification, which requires the knowledge and abilities acquired in the first degree course, but goes far beyond them.

Information on Master's study courses providing continuing education [2] can be found in the section on second cycle programmes, as they are part of the Bachelor and Master structure.

An overview [3] of the range of special graduate courses on offer provided by the German Rectors’ Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK) is available on the Internet.