

## **Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees\***

(Developed in collaboration with the German Rectors' Conference and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany and in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and adopted by the Standing Conference on 16 February 2017)

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## Preface

In 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna States agreed to “develop a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile”. They also undertook to “develop an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area”. This European framework, which was adopted in 2005, is intended to:

- bring together the national qualifications frameworks, which form the core of the European framework,
- guarantee the transparency of an increasingly diversified higher education system and take account of the need for readability by students and employers, and
- depict the diversity of qualifications in Europe.

Immediately after the 2003 conference, Germany assumed the initiative of developing a national qualifications framework for higher education and, following consultation with stakeholders, adopted the “Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees” in 2005<sup>1</sup>. The compatibility of the “Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees” with the “Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area” was confirmed in 2008<sup>2</sup>.

The higher education framework as a national elaboration of the overarching Bologna Framework is compatible with the comprehensive German Qualifications Framework (DQR in German) as national implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL). With regard to the specified requirements and competences, levels 6, 7 and 8 of the DQR correspond to stages 1 (Bachelor level), 2 (Master level) and 3 (Doctoral level) of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees. The national higher education framework has been attached to the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) and is therefore a component of the latter.

Provisions for further development of the frameworks are made in the DQR as well as in the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees of 2005.

What is a Qualifications Framework?

A Qualifications Framework is a systematic description of the qualifications offered by the education system of a particular country. This description includes:

- a general depiction of the qualification profile of a graduate holding the corresponding degree,
- a list of the intended learning outcomes,
- a description of the competences and skills the graduate should possess, and

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<sup>1</sup> Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees, adopted on 21 April 2005 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Report on the examination of compatibility of the “Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees” with the “Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area” on 18 September 2008.

- a description of the formal aspects of an education level (workload in terms of ECTS credits, admission criteria, designation of the degrees, and formal entitlements).

The Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees is a transparency tool to improve comparability, both nationally and internationally, of the degree programmes on offer. It provides information for prospective students and employers, supports evaluation and accreditation, and facilitates curriculum development. It leads to greater comparability of qualifications in a European and international context.

The formal aspects referred to above do not yield entitlements. The latter follow from the respective regulations and provisions of federal and state law.

## Introduction / Guidelines

In the revision of a Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees (Hochschulqualifikationsrahmen: HQR), dated 21-04-2005, particular importance was attached to the following guidelines:

- The HQR explicitly comprises the area of higher education and refers to the “Bologna Qualifications Framework“ (Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area - QF-EHEA). It thus remains compatible with qualifications frameworks that take the QF-EHEA into consideration. At the same time the respective statements of the European Council<sup>3</sup> and of the German Council for Science and the Humanities<sup>4</sup> serve as reference points.
- The HQR describes proficiency in reflective/innovative action as a generic competence development. Proficiency in knowledge generation/innovation through scientific methods is regarded as a domain-specific competence development. This development takes place in disciplinary or possibly interdisciplinary arrangements within subject-specific contexts. This accounts, moreover, for the distinction made between reflective knowledge application (on the basis of scientific insights) and critical knowledge generation (on the basis of scientific methods): utilisation/transfer of knowledge and scientific innovation. Foreign language proficiency is a key condition for the comprehensive development of these competences.<sup>5</sup>
- The HQR describes the qualification profiles independent of higher education institution type on three different levels. The Bachelor’s degree is to be understood as an initial scientific degree that provides graduates with competences that are also relevant to the labour market. At Master level a distinction is made between consecutive and continuing education Master programmes, specifically with regard to the admission requirements, financial aspects as well as overriding aim or objective. The HQR’s formulations are binding for both kinds of study programme. The key constituent at Doctoral level is the achievement of independent research; at the level of equivalent artistic degrees (“solo performance class“/“master class“) the key constituent is independent artistic achievement.
  - The HQR links the acquisition and continuing development of competences to “inquiring learning“, which is understood here as guided by scientific research methods, as discipline-based and largely self-regulated.
  - The HQR focuses on “academic self-understanding“, which is defined as the “academic professionalism“ of higher education graduates. The recommendations

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<sup>3</sup> Recommendation 2007(6) by the Ministerial Committee of the European Council on public responsibility for higher education and research

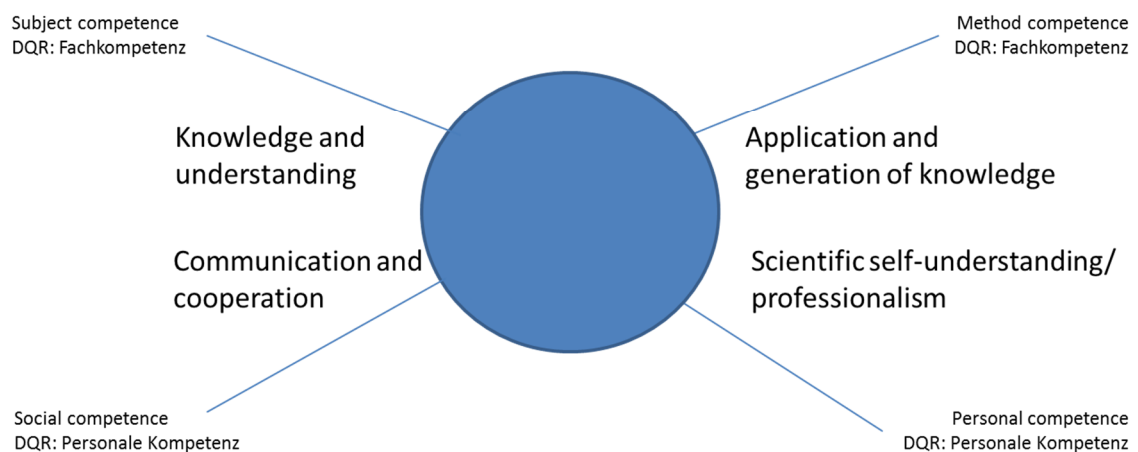
<sup>4</sup> German Council for Science and the Humanities (2015), Recommendations regarding the relationship between higher education and the labour market. Part Two: Recommendations regarding the qualification of specialised personnel against the background of demographic change. Drs. 4925-15, pp. 40ff. (Wissenschaftsrat (2015), Empfehlungen zum Verhältnis von Hochschulbildung und Arbeitsmarkt. Zweiter Teil: Empfehlungen zur Qualifizierung von Fachkräften vor dem Hintergrund des demographischen Wandels. Drs. 4925-15.S. 40ff.)

<sup>5</sup> The HQR explicitly includes the segment of courses of study offered by art and music colleges. A domain-specific artistic competence development, depending on the type of higher education institution, is therefore to be kept in mind; acquisition of artistic methods and knowledge proceeds analogously to the scientific methods and knowledge described here. Competence development is frequently linked in particular to the performative realisation of the artistic process or object.

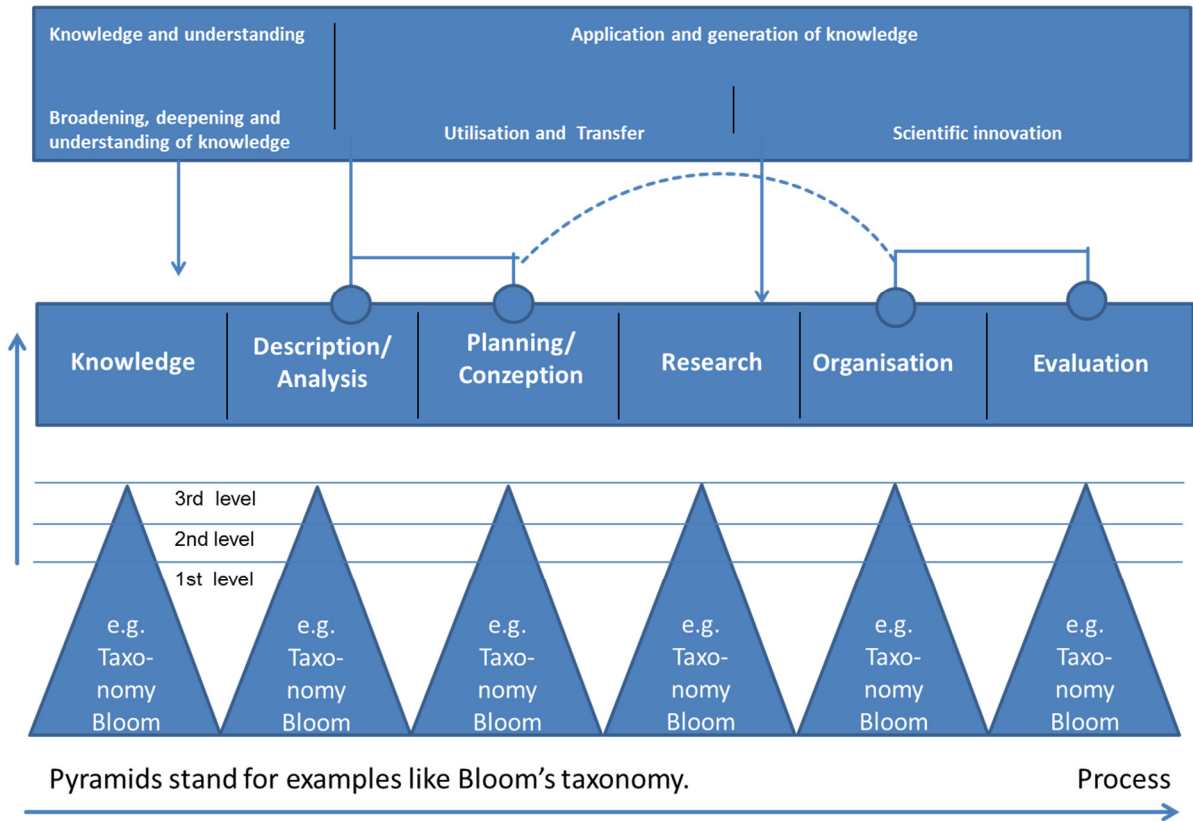
towards operationalisation imply that the person who qualifies is a largely free and autonomous agent who makes responsible decisions regarding things and persons, and whose reflections are guided by scientific/epistemological principles.

- The HQR follows an understanding of science that presupposes the public discourse of science (its questions, methods, research intentions and research findings) in the context of a constitutional and welfare state democracy.
- As a competence model, the HQR is compatible with well-established models of the competence discussion.

**Competence model** HQR  
 (“Potential“ of the qualifications framework)  
 (following H. Roth, 1971 with reference to the DQR)



The HQR matrix formulates or, rather, complements the descriptors of the earlier version of 21-04-2005. In the process the HQR’s logic is retained, as it has since been established in the accreditation processes, and because fundamental changes are neither enforceable nor necessary. The description of the HQR as “competence dimensions” can be implemented and made more precise as a process model within the subject-specific qualifications frameworks. This is where a particular taxonomy (such as Bloom’s) will be applicable.



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## **Bachelor level**

### **Knowledge and understanding**

#### Broadening of knowledge:

Graduates' knowledge and understanding build on the level of the higher education entrance qualification and extend significantly beyond this. Graduates have demonstrated a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scientific foundations of their field of learning.

#### Deepening of knowledge:

Graduates possess a critical understanding of the key theories, principles and methods of their study programme and are able to deepen and extend their knowledge beyond the discipline. Their knowledge and understanding corresponds to the current state of the specialist literature, but should at the same time include some advanced knowledge of the current state of research within their field of learning.

#### Understanding of knowledge:

Graduates reflect critically on the epistemologically based correctness of subject-specific and practically relevant statements. These are contrasted and weighed in relation to complex contexts. Problems are considered against the background of possible connections, and plausible solutions are sought for these problems.

### **Application and generation of knowledge**

Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding to their occupational or professional context and can develop and advance solutions to problems and arguments in their subject area.

#### Utilisation and transfer of knowledge:

Graduates

- collect, assess and interpret relevant information, in particular in their study programme;
- make scientifically founded judgements and assessments;
- develop problem-solving approaches and reach solutions that reflect the current state of scientific inquiry;
- carry out practice-oriented projects and make team contributions to the solution of complex tasks and problems;
- independently shape further learning processes.

#### Scientific innovation:

Graduates

- infer and define research questions;
- explain and justify the operationalisation of research;
- apply research methods;

- set out and elucidate research findings.

### **Communication and cooperation**

#### Graduates

- formulate specialised positions and pertinent solutions to problems and defend these through theoretical and methodological argumentation in discourses with specialists and non-specialists;
- share information and ideas and cooperate with other specialists and non-specialists, in order to arrive at responsible solutions to problems;
- deliberate and consider the different points of view and interests of all participants.

### **Scientific self-understanding / Professionalism**

#### Graduates

- develop a professional self-image that is guided by the goals and standards of professional agency within predominantly extra-scientific professional fields;
- justify their own actions by means of theoretical and methodological knowledge;
- are able to assess their own capabilities, autonomously reflect on pertinent freedoms of creation and decision, and employ these under instruction;
- recognise appropriate framework conditions of professional, responsible agency and provide ethical justification for their decisions;
- critically reflect on their professional action with regard to social expectations and consequences.

### **Formal aspects**

#### Admission requirements:

- higher education entrance qualification (general or subject-specific higher education entrance qualification, university of applied science entrance qualification, admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification in accordance with the regulations of the federal states, including special procedures for determining eligibility);
- in accordance with the regulations of the federal states regarding admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany (publisher): Synoptic presentation of the opportunities available in the federal states for access to higher education by vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification on the basis of higher education institution regulations (Synoptische Darstellung der in den Ländern bestehenden Möglichkeiten des Hochschulzugangs für beruflich qualifizierte Bewerber ohne schulische Hochschulzugangsberechtigung auf der Grundlage hochschulrechtlicher Regelungen). Version: August 2014



Duration:

(incl. thesis) 3, 3.5 or 4 years (180, 210 or 240 ECTS credits);  
Degrees at Bachelor level represent the first qualification for entry into a profession.

Postgraduate options:

Master level programmes (outstanding results can even lead directly to Doctoral level programmes), other continuing education options.

Transitions from vocational education and training:

On starting a study programme at a particular higher education institution, qualifications and competencies acquired outside of higher education institutions and established by means of an equivalence examination procedure can be credited, insofar as they correspond to the requirements of the respective study programme.<sup>7</sup>

**Master level**

**Knowledge and understanding**

Broadening of knowledge:

Graduates have a proven level of knowledge and understanding that builds on the Bachelor level and have significantly deepened and broadened this knowledge and understanding. They are able to define and interpret the special features, limits, terminologies and schools of thought in their field of learning.

Deepening of knowledge:

Graduates' knowledge and understanding form the basis for the development and/or application of independent ideas. This may be either more practice-oriented or more research-oriented. They have a broad, detailed and critical understanding of the most up-to-date state of knowledge in one or several special areas.

Understanding of knowledge:

Graduates gauge the subject-specific and epistemologically substantiated correctness of scientific and methodological considerations and are able to solve practically relevant and scientific problems with the assistance of these considerations.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Joint recommendation on 26 September 2003 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Rector's Conference to the higher education institutions on the award of credits in further vocational education and crediting them to a higher education degree programme; credit transfer of knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher/university education towards a university education (I), decision on 28 June 2002 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and credit transfer of knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher/university education towards a university education (II), decision on 18 September 2008 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

## **Application and generation of knowledge**

Graduates are able to apply their knowledge and understanding as well as their problem-solving skills also to new and unfamiliar situations that are in direct wider or multidisciplinary relation with their academic subject.

### Utilisation and transfer of knowledge:

Graduates

- integrate existing and new knowledge in complex contexts also on the basis of incomplete or limited information;
- make scientifically-founded decisions and critically reflect on possible consequences of these decisions;
- independently acquire new knowledge and competence;
- carry out independent scientific or applied research projects in a largely self-directed/autonomous manner.

### Scientific innovation:

Graduates

- construct research questions;
- choose and justify concrete ways of operationalising research;
- select research methods and justify this selection;
- explain and critically interpret research results.

## **Communication and cooperation**

Graduates

- discuss pertinent specialised positions on alternative, theoretically justifiable solutions with representatives of different academic and non-academic spheres of activity;
- involve participants in the articulation of problems in a manner that is both goal-oriented and sensitive to group dynamics;
- recognise potential conflicts in the collaboration with others and reflect on these against the background of general possibilities and conditions. Their constructive, conceptual action ensures operative implementation of solutions.

## **Scientific self-understanding / Professionalism**

Graduates

- develop a professional self-image that is guided by the goals and standards of professional action not only within the sciences but also within extra-scientific professional fields;

- justify their own actions by means of theoretical and methodological knowledge and reflect on this with regard to alternative constructs and projects;
- assess their own capabilities, autonomously reflect on pertinent freedoms of creation and decision, and refine these under instruction;
- recognise appropriate framework conditions of professional, responsible agency and provide ethical justification for their decisions;
- critically reflect on their professional action with regard to social expectations and consequences, and refine their professional action.

### **Formal aspects**

#### Admission requirements:

For degree programmes leading to a first degree (*Diplom, Magister, Staatsexamen*):

- higher education entrance qualification (general or subject-specific higher education entrance qualification, university of applied science entrance qualification, admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification in accordance with the regulations of the federal states, including special procedures for determining eligibility);
- in accordance with the regulations of the federal states regarding admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification.

For Master level:

First higher education qualification, at least at Bachelor level, that provides qualification for qualified employment, plus further admission requirements to be defined by the respective higher education institution.

#### Duration:

- for Master programmes 1, 1.5 or 2 years (60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits);
- for degree programmes leading to a first higher education qualification 4, 4.5 or 5 years, incl. thesis (240, 270 or 300 ECTS credits).

#### Postgraduate options:

Doctorate, continuing education options.

#### Transitions from vocational education and training:

Notwithstanding the requirement for a first higher education qualification providing qualification for qualified employment, qualifications and competencies acquired outside higher education institutions and established by examination can, on starting a study programme at a particular higher education institution, be credited on the basis of an equivalence testing procedure to the amount corresponding to the requirements of the respective study programme.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Joint recommendation on 26 September 2003 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Rector's Conference to the higher education institutions on the award of credits in further vocational education and crediting them to a higher education degree programme; credit transfer of knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher/university education towards a university education (I), decision on 28 June 2002 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and credit transfer of knowledge and skills acquired outside of higher/university education towards a university education (II), decision on 18 September 2008 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

## Doctoral level and equivalent artistic degrees (“Solo performance class“ / “Master class“)<sup>9</sup>

### Knowledge and understanding

#### Broadening of knowledge:

Doctoral graduates have a systematic understanding of their research discipline and have demonstrated the skills and methods used in research within this field. They have a comprehensive knowledge of the relevant literature.

“Solo performance class“/“Master class“ graduates possess a systematic understanding of their artistic discipline and have demonstrated the skills and methods used in the artistic development within this field. They have a comprehensive knowledge of the relevant repertoire.

#### Deepening of knowledge:

By presenting a scientific paper or thesis graduates have made an independent contribution to research that extends the boundaries of knowledge and stands up to national or international review and examination by experts and specialists in the field.

“Solo performance class“/“Master class“ graduates have made an original contribution to artistic development through the presentation of an artistic work that extends the boundaries of the state of artistic development and stands up to national or international review and examination by experts and specialists in the field.

#### Understanding of knowledge:

Graduates reflect on the subject-specific and epistemologically substantiated correctness of probabilities and coherences. Implications for the solution of situational and extra-situational problems are compellingly determined on the basis of scientific and methodological inference.

“Solo performance class“/“Master class“ graduates arrive at compelling solutions to situation-specific and more general problems on the basis of artistic, theoretical and methodological inference.

### Application and generation of knowledge

Doctoral graduates can independently conceptualise and execute significant research projects with scientific integrity.

“Solo performance class“/“Master class“ graduates can independently conceptualise and execute significant artistic development projects with artistic integrity.

#### Utilisation and transfer of knowledge:

Doctoral graduates

- develop formats for testing current scientific findings and/or possibilities for the controlled testing of novel practice;

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<sup>9</sup> The qualifications of doctorate and “solo performance class“/“Master class“ are equivalent but they follow different logics and practices of knowledge production and application/transfer.

- define novel tasks and goals of strategic relevance, and make visible contributions to the social, scientific and/or cultural progress of a knowledge community within a professional field;
- are responsible for their scientific expertise and reflect on possible consequences of their work;
- use their own initiative to develop and implement products and processes of strategic significance, while utilising organisational units.

“Solo performance class”/“Master class” graduates

- develop formats for examining current artistic insights and/or possibilities for the reflective examination of novel artistic practice;
- define novel artistic tasks and goals, and make visible contributions to the artistic and cultural organisation and progress of society;
- are responsible for their artistic expertise and reflect on possible consequences of their work;
- reflect on the implications of artistic agency for social development.

#### Scientific or artistic innovation:

Doctoral graduates

- independently identify scientific questions and issues;
- develop and synthesise novel, complex ideas within a framework of critical analysis;
- refine research methods;
- make public contributions to the social, scientific and/or cultural progress of a knowledge community within the academic profession.

“Solo performance class”/“Master class” graduates

- independently identify artistic questions and issues;
- develop and synthesise novel, complex ideas and programming within a framework of critical analysis;
- refine artistic methods;
- make public contributions to the artistic and cultural design and development of the artistic profession.

#### **Communication and cooperation**

Doctoral graduates

- present, discuss and defend research-based insights from their specialist field within interdisciplinary contexts of research and application;
- discuss insights from their specialist fields with peers, present in front of an academic audience, and impart these insights to non-specialists.

“Solo performance class”/“Master class” graduates

- present research-based insights from their artistic discipline in front of specialist audiences and in competitions;
- assume responsible leadership of ensembles and bring artistic projects to fruition;
- present, discuss and defend research-based insights within international artistic-scientific contexts and impart these insights to non-specialists.

## Academic self-understanding / Professionalism

### Doctoral graduates

- develop a professional self-image that is guided by the goals and standards of professional action predominantly within the sciences and also within other professional fields;
- critically reflect on their professional action on the basis of theoretical and methodological knowledge, and assess their own skills and general knowledge; they make autonomous use of their freedom of creation and decision, and refine their skills and general knowledge;
- conduct theoretical and methodological evaluations of the professional action of others and support their ongoing development;
- refine theoretical and methodological knowledge as the basis for professional action in terms of foundational and applied research;
- recognise research-based framework conditions of professional action and reflect on the responsibility of scientists for the possible implications of their work;
- reflect critically on professional action with regard to social expectations and consequences, and develop and implement sustainable innovations.

### “Solo performance class“/“Master class“ graduates

- develop a professional self-image that is guided by the goals and standards of professional action within artistic professional fields;
- reflect on their professional action artistically, theoretically and methodologically, and assess their own skills and general knowledge; they make autonomous use of their freedom of creation and decision, and refine their skills and general knowledge;
- conduct artistic, theoretical and methodological evaluations of the professional action of others and support their ongoing development;
- refine artistic, theoretical and methodological knowledge as the basis for artistic action through both the development of new repertoires and the restructuring of programmes;
- recognise framework conditions of artistic action and reflect on the responsibility of artists for the possible implications of their work;
- reflect critically on artistic action with regard to social expectations and consequences, and develop and implement sustainable artistic and cultural innovations.

## Formal aspects

### Admission requirements:

*Master* (Univ., FH) [Master degree awarded by a university, Master degree awarded by a *Fachhochschule* (university of applied sciences)],  
*Diplom* (Univ.) [*Diplom* degree awarded by a university], *Magister*, *Staatsexamen* [State examination], outstanding Bachelor's degree or outstanding *Diplom* (FH) [*Diplom* degree awarded by a university of applied sciences].

Additional admission requirements are set by the faculty.