

VET in Austria

Vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role; 75% of all learners who have completed compulsory schooling are in VET programmes. Young people can choose from a wide range of dual track (apprenticeship) and mainly school-based programmes; there are about the same shares in both. School-based VET starts in the last year of compulsory schooling (year 9), and apprenticeship usually in year 10, as the minimum age is 15. These VET programmes lead to different qualification levels (from EQF 3 to EQF 5) and cover all economic sectors. While most school-based VET comes under the responsibility of the education ministry, governance of apprenticeship is shared by the ministries of economy and education, the social partners and the *Länder*. There is also a variety of post-secondary and tertiary level VET programmes.

The major VET programmes include:

- three- to four-year (mainly) school-based programmes (BMS, age 14 to 17/18, ISCED-P 354) leading to qualifications to exercise the respective occupation(s) and have access to regulated activities immediately after the final exam. Those who complete the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (exam for people whose initial VET does not automatically qualify them for entry into higher education) also have general access to tertiary level studies;
- five-year (mainly) school-based programmes (BHS, age 14 to 19, ISCED-P 354-554), which lead to double qualifications for senior positions in business and general access to higher education at the same time (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung*). As with graduates of BMS, access to regulated trades is possible. More than 50% progress to higher education;
- dual track (apprenticeship) training (age 15 onwards, ISCED-P 354) in some 200 apprenticeships. Training takes place at a company and at vocational school. In-company training is based on training regulations valid throughout Austria, which are within the remit of the economy ministry, but largely shaped by the social partners. The school-based part comes under the responsibility of the education ministry

(curricula) and the *Länder*. Graduates can obtain further qualifications by taking, for instance, the master craftsman exam or *Berufsreifeprüfung*;

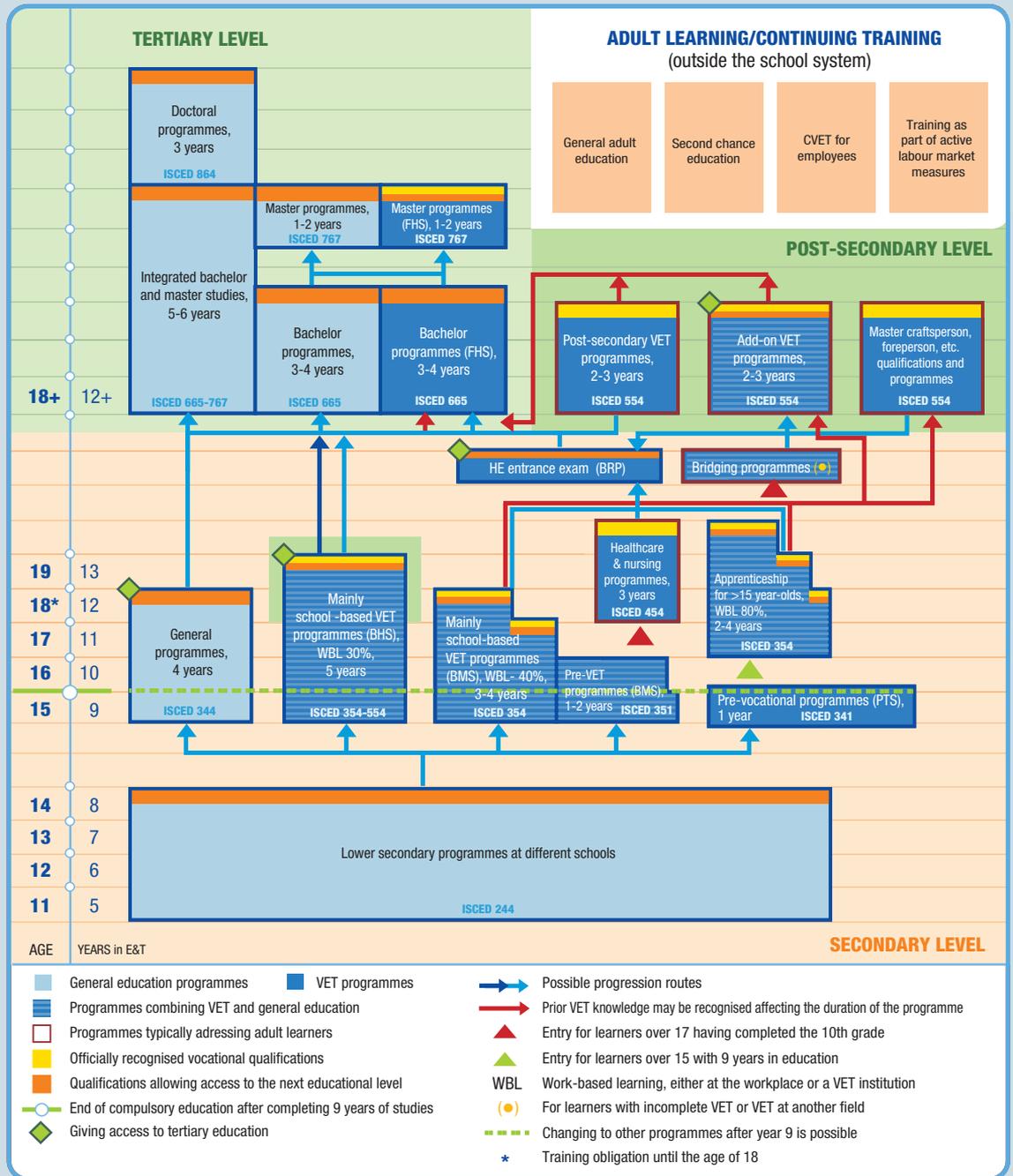
- those at universities of applied sciences (FHS, age 18 onwards, ISCED P-665/767): these are tailored to specific occupation fields and award academically founded professional qualifications (bachelor-master). A period of work placement is mandatory in most FHS programmes. Access requires higher education entrance qualifications but can also be granted to people with VET qualifications relevant to the field of study.

Adult learning/CVET: (young) adults can acquire the same qualifications within formal education and training as those open to the young: building on prior learning (VET as well as general education), these programmes help people upgrade their qualifications or obtain additional ones.

Outside formal education and training, learners can acquire different (legally regulated) qualifications through continuing VET. The CVET landscape is highly diverse and offers a wide range of courses: social partner institutions are the key providers.

Progression from general to VET strands is possible at different stages. Horizontal mobility between general education and VET or among different sectors and types of VET may be challenging, given the substantial share of work-based learning and occupation-related theory required for vocational qualifications. Progression to tertiary level studies is possible either through qualifications acquired in VET (such as BHS programmes) or after completing additional exams (such as *Berufsreifeprüfung*), depending on the type of programme.

VET in Austria's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Austria.

Distinctive features of VET

VET for young people is characterised by specific features which contribute to its attractiveness:

- linking theory and practice in all VET programmes: this is particularly evident in apprenticeship where learners spend 80% of their training time in a company acquiring the required competences in real-life conditions. At vocational school they acquire complementary skills and occupation-specific theory, and expand on general education. School-based VET includes mandatory work placements in companies and learning by doing in school workshops, labs, training restaurants, practice firms and through specific projects carried out in cooperation with business and industry;
- acquisition of key competences and general education: all VET programmes include general education, albeit to different extents. Working methods such as project work, practice firms and presentations, promote the ability to innovate, work in teams and autonomously, as well as entrepreneurial, ICT and communication skills. At least one foreign language is mandatory (in some sectors up to three) and is also used as a working language at several schools;
- training focus defined by schools: VET providers can partly amend national curricula, for example by opting for, or designing, a specific training focus to respond better to the needs of the regional economy;
- cooperation with the economy: to ensure VET relevance, programmes and curricula are continually adapted to the requirements of the economy. Cooperation with social partners and businesses ensures the necessary exchange of information;
- teachers with experience in business and industry: teachers of occupation-specific subjects need to prove they have acquired professional mastery before they can take up teaching. They may also teach part-time while still working in the industry or running their own businesses.

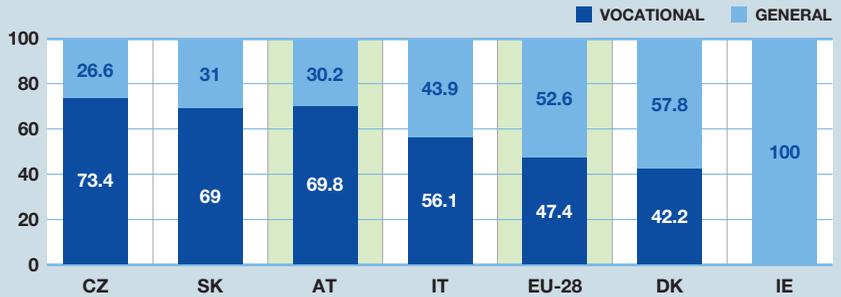
Challenges and solutions

- New perspective on qualifications: Austria has a relatively segmented education system and, as a result, a highly institution-focused perception of qualifications. The national qualifications framework (NQF) should lead to a new perspective on qualifications beyond their institutional positioning. The principle of 'parity of esteem' should underline that qualifications at the same level are 'equivalent' but not necessarily 'equal'. The NQF legal framework was adopted in 2016.
- Increasing transparency and permeability: learning-outcomes-oriented curricula and training programmes are meant to improve European comparability and transnational mobility as well as permeability within the country.
- Improving the quality of VET: following the comprehensive quality assurance initiative for school-based VET (QIBB), in 2013 a quality management initiative (QML) was established as an umbrella for related measures within apprenticeships. Work in higher VET aims to establish common quality assurance guidelines.
- Training obligation until age 18: the share of early leavers from education and training was already 7.3% in 2015, below the national 2020 target of 9.5%; a 'safety net' for young people has been in place for many years. Many of those who leave early have migrant background; with high numbers of newly arrived migrants, the risk that many may be left behind has increased. What used to be an offer became an obligation for young people in 2016. Those who are not in post-compulsory education and training, or in a job, must participate in mainstream school-based or apprenticeship programmes, supra-company training, production schools, or active labour market measures. Support and coaching measures for learners but also for training companies have been extended.



Education and training in figures

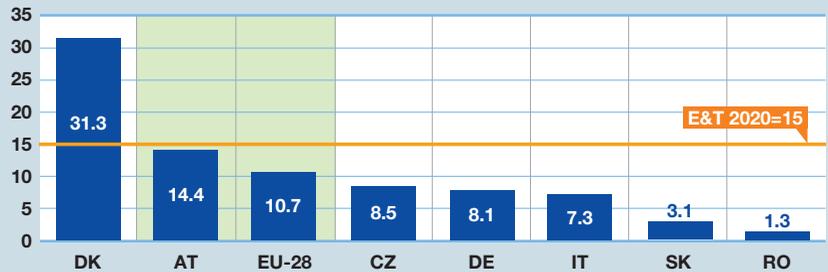
Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2014



NB: 47.4% is the provisional weighted EU average for 2014 based on available country data (27 countries). In Ireland it is possible to proceed to apprenticeship training following completion of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), but most learners continue to complete upper secondary education, which is general, rather than vocational, in nature.

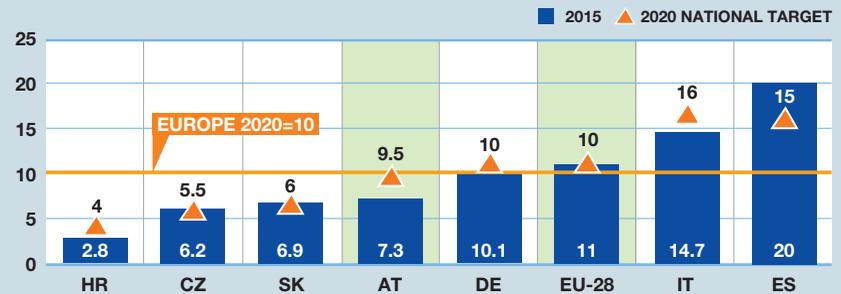
Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 6.12.2016.

Lifelong learning
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2015



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 6.12.2016.

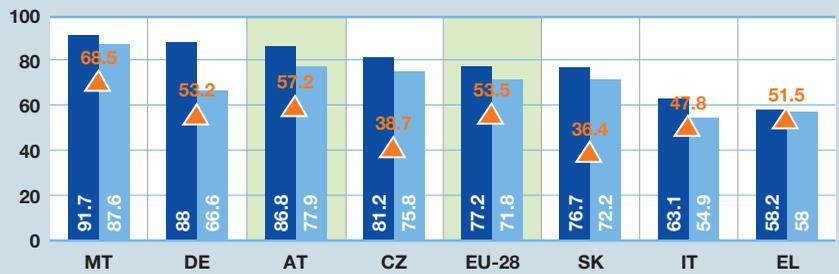
Early leavers from education and training
% of early leavers from education and training, 2015



NB: Low reliability in HR; definition for national target differs in SK, DE and ES.

Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 6.12.2016.

Employment rates of young graduates (20 to 34 years old) no longer in education and training, 2015



■ Upper vocational secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

■ Upper general secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

▲ Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 14.10.2016.

Further information

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE
 PO Box 22427, 551 02 Thessaloniki, GREECE
 Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, E-mail: info@cedefop.europa.eu

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