

Introduction of semester-based upper secondary education system



Timeline



ID number 44426

Background

There is a high drop-out rate at many upper secondary schools (general and vocational). A major influencing factor for this is seen to be that learners who received negative marks in their annual reports had to repeat the entire school year. This led to learners losing valuable learning and lifetime by repeating classes and partly being torn out of their social structures, which in turn increased the dropout rate. In response to this, the 'new upper secondary school' (NOST, *die neue Oberstufe*) was introduced, which was semester-based system including a course system. Schools have been able to implement the NOST system on a voluntary basis since the 2013/14 school year.

Objectives

At the programme objective level, the following goals should be achieved: increase in success rates and reduction in class repetitions and dropouts.

The programme itself aims at the implementation of needs-based support measures including individual learning support; semester-by-semester distribution of subject matter into competence modules; and the promotion of the continuous performance of learners.

Description

In 2019, an extensive evaluation of the NOST system took place. It was published in 2020 and formed the basis for further improving the semester-based education system. In 2022, the legal foundations were laid for the reform of upper secondary education to a 'semester-based upper secondary education' (SOST). The SOST system thus replaces the predecessor model NOST and is applied from the 10th grade onwards at general and vocational schools, with the exclusion of the apprenticeship system. In contrast to year-round subjects, in the course system the learning content is grouped into smaller blocks (courses), which learners can choose semester by semester as part of individual focal points in addition to the compulsory subjects. This SOST system leads to a condensation of the learning activity, since (positive) performance must be achieved in all subjects in both the winter and summer semesters. In contrast to the NOST system, advancement to the next semester or school year is possible under certain conditions even in the case of a negative semester

evaluation.

The new semester based-system is accompanied by a comprehensive support system. The system of early warning during the semester is optimised. Learners with support needs receive individual learning support. Subject teaching, remedial teaching and individual learning support thus support the learners in a new overall concept. Individual subjects can be brought forward or skipped by taking semester exams. This also makes it possible to take the final examination in the respective compulsory subject earlier.

The early warning occurs, if the performance of learners in a compulsory subject would have to be assessed as 'insufficient' at the end of a semester on the basis of the performance achieved three months before the end of the semester: the parents or guardians shall be informed immediately and the learners and the parents or guardians shall be given the opportunity by the head of the class or the teacher to consult and to develop an individual learning support. The aim is to improve the individual learning situation for learners.

However, the implementation of the new organisational form of the semester-based upper secondary education is the responsibility of the individual school location, which can decide within the framework of its school autonomy whether it introduces the new form or remains with the year-round school form.

2019 Design

In 2019, extensive evaluation of the 'new upper secondary school' system NOST was carried out, with the involvement of all stakeholders.

2020 Design

In 2020, the results of the evaluation of the NOST system were published.

2021 Legislative process

In 2021, based on evaluation results, the structure of the existing NOST system was further developed into the SOST system. At the same time, relevant provisions were prepared that would come into effect in the event that a learner switches between a school with SOST and one with the year-round system, which continues for the time being.

2022 Approved/Agreed

In 2022, the reform of the upper secondary school to SOST was introduced through an amendment of the relevant school laws by resolution in parliament in June 2022. Since 1 September 2022, schools can switch to the semestral upper cycle within the framework of their school autonomy.

2023 Implementation

The Semestral Upper Secondary School (SOST) was introduced in September 2023. Schools that previously operated under the predecessor model, the NOST, and did not transition to the year-round system were moved to the SOST model starting from the 10th grade when the new framework was implemented.

2024 Completed

In 2024, the policy is fully implemented and runs on a regular basis.

Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Education (BMB)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Young people (15-29 years old)

Education professionals

Teachers
School leaders

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[Evaluation of the new upper school NOST 2018/19. Final report 2020.](#)

[Information on the conversion of the upper school from year-round to a semester-based organisation \(only in German\)](#)

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Introduction of semester-based upper secondary education system: Austria. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/44426>