

# Establishing a higher VET field



## Timeline



ID number 29653

## Background

Austria has a strong qualification/labour market-oriented IVET system. About 75% of young people opt for one of the various VET programmes at upper secondary level (i.e. between the ages of 14 and 19) after compulsory schooling. These programmes enable them to directly enter the labour market. The tertiary level is – in comparison to other European countries – rather small and focusses on academic/research-oriented education. Many further or upskilling programmes, which build on upper secondary qualifications, are offered outside the tertiary level. With very few exceptions, these programmes are not part of the formal education system. Moreover, they are not considered in educational statistics (e.g. ISCED) either. The qualifications acquired through these programmes are hardly known or are only known within the respective sector. In contrast to qualifications from the academic tertiary area (i.e. bachelor, master and PhD degrees), the qualifications from higher VET are regarded as less prestigious by public opinion.

For the labour market, though, higher VET programmes are very important, as they are demand-driven/demand-oriented and focus on the further education and training of people with an upper secondary VET qualification (not necessarily with an entrance qualification for higher education) and are usually offered part-time (i.e. parallel to work). The great variety of qualifications within this educational field, however, hampers an understanding of them and diminishes public perception.

The allocation of qualifications to the national qualifications framework (NQF) has drawn more attention to this problem. This is because the Austrian NQF is a comprehensive framework to which all qualifications can potentially be allocated, irrespective of where they were acquired (i.e. in schools, universities or CVET provider institutions, which are outside the formal education system) and of their legal status (governmentally regulated and also non-governmentally regulated qualifications can be allocated).

## Objectives

The main objectives of this initiative are:

- (a) consolidation of the heterogeneous field of higher VET by defining connecting elements and thus creating a common understanding of what this term means;
- (b) establishing a legal basis for a common understanding of higher VET, either through a

- quality assurance act on higher VET or an amendment of the NQF Act;
- (c) introducing higher VET as a label with a clear message to make the qualifications more visible and better known;
- (d) indicating this area in the education system chart.

## Description

To realise parity of esteem and increase the visibility and public perception of higher VET qualifications, a discussion on the establishment of a defined educational field for higher VET qualifications was started in 2019 within educational policy. The Ministry of Education commissioned a paper that should form the basis for further discussion and decision-making (*Grundlagenpapier*). This paper, which was drawn up by ibw, was presented and discussed in a conference with national and foreign experts in November 2019.

For this goal to be reached it is necessary to consolidate the very heterogeneous field of higher VET, that is, to define its connecting elements and structure. By doing so, higher VET should also be defined clearly and there should be a common understanding of what higher VET comprises. Moreover, higher VET should be introduced officially as a label and be laid down by law. This should push the visibility and appreciation of higher VET qualifications.

How should this initiative be implemented?

- (a) The implementation is still to be discussed.

Who is involved?

- (a) leading ministries: the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Economic Affairs;
- (b) stakeholders from other ministries that are responsible for VET programmes (e.g. health, agriculture);
- (c) social partners;
- (d) CVET provider institutions.

Who should benefit from this initiative?

- (a) learners in higher VET programmes/future graduates;
- (b) companies;
- (c) CVET provider institutions.

When should this initiative be implemented?

- (a) discussions should have already started in the first half of 2020;
- (b) it is expected that during 2021 concrete results (e.g. an amendment of the NQF Act or a quality assurance act on higher VET) will be available.

### 2019 Design

In 2019, when the first discussions on higher VET started within educational policy, the Ministry of Education commissioned a paper that should form the basis for further discussion and decision-making (*Grundlagenpapier*). This paper, which was drawn up by ibw, was presented and discussed in a conference with national and foreign experts in November 2019 with the intention of being published in 2020 to start the political discussion.

### 2020 Design

The strengthening of higher VET is part of the programme of the acting government which has been in office since January 2020. In the second half of 2020, discussions about establishing a separate higher VET education segment started. It was stipulated that higher VET falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs and that this ministry should, therefore, also be primarily responsible for drawing up a Higher VET law. A corresponding draft law was in the process of being

drawn up.

### 2021 Design

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the implementation of this project, as many forces combined to deal with the crisis. Nevertheless, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber continued to work on the topic by developing proposals for criteria and creating Higher VET-specific descriptors. In addition, discussions were held between stakeholders to promote the formation of political opinion.

### 2022 Legislative process

On 23 Feb. 2022, the Council of Ministers formally took the decision to establish Higher VET as a separate education segment. At the same time, the starting signal was given for the creation of a Higher VET Act under the auspices of the Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs.

In May 2022 a kick-off event was held with relevant stakeholders, aiming to exchange opinions on higher VET as well as to solicit proposals for the Higher VET Act. Immediately afterwards, an editorial team for the drafting of the law was established, including representatives of the social partners in addition to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economic Affairs. A first draft of the Act was prepared by autumn 2022, which was presented and discussed in a second stakeholder event in October 2022. The results of this event have been incorporated into the improvement of the draft law. It is planned to send the draft for review in the first quarter of 2023.

### 2023 Legislative process

In 2023, the political process continued. The draft was subjected to an official review and the text was then finalised.

### 2024 Approved/Agreed

The Higher VET Act was published on 28 February 2024 and came into effect on 1 May 2024.

In the second half of 2024, the operative work commenced, with the development of guidelines and aids for the implementation of the law at the level of the qualification providers. Additionally, the development of first qualifications was initiated with the 'technical consultancy on energy efficiency'.

### 2025 Implementation

In 2025, the practical implementation of the HiVET through the work on its first qualification 'technical consulting for energy efficiency' continued. In parallel, the practical insights gained from this work were used to develop guidelines for the development of new HiVET qualifications. These guidelines are intended to support those institutions that wish to develop HiVET qualifications in the future. They include process information and annotated templates for the required submission documents.

Also in 2025, relevant stakeholder institutions were established, including the scientific institutions provided for in the HBB Act and the validation and examination bodies.

In September 2025, the pilot qualification came into force. Many other sectors have started developing HiVET qualifications, which are expected to be enacted by regulation in the course of 2026.

## Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry of Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW) (until 2022)

- Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (BMAW) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism (BMWET)
- Federal Ministry of Education (BMB)

## Target group

### Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Adult learners

### Entities providing VET

Companies

VET providers (all kinds)

## Thematic categories

### Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Expanding VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8

### Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Comprehensive national qualification frameworks

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

### Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

## Subsystem

CVET

## Further reading

[ReferNet news: Does Austria need a higher vocational education and training education segment?](#)

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[Joint Report of the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Research and the Federal Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs, Number 2022-0.136.428, concerning Higher Vocational Education and Training.](#)

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[Higher VET Act \(in German only\)](#)

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[National news on VET: Implementation of higher VET Act picks up speed.](#)

## Related policy developments

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2025 Implementation

### Apprenticeships for adults leading to NQF level 5

Under the title Apprenticeship NEW for adults, the Federal Economic Chamber has taken the initiative within its education campaign (*Bildungsoffensive*) to develop a programme for people with a higher education entrance qualification that leads to a dual VET qualification at NQF/EQF level

 AUSTRIA

#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

### Increasing attractiveness of apprenticeship training

In January 2020, the Austrian parliament passed an amendment to the Vocational Training Act (BAG), jointly developed by the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and the social partners.

 AUSTRIA

#### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

#### Subsystem

IVET

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2025 Implementation

### Engineering Act (IngG 2017)

A new Engineering Act (IngG 2017) came into force on 1 May 2017.

 AUSTRIA

#### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

#### Subsystem

CVET

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## 2025 Implementation

### Implementation of the national qualifications framework

The NQF development and implementation process is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF).

 AUSTRIA

**Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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## 2025 Implementation

### Transparency of master craftsperson qualifications

The policy development refers to a comprehensive process for aligning master craftsperson qualifications to the requirements of the NQF.

 AUSTRIA

**Type of development**

Practical  
measure/Initiative

**Subsystem**

CVET

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## 2025 Implementation

### We educate the economy plan: promoting innovative and excellence in VET

The We educate the economy plan was approved in 2018 by the Austrian Economic Chamber and focusses on developing projects in five fields:

 AUSTRIA

**Type of development**

Strategy/Action  
plan

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/29653>