



spotlight on VET

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VET in Austria

Austrian vocational education and training (VET) ranks high, as demonstrated by its differentiated offer and high attractiveness: around 70% of each age cohort opt for a VET path at the end of compulsory education. The last year (year 9) of compulsory education and the first of upper secondary education coincide. School-based VET and apprenticeships (dual track training) coexist. They cover nearly all economic sectors and lead to different qualification levels (either EQF 4 or 5). Most school-based VET comes under the remit of the education ministry. Governance of apprenticeship is shared by the ministries of economy (company-based track) and education (school-based track), the social partners and the *Länder*. There is also a variety of VET programmes at tertiary level and for adults.

Upper secondary level

Alongside general education programmes, learners can choose from various pre-VET and VET options in different occupations/sectors:

- **different types of one- or two-year pre-VET** (PTS, ISCED 341; BMS, ISCED 351): learners acquire general education, key competences and basic vocational skills preparing them for further school-based VET, apprenticeships and simple jobs on the labour market;
- **three- to four-year school-based VET** (BMS, ISCED 354, EQF 4): learners strengthen their general education and acquire the respective occupational competences and qualifications to perform medium-level jobs. Those who complete an add-on programme or take the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (exam for people whose initial VET does not automatically qualify them for entry into higher education) also obtain general access to higher education studies;
- **five-year school-based VET** (BHS, ISCED 354-554, EQF 5): combining theory and practice, these programmes offer high-quality occupation-related training while strengthening learners' general education. They lead to double qualifications for senior positions in business and general access to higher education at the same time (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung*);
- **apprenticeships (dual track training)** (ISCED 354, EQF 4) in some 200 occupations and trades for learners from age 15 onwards,

after compulsory education. They lead to qualifications at medium level. Graduates can progress to qualify, for instance, as master craftsperson or, following additional exams, access tertiary level training in a related field. By completing the *Berufsreifeprüfung* or an add-on programme they can also obtain general access to higher education;

- **training for occupations in the health sector:** access to programmes preparing for care and medical assistant professions (ISCED 351 and 353) and other occupations in the health sector (ISCED 351) requires completed compulsory education, being of minimum age, and/or a specific qualification. Training to become specialist and general care nurse (ISCED 454) is being upgraded to bachelor level. This process will be completed by 2023.

Tertiary level

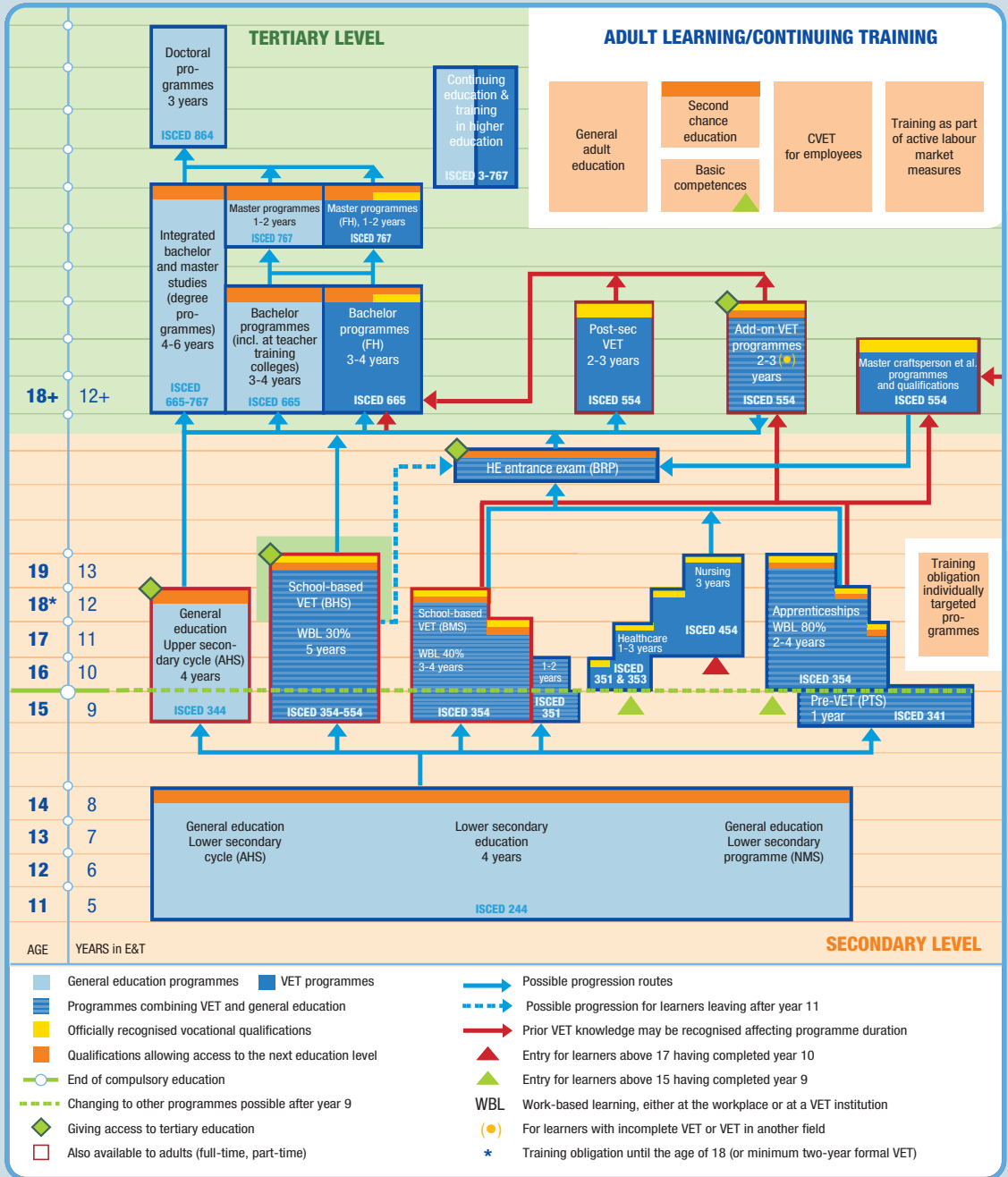
Universities of applied sciences (FH) provide practice-oriented bachelor (EQF 6) and master programmes (EQF 7) in different fields. Several of these include a mandatory work placement. Many are open to, or cater for, people in employment. Some are based on the dual principle, where theory and practice in enterprises alternate.

University studies are generally pre-professional; some, such as medicine, law or engineering/technology, have a strong vocational focus. Initial training for primary and secondary school teachers is a joint responsibility of universities and teacher education colleges.

Adult learning/continuing VET

Adults can acquire the same qualifications within formal education and training as those open to the young. A diverse range of institutions offers continuing training and progression opportunities to complement or upgrade people's initial qualifications. These include programmes awarding or preparing for tertiary/post-secondary vocational qualifications, such as industrial master and master craftsperson certificates, certified accountants, or for law enforcement services. They also provide training within active labour market measures.

VET in Austria's education and training system



NB: Simplified. ISCED-P 2011.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Austria.

Distinctive features of VET

VET, specifically at upper secondary level, is characterised by features which contribute to its attractiveness:

- **differentiated and high-quality offer:** the broad range available is not only reflected in the various types of training and qualification levels but also in the fields of study, which include business, engineering, tourism, fashion, design, arts, and agriculture. Programmes can be adapted to regional economic contexts and skill needs and allow learners to develop their strengths and talents in the best possible way. The comprehensive quality assurance initiative for school-based VET (QIBB) in 2013 was followed by a quality management approach (QML) for apprenticeship. There are similar initiatives for higher level programmes;
- **content and methods:** all programmes, whether school-based or dual track, combine VET with general education and theory with practice. Much attention is also paid to acquisition of key competences such as the ability to work in teams, and digital and entrepreneurial 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. Competence-orientation is a key principle in VET;
- **work-based learning:** links to the world of work is central to VET, particularly in apprenticeships where learners spend 80% of their training time in a company. School-based VET is also practice-oriented: it includes learning in workshops, labs, training restaurants, and practice firms, complemented by mandatory work placements in companies. Project and diploma assignments as part of the five-year programme final exams are often set by companies or carried out with their collaboration. Many teachers have experience in business and industry, which, for certain areas, is also an admission requirement;
- **demand orientation in apprenticeship:** on completion of compulsory education, young people apply for apprenticeship places in companies and conclude a training contract with them. Apprentices are also assigned to the respective school-based programme, which is mandatory. The number of apprentices being trained is demand-led.

Challenges and solutions

Despite its wide recognition, VET faces several challenges that generally characterise the current education policy discourse:

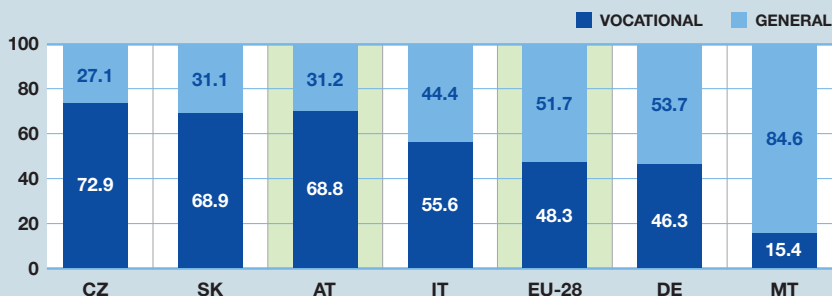
- **basic skills:** OECD-PISA results in recent years suggest that the share of learners with low achievement in reading literacy and maths is comparatively high. Companies tend to point to young apprentices' basic skills gaps. This drives the current government's goal that no young person should leave compulsory education without having achieved basic competence levels in reading, writing and maths. To this end, a shift in focus towards achieving agreed standards on key competences is envisaged;
- **early leaving from education and training:** early leaving rates have been comparatively low and a 'safety net' for young people has been in place for many years. What used to be an offer became a training obligation until age 18 in 2017: all young people who are not in post-compulsory education and training, or in a job, must participate in mainstream school-based programmes, apprenticeships or other recognised training;
- **value of non-formal training:** Austria has a relatively segmented education system; permeability is limited, particularly between non-formal and formal programmes at higher levels. Public perception of formal and non-formal qualifications is not the same. The national qualifications framework (NQF) is expected to provide a new perspective on them, as assigning qualifications to NQF levels is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of the institutional context in which they were acquired.



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, 2016

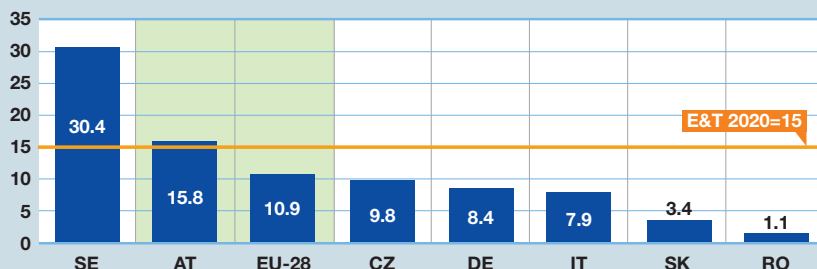


NB: AT: For five-year VET (BHS) the value only covers enrolment in the first three years, as the last two are assigned to ISCED 5. EU-28 value is based on Cedefop calculations; UK values were not available.

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 23.4.2018.

Lifelong learning

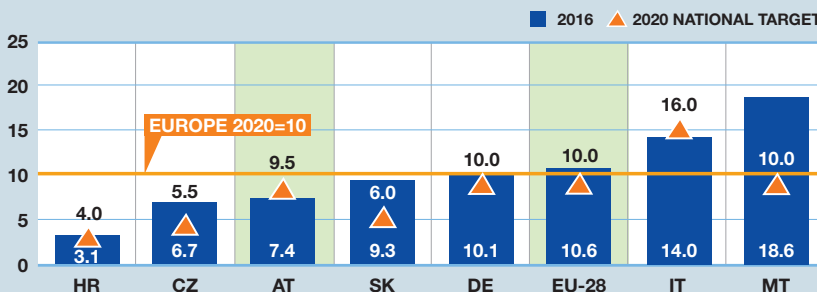
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2017



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 23.4.2018.

Early leavers from education and training

% of the population aged 18 to 24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks prior to the survey, 2017

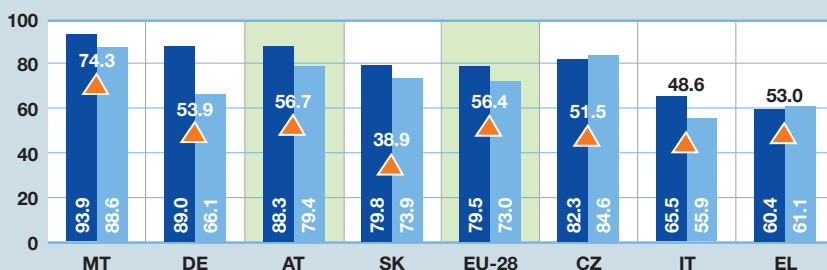


NB: Break in time series for 2017 MT value.

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 23.4.2018.

Employment rates of young graduates

% of 20 to 34 year-olds no longer in education and training, 2017



■ 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).

NB: Break in time series for MT values.

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 23.4.2018.



Further information

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https://www.qualitaet-lehre.at/	information on apprenticeships in Austria
http://www.fachhochschulen.ac.at/	Austrian universities of applied science portal
https://www.aq.ac.at/de/	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
http://www.ams.at/	public employment service Austria
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview	information on the Austrian education and training system in Eurydice's 'Eurypedia'
https://refernet.at/de/	ReferNet Austria

This Spotlight is based on information and input by ReferNet Austria (<https://refernet.at/en/>).



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Publications Office

ISBN 978-92-896-2678-1



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