



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 follow a VET path at the end of compulsory education. The final year (year 9) of compulsory education and the first of upper secondary education coincide. 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 VET options:

- different types of one- or two-year pre-VET (PTS, ISCED 341; BMS, ISCED 351): learners acquire general education and basic vocational skills preparing them for further school-based VET and apprenticeships;
- three- to four-year school-based VET (BMS, ISCED 354, EQF 4): combine general education and respective occupational competences and qualifications to perform medium-level jobs. Those who complete an add-on VET programme (lasting two to three years) or take the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (higher education entrance exam) also obtain general access to higher education studies;
- five-year school-based VET (BHS, ISCED 354-554, EQF 5): 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 (ISCED 354, EQF 4) last two to four years and are offered in some 230 occupations to learners having completed compulsory education. They lead to qualifications at medium level. Graduates can progress to qualify as master craftsperson or, with relevant work experience and/or additional exams, access tertiary level training in a related field. By completing the *Berufsreifeprüfung* or an add-on VET programme, they can obtain general access to higher education;
- VET programmes in the healthcare sector last one to three years and are offered at ISCED 351 and 353. Three-year nursing programmes are offered at ISCED 454 and provide access to tertiary-level training in related fields.

Tertiary level

Post-secondary VET programmes (ISCED 554, EQF 5) last two to three years and provide high level professional training. They are available in various specialist areas and graduates attain the professional qualifications of the corresponding BHS.

Universities of applied sciences (FH) provide practice-oriented bachelor (EQF 6) and master programmes (EQF 7) in different fields. Some are based on the dual principle, where theory and practice in enterprises alternate. Many are open to people in employment.

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.

Distinctive features of VET

The broad range of available VET programmes 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 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.

Work-based learning 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, including learning in workshops, labs, training restaurants and practice firms, complemented by mandatory work placements in companies. Project and diploma assignments as part of the final exam of the five-year VET programme (EQF 5) are often set by companies or carried out with their collaboration.

Much attention is paid to the acquisition of key competences (including teamwork, digital and entrepreneurial skills). At least one foreign language is mandatory – in some study fields (such as tourism) up to three – and is also used as a working language at several schools. Competence-orientation is a key principle in VET.

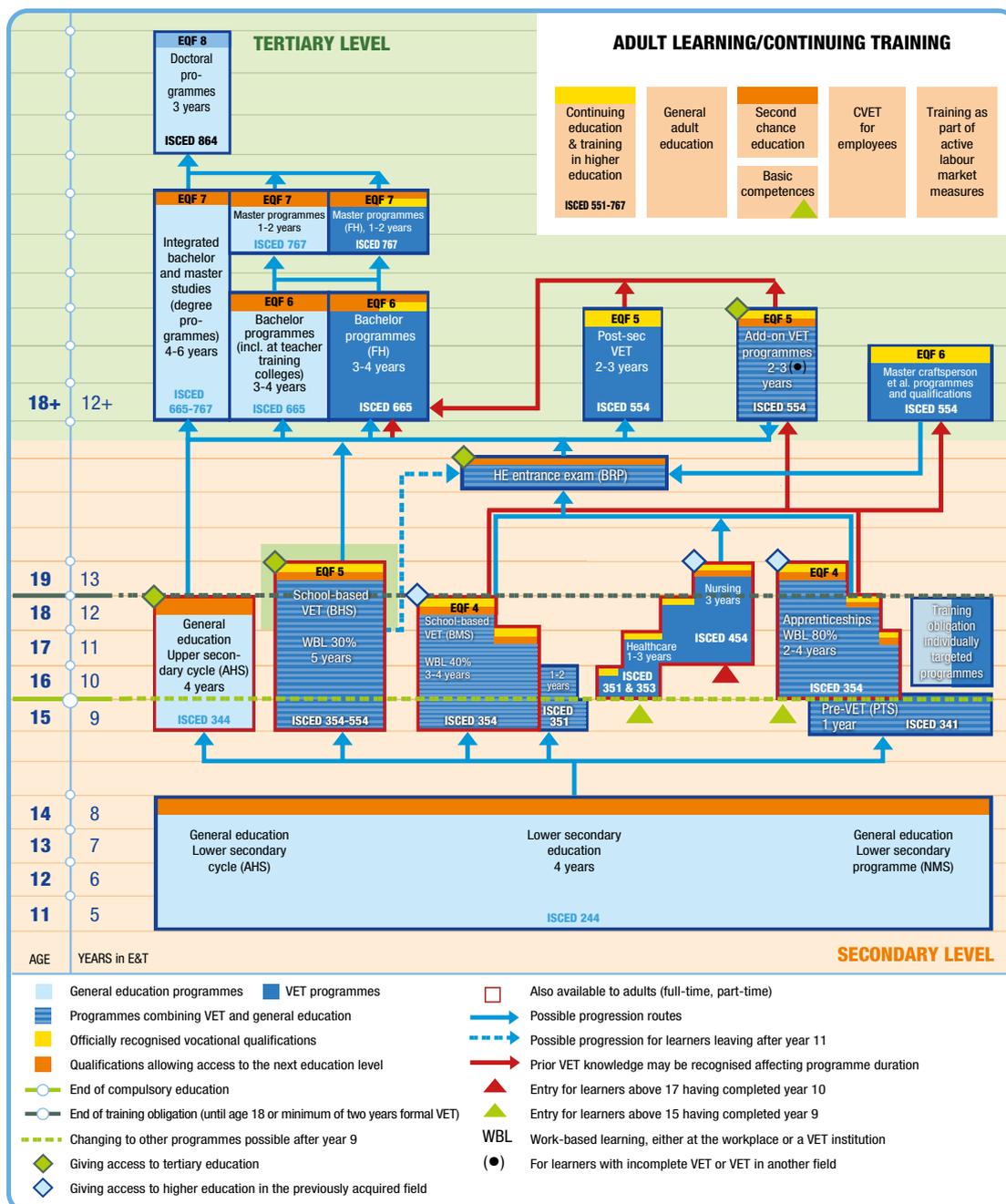
The number of apprentices (within the dual VET-track) being trained is driven by company demand. The training is based on a training contract between the company and the apprentice and learners need to follow a respective school-based programme. Early leaving rates from education and training have been comparatively low (7.8% in 2019) and there has been a training obligation since 2017: all young people must participate in mainstream school-based programmes, apprenticeships or other recognised training until the age of 18.

Contrary to fears, the coronavirus pandemic has, so far, not had any serious impact on the supply of apprenticeship places. However, consideration is being given to how alternative supra-company training can be expanded to bridge possible gaps in apprenticeship training places.

Challenges and policy responses

Despite its wide recognition, VET faces several challenges:

- basic skills: the latest OECD-PISA results reveal that the share of learners with low achievement in reading literacy and maths is comparatively high. Companies tend to point



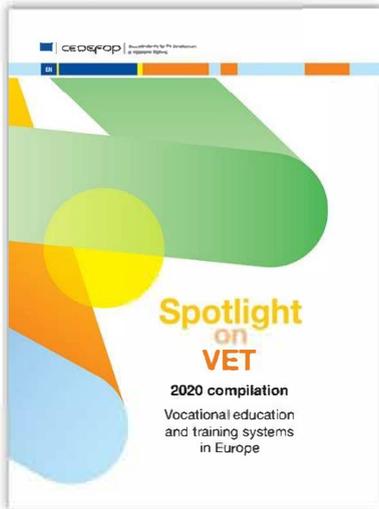
NB: Simplified. ISCED-P 2011.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Austria, 2020.

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;

- 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 assignment to NQF levels is based on learning outcomes, irrespective of the institutional context in which they were

acquired. Since end of 2019 it has been possible to assign non-formal qualifications to NQF;

- lack of skilled workers: there is a shortage of skilled workers which is mainly attributed to demographic developments and the increased attractiveness of general education. Several measures have been introduced, such as the possibility to follow part-time apprenticeship for parents and people with health problems (from 2020).



Publication:

Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation:
vocational education and training systems in Europe.

Access the full publication at:

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

Please cite this chapter as:

Cedefop (2021). VET in Austria. In: Cedefop (2021). *Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation: vocational education and training systems in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. pp. 8-9.
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4189>

© Cedefop, 2021