



spotlight on VET

# AUSTRIA

## VET in Austria

Vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role; 75% of all learners who have completed compulsory schooling are in a VET programme. Young people can choose from a wide range of mainly school-based and dual track (apprenticeship) programmes (about the same shares in both). These upper secondary programmes cover all economic sectors and lead to different qualification levels (from EQF 3 to EQF 5). 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. 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 tertiary level VET programmes. Outside formal education, learners can acquire different qualifications through continuing VET (CVET).

The major VET programmes include:

- **three- to four-year (mainly) school-based programmes** (BMS, 14-18 years, ISCED 3B) 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, 14-19 years, ISCED 4A), 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** (from 15 years onwards, ISCED 3B) in some 200 apprenticeships. Training takes place at a company and at vocational school. In-company training is based on a training regulation valid throughout Austria, which is within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Economy, 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, such as the master craftsperson exam or *Berufsreifeprüfung*;

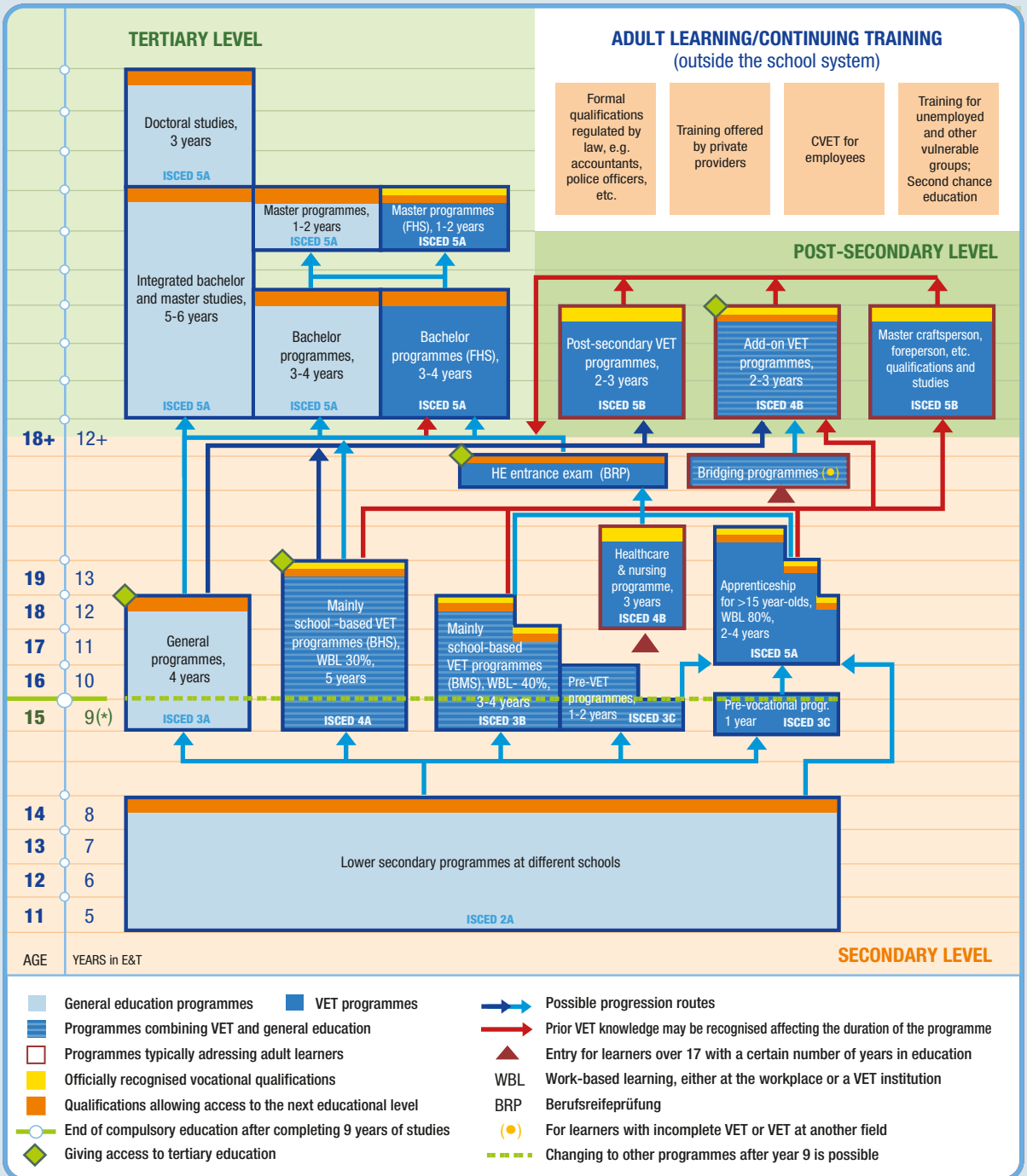
- **those at universities of applied sciences** (FHS, from 18 years onwards, ISCED 5A/6): these programmes are tailored to specific occupation fields and award academically founded professional qualifications at higher education level (bachelor-master). A period of work placement is a mandatory part of the curriculum. FHS programmes are not only open to learners who hold higher education entrance qualifications but can also be undertaken by people with VET qualifications relevant to the field of study.

**Adult learning/CVET:** within the formal education and training system, (young) adults can acquire qualifications open to youth through specific programmes which build on initial qualification/prior learning (for those with a VET background as well as those from general education). There are also exam preparation programmes for master craftsperson/foreperson and similar qualifications.

VET outside schools and higher education institutions is often available at CVET institutions. The CVET landscape is characterised by a high degree of institutional diversity (social partners' institutions are the key providers) and an associated wide range of available courses. There are also programmes that award legally regulated qualifications.

Progression opportunities from general to VET strands are 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. Upper secondary VET graduates can progress to tertiary level studies either immediately following graduation or after completing additional examinations (such as *Berufsreifeprüfung*), depending on the type of programme undertaken.

# VET in Austria's education and training system



NB: This is a simplified chart based on a common format for all countries in EU-28+Norway and Iceland.  
 ISCED 1997 was used in this chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing. EQF levels are being discussed.  
 Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Austria.

## Distinctive features of VET

Upper secondary VET programmes are characterised by specific features which contribute greatly to their attractiveness among young people:

- **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 (20%) they acquire complementary skills and occupational theoretical background, and expand on general education. Most 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 subjects, albeit to different extents. Other competences, such as the ability to innovate, work in teams and autonomously, as well as entrepreneurial, ICT and communication skills are acquired through different working methods (such as project work, practice firms and presentations); 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:** within the framework of school autonomy, VET establishments can partly amend curricula, for example by opting for, or designing, a specific training focus. Such options allow them to respond better to the needs of the regional economy;
- **cooperation between education and the economy:** to ensure VET relevance, curricula and training programmes 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;
- **training guarantee until age 18:** young people who do not find a place in a company or school-based VET after compulsory education are offered apprenticeships in a supra-company training workshop. With this, the number of early school leavers was reduced to 7.3% in 2013, below the national 2020 target of 9.5%.

## Challenges and solutions

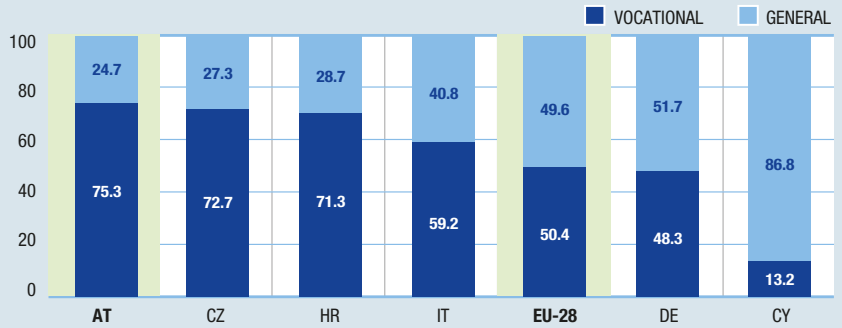
- Parity of esteem of VET qualifications for progression to and at higher education level (change of mindset). In this, the work on the national qualifications framework (NQF), which aims to include qualifications from all education contexts, whether formal or non-formal, is of major importance.
- Learning-outcomes-oriented 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: quality development in school-based VET has been supported since 2004 by the VET quality initiative (QIBB), which is in line with the EQAVET reference framework. This work has also helped reduce dropout rates. For apprenticeships, the aim is to raise the quality of training and of the apprenticeship-leave exam. In 2013, the social partners launched a quality management initiative (QML) to ensure that even more apprentices complete their training and pass the exam.
- In addition to training guarantees, which Austria introduced several years ago, coaching for young people and enterprises and support measures within school-based VET are used to reduce (further) the number of young people leaving education and training early.



## Education and training in figures

### Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

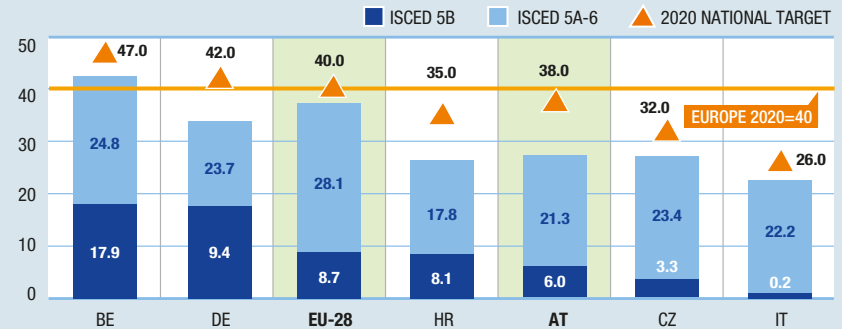
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 30.5.2014.

### Tertiary education by type

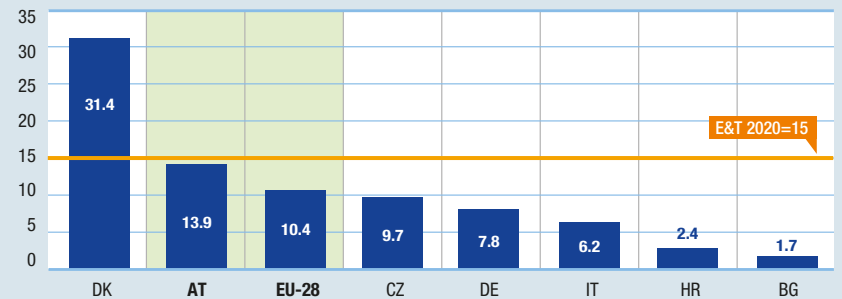
% of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education by type, 2013



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

### Lifelong learning

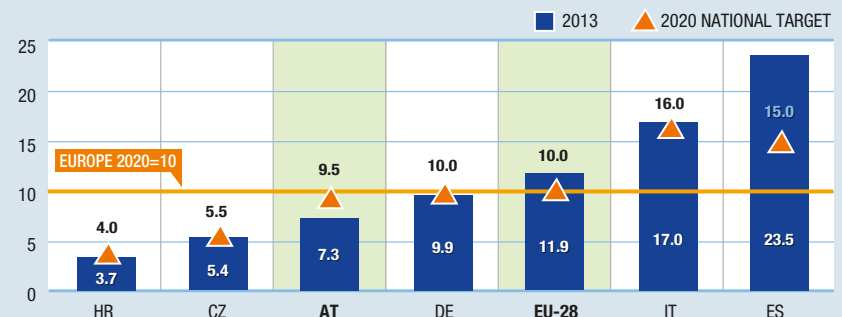
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

### Early leavers from education and training

% of early leavers from education and training, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

## Further information

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<a href="http://www.bildungssystem.at">www.bildungssystem.at</a>	Education system in Austria
<a href="http://www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/index.html">www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/index.html</a>	Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs
<a href="http://www.en.bmwf.gv.at/Seiten/default.aspx">www.en.bmwf.gv.at/Seiten/default.aspx</a>	Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy
<a href="http://www.sozialministerium.at/siteEN/Labour/Labour_Market/Labour_market_policy_in_Austria/Youth_and_Work_in_Austria">www.sozialministerium.at/siteEN/Labour/Labour_Market/Labour_market_policy_in_Austria/Youth_and_Work_in_Austria</a>	Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
<a href="http://www.ams.at/english">www.ams.at/english</a>	Public Employment Service Austria
<a href="http://www.aq.ac.at/en/index.php">www.aq.ac.at/en/index.php</a>	Agency for quality assurance and accreditation Austria
<a href="http://www.act.at/en">www.act.at/en</a>	Austrian centre for training firms
<a href="http://www.fachhochschulen.ac.at/en/faq">www.fachhochschulen.ac.at/en/faq</a>	The Austrian UAS (universities of applied sciences) portal
<a href="http://www2.cebs.at/index.php?id=52">www2.cebs.at/index.php?id=52</a>	Centre for vocationally-oriented language education ( <i>Center für berufsbezogene Sprachen – CEBS</i> )
<a href="http://www.ibw.at/de/bbs">www.ibw.at/de/bbs</a>	Vocational education and training in Austria
<a href="http://www.refernet.at">www.refernet.at</a>	ReferNet Austria

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Austria.



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