

Achieving the Lisbon Goal:

The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems

Country Report: Austria

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Theme 1:

Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon

1. Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET)

General remarks:

Austria possesses a qualification-oriented educational system, characterised by a large proportion of specific vocational training. The combination of a highly-developed apprenticeship system with a comprehensive scholastic vocational training system (at the level of upper secondary education) ensures the dissemination of relevant vocational skills and qualifications through the educational system. If all forms of vocational training are considered together, approximately 80% of young people in upper secondary education are in post-compulsory vocational education. Slightly more than half of those in vocational education choose a school-based option, the other half take part in dual-system vocational training. This structure proves, that IVET has a very high status and is attractive to the young generation.

a and b) Raise the status and improve the attractiveness of IVET

Therefore sub-questions *a) and b)* only apply to a very limited extent to the Austrian situation. There is almost no need for raising the status and/or improving the attractiveness of IVET in Austria. To guarantee this high status of IVET there is continuous development of educational opportunities with future oriented content. VET curricula and occupational profiles for apprenticeship training are regularly updated and revised and new programmes are introduced to ensure that the educational system responds to changing labour market/skill needs.

Within the IVET-system some problems concerning the status and attractiveness can be observed in the fields of *BMS* (Secondary VET Schools) and the apprenticeship system: The attractiveness of the *BMS* somehow suffers because it does not offer a *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* (certificate and VET diploma). For more than a decade a declining trend of apprenticeship places has been observed. As a first reaction to this, the creation of new apprenticeship trades and the adaptation of existing apprenticeships in the mid-1990s attempted to meet the required modernisation of the dual training system. Recent policy proposals aim at introducing a more modular approach (see also sub-question c), the provision of financial incentives for training companies by the federal government and the installation of “recruiters of apprenticeship places”: in short all these measures aim at encouraging more companies to train.

c) Increase the flexibility of IVET:

For some years there has been a debate on introducing elements of modularisation of apprenticeship trades, i.e. reducing the number of apprenticeship trades by

clustering them into craft-specific groups and structuring the curricula of these new “apprenticeship trade groups” in line with modules, whereby specialisation-tracks will be offered at the later stage modules¹. The goal is to reduce the number of trades from 270 to about 100 new “clusters”. The legal basis (Vocational Training Act) for introducing this approach will be changed in the next future.

Between 1997 and 2002, more than 100 new apprenticeships were introduced or modernised. These apprenticeship trades relate to technical vocations, administrative and office jobs, manual trades and trade vocations. As well as the introduction of modular-structured apprenticeship trades, new jobs in specific fields were introduced. Additionally, “hybrid” job profiles (including, for example, steel and electrical components) were introduced to deal with the impact changes in technology and economy have had on skilled workers’ employment.

Vertical flexibility is enhanced by the introduction of *Berufsreifeprüfung* (i.e. a certificate providing university access for skilled workers, that is, for graduates of apprenticeship training and 3-4 years school-based VET). Access to Fachhochschul-studies is also possible by the way of accreditation of prior learning.

Under certain conditions persons without a final apprenticeship examination who have acquired the relevant skills at the workplace can now pass such an examination and thus acquire a vocational qualification (this provisions is not applicable in all trades).

During the last years (horizontal) flexibility in school-based VET has also been increased by the further development of specialist areas that pupils have to choose at a rather late stage of their education.

With respect to flexibility in school-based technical VET two rather new options were implemented: The “Technikerprojekt” in secondary VET schools (BMS) can be chosen instead of the compulsory work experience scheme. The “Ingenieurprojekt” in VET colleges (BHS) can be chosen instead of project-work at the final examination².

A further emphasis is given to enhance better linkages between IVET and continuous VET to improve incentives for LLL. There exist quite concrete plans of the social partners and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour but they have yet to be agreed on.

d) Main barriers to achieving these objectives

Because of the long lasting good performance of the Austrian IVET system the question of raising the flexibility by way of modularisation needs time. Therefore, it looks as if the system will change in a rather evolutionary bottom-up way, that is, the updating, consolidating and modularising of apprenticeship trades will evolve along concrete apprenticeship trades and step-by-step and not in a general system-overhaul.

Lifelong Learning as a central emphasis of education policies

Recent government programmes have included lifelong learning as a priority in education policy. In specific areas, clear and promising concepts exist. However, due

¹ The module structure will consist of “basic modules” (for the provision of key skills) and “main modules” (for in-depth study of the chosen professional ‘field’) and “additional modules” (specialisation-track).

² The pedagogical aspects of these two new options are described in question 7.

to the division of responsibility between different federal ministries and provincial governments, a comprehensive and uniform implementation of an LLL-strategy has yet to emerge.

2. Reducing the number of early school leavers

General remark:

Austria is in a leading position with respect to the low numbers of early school-leavers in Europe³. According to data from the Ministry of Education less than 10% of young people do not finish successfully their chosen educational track. Austria therefore already reached the set Lisbon-target. Because of this comparatively low number a further reduction of early school-leaving levels seems hard to achieve.

a) Despite this low number three special “problem” groups can be identified:

- young people with either a migration background or
- young people whose parents have a relatively low level of formal qualifications or
- young people with some form of handicap tend to leave education or training at the earliest opportunity.

Initiatives undertaken to tackle the problem of early school-leaving focus on two main aspects:

- offering IVET-opportunities to young people with “learning problems” after general compulsory schooling: these take the form of “*Integrative Berufsausbildung*” (Integrated Vocational Training⁴) and the provision of training places either in a company, a school or in a training programme of the Austrian Public Employment service.
- offering ways to make up the school-leaving qualification of compulsory schooling (“Hauptschulabschluss”) or the apprenticeship-certificate: second-chance schools.

b) With respect to leaving formal education at the age of 15 with low levels of basic skills the same groups as in subsection a) can be identified. As PISA 2000 showed the proportion of 15 year-olds with low levels of reading-literacy amounts to approximately 15%.

³ According to a EU Commission report (European benchmarks in education and training: follow-up to the Lisbon European Council; COM(2002) 629 final) Sweden, Finland and Austria are “*the three best performers in this field*”.

⁴ Integrated Vocational Training (also termed Inclusive Initial Vocational Training) is an innovation in the Austrian dual system to facilitate access and completion for persons who have not (yet) reached the prerequisites for a usual or full apprenticeship programme. These persons have the possibility to undergo a full apprenticeship training in an extended way or to obtain partial qualifications in a specific apprenticeship trade. Additionally they are supported by an assistance supporting the apprentice psychologically and pedagogically as well as in organisational matters.

To tackle this problem the Ministry of Education has created the “Initiative LESEFIT” that aims at reducing this proportion by 50%. Furthermore, there are ongoing projects like IMST (Innovations in Mathematics, Science and Technology Teaching) and Q.I.S. (Quality in Schools) that ensure and enhance the quality of schooling. Currently (2004 to 2006) an e-learning programme is under way to promote IT-competencies.

As a response to PISA 2000 the “Initiative klasse:zukunfft” was founded. A special task force (in collaboration with other experts and school-partners) was set up to work out concepts for structural changes of the Austrian educational system.

3. Increasing VET at tertiary level

Until the beginning of the 1990s, higher education in Austria was characterised by long-term academic university studies. The education expansion was followed by a process of diversification of institutions and available courses of study. Although opportunities for studies had widened with new subjects and faculties, the orientation remained focused on long-term study. Besides universities, the Austrian system of higher education differentiated between conventional studies and post-secondary VET courses and colleges. While conventional studies conveyed a scientific qualification, the majority of post-secondary VET courses and colleges served as applied special-subject continuing education. For a long-time these consisted of VET programmes for graduates of upper secondary general education or VET colleges in a different sector, teacher training colleges and programmes in the paramedical/health sector.

Recent developments have led to significant changes in the area of tertiary education. The **creation of Fachhochschulen** (i.e. university level study programme of at least three years' duration with vocational-technical orientation) in 1994, the **establishment of the baccalaureate** within certain courses and the introduction of tuition fees for the participation in university and Fachhochschulen are particularly relevant in this context.

Differentiation of tertiary education

Since 1994, **Fachhochschulen (FHS)**, financed by the state but run privately, often with the assistance of the provinces, communities and social partners, have been available. Authorisation and quality control are the responsibility of the *Fachhochschulrat* (Fachhochschule Council). Since 1999 private education providers have also had the possibility, to receive accreditation as a private university from the independent *Akkreditierungsrat* (Accreditation Council). The *Universitätsgesetz 2002* (University Law of 2002) changed the status of the state universities. The law provides for the autonomy of the universities, as well as the creation of *Universitätsräte* (university councils) consisting of members from outside the university system. These councils have significant strategic powers. Since 1999 it has been possible for study programmes at the universities (and since recently at the

Fachhochschulen) to restructure their curricula according to the three tier degree system Bachelor-Master-Doctor.

The creation of the Fachhochschulen in the course of the process of diversification at the tertiary educational level has reacted to these criticisms. They are defined by a high level of economic relevance, through vocational educational content, shorter study duration and an implicit component of demand (the operators of the FHS must, at the establishment and in regular stages thereafter, provide proof of the economic and therefore job market relevance of its courses). The expansion of FHS has been enforced with great effort, with the result that the goal of having one third of all new students entering this form of education by 2005 will definitely be reached. Access is not restricted to people with the *Reifeprüfung Certificate*, people with specialised, vocationally relevant qualifications may also apply. Recent reports indicate that graduates of the FHS have positive employment prospects.

Currently, about 28 percent of the students at university study humanities, 25 percent study social sciences, 18 percent are engaged in technical studies (including mining and metallurgy, and land management), 10 percent study a natural science subject and about 8 percent study medicine or law. At FHS, the most popular subjects are technical courses (45 percent), followed by business & administration courses (39 percent).

4. Incentives for updating knowledge & skills

Generally, the current approach can be labelled as a policy-mix consisting of measures and initiatives to broaden the understanding and necessity for lifelong learning in connection with mainly financial incentives for encouraging the participating in further education. This approach has to be seen in the light of a well developed supply structure for vocational further education and training (CVET).

- With respect to **enhancing** the understanding of the population for the need of **lifelong learning** the following initiatives and measures can be mentioned:

„Info-Tage zur Weiterbildung“: Information events that are especially geared at those persons that normally do not take part in CVET (in the year 2002 there have been 887 events with 155.000 visitors/participants);

Networking-initiatives: further development of regional, trans-national and European-wide centres for education;

“eTraining Austria”: is an ICT offensive for the development of open and flexible learning tools especially for CVET;

An essential part of the promotion is done via the ESF-projects: Until 2006 62 million € have been earmarked in the field of lifelong learning.

- **Financial incentives** consist of:

Until recently, the conditions under which training expenses were accepted as income related expenses by the financial authorities were quite strict. Only training measures deemed necessary for the individual to maintain his or her current job or, in the case of the self-employed, training expenses which were directly related to the professional field qualified as income related expenses. However, recent adoptions of the Income Tax Act (2000 and 2002) introduced a more flexible approach. The

current provisions take into consideration all expenses for training related to the professional field of the individual as well as expenses for long-term training measures leading to a broad vocational re-qualification (i.e. leading to completely new qualifications). Basically all training measures with some degree of vocational orientation are eligible in this context. Typical examples would be IT-courses, business related courses, language courses, vocational evening schools (second chance schools). Expenses for general and academic education and for training which is primarily intended for private purposes are not deductible.

Since 2000 Austrian employers can claim an extra tax allowance for training expenses. The target group for this measure are all employees of a company irrespective of position, age, training needs etc. The stated goal is to promote companies' investment in human resources. This training incentive is regulated by the Income Tax Act (§4 Abs 8 ESTG 1988) and has the form of an extra deduction from taxable profits. This means that not only the actual expense for training is deducted from taxable income but in addition also an extra "virtual expense".

When this measure was introduced in 2000 the tax allowance was 9% of the expenses on external training (e.g. a course offered by a training provider different from the company itself). From 2003 onwards, the tax allowance has been increased to 20% and extended to company internal training. This incentive allows companies not only to deduct the actual cost of training as a business expense from their taxable profits but also an extra 20%. This leads to the effect that the tax base is diminished by 120% of the actual expense, which in turn leads to a lower tax liability.

The tax deduction is available for external training measures as well as for internal training measures and covers all expenses that are directly linked to a training measure.

Training tax credit (Bildungsprämie)

Companies which do not make enough profit to benefit from the 120% tax allowance can alternatively claim a tax credit of 6% of the actual expense. The training credit is subject to the same criteria as the tax allowance.

Financial incentives for enterprises provided by the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS):

The AMS subsidises up to 66% of the expenses enterprises have to pay for training measures of their employees. Emphasis is put on further education of women and older employees.

Regional financial incentives

In addition to the above mentioned incentives, there are funding instruments for CVET in place in all Austrian provinces. The amount of funding and the criteria for subsidies differ greatly, as the budgets of the awarding body (province, Chamber of Labour) are not of equal amounts. Generally, these promotional measures take the form of vouchers for an accredited educational institution or a specific educational measure, with the recipient making up the difference between the cost and the value of the voucher privately. In essence this amounts to a partial reimbursement (of about 50%) for training course-cost.

Educational leave

Within the framework of the educational leave, people interested in participating in CVET may be given temporary leave from the workplace to pursue this goal. During

the leave, the participant is provided with a fixed sum not related to the salary level. The educational leave therefore provides a mixture of direct financial support and leave to pursue CVET.

Other stakeholders:

Learning Voucher of the Chamber of Labour

Launched in 2002. Every member of the Chamber of Labour can order a learning voucher worth € 100 and use it for specific courses at selected training providers.

Quality Label “Investors in People”:

Since march 2004 nine Austrian enterprises take part in an ESF-financed pilot-project to introduce the IIP-Standard in Austria⁵. Originally developed in the UK, the Standard sets out a level of good practice for training and development of people to achieve business goals. The Standard provides a national framework for improving business performance and competitiveness, through a planned approach to setting and communicating business objectives and developing people to meet these objectives. The result is - what people can and are motivated to do matches what the organisation needs them to do. Investors in People is cyclical and should engender the culture of continuous improvement⁶.

5. Meeting the challenges of an aging population

Active labour market policy – educational measures

Emphasis in this field is put on preventive measures to enhance the employability of older people (either still at work or on the dole). In 2002 almost 48.000 persons have been supported – about 36.000 persons got some form of qualification support.

Other planned educational measures / initiatives

Jobless persons above 50 years (if they have not the chance of being offered a reasonable job within three months) are entitled to take part in a qualification measure of the Austrian Labour Market Service.

Financial means for the above mentioned active labour market policy for older employees will be raised.

Most of the educational initiatives for lifelong learning have special target groups – the elderly are one of them (e.g. the ICT-offensive will put - among others - special emphasis on the accessibility to the internet for older people).

Second-chance schools as well as all forms of schools for working people have no age limit. In essence, adults can acquire qualifications offered to young people in school-based IVET through specific programmes and add-on courses.

As an overall assessment of the Austrian initiatives with respect to VET for older people the following quotation from a recent OECD-report on adult learning (2004) shall be mentioned:

⁵ This pilot-project is supported by the Federation of Austrian Industry and the human resources consultancy Pendl & Piswanger.

⁶ More information about IIP in Great Britain and in Austria:
<http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/IIP/Internet/default.htm>; <http://www.investorsinpeople.at/>

“...the training of older workers is consistent with a relatively recent interest in lifelong learning (LLL) in Austria, mentioned by many providers and policy-makers. The emergence of large amounts of upgrade training, and of various subsidies provided by Länder governments and active labour market programs is a clear manifestation of this concern with continuing training.”

Remark:

Most of the policies undertaken or in the pipeline for older people consist of measures that are not in the field of VET. Changes in retirement policies and social security regulation will probably have a much deeper impact for the occupational attainment of “older” people.

6. Effectiveness and efficiency of VET

a) Effectiveness of VET:

Unlike many other nations, Austria has a long-standing tradition of VET - and especially IVET – in post-obligatory education (comp. question 1). This system is generally perceived as very effective. For example, the Austrian IVET system - and especially the dual system (apprenticeship) - is seen as a significant factor in the comparatively low level of youth unemployment in Austria, compared to international levels. The unemployment level of under-25s were at 7.3% in March 2004 – compared to an EU-average of 18.0 (Feb. 2004)⁷.

Furthermore, there are almost no general deficits with respect to qualified / skilled personal observable at the macro-level (nevertheless temporary shortages of skilled workers in some line of businesses may occur). Nor are there signs of over-qualification either.

Besides these overall very positive perception of VET some special areas can be identified that are currently more controversially discussed:

- Emphasis on IVET: VET in Austria is essentially based on IVET – therefore efforts have still to be made to further promote LLL aspects. There is intense discussion on how to enhance LLL-aspects best (compare also question 4).
- Apprenticeship is strongly influenced by the sectorial change as it has a long standing tradition for production professions: with the sectorial change from production to service this traditional base for the dual system is eroding - at the same time companies in the service sector are not raising their apprenticeship places by the same amount⁸. Especially low achievers and young people with disabilities have problems finding a suitable school-offer or an apprenticeship place.
- During the last decades educational attainment in post-obligatory education has been raised fundamentally. With raising post-obligatory graduation rates pressure is mounting for the provision of accession routes for all young people to IVET. Discussion centers around the question who is responsible for offering the

⁷ http://www.bmwa.gv.at/BMWA/Presse/AktuelleMeldungen/20040505_03.htm

⁸ There is discussion on how best to combat this trend: either by voluntary or compulsory education funds (Ausbildungsfonds) or by raising incentives for training companies or by improving the basic skills of those young persons having problems in finding an apprenticeship place.

necessary supply of educational opportunities: the apprenticeship system (i.e. companies) or the public (i.e. (IVET)-schools, state-funded apprenticeship entities).

b) *Efficiency of VET:*

Austria has one of the highest share of educational expenditures⁹ in relation to GDP (above 6%) of the EU countries¹⁰. For a long time this was not seen as a problematic feature and - if noticed at all - rather seen as a proof of the high quality of the nation's educational system. Recently, the combination of public budgetary limits (i.e. consolidation policies) and the results of PISA 2000 (reading competency levels only slightly above the average of the participating countries) have enforced discussions about the efficiency of the Austrian educational system. Generally, IVET is not considered the main "problem" – the high amount of teaching hours, teachers salary levels and long durations of university studies are much more controversially debated with respect to the "cost factors" of the educational system than IVET itself.

c) *Investment trends in VET:*

The largest investor in VET is the state, followed by enterprises (for apprenticeship training and in-company continuing training) and the individuals. Generally, there is a high level of spending of companies and the state in IVET. CVET is mainly carried out and financed by employers and employees.

CVET: value for money

The already mentioned fact (compare question 6a), that no general skills shortages / gaps can be observed at the macro-level indicate a highly efficient use of the invested money in Austria. Results of CVTS-2 point at the same direction: Firstly the total course costs per participants are the lowest in Europe. Secondly, the investment of 1 per cent of total labour costs in training allows to train 24 per cent of the employees in companies (with ten or more employed persons) in Austria – vs. only 17 per cent on the European average (all results of CVTS-2).

As already shown (compare question 4) public initiatives in this field are highly geared by financial incentives for employers as well as individuals.

Public-private partnerships:

One way of increasing the efficiency of VET may be the creation of "**training clusters**" (**Bildungscluster**¹¹), which could lead to more cost-effective use of expensive specialist facilities (e.g. teaching aids, workshops etc.) in individual

⁹ Eurostat Data Definition: total public expenditures on education includes direct public expenditure on educational institutions as well as public subsidies to other private entities for education (e.g. subsidies to companies or labour market organisations that operate apprenticeship programmes). It also includes public subsidies to households (e.g. scholarships and loans to students for tuition fees and student living costs), including those not attributable to household payments for educational institutions, such as subsidies for student living costs. Therefore the expenditures of companies who are engaged in apprenticeship training is not included in that data: The aggregate costs of apprenticeships to businesses are not statistically recorded. According to different estimates the costs born by enterprises for apprenticeship training are in the range of about 1-1.2% of GDP.

¹⁰ Only Norway and Sweden of the EU-15 countries have higher shares.

¹¹ The main cooperation-partners are the Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture.

schools, among other things. Several Austrian schools are already cooperating with businesses, establishments of the social partners etc. The sharing of training facilities with regional businesses enables requirements of the regional economy to be incorporated into the training programmes of schools through development of curricula and joint projects. There are already some promising “best-practice” projects under way. Nevertheless the idea of “training clusters” seems to be still in its beginnings.

Theme 2:

Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes

7. Improvements in learning processes and contents

The Austrian educational system is still influenced by “traditional” learning styles and methods. Nevertheless, a (gradual) shift from content/subject-centred learning to competence/outcomes can be observed. The same can be said for problem- and project-based pedagogy. The implementation of such learning “styles” into teaching essentially depends on the initiative of the teachers at the school level. This is a reflection of the high degree of freedom in choosing the pedagogical method by the teacher himself. In the framework of the school-autonomy regulation, schools have also started to make use of their scope in shaping their content-profile, which is often accompanied by “new” pedagogical learning approaches.

On the other hand, because of the importance of the apprenticeship system in Austria’s IVET system there is a strong tradition of work-based learning processes and contents (the apprentice spends 2/3 of his/her time at the enterprise in the form of in-company training; the rest of the time is spent in a part-time vocational school for apprentices which provides vocationally relevant theory and general knowledge, as well as rounding off the practical element of the vocational training).

Forms of contextualised work-based learning processes and contents are also important educational elements in the Secondary VET Schools (BMS) and VET Colleges (BHS). In the BMS a central element of the schooling is practical tuition in school-owned workshops, laboratories, kitchens, training hotels and practice companies (termed “training firms”). The pupils must take part in compulsory work experience schemes during the summer holidays. In the BHS the curriculum consists of approximately one third general education, one third subject-specific theory and one third subject-specific practical experience. Like in the BMS also the pupils in the BHS are required to take part in compulsory work experience in training firms during the summer holidays.

To further enhance practical as well as pedagogical (e.g. teamwork, interdisciplinarity, project-based learning) aspects the so called “Technikerprojekt” at secondary VET schools and the “Ingenieurprojekt” at VET colleges have been introduced.

During the last years some innovations have focussed on the implementation of new technologies in learning environments: online learning portals / e-learning and the like. Moreover, ICT skills now form an important and integral part of IVET. Additionally, about 10 ICT apprenticeship trades and about 30 school-based ICT programmes have been introduced.

8. Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning

As already mentioned under point 7 the apprenticeship system is a long and well established type of vocational education that links learning sites at schools and companies. For smaller and highly specialised companies apprenticeship alliances ("**Ausbildungsverbünde**") between two and more training companies as well as between a training company and other training establishments exist. In some branches like in the construction-industry or in the restaurant and catering-industry training centres have been set up by the employer's organisations.

Another type was also already mentioned under point 7: the compulsory work experience for pupils of a VET school or college during the summer holidays.

Since the mid-1990s "**Entrepreneurship Education**" attained a significant level of attention within the education system. The establishment of *Übungsfirmen* (training firms) within the curricula of *Handelsschulen*, *HAS* (Schools of Business Administration), *Handelsakademien*, *HAK* (Colleges of Business Administration) and *wirtschaftsberuflichen Schulen* (secondary schools of management and services) as well as the founding of *Junior-Firmen* (Junior companies) within other forms of schooling intensified the role of entrepreneurial training at upper secondary level.

The training firm was established as a compulsory subject within the curricula of the schools and colleges of business administration. Tuition takes place in so-called business management centres, equipped with all aspects of a modern company infrastructure. The training firms represent models of existing companies, the business processes are simulated.

"**Junior**" companies are founded within the framework of the project "Junior – school pupils found companies" set up by the National Economic Society, a non-partisan educational establishment of the economy. In contrast to the training firms, the founding and running of a company is not simulated, but takes actually place. Real goods or services are made available, requiring the use of real capital. The "Junior" companies are not established as part of school curricula and are voluntary, but are declared as a school-related activity.

In November 2000, the initiative "**Unternehmen – Bildung**" (Enterprise – Education) was established by the Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, BMBWK (Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture). A statement of intention was signed by the Education Ministry and representatives of the economy, with the goal of promoting and strengthening the cooperation between educational institutions and economic organisations. Within the framework of this initiative, which has a significant role in educational policy, measures are implemented to increase economic education and entrepreneurial thinking in the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors.

E-Learning is again an area that intends to integrate different learning sites better.

In addition, there is also the possibility of an exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship examination for all persons, who have not passed a formal apprenticeship training programme, but have acquired their competences in an informal way (e.g. through courses, occupational practice, experience in semi-skilled occupations). In 2002, about 5300 persons have thus acquired apprenticeship leaving certificates. In case that the acquired knowledge does not cover all necessary competences to pass this exam, a shortening of the apprenticeship period up to two-thirds of the regular duration of the respective apprenticeship training is also possible.

9. Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision

For the individual

General remark:

In Austria no central (i.e. nationwide) examinations exist. The student has to be successful in every subject to be allowed for the next class¹² otherwise he has to repeat the class.

In all school-based types of IVET students are evaluated through continuous monitoring of progress and in written (school tests and assignments), graphic, practical or oral tests. The examinations and assignments are prepared and evaluated by the class teacher. Graphic, practical or combined forms of evaluation are more frequent in technical and vocational than in general education.

Different provisions apply to apprentices during practical training in companies. They are evaluated by an IVET trainer. Large companies with separate apprentice workshops often use examination and evaluation systems which are similar to those used by schools.

Certification for school-based vocational schools:

To complete a study course successfully, students must be positively assessed in all compulsory subjects laid down in the curriculum in all grades and in all subject-matters examined in the final examination¹³ (for BMS) or in the Reifeprüfung Certificate and VET Diploma (for BHS) respectively.

Final examinations are officially recognised examinations in front of a board of examiners, chaired by a representative of the school authorities, comprising written, graphic/ practical and oral exams comprising general education fields and specific project work, general, specific project work, oral part¹⁴.

Certification for apprenticeships:

After having successfully completed the last year of Berufsschule (vocational school for apprentices), students receive a school-leaving certificate which dispenses them from the theoretical part of the final apprenticeship examination. This examination is taken in front of a board consisting of a chairman and two examiners. The final apprenticeship examination may be repeated as often as needed. Upon successful completion, the examinee obtains a certificate and an indenture.

For the institution

¹² There are some provisions that a student who was not successful in one subject may be allowed to continue in the next class.

¹³ Exception: One-year, two-year and three-year vocational courses at schools for social occupations do not have a final examination. They end with the completion of the last year.

¹⁴ In the case of a VET diploma (for BHS) a 40-hour project constitutes a central part of the examination, in which a specific assignment comprises a broad range of activities within a given topic area: planning, calculating, designing and preparing a master plan for production.

A new scheme has been introduced at VET schools and colleges for agriculture and forestry: during the first semester of the final year teams of students have to carry out a project ("Diplomprojekt") within and outside school hours. It must be related to current problems specific to the economy and the sector. Many of these projects are conducted in co-operation with business and industry, under the supervision of experienced teachers.

First, school heads are responsible for monitoring and inspection. They are the immediate superiors of all teachers at a school and are, under school legislation, charged with advising teachers in their educational work. Furthermore they must regularly satisfy themselves of the quality of teaching and the performance of pupils.

School inspectors¹⁵ look into the quality of teaching and the implementation of administrative tasks. As a general rule, the school head and the teachers visited should be previously informed about an intended school inspection, without however thwarting the purpose of the exercise. For this reason, a decision on whether or not to give preliminary notice of a visit of a school inspector will be taken on a case-by-case basis. The school inspection ends with a meeting of the inspectors and the inspected teachers. This meeting is mainly advisory in nature. Not the detected shortcomings only, but also the encouraging aspects should be emphasised.

In addition to guidance provided by the school inspection officials, the educational work at Austria's schools is scientifically monitored and evaluated by the Centre for School Development with departments in Vienna, Graz and Klagenfurt.

Institutional self-evaluation

New trends in school development aim at evaluating not only the scholastic achievement of pupils in accordance with the legal requirements, but also the ability and readiness of school staff (management, teachers) to plan and evaluate teaching and educational processes, and to promote the social organisation at school as well as school life as a whole. In this context, the Q.I.S. project is particularly important.

Within the ***Quality-In-Schools (Q.I.S.) project***, the Ministry of Education wants to encourage and support schools in critically appraising, monitoring and further developing their own quality. The common and systematic study of quality issues by the school partners is to become an integral part of school culture in the future. Q.I.S. defines a broad framework which is to embrace as many of the on-going initiatives in the field of school development (at regional and school level) as possible.

This development centres around the *school development programme*. This programme contains the school's mission statement, it takes stock of the status quo, and defines specific aims and measures to be taken in the different quality areas. The school development programme is an agreement for a defined period of time which has internal and external effect: as guidance for educational action and as information for the general public, as a planning instrument and as a yardstick by which to measure school development.

(Self)evaluation is therefore inseparably linked to the school development programme. Self-evaluation is needed to be able to assess the overall situation and the implementation and effectiveness of the measures taken: at reasonable intervals, individually and together, using practical methods. Personal data remain confidential and are not disclosed. Achievements and scopes for improvement become apparent, a common basis for further development is created. Q.I.S. is an invitation as well as a service proposal. All activities are voluntary; they have not yet found their way into legislation.

¹⁵ The school inspectorate primarily works at the level of the administrative districts and the provinces. There is no central and permanently established school inspectorate operated by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

With respect to **apprenticeship training** there exist so-called *Lehrlingsstellen* (apprenticeship offices) who control the apprenticeship training-agreement and the aptitude of the training company.

Prerequisites for apprenticeship training:

Apprenticeship training is regulated in principle by the Vocational Training Act (VTA). Some regulations concerning the schemes of application of the VTA, which are binding like the Act itself, have been adopted by the Minister for Economic Affairs and Labour. The most important of these are: the list of apprenticeship occupations, the training regulations, and the examination regulations for the final apprenticeship examination.

Before being entitled to train apprentices, enterprises must apply for a declaratory procedure with the competent apprenticeship office. Within the framework of this declaratory procedure, in case the enterprise does not provide the possibility to impart all necessary skills and competences to apprentices, the apprenticeship office may specify that training be held in a training alliance.

Apprentices must be trained by persons entitled to train (apprenticeship masters or approved apprenticeship employers), who can either conduct the training themselves or commission a trainer with this task.

Apprenticeship master (approved apprenticeship employer):

The entitlement to be an apprenticeship master is granted only to holders of a craft or trade, other enterprises and institutions specified in the Vocational Training Act (such as Österreichische Post AG, social insurance institutions, public offices, etc.), practitioners of the liberal professions (architects, physicians, pharmacists, dentists, notaries public, public accountants, veterinary surgeons, civil engineers, lawyers), as well as associations and other legal entities as long as the training of apprentices does not represent the main purpose of business.

Training companies with excellent educational performance may be awarded by the Minister for Economic Affairs and Labour with the label "*Ausgezeichneter Lehrbetrieb*" (outstanding/excellent training company).

For the system

So far, no overall systematic monitoring and evaluation system exists. Tasks that fall in that category have hitherto been fulfilled by the *Zentrum für Schulentwicklung* (Centre for School Development). Its scientific staff includes 12 persons at present, who are involved in different projects of evaluation, school development, scientific monitoring of school experiments and in large-scale structural reforms. Additionally, supra-regional evaluation of certain specific educational aspects is also done by applied-scientific research projects.

Currently there are ideas to establish an educational monitoring-centre at the PISA-centre in Salzburg.

The creation of **educational benchmarks** ("*Leistungsstandards*") is also pursued at the moment. They include a test-battery (in some way similar to PISA – meaning that the outcomes of educational processes are tested) that will examine the competence

levels of pupils in some subjects at the important decision points of the educational system (i.e. at the end of primary and obligatory schooling). According to official statements, these benchmarks are designed to serve as a system-monitoring tool as they will only test a representative sample of the pupils.

The ibw (Institute for Research on Qualification and Training of the Austrian Economy) is continuously working on the development of standards for the final apprenticeship examinations.

10. Professional development and status of teachers and trainers

General remarks:

The two main providers of pre-service teacher education are teacher training colleges and universities. Both institutions are rooted in different traditions. Teacher training colleges follow the seminaristic tradition focusing the curriculum around education as a discipline rather than subject areas. The programme is delivered in a school-like character, less academic than that at university level and strongly practice-oriented. This tradition is still in a certain contrast to that of universities which is rooted in a more “academic tradition”. For a long time, initial teacher education at universities mainly focussed on subject-specific education. Students were supposed to gain primarily academic knowledge to become specialists in the scientific disciplines. Consequently, the curricula did not concentrate on the complex professional skills required for the teaching profession. **By 2007 teacher training colleges will be upgraded** and called (*Berufs-*) *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (Vocational Teacher Training Universities). This step will bring the two systems into a stronger coherence within Austrian higher education.

Generally, teachers at VET schools and colleges undergo a university education (most of them need also at least some years of relevant professional experience¹⁶). Training for teaching positions at *Berufsschulen* (vocational schools for apprentices) are offered by the “*Berufspädagogischen Akademien, BPA*” (post-secondary vocational teacher training colleges¹⁷). The duration of six semesters is divided into four semesters of part time in-service training, conducted at the *Pädagogisches Institut, PI* (in-service teacher training college) or in cooperative measures between the PI and the BPA, as well as two semesters of full-time study at the BPA.

The training of teachers and tutors within the dual apprenticeship system is regulated by the *Berufsausbildungsgesetz* (Vocational Training Act) which stipulates that businesses providing apprenticeship training must employ at least one responsible IVET trainer. His or her task may either be fulfilled by the person entitled to train (the businessperson) or assigned to another staff member. The prerequisite for training apprentices are proof of specialist knowledge and skills in the relevant apprenticeship trade and the successful completion of the trainer examination.

The CVET of apprenticeship trainers is not regulated by law and is voluntary. Possibilities for CVET are provided by training facilities of the social partners as well as the in-service teacher training colleges. Different initiatives have been launched too. For the Land of Vorarlberg, e.g., the social partners founded the Training College

¹⁶ An exception to that rule are teachers of general education subjects.

¹⁷ Some teachers with an BPA-education may also teach certain subjects in technical and vocational schools and colleges).

for Apprenticeship Training; in addition, the Tyrol Trainers' Forum must be mentioned.

CVET of teachers mainly occurs at the in-service teacher training colleges, whose central function is to offer the necessary courses and trainings. Seminars are offered for certain subjects, job-specific subjects or for certain types of schools. Although teachers are obliged by law to continuously update their knowledge, there is no precise regulation on how they have to fulfil this duty. Therefore basically CVET for teachers is carried out on a voluntary basis.

Moreover, a broad range of post-secondary CVET courses for (VET)-teachers (“*Akademielehrgänge*”) are offered at the teacher training colleges that lead to new and/or additional qualifications and certificates.

Innovative aspects:

With respect to CVET of teachers and trainers emphasis has been placed on the following fields in the last years: gender sensitivity, new technologies, English as a working language. As these themes constitute rather new topics and sometimes approaches, they can be judged as having innovative character.

Obligatory further training for “Landeslehrer”

A new law for teachers who are employed by the regions (“Landeslehrer“) for the first time specified their further educational duties: they have to spend 15 working-hours per year on further education¹⁸.

Innsbruck University’s teacher training degree acts as a role model in Austria (and has achieved international recognition). The theoretical and practical course is based on the principle of competence-orientation with a total of 25 non-subject-specific skills. Practical periods of training in schools are seen as core elements of the training and as a central element of the best possible combination of theory and practice. There is a close partnership between the University and schools.

Ongoing problems:

Because of the seniority structure of teacher salaries¹⁹, there are ongoing recruitment problems for some subjects in vocational education (in particular subjects in new technologies) – experts in these fields normally earn more in the private economy than as a teacher.

Generally, teacher training in Austria is still heavily determined by IVET – CVET mainly serves as an additional offer and is not structurally integrated in a coherent system of teacher education and training.

Theme 3:

¹⁸ Concerning IVET, teachers at Berufsschulen (vocational schools for apprentices) and teachers in agricultural VET schools fall under this new regulation.

¹⁹ Relatively low starting salaries and biannual salary advances.

Building European Competences for a European Labour Market

11. Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy

a) main challenges for Austria (according to Annex 1 of the "KOK report")

Austria has achieved a high general employment rate, and a relatively high employment rate for women, in line with the Lisbon targets. Unemployment is among the lowest in the EU. Social partnership plays an important role for modernising work organisation, improving labour legislation and ensuring responsible wage developments. The employment rate of older workers, however, is particularly low. Employment growth has slowed down and unemployment has started to rise.

Increasing adaptability

1. Monitor and complement where necessary recent reforms (e.g. severance pay legislation; entitlement to unemployment benefit for the self-employed) to facilitate occupational mobility.

2. Further reduce non-wage labour costs for the low-paid.

Make work a real option for all

3. Develop comprehensive strategies for active ageing: reduce the use of early retirement; ensure the right incentives to retain workers longer in employment (including by adapting working conditions and greater access to training).

4. Further raise female participation: increase childcare facilities; review the impact of the child allowance; address other causes of the gender pay gap such as sectoral and occupational segregation.

Investing in human capital

5. Review incentives to develop lifelong learning and increase access to training, especially for the low-skilled and for immigrants.

b) Policies and strategies to tackle these challenges

According to the current National Action Plan (2003) the following policy actions will be envisaged:

ad 1) Monitor and complement where necessary recent reforms:

No particular new actions known

ad 2) Reduction of non-labour costs for the low-paid:

No particular new actions known

ad 3) Active Ageing: (also compare question 5)

- reduction of the non-wage labour costs (“Action 56/58”): for women over 55 and men over 57 social security payments for unemployment insurance will be dropped. For employees over 60 some further non-labour costs will be dropped: insolvency-pay-safeguarding, accident insurance contributions, FLAF²⁰-contribution. In total 12,6% of social security contribution will be dropped.
- Reform of partial retirement and adaptation of transition money (“Übergangsgeld”) due to changes in retirement regulation.
- Jobless persons above 50 years (if they have not the chance of being offered a reasonable job within three months) are entitled to take part in a qualification measure of the Austrian Employment Service.
- Financial means for the active labour market policy for older employees will be raised.
- Reform of the retirement regulation
- Harmonisation of the different pension-systems

Ad 4) Raising female participation:

- Change of the “Equal Treatment Law” (Gleichbehandlungsgesetz) and improvement of the respective control- and execution-instruments.
- Gender Mainstreaming Action Programme.
- Specific measures to reduce occupational discrimination by supporting women in technology and science sector.
- Measures for improving the reconcilableness of job and family.
- Intention to establish needs-based child-care facilities according to the Lisbon-goals.
- Proposal that under certain circumstances parents will have the right to part-time work up to their child’s age of 7.

Ad 5) Review incentives to develop lifelong learning and increase access to training:

- Establishment of a national task-force for LLL
- Obligatory language courses for immigrants
- Qualification initiatives with respect to disadvantaged persons center around profession oriented supporting measures at schools.
- Most of the actions concerning immigrants and low-skilled persons concern labour market policies and not education/training.

c) Obstacles for VET reform

²⁰ FLAF: Familienlastenausgleich (family burden compensation fund), a fund to compensate families for the economic burdens associated with rearing a family).

Generally, there seems to be no particular obstacles standing in the way of VET reform in relation to achieving the Lisbon objectives. Due to the two-thirds majority regulation with respect to passing school-laws in parliament the Austrian VET system is relatively stable in terms of its structures and regulative mechanisms. Besides its positive aspects, this legal condition may sometimes act as an obstacle to reforms, especially in situations where the social partners have diverging interest or attitudes. Similarly, the broad range of stakeholders involved in educational matters and schooling responsibilities ensures that the spectrum of interests is represented while at the same time reaching a compromise is usually a rather hard and time-consuming affair.

Currently, there is some national discussion whether some benchmarks (i.e. reducing the proportion of die 15 year-olds with low levels of reading-literacy) can be achieved by the initiatives already put into place (e.g. “Initiative LESEFIT” - compare question 2b) or a more radical approach with respect to changes in the educational system and the pedagogical approach (e.g. abolishing class repetition etc.) will be the appropriate way.

A second aspect concerns the question of how to integrate the disadvantaged groups into post-obligatory education (i.e. reducing the share of young school leavers / drop-outs). As already described (compare question 6a) the political discussions focus on the following options: creation of adequate and achievable professional profiles, raising incentives for training companies or improving the basic skills of those young persons having problems in finding an apprenticeship place.

A special task force (in collaboration with other experts and school-partners) was put into place to work out concepts for more fundamental changes of the Austrian educational system: the “Initiative klasse:zukunfft” (compare question 2b).

12. Involving stakeholders

a) The role of the social partnership in VET

General remarks:

The social partners²¹ are able to exert influence through representatives who are members of law-making bodies. The social partners exert their influence in the early stages of the law-making process by making use of the rights of legal assessment to be incorporated into the legislative process before the law reaches parliament for ratification. This also applies to all laws pertaining to education.

National level:

Within the framework of the **dual system**, the involvement of the social partners is more pronounced. The responses by the social partners to regulations for the individual apprenticeships are presented to the Minister for the Economy’s Federal Vocational Training Advisory Council in form of assessment reports, which are then applied throughout Austria by decree. Initiatives to rearrange and revise the apprenticeship system are generally presented by the social partners. Regional

²¹ The system functions on the foundation of informal structures and the collaboration of the social partners is not defined by law but is based on a form of constitutional consent. It is a system of antagonistic cooperation. Its members are aware of the divergent interests, but prefer mutual agreement to conflict.

Vocational Training Advisory Councils, consisting of members of the social partnership, form the advisory boards at provincial level. The primary governing bodies for apprenticeship training are the apprenticeship authorities of the various regional economic chambers. They are responsible for assuring the suitability of businesses for apprenticeships. A central task is the assessment of apprenticeship contracts and their registration.

Sector level:

The social partners also play a central role in the question of **apprenticeship compensation**, generally decided on the basis of collective contracts. The object of collective contract negotiations is the finalisation of raises in minimum salary and base salary levels, the compensation for apprentices, the regulation of working hours, and the employment and working conditions. Collective contracts are legally binding (for all companies within the relevant administrative sector or area). The approval of the collective contracts takes place according to vocational sectors. The contracts generally apply to the entire country, rarely for individual regions. In exceptional cases, collective contracts are set up for individual companies. A higher rate of apprentice compensation than is defined in the collective contract can be negotiated in the apprenticeship contract. The apprentice compensation is increased year by year for the duration of the apprenticeship. In the final year, apprentices receive an average of 80 percent of the salary of a skilled worker.

b) European social partners recent proposals for Austria

- Need for the development of a LLL strategy for Austria: a task force for LLL, working out a status quo analyses including objectives and cornerstones for an LLL policy until 2010 and the development of an LLL action plan should be at the centre.
- Quality Assurance in adult education: exploring different possibilities of fostering the notion of quality in CVET including quality management²² and the envisaged creation of an “Austrian Label of Quality for CVET”.
- Agreement that training standards in apprenticeship training shall be adapted by the introduction of a modular system of qualifications.
- Moreover a better link between IVET and adult training shall be reached through additional training modules beyond apprenticeship training.
- Implacment Stiftung as a new way for targeted and demand-oriented qualification of unemployed people.

13. Transparency, recognition & mobility

a) credit framework

²² At the moment the ibw (in cooperation with another research institute – ÖIBF) is conducting an ESF-funded research project concerning models, strategies and cases of best practice with respect to quality assurance in CVET at the national and international level.

In 1992/93 five Austrian Universities were among the first European HE institutions to test the ECTS system. Since that time many universities, *Fachhochschulen* and Post-Secondary VET Courses have introduced ECTS, which in the meantime has also been put down by law.

This year the European Commission awarded the “ECTS-Label” to the technical university of Graz (the ECTS-system was established at the university in the mid-1990s).

b) qualifications framework

Since February 2003 the internet portal www.chance-europe.at has been accessible. This website informs the public about all transparency instrument at European level (i.e. European Curriculum Vitae, Certificate Supplements²³, Diploma Supplement, ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence), Europass, European Language Portfolio).

In order to promote the idea of a “European workspace” three Austrian research institutes (3s, together with ibw, öibf) have initiated the Leonardo project VQTS – Vocational Qualification Transfer System, in which a systematic procedure is created to ensure international transfer of vocational qualifications (in terms of competencies and skills) at secondary level. VET-students and apprentices should be able to use their qualifications acquired in educational institutions and/or in companies as a “common currency” throughout Europe. The vocational field of “Mechanical Engineering” was selected as a model for developing and testing this procedure.

Equivalence applications for apprentices:

Austria has concluded specific agreements with Germany, Hungary, and the South Tyrol on the mutual recognition of vocational certificates and qualifications of apprenticeship graduates. These initiatives aim at a Europe-wide equality of opportunities for skilled workers with practical training. In this way it is possible to safeguard the apprenticeship training scheme and to create a functioning infrastructure for training posts.

Certificates that have been issued in other countries upon successful completion of a vocational training may be recognised as a replacement of an apprenticeship leaving certificate for the relevant apprenticeship trade in Austria. Applications have to be addressed to the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour.

c) Europass

Austria was the first EU country that established an information platform and online-access for Europass (<http://www.europass.at/>). Meanwhile almost all (young) Austrians, that have undergone a practical training abroad, already have an Europass.

²³ Meanwhile, Certificate Supplements for almost all apprenticeship trades and a lot of school-based VET have been developed.