

**Skills for Future**

# National Report Austria

**PROJECT: VS/2012/0516**

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. Overall Macroeconomic situation and scenarios

After favourable real GDP growth rates in 2010 (2.1%) and 2011 (2.7%) real GDP growth slipped back down to 0.8 % in 2012. This development shows that Austria has not effectively overcome the financial crisis yet. The slump in growth can mainly be explained by the substantial deceleration in export growth in the euro area and the weak global economic environment. Despite this negative trend in growth rates, the unemployment rate increased only slightly by 0.1 % on the previous year and remains to be the lowest in the European Union at 4.4%. Employment rates show a bright picture as well. Active employment rose by 1.4% compared to 2012. For the period 2012 to 2017, forecasts predict moderate GDP growth (1.5% on average), accompanied by a moderate rise of employment rates (0.9% on average) and a minor decrease of the unemployment rate (back to 4.3%). (Comp. Federal Chancellery 2013, 3)

The Austrian education system is characterised by a strong focus on a diversified system of institutionalised upper secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET), providing recognised qualifications for more than 70% of a cohort. Tertiary Education (HE) plays a comparatively minor role in the provision of qualifications. (Comp. Lassnigg 2010a, 1117)

## 1.2. Socioeconomic challenges for future skills (VET) policy

Globalisation, technology, as well as demography and migration will be the main drivers shaping the future conditions and challenges for a national skills policy: The low level of higher education (HE) qualifications and weaknesses in the area of research and technology resulting in the minor importance of high-technology in the economic structure poses a substantial threat to the future **global competitiveness** of Austria. According to the “new growth theory”, **innovation** is becoming the most important growth factor. If Austria wants to stay in the economic premier league, it will have to take a new growth path by changing from a **technology** importer to a technology supplier. Such an approach will necessitate a shift of the qualification structure towards tertiary qualifications, especially in the STEM sector. Today the Austrian qualification structure is dominated by VET with a clear focus on the secondary level. The Austrian population is **ageing** fast. Population growth is mainly sustained through **immigration**. Substantial groups of immigrants

are less qualified than the average population (entering the country with low qualifications and/or performing badly in the education system due to structural discrimination). Appealing to higher educated immigrant groups and creating better performance opportunities for immigrants with an unfavourable socioeconomic background in the education system are two of the big challenges at hand.

(Comp. Lassnigg 2010b, p. 7-23)

## 2. Education

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### 2.1. The Austrian Vocational Education and Training system (VET)

The VET system in Austria distinguishes itself through offering a wide range of pathways at different levels. The following introduction is divided into initial and continuous vocational education and training.

#### Initial vocational education and training (IVET)

Students can first decide to go for an initial vocational education and training pathway at the upper secondary level. However, it is also common to start a VET pathway at the tertiary level whereas VET at the post-secondary and non-tertiary level is declining as many of these programmes are integrated into the academic (tertiary) system.

#### IVET at the upper secondary level

The first possibility to opt for a VET pathway is after initial compulsory education at the upper secondary level, whereas the final year of compulsory schooling corresponds to the first year of the upper secondary level. In Austria the VET system at the upper secondary level is of high importance, since around 80% of the pupils who have completed compulsory schooling choose a VET path. Whereas 40% of all students start an apprenticeship, the other possible VET options include VET schools and colleges.

Students can choose between the following VET pathways, which lead to different qualification levels and can be differentiated in the full-time school-based VET and dual VET sector (comp. Tritscher-Archan et al. 2012):

- VET schools (berufsbildende mittlere Schulen or BMS)
- VET colleges (berufsbildende höhere Schulen or BHS)
- Schools for general healthcare and nursing
- Dual VET / apprenticeship training (Lehre, Lehrlingsausbildung): company based training and part-time vocational schools for apprentices (Berufsschule).

## VET at post-secondary, non-tertiary level

The number of post-secondary Vet colleges is declining as many of the programmes and courses are transformed into tertiary sector educational institutions (Fachhochschulen). The remaining colleges can be mainly found in healthcare and social fields.

## VET at tertiary level

VET pathways at tertiary level include universities, universities of applied sciences, and universities of education, which all require HE entrance qualifications.

- Universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen): they provide an academically founded VET qualification on the basis of bachelor and master courses. A period of work placement is a mandatory part of the curriculum.
- University of education (Pädagogische Hochschulen): training programs for compulsory school teachers in a three-year bachelor course.
- University: universities not only provide vocational subjects but also general education. Vocational programmes can be mainly found in the technical, medical and business fields and in teacher training for upper secondary schools.
- CVET university courses: CVET Universities offer courses both for postgraduates and for non-HE graduates who fulfil other access requirements.

## Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET)

Continuous vocational education and training can be considered as being embedded into the field of adult education. In the Austrian context the field of adult education acts autonomously based on a historically grown diverse structure which is administrated by regional governments.

## 2.2. Key national/regional strategic documents on VET

- **Government programme** (Regierungsprogramm 2008-2013: Gemeinsam für Österreich): Statements relevant to the VET system and the reform of the school system:
  - Upper secondary level: strengthening of the dual VET system, improvement of the company-based and supra company apprenticeship training, strengthening of the youth guar-

antee (integration in schools, dual system or supra-company training), continuation of the modularisation of the apprenticeship system, evaluation of funding, reducing the lack of apprentice positions)

- Increase of training places at VET colleges and VET schools
- Strengthening of the Universities of Applied Sciences, increase in financing study places, increase in the number of part-time courses
- CVET: sufficient offers for basic education, especially for adults with migration background, second-chance learning for formal qualifications
- The **LLL:2020 Strategy for lifelong learning in Austria** was adopted in 2011 by the Federal Government as a result of an interministerial consultation process. Strategic goals which are relevant in the context of VET include the decrease in the number of early school leavers to 6% in 2020; the decrease of NEETs to 6.4% in 2020; the increase of the quota of apprentices who complete the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (HE entrance qualification) to 10%
- The **VET Quality Initiative – QIBB**: this initiative contributes to the continuous safeguarding and systematic development of educational work quality in all VET schools and colleges.
- Development of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in relation to the European Qualification Framework (EQF)
- National reform programme 2013 (NRP) and country specific recommendations of the European Council within the European Semester, which both focus on the improvement of the educational results (see also PISA results)

## 2.3. Policies and practices in forecasting the future skills need

There is no systematically employed forecasting for the development of VET supply. (Lassnigg 2011: p.1114f). Three main approaches can be identified dealing with general forecasting of future skill needs, which have been developed by three different institutions (Vogtenhuber 2010)

- Projection of the qualification requirement and offer of the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS)
- Medium-term employment forecast of the Austrian Institute for Economic Research (WIFO)
- Labour market forecasts of the Synthesis Forschung research society including a report which deals with forecasts on the dual system and the supply and demand of apprentices.

But there are also small- and medium-scale instruments dealing with the analysis of qualification requirements which are mainly funded or conducted by the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) as well as the Chamber of Economy, the Federation of Industries or different studies on the qualification structure and skill needs commissioned by regional governments. (comp. Tritscher-Archan et al. 2012: p.32f)

- Skill needs studies (Qualifikationsbedarfsstudien): they rely on a survey of all companies with more than 20 employees and are commissioned by the PES
- Qualification Barometer: The Qualification Barometer is online since 2002 and gives an overview over current trends on the labour market and qualification requirements for the general public. The results are also published as a qualification structure report.
- AMS Standing Committee on New Skills: The Standing Committee on New Skills was set up in 2009 against the background of the difficult economic situation in order to prepare the labour force in time for upcoming changes and challenges. It comprises representatives of the AMS as well as representatives of the social partners, relevant ministries and the major CET providers (Institute for Economic Promotion of the Austrian Economic Chamber, Vocational Training Institute). The main objective is to identify companies' change processes which allow conclusions to be drawn about current and future requirements for employees and job-seekers. Several cluster groups about specific occupational areas were set up, in which HR and training managers from key major companies exchange opinions about issues related to employment and qualification development in moderated workshops. Examples for clusters which were already covered are "machinery, metal, motor vehicles", "chemistry, plastics, new materials", "office/administration", "wellness/tourism", aso. The direct involvement of major CVET training institutions ensures that the results of these meetings are incorporated into education offers. (comp. Bliem et al 2012)
- On a small-scale level different foresight studies are commissioned by the Ministries (education, etc.), interest groups (Chamber of Economy, Federation of Industry) and regional governments for a respective target group, for different regions or individual studies courses.

For details concerning the individual VET type see the detailed descriptions below.

## 2.4. Development of key competencies

These following key competences as found in the Austrian lifelong learning strategy LLL:2020 are supposed to be integrated in each learning process:

- 1) Communication in mother tongue

- 2) Communication in foreign languages
- 3) Mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology
- 4) Digital competence
- 5) Learning to learn
- 6) Social, intercultural and civic competences
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- 8) Cultural competence

## Education in international benchmarks

As the PISA results 2012 will be only published in winter 2013<sup>1</sup> we still have to rely on the results of PISA 2009. (comp. Schwantner et al. 2010) The results of the first round of PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) will be only published by October 2013.

Overview of PISA 2009 results of Austria:

### Reading

- Austria scores 470 points, which means 23 points below OECD average (31 out of 34 OECD countries)
- 5% top students, 28% at-risk students
- The gap between native and migrant students still is extremely high

### Mathematics

- Austria scores 496 points, which is almost the OECD average
- 13% top students, 23% students at-risk
- Boys perform significantly better than girls

### Science (physics, biology, chemistry, earth and space sciences)

- Austria scores 494 points, which is just below the OECD average
- 8% top students, 21% students at-risk

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<sup>1</sup> BMUKK (2013): Die aktuellen Kooperationen des BMUKK mit der OECD  
[http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/25012/20130625a\\_anlage\\_2.pdf](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/25012/20130625a_anlage_2.pdf) [09.09.2013]

- No significant differences related to gender

## 2.5. Identification and Validation of non-formal and informally acquired skill<sup>2</sup>

At the moment there is no legal framework to regulate validation and recognition of non-formal or informal learning in Austria. However, one of the ten fields of action within the LLL:2020-Strategy is the improvement of the processes on validation of non-formal and informal acquired skills and competences.

At the moment the level of qualification is measured by formally acquired certificates in the formal education system. Therefore, the current certification policy in Austria focuses on “external examination” meaning that almost all qualifications (except university degrees) can be obtained without taking part at the respective courses or programmes. However it is necessary to pass the same final exams as required in the regular system.

In contrast to this, learning at the place of work or continuous non-formal/informal VET are considered less important for the labour market, even though informally acquired skills and competences obviously are of high relevance. There are some instruments and projects dealing with the identification and validation of informally acquired skills. However, they are fragmented and insufficiently harmonised. (comp. LLL:2020 Strategy)

The main strategies for Austria will be to harmonise the National Qualifications Framework and informal learning through Contact Points for respective qualifications (Qualifikationsverantwortliche Stellen). Additionally, the curricula of schools and universities have to strengthen their orientation towards learning outcomes. The same will be valid for CVET organisations. An Austrian strategy for validations of outcomes of non-formal and informal learnings will be elaborated by the respective ministries, regional authorities and the social partners. One focus will be the implementation of types of competence balance to include and validate previous learnings and experiences. Some other projects build on procedures which do not have a corresponding qualification in the formal system but focus rather on recording individual development processes.

Selected projects on identification and validation of informally acquired skills<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> Genoveva Brandstetter/Karin Luomi-Messerer: European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Austria

- “YOU have competences” ([www.dukannstwas.at](http://www.dukannstwas.at)), was launched at the initiative of the social partners and the provincial government in response to a shortage of skilled workers in Upper Austria. Participants can obtain selected professional qualifications via recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences. Its target group are all people over the age of 22 who have not worked in their learned occupation for at least five years, who have a foreign professional qualification that is not recognised and have knowledge and skills in the specific occupations. With the support of trainers, existing knowledge, skills and abilities are evaluated in workshops and if necessary acquired in the course of targeted IVET and CVET programmes. This gives them the possibility for exceptional admission to the final apprenticeship exam.
- Competence balance of the Tyrol Centre of the Future: an instrument for personal competence balance to clarify one’s own knowledge, skills and competences and formulate specific objectives and steps for the future.

## 2.6. Support to technical and sciences education

There are many projects and programmes on federal as well as regional level promoting STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) pathways among young people and beyond. However, the landscape of projects is very fragmented and there is no systematic approach in STEM promotion. The support of individual competences in the field of technology and sciences would be especially required.

### At the upper secondary level

Different projects try to inspire young people to choose a STEM pathway.

Selected general examples<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> Löffler, Roland (2013): Austrian Examples for identification and validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences. Forum post on PIN / EQF – Praxis and Information Network <http://www.eqf-pin.eu/forum/thread/austrian-examples-identification-and-validation-non-formally-and-informally-acquired> [09.09.2013]

<sup>4</sup> Forschungsrat Steiermark (2010): MAJUT – Mainstreaming “Jugend und Technik”

- Sparkling Sciences: a research program of the ministry of science and research which brings scientific researchers and school students in different research projects together;
- Green Chemistry: a project of the University of Technology to interest school students in green chemistry;
- Generation Innovation: a project of the Ministry of Infrastructure to raise young people's interest in sciences and technology by placing them in around 1.000 internships;
- Regional teaching methodology centres (Styria): competence centre for educators (biology, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics etc.)

Initiatives for apprentices using the example of Styria<sup>5</sup>:

- Profil!Lehre: funding of additional qualification in the field of sciences and technology for apprentices;
- Future Jobs: information portal of the federation of industry on industry apprenticeships;
- “Smart Heads – Skillful hands”: information campaign of the chamber of commerce/trade, handicraft and business.

## At tertiary level

Although the number of students is increasing, too few choose one of the STEM fields. That's why there is a political initiative to promote studying STEM subjects (“MINT-Studiengänge”).

## Second chance learning

Some programmes support people who want to change careers and choose a STEM pathway, e.g.:

- FIT Programme (Women in craftsmanship and technology – Frauen in Handwerk und Technik): The Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) supports women who search for a career in the technical/industrial area.

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<sup>5</sup> Forschungsrat Steiermark (2010): MAJUT – Mainstreaming “Jugend und Technik”

## The different VET pathways in detail

### Dual VET<sup>6</sup>

The dual VET system is divided into a company-based training and a part-time vocational school for apprentices. The company-based training is regulated by the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ) while pedagogical matters fall under the purview of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK). Apprentices may only be trained in legally recognized apprenticeship trades. These skilled trades (BMUKK 2012: p.204) are included in the list of apprenticeship trades (Lehrberufsliste) published by the BMWFJ in co-operation with the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMAK). Additionally, there are 14 legally recognized apprenticeship trades in the agriculture and forestry sector which are not included in the list.

Companies which train apprentices are obliged to provide apprentices with the skills and know-how listed in the occupational profile. The basis is the training regulation, which is adopted by BMWFJ for every apprenticeship occupation. It is binding for the training provided in the training companies. This ensures a minimum standard of training. Companies which are not able to provide training which covers the whole occupational profile can take advantage of the possibility of complementary training within a training network.

In the companies the IVET trainer is responsible for the company-based training (often company owner). As the IVET trainers need to show specialist competences as well as knowledge of vocational pedagogy and law, they either have to pass an IVET trainer examination or take part in a forty-hour IVET trainer course.

Attendance of a part-time vocational school for apprentices (Berufsschule) is compulsory for apprentices. The aim of these part-time vocational schools is to provide apprentices with the theoretical basics of the respective occupation, to promote and complement company-based training and to deepen their general knowledge. Thus, the practical training is complemented by a special curriculum defining both the key issues of the technical theory and practical training for the respective apprenticeship trade. Cooperation between part-time vocational school and the company takes place as talks are held on the performance and behaviour of the apprentice. The IVET trainer and the vocational school teachers meet on a regular basis with specialists from the sector

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<sup>6</sup> BMUKK (n.y.): Apprenticeship Training in Austria – The dual System.  
<http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/secon/app.xml> [09.09.2013]

to exchange information about the respective subject. Some companies offer work placements for part-time vocational school teachers so they can find out about new company-specific developments.<sup>7</sup>

### **Special programmes**

Aimed at young people at risk of dropping out of the IVET system, e.g.

- Integrative initial vocational training: A flexible model for people at a disadvantage on the labour market
- Supra-company apprenticeship training (Überbetriebliche Ausbildung, ÜBA): Young people who cannot find a company-based apprenticeship can complete the apprenticeship within the context of the supra-company apprenticeship training (essential part of the youth employment guarantee in Austria).

### **Competences Dual VET**

- Federal Level
  - Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ): The company-based part of apprenticeship training is within the sphere of competence of the Ministry of Economy. The legal guidelines for dual training are laid down in the Vocational Training Act (BAG). The regulations for the individual apprenticeship occupation are issued by the Ministry of Economy on the basis of expert opinions submitted by the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship.
  - Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship (BBAB): Set up by the Ministry of Economy upon the proposal of social partners. Part-time vocational school teachers are co-opted as advisory members. The Federal Advisory Board submits expert opinions to the Ministry of Economy, e.g. on the restructuring of apprenticeship trades (introduction of new or the modernisation of existing apprenticeships).
  - Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK): Provisions concerning the organisation of part-time vocational schools and the cornerstones for the framework curricula are laid down in the Federal School Organisation Act. The Ministry of Education issues framework curricula for part-time vocational schools for each apprenticeship trade.

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<sup>7</sup> ibw (2012): Frequently asked questions about the topic of apprenticeship training

- Provincial Level
  - Apprenticeship Offices (Lehrlingsstelle)
  - Provincial governors, Federal Provinces: responsible for construction and equipment of vocational schools
  - Regional Advisory Board on Apprenticeship: representatives of the social partners with the aim of providing counselling services in all issues related to VET; also responsible for submitting expert opinions, proposals and suggestions related to the apprenticeship training system in its province.

### **Dual system – new regulation of trades<sup>8</sup>**

To ensure the labour market requirements the continuous modernisation of training regulations is of great importance. The initiative for a new regulation is generally taken by the social partners, but also international developments and educational programmes are considered.

Professional and practical requirements of the sector are always in the foreground. The content of the training regulations is prepared by the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship or the Ministry of Economy. In this, they are supported by the Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (ibw). Their work is based on surveys and research projects.

### ***Overview of procedures connected with the introduction of new apprenticeship trades<sup>9</sup>***

- ***Preparation***: identification of vocational and special prerequisites to design a new or adapt an existing apprenticeship trade on the initiative of the Ministry of Economy, the social partners or company representatives; clarification of the basic framework by the Ministry of Economy and the social partners; consideration of European and international developments as well as solutions introduced in other countries
- ***Elaboration of the training regulation and framework curriculum***: preparation of draft training regulations; expert discussions in the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship, submission of expert opinions of the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship to the Ministry of Economy, establishment of an expert group from the part-time vocational school area and the social partners under the leadership of the Education Ministry to develop a framework cur-

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<sup>8</sup> BMWFJ (n.y.): Apprenticeship. Dual Vocational Education and Training in Austria. Modern Training with a Future.

<sup>9</sup> BMWFJ (n.y.): Apprenticeship. Dual Vocational Education and Training in Austria. Modern Training with a Future. p. 22

riculum in compliance with the training regulation; preparation of drafts for a nationwide review.

- **Issuing of regulations:** involvement of all stakeholders in a consultation and review process; evaluation of opinions and comment; issuing of apprenticeship training regulations by the Ministry of Economy and of framework curricula for part-time vocational schools by the Education Ministry
- **Follow-up measures:** elaboration of supportive manuals and additional material by the companies' professional organisation, partly supported by the employees' representation or VET institutes to support training companies; provision of information to training enterprises by apprenticeship offices; training of trainers in enterprises and of teachers in part-time vocational schools; training of examiners of apprenticeship-leave examinations; continuous evaluation.

### **Curricula and key competences**

The curricula of part-time vocational schools for apprentices define educational objectives, contents and the procedures for the planning and realization of study processes. They include for example German and communication skills, career-related foreign language skills, civics, the apprentice's occupational and social environment as well as business education.

### **VET schools and colleges (BMSs and BHSs, together BMHS)**

The VET programmes at BMHSs combine the acquisition of vocational skills, competences and qualifications as well as well-grounded general education. This guarantees that graduates can either directly enter working life or choose out of a wide range of CET and higher qualification programmes. Thus the BMHS curricula are based on this combination of general education and intensive specialisation training in theory and practice, with BMS putting more emphasis on practical elements.

- VET schools (BMS, berufsbildende mittlere Schulen)
- VET colleges (BHS, berufsbildende höhere Schulen)
- Post-secondary VET courses (Kollegs)

### **Curriculum development and responses to skill needs**

For each type of school the objectives and the content of education and training are defined by a framework curriculum. These curricula are regulated by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts

and Culture (BMUKK). However, within these framework curricula the individual schools have the possibility to change the number of lessons for individual subjects autonomously or develop their own focuses, taking account of (regional) economic requirements. (Tritscher-Archan et.al 2012: p.18)

There is no systematic analysis of future skill needs. However, studies were commissioned to define certain skill dimensions relevant for employment and to identify the need for subject-related specialisation in curriculum design and for additional qualification. As there is no institutionalised cooperation between the AMS and the ministries responsible for the school sector, the AMS-based forecasts are not used for the development of curricula or for setting up new specialisation. Additionally, these forecasts also are not targeted to experts in the school settings. (Vogtenhuber 2010:40, 42)

### **Key competences**

Depending on the respective school type and focus, different key competences are addressed. Thus entrepreneurial competence can be both an interdisciplinary principle and the subject of special focus. Depending on the school type, up to three foreign languages, but at least one, are compulsory. The foreign language is also increasingly used as working language. Digital competence is an absolute necessity, a number of programmes and focuses are targeted towards the information and communication technology sector. (Tritscher-Archan et.al 2012: p.18)

### **VET at tertiary level**

VET pathways at tertiary level include universities, universities of applied sciences, and universities of education, which all require HE entrance qualifications.

- Universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen): they provide an academically founded VET qualification on the basis of bachelor and master courses. A period of work placement is a mandatory part of the curriculum.
- University of education (Pädagogische Hochschulen): training programme for compulsory school teachers in a three-year bachelor course.
- University: not only vocational subjects but also general education. Vocational programmes mainly in the technical, medical and business field and in teacher training for upper secondary schools.
- CVET university courses: CVET university courses both for postgraduates and for non-HE graduates who fulfil other access requirements.

### **Accreditation of tertiary VET Programmes/Universities of applied sciences and responses to skill needs**

For the universities of applied sciences the orientation towards the skill needs of the economy has been of great importance since their implementation. Even the initiative to set up new courses and programmes at the university of applied sciences and to modify existing ones often comes from the economy. Thus, needs and acceptance analyses are to be included with an application for accreditation of a study curriculum. These analyses have to provide evidence for a positive labour market outlook for the graduates. Therefore macroeconomic indicators of the economic development and of the labour market have to be used as well as qualitative surveys. In this process, the developed training and qualification profile is evaluated by potential employers. Programmes are accredited for a maximum of five years. During that time it is possible to make necessary adaptations by submitting change applications. Upon expiration of the five years, a follow-up survey has to be carried out for the reaccreditation, which also comprises an evaluation report which is based on a peer review. This process is used to ensure matching of qualification requirements and VET programmes. (Tritscher-Archan et.al 2012: p.32, Vogtenhuber 2010: p.40)

### **Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET)**

Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET) is embedded in the field of adult education and adult learning and can be differentiated from general adult education and public education. It comprises (comp. Tritscher-Archan et.al 2009:38):

- Enterprise CVET (Company training programmes/work-related training courses): at own company, at external providers, informal learning on the job; in-company CVET is the most frequent form of organised learning of the workforce.
- External CVET: can include formal (to acquire formal qualifications or certificates) and non-formal VET (no formal qualification)
- Qualification measures as instrument of active labour market policy: can lead to formal qualification but not necessarily - more information can be found in chapter 'Employment'.

By taking part in CVET, a formal qualification can be acquired, but mostly CVET courses and programmes do not lead to any legally regulated qualification. (comp. Tritscher-Archan et.al: 2012)

### **Responsibilities**

*"In the field of CVET there are no explicitly defined legal or educational policy supervisory functions for the whole sector. BMUKK is responsible for CVET in the school sector. The Federal Ministry for Science and Research (BMWF) is responsible for CVET in higher education institu-*

tions. CVET providers in non-school and non-higher educational CVET institutions are largely autonomous within the framework of legal specifications and mainly subject to the market conditions of supply and demand.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Providers**

A large institutional variety characterises the Austrian CVET landscape. As the public sector (schools, HE institutions) play a rather minor role, mainly the social partner affiliated organisations, associations and religious communities provide CVET. The two major CVET providers which are connected to the social partners are WIFI – economic promotion institute and bfi – vocational training institute.

### **Curricula Development and assessment of relevance**

Whereas the curricula of public CVET providers (schools, HE providers) are developed by teaching and Ministry staff, the non-public CVET sector *“is easiest to adjust programmes to qualification requirements. In this sector it is possible to respond to the economy’s needs most quickly. The extensive lack of legal bases as well as competition between providers on the free CVET market leads to more flexibility and scope when designing needs-oriented courses.”* The curricula are developed by the CVET providers themselves. The respective course material is often generated by the course leaders or trainers. (Tritscher-Archan et.al 2012:32, p. 29)

When it comes to formal qualifications which lead to formal certifications, the curricula which are developed by the providers have to be defined in analogy to the respective exam regulations. (Tritscher-Archan et.al 2009: p.40)

## **2.7. Selected problems to be solved in the future**

In Austria about 40% of compulsory school graduates move on to an apprenticeship (39,930 persons in 2010). This makes apprenticeship the most important route of further education (comp. AMS, 2011, p.4). From a European comparative perspective, the relevant Austrian labour market performance indicators like youth unemployment rates or the period of transition from education to work look very favourable. These numbers indicate that especially in economically hard times, the apprenticeship approach performs well as a vocational-oriented education system. Nonethe-

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<sup>10</sup> comp. Eqavet <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/austria.aspx> [09.09.2013]

less, the Austrian apprenticeship system does have some important flaws/weaknesses which have to be addressed to make the system fit for current and future challenges.

Nearly half of all trainees are concentrated on ten trades. Particularly girls are highly concentrated on two trades, namely retail saleswoman and office administrator.

Very few apprenticeship graduates move on to higher education. According to the BMUKK (2013) about 10,000 apprenticeship graduates took up the opportunity to gain a special vocational high school certificate in the last ten years and only 3% of all new students enter the Austrian universities with a special university entrance exam needed by people who do not hold a high school certificate (Statistik Austria 2013, p.57).

This situation is aggravated by a comparatively low proportion of people holding tertiary degrees especially in engineering and natural science.

As the Austrian economy is swiftly developing towards a high technology intensive, international oriented system which demands more tertiary skills, the educational concentration on few trades and the middle skills levels of great parts of the population will create a severe skills mismatch at the Austrian labour market in the near future.

In a knowledge-based economy it is of prime importance to keep people in learning situations all their life (LLL). Data throughout the EU show that this is especially difficult with regard to low-qualified people who tend not to participate in advanced vocational training. In addition to raising the awareness of this group for their current/future skill needs by offering career guidance, the validation of informally acquired skills can be a successful approach to attach this group to the education system. The process of gaining an educational certificate by validating informally acquired skills, requires most often some vocational training. Furthermore, gaining an educational certificate might motivate people to move on in their educational careers. The Austrian system of validating informally acquired skills is currently in an early stage of development. Looking at European trendsetters in this field, like Switzerland, there remains a lot to be done.

The pace of economic development is accelerating. It is becoming more and more difficult to anticipate future skill needs which are not outdated by the time corresponding education and training offers/schemes/curricula are set up and implemented. There is a need for spirited long term skills forecasts. At least in Austria, currently no big long term foresight studies addressing future skill needs are conducted. Aside from that, the forecasts which are conducted as described above are too often not integrated in strategic policy planning. According to one of the most established experts in the field *“the use of forecasting is contested by its moderate supports in the PES and ignored by the main actors on the ET supply side”* (Lassnig 2010, p.1118).

## 3. Employment

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### 3.1. Short characteristics of Employment Services

The Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) is the leading “*client-oriented services enterprise for the Austrian labour market. [...] It seeks to match the supply of and demand for labour as completely, economically and sustainably as possible in compliance with social and economic principles.* (BMASK 2012: p.13) The AMS as a public service enterprise under public law was spun off the Labour Ministry and set up in 1994.

The AMS performs its tasks under the mandate of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK) and under involvement of the social partners. As specified by federal legislation (AMSG), the AMS has to provide jobs to all workers on the Austrian labour market and on the other hand it has to ensure the supply of workers to business and industry. Its tasks include the provision of income support to workers during periods of unemployment. Within the framework of the Federal Government’s policy of full employment, the AMS renders a major contribution to preventing and eradicating unemployment in Austria. (BMASK 2012: p.13)

#### **The public employment service is charged with performing the following tasks:**

- *implementing active labour market measures (information, counselling, placement and assistance to job-seekers and employers);*
- *verifying claims for and paying wage-compensation benefits in the event of unemployment (Unemployment Insurance Act – AIVG);*
- *other labour market policies, such as the admission of third-country nationals to the labour market (Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals – AuslBG);*
- *providing vocational training options to young people through placement in suitable apprenticeships and through a variety of supplementary measures, e.g. mandating training*
- *establishments to provide supra-company apprenticeship training under §30 of the Vocational Training Act (BAG) or under §2 (4) of the Vocational Training Act for Agriculture and Forestry (LFBAG).* (BMASK 2012: p.14)

Next to the Public Employment Service, profit-oriented private placement services were only authorised to provide services to clients from 1994 onwards. By 2002, the legal situation had changed so far that it became easier for private placement services to operate.

## 3.2. Key national/regional documents on active labour market policies

The framework for Austria's PES (AMS) is defined by the following policy and strategy programmes:

- Europe 2020 – the EU's strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States;
- Austrian national reform programme 2013;
- ESF programming documents for 2007-2013; as well for the next funding period 2014-2020
- Longer-term plan of the Austrian PES 2009-2013;
- Targets defined by the BMASK for the PES's implementation of labour market policy.

(BMASK 2012: p.290)

Also the government programme mentions the AMS and active, demand-oriented labour market policy for integrating job-seekers into the labour market. It stresses the need for measures raising the skills level of job-seekers relating to the regional skills need, thereby increasing the labour market opportunities of the persons concerned. Intensified vocational orientation and focus on special target groups are primary objectives.

## 3.3. Key actors involved in employment policies

The BMASK confirms the superordinated targets, which are linked to the Austrian employment strategies as well as the annual budget of the AMS. It is more or less the AMS's responsibility to translate these superordinated targets into operative targets. (PES Monitor)

The organizational model of the AMS is based on the idea that effective labour market policy is based on a dialogue between workers and employers and that it has to consider regional disparities and characteristics (BMASK 2012: p.15)

The AMS is based on a three-tiered organization with one federal office, nine provincial (Länder) offices and 101 regional offices. At all these levels the social partners' involvement in policy design plays a substantial role. (BMASK 2012: p.15)

At the federal level the tasks are shared between the Administrative Board and the Board of Directors. Whereas two directors of the Board of Directors fulfill the executive tasks, the Administrative Board comprises maximum twelve members.

They are appointed by:

- *“the two sides of industry (three members by the employers’ side and three by the workers’ side);*
- *the BMASK (three representatives of whom one is proposed by the Federal Minister of Finance), and*
- *the central works council of the employment service’s employees (with one member entitled to vote solely on issues concerning staff matters and two other members optionally invited in an advisory capacity).” (BMASK 2012: p.17)*

The publishing of the targets defined for the AMS labor market policy by the BMASK is legally binding in accordance with the Public Employment Service Act. The targets generally stay in force for several years and are communicated to the PES in agreement with the social partners.

#### **Main targets of the Public Employment Service:**

- *Maintain the PES’s leading position in European comparison;*
- *Continue developing early intervention (provide assistance as early as possible to avoid and combat long-term unemployment);*
- *Provide support to specific target groups to enhance equal opportunities in the labour market for women, young people, older workers, migrants and people with health issues;*
- *Special requirements for PES management and organisation: continue developing quality standards; improve quality and sustainability of labour market policy measures; optimize compliance with arrangements agreed between PES and clients; ensure quality job brokering;*
- *Enhance organization development with a focus on electronic PES services.*
- *Fight poverty.*

(BMASK 2012: p.20)

In a yearly process the specific targets are discussed by the different bodies and agreed on: *“For the purpose of management by results, quantified targets are agreed each year between the federal PES organization and the Länder organizations and subjected to a process of control. The annual labour market policy targets of the employment service are developed in consultation with PES owners’ representatives, the federal PES organization and the Länder organizations, negotiated by the Board of Directors and the managers of the Länder offices and ultimately adopted by the Administrative Board. The social partners play a key role in this process. They are involved in the debate of these targets both at the federal and the Länder levels and adopt the binding tar-*

*gets for the entire PES organisation in the exercise of their function in the Administrative Board.”*  
(BMUKK 2012: p.20)

### 3.4. Services provided to job seekers

The main target groups of the service to job seekers:

- unemployed persons, persons in employment or in training who are seeking work;
- persons in employment who are at risk of losing their job due to structural problems or insufficient qualification;
- young apprenticeship-seekers;
- secondary school students facing a career choice.

(BMUKK 2012: p.25)

Services include information, counselling, guidance, benefit claims processing, assistance and support, subsidies to training, further training and employment, and matters relating to the employment of foreign nationals. (BMUKK 2012: p.25).

The kind of services provided to the individual client depend on specific target group criteria and the length of the unemployment period. For short-term unemployed and unemployed who are not considered to be a risk group, the services focus mainly on job brokering services and access to benefit claims. At the latest after four months of unemployment, services start to concentrate on counselling and guidance. Next to individualised action plans, which have to take into account the current labour market situation and more intensive counselling, different LMP programmes and subsidies are available to the clients. (BMUKK 2012: p.26).

The service to job seekers is mainly provided in the regional offices of the AMS. However, actual trainings and qualification measures are provided by a larger number of external providers.

Next to the regional offices there are around 56 vocational information centres (Berufsinformationszentren – BIZ) all across Austria.

### 3.5. Evaluation of employment policy and measures implementation

For the planning and the implementation of labour market and employment policies, the policy makers rely on scientific evidence. *“Labour market, vocational and skills research is indispensable for analysing current developments and providing the necessary background information for the development of labour market and employment policy measures. Great importance is attributed to the scientific evaluation and monitoring of the LMP instruments used. The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (former Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour) has commissioned in the past years and also in the present year a number of re-search projects to evaluate LMP instruments and programmes (ex ante, while running, ex post).” (BMUKK 2012: p.202).*

Additionally, the PES federal and Länder offices were given the task of ensuring appropriate labour market monitoring, compilation of statistics, background and development work, and empirical research on different fields, e.g. labour market, employment, skills development and work environment. The outcomes of monitoring, evaluation and research build the basis for devising and implementing labour market policy. (BMUKK 2012: p.202)

### 3.6. System of career guidance

The highly differentiated field of vocational and educational guidance (LLG) in Austria serves as a paramount example for a multi-level-governance challenge. At horizontal level, LLG is offered by a great number of providers in different fields: Educational institutions (schools, adult education providers, universities), the Public Employment Service (AMS), special interest groups (chambers), profit and non-profit private providers. At vertical level all government-levels (EU, federal level, national level, regional level) are involved in governing and funding the field of LLG in Austria. To address this governance challenge, the Austrian Ministry for Education set up an inter-ministerial steering group, the “National LLG Forum”, which involves representatives of all important actors in the field and serves mainly as information exchange platform. Furthermore a national “lifelong guidance strategy” was developed to further improve the dispersed guidance system. In a nutshell, the strategy contains the following programmatic goals:

- Implementation of basic LLG competences in all curricula
- Focus on process optimisation and support
- Professionalization of counsellors, trainers
- Quality assurance and evaluation of offers, processes and structures

- Widening access – creating provisions for new target groups (cf. <http://www.lifelongguidance.at/qip/mm.nsf> (26.08.2013))

### 3.7. Correspondence of retraining programmes to skill needs anticipation

In the last years a lot of effort was put in the forecasting, recording and documenting of labour market trends. As already mentioned in the previous chapter – additionally to documenting the current situation – the AMS has commissioned different high level forecasts on the future employment and economic situation with the objective to adapt courses and training programmes funded by the AMS to future needs. The research results are used for AMS qualification and skills training measures and for supra-company apprenticeship training (Vogtenhuber 2010: p.42).

The most recent example is the AMS Standing Committee on New Skills (see above) concentrating on the skills need in different sectors and occupational fields, mainly fields where a shortage of skilled labour is prospected. Thus on the one hand there are general quantitative forecasts which give a general overview on the economic and employment developments. On the other hand, there is more qualitative data on different job profiles.

### 3.8. Selected problems to be solved in the future

Due to strong immigration, the Austrian population will keep on growing in the next years. At the same time it will become older on average, as the baby-boomers are reaching a higher age. Despite a strong increase of labour market exits towards old age pension, the labour force will shrink only marginally due to migration gains and increasing labour market participation of women (full time) and older people (comp. Huber 2010, p.8ff.). Further vocational education offers/schemes/curricula as well as coaching and guidance offers will have to respond to this **structural shift in the Austrian workforce**.

In the wake of the current economic/financial crisis many companies stopped hiring/recruiting new employees. This led to a strong increase in youth unemployment, albeit at a comparatively low level, when compared to the youth unemployment rates in other European countries. The Austrian approach of offering young people who failed to enter the labour market vocational education (Ausbildungsgarantie) is reasonable, as it contributes to a better educated future workforce. Considering the course of the crisis, this situation could last for quite a while. It is therefore

paramount to start reforming the Austrian vocational education system (especially the apprenticeship system).

According to one of the most established experts in the field “*a comprehensive policy in the area of matching and coordination of ET and employment was never developed in Austria*”. (Lassnigg 2010, p.1114). The policies described in chapter one and two remain fragmentary.

## 4. Employers and Trade Unions

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### 4.1. The social partnership<sup>11</sup>

The social partnership (Sozialpartnerschaft) in Austria is a system of cooperation between the major economic interest groups and between them and the government. This system of cooperation on economic and social issues is a voluntary arrangement, which is of an informal nature and not regulated by law. One main part of the social partnership is to negotiate collective agreements on wages by the federal Economic Chamber (employer side) and the Trade Union Federation (employee side). Around 90-95% of private sector employees are covered by collective agreements. Furthermore the social partners are well-established in Austria's political system in different ways.

- **“Legislation:** *The representative organisations have the right to evaluate proposed legislation, to make recommendations to law-making bodies, and to draft texts for legislation directly related to the interests of the social partners (social welfare and labour law, etc.)*
- **Administration:** *The social partners are represented in numerous commissions, advisory boards and committees and thus exert influence in matters of, for example the apprenticeship system, inspection of working conditions, [...] competition and anti-trust policy, labour market policy and public promotion and funding programmes.  
[...]*
- *The social partners' responsibilities also include informal negotiating and problem solving in their special areas of expertise, such as labour law and social welfare issues, but also trade regulations and family law, where agreement between the social partners is often prerequisite for an appropriate solution at the political level.”<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.sozialpartner.at/sozialpartner/Sozialpartnerschaft\\_mission\\_en.pdf](http://www.sozialpartner.at/sozialpartner/Sozialpartnerschaft_mission_en.pdf) [09.09.2013]

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

## The interest groups for the employees

### **Austrian Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer)**

The Chamber of Labour represents the interests of all employees and consumers in Austria. Besides the Federal Organisations there is a regional Chamber of Labour in each of the nine Austrian provinces. Membership is compulsory for all employees working in Austria.

The main tasks are:

- Fundamental research for the benefit of workers and consumers
- Participation in and control of legislation
- Services
- International presentation

### **Austrian Trade Union Federation (Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund – ÖGB)<sup>13</sup>**

The Austrian Trade Union (ÖGB) represents the interests of workers based on a voluntary membership. Although it is a non-partisan organisation, one of its main goals is the influence on politics. One main task is taking part in the development of new laws including the initiative to the drafting of bills and the provision of political reviews of and comments on bills, which are submitted by other bodies which take part in the decision-making process. Trade union members are entitled to legal advice and legal representation in court as well as many other benefits.

The following bodies are united under the umbrella of Austrian Trade Union Federation : GPA-DJP (Union of Salaried Private Sector Employees and of Printers, Journalists and Paper Workers), GÖD (Union of Public Services), GdG-KMSfB (Union of Municipal Employees, Art, Media, Sport and Freelance Workers), GBH (Union of Construction and Woodworkers), vida (Transport and Service Union), GPF (Union of Postal and Telecommunications Workers), PRO-GE (Union of Production Workers).

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.oegb.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=S06/Page/Index&n=S06\\_11](http://www.oegb.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=S06/Page/Index&n=S06_11) [09.09.2013]

## The interest groups for the employers

### **Austrian Economic Chambers (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich – WKÖ)**

The Austrian Economic Chambers represent the interests of the Austrian business companies on a national and international level. The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber is the umbrella organisation for the nine different Länder Chambers and 110 trade associations for different industries. The membership is compulsory for all Austrian companies in operation.

The main tasks of the WKÖ are:

- Representation of interests: the Economic Chambers represent the interests of its members at the different levels of governance in the legislative processes and regulations important to the Austrian businesses. It also includes the collective bargaining with unions.
- Service: the Economic Chambers are one main service and information point for all Austrian companies looking for information and advice.
- Education: the Economic Chamber contributes to knowledge transfer and education through its educational facilities (WIFI, universities of applied sciences)

### **Chamber of Agriculture<sup>14</sup>**

The Chamber of Agriculture represents the farming and rural interests versus the state and the other professional associations. Besides other tasks, it is responsible for the submission of proposals and expert opinions, especially in draft legislation and regulations and consultation with officials.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.agramet.info/?+English+Version+&id=2500%2C%2C%2C1462> [09.09.2013]

## 4.2. Involvement of social partnership in education and employment

### Activities of employers' and employees' associations in defining future skills needs

Most of the large scale skill need forecasts are commissioned by the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS). Some of them include input and expertise from employer or employee associations or companies themselves, e.g. the AMS Standing Committee on New Skills – which includes focus groups to which representatives of employer's, employees associations or companies are invited.

Different interest groups like the Economic Chamber also commission medium- or small-scale studies to evaluate regional or sectorial demand.

### Involvement of employers in qualification and curricula design

As for the school-based vocational education and training types the responsibility for the curricula design is mainly carried by the Ministry of Education. The employer's associations are involved in the regulations of the trades within the dual VETsystem. At the tertiary level the employers and the employers' organisation have influence on the curricula design of the universities of applied sciences as they provide input to the need's analysis. The development and implementation of new curricula is to be based on the demand of the economy. Some universities of applied sciences are closely affiliated to the Economic Chamber or the Chamber of Labour.

### Involvement of social partnership in the Austrian Public Employment Service

The representatives of the social partnership are included in the bodies of decision-making powers and controlling on all three levels (federal, Länder, regional) of the Austrian PES. At the federal level the members are tripartite (social partners and government representatives), at the Land (province) level, a regional government representative is – under some conditions – included as well, next to social partner representatives and PES management. At the regional level only social partners and the PES management are included. (BMASK 2012: p.15).

## Involvement of employers in career guidance

Career Management is part of HR development within different companies, mainly to be found in large companies. Small companies often don't have a strategic approach to career management. However, external career guidance is provided by the employer's association and affiliated training institutes.

## Roles of employers and trade unions in employee training

The two main trainings institutions are affiliated to both the Economic Chamber and the Chamber of Labour:

- WIFI Austria – Institute for Economic Promotion of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
- bfi – Vocational Training Institute affiliated to the Austrian Chamber of Labour and to the Austrian Trade Union Federation

## 5. Summary and main conclusions

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The report at hand gives a rough overview of the Austrian approaches to skills policy with a focus on education and labour market systems and policies as well as the role of the social partners. Despite an overall bright picture of economic and labour market indicators, substantial skills-related challenges can be identified:

- if Austria wants to become an economy characterised by high technology, it has to shift the qualification structure towards tertiary qualification with a special focus on the STEM sector;
- poor results in PISA rankings and the fact that educational performance is more directly linked to the social background than in most other European countries, call for an overall reform of the education system;
- fast changing skills demands due to persistent technological developments and changes in the work structure make LLL a necessity for great parts of the workforce. The Austrian CVET system will have to adapt to this challenge, amongst others by addressing its fragmentation and transparency problems;
- an ageing population will have to stay in employment longer. It will be the task of CVET to provide older workers with the right skills to manage this challenge successfully;
- the evidence base for a coherent skills strategy needs strong improvement. Little objective information (scientific data, evaluations...) is available with regard to many skills demand and supply processes as well as of the performance of many skills offers. Forecasting is not systematically employed and if at hand, partly not used by practitioners;
- the Austrian policy system is highly segmented. With regard to skills policies, the minor developed coordination of the education and the labour market system constitutes a severe barrier for a coherent strategic approach. (The above mentioned LLL:2020 Strategy has to be pointed out as a positive exception in this respect.) The strong integration of the social partners in many skills-related policy processes is actually counterbalancing this problem a little. However, an institutionalised coordination of ET and employment is lacking in Austria. This for example also concerns the coordination, exchange and integration of results of foresight studies in the context of curricula design.

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