

# Vocational Education and Training in Austria

## Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

### STRENGTHS

The Austrian VET system has a number of strengths:

- The dual system has many commendable features, with well-structured apprenticeships that integrate learning in schools and workplace training.
- Youth unemployment rates are low and the transition from education to first employment is smooth by international standards.
- Social partner involvement at all levels, in VET policy design and delivery, is strong, with effective co-operation between different stakeholders.
- The VET system caters for a broad range of needs, providing safety nets for those with weak school results or from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also offering five year VET college programmes providing high level technical training.
- The VET system offers different progress routes at various levels, avoiding dead-ends and linking VET to general tertiary education through the *Berufsreifprüfung* (professional baccalaureate).
- The current teacher workforce in VET schools seems to be well prepared and industry experience is mandatory; many schools have flexible arrangements, with teachers working part-time in industry. Recent reforms have changed the requirements on VET teachers but the effects are not yet apparent.
- Completion rates in upper secondary education are high by international standards.

### CHALLENGES

- The VET system has a structural anomaly in the 9th grade, with a double transition for apprentices and some students spending a year in an inappropriate track.
- Some VET qualifications may be too narrow to provide an adequate foundation for a career as well as a first job.
- Quality assurance of apprenticeship training does not guarantee minimum standards.
- Workshop-based dual programmes (*Überbetriebliche Ausbildung*) are costly and risk reducing the incentives for employers to provide apprenticeships.
- Quality career guidance based on labour market information is not available to all VET students.
- Provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills to VET students is – particularly in the dual system - limited.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reform the 9th grade, reducing double transitions and ensuring that all students are channelled into the right programme and receive appropriate preparation for their apprenticeship or full-time school-based VET course.
2. Use modules, training firm alliances and apprenticeship experiences as means to counter-balance the tendency of employers to create their own separately defined specific qualifications. Make the VET provision on the school side more flexible to allow for a more rational provision.
3. Enhance quality and ensure minimum standards in apprenticeship training in firms, through effective monitoring and support to training firms. Consider different self-assessment tools and the possibility to make some form of quality control (through the mid-term test or inspection) mandatory.
4. Keep the focus of *Überbetriebliche Ausbildung* courses on leading young people into regular apprenticeships. Redirect resources from such courses to preparing young people for regular apprenticeships.

5. Ensure that good quality career guidance is available to all. Focus the preparation of career guidance professionals stronger on labour market information and improve the availability and presentation of relevant evidence.
6. Introduce systematic assessment to identify basic skills gaps among VET students and target help at those who need it most. Strengthen the focus on literacy and numeracy in the VET system, and consider reforming the curriculum of vocational schools to this end using innovative teaching methods.

## FURTHER READING

Vocational education and training (VET) has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. But in recent decades, VET has been a neglected part of initial education: education policy research and reform have tended to focus primarily on school and tertiary education.

The OECD's policy review of vocational education and training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, comprises a programme of analytical work and individual country reviews and is designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labour market needs.

[Learning for Jobs, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training Policies, Austria](#) (OECD, 2010) was released in June 2010 and assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of six policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website [www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs](http://www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs)