

## 02 VET schools and colleges in Austria

### The General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and School Sports at BMBWF (GD VET)

GD VET fulfils the **tasks of school administration** for the VET school sector which, based on legal provisions, fall within the sphere of competence of BMBWF (Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs). School legislation is implemented at the governmental school authorities, i.e. the regional education boards at provincial level.

GD VET is responsible for the **following areas of school-based education and training (at the upper secondary level)**:

pedagogical matters and subject- and occupation-specific issues (e.g. curriculum development); in-service and continuing education and training of teachers; location and facility management; school development and education research; international cooperation; and much more.

This General Directorate is also the umbrella organisation for adult education and school sport/sport-related issues within the sphere of competence of BMBWF.

### The VET school sector

provides **initial vocational education and training (IVET)** programmes of differing duration and at various levels in addition to broad general education from the ninth school year.

**The VET school sector** comprises the following institutions:

- Part-time vocational schools
  - Schools and colleges for engineering, arts and crafts
  - Schools of business and colleges of business administration
  - Schools and colleges of management and services industries
  - Schools and colleges of tourism
  - Schools and colleges of fashion, colleges of art and design
  - Schools of social occupations
  - Colleges of agriculture and forestry
  - Federal sport academies
  - Kindergarten teacher training colleges and colleges of social pedagogy
- including special forms and pilot projects.

### A variety of VET pathways

With the exception of **part-time vocational schools** (school-based training within the dual system), they can be organised in different forms with courses of differing length (1-5 years):

#### Schools for intermediate vocational education:

- 3 or 4 years: full-time school from the 9th school year; IVET qualification
- 1 or 2 years: full-time school from the 9th school year; basic vocational training

#### College for higher vocational education:

- 5 years: full-time school from the 9th school year; IVET qualification

#### Add-on course:

- 3 years: full-time school from the 9th school year following completion of a school for intermediate vocational education

#### Post-secondary VET course:

- 4 semesters: full-time school after the matriculation certificate (the educational objective of the college for higher vocational education)

#### Schools and colleges for people in employment:

- 4-8 semesters: the above-mentioned school types in the form of an evening school

It is possible to change between the individual types of VET schools and colleges with the same curriculum. Should the curriculum differ, examinations are required (in certain subjects).

### Education and training pathways to VET schools and colleges

After completing primary school (years 1-4), pupils can complete the lower secondary level (years 5-8) either at academic secondary school (lower cycle) or the new secondary school. Admission to VET schools and colleges (at the upper secondary level) is possible upon successful completion of year 8.

Depending on the previous education and desired school type, additional entry requirements include previous school performance in specific subjects and/or an entrance examination. **Some 80% of Austrian young people at the age of 14 opt for the VET sector route.**

### Initial vocational education and training (IVET)

is the major concern of VET schools and colleges, alongside the provision of general education. Graduates of these courses have direct entry into a profession or different forms of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) opportunities, depending on the level of their qualifications.

Schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education have been experiencing **continuous growth in the number of students** for three decades, not least because of the balanced provision of broad general education, occupation-related theory and occupation-related practice (including compulsory or optional work placements, depending on the type of school) and because of a variety of specific training opportunities and special training focuses of varying duration.

Since the early 1990s, **colleges for higher vocational education** have become very popular. Their students graduate with the matriculation and diploma certificate and, thanks to the combination of professional

qualifications, general access to higher education and the recognition of the available courses at European level, these establishments ensure a **high qualification level**.

## Framework conditions

Relevant basic legislation is embodied in the School Organisation Act (*SchOG*) and School Education Act (*SchUG*) and can be changed by Parliament acting with a simple majority following a consultation process. The curricula of the various school types are decreed by an ordinance of BMBWF.

## Costs and finance

With the exception of private schools, VET school and college attendance is free. This also applies to post-secondary VET courses and the special forms for people in employment. Contributions for textbooks, travel to school and materials have to be made, however. Fees are charged for school trips and other events as well as boarding facilities (grants are possible).

The Federal Government bears the costs of facilities and maintenance of public schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education with the exception of schools of agriculture and forestry and part-time vocational schools (where costs are borne by the respective provincial government, which is also in charge of these schools). The Federal Government also meets the salaries of teachers of federal schools and colleges including those at private schools with public-law status. The costs for teaching staff at part-time vocational schools and schools of agriculture and forestry are shared by the Federal Government and provincial governments.

## School supervision

At the upper secondary level, responsibility lies with the regional education boards competent at provincial level. Regional school inspectors, each of them in charge of a particular school type, are entrusted with supervision. Colleges of agriculture and forestry and some schools and colleges for engineering and crafts, however, are under direct supervision of BMBWF.

## Involvement of other ministries

Certain areas of the VET sector fall within the remit of other ministries, such as the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (e.g. company-based training of apprentices and accreditation of professional qualifications), the Federal Ministry of Health (e.g. schools for healthcare and nursing) and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management.

## The social partners

The Austrian system of economic and social partnership is based on voluntary cooperation between statutory and voluntary interest groups and between these and government representatives, with statutory interest groups comprising representatives of employers (Austrian

Federal Economic Chamber), employees (Federal Chamber of Labour) and agriculture (Standing Conference of the Presidents of the Agricultural Chambers) and voluntary interest groups comprising the Federation of Austrian Industry and the Austrian Trade Union Federation.

In the field of **school-based education**, the social partners are involved in legislation and the adoption of ordinances (for new curricula, for example).

## Cooperation with the business sphere

Cooperation with the business sphere plays a major role for all those involved in the VET school sector. On the one hand, curricula and special focuses are thus adapted to the **requirements of the economy**, on the other, companies offer subject-specific professional apprenticeship training and/or places for mandatory work placements. **Results of research and development are implemented in a practice-oriented way** in joint projects between schools and the business sphere, e.g. in the form of **diploma or project work**. Nearly all teachers of occupation-related and practice-oriented subjects boast practical experience in the private sector.

## Educational counselling and career guidance

at schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education is provided by specially trained teachers, who are available for information and guidance, preparation for decision-making, assistance and individual advice to pupils. One to three teachers at every school are active in guidance and counselling, depending on the number of students there.

Educational counselling teachers work with feeder schools, educational counselling teachers at general secondary and lower-cycle academic secondary school, new secondary school and other advisory services for pupils in their final year (Public Employment Service Austria, the Austrian Students' Union at university level, etc.).

## Key pedagogical projects

### The new upper cycle

An amendment to the School Organisation Act (Federal Law Gazette no. 9, 14 February 2012) forms the legal basis for the new upper cycle. It will enter into force in the whole of Austria in 2016. This reform aims to step up individual learning support and provide remedial measures to students. By spreading learning content (competence modules) over semesters, students are supported in performing gradually and continually.

### The cornerstones of the new upper cycle:

- **Scope:** The new upper cycle applies to all three- to five-year schools and colleges from year 10 onwards: academic secondary school, school for intermediate vocational education, college for higher vocational education.

- **Adjustment of curricula:** Curricula are formulated with competence orientation. The syllabi of the various subjects from year 10 onwards will be split into competence modules for every semester.
- **Assessment on a semester basis:** From year 10 onwards, students will get semester reports with qualifications and rights which were previously reserved to year-end reports. This means that every semester must be completed with positive marks. Where competences have been assessed as negative, pupils need to take semester exams; the teaching content which still needs to be learned and, at the same time, is the subject matter of the semester exam is additionally documented (supplementary sheet of the semester report). Here, all performances marked as positive will be registered and only negative marks need to be corrected, which means that students assessed as negative need to study smaller bundles of the teaching content. Semester exams and their first and second repetition are possible within the two following semesters. A third exam attempt is only possible before students take the final exams.
- **Repetition of the school year:** The option of correcting negative marks very soon after failing by taking semester exams aims to prevent repetitions of school years. This means that students can always progress to the next higher grade with two subjects marked as “fail”. This ensures that students remain part of the class community. For pupils with more than two negative marks, the class conference can permit that students move up one time with three subjects marked as “fail”.
- **Promotion of young people with learning weaknesses and special talents:** An extended early warning system with performance agreements, individual learning support to implement previously agreed remedial measures (learning facilitator) aim to help prevent negative marks. Participation in individual subject classes in a higher semester aims to promote talents in a special manner.
- **Completion of the upper cycle:** Only pupils who have completed all subjects with a positive mark can sit the matriculation and diploma exam.

#### Modularisation at schools for people in employment

In 2010 at schools for people in employment – of which there are some 80 locations in Austria – the school subjects were already implemented in a modular format for people in employment in line with the amendment to the School Organisation Act. “Module” denotes the curriculum of a subject in one semester; this facilitates the advancement of **employed students** at schools and makes **adult-oriented educational programmes** possible. The new Act has also led to progress in terms of the recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge and andragogical support. This allows people in employment to access programmes, add-on courses and post-secondary VET courses in modularised forms.

#### Partly standardised matriculation and diploma exam

With the introduction of the partly standardised, competence oriented matriculation and diploma exam (*sRDP*) in 2015/16, standardised basic competences, the

same framework conditions for all students as well as objectification will be created.<sup>1</sup>

The matriculation and diploma exam comprises **three cornerstones** with **seven exam sections**:

1. a diploma work including its presentation and discussion
2. standardised and non-standardised written exams with options (depending on the school type)
3. oral (non-standardised) exams with various options (depending on the school type)

Pupils can decide themselves if they want to take three written and three oral or four written and two oral partial exams.

- All students write a **diploma work** either alone or in a team (of 2-5 people) which covers a topic that corresponds to the educational objective of the respective school type. The diploma work covers a problem which requires comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge coming up to the state of the art in the subject disciplines or in business and technology and also requires creative and innovative approaches to solutions.
- **Written exams** such as German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Applied Mathematics are laid down centrally. In addition, there are non-central subject-specific exams which aim to test key qualifications specific for the school type. Written exams that have been marked negative can be repeated at the next possible date. There is also the option of taking a **compensation exam** about the subject matter in the form of an oral exam.
- The **oral exams** are also standardised by specifying topic areas in the individual exam areas. Although these exams are prepared and checked by the teachers at the school location, comparability is ensured by specifications, such as the development of a competence-oriented assignment, which not only require reproduction but also transfer and problem-solving competence. The reorganisation of the exam committee – examiner and assessor who jointly make a proposal on the mark – also contributes to a certain degree of standardisation of the exam procedure.

#### Competence-oriented teaching

In the future, acquired competences will be even more a measure of the success of learning processes – knowledge that has been learnt “by heart” plays an ever decreasing role in our technologised, occupation-oriented information society. For this reason, for some years the **focus** of the Austrian VET school sector has been on **competence-oriented teaching**. Competences play a major role in the VET sector as they are a prerequisite for the ability to exercise an occupation and the ability to take part in higher education programmes. Competence

<sup>1</sup> The legal bases are an amendment to the School Education Act (Federal Law Gazette no. 52, 19 June 2010), and the Regulation on final examinations (Examination Regulation for the college for higher vocational education) of 30 May 2012 (Federal Law Gazette II no. 77) and 6 August 2012 (Federal Law Gazette II no. 265).

comprises a **network of connected aspects** such as applicable knowledge, abilities, understanding, know-how, acting, experience and motivation, and is therefore the requirement for overcoming a specific (problem) situation and solving a specific task.

Due to the paradigm shift from subject- to competence-oriented teaching, pupils learn how to transfer factual knowledge into competent action and how to use existing knowledge when they take certain steps. The goal of the VET school sector is to further develop learning and teaching towards competence orientation, which is to become a key element of the planning and realisation of teaching and of performance assessment. New forms of teaching and learning are to be the focus here. Competence-oriented teaching is to be seen as an overall concept for developing and safeguarding the quality of school work.

With systematic project management and a project group comprising representatives of educational administration, university colleges of teacher education, academia and schools, measures have been and are being developed and implemented for competence-oriented teaching design, which are regularly supported by in-service training measures.

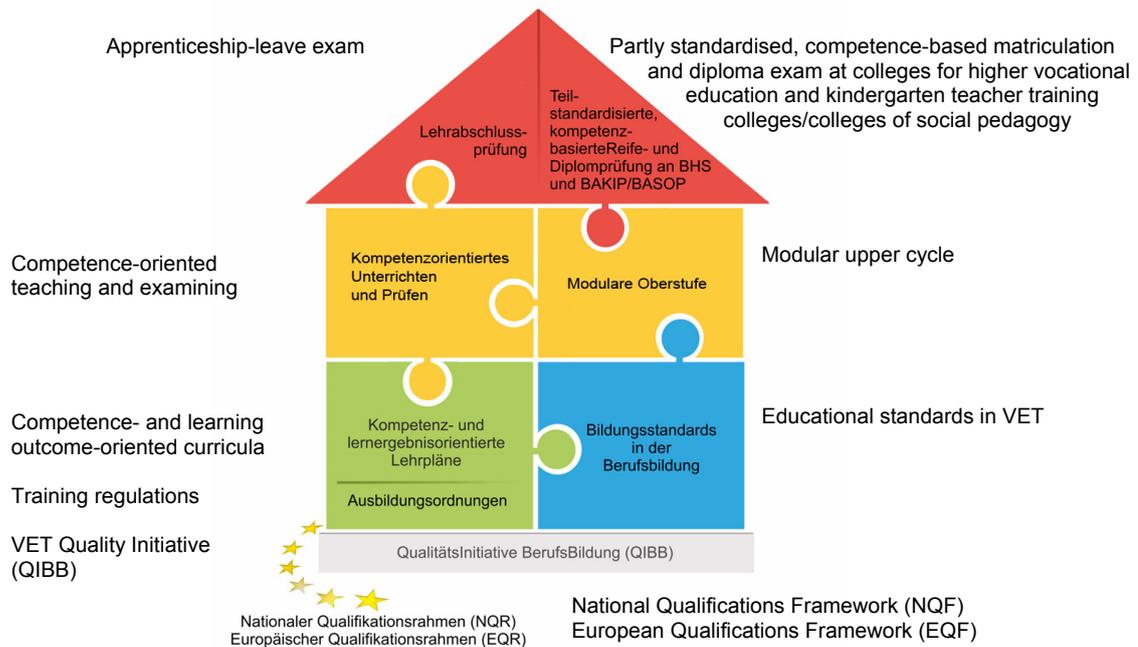
#### Measures and activities

- The starting point is the **educational standards** in VET: They provide teaching staff with an instrument to orient their work even more towards competences.
- **Competence- and learning outcome-oriented curricula:** As well as educational standards, they constitute another major element to encourage the competence orientation of teaching. Competence- and learning outcome-oriented curricula focus on the **competences** (learning outcomes) to be achieved. This means there is a change in the objectives of curricula, away from “mere” content (input) towards results (outcome). “Learning outcomes” means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning). Competence- and learning outcome-oriented curricula are based on the **competence models** specified in the **educational standards** for the VET sector. In concrete terms, the **descriptors** of the educational standards are allocated to the learning and teaching objectives of the individual learning/teaching contents. Therefore these objectives build on the developed competence models, follow the approach of learning outcome orientation and also contain social and personal competences. Curricula also refer to previous and future classification systems such as **ISCED** and the future European credit transfer system for vocational

education and training (**ECVET**) in Austria and this makes it easier to allocate qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework (**NQF**) based on learning outcomes.

The basis for the preparation of curricula is the “Guidelines for the preparation of competence- and learning outcome-oriented curricula” for all school types in the VET sector.

- **BMBF training programme** “Competence-oriented teaching”: This training programme has been and is provided in the subjects that cannot be allocated to the *sRDP*. Major contents are the definition of terms related to the topic of competence orientation, the development of teaching and learning methods as well as new learning formats, social forms and assessment criteria, the use of educational standards and the development of examples for classroom use to promote competence-oriented teaching.
- **The Competence Centres East and West:** The Competence Centre East (Upper Austrian University College of Teacher Education) – responsible for the provinces Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland, Upper Austria and Salzburg – and the Competence Centre West (Tyrol University College of Teacher Education) – responsible for the provinces Carinthia, Styria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg – have to fulfil the following tasks:
  - development and implementation of standardised in-service training formats for various reform projects of BMBF,
  - intensification of relations between the points of contact in in-service training departments in VET divisions of university colleges of teacher education and strengthening of cooperation to ensure in-service programmes in the various provinces are standardised and conducted jointly. Since 2010 when the Competence Centres were set up, 80% of teachers have been trained in the new formats of the standardised matriculation and diploma exam in the subjects mathematics, German, English and the second modern foreign languages: French, Italian and Spanish. In-service training events have been held on the design of competence-oriented teaching in the subjects that are not examined in the course of the standardised matriculation and diploma exam. Events have been held on the new diploma exam and the nationwide pilot training programmes on individual learning support have been put into practice.
  - Points of contact for schools, teachers, in-service trainers regarding reform measures of BMBF and link between BMBF, regional education boards and teachers.



### Educational standards in VET

Educational standards in VET focus on the **final qualifications** of schools for intermediate vocational education (year 11) and of colleges for higher vocational education (year 13), on the core process of “teaching” and describe, based on competence models, cross-curricular and multi-disciplinary **core competences** which students (are to) achieve by the end of the training. They are therefore a **proof of qualifications** for the graduates’ portfolio at the interface to the world of work or a further (tertiary) educational institution. They enable learning outcomes to be represented and compared optimally at national and European level. The overall project aims to develop and implement competence-oriented teaching in the entire area of school-based VET.

Since 2004 BMBF (GD VET) has been working together with working groups of teachers both on educational standards **for all school types** and also **for specific school types**. This development process is supported and evaluated scientifically by the Universities of Graz and Salzburg as part of a pilot phase. In this phase, the developed standards were and are being tested at selected pilot schools before being published on the website [www.bildungsstandards.berufsbildendeschulen.at](http://www.bildungsstandards.berufsbildendeschulen.at).

In the VET sector it was decided not to have the educational standards (attainment of the standards) externally examined. The educational standards in VET are therefore not examples of exams but should be seen as **suggestions and orientation in teaching** and should also be used as a means of self-evaluation. They will be integrated into practical teaching as examples for classroom use in order to define the objectives for pedagogical and didactic work and intensify requirements for the problem-solving capacities of students.

The project structure comprises the **four stages** of the development process:

The project structure comprises the **four stages** of the development process:

Stage 1 is about preparing the **competence model** and formulating the core competences to be acquired in the form of **descriptors**.

In stage 2, a variety of **examples for classroom use** are prepared, which are coherent tasks that can be integrated into the teaching process. They can be used as suggestions and guidance for the classroom and contribute towards improving the quality of teaching.

Stage 3 is about **piloting** the examples for classroom use with the aim of guaranteeing high quality and comprehensibility of the educational standards.

Stage 4 is about conceiving the pedagogical foundations for **competence-oriented teaching** and implementing the required support measures.

### Vocational training research

#### Setting up networks – planning – developing further

As well as commissioning **individual research projects** when necessary, a decisive pillar for the strategic development of VET is the **VET Research Conference (BBFK)**, which has been held every two years since 2008:

[www.berufsbildungsforschung-konferenz.at](http://www.berufsbildungsforschung-konferenz.at).

The conference is organised by the Vocational and Adult Education and Training Department of the Austrian Association of Research and Development in Education (ÖFEB) and supported by GD VET of BMBF jointly with Public Employment Service Austria (AMS).

The VET Research Conference is supported and planned by a **programme committee**, comprising representatives of BMBF and AMS as well as academics from public and private research establishments.

The priority topics of the conference are **current** (socio-economic) **developments** where **research projects are required**.

The objectives of the conference are the following:

- **exchanges and formation of networks** of VET experts, between researchers at university-based and non-university-based institutions, between Austrian experts and specialists from other German-speaking countries,
- the promotion of **academic research projects** against the background of **current developments** (priority topics of the respective conference),
- the **improvement of quality** in Austrian VET research by means of exchanges, the formation of networks and the promotion of young talents,
- the stimulation of research in German-speaking countries by promoting **young academics**,
- the **creation of evidence** for (strategic) decisions in VET.

The results are documented in **conference proceedings** published by BMBF and in this way they are also made accessible to a wider circle of stakeholders and researchers.

## Gender mainstreaming in VET

### Equality of opportunity in education, training and the world of work

Gender segregation in some VET school types and consequently also a lacking balance of the sexes in **training and professional pathways** result in inequality of **employment and career opportunities**. The activities related to this topic have a long **tradition** and are rated as **highly important** in the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and School Sports. This is reflected by:

- the active **participation** of specialist units for business, engineering, social and services education in **several school development projects** with the specialist units for gender-specific educational issues and academic secondary schools,
- the inclusion of the **topic of equality of opportunity in the context of the VET Quality Initiative QIBB** by means of the following measures, among others:
  - the **integration** of the orientation towards the gender mainstreaming objectives in the **mission statement** of GD VET,
  - the provision of **evaluation instruments for students and teachers of the VET school sector on the topic of “gender-responsive teaching” and “gender-responsive school management”**,
  - the preparation of a **hand-out “QIBB gender\_diversitätskompetent” (“QIBB gender diversity competent”)** for schools as support in the **integration of objectives and measures of gender equality** into quality and school development work.

## The exam and certificate termed *Berufsreifeprüfung*

The introduction of the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (or *BRP*) in 1997 has led to increased permeability of the education system.

Whereas the *Berufsreifeprüfung* does **not** lead to the acquisition of any **professional qualifications**, it provides the **general higher education entrance qualification** to graduates of the dual system (apprenticeship-leave examination), graduates of schools for intermediate vocational education of at least three years' duration, graduates of schools for healthcare and nursing, graduates of schools for paramedical training, as well as to graduates of the skilled workers' examination pursuant to the Vocational Training Act for Agriculture and Forestry and people with the entrance examination pursuant to the Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation. Prior school attendance is not required for admission to the *Berufsreifeprüfung* examinations.

### *Berufsmatura*: Apprenticeship with the matriculation certificate

Since 2008 preparation for the *Berufsreifeprüfung* (also termed *Berufsmatura* in German) examination has been offered parallel to apprenticeship training and is also fully subsidised in this form (under the name *Berufsmatura: Apprenticeship with the matriculation certificate*). Apprentices who are interested in general education sign up to this programme; as early as at the age of 19 they can be awarded access to higher education combined with a vocational qualification.

### Preparatory courses

are offered by adult education institutions recognised by BMBF (e.g. the vocational training institutes or BFIs, the economic promotion institutes or WIFIs, adult education centres or *Volkshochschulen*) and some schools in the VET sector. Examinations can also be conducted at certified adult education institutions in up to three specialist areas. Similar preparatory courses organised at adult education institutions or by associations can be attended by apprentices free of charge.

In principle, examinations set by schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education and their special forms for people in employment can be taken **without prior school attendance**. This also applies to the matriculation and diploma exam and the final examination of schools for intermediate vocational education.

## Cooperative open learning

COOL (cooperative open learning) is a pedagogical **concept for the development of teaching** based on reforms of teaching for the lower and upper secondary level. COOL is not a ready-made scheme but an approach that is **developed** at the respective **school location**.

The focus is on the **attitude of the actors involved at the school**: COOL makes it possible for students to introduce their intellectual and emotional skills, different talents, creativity, curiosity and social competence to the classroom. As an initiative of the schools of business and

colleges of business administration, the **COOL impetus centre**, which was set up by BMBF as early as in 2001, supports the COOL schools and disseminates the concept. GD VET at BMBF is responsible for the strategic and content-related implementation of COOL.

The COOL concept is already being implemented by as many as 150 schools in Austria, mainly in the VET sector. Since 2004 school locations have had the possibility to be certified internally.

## Electronically assisted learning

In the VET sector, **mobile, digital learning facilitators and learning platforms** are already part of everyday teaching routine in many classes.

Supplementing the notebook PC class projects held since 1998, for the past three years there have been more and more **BYOD** (“bring your own device”) **classes** at schools, where students use their own tablet PC, netbook PC or notebook PC in the classroom for taking notes, doing research and learning at home in most subjects.

With this form of teaching, which is increasingly gaining ground, **occupation-specific competences can be acquired** through technology-enhanced learning at **five didactic levels** overall, ranging from the application of IT and the internet, e-learning and social learning, on to IT support in everyday work contexts and the training of future IT experts.

Since 2002, exchanges about all pedagogical and organisational issues related to electronically assisted learning have been taking place in the **e-learning cluster**, which comprises around 160 upper-cycle secondary schools (schools for intermediate vocational education, colleges for higher vocational education and academic secondary schools) and, due to the large interest, can be followed at **two major e-learning events** of BMBF each year. As well as “learning from one another”, since 2009 local, vertical clusters have also been held in these e-learning projects between upper-cycle schools and other local intermediate and primary schools to enhance digital competence (e-education).

Evaluation results, experiences and materials about these topics are made available to interested schools and teachers at <http://elc20.com/> and [www.eeducation.at](http://www.eeducation.at).

## CEBS

The language competence centre of the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training, Adult Education and School Sports offers support to teachers in implementing modern, up-to-date foreign language didactics (Common European Framework of Reference, education standards, and the European Language Portfolio ESP 15+). The nationwide language contest, which is held every year, gives pupils of all VET schools and colleges the opportunity to compete on an Austria-wide basis. A diagnostic procedure for English, prepared and continually developed with international experts, provides a tool for teachers of English to assess the performance of their pupils and support them individually.

Many contacts with international organisations and participation in projects of the European Commission and Council of Europe round off the expertise of this competence centre.