

08 Qualifications, certificates and diplomas

Qualifications

Final examination

Upon passing the final examination at schools for intermediate vocational education (3 to 4 years), graduates boast professional qualifications entitling them to immediately exercise the respective occupations and giving them access to regulated professional activities.

Matriculation and diploma exam

Graduates of colleges for higher vocational education (5 years) acquire a double qualification: The matriculation and diploma certificate opens up access to higher learning and also to regulated professional activities, thus providing immediate entitlement to jobs at executive level.

The project/final work carried out for the final examination or the diploma project carried out for the matriculation and diploma examination gives students the possibility to demonstrate all the practice-oriented knowledge and skills they have acquired.

In the school year 2015/2016, a **competence-oriented form of the matriculation and diploma examination** will be introduced which, as well as the diploma projects, will comprise a standardised form of written exams in German, modern foreign languages and applied mathematics for all candidates. This means that foreign languages will be certified at Level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the second modern foreign languages at Level B1, which will also be noted in the end-of-year report. With the two innovations, the diploma project and partial standardisation, the final qualification of colleges for higher vocational education will become even more competitive internationally.

Diploma examination

The diploma examination is the final exam of training programmes at post-secondary VET courses and post-secondary colleges for social work as well as part of the final exam at colleges for higher vocational education (the matriculation and diploma examination).

EU recognition

The new **Directive 2013/55/EU** amending Directive 2005/36/EC **on the recognition of professional qualifications** entered into force on 18 January 2014 and has to be implemented into national law by member states by 18 January 2016. Due to Annexes II and III having been deleted, the recognition of professional qualifications is noticeably simplified, mobility enhanced, and regulations on the recognition of professional qualifications are written more concisely and consequently their transparency improved.

Now as before there are **levels a, b, c, d and e**. The **final qualification obtained at schools for intermediate vocational education** corresponds to level b, the **final qualification from colleges for higher vocational**

education to level c, where according to the new Directive (Article 11 point (c)(ii)) a note must be included for level c on the matriculation and diploma certificate of a college for higher vocational education.

According to Article 13(3), the host Member State shall accept the certificate by which the home Member State certifies that regulated education and training or vocational training referred to in point (c)(ii) of Article 11 is equivalent to the level provided for in point (c)(i) of Article 11.

According to Article 13 of the new Directive, Austrian qualifications from colleges for higher vocational education shall also be accepted in those Member States where training on level e (post-secondary course of at least four years' duration) is foreseen for the respective profession. This is an improvement for holders of qualifications from colleges for higher vocational education who, according to the previous legal situation (Article 13(3) of Directive 2005/36/EC), have only been entitled to recognition if the host Member State requires a qualification certifying successful completion of higher or university education of four years' duration, but not for a training course of a longer duration than four years.

As previously, in the event of substantial differences, the host Member State is able to impose compensation measures (an adaptation period or aptitude test).

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)

The structures of education systems vary between countries and can therefore be compared only with difficulty in many cases.

ISCED is a statistical instrument and increases the **international comparability of qualifications**. ISCED helps educational researchers and educational policy-makers compare, analyse and enhance the education systems in the OECD area (www.oecd.org) with currently 34 member states. As ISCED levels have been specified from pre-primary education to university, they help experts and partners in other countries understand better and more quickly which educational level is achieved upon completion of a particular programme.

To be able to take account of current developments in education systems, especially by creating the European Qualifications Framework in particular in the OECD countries, the ISCED classification was redesigned:

The adapted system **ISCED2011** now brings a positive and far-reaching change for Austria regarding the presentation of colleges for higher vocational education. According to the available new criteria, the **4th and 5th years** correspond to **Level 5**; these programmes are also termed **short-cycle tertiary education**. This level covers all post-secondary qualifications that teach graduates

professional knowledge, skills and competences typically in a practice-oriented way. One particular characteristic is that they are for specific occupations. Such programmes can also be defined as the first part of a Bachelor's programme. Therefore competences acquired at colleges for higher vocational education are in direct comparison with academic programmes (such as a short-cycle degree in the UK), which will enhance permeability and mobility.

ISCED 304 ¹	Part-time vocational schools for apprentices, schools for intermediate vocational education
ISCED 550	Colleges for higher vocational education
ISCED 550	Add-on courses, schools and colleges for people in employment
ISCED 550	Post-secondary VET courses, post-secondary VET colleges, master craftsperson schools, industrial master colleges

Certificates and diplomas

The final certificate (from the school for intermediate vocational education) and the matriculation and diploma certificate (from the college for higher vocational education) show not only the examination areas and related assessments but also the timetable with the allocation of hours per subject. In addition, these documents include information on connected qualifications.

Furthermore, graduates of schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education can take advantage of Europass Certificate Supplements at www.zeugnisinfo.at, which provide additional information about the acquired skills, competences and activity areas.

Professional qualifications

Vocational Training Act

The Vocational Training Act (VTA) provides the statutory framework for the training of apprentices. In addition, the VTA includes some provisions governing the fields of schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education as well as their special forms and school pilot projects. One provision, for example, stipulates that **successful completion** of a school for intermediate vocational education or college for higher vocational education of at least three years' duration ensures **minimum professional skills** in terms of

- professional qualification,
- labour legislation including collective bargaining agreements,
- social security legislation.

This means that the certificate awarded to graduates of VET schools or colleges also

- gives them access to professional activities requiring successful completion of an apprenticeship-leave exam in a related apprenticeship trade,
- is evidence that they have fulfilled recruitment requirements for specific payment levels in the public sector,
- ensures that they are classified adequately into particular wage and salary levels.

In this context, the term “**certificate**” comprises

- the final certificate of a school for intermediate vocational education of at least three years' duration,
- the matriculation and diploma certificate awarded by a college for higher vocational education,
- the diploma certificate issued by a post-secondary VET course.

Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act

The Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act is the legal basis for the commercial pursuit of activities conducted on an independent, regular basis with the aim of obtaining revenue or another economic benefit. With the 2002 Amendment to the Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act, a unified list of regulated trades was created – these are all trades (crafts and other regulated trades) that are linked to a certificate of competence. Hence the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy is obliged to issue an ordinance for every regulated trade to stipulate which evidence can be considered as fulfilling access requirements for the respective trade.

A final certificate awarded by a school for intermediate vocational education or a matriculation and diploma certificate from a college for higher vocational education can be considered such evidence – the successful completion of these schools can therefore provide direct access to different regulated crafts and trades. For some regulated trades, completion of the entrance examination or of specified programmes as well as evidence of relevant professional experience are also required.

At www.gewerbeordnung.at it is possible to find the access requirements for the pursuit of a regulated trade.

The professional title *Ingenieur/Ingenieurin*

The professional title *Ingenieur/Ingenieurin* can be awarded to graduates of colleges for engineering and colleges of agriculture and forestry.

The title is conferred by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy or the Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. The legal bases are the 2006 *Ingenieur* Act and relevant ordinances.

Graduates must fulfil the following **requirements**:

- the matriculation and diploma exam according to the curriculum of Austrian colleges for engineering and crafts or colleges of agriculture and forestry,

¹ The second and third digits of the ISCED code indicate the categories within complementary dimensions (such as vocational education, general education).

- at least three years of relevant professional practice that requires specialist knowledge in those subjects where the matriculation and diploma exams can be taken,
- a written application for the awarding of the professional title *Ingenieur/Ingenieurin*.

Entrepreneurial examination

For the pursuit of a trade or a regulated craft or trade on a self-employed basis, candidates must prove knowledge and skills related to business administration and legal issues. This proof is furnished by successful completion of the entrepreneurial examination or of a pathway leading to the waiving of the entrepreneurial examination. The Entrepreneurial Examination Ordinance regulates the topics related to the entrepreneurial examination and the waiving of the examination.

A range of institutions in the VET sector teach the knowledge and skills relevant for the entrepreneurial examination to the required extent of 160 periods of instruction. These include all types of colleges for higher vocational education and the majority of schools for intermediate vocational education.

This leads to the waiving of the entrepreneurial exam for these graduates.

Other certificates

Pupils in the VET school sector can acquire **many other relevant (external) certificates** in line with their specialisation or in addition, which are beneficial for their future career.

Foreign language certificates are named as an example here. Students whose mother tongue is not English, French, Italian, Spanish or Russian can, for example, prove their language skills by taking internationally renowned **foreign language certificates** which help them to be successful later at an intermediate professional level in a foreign-language environment.

These international certificates in foreign languages aim to impart qualifications that are recognised in the graduates' future professional life by industrial and business enterprises or for higher studies or are helpful for related job applications.

These exams are prepared entirely by the respective institutions themselves and administered exclusively in examination centres by examiners with relevant qualifications who are officially appointed.

Preparation for language exams is an **additional service** offered by many schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education, which students may take advantage of on a **voluntary basis**.