

10 Adult education and training

Adult education and training in Austria covers a **large number of educational establishments** with different objectives and educational programmes. The **spectrum of education and training** ranges from general education, basic education, and the acquisition of qualifications in “second-chance education”, vocational education and training (VET) programmes, on to management courses and personal development programmes, to higher education and university-based programmes.

Large number of educational establishments and wide educational spectrum

At the **federal level**, general adult education is within the sphere of competence of the specialist unit in the **Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs**, but other ministries are also responsible for specific agendas of adult education and training. At the **level of associations**, first and foremost the Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions (KEBÖ) needs to be mentioned, which comprises the ten largest continuing education and training (CET) associations. University-based and non-university-based **research institutions** are another category. Finally, a large number of **NGOs and registered societies** are active in non-profit and commercial adult education.

The **St. Wolfgang Federal Institute for Adult Education (BIFEB)**, a service provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, sees itself as a competence centre for professionalisation, quality development and expert discourse. BIFEB is an innovative partner in national and international networks and projects and, at the same time, a seminar centre for all actors in adult education and training; its range of services covers courses and workshops on to CVET university courses.

Funding of adult education

The Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs supports **associations and institutions of adult education and training**. The prerequisites and criteria for awarding funds are laid down in the *Federal Financing Act on the Funding of Adult Education and Public Libraries from Federal Funds* (or **1973 Adult Education Funding Act** for short). **Performance agreements** are concluded with the individual KEBÖ associations.

For funding the supported measures, educational programmes and development projects, funds of the **European Social Fund (ESF)** are also used. The European Social Fund is a structural fund of the European Union. In the adult education and training sector, it provides funds for projects aiming at the lasting integration of adults at a disadvantage into society, education and the labour market, the reduction of barriers and the creation of equal opportunities, as well as professionalisation and quality development. **Support from ESF funds** is co-financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs.

A **comprehensive overview** of adult education and training in Austria can be found at the website www.erwachsenenbildung.at.

Objectives and priorities

The main objective of adult education and training is to enhance access to **lifelong education measures for everyone**. Essential for participation and CET success is the development and implementation of programmes appropriate to adults and the target group as well as high-quality educational counselling and career guidance.

Adult education and training serves both personal development as well as CVET and, in this way, contributes to creating equal opportunities, reducing educational disadvantages and, overall, to social development.

Therefore it focuses on the following **priority areas**:

- offering possibilities of lifelong learning, with particular focus on groups who are at a disadvantage,
- enhancing access to adult education for everyone,
- improving the permeability of the education system, from basic education through to university education,
- improving the quality and professionalisation of adult education and training,
- safeguarding the basic structures of adult education and training.

Educational programmes

Basic education and acquisition of qualifications by adults

To facilitate entry to educational processes and open up access to and participation in secondary general education and vocational training programmes, support is provided for basic education and the acquisition of qualifications by adults. In this context the Adult Education Initiative was developed and implemented in 2012 (www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at).

Adult Education Initiative

The Adult Education Initiative enables adults who lack basic skills and/or have not acquired a compulsory school qualification to resume and complete compulsory schooling free of charge. The support scheme was developed jointly by the federal government and provincial governments, its legal basis is an agreement according to Article 15a of the Austrian Federal Constitution (*B-VG*). Its main objectives are:

- equal opportunities and the reduction of educational disadvantages,
- reducing the number of people without a sufficient basic education,
- increasing the number of people with basic educational qualifications,

- raising the qualification level of adults,
- improving the permeability of the education system.

The new **Act on the Final Examination for Compulsory Schooling** (since August 2012) calls for innovative forms of implementation which are appropriate to adults and competence-oriented, cross-curricular programmes which are tailored to the target group and take their life situation and particular potential into account.

The exams and certificates *Berufsreifeprüfung* and *Studienberechtigungsprüfung*

The *Berufsreifeprüfung* provides holders with unrestricted access to studies at universities, higher education establishments, *Fachhochschulen*, post-secondary VET colleges and post-secondary VET courses and requires candidates to have an initial VET qualification.

The *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* provides access to the education and training pathway for which it was taken specifically. Therefore, holders of this certificate are restricted in the extent to which they can change the study programme they have selected.

Preparatory courses for candidates of the *Berufsreifeprüfung* and *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* exams are mainly offered at adult learning establishments.

Access to higher education

In the area of the *Berufsreifeprüfung*, the **standardised matriculation and diploma examination** will apply from April 2016. As preparation, disseminators are being trained in the subjects German, English and mathematics jointly with the adult education associations concerned and the Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School Sector (BIFIE). The curricula are being revised, field tests conducted, and the logistical requirements established at the exam venues. In addition, project support is provided by the European Social Fund to increase participation rates of previously underrepresented, educationally disadvantaged groups of people.

Education programmes for women and development projects related to migration

The focus of **education programmes for women** is on women who are (regionally) disadvantaged and not used to learning; they are motivated to take part in education programmes up to easily accessible tertiary CET measures.

The **development projects related to migration** with the target group of migrants and the so-called “2nd generation” aim to tackle the issues of migration, the first language, multilingualism, and educational practice in the field of adult education and training and promote

cooperation between institutions of adult education, organisations run by migrants and the academic sphere.

A joint feature of the **two priority areas** is the development and implementation of strategies which reach out to the target group and enhance participation in CET. Innovative methodical and didactic concepts (such as using e-learning and social media) are developed and tested which take account of the potential and competences of the respective target group and deal with its educational interests and aspirations.

Awareness of different target groups is raised among adult education establishments. These are stimulated to open up to other cultures. Another objective is the **transfer and dissemination of tried-and-tested learning schemes** in other regions and educational establishments as well as the promotion of new cooperation ventures at the regional and municipal level. In addition, **specific training courses** are developed and implemented for trainers active in educational work with women who are not used to learning as well as measures related to the quality development and professionalisation of literacy and basic education work.

Educational counselling and career guidance

Provider-independent educational counselling system

Jointly with all provinces, an efficient, nationwide and provider-independent educational counselling system has been set up in Austria with networks which serve as first point of contact for all people interested in education.

Network and lasting integration

The aim is to make the know-how of educational counsellors increasingly accessible and enhance their self-image. Specific measures in this field include the joint platform www.bib-infonet.at, supra-regional networking meetings, a newsletter, expert workshops, and the establishment of the Educational Counselling Advisory Panel (*Beirat Bildungsberatung*).

Virtual guide to education

The portal www.erwachsenenbildung.at is also a major contact point and hub in educational counselling and guidance:

The **course support database** (www.kursfoerderung.at) is a nationwide database for individual support in CET. The **bib-atlas** (www.bib-atlas.at) provides an overview of the large variety of information, counselling and guidance offers for education and careers. **eduArd** (EDUCation Austria Resource Directory, www.eduard.bildung.at), the Austria-wide search service for adult education and training measures, makes the search for CET offers easier. With **BiB Wiki** – the “wiki for educational counselling” – a forward-looking instrument has been available since 2007.

Professionalisation and quality development

Federal Institute for Adult Education

The **St. Wolfgang Federal Institute for Adult Education** (BIFEB) is committed to the principles of lifelong learning (LLL) and equal access to education for everyone. Close national and international cooperation with partners in networks, projects and research institutions ensures the professionalisation of CET and the setting of new quality standards in lifelong learning issues.

Cooperative system of adult education

The “cooperative system” of the Austrian adult learning sector is a joint initiative of KEBÖ associations and BIFEB which aims at the professionalisation and quality development of adult education.

Within the framework of the “cooperative system”, partners have agreed to jointly shape the business fields of the **Austrian Academy of Continuing Education**, the **bases of adult education** and **education management** at BIFEB and promote part-time and in-service CET measures of adult educators.

The **Austrian Academy of Continuing Education** (WBA, <http://wba.or.at>) examines and recognises the competences of adult educators based on predefined standards. WBA awards a two-tier occupational qualification with a certificate and diploma and supports permeability between adult education and university-based initial and continuing training. With its binding education and training standards, WBA ensures quality assurance and transparency and thus makes a valuable contribution to the professionalisation and quality development of adult education.

Ö-CERT

The quality framework for the adult education sector in Austria/Ö-CERT is a nationwide scheme to recognise quality-assuring measures of adult education providers in Austria and was launched in December 2011. Ö-CERT targets all providers that boast different, often regionally developed quality labels. Ö-CERT was developed to create more transparency both for clients and learners as well as for public bodies regarding the quality of adult education providers and also to establish uniform quality standards.

To be awarded Ö-CERT, applying institutions have to furnish proof of a valid quality management system or quality assurance process listed on the Ö-CERT website. In addition, specific basic requirements (regarding the organisation, programmes, quality assurance, compliance with democratic and ethical principles) are checked (cf. <http://oe-cert.at>).

The development of Ö-CERT was a joint effort of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (BMBWF), provincial governments, as well as representatives of the adult learning sector and academic sphere. The legal basis of Ö-CERT is an agreement according to Article 15a of the B-VG.

Public relations / development and research

Portal www.erwachsenenbildung.at

The adult learning portal offers information and support on CET for the interested public and is also a platform for all actors in adult education.

The portal currently comprises five sections with thousands of sub-pages and thematic databases to date. In 2013 approximately 59,000 visitors a month were counted. Some 220 news items and 180 dates of events have been published. Around 3,100 people have subscribed to the newsletter, which comes out at least every two weeks.

MAGAZIN.www.erwachsenenbildung.at

In 2007 a nationwide, provider-independent specialist medium for research, practice and discourse on adult learning was launched in cooperation with BIFEB. With the MAGAZIN, the adult education sector has a modern, open-access publication which combines quality of content with smooth and inexpensive distribution.

The MAGAZIN is published three times a year and covers important topics related to adult education; it can be downloaded free of charge from www.erwachsenenbildung.at/magazin or also ordered in printed form at cost price. Its articles and complete issues are downloaded up to 90,000 times a year (as at: 2013).

Material on adult education

Since 2006, the series of publications “Material on adult education”, which was launched in 2000, has come out in a new layout. Academically founded works and specific studies related to adult education are published in this series of publications and made available to the interested public.

The individual issues can be ordered in printed form free of charge and are also available for download at the portal www.erwachsenenbildung.at.

Austrian State Prize for Adult Education

Since 2008 the Education Ministry has awarded the Austrian State Prize for Adult Education, which was conceived in 1956, in a new form: The State Prize is now conferred in up to four categories (“Adult educator”, “Innovation”, “Thematic focus” and “Science and research”). The decision for the respective prize winners and winning projects is made by an independent jury of experts on adult learning with the involvement of the public, the prizes are awarded in a ceremony by the Federal Minister.

Due to changing thematic priorities, the distinction of good practice, the openness for innovation and the bigger picture as well as the **high level of awareness** and importance, the State Prize for Adult Education fulfils an important function in the entire adult learning community.

The EU and international affairs

Work on fundamental themes of adult education and experience exchange with experts at EU and international levels, participation in working groups, projects and

surveys, the preparation and coordination of statements and reports, as well as participation in consultations, events and expert conferences are also among the tasks of the departmental unit (cf. chapter 11).

Implementation of projects of the European Commission

Topics of relevance to education are continually introduced by the EU. One important example in this context is the so-called **LLL process**, which was initiated by the European Commission and has been discussed intensively at all levels by the adult education sector. In connection with the comprehensive activities of the European Commission related to lifelong learning (LLL), the document **LLL:2020 – Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich** (Lifelong Learning Strategy in Austria) was drawn up by an interministerial working group and adopted by the Austrian Federal Government in July 2011. As well as the ministries concerned with educational issues, social partner institutions and academic expert opinions were also taken into consideration. Ten action lines formulate political objectives and strategic projects by 2020 based on a vision, the current state, objectives and measures, with the progress of the work being reported on an annual basis.

European and National Qualifications Framework

In September 2006 the European Parliament and the Council published a Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) with the goal of relating the different educational and qualification systems of the European countries to one another in a transparent manner.

The national states were called on by the EU to develop a **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** based on the EQF which comprises the entire national state's education system, which means qualifications acquired in different ways (formally, non-formally, informally) and at different levels. Austria has decided to comply with this request, with implementation still ongoing.

Current educational issues, which are important including in connection with the development of the NQF, such as **learning outcome orientation**, competence identification, **validation** and the recognition of **non-formal and informal learning**, represent a particular challenge and are being discussed in the adult learning sector at all levels nationally and internationally and in working groups in which the departmental unit is also represented.

Agenda for Adult Learning

Major impetus for the further development of adult learning in the overall European context is given by the **European Agenda for Adult Learning**. It is the follow-up to the *Adult Learning Action Plan*, which ran from 2007 until 2011.

The Department for Adult Education of BMBF has taken on the function of the **national coordination point** for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult

Learning. In this connection, projects including ones co-financed by the EU (EACEA projects) are implemented and coordinated.

The **EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency** – works on behalf of the European Commission and is responsible for the management of programmes such as Erasmus+ (European educational programme for lifelong learning) and EURYDICE.

EURYDICE collects, prepares and publishes information and analyses on European education systems and policies and, since 2013, has consisted of 40 national offices seated in all 36 countries which take part in the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. EURYDICE includes the database **EURYPEDIA**, which is the most comprehensive collection of descriptions of education systems in Europe. Reports and descriptions related to the departmental unit are regularly drawn up and updated on behalf of EURYDICE and EURYPEDIA.

OECD

OECD provides important foundations and analyses for adult education, in which Austria takes part regularly. Participation in the **Thematic Review of Adult Education** (Country Review Austria 2002-2004) definitely had repercussions on the adult learning landscape in this country.

On the initiative of OECD, reports are regularly drawn up on the topic of the **recognition of non-formal and informal learning/RNFIL**, in which Austria also takes part, as it does in the **PIAAC study** (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies). It was published in October 2013 and has furnished data about CET participation and measurable competences in a similar way to PISA.

UNESCO

Austria's participation in activities of **international organisations** also has positive effects on the further development of adult learning. Thus, for example, a delegation of representatives of BMBF, the social partners and KEBÖ took part in the **Sixth UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA)** in Brazil in 2009. **UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning)** is responsible for various agendas of adult education and has organised and run events such as the International Conference and all activities connected with it. In preparation for the **GRALE (Global Report on Adult Learning and Education)** a national country report on adult education was drawn up. The Department takes part in **online consultations**, such as concerning the revision of the *UNESCO Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education* (Nairobi 1976). Specific topics such as the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning/RVA are also analysed from a global perspective by UNESCO/UIL and dealt with in consultations of the member states.