

14 International vocational education and training

Europe 2020 is the strategy for growth and employment of the European Union. It provides the strategic framework not only to overcome the economic crisis but also to create the foundations for smart, sustainable and integrative growth. By 2020 the EU wants to achieve **five headline targets** in the policy areas employment, research and development, climate/energy, education and training, social inclusion and fight against poverty (*ec.europa.eu*). Smart growth means improving the EU's performance particularly in education, research and development, as well as in the field of the digital society.

Towards making the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, **vocational education and training (VET) is the basis for the personal developments of each individual to be able to meet the increasing requirements of the labour market.** European cooperation in the field of education lays the foundations for the development of society and the economy.

The schools and colleges in the VET sector enable young people to acquire the competences and qualifications which are a prerequisite for tackling these challenges. **High-quality education and training** can open up career opportunities to graduates also beyond the borders of our country. At the **basis** of this education and training there are

- competence-oriented framework curricula with the possibility of choosing between special focuses,
- an open offer of foreign languages, the integration of foreign languages as working languages into specialist areas and bilingual (initial) VET programmes,
- innovative teaching methods,
- the opportunity to acquire international certificates (such as for foreign languages, IT),
- information about the content of the training, about the qualifications and competences acquired.

What are the objectives of international cooperation?

Modern communication technologies provide access to information independent of time and place. Electronic networks and forums make it easy to exchange information. International encounters at a personal level offer even more benefits, however. They make it possible for

- the quality of the Austrian (initial) VET system to be presented at an international level,
- the (initial) VET systems in various other countries to be discussed and reflected on,
- the experiences and models of good practice in different countries to be learnt from,
- the Austrian VET system to be further developed,
- new (initial) VET programmes to be developed with partners in other countries,
- VET policy to be developed on an international scale.

What are the benefits of international cooperation?

For young people and adults involved in training, these international contacts mean

- getting to know training and the world of work in other countries,
- experiencing other cultures and economic areas by interacting with people,
- applying their foreign language skills confidently and improving them,
- developing their own personality.

International cooperation of VET schools and colleges extends from Europe to the Middle East, across the USA and Latin America to China and South and Southeast Asia. The experience exchange with experts from other countries, work on joint projects and participation in programmes and studies of international organisations open up opportunities for a variety of new forms of cooperation.

Cooperation within the European Union

Erasmus+ is the EU programme for education, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. Erasmus+ follows all previous EU-funded programmes in the fields of education, training and youth and groups them under one umbrella: **Lifelong Learning** (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig), **Youth in Action** and five international **cooperation programmes** (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries). In addition, Erasmus+ also comprises funding options for sport.

At the heart of the new EU programme there is, in the field of education, the **promotion of mobility and transnational cooperation as well as the exchange of best practice.**

For this purpose, Erasmus+ provides for **three action lines** for cooperation activities, which are open for all programme areas and education sectors:

- Action line 1: Learning mobility for individuals
- Action line 2: Strategic partnerships
- Action line 3: Support for political reforms

In the school sector, Erasmus+ specifically addresses kindergartens and **schools** as well as **all institutions and authorities in the field of school-based education** and offers the possibility to take part in mobility measures and partnerships, thus contributing actively to the further development of the European and Austrian education areas.

In the mobility action line, education staff as disseminators and a motor of knowledge transfer are coming more into focus. The **promotion of mobility of teachers and general staff** in (pre-) school education is highlighted.

The previously practised application procedure by individuals is replaced by an institutional application of the respective educational establishment, which means that the institution can apply – in one process – for several mobility measures for teachers, principals and general education staff of schools. Individuals widen their knowledge, skills and competence in job shadowing, teaching assignments or an in-service training measure abroad.

In action line 2, **strategic partnerships** support **positive and long-term cooperation projects** between schools, kindergartens and institutions from the school-based sector, including VET. In this strand, previous Comenius school partnerships, Comenius regional partnerships and other project lines are continued. The goal is to further enhance the quality of education. Within these partnerships, the mobility of pupils is also promoted.

As previously, **eTwinning** facilitates cross-border projects via the internet for European schools and kindergartens. In addition, eTwinning promotes national and international networks of teachers through European in-service training programmes and conferences.

In the VET sector Erasmus+ invites all actors to take part in **mobility and innovation projects**, thus contributing actively to the further development of the European and Austrian VET areas. The programme promotes transnational mobility in VET and CET particularly for people in IVET programmes and skilled workers in VET and CET.

In addition, institutions have the option to establish **training-related and work-related partnerships** with other European institutions.

In the mobility action line, individuals can widen their knowledge, skills and competences in **work placements** or **job-specific CET programmes abroad**. In the future, special attention will be paid to ensure that participants can use their acquired competences on the job and can also have them recognised to make the biggest possible contribution to their career development. Support is provided particularly for **compulsory work placements at schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education**.

In action line 2, Europe- and world-wide strategic partnerships between institutions and interest groups in the VET sector contribute to increasing the quality, attractiveness and innovation in European VET systems and practices.

In **sector skills alliances** there is the option of developing innovative VET programmes and measures for selected economic sectors (such as textiles/clothing/leather, wholesale and retail, modern manufacturing techniques) to close qualification deficits in these areas.

The **National Agency for Lifelong Learning** at OeAD GmbH informs and advises on promotion schemes related to Erasmus+ Education. For details see: www.bildung.erasmusplus.at

The Europass initiative

One prerequisite for being able to make a successful impression on the labour market is the professional presentation of one's knowledge, skills and abilities. The Europass instrument was developed to make these competences visible. In the form of a **portfolio of five documents** it offers all European citizens the possibility to present **their skills and qualifications** acquired at school, university or during an organised period of study or training abroad **in a clear and standardised format**. Currently, a total of 34 European countries take part in the Europass initiative (www.europass.at).

The five Europass documents:

- The **Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV)** is a uniform document to prepare a CV covering a comprehensive and standardised overview of education/training, non-formally and informally acquired competences, and personal skills.
- The **Europass Language Passport** offers a clear presentation of language skills and competences based on the grid of the Common European Reference Framework for Languages.
- The **Europass Mobility** is an instrument for recording organised periods spent in another country participating in the Europass initiative for the purpose of learning or training.
- The **Europass Certificate Supplement** is issued jointly with the vocational education and training certificate to which it applies and provides an accompanying description of the skills and competences gained in the given programme (www.zeugnisinfo.at).
- The **Europass Diploma Supplement** contains detailed information about the holder's higher education diploma.

The European Social Fund (ESF)

BMBWF is already taking part in measures of the European Social Fund (ESF) for the third time. The EU funds obtained from this institution make a major contribution to implementing innovative and labour market-relevant projects in the field of education.

In the new ESF programming period 2014-2020 measures in the following areas are implemented:

Adult education: Here the focus is on educational counselling and career guidance, basic education, measures for people at a disadvantage and also the field of equality of opportunity.

School: The core area here is the fight against early school leaving and comprises different measures which essentially contribute to improving the situation in this respect. These include the so-called transition level, school-based social work, educational counselling and career guidance and a model project in compulsory schools.

Equality of opportunity: Here, among other projects, measures are implemented as part of the "women's VET course" with the objective of raising the share of women in technology programmes.

This guarantees the possibility of re-entry into the world of work for women based on attractive training plus the relevant qualification.

European Qualifications Framework and National Qualifications Framework

Since the year 2000 the Lisbon Strategy has been aiming to ensure competitiveness and social cohesion in Europe. The Recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2008 set an important **milestone for comparing education systems and qualifications in Europe**. All EU member states and several candidate countries are currently working on the implementation of this Recommendation and are therefore clearly pointing the way towards a European Education Area.

The Recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework advised member states to develop **national qualifications frameworks** on a voluntary basis and link them to the EQF. In addition, they should adopt related measures so that all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents contain a clear reference to the EQF level.

At its core, the EQF is a **grid aiming at transparency, comparison and translation** that makes the variety of national and sectoral qualifications comparable and understandable across Europe. It aims to **portray qualifications of the entire education landscape**, from general and vocational education and training, CET, on to tertiary education, to non-formal and informal learning. Learning outcomes form a joint and Europe-wide understandable basis of the description of qualifications, independent of institutions or learning contexts.

The development of the Austrian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and of the EQF referencing report, which was presented before the EQF Advisory Group in June 2012, was under the overall control of GD VET of BMBWF with continual involvement of the most important stakeholders and experts.

The current work phase mainly aims to **set out in concrete terms the referencing procedure** and responsibilities and to specify further bases for the NQF. In addition, development work on the three “corridors” is continuing.

In the future, qualification certificates of all qualifications which have been assigned to the NQF will contain a reference to the NQF level. In addition, qualifications assigned to the NQF will be made accessible online in the form of a national qualification register that is linked with the EQF portal.

To implement a comprehensive qualifications framework it will be necessary to clarify, in particular, the question of the referencing of qualifications from the non-formal and informal areas and, if appropriate, continue work on instruments and processes for validating informally acquired knowledge, skills and competence. Close cooperation with the Austrian adult education sector is required here.

European credit transfer system for vocational education and training – ECVET

The development and implementation of a credit transfer system for VET aims to ensure **better comparability of**

qualifications and therefore make mobility for learning purposes easier.

The **implementation** of ECVET in Austria is part of an **overall national strategy**. Due to the distribution of competence in the Austrian education landscape, partial strategies will be elaborated in working groups and with consideration of the framework conditions (such as sphere of competence, objective, etc.) of the respective education area. The task of overall coordination will be fulfilled by GD VET and the GD for International Affairs of BMBWF with shared responsibilities.

As Austria understands it, ECVET complements the EQF in that it offers a **system of transfer of learning outcomes of VET and CET** based on a structured description and documentation. ECVET – in analogy to the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) – is the credit transfer system for VET and CET with which learning outcomes can be transferred in the academic tertiary sector.

With the systematic description of qualifications by using learning outcomes and any credits, ECVET is expected to contribute to reaching the **following objectives** in Austria:

- further development of learning outcome orientation and, connected with this, support of the paradigm change from input to output control,
- more efficient implementation of mobility stays for learning purposes in Austria and abroad and quality improvement of mobility stages and work placements in VET,
- enhanced permeability within the national education system at the major interfaces of the Austrian qualification landscape by enhanced mutual recognition of learning outcomes that have already been acquired,
- improved recognition of formally, non-formally and informally acquired learning outcomes to ensure an “optimisation” of learning periods,
- enhanced employability in the Austrian and European labour market by improving documentation of acquired competences.

Austrian institutions have also participated in many pilot projects about ECVET both as a coordinator and as a partner; some of the projects are considered as **models internationally** and have won national and international prizes.

International agreements on education and training

The multifaceted cross-border cooperative efforts of schools for intermediate vocational education and colleges for higher vocational education also include **cooperation with universities of applied sciences and universities in other countries**. These agreements reduce the duration of study of Austrian graduates in relevant area specialisations at these institutions. Related agreements have been concluded with Kingston University and the University of Central Lancashire in the U.K. and in Germany with FHS Fresenius in Idstein, FHS Mittweida, and Leipzig University, among other institutions.

Cooperation with international examination boards is provided, for example, by

- CEBS (the Centre for Professionally-Oriented Languages) to provide access to international foreign language certificates, e.g. in English, French, Italian and Spanish, to pupils at VET schools.

Cooperation with neighbouring countries

As well as cooperation ventures within the framework of the practice firm network, cooperation takes the form of different regional cross-border education and training models, such as:

- **Slovakia**
Cooperation of Austrian teachers at the College of Business Administration in Bratislava where German is also a language of instruction.
- **Czech Republic**
Joint training of Austrian and Czech students at the Retz Intercultural School of Hotel and Catering Industries and College of Business Administration. In Gmünd there is a **two-semester preparation course for pupils with the mother tongue Czech for entry to the college of business administration or the school of business.**
- **Hungary**
Joint training of Austrian and Hungarian pupils at the Frauenkirchen College of Business Administration

In regions near the border, many school partnerships have also been concluded.

EU candidate countries

Cooperation with its eastern and southern neighbouring regions is one of the EU's major concerns. These regions include the countries of Eastern and Southeast Europe as well as the southern Mediterranean in particular, the priorities of which include **their VET sectors' reorientation and further development.** For the regions aiming at stabilising their political and socio-economic framework conditions, an adequate range of VET programmes forms the basis for improved employment opportunities, democratic decision-making processes, a functioning economy and thus stronger social cohesion. BMBF encourages these efforts because economic and political stability in the European Union's vicinity is also of great importance from an Austrian viewpoint.

BMBF supports **VET projects** in cooperation with the association KulturKontakt Austria, particularly in Southeast Europe. In many countries, Austrian cooperation initiatives are managed on site by **officers for educational cooperation** appointed by BMBF. They manage the k-education project offices in **ten countries** and carry out bilateral and multilateral projects about key themes of the school reform and modernisation of education systems.

Austrian expertise supports the reforms in the **target countries** by means of experience exchanges, cooperation and well-aimed further training measures with local decision-makers and experts, for example with:

- establishment of schools and support in the re-orientation of initial VET programmes in the tourism and catering industry by developing curricula, teaching materials and in-service teacher training measures,
- cooperation networks that have been initiated and supported by Austria and projects of schools of business, colleges of business administration, and schools and colleges of tourism (ECONet, AL-BIZ, tour.reg, BINET, SEN; Entrepreneurship Education),
- reorientation of agricultural schools in Albania and Moldova into competence centres for agriculturally oriented VET in the respective region.

Austrian VET colleges have been set up in Shkoder/Albania (with the College for Engineering specialising in information technologies) and in Istanbul/Turkey (with the College of Business Administration at St. Georgs Kolleg).

International recognition

The OECD gives a very good assessment of the Austrian VET system in *Education at a Glance*, the annual overview of education systems in the 34 OECD countries and a number of partner countries. Here more than 150 indicators enable the international comparison related to educational participation and careers, funding of education and the organisation of schools.

In the *Country Note* on Austria it says: "**Vocational education remains an important pillar of the Austrian education system:** 76% of students were enrolled in upper secondary education participating in pre-vocational or vocational programs, the second highest percentage in the OECD."

This means that VET schools and colleges are still **attractive** in Austria. With 9.7% Austria boasts the lowest rate of young people aged 15 to 29 years who are not employed or in training. The objectives of the **Austrian VET sector** of providing high-quality and differentiated programmes in all areas, ensuring university entrance qualifications with the colleges and nevertheless reaching the majority of young people are thus **recognised internationally.**

This is proven not only by the interest of many countries in Austrian VET (such as Spain, Egypt, Taiwan) but also the **successes of Austrian pupils in international competitions:** In all fields – technology, business, tourism – young Austrian talents score highly in a worldwide comparison and acquire key skills and important contacts for their future career in this way. Therefore VET also promotes top performances and individual and team successes. Austria is among the most successful teams especially in the skills competitions EuroSkills and WorldSkills.