



Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training in Austria Strengths, Challenges and Recommendations

STRENGTHS

- The system is highly diverse with different programmes and institutions offering access for a wide range of social groups and different modes of provision. A range of pathways have been developed to allow graduates of vocational programmes to access further and higher education. These are substantial achievements.
- In vocational education and training (VET) colleges, student numbers have continued to grow. Graduates of the VET colleges can expect relatively high earnings in the labour market, but can also continue studying through entry to bachelors programmes – and they are doing so in increasing numbers.
- Launched in the early 1990s, the *Fachhochschulen* have proved extremely popular, with student numbers tripling in less than ten years. Relatively quickly, the sector has built a high reputation amongst students, employers and the general public.
- Professional examinations present an effective system for upskilling graduate apprentices, offering a route to higher earnings and more senior positions in enterprises, and a way to independence, as owners of small business.
- The social partners have high levels of engagement in the postsecondary VET system, notably through the Economic Chamber and the Chamber of Labour – both bodies also running their own training arms. The social partners are also active members of many commissions and co-ordination councils and have substantial influence on the VET system.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- In Austria, the postsecondary VET system is composed of many different institutions, subject to different and uncoordinated governance systems. This diversity has many strengths, allowing innovation and entrepreneurial approaches, as well as accommodating the needs of many different groups of students. The challenge is to ensure that this diversity is adequately managed and co-ordinated, recognising that it is, by and large, funded from the public purse.
 - *Building on recent initiatives by the government and the social partners, establish a national advisory body on VET, involving all the key stakeholders. Its objective would be to ensure more strategic coherence and co-ordination in the VET system without damaging its vibrant diversity.*
- Given the rising aspirations of young people and increased demand for higher level skills, the issue of access to further learning opportunities is critical. There are two key challenges. First, although many graduates of VET colleges go on to *Fachhochschulen*, they often fail to receive adequate recognition for their VET college qualifications in terms of exemptions from course requirements. Second, although pathways have been created for apprentices and others without the Matura qualification to enter tertiary education, they are little used.
 - *To improve access to Fachhochschulen and universities: establish a commission to develop an effective articulation arrangement between VET colleges and Fachhochschulen; take steps to improve the access of apprentice and vocational school graduates into tertiary education.*
- Workplace training is an exceptionally effective means of vocational training. While workplace training in different forms is very widespread in VET college programmes, it is not mandatory.
 - *Workplace training should be a substantial and mandatory part of VET college programmes; learning objectives for workplace training should be built into the curriculum and into the quality assurance arrangements.*

- The mix of training provision (as between different fields and contents) in postsecondary VET is mainly driven by student preferences, and may therefore not fully reflect the needs of the economy.
 - *Building on existing initiatives, institutional mechanisms should be developed to ensure that the mix of provision in Fachhochschulen and VET colleges takes account of employers' needs alongside student demand.*

FURTHER INFORMATION

Increasingly countries look beyond secondary school to more advanced qualifications to provide the skills needed in many of the fastest growing technical and professional jobs in OECD economies. The OECD study, *Skills beyond School*, is addressing the range of policy questions arising, including funding and governance, matching supply and demand, quality assurance and equity and access. The study will build on the success of the previous OECD study of vocational education and training *Learning for Jobs* which examined policy through 17 country reviews and a comparative report. The study also forms part of the horizontal OECD Skills Strategy (OECD, 2012).¹

Full country policy reviews are being conducted in Austria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (England), and the United States (with case studies of Florida, Maryland and Washington State). Shorter exercises leading to an OECD country commentary will be undertaken in Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Iceland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and in Northern Ireland and Scotland in the United Kingdom. Background reports will be prepared in all these countries, and in France and Hungary.

[A Skills beyond School Review of Austria, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training](#) (Musset, P. et al.) was published on 3 July 2013.

Further information about the policy review and reports on VET systems in other countries is available on the OECD website www.oecd.org/education/vet

1. OECD (2012), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives: A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD Publishing. Doi: [10.1787/9789264177338-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264177338-en)