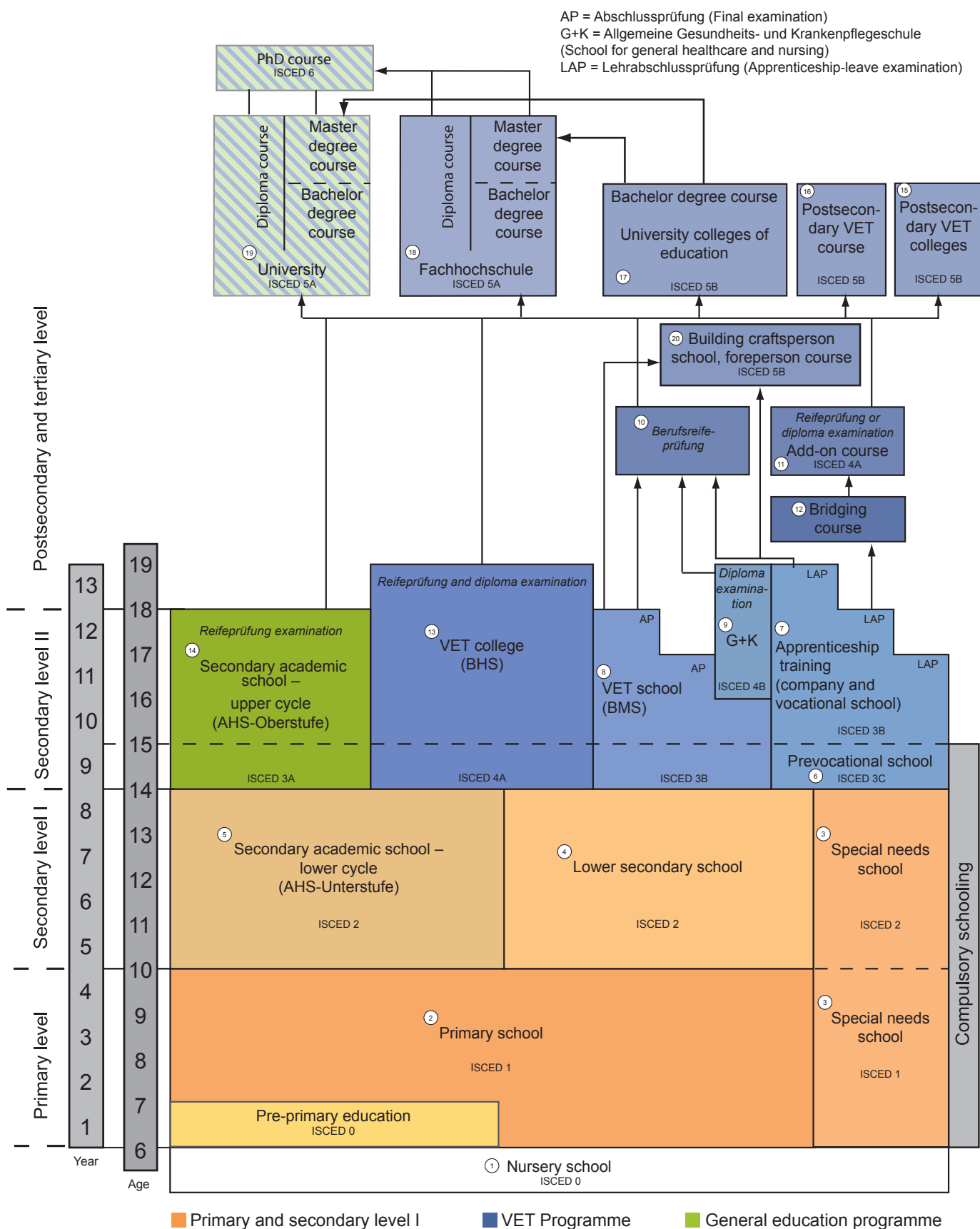


# The Austrian education system



## The Austrian education system

In Austria, children aged three and over can attend a **nursery school (Kindergarten) (1)** [ISCED 0] voluntarily. As soon as they are five years old they must attend nursery school in a half-day form. Kindergarten is not part of the school system, however.

In Austria **compulsory schooling** starts at the age of six and lasts for nine years. One nursery or school year lasts for ten months (from September to June). There are private and state schools; in state schools, no tuition fees are charged. The Austrian school system provides for a variety of education and training options which are designed to meet the needs and interests of children and their parents.

### Primary level

In Austria every child's education starts with four years at **primary school (Volksschule) (2)** [ISCED 1]\*. **Pre-primary education** [ISCED 0] is provided for children who have reached compulsory school age (i.e. at the age of six) but are not yet mature enough for school (e.g. because they have difficulties following instruction).

Children with special educational needs can attend either a **special needs school (Sonderschule) (3)** [ISCED 1] that is tailored to their needs or primary school classes that are run in an **integrative (inclusive) scheme**. Primary schools and special needs schools impart comprehensive general education to all pupils with the objective of fostering their social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills and abilities. Classes for children with special educational needs additionally take the children's individual disabilities into account.

### Lower secondary level

The first differentiation of the school system is at the beginning of lower secondary level. Schoolchildren have a choice between two types of school that last for four years each: these are the **lower secondary school (Hauptschule) (4)** and the **lower cycle of secondary academic school (allgemein bildende höhere Schule or AHS - Unterstufe) (5)** [both ISCED 2]. Schoolchildren with special educational needs can continue attending **special needs school** [ISCED 2] from the fifth to the eighth year. Afterwards they can choose from among intermediate and higher school levels depending on their inclinations and talents. **Lower secondary schools** provide schoolchildren with basic general education, preparing them for transfer to

the upper secondary level and for working life. The lower cycle of AHS aims to impart a broad and advanced general education. It is offered in three branches with different focuses: as classical secondary academic school (klassisches Gymnasium) with Latin and as secondary academic school (Realgymnasium) specialising in sciences or economics. In the 2008/2009 school year the pilot project **new secondary school (Neue Mittelschule)** [ISCED 2] was launched at lower secondary level. This is a school for all 10-to-14-year-olds. The curricula of a Realgymnasium at the lower cycle of AHS are valid for new secondary schools. It is planned to introduce this scheme as a permanent school form as of 2016.

### Upper secondary level

For the majority of Austrian schoolchildren the first school year at upper secondary level is the final year of compulsory schooling at the same time. Then they can decide between a **vocational (VET) and a general education pathway**. VET programmes are provided within the framework of apprenticeship training (dual system), at VET schools (BMSs) and VET colleges (BHSs). General education is imparted at the upper cycle of AHS. Depending on their interests and inclinations there is the choice between a classical, business, science, musical and artistic, or language focus. Some 80% of schoolchildren opt for a VET programme after completing lower secondary level.

### VET programmes

Young people who want to attend a VET programme in the dual system after lower secondary level are obliged to complete their ninth year of compulsory schooling first. This is in most cases done at a one-year **pre-vocational school (Polytechnische Schule) (6)** [ISCED 3C]. Due to the variety of subjects, company visits and practical days at training workshops provided at pre-vocational school, students are offered tailored guidance for their future career decision. Subsequent **apprenticeship training (Lehrlingsausbildung)** is provided both at the **training enterprise (Lehrbetrieb)** (practical training, which makes up some 80% of the training period) and **part-time vocational school (Berufsschule) (7)** [ISCED 3B]. It is the task of these vocational schools to expand the trainees' general education and complement the specialist knowledge and skills they are taught in the training enterprises. Depending on the apprenticeship, training lasts between two and four years, but mostly three years. At the end of the training, every apprentice can take an **apprenticeship-leave**

**examination (Lehrabschlussprüfung)**. Young people with special educational needs, disabilities or disadvantaged youths have the possibility to attend an **integrative VET programme (integrative Berufsausbildung)**. By training in partial qualifications which the apprentices agree on with their company it is possible to meet the special needs of these young people. Integrative VET is supervised and supported by vocational training assistants.

Another VET form of upper secondary level is **VET school (berufsbildende mittlere Schule or BMS) (8)** [ISCED 3B]. It aims to impart to students the fundamental subject-specific skills that enable graduates to exercise their occupation immediately upon its completion and also aims to expand their general education. VET schools mostly last between three and four years, but there are also one-year and two-year forms.

**Schools for general healthcare and nursing (Schulen für allgemeine Gesundheits- und Krankenpflege) (9)** [ISCED 4B] cannot be started before successful completion of the tenth year of schooling. Training is provided within the dual system, with practical training at a hospital and theoretical education at school. They are completed with a diploma examination.

Since 1997, graduates of apprenticeship training, of three- and four-year VET schools and of schools of healthcare and nursing have had the possibility to take the so-called **Berufsreifeprüfung (10)** examination. It comprises four partial exams (German, mathematics, a modern foreign language and occupation-related specialist area) and entitles students to transfer to any post-secondary or tertiary establishment (higher education entrance qualification). Another way to obtain the higher education entrance qualification is by acquiring the **Studienberechtigungsprüfung** certificate. It qualifies holders to study only one specific specialist area, however. Another way to obtain the access requirements for the post-secondary and tertiary sector is to complete an **add-on course (Aufbaulehrgang) (11)** [ISCED 4A]. Particular groups of people have to attend a **preparatory or bridging course (Vorbereitungslehrgang) (12)** before entering this educational track. Graduates of add-on courses are awarded a Reifeprüfung or diploma certificate.

Apart from apprenticeship training and vocational programmes provided by VET schools, students who have completed lower secondary level also have access to a **VET college (berufsbildende höhere Schule or BHS) (13)** [ISCED 4A], which

provides higher vocational qualifications in different specialisations (e.g. tourism, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, etc.) and well-founded general education. VET colleges last for five years and are completed with the Reifeprüfung and diploma examination. Students thus acquire professional qualifications and the general higher education entrance qualification (double qualification).

#### **General education programmes**

A general education is provided to students by the **upper cycle of secondary academic school (allgemein bildende höhere Schule or AHS – Oberstufe) (14)** [ISCED 3A]. These schools mainly prepare students for university-based education programmes. They last for four years and are completed with the Reifeprüfung examination. Graduates acquire the general higher education entrance qualification.

#### **Post-secondary and tertiary level**

Successful completion of AHS or BHS as well as passing the Berufsreifeprüfung or Studienberechtigungsprüfung exams provides students with higher education entrance qualifications and hence access to the following education routes: **post-secondary VET colleges (Akademien) (15)** [ISCED 5B], which qualify graduates to exercise specific activities in the social services and healthcare sector, and **post-secondary VET courses (Kollegs) (16)** [ISCED 5B], which are mainly oriented towards AHS graduates who want to obtain BHS qualifications. For some years

Fachhochschulen have provided tertiary programmes for specific advanced-level medical professions, which is leading to a reduction in the number of **post-secondary VET colleges and schools for general healthcare and nursing. University colleges of education (Pädagogische Hochschulen) (17)** [ISCED 5B] train compulsory school teachers in a three-year bachelor course. On the basis of this qualification it is possible - depending on the chosen subject and credit modalities - to take up a master study at a Fachhochschule or university.

At the tertiary level it is possible to enrol in three-year bachelor and then in at least two-year master programmes at **Fachhochschulen (18)** [ISCED 5A] and **universities (Universitäten) (19)** [ISCED 5A]. At both institutions, students may also enrol in diploma studies. Graduates of a master course or a diploma study are entitled to enrol in doctoral studies at universities [ISCED 6]. In addition, universities, Fachhochschulen and university colleges of education offer (**university-based) CVET programmes** [ISCED 5A and 5B] as post-graduate continuing training programmes or opportunities for specialisation for graduates. The required access qualification is either a completed study at one of the mentioned institutions or the general higher education entrance qualification in conjunction with several years of professional experience. Graduates are awarded the degree "Akademischer Experte/Akademische

Expertin" (Academic Expert), "MSc", "MBA", "MA", "LL.M" or "M.A.I.S".

People over the age of 18 who have successfully passed the apprenticeship-leave exam as well as BMS graduates can deepen their theoretical specialist education at **building craftsperson schools (Bauhandwerkerschulen)** and **foreperson courses (Werkmeisterschulen) (20)** [ISCED 5B]. They last for one to two years and are completed with a final examination.

#### **Continuing education and training – lifelong learning**

People who have completed an initial vocational training (IVET) pathway at the upper secondary, post-secondary or tertiary level and start another stage in their education are usually in **continuing vocational education and training (CVET)** programmes. Participants in these CVET programmes are usually over the age of twenty. The Austrian CVET landscape is characterised by a high degree of institutional diversity (schools and HE establishments, educational institutions of the social partners, non-profit CVET institutions, private providers, etc.) and an associated wide range of courses.

\* ISCED = Internationale Standardklassifikation im Bildungswesen. Da die Bildungssysteme der verschiedenen Länder oft unterschiedlich aufgebaut sind, erleichtert die Angabe von ISCED deren inhaltlichen Vergleich. ISCED fördert das transnationale Verständnis von Bildungsgängen und Anerkennungsmöglichkeiten. Eine Übersicht beziehungsweise detaillierte Erklärung aller ISCED-Levels bietet das OECD-Dokument *Classifying Educational Programmes. Manual for ISCED-97 Implementation in OECD Countries* (1999).

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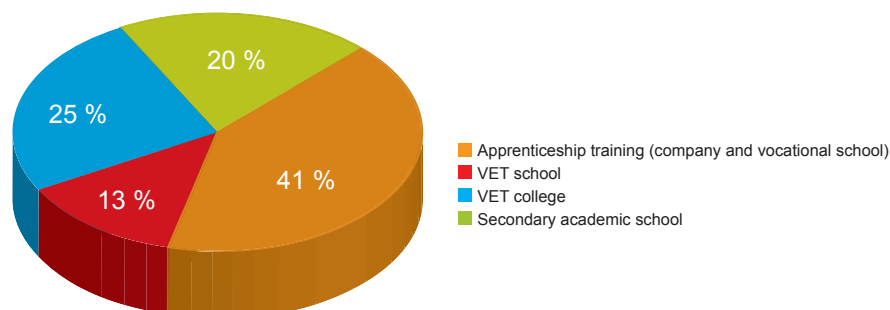
# Facts and figures about education

## Attractiveness of the VET sector

Vocational education and training is extremely important in Austria: Some 80% of young people in their tenth school year sign up to a VET programme.

Source: Schneeberger/Nowak 2010

Tab. 1: Distribution of students at grade 10 by school type (2008/09)\*\*

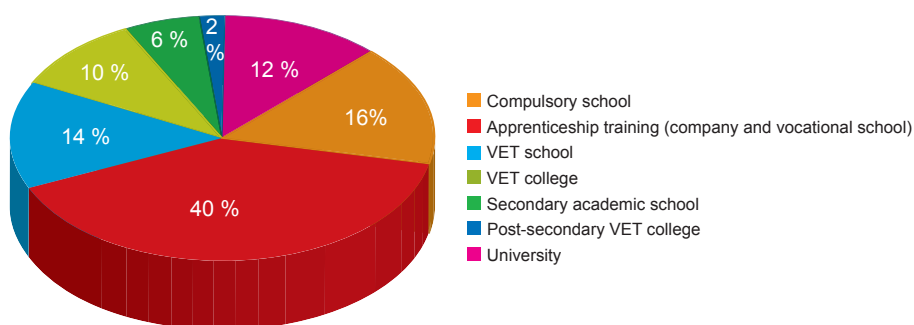


## High importance of apprenticeship training

Apprenticeship training is highly valued as a VET path: 40% of the Austrian workforce boast an apprenticeship diploma as their highest educational attainment.

Source: Schneeberger/Nowak 2010

Tab. 2: Formal qualification structure of workforce (2009)\*\*

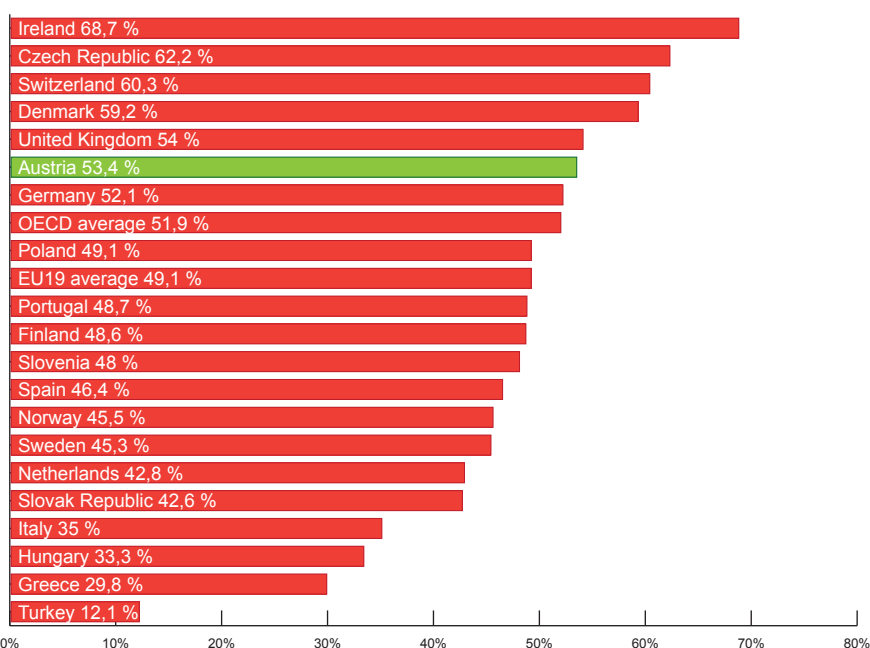


## High post-secondary and tertiary graduation rates

With its post-secondary and tertiary graduation rates, Austria is clearly above the EU-19 country mean and the OECD average.

Source: Tritscher-Archan/Nowak 2010

Tab. 3: Graduation rates in the post-secondary and tertiary sectors (2007)



\*\*Values rounded up to full figures.

## Imprint

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