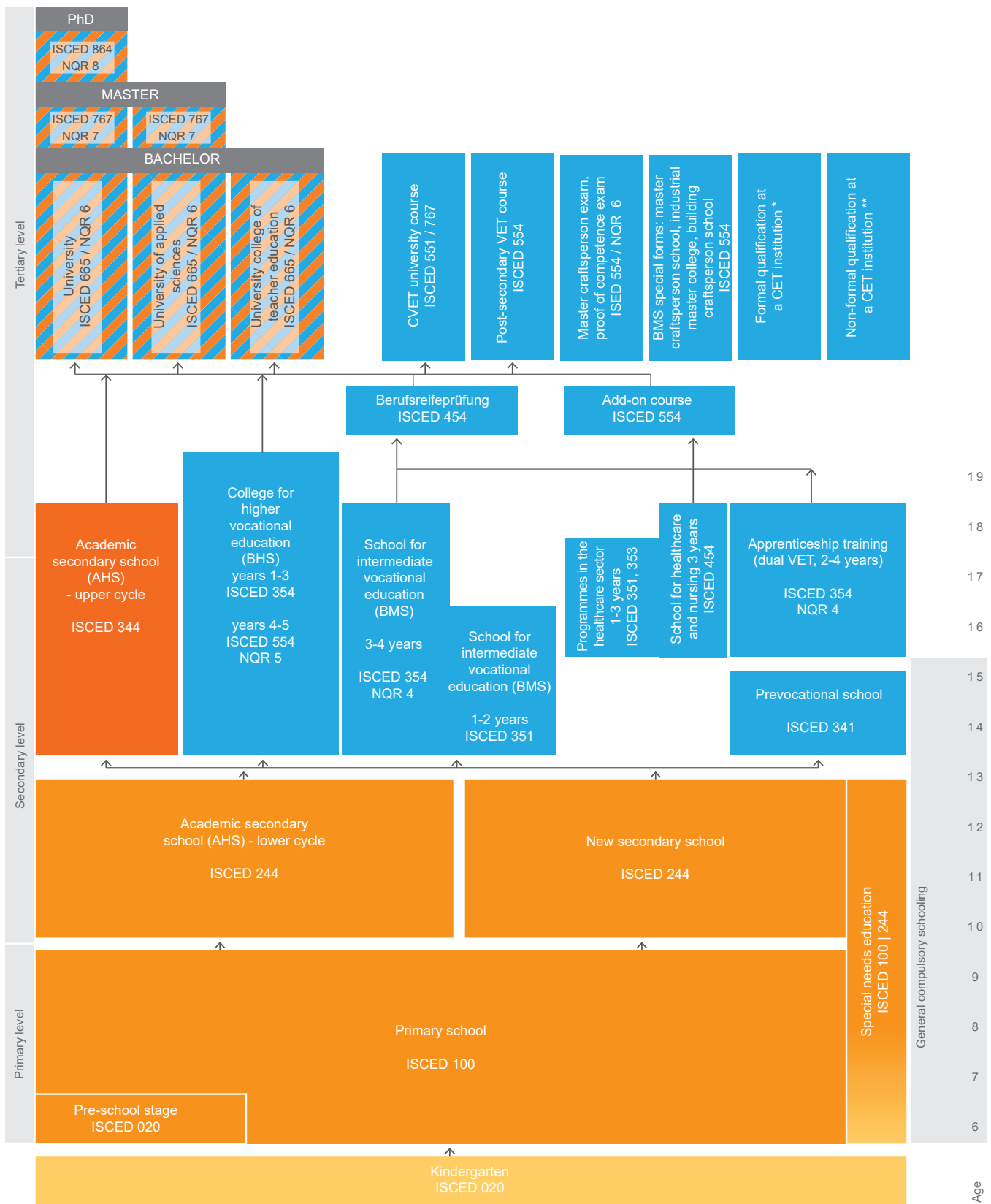


The Austrian education system



■ Vocational education and training (VET)
■ General education

* Legally regulated qualification, e.g. safety expert
 ** Non-legally regulated qualification, e.g. coach, HR development expert

The Austrian education system takes the different needs and interests of learners into account by offering a **wide range of programmes** starting at upper secondary level. Vocational education and training (VET) with its variety from upper secondary level onwards is highly important. At this level, basically, learners have the choice between school-based and dual programmes.

In Austria, children who have reached the age of three may attend **kindergarten** [ISCED 020]* on a voluntary basis. From the age of five years, half-day attendance is compulsory. But kindergarten is not part of the school system.

In Austria, **general compulsory schooling** starts at the age of six and lasts nine years. To promote equality of opportunity and employability, a **training obligation** up to the age of 18 has been established after completion of compulsory schooling. This means that young people are obliged to attend an education programme up to the age of 18.

One school year lasts ten months (September until June). There is a choice between private and state schools – for the latter, no tuition fees need to be paid.

Primary level

Children in Austria start their educational career with four-year **primary school** [ISCED 100]. Primary schools impart basic general education to all pupils with the objective of promoting the children's social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills. A **pre-school stage** is foreseen for children who are already of compulsory school age (i.e. six years old), but who are not yet ready for school (e.g. because they find it difficult to follow classes).

Children with special educational needs can attend both a **special needs school** [ISCED 100] tailored to their needs and an integrative/inclusive class of a primary school. Basic general education is imparted to the pupils by specially trained educational staff and by applying individual teaching methods.

Lower secondary level

The first differentiation of the school system starts with lower secondary level. Pupils have the choice between two school types, both of which last four years (aged 10 to 14 years). These are **new secondary school (NMS)** and the **lower cycle of an academic secondary school (AHS)** [both ISCED 244]. Pupils with special educational needs can attend years five to eight of special needs school [ISCED 244]. It is the task of **NMS** to ensure pupils

are qualified for the transition to educational options at upper secondary level. The **lower cycle of AHS** which is offered in three branches (languages and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, economics and life skills) aims to teach comprehensive and extended general education.

Upper secondary level

The final year of compulsory schooling is at the same time the first school year at upper secondary level. Compulsory schooling ends upon completion of the ninth school year. At the upper secondary level, learners have the choice between **pre-professional, vocational and general education programmes**. Some three quarters of the pupils who have completed lower secondary level opt for a pre-professional or vocational pathway.

Pre-professional education

Pre-professional schools aim to impart general education and basic vocational skills. By offering relevant subjects, company visits and days of practical work experience, they provide targeted orientation for the pupils' career choice. Most often, **prevocational school (PTS)** [ISCED 341] is chosen to prepare for a dual VET pathway. Pre-professional education also includes **one- to two-year schools for intermediate vocational education (BMS)** [ISCED 351]. With special-focus programmes, such as those specialising in agriculture, social themes, nutrition, the pupils are introduced to the labour market in a targeted manner.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Vocational qualifications can be acquired either in a dual VET programme or in two mainly school-based programmes:

Dual VET [ISCED 354, EQF 4] – also called apprenticeship training – usually takes place in the **training company** (practical training, some 80% of the training time) and at **part-time vocational school**. It is the task of the school to deepen general education and complement the competences taught in the training company. Depending on the apprenticeship occupation, training lasts between two and four years, usually three years. At the end of the training, every apprentice can take an **apprenticeship-leave examination**. To be able to integrate young people at a disadvantage better into the world of work there is the possibility to prolong the apprenticeship period or acquire a partial qualification.

Another VET pathway at the upper secondary level is **three- and four-year BMS** [ISCED 354, EQF 4]. Here the pupils acquire basic subject-related competences which ensure they are able to exercise a profession at intermediate qualification level/skilled worker's level immediately afterwards and they are taught general education.

The third VET option at the upper secondary level is the **college for higher vocational education (BHS)** [years one to three: ISCED 354, years four and five: ISCED 554, EQF 5], which offers higher-level vocational training

* ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education. As the education systems of the different countries frequently have different structures, the ISCED data makes it easier to compare their educational content. ISCED promotes the transnational understanding of education programmes and recognition options. An overview and detailed explanations of all ISCED levels can be found in the OECD document OECD (2015): ISCED 2011 Operational Manual. Guidelines for classifying national education programmes and related qualifications.

in different specialist areas (such as tourism, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, commercial sector) and well-founded general education. BHS lasts five years and is completed with the Reife- and Diplomprüfung, a certificate which grants access to higher education and enables direct labour market entry (double qualification).

The prerequisite for attending programmes which lead to occupations in care assistance and specialist care assistance [ISCED 351 and 353] as well as other healthcare professions [ISCED 351] is completion of compulsory schooling, a minimum age and/or acquisition of relevant previous qualifications. The training programme for registered general nurses [ISCED 454] is currently also still offered by **schools for healthcare and nursing** [ISCED 454], but will be transferred to a tertiary bachelor's programme by the end of 2023.

General education

Typically, the **upper cycle of academic secondary schools (AHS)** [ISCED 344] follows the AHS lower cycle. However, it can also be attended by NMS-graduates. The upper cycle mainly prepares for university-based studies. Similar to the AHS lower cycle, three special-focus areas are offered. It lasts four years and is completed with the Reifeprüfung (higher education entrance qualification).

Tertiary sector

Tertiary level programmes are offered in Austria at **universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education**. Whereas universities offer programmes of both general education and vocational content, universities of applied sciences have a vocational focus. University colleges of teacher education provide teacher training programmes for the primary and secondary level in cooperation with universities. At all three types of higher education institutions, students can enrol in three-year bachelor's programmes [ISCED 665, EQF 6] and, on that basis, in master's programmes with a duration of at least two years [ISCED 767, EQF 7]. Graduates of master's programmes have the possibility to acquire a doctoral degree [ISCED 864, EQF 8] at universities. In most cases, the higher education entrance qualification is required for tertiary education programmes.

The higher education entrance qualification can be acquired in Austria – as already explained above – as a **Reifeprüfung** in the upper cycle of AHS or as a **Reife- and Diplomprüfung** at a BHS. Graduates with an intermediate vocational qualification have the possibility to take the Berufsreifeprüfung (BRP) [ISCED 454]. This examination comprises four partial exams (German, mathematics, one modern foreign language and an occupation-related specialist area) and entitles its graduates to enrol in every type of tertiary education

establishment (higher education entrance qualification). Apprentices have the possibility to take/start taking the BRP already during apprenticeship training. Another option to obtain access to a higher education institution is by taking the **Studienberechtigungsprüfung** exam. This, however, only qualifies for degree programmes of one or several related disciplines.

Another option to fulfil access requirements for the tertiary sector is completion of an **add-on course** [ISCED 554] which ends with a Reife- and Diplomprüfung (corresponding to long form of BHS). Graduates of non-subject-related dual VET programmes are obliged to attend a **preparatory course** before entering this education pathway. Also post-secondary VET courses [ISCED 554] lead to a BHS qualification; the access requirement is the Reifeprüfung certificate. Graduates of **post-secondary VET courses** additionally acquire the Diplomprüfung certificate.

Non-higher education-based, tertiary** programmes are **building craftsperson schools and industrial master colleges** [ISCED 554]. These programmes enable those who have successfully completed the apprenticeship-leave examination and BMS graduates to deepen their subject-related theoretical education. They last one to two years and are completed with a final examination.

Continuing education and training – lifelong learning

As a rule, **continuing education and training (CET)** is an educational career stage following initial VET. In most cases, participants in CET programmes are over 20 years old. As part of their CET activities, they can acquire **qualifications** (such as second-chance apprenticeship training or the master craftsperson diploma) or attend courses and seminars. Higher education based, postgraduate CET is offered in the form of **continuing vocational education and training (CVET) university courses** [ISCED 767]. The Austrian CET sector covers vocational programmes as well as personality development. In general, the Austrian CET landscape is characterised by a large institutional diversity (schools and HE institutions, educational establishments of the social partners, non-profit CET institutions, private providers, etc.) and a corresponding wide range of programmes.

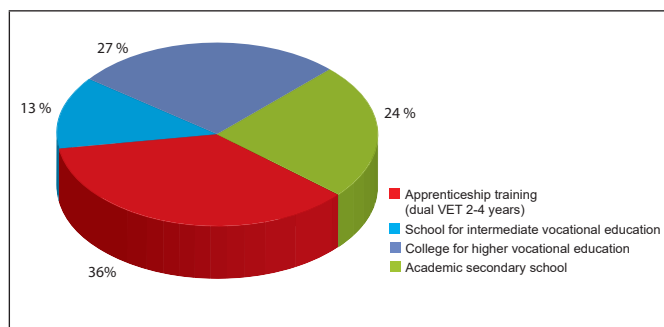
** According to ISCED, these education programmes are considered as tertiary. In the public perception, they are assigned to the upper secondary level.

Education in figures

Attractiveness of VET

Diagram 1: Distribution of pupils in year 10 broken down by school types (2016/2017)

VET plays a major role in Austria. Around three quarters of young people in year 10 attend a pre-professional or vocational programme.

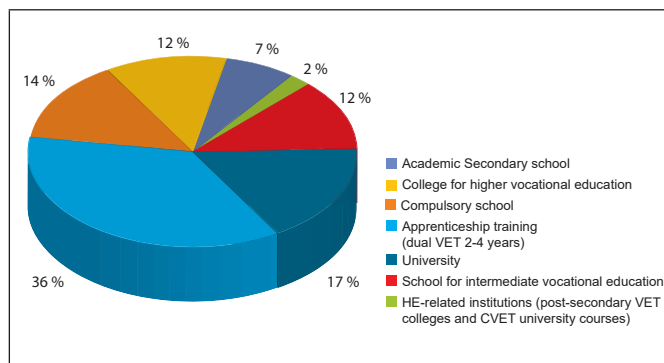


Source: Dornmayr/Löffler 2018

Great significance of apprenticeship training

Diagram 2: Formal qualification structure of the workforce (15+) (2017)

Apprenticeship training is held in high esteem as a vocational pathway: a share of 36% of the entire Austrian workforce has acquired an apprenticeship diploma as highest educational attainment.

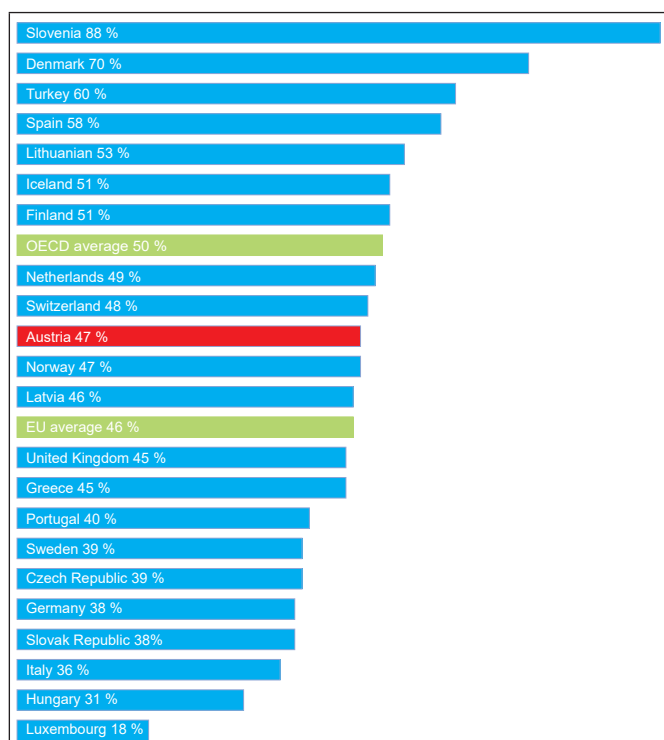


Source: Dornmayr/Nowak 2018

High post-secondary and tertiary graduation rates

Diagram 3: Share of people who have completed a tertiary programme for the first time (2016)

With its tertiary graduation rates, Austria is above the EU-18 country average and slightly below the OECD average.



Source: OECD 2018, ibw calculations

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Legal notice

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