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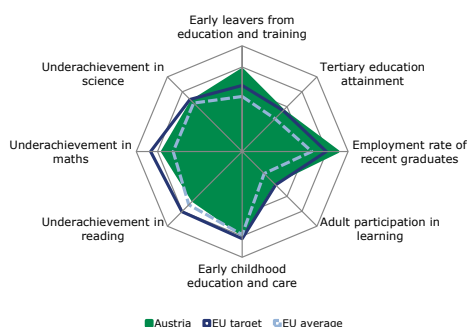
# AUSTRIA

## 1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Austria		EU average	
		2011	2014	2011	2014
<b>Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector</b>					
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	•	19.5% <sup>12</sup>	:	17.8% <sup>12</sup>
	Maths	•	18.7% <sup>12</sup>	:	22.1% <sup>12</sup>
	Science	•	15.8% <sup>12</sup>	:	16.6% <sup>12</sup>
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		5.0%	5.0% <sup>13</sup>	5.1%
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		9.8%	9.8% <sup>13</sup>	10.5%
<b>Education attainment levels of young people across Europe</b>					
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		9.0%	7.6%	15.2%
	Women		8.0%	6.5%	11.5%
	Total	•	8.5%	7.0%	13.4%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		22.8%	38.3%	31.0%
	Women		24.3%	41.6%	38.7%
	Total	•	23.6%	40.0%	34.8%
<b>Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance</b>					
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		•	94.3%	93.9% <sup>13</sup>	93.2%
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	:	84.6% <sup>13</sup>
	Special needs education		:	:	32.4% <sup>13</sup>
	Multicultural settings		:	:	13.2% <sup>13</sup>
	ICT skills for teaching		:	:	51.0% <sup>13</sup>
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		9.4%	9.7% <sup>12</sup>	63.0%
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			76.1%	70.2% <sup>13</sup>	50.4%
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4		90.4%	86.0%	71.3%
	ISCED 5-8		90.6%	88.5%	82.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	90.5%	87.2%	77.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	13.3% <sup>13</sup>	:
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	16.2% <sup>13</sup>	:
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	13.4%	14.2%	8.9%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: • ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, <sup>12</sup>= 2012, <sup>13</sup>= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

**Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)**



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

## 2. Main strengths and challenges

Austria's early school leaving rate is below the EU average. The country's vocational education and training system is well adapted to the labour market, a factor that has contributed to it having one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the EU. Nonetheless, foreign-born students are three times as likely to leave school early as native-born students, and educational performance continues to be very dependent on parents' socio-economic status. Higher education lacks consistent strategic orientation and is underfunded. The drop-out rate from higher education remains high, and there is starting to be a lack of maths, science and technology graduates.

### Box 1. The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendation on education

The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to Austria (Council of the European Union 2015) included a recommendation on education and training:

CSR 2: Take steps to improve the educational achievement of disadvantaged young people.

## 3. Investing in education and training

General government expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP has remained stable over 2011-13 at 5.0%, slightly above the EU average of 4.8% in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Expenditure on education as a percentage of overall government spending also remained broadly unchanged, at around 9.7-9.8% between 2010 and 2013 (compared to an EU average of 10.3% in 2013).

Austria plans to keep spending on education at 4.7% of GDP at least until 2030, with no increase expected before this date (Federal Ministry of Finance 2015). The government also intends to improve the country's complex funding system and make it more efficient. A high level reform commission set up to address this issue is expected to present its results by 17 November 2015.

## 4. Tackling inequalities

School education in Austria varies widely in its effectiveness. While average educational outcomes have improved, young people from low socioeconomic groups and/or with a migrant background continue to perform significantly worse in school than other students.

The early school leaving rate remains well below the EU average (7.0% compared to 11.1% in 2014) and below the Europe 2020 national target of 9.5%. The rate has been falling continuously over recent years, from 10% in 2006. The early school leaving rate remains lower for girls (6.5%) than boys (7.6%). The early school leaving rate among foreign-born students has also improved, falling by almost half from 27.8% in 2007 to 14.9% in 2014, and is also below the EU average (20.1%). Foreign-born students are, however, still three times more likely to leave school early than are native-born students (14.9% compared to 5.7% in 2014).

In 2013, only around a third (34%) of the adult working population with non-Austrian citizenship had completed an apprenticeship or a lower secondary vocational school qualification. Around 28% of migrants in the 25 to 64 age group had completed no more than compulsory schooling. In the 2011-2012 school year, 12% of foreign-born students did not continue their education after finishing their eighth year of school at a lower secondary school i.e. the school year normally attended by students of about 13-14 years of age (BMEIA 2014).

The participation of children aged four and above in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has risen continuously, from 86% in 2001 to 93.9% in 2013. Rates continue to vary widely across regions, however, ranging from 99.5% in Burgenland to 79.6% in Carinthia (in 2012).

<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.

Participation of 0-2 year olds in ECEC is low in most provinces. Only Vienna is currently meeting the Barcelona target with a participation rate of 40.3% (compared to 11.9% in Styria). Participation rates are higher for 3 and 4 year olds, and rise to 97.2% for 5 year olds, education being compulsory from this age (Statistik Austria 2015b).

Students' performance in basic skills was shown to have improved in the 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Performance in reading remains somewhat below the EU average, however, with 19.5% of students performing poorly on this test compared to 17.5% in the EU as a whole. In mathematics and science, the proportion of low achievers is below the EU average (18.7% and 15.8%, respectively, in Austria, compared with EU averages of 22.1% and 16.6%). Students from migrant backgrounds (migrants and the children of migrants), who constitute a large and growing proportion of students, score less well. Austria is one of the few countries that have not seen an improvement in the performance of second-generation migrants (OECD 2013).

A number of measures have been introduced to tackle early school leaving and low achievement of particular groups that have become visible in tests such as PISA. These relate, in particular, to teaching of German from an early age and improvements to the transition between stages of education, especially the transition from ECEC to primary school. In addition, more advice is now being given to students to help them choose the appropriate type of education and training (Federal Chancellery 2015, p.12) and a pilot programme for extending compulsory education until the age of 18 (*AusBildung bis 18*) has been launched.<sup>2</sup>

The government has increased funding for ECEC, including for German language lessons for this age group. The new measures introduced are designed to increase the participation of foreign-born children, in particular, in language learning. Some of the measures announced in the government programme are yet to be implemented, such as the national quality framework for ECEC,<sup>3</sup> and the introduction of an additional compulsory year in ECEC. Teacher training of ECEC teachers has not yet been discussed within the reform of the teaching profession. A new approach to managing the transitional phase between early childhood education and primary school is currently being tested (see Box 2 for details). The number of places offered in all-day schools (as opposed to traditional schools that are open in the morning only) has also continued to rise, and the government announced that a total of EUR 800 million will be invested over the period to 2018/19 in increasing the number of all-day school places and in measures to improve the quality of afternoon provision in all-day schools.

The evaluation of the new secondary school system (*Neue Mittelschule*) published in March 2015 showed its introduction to have had mixed results. Whilst the school environment has improved overall, the level of educational achievement was not better than in the *Hauptschule*, the type of school being replaced. In particular, the new school system did not improve the levels of achievement of disadvantaged groups, which had been one of the main objectives. This was primarily due to the fact that the planned changes were only partly implemented. Recent statistics for 2013/14, however, showed the transfer rates from the *Neue Mittelschule* into upper secondary education to be better than those for the *Hauptschule* (Statistik Austria 2015a, p.50).

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sozialministerium.at/site/Arbeit/News/Auftaktveranstaltung\\_AusBildung\\_bis\\_18](https://www.sozialministerium.at/site/Arbeit/News/Auftaktveranstaltung_AusBildung_bis_18).

<sup>3</sup> In April 2015, the Minister of Family and Youth announced a year-long study to analyse the future of Austrian ECEC, which will lead eventually to the development of quality guidelines (*Qualitätskompass*) for ECEC. The study is to be carried out in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce.

### Box 2. Structured transition from early childhood education to primary school

The Austrian government's work programme for 2013-2018 includes a number of measures designed to improve early childhood education and care (ECEC). In particular, the policies introduce an assessment of language ability at the age of four, designed to help identify appropriate support measures for individual children and to make the transition to school easier.

There is particular emphasis on improving the transition process, including the transfer of information on individual children from the pre-school or nursery to the primary school. The final year of ECEC, which is compulsory, and the first two years of primary school will form a new 'joint school-entry phase'. Representatives from 35 pilot projects met at the Education Ministry at the start of the 2014/15 school year to launch the test phase of the programme. A range of actors involved in the projects were invited, and the event was also designed as an opportunity for them to build networks, and thus allow ideas to be shared between the different initiatives. The projects are located across the country and will be implemented during two school years (2014 to 2016) in all regions. Their objective is to develop local approaches, to improve the individual support given to each child by taking a more holistic approach to each child's needs, and thus to allow each child to develop their skills to their full potential during the transition to primary school. Particular focus is given to language ability in German.

The idea behind this initiative is that it is only by giving every child high-quality support from the start of their education that their chances of success later in their educational career can be improved. The new three-year transition phase creates a structure for cooperation between pre-school and primary school, and will ensure that important knowledge gained in ECEC is not lost, but is used to allow better integration in primary school. Defining specific educational objectives will facilitate teaching across age groups, ensuring that each child is progressing at their own individual pace.

The current testing phase is designed to encourage closer cooperation between ECEC and primary school teaching staff. It is being used to develop experience and to identify best practices. The specific aims of the testing phase are:

- (1) to develop the syllabus for the transition phase, placing a clear emphasis on the teaching of basic skills;
- (2) to identify children who may need language support. Compulsory targeted intensive language training should allow each child to successfully complete the school-entry phase;
- (3) to involve parents in order to ensure that all children make progress with their learning.

This new approach should help children to feel more secure and confident at school, and should stimulate their curiosity to learn. The transition phase also involves a system of alternative performance assessment. This will help to keep parents better informed about and more involved in their child's education. Under the new transition structure, ECEC staff will play a bigger role in shaping children's development and will also gain a general insight into primary school life. Primary school teachers will, in turn, develop a better understanding of ECEC. Information on individual children will be passed from the pre-school to the primary school, to give primary school teachers a better understanding of each child's potential. Data protection issues related to the sharing of information must of course be considered. Adapting teaching to the needs of each child is expected to improve children's achievement, and also to help the school win parents' trust more easily. Most importantly of all, this measure could particularly benefit children from a disadvantaged socioeconomic and/or migrant background. An evaluation is scheduled for 2015, the results of which will be used to plan the full roll-out of the programme in 2016-2017.

## 5. Modernising school education

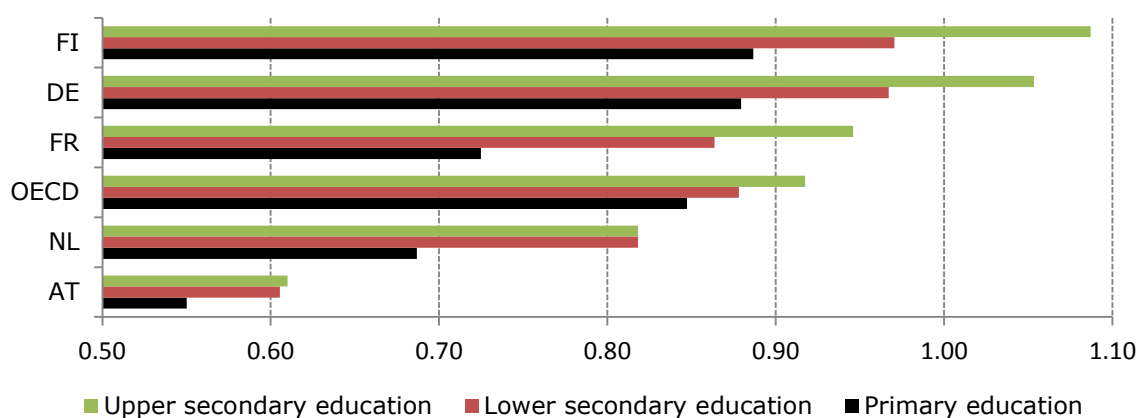
In the 2013/14 school year, Austria devoted the third most hours a week in primary education to reading, writing and literature (29.8 hours), behind only France and Hungary. It ranks ninth, however, for the teaching time allocated to mathematics (17.0 hrs compared to 27.0 hrs in Denmark). An average of 12.8 hours are devoted to natural sciences, the second longest among EU countries, after Dutch-speaking Belgium where 17.6 hours a week are spent on this subject.

In contrast, the 2.1 hours a week devoted to languages put Austria in lowest place in the EU ranking. In secondary education, the teaching time spent on different subjects is closer to the EU average, with the exception of languages, where Austria ranks in the last third with 12.5 hours (European Commission 2014, p.7).

The ratio of students to teaching staff in Austria was below the EU and OECD averages in both primary and secondary education in 2012.<sup>4</sup> The difference is particularly marked in upper secondary education, where Austria ranks 34th out of the 37 OECD countries studied (OECD 2014a).

Austrian teachers' statutory salary levels are higher than the EU/OECD average at every stage of their careers. Their earnings are, however, only around 55-60% of those of comparable full-time workers with tertiary education (Figure 2). These last numbers have to be interpreted with care, however, since international comparison of statutory remunerations does not fully reflect actual payments. What is more, as the tertiary attainment rate in Austria has until recently been lower than in other countries (see section 6), income data of this group represented top earnings in the population.

**Figure 2. Ratio of teachers' salaries to average earnings for full-time workers with tertiary education (2012)**



Source: OECD (2014a)

Austria has introduced a new scheme for teacher training that standardises educational requirements and reorganises and standardises the teacher training programmes offered. New curricula have been developed for teacher training for all levels of education, and training programmes for upper secondary teachers will now benefit from greater cooperation between teacher training providers and universities. The new training schemes will start in 2015/16 for primary school teachers and in 2016/17 for secondary school teachers.<sup>5</sup> These changes to training have been introduced alongside changes to teachers' contracts and conditions (introduced in 2013), which increased entry salaries and offer the potential for a steeper earnings curve during the first 15 years of service, after which point salaries flatten out considerably. These changes have been made with the aim of encouraging young people to become teachers, Austria having one of the oldest teacher populations in Europe, according to Eurostat figures.

Austrian teachers are burdened with a significant amount of administrative work<sup>6</sup> and are not receiving sufficient ongoing training. Almost half of all teachers feel that they need better

<sup>4</sup> The EU average refers to the 21 EU Member States included in the study.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Ministry of Education and Women, information folder on *PädagogInnen Neu*.

<sup>6</sup> In December 2014, the Austrian Court of Audit criticised the administration of general education in Austria (Rechnungshof 2014).



professional training, especially to be able to manage students with disciplinary and behavioural problems and those with special learning needs more effectively. The other main areas where teachers in Austria express a wish for more training are ICT teaching skills and pedagogy. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) found that Austrian teachers are given relatively little continuing education and training and also benefit from less support in the form of induction and mentoring than teachers in many other countries. On average, teachers had received 10.5 days of training during the last 18 months (OECD 2014b).

In 2015, Austria introduced a centralised assessment (*Zentralmatura*) for the upper secondary leaving certificate. This measure makes certificates from this level of education more comparable across the country. An expert group established in March 2015 has been asked to examine whether changes are needed to respond to improve the organisation of the assessment as well as its content.

## 6. Modernising higher education

Austria's tertiary education attainment rate among 30-34 year-olds has increased continuously in recent years. It achieved 40% in 2014, surpassing the Europe 2020 national target of 38%. This was, however, in part due to a reclassification of qualifications stemming from higher technical and vocational colleges introduced in ISCED 2011<sup>7</sup>, which has made it more difficult to assess the real level of progress. The tertiary education attainment rate among foreign-born people is close to the EU average (35% compared to 35.6%), but still significantly lower than for the native-born Austrian population, for which it is slightly above the EU average (41.8% compared with 38.6%). The percentage of foreign-born students in Austria is relatively high, at 24%.

Overall, 40.8% of university students drop out within the first three semesters. At universities of applied sciences, however, this is only 18.1% (Statistik Austria 2015a). Students who drop out are very often those that work whilst studying and single mothers. While drop-out is a concern, data on this pattern is very imprecise, however. Around half of the registered drop outs actually either change study program, or university, or they change into a different type of higher education (e.g. from a university to a university of applied sciences or a university college for teacher education). The figures also do not take account of the fact that some students were enrolled on multiple courses at once (Thaler and Unger 2014).

Finding a job has become more difficult even for the high-skilled due to deteriorating economic conditions. The employment rate among recent tertiary graduates<sup>8</sup> began to fall in 2013, to 93%, and has continued to decline, reaching 88.5% in 2014. The negative trend in employment of recent tertiary graduates seen in Austria is starting from a very high level, but is more pronounced than in the EU overall, with the rate dropping by 4.5 percentage points between 2013 and 2014, compared to only 0.4 percentage points for the EU (Figure 3).

Austria's higher education institutions continue to face increasing student numbers, and universities are generally considered to be underfunded (Österreichischer Wissenschaftsrat 2013). The current trend of increasing student numbers is projected to continue at least until 2017, when it may start to slow (Statistik Austria 2014).

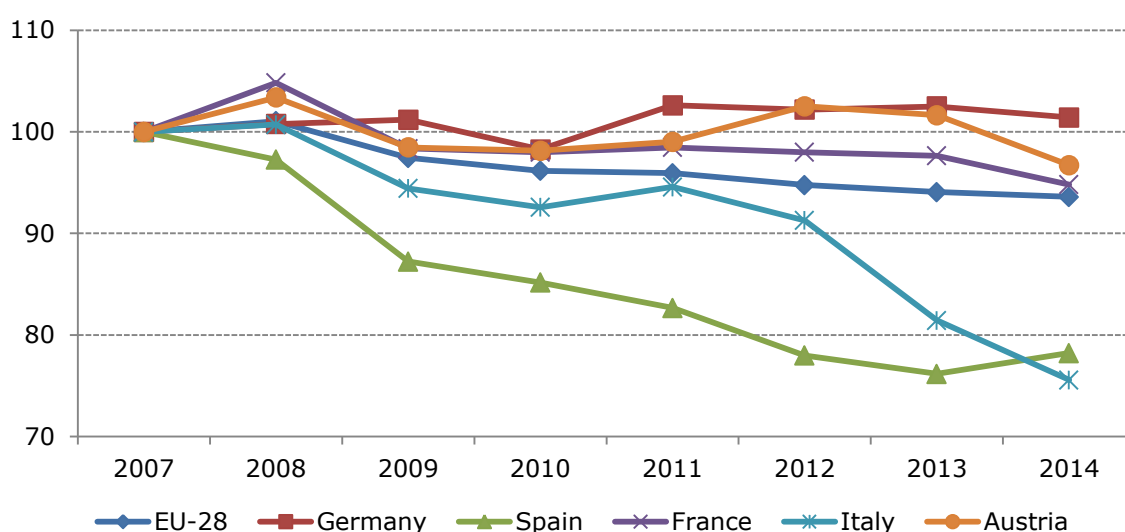
The total budget allocation for higher education institutions increased from EUR 6.2 billion over the period 2007-09 to EUR 8 billion for the period 2013-15. At the same time student numbers increased from 261 000 in 2007 to 376 500 in 2012. Thus, while funding increased by 29%,

<sup>7</sup> The new International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), implemented in the EU Labour Force Survey for the first time in its 2014 annual data, causes a break in series for data on Austria's tertiary education attainment (ISCED 2011 levels 5 to 8). The qualification acquired upon successful completion of higher technical and vocational colleges is now allocated to ISCED level 5 (tertiary level). Under ISCED 1997, the same qualification was reported as ISCED level 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary level).

<sup>8</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

student numbers went up by 44.3%. In 2002, Austria introduced reforms giving higher education institutions greater independence. Subsequent reforms then allowed institutions to develop a more individualised profile and encouraged cooperation with the private sector. Performance-based funding was introduced in 2006, as a way of incentivising universities to make use of these freedoms. The funding is allocated on the basis of three-year agreements between the education authorities and the higher education institutions. Evidence collected to date shows that the changes have had a generally positive effect on the positioning of institutions and have helped to strengthen internal and external governance (Österreichischer Wissenschaftsrat 2013). Austria is also planning to introduce capacity-based financing. The pilot phase provided for in the legislation ended in 2014, however, and the results are currently being evaluated. Funding for a general roll-out of this type of system (Bundeskanzleramt 2013) has not yet been obtained, making the original schedule less realistic.

**Figure 3. Employment rates of recent tertiary graduates (index 2007 = 100)**



Source: European Commission calculations based on Eurostat data

Students in Austria are not always satisfied with the quality of teaching (Larcher and Schönherr 2012). The Higher Education Advisory Board, established in 2012, advises on a variety of issues including the quality of teaching. In March 2015, the Austrian Higher Education Conference presented a recommendation on improvements to the quality of higher education teaching (*Qualität der Lehre*). It addressed issues including the ability of individual teachers, the courses offered by universities, the organisation of learning and teaching and the efficiency of the higher education system. Although these recommendations are not binding, the government plans to use them as a reference for future performance agreements.

## 7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Austria has a very well developed vocational education and training system, offering a wide range of courses. In 2013, 70.2% of upper secondary students (ISCED 3) were following vocational education and training (VET) programmes. This is one of the highest rates in Europe, well above the EU average of 48.9%. A total of 120 579 young people were enrolled in initial dual VET courses at the end of 2013.<sup>9</sup> The high rate of participation in VET and the quality of the courses offered are two of the main factors explaining Austria's employment rate for recent

<sup>9</sup> In 1980, the number of apprentices reached a peak of 194 000, but then dropped steadily until 1996, when it started to fluctuate around 120 000. It peaked again in 2008 at around 130 000.

upper secondary graduates,<sup>10</sup> which is one of the highest in the EU (88.7% compared with an EU average of 75.6%). The proportion of young people between 15 and 29 years old not in education, employment or training (NEET rate) was also one of the lowest in the EU, at 8.7%, around half the EU average of 17%.

Adult participation in lifelong learning has remained at around 13-14% over the last five years (in 2014, it stood at 14.2%, above the EU average of 10.7%). The participation rate of foreign-born individuals has been catching up and was only 0.5 percentage points lower than the overall figure in 2013. People between the ages of 24 and 35 are twice as likely to take part in training than those in the 45-64 age group.<sup>11</sup> Low-skilled adults are, however, six times less likely than those with a higher skill level to follow a job-related training course (compared with a likelihood of five times less in the EU overall). Austrian adults score well above the EU average in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) numeracy proficiency tests and slightly above the EU average in literacy. The gap in literacy proficiency between foreign- and native-born individuals is close to the EU average and the proportion of people with low literacy or numeracy skills (level 1 or below) is significantly below the EU average.

Austria has continued to modernise and upgrade vocational education and training. VET courses offered in upper secondary school will be modularised (structured in semester modules) as of 2015/16, as is the case for general education. Work experience requirements now apply across a wider range of courses.<sup>12</sup> Standardised competence-based upper secondary leaving exams (*Reife- und Diplomprüfung* and *Matura*) have been piloted in the VET sector and will be introduced in all upper secondary schools in 2016.

The updated curricula for the school-based part of around 200 types of apprenticeship now include the new approach based on 'learning outcomes'. This approach has been introduced as part of the quality initiative (Cedefop 2015, p.26).

The most recent amendment to the vocational training act (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*) introduced quality objectives for apprenticeships and provided for the introduction of standardised programmes and curricula that will allow students to obtain partial qualifications as part of the inclusive VET initiative. It also makes it easier for education institutions to pilot innovative approaches. In order to encourage companies and other education providers to modernise the training they offer, a specific fund was set up in 2014 to subsidise improvements to training methods, assessment and documentation. The scheme whereby students can complete an apprenticeship at the same time as studying for the upper secondary school leaving qualifications that give access to higher education (at *Lehre mit Matura* universities and universities of applied sciences and on post-secondary programmes) has been extended to 2018.

The government announced in 2015 that it will be extending the *Initiative Erwachsenenbildung* until 2017. This is a joint federal and regional initiative co-funded by the European Social Fund that supports schemes that offer courses leading to the compulsory school leaving certificate for adults who did not obtain this when they were at school.

<sup>10</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

<sup>11</sup> Austria has maintained a high rate of participation among the younger age group (24-35 years), at 22.5% compared with an EU average of 15.2%. The outperformance compared to the EU average is proportionally even greater for the middle age range (35-44 years), at 13.9% compared with 9.1%, but lower for the older age group (45-64 years), at 11.5% compared with 8.7%.

<sup>12</sup> VET programmes preparing students for jobs in the business sector (e.g. business administration) now also include mandatory work experience, in the same way as the programmes for, e.g. engineering and tourism.

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