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Principles and general objectives of education

The School Organization Act of 1962 and subsequent amendments specified that it shall be the task of the Austrian school to foster the development of the talents and potential abilities of young persons in accordance with ethical, religious and social values and the appreciation of that which is true, good, and beautiful, by giving them an education corresponding to their respective stages of development and their respective courses of study. The Austrian school shall give young people the knowledge and skills required for their future lives and occupations and train them to acquire knowledge on their own initiative. Young people shall be trained to become healthy, capable, conscientious and responsible members of society and citizens of the democratic and federal Republic of Austria. They shall be encouraged to develop an independent judgment and social understanding, to be open-minded to the philosophy and political thinking of others, they shall be enabled to participate in the economic and cultural life of Austria, of Europe, and of the world, and to make their contribution, in love of freedom and peace, to the common tasks of mankind.

Article 14(5a) of the Federal Constitutional Law, last amended in 2009, stipulates that “democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice as well as openness and tolerance towards people are the elementary values of the school, based on which it secures for the whole population, independent from origin, social situation and financial background a maximum of educational level, permanently safeguarding and developing optimal quality. In a partnership-like cooperation between pupils, parents and teachers, children and youth are to be allowed the optimal intellectual, mental and physical development to let them become healthy, self-confident, happy, performance-oriented, dutiful, talented and creative humans capable to take over responsibility for themselves, fellow human beings, environment and future generations, oriented in social, religious and moral values. Any young person shall in accordance with his/her development and educational course be led to independent judgment and social understanding, be open to political, religious and ideological thinking of others and become capable to participate in the cultural and economic life of Austria, Europe and the world and participate in the common tasks of mankind, in love for freedom and peace.” Article 14(6) further specifies that “schools are institutions in which pupils shall be educated together according to a comprehensive fixed curriculum and in which, in connection with the imparting of knowledge and skills, a comprehensive educational goal is strived for. [...] Admission to public school is open to all regardless of birth, sex, race, status, class, language and religion, and in other respects within the limits of the statutory requirements. The same applies analogously to kindergartens, day homes and student hostels.”

The Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL) in Austria, adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2011, was formulated through a broad discussion process with the involvement of major institutions and stakeholders. The Strategy aims to address the individuals’ life plans and realities and meet the needs and requirements of the broad range of life cycles by making relevant educational programmes available that are



appropriate to the various age groups. Therefore curricula, access and authorization systems as well as the organizational structures of educational programmes need to be oriented to the individuals' life situations, focuses and perspectives in different life stages. LLL should be geared towards individuals. Its goal is to create new and transparent forms of provision, strengthen the teachers' professionalization, set up new counselling services, and support individuals in their participation in LLL by implementing appropriate approaches. Educational institutions and major actors in educational counseling and career guidance should ensure that counselling for learners within the meaning of the lifelong guidance strategy is easily accessible, independent and encompasses all educational providers. Educational actors and relevant stakeholders should jointly develop a system in which competences in the sense of learning outcomes can be used to enhance transparency and comparability between the different sectors. Learning outcomes represent the central starting point both for the National Qualifications Framework and the European credit transfer system for vocational education and training. The goal of the LLL policy is, jointly with educational institutions and major stakeholders such as employers' and employees' associations, to set up nationwide, needs-oriented educational programmes, promote closer ties and cooperation between the individual educational institutions and with the labour market, and demand mutual recognition of learning outcomes in the public, non-profit and private education sectors. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The reorganization of the school system began with the Acts passed in 1962. The first area to be regulated by an amendment to the **Federal Constitutional Law** of 18 July 1962 was the competency of federal and provincial authorities in the field of education and schooling (legislation and execution), thus establishing a basis for the 1962 school acts. This amendment defined the term 'statutory school-maintaining authority' as a federal or provincial agency or, with regard to compulsory schools, the local communities. Schools established and maintained by the statutory school-maintaining authority are public schools and are universally accessible. Non-public schools are accredited under the provisions of the Private Schools Act. The 1962 amendment also provided the basis for the organization of the federal school authorities in the provinces and districts, namely provincial school boards and district school boards, respectively. According to the Constitution, all universities and universities of arts are public institutions. Academic freedoms—i.e. the freedom of research and teaching, as well as the freedom of artistic expression—are guaranteed as constitutional rights. Until 2002 federal laws regulated the affairs of universities and universities of arts, as higher education institutions were under the federal jurisdiction.

In 1995 a fundamental school reform was started. It provided for autonomy of schools, giving them the possibility to develop their own specific school profiles and to establish areas of emphasis. In 1999-2000 a new curriculum was introduced for the lower level of academic secondary school and general secondary school, which consists of core and extension areas. A new curriculum for the upper level has been developed as well, being implemented starting from 2004/05. (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2004).

The **Compulsory Schooling Act** of 1985 regulates compulsory general schooling between the ages of 6 and 15 years and compulsory vocational schooling

which completes the training of apprentices in business and industry by part-time instruction at compulsory vocational schools (dual system of vocational training). Compulsory general schooling may be completed not only by attending a school, but also by receiving equivalent instruction. The **Private Schools Act** of 1962 and subsequent amendments regulates the establishment and operation of private schools and private student boarding houses, as well as other aspects such as the accreditation of private schools, subsidies, inspection, and administrative competencies.

The **School Organization Act** is the core of the 1962 school acts, containing for the first time an all-encompassing and systematic regulation of most types of schools within the sphere of competence of the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK). The **School Periods Act** of 1985, last amended in 2012, contains regulations concerning the school year, the instructional year, school days, holidays and vacations, lessons (periods) and breaks. The **School Education Act** of 1986 and subsequent amendments contains provisions applicable to most of the schools under the School Organization Act on aspects such as admission, pupils' assessment and progression, repetition of school grades, final exams, and tasks of teachers. An amendment extended its coverage to the federal schools of agriculture and forestry.

The **2009 Regulation of the Minister for Education, the Arts and Culture on educational standards in schools** defines the specific learning outcomes and basic skills that students are expected to achieve by the end of year 4 in German (reading and writing) and mathematics, and by the end of year 8 in German, a modern foreign language (English) and mathematics.

Under the **Federal School Inspection Act** of 1962, last amended in 2011, school administration and school inspection are carried out on behalf of the federal authorities by the Federal Ministry of Education (as the supreme authority), its subordinate provincial schools boards, and the district school boards responsible to the provincial school boards.

The **Vocational Training Act** entered into force in 1969 and last amended in 2012, regulates the vocational education and training sector, including enterprise-based apprenticeships (within the sphere of competence of the Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth). The implementation of this Act is incumbent on the apprenticeship offices of the regional Economic Chambers; these are assisted by the advisory boards on apprenticeship, which comprise members of employers' and employees' representatives. The **Vocational Training Act for Agriculture and Forestry** of 1990 and subsequent amendments regulates apprenticeships in the areas of agriculture and forestry. For schools specializing in agriculture and forestry, separate legal regulations have been enacted, such as the **Federal Act Governing Schools in Agriculture and Forestry** of 1966 and subsequent amendments, while the training in non-medical health professions is regulated by the **Federal Act on Healthcare and Nursing Professions** of 1997 and subsequent amendments. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

For the further development of the school system, two acts in the field of social policy must also be considered of major importance. The **Studies Promotion Act** of 1969 and the **Student Grants Act** of 1983 have provided students with the



legal right to study grants and talent scholarships (university and other post-secondary courses) or to school grants and boarding grants (secondary schools); social need and academic success as the prerequisites for such grants are defined, as well as their types and amounts, and questions of procedure.

The **Universities of the Arts Organization Act** of 1970 sets the legal framework for these institutions. The more detailed organizational structures of these institutions are regulated by a set of legal provisions. The Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna is a unique case, as it is regulated by a specific law, the **Academy Organization Act** of 1988. The University Studies Act of 1997 established the general framework for university studies defining the general prerequisites for admission; content structure and organization; the types and details of examinations; the degree programmes; the minimum required duration of study; and academic degrees and titles. Curricular commissions at the individual universities are responsible for the detailed articulation of the content of degree programmes. On 1 September 1999 an amendment to the University Studies Act came into force, creating the legal basis for the introduction of the bachelor's degree as the first university degree followed by master's degree studies. The Academies Study Act of 25 June 1999 provided the overall framework for the establishment of a system of initial and in-service training for teachers (teacher training colleges). Teacher training colleges have been reorganized as university colleges of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) in accordance with the **Federal Act on the Organization of University Colleges of Education and their Study Programmes** of 2005 and subsequent amendments. University colleges of education train compulsory school teachers (primary, lower secondary, pre-vocational, and special education schools), while teachers at academic secondary schools and teachers of general subjects at intermediate and higher technical and vocational schools are trained at universities.

The new **Universities Act** of 2002 provides the comprehensive legal framework for the implementation of the three-cycle degree structure in accordance with the Bologna process. This Act, which became fully effective in January 2004, establishes a completely new framework for public universities. Although they remain institutions of public law, universities are no longer part of public administration, but are autonomous legal entities with full contractual capability. The federal authorities do not have any influence on decisions within universities, except for their competence to review whether these decisions are in accordance with the law. The internal structure of universities (faculties, departments etc.), except for the level of university management (university council, senate, rector), are no longer determined by federal legislation, but are decided upon by each institution within a given framework. Decisions concerning staffing and the introduction of new programmes are now the sole responsibility of universities, with the rector being the head of the university staff and the senate deciding upon curricula. A 2006 amendment to the Universities Act created the legal basis for introducing doctoral degree programmes in accordance with the Bologna process. Another amendment adopted in 2009 further defines the competences of the rectorate, the senate, the university council, and prescribes a 40% share of women in all university bodies. The amendment was conceived as a cornerstone in the Bologna architecture and allows to transform all study programmes into the bachelor's and master's degree structure, including teacher training and studies in the field of medicine as well as to set up four-year bachelor's



programmes (for example in the fields of law and pharmacy.) after submission of an expert opinion.

The **Universities of the Arts Studies Act** of 1983 established the framework for academic programmes at the universities of the arts. The Act established the principles and objectives that guide academic programmes, different types of degree programmes and categories of students, the organization of studies, the examination system, the number of degree programmes offered, and the procedures for determining the form and content of individual curricula. Commissions at the respective institutions are responsible for the articulation of the curricula of degree programmes. The *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences or polytechnics) sector was established in 1993 by the **Fachhochschule Studies Act**, which marked the end of the traditional monopoly of the federal government in establishing and funding tertiary institutions. The Act has been amended in 2002 in order to introduce two-cycle degree programmes, and further amended in 2006. The **University Accreditation Act** was adopted in 1999. It establishes the tasks and responsibilities of the Austrian Accreditation Council, an autonomous public authority subject to ministerial supervision, and provides a legal framework for the accreditation of private universities.

The Basic Law on the Universal Rights of Citizens of 1867 stipulates that teaching, research, and practice of the arts shall be free and that “everyone shall be free in choosing his occupation and in obtaining the necessary education and training how and where he wants” (Article 18). Section 5 of Article 17 stipulates that the federal government has the right to direct, manage and supervise the school and education system.

Article 14(7a) of the Federal Constitutional Law, last amended in 2009, stipulates that compulsory school attendance covers at least nine years. Compulsory schooling extends to all children permanently residing in Austria regardless of their nationality. The compulsory school age starts on the 1st of September following the child’s sixth birthday. Parents are obliged to register their child at the competent school and to make sure the child attends on a regular basis. Particular attention is given to children in need of special care. The right to education and the principle of equal educational opportunities are ensured by specific measures. All pupils receive the suitable and necessary textbooks free of charge and they have a legal title to free travel to and from school. In both cases, small deductibles apply.

Children may defer their (compulsory) enrolment in the first grade of primary education if they do not demonstrate the necessary maturity for school. Such deferral may be pronounced *ex officio* or upon application by the children’s parents. Children thus deferred from school attendance must or may (depending on how far away they live from the nearest pre-school institution) fulfil their first year of compulsory schooling at the preschool level (preschool group/class).



Administration and management of the education system

Decisions concerning innovations and/or reforms of the school system are taken by the Federal Parliament. The education and training system was under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (until 2000, the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs). Following a reorganization of the federal ministries, as of 1 March 2007 the ministry has been renamed as the **Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK)**, with responsibility over the school education system (primary and secondary education, including technical and vocational education), training colleges for non-teaching supervisory staff, and training colleges for kindergarten teachers. The **Federal Ministry for Science and Research** is responsible for universities, universities of applied sciences and scientific research. The **Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth** oversees enterprise-based apprenticeship training (dual system), and is also in charge of childcare benefits, parenting education, youth welfare and children's rights. Furthermore, the **Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management** is responsible for the maintenance of colleges of agriculture and forestry, and the **Federal Ministry for Health** oversees programmes for healthcare professions.

As of September 2012, the BMUKK comprises the following Directorates: international affairs and culture; budget and finance; general education schools, quality assurance and university colleges of teacher education (Directorate I); vocational training schools, adult education, school sports (Directorate II); staff and school management, law and legal affairs (Directorate III); culture (Directorate IV); and the arts (Directorate V).

The Federation has exclusive responsibility for legislation and implementation with regard to the entire system of general secondary schooling, intermediate and upper technical and vocational education and training for kindergarten teachers and non-teaching supervisory staff, and with regard to the conditions of service and staff representation rights of teachers at these schools. The federal government is responsible for fundamental legislation, while the nine provinces (*Länder*) are responsible for issuing and implementing by-laws. This particularly applies to the organizational structure of federal education authorities or the external organization of public compulsory schools. The term 'external organization' refers to the development, construction, maintenance and closing of schools, and also to the fixing of pupil numbers per class and teaching periods. All fundamental legislation is in the nature of a framework which has to be filled in by implementing by-laws promulgated by the respective provincial parliaments (*Landtage*), the legislative bodies at provincial level. The provinces are responsible for legislation and implementation as, for example, with regard to kindergartens. Compulsory schools, such as primary schools, lower secondary schools, special education schools, pre-vocational schools and part-time compulsory vocational schools, are maintained by the provinces, municipalities or municipal associations. While most of the schools in general compulsory education are maintained by municipalities or municipal associations, part-time compulsory vocational schools are maintained by the provinces. Teachers in public compulsory schools are employed by the federal provinces, which pay the cost of their salaries. However, the provinces are fully compensated for this by the federal government as part of the fiscal adjustment (for teachers at part-time compulsory



vocational schools this compensation only amounts to 50% of the salary). Intermediate and upper secondary schools (secondary stage II) are established and maintained by the federal government, which bears the full cost including teachers' salaries. (BMUKK, 2008).

Separate federal bodies have been established wherever the Federation is responsible for implementation. These are: district school boards at the level of political 'districts'; provincial school boards at the level of the provinces; and the BMUKK for the entire territory. The district and provincial school boards are the federal school authorities in the provinces. The system of administration is characterized by a two-tier hierarchy. Provincial school boards have designated jurisdiction in matters referred to a district school board, while the BMUKK deals with cases referred to provincial school boards in the first instance.

Provincial School Boards are directed by the Provincial Governor (as chairperson of the board). For all practical purposes he/she is assisted in the fulfilment of his/her duties by an executive chairperson. The central body within a Provincial School Board is the **Collegiate Council**, made up of voting members and members with consultative status. It is one of the major tasks of the Collegiate Council to submit proposals for the appointment of teachers and head teachers at intermediate and upper secondary schools and colleges. Collegiate Councils also issue general directives on the basis of existing laws and ordinances (e.g. curricula) and submit expert opinions on draft laws and regulations. **District School Boards** are headed by the District Governor. The collegiate councils at district level are structured and set up similarly to those at provincial level. The collegiate council at district level issues general directives and submits expert opinions on draft laws and regulations, for example with regard to curricula. (*Ibid.*).

The implementation of matters falling under the responsibility of the individual provinces is carried out by executive authorities at provincial level, i.e. the **Offices of the Provincial Government**. Their most important task is to cooperate with municipalities on the maintenance of public general compulsory schools and the appointment of teachers and head teachers at these schools. However, district and provincial school boards often have the right to participate in deciding on such matters. As established by law, school representatives (heads, teachers, teachers' conferences, examination boards, parents' and pupils' representative bodies) retain some essential decision-taking powers (school autonomy). Moreover, federal ministries, provincial governments and the federal school authorities in the provinces are given an opportunity to comment on bills and proposed ordinances before their adoption. In addition, in each case the relevant stakeholders are also contacted, including employers' and employees' organizations, teachers' organizations (particularly in school matters), parents' associations and young people's associations.

Legal instances for **school inspection** are, in most cases, the district school boards, the provincial school boards, and—as the supreme instance—the BMUKK. There are provincial school inspectors for the various types of school. At compulsory school level, provincial school inspectors are assisted by district school inspectors and in intermediate and upper secondary education by subject inspectors. There are a few schools, e.g. the upper secondary colleges in the fields of agriculture and forestry



(secondary stage II), as well as a number of higher technical and vocational schools (secondary stage II) in Vienna, that come directly under the BMUKK.

The **Austrian Accreditation Council** is an autonomous public authority subject to ministerial supervision. The Council is responsible for the accreditation of private higher education institutions or of study programmes at already accredited private universities. In addition, it monitors the private university sector and the maintenance of general standards. The **Universities of Applied Sciences Council** (FH Council) is an independent public authority subject to ministerial supervision, and carries out the accreditation of universities of applied sciences and/or their programmes. Its functions include accreditation, advice to the ministry, the promotion of the quality of teaching and learning, innovation and further education, as well as the monitoring of the *Fachhochschulen* (FH) sector. After the approval of its statutes in late 2003, the **Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance** (AQA) started its operations in spring 2004. The AQA is a joint initiative of the Rectors' Conference, the Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK), the Association of Private Universities, the Austrian Students Union (OH) and the Federal Ministry of Education. The Agency is responsible for quality assurance and the evaluation of public and private universities, universities of applied sciences and (in the future) teacher training colleges. The Agency's functions include the development of evaluation standards and procedures, the coordination of the evaluation process of study programmes and institutions as well as the certification of institutional quality assurance processes. The AQA assists all higher education institutions, i.e. universities, universities of applied sciences and teacher training universities (based on the Teacher Education Act of 2005), in creating their quality management systems.

A new Federal Act for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz*), entered into force on 1 March 2012, sets a common framework for quality assurance in all sectors of higher education, e.g. public universities, universities of applied sciences, and private universities. The new Act provides for the establishment of the **Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria**. This new agency will unify the functions of AQA, FH Council and Accreditation Council for the private universities. AQA will operate until 2013 and progressively integrate its activities into the new agency.

The **Federal Institute for Research on Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System** (BIFIE), established in 2006, was made an independent institution in January 2008 taking over the tasks of a number of smaller bodies such as the Centre for Pilot Projects and Education Development, the Working Group on Educational Standards, the Centre for Comparative Research on Education, and others. The BIFIE is responsible for: applied research on education, education monitoring, quality development, and producing regular reports on the state of education in the country. The BIFIE is also responsible for advising, on the basis of evidence collected, the decision-makers on issues related to education policy and school development. (BMUKK, 2008).

There is also an **expert commission**, comprising 13 national and international experts, which develops strategies and models for school organization. It is concerned with evaluating existing school models, innovations in education policy, as well as aspects of societal policy. Parents associations are generally organized in province



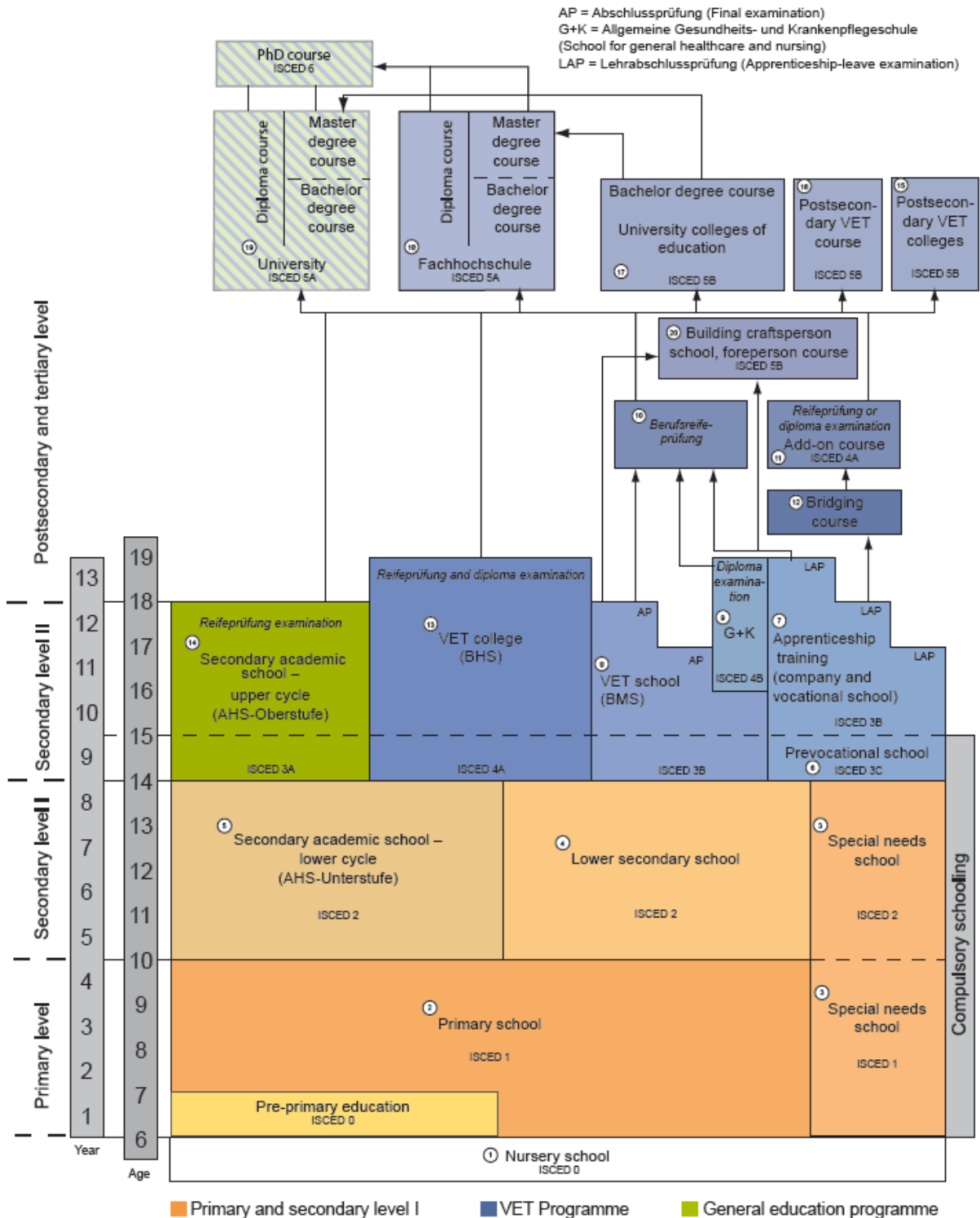
and federal organizations. The representatives of parents and family-interest associations are invited to take part as advisory boards in consultations with the school authorities and the BMUKK in fundamental matters pertaining to education to represent the point of view of parents. The provincial students' representative bodies and the federal students' representative body represent students' interests in issues affecting students (Students' Representation Act of 1990). They are entitled to: comment on draft acts and draft ordinances; submit suggestions for acts and ordinances; raise issues and present complaints, and plan and organize further training measures for students' representatives. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

In the field of adult education, the **Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions** has existed since 1972, including the most important non-profit adult education providers. As a permanent institution, it represents adult education vis-à-vis the federal government, the other sectors of education, the Austrian Radio and Television, etc.

At secondary schools, **school community committees** exist, in which parents, teachers, and pupils are represented. They have a decision-making capacity in school questions, including: the planning of school events; the carrying out of parents' consultations days; school regulations; events in connection with career counselling; and healthcare. The school community committee also has a decision-making capacity in defining the extent of pupils' co-determination. In this connection, the rights of parents and pupils are fairly extensive. Thus, parents not only have the duty, but also the right of supporting instructional and educational work. Pupils' representatives have a right to information and co-determination: in the selection of instruction media; in the organization of instruction; and— from the ninth grade onward—when school expulsion of a pupil is involved. At primary schools, general secondary schools and special education schools, **school forums** have been established, comprising teachers' and parents' representatives. Essentially, the school forum has the rights of a school community committee, insofar as class problems are concerned. The variety of the educational offerings and the increasing diversification of educational programmes require in-depth and efficient counselling. At all schools throughout the country (except primary schools), **pupils' counsellors** and **educational advisors** provide counselling services. They are full-time teachers, partially exempted from teaching in order to be able to concentrate on counselling activities. They receive continuous in-service training provided by the BMUKK.

Structure and organization of the education system

Austria: structure of the education system



Source: Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (IBW), 2012.

Pre-school education

The kindergarten (nursery school) is the traditional form of pre-primary education for children aged 3 to 5, and it does not form part of the school system. Kindergarten education is a responsibility of the provinces and municipalities and attendance is optional; children are admitted, subject to availability of places, at the request of their parents. Children up to 3 years of age may attend a crèche if available. Since 2009 attending childcare facilities is free of charge for 5-year-olds.

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for all children aged 6. It covers four years and is provided at the primary school (*grundschule*). The primary school is normally organized into two levels, i.e. the first two years (level I) and years 3 and 4 (level II). A preschool stage may be organized for children who have attained the compulsory school age, but are not yet mature for schooling; this preschool stage can be organized together with years 1 and 2, or separately. The pre-primary year is considered part of the school system. The upper cycle of primary education (grades 5 to 8, corresponding to lower secondary education) can be provided at the *volksschuloberstufe*, although is offered in a few locations. Upon completion of grade 4 pupils receive a certificate. Starting from 2012-2013, pupils in year 4 are expected to sit a test in German (reading and writing) and mathematics; the performance feedbacks will serve as starting points for quality development processes. (BMUKK, 2012).

Secondary education

Secondary education is provided at different types of schools. The lower secondary school (*hauptschule*) covers grades 5-8 and provides general education preparing students for a possible transfer to intermediate and upper secondary schools/colleges or for employment. Students with an appropriate level of achievement in German, reading and mathematics (e.g. 'very good' or 'good') can transfer to the academic secondary school without having to pass the admission test. Students who have successfully completed lower secondary education (*hauptschule*) can be admitted to a pre-vocational school, an intermediate or higher-level technical and vocational school or college, or an academic secondary school. At the end of lower secondary school pupils receive a certificate. Starting from 2012-2013 students in year 8 are expected to sit a test in German, mathematics and English. They will receive a feedback in terms of formative assessment, as the educational standards tests have no effect on the performance assessment and the resulting qualifications. (BMUKK, 2012). The academic secondary school (*allgemeinbildende höhere schule*–AHS) comprises a four-year lower stage (AHS–*Unterstufe*, ages 10-14) and a four-year upper stage (AHS–*Oberstufe*, ages 14-18), culminating in the secondary school-leaving examination (*matura*). The first two years (Forms 1 and 2) are common for all students. The third and the fourth years (Forms 3 and 4), as well as the upper stage (Forms 5 to 8), are divided into three types: *gymnasium* (focus on languages, including classical languages), *realgymnasium* (focus on mathematics and geometry), and *wirtschaftskundliches realgymnasium* (focus on chemistry, home economics and handicraft). In addition, there is a separate upper-level type of gymnasium (*oberstufenrealgymnasium*) covering years 9 to 12 and offering three orientations, namely emphasis on science subjects (biology and environmental science, chemistry

and physics), on design and crafts, or music (musical instruments). It is envisaged that starting from 2013/14 a new standardized, competence-oriented secondary school-leaving examination (including a nation-wide written part) will be introduced. Students having completed grade 8 can also enter: (i) training colleges for kindergarten teachers and for non-teaching supervisory staff, which offer five-year programmes culminating in the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination; (ii) intermediate technical and vocational education schools offering programmes lasting one to two years (preparatory vocational training) or three to four years (advanced vocational training); students having successfully completed at least a three-year programme have access to regulated trades and they may acquire the qualification to pursue university studies by sitting the secondary school-leaving examination for working people, or they may sit the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination of the respective higher-level technical and vocational school after having completed a three-year add-on programme; (iii) higher-level secondary technical and vocational education schools or colleges offering five-year programmes leading to the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination. The new secondary school (*neue mittelschule*) is a comprehensive school for 10- to 14-year-olds introduced through pilot projects in 2008/09 as an alternative to the general secondary school (*hauptschule*) and the lower cycle of academic secondary school. The pre-vocational school primarily offers basic vocational training to students having completed grade 8 (14- to 15-year-olds) and wishing to enter the working life after completion of compulsory schooling (one-year programmes, sometimes including a voluntary tenth year), preparing them for the transition to vocational training in the dual system or further studies. Vocational training is provided to a considerable extent through the apprenticeship training scheme (e.g. dual system: training in business or industry, combined with theoretical instruction at the compulsory vocational school). A wide range of training programmes in different occupations and trades are offered under the apprenticeship scheme, lasting between two and four years (three years being the average duration). Apprentices attend compulsory vocational school by age groups at least one day per week, or in blocks (course design) covering at least eight weeks per year. At the end of the training, students sit the final apprenticeship examination.

Higher education

The higher education system comprises: postsecondary colleges for medico-technical occupations and midwifery offering three-year programmes on a full-time basis; postsecondary courses for technological, trade and commercial occupations normally lasting four semesters (or four to six semesters for working people); university colleges of teacher education (i.e. *Pädagogischen Hochschulen*); public and private universities, and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). Traditionally, university programmes leading to a diploma degree (*Magister/Magistra - Mag.; Diplom-Ingenieur/Diplom-Ingenieurin - Dipl.-Ing. or DI; or Dipl.-Tierarzt/Dipl.-Tierärztin*) are divided into two or three stages, each one ending with a diploma examination. Students having obtained a diploma degree are admitted to doctoral courses in their specialized, or a related, field of studies. Holders of a diploma degree are also entitled to enter postgraduate professional studies. Most traditional programmes last eight to eleven semesters (four to five and a half academic years). Doctoral courses take at least another two to four semesters to complete. Within the framework of the implementation of the three-cycle degree structure of the Bologna



process, higher education institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences, and university colleges of teacher education) have started to offer bachelor's degree (normally lasting three years) and master's degree (lasting one to two years) programmes. Doctoral degree programmes take at least three years to complete. University colleges of education offer three-year bachelor's degree programmes training compulsory school teachers (primary, lower secondary, pre-vocational, and special education schools). Universities offer diploma programmes lasting at least nine semesters for the training of teachers at academic secondary schools and teachers of general subjects at intermediate and higher technical and vocational schools. Universities of applied sciences offer three-year bachelor's degree, one to two-year master's degree as well as diploma programmes taking four to five years to complete, all including a period of practical training. The minimum duration of programmes in the field of medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry, is twelve semesters (long-cycle structure).

Depending on the respective province the school year starts between 1 and 7 September or between 8 and 14 September, and ends between 28 June and 4 July, or between 5 and 11 July. It is divided into two semesters. On average, the school year consists of 180 instructional days on the basis of a five-day week and about 215 school days on the basis of a six-day week (more common at the upper secondary level given the higher number of lessons). At the tertiary level, the academic year is divided into two semesters.

The educational process

The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) promulgates curricula on the basis of the School Organization Act. All curricula provide for areas of school autonomy which schools can but are not obliged to use. The preparatory work for curriculum development is entrusted to teachers' working groups set up to cover most subjects. Within the framework of a list compiled by the BMUKK, teaching aids are selected by the teachers' conferences for the upper level of secondary education (secondary stage II), or by school forums (all other schools), with parents' and pupils' representatives participating. Although textbooks not featured on the list may be selected, normally they are not made available free of charge. (BMUKK, 2008).

Starting from the school year 1993/94, an amendment to the School Organization Act empowered schools to issue their own curricular regulations autonomously by a two-thirds vote of the school Committee or the school forum. The former consists of teachers', pupils' and parents' representatives, while in the latter, which is established in compulsory schools, only teachers and parents are involved. General secondary schools and academic secondary schools are allotted a number of lessons that can be used on the basis of local decisions. Provisions governing school autonomy at pre-vocational schools enable a flexible response to the vocational interests of pupils and the respective demands of the particular region.

As regards primary education, the curriculum was thoroughly revised in 1986. The main objectives were to convey a common elementary education to all children, to emphasize principles of special education, in particular in the school entry phase, the dovetailing of preschool and primary education, and the consideration of new



didactic findings at primary level. Since then, the primary school curriculum has been continuously developed. Important steps were the integration of 'intercultural learning as a principle of instruction (1991), the expansion of the programme of modern foreign languages taught as compulsory exercise in years 3 and 4 to include the minority languages spoken in Austria and in Austria's neighbouring countries (1991, 1993), the integration of disabled pupils in primary education (1993), and provisions on full-day attendance at school (1994). The amendment to the adopted in the summer of 1998 transferred the pilot project on “Modern Foreign Language as of Grade One” into mainstream education in September 1998. Starting from 2003/04, foreign language instruction is compulsory at all primary schools as of the first year of schooling. The primary school curriculum is framed in broad terms. It defines in a general way the educational objectives, the educational and didactic responsibilities, and the contents to be taught in the different subjects and the interdisciplinary fields. The curriculum is the foundation on which teachers may independently base their conceptual and practical work. Although the contents taught at the primary school are divided into different subjects, a strict division of contents by subjects should be avoided for all practical purposes. As classroom instruction is to be based on the experiences, interests and needs of children, learning approaches are situational and interdisciplinary. Moreover, the school has many educational tasks to accomplish which it can only deliver through an interdisciplinary approach. These so-called ‘didactic principles’ are: health education, reading, media education, music and arts education, political education (including education for peace), intercultural learning, sex education, communication, environmental education, road safety, economics (including saving and consumer behaviour), and education for gender equality. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

The new curriculum for the lower secondary school (*hauptschule*) and the lower cycle of the academic secondary school was finalized in 1999 and came into force on 1 September 2000. The new curriculum has systematically incorporated various competence concepts into the monitoring processes governing the education system. It lists three areas of competence which are to be equally promoted at lower secondary level, namely: subject-matter competence (in the context of class instruction, independent self-study and critical reflection on presented topics), self-competence (students’ ability to build on their talents and possibilities, students’ awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses, self-reflection) and social competence (the ability to take on responsibility and to cooperate; initiative as well as creative abilities). The curriculum subsumes self-competence and social competence under the heading of ‘dynamic abilities’, which are to foster constructive approaches to problem-solving. The new curriculum was the result of a project-based process which spanned several years and involved academics, teachers, school heads, decision-makers, etc. One explicit objective of this curricular reform was to adequately react to social change and to the new demands that schools for 10- to 14-year-olds are facing in the field of competence development. Academic orientation is manifest in subject-based instruction. General objectives, however, also emphasize personality-based factors, thus promoting a student-oriented approach. The reform has also brought about important change in connection with curricular content, as it allows for local differences. The new curriculum distinguishes between core contents (two thirds) and optional topics (extended contents) which may be chosen in accordance with local needs (one third). These optional contents are supposed to serve as a concrete possibility of increasing school autonomy. The new curriculum also



encourages team building and increased cooperation among teaching staff, thus promoting the conception of schools as learning organizations. In the area of (first and second) foreign languages, the proficiency levels defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages were introduced in a binding manner. In comparison with curricular reforms of the 1980s, the 1999 curriculum clearly reflects new trends, as it aims at concise, simplified regulations. (*Ibid.*).

Educational standards have been developed specifying the subject-specific proficiency that students are expected to acquire upon completion of year 4 in German (reading and writing) and mathematics, and upon completion of year 8 in German, English and mathematics. The development of educational standards began in 2001/02 with the appointment of a steering group consisting of representatives of the BMUKK, the school administration and regional school inspectorates (compulsory schools and academic secondary schools), the scientific community and the Centre for School Development. The educational standards were later piloted in 2003/04 and 2004-2007. In 2008, approximately 100 schools took part in pilot tests in mathematics, German and English. The results of the pilot scheme have formed a basis for further development and baseline testing. A 2008 amendment to the School Education Act provided the legal basis for the introduction of educational standards and the statutory regulation entered into force at the beginning of 2009. The first country-wide standards tests are expected to take place in 2012 and 2013. (Eurydice, 2009; BMUKK, 2009).

Educational standards apply to the entire curriculum; they specify tangible and detailed learning outcomes for the core areas. The differentiated guiding principles governing the curricula of primary schools and secondary level I (lower secondary) correlate with the objectives pursued with the outcome-related educational standards. Hence, educational standards and curricula are neither rivals nor opponents, but positively complementary units. Educational standards are open to reappraisal: individual learning outcomes indicate whether core competences have been acquired. Educational standards cannot be used as yardsticks for measuring performance; they provide feedback on the competences attained, including the level of proficiency, and on the areas in which there is need for action. Making the learning processes more sustainable is an objective inherent in the system. (BMUKK, 2009).

The reform of the upper cycle of the academic secondary school rests on two pillars: (i) new curricula, designed to encourage pedagogical innovation in classroom teaching; these curricula were implemented step by step (from year/grade 9 upwards) as of 2004/05; and (ii) scope for autonomous upper-cycle design (grades 9 to 12). Previously, the leeway for autonomous action in academic secondary schools ended with grade 8. The resulting rigid organizational structures triggered a flood of upper-cycle pilot projects. Now, academic secondary schools will also be given the possibility to determine individual priorities for the upper cycle and, therefore, will no longer have to undergo the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures associated with pilot projects, in order to be able to provide attractive programmes for their target groups. The degree of autonomy granted to academic secondary schools in the design of their upper cycles has been enshrined in a statutory regulation which became effective as of the school year 2003/04. Previously, curricula set out 'maximum subject contents' based on which teachers were supposed to make a selection for their class work ('exemplary principle', 'framework curricula'). In some respects, the new curricula

are more strictly binding than the previous ones. On the other hand, they leave more leeway for individual (location-specific) choices as they restrict themselves to a strongly reduced number of binding provisions (thus promoting school autonomy). (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Pre-primary education

As mentioned, the kindergarten (nursery school) is the traditional form of pre-primary education for children aged 3 to 5, and it does not form part of the school system. Kindergarten education is a responsibility of the provinces and municipalities and attendance is optional; children are admitted, subject to availability of places, at the request of their parents. Children up to 3 years of age may attend a crèche if available. Since 2009 attending childcare facilities is free of charge for 5-year-olds. Kindertartens increasingly admit children who have not yet reached age 3.

Pre-primary education includes all measures to promote the full development of the personality of a child from birth to school age. With regard to pre-primary education in the family, the aim is to maintain the child's family context (e.g. by the legally guaranteed right of working mothers/fathers to a subsidized leave). A wide variety of activities for the promotion of parents' educational capabilities is undertaken, both under the auspices of institutions of adult education and by the competent provincial and federal authorities.

The nursery school system is entrusted to the provinces in both legislative and executive matters. There are nine different Kindergarten Education Acts (identical in their essential points) which correspond to the number of Austrian provinces. In general, kindergarten (nursery school) aims to: support and complement education within the family (special emphasis is placed on cooperation with parents or guardians); promote the individual development of children through appropriate measures as well as social interaction of peers; impart an elementary religious and moral education; and prepare children for school (by involving parents and school). In some provinces, the law explicitly states that these aims are to be reached by using appropriate methods of early childhood education and by excluding any form of school-like instruction. All matters pertaining to the training of kindergarten teachers and their professional qualifications fall within the competence of the Federation. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Pre-primary education focuses on whole development of the child's personality. To reach this objective, kindertartens are run in small, generally co-educational groups, taking individual styles and approaches into account and providing a systematic offer of different games and materials. First and foremost, a child should have the chance of gaining experience through appropriate playing activities without the pressure of time or achievement. Model approaches are often applied to integrate children with special needs into mainstream groups. Normally children aged 3-6 are organized in small groups, either by age or in mixed-age groups. Each group has its own kindergarten teacher and a separate room. In many cases, a second person (a kindergarten teacher or an auxiliary) will support the educational work. There are no strict regulations governing kindertartens daily schedules or the thematic organization of the year. There is no national compulsory curriculum. An expert group under the scientific guidance of the Charlotte Bühler Institute for



Practice-Oriented Early Childhood Research has, however, compiled a comprehensive outline of educational aims to be achieved. Some kindergartens emphasize a specific approach or methodology (e.g. Rudolf Steiner, Montessori, Freinet or Piaget). In general, all of these approaches are part of kindergarten teacher training and adopted in kindergarten education. 'Integration groups', which are starting to replace the special kindergartens, aim at integrating children with special educational needs in the mainstream kindergarten groups, where regular and special kindergarten teachers work side by side. Integration groups at preschool level stimulate important encounters and experiences that foster the development of all those involved. There is no formal, school-like assessment and teachers closely monitor and support the development and progress of children in cooperation with parents/guardians. (*Ibid.*).

There are public kindergartens (established and maintained by the federal government, the provinces, or the municipalities) and private kindergartens. Some of the private kindergartens are self-administered by non-teaching supervisory staff and parents as autonomous groups. The majority of kindergartens are set up by municipalities. Around 30% of all childcare facilities are maintained by local parishes, family organizations, charitable organizations, companies and private individuals. Staff and operational costs are generally borne by the maintaining body. The contributions made available by the provinces vary considerably; this applies to private kindergartens in particular. Private kindergartens run by private associations, churches or religious communities receive, under certain conditions, subsidies to help them cover the cost of staff and overheads, either on a discretionary basis or according to a fixed percentage in accordance with the applicable Kindergarten Act. Private kindergartens run by bodies other than the above-mentioned generally do not receive any financial support. Some kindergartens do not charge any fees at all, while many municipalities charge a kindergarten attendance fee according to a graded scheme adjusted to net household income. Private kindergartens similarly charge varying amounts. Kindergartens operate either on a full-day or half-day basis. Half-day kindergartens are open from at least 7 a.m. to 12 a.m., with the possibility of lunch. Full-day kindergartens are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and include lunch. Parents may pick up their children whenever they want. Many kindergartens are open throughout the year. (BMUKK, 2008).

A measure to support early language development of children whose mother tongue is not German has been introduced in a combined effort involving several ministries. If a special need is diagnosed when a child's linguistic abilities are assessed, the respective child is entitled to receive 120 hours of language training at kindergarten in the year before entering school. Private initiatives have given rise to new concepts and forms of child care. For example, children's groups usually take the form of associations with legal personality and their parents are usually strongly involved in all relevant decisions and maintain a high degree of responsibility. Typically, children's groups are mixed-age groups of five to ten children. The individual provinces' provisions concerning children's groups are either laid down in their respective Youth Welfare Acts or in Daycare Acts. 'Day parents' mainly look after infants in their own private homes, usually in addition to their own children. In recent years this form of childcare has gained in significance, as the number of children requiring daycare has increased and the qualifications of day parents have improved. In some provinces formal training for day parents has become compulsory. (Eurydice, 2008/09).



In 2006/07, there were 928 crèches with 16,551 children enrolled and 4,329 care-givers. The number of kindergartens was 5,133 with a total enrolment of 216,417 children and 29,099 staff members. (Eurydice, 2008/09). In 2005/06, 66.3 % of all 3-year-olds, 89.8% of all 4-year-olds, and 91.9% of all 5-year-olds attended pre-primary education. The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 the total enrolment in kindergartens (both public and private) amounted to 217,709 children, of whom 49.1% were girls, which represents the 90.7% of the age cohort (91% for girls). (BMUKK, 2011).

Primary education

As mentioned, primary education is compulsory for all children aged 6. It covers four years and is provided at the primary school (*grundschule*). Primary education is normally organized into two levels, i.e. the first two years (level I) and years 3 and 4 (level II). A preschool stage may be organized for children who have attained the compulsory school age, but are not yet mature for schooling; this preschool stage can be organized together with years 1 and 2, or separately. The pre-primary year is considered part of the school system. Children with special educational needs either attend special schools, which are run in parallel to the primary school system, or are integrated into mainstream schools. The upper cycle of primary education can be provided at the *volksschuloberstufe*, although is offered in a few locations. Upon completion of grade 4 pupils receive a certificate. Starting from 2012-2013, pupils in year 4 are expected to sit a test in German (reading and writing) and mathematics; the performance feedbacks will serve as starting points for quality development processes. (BMUKK, 2012).

Depending on the number of children, the preschool stage can be organized as a class or a group. Pre-primary classes normally comprise more than 10 children; less than 10 children form a preschool group. Preschool classes and groups form an independent part of primary schools and do not belong to the kindergarten system. The curriculum of these classes/groups includes a number of compulsory subjects. Children have to attend instruction but are not graded at the end of the year, and receive only an attendance certificate. Compulsory subjects include: religious instruction, reading, writing, speaking, the environment, arithmetic, music and singing, artistic education, physical education, and road safety.

Primary education should lay the basis for a successful learning experience in secondary education. On the basis of pupils' individual backgrounds, the primary school is expected to: arouse and nurture the eagerness to learn, the skills, interests and talents; strengthen and develop pupils' faith in their own achievement; strengthen or build social competences (responsible behaviour, cooperation, adjustment, development and acceptance of rules and norms; sense of criticism); improve language skills (communication, expression); develop and convey elementary knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes with a view to the acquisition of the 'three Rs' (reading, writing, arithmetic) including the use of modern communication and information technologies in a child-appropriate manner, of sound environmental behaviour and understanding, and a general development of artistic, manual and physical skills; contribute towards the gradual formation of appropriate attitudes towards learning and working (perseverance, meticulousness, exactness, helpfulness); and promote the transition from the play-oriented forms of learning at preschool level



to a purposeful, independent and achievement-based learning process. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Classes are co-educational. Every primary school grade corresponds to one class (pupil numbers permitting). If the number of pupils in each grade is too small, several grades may be combined in one class. Preschool classes are often accommodated in a primary school, which can be located in the same building or one that is adjacent to a secondary general school, depending on the local situation. The upper cycle of primary school, covering four years (grades 5-8, corresponding to lower secondary education), is offered only in sparsely populated regions (particularly in Tyrol). Admission to grade 5 and attendance in grades 5-8 is allowed provided that attendance at a general secondary school does not appear feasible (owing to the school's distance from the pupil's home). Since the upper cycle of primary school is available in extremely few places, no separate curriculum was introduced for it; rather, it is governed by the curriculum of general secondary school.

The primary school curriculum consists of a framework to be filled in by the teacher's pedagogical work rather than a codification of educational subject matter and content in a fixed amount and a precisely defined sequence. While this permits the application of a nationwide curriculum, limited shifts of subject matter and additional content based on local conditions are also possible. Thus the number of weekly periods assigned to individual compulsory subjects may be determined by the provincial school board taking into account local conditions and within the limits given in the distribution of class periods. Moreover, there is the possibility of offering optional subjects and optional exercises, which are intended to cater to individual talents and preferences. There is a general framework for the total number of weekly lessons, e.g. a total of 90 weekly lessons over grades 1-4. Within that framework, the weekly lessons per year may be increased or lowered by no more than one weekly period in the individual compulsory subjects and in the compulsory exercise 'modern foreign language' (excepting religious instruction), yet no more than by two weekly lessons altogether. A subject that has to be taught in a year cannot be dropped entirely. Since 2003/04 all primary schools have include a modern foreign language starting from grade 1. Schools can decide autonomously the number of lessons per week. (BMUKK, 2008).

The weekly lesson timetable is shown in the table below:

Austria. Primary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	1	2	3	4
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
Local history, geography, biology (*)	3	3	3	3
German language, reading & writing	7	7	7	7
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
Music	1	1	1	1
Drawing	1	1	1	1
Crafts and textiles	1	1	2	2
Movement and sports	3	3	2	2
<i>Compulsory practical exercises:</i>				
Modern foreign language	A	A	1	1
Road safety	B	B	B	B
Total weekly periods	20–23	20–23	22–25	22–25

Source: BMUKK, 2008. (*) *Sachunterricht*. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. A = A total of 32 lessons per year (English, French, Italian, Croatian, Slovak, Slovene, Czech or Hungarian) within the framework of the total number of weekly periods available. B = A total of 10 lessons per year within the framework of the total number of weekly periods available. If necessary, remedial classes (one lesson per week) in languages and mathematics are offered.

Schools for minorities exist in the provinces of Burgenland (Croatian and Hungarian) and Carinthia (Slovenian). This means that at these schools instruction is, as a rule, offered in two languages. In Carinthia, children are taught on the basis of the registration principle, i.e. parents have the possibility of registering their children for bilingual instruction. Children whose mother tongue is not German receive remedial instruction (mainly in the German language), either separately or as part of classroom instruction. In addition, auxiliary instruction of a general nature is given to pupils needing remedial training in German or mathematics. The parents of children with special educational needs are entitled to choose between a special school and a primary school that meets the necessary framework requirements for integrated teaching. Classes with children in need of special education have less pupils and are provided with additional teaching staff for at least several days a week. The competences to legislate on this matter in detail lay with the provinces.

The teaching and learning process is carried out by the class teacher excepting religious instruction and partly technical and/or textile work. Teachers decide autonomously the teaching methods and materials they want to use. However, the form and content of such methods and materials must comply with the curriculum for the respective year and be suited to children of that age.

Performance assessment should be spread as evenly as possible over the respective period reviewed. Achievement and performance is determined by assessing: active participation of pupils in class work; oral performance; written work (class papers, tests, dictations); practical work; graphic performance (e.g. in subjects such as descriptive geometry). Teachers are responsible for all assessments and generally assess skills and capabilities in individual subjects. Marks range from 1 to 5. Both compulsory and optional subjects are graded. Schools issue reports (at the end of

the first semester), annual reports (at the end of the year) and certificates (after successful completion of a particular school type). The annual report reflects pupils' achievements during the entire year, with particular attention being paid to the most recent assessments. For assessment purposes the following grades are used: very good (1), good (2), satisfactory (3), sufficient (4), and insufficient (5). In pre-primary classes no marks are given. The report simply contains a record of the child's participation. The first two years of primary education are considered as one unit. All first-graders progress to the second grade regardless of their assessment in the annual report. As a general rule, pupils are entitled to pass the next grade if they have been assessed in all compulsory subjects and were never rated 'insufficient' (however, the law establishes the possibility of passing to the next grade in certain cases with one 'insufficient' rating). Children who are not entitled to pass to the next grade may repeat the grade in which they failed, provided that the maximum number of years of compulsory schooling is not exceeded. In year 4, pupils complete between four and six class papers in German and mathematics. In the course of year 4, either towards the end of the first term or at the beginning of the second term of the school year, parents/guardians are provided further educational recommendations for their children, based on his/her interests and past achievements. Successful completion of the fourth grade is a prerequisite for admission to the lower secondary school. (BMUKK, 2008).

In order to be admitted to an academic secondary school, pupils must have been assessed with 'very good' or 'good' in German, reading and mathematics. However, this is not necessary if the school conference states that, in spite of a grade of 'satisfactory' in these compulsory subjects, and judging from other achievements, the child will be able to meet the requirements of academic secondary school. Children failing to meet these requirements may be registered for an admission test by their parents or guardian with the school head of an academic secondary school. The above aptitude requirements can be waived if the admission test is successfully completed. The admission test covers the subject matter in the fourth grade of primary school at a slightly more difficult level. It comprises both a written and an oral test. This admission test may not be repeated within the same school year.

In 1999/2000, there were 3,389 primary schools (including pre-primary education offered to 7,168 children in 673 pre-primary classes and groups) with 393,460 pupils enrolled. The number of teachers (including heads, full-time and part-time staff) was 33,903. The pupil-teacher ratio was 11.6:1 and the average number of pupils per class was 19.8. According to Statistics Austria, in 2004/05 there were 3,324 primary schools with 364,900 pupils enrolled. The total number of teachers was 31,726 (of whom 28,547 were women).

The Federal Ministry reports that in 2010/11 there were 3,171 primary schools and the total enrolment was 327,663 children (including 7,599 children in pre-primary classes/groups), of whom 158,549 were girls. The total number of teaching staff was 29,653, of whom 26,867 were women. In addition, there were 321 special education schools with 13,198 pupils enrolled (of whom 4,701 were girls) and 5,911 teachers, of whom 5,071 were women. (BMUKK, 2011).

Secondary education

As mentioned, secondary education is provided at different types of schools. The lower secondary school (*hauptschule*) covers grades 5-8 and provides general education preparing students for a possible transfer to intermediate and upper secondary schools/colleges or for employment. Students with an appropriate level of achievement in German, reading and mathematics (e.g. 'very good' or 'good') can transfer to the academic secondary school without having to pass the admission test. Students who have successfully completed lower secondary education (*hauptschule*) can be admitted to a pre-vocational school (polytechnic school), an intermediate or higher-level technical and vocational school or college, or an academic secondary school. At the end of lower secondary school pupils receive a certificate. Starting from 2012-2013 students in year 8 are expected to sit a test in German, mathematics and English. They will receive a feedback in terms of formative assessment, as the educational standards tests have no effect on the performance assessment and the resulting qualifications. (BMUKK, 2012).

The academic secondary school (*allgemeinbildende höhere schule*–AHS) comprises a four-year lower stage (AHS–*Unterstufe*, ages 10-14) and a four-year upper stage (AHS–*Oberstufe*, ages 14-18), culminating in the secondary school-leaving examination (*matura*). The first two years (Forms 1 and 2) are common for all students. The third and the fourth years (Forms 3 and 4), as well as the upper stage (Forms 5 to 8), are divided into three types: *gymnasium* (focus on languages, including classical languages), *realgymnasium* (focus on mathematics and geometry), and *wirtschaftskundliches realgymnasium* (focus on chemistry, home economics and handicraft). In addition, there is a separate upper-level type of gymnasium (*oberstufenrealgymnasium*) covering years 9 to 12 and offering three orientations, namely emphasis on science subjects (biology and environmental science, chemistry and physics), on design and crafts, or music (musical instruments). It is envisaged that starting from 2013/14 a new standardized, competence-oriented secondary school-leaving examination (including a nation-wide written part) will be introduced.

Students having completed grade 8 can also enter: (i) training colleges for kindergarten teachers and for non-teaching supervisory staff, which offer five-year programmes culminating in the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination; (ii) intermediate technical and vocational education schools offering programmes lasting one to two years (preparatory vocational training) or three to four years (advanced vocational training); students having successfully completed at least a three-year programme have access to regulated trades and they may acquire the qualification to pursue university studies by sitting the secondary school-leaving examination for working people, or they may sit the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination of the respective higher-level technical and vocational school after having completed a three-year add-on programme; (iii) higher-level secondary technical and vocational education schools or colleges offering five-year programmes leading to the secondary school-leaving and diploma examination. The new secondary school (*neue mittelschule*) is a comprehensive school for 10- to 14-year-olds introduced through pilot projects in 2008/09 as an alternative to the general secondary school (*hauptschule*) and the lower cycle of academic secondary school.



The pre-vocational school primarily offers basic vocational training to students having completed grade 8 (14- to 15-year-olds) and wishing to enter the working life after completion of compulsory schooling (one-year programmes, sometimes including a voluntary tenth year), preparing them for the transition to vocational training in the dual system or further studies. Vocational training is provided to a considerable extent through the apprenticeship training scheme (e.g. dual system: training in business or industry, combined with theoretical instruction at the compulsory vocational school). A wide range of training programmes in different occupations and trades are offered under the apprenticeship scheme, lasting between two and four years (three years being the average duration). Apprentices attend compulsory vocational school by age groups at least one day per week, or in blocks (course design) covering at least eight weeks per year. At the end of the training, students sit the final apprenticeship examination.

The lower secondary school (*hauptschule*) provides general education in coeducational classes. Lower secondary schools are often housed in the same building as, or adjacent to, a primary school. Usually the legal school-maintaining authority is a municipality or a municipal association. After an observation period (at least two weeks) students are allocated to one of three ability groups in German, mathematics and modern foreign language. Educational requirements in the top ability group correspond to those of the academic secondary school. Within one group students generally have approximately the same level of ability; however, internal differentiation is possible. In all other subjects there is mixed ability teaching within established classes. Individual schools can lay down special dates at which students are transferred to the next higher or next lower ability group. Compulsory preparatory/remedial teaching is provided to pupils preparing for being upgraded to a higher group or those facing downgrading, respectively. (BMUKK, 2008). Completion of grade 8 gives access to higher-level secondary technical and vocational education schools and colleges. Some of these institutions, however, also require: entrance examinations, sometimes differing according to the type of the student's school of origin; transitional classes attendance; or aptitude tests (even though there is a growing tendency to abolish such tests).

The officially prescribed total number of lessons per subject (e.g. a total of 120 lessons over four years) constitutes a framework which can be filled in, at the schools' discretion, by autonomous decisions. Where such decisions are not made, the non-discretionary timetable applies. The tables below show the weekly lesson timetable for the lower secondary school:

Austria. Lower secondary school (*hauptschule*): discretionary weekly lesson framework

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year				Total
	5	6	7	8	
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2	8
German language					15–21
Modern foreign language (English)					12–18
History and social studies					5–10
Geography and economics					7–12
Mathematics					14–20
Geometric drawing					2–6
Biology and environmental education					7–12
Chemistry					1.5–4
Physics					5–10
Music					6–11
Arts					7–12
Technological work/Textile work (*)					7–12
Nutrition and home economics					7–12
Physical education and sports					2–6
Total weekly periods	27–31	27–31	28–32	30–34	120

Source: BMUKK, 2008; Eurydice, 2008/09. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. In years 7 and 8, 32 lessons per year of vocational orientation are integrated into compulsory subjects. (*) As alternative compulsory subjects.

Austria. Lower secondary school (*hauptschule*): non-discretionary weekly lesson timetable (applicable in the absence of autonomous curricular provisions decided by the school)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	5	6	7	8
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
German language	5	4	4	4
Modern foreign language (English)	4	4	3	3
History and social studies	–	2	2	2
Geography and economics	2	1	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	4	4
Geometric drawing	–	–	–	2
Biology and environmental education	2	2	1	2
Chemistry	–	–	–	2
Physics	–	1	2	2
Music	2	2	1	1
Arts	2	2	2	1
Technological work/Textile work (*)	2	1	2	2
Nutrition and home economics	–	1.5	1.5	–
Physical education and sports	4	3	3	3
Total weekly periods	29	29.5	29.5	32

Source: BMUKK, 2008. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. In years 7 and 8, 32 lessons year of vocational orientation are integrated into compulsory subjects (*) As alternative compulsory subjects.

The curriculum also defines educational tasks not attributable to a particular subject which have to be tackled in an interdisciplinary process. It outlines general education objectives in five areas. They form the basis for interdisciplinary cooperation linking different subjects. Students are to develop subject-matter competence, personal competence and social skills in a balanced manner. The promotion of dynamic abilities is to prepare them for situations which cannot be coped with by memorised knowledge and acquired experiences, but by developing solutions in response to facts at hand. To complement instruction by immediate and practical contacts and by direct encounters, a number of corresponding activities may be undertaken. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Vocational guidance is provided as a compulsory practical exercise. There are also optional subjects and practical exercises. 'Nutrition and home economics' must be taught in coeducational groups. The same applies to the alternative compulsory subjects 'technological work' and 'working with textiles' if they are chosen by boys and girls. Normally lower secondary schools teach English as modern foreign language, but also French and Italian are offered to some extent. In border regions, Slovenian, Croatian, Hungarian, Czech or Slovak may be taught. Teachers are free to decide the teaching methods and materials they use. However, form and content must comply with the curriculum for the particular year and be suited for the students. Both head teachers and school inspectors are entitled to issue directives to teachers on this matter. Students are generally allowed to move up to the next year if they have been graded in all compulsory subjects and have not received a mark of 'insufficient' in their annual report. Special provisions with regard to the marking system apply to classes with ability grouping. (BMUKK, 2008).

The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 there were 1,158 lower secondary schools with a total enrolment of 192,616 students, of whom 91,655 were girls. The number of teaching staff was 28,328, of whom 19,991 were women. In addition, there were 323 'new secondary schools' with 34,324 students enrolled (of whom 16,189 were girls). (BMUKK, 2011).

Admission to the first year of the academic secondary school (AHS, lower stage) requires the successful completion of the fourth grade of primary school normally with 'very good' or 'good' marks in German, reading and mathematics. Admission from a lower secondary school requires a yearly report showing 'excellent achievement' or the remark that in the subsequent year at *hauptschule* the student would be eligible to attend the top achievement group in German, modern languages and mathematics. 'Satisfactory' is the minimum requirement for other required subjects.

The first stage of the AHS is organized in coeducational classes according to age and provides a comprehensive and in-depth general education. It has a dual function since it both prepares students for the subsequent attendance of the AHS second stage and also enables them to transfer to intermediate and higher technical and vocational schools. The first two years of the first stage are uniformly organized according to a common curriculum and serve as a period of observation and orientation. The curriculum corresponds to that of lower secondary school (*hauptschule*) and a modern foreign language is taught from the first year onwards. Starting from the third year three main orientations are available: emphasis on

languages (with a second modern foreign language or Latin); emphasis on geometric drawing, more mathematics and handicrafts); and emphasis on chemistry and handicrafts.

The tables below show the weekly lesson timetables of the academic secondary school:

Austria. Lower stage of the academic secondary school: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	5	6	7	8
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
German language	4	4	4	4
Modern foreign language	4	4	4	3
Latin/Second foreign language	–	–	4 (–,–)	3 (–,–)
History and social studies	–	2	2	2
Geography and economics	2	1	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	3 (4, 3)	3 (3, 3)
Biology and environmental education	2	2	1 (2, 1)	2
Chemistry	–	–	1 (–, 2)	2
Physics	–	1	2	2
Music	2	2	2	1 (1,2)
Arts	2	2	2	2
Technology/Textile work (**)	2	2	– (2, 2)	– (2, 3)
Physical education	4	4	3	3
Vocational guidance (**)				
Total weekly periods	28	30	31 (30,31)	31 (32,31)

Source: Eurydice, 2008/09. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. (*) Alternative compulsory subject. (**) Compulsory exercise (as block or as an integral part of instruction of the compulsory subject).

Austria. Lower stage of the academic secondary school (*realgymnasium*): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	5	6	7	8
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
German language	4	4	4	4
Modern foreign language	4	4	3	3
History and social studies	–	2	2	2
Geography and economics	2	1	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	4	3
Geometric drawing	–	–	–	2
Biology and environmental education	2	2	2	2
Chemistry	–	–	–	2
Physics	–	1	2	2
Music	2	2	2	1
Drawing	2	2	2	2
Technological/Textile work (*)	2	2	2	2
Physical education	4	4	3	3
Vocational guidance (**)	–	–	X	X
Total weekly periods	28	30	30	32

Source: BMUKK, 2008. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. (*) Alternative compulsory subject. (**) Compulsory exercise (a total of one to four lessons in years 7 and 8).

**Austria. Academic secondary school (upper stage, emphasis on languages):
weekly lesson timetable**

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	9	10	11	12
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
German language	3	3	3	3
Modern foreign language	3	3	3	3
Latin	3	3	3	3
Greek/Modern foreign language (*)	3	3	3	3
History/social studies/civic education	1	2	2	2
Geography and economics	2	1	2	2
Mathematics	3	3	3	3
Biology, environmental education	2	2	–	2
Chemistry	–	–	2	2
Physics	–	3	2	2
Psychology and philosophy	–	–	2	2
Informatics	2	–	–	–
Music	2	1	} 2 (*)	2 (*)
Arts	2	1		
Physical education	3	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	31	29	31	33
Compulsory electives (**)			6	

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. (*) Alternative compulsory subject. (**) A total of six periods to be distributed in years 10-12.

Austria. Academic secondary school (upper stage, emphasis on mathematics and science): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each year			
	9	10	11	12
Religious instruction	2	2	2	2
German language	3	3	3	3
Modern foreign language	3	3	3	3
Second modern foreign language/Latin (*)	3	3	3	3
History/social studies/civic education	1	2	2	2
Geography and economics	2	1	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	3	3
Biology, environmental education	2	3	-/2	2
Chemistry	-	-	3	2/3
Physics	2	3	2	2/3
Descriptive geometry	-	-	2/-	2/-
Psychology and philosophy	-	-	2	2
Informatics	2	-	-	-
Music	2	1	} 2 (*)	2 (*)
Arts	2	1		
Physical education	3	2	2	2
Total weekly periods	31	28	31	32
Compulsory electives (**)			8	

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes. (*) Alternative compulsory subject. (**) A total of eight periods to be distributed in years 10-12.

The academic secondary school concludes with the school-leaving examination (*Reifeprüfung*). Students having passed the examination receive a certificate and are called *Maturantinnen/Maturanten* (higher-level secondary school graduates). The certificate provides access to university studies. A preliminary examination taking the form of a specialized paper may reduce the main examination to 3 written and 3 oral parts, one of which has to relate to the subject chosen for the specialized paper. An additional question refers to this paper. If the candidate does not prepare the specialized paper, the following option can be chosen: 3 written and 4 oral parts (one of which constitutes an oral specialist-topic examination); 4 written and 3 oral parts (one of which constitutes an oral specialist-topic examination). There are three variants of the specialist-topic examination: interdisciplinary, specialized or complementary. In the first case the question is 'composed' of two exam areas, in the second case the question relates to a specialist elective compulsory subject, in the third case another compulsory or elective subject is chosen in addition to a compulsory subject. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

Almost 28% of lower secondary school graduates and only 0.5% of first-stage academic secondary school graduates choose a pre-vocational school. On the other hand, more than 61% of first-stage AHS graduates move up to the second stage. Almost 57% of lower secondary school graduates subsequently attend an intermediate or higher-level technical and vocational school (21.2% and 27.9%, respectively), or



enter an apprenticeship (7.8%). About 30% of the students in the first stage of AHS subsequently move on to higher-level technical and vocational schools. (BMUKK, 2008).

In 2002/03 there were 327 academic secondary schools (lower and upper stage) with 189,753 students enrolled. The number of teaching staff was 19,690. The students/teacher ratio was 9.6:1 and the average number of students per class was 24.3. The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 there were 340 academic secondary schools with 200,742 students enrolled (112,330 students in the lower stage and 88,412 in the upper stage), of whom 108,517 were girls. The total number of teaching staff was 20,580, of whom 12,640 were women. (BMUKK, 2011).

The three major aims of the pre-vocational school (*polytechnische schule*.) are vocational guidance, general education and vocational preparation. The first six to eight weeks of the school year are devoted to extensive (also practical) vocational guidance (vocational orientation phase). Subsequently, the pupils may choose between seven specialized branches: metal, electronics, timber, construction, commerce-office, services, and tourism. The basic vocational curriculum essentially corresponds to that of the first years of intermediate technical and vocational schools. In addition, general education contents are increasingly offered. Successful completion of the pre-vocational school qualifies students for admission to the dual vocational training system, for a transfer to a secondary technical and vocational college, or a transfer to the second year of an intermediate technical and vocational school. Within the framework of school autonomy provisions, each school may tailor its programme to the regional requirements and to student vocational interests and abilities. (Eurydice, 2008/09). A network of pre-vocational schools is maintained throughout the country, and depending on local circumstances they are either run as independent schools or in organizational units together with academic secondary schools. In 2004/05, there were 276 pre-vocational schools with 21,482 students enrolled. The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 there were 255 pre-vocational schools with a total enrolment of 18,841 students, of whom 6,988 were girls. In the same year, the number of teaching staff was 2,271, of whom 1,226 were women. (BMUKK, 2011).

The training college for non-teaching supervisory staff trains supervisory staff for afternoon-care centres and boarding establishments for children and young people, as well as for youth work outside school. Admission is conditional upon the successful completion of year 8 and the passing of an aptitude test. The programmes last five years and end with a secondary school-leaving and diploma examination, giving access to university studies. Kindergarten teacher training colleges train prospective kindergarten teachers or, with an additional examination, prospective kindergarten and afternoon-care teachers combined. Admission criteria and prescribed length of studies at the kindergarten teacher training college are identical with those for training colleges for non-teaching supervisory staff. The programmes also end with a secondary school-leaving and diploma examination, giving access to university studies. For upper secondary school graduates, two-year postgraduate courses (*kollegs*) are provided in which the secondary school-leaving examination can be replaced by a higher education entrance examination or a secondary school-leaving examination for working people. The curriculum for both colleges comprises general education with subjects such as German, modern foreign language, history,



geography, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, music, movement and sports, as well as vocation-oriented subjects. The theoretical part takes place at the colleges, while the practical part is in kindergartens, afternoon care centres or boarding establishments (Heime). This practical part is under the supervision of specially trained kindergarten teachers or non-teaching supervisory staff, also with special training. (BMUKK, 2008). The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 there were 38 training institutions with 14,022 students enrolled (of whom 11,013 were girls); the total number of teaching staff was 1,521, of whom 1,230 were women. (BMUKK, 2011).

There are several types of intermediate secondary technical and vocational education schools, offering programmes lasting one to four years in a variety of fields, including: industry, trade and crafts (mostly four-year programmes); business and administration (three-year programmes); computer science (three-year programmes); food and beverage industry (three-year programmes); preparatory vocational qualification courses (lasting one or two years) for careers in social services, health, nutrition, business and tourism; etc. Higher-level secondary technical and vocational education colleges offer five-year advanced vocational training programmes, culminating in the matriculation and diploma examination. This entitles successful students to admission to university (additional tests may be required for some courses of study), to tertiary-level colleges (students who have completed higher-level technical and vocational colleges may receive credit for this, thereby shortening their courses by up to two semesters), and academies. Completion of occupational training courses also entitles students to admission to the various trades (and to practice regulated trades independently) as stipulated by the Trades Act. In each case, the regulations on occupational qualifications specify the examinations that must be taken and the duration of specialized vocational activities that must be completed. Once they have worked in their field for three years, graduates of most higher-level secondary industrial, agricultural and forestry colleges may apply to relevant federal ministries for authorization to use the professional title of *Ingenieur*. The BMUKK reports that in 2010/11 there were 693 technical and vocational schools and colleges (intermediate and higher level, including schools with a statute of their own) with 332,872 students enrolled, of whom 147,304 were girls. The total number of teaching staff was 26,678, of whom 12,619 were women. (BMUKK, 2011).

In addition to training at intermediate and higher-level technical and vocational schools/colleges a considerable amount of initial vocational training is provided by apprenticeship training schemes (dual system). The dual system is characterized by practical training in business and industry, combined with a theoretical course at a part-time compulsory vocational school. While apprenticeship is based on an apprenticeship contract under labour law, apprentices are still considered to be in compulsory education because they must enrol in a part-time vocational school. Approximately 40% of all young people aged 15 to 19 are prepared for their future occupations in the dual apprenticeship training scheme. Around 40,000 business establishments take part in this apprenticeship training scheme, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises in the fields of commerce and crafts, trade, tourism and leisure, training about 80% of all apprentices. Industrial enterprises and firms not affiliated with a Chamber also make a significant contribution to the training of young people. In 2008, around 250 occupations and trades were covered by the apprenticeship scheme. Part-time vocational schools are compulsory schools that must



be attended by all apprentices part-time or in blocks of time. Compulsory part-time vocational schools complement practical training in an enterprise by giving apprentices the theoretical knowledge necessary for their respective occupations. Their general aim is to promote and accompany the apprenticeship training period in business and industry and to broaden general education. Three compulsory subjects, viz. two specialized theoretical subjects and one business management subject, may be taught in two ability groups. In order to be admitted to apprenticeship training, young people must have completed nine years of compulsory education (BMUKK, 2008).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Traditionally the educational institutions are evaluated by means of self-evaluation as well as through inspection procedures performed by the school inspectorate. The school inspectorate primarily works at the level of the administrative districts and the provinces. There is no central and permanently established school inspectorate operated by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK). School inspectors look into the quality of teaching and the implementation of administrative tasks. As a general rule, the school head and the teachers visited should be previously informed about an intended school inspection, without however thwarting the purpose of the exercise. The school inspection ends with a meeting of the inspectors and the inspected teachers, which the school head may attend. This meeting is mainly advisory in nature. Not only should the detected shortcomings be emphasized, but also promising and positive aspects.

Until recently there was no tradition of external assessment in the school system or of a systematic evaluation of the national school system. Many school statistics so far have been purely descriptive rather than the result of systematic evaluation. In addition to the perceived need for greater comparability of students' performances, the results of the international comparative studies such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) caused doubts among Austrian students and their parents concerning the benefit and quality of education and training. International performance studies have also shown that quality assurance systems focusing exclusively on input monitoring no longer meet practical requirements. Therefore, the BMUKK is now placing special importance on the development and introduction of nationwide educational standards testing. The country is currently undergoing a paradigm shift in education policy, namely the transition from input orientation to output orientation. While input orientation is concerned with the content of instruction, output orientation focuses on the expected results of students' learning at a specific point of time. Students' learning performance and their academic achievement is taken as a basis for orientation for further development. Output orientation gives rise to external assessments and in Austria's case the development, implementation and external testing of educational standards. Educational standards are normative expectations determining the lasting and effective competences that students are expected to have acquired by the end of year 4 in German (reading and writing) and mathematics, and by the end of year 8 in mathematics, German and English. Standards describe the expected learning outcomes, focusing on the core areas of a subject. They also define the basic subject and interdisciplinary competences which are crucial for further education. As schools become increasingly



autonomous, more and more emphasis is laid on standards to ensure comparability. Therefore, educational standards serve as a means of self-evaluation for schools and teachers. (Eurydice, 2009).

The development of educational standards began in 2001/02 with the appointment of a steering group consisting of representatives of the BMUKK, the school administration and regional school inspectorates (compulsory schools and academic secondary schools), the scientific community and the Centre for School Development. The educational standards were later piloted in 2003/04 and 2004-2007. The results of the pilot scheme have formed a basis for further development and baseline testing. A 2008 amendment to the School Education Act provided the legal basis for the introduction of educational standards and the statutory regulation entered into force at the beginning of 2009. The first country-wide standards tests are expected to take place in 2012 and 2013. (*Ibid.*).

In September 2006 a new institution concerned with the increased requirements as to quality development and evaluation was founded, e.g. the Federal Institute for Research on Education, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (BIFIE). The BIFIE also absorbed the former Centre for School Development and in 2008 it was legally empowered as a public service institution. The BIFIE consists of three centres. The centre (headquarters) in Salzburg concentrates on national and international assessments, international large-scale studies such as PISA and national school performance assessment programmes in connection with educational standards. The centre in Graz deals with scientific projects in educational research and evaluation, especially evaluation projects concerning innovation in schools which were formerly conducted by the Centre for School Development. The centre in Vienna prepares measures of quality development for schools and is concerned with devising and implementing educational standards for years 4 and 8. The BIFIE also conducts and evaluates the educational standards tests. (*Ibid.*).

In 1995/96 Austria for the first time participated in TIMSS, an extensive collection of comparative data on the achievements of the school system and of pupils in mathematics and science subjects. At that time, this study showed extremely differing results for the various age groups: while primary school pupils achieved very good results, the results of the grade 8 students were only average. Upper level secondary school graduates showed lower achievements when compared internationally. The results of the PISA studies 2000, 2003 and 2006 gave rise to intensive discussions on education in Austria. In PISA 2000 the achievements of Austrian pupils were, when compared internationally, average or slightly below average after the evaluation criteria had been revised. This study also showed a clear socio-economic differential between the achievements of pupils from lower-income families and those from higher-income families. In PISA 2003 Austria's results were, when compared internationally, below average; there were also clear indications that the Austrian school system was relatively costly when compared to the results achieved. The impression given by the first PISA study, i.e. that there was a strikingly large socio-economic differential in pupils' achievements, was reinforced. By and large, the results of PISA 2006 confirmed the previous two studies. What is particularly troubling from the Austrian point of view is the relatively bad performance of pupils with a migration background, both first-generation and second-



generation pupils, as well as the differences in achievement between girls and boys: while girls show significantly better reading competences—as was also shown by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2006—boys show markedly better achievements in the science field. (BMUKK, 2008).

Compared to PISA 2006, in 2009 Austrian students lost 20 points in the proficiency test “reading” on which this PISA cycle had focused. The OECD admitted, however, that interpretation of this result was subject to “reservations”. The data complied with the technical standards of the OECD but the possibility could not be ruled out that a call to boycott PISA during the first test week had influenced the students and/or had had a negative impact on the framework conditions. In the reading tests of previous PISA studies the Austrian students had achieved very similar scores (2000: 492; 2003: 491; 2006: 490). Austria has always been significantly below the OECD average but it should be pointed out that the OECD average score in reading dropped from 500 to 493 between 2000 and 2009 due to the inclusion of new countries. In mathematics the Austrian students seem to have been more motivated according to the OECD. In this subject the Austrian students achieved a score of 496, corresponding exactly to the OECD average (rank 18) and to a minus of 9 points compared to PISA 2006 (but also in mathematics the OECD average declined by two points between 2006 and 2009). In 2003 Austria had scored 506 points in mathematics, compared to 503 in 2000. In science the Austrian students achieved a score of 494, a 17 points decrease compared to 2006. This means that their score deteriorated from a level that was significantly above the OECD average to a level significantly below it (OECD average in 2009: 501). Another striking fact is that the science score has always fluctuated. In 2000 the Austrian students achieved 505 points, in 2003 491 points, and in 2006 511 points. The development concerning ‘at-risk students’ is particularly concerning. In 2009, 28% of all students at the end of compulsory school age failed to understand the full meaning of the text in the reading literacy test, whereas this share was only at 21.5% 2006. In 2009, 15% of the students belonged to the at-risk group in all three test areas, compared to merely 10% in 2006.

Teaching staff

As mentioned, kindergarten teacher training colleges train prospective kindergarten teachers or, with an additional examination, prospective kindergarten and afternoon-care teachers combined. Admission is conditional upon the successful completion of year 8 and the passing of an aptitude test. The programmes last five years and end with a secondary school-leaving and diploma examination, giving access to university studies. For upper secondary school graduates, two-year postgraduate courses (*kollegs*) are provided in which the secondary school-leaving examination can be replaced by a higher education entrance examination or a secondary school-leaving examination for working people. Kindergarten teachers’ legal and contractual status, as well as their salary, depends on the type of employer. They may have civil-service status or be employed on the basis of a private-law contract. They are evaluated by kindergarten inspectors of the respective provinces. In-service training for kindergarten teachers is mandatory in almost all of the provinces. The amount of time which has to be devoted to further training varies, and ranges from three to five days per year. In-service training activities are offered by: those units within the provincial further-education departments responsible for kindergarten teachers; kindergarten providers; or university colleges of teacher education. In general, further-training



activities are financed by the institutions offering them. Contributory fees may, however, be charged. (BMUKK, 2008; Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

Teachers for the pre-primary year and primary school are trained at tertiary-level university colleges of teacher education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). Candidates for university colleges must have passed the secondary school-leaving examination, or a special higher education entrance examination or secondary school leaving examination for working people. The training course for prospective primary school teachers lasts at least six semesters (three years) leading to the award of the degree of Bachelor of Education. Normally prospective primary school teachers acquire the qualification for teaching all subjects in primary school (except religious instruction) and pre-primary education. Primary school teachers are provincial employees either under a private-law contract or a public-law contract (tenured civil servants). In certain cases part-time employment is possible. Teachers receive in-service training either through autonomous study or by attending training events, with 15 hours per year of such training being compulsory. These in-service training events can be attended during the holidays, in the teacher's free time or during working hours. The programmes are usually designed for specific target groups (teachers of one school type or of one specific subject), but sometimes interdisciplinary seminars are offered that are open to all teachers. For some courses, special admission criteria (restricted number of participants) may apply. In-service training activities mainly focus on the following areas: technical theory in the relevant field; teaching methodology (general, related to a subject matter); school law and organization; teacher development, school development, autonomy. An increasing number of courses are devoted to topics such as school management, quality assurance, environmental protection, ICT, internationalization, foreign languages, integration of children with special educational needs and multicultural education. (*Ibid.*).

Initial training at university colleges of teacher education for acquiring the teaching qualification at general special schools is part of the tertiary sector. Studies leading to the teaching qualification for special schools focus on the general aspects of teaching disabled or disadvantaged children, with special emphasis on integration. The curriculum includes courses in the humanities, didactics, practical teaching problems as well as supplementary courses; additional events offered in modular form focus on aspects specific to certain disabilities. Admission to the university colleges of teacher education depends on the successful passing of the secondary school-leaving examination. Admission is also granted if the higher education entrance examination or the secondary school-leaving examination for working people has been successfully passed. The study course for acquiring the teaching certificate for special schools lasts at least six semesters (three years) leading to the award of the Bachelor of Education. Amongst other qualifications students are to acquire the skills of assisting and supporting students, giving them, if possible, an education corresponding to that at primary school, lower secondary school or pre-vocational school, and preparing them for integration into working or vocational life. In-service training programmes, which partly go beyond the scope of individual provinces, help to develop methodical and didactic competences for specific disabilities, e.g. for hearing-impaired and deaf pupils, physically disabled pupils, visually impaired or maladjusted pupils. University colleges of teacher education offer in-service training in the form of regional and supra-regional seminars and events on various points of emphasis such as specific disabilities or specific developments. (BMUKK, 2008).



Teachers in lower secondary schools often teach their subjects to the same class for all four years, although changes may be necessary for various reasons. Lower secondary and pre-vocational school teachers, just like primary and special school teachers, follow tertiary-level training at university colleges of teacher education. The study course for acquiring the teaching certificate for the lower secondary or the pre-vocational school lasts at least six semesters (three years) leading to the award of the Bachelor of Education. Teachers for lower secondary and pre-vocational schools are qualified in at least two subjects (subject teacher system). They teach their subjects in various classes and, provided one of the ability group subjects is involved, in different ability groups.

Teachers at academic secondary schools are trained at universities or universities of the arts. Courses for qualifying as a teacher are defined as diploma programmes. They last at least nine semesters (four and a half years). Students must pass two diploma examinations and submit a diploma paper in order to graduate with an academic degree (*Magister*). Studies include academic training in two subjects, pedagogical training and a term of school practice (*schulpraktikum*) comprising a four-week introductory phase and eight weeks of teaching practice. The *Magister* diploma does not automatically entitle candidates to a teaching post. Prior to being employed, graduates have to successfully complete both a year of teaching at a school and accompanying seminars. Teachers at academic secondary schools are federal employees under either a private-law contract or a public-law contract (tenured civil servants). Part-time employment is possible. The training of teachers of general subjects at intermediate and higher-level technical and vocational schools is the same as that of academic secondary school teachers. Teachers of special subjects/theoretical part at higher technical and vocational schools must have professional experience in their respective subjects in addition to relevant university training. Teachers of practical subjects and teachers of theoretical subjects at intermediate technical and vocational schools receive special training (at university colleges of teacher education); in addition they must have professional experience in their respective subjects. (*Ibid.*).

Teacher salaries are regulated in the pertaining law (Emoluments Act). Depending on their training and type of service at the individual schools, teachers with civil-service status are remunerated according to a total of six remuneration groups. In the case of contract teachers the remuneration groups are replaced by the same number of pay groups. The mandatory teaching load at the federal level is regulated by the Act on the Teaching Assignment of Federal Teachers, for teachers at the provincial level it is regulated in the pertaining provisions of the law governing their service (Service Code for Province-employed Teachers). For teachers at the federal level, the subjects a teacher teaches count – depending on their subject group – towards the compulsory teaching load of 20 hours per week. The group a subject belongs to is laid down in the Act on the Teaching Assignment of Federal Teachers or in the pertaining curriculum. Subjects belong to one of six groups designated with the numerals I to VI. Subjects of group I count as 1.167 units, those of group VI as 0.75 units per classroom hour towards the compulsory teaching load of 20 hours per week. Province-employed teachers at general compulsory schools are governed by an annual working time regime according to which every province-employed teacher has to work the same number of hours during a school year as a comparable public servant in general administration. To meet the teaching load, 720 to 792 unit hours (20 to 22



weekly units) must be taught in the course of a school year; 600 to 660 hours are spent on planning and follow-up work after classes. The remaining 330 to 470 hours to meet the annual standard are used to participate in conferences, stay in contact with parents or guardians, administrative work, and possibly taking part in school events (e.g. sports weeks). The times of performance are laid down by the timetable and fixed hours at which the teacher is at school; other than that, non-instruction working hours may be organised at the teacher's discretion. Federal teachers and province-employed teachers at part-time compulsory vocational schools perform auxiliary tasks (e.g. maintenance of IT workstations and running the school library) which count towards the compulsory teaching load. This reduces the number of hours actually spent teaching in a classroom. Some non-teaching activities, e.g. duties as a class head teacher or custodian, are remunerated separately or may count towards the compulsory teaching load. In part, remuneration for these services is already included in teachers' basic salaries. (Eurydice, 2008/09).

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Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/>
[Mainly in German; some information also available in English and French. Last checked: October 2012.]

Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (IBW):
<http://www.ibw.at/> [In German and English. Last checked: October 2012.]

Knowledge-Base Adult Education Website: <http://www.adulteducation.at/> [In
German; some information also available in English. Last checked: October 2012.]

Portal of the Vocational Schools Austria: <http://www.berufsbildendeschulen.at/> [In
German. Last checked: October 2012.]

*For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information
network on national education systems and policies in Europe:*
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

*For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of
UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>*