

The Austrian Education System

In Austria the general compulsory schooling starts with the completed 6th year of one's life and amounts to 9 years. The primary level has the two branches primary school (comprehensive school) and the special needs school for mentally handicapped pupils which both last for four years.

The four-year-lasting primary level is followed by the secondary level I. There the students can choose between three different school branches which all last for four years (5th to 8th school year). Depending on the diploma of the primary level the following possibilities exist: the lower cycle of the secondary academic school, the new secondary middle school, the lower secondary school as well as the special needs school. The new secondary middle school is a model experiment and is designed as a Comprehensive School. It orientates itself on the curriculum of the lower cycle of the secondary academic school.

The 9th level of education at the secondary level I is followed by the secondary level II. There the differentiation increases within the Austrian school system. Depending on their diploma in the secondary level I the adolescents have the chance to choose between the general-education school branch and several vocational training school branches. A higher general-education offer is provided by the upper cycle in the secondary academic school (AHS upper cycle). It is intended for the preparation of educational programs in the tertiary level like university and concludes with the general qualification for university admission. In the vocational training field the pupils have the choice between the apprenticeship training in the dual system, the VET school (BMS), the VET college (BHS) (without 4th and 5th year) as well as the prevocational school and the integrative apprenticeship training.

In the dual system the attendance of the vocational part-time school is obligatory. The vocational part-time schools last as many school years as the apprenticeships require which is depending on the later profession. The apprenticeship training lasts from two to four years but usually three years. The schools teach the apprentices in the extra-occupational lessons the basic theoretical knowledge and advance and complement the vocational training at the companies as well as the general education.

VET schools (BMS) last from one to four years. If they last one or two years they attain only a part of apprenticeship training and if they last three to four years they attain fully completed apprenticeship training. After the qualification of at least three years of vocational education middle secondary school advanced training courses alternatively lead to the qualification for university admission. However, this qualification leads only to vocational corresponding

studies at university or to the vocational matriculation examination which is the general qualification for university admission.

VET colleges (BHS) teach a funded general education and higher apprenticeship training within five years and seclude with a matriculation and diploma examination. The matriculation examination qualifies for studies at university, polytechnic schools and colleges of education. The diploma examination qualifies for the access to a profession regulated by law.

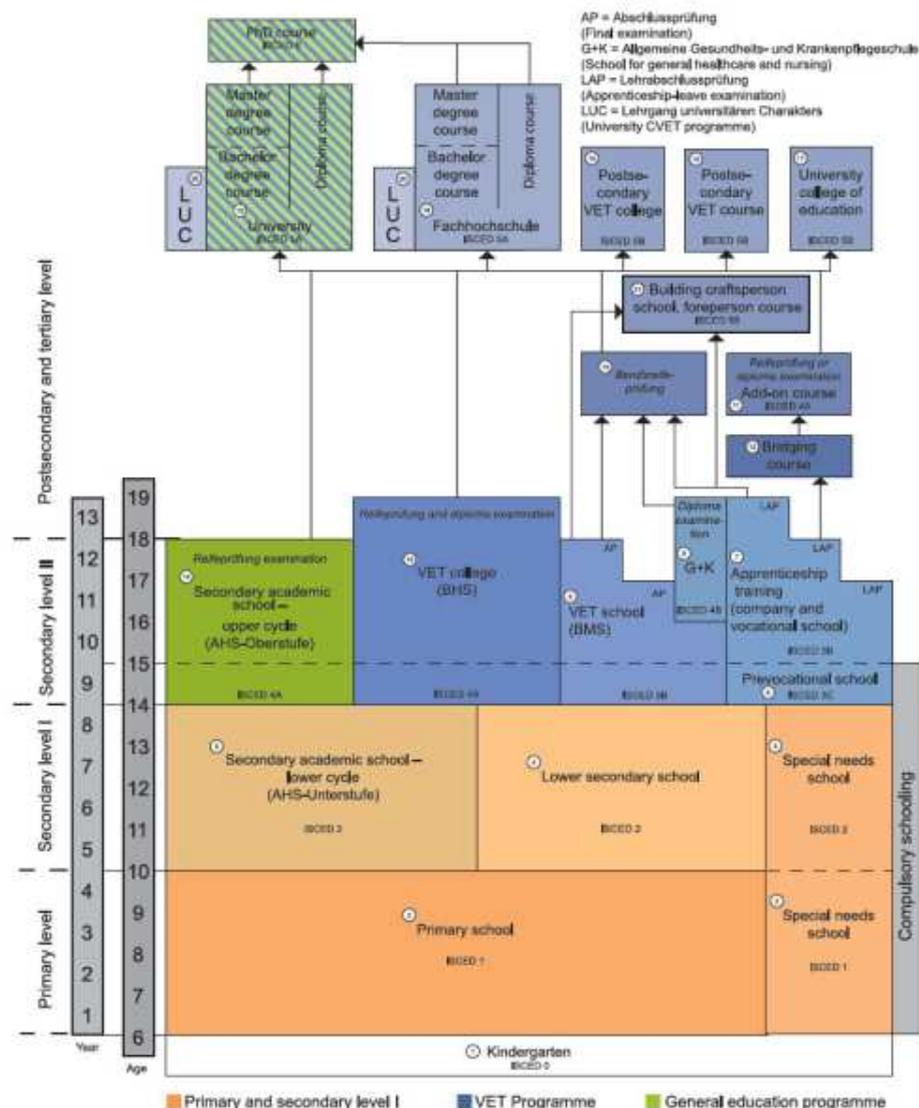


Figure 2 The Austrian education system (ibw 2008, p. 1)

Especially remarkable is that approximately 80% of all pupils are in the educational background of the professional field of the secondary level II. This is also reflected in the educational biography of the students. The majority of students attended a professional school before. The professional education is not only based on the dual system and on the full-time professional schools (BMS resp. BHS) which is reflected in the number of pupils. In each case half of the pupils who decided after secondary level I to attend the apprenticeship training are in the dual system resp. in the full-time professional schools (BMS resp. BHS). Therefore the apprenticeship training in the secondary level II is characterized by a „Double-Pillar-Model“ in a structural as well as in a quantitative view.