

■ Governance of the VET System

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Preface

This report provides an overview of the **state of research** in the following four **areas of vocational education and training (VET)**:

- (a) the benefits of VET
- (b) VET and employment-related mobility and migration
- (c) governance of the VET system
- (d) labour market groups at risk

Each chapter first of all analyses **relevant research questions and challenges** in Austria before presenting and discussing the **main findings** of available research projects. In the final **synopsis**, conclusions are drawn from research findings and implications for further research work demonstrated. A **summary** preceding each chapter enables readers to gain a quick overview of the content.

The **selection** of these four topics is closely linked with current educational policy debates on VET in Austria, which have been triggered not least by European developments. The topic of “governance”, for example, has regained importance due to activities in connection with the development of a lifelong learning strategy. Debates related to creating and implementing a national qualifications framework and a European credit point transfer system have again put the subject of “employment-related mobility and migration” increasingly on the educational policy agenda. Precisely because of the diversity of VET programmes, the promotion of equality of opportunity in VET and the implementation of measures for groups disadvantaged on the labour market are central topics in Austria, like the benefits of VET.

One **reason** why VET plays a major role in Austrian research is its high relevance in the **Austrian education landscape**. This is shown, on the one hand, by the high attractiveness of VET programmes for young people: some 80% of all pupils who have completed compulsory schooling opt for a VET path. On the other hand, the major significance of VET can also be seen in the diversity of programmes. A pronounced differentiation both in the school-based and in the dual VET sector ensures that every young person is able to optimally develop their strengths and talents. The success of the Austrian VET system is reflected in the low youth unemployment rate and the international recognition of Austrian skilled workers.

This report has been prepared by **authors** from the 3s research laboratory and the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS). For **coordination and editing** the Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (ibw) was responsible. Valuable feedback and useful comments were submitted by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK), in particular Ms Sonja Lengauer, for which all people involved in this report would like to extend their thanks at this point.

This report is part of a series of country reports on national research priorities in the field of VET in the EU member states, Norway and Iceland (*National VET Research Report*). It was drawn up within the framework of ReferNet – the reference and information network of Cedefop (<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/networks/refernet/index.aspx>).

To complement this report, information about the Austrian VET system can be found in the report *VET in Europe. Country Report Austria*. Additional information about VET policy is included in the *VET Policy Report*.

Sabine Tritscher-Archan

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Governance of the VET System

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Although the term “governance” has only been used in recent years and is to date by no means very widespread, research projects have been carried out on many of its facets that deal with the key questions related to this subject. Most research projects on the school sector are conducted from a pedagogical and educational science perspective; the social partnership – which is pivotal for apprenticeship training – has been studied from the political science perspective; within the framework of social scientific research on education there are some studies on a series of special aspects, e.g. PISA survey results in the light of the governance system, quality assurance and governance, governance of the LLL strategy, anticipation as a governance problem. The key findings of this present overview are, first of all, that the governance problems present in the Austrian education system need to be seen as part of more general governance problems, due to the fact that legal and constitutional provisions are written in a particularly dense and detailed manner. All previous attempts to rectify this situation have to date not been crowned with success. A second finding is that both the Austrian education system and the VET system itself are regulated and managed by several different governance systems that act partly in parallel but also partly overlap, with no overall control existing. A predominant research issue is the Fachhochschule sector, which has been explicitly conceived and established as a new “outcome-oriented” governance system.

1. National research issues and goals

1.1. Introduction and background

The governance structures and mechanisms in the education system cannot be seen as independent from the entire state’s governance systems, as the education system - with the exception of ALE – is closely integrated in them.¹ As in most other countries, there has been debate in Austria since the 1980s about the efficiency of established governance systems (Wutscher and Hammerschmid, 2005; Hammerschmid and Meyer, 2005). One related milestone was Austria’s accession to the EU and the associated change of national and European competences. Additional influences are international debates related to the welfare state and the social model, as well as the influential paradigm of new public management. In recent decades this general governance discussion in Austria has been dominated by three major themes, which can also be understood as the background for debates and research work in the education system:

¹) The concept of governance has no clear and generally shared definition (as can also be seen from the literature quotes referred to in this chapter; cf. above all Altrichter et al. 2005, 2007). In English it is mainly about extending the concept of “government” by the different, actually effective processes and actors; in German it is mainly about extending the concept of “political control”.

- (a) State bureaucracy mainly at the national level is a regular subject and issue of administrative reforms under a wide range of government constellations, with staff cuts forming one major focus;
- (b) The system of Austrian social partnership is seen and analysed as a special system of neo-corporatist governance; it came under strong pressure to change at the turn of the millennium due to the centre-right coalition of ÖVP and FPÖ/BZÖ, but has in the meantime re-established itself;
- (c) The fairly strongly pronounced system of federalism is discussed from perspectives of efficiency and efficacy and has in recent years also been the subject of an attempted “state reform” aiming to newly regulate relations between the federal and provincial governments (<http://www.konvent.at/>).

Of the three mentioned general discussion and research issues, the education system as well as VET are indirectly affected, and general debates also have an impact on the special issues.

Austrian VET in the narrower sense mainly comprises: (a) the sector of apprenticeship training, which includes part-time vocational school (BS), and (b) the full-time school sector, which comprises schools at different levels (BMSs: VET schools, and BHSs: VET colleges). These different sectors are subject to different governance systems, in addition there are some other special sectors (e.g. agriculture, health), which themselves are controlled by separate governance systems.² In the field of apprenticeship training, the company-based part is managed by the Economics Ministry with the involvement of social partner organisations, the school-based part is within the sphere of the Education Ministry. BMSs and BHSs are also within the responsibility of the Education Ministry.

VET in the wider sense can also be understood to comprise Fachhochschulen (FHs, comparable to the former polytechnics in Britain), teacher training and universities. Each of these segments has their own governance systems. Universities fall within the sphere of the Science Ministry and underwent radical reform towards autonomy in the year 2002. Teacher training is in the process of reform, whereby it is being transformed into a new system of so-called university colleges of education (PHs). The FH sector was created in the 1990s; it was explicitly conceived and implemented with an accreditation model, also with a view to the governance model, as a reform sector.

The state’s responsibilities in the fields of adult learning (ALE) and continuing education and training (CET) are very limited (provinces and municipalities have some competences while, the Education Ministry promotes ALE on a statutory basis). Major ALE/CET institutions are run by the social partners, another section is in the hands of communal and regional administrations (municipalities and federal provinces), a third section is organised according to private law and partly also run by private companies. A very significant area in quantitative terms is about qualification and skills training within the framework of active labour market policy, which is organised by the Public Employment Service (AMS) and subject to the control of the Labour Ministry.

²) The education and training systems in agriculture and health are still governed by the ministries that are responsible for the respective sectors, in the health sector the regional governments have a strong say. In agriculture the schools have been formally adapted to the overall VET structure, and they are also included in the common education statistics, whereas in health this is not the case. This system is still clearly separate from the overall education and training system.

Therefore, in the Austrian education system overall several different governance systems exist side by side, which are managed by different authorities. There is no connected, overarching centralised control or centralised responsibility for the education system. In some segments, efforts were launched a few years ago to take steps towards centralised control within the framework of the development of a lifelong learning (LLL) strategy (Chisholm et al., forthcoming). A comprehensive descriptive study of the governance system in VET was conducted in 2000 (Mayer et al., 2000; on governance in the field of labour market policy, which comprises a major part of ALE, cf. also Lassnigg, 2004).

At research level many projects and initiatives have been conducted since the 1990s that deal, in different segments, with certain aspects of the governance systems in education and VET, although an overarching explicit research agenda does not exist in this field so far³. These research assignments are distributed in a specific way across the disciplines: with the exception of research projects on the special Austrian system of social partnership, which is also of particular importance in the field of apprenticeship training for VET, political science has yet to take steps to become involved. Existing research is mainly found in pedagogy/educational science (particularly for the school sector) as well as in economic and social scientific educational research (VET, ALE, HE research).

Since the 1990s there has been increasing awareness about the weaknesses and problems in the governance systems of the Austrian education system in different educational segments from both the practical⁴ and political side. School administration, in particular, which is still structured in a traditional, bureaucratic manner and is very complex due to its strong federalist component, has undergone major reform efforts over the past few years. Also in ALE/CET, in connection with promoting LLL, there have been efforts to further develop the governance system since the consultation process on the EU Memorandum.

The traditions and developments that today's research on governance issues is based on can be summarised as follows:

- (a) A major part of previous research is more or less oriented descriptively and attempts to describe and understand the existing Austrian system and contrast it with aspects from discourses concerning new public management, frequently with normative demands in the direction of required changes (on VET cf. Mayer et al., 2000).
- (b) This means that descriptive and normative requirements are often mixed in research, whereas causal-analytical research on governance issues is almost non-existent. Research takes part in political discourses primarily with a pronounced orientation towards application and develops reform proposals.
- (c) One research line with at least indirect relevance for governance issues, which developed first, is evaluation research with its origins in the early 1980s in the sector of active la-

³) "With a few exceptions [...] even the internationally increasingly postulated ideas of 'governance' in the sense of a political understanding that is marked by a stronger sense of partnership [...] have to date met with little resonance." (original in German, Wutscher and Hammerschmid 2005, 119).

⁴) Already in the first major expert statement about the problems of the Austrian school governance system it was documented in the form of a large number of case studies from school practice how inhibiting and resource-consuming the bureaucratic system was (Posch and Altrichter, 1992).

bour market policy, later in regional and innovation policy, then also in the HE sector and school development (cf. Lassnigg, 2009).

- (d) In the school sector, governance research work was started in the 1990s with several expert statements about the possibilities of autonomising school locations, to which subsequent research projects about various special governance issues (bottom-up school development, quality assurance/development, leadership, education standards, etc.) linked implicitly and explicitly (cf. mainly Posch and Altrichter, 1992; Eder, 2002; Altrichter et al., 2005; Specht 2006).
- (e) In the HE sector, the setting up and implementation of the FH sector was connected with accompanying research that attributed major importance to the subject of governance and was explicitly geared towards the development and establishment of a new governance model that contrasted with existing structures (cf. Lassnigg et al., 2003; Pechar, 2004; Prisching et al., 2004; Lassnigg and Unger, 2006; Holzinger and Jungwirth, 2009).
- (f) The university sector has repeatedly undergone new governance reforms since the 1970s, until its most recent radical autonomisation, which was inspired by the FH reform and was also conducted with specific support by researchers (cf. Titscher et al., 2000; Zechlin, 2002).
- (g) In the field of ALE/CET, governance issues have mainly been dealt with in connection with financing, whereas there is very little research in connection with debates regarding a reform of the regulation (cf. Markowitsch and Strobl 2005; Lassnigg, 2007).
- (h) In apprenticeship training very little explicit research about the functioning of the governance model has been conducted. But this sector was also indirectly affected by research projects related to the future of social partnership around 2000, when the latter came under strong pressure due to the right-wing populist change of government (cf. e.g. Traxler et al., 2001; Karlhofer and Tálos, 2005).

More substantial contributions to Austrian research on issues of governance in the education system have mainly been made based on general education schools against the background of their long history with moderately successful reform and development attempts (cf. mainly Altrichter et al., 2005).

1.2. Development of the FH sector: policy borrowing or policy learning?

The entire Austrian FH sector was newly created in the 1990s and - as opposed to many other countries - does not link to existing institutions. This means that existing VET colleges at secondary level (BHS) remained untouched and were not transformed - in an “upgrading” process – into the HE sector.⁵ The governance model for the FH sector was built up explicitly in contrast to existing state bureaucratic structures on an accreditation model that comprises the following elements:

- (a) The Fachhochschule Council as an independent professional accreditation authority decides about the quality and public finance eligibility of study programmes.

⁵) After the establishment of the FH sector, however, some postsecondary “HE related” institutions (e.g. the previous so-called “social academies” [*Sozialakademien*] as well as training institutions for professional level health professions) were accredited as FH programmes.

- (b) Study programmes need to be submitted to the accreditation council pursuant to certain criteria (also including an independent needs and acceptance appraisal).
- (c) Financing is conducted for a specified number of study places based on a decision of the Ministry of Science and Research; this decision itself is based on a multi-year development plan that lays down certain criteria.
- (d) A very wide range of providers can run FHs within a legal provisions framework and enjoy considerable autonomy in the designing of institutions.

At the time of its creation (1993), this governance model differed completely from the environment of Austrian school and university administrations, both of which were extremely bureaucratic state systems, and the question was repeatedly raised whether the new institutions would be able to survive at all. One particular feature of the FH system as opposed to the other sectors is that there are no detailed study regulations, but that the objective formulated from the start is to train in an “outcome-oriented” manner and on the basis of needs- (economy) and acceptance-surveys (potential students) with a view towards a particular qualification profile. Another special feature is that teaching staff are appointed by providers according to private law without being subject to detailed provisions.

On the occasion of the sector’s ten-year anniversary (in 2003), an analysis of the start-up phase was conducted, which also addressed many questions related to the governance system (Lassnigg et al., 2003). Parallel to that, legal-organisational analyses were conducted on the system. In another project, the structure of the sector was examined as a case study for policy learning. Subsequently a smaller study examined the special aspect of whether the objective of access to study programmes in the FH sector by apprentices had been reached. Some major findings of this study can be summarised in the following manner:

- (a) The setting up of an education sector that strongly deviates from its environment in terms of its governance system had been managed successfully, although some problems had come to the fore:
 - (i) A high density of regulations had also developed in this alternative governance system (Prisching, 2004).
 - (ii) Concerning results orientation, the focus was solely laid on the function of instruction as regards students and graduates, whereas no objectives had been formulated nor financial resources provided for the legally stipulated functions of research and regional services.
 - (iii) The private-business structure had in some areas led to a lack of transparency regarding financing and also, at some locations, to very weak staffing with those who mainly teach part-time. .
- (b) The establishment of a new education sector, which at that time represented a radical breach in the development of HE policy, was examined in terms of the connected processes of policy learning (Mayer and Lassnigg, 2006; Mayer, 2007). It was found that the concept of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1998) constitutes a very suitable approach for changes in Austrian HE policy. This implies that, for learning processes in core beliefs, substantial external changes are required, which in the critical period could be noted in Austria (grand coalition as a new form of government starting in 1986; new minister after 17 years for the first time of another political orientation as of 1987; decision for accession to EU in 1988; increasing budgetary bottlenecks; neoliberal state discourse in the entire OECD area).
- (c) A separate analysis dealt with the issue of why the original goal to open up access to the HE system to graduates of apprenticeships by setting up FHs had not worked (Winkler,

2008). This analysis comes to the conclusion that the reformed governance approach of the FH system was not well suited for pushing through objectives of public interest which, however, did not enjoy priority in the prevailing “advocacy coalitions”.⁶ The author argues that for the pursuit of public interest, which is not commonly shared by stakeholders in a deregulated system, stronger steering mechanisms might be necessary.

1.3. The complexity of school administration: comparative research on the administrative reform

Austrian school administration has for many years been seen as an obstacle to the further development of the school system. One relevant aspect is that – since 1962 up until a few years ago – almost all major provisions of school organisation were regulated at the federal level by the Constitution and any amendments required a two thirds majority in Parliament. This has been slightly softened but still applies for some major issues. A second aspect – mainly in the compulsory school sector – consists in the interlinking of national and regional competences, accompanied by a high degree of politicisation of decisions (in particular, staff decisions related to the teaching personnel for schools are made by political instances at provincial level). Of special relevance here is that expense-relevant decisions are made at provincial level, whereas financing is incumbent on the federal government, thus there is no congruency between the causing of expenditure and financing.⁷ A third aspect is that the governance system still corresponds clearly to the bureaucratic type and is “input controlled” (particularly via staff expenses and associated detailed regulations), with schools having only very little freedom of movement due to the density of regulations and, furthermore, their staff being assigned to them by higher authorities. These problems affect compulsory schools in particular. In VET, part-time vocational schools in apprenticeship training are financed jointly by the federal and provincial governments, VET full-time schools, however, fall within the sole sphere of responsibility of the federal government.

First and foremost, issues related to restricting the professional scopes of action in service provision were raised due to dense bureaucracy (Posch and Altrichter, 1992). With comparative large-scale assessments (PISA and TIMSS), issues related to the efficacy and efficiency of education expenses also came to the fore, as Austria has always been proud of its high level of expenditure, but this no longer seems justified due to the average results in the performance comparisons. For some time, therefore, there have been various attempts and demands for a fundamental reform of governance that is envisaged to provide schools with more

⁶) “The presentation of findings about the still low share of FH students with an apprenticeship diploma as access requirement and the presentation of the educational policy objective of permeability in the policy cycle as well as in the governance model of the FH sector reveals that it has not been possible to implement access to the HE system for apprenticeship graduates by using existing instruments. The dense educational policy network and the repeated emergence of new protagonist coalitions at the different levels can be influenced via a deregulated control system with extreme difficulty only [...] Finally the question arises whether systems of high complexity that need governance can be controlled more successfully by using control systems of even higher complexity than by hierarchical ones. In this case, no proof has been possible.” (original in German: Winkler, 2008, p. 175).

⁷) In compulsory schooling, the regional governments are responsible by law for the running and staffing of schools, and the federal government is mandated to refund their expenditure afterwards.

autonomy in service provision.⁸ Various studies have investigated aspects of this problem in detail.

A summary of the available knowledge level on the basis of international comparative and national studies was provided in a recent expert opinion on the structure and efficiency of the Austrian education system and its administration (Lassnigg et al., 2007; cf. also Lassnigg et al., 2009) with a separate section on the “governance of the school system” (ibid. p.116-146). In this context, reform proposals were developed and reasons given. Major (selected) findings of this study are the following:

- (a) The Austrian school system is still administered with the type of governance bureaucracy, which shows considerable deficiencies, particularly as regards the very complex structure of responsibilities and the lack of congruence between the raising and spending of financial resources in the relationship between the federal and provincial governments.
- (b) Variables that increase the efficiency of administration, as found by comparative analyses, have a weak presence in Austria: the scale of local decisions; clear responsibilities (mainly no overlaps); scale/assessment of teachers and schools by conducting performance tests; choice between public and private schools; use of benchmarking at school level (cf. Schmid, 2007 and 2005; Schmid et al., 2007);
- (c) the comparison of efficiency-promoting governance factors according to the institutional principal-agent model⁹ of Bishop and Woessmann (2004) with the Austrian structure also reveals a lack of efficiency-promoting factors (e.g. central exams; central standards and control; school autonomy in staff issues; influence of parents) and a strong degree of efficiency-reducing factors (e.g. the teachers’ influence over workload; the influence of the teachers’ trade union);
- (d) another major finding is that, in the bureaucratic model, no provisions are made for essential information flows and therefore the setting up of an accurate monitoring system about required input, process and result variables represent an indispensable prerequisite for improving the efficiency of the governance system. In particular, the information about results is lacking in a bureaucratic system, because it is assumed that the desired results would automatically be achieved by properly following the specified rules and regulations.

1.4. PISA performances and governance

Within the framework of the more in-depth national evaluations of the 2006 PISA survey, some aspects of the governance system are examined in great detail. Lassnigg and Vogtenhuber (2009) apply a multi-level model to appraise the effect of governance mechanisms on the performances in the three thematic areas of reading, mathematics and science. Also an overview of the governance structure of the Austrian school system in an international com-

⁸) One attempt in recent years was made within the framework of the envisaged “state reform” (cf. http://www.konvent.gv.at/K/Willkommen_Portal.shtml). In addition there is also a related proposal by the social partners (cf. Advisory Council for Economic and Social Issues / Beirat für Wirtschafts- und Sozialfragen 2007). At present a renewed attempt towards administrative reform is ongoing, in which the school sector plays a vital role.

⁹) The principal-agent model is based on an analysis of the interests of actors in the system and states that the efficiency of the services depends on a structure of incentives that might prevent opportunistic behaviour. The analysis shows that a typical school system uses many mechanisms to prevent opportunistic behaviour of students, however similar mechanisms for preventing opportunistic behaviour on the side of providers and teachers are often lacking.

parison is provided, to the extent this is possible by using the variables collected in the 2006 PISA survey.

Using the various institutional indicators in the PISA survey it is possible to describe the distribution of responsibilities and the individual schools' and state administration's potential to influence different governance aspects. The study has provided an overview based on a ranking of the indicators among the countries involved in the survey. In terms of staff responsibility (recruitment, dismissal and remuneration of teachers), the state's responsibility ranks among the top, while the school's responsibility lies back in 48th to 55th place (of 55 surveyed countries). The specification of the school budget is stipulated by the state, allocation is conducted at school level. School allocation in Austria, however, eliminates the financially most important item of staff costs and therefore only comprises a fraction of the budget. In the sphere of influence on teaching content and programmes (mainly in the selection of school textbooks, the state's influence is low) and in the process characteristics (student admission and disciplinary regime), school influence is in the (upper) midfield (between the twelfth and 26th place), the exam regime is however more strongly influenced by the state.

As far as decisions are taken at school level, this is primarily within the sphere of the bodies of democratic codetermination and only rarely of administrative management alone, and the structure is fairly homogeneous across the different school types (as can be expected in a bureaucratic system). Regarding the weight of various groups of influence, the public authorities' influence is clearly rated highest in recruitment and in the budget, followed by the influence of the teaching staff and codetermination, whereas the teaching staff jointly with public authorities have the highest influence in the determination of the teaching content, clearly followed by codetermination. The parents' and schoolchildren's influence is rated as low or very low in all dimensions. Also with respect to these characteristics, the distribution across the different school types is fairly homogeneous. Worth noting is the very high influence of the business sphere on the curriculum (here Austria ranks first among all countries), this mainly applies to VET.

Concerning the degree of characteristics that have an influence on performance results according to common theories (see points b, c in section 1.3 above; cf. Bishop and Woessmann, 2004; OECD, 2007), Austria mostly brings up the rear. One exception is the influence of the business sphere on the curriculum, which is perceived as relatively strong. Regarding selection criteria, above all the schoolchildren's wishes, previous performance and sense of family community top the list. The use of types of performance grouping is less pronounced in Austria than in most other countries, although schools without performance grouping most often achieve a better performance, at least in the natural sciences. Performance grouping can be seen as the equivalent of the Austrian system's external differentiation, therefore it is not additionally "required" within schools. Regarding the other groups of characteristics, Austria always lies between the 36th and 52nd place among 55 countries. Thus, for example, Austria holds places 41 to 50 in competition between schools and ranks between 36 and 51 in the use of performance information for the purpose of evaluation or accountability. Nevertheless, as many as 44 of 55 countries use performance data for the evaluation of teaching staff more frequently than Austria. In Austria, performance data are more strongly used in the administrative relations between schools and supervising office and for the evaluation of principals. Also the information provided to parents about the pupils' performance takes place relatively rarely (ranks 44 to 52) - this corresponds with the parents' demand for high performance standards, which is perceived as low.

For Austria the causal multi-level models reveal a very strong influence of the school types of the differentiated school system and the origin-specific background of schoolchildren on measured performances. In VET, the effects of school types are very markedly graded between VET colleges (BHSs), which lie near secondary academic schools (in reading slightly below), VET schools (with some 90 points less than VET colleges), and part-time vocational schools of the apprenticeship system (with another 20 to 30 points less than VET schools). The statistical control of the schoolchildren's background characteristics reduces the values of general-education schools by 30 to 50 points and BHSs by 20 to 30 points. This control by the statistical model tells us what performances would have to be expected if the schoolchildren's background was approximated in the various school types. According to the results, the selective "higher-level" schools benefit from social selectivity, because their average performance level is increased due to the selection of pupils with performance-enhancing background factors. In the other school types, this control by the model changes nothing or very little regarding performance. The effect of the additional control of governance variables only lies at 5 to 10 points, and these do not lead to an improvement but rather to a reduction of performance.

As in Austria PISA tests are conducted in a school year in which, due to the school structure, the majority of students have just changed schools, the differences caused by the effects of selection measure more strongly than the schools' "productive" effects. Therefore it has also been assessed whether the governance mechanisms are used to optimise the selection of students in terms of improved performance. This is however not the case based on results. Insofar as a variation exists in the governance variables, these are rather used to mitigate the strong selection effects due to the school structure.

1.5. Quality, standards and QIBB

Based on the initial studies of governance and school autonomy (Posch and Altrichter, 1992), a comprehensive master plan about quality assurance and quality development in the school sector was elaborated by a broad team of pedagogues and educational scientist (Eder, 2002), but it was not implemented in the first instance. In an expert opinion to specify the necessary reforms in more details, some proposals on the further development of the governance system were developed (Committee on the Future / *Zukunftskommission*, 2003). One development line for various fields of the school system is about the use of education standards. These are developed and tested in the form of a national programme for the development of standards (see <http://www.bifie.at/bildungsstandards>). These approaches mainly refer to the general-education sector. To date a rather "soft" approach geared mainly to informing teachers about the test results of their students is envisaged. How the standards might influence the performance and the governance structure cannot be said at the moment.

In the school-based VET sector, the development of standards is integrated into a comprehensive system of quality development and quality assurance (QIBB: <http://www.qibb.at/>), which is partly being developed and implemented with research support. This QIBB-system is geared towards developing a comprehensive governance system for VET that follows the model of the European Quality Framework (CQAF and EQARF). Timischl (2006) describes the principles of this system. In certain aspects, this model is supported by research projects and development projects. Major development projects within this framework included a Leonardo project about the use of peer reviews in VET (Gutknecht-Gmeiner, 2008; http://neu.peer-review.at/index.php?class=Calimero_Webpage&id=12700) and a Leonardo

project to develop a joint language to represent competences acquired in different education systems (VQTS - Vocational Qualification Transfer System, cf. Luomi-Messerer and Markowitsch, 2006; <http://www.vocationalqualification.net>). In apprenticeship training there are still many open questions about the functioning of the governance system. One question concerns the organisation of the interface between company-based training and part-time vocational school (Steiner, 2005). The governance system is indirectly strongly affected by initiatives to modularise apprenticeship training, as this could create an increased market control if modularisation breaks up the conceived connected training courses (Archan, 2006). A major feasibility study about modularisation has been conducted that has proposed an approach based on basic, main, and specialised modules without breaking up the whole qualification. A legal regulation has been adopted that allows for an incremental implementation of the new modular concept. However, training enterprises have also posed the question of why the modules cannot be provided separately.

1.6. Governance of the LLL strategy

Currently an Austrian LLL strategy is being elaborated (Chisholm et al., forthcoming). For some years there has been related development work, particularly focusing on the issue of overall control of a system of lifelong learning, in order to coordinate the different sectors of education and training. To achieve this goal, different proposals for the establishment of independent expert-supported “buffer” organisations were put forward by various parties (e.g. Expert Group / *ExpertInnengruppe* 2007; Advisory Council / *Beirat* 2007), which were, however, rejected by the other parties. Opposing views are prevalent: whereas one party prefers a pure bottom-up strategy, the other - in line with international experience - emphasises a more focused clarification of responsibilities and considers a top-down element in the form of clear specifications of objectives and time as necessary. Possibly, in such a complex and multifaceted system, which comprises various protagonists in the education sectors, regions, social partners, administrations, etc., something like the “open method of coordination” could function.

At present, expert-supported development work is ongoing, which is attempting - via a trans-disciplinary project - to elaborate a programme for new forms of funding for selected disadvantaged target groups in collaboration with the federal government, provincial governments, social partners, Public Employment Service Austria and selected experts. The model for this process is formed by the EU’s Structural Fund programmes, which are based on objectives, quality specifications and assurance, and co-financing.

Several expert statements have dealt with the issue of appropriate governance structures for an LLL strategy in Austria (Expert Group / *ExpertInnengruppe*, 2007; BMUKK, 2008; Lassnigg, 2007). Their major findings actually reveal various contradictions:

- (a) One contradiction is that it is generally assumed that Austrian ALE is primarily controlled by the market (in fact, many providers create the market). On the other hand, empirical findings show that by far the largest part of CET is subsidised in a wide variety of ways (only a minority of participants pay the costs of CET themselves, and very frequently the lessons take place during working hours; cf. Vienna Chamber of Labour / *Arbeiterkammer Wien*, 2007, p. 44-69). Therefore it would be more appropriate to speak of collective provisioning than emphasising the market metaphor so strongly.

- (b) A second contradiction is that, on the one hand, it is highlighted that existing demand is met by the existing structures (in reality the different empirical surveys do not identify any clear excess demand for CET/ALE). But on the other hand, the establishment of stronger public governance structures for this sector is called for (Biffel and Lassnigg, 2007).

To some extent these contradictions reflect the broader camps and divisions in lifelong learning policies that also prevail beyond the national level, i.e. between a market-led approach and more planning-oriented approaches that emphasise more strongly the public responsibility for continuing education and training as well as for adult learning. The various actors are taking “pragmatic” approaches in favour of their interests, which, however, do not fit together into a consistent picture. A main obstacle seems to be that in the complex system of various actors with converging and diverging interests no-one has taken a lead towards coordination so far.

1.7. Anticipation and needs-orientation as a governance problem

The Austrian VET system shows a strong alignment towards relatively specialised qualifications and competences. Therefore, the question arises of how this system is oriented in terms of its governance mechanisms towards the demand for qualifications and competences. A special study has investigated the different facets of this problem (Lassnigg and Markowitsch, 2005).

One research project examined the topic of via which communication channels in the different sub-systems information about new demand constellations is disseminated to responsible decision-makers and which sources of information are used in these governance structures (Henkel and Markowitsch, 2005; Lassnigg, 2006). It was found that Austria is dominated by informal communication structures. Although research-based projections of differing types are also conducted at regular intervals, they are not used for adjusting teaching programmes. Some of them are also not well suited for that purpose. In some areas, formal evaluations have been recently carried out (cf. Aff et al., 2009).

In the FH sector, needs and acceptance studies constitute an integral part of the accreditation process for new study programmes. Several more detailed analyses indicate, however, that these research reports frequently have a more confirmatory or legitimising character rather than being used for developing the programmes. Specifically, many studies had a very small-scale design and had to assess demand for a few hundred graduates (Lassnigg et al., 2003). As there is no regular overall reference about the use of qualifications and the development of qualification demand, findings of such small-scale studies can be evaluated only with difficulty.

Qualitative analyses have found functioning governance systems for qualification policy in the regional setting that are organised jointly by regional policy-makers and regional social partners (Steiner, 2004).

As a major spin-off of this study it has also become clear that in Austria there is a complete lack of regular observations of the use of qualifications provided by VET on the labour market and in employment, and a relevant basic concept was elaborated in a follow-up study.

2. Conclusions and implications for further research projects

Issues related to the governance system of VET are analysed from a number of individual approaches, often not under this explicit title. To date, however, no unifying view of all these approaches exists, and overall there lacks a view on the issues and options of overall control. It is, in fact, not clear in Austria in how far the education system's various sub-systems complement each other or in how far they counteract. Possibly the idea of overall control is not useful but this should also be a topic for research.

There are open questions at all ends and interfaces of the governance system, at the same time there are many practical ideas and suggestions for change, which are however worked on by using an insufficient research basis. Where there are proposals based on research, they are often not used, because it is in governance issues in particular that the involved protagonists' interests have a very strong weight.

As the Austrian public administration's bureaucratic and federal system is relatively strongly anchored in the Constitution and also regulated particularly tightly in terms of rules of procedure (service and administrative law), the fundamental governance structures in the school-based education sector depend on these general provisions as well. Independent changes are therefore rather unlikely to happen as long as the system remains within public administration. The structure of the FH sector shows that a new sector with new governance structures has been set up outside this system. In addition, universities were formally hived off from the state administration in a radical step, with public influence over the committee structure remaining unchanged, however, which is a contentious issue. Whether this reform has been successful will be left to future research. Due to the public significance of the school sector, this way of hiving off the school system will probably not be chosen. Due to the strong involvement of the social partners, apprenticeship has a special governance system with interfaces to school administration. Only little research interest exists in the functioning of this system. Governance mechanisms in the field of ALE and CET are currently the subject of political considerations, mainly in the development of a lifelong learning strategy. In this sector there are numerous relevant questions, which meet with little research interest either.

As research on VET is largely conducted outside universities and is contract research in most cases, the further investigation of governance structures would depend on corresponding funds. It is questionable, however, in how far the protagonists are interested in this form of external contribution towards the self-reflection of activities that directly affect their own best interests to the extent that they will raise the scarce funds required for this purpose. Progress of research in this area is more likely when academic institutions, and in particular political science, deal with these issues. That this enables substantial contributions to be made is revealed by research about "educational governance" in the field of general-education schools (Altrichter et al., 2007).

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List of acronyms

| Abbreviation | German term | English term/explanation |
|---------------------|---|---|
| abf-austria | Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berufsbildungsforschung | Austrian Working Group on VET Research |
| AHS | allgemeinbildende höhere Schule | Secondary academic school (higher gen- eral education school) – junior cycle and senior cycle |
| ALE | Erwachsenenbildung | adult learning |
| AMS | Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich | Public Employment Service Austria |
| ARQA-VET | Österreichische Referenzstelle für Qualität in der Berufsbildung | Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training |
| BAG | Berufsausbildungsgesetz | Vocational Training Act |
| BBAB | Bundesberufsausbildungsbeirat | Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship |
| BFI | Berufsförderungsinstitut | Vocational Training Institute |
| BHS | Berufsbildende höhere Schule | VET college |
| BIC | Berufsinformationscomputer | database containing career information, job descriptions etc. |
| bifie | Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation und Entwicklung des Bildungswesens | Federal Institute of Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Edu- cation System |
| BildokG | Bildungsdokumentationsgesetz | Education Documentation Act |
| BIZ | Berufsinformationszentrum | Career guidance centre |
| BMF | Bundesministerium für Finanzen | Federal Ministry of Finance |
| BMG | Bundesministerium für Gesundheit | Federal Ministry for Health |
| BMHS | Berufsbildende mittlere und höhere Schu- len | VET schools and colleges |
| BMLFUW | Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft | Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management |
| BMS | Berufsbildende mittlere Schule | VET school |
| BMASK | Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz | Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection |

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|-----------|---|--|
| BMUKK | Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur | Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture |
| BMWFJ | Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend | Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth |
| BRP | Berufsreifeprüfung | examination providing access to higher education for skilled workers and graduates of three- and four-year full-time VET schools |
| CET | Weiterbildung | continuing education and training |
| CVET | berufliche Weiterbildung | continuing vocational education and training |
| CVTS | Continuing Vocational Training Survey | Continuing Vocational Training Survey |
| ECHP | European Community Household Panel | European Community Household Panel |
| ECVET | Europäisches Lernkreditsystem | European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training |
| EQR / EQF | Europäischer Qualifikationsrahmen | European Qualifications Framework |
| ESF | Europäischer Sozialfonds | European Social Fund |
| EU-SILC | Gemeinschaftsstatistiken über Einkommen und Lebensbedingungen | Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions |
| FH | Fachhochschule | university level study programmes of at least three years' duration with vocational-technical orientation |
| FHR | Fachhochschulrat | Fachhochschule Council |
| FHStG | Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz | Fachhochschule Studies Act |
| GE | Allgemeinbildung | general education |
| GewO | Gewerbeordnung | Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act |
| HE | Hochschulbildung | higher education |
| IHS | Institut für Höhere Studien | Institute for Advanced Studies |
| IBA | Integrative Berufsausbildung | integrative vocational education and training, integrative VET |
| ibw | Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft | Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education | International Standard Classification of Education |
| IVET | berufliche Erstausbildung | initial vocational education and training |

| | | |
|-----------|---|---|
| JASG | Jugendausbildungssicherungsgesetz | Youth Training Guarantee Act |
| KEBÖ | Konferenz der Erwachsenenbildung Österreichs | Austrian Conference of Adult Education Institutions |
| LAP | Lehrabschlussprüfung | apprenticeship-leave examination |
| LBAB | Landesberufsausbildungsbeirat | Regional Advisory Board on Apprenticeship |
| LFI | Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut | Institute for further education in rural areas |
| LFS | Labour Force Survey | Labour Force Survey |
| LLG | Lifelong Guidance | Lifelong guidance |
| LLL | Lebenslanges Lernen | Lifelong learning |
| MZ | Mikrozensus | microcensus |
| NEC | Nationales Europass Zentrum | National Europass Centre |
| NQR / NQF | Nationaler Qualifikationsrahmen | National Qualifications Framework |
| OECD | Organisation für wirtschaftliche Ko- operation und Entwicklung | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| ÖGB | Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund | Austrian Trade Union Federation |
| öibf | Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung | Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training |
| PTS | Polytechnische Schule | prevocational school |
| SBP | Studienberechtigungsprüfung | higher education entrance examination |
| SchOG | Schulorganisationsgesetz | School Organisation Act |
| SchUG | Schulunterrichtsgesetz | School Education Act |
| VET | Berufsbildung | vocational education and training |
| WB | (berufliche) Weiterbildung | continuing (vocational) education and training |

