

Call for Evidence questions on Education, Vocational Training and Youth

Please send your answers to: BalanceofCompetence.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk

The questions are intended to stimulate discussion. Whilst we would particularly welcome responses to the questions themselves, we recognise that these are not exhaustive and you should feel free to comment on any related issues which they raise.

Education and training questions

1. General Issues

- 1.1. Does EU action, as opposed to national government action, in the areas of education and vocational training generally benefit or disadvantage Austria? Can you point us to any published evidence or analysis in support of your view?

In general, the EU, working with Member States (MS), is beneficial to Austria (AT). One particular initiative introduced by the EU which has been beneficial is the European Qualification Framework which has gone some way to encourage uniformity across MS and has allowed increased mobility. Policy changes have not been translated into law which has allowed for a certain level of flexibility of how to introduce such policies at a national level, which has been positive. Political direction has changed indirectly – not sure exactly how much change has happened as a direct result of EU policy directives – AT was probably going to implement many of the changes anyway.

- 1.2. Are there any specific EU activities in the areas of education and training that you consider particularly beneficial or particularly disadvantageous to Austria?

Beneficial: European Qualification Framework.

Disadvantageous: Benchmarks. The proposal to aim for 40% of people to leave education with tertiary level qualification such as a Bachelors Degree does not account for those with Vocational Qualifications. AT has more people in Vocational Training than some other MS therefore benchmarking should perhaps include a broader set of qualifications.

- 1.3. Do you think the EU, as opposed to national government, should do more or less in relation to education and training? If so, where and why?

Put quite simply, the EU should stop introducing new directives and policies and allow time for implementation. The EU has introduced a lot of good directives and policies in recent times but there is an urge to maintain a steady stream of new proposals. This could disrupt the effect of those already in place.

- 1.4. What other areas of EU competence or activity have an impact on education and training in your sector and how?

Labour market policy. AT relies on vocational qualifications and incentivises entry to such schemes. A liberalisation of access to these professions could undermine previous schemes – or allow less qualified individuals to enter markets on an even playing field where those who have invested in training for many years are put at a disadvantage.

- 1.5. What challenges or opportunities are there for Austria in further EU action on education?

Structure: Tertiary Education vs Vocational Training:

- *Make the AT system widely known and understood;*
- *Make use of the Qualification stock in AT (not just those with Tertiary Education);*

1.6. What international bodies or arrangements other than the EU are important to education and training in Austria? How does your experience of dealing with them compare with the EU's activity in this sphere?

(i) *OECD, specifically the Pisa Study, has been beneficial to AT. AT is among the highest spenders in the world per student for education but AT is average/below average when it comes to general education – reading/writing/arithmetic. The Pisa study has been a useful tool to highlight this.*

(ii) *Whilst OECD has been useful to push for better Higher Education rates it has been a problem when it comes to vocational qualifications. AT has been supportive of 'Skills beyond school'.*

2. The Programmes

2.1. For the specific programmes which are funded and managed via the EU (such as Erasmus+ or Leonardo), what are the benefits or disadvantages of having EU rather than national responsibility and funding for these activities?

EU level is the only level where it is possible to implement international programmes such as Erasmus+/Leonardo which also promotes mobility.

2.2. Can you point to evidence which shows that language learning has improved through participation in the programmes?

Language proficiency has improved in AT. There is no evidence to suggest that this is as a direct result of EU initiatives. Mobility has increased with more students from AT studying abroad for between 3-4 weeks to improve their grasp of a foreign language.

2.3. How would you describe the costs and benefits to your organisation of participating in the programmes?

*Benefit: Provides a platform to work together on common issues.
Disadvantage: Sometimes there are 'empty rounds' where MS can work together on a project for up to 2-3 years until they each discover that it is impossible to make the project work. This costs time and money for no gain.*

3. Policy Coordination

3.1. Have you noticed any change in EU activity or emphasis since the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the introduction of Europe 2020, and, if so, where has this manifested itself and in what ways? Have these changes been helpful or unhelpful?

Most of the major initiatives in this area precede the Lisbon Treaty. AT has not noticed much acceleration of these initiatives since the Lisbon Treaty was signed.

3.2. Is it appropriate that Europe 2020 focuses on early school leaving and the completion of tertiary education?

Yes – but needs a broader outlook on vocational training at the tertiary level (see previous answers).

3.3. Has the adoption of EU education policy frameworks or Council Recommendations had any impact on your sector?

Yes – European Qualification Framework has had an impact.

3.4. How does policy cooperation on education in the EU compare with other 23 organisations, for example the OECD?

They are not really comparable. For example, OECD provides analysis rather than makes recommendations. However, the OECD is biased towards Higher Education rather than Vocational Education Training.

3.5. Can you point to examples of reform in national policy which have resulted from EU co-operation in education and training?

AT recently translated their education system to use learning outcomes as a way to measure what specific qualifications mean. By assessing their education system in this way they have developed a more concise way of measuring the quality of qualifications. This project was initiated entirely because of EU policy.

3.6. How would you assess the costs and benefits to policy makers of participation in education policy cooperation at EU level?

In general the benefits outweigh the costs. The costs are high, but the benefits still outweigh them.