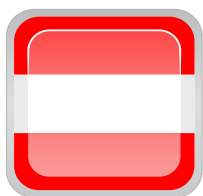

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY
IN APPRENTICESHIPS: FOCUS
ON LONG-TERM MOBILITY

AUSTRIA



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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

The vocational education and training (VET) sector is of major importance in the Austrian education system. This is reflected both in a broad, highly differentiated range of programmes and in a high level of participation: around 75% of all pupils take up a VET programme at the end of compulsory schooling. At upper secondary level, pupils can choose between school-based VET programmes (with occupation-related practice and compulsory work placements in companies) and dual vocational training (with around 80% company-based training). Both forms cover almost all economic sectors and lead to the qualification levels EQF 4 and 5. As a rule, the Ministry of Education is responsible for school-based vocational education and training; the Ministry for Economic Affairs (company-based training) and the Ministry of Education (school-based part) as well as the social partners and the provinces are jointly responsible for dual VET (=apprenticeship). In addition, a wide range of VET programmes has also been established at the tertiary level and for adults (Cedefop, 2018).

Apprenticeship training is a nationwide regulated, formal training pathway at the upper secondary level (ISCED 3B) which – in line with the occupation-based VET approach – imparts a full qualification for a specific occupation. It takes place in a training company (80% of the training period) alternating with occupation-specific part-time vocational school (20% of the training period). The programmes have a duration of between two and four years, most of them three years. The apprentices are typically between 15 and 18 years old (ibw, 2014). The average age of apprentices in their first year of apprenticeship is rising steadily, however, and was 16.9 years by 2018 (Dornmayr and Nowak, 2019). The training is completed with the formal apprenticeship-leave examination. Currently (in August 2019) there are 205 apprenticeships in trade, commerce and industry and 13 agricultural apprenticeships. ⁽¹⁾

The apprentice is in a contractually regulated training relationship with his/her training company (i.e. he/she has concluded an apprenticeship contract with it) and, at the same time, is a pupil of a part-time vocational school. For every apprenticeship, a binding training regulation is set up, which includes the specific activity description (i.e. the profile of learning outcomes) and the job

⁽¹⁾ <https://lehrberufsliste.bic.at/> [accessed 2.12.2019]

profile (i.e. the in-company curriculum). School-based training is regulated by an occupation-specific framework curriculum that is valid in the whole of Austria (ibw, 2014).

The high importance of apprenticeship training can be illustrated by the distribution of young people in year 10. With a share of around 37% of all pupils in year 10 (school year 2017/2018), apprenticeship training constitutes the most significant VET pathway at the upper secondary level. In full-time school-based vocational education and training, 26% are enrolled in a college for higher vocational education (BHS, 5 years, completed with matriculation certificate) and another 13% in a school for intermediate vocational education (BMS, 3 to 4 years). The remaining 24% attend an academic secondary school (AHS). As of 31 December 2018, a total of 108,000 people were undergoing apprenticeship training (Dornmayr und Nowak, 2019).

CHAPTER 2.

Exogenous factors influencing mobility of apprentices at upper secondary level

This chapter examines a number of factors which, as framework conditions, can have an enabling or a restrictive influence on mobility stays abroad ⁽²⁾ in apprenticeship training.

2.1. Economic sectors and actors

The Austrian economic structure is characterised by a high proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large regional differences. In 2015, 99.7% of around 330 000 Austrian companies in the market-oriented economy were SMEs. More than 87% of them were micro-enterprises with fewer than ten employees. The share of large enterprises in the total number of Austrian companies was as low as 0.3% in 2014. But these employed about one third of all employees. Around 80% of all enterprises are active in the services sector ⁽³⁾ (Cedefop, 2016).

Statistics Austria characterises the Austrian economy as a small open market economy with a multi-branched and highly differentiated foreign trade. The export quota (exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP) is 54.0% (2017) and has risen sharply since 1995 (33.5%) and is well above the EU average (EU-28) of 45.8%. Over the same period, the import quota rose strongly from 34.7% to 50.7% (EU-28: 42.2%) ⁽⁴⁾. According to the initiative 'go-international' one in two jobs in Austria is dependent on exports ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽²⁾ The focus of this article is on long-term-mobility, which is defined as mobilities that last at least 3 months. Even though the legal regulations and framework conditions generally allow such longer mobilities (see 3.8), they have not played a role in practice so far. Mobilities in apprenticeship training in Austria are almost exclusively short-term in nature, which means a period of 2 to 8 weeks, with the vast majority of mobilities lasting 4 to 6 weeks (see Chapter 4).

⁽³⁾ http://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/wirtschaftsatlas_oesterreich/branchendaten_nach_beschaeftigtengroessenklassen/index.html [accessed 2.12.2019]

⁽⁴⁾ http://www.statistik.at/web_de/services/wirtschaftsatlas_oesterreich/aussenhandel/index.html [accessed 2.12.2019]

⁽⁵⁾ [accessed 2.12.2019]

The companies' degree of internationalisation does not only depend on the size of the companies, but above all on the respective sector. While the large number of craft enterprises tend to operate locally and regionally, many tourism enterprises, including small ones, as well as many medium-sized manufacturing companies for example, have a strong international orientation. Industry, but also trade, construction and finance are characterised by internationally operating companies.

But the region in which the companies are located also plays an important role. Smaller craft enterprises in border regions are also highly active across borders.

With the 'go international' initiative, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (BMDW) and the Austrian Economic Chambers (WKO) have been encouraging companies in their internationalisation efforts since 2003 with various activities and support programmes. As well as export promotion, programmes to raise awareness of the importance of internationalisation and to promote foreign activities and mobility in vocational education and training are regularly supported ⁽⁶⁾.

The establishment of international companies in Austria is also being actively pursued. The arguments put forward in favour of the establishment include the good infrastructure, economic, social and political stability, but also the good supply of qualified skilled workers due to the established VET system.

2.2. Dynamics of skills demand and supply at the medium level occupation level

As shown by a study of ibw Austria - Research and Development in VET from 2018, the demand for skilled labour (skilled labour shortage) is increasing considerably in many occupational areas. In the survey carried out in spring 2018, 87% of the 4 500 questioned companies stated they had felt the shortage of skilled labour last year, 75% strongly. However, the study also makes it clear that there are regional as well as sectoral differences within Austria. While in many areas, for example in Vienna, the number of job seekers is in some cases significantly higher than the number of vacancies, the situation in the western provinces is often the other way round (Dornmayr und Winkler, 2018).

In key areas in particular, such as the MINT occupations (i.e. in the areas of mathematics, IT, natural sciences and technology), bottlenecks in the supply of

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.go-international.at/> [accessed 2.12.2019]

qualified staff are increasingly being identified. However, traditional sectors such as tourism and various artisanal/technical fields are also faced with problems finding young skilled workers and are increasingly dependent on employees and apprentices from neighbouring countries.

Various initiatives such as the Red-White-Red Card (since 2011), combined with a list of shortage occupations, aim to encourage the immigration of qualified workers from third countries in occupations with a particularly high demand for skilled labour. So far, these initiatives have had only modest success ⁽⁷⁾.

In 2012, the possibility was created to grant asylum seekers (especially young people) access to apprenticeship training in so-called shortage occupations, also in order to cover the demand for qualified staff at the intermediate qualification level. Since then, however, the problem has often come up that young people with a negative asylum decision who do not have a secure residence status have been deported while still undergoing training and are unable to complete it. A situation that poses major problems to training companies and asylum seekers alike. This possibility was therefore again lifted in 2018 and the Federal Government is working on an alternative regulation.

2.3. Attitude of employers towards training

The structure of the Austrian vocational education and training sector, with its major importance of apprenticeship training, requires an intensive commitment on the part of companies to training. In 2018, around 28 000 training companies from almost all economic sectors safeguarded the functioning of the training system. 56% of these come from the crafts and trades sector, which has a pronounced small business structure. At the same time, around 37% of all apprentices can be found in large companies with more than 250 employees in 2018 (Dornmayr und Nowak, 2019).

After the number of companies providing company-based training has fallen significantly over the years (in 2010 the number of training companies was as high as 36 000), a stabilisation of the number of training companies can be observed since 2016 (Dornmayr und Nowak, 2019).

In addition, it should be noted that meanwhile all school-based VET programmes provide for partly long periods of work placement, which can only be ensured through the participation of companies.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.migration.gv.at/de/formen-der-zuwanderung/dauerhafte-zuwanderung-rot-weiss-rot-karte/rot-weiss-rot-karte-plus.html> [accessed 2.12.2019]

There is consequently both a strong tradition and a high willingness on the part of companies to participate in VET.

Companies are also involved in continuing vocational education and training (CVET). As the latest available findings from the European Continuing Vocational Training Survey 2015 (CVTS5) show, 88% of enterprises with ten or more employees actively support continuing vocational training for their employees. Small companies (10 to 49 employees) in particular, with a share of 80% of enterprises that provide continuing vocational training, are showing a strong increase in their commitment over time (2005: 63%, 2010: 69%). 82% of the enterprises offer their employees participation in internal and external continuing vocational training courses, 80% also offer other forms of continuing vocational training, such as participation in conferences, workshops and trade fairs, individual training in the workplace or participation in learning and quality circles. (Statistik Austria, 2018 and ReferNet Austria, 2018)

2.4. International qualifications existence (and extent)

The range of international qualifications on offer and their acquisition do not play a special role in vocational education and training. Exceptions are the acquisition of language certificates (such as in cooperation with the Centre for Job-Related Languages or CEBS) and IT certificates such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or industrial IT certificates in cooperation with major software providers (such as Microsoft or SAP). These are actively supported and offered as part of the lessons or in separate courses. (BMBF, 2015)

Traditionally, great importance is also attached to ensuring that Austrian VET programmes (especially apprenticeship training) are considered equivalent with programmes in specific neighbouring countries. Bilateral agreements (VET agreements) concluded with Germany, Hungary and South Tyrol safeguard the mutual recognition of some important initial vocational education and training (IVET) programmes in the apprenticeship training sector and consequently promote labour mobility and learning mobility in both directions ⁽⁸⁾.

The implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2018, with the allocation of apprenticeship training to NQF Level 4 (equivalent to EQF 4), also promotes the international comparability of qualifications.

⁽⁸⁾ <https://www.bmdw.gv.at/Themen/Lehre-und-Berufsausbildung/GleichhaltungeinerauslaendischenBerufsausbildungmitderoesterreichischenLehrabschlusspruefung.html> [accessed 2.12.2019]

2.5. Any other relevant factors (e.g. level of interest in foreign language)

Learning foreign languages (especially English) is of great importance at all levels of education and is enshrined in all school curricula from the lower secondary level onwards. The English Proficiency Index of the language travel provider EF also confirms the Austrians' very good command of English with a ranking as number 8 among 100 countries tested ⁽⁹⁾.

In the apprenticeship training sector, foreign languages (primarily English, in tourism occupations also others) are also enshrined in the curricula of part-time vocational schools and in the companies' training regulations. The focus is on communicative competence as well as on the mastery of relevant technical terms. In more recent training regulations, general communicative competence is defined as follows: "Command of English at sectoral and business level for everyday and technical conversations." (BMDW, 2018b).

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.ef.at/epi/#> [accessed 2.12.2019]

CHAPTER 3.

The link between the apprenticeship scheme design and apprentices' mobility

This section aims to analyse the extent to which the institutional prerequisites for long-term mobility in the Austrian apprenticeship training system have an enabling or a restrictive effect. Since long-term mobility has not yet had any practical significance in the Austrian apprenticeship training, the following comments refer to mobility in general, with the attempt to discuss the relevance for long-term mobility.

3.1. Apprenticeship type (e.g. system or mode of delivery)

In Austria, apprenticeship training forms part of the vocational education and training (VET) system at the upper secondary level. The key objective of apprenticeship training is the acquisition of the capacity to act in the world of work. In addition, the Vocational Training Act (Berufsausbildungsgesetz or VTA) stipulates that the “international dimension” (§1a of the VTA) ⁽¹⁰⁾ of vocational education and training also needs to be taken into account in order to increase the attractiveness of VET. However, the definition of what is meant specifically by the “international dimension” remains open here. As well as taking international trends into account in the design of vocational education and training, this concept most likely also includes the international mobility of apprentices, especially since the Act contains further provisions on how international mobility can be implemented within the framework of apprenticeship training.

In Austria, about 80% of traditional apprenticeship training is carried out in the training company and 20% at part-time vocational school.

This means that two basic enabling elements can be identified at the systemic level that are conducive to international mobility experiences by apprentices. At the systemic level, internationality in initial vocational education and training (IVET) is emphasised as an essential goal. In addition, at the practical level, a large part of the training takes place in the company; all that is

⁽¹⁰⁾<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10006276> [accessed 2.12.2019]

needed here is the availability of related international companies that are willing to offer corresponding periods of work placement. In principle, at national level, there is also the possibility of entering into training alliances in which apprentices are trained jointly in several companies. At the national level, the outgoing short-term mobility of apprentices is everyday practice - at least for some of the companies.

According to a company survey conducted in 2009 (the most recent data available), about 1/3 of the companies that offer apprentices outgoing mobility come from the production sector, primarily from the metal/mechanical engineering and vehicle construction sectors (Klimmer, 2009). A further 20% of the companies come from trade (retail and wholesale). With a share of 67 %, the majority of the companies are medium-sized to large enterprises with more than 100 employees. ⁽¹¹⁾ This indicates that it is likely to be considerably more difficult for small companies to send apprentices on a mobility abroad.

3.2. .Apprenticeship governance (at strategic, decision-making level)

The governance (decision-making and administration) of apprenticeship training is characterised in particular by the following features (BMDW, 2018):

- (a) the separation of competences for the company-based and school-based part of apprenticeship training between the responsible ministries of economics and education at federal level and the Länder governments, school authorities and apprenticeship offices ⁽¹²⁾ at Länder level;
- (b) the strong influence of the social partners, both employer and employee representatives, at all levels of decision-making and administration;
- (c) and the federal structure with development, steering and legislation at federal level and implementation and administration at Länder level and local level.

Initiatives for innovations and developments can come from affected companies, sectors, social partner institutions or responsible ministries; as a rule, they come from companies and their associations. In any case, the requirements of professional life and the practical needs of an industry are always in the foreground.

⁽¹¹⁾ Thereof 36 % with 101 to 500 employees and 31 % with over 500 employees.

⁽¹²⁾ Responsible for the administration of the company-based part of apprenticeship training.

In principle, these structures could be conducive to the international mobility of apprentices. National steering with the participation of the social partners will ensure that uniform rules exist throughout the country, providing both transparency and legal certainty. At the same time, the regional proximity of the administrative authorities to the companies provides the necessary flexibility and design options in operational implementation.

On the other hand, the shared competences for the company-based and school-based part of apprenticeship training, both at federal and state level, may mean an increased need for coordination between the ministries, the school authorities and apprenticeship offices, but also between the company and the vocational school in the actual implementation of mobility.

In addition, at the level of governance, the legal goal of internationality of IVET is supported. This is expressed in concrete terms in the funding schemes for in-company apprenticeship posts. These measures are steered by the funding committee, which is made up of the main education policy players in apprenticeship training, the WKO ⁽¹³⁾, the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (AK) and the BMDW.

The related funding guideline (pursuant to §19c (1) (8) of the VTA, as per: July 2017) provides for a mix of measures which pursue the goal of “supporting vocational mobility” and aim to complement the programmes offered as part of Erasmus+. The mix of measures ensures that for the duration of the internship abroad, training companies are reimbursed the share of the apprenticeship allowance they pay and which is due on a pro rata basis (Chapter 3.6),

- (a) language courses in preparation for the internship abroad are promoted,
- (b) a bonus is paid for apprentices as an additional incentive (EUR 15 a day). ⁽¹⁴⁾

3.3. Duration of apprenticeship and of the company placement in particular

Overall, there are 205 apprenticeship occupations in Austria (as per: August 2019), which have a training duration of between 2 and 4 years, with the vast majority of apprenticeships (80%) lasting 3 or 3.5 years ⁽¹⁵⁾. Approximately 80%

⁽¹³⁾ See list of abbreviations.

⁽¹⁴⁾ <https://www.wko.at/service/bildung-lehre/foerderungen-lehre.html> [accessed 2.12.2019]

⁽¹⁵⁾ <https://lehrberufsliste.bic.at/> [accessed 2.12.2019]

of the total duration of apprenticeship training is held in the company as the place of learning.

The training period of the apprenticeship occupations - or the duration of company-based training (Section 3.3) – which is primarily affected by outgoing mobility, should therefore not constitute a major obstacle to enabling young people to spend longer periods abroad without jeopardising attainment of their occupation-specific training objectives. Moreover, over the entire training period, there should still be sufficient time for companies which provide training and enable their apprentices to spend a mobility period abroad to train them for company-specific requirements.

3.4. Organisation of alternance

In Austria, all apprentices are obliged to attend part-time vocational school. Depending on the region and the apprenticeship occupation, the time at part-time vocational school may be organised differently. A basic distinction can be made between all-year forms of vocational school (e.g. one day a week) and block forms or course-based vocational school types (e.g. 8 weeks continuous). These instruction periods at part-time vocational school (all-year forms of vocational schools) must generally be taken into account when organising international mobility stays, but especially block forms and course-based forms must be given special consideration. In order to prevent learners from missing too much time in vocational schools, mobility is therefore usually timed to takes place outside the blocked periods. In principle, permission is required from learners for periods of absence from vocational school (one day: school management, more than a day: regional education board).

3.5. Type of contract and status of apprentices

For every apprenticeship relationship, an apprenticeship contract must be concluded between the apprentice and the authorised apprenticeship trainer, which must contain essential basic elements such as the apprenticeship occupation, the duration of training and the amount of the apprenticeship remuneration. The apprenticeship contract is valid for the entire training period, regardless of whether parts of the training are held in a training alliance or as international mobility stays. Therefore, international mobility does not change the status of the contract. The training contract and consequently also the training relationship ends when the end of the apprenticeship period is reached or the

contract is terminated. Furthermore, there are no legal provisions or restrictions linked with the contract that would hinder international mobility.

3.6. Remuneration

Since the apprenticeship contract remains in force even during international mobility stays, the company is still obliged to pay the apprenticeship remuneration to its apprentices (§27c (4) of the VTA). This could be a negative incentive for companies to enable apprentices to complete a mobility stay abroad. This is precisely where the funding measure described above (Chapter 3.2) aims to act as a counterweight by completely reimbursing the apprenticeship remuneration paid out on a pro-rata basis for the duration of international mobility. Training companies therefore incur no costs during the international mobility of apprentices; apprentices, however, continue to receive an apprenticeship remuneration during their mobility stay. In this sense, funding of international mobility is largely taken on by the public sector. The funding aspect should therefore not provide a negative incentive for longer-term mobility. However, it would have to be ensured that these financing structures remain in place for long-term mobility.

3.7. Provisions on occupational health, safety and social insurance

Apprentices are covered by social insurance for the entire duration of their training. In addition to health insurance, this includes accident insurance, pension insurance and unemployment insurance. Since the contract status does not change in the case of international mobility stays and apprenticeship remuneration continues to be paid (which includes social security contributions), apprentices are still insured in the case of international mobility (§27c (4) of the VTA).

3.8. Curriculum / training standards specification

A separate, comprehensive training regulation is laid down for every apprenticeship occupation; it includes the job profile [Berufsbild], the profile of learning outcomes [Berufsprofil] ⁽¹⁶⁾ and the examination regulation.

The Vocational Training Act (VTA) ⁽¹⁷⁾ stipulates that participation in international training programmes of up to four months per apprenticeship year is counted towards the legally regulated training period. The prerequisite for this is that the training period must be vocationally oriented. (VTA, § 27b) However, it is not defined in more detail what is meant by 'vocationally oriented'. The funding scheme for the funding of stays abroad ('reimbursement of the apprenticeship remuneration for the duration of the training, Section 3.2) also define that a foreign internship must be 'vocationally oriented'.

Provided that the learning content imparted by the international mobility stay is not only occupationally related but also specifically part of the job profile (curriculum) of the respective apprenticeship and apprenticeship year, the mobility can last up to six months.

This gives a certain amount of leeway in the design of the training content of international mobility, since this does not necessarily have to be covered by the curriculum (job profile) of the apprenticeship occupation, but only has to related to the occupation in a broader sense. However, if the mobilities are specifically aimed at teaching training content that is included in the curriculum of the apprenticeship, even a longer period of international mobility is possible.

3.9. Use of validation in apprenticeships

No validation procedure is used to credit international mobility. The Vocational Training Act provides that the duration of international mobility is credited fully towards the apprenticeship period, provided it does not exceed four months or six months (Chapter 3.8).

⁽¹⁶⁾ The profile of learning outcomes defines the requirements that a fully trained apprentice can meet; the job profile is the in-company curriculum and contains the competences by years of apprenticeship, that an apprentice must acquire during his or her in-company training. (BMDW, 2018a).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Regulating the company-based part of the apprenticeship training.

CHAPTER 4.

Lessons learnt from existing policies, initiatives, projects of apprentices' mobility

Experience with existing exchange programmes has shown that, in addition to the funding of international mobility, mainly support in organising and implementing such programmes is a decisive argument in favour of or against mobility, both for companies and for apprentices. Especially in the case of the relatively young target group, typical of Austrian apprenticeship training, secure local support also plays an important role.

In Austria, international mobility in apprenticeship training is mainly financed by the Erasmus+ programme in combination with other public funding programmes and is usually organised by the association International Young Workers Exchange (IFA). IFA supports both companies and apprentices in the preparation, organisation and implementation of mobility and is also the first point of contact for apprentices wishing to come to Austria from abroad. In addition, IFA also organises mobility stays for apprenticeship graduates and IVET trainers. ⁽¹⁸⁾ According to the mobility radar of the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD), 632 apprentices, 197 skilled workers and 79 IVET trainers were supported during stays abroad in 2017 (OeAD, 2018).

Other regional initiatives, such as the 'Let's Walz' programme in Lower Austria, usually cooperate with IFA and support apprentices and companies both financially and organisationally at regional level.

The 'xchange' programme adopts a somewhat different approach, with apprentices (a maximum of two per company and programme period) spending three to four weeks of their company-based training in a company abroad. In return, one or two apprentices are transferred from the host company to their own company. The project is supported by the International Lake Constance Conference (IBK) and the Association of Alpine States (Arge Alp). The exchange takes place between the member regions of the programme, i.e. several German laender and Austrian provinces, some Swiss cantons, northern Italian provinces and Liechtenstein. ⁽¹⁹⁾

⁽¹⁸⁾ <https://ifa.or.at/en/working-abroad/> [accessed 2.12.2019]

⁽¹⁹⁾ <https://www.xchange-info.net> [accessed 2.12.2019]

This model builds on the direct exchange between specific enterprises. In addition to the project's positive effects on the development of apprentices' skills, this programme is also intended to initiate cross-border exchanges between specific companies and possible further cooperation ventures and business relationships.

In a survey conducted among training companies by IFA in 2009, the following arguments in particular were put forward for work-based learning of apprentices abroad (Klimmer, 2009):

- (a) improving foreign language skills, especially communication skills, above all English (English-speaking countries are therefore at the top of the list of target countries);
- (b) gathering personal experience and maturing;
- (c) enhancing the motivation of apprentices;
- (d) promoting intercultural competences, reduction of prejudices;
- (e) getting to know new company structures and other workflows.

These arguments and objectives also largely coincide with the objectives and experiences gathered by apprentices in the course of their mobility stays, as stated in regular internal evaluations of IFA.

According to this survey, which is the most recent available, it is less important to companies that there is a comparable model of apprenticeship training in the target countries.

The vast majority of companies (87%) consider a period of 3 to 4 weeks to be ideal for mobility stays because this duration can be easily reconciled with their own training plans and is seen as sufficient to achieve the above objectives. Hardly any company can imagine a duration of more than 8 weeks. In this connection, long-term cross-country mobility is not considered a desirable goal or implemented by Austrian companies.

Furthermore, it can be deduced from the survey results and other experiences that companies also see an opportunity to become more international themselves by participating in mobility programmes. Approximately one third of the respondents also take in apprentices and interns from abroad, almost half of the other companies would be willing to do so.

It seems particularly relevant to note that companies attach great importance to receiving support from organisations such as IFA in the organisation and implementation of in-company based training. In the eyes of most companies, this support is a basic prerequisite for participation in mobility programmes and should include the handling of financial support, the organisation of suitable workplace-based training and accommodation as well as help with the documentation of the professional and interdisciplinary skills acquired. This

targeted support in preparing for a stay abroad is proving to be a key factor in the success of the programme in terms of why it is received extremely positively by companies.

With the quality label for apprentice mobility (European Quality Assurance for In-company Learning Mobility for Apprentices or EQAMOB) of the Europe-wide network EuroApprenticeship, a further incentive system was created in 2017 to make mobility stays of apprentices abroad attractive for companies. The label is awarded to companies for their special commitment and high quality in the mobility of their apprentices. So far (2017 and 2018), the label has been awarded by the Ministry for Economic Affairs to 24 companies. ⁽²⁰⁾

In addition to the positive experiences gathered from short-term mobility stays, the existing programmes also show some challenges which could have a stronger impact on longer stays abroad:

- (a) Mobility programmes usually start at the age of 16, when young people are often in their second year of apprenticeship. While on the one hand they are at an age at which some have reached a certain degree of independence and maturity in order to complete a longer stay abroad, this can still be relatively early in their development for others.
- (b) On the other hand, however, with increasing age, young people enter a stage of training (higher apprenticeship year) in which they become productive for the company and thus more difficult to do without, if they spend time in companies abroad. In these cases, reimbursing the apprenticeship remuneration via grants can no longer cover the loss of productivity.
- (c) With increasing age or the apprenticeship year reached by the apprentices, they are also close to the apprenticeship-leave examination, which can tend to make longer stays abroad more difficult.
- (d) Experience has shown that some older young people already have certain financial obligations (household expenses, payment of alimony) and may be subject to a double financial burden in the event of prolonged international mobility, such as due to dual household expenses (e.g. rent that still has to be paid) or payment of alimony. These costs are usually not sufficiently covered by the grants.
- (e) While the lack of comparability of VET systems does not seem to play a major role for short-term mobility stays, it could be a decisive factor for the recognition of acquired competences for longer-term mobility.

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://ifa.or.at/eqamob-qualitaetslabel-fuer-lehrlingsmobilitaet-2019/>
2.12.2019]

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CHAPTER 5.

Conclusions

As described in Chapters 3 and 4, the framework conditions for international mobility in apprenticeship training have been created by the Vocational Training Act and both financial support programmes and institutional support facilities have been set up for this purpose. Here, in principle, the legal basis also allows long-term mobilities from more than 3 months (according to VTA up to 6 months under certain conditions; see 3.8). In practice, however, these have so far not played a role. At present, mobility is almost exclusively limited to stays abroad between 4 and 6 weeks.

The general economic, social and educational policy conditions also seem to favour mobility activities in principle.

By way of summary it can be stated that the framework conditions for mobility stays of apprentices in Austria are therefore basically favourable and at least short- to medium-term mobility is by now well established. Proving or crediting acquired competences currently plays a subordinate role but is likely to become a decisive criterion for longer mobility periods.

Moreover, the obstacles to longer-term mobility appear to be mainly of a practical nature and can be summarised as follows:

- (a) the relatively young average age of apprentices in the first years of apprenticeship and therefore possible reservations on the part of parents and young people regarding longer stays abroad
- (b) reservations on the part of companies that longer periods of absence from work are detrimental to the progress of training and lead to a drop in productivity
- (c) Although the lack of comparability of VET in destination countries does not seem to play a major role in short-term mobility, it could be a decisive criterion in longer-term mobility.

The following starting points for an extension of apprentice mobility must be discussed on the basis of experiences made to date:

- (a) possibilities of extending the total apprenticeship period (in-company training and compulsory vocational school) for longer mobilities; it would also only be conceivable to extend the period of in-company training if the period of vocational schooling is not affected by mobility, e.g. in the case of blocked forms of vocational schooling;
- (b) additional financial incentives:
 - (i) additional financial security in the case of regular payments of alimony or living expenses of apprentices, as well as

- (ii) compensation for any loss in productivity due to the apprentices' absence from the company.
- (c) The 'xchange' model (Chapter 4) could constitute an alternative approach for cross-border mobility projects, which also opens up flexible possibilities for longer-term mobility in direct exchanges between companies.
- (d) There is no simple and transparent system for proving and recognising acquired competences or for agreeing on the competences to be taught.
- (e) Ensuring efficient support systems in the organisation and implementation of mobility stays seems essential.

List of abbreviations

AHS	academic secondary school
AK	Chamber of Labour
Arge Alp	Association of Alpine States
BHS	college for higher vocational education
BMS	school for intermediate vocational education
BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs
BMDW	Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs
BMI	Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs
CEBS	Centre for Job-Related Languages (Center für Berufsbezogene Sprachen)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CVET	Continuing Vocational Educational and Training
CVTS5	European Continuing Vocational Training Survey 2015
e.g.	for example
ECDL	European Computer Driving Licence
EQAMOB	European Quality Assurance for In-company Learning Mobility for Apprentices
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
i.e.	that is
IBK	International Lake Constance Conference
ibw	Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft (ibw Austria - Research & Development in VET)
IFA	International Young Workers Exchange
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	information technology
MINT	mathematics, IT, natural sciences and technology
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OeAD	Austrian Exchange Service
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
VET	vocational education and training
VTA	Vocational Training Act
WKO	Austrian Economic Chambers

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Abstract

Apprenticeship training plays a prominent role in the Austrian education system. Around 37% of young people of each age cohort choose this VET pathway after compulsory schooling. International mobility is actively promoted within the apprenticeship training system by the Erasmus+ programme and some other support mechanisms.

This article analyses the framework conditions for international mobility, especially long-term mobility, in apprenticeship training in Austria and refers to economic and legal framework conditions as well as to existing programmes and activities.

After a brief classification of apprenticeship training in the education system and a presentation of the significance of this training pathway on the basis of indicators on training participation, some exogenous framework conditions influencing international mobility are described. In a further step, it is analysed which characteristics and legal foundations in the existing training model can enable and promote international mobility in apprenticeship training and which can also have a restrictive effect.

On the basis of existing mobility projects, experiences are finally derived which allow overall conclusions to be drawn for the future design of framework conditions for promoting long-term mobility.