



Department
for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 30 June 2014
Your comments must reach us by that date

REVIEW OF THE BALANCE OF COMPETENCES

CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S REVIEW OF THE BALANCE OF COMPETENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND YOUTH

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

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If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.	
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Eduard Staudecker, Stephanie Mayer	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	<input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/>
Name of Organisation (if applicable): Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs	
Address: Minoritenplatz 5; 1014 Wien; Austria	

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's ['Contact Us'](#) page.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUESTIONS

General Issues

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

Comments:

The fields of action encompassed by European educational strategies since 2000, i.e. the work program 2010 and ET 2020, entail the promotion of lifelong learning, of key competences, improving basic skills in literacy, numeracy, multilingualism, schooling completion rates, early education and care, professionalism of teaching staff and quality assurance in E&T, migration and mobility. All of the above are seen as being in line with key issues that are currently at the center of national reform initiatives in Austria.

In that respect, EU guided action related to the above policy priorities is seen as beneficial in that it provides support, incentives and structure to implement both European tools and national reforms and to further work towards reaching the ET 2020 Benchmarks:

1. more than 15% of adult population in LLL;
2. less than 10% Early School Leavers;
3. reduction of poor performance in basic skills to less than 15 %;
4. increasing tertiary attainment of 30-34-year olds to more than 40 %;
5. provide early education and care for a minimum of 95 % of above 4-year olds;
6. at least 6% of mobility in initial VET.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

The added value of European cooperation in the field of VET within the framework of Copenhagen 2002 and within the framework of the OMC for the development and positioning of the Austrian VET system is widely acknowledged by respective stakeholders. Two specific initiatives deserve to be highlighted as being particularly beneficial in this context:

1. European/National Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as one of the products of the Copenhagen Process serves as an important tool for improving quality and transparency of VET qualifications throughout Europe. The implementation of the EQF recommendation did not only give rise to the development of a National Qualifications Framework, but provided additional impetus for more overarching national reform processes, such as the development and implementation of learning-outcomes based curricula throughout the national ET landscape. The EQF further constitutes an important means for making the highly diverse Austrian VET system more transparent and visible and for positioning national VET qualifications on the European ET and labour market in a realistic manner, reflecting their value for the Austrian society. Finally, the implementation of the EQF recommendation has yielded a significant intensification of inter-ministerial cooperation and stakeholder involvement in the field of ET.

2. Quality development and quality assurance in E&T

The second initiative that should be highlighted is the EQAVET initiative, which provides a valuable framework and vehicle for numerous reform processes and initiatives.

QIBB (www.qibb.at) is the strategy of the General Directorate for Vocational Education and Training (GD VET) at BMUKK to introduce a comprehensive quality management system in the Austrian VET sector. Concept-related development work started in 2004. QIBB is based on the principle of voluntary participation. But back in the school year 2006/2007 QIBB had already been implemented at nearly all VET school and college locations in the whole of Austria.

QIBB meets the criteria of nationally and internationally recognised quality management systems for educational institutions and is carried out in coordination with the developments of European vocational education and training policies. As an example, QIBB constitutes one element of the national strategy to implement the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), which was adopted in the context of the Copenhagen process in June 2009. QIBB corresponds to the model of the European reference framework as regards objectives, guiding principles, priorities and structure.

With the decision on amending Section 18 of the BSchAufsG on 20.5.2011 (the Amendment will enter into force on 1.9.2012), another quality initiative in the field of general education was launched. The 'School Quality in General Education' (SQA) initiative pursues the objective of contributing to the best possible learning conditions at general education schools by conducting

quality development and quality assurance in the field of teaching. Independent learning of pupils backed by appreciative, factually founded support by teachers aims to raise the education level. The objective of BMUKK for the general education school sector in the period 2012-2016 is to further develop learning and teaching towards individualisation and competence orientation.

Austria was and still is considered to be providing important inputs for development and implementation of the EQAVET framework at European level. For the implementation at national level, both in general and vocational ET, political commitment was vital, and was fostered considerably by respective EU activities in the case of vocational education and training. Given the absence of a respective European quality initiative in general education, there is a lack of European support regarding the national developments in general education.

Further Information:

Austrian EQF Referencing Report (2012)

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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?

Comments:

The subsidiarity principle should be acknowledged and sustained at all times in line with the Lisbon treaty of 2009. EU action should be targeted at supporting and triggering national developments within the OMC, yet should not interfere with the development of e.g. national curricula, or implicitly impose standards. There should also be a bidirectional dialogue and cooperation between the labour market and the world of education in designing qualifications, rather than a unidirectional influence from one system to the other.

Focus in EU action and cooperation in the field of ET should be placed on the improvement and promotion of the use of European transparency tools in order to improve national and international recognition, to foster permeability and mobility. It was recently demonstrated by results of a Eurobarometer survey conducted on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications, that European tools still lag behind in their level of familiarity and popularity and that they are not utilized to the expected degree at this point in implementation.

This is an issue both at national and European level, and should therefore be addressed by closer cooperation and support structures provided by the European Commission for national authorities and coordinating units to foster and drive forward the implementation and actual use of transparency tools launched within Copenhagen.

Therefore, EU action should continue to provide impetus, structure, guidance, and platforms for policy learning within the framework of the OMC.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

There are many areas interrelated with the education and training systems, in particular vocational education and training, most notably EU activities and work programmes in the area of: employment and labour market needs – which do play an important part in the design of labour market relevant VET qualifications – and in the area of migration, inclusion and social affairs – issues at the centre of policy makers' ambitions to develop means and methods for improved recognition of qualifications and labour market integration.

5 What challenges or opportunities are there for the Austria in further EU action on education?

Comments:

The most significant opportunities arising from EU action and European cooperation in the field of VET are related to the strategic aims of the Copenhagen process, therefore the implementation of the learning outcomes approach, the fostering of student mobility in initial VET, the increase in transparency of Austrian VET qualifications, as well as the realistic positioning of Austrian VET qualifications on the European education and training market and labour market.

A challenge for many OMC activities that prevails is the sustainable participation and impact-assurance at national level. The sharing of experiences and results requires time and resources and the dissemination of the results of European activities is only regulated and assured for some areas, where there are set national bodies and authorities dedicated to the transfer and quality assurance (e.g. NQF NCPs or QA in VET). In numerous other thematic areas there is a lack of specialised support structures, and responsible stakeholders aim to report and document by means of experts reportings. Frequently, networking and exchange between members of the various working groups are encouraged and supported. In the future, it will though be necessary to intensify those activities. It is aspired to yield a greater visibility and usability of the OMC at national level. The fact that processes, results, policy handbooks etc are generally not sufficiently known and used constitutes an issue at both national and European level.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

Alongside the European Commission, the OECD, the IEA provide important impetus for policy discussion and development at national level via their international comparative assessments of educational achievement. The OECD has become an important pool of expertise and resource also within the framework of the OECD skills strategy and the valuable country reports issued on an annual basis.

The Programmes

7 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?

Comments:

European funding is the essential driver for participation and increasing numbers of students in mobility programs. National funds are provided and ensured with the aim to ensure maximum consumption of EU funds. This is vital as it ensures the participation in the programs overall; and success rates and participation rates have been increasing over the past 5 years, with rising funds and approval rates, clearly demonstrating the success and popularity of the programs and the necessity to provide EU funds also in the future.

Current data shows that throughout the last 12 years, 1.603 schools have participated in mobility programs, with an average 2,7 participants per school. This means that 26% of all schools were reached, participation was particularly high in upper secondary schools. Academic upper secondary schools participated at the highest rate of almost 90%, which vocational upper secondary schools participated at a rate of 56%.

These numbers would not have been achieved without the provided funds, which will therefore remain to be essential incentives for future implementation.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

Approximately half of all Comenius training periods took place in the UK, with other important destinations being France and Spain, Ireland, and Italy. Training periods were largely administered in English, other languages respectively including German, French, Italian and Spanish. An analysis of participation in language courses also shows a clear preference for English language courses.

The promotion of multilingualism therefore is often restricted to the most frequently spoken European languages – less widespread European languages are very often not covered. This applies particularly to the languages spoken in Austria's neighboring countries (e.g. Turkish, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian).

Evidence for actual language learning and improvement is not available and difficult to gather, due to a lack of systematic data collection and pre- and post- mobility assessment.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

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Policy Coordination

10 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?

Comments:

Despite limited EU competence in the field of ET, increased efforts in ET policy have been observable ever since Lisbon 2000. The tension between “competence-conflict and coordination-requirements” (Primova & Becker, 2009, S. 3) was resolved through the implementation of soft governance structures, based not on legislation but on cooperation and political commitment: the OMC, the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process.

The OMC specifically refers to the work programme for general and vocational education 2010 and the council conclusions for a strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of general and vocational education (ET 2020), while interaction and bidirectional links and impacts between the individual processes do exist. Through intergovernmental coordination, political commitment and strategies, room for European ET policy was created. Within that strategic framework, a multiplicity of actions, activities serving a whole pallet of topics was initiated by the EU. In addition, there is a wide range of initiatives taking place in other policy areas, directly or indirectly impacting on ET (vgl. Becker & Primova, 2009, S. 3; Odendahl, 2011a, S. 19). ET is mainly affected by actions carried out within the framework of the OMC, and the Copenhagen process. In the light of Bologna and Copenhagen, general and basic education have become priorities in European policy only at a later stage, national specifics in that area are particularly important and European cooperation and coordination in that field has lagged behind those in VET and HE.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

11 Is it appropriate that Europe 2020 focusses on early school leaving and the completion of tertiary education?

Comments:

The focus on achieving the above two benchmarks is generally described as appropriate within the context of Europe 2020, yet, it might be more appropriate for some countries or some fields of ET than for others.

Both early school leaving rates and tertiary attainment rates are traditionally low in Austria, with the latter being explained by the national particularity of a strong and valuable VET system at upper secondary and post-secondary level. Blind pressure to increase the number of HE graduates would not only provide a sense of devaluation of this very high quality and quantity VET system of great value for the Austrian labour market, economy and society, but would not necessarily reflect the national system or correspond to in fact national needs in terms of economic success. It is therefore vital to include tertiary and tertiary equivalent into this benchmark in order to be able to capture those qualifications within the national context.

In conclusion, the focus on the benchmark of early school leaving is seen as unrestrictedly appropriate within the context of Europe 2020, and within the context of national policy, while the focus on the benchmark for tertiary attainment and the concept of upskilling deserves careful consideration in the light of national ET systems.

Further Information:

Gutknecht-Gmeiner (2012) Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich.

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

Comments:

The greatest impact on the VET sector in Austria deriving from the adoption of recent EU education policy frameworks are related to the adoption of the council recommendations on the EQF, ECVET, EQAVET and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The impact the implementation of these recommendations has had refer largely to the systemic and coherent implementation of the learning outcomes approach throughout VET curricula, the transparent description of programmes in terms of learning outcomes, the resulting improvement in mutual recognition and cooperation between ET sectors, the fostering of cross-border mobility, and the development of a national strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A unique and significant impact that was yielded by the adoption of the above council recommendation entails the intensified inter-governmental cooperation and stakeholder involvement at national level in steering committees and working groups, and the established bridges, mutual understanding and cooperation between the various ET stakeholders and subsystems.

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

Comments:

Alongside the European Commission, the OECD, the IEA provide important impetus for policy discussion and development at national level via their international comparative assessments of educational achievement. The OECD has become an important pool of expertise and resource also within the framework of the OECD skills strategy and the valuable country reports and reviews issued on an annual basis.

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

Comments:

Definite evidence on the direct impact of EU co-operation on national reforms is scarce, as clear cut data and impact analyses are methodologically challenging to conduct. Impact is often not unidirectional and evidence hardly ever clear cut.

However, it has been stated previously that many reforms at national level are strongly linked to EU policy and cooperation (see question 12 – implementation of learning outcomes approach, quality assurance systems, validation of non-formal and informal learning, etc.) and can be interpreted as triggered by EU cooperation and European ET policy.

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

Comments:

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YOUTH QUESTIONS

General Issues

16 What evidence is there that EU action in the area of Youth benefits or disadvantages the Austria?

Comments:

17 Do you think the EU should do more, or less, in relation to Youth, and why?

Comments:

18 Do you think the EU focuses on the right aims and priorities in the Youth field?

Comments:

19 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?

Comments:

20 Has the adoption of the Structured Dialogue had any impact on your sector?

Comments:

21 What other areas of EU competence or activity have an impact on your sector and how?

Comments:

22 What international bodies or arrangements are important to your sector beyond the EU?

Comments:

23 Has the EU had an impact on young people's opportunities to have a voice in policy and decision making, or on organisations' work to involve young people in shaping services?

Comments:

24 Has the EU had an impact on young people's social inclusion in the Austria?

Comments:

Youth Programmes

25 What are the benefits or disadvantages of having EU rather than national funding for activities under the Youth Programme?

Comments:

26 What do you think about the criteria and conditions set by the EU for applying for and receiving funding?

Comments:

27 What do you think about the aims and activities of Erasmus+ in comparison to the Youth in Action programme?

Comments:

28 Any other comments?

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply.	x
E-mail address for acknowledgement: eduard.staudecker@bmbf.gv.at	

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and use real discussion with affected parties and experts as well as the expertise of civil service learning to make well informed decisions
- departments should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy

- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Aileen Shaw, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed responses should be sent to the address shown below by 30 June 2014

Send by post to:

International Education Division, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

Send by e-mail to: BalanceofCompetence.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk.