

## Training up to the age of 18

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Support for young people in the acquisition of advanced qualifications (i.e. those going beyond compulsory schooling) has been a key objective on the Austrian youth-related policy agenda for quite some time: starting with the introduction of supra-company apprenticeship training at the end of the 1990s and its reform in the 2000s onto preventive programmes such as youth coaching which focus on early school-leavers or the easily accessible production schools, the “Training up to the age of 18” scheme, which was adopted in the summer of 2016, marks a major further development step.

This Austria-wide scheme, which was developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Youth, targets young people up to the age of 18 who have not yet acquired any qualification beyond compulsory schooling and are not in education or training. This affects around 7% of youths between 15 and below 18 years of age in Austria, or slightly over 21,000 young people in absolute figures. They are increasingly faced with the risk of exclusion on the labour market, poverty and social marginalisation. Consequently this scheme pursues the key objectives of encouraging conditions for stable professional careers and social integration.

With the Youth Training Act (*Jugendausbildungsgesetz*) there is now the statutory obligation for these young people to attend a training programme. In contrast to compulsory schooling, which lasts for nine years in Austria, the “Training up to the age of 18” scheme means that not only attendance of a school or completion of an apprenticeship is regarded as continuation of the educational career but also participation in non-formal programmes, such as those provided in the adult learning sector, or in measures which prepare for the (re-)integration into the education system in the longer term, such as German courses or measures in non-school-based youth work. The law basically provides for fines for parents whose children do not attend any programme as long as they are below the age of 18. But this is considered the last resort – the primary objective is to already support young people before they might leave the education system and/or help them with re-entry.

Pupils who attend their last year of compulsory schooling in the school year 2016/17 will be the first to be affected by the new law. The law provides for a few exceptions from compulsory participation, such as for medical reasons, if the young people themselves have children or if they take part in programmes such as a voluntary social year. Asylum seekers are excluded from the “Training up to the age of 18” scheme even if they count among the group of early school leavers, however.

### *Which concrete steps will be taken?*

In the next years, a monitoring system will be set up to provide information about learners entering and leaving the formal and non-formal education systems. The information will be passed on to coordination offices in the individual provinces so they can contact young people who are learners under the “Training up to the age of 18” scheme.

In these cases it is envisaged to organise individual support for entry or re-entry into an education or training measure beyond compulsory schooling. This makes it necessary to form close networks between the different, already existing programmes, such as youth coaching, production schools or programmes organised via Public Employment Service Austria. In addition it is planned to increase the number of these programmes: an additional 6.8 million euros will be invested in these programmes in 2016 – in the following years, the

relevant budget will be stepped up on an annual basis and will rise to 57 million euros from 2020.

As well as the expansion of these offers, efforts in the field of prevention will also be required – those who do not leave school or training will not come under this “Training up to the age of 18” scheme in the first place. Specific approaches will still be needed in this respect in the next years; plans include pilot projects as part of supra-company apprenticeship training, for example.

## Sources

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