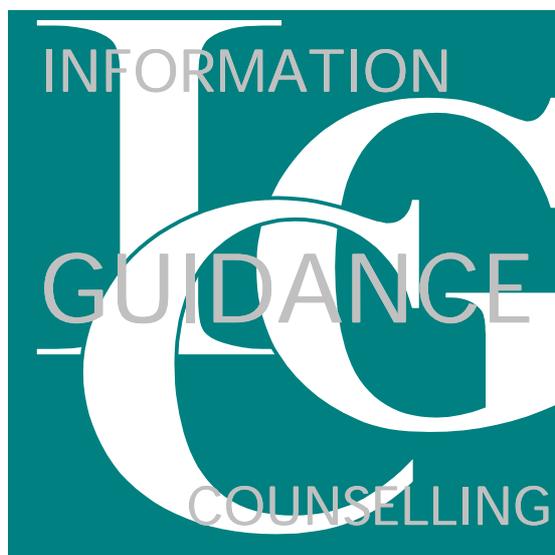


OECD REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE POLICIES

COUNTRY NOTE



AUSTRIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. As part of the OECD's comparative review of national policies for career guidance services Austria hosted a one-week review team visit on March 4-8, 2002¹. During the visit the review team visited guidance services in schools, in tertiary education, in employment offices, in training centres, and in community settings. In addition to visiting guidance programmes the team was able to meet key policy makers in both the education and employment portfolios, to talk to those responsible for developing career information materials, to meet representatives of professional associations of guidance practitioners, to meet a representative from Euroguidance responsible for European collaboration in the field of career guidance, and to talk to those responsible for training guidance practitioners. Drawing upon the visit, upon the national questionnaire that was provided to the OECD Secretariat before the visit, and upon other documentation, this Country Note summarises the impressions of the team as well as its suggestions for some of the ways in which career guidance service policies might be developed in Austria². In addition to its descriptive introduction, the Country Note raises a number of issues for consideration in order to suggest ways in which career guidance services might be improved. Some of these relate to particular sectors, such as schools or adult guidance, and others are transversal: for example issues that relate to professional training.

2. THE CONTEXT

2.1 *Austrian economic, labour market and education indicators*

2. Austria is, like its neighbour Germany, a country with a Federal constitution in which the nine Länder retain significant powers. With a population of just over eight million, it is a relatively small country by OECD standards. Its GDP per capita is somewhat higher than the OECD average (US\$27 800 per capita in 2001 compared to an OECD average of US\$24 600), and during the 1990s GDP grew, on average, somewhat faster than in the OECD as a whole. Sound economic performance during the 1990s helps to explain Austria's relatively good labour market outcomes, with the total unemployment rate in 2001 being 3.6%, below the OECD average of 6.2%. Austria has been particularly successful in achieving good labour market outcomes for its youth, one indicator of which is an unemployment rate for 15-24 year-olds in 2000 that was, at 6.3%, close to half that of the OECD as a whole (11.8%)³.

3. Overall public expenditure on education is somewhat above the OECD average in Austria, with expenditure per student being particularly high in secondary education (US\$8 163 compared to an OECD average of US\$5 294). PISA 2000 results (OECD, 2001a) showed Austrian 15-year-olds' performance to be somewhat above the OECD average. Upper secondary graduation rates in Austria are high (96% in 1998 compared to an average of 79% for the OECD as a whole). This relative advantage is a long-standing one, as the proportion of 50-54 year-olds in Austria who have completed upper secondary education is close to a third higher than the OECD average. However tertiary education completion rates in Austria are relatively low, and have been relatively low for many years: in 1998 the proportion of 30-34 year-olds and of 50-54 year-olds with a tertiary qualification were both only some 55% of the OECD average. Rates of

1. Appendix 1 gives details of the review team.

2. A description of large parts of the Austrian career guidance system in the mid 1990s can be found in OECD (1996).

3. The OECD's Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life (OECD, 2000a) points to a number of other favourable youth labour market indicators in Austria, such as employment rates among 20-24 year-olds and the youth to adult unemployment ratio.

adult participation in education also appear to be relatively low in Austria. Only 1.5% of adults over the age of 35 were enrolled in any form of formal education in 1998, compared to an OECD average of over twice that (OECD, 2001b); and Eurostat Labour Force Survey data show rates of participation in adult learning of only around seven per cent in Austria in the mid 1990s, compared to figures that are well over twice this for countries such as The Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland (OECD, 2002a, Figure 3.1).

2.2 *The structure of the Austrian education system*

4. To understand how career guidance is organised within Austria, and to understand the demands that are placed upon it, it is important to first understand the complex pathways that exist through schooling and beyond. An important feature of the school system is that students are streamed into distinctive school types at an early age. At the end of the fourth grade, or roughly at age ten, students are divided into the 30% attending Secondary Academic Schools or Gymnasia and the 70% attending Lower Secondary Schools or Hauptschule (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, 2001)⁴.

5. Lower secondary education ends after grade 8, at which point students can be faced with complex choices⁵. Those in the Gymnasium are faced with two main options: to continue to upper secondary education within the Gymnasium with the aim of entering university after grade 12; or to transfer to a Secondary Technical and Vocational College to undertake a demanding five-year programme leading both to a tertiary-entry qualification and to a recognised⁶ occupational qualification. Roughly 60% of lower secondary Gymnasium students take the first route, staying in the same type of school, and roughly 38% take the second route. The remaining very small minority enter Secondary Technical and Vocational Schools where they undertake a full-time⁷ vocational education programme that leads to a recognised occupational qualification. These programmes are of varying length, and can last up to four years.

6. The first group of grade 8 Gymnasium students are largely faced with decisions about which subjects to study in upper secondary school, with relatively weak occupational implications. The second group must make decisions that can have much stronger occupational implications, but which can also lead to a wide range of tertiary education programmes rather than to a specific occupation. The small third group must make decisions that have quite specific occupational implications.

7. The 70% of the total cohort who enter a Hauptschule after grade 4 are faced, at the end of grade 8, with three main options⁸. They can enter a Secondary Technical and Vocational College to gain a double qualification (and around 30% do so). They can enter a full-time Secondary Technical and Vocational School and study for an occupational qualification (around 17% take this route). Or they can decide that

4. However within Vienna these proportions are reversed, with roughly 70% entering the Gymnasium and roughly 30% entering the Hauptschule. (These percentages are approximate, being affected both by rounding errors and by the small proportion -- roughly 3% -- who attend special schools).

5. In addition to the options that are described below, special provision -- for example a pre-vocational year -- is made for the small number of pupils with special educational needs to help their transition from school.

6. "Recognised" implies a qualification that has been approved by the social partners as qualifying the individual for a particular occupation.

7. Normally students in these schools are required to undertake periods of work placement, particularly during summer holidays, where projects that relate to their school work must be undertaken.

8. In addition to the three main options that are described, some -- no more than five per cent -- transfer to a Gymnasium.

they wish to become an apprentice: this involves a combination of employment and attendance at a Vocational School for Apprentices, and leads to a recognised occupational qualification.

8. A decision to become an apprentice after grade 8 can lead to difficult decisions for some young people. In Austria, lower secondary education ends at the end of grade 8, but compulsory education ends roughly one year later, at the age of 15. For those who continue within the Gymnasium, or who move either from the Gymnasium or the Hauptschule to a Secondary Technical and Vocational College or a Secondary Technical and Vocational School, this is not a problem. However most of those who wish to become an apprentice after the end of lower secondary education must mark time, as they will not be old enough to take up an apprenticeship (in which they are classed as an employee rather than a student) for another year. The most common choice is to enter a one-year Pre-vocational School for Apprentices, and then to seek an apprenticeship one year later⁹. So at the end of lower secondary school they must make decisions about the strategy that they will use to mark time before taking up an apprenticeship, as well as make a decision about the type of specific occupational field that they want to become an apprentice in¹⁰.

9. Early streaming, which carries important implications for young people's later educational and occupational choices, is one of the features of the Austrian education system. A second, as described above, is the way in which the distinct pathways through different school types present young people with complex decisions about learning and work, and with decisions that have quite different educational and occupational consequences depending upon the point within the system at which they are taken.

10. A third feature is the existence of many opportunities for cross-over and transfer between pathways. For example:

- Some four in ten of those who begin in a Gymnasium in grade 4 transfer to a Secondary Technical and Vocational College.
- Apprenticeship can be entered directly from the Hauptschule or, more commonly, from the Pre-vocational Schools, but also by transferring laterally from Secondary Technical and Vocational Schools, or by "dropping down" from a Gymnasium or a Secondary Technical and Vocational College¹¹.
- Those who have completed an apprenticeship can sit for a special examination (the *Berufsaufnahmeprüfung*) to qualify them for entry to tertiary education.
- Those who have completed the four-year course required to obtain the final examination (*Matura*) in a Gymnasium can then undertake a two-year bridging course to make up the difference between it and the double qualifications awarded after five years of study in a Secondary Technical and Vocational College.

11. Generally each of the pathways through secondary education in Austria is associated with a different type of school, with a separate teaching force, with separate legislation and regulations, and with a separate central administrative department within the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and

9. Some 12% of those in the Hauptschule are old enough at the end of grade 8 to enter an apprenticeship directly.

10. Others transfer to an apprenticeship after a period in a full-time Secondary Technical and Vocational School, or after finding that the demanding programmes of the Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges are too difficult for them.

11. Such young people are reported to be highly valued by employers (OECD, 1999).

Culture¹². Together these tend to reinforce the separate nature of pathways, and they tend to make substantial structural reform to pathways (for example the introduction of comprehensive lower secondary education) very difficult to achieve. These difficulties are exacerbated by the strong reliance upon legislation to regulate and govern Austrian education, and by the requirement for all educational legislation to achieve a two thirds majority in the Parliament if it is to pass. This requires strong social consensus to underpin any major, and many minor, educational changes.

12. Two important additional features of the pathways through education to work in Austria are low graduation rates in tertiary education and accompanying high dropout rates. Graduation rates in first degree (tertiary type A) programmes in Austria in 1999 have been estimated to be only a 11.1%, the fourth lowest in the OECD and the lowest in the European Union, compared to rates that are roughly three times this in countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, the United States and Spain (OECD, 2001c, Chart C4.1). Using a different estimation method, dropout rates from university in Austria in 1996 have been estimated to be 47%, the third highest in the OECD (OECD, 2000b, Table C4.1)¹³.

2.3 *Career guidance services in Austria: An overview*

2.3.1 *Schools*

13. In principle, career guidance in Austrian schools is organised according to a three-level model: career education lessons are provided by careers teachers; individual advice is provided by student advisors; and both of these are supplemented by a School Psychology Service that can offer specialised assistance. These are supplemented by classroom teachers and a wide range of other individuals and agencies outside the school.

Career education lessons

14. Reflecting the importance of the decisions that students must make at the end of grade 8, since 1998-99 Austrian legislation has provided for all grade 7 and 8¹⁴ students to take part in career education lessons. This is an important and distinctive feature of career guidance in Austria, as elsewhere in the OECD formal career education classes are often either absent from secondary education or, where they exist, are often not compulsory. Supported by a formal curriculum, these career lessons occupy a total of 32 lesson periods per year. The lessons can be delivered in one of two ways. For those students who are in the Hauptschule, they are sometimes (in around 45% of cases¹⁵) provided as a separate school subject. However in the Gymnasia, and in more than half the time in the Hauptschule, they are most commonly taught using an “integrated” model: in other words they are taught by teachers of other school subjects as part of these subjects¹⁶. The effectiveness of the integrated model is an issue of some debate in Austria, and

12. Referred to from now on in this Country Note as the Ministry of Education.

13. However recent Austrian analysis shows the survival rate in the tertiary sector to have increased from 48.5% in the academic year 1994/95 to 63.7% in the academic year 2000/01 (BMBWK, Hochschulbericht, Bd. 1, S. 158 f - http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medien/8330_hb_2002_bd1.pdf)

14. In addition schools have the option to begin teaching career education from grade 6.

15. The proportion varies between the different Länder.

16. Geography and economics, German, history and social studies, religion and handicraft are the most common subjects that career lessons are integrated with in the Gymnasium. When the legislation requiring careers lessons to be provided to all students in grades 7 and 8 was being drawn up it was originally intended that in all cases separate lessons should be provided. However teachers, within the Gymnasia in

it is commonly criticised as inadequate. It is often felt that this model does not give career education the importance that it deserves, at times it is not clear that the required hours really are devoted to careers, and often the teachers are not adequately trained to teach it. Some limited training programmes are available for the teachers who deliver these lessons. However this training was reported generally not to be made use of by teachers using the integrated model, and when it is available it tends to vary widely across the different Länder. If the integrated model is to work effectively, experience in the Hauptschule suggests that good co-ordination is required. This, in turn, requires sufficient time and resources to be available to co-ordinate the teachers who are delivering the careers lessons.

15. The curriculum includes opportunities for students to reflect upon their strengths, weaknesses, interests and preferences, as well as to explore the world of work. This would commonly include work experience in enterprises for students in the Hauptschule, but less commonly for students in the Gymnasia. At around 1-2 days, the duration of this work experience appears to be relatively brief compared to the some other OECD countries¹⁷. However the preparation of students to participate in it appears thorough, and it seems to be very well supported by employers. An additional tool for the career education courses, relatively recently developed, is a jobs passport in which students can record what they have done to learn about the world of work.

Student advisers

16. The career lessons that are provided in grades 7 and 8 are, at least in principle, supplemented by individual assistance that can be provided by student advisers. These are teachers who receive special training for the task of providing students with help with their educational and occupational decisions. The Ministry of Education develops the guidelines for this training, which is delivered by the Länder in co-operation with pedagogical institutes for the Hauptschule, pre-vocational schools and special needs schools, and by the Ministry of Education itself, again in co-operation with pedagogical institutes, for teachers in the Gymnasia and the vocational schools. The initial training is quite brief, lasting for only three weeks, which is followed by a further six periods of training each lasting from three days to one week. This initial training can be supplemented with one week a year of recurrent training. Differences between the Länder in the duration of the initial training were reported to be quite large. However in 2003 a new standardised initial training course of 208 hours over two and a half years is to be trialled in three Länder.

17. Whilst student advisers do receive some brief initial training for their role, and have the opportunity to undertake some later in-service training, the resources that are made available to them for the task are quite limited. Generally they receive only 1-2 hours per week for the task¹⁸, but many are reported to devote more hours than this to student advice on a voluntary basis. Often they are not provided with appropriate facilities such as an office where interviews can be conducted privately and career

particular, expressed concerns that this would reduce the amount of time available for other subjects, and as a compromise the “integrated” model was adopted.

17. For example in Denmark most students undertake at least two different one-week work experience placements in grades 7-9. In Norway almost all students have a week of work experience in grade 9, and some have a further placement in grade 10. In British Columbia (Canada), all students must complete 30 hours of work experience in order to graduate.

18. At the time that the role was created, teacher unions argued for student advisers receiving additional salary to recompense them for their additional training, rather than additional hours of release from teaching to perform the role.

information and resource materials displayed, or with access to computer facilities¹⁹. This means that in practice very few school students are able to receive individual advice.

18. A special project (My Way) has been initiated to provide some student advisers with additional facilities. It was operating in only a limited number of schools (ten) at the time of the national visit, and the actual resources provided, including a special room, a computer and some limited additional staff hours (3-6), were relatively limited. However it is an initiative that is certainly a step in the right direction.

19. While the formal policy connection between the work of careers teachers and student advisers within the Ministry of Education is limited, the review team gained the impression that at the level of the individual school working relationships are generally co-operative and effective.

The School Psychology Service

20. The work of both the careers teachers and the student advisers can be supplemented by the School Psychology Service. This is a relatively small service²⁰, staffed, as the name implies, by qualified psychologists. Many of the individual students who are referred to it are referred because of the behavioural, emotional or study difficulties that they are experiencing, rather than for specialised career advice. However whilst it is not a specialised career guidance service, its role in career guidance is an important one. It is responsible for organising the training programmes for student advisers, has developed specialised interest tests for use in career guidance -- including an on-line version -- and has an important role in policy formulation and co-ordination.

Other school career guidance services

21. In addition to the staff -- careers teachers, student advisers and school psychologists -- who formally provide career guidance, Austrian legislation imposes a broad duty upon all teachers to relate the subjects that they teach to the world of work. Whilst this might be interpreted as a formality, the review team was impressed by the frequency with which the students that we met indicated that they relied upon their teachers as sources of information and advice for their educational and occupational decisions. It is also worth pointing out that the initial training of all teachers in the Hauptschule involves some careers content. This suggests that the culture of Austrian schools and teachers supplements the formal role of careers staff with strong informal networks.

22. A very important and distinctive feature of career guidance in Austrian schools is the way in which the work of those within the school is supplemented by a assistance provided by wide variety of individuals and agencies from outside of the school. These include:

- The Federal Employment Office (AMS). Its 56 career information centres (BIZ) in Austria are regularly visited by groups of school students taking part in organised programmes designed to provide them with job and career information. These are further described in Section 2.3.2 below;

19. By way of comparison, comparable teachers in Irish upper secondary schools normally receive at least a 50% release from teaching duties and are provided with a dedicated room and a computer. This is in addition to being required to obtain a specialist post-graduate guidance qualification that involves the equivalent of one year of full-time study.

20. For example at the time of the review team's visit there were only around 150 school psychologists in Austria, not all full-time and permanent, compared to around 2,370 student advisers. In the Vienna area there were only three psychologists for the 20,000 students in 36 vocational schools.

- The career information centres, which exist in nearly all Provinces, under various names, which are run by the Economic Chambers²¹. Like the AMS, these provide a programme of formally organised visits for groups of school students. These visits give students access both to extensive print and audio-visual material and to a network of employer contacts that students can consult for personal visits. It provides occupational tests of practical skills, and has available samples of the types of materials that are used in different occupations for young people to sample in a hands-on way. The multiple media in which information is available, and the systematic use of networking and experience to convey information, are particularly attractive features of the centres. The service tends to concentrate upon careers that follow completion of an apprenticeship or other vocational qualification rather than upon careers that follow completion of a tertiary qualification²²;
- Employers and trade unions²³, both through central organisations and individually, play a significant role in assisting young people to make the “second transition” from apprenticeship to full-time work, through advice and information that are offered in a wide variety of ways;
- Each year three very large job and education fairs are held -- in Vienna and in two regional centres. These are organised by a professional company that is contracted by the Ministry of Education, are organised in co-operation with the AMS, and are visited by tens of thousands of young people and their families each year. They involve many hundreds of professional and trade organisations, employers, trade unions and educational institutions, are carefully and strategically marketed to schools and to the community at large, and are carefully evaluated each year to assess their impact and effectiveness. Material has been developed by the Ministry of Education, and provided to schools, to help students prepare for their visits to the fairs. These fairs cover vocational training, tertiary education and adult education, but have a particular emphasis upon assisting prospective, and enrolled, tertiary students;
- The Austrian National Union of Students has, for many years, provided a voluntary but highly organised programme of advisory services for final year (grade 12) school students to assist the transition to university life. This involves a comprehensive programme of visits to school classes to provide information on university study, as well as individual advice that is available to both prospective and current students in the offices of the Union. Those who take part in the school visits are provided with some training by the Union. The programme is currently (2003) being expanded, with training for its personnel being improved, and attempts to target students in school earlier;

21 . In Austria all employers must belong to an Economic Chamber. The membership fees are used to fund a wide range of services for employers but also for the wider community, including the career information centres. Also included is a personal career guidance service that includes psychological testing and individual interviews. This service is funded partly from client fees but is also heavily subsidised from the chambers’ general resources.

22 . Both the AMS BIZs and the Economic Chambers’ centres appear to be visited by very large numbers of students, and demand for their services from schools seems to be very high. While there is some tension between the two about their roles, the impression gained by the review team is that they are complementary rather than duplicating one another. For example the Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour reported that the BIZ clients came from a wider age range than those using the Economic Chambers’ centres, who tend largely to be youth. Certainly the view that clients should have a choice of services is common in Austria.

23 . In addition to the career guidance service provided by the Federal Economic Chamber, the Chamber of Labour (the legal representative of employees) also provides an individual career guidance service in all Länder. This is largely directed to assisting the unemployed, and is free of charge.

- At the local level, it is very common to find extensive networks of employers, trade unions, educational institutions and other community organisations that assist school career guidance programmes through making work sites available for visits, through providing speakers as part of career education classes, and through helping the organisation of job and education fairs. An impressive example of one such network, the *Berufsfindungsbegleiter* project in Hartberg, Styria, is described in Box 1.
- In addition to the above, a number of special career guidance bodies for young women have been established in Austria since the 1980s to help address the issue of gender stereotyping in occupational choice.

BOX 1: The *Berufsfindungsbegleiter* project in Hartberg, Styria

The province of Styria has established a strong regional network to improve young people's transition to work. It addresses a number of problems: lack of information about apprenticeship; insufficient career guidance; young people's lack of awareness of their strengths and weaknesses; and the need for more support for parents in helping their children. The network includes a wide range of organisations and individuals. These include: the Styrian provincial government; schools and other educational institutions; employer organisations; individual companies; trade unions; and the labour market service. The project is co-ordinated by the Styrian Economic Society, and funding is provided by the provincial government's economics department. It is very much seen as a regional economic development initiative, not as a social initiative. The network employs six staff, four of whom are located in different parts of Styria.

The network project supports a wide range of initiatives, central to all of which is improved contact between schools and firms, and improved access to advice and information. Specific initiatives include data bases of apprenticeship opportunities; co-ordination of work experience placements -- that are more extensive than found in many other regions; networks of employers who can speak at schools; information evenings for young people and parents; support and resources for school student advisers and career teachers.

The project had been in existence for three years at the time of the visit. Evaluations show that, in this period, apprenticeship openings have risen in the four areas covered by the project, but that they have fallen in other areas of Styria.

2.3.2 The public employment service

23. The Austrian Federal Employment Office (AMS) delivers its services through some 110 local offices. It is intended that by 2003, all will provide services using a common integrated, three-tier model. (At the time of the review team's visit this model had been introduced into roughly a third of local offices, with the model first being introduced in a number of pilot offices in 1999). The first level is known as the self-service area, and is available to all: the employed, job seekers, and those not in the labour market. At this level basic information and job vacancy information is available, with all job vacancies being available on-line, through the Internet. At the next level - the service area - personal advice, information, job placement and unemployment benefit administration is available to job seekers. The third level of service is known as the counselling area. It involves more intensive counselling and advice for those with particularly difficult labour market problems. Some special target groups -- for example women returning to work after parental leave, disabled persons and older job seekers -- are automatically referred to the counselling area. Others are referred there if they remain jobless after three months in the service area. At any one time roughly 25%-30% of job seekers are in the counselling area. This way of delivering labour market services replaces a previous system in which there was a clear separation between job placement, including counselling, and benefit administration.

24. These services are provided in an integrated way by all AMS staff²⁴. These staff all undertake the same basic internal training of a full-time course of six months duration, which is supplemented by roughly an additional one-and-a-half weeks in-service training each year.

25. Some 90% of AMS clients²⁵ are job seekers who are on unemployment benefits, with the remainder being groups such as school leavers and women returning to the labour force²⁶. In addition to services for individual job seekers, the AMS provides counselling and advice services to firms primarily to support the recruitment of staff, but also to assist older workers to retain employment, to support those facing redundancy and displacement, and to help the low-qualified to improve their skills. However services to the employed, other than in such enterprise-based programmes, represent a very small proportion of the work of the AMS.

26. The AMS also provides services to schools. Until the beginning of the 1990s, it had a regular programme of staff visits to schools (OECD, 1999). However with the increasing levels of unemployment in the 1990s, the AMS priorities shifted to assisting the unemployed. As a result, schools are now assisted through the vocational information centres (BIZ) that are attached to regional offices. As indicated in Section 2.3.1 above, these centres provide programmes of half day visits for school groups, normally arranged at the request of school teachers. As with the class visits to the Economic Chambers' career information centres described above, these visits are normally part of the grade 7-8 career lessons, and in both cases they are seen as a resource available to the school teacher.

27. In addition to the services that it provides directly, the AMS contracts out some guidance services to a range of for-profit and not-for-profit organisations which in turn can contract services to private counsellors. Much of this work takes the form of six week "orientation" courses for groups of 14-20 people, which cover matters such as job finding techniques and career planning, but also personal and social skills. According to some of those providing these courses, the quality control exercised by the AMS over the skills and qualifications of those delivering the courses could be further developed. In an attempt to develop an improved approach to quality assurance, a Professional Association of Counsellors was formed in 2001. Membership is voluntary, but requires initial training or experience in the field, a commitment to ethical standards, a willingness to undertake further training and a willingness to accept professional supervision.

28. The AMS is also responsible for producing occupational information, most of which is contracted out to a wide range of private firms and organisations. This takes the form both of booklets and information folders (each BIZ, for example, has a library of some 200 such folders), which are revised at the latest once every three years, and of an on-line data base. However much of the information that was seen by the review team seemed as if it could be made much more user-friendly. The print seemed to be fairly dense and not always easy to read or easily to navigate, and it contained few graphics or illustrations.

24. However some staff continue to specialise in services for particular groups such as youth and the handicapped.

25. Excluding the clients of the BIZ.

26. As indicated above, the Chamber of Labour also provides a career guidance service for unemployed adults. It sees itself as a complement to the AMS, and as being able to offer a more personalised service.

2.3.3 Tertiary education

29. Career guidance services in tertiary education²⁷ are relatively under-developed in Austria. A 1998 review of vocational guidance in higher education concluded that that as yet it was not highly professionalised, that to a large extent it operated through information giving, and that:

“In general, counselling and guidance provisions at institutions of higher education present themselves as a patchwork of services active at different institutions, in different geographical areas, with different forms of specialisations, that are not systematically organised so as to make all forms of guidance and counselling *equally* available to each student at each university.” (Schilling and Moist, 1998, p. 55).

30. The Ministry of Education has established six Psychological Student Counselling Service centres to assist students and prospective students in both universities and the Fachhochschulen. The Service seems to have a high standard of professionalism, but within a relatively specific field: it largely deals with personal, emotional and study problems experienced by enrolled students, rather than specifically with career decision making and career development issues²⁸.

31. The efficiency of the present system for collecting and disseminating information on tertiary study for prospective students, in both sectors, could be improved. No common standards on the format and content of information appear to be required of the individual institutions that provide it to the Ministry of Education²⁹; in most cases the information is supplied to the Ministry in the form of leaflets and newsletters or otherwise in print, rather than electronically; and the main annual handbook that is produced by the Ministry of Education, in association with the AMS, is made available primarily to teachers, and grade 11 and 12 students who were interviewed by the review team often seemed not to be aware of it.

32. There is also a lack of consumer guides to tertiary education that might enable potential students to compare particular courses at individual universities in terms of factors such as content, quality of teaching, graduation rates, post-study employment rates and graduate destinations³⁰.

33. There are some careers services available that provide advice and information to students on post-study employment options, that provide a job placement service, and that liaise between universities and the world of employment³¹. However these are relatively few in number (seven). Much of the advice that is provided to students on jobs and careers is provided informally by academic staff, and the Austrian National Union of Students provides advice to students about university life, housing, finance and other practical issues on a voluntary basis.

27. In Austria there are two main sectors within tertiary education: the universities and the Fachhochschulen

28. Psychological and personal problems were reported to occupy 75% of the Centres' staff time, although to represent only 22% of issues or problems dealt with. Only 25% of the staff time is used for supporting the choice or change of course of study.

29. However information such as the duration of courses and the number of teaching hours per semester is specified in legislation and as such is standardised.

30. General information on the occupations that particular fields of study can lead to is available (see http://www.ams.or.at/b_info/index100.htm). However this is not the same thing as a consumer guide that provides a comparison, on a course-by-course, or university-by-university basis, of factors such as students' satisfaction with their courses and the quality of the teaching, and graduates' employment outcomes and earnings.

31. In addition there is a privately funded placement service at the Vienna Economic University that was established in 1983. It is funded through fees paid by employers, but this is not a model that can easily be generalised to other faculties and areas of study.

34. The lack of consumer guides and the relatively small number of placement services stems in part from the strong centralised tradition in Austrian tertiary education, and a relatively strong isolation from the world of work. However there are currently pressures for this to change, with central Ministry control over the content of the curriculum, and standard curriculum content in the same faculties of different universities, giving way to greater curriculum diversity across institutions, and greater institutional control over curriculum content. Such changes are likely to increase competition between institutions, and in turn this is likely to result in greater attention being paid to attracting potential students and to monitoring their satisfaction and outcomes. Some work of this type, for example on the ranking of several fields of study, has begun within the Ministry of Education. Such developments will increase pressures for strengthened tertiary education careers services.

2.3.4 *Adult education*

35. As implied in Section 2.1, adult learning is relatively under-developed in Austria. However this is an area that has been receiving increasing policy attention and resources, and as part of this growing policy importance some interesting pilot initiatives have been undertaken, particularly at the regional level, to improve career guidance for adult education. Significant effort has been devoted to developing electronic data bases of course information, although often these are not sufficiently well integrated.

BOX 2: Adult guidance in Burgenland

In the county of Burgenland the Ministry of Education has established a regional service to address the need for adult guidance that is independent of particular adult education providers. The service is located in a regional adult education support centre, rather than in an institution that provides adult education. It has a high proportion of women who are unemployed or seeking to return to work among its clients, but sees adult education providers as its clients, as well as individuals. Its services are free.

The service has a number of interesting and innovative features:

- In order to give information and guidance to people where they are located and at times that are convenient to them, it provides guidance by telephone and by e-mail as well as face-to-face;
- It provides guidance to smaller communities in the region on a peripatetic basis, rather than requiring all clients to travel to the regional centre;
- It is committed to using data to improve its client services. It was established in conjunction with a survey to define client needs, it maintains a computerised data base of client needs and problems and feeds results from this to adult education providers, and it is being evaluated in association with the University of Graz.
- It makes intelligent use of the local media in order to publicise its services and to increase access.
- It communicates with regional adult education providers through a regular newsletter, and has developed a data base of adult education advisors in the region to help it keep in touch with regional institutions.

36. As in many other OECD countries, adult education provision in Austria is fragmented across a number of institutions. These include: adult education centres funded by the Ministry of Education; the economic chambers; trade unions; chambers of labour; organisations representing specific groups such as migrants and gypsies; and local communities/municipalities. In many cases funding for these services is less secure than in other areas of education. And unlike guidance services that are provided in schools,

those in adult education are not subject to legal regulation. Both of these factors make a co-ordinated approach to guidance in adult education more difficult to achieve. The training and qualifications of the staff who provide career guidance in adult education institutions, for example, can be quite variable, as can their conditions of employment. As one way of attempting to improve the co-ordination of guidance for adult education, the Ministry of Education has developed a data base of such guidance services, and this can be used as a tool by both clients and counsellors. It is the basis both of annual workshops of counsellors and of communication through virtual communities of counsellors. In addition, the Ministry of Education operates the Federal Institute for Adult Education (BifEB) which, among other roles, provides initial and recurrent training programmes for guidance staff in adult education. These courses are relatively brief (with the initial training course lasting only some three weeks in total) but have proved to be very popular with adult education staff. Those who complete the courses are awarded a certificate, but these do not form part of any formal national qualifications framework.

37. A particularly important initiative has been the establishment of a number of regional adult education centres that have responsibility to provide information and advice on a regional basis. This allows potential adult learners to receive broader and more objective advice and information than can be provided by individual institutions, where often the role that guidance staff are asked to play in marketing institutions' courses can be perceived as compromising their independence. The regional adult education centre that was visited in Burgenland by the review team was particularly innovative, and has features that a number of other countries might wish to learn from. It is described in Box 2.

3. POLICY ISSUES

38. There are a number of very positive features to the provision of career guidance services in Austria. A wide range of services exists, at most levels and in most sectors of the education system, in the labour market, and in community settings. The review team was impressed by the positive and enthusiastic approaches of nearly all who are involved. This is reflected in:

- Close co-operation and good working relationships between the key stakeholders, both government and non-government;
- The existence of many partnerships to support programme delivery;
- The existence of many local initiatives and a lot of voluntary effort.

39. Reflecting these close working relationships, employers and the chamber of labour in co-operation with trade unions play a very strong and practical role in shaping policy. They also play a much stronger role than in many other countries in the direct provision of a range of career guidance services: information centres; personal guidance; and participation in careers fairs. The strong support that the social partners and other bodies provide for career guidance can be seen at the regional and local levels as well as at the national level. This strong external involvement in career guidance by a wide range of community members and organisations is one of the most important and distinctive features of career guidance in Austria.

40. Austria has also taken a number of steps to improve career guidance in recent years, all of which seem to be in the right direction, even if their scale and the resources devoted to them could both be increased in some cases. These initiatives and pilot programmes include the introduction of career education into the curriculum; the My Way projects to extend the resources available to student advisers;

the creation of networks of adult education guidance staff; the regional adult guidance pilots; the three-tier assistance model adopted by the AMS; and the creation of an association of counsellors.

3.1 Career guidance and pathways through education and beyond

41. Many of the problems that career guidance services are asked to respond to in Austria are a function of the nature of the pathways that young people are provided with through education to working life. Choices must be made at an early age, the boundaries between general and vocational education are quite tight, and the several pathways, represented by different school types, are highly differentiated. Young people can make downwards transfers between tracks, but lateral transfers are less easy. These problems are compounded by regional imbalances in the availability of pathways that are provided: in the Vienna region some 70% enter the Gymnasium track, but in the rest of Austria it is only around 30%. In each case there is likely to be an imbalance between young people's real abilities and interests and available opportunities, with a resulting pressure for transfer to other tracks.

42. In countries with comprehensive schooling systems that allow specific occupational choices to be delayed until a later age, the types of educational and occupational decisions faced by young people of any given age are relatively similar. In Austria, young people have to make educational choices at an early age which have major implications for later work and study options, and they are tracked into highly differentiated pathways within the school system schooling. As a result, young people who are of a similar age but who are in different pathways are faced with quite different types of career-related decisions³².

43. While the ideal answer to the difficult career-related decisions that young Austrians must make at an early age might lie in pathway reform, as has occurred in other OECD countries, the reality in Austria is that pathways are very difficult to modify, for reasons that were outlined in Section 2.2. This has resulted in policy makers seeing improved guidance as one way to help make pathways work better for young people³³. This was an important motivation for the introduction of the mandatory career education classes in grades 7 and 8. Certainly this move was a very positive one, and a step in the right direction. However if guidance is to be of maximum value in making such a system effective, it is important for it to be provided in a more differentiated way.

44. A particular problem exists for those who are in the Gymnasium and Secondary Vocational and Technical College tracks. They are provided with careers assistance in grades 7 and 8, some years before they need to make specific choices about careers and the world of work. But in their final year of schooling, when they are faced with the need to make detailed decisions about courses of tertiary study, or of an occupation or further vocational training, classes that could help with these decisions are not provided. Many are able to take advantage of careers fairs, and some assistance is provided by the Austrian National Union of Students. However their student advisers have very little time available to assist them on a one-to-one basis, and no curriculum time is set aside at this stage. A similar problem exists in the case of students in the last years of the Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges. While they will emerge from their courses with a qualification in a specific occupational area, they are also faced with the option of choosing between a wide range of tertiary courses, not only in areas related to their occupational specialisation but also more widely. For both groups of students there is a strong need for a better concentration of guidance resources in the last two years of schooling. This should take the form both of increased resources (particularly time) for student advisers to work with these students, and of the introduction of curriculum-based careers assistance.

32. Section 2.2 above outlines some of these differences.

33. Together with other initiatives such as more flexibility in movement between pathways, increased curriculum choice, and greater involvement of the world outside of the school (e.g. career fairs).

45. In addition the guidance needs of those in the Pre-vocational Schools could receive more attention. The experience of attending the schools may help to sharpen and better focus decisions about which apprenticeship to enter, but a significant number (around one in eight) do not appear to move from these schools into an apprenticeship.

3.2 *Career guidance in schools*

46. Schools in Austria are required to provide career lessons to all students in grades 7 and 8. This is a strength of the Austrian system, particularly when compared to other countries in which career assistance is not mandated. Another strength, at least in principle, is that services in schools are organised in a coherent and potentially attractive three-layer model: careers teachers to provide curriculum delivery; student advisers for individual attention; and school psychologists. Despite these strengths, there are a number of weaknesses in school career guidance services:

- There is quite a weak resource base for career guidance in schools in Austria compared to many other countries. The hours allocated to student advisers are very low, raising the question of whether in fact it is possible to gain any return on the resources invested in training them. In addition the physical resources (space for student advisers to work; access to computers; printed resources) seem poor.
- A particular problem appears to exist with the “integrated” delivery model, which does not, in many cases, seem to be an effective response to students’ needs.
- The training for careers teachers and student advisers is fragmented and of very limited duration. It needs to be both upgraded and standardised.
- The amount of real work life contact by students is quite limited when compared to other countries.

47. So while in theory services are organised in schools in a three-layer model, each of the individual layers is fairly weak, and the integrated model in practice has a low profile. The student advisers in particular are given poor support and few resources, and as a result have a very ambivalent profile in schools.

48. The three-tier model is potentially an attractive one, and it could be strengthened by, as a first step, increasing the time and resources available for the student advisers, both so that they can devote more time to the needs of individual students, and so that they can increase the time that they can spend in co-ordinating the work of the careers teachers, particularly if the integrated model of career education is not to be replaced. Extending the My Way initiative to all schools would be an important first step in increasing the resources that are given to the student advisers and in strengthening their role. As part of this extension, experimenting with using the additional space provided to the advisers to create information self-service spaces that can be used by students when a teacher is not present could be considered.

3.3 *Career guidance in tertiary education*

49. The Ministry of Education supports and funds the provision of a psychological counselling service for enrolled students. While its orientation is not primarily on careers work it is a source of assistance, that students and prospective students who are having difficulties are able to turn to.

50. A very positive feature of the way in which career guidance is provided for tertiary education in Austria is the role played by the Austrian National Union of Students in helping to inform grade 12 students about options and possibilities for university study. However there is a need for the assistance provided to grade 12 students to help them to decide upon university courses to be strengthened. One indication of the need for career guidance for grade 12 students to be strengthened is the very high rates of drop-out from tertiary study in Austria. One step that could be taken to address this issue would be to strengthen the quantity and quality of information on tertiary courses that is provided to students in grade 12. The major publication that summarises available courses is provided to student advisers in schools each year by the Ministry of Education, as well as to other institutions such as student unions. While it is reported to be provided to all students in Secondary Technical and Vocational schools, it appears to be left up to students themselves to gain access to it in Gymnasias and the Secondary Technical and Vocational Colleges. Many students do not seem aware of it, and students that we met assumed that their teachers would make the information available to them when they needed it. In addition we suggest that advice could be sought on ways to make it visually more attractive and user-friendly.

51. There is also a need for tertiary education consumer guides to be developed in Austria. These should including not only information on course content, but also data on the career opportunities that courses typically lead to, graduation rates, employment rates and student satisfaction rates. These are common in other countries, and are an important means for potential students to gain information on tertiary courses to help their decision making. The need for such guides will grow as the Austrian tertiary education system becomes more diversified and less centralised, and as differences begin to emerge between universities in the content and orientation of similarly-named courses. In other countries the private market often plays this role. The government can help to stimulate the production of such guides through, for example, commissioning course satisfaction surveys, conducting graduate follow-ups, and making information of this sort publicly available.

52. Another weakness in tertiary education career guidance services is the relative lack of specialised placement services for graduating students. Again, the need for these will rise as the Austrian tertiary education system becomes more diversified and as the content of degree programmes becomes more differentiated between universities. Such services, in other countries, can also assume a more extended careers guidance role, providing assistance with career choice to enrolled students throughout their university studies, not only at the point of graduation. They can act as an important co-ordinated source of information on the link between universities and the labour market. The Ministry of Education has an important role to play in stimulating and funding such services, in much the same way that it funds the provision of psychological services for enrolled students.

3.4 *Career guidance for adults*

53. The fragmentation of adult education services in Austria is one of the key factors in the fragmentation of adult career guidance services. Another is fragmentation of guidance services between education and labour market portfolios. Many services exist to provide educational and occupational guidance for adults, but they do not constitute an integrated system. There have, of course, been some impressive initiatives: the creation of information data bases; the development of a network of counsellors; and regional co-ordination of the type observed in Burgenland.

54. Harmonising the information base for career guidance in adult education is one step that could be taken to improve the system. The existence of many data bases of course information is a duplication of effort and resources, and the Ministry of Education should, as with information on tertiary study, play a stronger role in producing a single co-ordinated, course guide.

55. The initiative that was observed in Burgenland is an attractive one, carefully designed, and effective as a way to use resources. For these reasons it is suggested that it be both generalised across all regions, and put on a regular basis by providing it with permanent funding rather than year-to-year submission-based funding.

3.5 *Career guidance in the labour market sector*

56. The three-tier model of service delivery that is used in the AMS makes a great deal of sense from the client perspective, as it makes it possible for multiple client needs to be dealt with at a single service point: benefit administration; job placement; and advice and guidance. It also makes a great deal of sense in terms of flexibility in resource allocation.

57. While the model seems an improved way of dealing with the unemployed, who are the major client group of the AMS, from the wider perspective of active labour market policy, there are gaps in the range of career guidance services that are available in Austria. Unemployed people can receive assistance through the AMS. Those adults who have decided that adult education is the appropriate route for career development can seek advice from adult education institutions, although this will tend to concentrate upon educational guidance. This source of guidance will be used by many with low basic qualifications. However in Austria, as in many other OECD countries, there is no readily available service for employed adults who wish to develop their careers through changing jobs, through self-study, or through education and training other than that offered by adult education institutions. Some such adults are able to pay for the guidance services of the Economic Chambers' career information centres, but for others there is nowhere that they can readily turn to. In principle, of course, the AMS is available to all, regardless of their labour market status. However in practice its image as a source of help for the unemployed presents a major marketing problem in delivering its assistance to the employed.

58. One option for addressing this problem would be for the AMS to create and train a group of staff in the regional BIZ who could provide specialist adult career guidance. Such an initiative would make a lot of sense in light of the growing extent to which adults are now using the BIZ. In 2001 the number of adult users grew by 15% compared to the previous year, and adults constituted 47% of all BIZ users.

59. Giving the BIZ a more explicit role in adult guidance would have implications for staff training. However the staffing flexibility that is built into the three-tier service delivery model suggests that this would not be a major issue, as at present there are some AMS staff who specialise in providing services to other specific groups such as youth. It would also have implications for information resources -- ensuring that these are suitable for and attractive to adults, as well as to youth. A decision to progressively develop the guidance services of the BIZ in this way would require a sustained marketing effort, perhaps developed initially through regional pilot programmes. It would also have resource implications. At present the priority for the AMS is to focus its resources upon the unemployed. Without additional resources, more broadly targeted services for the employed and for companies could risk a reduction in services for the unemployed.

60. Examining the suitability of current career information for an adult audience should form part of a wider review of the user-friendliness of the AMS career information. This should examine the attractiveness of visual layout and design, the use of more graphics, and the level of readability of written material.

61. Within the AMS wider approach to quality assurance, it is suggested that attention be paid to the quality assurance and service delivery standards of those individuals who are providing the orientation courses under contract.

3.6 Professionalism

62. While frameworks do exist for the initial training of career guidance staff in Austria, and opportunities are also available to take part in in-service recurrent training, the initial training periods for nearly all groups of career guidance workers are very short indeed. One result of this is that the level of professionalism of career guidance in Austria appears to be relatively low, no matter how much this is compensated for by the enthusiasm of those who work in the area. The short periods of the initial training limit both the confidence that staff have in their skills, and the depth of knowledge that they can bring to their work.

63. Additionally, and this is a major problem, the very short initial periods of training mean that its content is almost entirely knowledge based, and that almost no opportunities exist for developing skills through techniques such as role rehearsal, job shadowing and practice. There is a considerable irony to this, given the strength of the pedagogical model that underpins apprenticeship, with its emphasis upon the virtues of combining theory and practice. One consequence is that the approach to career guidance that is commonly used in Austria seems to be heavily based upon information giving, rather than upon experience, reflection, development and decision making: it appeared to the review team as if it is often felt that information giving alone is enough to satisfy client needs.

64. While it would be excessive and unnecessary, as well as possibly a mistake, to work towards a model in which career guidance staff were required to have a post-graduate qualification at Masters level, or to require all career guidance staff to be narrowly qualified as psychologists, it will be important, particularly in schools and adult education, to improve the qualifications of career guidance staff in Austria. Two steps are necessary here. One is to substantially increase the period of initial training, and in doing so to ensure that this makes it possible for skill development to be provided as well as practical and theoretical information. The second is to recognise that a wide range of different types of staff contribute to career guidance, and to develop a competence framework that can meet the needs of all: careers teachers; student advisers; guidance staff in adult education; and those working in other centres such as the BIZ, the Economic Chambers' centres and the trade unions.

3.7 Quality assurance and quality development

65. The issue of quality assurance and service delivery standards in relation to the AMS has been discussed above. In general, systematic approaches to quality development and quality assurance seem to be under-developed in Austria, and must be regarded as an area for further development.

66. In the education sector, quality concepts seem mainly to be applied to pilot activities such as the My Way project. In mainstream careers guidance in schools and tertiary education, approaches to quality development and quality control are weak.

3.8 Networking and co-ordination

67. A very real strength of the Austrian approach is the strong relationships that exist between parties at all levels: nationally, regionally and locally. However co-ordination is weaker at the national level, both within the Ministry of Education and between the Education and Labour Ministries. There is a lack of a peak policy forum that can co-ordinate across the several sectors: the several types of schools; tertiary education; adult guidance; and the labour market. One result of such a lack of co-ordination is that service gaps can develop: for example in relation to guidance for employed adults.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

68. Some of the observations that are made in this Country Note about career guidance in Austria are not new. For example Lassnig and Schneeberger (1997) point to criticisms about its scope (too little, too late in careers), its impact (little apparent impact on poor choice of pathways or drop out rates), and its content and objectives (for example staff with insufficient knowledge and qualifications). In the face of such observations the direction of recent reforms in career guidance seems correct. However the scale of these reforms has often not been sufficient to make a major impact upon the problems, and they have often not been adequately resourced. The major challenge for the future will be to give increased impetus to the directions for reform by giving them appropriate scale and resources.

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Appendix 1: OECD review team

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Appendix 2: Programme for the national visit

Monday 4 March

- 9.30-10.30 Meeting with the Austrian steering group
10.30-11.30 Rahlgasse Gymnasium
- 13.00-13.30 Mr. Gruber, Head of Department V, Ministry of Education
14.00-14.45 Mr Nöbauer, Mr Orth, Department II, Ministry of Education
15.00-16.00 Mrs Regina Barth, Adult Education, Department V, Ministry of Education
16.30-17.30 Mr Gerhard Krötzl, School Psychology Service

Tuesday 5 March

- 10.00-14.00 Regional network project “Berufsfindungsbegleiter”, Hartberg, Styria.
15.00-16.30 Network for adult education, Eisenstadt, Burgenland

Wednesday 6 March

- 8.30-10.15 Labour Market Service
10-15-11.00 Federal Economic Chamber Information Centre (BIWI) Vienna
11.00-11.30 Mr Alfred Freudlinger, Department for Education Policy, Federal Economic Chamber.
11.30-12.00 Mrs Melter, Institute for Adult Education
13.00-14.00 Mr Dobart, Head, Department I, Ministry of Education
15.00-16.30 Mr Sieteck, Head of Department, Ministry of Economy and Labour
16.30-17.30 Psychology Student Counselling Service, University of Vienna

Thursday 7 March

BeSt (Job and Education fair)

- 9.30-10.15 Mrs Pegac Ministry of Education (Gender mainstreaming)
10.15-11.00 Mrs Kampl, Ministry of Education (Tertiary education information)
11.00-12.00 Mrs Margit Vogelhofer and Ms Brigitte Rösner, Professional Association of Counsellors
12.00-12.30 Mr Tölle, Chamber of Labour
13.30-14.00 Mr Kerl and Mrs Winkler (Job and education fairs)
15.00-15.30 Mrs Eva Baloch-Kaloianov (Euroguidance)
15.30-16.00 Mrs Petsch (School Psychology Service)
16.00-17.00 Mrs Feyer-Königshofer and Mrs Etz (School Counsellors) and students.

Friday 8 March

- 9.30-13.30 Final debriefing meeting and conference with area co-ordinators