

NATIONAL EDUCATION REPORT AUSTRIA 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Phone: +43 1 531 20-0
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National Education Report Austria 2024. Executive Summary
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Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF):
Project management: Julia Schinwald, Natalie Horn, Markus Bönisch

Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian Schooling System (IQS):
Coordination: Saya Gurtner-Reinthal
Typesetting & layout: Hannes Kaschnig-Löbel
Editing: Martin Schreiner

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Introduction

The present report represents the sixth edition of the National Education Report (NBB). Editions in 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018 were produced in two volumes under the coordination of the Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian Schooling System (BIFIE). However, since 2021, the overall coordination and publication of the National Education Report has been conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). As the successor organisation to the BIFIE, the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance of the Austrian Schooling System (IQS) continues to play a key role in the creation process, also with respect to the National Education Report 2024.

The National Education Report 2024 continues the structure with its division into three parts, which was introduced with the edition from 2021: Part 1 – Education controlling report, Part 2 – Education indicators and Part 3 – Selected areas of development. The NBB 2024 is now the second education report to be published in this form. At the same time, it implements the new requirements with entry into force of the Boards of Education Establishment Act (BD-EG): In addition to the comprehensive description of the components of education controlling and their further development, the National Education Report 2024 also, for the first time, includes schooling quality reports of the boards of education (Section 5 (3) of the Boards of Education Establishment Act (BD-EG)).

The National Education Report is directed at several target groups. The purpose of all three parts of the report is to inform members of the public who are interested in education policy. The education controlling report with schooling quality reports of the boards of education (Part 1) also constitutes a source of information for the National Council and education administration, providing insights into components and results of education controlling. Education indicators (Part 2) offer a comprehensive overview of existing data on the education sector and thus deliver important information for education administrations, education research and stakeholders in various education-related areas. The selected areas of development (Part 3) represent a comprehensive expert analysis of key topics. This establishes a source of information for educational research on the one hand and provides scientific analysis of an evidence-based foundation for decision-making processes within educational policy on the other.

The present executive summary offers an overview of the contents of the National Education Report 2024, organised according to the three parts of the main report. Detailed information can be found in the main report and on the BMBWF website.

Part 1 – Education controlling report

Introduction

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) is responsible for the strategic direction of education in Austria. The establishment of education controlling at the BMBWF makes it possible to monitor developments in the education system, design directive measures for further development, utilise resources efficiently and transparently and also control these processes. The aim of education controlling is to evaluate the quality and quantity of education programmes and processes at all levels of schools and schooling administration. The interlocking of education controlling instruments secures educational standards in the Austrian schooling system and enables constant further development of educational institutions and administrative structures.

Since the Boards of Educations Establishment Act (BD-EG) came into force, the BMBWF has submitted an education controlling report to the National Council every three years in accordance with Section 5 (3) of the BD-EG. For the first time, the National Education Report (NBB) 2021 included a comprehensive education controlling report. The report contained a detailed explanation of the legal framework conditions and directive model for the education system, which were introduced in the components of education controlling. The NBB 2024 builds on this in terms of content.

This report provides an overview of:

- the components of education controlling,
- the EU targets and
- the results of education controlling and schooling quality reports.

Components of education controlling

The NBB 2021 emphasised the establishment and tasks of education controlling in Austria and especially focussed on the implementation and legal basis of individual components. Following its entry into force, this year's report prioritises their further development. Explanations in the report elucidate the process of systematically collecting evidence-based data on schooling quality and schooling administration and the emergence of targeted directive options that can ensure efficient and transparent resource usage. The following education controlling instruments are presented in detail in the report and summarised here:

The quality framework for schools:

The quality framework for schools was introduced in January 2021. It describes the characteristics of schooling quality based on practically formulated quality criteria according to the five qualitative dimensions of quality management, leadership and management, learning and teaching, school partnership and external relations as well as results and impacts. The document serves as a content-related basis for goal and impact-orientated school development at Austrian schools and for education controlling of the schooling system (quality management, education monitoring, resource controlling). From 2026 on, the quality framework for schools will be evaluated at regular intervals and adapted, if necessary, in order to ensure currentness.

Education monitoring:

The establishment of the Education Information System (BILIS) marked the starting point for integrating the previously highly disparate education data landscape. The information system provides the technical infrastructure for education monitoring, which aims to provide needs-based information in the form of modern dashboards at all levels of schools and education administrations. In spring of 2024, “basic data of the Austrian schooling system” was made available to the BMBWF and the boards of education, for the first time, in form of a dashboard. The dashboard provides basic key data on schools, classes, pupils and teachers for education administration. The first school data sheets will be rolled out gradually in school year 2024/25, starting with primary schools. School data sheets contain basic information about school locations and indicators as they offer school management a data basis for school development. In the coming years, the focus will be on integrating additional data sources as well as expanding and further developing various dashboards for all levels while taking user experiences into account.

National competence surveys – iKM^{PLUS}:

Implementation of the diagnostic component for the individual support of pupils was completed with the surveys conducted in 2023. The individual competence measurement PLUS (iKM^{PLUS}), already implemented in the field will be fully developed by the end of 2024. Once the first cycle of iKM^{PLUS} has been completed, cyclical reporting with reports for schools, boards of education and educational regions as well as public reports on federal results will take place from 2026 on. The results of cyclical reporting will be integrated into the education monitoring reporting system (in particular BILIS) in order to promote holistic, data-based schooling and lesson development.

Internal school evaluation and feedback:

Internal school evaluation and feedback are core elements of the quality management system for schools (QMS; www.qms.at). Since school year 2021/22, the evaluation and school development platform IQES Austria has been made available to schools (www.iqesonline.net/at), which offers a rich repertoire of quality-assured materials for school and lesson development. Evaluation and feedback instruments of the IQES

evaluation centre (including questionnaires, interview guidelines), which are tailored to the conditions at Austrian schools, are used to systematically obtain information for the assessment, evaluation and further development of the quality of communal work at schools. The long-term goal is to establish a professional evaluation and feedback culture at Austrian schools.

External school evaluation:

The external school evaluation supports schools by providing a data-based external view of the organisational process and teaching quality as it identifies existing strengths and areas for development, thus providing an impetus for quality development on site. Moreover, by processing and analysing aggregated evaluation results, external school evaluations contribute to educational monitoring by providing management staff with practical knowledge about the quality of teaching and effective processes for schooling quality management.

With the completion of the nationwide test run at 42 voluntarily participating schools (primary schools, secondary schools, grammar schools) in school year 2021/22, the external school evaluation has become a regular standard practice. In school year 2022/23 and 2023/24, a total of 195 external evaluations were carried out at schools and school clusters throughout the country. Starting with school year 2024/25, the external school evaluation will gradually evaluate other school types. The regular publication of organisational and teaching quality analyses of Austrian schools is planned from NBB 2027 onwards.

EU targets for education and training

As part of the European education area, Austria actively participates in cooperative EU education. In February 2021, the Council of the European Union redefined the strategic framework for this cooperation and outlined seven European targets:

1. **Performance in basic competences:** *By 2030, the proportion of 15-year-olds with poor performance in reading, maths and science is to be below 15%.*
2. **Computer and information competences:** *By 2030, the proportion of eighth-grade pupils with low computer and information competences is to be below 15%.*
3. **Early childhood supervision and education:** *By 2030, at least 96% of children between the ages of 3 and the statutory school entry age are to participate in early childhood supervision and education.*
4. **Early school leavers and training leavers:** *By 2030, the proportion of vocational training drop-outs is to be less than 9%.*
5. **Acquisition of tertiary educational qualifications:** *By 2030, the proportion of 25 to 34-year-olds with a tertiary education degree is to be at least 45%.*

6. **Learning at the workplace in vocational education and training:** *By 2025, the proportion of young graduates who have benefited from workplace learning as part of their vocational education and training is to be at least 60%.*
7. **Participation of adults in educational programmes:** *By 2025, at least 47% of adults aged 25 to 64 are to have used educational programmes in the last 12 months.*

Austria currently has already achieved the defined targets in regard to item 4. “Early school leavers and training leavers”, item 6. “Learning at the workplace in vocational education and training” and item 7. “Participation of adults in educational programmes”.

Impact information from the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research 2023

The report on impact orientation from 2023 encompasses the estimate of the 2023 federal budget, in which the department defines its impact goals and, building on this, the key figures in its budget planning and derives corresponding measures. In the federal budget, short-term and long-term targets are set for each key figure and each measure is made verifiable by setting milestones.

The BMBWF had set the following impact targets in the area of education for 2023:

- **Impact goal 1:** “Increasing the performance and educational level of pupils and target groups in adult education”
- **Impact goal 2:** “Equal opportunities and gender equality in education”
- **Impact goal 3:** “Increasing the effectiveness and efficiency in school organisation and education administration”
- **Impact goal 4:** “Improving the education system’s needs-orientation”

In 2023, three of the four impact targets were largely achieved. There is potential for improvement with respect to impact goal 3 “Increasing effectiveness and efficiency in school organisation and education administration”, which was only partially achieved. The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) is stepping up its initiatives, in particular “Klasse-Job” [training programme for aspiring teachers] and the legal anchoring of a new lateral entry model in order to retain teachers in the teaching profession and recruit young teachers in line with demand through incentive measures.

Evaluation results are published annually at <https://wirkungsmonitoring.gv.at/>. The website also contains detailed information on respective impact targets, indicators and global budget measures.

Schooling quality reports of the boards of education

For the first time, schooling quality reports of the boards of education (reporting period 2021–2023) are presented in the annex of the education controlling report (NBB 2024, Part 1). These provide insight into impact-orientated education administration as well as information based on selected key figures, indicators and explanatory texts on the development status of schools and the schooling system in the nine federal states. The organisation and structure of schooling quality reports as well as the cooperation process between the BMBWF and the boards of education, based on which the reports were created will be further developed in close coordination with the work on the planned expansion of BILIS once initial experiences have been evaluated.

Part 2 – Education indicators

The following aspects stand out from 58 education indicators in 16 indicator groups with around 150 illustrations.

Challenges due to demographic developments

The demographic development (including forecasts) presented by Statistics Austria shows that the number of 6 to 14-year-olds in Austria has risen by around 5% in the past ten years and will rise by over 2% in the next ten years (indicator A1.1). This stands in contrast to the fact that more than a fifth of primary school teachers and more than a quarter of secondary school teachers are currently 55 years or older and will therefore retire within the next ten years (indicator B3.1). Therefore, sufficient recruitment of new teachers remains a major challenge to countering the impending shortage of teaching staff.

As in the resident population as a whole (indicator A1.2), in recent years, the proportion of children with a migration background and an everyday language other than German has increased significantly at the primary level (indicator A2.2). The recent refugee movement from Ukraine with almost 13000 pupils admitted to the Austrian schooling system by July 2023 significantly contributed to this rise (indicator A1.5). Depending on the specific family background – a migrant background is often associated with comparatively lower levels of parental education and a lower household income (indicator A2.1). Overall, this leads to an accumulation of social risks for the learning success of the groups mentioned (indicator A2.3) as can be seen both in school careers (indicator C2.1) and the attainment of qualifications (indicator D1.1) as well as in the acquisition of competences (indicator group D3).

The most urban municipalities (including Vienna) occupy a special position both in terms of general demographic development and with regard to the change in social composition as can be seen from several context indicators (especially A2.3). Moreover, there is a concentration of certain social settings in some schools and classes (indicator group B6). The different framework conditions under which schools are required to provide their services suggest concepts of location-related promotion and support for schools in socially difficult settings.

Level of spending on education as a matter of perspective

According to the international comparison of the often-cited indicator of education expenditure per capita, the Austrian education system is particularly cost-intensive (“expensive”) when compared to European neighbours (indicator B1.2). Broken down by school type, the high per capita expenditure of middle schools compared to lower-level grammar schools is particularly striking (indicator B1.1), which, in addition to higher expenditure on teaching staff (due to lower supervision ratios), can also be explained by the lower number of pupils per class in middle schools (indicator B5.2) as these are increasingly located in smaller, rural communities (indicator B4.2). In the case of Austrian primary schools – with respect to costs per capita – it is significant that there are also small primary schools with fewer than four classes in urban or regional centres as well as in the vicinity of these centres (indicator B4.2). However, if total education expenditures are considered in relation to GDP – as a very general indicator of prosperity – Austria does not occupy a special position within a European comparison and the ratio of education expenditures to GDP has not changed significantly compared to the years before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the pandemic years, there was a decline in GDP and education expenditure, which also temporarily affected the relationship between the two variables (indicator A1.3). Compared to other European countries, public spending on education is contrasted by a lower proportion of private funding for schools and universities (indicator B1.3).

Competences are largely located in the midrange within an EU-wide comparison with continuing social selectivity

In 2021, the reading competences of Austria’s fourth-grade primary school pupils were in the mid-performance range among EU countries participating in PIRLS, although the reading competences of Austrian children – as in 15 of 22 other EU countries – have deteriorated compared to 2016 (indicator D2.1). The reading competences of Austrian 15 to 16-year-olds are in line with the EU and OECD average. At the end of compulsory schooling, Austria’s young people rank above the EU average and also above the OECD average in terms of maths competences. The scientific competences of Austria’s young people correspond to the average EU and OECD level. Financial competence of 15 to 16-year-olds is also in line with the EU and OECD average (indicator D2.4).

The percentages of children from socially and educationally disadvantaged families are disproportionately highly represented among low-achieving pupils (indicator D3.1). Differences according to individual social characteristics remain even when examining other characteristics (e.g. migration background), but are at times significantly reduced.

The influence of social background is also more pronounced in Austria when compared internationally (indicator D3.2). Moreover, indicator C2.2 again demonstrated secondary effects of origin on educational pathways, meaning that pupils from different social backgrounds pursue higher formal educational pathways to varying degrees, even if their levels of competence are comparable.

Recent developments in the areas of “digital learning” and “after-school supervision”

At the latest since the COVID-19 pandemic and the conditions that resulted on account of it, information technology to support learning has become an absolutely indispensable and integral part of everyday school life. Since its first implementation in school year 2021/22, the BMBWF’s “Digital Learning” initiative has been aimed at helping pupils in the 5th grade learn digitally by providing them with their own notebook or tablet for use in and outside of school; in school year 2023/24, almost 84000 notebooks or tablets were issued (indicator B4.4). In school year 2022/23, 26.2% of pupils up to grade 8 attended after-school supervision on at least one day a week. This represents an increase of 2.5 percentage points in just three school years; in Vienna, the proportion exceeds 40%. The majority of all-day schools are open until at least 17:00 p.m. for their pupils (indicator C3.1).

Part 2 of the NBB 2024 contains numerous other profoundly prepared data sources within the other indicators in order to provide the public and political-administrative decision-makers with a lucid synopsis.

Part 3 – Selected areas of development

Part 3 of the NBB 2024 presents four selected areas of development from a scientific perspective. The contributions represent challenges relevant to education policy in connection with the current state of research, political measures implemented to date and resulting relevant research desiderata. Following the authors' contributions, the National Education Report briefly presents the BMBWF's position on the respective topic. Part 3 of the NBB 2024 is rounded off with a final contribution from the Quality Council – a group consisting of five scientists who promoted scientific quality assurance of contributions and accompanied their development process.

Lateral career entry programmes for teachers

The shortage of teachers is a current topic internationally – both in public debate and in research. As a means to counter this shortage, many countries have established training programmes that offer alternative routes into the teaching profession. Austria has also established a lateral entry programme since school year 2022/23 by which universities providing teacher training offer a part-time qualification course (in short: *University course for lateral entry*). The article by authors *Doreen Flick-Holtsch*, *Sarah Forster-Heinzer* and *Anne Frey* presents and analyses the characteristics, conditions and prerequisites of this programme. Moreover, based on a systematic literature review and competence-theoretical understanding of the profession and offer-utilisation model, empirical findings on the conditions for success of lateral entry are discussed and fields of action and impulses for further development of the lateral entry programme and for possible research projects are formulated.

Artificial intelligence in education: a localisation

Artificial intelligence (AI) has established itself as a central social and economic leitmotif. Since autumn of 2022, the hype surrounding generative AI has raised public awareness for the topic and triggered a broad discussion. Education systems around the world face the challenge of creating a sound awareness for AI, promoting acceptance and conveying a basic understanding of the technology. Initially, the article by authors *Elke Höfler*, *Martin Kandlhofer*, *Manuel Ninaus* and *Thomas Strasser* describes the historic development of AI and clarifies key terms that are important for discourse on the topic. Specific challenges for teachers, learners, school management and education policy are then identified.

The article concludes by deriving implications for lesson planning, training and education as well as for further training and education of teachers and school development. Moreover, research gaps and educational policy “construction sites” are identified that require visionary and future-orientated approaches.

Democracy education. Concepts, strategies and perspectives

Dirk Lange, Lara Kierot, Britta Breser and Wolfgang Beutel outline the current discourse on “democracy education” in German-speaking countries and relate their presentation analytically to the practical pedagogical conditions at schools and universities in the Republic of Austria. In their analyses, the authors acknowledge existing initiatives such as the departmental strategies DNAustria, TruSD and the decree on the teaching principle of political education from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. At the same time, they point out the Austrian education system’s insufficient handling of multiple current crises and the resulting increasing pressure on democracy.

The article elucidates the need for professionally oriented approaches and didactically differentiated forms of support and further development. A separate political education subject, a teacher training programme in political education, a compulsory module on democracy education for all teachers in training and the development of a democratic school culture are identified as necessary measures. As a scientific discipline, the didactics of democracy education are recognised as an area with enormous potential for development. These possibilities range from the establishment of research chairs for political education to comparative studies and institutionalisation in the field of democracy education.

Data use for school and lesson development

The article by *Marko Lüftenegger, Nele Kampa and Marcus Pietsch* focusses on research findings on data use in school and lesson development. The authors first look at findings on data-based versus data-informed action in schools and the effects on pupils as well as different types of data sources, data literacy competences required for data handling and the role of teachers and school leadership. Subsequently, previous education policy measures in Austria and their effects are presented within the framework of output-orientated direction. For further development of the Austrian education system, the authors suggest systemically anchoring the acquisition of data literacy, establishing positive “data cultures” in schools and utilising a variety of data sources.

Moreover, accompanying research should be both intensified (e.g. focus on mechanisms of action, implementation) and optimised (e.g. design).

Areas of development for the Austrian education system in the National Education Report (NBB) 2024: Synthesis and outlook

On the one hand, the article by *Barbara Schober, Stefan Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz, Jana Groß Ophoff, Gerda Hagenauer* and *David Kemethofer* summarises the topics addressed in Part 3 of the NBB, the key challenges in each case and the associated recommendations for the four development areas. On the other, the authors categorise central topics and their relevance. They work out which elements link the topics and which further challenges and development needs arise from them. They also derive five overarching guiding principles that should be given greater consideration when dealing with and processing the development fields addressed here: (1.) evidence-based design and justification of education, (2.) acceptance of complexity and appropriate use of time, (3.) focus on implementation and holistic action, (4.) appreciation and empowerment as central psychological parameters and (5.) conveyance of lifelong learning as a matter of course for professional conduct and as the foundational attitude of learners. Even if these guiding principles are not new, they should be implemented consistently and systematically at various organisational levels of the education system.

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