

Yes, you can! (Du kannst was!)



Austria

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'Yes, you can!' aims to challenge the shortage of skilled workers and to make lifelong learning for low skilled adults more attractive.

Short summary paragraph

'Yes, you can!' focuses on the validation of professional competences acquired in informal and non-formal learning contexts and leads to the awarding of an 'Apprenticeship Certificate'.

The project, up until now, covers 24 professions. It was initiated in 2011 in Upper Austria by social partners. Within this region, it is funded by the Regional Government of Upper Austria. Starting with a pilot project, the project was gradually extended to four regions (Lower Austria, Salzburg, Burgenland and Vorarlberg).

ECVET principles such as the identification of groups of learning outcomes, separate assessment of groups of learning outcomes, transferability of learning outcomes, and additional learning provision to address skills gaps are the backbones of 'Yes, you can!'.

Scope of project/initiative

Regional: five regions have been involved to date. These are Upper and Lower Austria, Salzburg, Burgenland, Vorarlberg. The project will be further extended to the Kärnten region as of Autumn 2019.

Discussions are ongoing to roll out the initiative at federal level as part of the Austrian strategy for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

When was the project/initiative implemented?

Since 2011

What were the source(s) of funding?

The project is financed by the Regional Governments of each participating region, with support of the regional Chambers of Commerce, the Chamber of Labour and Adult Education institutions. The financial support allocated by the Regional Government of Upper Austria is approximately EUR 250,000 per year, while the Regional Government of Vorarlberg invests approximately EUR 100,000 per year. The Salzburg region finances the project through a mix of regional and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Regional Governments and the Chamber of Labour co-finance the costs of further learning opportunities leading to the award of an 'Apprenticeship Certificate'. Courses under the apprenticeship diploma are covered for up to 60% of the total cost. Other education courses can be reimbursed for up to 30% of the total cost. The individual can pay later or pay in rates, but this is in exceptional cases.

Furthermore, the Chamber of Commerce reimburse up to 60% of the total fee for the 'Competence Checks' (the total test fee is 130 euros).

Why was/is the project implemented?

'Yes, you can' started as a pilot project in 2011 with 100 low skilled people participating.

A study published in 2005 by the University of Linz on 'Less qualified People in Upper Austria' highlighted that roughly 20% of the workforce in Upper Austria¹ does not have formal qualifications. The Chambers of Commerce and Labour, in collaboration with the Austrian Public Employment Service (PES), identified the sectors with the highest number of low-skilled adults in the region of Upper Austria.

The project was implemented as a response to the shortage of skilled workers in nine professions (including metalworker, welder, painter, bricklayer, landscape gardeners, chef, and retail salesperson). There are many lifelong learning opportunities on offer for workers in these sectors, yet the further education timetables tend to conflict with workers' commitments. In addition, individuals' have a fear of failing or not 'being able' to learn.

In order to overcome such resistance to participation in lifelong learning, the project uses a strength-based approach that focuses on existing competences rather than individuals' deficits.

¹ http://www.kuwi.jku.at/Ingo_Moerth/moerthpub/WeiterbildungBuch.pdf

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

'Yes, you can!' targets individuals that are:

- ▶ Aged 22-years-old and over;
- ▶ Have no formal qualification;
- ▶ Are employees or are unemployed (the latter since October 2019);
- ▶ Have a formal qualification but have not worked in that field for a longer period, so that the qualification is most likely outdated.

The initiative also targets individuals who have migrated to Austria but do not have a recognised qualification in Austria. From Autumn 2019, the initiative will also target unemployed people.

Information about the project is disseminated via the stakeholders involved (public employment services, workers' unions, chambers of labour and human resource teams within companies).

What were the practice's main objectives?

The project focuses on the validation of skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts (including through work experience) towards the award of an 'Apprenticeship Certificate'. Custom-made learning opportunities are available to address potential skills gaps. Support and guidance are provided throughout the process. It is an economical and time-efficient way to obtain an 'Apprenticeship Certificate'.

An indirect objective is to help migrants integrate into Austrian society. Through the validation of prior learning, they can gain an 'Apprenticeship Certificate' which will increase their chances of finding suitable employment.

What activities were carried out?

'Yes, you can!' offers the opportunity to take the Austrian apprenticeship examination in two parts ('competence checks'). The first part focuses on already required competences and identifies the missing ones; the second part focuses on the missing ones only (that were obtained in tailored training courses following the first competence check).

The process is structured according to a multi-step approach:

1. Introductory counselling

Prior to being admitted to the project, potential participants are required to attend a one-hour counselling session. During the session they are informed about the opportunities and requirements of the project. Both their German language skills and technical language skills are evaluated. The counselling sessions are carried out by the education and training guidance counsellors, or career guidance counsellors, from the Chambers of Labour and Chambers of Commerce.

2. (Self-) evaluation workshops

2.1 For technical professions: screening (up to one day):

Participants for technical professions are invited to an intermediary step which consists of a 'screening' of their technical skills (e.g. carrying out a specific task, preparing a work sample etc.).

2.2. For all: guided (Self-) evaluation workshops

All participants undertake three workshops where they are supported in the preparation of a 'Competence Portfolio'. The method used is guided self-assessment. Participants are taught how to use a self-evaluation tool and receive ad-hoc technical support.

The competences and skills visible in the 'Competence Portfolio' are compared to those corresponding to a specific job profile (which is part of the training regulation of the respective apprenticeship qualification). The added value of the portfolio is that it makes skills visible, and at the same time boosts participants' self-esteem as it helps participants to understand and value their knowledge.

The workshops usually take place during evenings so that employees can fit them around their working schedules. The workshops are run by certified trainers and professional experts, who support the occupational side. The workshops can host from six to twelve participants. The workshop methodology is group-oriented, where all participants can discuss and help each other. After each workshop, participants are asked for feedback about the methodology, in view of possible improvements.

In the first workshop, participants are introduced to the 'Competence Portfolio' and start to document their occupational competences. Participants are further assisted on the completion of the portfolio. Support is provided on how and where they obtained evidence of competences and professional experience (e.g. certificates or evidence provided from employers). Additional work on the portfolio needs to be carried out at home. During the third workshop, the participants clarify any questions and finalise their 'Competence Portfolio'.

The organisation of the workshops allows a certain degree of flexibility. After the screening takes place the counselling team may decide that a group of participants are highly skilled, in that case they will only organise two workshops. This takes place on a needs-by-needs basis. In contrast, if some participants require more support, they will be asked to participate in a fourth workshop.

3. First 'Competence Check' (one day assessment)

During the third step, skills and competences - highlighted in the 'Competence Portfolio' - are evaluated against the learning outcomes included in the training regulations of a certain qualification. The 'Competence Checks' are carried out by experts in the respective occupational field who are appointed by the Apprenticeship Offices of the Chambers of Commerce. During this assessment, participants are asked theoretical questions about the profession to check if their knowledge corresponds with what has been included in the portfolio.

The first 'Competence Check' (or performance check) usually results in a 'positive list' with proven competences and an 'open list' of competences that must be acquired, in view of obtaining all learning outcomes related to the qualification.

3.1 Individual further education to fill skills' gaps

Participants will receive guidance on additional training opportunities tailored to their needs to cover the competences in the 'open list'. Usually, participants are asked to take training courses in groups and participants are informed in advance so they can schedule the training around their work commitments.

4. Second 'Competence Check' (one day assessment)

After the completion of further training, the participant will be assessed again to check that the competences in the 'open list' are covered. The second Competence Check should prove that an applicant has all required learning outcomes related to an apprenticeship qualification.

5. Awarding of the certificate

After passing the second Competence Check – hence the second and final part of the apprenticeship exam – the apprenticeship office issues the official Apprenticeship Certificate (which is the same as the one obtained via the traditional apprenticeship training and final apprenticeship examination).

Outcomes achieved

'Yes, you can' is a successful, inclusive and gender-balanced initiative. So far, in Upper Austria, 78% of participants have obtained the final 'Apprenticeship Certificate'. 57% of the participants are male and 43% are female; 61% of all participants are Austrian and 39% are migrants.

The number of sectors and qualifications covered by 'Yes you can' expanded over time. Validation of prior competences is now offered in a broad variety of sectors and professions:

- ▶ Construction: joinery, painter, bricklayer, installation and building technology, cleaning, ancillary construction trades, construction machinery technology.
- ▶ Automotive and manufacturing: welding, metal work, surface coating and vehicle body construction.
- ▶ Catering: chef, baker.
- ▶ Engineering: metal technology, electrical engineering, production engineering.
- ▶ Environment: garden and park design, recycling, agricultural mechanics.
- ▶ Retail: retail trade service, clothing engineer, professional drivers.
- ▶ IT
- ▶ Operational logistics

What specific ECVET principles were/are used?

It is important to note that the 'Yes you can' initiative does not explicitly refer to ECVET principles. Yet the design of the initiative is based on the same ideas and objectives as the ECVET principles.

▶ **Principle 2: Groups of learning outcomes within a qualification should be capable of independent assessment.**

The division of qualifications into separate parts is not existing in the Austrian apprenticeship system. 'Holistic' three-year training pathways are the norm. Yet, to offer flexibility to those that need it, the project developed a specific methodology to assess and validate learning outcomes acquired via prior learning and additional training.

The specific characteristic of this initiative is that the final apprenticeship examination is taken in two parts. Learning outcomes are assessed during 'Competence Checks' and carried out by the Chamber of Commerce. Depending on the profession, the assessment can be carried out either through a theoretical or practical assessment, or a mixture of both, to assess the knowledge of the participant. Evaluators are the official assessors appointed by the Apprenticeship Offices of the Chamber of Commerce.

▶ **Principle 4: Provision of learning opportunities should be arranged to facilitate individuals to achieve groups of learning outcomes.**

The first 'Competence Check' identifies the additional competences needed for the awarding of the 'Apprenticeship Certificate'. Learning opportunities are provided to achieve missing learning outcomes and are partially funded by the Chamber of Commerce. Counselling is provided for the development of tailored training paths. Usually, participants are asked to take part in training courses that are scheduled compatibly with working commitments.

▶ **Principle 5: Individuals should have the opportunity to have their learning outcomes validated, irrespective of how and where they have acquired them.**

'Yes, you can!' focuses on validation of prior learning gained in informal and non-formal contexts. Validation of prior learning takes place with a multiple steps approach:

1. First participants are asked to complete a 'Competence Portfolio' to identify their prior knowledge, skills and competences.
2. Competences highlighted in the portfolio are then evaluated in two 'Competence Checks' carried out at the Chamber of Commerce.

▶ **Principle 6: Individuals should have the opportunity to accumulate their assessed groups of learning outcomes towards a qualification.**

The first 'Competence Check' results in a 'positive list' with proven competences and an 'open list' of competences that must be acquired. On the basis of the gaps identified, participants receive guidance on learning opportunities tailored to their needs. The second and final 'Competence Check' focuses exclusively on the competences in the 'open list'. The learning outcomes already assessed are recognised for the award of the Apprenticeship Certificate.

▶ **Principle 8: Processes for development, assessment, validation and recognition of sets of learning outcomes should be transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.**

In order to ensure quality during the counselling process, counsellors and trainers are qualified professionals in their respective fields. Trainers and professionals involved in the workshops need to undertake a course on the self-assessment method. The assessors involved in the first and second 'Competence Check' are the same assessors involved in the assessments for a regular Apprenticeship Certificate. This helps to guarantee that 'Yes, you can!' participants have the same Apprenticeship Certificates as their colleagues that follow the traditional path.

What was/is the added value of ECVET?

The ECVET principles are embedded in the methodology of the 'Yes, you can!' project. The initiative aims to raise the qualification level combining the validation of prior learning with tailored learning opportunities. The project provides an opportunity for participants to validate the learning outcomes previously acquired in informal and non-formal context towards the awarding of a VET certificate.

The final apprenticeship examination, that is usually the only one for obtaining the Apprenticeship Certificate, is split in two parts. The first one focuses on already required competences and identifies the missing ones; the second Competence Check focuses on the missing ones only. Moreover, custom-made training is provided to fill skills gaps identified during the first 'Competence Check'.

Website

<http://www.dukannstwas.at/> (DE only)

ECVET Peer Learning Activity: 'ECVET and validation of nonformal and informal learning':

- [Synthesis report](#)

- [Presentation Du kannst was!](#)



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