

Policy learning and outcome orientation in Austrian VET - theoretical and empirical explorations

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Introduction

This paper explores two frequently used concepts in recent discussions more deeply and relates them to the basic lines of the development of vocational education and training (VET) in Austria. A main goal of these explorations is to find ways of how the two rather complex concepts might be used in empirical analysis without too much simplification. In the first section a framework for the analysis of policy learning is developed, which combines two approaches from different fields and applies them to education and training (ET) policy. In the second section the concept of outcome orientation is related to policy learning, and some proposals for the analysis of its empirical status are made. In the third section an attempt of the empirical analysis of Austrian ET policy with a focus on VET due to outcome orientation and policy learning is made.

The methodology applied is qualitative and explorative. The potentials of the proposed conceptual frameworks are demonstrated by applying them to a set of specific policies within the broader field of ET policy:

- Educational research and development (R&D)
- Governance and financing
- Quality assurance and quality development (QA/QD)
- Set up the polytechnic (FH) framework
- Transition from school to work
- National qualification framework (NQF)

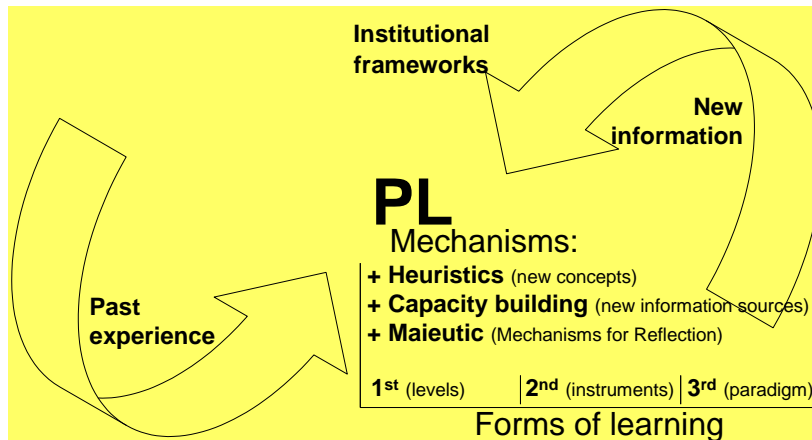
These policies do not cover the whole field. Nevertheless they are important policies, which are representative for the whole field. The first three are generic policies, affecting the whole ET system, whereas the latter are more specific, covering different policy dimensions, the set up of a new institutional framework (FH), a process related policy (transition), and a regulatory policy (NQF). The empirical basis is taken from previous studies in the respective fields, which have been undertaken mainly with evaluative purposes. These studies have included careful analyses of the policies in question, and this paper includes a secondary analysis of the existing material which at least provides a set of hypotheses which might be used in further research. We also suppose that the developed concepts can be helpful for comparative analyses.

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1. Policy learning

Policy learning has been originally coined as a scientific concept decades ago (see Deutsch 1993, 1969, Hecl 1974, Hartlapp 2006) however, has regained strong attention more recently. It is by far not obvious, that policy can learn, thus we have to establish methods to prove this. Alternative policy mechanisms to learning might be imposing, selling, bargaining, adopting, or borrowing. To propose a conceptual framework, how the analysis of policy learning might be achieved, is the main purpose of this section.

Figure 1: Stylised picture of policy learning



Source: Own compilation, based on Zeitlin, Hall, Hartlapp

Figure 1 give a stylised sketch of the basic structure of this framework. First, it is agreed that policy learning might occur on basis of past experience and/or new information. There must be certain procedures or mechanisms, of how these sources might lead to learning. Learning is conceptualised like organisational learning on an aggregate or systemic level beyond learning of individuals. That means that we must find aggregate or emergent processes which can indicate learning. From the literature we can infer two kinds of channels of policy learning, which can be operationalised and observed: first, the mechanisms that were obtained by (Zeitlin 2005, 2006) in his analysis of the open method of coordination (OMC) in European policy. If we look at the complex ET-systems which consist of different institutions at various levels within countries or regions, those mechanisms can be easily transferred from the European level to countries or regions. Three kinds of mechanisms have been distinguished:

- *Heuristics*: this means primarily the establishment and use of new concepts to describe and understand certain policy areas, it leads at least to a new rhetoric of different degree.
- *Capacity building*: this means the establishment of new mechanisms or instruments of the generation of knowledge in certain policy areas (e.g., new systems of indicators, or new data based on monitoring systems), it leads at least to new information which might establish competing views to prevailing policies.
- *Maieutic*: this means new mechanisms for reflection about certain policies (e.g., task forces, or reporting procedures), this mechanism might lead to changed or new policy practices.

The second kind of channels have been defined by Peter Hall (1993) based on his analysis of British economic policy changes according to the well-known forms of learning at increasingly complex levels of change:

- 1st-order learning comprises learning which is focused on the experience with levels of given policies; this kind of learning, if it occurs, is very much incremental learning based on past experience, and means to expand or to reduce already established policies, without substantive new elements.
- 2nd-order learning comprises the establishment of new policy measures or instruments within given overall policy paradigms and based on given goals; that means to put new elements into a given policy, and we can say it is analogous to product-innovation, based on a combination of past experience and specialised new information
- 3rd-order learning comprises new policies based on a new policy paradigm including new goals and objectives; that means that the basic structure of a policy is changed which is analogous to radical innovation based on new information.

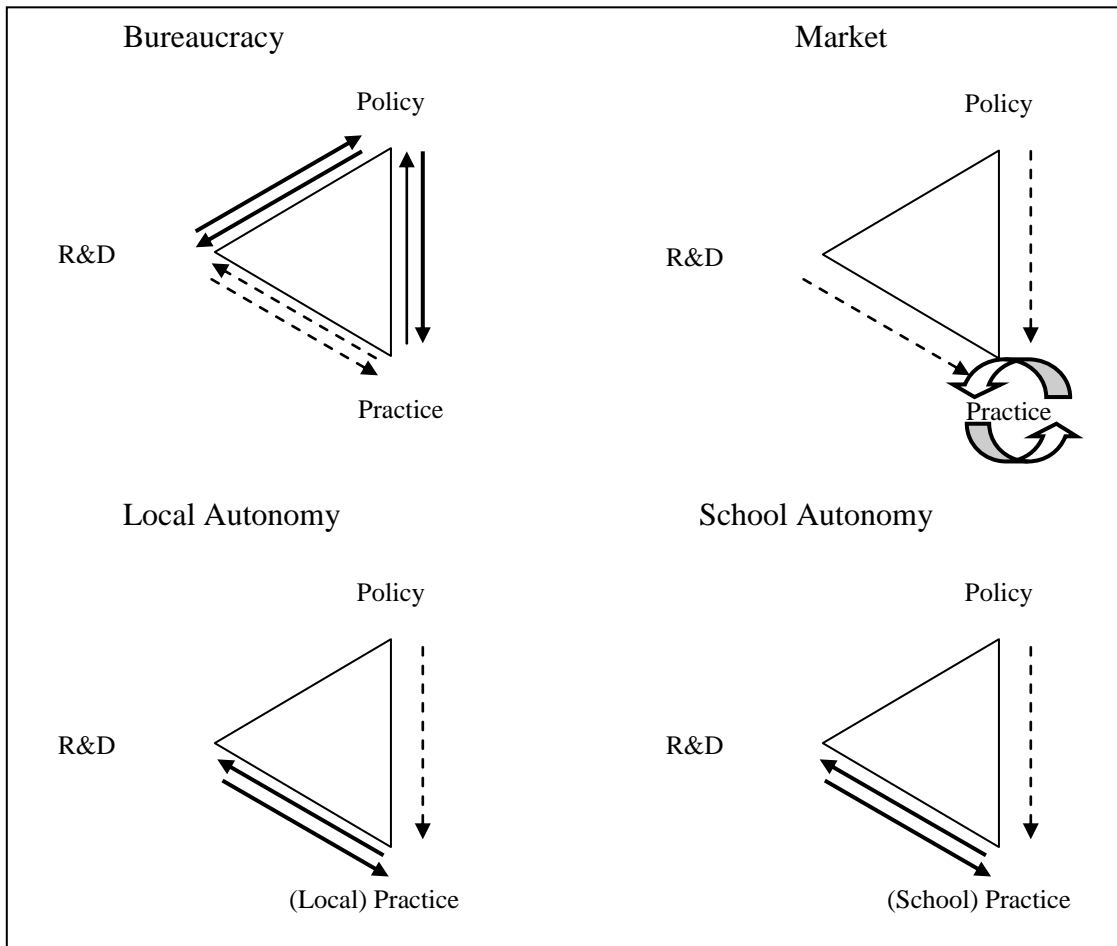
If we cross those two dimensions, we get some more detailed types of policy learning, which will be further elaborated in the next section, taking the case of outcome orientation as an example.

If we ask, how learning might come about, internationalisation and Europeanisation comes into play. From either these sources new information is put into play, which interacts with the processing of past experience on the various levels. Many procedures in this space explicitly induce the reworking of past experience in this way or another: The OECD or IEA activities include reviews or assessments of country experience, the EU, by implementing its OMC has established various reporting procedures including indicators, or activities of exchange of experience among member states. A basic idea of the approach is, that ET systems are very complex entities which comprise different sectors and various actors at different levels of aggregation which have to interact with one another in order to bring about certain activities and results. In order to have the system working, the various constituencies, and different goals and interests have to be integrated. Those interactions allow for discretion, and give room for deliberation and processes of decision making, and thus also allow for learning, despite not necessarily.

If we ask who learns from whom, we have to look at the actors and institutions involved in policy making in a certain field. A well established framework to look at these is the OECD triangle of policy, practice, and R&D. We can combine this triangle with the main types of governance mechanisms from the literature (Schmid 2007, Glatter 2002), and get different patterns of potential interactions and channels for learning. In principle the stylised categories of actors might learn from each other in every combination. R&D can be expected to bring new information into the system, more or less based also on past experience. The signals produced by R&D can be recognised and adopted, or rejected or ignored by both categories, policy makers and practitioners in similar of different ways. There might be also channels of learning between policy makers and practitioners in place, and of course within each of the categories channels of learning might exist. Figure 2 proposes a certain structuring of those potentially existing relations due to the different models of governance. We can see that not each of the potential learning channels seem to be equally likely to work in different governance models. In the bureaucratic model

policy makers can be expected to have a key role in mediating information transfer as a basis for potential learning; in the market model the practitioners are those who own the main bases of learning channels, and those actors can also be expected to control the incoming information from the other actors. In the governance models with local or school autonomy the direct exchange relations between the autonomous actors and R&D can be expected to provide the main basis for learning.

Figure 2: The OECD triangle of actors and typical expected learning channels in different governance systems



Source: Own compilation

In a real system the relations are much more complex, as we can have a set of different governance systems in parallel, and more or less tightly related to each other, interacting with each other. We will see this more concretely in the Austrian system. Another source of complexity arises, when we make a difference between national, or regional systems, and the international or transnational levels. International or European sources have become very important signals to the national systems and actors, and they can also be differentiated due to the triangle of R&D, policy and practice. This framework allows us, to differentiate between e.g., the new information sent by the R&D actors within the OECD, and the potential recipients in national systems, with possible gatekeepers, or even filters for changing, accelerating, or reducing the signals. We can also take account

of the potential relationship between R&D and policy at the European level, which might structure the signals in certain way, as e.g., by the influential commission staff working documents.

2. Outcome orientation

A more general expression of outcome orientation would be result orientation, as this includes both types of results, outputs (i.e., the direct results of ET processes, as competences, or certifications and their other side of graduates or drop-outs), and outcomes (i.e. the more complex mid- or longer-term results, as the contribution to democracy, employment, economic growth, or social inclusion). The expression has spread since the early 1990s. being closely related to issues of governance and financing ET systems. Outcome orientation implicitly or explicitly means a critique of bureaucratic ET planning and governance which has been focused on inputs and process regulations. In the bureaucratic model, which had been primarily the main mode of governance of ET systems, goals are expected to be automatically reached by proper inputs and the enforcement of process regulations. Thus the attention of the actors is guided towards these kinds of assets. As a consequence of this the goals and their realisation remained largely implicit and unobserved in the bureaucratic model. The delivery of results was ultimately given to the responsibility of the teachers at the micro level, with some discretion in their “semi-professional autonomy (Lehrfreiheit)”, who also controlled results, in most cases without objective observation.

In the first place with the pressure on public expenditure, and second with the increasing emphasis on human capital and the outcomes of ET, the bureaucratic model has been increasingly questioned. Emphasis has now been laid on results instead of inputs, and the efficacy and efficiency of process regulations has also come under scrutiny. This development gave birth to outcome orientation and new governance models in ET. The spread and development of the international comparative large scale assessments of learning outcomes have posed an additional impetus to outcome orientation as an objectivation of learning results has been improved.

In terms of our framework of policy learning we can see result orientation as a new heuristic for the improvement of the governance of ET systems. Why should we see outcome orientation as a heuristic rather than as a new policy paradigm? The new heuristic mainly has extended the attention from input and process standards to the overall cycle of the delivery process. Thus its scope is too limited to be seen as a new policy paradigm, which should change the basic goals and delivery in a certain area. A reasonable view of outcome orientation, which also limits an oversupply of new paradigm, is to see it as a heuristic which might link the two paradigms of new public management (NPM) and of lifelong learning (LLL). NPM puts efficiency at the centre of ET governance, and LLL includes – besides a broader perspective on the ET system – the shift of attention from teaching to learning.

A strong impetus towards outcome orientation has come from the international and the European levels. Main examples for this are the basic model of ET policy in the Lisbon

follow-up strategy “Education and Training 2010” (EU Council 2001), and the proposal for the European Qualification Framework (EQF; EU 2008) which recommends learning outcomes to be the main element for the creation of a transparency framework of national ET systems. At the international level the OECD and the IEA have contributed to this orientation by the set of large scale assessment of competences and learning outcomes in different areas of ET. The OECD governance studies as well as a bulk of new models in economics of education have reinforced the outcome dimension in ET systems and policies (Gonand, Joumard, Price 2007, Sutherland 2007).

Of course, results are not completely new in ET policy and practice. Rather they have shifted in status and meaning. Figure 3 gives a stylised account of these changes. The changed meaning primarily implies a shift from implicit, individualised and informal knowledge to explicit, operationalised and formalised knowledge for policy and management. The figure shows the broad range of formalised knowledge, which should be available, if outcome orientation is implemented. The figure also demonstrates a kind of shift of attention from the actors at the grass roots level of delivery of teaching to the more aggregate institutional levels of management and policy making. Therefore, a positive change of practice at the level of teaching and learning processes is not obvious with this shift.

Figure 3: Changed status and meaning of results in ET policy and practice.

Traditional status and meaning of results: - Implicit and diverse, - relevant for individual practice - mainly informal and local knowledge	Changed status and meaning of results: - Explicit, operational, - relevant for policy & management practice, - increasingly formal knowledge
Dimensions for observation of results	
OUTPUT (immediate results)	+ Competency + Qualification (negative: Dropouts)
OUTCOME (longer term results)	+ Competency + Employment + Productivity + Income (individual; aggregate) + Other social & cultural dimensions
How to measure?	+ quantitative measures + qualitative accounts
How to assess?	+ Effectiveness + Efficiency both by internal and/or external dimensions
How to use?	+ Policy + Practice

Source: Own compilation

Now, if we discuss the relationship between outcome orientation and policy learning, we might ask whether policy learning is necessarily implied in outcome orientation. Figure 4 tries to give a systematic framework, of how outcome orientation might be related to the mechanisms and forms of policy learning. The basic point of outcome orientation as a new heuristic is the operational definition of goals and objectives, which should guide policy and practice. In order to make this heuristic work, measurement (capacity building) and feedback and its use in implementation practice (maieutic) is necessary. Thus, in order to set the new heuristic in practice the additional mechanisms of policy

learning are needed. The three forms of learning constitute another axis which describes the depth and scope of change. We can propose a nexus of the forms of learning with the different categories of innovation. The figure indicates that a full change of policy from input orientation to outcome orientation would include a dynamic at both dimensions to the third step, and we would reach the implementation of a new policy paradigm. This, however, does not mean, that this necessarily leads to a better functioning of the system.

The scheme also allows for a further differentiation of the analysis of the implementation of outcome orientation: First, a specific system can stand at a different state of the continuum between input and result or outcome orientation. E.g., a system which has already reached outcome orientation may embark at the level of 1st order learning to improve its status or working; in a system which works at the basis of input orientation will probably not reach the status of fully implemented outcome orientation with 1st or 2nd order learning either. Second, there may be different pathways and degrees of an inclusion of outcome orientation in a certain system. That means, that the scheme allows for an assessment of various combinations of policy learning and outcome orientation. E.g., there may be 3rd order learning at the level of the heuristic, as the concept can be fully adopted, however, only at the level of rhetoric; or the different mechanisms might work at the level of 1st order learning, resulting in a degree of adopting outcome measures in a mainly input oriented system.

Figure 4: Outcome orientation and mechanisms and forms of policy learning combined

	1 st order Incremental improvement, Process-innovation	2 nd order new instruments product innovation	3 rd order new policy paradigm radical innovation
Heuristic	- operational definition of given goals and objectives	- new understanding of goals and objectives or change in focus leads to new measures	- new goals and objectives - new understanding of key aspects of policies (maybe new rhetoric only)
Capacity building	- observation and measurement within prevailing policies	- new indicators - new systems of capacity building - new frameworks of description	- new information available, based on new paradigm (competing or mainstream)
Maieutic	- inclusion of a policy in existing reflection mechanisms	- new regular feedback mechanisms - established consequences from feedback	- new goals and objectives lead to new policy proposal - new governance system for a new policy

Source: Own compilation

Taking up those differentiations, we can finally ask, how the combination of policy learning and outcome orientation is related to the constellations among actors in the different governance models. Can the dynamic of policy learning lead to incremental change of the main governance mechanisms, or is a change of the governance system necessary for a movement of the system along the categories of the framework? This question, which seems rather important, can only be posed at this level, an answer would need comparative empirical work.

Based on this framework, we can propose some questions for an empirical analysis of outcome orientation and policy learning:

- If we see outcome orientation as a heuristic, we can analyse, which aspects of the dimensions of observation, measurement, assessment and utilisation given in

figure 3 have been taken up by policy - the broader this understanding the more fully we can speak of an adoption of outcome orientation.

- We can further analyse, how much the heuristic has been taken up at the axis of mechanisms through capacity building and maieutic, and to which extent prevailing policies have been changed through the forms and innovation levels – by this the extent of policy learning can be obtained.
- As a different strategy we can look at certain policy channels or instruments (e.g. EU-Lisbon objectives, or OECD-reviews), and analyse if, and how the heuristic has been processed via those channels - we can see, whether certain policy channels are effective in promoting outcome orientation.
- We can look at policy change, overall, or in certain policy fields, and try to analyse whether and through which forms and mechanisms of policy learning outcome orientation does occur - does it work as a heuristic, to which extent are the other mechanisms at work?

3. Outcome orientation and policy learning in Austrian ET policy – an explorative analysis

The starting point for this analysis is a series of extensive studies according to the six selected policies (supported by personal knowledge accumulated by experience in policy advice; see Lassnigg 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, Lassnigg et al. 2007, Lassnigg/Unger 2005, Steiner 2005, Lassnigg/Vogtenhuber 2007; Mayer/Lassnigg 2006]. Figure 5 gives an overview of the basic structures and lines of development in the policies in question, which are described in a sketchy way in section 3.1. for a basic understanding. The description is supported by an overview table in the ANNEX. In the following section (3.2.), the main lines of development towards outcome orientation are summarized, before an assessment according to the categories of policy learning is made in section 3.3., accompanied by a brief description of main aspects of the policies in question.

3.1. General traits of selected policies

Figure 5: Overview about general traits of the selected policies

Policy	Key dimensions	General traits
Educational research and development (R&D)	- International inputs - EU - national Institutions - national Policies - major initiatives - outcome orientation	Since 1960s several OECD reviews, less participation in assessments broad participation in EU activities, „soft“ measures/engagement R&D-structures different for sectors: Schools-VET-H.E., low cooperation Sectoral: Agency&PISACentre - Social Partners&Market - Market&Univ. TIMSS-follow-up; Competence Centres; regional FE-Institutes; Reporting School autonomy; QA/QD-framework; Anticipation; NQF
Governance Financing	- Financing - Organisation - Process - Content	Sectoral: Cameralistic/Market/Formula+Subsidies/Service Agreements School: bureaucratic; H.E. institutional autonomy Teaching individualised; Assessment and participation regulated Central framework regulations, small autonomy
Quality assurance and development (QA/QD)	- top down - interactive - bottom up	Statistics/monitoring: weak, input-oriented Frameworks: Schools Q:I.S. and QIBB; peer reviews various initiatives at institutions, encouraged
Polytechnics (FH)	- governance	New sector, organisation deliberately „outcome oriented“
Transition Policy	- employment - education	deregulation; subsidies for apprenticeship; alternative training long time neglected; recently 2nd chance improved
NQF	- strategy	R&D-supported process for strengthening outcome orientation

Source: Own compilation

3.1.1. Educational R&D policy

Educational R&D must be seen as a main potential source for the development of outcome orientation and policy learning, as it reflects past experience and acquires new information. Policy in this area thus can be seen as a mirror of how outcome orientation is valued by policy makers. Overall, there has not been a deliberate policy in this field for a long time, and educational R&D is rather weakly developed in Austria (Lassnigg 2007, Lassnigg, Markowitsch 2005, Zukunftskommission 2003). Policy is informed rather by informal practical knowledge than by formal research, and the R&D infrastructure is fragmented and low level, with very different profiles and agency structures in different areas of ET. In particular the regular information base about the ET system is still very deficient, with little progress during decades (Lassnigg 2006b) almost totally input related, and even unsatisfactory at this level (Lassnigg et al. 2007). Participation in international and European initiatives has been low level, with little participation in large scale assessments (TIMSS and PISA being exceptions).

More recently, there have been some policy initiatives in R&D focused on results: First, a research initiative has been started with the aim to develop school governance towards more school autonomy (Posch, Altrichter et al. 1992), however, without substantial impact except at the rhetorical level. Second, following the unsatisfactory results in the TIMSS study a rather large scale medium-term project has been set up (IMST; see IFF 1999, Krainer 2005, 2007), which has analysed the results in more detail and set up various activities to improve practice in math and science teaching, mainly at the process level and teacher competences. Third, following the research about school governance, and the first PISA results, a project has been set up among the main researchers in the school area to develop a comprehensive framework of QA/QD (Eder et.al 2002), which, however, has still not been implemented systematically. Fourth, a R&D initiative has been started to assess and develop the relation of supply and demand in VET, which has been focused on the outcome dimension (Lassnigg/Markowitsch 2005, Lassnigg/Vogtenhuber 2007), and is still in a phase of exploring the potentials for implementation. Fifth, in the initial phase of the development of a NQF educational R&D has been commissioned to provide basic advice in a new and open way. How, and to which extent this might lead to policy learning, is still an open question.

3.1.2. Governance and financing of ET

WE have already shown that the systems and mechanisms of governance and financing of ET are a key dimension for outcome orientation and the potentials for policy learning. Overall Austrian ET is extremely complex in terms of governance and financing, as it comprises 7 to 10 different systems of governance, which are located at different levels of policy and include different actors. In fact there is no overall steering or governance in Austrian ET, and there also have been marked changes particularly in higher education recently. The school sector is still clearly governed by the bureaucratic model, which is even partly dispersed to regional areas – thus there is not one overall bureaucracy, but partly nine bureaucracies in the small country, particularly in compulsory education. In higher education a new polytechnic sector has been set up in the 1990s with a completely

new governance system based on accreditation and institutional autonomy, and after 2000 the university system, which had also been governed in a highly bureaucratic manner combined with academic self-governance before, was changed towards a high degree of institutional autonomy.

The teaching process within schools is mainly individualised to the teachers, assessment and progression is highly regulated, and the content is regulated by framework curricula, with a high degree of discretion with individual teachers. The financing, organisation and management of schools, in particular the recruitment of teachers is also highly regulated. Schools have been given only small autonomy in curricular issues and allocation of their running costs during recent years. Output and outcomes are not controlled, in most areas there are even statistical figures of graduates lacking, and due to PISA results the correlation of school marks to measured achievement is very low. Thus, so far result orientation has not been implemented at the school level.

In higher education a new governance system has been created by the establishment of the polytechnic (FH) sector, which has included a partly turn towards result orientation. To some extent goals and objectives have been stated, however, rigorous mechanisms of monitoring and feedback have only been established regularly with the control of retention, as the public financing was directly linked to effective student numbers. The accreditation of study programmes has been also linked to assessment of labour market demand and of acceptance by potential students. Another, more indirect mechanism for outcome orientation has been established by various linkages of the study programmes to the enterprises sector, e.g., by diploma projects of the students in enterprises. In the university sector some steps to result orientation have been taken by a new mechanism of financing based on goals formulated in service agreements, and partly based on performance indicators. However, this new mechanism is still not completely implemented.

3.1.3. Quality assurance and quality development

Emphasis in QA/QD has increased following a debate about reforms of the governance system of schools towards more autonomy. A group of researchers from universities and from the state agency for school development have developed a comprehensive master plan for QA/QD in school (Eder et al 2002) which, however, has remained in the state of a proposal for some years. More recently, steps towards implementation have been set first in VET schools and colleges with the establishment of an operational QA/QD system which is in a state of implementation, and second in compulsory schooling with a new initiative of standards at key grades of the system in main subjects. This initiative is in a piloting stage at the moment. An expert task force established by the last government has formulated a more concrete proposal for future policy priorities, which are still to some extent guiding policy makers (Zukunftskommission 2003). The top down initiatives by the master plan have been supplemented by several grass roots initiatives at the school level which are encouraged by policy, and by interactive projects between the bureaucracy and the schools as, e.g., the quality initiatives in the VET sector (Timischl 2006).

3.1.4. The development of the polytechnic (FH) sector

The polytechnics have been established in the early 1990s in Austria as completely new institutions, on the contrary to other systems which established in this period (Finland and Switzerland), which were related very much to an upgrading and merging process of existing institutions. The Austrian policy was explicitly aiming at the creation of a new mode of governance, which would not have been possible in this way if existing institutions were taken as a starting point for the new sector. Despite the similarity in naming with the German institutions, the Austrian Fachhochschule was built more after the model of the former British Polytechnics, which paradoxically have been abolished at more or less the same time (Mayer/Lassnigg 2006, Pratt 2004a, b).

It was an explicit aim of the creation of the new structure to bring about a shift from input orientation to output orientation. Mainly two mechanisms should achieve this aim, first an accreditation procedure of new programmes by an autonomous expert led council, and second by a separate decision of public financing based on a per student contribution. The new institutions were only regulated by a set of general requirements, and were given autonomy in several aspects.

An evaluation of the experience during the first ten years of the sector, however, has shown that the output orientation has been set in place only to a limited extent. The formulation of goals and objectives was in most cases rather vague, and a regular monitoring and feedback procedure has been set up in case of the teaching goals – the other main goals – R&D and provision of services – have not been monitored in a similar way (Lassnigg, Unger 2005).

3.1.5. Transition policy

Austria has been quite successful in managing the transition process from school to work, despite there are signs for a shrinking advantage. Youth unemployment is comparatively low, and also is early school leaving markedly below the EU average. One factor is the apprenticeship system which provides for a bridge into employment also for young people with lower performance in formal schooling, however, there have also been noteworthy policy attempts tackling this issue since the mid 1980s, when a strong demographic upturn in parallel with economic disturbances caused visible problems on the youth labour market. We can see two main lines of policy in this area: first employment and labour market policy with subsidies for apprenticeship and active labour market policy measures as the main elements and second ET policy with the supply of additional places in VET schooling mainly. During the last decades those elements have been modified and partly institutionalised, and some measures have been added, however, the main line of promoting employment via apprenticeship and some additional labour market training for young people with transition problems has remained the same. The ET system has rather held his selective dynamic by constantly pushing a part of young people to lower tracks and to apprenticeship, thus aggravating to some extent transition problems. The European priority on the problems of early school leaving has contributed to a shift of attention to the production of drop outs and to measures against

that some years ago. This issue has been strengthened by the participation of the ET authorities in the European programmes, particularly in the European Social Fund (ESF), followed by the Lisbon goals and objectives.

3.1.6. Development of a National Qualification Framework (NQF)

The more recent policy case of the development of an Austrian NQF is special by having been set into play completely from abroad by an agreement to the European proposals. A new policy line has been created which in some areas complemented reform options, and in others posed additional constraints on changes already in place. In VET schooling the existing impetus towards learning outcomes has been strengthened by the NQF policy, whereas in the university sector the ongoing process of implementing the severe governance reform in parallel with the participation in the Bologna process rather created irritation and a sense of exhaustion by “external” and top down policy demands.

This policy is also interesting because it has made use of project management and research in a new way by setting up a deliberate strategy of policy development and implementation which started by a mapping of the problems and possibilities from research (IHS et al 2007). A task force which combined the structures of European policy within the bureaucracy with the external stakeholders, mainly the social partners, has been created which has tried to set up a rational structure of the policy process, different to the practices of informal negotiations and policy bargaining among the various stakeholders.

3.2. Identification of indications for outcome orientation in those policies

In figure 6 those key policy activities and measures are summarised, which have carried some noteworthy elements of outcome orientation. Those policies which have been main carriers of outcome orientation are marked by bold letters. We can briefly summarise the main results as follows:

- First, policies of this kind have not been started before the 1990s. During the decades before the main strand in ET policies has been input oriented, including a general line of substantial increasing resources. In the policies for a reform of Lower Secondary School the academic results have been controlled by so called “experiments”, however, the politics level was not prepared to taking evidence seriously as a basis for decision making – the decisions for non-reform were taken on a basis of political preferences alone. During the 1980s some steps towards outcome orientation have been taken in Labour Market Policy, where the main part of transition policy is situated, by starting to carry out evaluations of measures. However, similar to ET policy, the results were seldom taken up by decision making.
- Second, during the 1990s we can identify increasing activities by participation in international and European initiatives which carried some elements of outcome orientation and in particular two main activities towards that: The establishment of the polytechnic sector as a deliberate reform sector for a new outcome oriented governance structure, and a major R&D initiative for preparing a Masterplan for

the implementation of a QA/QD framework in the compulsory school sector. The spread of the new heuristic has been supported by new information from international indicator systems, and by the overall project oriented EU programmes. As far the new heuristic has been taken up, it remained mainly at the rhetorical level. The QA/QD frame work has been created at a conceptual level, however, not been implemented practically on a broader scale. Even in the polytechnic sector as a real implemented policy, the notion of outcome orientation has remained rather limited to a subset of objectives which were monitored in a very selective way.

- Since 2000 there have been some steps taken towards implementation of earlier initiatives, and some new attempts have been developed towards outcome orientation. The QA/QD framework has been taken up and transformed into a more concrete project in the area of VET schools by the QIBB initiative, and in compulsory schooling a piloting project for standards has been started. Borrowing from the experience with the polytechnic sector, a strong governance reform of university has been amended and implemented, which also has given more impetus on results. Taking up European priorities, the issue of dropping out from school and of early school leaving has also been taken up, by creating new evidence and by starting to develop evidence based measures. Finally, the proposal of the development of a National Qualification Frame has been taken up, and a basic policy framework has been created, aimed at a substantial shift of ET towards learning outcomes. Overall, at least steps towards capacity building have been taken during this decade, in some areas even stronger initiatives for implementation can be observed.

Figure 6: Indications for outcome orientation

Policy	Key dimensions	1990s	since 2000
R&D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International inputs - EU - national Institutions - national Policies - major initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participation in TIMSS, PISA; OECD-Indicators - Evaluation .NAP and ESF - creation of PISA-Centre -TIMSS-follow-up project; QA/QD masterplan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESF evaluation; Indicators; Lisbon-follow-up - creation of competence centres, creation of a new R&D agency - Task force about future of schools; national report about school education started - TIMSS continued; research about ESL
Governance Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financing - Organisation - Process - Content 	all dimensions covered by Polytechnics reform	all dimensions covered by University reform - process and content covered by standards initiative
QA/QD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top down - interactive - bottom up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QA/QD Masterplan; Q.I.S. webpage - some support for implementation - various initiatives at regional, local or school levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competence oriented curriculum 2000. - EU-Presidency priority - QIBB initiative in VET - various initiatives at regional, local or school levels
Polytechnics (FH)	- governance	- Set up as a “reform sector”	- re-accreditation of programmes
Transition Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employment - education 	- 2nd chance for ESL	- strengthening of education oriented policy
NQF	- governance		- set up of project oriented and R&D supported strategy

Source: Own compilation

3.3. Identification of sources, mechanisms, and forms of policy learning in those examples

Now, for the purpose of identification of policy learning we can try to classify the identified policies according to the different aspects of policy learning developed above in section 1. To do this with all identified policies would go beyond the scope of this paper, so we restrict the analysis to the 9 main policies given in bold letters in figure 6. The NQF strategy must be excluded from this procedure, as it is too young to be assessed due to the framework.

Figure 7: Assessment of outcome oriented policies for policy learning

	1 st order Incremental improvement, Process-innovation	2 nd order new instruments product innovation	3 rd order new policy paradigm radical innovation
Heuristic	- operational definition of given goals and objectives	- new understanding of goals and objectives or change in focus leads to new measures - R&D: QA/QD masterplan - R&D: standards initiative - QA/QD Q.I.S. webpage - QA/QD QIBB initiative in VET	- new goals and objectives - new understanding of key aspects of policies (maybe new rhetoric only) - GoF, FH: Polytechnics reform - GoF: University reform
Capacity building	- observation and measurement within prevailing policies	- new indicators - R&D: research about ESL - new systems of capacity building - new frameworks of description - QA/QD Q.I.S. webpage - QA/QD QIBB initiative in VET	- new information available, based on new paradigm (competing or mainstream) - GoF, FH: Polytechnics reform - GoF: University reform
Maieutic	- inclusion of a policy in existing reflection mechanisms	- new regular feedback mechanisms - established consequences from feedback	- new goals and objectives lead to new policy proposal - new governance system for a new policy

Source: Own compilation

Figure 7 gives an overview about how the policies can be classified in terms of the two dimensions of policy learning towards outcome orientation. The polytechnic reform, as well as a decade later the university reform clearly have included the new heuristic of outcome orientation. Both policies also have included new mechanisms of capacity building: In the *polytechnics reform* the public financing has been linked to the progress of students by a simple form of formula funding which also takes into account for dropout. The student numbers must be properly monitored by the statistical system. In the *university reform* a system of knowledge management has to be installed which is able to control the indicators needed for a proportion of funding, which are partly input and process related, and partly output related. Moreover, as financing will be related to specific service agreements, the results also must be documented in the future. As compared to the traditional governance systems, these new systems have to be classified as radical innovations.

Less radical innovations have been brought by the remaining policies. The *QA/QD masterplan* developed by R&D activities and the subsequent *standards initiative* have clearly developed new heuristics and formulated new policies according to quality

assurance and quality development. However, up to now those policies have stayed at this level. Two subsequent policies have reached the status of capacity building, the *Q.I.S. webpage*, and the *QIBB initiative in VET*. The former provides a number of instruments for the implementation of QA/QD at school level, the latter goes a step further, as it includes a comprehensive system of structured implementation of QA/QD in VET schools. Finally, the research about ESL has provided new indicators and analyses about a previously neglected issue in ET policy making.

If we try to relate those results to the institutional models of governance given by the triangle of actors, we can see that in the polytechnics reform institutional autonomy has been implemented, which includes monitoring in the relation between policy and practice, and some other exchange relations between R&D and practice, in particular with the assessment of demand and acceptance. The QA/QD masterplan has been developed in a relation between policy and R&D, however, the linkage between policy and practice has not been sufficiently achieved, and as can be expected by the conceptual framework, the relation between R&D and practice has remained weak in the bureaucratic governance system. The Q.I.S. webpage as a supply tool, has not been utilised very much voluntarily, whereas the top down imputed QIBB initiative has necessarily been given more attention at the level of practice.

3.4. Appraisal of policy learning and outcome orientation in the selected policies

We have to recognise that the selected outcome oriented policies have borrowed very much from the international and the European levels. The governance reforms as well as QA/QD initiatives and the issue of early school leaving had been strongly emphasised and put forward at these levels already, before they were taken up by Austrian policies.

Thus external influence has been essential for some movements towards outcome orientation in Austria. We can say that education and training does not differ from other economic sectors in being driven by mainly importing and modifying innovations. The set up of the polytechnic sector was directly inspired by discussions and analyses by the OECD, and made explicit use of foreign models and external expertise. The movement towards QA/QD has been influenced by comparative research about governance mechanisms through school autonomy, as well as by debates around the large scale assessments, and – more recently – by European VET policy (the CQAF; see Lassnigg 2006b). In particular the large scale assessments have with some time lag impacted through each of the three mechanisms of policy learning (Heuristic, Capacity building, Maieutic). Another source can be found in the participation in the EU-policy practice: in these the Austrian actors have gradually adopted new working procedures by a more specific and goal oriented project orientation. At this level a gradual improvement is visible with the approach taken for the development of the NQF. In the following sections we give a brief appraisal of policy learning in the selected policy fields.

Overall, there remain many limitations of outcome orientation so far in Austrian ET policy. Information about several aspects of outcomes is still missing at all, in particular at the economic and the socio-cultural level. Even in the FH-sector, the “flagship” of outcome orientation this means mainly avoiding drop-outs (which are besides, are not

very low compared to other sectors). In the school sector the establishment of standards is in a pilot phase, and rather plan than reality, a proper statistical monitoring system is lacking so far. In the university sector it is open as to now, how the new structure will work according to outcome orientation.

3.4.1. Policy and utilisation in educational R&D

We can look at R&D in two ways, first whether we can find policy learning in R&D policies, and second, as to how R&D might have contributed to policy learning. To the first aspect, the answer is that there has been little deliberate educational R&D policy in Austria so far. Moreover, changes have not been informed by activities according the framework for policy learning. In the past, R&D, as far as it has existed at all, was clearly embedded in the relationship between policy and practice, more or less without making use of independent research. On the one hand, there has been a closed circle of factual research (“Pädagogische Tatsachenforschung”) in the institutions of continuing teacher education as a separate community of practice oriented research, and on the other hand with the reform attempts for lower secondary schools a policy led state agency for the control and evaluation of the “experiments” has been created in the 1970s. A new impetus has arisen by the participation in TIMSS and PISA, with the development of a loosely university affiliated research unit, which became the PISA centre. During the late 1980s punctual research has been commissioned with independent research institutes and with a new generation of academics from universities. The initiatives for reforming governance through school autonomy, followed by the QA/QD masterplan, have involved a shift to the policy and independent R&D and have further contributed to the development of a research community. More recently, the state agency has been relaunched as a core R&D institution which is also designed to be the centre of wider network of school related research. Since 2007 concrete steps have been taken towards the production of a comprehensive report about school related developments, strongly related to the attempt to contribute to evidence based policy making. This project involves a broad range of the existing R&D community, and will also contain two studies about the development of educational R&D in Austria. So far, however, all these movements have been taken without deliberate reflective R&D activities about the most “outcome oriented” pathways towards educational R&D.

According to the second question, as to how R&D might have contributed to policy learning and outcome orientation, we reach a mixed conclusion. There have been doubtless contributions to heuristics, with a strong push towards outcome orientation by R&D activities. There also have been some movements towards capacity building, mainly with the utilisation and follow-up of the large scale assessments. Some reflection at expert level has been implemented with the participation in the EU programmes and activities, which also have included increased utilisation of indicators, and reporting. However, there has been a considerable time lag until steps towards 2nd or 3rd order policy learning has set in. An exemption to this has been the set up of the polytechnic sector, which has been followed by the university reform a decade later.

3.4.2. Governance and Financing

Governance and financing has been reformed towards outcome orientation in higher education, however, in the area of school education the system is still strongly bureaucratic and input oriented. Moreover, there are different governance systems existing beneath each other in different sectors of schooling, which even are breaking up the potentials of an effective bureaucracy. The problems with this system are quite well known from research since decades. However, an attempt for a change towards a system based on school autonomy has not been successful in the 1990s. Recently, a new study has analysed the problems in the existing governance system, and made proposals for change. However, the vested interests appear too strong and the system too complex, thus we cannot find indications for policy learning in this policy area in the school sector, except the attempts towards QA/QD with the standards movement. Still there must be serious doubts whether this movement can be successful towards outcome orientation without changes in the governance system.

3.4.3. Systems of QA/QD

We have found indications in the area of QA/QD at the policy learning mechanisms of heuristics and capacity building, which have reached the level of 2nd order learning. If we consider the whole ET system there are different practices of QA/QD in place, and there is not much exchange among them. As already shown, there have been considerable R&D inputs, followed by marked delays with implementation. Standards as a new instrument of QA/QD are under way with pilot projects in different school sectors, which are designed to include feedback to the school level. However, in compulsory schooling the relationship to governance is not clear so far, thus we cannot predict how far their impact will reach in this sector (maybe 1st order learning only). In VET the QIBB project includes the design of implementation mechanisms, thus in this sector 2nd order learning might be reached.

3.4.4. The polytechnics reform

The polytechnics reform is a clear example of a successful reform, and in relation to the Austrian context it also has been a radical innovation. A deliberate goal of the reform has been to implement outcome orientation, as opposed to the existing input oriented system. The reform included 3rd order learning with the mechanisms of heuristics and capacity building. Capacity building was involved with the establishment of various mechanisms to observe outcome orientation at the level of teaching and studying (required studies about enterprises' demand and potential students acceptance for each programme; follow-up of students required for formula funding; required re-evaluation of each programme after 5 years). Some reflection was also implemented by a commissioned review study about the set up of the sector after the first decade, however, without having a formal influence on further development.

Overall, this policy process is an example of how policy learning can take place. There has been a specific OECD review about the new proposal in advance. The reform was

directly inspired by the British Polytechnics (which were, paradoxically, abolished shortly after this time). Key players in the process were the leading persons of the accreditation council, some leading and high level officials in the administration, and some influential politicians, supported by some academics and researchers – we can speak of a “reform coalition” which directly was interested in learning from past experience and new information. We can also see in this process, that the mechanisms of policy learning are inextricable mixed up with the more traditional mechanisms and channels of policy making, including negotiations, power play, persuasion, demagoguery, and the like. The polytechnics reform is also an important case of policy learning, as its successful implementation and functioning has influenced the reform of university governance towards a much higher level of institutional autonomy.

In terms of outcome orientation the scope according to the dimensions outlined in figure 3 is rather narrow, as mainly the graduation in time is controlled (output in terms of graduate figures). Thus, only part of the teaching goals is regularly observed – the two other goals of polytechnics, R&D and service for the region, as well as efficiency aspects are not considered systematically.

3.4.5. Transition policy

In transition policy several measures have been taken to improve the transition of young people into working life since the late 1980s. The main mechanism has been furthering access into apprenticeship through subsidies for training enterprises taking apprentices and legally based alternative training programmes in active labour market policy, later added by programmes for completion of compulsory education. Those measures have been included into the EU programmes, which required some degree of monitoring. The alternative training programmes have been bureaucratically monitored, with yearly updated numbers of places according to the number of seekers for an apprenticeship which could not find a training place until a specified day in autumn. The monitoring included mainly routine procedures, the outcomes were monitored to a limited degree only. Thus there are limited indications for outcome orientation (the measures have been administrated rather in an input oriented way, as providing training places) and limited indications for policy learning.

More recently the Austrian policy for disadvantaged young people has been analysed in a broad comparative project with rather mixed results. Some reflection procedures have been set up in Austria, inspired by the EU emphasis on early school leaving, by a systematic inquiry through a series of workshops of the various stakeholders in this policy area, including policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. This project might be a starting point for policy learning in this area. In parallel the social partners have developed some expert opinions and policy proposals for transition policy which, however, do not point to new heuristics.

3.4.6. The NQF strategy

Quite generally deficits in outcome orientation are emphasised by various actors in Austrian ET policies, and the first research endeavours with the EQF and possibilities for an Austrian NQF have shown a consensus that outcome orientation should be strengthened by including learning outcomes into the governance mechanisms of the ET system. This is one of the main shared goals of the Austrian NQF strategy. However, there is still a low level of awareness among actors about what this could mean in practice. In the beginning phase of activities a project has been set up, including R&D and stakeholders, to collectively develop the NQF. In this process there is scope for policy learning, however, the process is open as to now.

3.5. Discussion

Using the proposed methodology, we have found indications of policy learning in Austrian ET-policy. We have seen essential influence of international and European sources. The existing governance system constitutes on the one hand limitations for policy learning in areas where the governance system is bureaucratic, on the other hand we can also see opportunities because of the diversity of the overall ET system. Those opportunities are not utilised very much, because there little communication is going on between the different sectors so far. The process of the creation of a national qualification frame might increase the opportunities for communication, and thus for policy learning. We can also conclude from our results, that occurrence of policy learning about outcome orientation does not necessarily lead to immediate and visible improvement of outcomes. There might be several steps necessary to achieve improvement at the practical level.

The proposed methodology seems basically to be feasible to identify the presence of mechanisms and forms of policy learning as well as the occurrence of outcome orientation. The identification, however, has been rather rough and explorative, to see whether the concepts can be reasonably applied to empirical phenomena. A further analysis would have to intensify the observation methods. A further complication and an increase of complexity would arise, if we would look more deeply at the interaction between the international and the European levels at the one hand, and the national level at the other, which has turned out very important in the analysis: In fact we have the triangle of the different categories of actors at each level, and there might be different kinds of interactions, including criss-crossing ones not only within each level, but between levels. E.g., relations between international R&D and national R&D are different from the relations between international policy and national R&D.

We have seen the many facets of observation of outcomes, and the complexity involved in policy learning. Knowledge at a comparative as well as at a national level is missing very much at present. We have also demonstrated the interaction of mechanisms and forms of policy learning with the structure of governance systems, and with the status-quo ante.

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ANNEX-Figure: Key policy activities and measures

Policy	Key dimensions	1970s & before	1980s	1990s	Since 2000
R&D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International inputs - EU - national Institutions - national Policies - major initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation in OECD-Educational Planning - - Evaluation Agency for Lower Secondary School reform - Social Partners created their VET-research institutes - Lower Secondary school reform „experiments“ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participation in OECD reviews; study about non-university h.e.; FH-review - - market orientation for research - „experiments“ finished; new expert task force “Qualification 2000” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participation in TIMSS, PISA; Indicators - Evaluation .NAP and ESF - creation of PISA-Centre - Commissioned Research - TIMSS-follow-up-project; Autonomy project; QA/QD-project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESF continuation; Indicators; Lisbon-follow-up - creation of competence centres, creation of a new R&D agency - Task force about future of schools; national report about school education started - TIMSS continued; research about early school leavers (ESL)
Governance Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financing - Organisation - Process - Content - outcome orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big studies about state of financing - initiative for reform of Lower Secondary school; reform of university organisation - Laws including codetermination of stakeholders - periodic curriculum update - hardly any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costs increased substantially - Conservation of structure - periodic curriculum update - hardly any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polytechnic reform - Polytechnic reform - Polytechnic reform; some autonomy of schools - Polytechnic reform; periodic curriculum update - perceived as goal in polytechnic reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University reform - University reform; h.e. access through “occupational maturity” - University reform; initiatives about standards - University reform; curriculum 2000 at lower secondary level; initiatives about standards - strengthened in university reform; standards
QA/QD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top down - interactive - bottom up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inspection - - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inspection - - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Masterplan; Q.I.S. webpage - some support for implementation - various initiatives at regional, local or school levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competence oriented curriculum 2000; EU-Presidency priority - QIBB initiative in VET; standards pilots - various initiatives at regional, local or school levels
Polytechnics (FH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - policy debate about non-university h.e. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - set up as a “reform sector” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - re-accreditation of programmes
Transition Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employment related - education related 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - subsidies for apprenticeship; active LMP - outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - law for youth employment; subsidies - 2nd chance for early school leavers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - follow-up of employment related policies - strengthening of education oriented policy
NQF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strategy 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - set up of project oriented and R&D supported strategy

Source: Own compilation