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Financing models for initial and continuing vocational training

Besides differing vocational education and training (VET) systems, funding is another area in which there are still major differences between European countries. Experts believe that financing can make a major contribution to increasing or reducing the number of graduates from initial and continuing vocational training schemes.

In **initial vocational training** in Germany, dependence on economic cycles and financing by individual companies are seen as major causes of the repeated crises on the training market. State training place programmes and support premiums for in-company apprenticeships do indeed reduce the pressure in the short-term. At the same time, however, they send out the message to companies that they could withdraw from their responsibility for training. Whereas in neighbouring countries with comparable forms of dual training, inter-company fund financing models are used, discussions about the fund financing of vocational training in Germany have so far been bogged down in controversy spanning decades which normally produced no concrete results at all.

Initial vocational education and training is normally school-based in most EU Member States. It is state regulated and financed. In-company vocational training, which is comparable to the German dual training system, is only offered at the present time in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland. However, besides individual company financing they also have inter-company fund models for financing training.

In e.g. Switzerland the new Vocational Education and Training Act (BBG) that came into force in 2004, allows the government to declare vocational training funds of employment organisations (professional associations) – at their request – as generally binding for an industry. Here the professional associations, who represent the interests of companies, themselves assume vocational training tasks by, for instance, providing vocational training courses or training documentation to companies. The funds serve to finance these offerings. Up to now 12 sector-related vocational training funds have been declared to be

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generally binding. Overall experience shows that this also leads to companies assuming financial responsibility which had not previously shouldered any training costs but had merely exploited their industry's training provision. Of course there were also problems. Companies that could be classified in various business sectors tried to shirk their financing obligations. But these were very likely isolated incidents. Particularly from the German angle the question is raised about how Switzerland succeeds in getting employer organisations to assume social responsibility for vocational education and training.

Beyond the collective bargaining conflicts in terms of wages and salaries, Denmark also has a long tradition of cooperation between the social partners in the field of vocational education and training. Here, too, companies in an industry contribute to the funding of vocational education and training by making staggered contributions to a joint fund determined by the size of their workforce. This fund is run by employer organisations and trade unions and is used, for instance, to finance training remuneration.

In contrast to dual training, there is no uniform nationwide regulatory principle for **continuing vocational training** in Germany. The institutional breakdown of continuing training into in-company continuing training, individual continuing training and continuing training for the unemployed leads, depending on the sub-segment, to different forms of continuing training financing, too. Here companies, continuing training participants or the state (primarily within the framework of its labour market policy) bear the costs of continuing training. Besides financial support from the state for continuing training for the unemployed which has been considerably cut back in recent years, the state also contributes to upgrading training. Using the tools education savings plans, continuing training bonuses and loans, it encourages participation in continuing training, particularly by low-skilled workers. State support is mainly provided for financing instruments designed to strengthen individual demand on the continuing training market.

Denmark, France and the Netherlands have collective financing instruments which make it possible for companies too – irrespective of their individual continuing training activities – to be more involved in the financing of continuing training.

Experience in France and also in the Netherlands shows that the financing fund for continuing training based on mandatory company levies is seen as beneficial by companies and is used proactively. Experts believe this overcomes the problem of employees failing to take part in continuing training because of a shortage of money or time. Another advantage is that the steering of continuing training activities via the continuing training fund also permits consideration of both the supra-ordinate goals of the industry and region, and the socio-political and social goals of continuing training.

Conclusion: Inter-company forms of financing initial and continuing vocational education and training are common practice in many European countries. In training they primarily serve to improve the quality of training and achieve a more balanced distribution of training costs between training and non-training companies. Financing funds have increased the participation level of companies and their workforces in continuing training programmes.

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Vocational guidance as a process

Schools should see career guidance as a longer-term process and offer this to their pupils early on. This is one of the main findings of a BIBB study on the importance of pupil work placements during the career choice phase, which will soon be published by BIBB. Besides the young people's ability to realistically assess themselves and the market, the anchoring of vocational guidance units and contents is essential in order to smooth the transition from school to training. Before the end of ninth or tenth grade young people should at least have some concrete idea about their career choices and options. This is the decisive precondition for young people successfully pursuing their career goals and developing the necessary perseverance.

In recent years a number of measures have been tested in order to explore pupils' inclinations and abilities. They include competence checks or assessment processes. The education centre of the CCI Bonn/Rhein-Sieg offers young people, for instance, two-day "competence checks" which involve determining their particular talents, assessing their main aptitudes and preparing a competence profile.

However, this type of guidance appears to encourage unequal opportunities as many young people do not get to participate in these schemes because the offering is limited regionally, information about the offerings does not reach the target group or the offerings are sometimes linked to significant costs. The Standing Conference of *Land* Education Ministers and the Federal Employment Agency entered into a framework agreement about offering more specific advice on the transition from school to training, higher education and occupations. In this context, efforts are to be made to ensure nationwide provision of these aptitude tests.

The decisive contributory factor to the success of career guidance activities is the right timing. According to the findings from the BIBB survey, they should be integrated seamlessly into in-school career guidance processes to ensure that young people are offered effective, structured support in their search for viable career paths. The professional assessment of skills and inclinations undertaken in a social services support context often comes too late, for instance not until tenth grade – by which time the career guidance phase should, in fact, have been more or less completed.

In order to select suitable work placements, it may also be necessary to repeat the assessments of the young people's aptitudes and inclinations as the rhythm at which young people develop varies. Provision should be made for this.

The study pays particular attention to the role of pupil work placements. They are of special interest since they have a major impact not only on the pupils' choice of occupation; they also give companies an opportunity to pre-select later potential training place applicants. Decisions, which may be of major importance, are already taken when looking for suitable work placements. Some schools look for work placements for their pupils themselves and have extensive contacts to companies. Contacts of this kind are helpful from the career guidance angle but the question must, nevertheless, be raised whether pupils are encouraged to be independent when schools or parents do this for them and even attend to the related formalities even though this may seem to be the easier path for many pupils and companies, too.

Another study finding is that when pupils look for a work placement themselves, schools should steer and coordinate this process. The goal here is to prevent pupils concentrating on a few "particularly popular" companies. The study explicitly recommends extensive follow-up discussion of pupil work placements in school. This would not only have a positive effect on the choice of training place by encouraging the young people to reflect critically on their work experience but would also allow them to hear about other pupils' work experiences. Many schools tend to spend very little time on this because of curriculum pressures.

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Pilot Projects: new strategies for open structures and flexibility

In recent years flexibility in vocational training has made a major contribution to modernising and developing the dual system. One important feature is the concept of open structures which was taken over into training regulations in the mid-1990s. It allows companies to establish their own internal priorities when drawing up their vocational training curricula in addition to the mandatory areas. This remains faithful to the principle of the regulated occupation and complies with the nationwide rules that are the foundation for the comparability of the qualifications of graduates from a training course.

Despite fundamental acceptance of this concept of open structures, efforts to anchor it in the vocational training practice of companies, vocational schools and inter-company training centres have not been completely successful. Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular are unable to make adequate use of this flexibility without additional assistance. By means of active, systematic and concerted support for all stakeholders in the dual system, the potential offered by this open-structured training can be tapped even better for the quantitative and qualitative development of vocational education and training.

The nationwide pilot project programme "Flexibility scope for initial and continuing training" aims to promote the implementation of the "open structures" concept in practice. This is done by different activities designed to tap into unused flexibility potential in companies. The individual pilot projects in the programme elaborate instruments and processes. For instance, modular concepts are developed and tested as didactic approaches in line with the principle of the regulated occupation ("Berufsprinzip"). Thus, the open-structured elements of initial and continuing training regulations can be effectively used above all by SMEs.

The results of this work make a major contribution to finding answers to the question about how modularised learning concepts can help to ensure that vocational training complies with current social and training policy demands. In this context modularisation is seen as the sub-division of occupation/training contents into specific technical competences. In each module this combination leads to viable and useable occupational competences. The sum of all the individual modules is the occupational competence defined in the occupational field. The training contents are broken down in order to achieve need-driven, company-specific useable and competence-enhancing "qualification bundles". This upholds the principle of the regulated occupation and also introduces a new dimension. Based on this fundamental understanding, modularisation requires a differentiated learning concept which implies an understanding of the company problem areas as well as the underlying technical competence level. The contextual examination and description of in-company areas of activities helps to identify the necessary flexibility potential whilst upholding the principle of the regulated occupation.

The goal of the pilot projects is to develop vocational training practice with regard to

- pedagogical-didactic questions,
- the organisation of vocational training processes,
- the co-ordination of learning venues and institutions.

The pilot projects around this open structures concept reveal the wealth of opportunities on the different levels when it comes to developing offerings and instruments for the various target groups of initial and continuing vocational training both nationally and beyond national borders.

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BIBB supports Turkish textile vocational training centre

The Turkish Education Minister, Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Çelik, has opened the first inter-company centre for the initial and continuing training of skilled workers in the Turkish textile industry in Çerkezköy near Istanbul. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) has been very much involved in the establishment of this new vocational training centre. Since 2003 BIBB has continuously provided the Turkish textile employer association with advice on the development of standards, curricula, test requirements, facilities and further teacher training.

In the beginning, the new vocational training centre will run initial and continuing training courses for the textile occupations: spinning, weaving, finishing and laboratory and in the occupational field „mechatronics". The three-year training course is based on the German dual vocational training model. It mainly takes place in the new vocational training centre. This is followed by a one-year full-time training course in one of the surrounding Turkish textile companies. The new continuing training courses all have a modular format again with the support of BIBB.

There are plans for more training centres in 2008 and 2009 in Kayseri and Adana in Central and Southern Anatolia. Here too, BIBB will play a leading role by supplying active support and advice. Furthermore, the Institute provides scientific back-up and evaluates the activities of the Turkish vocational training centre.

The German-Turkish project is a good example for the sustainability of BIBB's international consulting activities. BIBB already had a liaison office in Ankara between 1994 and 2002, in order to develop standards and test requirements for vocational training in Turkey.

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GPC – an instrument of occupational integration

With its Good Practice Centre (GPC) for the assistance of disadvantaged individuals in vocational training, Germany has equipped itself with a tool that could be relevant for other countries, too. Since its establishment in 2000 the GPC has grown into a major centre of excellence for assistance for the disadvantaged. It is attached to BIBB and can be accessed on the Internet at *www.good-practice.de/*.

As a communication and co-operation forum, the Good Practice Centre (GPC) makes experience and tried-and-tested solutions available to practice. It also supports co-operation with the training venues which, in turn, train the various teaching staff i.e. trainers, education social workers and instructors.

Last year the GPC focussed on the links between research and teaching at universities with the work of experts involved in assisting the disadvantaged. The emphasis was on taking over impetus and findings from practice into the university curriculum of future experts involved in assisting the disadvantaged. The goal of this transfer of experience is to increase the acceptance and recognition of promotion of the disadvantaged as part of university studies of vocational pedagogics. Adding a module on the disadvantaged to this course of study could also help to make teaching staff more professional.

Another initiative is the creation of a "knowledge portal" on topical research questions of assistance for the disadvantaged. Because pedagogical assistance for the disadvantaged has frequently only played a fringe role in university research and teaching, a close network of corresponding stakeholders and projects is of major importance.

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