

**COMMENTARY**

**The systematic expansion of quality development**

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Dear readers

This edition of BWP addresses the quality of vocational training. This is a highly topical object of debate at both national and European level and is something which will be of major significance in future for the permanent continuing development and profiling of vocational training.

**The task of Parliament**

In passing the Vocational Training Reform Act of 2005, the German Lower House of Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) further resolved that the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) was a “comprehensive set of instruments for the securing of quality in vocational training” whilst at the same time calling upon the Federal Government “...to work in conjunction with the social partners and with the support of BIBB on the drawing up of procedures for the external evaluation of quality assurance practice in initial and continuing vocational education and training”. This represented an implicit articulation on the part of the Lower House of Parliament that only a relatively low number of established findings are available for the purposes of implementing the quality objectives of the BBiG and for ensuring the effectiveness of its quality assurance measures and instruments. This situation has changed very little down to the present day.

The resolution of the Lower House of Parliament continues in the following terms. “The aim of such evaluations should be to support those involved in vocational training in further developing quality assurance practice and to provide them with appropriate and practical instruments for ongoing quality assurance and quality management.” For this reason, we should welcome the fact that the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) will commission BIBB with the implementation of a pilot initiative to foster quality assurance and development in company vocational training. The main objective of this initiative is to use the development and piloting of model procedures as a vehicle for providing support in securing

and further developing training quality to small and medium-sized companies in particular and the institutions with which such companies cooperate.

Demographic development means that reliable documentation of the quality and quality development of in-company initial and continuing vocational training is growing in significance as companies attempt to secure the services of up-and-coming talent and skilled workers. Good training and ongoing continuing training provide a guarantee of permanent employability. This is likely to become one of the major factors which will determine success within the impending competition to recruit trainees and skilled workers. Companies could be supported in this process via an audit (conducted on a voluntary basis) to provide evidence of good quality in-company initial and continuing training. The audit procedures should be developed in conjunction with those involved.

### **Maintaining European connectivity**

The development of quality assurance approaches should display connectivity in European terms. Important guidance in this regard is provided in the form of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF). As KÜßNER indicates in her paper, member states are recommended to use selected indicators as the basis for testing the quality of their vocational training systems on an ongoing basis and to pursue permanent continuing development within the scope of a “quality assurance cycle”.

This means that preference should be accorded to procedures which correspond to the EQARF “quality assurance cycle”. Such procedures should be implemented with the aim of developing a standard for continuing quality improvement processes rather than in pursuit of a “one size fits all solution”. A further implication is that competence orientation, dimensions of competence and the descriptors and reference levels of the German Qualifications Framework should be reflected in the definition of quality objectives and quality criteria. At a system level, it is becoming increasingly important to document quality and quality development in a reliable manner and in a way which facilitates international comparability. This is a prerequisite for reciprocal trust in the application of qualification frameworks. Against this background, work should take place over the course of the next few years within the scope of EQARF to develop and pilot European quality indicators which permit European comparisons and accord due consideration to national characteristics and which are also capable of fostering and steering the permanent further development of vocational training quality. In its capacity as the “National Reference Body for Quality Assurance in Vocational

Education and Training" (DEQAVET), BIBB will support such developments in a committed manner.

### **Quality development at all levels**

The papers contained within the present edition make the wide-ranging and differentiated nature of the debate clear. The focus is on quality assurance and development at both a learning venue and system level.

Quality assurance and development issues in companies and educational establishments are affected by factors relating to input and process quality (such as planning of training, learning during the work process, pedagogical aptitude of trainers, cooperation between companies and vocational schools etc.) as well as by factors determining the output quality of vocational training (including success in examinations, employability, employment opportunities, readiness to engage in continuing training).

*Quality indicators must permit European comparisons and accord due consideration to national characteristics.*

KREWERTH and BEICHT use a BIBB study as the basis for demonstrating the degree of significance accorded to certain quality objectives by experts and trainees and to show the extent to which these objectives are achieved within training from the point of view of the trainees themselves. Although the evaluations provided by the trainees clarify the strengths of the dual system of vocational education and training, one of these strengths being the strong degree of work process orientation, they also highlight such weaknesses as the lack of cooperation between companies and vocational schools.

A further BIBB study surveyed companies on the deployment of quality assurance measures and requested the companies to evaluate the effectiveness of such measures. The results presented by EBBINGHAUS provide evidence that most companies providing training use established quality assurance instruments and also show that companies which deploy a diverse range of instruments believe, on the basis of their own self-evaluation, that they achieve quality objectives in a better way than other companies.

Both these BIBB investigations make it clear what experts, companies providing training and trainees themselves see as the main issues for the further development of quality management for in-company training.

This is also one of the issues addressed by FALK and ZEDLER in their evaluation of the enactment of the new Ordinance on Trainer Aptitude (AEVO) on 1 August 2009. They rightly view the AEVO as an important signal of the necessity for the pedagogical qualification of trainers. They also emphasise the importance of the “Skeleton Curriculum for the Training of Trainers” as recommended by the BIBB Board in June 2009 as an instrument for the securing of nationally standardised quality standards.

Two further papers included in the present edition deal with various approaches to quality assurance and quality development in the field of vocational schools. TENBERG describes one such approach and the attendant school change management process aimed at bringing about an improvement in teaching quality. This approach is very much in line with the tenets of classical “Change Management” in that the main emphasis is on involving those affected in the structuring of processes and in the determination of quality objectives. SCHNEEBERGER reports on an indicators-based model for quality assurance and development for courses at higher technical teaching institutes (HTL) in Austria. In light of the development of qualifications frameworks at a national and European level, the focus in this case is also on quality indicators which provide evidence of the level of competences acquired at HTL’s in internationally comparative terms.

SAUTER contributes a short paper addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance instruments introduced in conjunction with the Modern Services on the Labour Market Act (so-called “Hartz Laws”) in the form of the “Directive on Recognition and Licensing of Continuing Training” (AZWV). This also involves the presentation of a further quality assurance approach, the core of this being the certification of continuing training providers by expert bodies on the basis of publicly accountable quality standards.

NEHLS presents a paper on a draft quality assurance concept from the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB) in which he addresses the issue of how the equivalence of upgrading training and academic education can be presented and documented in a visual way. Irrespective of the evaluation of the individual details of this concept, one thing becomes apparent. The quickest way of implementing the justified claim for recognition of the equivalence of upgrading training qualifications in a manner which renders such recognition visible in international terms is via an accreditation procedure which guarantees a nationally uniform degree of quality and which is based on recognised standards.

In overall terms, the papers presented here show that quality assurance in vocational training is broadly based. They also demonstrate, however, that there continues to be a lack of systematic quality development approaches. This is another area in which the DEQA-VET Reference Body will generate impetuses for quality assurance and development in vocational training by acting as a national platform and as a way of integrating networks.