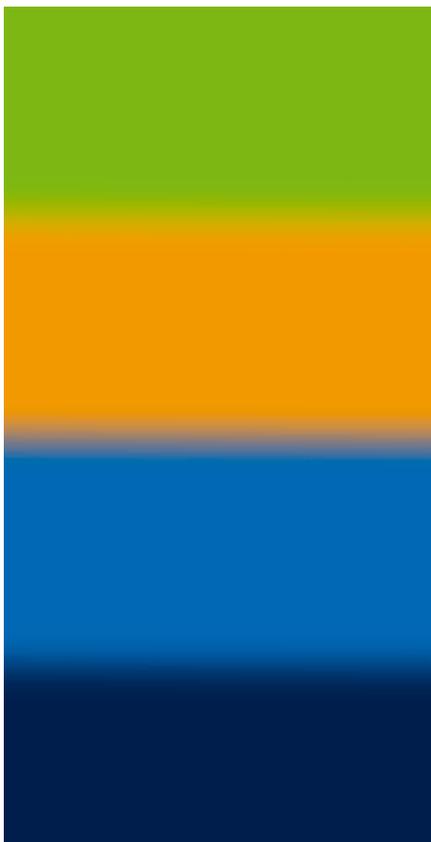

The 2014 BIBB Congress 2014 – a platform for cross-cutting and international dialogue

An interview with BIBB President Prof. Dr. Friedrich Hubert Esser and Director of Research Prof. Dr. Reinhold Weiß



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The 2014 BIBB Congress 2014 – a platform for cross-cutting and international dialogue

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On 18 and 19 September, specialist representatives from the fields of academic research, policy and practice will gather at the Berlin Congress Centre for the 2014 BIBB Congress. Five forums and two special forums to be staged across the two days of the event will provide an opportunity for professional networking. Current issues and perspectives in vocational education and training will be highlighted from both a national and an international angle under this year's motto of: "Structuring vocational education and training in a more attractive way – facilitating greater permeability".

BWP Professor Esser, what were the main reasons for selecting the topic for this year's conference? Why are the attractiveness of vocational education and the permeability of the educational system so close to your heart?

Esser Alongside internationalisation, "permeability" is currently the number one topic in vocational training. We believe that improved permeability across the whole of the educational system is an important lever for structuring vocational education and training more attractively in future. The goal of all stakeholders in education and VET needs to be to correct the current trend towards academisation in favour of increased esteem for the dual system and for the employment segments that lie behind it. There is an urgent requirement for skilled workers in these segments. For this reason, the aim of this year's BIBB Congress is to provide a dialogue platform for all those involved in vocational education and training as well as for stakeholders in the educational and higher education system.

BWP Access pathways into the educational and employment system and issues relating to permeability between vocational education and training and higher education are the core themes of Forums I and II. There are a further three forums in the programme of events that will look at major issues within VET. What are the main thematic focuses that will be addressed?

Weiß Vocational education and training faces two central challenges. In light of the growing numbers entering higher education study, it needs to remain sufficiently attractive to those holding higher formal qualifications. At the same time, it has to tap into the areas of potential offered by people who have not yet completed vocational education and training and who are frequently shut out of the labour market. Various approaches are required in order to overcome both of these challenges. This will be the focus of Forums II to V. The forum "Promoting the attractiveness of vocational education and training" will examine both the system level and the involvement of companies. Practical examples will show how companies secure their requirement for skilled workers. The topics of the forum "Tapping into areas of training potential" will be opportunities for second-chance training and the visualisation and recognition of competences acquired via informal means. Finally, the forum "Opening up opportunities via continuing training" will explore improved pathways into continuing training and use practical examples as a vehicle for presenting the learning opportunities in digital worlds.

Esser: “The Congress programme creates an opportunity for dialogue between the Federal Government, the federal states, the higher education system, the academic research community and trade and industry. This provides maximum permeability!”

BWP As well as the five forums mentioned, there will also for the first time be two special forums: “Vocational education and training research” and “Internationalisation of vocational education and training”. Why is important to you to highlight these areas in particular, and what will be the main topics addressed?

Esser On this occasion, we have opted for a variable Congress structure in order to offer participants even more choices with regard to which events to attend. For this reason, we are extending the Congress programme by offering special forums on topics that constitute particular focuses of BIBB’s work. I am especially looking forward to the special forum on “Internationalisation”. Last year, we launched the “German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training” – GOVET – and thus nailed our colours to the mast with regard to expanding BIBB’s activities both within and outside Europe. The aim is for the Congress to support this commitment.

Weiß Evidence-based educational policy requires robust information on the situation of the educational system in all its facets. Alongside input data and information on processes, this also includes data on learning outcomes and effects. The Qualifications Framework provides an instrument that has been designed to function in a cross-cutting way. The main focus thus far has been on educational standards and on competence assessment in the field of general education. Survey instruments have been developed and research findings presented via “large-scale assessments” such as PISA and PIAAC. However, in the field of vocational education and training there are also various approaches towards measuring occupational competences.

The objectives of the special forum “Vocational education and training research” are to relate the various approaches and perspectives to one another and to analyse commonalities and differences. The forum has been supplemented by a Call for Papers for an edited volume that will collate the relevant research approaches and results for this topic. Although the thematic focus of the forum is particularly aimed at academic researchers, it is also open to interested parties from other areas. The aim also needs to be to look at the various research approaches with regard to transfer to practice.

BWP Another new aspect compared to previous BIBB congresses is that there will be a forum in English. An interpreting service will be provided for further parts of the event. Is BIBB seeking to strengthen its appeal to foreign partners? What do you expect from a debate that will take on a more international stamp?

Esser Globalisation is not only taking place on the markets. The demands for internationalisation of BIBB’s work are increasing. We are trying to take this into account by gradually extending our radar beyond the borders of Germany. This is why we are also seeking to open up our events more to international educational and VET networks.

BWP One of the main tasks of BIBB is to foster dialogue between academic research, policy making and practice in vocational education and training. How will you succeed in establishing such a dialogue between the Congress participants in these areas?

Esser The Congress programme shows that we will be including special forums or topics for all these groups and will be providing an opportunity for interdisciplinary networking. This is a particular aim against the background of the theme for the Congress. For this reason, I am particularly looking forward to the high-quality debate that will open the Congress. This will create an opportunity for dialogue between the Federal Government, the federal states, the higher education system, the academic research community and trade and industry. This provides maximum permeability!

Wei: "The BIBB Congress aims to send out a signal that the major challenges facing vocational education and training can no longer be overcome from the point of view of a single area of education."

BWP Professor Wei, what messages and impetuses do you expect will emerge from the BIBB Congress and have an influence on experts in the field beyond the event itself?

Wei Dual vocational education and training in Germany enjoys worldwide recognition and is a role model for reforms in other countries. It is one of the foundations of the German production and innovation model. Not the least of its strengths is the fact that it has constantly undergone further development rather than being a static system. At present, there is a particular need to adapt with regard to the changing requirements emerging from the employment system and altered educational behaviour. This means that vocational education and training must develop further in respect of its structures, organisational forms and methods. If nothing else, this has consequences for cooperation between the various stakeholders. The BIBB Congress aims to send out a signal that the major challenges facing vocational education and training can no longer be overcome from the point of view of a single area of education. What we need are cross-cutting perspectives, interlinked approaches and the broadest possible networking between all responsible stakeholders and partners.

BWP What advice do you offer to those who remain undecided? What are three good reasons why they should be sure not to miss the 2014 BIBB Congress?

Esser Firstly, the BIBB Congress is one of Germany's major vocational education and training events. It offers a broadly based programme for information and debate on educational and VET matters. After the Congress, participants will be better informed and wiser! Secondly, the size of the event and the high quality of the speakers make the BIBB Congress a unique networking opportunity that should not be missed. And, last but not least, the Congress is taking place in Berlin. Plans are also in place for an attractive and entertaining evening and support programme.